

SUMMER HAS BLAZED.

A TIME FOR HEROES TO  
RISE FROM FLAMES.

HERO SOCIETY

SUMMER



JESSICA FLORENCE

Hero Society  
Summer



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Summer (Hero Society #8)

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## Prologue

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Vincent

“You can’t even do the damn dishes right,” Mother spat from the kitchen as I tried to tune her out from the couch. She knew I did my best, but of course that wasn’t enough. She stomped into the living room, and I knew, based on how loud the stomps were, that I was in for another lecture. I had tried explaining to my friends that the sound of someone walking *can* make you want to hide. No one could believe it when you knew, based on the shutting of drawers or the gripping of a door handle, that you were in for suffering.

If I could sink into the cushions, I would. But I was stuck with my homework spread out on the coffee table. She stepped into my view, and I tensed.

“I work all day, and I expect to come home to a clean apartment. This is why your father left us. He couldn’t handle you. You ruined everything, just like you’re ruining this house. Look at this mess.” I followed the line of her thick finger to my boot that had fallen off the shoe stand when she slammed the door open earlier. It wouldn’t make a difference if I told her that. It was my fault no matter what.

“I’m sorry.”

“*He’s sorry*. Sorry doesn’t bring your father back. Sorry doesn’t change the fact that you were born sixteen years ago on this day. I don’t know why I take care of you. You’re not worth this stress.” She flapped her arms up, then stomped back to the kitchen, perhaps to eat the small birthday cupcake I hid behind the expired milk jug.

“Well, well. Someone like you who doesn’t take care of his home, doesn’t deserve cake.” I knew it. Somehow my mother always knew where my little dashes of happiness lay.

Like a hunting dog with a scent of hope. That cupcake was a gift from the baker I delivered for on Fridays. It would be gone in seconds, and my head hung a little lower.

“I just wish your father was here to see how rotten you are. Maybe he could have changed our fate. Maybe we could have been a happy family who loved each other.” I did love her. And that’s what hurt the most. She was my mother. I knew she suffered from heartbreak, and if I could go back in time and stop Dad from leaving, I would.

I lifted my head and waited for her to walk into the room with blue frosting on her lips to brag about how good the cupcake was, only little orange flecks of light nearby caught my attention. I sat forward on the cushions to inspect them more closely as they suddenly multiplied.

“Shit.” I jumped back, knocking a lamp against the wall with another curse.

“What the hell are you doing now?” Mother shrieked, and my gut seized. The lights shot toward me and attached themselves to my skin.

“Help!” I screamed, and by the time Mother walked into the room, my whole body glittered with tiny sparkles. I tried to call for help again, but my sight turned white. My body hummed and shook, and I feared that if I had some sort of seizure, Mother would let me die and end her suffering.

Then everything stopped so suddenly that I had to catch my feet as I stumbled back. My eyes slowly adjusted to the blue sky that lacked the orange attackers.

“What the hell?” I glanced around and couldn’t believe my eyes. I wasn’t in our run-down apartment anymore. I stood in front of our old house. The tan, one-story home with a fenced-in yard and two trees out front. The one we lived in with my dad. My feet stayed glued to the chalk-covered sidewalk, as I couldn’t comprehend the sight. This house had been burned down two weeks after Dad left. Mother forgot she was cooking mac and cheese, and it happened so fast. We almost lost everything.

“Vincent! Watch those stairs!” A little kid around four with light brown hair pushed past the screen door, with a smile on his face. I nearly fell to my knees. Then a younger version of the woman I’d called Mother walked out with a tote bag hanging on her shoulder. She glanced at me once, nodded a hello, then followed her son in the direction of the park down the street.

This wasn’t possible. Maybe Mother had killed me and this was some sort of heaven. One where I was loved and cared for by the people who birthed me. I watched them walk away and didn’t know what to do. Should I talk to them? Do something? Stand here?

“You lost, kid?” a male voice called out from the house, and I lost it. Whatever dream this was, a son couldn’t hear his long-lost dad and keep his shit together. The same dad from the pictures I’d hidden from Mother stepped past the screen door.

I ran as fast as the tears that slid down my cheeks.

“Dad. You’re here, please don’t leave us. I’m sorry for whatever I did.” It all came out. Him leaving for whatever reason broke Mother. It broke me, and maybe this was a dream, but maybe I could do something about it.

“Listen, kid, I don’t know what you’re talking about.” His strong hands stopped me from wrapping my arms around him. His grip held firm, and my voice cracked with how real this felt.

“You can’t leave us. I know you’re planning it. Whatever your reasons are don’t matter. We need you. Mother will fall apart. I can’t do this anymore. Please, please don’t leave.” I glanced up his tall and broad body to see his downturned expression.

“Did Beatrice put you up to this?” His gaze darted down the street, and I shook my head.

“No. It’s Vincent. An older one. I don’t know what the hell is going on, but I wished I could come back and change things, and here I am. Maybe this is my chance. Maybe you



can stay, and we can work it out. We can be a family that loves each other. That's all we need, right?" I pleaded as my fingers dug into his forearms. I had to try. I couldn't keep living like before.

"Alright, alright. Let's get you something to drink. Calm the waterworks down, kid." He released me and pressed a hand on my shoulder to guide me inside. I smiled despite the tears. This could work!

Then they came. Those devilish orange flecks of light.

"No, no, no!" I stumbled into an end table and knocked a vase to the ground.

"Kid, are you on something?" My dad stepped forward, and I rushed to him immediately. The flecks brought me here, and they would take me away.

"No. Shit. I'm leaving. But you shouldn't. I'll see you in the future. Please stay," I begged as the little lights covered me once again. Expecting the blindness to come, I closed my eyes and prayed. Once the shaking and humming stopped, I eagerly opened my eyes in hope.

"Dad! Mother!" I called out and ran through the apartment. Everything looked cleaner, more organized than I had made it before I left. Maybe I changed the past and they were happy parents again. In love and loving me.

"Mother! Dad! Where are you?" I opened the two bedroom doors and one bathroom. They weren't here.

"Vincent. Listen, dear, we've talked about this." I twirled on my heel as an older feminine voice came from the apartment door. Perhaps Mom's voice had changed. I hoped I didn't go too far into the future to where my parents were old.

"Mom!" I raced down the hall and stopped dead in my tracks. That wasn't my mother.

"Who? Who?" I couldn't get the rest of the words out. The older woman set an umbrella to the side of the door. The same spot where my boot had fallen off the shoe stand that wasn't there anymore.

“Vincent. It’s me, Mrs. Grandreg.” The frail woman softly walked to a pink sofa and sat down.

“Where are my parents? How do you know me?” I stood still as stone.

“Honey. Your parents haven’t lived here in four years.” They were together! Dad stayed! It worked! The dream, or time travel, worked! I smiled and found my footing again.

“Wait, Vincent. What’s gotten into you? You know your parents left you. Remember? I helped you get the apartment next door and get your emancipation papers.” What the hell? My hand gripped the doorknob but didn’t turn it.

“What do you mean? They worked it all out, right?” My parents stayed together and we got to be happy. Mrs. Grandreg shook her head.

“Dear, did you bump your head? I know you don’t like talking about those monsters who abandoned you, and rightfully so. But you know what happened to them. Remember the last time you searched them out?”

I shook my head and the woman sighed.

“Vincent, your parents both overdosed on drugs. We found out a year ago. They were monsters and you have been better off without them.” She stood as her words bled into my chest and broke whatever hope I found earlier.

“Let’s order pizza. You always like pizza on sad days. We can stream a movie too.” She walked into the kitchen and I stared at the empty sofa. I changed the past. Dad stayed, and it made everything worse. Worse than worse. I tried to change my life for the better, but instead I shattered it. The orange flecks were nowhere to be seen, and I didn’t want them to appear. I had nothing now, and I did it to myself.

## Chapter One

### Vincent

“Nice work, Vince.” Gina from the front desk waved bye as I slid into the elevator.

“See ya, Gina.” I gave her the nod as the doors closed, and leaned against the metal walls. The scent of smoke crept from my shirt to my nose, and I wished I’d taken a shower before leaving headquarters. I was already late for dinner and wouldn’t hear the end of it. I could save myself the hassle and jump back and make sure I arrived promptly, but I was tired. Not that it mattered that I’d saved two older women from a blazing section of a retirement home; being on time was more important to Chasity.

I raced to my motorcycle as soon as the elevator opened. Thankfully, our apartment wasn’t far and rush hour had passed. I pressed the button on the handle to start it up.

Within seconds my legs were up and on my way. A car horn blared, and I realized I hadn’t even looked before pulling out. My body ached, and my lungs still burned from the smoke. Working with the Hero Society wasn’t for everyone. Hell, most people didn’t like helping out their neighbor, let alone strangers who weren’t always grateful. But it helped support Chasity, and I had to put my power to use before it drove me mad. Sort of an unfortunate side effect for all those with super powers. Thanks to the gods and goddesses of old who fucked up, now some of us mere mortals had godly gifts in our veins. Obviously, I didn’t resent them at all.

When Pomegranate Towers came into view, I hit the button on my keychain for the security gates to rise. By the time I crossed the street, they were fully up, and I hit the button again for closing. Only two more minutes, thus making a grand total of ten minutes past seven. I parked in my reserved spot and shut the bike off. Without running, I quickly moved to the garage elevators and counted the seconds it took to arrive on floor eight. Twenty-four seconds, to be exact.

I inhaled deeply as I punched in the key code to the apartment. My whole body tensed as I stepped inside and smelled the roasted chicken and garlic potatoes that permeated the foyer. The scents should have been the first red flag if I hadn't been too tired from work to notice. I waited for the screaming, the barbed words. I even set my keys down louder than normal to announce my arrival in case she hadn't heard the door. I wanted the screaming over with so I could eat. With my toe, I pushed my shoes off and set them on the shoe stand near the door.

“Honey! Is that you?” *Honey?*

“I'm home.” I walked into the kitchen with a wrinkled brow. That woman had never called me honey in our whole marriage. Was I on video and didn't know it? I stepped across the marble floor to the dining area, and my breath stilled. My beautifully manicured wife had her brown hair pin straight, and her blue eyes lit up in my direction. She looked stunning in a tight brown dress and heels. What game was she playing at? Then I noticed two people sitting at the table. Guests. No wonder she stood with false love beaming in her eyes like I was her world. I'd like to believe at one point I was her world, but that thought usually made me feel shittier. If she had loved me, then I must have done something awful to lose such adoration.

“That must be him. Your Vincent.” A woman in her forties with box-dyed blonde hair stood with a smile and her hand outreaching. I slowly released my breath and walked over.

“That's me.” I shook her hand, and the gentleman next to her replaced her hand with his instantly. He gave me a nod, then muttered a generic greeting before sitting back down at our gold-cushioned dining set. Chasity had expensive tastes, and it would appear the couple appreciated that.

“Honey, this is Mr. and Mrs. Hahns. They are our new neighbors. You know, the ones that had trouble parking that fancy car in the garage yesterday.” Chasity giggled and it took everything in me not to raise my eyebrow at her. We lived in the most expensive apartment building in Seahill. Everyone in

here drove fancy cars, so I didn't know what her deal was with these two.

“We were just talking about how they needed to redesign the garage. It's hard to turn around sometimes. Anyways, I thought it was the neighborly thing to do to invite them over for a home-cooked meal,” she continued and waved over the beautiful display of food on the polished mahogany table. She had it catered for sure.

“Always thinking ahead. If you'll excuse me, I need to freshen up. Please don't wait another minute to dive into that amazing meal my wife made. She's got a gift in the kitchen.” I smiled through the lie as I walked into the bedroom, wondering if I could skip whatever grift she was pulling.

“You're such a terrible liar. I don't know why you bother.” *There's my wife.* My fingers lifted the hem of my shirt and tossed it over my head, then straight into the hamper.

“You stink.”

“I had a rough day, but I saved lives.” I shucked my pants off and jumped into the shower. With guests in the apartment, I could push off the screaming match for later.

“You better not fuck this up for me. I've got the husband's attention, and there's a check for our foster kids' charity. Keep your lips shut, be the man candy, smile like the good dog you are, and I'll leave you alone tonight.” She stared at me through the glass with an arched brow. Of course this was about money; my wife was not kind and neighborly. I didn't answer, but she knew my expressions well enough. I'd stay quiet because the outcome of speaking wasn't worth it. Chasity easily made me miserable without trying, so I didn't want her to actually put forth effort.

“Good bitch.” She smirked and I wanted to punch the glass between us. Her heels clicked as she left to entertain our guests, and all I could see was the image of an evil queen walking about her castle. Maybe I'd gift her an evil queen cape for her birthday. She'd love that.

I sighed and finished washing, then dressed. The sooner I played the part, the sooner I'd be able to take my nightly walk in the park. The one place I could let myself relax. I tugged on a button-up shirt and slacks to look the part Chasity wanted: a doting husband who made millions and worshipped his wife. Once upon a time, that had been me. Then it was clear, no matter how much love I gave or money I spent, it wasn't enough.

“Vincent, your lovely wife has been telling us all about the children you help with your organization. You are such a lucky man to have a wife with a heart of pure gold.” Mrs. Hahns sipped her wine, and my expression froze in place. I hated lying. Chasity was right when she said I was shit at it. So I zipped my lips and nodded with my gaze on that supposed wife with a heart of gold.

The dinner carried on without me, and I wished I'd chosen the screaming over it. Nothing like being a damn superhero and married to a literal villain. The couple left with five thousand dollars less in their bank accounts, and Chasity didn't even wait till the door closed before depositing it. That money would be gone in an hour.

“I'm going for a walk,” I announced with one shoe already on.

“You made me so proud, husband. Maybe you aren't a waste of space after all,” she cooed, and I almost rushed out with only one shoe. Delicate fingers ran up my back, and my lips thinned.

“I played the role.” Her hands moved across my waist and tickled up and down my abdomen. Chasity liked my tall, muscled body. My light brown hair and brown eyes were all part of the package that made her chase me in the first place. But it never went deeper than aesthetic.

“Perhaps you will play another tonight. A husband that I give a fuck about. What do you think, Vincent? Are we up for role playing?” She nipped at my shoulder blade, and my body trembled. Starved for intimacy, I almost gave in. But it was a lie, and I always felt worse after.

“I’ll be back.” I removed her hand and left. No doubt she’d spend her money or fuck someone else during my walk, but I needed real connection after that disaster.

Seahill Memorial Park had been created after the disaster of 2023 where a patch of the city had been scorched. Only about a mile long, the park had five benches, an art sculpture to remember the Hero Society members who had fallen on these grounds, and a koi pond. While I didn’t live in Seahill during the accident nine years ago, I’d always felt connected to the park. I walked in silence, listening to the crickets and low hum of city life through the trees until I reached my favorite spot.

Two feet behind one of the memorial benches was an old mailbox. Birds usually laid nests in it, and observers left it alone. It blended with the bushes, and most people were interested in the pond over a worn mailbox. Still, I didn’t know what possessed me to look inside it one year ago, but that gut feeling had changed my life. I stepped up to the box and felt inside. My fingers caressed two bird eggs, and I was careful not to break them as I pulled the folded-up paper out of the box with a smile.

I stepped back to the path and sat on the bench with the metal plate in memory of Fallen Hero Aemilia on its back, and unfolded the page. The familiar handwriting warmed my hurting heart from tonight’s events, and the more I read, the stress of the day melted away.

## Chapter Two

### Emily

“Just clean your room, ok?” I sighed, closing the door to my sister’s clothes-covered room. I didn’t hear her mumbled response as I walked down the hall of our two-bedroom apartment, and I didn’t care to.

“Being a parent is hard.” Bonnie, my older neighbor from down the hall, stepped through the front door, and I nodded. She’d raised five kids in her lifetime and, thankfully, offered to hang out while I ran errands every weekend. I couldn’t leave that asshole in the space alone, or she’d end up pregnant or sell off all my stuff.

“Thanks again. I doubt she’ll leave her room, but check in to make sure she hasn’t busted out the window or something.” I wished I was kidding.

“I know the tricks. I may be older, but she won’t pull a fast one on me. Enjoy your errands, Emily.” Bonnie’s soft hands nudged me out the door, and I grabbed my purse and reusable bags on the way out. My anxiety lessened the instant the door closed behind me. Everything was ok. My sister was a nightmare, but I was doing my best. There were moments that we laughed and acted sisterly to each other. But ever since I had to take on the parent role after our parents’ car accident, those moments were few and far between.

“She graduates next year.” I breathed and walked down the three flights of stairs to the ground floor. Our elevator had been broken for two years, but thanks to the workout, I had a booty that you could bounce a quarter off of. Life’s all about balance.

The humid air of summertime in the city smacked my face as soon as I exited the building. I wished we had more trees in this section of the city. The air felt cleaner, less stagnant, in the natural, upscale section a few blocks over.



Still, it was nice to be alive despite the humidity frizzing my pink hair.

“Alright, let’s see.” I glanced to my left, then right, judging which way I wanted to take to the park. Both of my jobs kept me busy, and Saturdays were my only day to get food and items for the apartment and take a breath. Could I have spent my time for self-care? Sure. I hadn’t gotten a mani-pedi in years, and my pink hair dye had faded to more of a pale pink than vibrant. But I preferred spending my time in the fresh air, with an iced coffee at the park. I smiled and chose the direction to my right. Baker’s Dozen Coffee and Donuts was two blocks over, and that sounded better than Bagels Direct to my left.

“What are we grateful for, Emily?” I asked myself, like I did every morning, and gazed around the city for things to choose.

“Indoor plumbing,” I announced to myself, and the couple who passed by me shot me a weird look. Thankfully, it didn’t bother me. I’d spent enough time holding myself back for the comfort of others. My gaze darted down to the light blue long sleeves that covered my marred skin. No, I would continue focusing on the good in my life, because the opposite was too hard to control. Screw it if people thought I was weird.

“I’m grateful for trees!” I announced loudly with pride as I walked under a maple next to the sidewalk. The more I looked around, the happier I felt. By the time I reached Baker’s Dozen, the line had dwindled and I was able to slide in for my coffee and donut in no time.

“Enjoy your park time, Emily.” A barista named Jeff grinned as he handed me the order. I knew he liked me. What’s not to like, right? I’m a five-foot-seven, pink-haired beauty with green eyes and freckles across my nose. From the outside, I knew I had it going on. It’s once you got past the outside, things changed.

“Thanks, Jeff.” I beamed and left without another word. It was better this way. I had too much going on working

two jobs, taking care of my sister, and trying not to slip down the road into Insanityville. Poor Jeff wouldn't know what to do with someone who had darkness inside them like me.

"I'm grateful for coffee and glazed donuts." I changed the subject before that darkness grabbed me tight and my day took a turn. My heart fluttered as the entrance to the park came into view, and it wasn't from the caffeine.

I'd been in a weird place a year ago. My sister had a pregnancy scare and blamed it all on me. Like I made her jump on a guy in the bathroom at the school. Sorry, kiddo, that was all you. I'd had the talk and tried my best to be sex-positive. Making things taboo only made teens wanna do it more. At least that's what the books I read said. When the tests all came back negative, I left the apartment and walked until the meltdown caught up with me. I could only do my best, but damn, it was hard. I'd felt like a nonstop beating of life's shitty waves kept smacking me and smacking me, with no time to breathe.

I took a sip of my coffee as the little park bench that I sat on every Saturday came into view, and my gaze darted to the bushes behind it. The fluttering in my heart beat faster, and I bit my lip with a quickened walk. Claiming my spot on the bench, I set my drink and donut down, then climbed into the bushes.

A year ago, the bench had been older and broke when I sat down with a little more force in my emotional state. I'd tumbled feet over ass, and my head hit something metal in the bushes. A mailbox. It was an odd setting for such a thing, but I took it as a sign from the heavens. I needed to talk, to connect, to pour my heart out, and a mailbox showed up. I dug into my purse, grabbed a pen, ripped a page out of my planner, and wrote. I never signed the paper just in case someone stumbled upon it. They'd only read an unhinged releasing of thoughts from a stranger. Mailboxes were that meeting place of connections. Mail and letters brought people together. It was the first form of long-distance connection before our phones made it easy. Something about the act of writing my feelings, putting them in the box, and walking away made me feel free.

The next time I came to the park, I decided to take back my paper because it felt too personal; however, it wasn't there. Instead, there was a note from someone else, which freaked me out. There was a scribbled heart and stick figure hugging another, and the words *It's gonna be ok, this world needs you* underneath. Thus, a weird anonymous pen pal situation was born.

My fingers quickly dove into the box and pulled out a folded paper. I smiled and waited until sitting on the bench to open it.

*E.*

*I'm sorry your week was rough. Losing patients must suck. Did you get your coffee and donut to feel better? Maybe soak in the bath or re-dye your hair?*

*My day was shit, and I hate that pink isn't my color or I'd stress dye too. Anyways. Hopefully, this weekend goes great and your errands are effortless. We can't let the world break us. Who else would tell such corny jokes to their patients? I mean... "Time flies like an arrow. Fruit flies like a banana." You must have a pun book or something to come up with that. It's embarrassing.*

*Until Next Time.*

*Your friend,*

*V.*

"Oh, V." I laughed and placed the paper against my chest. This anonymous person had become someone I relied on, and I didn't even know his full name. I'd thought about asking V out for coffee sometime, but every time I tried writing it, I chickened out. V was married, and while his marriage was shit, I wasn't sure I could be around him without wanting more than friendship. I wasn't about to be a homewrecker. He was kind, funny, caring, smart, and just a genuine person. Then there was everything I'd shared in our back and forth. He knew more about me than anyone else, and that scared me. What if he wanted to use all that knowledge to

take advantage? Instantly my brain said he wouldn't. But the more intrusive side of me said he could, and could is still a scary possibility.

“Keeping it simple,” I murmured before taking a sip of coffee and digging for my journal and pen set.

“Dearest V.”

## Chapter Three

### Vincent

The wind brushed against my cheeks as I sat in the open field. I'd jumped through time to before Seahill was inhabited by any humans. It was quiet and peaceful. The sheer opposite of the loud horn-honking, people-cursing city it often was now. Still, I loved both. The mountains hadn't changed in all the time, and I was grateful for that. Seahill kept their surrounding nature preserved. It was stunning now, and it would be that way beyond my lifetime.

With the birds and bug life carrying on around me, I reached into my pocket and pulled out E's last letter. She's been having a hard time, and I wished I could offer more besides my scribbled words. Shortly after we started talking, I stayed all day at the bench to meet her. But she must have slipped the note in after I left. If we were going to run into each other, it would have to be on purpose. Hence why it hadn't happened.

*Dearest V.*

*HAAA.*

*It's a funny joke! You know you laughed!*

*I did take a bath but sadly didn't touch up my hair.*

*\*Sad face\**

*But I'm sitting here on the bench, with my coffee and donut, and life is ok. My sister is a brat, but nothing new there. I'm just trying to focus on the good, and it's helping. Like, this donut? Soooo good. I went with the maple bacon one. My ass won't like me later, but who cares?*

*How's everything going with you? It's ok if you don't wanna talk about it. I've just noticed you've been silent in that department. Not that I mind being the center of attention. LOL*

*but I'm your friend, and I'm here if you need to vent. Just like you do for me.*

*Always your bestie,*

*E.*

I had been quiet about my life lately. But what was I supposed to say? I'm a time traveling superhero who saves people and is miserable in his marriage? She knew about the marriage part and often called my wife a bitch. Which was true, and I didn't need to defend her honor. Chasity relished the title, like it made her superior not to care about others.

This conversation always brought me back to the same question: Why do I stay with her? A therapist would have a fun day pinning all the reasons down. The answer was quite simple though. I didn't feel like I deserved better. I once heard a quote that stuck with me since my teen years. "We accept the love we think we deserve."

Chasity's brand of bitch was familiar. I could shut my emotions off with her, and I didn't have to be vulnerable. I tried in the beginning, but she had picked me out from a crowd as the sucker, and I fell for it. Being with someone like her was safe to my heart as opposed to E, a kind woman who rarely thought of herself. What if I took that chance and gave it all? I'd never recover if I wasn't enough for her either. Chasity was awful, but she couldn't hurt me if I never really let her in.

I hadn't known what else to say to E, so I nicely stuffed the paper into my pocket and left the park. I debated going home, but instead, I went back to the Hero Society's headquarters underneath Pizza Pazza, an Italian restaurant. I slept in the apartment I bought above the restaurant, then after two hours of training, I needed the quiet time.

Jumping through time became effortless after the first experience with my parents. At the age of sixteen, those chosen few would get their powers that had lain dormant since birth. Since their inception, the Hero Society tried to get word

out to all humans about this occurrence, but my birthday had been six years shy of that. The info would have been nice to know though.

Ever since that day, I made a rule to not change the past for myself. It made my life worse than it was before, and I wasn't taking a chance again.

I couldn't express how many times I wanted to go back and not give Chasity a chance in that bar. It would be so easy to shift that timeline. But what if I did and somehow she was tied to me further, or married another and became president? She could. That woman was conniving enough to get whatever she wanted.

Everything happened for a reason. At least that's what I told myself. I thought back to my first interaction with the Hero Society. They'd made a mess of things changing time once, but it fared well for them. At least that we knew of.

*"Time travel. Tricky gift." A man with long brown hair stepped forward and clasped my hand in a strong shake. His blue eyes scanned over me, and I retracted my hand nervously. These people knew about my powers and could help me use them for good.*

*"Draco, whose power was that?" A blonde woman with a small baby bump stepped forward. She had a pink birthmark on half her face, and Draco pulled her in to kiss her cheek before speaking. It was interesting to watch the couple be so open with their affection in front of me.*

*"Yeah. That's Kronos. The Titan and father of the big gods. He didn't willingly give his powers like the others did. But when they faded, he did too." Draco glanced my way and narrowed his eyes. "You've got one of the strongest powers known. You'll need a balance or it'll consume you. Kronos had Rhea. And Uranus and Gaia before that. Titans need another half. But we'll help you figure it out. Welcome to the Hero Society." He grinned and pulled his woman even closer.*

My balance thus far had involved working for the heroes and jumping around time to escape my present. At my apartment above headquarters, I had costumes of different centuries so I wouldn't cause a stir. The power had to be used or soothed. I had no Rhea to soothe me, so I used it. I'd been an interloper throughout all of history. I could watch but never do anything.

My stomach rumbled and I knew my time in this untouched land was over. I needed food and I wasn't about to hunt for it.

I called the little orange glitter forward and closed my eyes. I focused on my hero apartment and willed my body to go there. But just before my body did the ole shake and vanish, warm sensations like the ones I got from E's letters raced through my veins.

When I opened my eyes, I wasn't in the apartment, but sitting in a hospital chair. The typical fluorescent bar lights on the paneled ceilings made me wince. Combine the lights and the white walls, and everything was too bright for having jumped through time. Thankfully, I'd been hidden off in a corner of the waiting room with a fake plant keeping others from seeing my magic.

"Emily! Hey! You forgot your chart!" someone called out as I rose to leave. Sometimes my powers would latch onto a feeling instead of the images in my head. Draco had told all heroes that our powers came from our emotions, so this mistake sort of made sense. I felt warmth, but where did that feeling take me?

Just as the thought came, a woman with pale pink hair walked by. My heart stopped.



## Chapter Four

### Emily

“Emily! Hey! You forgot your chart!” Morgan from the nurse’s desk called out, and I cursed. I’d been so distracted today between thoughts about my sister getting in trouble at school for skipping, feeling hard on myself about job number two, and V holding back in our letters. My gut twisted when I thought maybe this pen pal thing wasn’t working for him anymore. What would I do if I lost him as a friend? I shook the thought away as I walked back to the desk.

Then I felt that tingle of warmth on my neck of someone watching you. Instinctively, I glanced around and found a pair of wide brown eyes hyperfocused on my face.

“Hello.” I nodded and turned my head away before the blush on my cheeks tattled. In the few seconds of looking, I absorbed every detail of that beautiful man. Broad shoulders and so, so tall. He stood taller than all the adult males I knew in the hospital. His muscles strained against his gray V-neck shirt, and those jeans barely contained his thick thighs. Long light brown hair had been tossed into a bun on his head, and I’d give my left kidney to let it loose to run my fingers through. But it was the face that made my stomach flutter as I walked down the hall on autopilot.

Long lashes, high cheekbones, and a sharp jaw that made my mouth water.

“I’m grateful for attractive people to keep my heart pumping,” I whispered and heard a gasp behind me. I shifted to make sure whoever behind me was ok, and my face turned strawberry red.

“E?” The handsome man stood a few feet from me with his eyes wide and lips parted. It took a few seconds to see beyond his stunning presence up close to understand what he said.

“My name is Emily. I’m a nurse. Do you need help with something?” My thoughts jumped around so quickly that

I felt like I missed something. The man shook his head.

“It’s me. I’m V. Your friend.” He stepped closer and I had to look up into soft brown eyes that slowly softened as they gazed on my pink hair. V... Like MY V? My friend-that-we-secretly-left-letters-in-the-mailbox-at-the-park V?

“Oh my gosh. Um... You’re V. Like letters V?” The moment I both dreaded and eagerly wished for merged. I had a huge friendly crush on V from our letters. He was the best human I knew. I didn’t want to meet him for many reasons. But now he stood before me. Just as shocked as I was. What did we do now? The anonymous pen pal had a face. A gorgeous face at that. His hand went to the back of his neck, and I fixed my eyes on his face and not the tan skin that showed at his shirt hem. Nope, I could pretend he didn’t have abs I’d only seen in porn.

“Yeah. This is wild, right?” he admitted, and I nodded vigorously.

“So wild. You’re, like, real and so big, and I just... Wow. Ok, this is happening.” I was obviously losing my shit, which only made V’s mouth shift into a big grin.

“You’re so you,” he said, and I did a little curtsy.

“I try.” I laughed and then remembered I was at work. “Um, I’d love to chat with you, so maybe we can meet at the park bench and, ya know, chat. But also, it’s totally ok if you’d rather not and just go back to writing letters. I get off in about two hours. Yeah. Either way is cool with me. Whoop! Is it hot?” In a sheer embarrassing display of my rambling, I fanned my chest and armpits. V knew me, he knew I was a wee bit dramatic. However, there’s a difference between knowing and experiencing.

“Yeah. Sounds good. I’ll see you there.” His body leaned forward like he was going to attempt a hug but stopped himself.

“I’ll see you there.” I grinned, nodding excitedly, then turned before I could scare him with more rambling.

“That is one attractive man. I hope you gave him your number because, damn, I bet he fucks good.” I never snatched a patient chart so fast. With quick steps, I raced away without looking too obvious, of course. I bet he did fuck good. Those muscles. A shiver rolled down my spine and landed somewhere that needed attention below.

“Stop. He is your friend. Practically your best friend. He’s friend zone resident uno. He’s sexless. He doesn’t even have a penis, ok?” I gave myself a talking-to and ignored the looks that shifted my way when I said *penis*.

“We’re in a hospital. Penises are normal human anatomy.” I stared the few nurses down as I walked past. I could do this. I could push V out of my head to finish my job. Once my shift ended, I could think about how I wanted to handle our meeting.

“You got this. You are a kick-ass nurse. You help people feel safe in their mental space. You are kind and compassionate. You can handle hard things.” I stood in front of the exam door and readied myself to get to work.

## Chapter Five

### Vincent

After running into E, or Emily as she clarified, I quickly grabbed a newspaper in the hospital lobby for the year. The hospital looked mostly the same, but the technology was outdated. I knew I wasn't in my normal present of 2032. The paper's headline caught my attention before the date did.

“Terratrex Set to Unveil Global Warming Solution!”  
Shit... I winced as I glanced to the upper right corner, and my gut clenched.

June 24, 2023.

I was a month away from the devastation that took many lives in the city. Needing to walk off the thoughts in my head, I left the hospital for the park. I'd only seen it after the devastation, having never bothered to visit in other timelines before. It was more natural looking than in my time. The sidewalk was more of a dirt path, with a few benches but not as many. The pond wasn't where I knew it to be, but on the other side. The trees were larger, but after having burned up, that made sense. After walking the paths twice, I finally sat at a bench and faced the music.

I had met Emily.

My stupid powers brought me to her. Or did I technically do it because I thought of her? Either way, I'd seen her, and I was fucked. Not only did she have a kind heart, she's gorgeous. Not in the cold supermodel way Chasity was, but in a “warm smile, bright green eyes, sun-kissed freckles on her nose, and probably gives soft hugs” way. I couldn't have dreamed a more perfect version of her, and that's why I was fucked. I was married and from a different timeline.

I should leave and let her go. Maybe she went on to live a happy life with someone amazing who treated her right, and being close would harm that future. My head ached as I tried to rationalize jumping to my time, but as the minutes passed, my ass stayed glued to the bench.

What if I talked with her? I said I'd meet her here. We could chat, then we could go back to being pen pals. I'd make up some excuse like I'd learned to do to save the timelines before.

"You're here. For a bit, I thought you'd leave me hanging, but you didn't. Ok, new plan." Emily's frazzled voice entered the space, and my mouth parted. She wasn't dressed in scrubs anymore but in shorts and a long-sleeve blue top. Her pink hair swished at her shoulders, and all excuses I'd come up with vanished. Fuck, fuck, fuck.

"I'm not that big of a dick," I pushed past the lump in my throat and watched her cheeks redden. If she was thinking about my dick right now, I'd drown myself in the koi pond.

"Right. You're right. You're V. You're nice, and yeah." She sat beside me, and I swear I heard her mutter something about a big dick afterwards. But for the sake of my life, I pretended I didn't. We both faced forward, and I couldn't help but notice our size difference. She wasn't short, but compared to me, her head barely reached my chin.

"So, how are you?" She broke the awkward silence, and I sighed.

"Confused." I was already going to lie about my powers and why we wouldn't see each other anymore, so I gave her the honest answer.

"Same. Talking to you felt easier when you didn't have a face. I've shared so many things." She tucked strands of hair behind her ears, and I nodded. We both had.

"I'm sorry for being so distant in our letters. I didn't know what to say about my life. Much is the same." That she knew of.

"I figured. I just wanted to check in, make sure you knew I was there if you needed me." She blew out a deep breath and faced me. "You're like my best friend, and I don't wanna do anything that pushes you away, ya know?"

Without thinking, I pulled her in for a hug, and she shook in my arms. "There's nothing you could do that would

push me away.” I breathed her in and silently cursed myself. There were reasons I stayed away and never searched for her. Now the object of my secret obsession hugged me like I’d disappear and it terrified her. Despite knowing I should put distance between us, my arms stayed wrapped around her. She shouldn’t fear me pushing her away, but the opposite. Her body felt warm and too good against me.

“I feel like there is a challenge in there, but I’ll relent.” She eased back and my arms fell to my sides.

“Work was good today. Home was lame. My sister got in trouble for skipping school, and I hate that I can’t reach her. Her mother wasn’t the nicest, but I’d hoped our dad’s kind genes were in there somewhere.” This was normal, more like our typical conversations in the letters.

“Maybe she needs therapy,” I offered for the tenth time, and Emily chuckled. The sound soothed the tension in my body like soft heat from the summer sun.

“Yeah. I tried once and she made the therapist cry. It’s like raising Cartman from South Park but with a period.” The visualization made me burst. I laughed harder than I’d laughed in years, and when I finally ceased, I knew I’d be back to see her.

“She sounds like a pill. Her and my wife would get along flawlessly.” I shook my head and pushed away thoughts of Chasity. She could taint all other parts of my life, but I’d be damned before I let her tarnish this.

“Yeah. You’ll have to tell me how you met the bitch one day.”

I was careful not to feel the emotions from that day just in case my powers were feeling touchy. “I was at a bar, blowing steam from the day. She singled me out, gave me drinks, listened to me talk, and the next day I woke up with a wedding ring on.” I shrugged. I’d like to think I wouldn’t have married her if I didn’t see something in her. One of the guys at the Hero Society had a similar interaction where they got married and he didn’t remember, but they saw the other half of their soul that first night.

“That doesn’t sound very romantic,” Emily stated, and I kept quiet. She knew that my marriage was crap, so it wasn’t like I had anything to hide there.

“You haven’t mentioned a person lately. What happened with that date a few weeks back?” I changed the subject and instantly regretted it. Before meeting, I would have cared to know more. She deserved happiness. Right now it felt like my intestines twisted in knots, thinking about someone touching her.

“Oh, that didn’t last through dinner. He didn’t think I was funny, and ordered a side of mayo to mix in his milkshake. So gross. Dating is hard right now, so I feel I’m just not meant for anything other than my vibrator for the next few years.” Her hands instantly covered her lips, and I closed my eyes to summon the strength of the supposed Titan powers in me.

I was so fucked.

## Chapter Six

### Emily

“So you finally got laid?” my best friend Selene asked as we walked through a cemetery in the moonlight.

“I didn’t sleep with him. He’s married,” I scoffed and ignored the feeling of my tits perking up thinking about sex with Vincent.

Her blonde hair swished around as she arched an eyebrow. Those blue eyes that saw dead souls, saw right into my living one. She scanned my face for something, then shrugged.

“Like you’d sleep with a married man. Sure.” I rolled my eyes.

“I’m married, so technically I sleep with one now.” She walked down a few rows and stopped. It had been a few years since I found out my friend was part of the Hero Society and had powers. Not just any powers, she was a reaper. If someone died near her, she could take them on. Of course, I’d found out through being kidnapped and held hostage by a psycho ghost, but at least it’s all out in the open. Her powers were why we met in the first place. Death sang like a sweet siren to her, and one day she followed the tune. I’d been working at the hospital while in school, and we bonded over our shitty mental health.

*But hey, look at us now,* I thought. Selene was married to a hottie and had a little toddler, and I was alive. Gotta celebrate the little things in life.

She stopped in front of a newly covered grave, and I peered at the tombstone.

“Roger Mills. Is this for the paper or hero work?” Selene also worked for the newspaper as a journalist in the daytime.

“Both, sort of. Roger worked for Terratrex and was part of that accident a few weeks ago. They just buried him and with no funeral for family. It feels like a story. So I wanted



to see if he's around." She glanced nearby, and I didn't bother assisting. I didn't have powers like her, and I definitely didn't want to see the dead again. Once was plenty for me.

"Any luck?" I gave the other tombstones the side-eye just in case those dead people wanted to be shady. Selene shook her head.

"Care to hang around for a bit?" She walked to a memorial bench under a big evergreen tree. I didn't answer but plopped down in the space beside her. "How's everything else going?" Selene wasn't usually much for small talk with most people, but since the early stages of our friendship, she always opened up to me. Most patients did. And she cared enough to check on me and listen about my life.

"My sister is a twat, and I say that with both love and exhaustion. I swear she's the only person in the world that doesn't like me trying to comfort her. It usually makes her more annoyed." I sighed, thinking about how I offered her a hug after her newest boyfriend broke up with her, and she slammed the door in my face.

"Comfort by Emily is top tier. Her loss." Selene opened her palm, and I laced my hand in hers. It was ok for me to accept comfort too. Or at least that's what I tried to tell myself. I was the caretaker, the mom of everybody. But allowing others to take care of me was hard.

"Otherwise, work is work. I do my best and hopefully it helps."

"It does." She squeezed my hand. "Now back to letters dude. Are you going to see him again?" Selene asked as her gaze scanned the cemetery. I didn't ask if she saw anyone else, because I really didn't want to know. A warm breeze blew from behind us, and I smiled, then saw Selene shake her head.

"I swear if some ghost just mouth breathed on me, we're having an exorcism," I whined and rubbed where the air touched.

"Not how that works." She chuckled and I shivered from the creepy feeling on my skin.

“Gross. Imagine how you’d feel if people breathed all on you while you’re trying to rest in peace.” I attempted to get my point across, but of course no one answered.

“Now that the ghosts got told off by mom, answer my question?” she prodded, and I squeezed her hand once.

“We chatted for a bit about random things, nothing personal after the hug. Then he said he had to go and he wasn’t able to meet all the time, but if I wanted to chat in person, send a letter.” It was for the best. We’d stay pen pals unless we really needed in-person talks. The distance kept my heart safe.

“Are you ok with that?” The journalist in her came out, and I shrugged.

“Yeah. He’s nice and caring, and I don’t know, Selene. Both of our situations are so complicated. I don’t think I needed to like him more than I already do. He’s already too important to me. He’s my other best friend.”

“I get it. I wasn’t wanting Jude either, but it happens. Maybe this guy is supposed to be friends only, but I’ve found love rarely happens when you want it to. Love chooses; you don’t always get a say.” She squeezed my hand back, and I pondered her words for a few silent minutes.

“Oh, there’s my guy. Hang out here, ok?” She stood and left for a chat with ghostly Roger. I was so glad I wasn’t born with powers. Seeing the dead, super strength, immortality, or anything like the others at the Hero Society sounded intense.

I watched Selene pepper the invisible ghost with questions, and tried not to think about Vincent. Nothing changed. He was still my friend and someone to talk to.

“He’s hot though and gives good hugs,” I muttered to myself and sighed. “Vincent’s hot, so what? Would I love to have a sweaty, hot night with him? I’d be dumb not to. But am I going to? No. I won’t break up his shitty marriage. I can keep it in my pants and control the urge to run my fingers through his hair. There will be no accidental vagina slips onto his dick

from me.” I nodded, feeling like I gave myself a good talking-to and everything would be ok now.

Hot air blew against my neck, and I yelped.

“Fucking ghosts! Stop being so rude!” I twisted on the bench and leveled the empty space behind me with the meanest glare I could muster.

“That was just the wind this time. But all the others are now gossiping about your vagina accidentally slipping onto a dick.” Selene broke the stare down, and I turned back around so fast my back cracked.

“I was just giving myself a talking-to. Not a big deal.” I stood and led the way back to the car.

“They’re taking bets now on how long your talking-to will last. And now I’m supposed to bring updates.”

“Ghosts suck,” I sighed and couldn’t make it into my seat fast enough.

## Chapter Seven

### Vincent

“Figured I’d find you here.” The seer himself plopped beside me on the training mat at headquarters.

“I doubt you *figured* I was here.” Phillip Griffin KNEW I was here. The forty-year-old blond-haired man shrugged.

“You did good today. The world won’t know that you saved them, but we do.” Phillip saw all possible futures and straddled the lines to the ones he deemed best. A real-life puppet master, super genius, or gambler, depending on who you asked. He orchestrated the greatest powerhouses in the world. Griffin Enterprises and the Hero Society. And I trusted him with my life. I never changed the timeline for myself, but I did for the greater good. Tragedies were part of life; I couldn’t stop every one. But I did my best.

Needing some space, I had been walking along a dam-made lake two years in the future and saw six jackasses setting up explosives along the big dam to hold the area for ransom. Pay money or be flooded.

“They were going to flood the area even if they got paid. You saved thousands of lives. It was the right call.” Phillip’s words eased the tension in my shoulders. I’d stayed awake many nights wondering if I made the right choices in other timelines. Between Phillip and Dorian, the two seers of the heroes, I had some insight.

“Thanks.”

“Wanna talk about her?” Despite him not saying a name, I knew who the *her* was. I glanced at the male and rolled my eyes.

“Don’t you know what I’ll say?” I joked but decided to talk about it to someone. Phillip knew percentages of futures; none of them were solidified. Anything could change the

course. Hence why I typically leaned in the gambler side of his nicknames. Phillip gambled with futures.

“The future is never set in stone.” I wasn’t the type that talked about my feelings to people. However, Phillip knew it all and saw it all.

“It’s a mess, and I’m trying not to think hard about it. We’re friends, and nothing will change.” At least that was my plan. Keep everything how it was before meeting. I stretched my hands to my toes and relished the sweet burning sensations in my legs.

“It’s quite the mess indeed. But she’s kind and caring. You deserve someone like that.” Phillip twisted his torso before leaning over to stretch as I did. His fingers wrapped around his arches, whereas mine barely touched my feet.

“She is that, and more.” He’d get no arguments from me.

“What if it was worth it?” He slowly rolled his upper half up and tilted his head from side to side. I glanced at the two female heroes jogging on the treadmills, then back to Phillip.

“I won’t change things for myself. You know my rule.”

“Do you remember mine?” he countered, and I shook my head. I’d heard him say it before, and I wasn’t sold.

“That you are a gambling man, and you’ll always bet on love.” Love. Most of the time the word caused me to run. No one loved me, and obviously I sucked at giving it. “It’s not that serious. She’s beautiful and kind. We can be friends.” I tried to shut down the conversation because it made me want to whisk myself back to 2023 and see her. Suddenly, like I’d been smacked in the head, it hit me.

“You’re plotting, aren’t you?” I shifted to narrow my eyes at him.

“I don’t need to. You’re doing marvelous on your own. But I’m always around if you need a friend.” He slapped me on the shoulders as he used my body to push up. I groaned and fell back to the mat. His parting words churned in my head as I

finished stretching, showered, then walked to the park instead of home.

Chasity was in a weird mood, like she was trying to prove that our marriage worked somehow. She ordered takeout, touched me nonstop, and gave me constant compliments. Years ago, I looked forward to the moments Chasity snuggled close on the couch. When she whispered how much she loved me taking care of her. Later on, I realized it was because she wanted to keep me in her sharp manicured claws.

I reached into the mailbox and sighed as I sat on the bench.

*Sup V,*

*It's been a stressful week. This time of year is always hard with the anniversary of my parents' death. Oddly, it's the only time my sister likes being around me. Which is nice for a change, but it's fleeting. One of my long-term patients was able to check out of the hospital today. It's a nice feeling but I'll miss her. Life just feels silent, if that makes sense. Like the stillness before a storm rolls in.*

*Anyways, how's everything with you? Hopefully all is well.*

*P.S. I'm glad we're still friends. Life feels a little less lonely when I get to talk to you.*

*E.*

The letter felt heavy in my hands as I glanced up to the night sky. Nicely, I folded the paper and tucked it into my pocket. I left the park without responding and strolled to my headquarters apartment. The ache in my chest spread throughout my body, and I wanted comfort. I wanted to be told things would be ok, that I was loved. But I didn't want it from Chasity, and I wouldn't allow myself to get it from Emily.

As soon as I hit the code on the door pin pad, I marched to my cabinet and grabbed a bottle of vodka. Knowing I'd be down on my ass in ten minutes, I sat on the bed, kicked off my shoes, and uncapped the drink.

Shortly after, the aching eased and that sweet numbness took over. I didn't think about how lonely I felt or how much I wanted a different life.

If I hadn't been so intoxicated, I would have noticed the orange sparkles floating into the room. But I was THAT intoxicated, so I smiled, set the bottle on the nightstand, and blissfully passed out.

## Chapter Eight

### Emily

“Vincent?” I rushed to the tall form lying on the bench in front of our mailbox. His shoes were nowhere to be found, and I cursed, knowing someone must have robbed him. Crap.

“Vincent. Wake up, you’re ok.” My fingers softly pushed against his arm that flopped over the edge of the wooden bench slats. Slowly, his eyes opened, then squinted before he shot up.

“Shit,” he cursed, his hands gripping his head. I stood unmoving, not wanting to scare him. It took a few seconds, but his brown gaze landed on me.

“Emily?”

“Yes, big guy. It looks like you were robbed. Someone stole your shoes.” I pointed to his feet, and he followed the line of my finger.

“Right... robbed,” he muttered and sat back on the bench. I rushed to his side, ready to help if he needed it. Not that I would do much good; he was three times my size.

“Take it easy. Get your bearings, then we’ll get you home to some comfy shoes. I’d give you mine, but I don’t think they’re your style.” I lifted my foot and showed off my white tennis shoes with black scuff marks on the sides. I was a fancy girl, what could I say? Vincent stared at my wiggling foot for a few seconds, then scared the crap out of me. His head flew back, and he laughed. Like full belly, mouth-open-wide laughter bellowed from his lungs.

“Oh dear, they must have hit you hard on the head. We should get you to the hospital.” I was only half kidding. Vincent’s laughter slowed to a chuckle as he shook his head.

“I’m fine. Shoes and food, and I’ll be ok.” He leaned back and my gaze got stuck on his grin. *Bad Emily, we don’t*



*stare at Selene's lips, so we don't stare at friend Vincent's lips.*

"I was just stopping by to see if there was a letter for me, then I was gonna grab something to eat and maybe hit the bookstore before groceries. You could join me if you want," I offered, like I would any friend. He tilted his head to the side, then shrugged.

"Right. It's Saturday. Yeah, I'll crash your errands day." He stood and I readied myself to help again. His eyebrow arched, noticing my stance.

"I can't help it." I lifted my chin and started walking.

"I appreciate the notion. Thank you for being here, E." I softened as he caught up to me.

"It's what friends do, and you are my friend." I added the second part to keep the boundary clear. We made it out of the park in a short time, and I pondered where the closest shoe store was. But he moved to our right before I could rattle off the closest shop. By the time I realized what he was doing, he was mid handing the street vendor cash and sliding a pair of sandals on his large feet.

"That was quick." I walked over and immediately laughed.

"You look like a tourist." He wiggled his tan toes in the purple and green sandals with bold "I heart Seahill" written across the top.

"Well, take me on a tour through Emily's famous errands." He gestured and I shook my head. Vincent was a hoot.

"Alright, this way, you goof." As we walked together, I silently started listing things I was grateful for. It was either that or be taken down by insecure thoughts about our friendship.

"I'm surprised you aren't listing things," he commented, and it oddly made my steps cease.

"I was, but I didn't wanna weird you out by saying it out loud. Or make people look at you." I was used to it, and

their stares mattered less than my mental status.

“You wouldn’t weird me out. We pretty much know everything about each other, and we’re still here, right?” He shrugged and continued walking to the new bakery I wanted to try.

“That’s true, but I guess I’m still worried how you’ll think of me in person. My mystery is gone.” Well, not completely, but I was ok with that. Vincent didn’t need to know everything.

“I highly doubt the mystery that is you, can ever be gone.”

“That feels like a challenge somehow.” I nudged him with my shoulder, and he didn’t budge. The man was huge.

“Let’s do your thing together. I’m grateful for these comfy shoes.” He lifted them up for show, and I rolled my eyes. Ok, I was doing it anyways, so why not include him? We were near the bakery, so it would only be a few minutes.

“I’m grateful for donuts.” Earlier, I saw a picture online of their donut of the day and drooled on my sleep shirt.

“I’m grateful for the sunny morning.” He glanced up and missed me nodding. That was a good one. It had rained for a few days, so I appreciated the sun’s rays on my face when I stepped out of the apartment.

“This really doesn’t weird you out?”

“That you’re choosing to look at the positive things in life? Those same things that actually make our lives worth it? Not one bit.” He reached the bakery door and held it open with a smile. If he kept up this amazing human behavior shit, I was going to fall for him. And I couldn’t, so we needed to make him less amazing, somehow.

“Oh, wow, ok. Welcome to Shady Shay’s Bakery. What can we get you?” the blonde at the counter stammered as Vincent stepped up first. Couldn’t blame her there. A few eyes from around the little shop darted to him and lingered.

“Coffee, black. And a regular glazed.” He glanced at me to place my order.

“Strawberry chocolate glazed and a French vanilla latte.” I pulled out my wallet, but Vincent whipped his out from his back pocket. I guess the muggers left that behind, which was odd. He paid and I waited at the counter to grab our stuff.

“Go pick a seat. I’ve got these.” Vincent’s hand touched my lower back as he softly nudged me onward.

“I can get it for us. You paid.” I resisted but he nudged with a tiny bit more force. Bleh, fine. I didn’t want to start a fight over who carried the food. I sat in the light pink booth seat, and people watched until Vincent set our drinks and donuts in front of me.

“It’s ok to let others take care of you.” I heard his words, but I didn’t let them settle.

“I know. I’m just used to being the caretaker. I like being useful, ya know.” Not to mention I felt off when I wasn’t doing something for others. Vincent sipped his black coffee in silence, and I reached for the donut first.

“Well, E, what’s been new with you?” he asked, and we both chose to change the conversation to something easier. We talked until we finished our drinks without awkward silences, then headed to the bookstore, where he convinced me to try three romance books I kept looking at and bought them for me. We split before going grocery shopping, with the goofiest grins on our faces. Every word, every simple nudge, was fully in the friend zone. We handled being close with ease, and I finally felt secure in our friendship again.

Which was good because we decided to meet up every Saturday for errands day.

## Chapter Nine

### Vincent

“What are you staring at?” Emily watched me with a gob of ketchup on her cheek.

“You and your stunning face.” True statements, but we somehow didn’t take any compliments toward each other seriously. I planned on waiting until Saturday to see Emily again, but Chasity had a “friend” over, and I didn’t feel like dealing with that. So naturally, I met up with Emily at the park after she got off work, because I knew she’d be there, and we grabbed dinner.

“Sure, sure. Whatever.” She bit into her loaded burger, and a mixture of ketchup and mayo stuck to her other cheek. She was a disaster, and I couldn’t get enough.

“I needed this. I’ve been too tired to make any great meals,” she stated while taking a sip of her drink.

“You do seem a bit off.” She had little circles under her eyes, and she seemed on the pale side. I held back the smile when she ordered so much food and dug in with glee.

“Yeah. Life’s just a lot. Working nonstop, home is stressful. I’m not getting a lot of sleep.” Her gaze darted around the room, then back to her plate. Nope. I didn’t like that one bit.

“E. You can tell me anything. You know that, right? Nothing you say will get you unfriended.” I reached out and touched the hand on the side of her drink. She finished chewing and swallowed with a big gulp.

“Um...” She retracted her hand, and I ignored the sting of perceived rejection.

“I... Well... Ok... This is probably going to shock you, but I have to tell someone. I know Selene wouldn’t judge me, but I don’t know. Ok. I can do this.” She closed her eyes and breathed deeply once, then three more times before showing

those green beauties. She opened her mouth, then closed it and groaned.

“Did you give yourself a super wedgie from the cabinets again?” I grinned to lighten the mood, ease the tension in her face.

“No, you butt.” She shook her head, but that crack in her frown pushed me to continue. I leaned closer and plucked one of her fries.

“Did you have to pull something out of a patient’s rectum again?” She shook her head, and the smile grew.

“Oh, I know. You did the hand-in-water-bowl trick and made your sister pee the bed.” I’d call that poetic justice if she did.

“Oh my god, no. I couldn’t do that.” She wouldn’t. Emily was good, through and through.

“Money’s been tight. Rent’s gone up in the building. Teens are expensive, and well...” She chewed on her bottom lip, and I held my breath. “I’ve been doing a few night shifts as a phone sex girl.” Her head tilted down, and I saw the darkness reach around her shoulders. Emily wasn’t always so bubbly and grateful. She had another side that she tried to keep others from seeing. Her hands drifted to her arms. I figured I had thirty more seconds before she was lost to her head for the rest of the night.

“You should tell them the wedgie story. I bet guys would pay extra to know how you jumped on the counter to get something, then when you jumped off, your panties got stuck on the knob. Better yet, do it again and we could send the ripped panties for mad money.”

She blinked, her face void of all emotion.

“You thought that would shock me? We’ve talked almost every day for the past year. We’re not ones to judge each other. Broken people shouldn’t throw stones at other broken people.” I stayed in a toxic marriage and worked as a time-jumping superhero. If she wanted to moan deliciously over the phone to make extra money, good for her. Did I wish I

could help her struggles? Yep, and I might. I had money, but I doubted she'd take it.

“You really don't care that I tease and talk dirty to people over the phone for money?” Those green eyes went all doe-like on me. I wanted to scoop her up, hug her, and let her talk dirty to me all day. Except I couldn't. Fuck.

“Not one bit. I gotta take a piss. Be right back.” I winked and left Emily sitting at the booth with a smile on her face. As soon as I entered the empty bathroom, the orange flecks were on me, and I was out.

The tall trees bristled in the wind of the island where Seahill would be in a couple hundred years. With no one around to hear me, I cursed, then groaned so loud an echo danced across the bay. I gripped my hair and tightened my hold.

“Keep it together. She's not yours.” I groaned and transported back to Emily's time but four minutes later. I glanced in the mirror before leaving and pointed a finger to myself. “You're her friend and nothing else.”

I left for our table where Emily had finished her burger and sported clean cheeks. Damn, I had wanted to see how long it took for her to notice.

“Thanks for being here, V. I'm glad I have you.” She reached out to touch my hand as soon as I'd set it on the table, and I slowly nodded. I was glad I had her too, but I held the words in. Her petite hands squeezed my fingers, and her gaze remained on me. Moving from my eyes, down my nose, darkening over my lips, and staying there. I pretended my dick didn't harden. Then she licked her lips, and I pretended that I didn't want to toss her ass on the table and devour her.

“I should probably get going. Want me to walk you home?” I pulled my hand away, and like a veil had lifted off her eyes, she shook her head and blushed.

“Yeah. I need to get home. Um, no, that's ok. It's not too far from here. I'll see you on Saturday?” Her hands chaotically dug through her purse, but I'd grabbed money

from this time just in case. I placed the bills on the table and stood with my hand out for Emily.

“I got this. How about I bring lunch tomorrow? I’ve got something in the morning that is likely gonna piss me off. I could use a break.” I shouldn’t, but I’d continue pretending if it meant I could have moments like this. Where I felt lighter, happier. My deepest addiction in the form of a pink-haired goddess.

“Yeah. I should be taking lunch around one.” I helped her up, but then in a move I should have expected, she wrapped her arms around me, and I rested my chin on top of her head.

“Get some sleep, ok? It’s not good for your chaotic brain.” I embraced her once, then put some needed space between us. Emily chuckled and took one last sip of her drink before walking to the exit.

“See you later.” She held the door open for me. We waved bye and walked in separate directions. Once I was out of view from all eyes, I jumped to my timeline outside my apartment with Chasity. Just as I moved to go inside, a dark figure stepped into the light.

“How did the date go?” Phillip grinned and I relaxed my body. Not that I’d have won against him anyways.

“It wasn’t a date,” I stated, and Phillip rolled his eyes.

“Right. We’re in the pretending future. Got it. How was dinner with a woman who makes you happy and you would kill for?” He pushed away from the apartment wall and walked over, full of mischief in each step.

“Worth it.” No use lying. Though I did wonder what other futures he saw between Emily and me. Then I smacked the thought away just as quickly as it entered. “She’s having a hard time, and I wanted to get out of the house. Nothing I would be ashamed about happened.” I shrugged and took a step toward the building. I wanted a shower and to go to sleep. Time jumping took a lot of energy sometimes, today being one of those times.

Phillip stepped in my way, and I arched a brow.

“I’m tired, Phillip. Is there something I need to know? Do you need me to work tonight?” I waited and Phillip’s eyes glazed over for a moment. I knew the face and gave him extra minutes to do his whole search through the future thing. When he came out of it, he shook his head.

“Nope. I came to check on you. It’s not an easy path you’re walking. I want you to know that you’re not alone, and you have family with the Hero Society.” He turned with a wave and strolled down the street like he wasn’t the king of the city.

A headache blossomed in my temples as I rode the elevator up to the apartment, and just as the doors opened, I saw the real reason Phillip showed up. To stall me from coming home.

“See you, precious.” A tall man with dark hair and rumpled clothes stepped into the hallway. I knew my wife had a visitor tonight, hence the reason why I sought out dinner with Emily. The guy gave me a nod with a happy face as he entered the elevator.

“Are you getting out?” He held the door for me, and I mindlessly stepped past him. I wanted out. Out of this life I trapped myself in.



## Chapter Ten

### Emily

“You’re such a Goody Two-Shoes. You don’t know anything about struggle. What it is like to be popular.” My sister curled her brown hair with one hand while touching up her mascara with the other. I made a comment about how that didn’t seem safe, and apparently that was enough to provoke her.

“Chastine, all I said was that what you’re doing looked unsafe.” I sighed, not wanting to fight again. After uncurling her hair, she pointed the tip at me.

“You think you know everything. You’re almost thirty, and what do you have to show for it? When I’m your age, I’ll have everything. A husband who spoils me, money so I don’t have to live in a dump like this.” She inched closer, like she would take that iron to my skin. And for once in the time we’d lived together, I feared her. She would do it. Just to hurt me.

“Chastine, what happened? We used to get along. I’m just trying to make the best of this situation and be here for you. Give you a home with someone who cares about you.” Despite the trembling in my legs, I stepped forward. Her blue eyes softened for the barest of seconds, and I smiled. Which was apparently the worst thing I could have done. Instead of poking me with the curling iron like I feared, she threw it like a javelin straight at my face.

“Little Aemilia, so soft. Your mother thought you were soft, and so did mine. You don’t have what it takes in this world. You should be put out like the other weaklings.” She stood tall and grabbed my wrists. I stood there, mouth open. She pushed back my sleeves and laughed. I ripped my hands away, and every word stuck in my throat. “Wish it wasn’t just for show.”

She thought my scars, my struggles with my mind, were for show?

“Yeah, I see it in your eyes. You think I’m a monster. Well, guess what, sis, I’m a monster, and fucking proud. I can’t wait until I’m old enough for my parents’ money. Then I’m out of here.” She laughed and went right back to applying her makeup. Like I was nothing to her, and the truth of that hit me deep. I turned around, grabbed my purse, and left. Even if she burnt the apartment down, which may happen with the curling iron still hot, she would survive. Chastine had a life to live, boys’ hearts to break, and kind people to make cry. She wouldn’t go down in something as simple as a fire.

I couldn’t believe I just stood there and allowed it all to happen. Stupid freeze response. I knew from my studies what it was, but it didn’t make me feel better. I was soft, maybe even too soft. My arms itched and I rubbed my skin vigorously back and forth. I needed something. Someone. I shouldn’t be alone. I grabbed my phone only to stall with my finger over the contacts list. Selene was busy. She had a toddler and jobs and a husband. She also suffered, and I couldn’t drag her down with me.

Logically, I knew Selene would be fine, but I just couldn’t have my best friend know how bad things had gotten with my sister. That I allowed her to treat me that way and did nothing. I thought about writing to Vincent. He’d understand, but instead of walking to the park, I found myself in front of Pizza Pazza. Selene and I ate here a few times. The pizza was great, and something about the place made me feel ok.

“Emily. Good to see you again.” Phillip, one of the heroes I met during the dead apocalypse, opened the door with a kind smile on his face.

“Uh, hi. Phillip.” I stepped into the restaurant and glanced around for Selene. The heroes liked to hang out together.

“Just me. I was grabbing some food and saw you outside. I ordered a stuffed crust with sausage and mushrooms; wanna join me?” With the mention of my favorite pizza, I nodded and followed him to the table where a fresh-out-of-the-oven pizza sat.

“If I didn’t know better, I’d say you knew I was coming,” I joked, and the corner of his lips tilted up an inch. We dug in at the same time, and I ate quietly. I didn’t know Phillip that well, so I wouldn’t be dumping all my issues on him. But I did feel better knowing I wasn’t alone.

“You’re a very calming person; has anyone ever mentioned that?” he asked, and I nodded with a mouthful.

“Yeah. It’s the reason they hired me at the hospital. I’m good at soothing the patients.” I tried to be calm, and usually it helped. I liked that feeling of being there for people.

“Do you ever think it was more than your training?” He grabbed another slice, and my face pinched together.

“Um, no. I’ve always been this way.” Except with my family. Wish I could calm my sister down. I chomped on the cheesy crust and thought of the things I knew about Phillip.

“How’s everything going with you? Your sister is pregnant, right? You’re gonna be an uncle; that’s exciting.” Selene mentioned something about Rose a few weeks ago. Poor Rose had the power to feel and influence others’ emotions. With her emotions on a constant rollercoaster, her husband took her to their cabin in the woods where no one else lived.

“Everything is always right in my world, and I am hella excited to be an uncle. We’re gonna have a lot of fun.” His eyes glazed over and his smile brightened. I wished I could feel that happy right now.

“That’s great,” I spoke between bites of my second slice.

“It truly is. I couldn’t have asked for a better family than her, Draco, and the heroes.” His focus shifted to me, and I couldn’t fake a smile or a nod.

“It sounds nice. I’m glad you have that.” People who cared, who wanted you happy, who held your hand on your hard days. I’d seen the heroes interact together, and they were a family. A found family.

“You’re part of the family too.” I laughed and shook my head, instantly dismissing his statement.

“You bunch are always kind to me when Selene brings me around, but no. I’m not like you all. I’m just—”

“One of us,” he declared with his whole chest. I stood and wiped my mouth with a napkin.

“I appreciate the kindness, and the pizza. But I’m already having a shitty day; I don’t need you rubbing in my wounds that I don’t fit in, ok? We can be friends and all, but I’m not really one of you.” I grabbed my purse and quickly marched to the door.

“Emily, wait.” He moved so silently I wasn’t aware of his hand on my wrist until the whole restaurant vanished.

“Shit,” he cursed, and a bunch of images of myself flashed before me. Trees on fire, my arms around a little boy in the flames, Vincent’s smile, us holding hands, Chastine’s cruel smile, Vincent and me sleeping in my bed, my eyes turning bright yellow as a lion walked beside me. I felt the hand on me tighten, and as if it never happened, I stared at the door of Pizza Pazza.

“We’re in that future. Let me explain.”

## Chapter Eleven

### Vincent

“It’s been an hour. Should I keep reading?” Emily asked over the phone, and I hit a button twice. That was our “no” code. I heard her yawn twice and knew she needed her rest. The call would cost me twelve hundred dollars, but it was worth it. Was I a jackass? Perhaps, but I wanted to help. I found the phone sex company she worked for and asked for her, with a special request. Read me stories. There’s no way in hell I’d have her moaning and telling me all the ways she touched herself over the phone. I’d cave, and I’d be a worse man than I already felt. So pretending to be a man with a reading kink was the path for me. Thankfully, she’d picked one of her favorite series about a demigod pre-teen and their camp, and not a romance. The troubles of the heroes in the story felt less complicated than the ones in real life. They fought monsters, plotting gods, and traumatized demigods. We fought other humans and kept people like us from hurting one another. Well, besides that one time fighting against the dead.

“Alright, goodnight.” She yawned, but I heard the smile in her voice. Worth it. I took the headphones off my head and left the twenty-four-hour coffee shop I listened to her in. For obvious reasons, phones didn’t work across timelines.

When I flashed back to my apartment garage, I sat on my bike and noticed a pink sticky note.

*We need to talk. —Chasity*

I sighed, took my keys out of the ignition, and entered the elevator. Today had been a good one, and I needed to keep that mindset while dealing with the devil. The silent apartment wasn’t very welcoming.

“Vince, is that you?” she called out from the direction of our bedroom. After slipping off my shoes, I followed her voice and found her in the bathtub with bubbles covering her body.

“Everything ok?” I scanned her for harm and saw none. Her red nails skimmed over the bubbles.

“I want a baby, Vince,” she stated flatly, and I gripped the wall for assistance to stand.

“Not with you. I know you associate with those heroes, and I don’t want their mutant genes rubbing off on you and into your sperm. I’ve been working with Roman. His family has beautiful genetics. I just thought you’d like to know we will have a child within a year. We may need to move to one of those neighborhoods outside of Seahill for the space.”

There was nothing. No words, no thoughts, just nothing as I stood there.

“You have adequate time to prepare yourself. While I’m not pregnant yet, I will likely be soon. We’ve upped the attempts to three times a day.” She settled further into the steamy water and exhaled calmly. How could she be so calm? What the fuck?

“You’re insane.”

“If I were a man, you’d call me tenacious,” she scoffed, and I was quick to shut that down.

“No. I’d call you insane. Do you even hear yourself anymore? ‘Oh, husband, we’re going to be parents, but don’t worry, I’ll fuck someone else like a god’s damn rabbit because your genetics are shit.’ We’re not having a kid,” I seethed, my hand gripping the wooden doorjamb so hard it cracked.

“Well, then you both can fuck me and see which sperm is superior. At least a child of yours will be obedient.” She stood, and I couldn’t even look at her.

“I was touching myself during that conversation, priming up for Roman, but you’re here and we haven’t fucked like the good ole days in a while.” It was like my brain ceased firing. This woman was a nightmare. She’d cheated on me, stole money, committed fraud, and now this. She really thought I’d follow her to the bedroom and rut her like an animal.

“Oh, Vince, I’m needy.” Her moan went in one ear and out the other. In the past, I would have given in. Chasity wasn’t cold in the bedroom, she kissed me, embraced me, and I’d been starved for it.

Suddenly, Emily’s ketchup-gobbed face flashed into my head, and I couldn’t do it. I stormed out of the room with her screams following me. I took the stairs instead of the elevator and left this time.

Because what else was I gonna do but sit at the park in 2023? Just being in a world where Chasity wasn’t mine and Emily existed calmed the blaring rage in my head. What the fuck was I gonna do?

“V?” Emily’s voice called from down the path, and I placed my head in my hands.

“You’re supposed to be sleeping.”

“Yeah, I am.” She sighed and sat beside me.

I opened my mouth twice to let the words trapped inside tumble out, but stopped. Would she think less of me? I’d allowed so much shit with Chasity my stained soul would bleed into her pure heart. She’d been so worried about driving me away, but here I was with a knot in my gut over the same thing.

“I’m not coming onto you or anything, but I need a hug, plea—” My arms pulled her close before she finished. She climbed onto my lap as we gripped each other so tightly. Her body trembled as a soft sob vibrated against my neck. I wanted to take away whatever pain she felt. Fight it off or absorb it into me. Anything to help this sunshine girl find her happiness.

“I’m not ok.” She breathed, and I closed the already dismal space between us. Her nails dug into the muscles on my back, and I almost whisked her away to another time. A time when neither of our problems existed.

“I’ve got you” were the only words I could manage. Everything else followed the lines of things I couldn’t say out loud:

*“Kiss me.”*

*“Let’s live in a different time together.”*

*“Who hurt you and where do I find them?”*

*“I wanna leave my wife and time for you because you’re worth it.”*

But all of those words would have changed fate. Images of my parents with me one minute, then a future without them flashed into my mind. I leaned down to tuck my head against her neck and breathed her in. We stayed wrapped together on that park bench into the morning hours. Our arms were a safe haven from the troubles that waited, our breath and steady heartbeat the only tie to reality. In our little bubble, everything was ok. We were worthy of comfort, and we found it in each other.

When time finally came to untangle, I felt ease and knew I wasn’t going to give Chasity what she wanted. If anything, I felt strong enough to release myself from that trapped life.

“I’m going home to sleep for a few hours before work.” She remained close and glanced at my lips. I wanted to give in. But I had to do things right.

“I’ll drop by for lunch again. I’ve gotta take care of some things.” Like my future.



## Chapter Twelve

### Emily

“So, I have powers.” I raised my eyebrows.

“Yeah. Wild, right?” When I got no response, I hurried to explain.

“It doesn’t change anything about our friendship. I just found out that, when people feel all warm and cozy around me, it isn’t just my natural calming effects. It’s like a thing.” I bit my lip before continuing, “I’m confusing you. You look confused. I’m confused. One minute I was normal me, and now I’m like a superhero? Although, I don’t know what I bring to the hero table, but I’ve been invited to sit at it... Ugh, I sound like an idiot. He’s going to think I’m nuts,” I groan to the pink-haired girl staring at me in the bathroom mirror.

I’d been rehearsing how I’d tell Vincent about my conversation with Phillip. It felt weird keeping something like that from him. I didn’t have all the answers yet. Phillip knew everything and all the futures, and he knew he wasn’t the one to tell me certain things. I’d have to wait for Draco to come down from the mountains to take a look at me.

My thoughts drifted to the future that flashed into my mind when Phillip touched me. Which apparently hadn’t happened before. When he explained those were flashes from various futures, I patted him on the shoulder and walked back to the elevator of the secret underground headquarters. The Hero Society headquarters was under my favorite Italian restaurant! He pleaded with me to stay and continue to hear him out.

*“The future can always change. One single act takes it in a different path. You saw glimmers of the future where I see all futures and the likelihood of them happening.” He sat me down in a cozy living room-ish space. The couch was well worn but still comfy, and you could tell the other heroes liked this room the most. It had pictures, art, water marks from cups on an end table. Not messy but lived-in and appreciated.*

I wasn't one of those people who wanted to know the future. Whenever the girls in school would ask that question, I'd quickly say no. I had shitty control over my mind on a good day, let alone if I actually KNEW what would happen. I shut the images out as soon as they tried to enter. Vincent still had a wife and a life. I wouldn't jeopardize our friendship for whatever future I saw with us together.

"Don't be a chicken. He deserves honesty." I gave myself the meanest glare I possessed and grabbed my backpack with waters and snacks. Chastine was out with her friends, and besides telling her that dinner was ready and go to school, we hadn't talked. So when Selene mentioned something about taking her kid to the zoo and invited me, I did a little excited dance. I loved the zoo and hadn't been in ages. She said I should invite letters guy, and I did.

Vincent said he'd try in our last letter, so I was hopeful. I knew him to be true to his word. If he said he'd try, then he'd try. The future of us holding hands flew past me again, and I shook my head to clear it out.

"No, no, no." I cursed as I closed up the apartment and noticed a family down the hall staring at me.

"Morning!" I waved and hauled ass. I had animals to adore and friends to laugh with. No doubt Vincent would be a hoot at the zoo.

Selene waited for me at the entrance with her little bundle in a black stroller. My little emo baby niece.

"It's your favorite Auntie Emily!" I sweetened my voice to greet two-year-old Bella. The toddler squealed and pointed at the big Seahill Zoo sign that had a variety of animals painted on it.

"We're going to see tigers and bears and—"

"Howler Emilys. I mean howler monkeys," Vincent's voice teased from behind me, and I ignored him.

"Don't listen to the big guy. We are going to have all the fun and eat snacks and buy stuff at the gift shop!"

“You spoil her.” Selene chuckled while handing us tickets and introducing herself and the kiddo to my friend.

“Nice to meet you. Emily talks about you a lot.” Vincent smiled and waved to Bella, after which I ignored the tugging feeling in my uterus. Selene pushed the stroller toward the entrance while talking about how she’s my best friend and she’ll fuck him up if he hurts me. To which he leaned in to whisper something in her ear, and she nodded once, then shut up.

Weird, but I wasn’t going to let it get me down. We had animals to see, and I needed this day off so badly.

“Where to first?” I grabbed a map and scanned it for the best strategic path. Whenever we were out and about, I tended to be the mom of the group, making sure everyone had what they needed, could find the bathroom, ate snacks, and didn’t get too overheated. Selene was used to it, but I wondered if Vincent would get annoyed.

“Tigers!” Bella yelled, and I nodded at her choice.

“Yes, let’s do the tigers first. They sometimes go swimming first thing in the morning.” Or at least that’s what I remembered from the last time I visited. Selene led us through a little crowd, and we stopped at the little habitats of animals on our way to the tigers.

Twice as we looked over the information signs to read about the animals to Bella, Vincent’s hand almost touched mine. It was like that future cursed me, and now our bodies were magnetized. Wherever I moved, he moved. I didn’t even think he realized we were doing a sort of dance. Crap.

When we finally stopped at the tigers, Selene let Bella out to walk into the underwater compartment to get a closer look.

“Can we talk later?” Vincent asked, and I nodded, with my eyes on Selene and Bella. They laughed, and seeing them so happy made my heart swell. She deserved this. She’d been through so much, and while I knew some days she struggled to get up in the morning, she had support. Jude was the balance

to her darkness with his own brand of it. They worked together and had a great life.

“You deserve that too.” Vincent’s breath tickled the hair against my ear, and I shivered.

“Maybe.” It wasn’t the most confident answer, but after Chastine belittled me, I didn’t feel so high on myself. I accepted what I thought I was worth, and since I took her bullshit, that was very telling.

“We both do.” His hand touched mine, and I turned only for my heart to pick up speed. I shook my head without tearing my gaze away from him.

“We do,” he insisted. His head leaned closer, and that darn heart found the rapid speed gear.

Suddenly, the ground shook, a blinding light shut my eyes, and screams filled the air. When I finally managed to open my eyes, Selene had Bella on her hip beside me, and Vincent stood in front of me. People ran in our direction, and I squinted to see what they ran from.

“What happened?” Selene asked, and a concession worker stopped to frantically respond.

“The African predator house melted, and the gate is open. The animals are loose!”

## Chapter Thirteen

### Vincent

“Selene, get Bella out of here.” Emily cursed and Selene took off. Her powers wouldn’t be any good in this matter. Now all I had to do was get Emily out of here.

“We’ve got to help them.” She stared at the people still flooding the pathway, running. A scream echoed through the park, and Emily ran toward it.

“Shit.” I wasn’t about to fight off a lion; I didn’t possess that power. However, I could take the animals out another way. I ran to the bathroom ten yards away, my power already around me as I closed a stall door. I jumped back fifteen minutes in the past and fled the bathroom to access the African predator house. I watched from a thick and prickly bush as two keepers hit their access codes to the building.

“5303, 5303, 5303, 5303,” I repeated as I walked with confidence to the door and hit the buttons. As I slipped in, I grabbed a brown vest from a coatrack by the door and swiftly moved to the gun case at the end of the hall.

“Hey! New guy!” someone called out, and I waved but kept moving. I peered into the inside containment spaces, and thankfully, no animals were inside.

“Hey, my man. We aren’t supposed to touch those without authorization. No codes have been called,” the same voice called out as I touched the pin pad to unlock the case.

“Seriously, are you crazy?” A hand fell on my shoulder as the building hummed. Shit. I knocked the man’s hand off me, and my sight grew glittering orange as a blinding yellow light shot through the ceiling, melting the metal structure as I left. So it wasn’t an internal explosion. I needed more time, and I needed to get all the people out. I arrived before the previous keepers entered, and hit the code. Instead of marching straight for the tranquilizer guns, I searched for a fire alarm.

Whoever stood in this building in five minutes would burn, and I wasn't ok with that. I found the alarm down the hall near a small lunchroom and pulled. I heard voices yelp, then delegate what to grab before they left. At least they'd leave. I waited a few seconds before running down the hall to the gun case and hitting the code.

“Denied.” Shit.

I didn't know when to jump or how long I needed to search for the code. I grabbed a towel from a cleaning station and wrapped it around my fist. Here's to hoping it wasn't thick glass. I reared back and lowered my head to avoid any shattered pieces. It didn't break on the first hit, but the glass splintered. Tempered glass. One more hit and it would crumble. Seconds after, the pieces fell like sand. I grabbed a gun and a case of tranquilizers, then ran.

As I neared the door, the building hummed. Shit shit shit. I flung the door open and jumped into the bushes, as I knew what came next. I covered my head but peered out from the ground to see the origin of the yellow light. It happened so fast I didn't have time to see it. One second the building was there, and the next it looked like a burnt casserole.

People screamed and it was time for me to get to work. I loaded up the gun and placed two more darts between my teeth. According to the feeding charts in the predator house, there were seven lions: two males and five females. Then there were a pack of hyenas, five if my memory serves me, and finally a cheetah. Only thirteen animals to put to sleep before someone got hurt. The thirty-foot gates that connected the animal house to the outside enclosures were gone, melted into a puddle on the ground. I stepped into the first area and readied my stance.

The cheetah was the first as it skittishly ran around its enclosure. I sighed and hit its back end with the dart on the first shot. It slowed and finally laid down a minute later.

“Thank you, Phillip.” I blessed the seer for suggesting I go to the shooting range with him for practice. Later I'd dissect his motives, but for now, I had more predators to catch.

I hid among the trees and buildings as I hunted. The lions had spread out, more nervous than anything. I took three down and had to jump into the enclosure for three more. Only one of the males was missing.

I darted to another set of trees and scanned the area. All zoo goers fled, and I heard a few radios going off with code names to initiate a plan. The police were called and animals would be put down if necessary. Hopefully, I got to the male and hyenas first.

“I’m so not grateful for this.”

Suddenly, nausea rolled in my throat as my heart beat rapidly in my chest as I saw the hyenas and Emily. She stood with her arms wide. A bleeding scrape marred her right cheek. A small child hugged her hips as she made loud noises to seem bigger and scarier. However, I didn’t think it worked since the hyenas stepped closer. Normally, these beasts would run off with all the commotion, but perhaps they were hungry enough and the scent of blood drew them in. Their grunts and cackles made Emily shake. I raised the gun and slipped a dart into the chamber. Once I hit one, the others would hopefully leave her alone.

Suddenly, a massive tan body stepped in front of Emily and the child. The male lion. He roared and the hyenas paced with more grunts.

“Oh shit,” Emily cursed and took a step back, the child moving with her. She couldn’t outrun them or fight them off. I fired, taking down one of the stunned hyenas. Within seconds, I had the next dart loaded and hit another. Without questioning how, once the hyenas started dropping, she grabbed the kid and ran. Good girl.

Once the hyenas were all asleep, I aimed at the lion. He glanced to where Emily had run off and grunted. I hit his shoulder twice and knew the crisis was over. The zoo could get the animal back to safety. I set the gun and tranquilizers next to the melted animal house and searched for Emily. As I neared the front of the zoo, I wondered if my stunt had changed anything other than saving a few lives. This was my

future now. No other me was in this city in this time, so I didn't need to jump and match up.

“V! You're ok. Oh my god, I was so scared.” Emily squeezed through a group of frantic people and wrapped her arms around me. I sighed and hugged her back so tight I wondered if we'd become one.

“I heard what you did, E.” I tucked my head against hers. She tensed and I wondered if she thought I'd yell at her. While it wasn't a smart decision, Emily was a protector. She cared about everyone and would always try to help others. It's who she was. “You are so brave, and I'm in awe of you.” She shook in my arms, and I held onto her until an ambassador of the zoo interrupted to let us know everything they could about the incident and where to receive full year passes and first aid services.

“I'm so glad everyone was ok and the animals weren't hurt,” Emily said with her hand in mine. I don't know when we started holding hands, but I wasn't about to let hers go. I nodded and kept my thoughts to myself. Something else happened here, and for the life of me, I couldn't recall hearing anything about it on the news in my past. My hero senses tingled and I doubted it was a simple accident. Thankfully, no one was injured.

“I know you said you wanted to talk, but I think the adrenaline is wearing off. I wanna find Selene, make sure they're ok, clean up, and take a nap. Unless it's important.” She yawned, and while I had been intending to tell her about my powers, it could wait. I wanted to get home to my timeline and see what actually happened today.



## Chapter Fourteen

### Emily

“I know it’s hard, but trust me, a shower will help. Just focus on one step at a time, nothing else, ok?” I assisted the young Ms. Collingswood out of the hospital bed, her fingers limp on my arm. She’d been admitted for severe depression. Her family found her lying on the couch. She hadn’t moved in days. No eating, no drinking, nothing. She didn’t want to exist, so she tried to stop.

“One step,” I whispered with every bit of kindness I possessed.

“You just want to change me,” she whispered back, her voice cracking with each word. She’d been so weak when they brought her to our wing. I held onto her and we took a step.

“I want you where you are. If you’re not feeling ok, then that’s where you are and I’m here for you. You don’t need to be happy for me to care.” While it was my job to care, there were plenty of nurses who didn’t. Most of the time, the patients were able to maintain their mental health. Some weren’t, which sucked, but that’s life. I was glad I got to be a small light in their dark for even a brief moment.

Her hand squeezed and my body warmed. She felt my words.

“You remind me of my mom. Like when I was sick. Like I could drip boogers all over her, and she’d wipe me up and snuggle close.” I turned on the shower and pulled the curtain between us for privacy.

“Boogers aren’t that scary,” I teased then got back to instructing her.

“If you feel faint, let me know, Ms. Collingswood.”

“Call me Kate, please.” I smiled. This was a step forward, and I was glad I was a part of it.

“Alright, Kate. Let’s get you cleaned up, dressed, and I’ll snag something from the vending machine for you. Any preferences?”

“A cinnamon bun.” She sounded lighter.

“Oh, that does sound good.” I groaned thinking about food. I hadn’t eaten yet, with the hope Vincent would join me for lunch. Which sort of churned my stomach because I didn’t know what I was doing anymore.

Truthfully, ever since we met, we’d grown closer. We pretended our compliments meant nothing and that each touch wasn’t a full need to connect. I wanted him, and I wanted him bad. Which twisted my gut every time I thought of him and me in those futures I saw through Phillip.

“I’m done,” Kate announced, and I blindly handed her a towel. I’d been so caught up in Vincent thoughts, that I forgot where I stood. Kate was my priority right now.

Once she dried and stepped into her fresh clothes, I snuck down the hall to grab us snacks, and Kate blessed me with a white-teeth grin as I entered the room again.

“I feel safe here,” she murmured as I opened the package and set it on the rolling table on her right.

“You are very safe here. We’ve got guards everywhere and the best doctors and nursing staff in the state. Plus, our kitchen is pretty amazing. No food poisoning from our hospital.” It was safe to say I liked where I worked. Kate grinned and shook her head.

“No. With you. I feel like I don’t have to be ok. That I’m safe to be as I am. Vulnerable.” She nodded to herself, then picked a piece of the cinnamon bun and ate it gently.

“I’m glad you feel that way.” I reached out to touch her hand, and my skin warmed against hers. She sighed and grabbed another bite, a bigger one. I was glad she liked the snack. It wasn’t on the approved list, and while I might get in trouble for the treat, I felt she needed it.

“It reminds me of my girlfriend in high school. We were each other’s safe havens. I simply was, and she loved me.

There wasn't anything I could do that would push her away, and I never tried to. It was nice to have that safe place in someone else you know." The bun in my hands stilled inches from my mouth. Besides Selene, I didn't know. My dad had been a place for a short time, but then he married Chastine's mom and well... I retreated inward. Those years were the worst. I had no one. No one to help me as I struggled to shower, to find the will to live.

I glanced at my pink-sleeved arms and felt the itch in my skin. After my dad and stepmom fought about me and my school, I found it made my life better if I pretended like everything was ok. They weren't mind readers; they didn't realize the difference. On the outside, I was perfect Aemilia. But all I'd done was channel my pain into physical instead of mental. It took years to stop cutting my arms.

But, with help, I was back to focusing on the mind and in a better healthier way.

"Will she be visiting you?" I cleared my throat and took a bite. Kate's expression dropped before her head barely shook.

"She died."

"I'm so sorry," I squeaked through the burning sensation in my throat. She lost her love and her safe person at the same time. Poor Kate. I opened my mouth to say something, to comfort her, but I closed it each time.

There wasn't anything to say. Kate lost someone who meant the world to her. There were no promises to make to soothe that. Maybe she'd meet another or find passion in something else. But that was her choice to make, and my words were only a Band-Aid in this moment.

She turned on the TV for sound and took two more bites before lying down to rest. Traumatic events like losing her love were exhausting to talk about. The mind and body processed the memory as if it happened all over again.

That's the thing about grief. The feelings didn't go away, we just hopefully got better at coping.

I waited until I heard little snores before taking her vitals and taking a break. I needed some air after that conversation. I grabbed an iced coffee and walked to the small garden with two picnic tables.

“I’m grateful to be alive.” I sipped the cool drink and took a deep breath in, held it for a few seconds, then released. Over and over until my thoughts cleared enough to process my feelings.

I couldn’t imagine the depth of Kate’s emotions after losing her girlfriend. To have that closeness, that bond in a person who you could be your absolute worst and best with. I’d be hard pressed to live too.

“You could have that,” I countered my thoughts aloud. An image of Vincent shot through my mind, and I sighed.

“I do have that with him. He is my safe place.” I took another breath. “But he’s married, and you haven’t told him your new Hero Society promotion yet.” I continued to talk to myself, and I didn’t care if anyone heard me. Sometimes I processed better when I heard the words, not just thought them.

“But what if?” I sighed again, my hands fidgeting with the hem of my sleeves as I thought about telling Vincent everything. I knew he wouldn’t reject me. He’d accept me as a Hero Society person, without thought. But if I told him I thought about him constantly and have for the past year... Well, I didn’t know how that would go.

What if he wanted an affair? Could I do that to his wife? I instantly shook my head with the thought. I knew she wasn’t kind, but two wrongs didn’t make a right.

“Hey, E.” Vincent called my name from the hospital door with two white takeout bags in his hands.

“Don’t be a chicken, Emily. Just tell him everything. He’s your safe place.”

## Chapter Fifteen

### Vincent

The nurses said Emily stepped outside for a break, which was perfect timing since I brought food from the taco truck she liked.

As I stepped into the small picnic area, I noticed her mouth moving with a pinched face. She was giving herself a talking-to. I recognized the look since I'd given myself one before jumping to this time. Phillip kept me busy once I got back from the zoo incident, and I stayed far away from Chasity by sleeping at the hero apartment. I didn't know what future was in store for Emily and me, but I didn't want the life I created in 2032, outside of the Hero Society.

"Hey, E!" I announced my approach and saw her mutter something to herself as I neared.

"Hey, I was just thinking about you." She smiled as I sat on the opposite side of the table and plopped the food between us.

"Oh, you know me so well." She groaned and dug through the bags to get her food. Garlic beef quesadilla. She wiggled in her seat as she opened the takeout box.

"Hard day at work?" I asked as I pulled out my three chorizo tacos. Even in my time, this taco truck was a huge hit. They went on to expand into a storefront and were never slow. Emily took a bite and I stifled the laugh as she got the garlic beef juice on her face. Unlike the ketchup the other night, I reached out to swipe the little droplets off her cheek and brought my thumb to my lips for a taste. Her mouth parted and those green eyes lit like the forest after a rainstorm.

"Thanks," she whispered, the sound barely audible. I waited for her to answer the question, and after another minute, she did.

"Yes and no. I love what I do, but sometimes they say something that smacks me in the head. Like today. The patient

lost their person. The one who they loved most and was their safe person. They could be chaotic, and sad, and happy, and a mess, and their person loved them for it.” She took another bite as her eyes glazed over like she tried to picture it, then shook her head before continuing.

“I just can’t imagine the pain of losing someone like that. I’m not sure I’d recover, you know?” I didn’t move because I didn’t know. The closest person I had to that was her. I understood what she meant by those words smacking her in the head since they did the same to me.

We had friends. She had Selene, and I had Phillip, but even as close as we were, it wasn’t like the bond she mentioned.

“I don’t know what I’d do,” I answered honestly, because right now I had a thought that went against all my rules. If I had a person like that with love and a safe place in one body... I closed my eyes as pain ripped into my chest. I’d steal, I’d cheat, I’d kill, I’d change time for that person. And that wasn’t the person I wanted to be.

“Anyways. I’m glad you’re here. I wanted to tell you some things.” She breathed and my focus narrowed on her.

“Wedgie underwear was a huge hit, huh? You can keep the royalties.” I joked to blow the serious thoughts in my head away. She laughed for a few seconds, then set her food down. This wasn’t an easy conversation if she chose to only talk over eating and talking at the same time. “You can trust me, E.” I reached out and set my hand on the table, palm facing the clear sky. She instantly placed her hand in mine and nodded.

“I know. So here goes.” She inhaled and on her exhale, my gut tensed.

“I just found out the other day that I’m one of those people with powers. I don’t exactly know what they are. I mean, I help calm people. It’s always been my thing, but now, it’s a real thing from ancient gods and such. But I don’t know who they come from because the man who knows them is out of town, and the leader won’t divulge right now. But technically, I’m part of the Hero Society now.” Her gaze

scanned my face as she waited for my reaction. Thoughts about why I hadn't seen her in the future at headquarters flashed into my head, then I wondered how hard that was on her to find it out. Why hadn't Phillip given her more answers? Usually all heroes got a spiel and were told where their powers came from. I found that odd, but more than any of those thoughts, I knew I couldn't keep my secret from her any longer. She shared something big with me. Something that most heroes have learned not to share with anyone: their identity. Heroes faced backlash for being in the open sometimes. You never knew who'd betray you.

But here she was, trusting me.

"I'm with them too." Her eyes widened and her hand gripped mine.

"You are?"

"Yeah." Her fingers loosened around mine, but she didn't retract her touch.

"Can you tell me more?" She breathed as her lips tilted up. My shoulders relaxed as she accepted this first wave of news ok.

"Yeah. But not here. Somewhere more private." I glanced around, wondering if we could slip into a closet or something similar. Telling Emily wouldn't be enough; I had to show her.

"Ok, let's go." She released my hand, packed up her food, and stood without giving me a second glance.

"Let's finish eating first." I pointed to my two remaining tacos. She shook her head, and I relented. I'd take her to my favorite spot in time, then we could finish our food and conversation.

"Fine, we'll bring it with us." I packed up my food despite my stomach growling for me to devour the rest.

"Follow me." She leaned close as we entered the hospital. She led me through a series of halls and stopped at a nurses' station to whisper in an older woman's ear, then

grabbed my arm with a big smile. The nurse winked and Emily pulled me away to a room filled with bunk beds.

“Ok, we’ve got about ten minutes. Shirley will keep people out of the room.” Emily sat on a lower bunk and waited for me to explain. I smiled, knowing what happened with the other nurse, but the need to hear her say it was too good to pass up.

“What did you say to her?” Emily’s cheeks turned red as I asked. She pushed pink strands away from her face, and I enjoyed every second of her fidgeting.

“Gah, I know you know. But fine, fine. I told her that you were my long-distance boyfriend who surprised me and I needed to climb you like a tree. So you’ve got nine minutes now to talk privately, and I’ll make myself look thoroughly fucked when we leave.” She huffed, and I groaned, images racing of her hair messed from my fingers gripping it tight, her cheeks red from the delicious ways my tongue lapped at her sex. We’d need more than ten minutes, that’s for damn sure.

“Are you ok?” She moved, stopping a foot from me to scan me for issues. Without thinking, I closed the distance, feeling her breath caress my neck. Her eyes widened, then those heavy lids dropped as her tongue snuck out to wet her lips.

Kill me now. I had this beautiful woman in a room, which I was supposedly fucking her in, and I wasn’t doing exactly that?

“Your... uh... powers.” She trembled and I snapped out of it.

“Right, right. Powers. Hold on.” I wrapped my arms around her shoulders and visualized Seahill before man. I closed my eyes but heard her gasp as the orange flecks stuck to us before we jumped time.



## Chapter Sixteen

Emily

My eyes ached from the bright orange lights, but I fluttered them open. What happened?

“V?” I gripped his body to make sure he was still there.

“I’m here, E. Right here with you.” He breathed against my head, and goose bumps rolled down my neck to my chest, hardening my nipples. Oh boy.

When my eyes adjusted to the light, I blinked three more times just to make sure I wasn’t dreaming. A beautiful landscape billowed in the summer breeze. Tall grass around us tickled my legs as I stood there with my mouth wide open.

“This is Seahill before, well... Seahill.” Vincent took a step back and held his hands wide.

“I need more details,” I managed to say as I took a step forward. The whole scenery looked like something out of a magazine. Seahill was gorgeous, especially when you hiked out in the parks, but this looked nothing like that.

“My power is time travel. This is a moment in time before Seahill had people. It was just nature and nothing more.” His powers. Time travel.

“You’re a time traveling superhero,” I stated, and he relaxed, nodding to my statement. I’d say it was a wild notion, but we stood somewhere completely different than the on-call room.

“I shouldn’t be suspicious, because I’ve met people who control the dead and have super speed, but V, this is hard.” I wasn’t afraid of him or anything; my brain simply had issues understanding it.

“I’ll show you another time. It may help with the processing.” He reached out and I set my bag of food on the ground to reach for him. I trusted him to take me wherever. I mean whenever.

“Close your eyes. It helps with the bright lights.” I did and then I felt that weird tingle over my body, then all sound and wind ceased.

“Open your eyes, but stay quiet.” I heard horses and the scuffling of shoes against stone. Again, it took a few moments for my eyes to adjust to the light. It wasn’t a particularly bright day, and we stood in the shade of a massive marble column.

White column?

I eagerly glanced around and saw a scene straight out of a movie like *Clash of the Titans*. People walked around in toga-like fashion with sandals, while horses carried soldiers. Large Grecian columns and architecture drew my eyes in every direction.

“Greece, 335 BC, in Alexander’s great era. I’ve always liked observing this time. We can’t stay, we’d cause a stir, looking how we do,” Vincent whispered in my ear, and the tingles started up again. I quickly closed my eyes, and the soft breeze of the old Seahill caressed the back of my neck.

“Ok. I’m a believer.” I walked over to my food and sat in the grass. I needed some garlic beef to bring me back to reality, because while time travel was my new reality, it would take some adjusting.

“You’re not mad I didn’t tell you?” Vincent sat beside me, his hand pulling food out of the bag. Was I mad at him for not telling me? I instantly shook my head.

“This is a big deal, and I’m not sure if I’d have believed you before we met in person.” He tilted his head to the side, then shrugged.

“That’s fair. I don’t tell people, because many have regrets that they want changed, and sometimes changing things makes the future worse.” He stared at his food, lost in a memory.

“I get it, V. You can trust me to keep your secret.” He snapped out of it and faced me.

“I know I can. You’re my safe person.” He stared into my eyes, and maybe my power was time traveling too since it felt like time slowed. My heart somehow picked up pace as we got lost in each other’s gaze.

“You’re my person too.” I breathed, afraid to move. Vincent’s brown eyes closed before he tilted his head back. The tension flowing between our bodies had us in a chokehold.

“I’m not from 2023. My normal timeline is 2032. I don’t know how we were able to talk to each other, and I didn’t know you were in a different time until I accidentally transported to you that day at the hospital.” He’d been jumping back and forth through time to have lunch with me and to go to the zoo.

“Is there anything else?” I asked before I let my mind get ahead of me.

“Yes.”

“I can handle it.” And I could. This conversation changed so much between us, might as well air it all out.

“You said you were struggling with money. I have a lot, and I knew you wouldn’t take it if offered, so I made up Mr. Woods.” He fell back against the grass, his body deflating from giving all these details. Because he knew, he knew what I’d feel. And it wasn’t anger. If anything, I wanted to laugh at the lengths this goofy man would go to in order to make sure I was ok. I chose laughter because the alternative was to cry.

“V—”

“Don’t. Talking about it won’t make it better.” He cut me off and I shook my head.

“We should talk. What you’re doing, what we’re doing.” I tried to push through, but he sat up and pressed his fingers to my lips.

“I don’t know what else to do.” He sighed, his brown eyes pleading with me to not make things more complicated. However, this whole scenario was complicated. Not saying it out loud didn’t change anything. I knew as well as he did what

his actions meant. The jumping through time to have lunch with me. Pretending to be some perv with a reading kink to help me with money. Before, it had been enough to know I had a friend that I could be myself with and talk to, and I could be that for him.

Now, I woke up each day wondering if I'd see him. When I felt the itch, or the pain of my own unworthiness, I craved his embrace. His laugh and teasing made me feel joy and ease. Vincent sewed himself into my heart months ago only to fuse into my very soul now.

“We should probably get back. It's been more than ten minutes.”

“I'll take us back before our ten minutes is up.” I paused, then laid back into the grass.

“Can we pretend just for this moment?” I didn't need him to clarify to know what he meant. Right now, in this timeline, we were the only thing that existed in our lives. No bitchy sister, no horrid wife, no Hero Society. It was just Emily and Vincent. I didn't say anything as I lowered myself to his side. His arm wrapped around me as I nestled into the nook of his shoulder and pec.

There was no kissing, no words we couldn't unhear, or touches that couldn't be undone. We lay in the grass, watching the clouds in silence. When the sun started to set, we left for the hospital with two minutes to spare. I ruffled up my hair and clothes, and Vincent laughed watching.

“I'm trying to make it look realistic,” I huffed, and Vincent shook his head with a big grin.

“I'm wounded you think that makes it seem realistic that we fucked.” I stopped all movement, my gaze darting to him. Unable to stop myself, my spine straightened as the words flew out of my mouth.

“Oh, yeah, and what would make it realistic?”

Vincent stepped closer, close enough that I took a step back and bumped against the ladder of the bunk bed. His arms reached up to the rails above, caging me between his massive

body and the bed. I fucked up, but I lived for every second of him so close.

“Besides the obvious of needing more than ten minutes...” His head dropped to look me in the eyes, and my knees wobbled.

“First thing would be your voice. My sweet and talkative Emily would be hoarse from my dick sliding between your tonsils before screaming as I make you come.”

We fucked up. I pushed a man on edge, and now the unsaid we tried to keep that way was said.

“Second would be your clothes. They wouldn’t be rumpled, they’d been torn. Nothing stands between your body and mine. Third, walking normally. I’m big everywhere, and if the red welts on your bubbly ass from being spanked don’t make you take cautious steps, then the soreness between your legs from being impaled over and over on my dick will.”

Seconds, I was seconds from gripping him by the collar and begging for him to show me, to make it realistic. But a knock on the door told me our time was up.

“V.”

“I’ll see you tomorrow, E.” His words brushed against my lips, and I shoved my hands into my pockets for safety.

“Tomorrow.” What a loaded word. Time didn’t exist for the man standing before me, but here he was choosing specific moments to exist, and out of all of them, he chose now.

What the hell were we going to do?

## Chapter Seventeen

### Vincent

“Crowded today.” I glanced at the hundreds of people surrounding a temporary stage in the park. I met Emily at work again, and we decided to talk in the park. As much as I wanted to ignore the problem between us, saying her voice would be hoarse from my dick between her tonsils changed things. I don’t know what broke me to where the words came out.

“Yeah. Terratrex is talking about their campaign to fight climate change. It’s nice to see a company try to do something about the world’s problems. Maybe we should go somewhere else. It’s pretty loud,” she said, and I agreed it wasn’t an ideal space. On our way to the exit, I listened to the company’s speaker talk.

“This satellite will repel those harmful rays that enter the ozone layer, giving us more time to work on our problems with ozone depleting habits. Like fossil fuels! Which leads us to our next exciting project we will unveil to you all, right here, right now! The Trex Electric SUV!” We stepped out of the park as the crowd went wild. That company was responsible for killing off fifty thousand varieties of plants and wildlife in the rivers and Seahill bay a few years back with their forever fruiting trees meant to stop world hunger. Everything would always come at a price; they weren’t the humanitarian company they wanted people to believe them to be. Those trees would have gone to the countries who paid the most, not people who were poor and needed food. Either way, I knew how this story ended. Terratrex burnt down this park with the big unveiling of the satellite, people died, and the company was forced to shut down. It saved the world from many other environmental tragedies.

“We can go to my place? It’s not too far. My sister is off on a date, and I can whip us up something.”

“Sounds good.” Anywhere that didn’t have a big crowd worked for me. We walked to her apartment silently. As we climbed up the stairs thanks to the broken elevator, the need to take care of Emily ripped through me. Her building wasn’t the worst, but she deserved better.

“Awesome. Sorry about the mess, I haven’t been home much. Chastine and I have been staying away from each other, and it’s sort of working, but not in a healthy way.” I stepped into the small space that reminded me much of my childhood apartment. The first one with my mother.

It wasn’t messy, just lived in. Blankets weren’t folded but strewn about on the purple couch. Cups sat next to the half full sink, and there were clothes scattered about. Like both Emily and her sister took them off and tossed them wherever.

“Oops. Let me get that.” She scooted me to the side to snatch a pink bra off the ground, then hurried to toss it into a room down the hall.

“Ok. I can make enchiladas, chili, bake chicken breasts, umm.” She rushed back into the kitchen to peek into the fridge. Her buzzing around like a fast moving bee made me chuckle.

“How about I cook?” I suggested and was quickly waved off without a word. The battle for who could take care of each other continued.

“I’m feeling enchiladas. I can use the leftover chicken from last night and—” She started mumbling, so I didn’t catch the rest, but I’m sure it was about the food. “Sound ok?” She glanced over, her hands already full with the ingredients.

“Sounds great.” I sat at the small dining table, my stomach in knots over the talk we needed to have. The silence in the space nudged me to say something.

“E, yesterday—”

“Let me get these into the oven, and we’ll talk while they bake.” Sounded reasonable for a conversation I didn’t think either of us wanted to have. Ten minutes later, Emily plopped down in the seat across the table. I watched her and

she watched me, both lips unwilling to open. I reached up to release my hair from the bun to redo it, anything to get the nerves out.

“Wait.” She jumped up as I pulled my hair back up, ready with the hair tie.

“Leave it down.” Slowly she stepped around the table, stood before me, and I froze. Her fingers reached out, then paused as her gaze found my curious one. “May I?” she whispered, and I dropped my hands.

“Yes.” I breathed, and within two seconds, her fingers delved into my hair, her pink nails lightly scratching against my skull. My eyes closed, and I swore no touch ever felt this good.

“I don’t know how to feel, V. I’m confused. I want you. Those things you said...” The pressure in her fingers deepened to more of a massage, and my breaths kicked up. “I want them. You’re so amazing and are there for me more than anyone ever has been.” I opened my eyes and snatched her body to sit on my lap as she continued, “But this is complicated. You’re not supposed to be here. You’re from another time, and what if this has changed things already? Oh boy.”

I knew she felt the hard length beneath her ass. I wasn’t lying when I said I was big everywhere.

“I’m dying and living every time I’m around you.” She breathed and I inched closer, every nerve in my body telling me to reach out with my lips to the skin of her neck.

“I’m not supposed to be here.” My fingers dug into her hips as her grip twisted, pulling my hair just enough. Fuck! I should leave. Just help her up, ask for space, and transport right out of the apartment.

“You’re married.” Her forehead touched mine, and I heard the crack in her voice. We were breaking at the seams with no thread to pull us back together.

“I can’t do it anymore. She’s—” The sound of the front door opening caught us off guard. Emily hopped right off me



and landed in her seat in seconds.

“I smell dinner. Better be good because my date sucked ass.” I assumed that was Emily’s sister walking in by the tone of the feminine voice.

“Dinner will be ready in ten. Chastine, this is my friend Vincent. Vincent, this is my sister.” Emily gestured between us with her hand. I remained sitting to keep my hard-on less obvious.

“Whatever.” The sister walked into the kitchen, and all lust in me died. In fact, bile rose up my throat, and I worried I’d puke on the floor.

“Whoa, you’re hot. Maybe my night isn’t so bad after all.” Emily’s sister walked closer. Those blue eyes I knew so well roamed over me. She liked what she saw—she always did. Her fingers reached out to touch my shoulder, and I sat there with my mouth open. Taking that as an invitation, she leaned down, lips to my ear, her brown hair brushing against my face.

“I know how to suck dick like a pro. If you want a better time than that miserable fish, I’ll be in the room down the hall on the right.” Her nails scraped against my arm as she walked by, wiggling her fingers at her sister in a mocking manner.

My body stayed in the chair, frozen, because my brain couldn’t process what just happened.

“I’m sorry. I don’t even know what just happened.” Emily tried to break the horribly awkward silence, but even I could see her eyes were wide. I sat there as her sister touched me and whispered about dick sucking in my ear. I said nothing. I didn’t move.

“I’ve got to go. I’m sorry.”

“Wait, V. Whatever she said, please don’t let it bother you.”

“Figured you’d chase him away.” The terrorist from down the hall stepped into the living room wearing a nightgown that wasn’t appropriate for company. I was in hell.

That was the only explanation to the sheer torture and shooting pain in my chest.

“Chastine. Oh my god.”

“I told you yesterday to call me Chasity, you fucking slut.”

I wanted to be anywhere but here. Their shouting, the realization of who Emily’s sister was. My head hurt, and I felt faint. My lungs couldn’t keep up with the breaths needed.

“I’m sorry.” I glanced at Emily’s red face and fled. As soon as I was clear of eyes, I got the fuck out of this time.

## Chapter Eighteen

Emily

V.

*You don't have to say anything else, just please let me know you're ok.*

E.

I folded the paper and tossed it into the mailbox with the other unseen ones. Vincent ran so fast, face so pale, it was as if he'd seen a ghost. I knew the look because I'd seen ghosts in person. I chased after him, but he'd already jumped time. Besides our little magical mailbox, I had no other way of checking on him.

I felt his distance in every breath, every step, and thought. He'd become the blood in my veins, and without him I felt cold.

"I figured I'd find you here. Get up, you're coming with me." Selene stepped up to the bench and thrust a hand forward.

"I miss him."

"I know, but there's nothing you can do right now. So you're coming with me to a Hero Society girls' night. Guaranteed to make you feel better." I eyed her hand before taking the offer a few seconds later. I wasn't going home, and I knew if I lay down, I'd stay down for days. For the sake of my job, and mental health, I had to keep moving. My whole body felt like it weighed an extra hundred pounds as I stood.

"I'm not dressed for going out."

"You're perfect as you are. We're going to a low-key place, with safe people." She emphasized the *safe* and *low-key* to ease the tension building in my gut. As we walked to her car, I asked who would be there, to help my nerves by eliminating the unknown.

“Hazel, Rose, Lilith, Echo, Esme, Gwen, Mina, and us. We’re grabbing Rose and Gwen from headquarters, then heading to Hazel’s estate in the woods.” All the details soothed my brain. I knew Rose and Gwen. They were the sweetest out of the heroes I’d met. Gwen’s little robots surprised me at first, but after one pizza luncheon with them, Pops and I were good friends. Cora the dragon sat beside me once, and I took that as best friend behavior too.

Phillip stood outside Pizza Pazza, with his blonde sister chatting with the white-haired petite woman to her right. A tall man stood with his arms crossed over his chest, and I’d remember the broody-looking man anytime. Draco. He watched every car that drove by, and Phillip nudged him with a laugh. I’m sure Draco was in full protective husband mode.

As we parked, Phillip ran up to the door and motioned for me to lower the window.

“Ladies. Emily, can I steal you for five minutes? Draco’s here, and we need to talk about your powers. All futures don’t make you all late for tonight. I promise.” He crossed his heart once, and I sighed. I wasn’t in the mood for this, but Draco had answers that would explain more than I could imagine.

“I’ll be right back.” I glanced at Selene before following Phillip over to the others. Rose gave me a soft smile before asking Gwen to walk with her to Selene’s SUV. My chest ached again, and I felt so heavy, like I could lie on the ground.

“Do you feel it?” Phillip asked, and I hadn’t realized I stood there staring at the ground. Great.

“It’s subtle, but something feels off,” Draco responded, and that caught my attention.

“Hi, Emily.” His face softened just a bit as our gazes met. He lifted his hand to hold it palm up in front of me.

“Can you place your hand in mine?” I nodded and did as requested. I felt nothing, but Draco’s eyes closed, and the most relaxed exhale I’d ever heard eased past his lips.

“Powerful,” he added before opening his eyes to glance at Phillip.

“I’m surprised you didn’t tell her; I know you’ve seen this.”

“It had to be you.” Phillip shrugged, and instead of feeling frustrated with them beating around the bush, I felt my shoulders sag further.

“She needs her balance. The longer without it, the harder it will be.” Draco continued to talk like I knew what they were talking about.

“Tell me,” I sighed, and Draco faced me again. This time his eyes remained focused on me, perhaps to watch for signs that I understood every word.

“Your powers come from the mother of the gods. Your very essence is that of the mother. Your presence comforts others like a mother’s hug. Makes them feel safe and warm. But that’s one side, and it feels like you’re only allowing that side to come through.”

“Mother of the gods?” I needed more clarification on that. Perhaps I could look up info in books or the internet later.

“The Titaness, Rhea. She was kind and nurturing, but also fierce. She stood against her husband, Kronos, when he wanted to eat their son Zeus. She gave him a big stone instead. Lying to the Titan of time was not a smart move, but it gave Zeus time to grow and defeat him,” he confirmed, and I played the words over in my head.

Rhea. Titaness. Mother of the gods. My power was a mother’s gifts of comfort and safety. Rhea was married to the Titan of time.

My head darted to Phillip, and he winced.

“He’s my balance, isn’t he?” The words flew out, barely above a whisper. “That’s what you were talking about. Why I feel so shitty after touching him and not being near him.” Phillip rolled his lips between his teeth, and his silence said it all.

“Please explain to me what the balance thing is.” I needed to know what happened if we weren’t balanced. Would I die? Would I be this miserable forever? Draco’s eyes switched focus from me to Phillip, then back to me.

“If you’ve met someone with Kronos’s power, then they are your balance. Everything has a balance. It’s the nature of our world. Sometimes it is emotional balance, sometimes it’s in the opposite of one’s power. Phillip has Mina, the one person in the whole world he can’t guess the future for. He can’t plan every detail of their life and nudge things to go a certain way. Mina is unpredictable. I was hard as stone from my immortal life, and Rose was the only person to soften me. We’re balanced together. Separate, we are still our own complete selves, but we are more aligned with our counterpart. Godly powers need balance, or they overtake human bodies.” He released my hand and took a step back.

“Kronos and Rhea being Titans means your powers are stronger. Needier. Especially with your dormant side. Perhaps touching your counterpart woke it a bit. Staying busy and releasing your power around others in comfort should help. But eventually you’ll burn up without balance. Those with godly powers who don’t use them go mad. Titans will end up using too much until they have nothing left.”

“Phillip,” I whimpered, needing some hope, some something, anything. I didn’t want any of that. I didn’t choose this. I thought of Vincent. He could be in pain and I didn’t know how to tell him, or what to tell him. Tears broke out onto my cheeks, and the need to crumble made me twitch. Phillip shook his head.

“I’m sorry,” he mouthed, and logically I knew this was hard for him. To not tell me everything I wanted to know.

“Whoever they are, they will be back. You are their balance, and they are yours. Your souls can’t be separated for long.” Draco gave me a nod, and I noticed Phillip do the same beside him.

“Go to girls’ night. You’ll feel better,” Phillip finally spoke, his arm coming up for me should I need assistance

walking. I did.

“We are here for you, Emily. You have us, and we are your family,” Draco said as a goodbye, then walked past us to give his wife a kiss from the SUV window.

“We are your family. Everything will work out.” Phillip helped me into the passenger seat, with a smile. I wanted to return a smile of my own, but I felt nothing.

As we drove off, I felt a hand on my shoulder.

“I can help if you’d like. My powers are mine again. If you want to feel a little different,” Rose offered, and I knew I shouldn’t. Feeling your feelings was the best way to work through them. The only way. But my feelings were too much right now. I wasn’t a drinker or drug user. I really didn’t want to cut myself again, so magical manipulation it was. Rose had the power to make me feel anything, and I was going to take her up on the offer.

“I wanna enjoy the night, so do what you gotta do.”

## Chapter Nineteen

### Vincent

For the first time in days, I smiled. My pillow smelled like the vanilla and jasmine candle from Emily's house, and I dug my face into the soft material. I'd tried so hard not to think during my waking hours, when my subconscious pushed me to face her. But in the dream world, I never married Chasity. I found Emily first, and I woke up to her sweet scented-candle room every morning, with her pink hair brushing against my chest as she peacefully slept in my arms. She'd wake up with bright smiles, and I spent those precious moments before breakfast showing her how grateful I was to be with her. I used my fingers, my tongue, and my cock. Every moan, every call of my name, made every second living in this life worth it.

"Mmm," she moaned, and I ran my fingers down the curve of her hips, then dipped below the hem of her sleep shorts to palm her muscled ass. I pulled her close, and she moaned against the feeling of my morning wood pressed against her.

"Mmm. Vinc—mmm... Holy hell!" Her body jerked out of my hands, and I jolted awake. Yeah... not my room and not a dream.

Emily sat on the floor beside what must be her bed, the sheets tangled between her legs. Her wide eyes and deep breaths worried me, but instead of comforting her, I looked around. I was still clothed, sans shoes. I closed my eyes to search for the memories of how I got here, but nothing came up. Phillip tried to talk to me a few times at the hero apartment, but I'd jumped time before he got a word out. In the few moments of alone time I got, I drank myself into that peaceful nothingness of thought.

I was assuming this was like the time at the park. Stupid powers.



“V.” Emily’s voice broke, and my gaze snapped to her. She scrambled out of the sheets and onto the bed to squeeze the fuck out of me. “I was so worried. Where have you been? You’ve never gone this long without writing, and I just... I’m glad you’re here. You’re a grown man—you can do what you want—but a little communication is nice, and I...” My brain obviously didn’t remember the situation at hand, or it didn’t care. Without letting her finish her ramble, my lips crashed into hers.

She stilled, as did I. As if the kiss were an anxiety pill, she melted and relaxed into me. Her lips parted, and I eased back. I couldn’t. Not like this.

“We have to talk.” I created as much space between us as her queen-size bed gave. It wasn’t enough for what I had to say, but my powers had enough of me adding more.

“Ok. We’re safe. I’m here to listen.” She nodded and sat calmly in sleep shorts and a pink tank top. In the chaos of the morning, I hadn’t noticed how beautiful she looked in her comfy clothes. My eyes glanced down to her forearms, and she instantly crossed her arms over her chest to hide them from me.

“We are safe. I will never judge you.” We needed to talk about her sister, but this came first. I needed Emily to know.

Moving closer, I reached over. I watched her eyes, waiting for the ok as I peeled her arms out of her guarded hold.

“You are beautiful. Every freckle.” Her arm shook as I lightly straightened it between us. Her breaths stilled as I leaned down and pressed my lips to the first set of straight scars on her inner arm. Crosshatching patterns switched angles up her arms and stopped at her elbow.

“Every strand of hair.” Another kiss on another set, and her breath released.

“Every smile, frown, and resting bitch face.” I smiled as I kissed my way up her arm.

“You are beautiful on your happy days.” I switched to the other.

“You are beautiful on your sad days.” I quickly pecked two sets and paused against the raised scars near her wrist.

“Every scar shows a moment where you did not let the sad days steal you from this earth. I am in awe of you and your strength.” I finished off with pecks to each finger and gently set her arms in her lap.

“Most people would say my scars showed my weakness. I should have been stronger,” she whispered, her head downcast.

“People don’t realize how many take their lives every day. Every hour. You didn’t join those statistics. You continue to work through the tough times in healthier ways and give yourself grace. You deal with your problems head-on. You are brave and strong. You make me want more than I ever allowed myself to try for.” Like her. Like actually doing something for myself in the timeline. I wasn’t sure if being here had changed things already, but I started not caring.

“Why did you run away?”

“I’m a coward.”

“I don’t believe that.” She shook her head, and I wished again for that bravery of hers. Instead of facing my problems, I’d found every distraction I could. I wasn’t taught how to cope or any of that shit, and I never tried to. If I’d learned better, then I’d want differently. Different scared me, plain and simple.

“You’re going to hate me.” I glanced to the small window of her bedroom, tempted to jump out of this timeline. If I did, she’d really hate me, and that’s what kept my ass on her bed.

“I don’t think I can, V. You have to know. Fuck, I feel it from you. This... between us... It’s real, it’s raw, and it’s deep inside our souls. It’s not going anywhere.” I felt it, and it felt like my gut had a python squeezing the fuck out of it. I turned my focus back to her, and her green eyes stared into

mine. I wanted to lose myself in her. I breathed deeply, ready to say those few damning words, but she saved me.

“Wait. You can tell me after this. I need you to know. Like really know that no matter what, I’m not going anywhere. Ok?” I nodded and she graced me with a soft smile. The python in my gut eased just a bit. “I spoke with Draco last night. My powers come from Rhea. A Titan, like yours. Like some crazy predestined fate or something. You are my balance, and I am yours. I ached without you, and I know you felt it. It’s why you’re here now. But more than the draw of those ancient powers, is this.” She grabbed my hand and placed it over her chest. Her heart beat steadily beneath my palm.

“Every beat of my heart belongs to my person. My safe person. You.” I gaped. She didn’t say love, but I knew. I mean, I’d known the trajectory of us and chose to ignore it. She...

She loved me... This perfect, beautiful woman, who I’d secretly loved from the future, loved me. My heart pounded, and I couldn’t do this anymore. That fucking gut python squeezed and squeezed until the words pushed out of me.

“Chasity is my wife in the future.”

## Chapter Twenty

Emily

All thoughts, heartbeats, and breaths stopped. Somehow, I didn't know how he did it, but Vincent must have frozen time and hell in the same moment. That's the power of Kronos, good ole Father Time, right there for ya. Because I thought he said Chasity was his future wife and, yeah, time and hell being frozen over felt way more realistic.

I vaguely noticed his lips saying more, but there were no sounds. Darn Kronos time powers taking away my hearing too. Wild. His mouth kept moving as he cupped my cheeks. The warmth in his touch thawed it all. Time sped, my heart sped up, and air raced out of my lungs. He did say Chasity was his wife in the future.

"That bitch," I said.

"Uh, what?" I nudged his hands off my cheeks and stood only to start pacing beside the bed.

"I said, that bitch."

"You don't hate me?" His voice cracked. Instantly, I rushed back to the bed to cup his cheeks like he had mine. Those brown eyes, so deep, yet the pain rested on the surface. I couldn't imagine everything he'd felt and gone through likely alone.

"I don't hate you. Chastine is horrid. Straight abusive when you get down to it. I've heard your stories and have experienced her in real life. She's a nightmare. I don't blame you or hate you for being ensnared in her glittering yet poisonous web. I've seen boys get trapped, and she ruins their lives. She's only a teenager right now. I can't imagine older Chastine who's had more time to hone her manipulation skills." Even as I said the words, I felt them deep in my bones. Chastine, or Chasity, or whatever name she called herself, was rotten to her core. Did I want to think about him and her together in the future? Hell no. But I understood it.

“You’re too good for me. I’m fucked up. This... You deserve better than this.” He shook his head as those big hands of his gently lowered mine to my sides. His head dropped, and I saw the intent to jump time or leave.

“I don’t care that you’re married to my sister in the future. If you were with her now in my time, then I’d say you’re a creep and I deserved better.” I tried joking, but maybe it was too soon for sister jokes. I grabbed his wrist, and his gaze darted up to mine.

“If you jump, then I’m jumping with you.”

“E. This situation. What are we going to do?” He shook his hand, but my grip remained firm.

“I don’t know, but it doesn’t matter. We care for each other. We’re both a balance power-wise. We are each other’s safe person. This is rare and I know it’s because we are supposed to be together. Maybe I was out of town in the future and you were drawn to the closest thing to me. I don’t know.” His chest moved up and down slowly. No orange magic surrounded us, so I kept going.

“I do know this. We’re both being abused by the same person. If we give up each other because of her, then she wins. She officially takes the one good thing we have in this life. Each other.” I pleaded for him to hear my words, to feel them deeply. This story was wild. My best friend and chosen for my heart was a time traveling superhero who was married to my sister in the future. It’s like a bad soap opera or some taboo romance novel. But here we were, in this real-life, fucking crazy scenario.

“I can’t change things. My parents. It just...” Whether he meant to or not, his powers surrounded us. My grip tightened, and no amount of power on earth could rip me from him. I closed my eyes, and when a summer breeze tickled the hair on my neck, I opened them.

“My dad left my mom and me when I was young.” Vincent led me to the ground as we looked over pre-Seahill Seahill. The same spot he showed me his cool power.

“She was never the same after that.” He breathed, and I slithered my hand from his wrist to lace our fingers. We weren’t going anywhere, and he needed the comfort.

“She didn’t hit me, but everything affected me as if she did. Her voice, her steps, the way she moved. My life was hell.” His head faced the bay, and a knot formed in my throat. I worked with enough people who struggled from emotional abuse, and knew the effects.

“On my sixteenth birthday, my powers showed up and transported me back to a time when my parents were together.” He inhaled deeply, then released slowly. “I begged my dad not to leave. I thought that if he stayed, then everything would be ok in the future. Mom wouldn’t blame everything on me.” *Deep breaths, Emily.*

“When I came back to my time, everything had changed. My dad stayed, and since they were both toxic to each other, they became addicts. They both abandoned me and died of overdoses.” I opened my mouth to say something, but I had nothing. That knot in my gut tightened, but with my free hand, I touched the grass on my side in attempts to soothe the need to jump in and fix.

“My whole life changed, and ever since, I try not to change the past.”

“But doesn’t you being in the past change things? Our dates at the restaurant? I’m sure you changed other things.” I felt like this timeline thing was very fragile. If I spit gum on the sidewalk, it could cause a chain of events that led to World War III and I wouldn’t know it. Or at least that’s the way it sounded to me.

“The zoo. I saved two keepers, although I shouldn’t have helped. It did change things, but as far as I can find, the two keepers that previously died got married and live as retirees with a house on the bay. They haven’t made big ripples that changed the lives of mankind. However, I wasn’t thinking. I can’t do it again. What if everything is worse?” I shook my head. No wonder my sister was able to dig her nails in deep.

“A valid question, and powers like yours are great enough to change the lives of every person. However, the what-if games will drive you mad. Especially when the what-ifs are all the bad situations. There are good possibilities too. That couple you saved died originally. That’s as bad as it gets for them. Now they are living a happy life together. It changed for the better.” I needed him to see that good and bad both existed and that we could choose which we focus on.

“What if something happens to you? What if it makes things worse for us? Chasity is... Well, what if it turns out like my parents? I can’t lose you.” He finally faced me with glossy eyes, and I was on the move. He gulped as I released our hands to climb onto his lap. I needed to look him in the eyes as I said my next words.

“There is always a chance of bad happening. Even here, right now in this time in space. A fucking asteroid could hit us, or your powers stop working and we get stuck here. Every moment of every day has a chance of good and bad happening. You can’t control everything, Vincent, and I wouldn’t wish that burden on anyone.” I placed my hand over his chest, his heart thumping rapidly beneath me.

“No matter where you are in time, you only have that moment. The past, the future, all of it isn’t real. Only right now is. I choose to live my now, right here with you.”

“But I’m—”

“Married to a monster that you haven’t slept with in ages, who manipulates you and treats you like garbage. I know. You can divorce her later and move into 2023 with me. See? Problems solved.” He was also the man who kissed my scars and loved me as I was. He’d be there during my happy days and my sad days.

For the first time since we woke up, his eyes lightened. The corner of his lips lifted, and I quickly pressed my lips to the right side of his. As I leaned back, his hand gripped the back of my neck, holding me close.

“I don’t think it’s that simple.”

“It can be. Something could happen quicker than you could respond. You’re not Phillip. You don’t know every single possibility, and even if you did, you can’t control what happens. We can die right now, V. How do you want to live your precious moments?” Humans were always fucked. If it wasn’t natural disasters, other people, the food we eat, or stress, something else would take us out. He tilted his head up, our lips a hairbreadth away.

“Taking care of you.”



## Chapter Twenty-One

### Vincent

She was right, but that didn't erase the pain. It didn't take a genius to know only time would do that. So I'd try. I'd try for her.

"You're my person," I whispered, and she nodded, our lips so close.

"I don't want to live in a time where you aren't mine." My vow turned to a kiss, then finally settled into a resolution. Emily was my future, and I'd exist wherever she did. Her taste, the sounds she made as we kissed, burned in my chest. A brand upon my heart.

"I vaguely recall something about sore tonsils, ripped clothes, and a red ass? I could be mistaken though. Not that I've masturbated to the exact words since I heard them or anything."

Those words. I'd said them and never thought I'd allow myself to act upon them.

"Hm, sounds like a good time. You should find whoever said them," I teased, and she smiled against my lips. I released my hold on her neck and rolled her hips over my hardening cock.

"A good time indeed. I bet he'd fill me with his big dick. Pretty sure there were words about that too. Being big everywhere." Her lip trembled as she felt the big length beneath her.

"Pretty sure he'd ruin you with his cock alone." My lips left hers to travel down her jaw to her neck.

"Ok. I just want that. I don't want to play anymore." She whimpered and I nipped at the flesh between her neck and shoulders.

"Right here?" I would.

“You could fuck me against the pyramids or the temples in ancient Greece. I don’t care where, I just need you inside me.” As tempting as the thought of fucking Emily through time was, I wanted her to be comfortable. She deserved being taken care of, and I wanted to give her everything she wanted and more. I gripped her tightly as I pressed hot kisses on my way to her lips. She groaned as our tongues danced, and my powers tickled against our skin.

Moments later, we were in my hero apartment.

Two seconds after that, her tank top was off and on the floor.

“Tell me what you’re grateful for, Emily.” I pushed my fingers through her shorts and pulled.

“What?” She ceased kissing me, and I stopped ripping.

“Want me to continue? Tell me something you’re grateful for,” I demanded, and the light in her green eyes brightened. It was a game, and we loved playing games.

“I’m grateful for this bed.” I ripped my way up her shorts, then pressed my fingers through the material on her other thigh. She lifted and the material fell, revealing soft pink panties.

“More,” I demanded as I rolled us over, her body settled snugly between mine and the mattress.

“Um, I’m grateful for you.”

“Give me more, Emily.” I lowered my head and kissed her lips.

“You’re touching me, and I can barely think.” She whimpered as I lowered myself down her body, peppering her soft skin with kisses as I did.

“I’m grateful for your soft skin. So smooth, so perfect. I’m eager to see your ass turn pink.” She shivered as I sucked her nipple. My fingers coasted over her curves and palmed her other breast. “I’m grateful for your tits. They fit perfectly in my hands.” They really did. I brought my other hand to lift her leg to my hip.

“Your turn, E.” I lowered myself further until her legs rested over my shoulders.

“I’m grateful—” She started and paused as I pulled her panties to the side. Perfect. I sure as fuck was grateful at the sight of her. A glistening pink pussy, ready for devouring.

“Grateful for what, E?” I blew against her sex, and her legs trembled.

“Um. Oh. Um.” If she had trouble finding the words, then I’d give her some inspiration with one long roll of my tongue against her clit.

“Ok. I’m so grateful for that. So beyond grateful that you should do it again.” I laughed and rewarded her. Her hands gripped the sheets at her side as I pressed my lips to her. A hot kiss turned to sucking and lavish licks. So fucking good.

“I’m grateful for this delicious pussy.” I groaned against her and saw her head nod against my pillow.

“I’m grateful for that too,” she whimpered. “I mean. I don’t even know. Oh.”

“Hm... Doesn’t sound grateful enough.” I stopped and her upper half jackknifed up with a feral narrowing of her eyes.

“I’d be more grateful impaled on your cock,” she snarled, and I was up. Her panties were ripped off, my shirt already over my head.

“Tell me more,” I growled. I kicked off my boots, then my pants, and crawled back up her body.

“I don’t seem to be impaled, so I can’t tell you what I’m grateful for.” She tried to turn the tables on me, and it was working.

“Sounds like a problem.” I bent her knees to the side and lifted onto my knees. I wanted to see myself slide into her.

“Fix it, and I’ll be a grateful good girl.” She was a good girl. I pressed my hips forward, and her warmth surrounded the head of my cock.

“Fuck.” Every inch, every dip and slide back and forth, slayed every dream I’d had of her. She squirmed, and her hands went to her breasts as I pushed into her fully.

“E?” I looked away from our joined bodies to her face and saw the pinched expression.

“I’m ok. It’s just a lot.” She breathed and I started to ease out, worried I’d hurt her. “No, no. I’m grateful for your big dick, Vincent. Now fuck me with it.”

## Chapter Twenty-Two

### Emily

Vincent wasn't lying when he said I'd be sore from him impaling me with his monster cock. His bed probably had a permanent indent of my body already.

"So fucking good," he groaned, and I swore I'd never seen a hotter sight than his abs flexing over and over as he thrust into me. Then those hands grabbed my hips, and my toes curled.

"I'm grateful you're so fucking hot," I moaned as my muscles tensed from the nearing climax. Fuck, fuck, fuck.

"Come on my cock, E." Fuck, ok. I could do that. My back bowed as he slammed into me harder and faster to ride my waves of pleasure.

"V." I cried out from the whole-body tremors that washed over me. Vincent groaned as I clenched him over and over. His hands palmed my tits once, and just as my orgasm came to an end, he pulled out and flipped me over to my knees.

"I'm grateful for this ass." He massaged my cheeks, and I knew before the smack echoed around the room that it was coming. The sting only lasted a few seconds before he entered me from behind.

"Fucking hell, you're a goddess." He pulled my hips back to meet his with each thrust. I wasn't gonna survive.

"Oh. Fuck. V. Come with me."

"I'm with you."

*Smack*

That sting of his big hand to my other ass cheek sent me over the edge again. I felt a little bad for anyone else nearby, because this time my orgasm ripped a porn-star-worthy cry out of my lungs with Vincent's guttural moan mixed in.

My knees wobbled as my pussy throbbed and clenched through Vincent's slowing thrusts.

As I came down from the cock high, sweet kisses peppered my back. I was seconds from collapsing face-first into the mattress when Vincent pulled out, then rolled us to the side. Big spoon and little spoon, happy in post sexy-time bliss.

"I love you," he whispered against my hair, and I snuggled closer to his front. Muscled arms held me, and I felt the safety in his words.

"I love you."

"I'm grateful for that." I could feel his smile against my head, and a laugh bubbled out of me.

"I think you've ruined my innocent game. How am I supposed to be grateful for fresh air or electricity when it makes me think of your dick?" I'd have to find another game to play.

"I don't see a problem. It's a good thing to be grateful for." He laughed, and my body shook with his.

"You're something else," I teased and kissed the arm closest to me.

"We both are, but I'm ok with that." He squeezed me, then relaxed at my back. Silence surrounded us, and instead of feeling awkward about it, I felt calm. Whenever I had alone time at home or work, I'd find ways to occupy myself, like scroll on social media, eat, watch a movie, fold laundry, or something. It wasn't until I lay with my person that I realized how peaceful the quiet was. I was warm, safe, and loved. I'd bask all day in his arms if I could.

I glanced around, and besides a line of clothes on a rack against the wall, it was pretty bare.

"Where and when are we?"

"My Hero Society apartment in my time. 2032." His time. The same time in space where he was married to Chasity. My brain immediately went to name-calling myself. Whore.

Homewrecker. Cheater. Mistress. And I had to take a few breaths to calm down.

“What’s wrong?” Vincent sat up and rolled me over to scan my face.

“It’s just weird being here. She’s here, and you two. I’m not being very kind to myself up here.” I pointed to my head and wished those thoughts stayed out.

“This is my apartment to get away. I’ve been here more than with her for a while.” I understood, truly. He talked about a second living space in our year of being pen pals.

“Do you regret what we—” I didn’t let him finish.

“No, Vincent. I don’t. I meant every word I said before. I love you, you’re my safe place, the keeper of my heart. Chasity is a manipulative human, and I don’t hate you. It’s just weird being in the same time and city. Weird but I just need to work through it.” His wife cheated on him, abused him, and probably did more than he’d told me. “As long as you aren’t regretting it and going back to her. That would be a problem.” I hadn’t thought of that, but I knew from my training that sometimes the abused are stuck in dysregulation. They are so used to the constant anxiety and trauma that it feels familiar. Sometimes they would attract the same people and keep the cycle. What if he changed his mind?

“No, I can’t. I won’t. I exist where you exist.” He leaned over to press a kiss to my forehead. I didn’t realize I’d tensed up until his touch relaxed me.

“I filled out the divorce papers days ago, just need to finish the process.” His lips touched the tip of my nose, then finally my mouth.

“We can figure out the rest later.” My fingers drifted to his arms, feeling the hard muscles. He was so strong, and thinking about his body over mine made my nether regions ache.

“We’ve got time,” he agreed, feeling the shift in my energy. I’d never been one of those girls who wanted to go another round right after sex. Maybe the Titan powers flowing

through us made the need more demanding, because I wanted him again, now.

“Need me to show you how grateful I am again?” he purred against my lips, and I laughed. What monsters had we become?

“Sounds delightful.” I spoke against his lips, then felt a tickle in my throat. With so much moaning and screaming, I wasn’t surprised.

“I think I’m gonna get a glass of—” The sound of a wooden door opened and shut across the room. Vincent rolled off me with an arm stretched out to block my body from an attack. Suddenly the faucet turned on, and a glass cup flew straight for us.

“What the fuck?” Vincent quickly rolled up out of the way. The glass would have shattered in his hand instead of the wall had he tried to catch it. Shards fell onto the pillow where my head had been.

“What just happened?” I watched as the faucet shut off, and the cabinet doors where the cups were open and closed randomly. Vincent said nothing as he stood, fully nude, and walked to the kitchen to inspect the paranormal-like happenings.

“Do you have ghosts? Perhaps Selene’s husband Jude can kick them out or something. I’m sure they’re around in this time.”

“They are. I’ve met them before. But this isn’t a ghost.” He pushed an open cabinet shut and waited. Nothing.

“Weird. While you’re up, can you get me a drink? I was about to get one when—” Another glass shot out of the cabinet, aimed right for my head. The faucet turned on, and I ducked and rolled off the bed. Vincent rushed over and picked me up off the floor where a few of the glass pieces fell.

“That’s crazy. I was just think—” Vincent moved us out of the way as another glass had it in for us again. There had to be a ghost throwing glass cups at us! This was insane.



“Emily. Stop thinking about a glass of water.” Vincent carried me into a bathroom and set me on the marble top vanity. Nice bathroom in these apartments.

“E, what did Draco say about your powers? That the calm feeling people get is Rhea’s. Anything else?” Vincent glanced at me, then peered into the rest of the apartment like a bodyguard.

“Um. He said that a part of me was dormant. Waiting or something like that. I was stressed and, like, physically hurting without you around. I may not have heard things right.” I shook my head, trying to dislodge any info I didn’t remember. Vincent leaned against the wall, with a huge grin on his face. Odd expression for someone with glass all over his bed and floors.

“What?”

“You.”

“What me?” I wasn’t doing anything funny.

“You, Emily. The cups, the cabinets, the faucet is you. Your powers aren’t dormant anymore.”

## Chapter Twenty-Three

### Vincent

We cleaned up the apartment and left for her time.

“Holy crap, it’s so hot,” she groaned as we stepped out from her apartment. The summer weather bumped up at least ten degrees since the last time I stood outside in 2023. However, I knew that the Terratrex catastrophe was just around the corner on the timeline. People mentioned the city’s heat close to the event so that tracked. I made a mental note to keep Emily away from the park during that event.

“My tits are gonna sweat right off me.” Emily shook her head, looking adorable as fuck. I wrapped my arms around her and lifted her body up for a kiss. Her legs wrapped around me as I carried her closer to the heroes’ headquarters.

“Vincent, I’m hot and have boob sweat. Contain yourself.” She rolled her eyes, but those legs tightened around my waist. A real fighter, this one. “So, we’re going to talk to Draco about my powers, then what?” she asked, and I had a few ideas in mind. That was until Phillip leaned against the outside wall of Pizza Pazza.

“He probably saw us coming.” She untangled herself and walked up to the seer first. Phillip smiled and held out a to-go cup for Emily.

“You were thirsty.”

“That I was.” She took it with a dash of pink on her cheeks and sipped the drink. The Phillip of this time looked like a younger version of the one in mine. Glad nothing changed.

“Assuming you have insight?” I initiated the conversation, knowing he always had a reason when he showed up first. He scanned my face, then smirked.

“Yeah. Draco is busy, and me telling you this doesn’t change anything.” He switched focus from me to Emily.

“You have telekinesis. Moving objects with your mind. You are both female and masculine energy. Calming, warm, nurturing, and create action physically. It’s gonna take some practice, but you’ll get the hang of it.” He glanced away, and while I knew normal people did that, Phillip only avoided eye contact when there was more info he couldn’t say.

“Ok. I move things with my mind. Got it. I can practice. You guys can help me train, right?” she asked, and I laced my fingers with hers. She already knew I’d be there to help as best as I could.

“Yep. We’ll probably put you on the mat with Lilith or Draco. They’re the best fighters and could avoid anything you threw at them.” He smiled, and again, I knew it wasn’t his real smile.

“Awesome. I guess that’s it?” Emily’s head turned to me, and I nodded.

“Unless you want to train now. There’s no one down there at the moment. You’ll have the mat to yourself.”

“Yes, please.” Emily did a little wiggle, and I released our hands.

“Go ahead. Your access code is 232. Hit the B2 button. I need to talk with Vincent for a minute.” Phillip opened the door to the restaurant, and Emily didn’t move but looked to me.

“I’ll be there in a few, promise.” I only had eyes for her, but if I’d been paying better attention, I would have noticed Phillip glance away again. The love of my life nodded, then walked into the building. I was assuming she knew the way when I saw her turn toward the janitor’s closet-slash-elevator.

The door closed and Phillip faced me.

“Am I messing with your master plans?” Already my skin itched for Emily’s touch. A tightness blossomed at the back of my head, the beginnings of a tension headache for sure. I wanted to hurry this conversation along so I could see her again.

“Not at all. It is interesting watching the futures shift.”

“Nothing else to say?” The Phillip of my time was a little more talkative. This one tilted his head like he was trying to figure me out.

“There’s a fifty-fifty chance of two futures, and I’m unsure if you’re ready for them. I can’t tell which direction you’ll go in. They both move back and forth into probable, then less probable.” His eyes glazed over, and I waited until he finished searching for the answer.

“Does telling me change the odds in a favorable outcome?” I asked, and he shook his head.

“That’s the kicker. If it were me, it would. But I’m a gambling man. You? You’ve got issues, future best friend,” Phillip said with a shrug.

I wanted to know in this case, so I told him so. “Doesn’t seem like it matters, might as well.” My whole body ached, and the summer heat licked the back of my neck while beads of sweat grew on my brows.

“I suppose so. I do hope, in telling you, that you’ll make the best choice.” He sighed and closed his eyes. Moments of deep breaths passed before he opened them again to level his stare at me.

“Emily dies during the Terratrex Catastrophe. She’s the hero that brings down that awful corporation through her death.” The tension in my body ceased only to be replaced by the heaviest of weights pulling me down. And down I went. Right there on the sidewalk, in front of the Italian restaurant, I crumbled to my knees.

“No.” I didn’t want to believe it, though I knew Phillip never lied. My future friend came to his knees in front of me, silent in support.

“What happens if I change it?” I needed to know. I couldn’t lose her.

“Terratrex gets a slap on the wrist and terrorizes our planet for a long time.” One life to save many, that’s what he’s hinting. Terratrex’s horrid reign would finally end, but at the

cost of Emily's life. To save her meant they continued on and hurt countless more. I understood why the futures were jumping back and forth. It should be easy. Save Emily. But what kind of person does that make me if I condemn others for her?

“What's the best choice?” My chest tightened as my heart beat so fast. My head hurt and I wondered if this was what having a heart attack was like.

“That's up to you. I have my hopes, but you know what I always bet on.” Love. He always bet on love. He said that to me days ago.

“Tell her I'll be back. That I'm sorry for breaking my promise, but I'll be at her apartment for dinner.” I needed to move, to run, to scream, to get this explosive energy out before seeing her. Images of her green eyes popped into my head, and I shook them out. If I saw her right now, I'd crumple further.

“I'm gonna look for answers.” I placed my hand on the wall for support as I stood on wobbly legs. I couldn't lose her, and I couldn't condemn humanity either.

“I'll keep an eye on her. She'll make lasagna for dinner. Bring wine and Italian bread.” Phillip stood and placed his hand on my shoulder for a brief moment of comfort.

I nodded once and kept quiet. I needed answers, and the man in front of me gave what he could. I walked into the restaurant bathrooms and called my power to me.

I needed to exist where she did; without her, I simply wouldn't. I needed answers.

## Chapter Twenty-Four

Emily

Vincent seemed distant throughout dinner, and I wished I could help. We chatted about hero work and my little bit of training, but the tension in his shoulders stayed tight. I wondered if being in the same apartment as Chasity bothered him, but he shook his head when I asked. She was staying at a friend's house, and after confirming with the parents of said friend, I relaxed, knowing she wouldn't be creepy with him.

We plopped onto the couch after eating, and Vincent wasted no time pulling me close. He held me tight, pressed soft kisses to my shoulder, and drew little circles on my waist. I didn't know how my comfort powers worked, but I assumed they did their job when little puffs of snores came from him twenty minutes into the TV show I put on.

Time jumping exhausted him, and I'm guessing he did a lot today based on how out he was. After a few episodes, I glanced at the clock, then decided to get him into bed. I tried doing it with my telekinetic powers at first, but nothing happened.

"Hey, big guy. Let's go to bed." I nicely ran my fingers down his cheek. He twitched, then as I said it again, he woke up.

"Bed sounds good." He tucked me close to his chest, and his glittering orange power stuck to us. I quickly closed my eyes, wondering why he called his powers. We hit a soft surface, and I opened to see what or where we were. Hopefully, nowhere awful.

My bedroom. Everything looked similar to how it did earlier, but perhaps we were here on a different day? I glanced at the clock on my nightstand to see five minutes past the last time I checked. What a dork. I laughed and kissed the closest part of him I could reach in his arms, his chin.

"Walking was too much, huh?" He jumped us five minutes ahead so he didn't have to walk down the hall. He

didn't say anything, but I saw the smile on his lips grow. Doofus. Part of me wanted to get up to do my nightly routine, but his body felt so warm, and snores somehow soothed me. I didn't want to wake him or move. So I pulled the blanket over us and placed my hand over his steady heart.

*Trees on fire, my arms around a little boy in the flames, Vincent's smile, us holding hands, Chastine's cruel smile, me and a black-haired man kissing, Vincent and me sleeping in my bed, my eyes turning bright yellow as a lion walked beside me.*

I woke up and churned over images of Phillip's visions that entered my sleep. Vincent's chest moved up and down so peacefully, and I realized the one with us sleeping in my bed came true. We held hands a lot and Vincent smiled a lot, so I felt comfortable saying those came true as well. All I hoped was my future headed in a pleasant direction. What I didn't care to see happen was my sister's cruel smile or burning trees. I liked nature, and I didn't want my sister's cruelty, period.

While I didn't believe the lion one happened exactly like the image in my head, perhaps the one roaring lion at the zoo was an adaption of that vision. Futures changed all the time. The lion at the zoo weirdly protected us, or at least that's what it felt like.

My alarm rang and I reached over to smack the top of the clock. Vincent slept through the morning wake up sounds, and I wondered how many timelines he went through to be so tired. Slowly, I lifted his arm and tried to crawl out of bed without waking him only to have strong arms pull me back into bed.

"Morning, beautiful," he whispered with a gruff voice. Morning Vincent sounded so hot. Hot enough that I could skip makeup time for sexy time. But not hot enough to hold off going to pee.

"I love you, but I've got to pee. So, unless you're into that, untangle me, big guy," I teased and felt lips press to my head before he let me go. His chuckles followed me to the bathroom, and I had a big smile on my face as I took care of morning business. Freshly peed, teeth brushed, and cleaned

up, I walked back to my room and found Vincent naked in the bed with his hand on his cock.

I tripped over my own feet as my brain short-circuited.

“I was warming it up for you.” Yeah, he was. My mouth salivated and, just like one of those trained dogs, I grew hungry. And it wasn’t food I wanted.

I found my footing and undressed as I closed the distance to the bed.

“Feeling better, I see.” I commented how lively he appeared, and his eyes flared.

“Feeling determined.” I liked determination, and I trusted his determination was a good thing for us. Drawn to movement, my focus fell from his face to his pumping hand on his cock. Oh yeah, I was determined too.

I ran my fingers up his thighs and crawled between his legs. My head dropped and licked the tip of him as his grasp moved up. We were a team, working together for his pleasure. His fist bumped against my lips as I pressed them to the tip, then found a rhythm sucking up and down as he continued pumping. He worked the bottom and I the head.

“E.” He groaned, his hips flexed beneath my hands, and while I enjoyed the group project, I needed more. I gave his cock one last kiss before slowly moving up him. His hand left his shaft and gripped my hips as I straddled him. I moaned as the tip of him brushed against my clit while I positioned him at my entrance.

We groaned in unison as I slid down him slowly. It took another minute to adjust. Then finally, with my gaze on his eyes, I lifted and found my rhythm. Up, down, roll around, back and forth. I smiled, thinking this could make a fun song when suddenly his upper half shot up, his lips pressed to mine.

Oh, his kiss, I’d die and come back to life for his lips. My arms wrapped around his neck as my body squished against his. Every roll of my hips in this position felt deep, with the added bonus of his hips grinding into my clit.



“You’re mine, E. Past, present, and future,” he snarled against my lips, and the ferocity in his declaration fast-passed my orgasm to the front of the line.

“Oh,” I whimpered before my whole body tensed.

“Fuck, yes, E. Come on my cock.” He groaned before clashing our mouths together again. He swallowed every heavy breath, every moan of my release. It was hot. So when his release caught up with him, I did the same.

“Wow.” Our kisses slowed to a peck here and there. We sat there, our torsos plastered to one another in silence for what felt like hours, but I knew only minutes passed. Being with him was timeless.

“Mm.” I peeled back to glance at his face.

“I can feel how happy and satisfied you are. It’s warm and soothing. Feels like what I’d imagine cats feel basking in the sun. I want to bask in you.” He smiled through each of those beautiful words, and my hands reached up to touch his lips. I liked his smile, and if my powers aided in putting it on his face, then I’d use them all the time.

“I am happy and satisfied. As dumb as it sounds, I feel complete.” Which sounded dumb to me, so I elaborated. “Not in an ‘I need you to complete me because I’m half a person’ type of thing. I’m me, but I feel bigger. Like... This sounds so stupid. I’m not doing a good job explaining.” I shook my head, but Vincent’s fingers touched my chin and held my gaze.

“I feel it too. Like us being together has been a long time coming. Perhaps our powers of the coupled Titans has been searching, waiting to be together again after all this time. I feel stronger as a human with you. Not just because of your strength and kindness and smile that make me want to defy everything. Like, we operate as one, in two bodies.” I nodded, agreeing with his every word. It was hard to explain, but I felt like a hundred-foot-tall goddess with him.

I knew with every fiber of my being that we were supposed to be together. Which left me thinking throughout

the rest of the day, why didn't we meet in his original timeline?

## Chapter Twenty-Five

### Vincent

“What are we doing here?” Emily asked as I jumped us to the day of the zoo incident. I’d searched the internet with every keyword I could think of, scrolled through hours of newspapers from the day. All I found were a few papers about a gas leak and the house burning down. Obviously by the time I got back, the people’s deaths had changed; perhaps the answers had been in there before. That’s the shitty thing about our society: unless someone died, no one cared. Terratrex was only going to stop in the future because Emily died. Without her death, they got away with destroying the environment.

“We’re out front of Terratrex. I think they were responsible for the zoo incident, but I can’t prove it. Phillip of my time suggested we go look. So we’re gonna peek around.” I refused to stop it, no one died and the animals were fine. Changing too much caused too much instability in the timeline. I was both surprised and not when Phillip found me in HQ, digging through every scrap of info on Terratrex I could find. I stared, waiting for him to say something about Emily’s death, or something, only for him to shrug and suggest I take Emily to scope it out. Do a little hero work. Since he gave me the ok, so to speak, I knew we’d be ok.

“Ok, so we’re doing super-secret Hero Society work in the past. Cool. Cool. Cool.” She rubbed her hands together, and I stopped walking in the parking lot. Emily’s pink hair swished around as she noticed I wasn’t keeping pace.

“What’s wrong?” She glanced from side to side as she slowly shuffled back to me. Perhaps taking her here was a bad idea; she was not subtle in her sneaking.

“You just amaze me. I brought you to another time to play spy, and you just go with it.” I shook my head.

“Well... for one, I trust you. You wouldn’t hurt me or put me in any bad situation. Second. It sounds like a fun adventure. Like I get to play someone else. Speaking of, can

we have fake personas? I want to be Melody Sparklings. A stripper who wanted to make a difference in the world, so I went to college and work for Terratrex now. Going on two years, my work anniversary is around the corner.” She paused and I had to clench my lips tight to prevent the loud laughter from escaping.

“And third. I may be new to accepting my fate as a hero member, but isn’t this what they—we—do? We figure stuff out and stop bad guys. If Terratrex is a bad guy, then we’re doing our job.” Too fucking perfect.

“I don’t deserve you.” I was still in shock that this genuine person chose me for her heart. Even with my shortcomings.

“One day, you’re gonna see yourself the way I do, and you’ll know that’s not true.” She lifted up to kiss my cheek, then gripped my hand. “Now, let’s go snoop.” She pulled me onward.

As we neared the entrance, I kept us close but not joined at the hands.

“Act like normal you.” I handed her a photo ID badge with her picture on it before stepping into the building. Security guards stood beside metal detectors and a podium that scanned the barcode on the badges.

I gave the guard on my side a hello nod, and he ignored me when the podium lit green.

“You stay dry today. They’re saying it’s gonna rain later.” Emily smiled at the guard nearest her. The guard’s lips cracked into a tiny smile as she walked by. Her badge lit the podium, and we walked into the large glass atrium.

“These are fancy. Where’d you get them?” Emily leaned close as I stopped to look around the open area.

“AJ, the heroes’ tech genius. I looked at the blueprints of the building. The research labs are in the palm wing.” I pointed to our right where two signs pointed in different directions: orchid wing and palm wing.

“Cute names after all the plants in here.” I followed her gaze, taking in the various plants and trees growing in little natural cutouts of the floor. It looked like the tropics in here.

“The plants provide us with fresh oxygen while sucking up our carbon dioxide. Keeps the air quality in the building perfectly balanced.” Emily yelped as a feminine voice came from behind us. I turned slowly with a plastered smile on my face.

“It feels very fresh in here.”

The black-haired woman with blue eyes scanned me in a familiar way, then shifted to Emily, her smile growing wide. She shifted her petite body to one side, stretching her green dress as she moved.

“You must be Brandy and Tod, our recruits from Griffin Enterprises. We’re so glad to have you jump ship to ours. I’m Haley. I’ve been assigned to show you around, make sure you find Terratex comfortable.” Haley’s hand shot out to shake mine first, then Emily’s, whose smile was one hundred percent fake.

“Sounds great. We like being comfortable. Griffin Enterprises was so not comfortable,” she rambled, and if Haley weren’t watching, I’d shush her rambles with a kiss. The raven-haired woman nodded like she understood and gestured for us to follow.

“Workday starts at nine. We want our employees to prioritize a work-life balance. We take frequent breaks in the meditation lounges or yoga in the courtyard. There’s a class every hour if you’re interested. Jill is my favorite instructor.” She gushed about her job, and it sounded nice, but it didn’t make up for the devastation they caused to the rivers and bay from their last humanitarian stunt.

“We have refreshment bars in this atrium, and one in the common spaces of each wing. All juices are made from the fruit of our very own orchard, as well as the coffee and tea from our farms.” She walked us over to the bar and ordered three blackberry green tea lemonades.

“These drinks are to die for and have proven to give you a boost to focus better. I get one every break to stay hydrated and on top of work.” She grinned and I wondered if they put something in the drinks. Maybe this was a “don’t drink the Kool-Aid” situation.

“Sounds yum. I’m excited to try it. This sounds like such a nice place to work. Yoga, drinks, and taking care of the environment. Woot.” Emily pumped her fist in the air. Haley gave her a nod, then handed us the drinks.

“Here you go.” I lifted mine to my lips and pretended to sip just in case. I’d take Emily to the hospital or jump back and smack the drink out of her hand if anything happened.

“So good, right? Let’s take a moment to bask in the goodness of our drinks and get to know each other.” Haley took three big sips of her drink and leveled me with a sultry stare.

“Vincent, do you have a girlfriend?” she bluntly asked, and despite her firm grip on her drink, the cup flipped over and spilled the cool liquid all over her green dress. Shit. She wasn’t in control yet, and Emily’s powers knocked over the drink by accident.

## Chapter Twenty-Six

### Emily

It wasn't an accident. As soon as Haley appeared, she'd been giving mad come-hither eyes to Vincent. I'd been practicing with my powers when I could. Sometimes it felt like they had a mind of their own, and sometimes we worked together. When she asked him about his dating life, my powers and I were on the same team.

"I'm so sorry. I can be such a klutz. Go ahead and start this tour without me; I'll catch up. Your offices are down the palm wing if you want to start there." Haley raced off, and I bit back the smile.

"At least we have space to look around, privately." I sipped more of my drink, then took steps to the palm wing.

"I assumed that was an accident, but your nonchalant vibes say it wasn't." Vincent bumped my shoulder, and I neither denied nor confirmed. A simple shrug had Vincent fighting his chuckle.

Terratrex's headquarters gave off the impression of a caring and kind company. The workers appeared happy. They all had a plant or art in the offices and were chatting away on the phone or working with each other.

"I don't see a door to any labs or anything suspicious." I glanced around as Vincent nudged me forward. Haley would eventually find us, and then our snooping would be over. Thankfully, a clue appeared. A man in a white coat walked out of the break room and slid his badge down a reader on the doorjamb. It felt odd to lock up a break room, but maybe they had fancy snacks in there.

"Let's go." Vincent stepped forward.

"Will our badges work on this?" I didn't know how this worked, but I assumed some people had higher clearance than others.

"AJ programmed them to go anywhere. Beyond the main atrium, there's a code inside the badge to scramble our

identity. Can't have security knowing where we've been." He slid his badge down the reader, and a green light lit up. We were in.

The break room appeared like any other break room. Vending machines, a sink, microwave, and a table with chairs. A simple design over the other rooms we passed. There wasn't even a window to let natural light in.

"Over there." Another reader on a bathroom door.

"That has to be a secret entrance; the last thing anyone would want to do is constantly fight these readers if they have to poop." I slid my card first, and the door unlocked. Slowly, I peeked through the crack of the door as I pulled on the handle. There wasn't a toilet in sight. But there was a matte glass door and a golf-ball-sized green button. I couldn't see beyond the glass at all.

"Clean room." Vincent propped the door open, then stepped inside first. I followed and as the door closed behind us, the glass box we stood in turned blue. Vincent hit the green button, and air rushed around us. I assumed the lights were UV, and the air kicked everything around. A second glass door I hadn't noticed opened when the air died down.

Silently, we stepped past the door and saw the labs. People worked on various small projects, but nothing looked predator-house-melting worthy to me.

"Put this on." A white coat came into my view, and I took it from Vincent's outstretched hand. The starchy material wasn't my style, but it would do. I glanced at Vincent and blushed.

"You look hot. Maybe we should play doctor and patient later." I could see him being attentive to my needs, so patient. Vincent winked before leading me into the room. Oddly enough, no one batted an eye as we walked around. I figured it was safe to say, if we could get in through the security, then they assumed we belonged.

"The satellite is almost ready for trial." Vincent's head perked up, hearing the conversation between two men on our



right. They walked into a command center look-alike room. There was a big screen with the Terratrex logo bouncing around the edges like an old screensaver. Five men sat at long rectangular desks with computer monitors in front of them.

“HQ1 to ship base, still set for trial in twenty?” someone spoke, and the bouncing logo disappeared as two men fiddling with their own computers came on the screen.

“We need to see more,” Vincent whispered, and I agreed but didn’t see how. It wasn’t dark in that room; the men would definitely notice us, perhaps even ask questions.

A water cooler sat nearby, diagonal to the command room. Perhaps we could be very thirsty workers to hang around it. I pointed to the cooler, and Vincent nodded.

“Confirmed, HQ1. Opening wings at sixty-five percent,” the person on the screen answered before leaning close to his monitor.

“Objective is repel. Ship base, do you have clear sight?”

“Clear sight, HQ1. Countdown in five, four, three...”

I forgot I was pouring water into my cup until water spilled onto my shoes.

“Shit,” I whispered and looked around for a napkin or something, but Vincent’s hand grabbed my wrist to stop me.

“It was them.” My gaze shot back to the screen just as the countdown finished and a bright yellow light shot into space from what appeared to be a big orange satellite.

“Excellent work, ship base.”

Then an alarm sounded from the large screen. That didn’t sound good.

“Communicate, ship base. Our computers show satellite B23 has shifted course.”

“Confirmed. Turn it off! Bryan! Turn it off now!” someone yelled, and the men in the command room were

hollering at the ones on the screen as the computers showed the satellite turning.

“Shit.”

“Shut it down!” The computer closest to us showed the trajectory of the satellite. The zoo.

“It’s not turning off! Bryan! Enter the kill code!”

“Don’t you dare. That’s a thirty-five-million-dollar satellite you’re about to leave powerless.” Someone from our side slammed his fist on the table.

“I think we should go,” I whispered to Vincent.

“I have to confirm it’s them.” It appeared obvious to me. I glanced around the offices and saw a few eyes darting to the command room but otherwise continuing on as normal. Perhaps this wasn’t the first time.

“Unplugging now!” The satellite’s yellow beam vanished, then shot back out seconds later.

“Ship base, confirm where it hit!” I knew where it hit. After a few minutes, they confirmed it was the zoo.

“Now we leave.” Vincent laced his hand in mine as we turned. We made it back to the palm wing without anyone stopping us. I stopped by the water cooler in this wing to drink another cup and have an excuse if someone asked about my wet shoes.

“There you are. Ready to continue your tour?” Haley’s petite figure came into view, wearing a black pencil skirt and cream-colored blouse. I may have jumped a tiny bit, then nodded.

“The recycling can is over here for your water cups, then we’ll check out your offices. This way please.” She waved us to follow her, and despite wanting to leave, I figured it would be more suspicious if we vanished in the middle of a tour.

When Haley dropped us back off at our offices after our hour-long tour, Vincent grabbed my hand, and we left this time.



## Chapter Twenty-Seven

### Vincent

After jumping through time and the work at Terratrex, Emily walked straight to the shower, then changed into her pj's and crawled into bed.

Music blared from Chasity's room, but she never came out to check on her sister. I hadn't seen adult Chasity in over a week. The divorce papers were delivered, but I hadn't heard back from the lawyer if she'd signed it. I doubted she would. She liked her life. I however, did not.

"I'll be back." I leaned over to kiss Emily's forehead. She nodded and mumbled something to which I agreed.

Making sure to lock the door as I left, I tucked her keys into my pocket after. I needed a moment to think. That's when I found myself at the park. Our park.

The same park Emily was cued up to die in, in five days. In my time, Aemilia had been engraved on the memorial bench. Emily's given name. She told me this when I asked about her sister's interesting name. Their parents wanted names from their Italian heritage.

I didn't have a clue how to stop her death *and* stop Terratrex.

"Mind if I sit with you?" The younger Phillip stood with his hands in his pockets.

"Pretty sure you know what I'll say." He shrugged and sat down. I wasn't going to turn him down anyways, and he knew it.

"How's the mission going?" he prompted, and I sighed, resting against the back of the bench.

"Terratrex was responsible for that zoo incident. It'll be the same satellite that burns the park on Terratrex's big day. I don't know how to stop it." I'd gone back at night to look for

information on the ship base the people controlling the satellite were on, but didn't find any.

"They keep information on the big projects locked up tight. Only a select few know the location," Phillip added.

"I don't suppose you'll tell me how I can defeat them."

"Unfortunately, the future has stayed the same. Even if you try."

"What would you do?" I instantly wanted to suck the question back in. I knew what he'd do. What he always said. "You'd bet on love," I answered just as he opened his mouth.

"Saving her could change the world beyond repair." My body sagged against the bench. "Or it could make things more balanced. Perhaps saving her was what you were supposed to do all along." I gave him my best side-eye.

"Is that actually true?"

"It could be. I still see two futures, and you're still walking the fine line between them. You're the only one who can tip the scales, not me. Not Emily." Great.

Phillip remained quiet as we sat in the park until midnight. The comfort of having someone know my predicament soothed the anxiety a bit. I still had time. Time was always on my side. I just needed to see things from another angle. Perhaps I missed something.

"Your power is not a curse, Vincent, but a gift. Powers like yours aren't given to anybody. They chose you, and only you. You've done good work with the heroes, saved thousands of lives. If anyone can make the best choice for us all, it's you." He rose from the bench with his arms in the air to stretch.

"See you later." He nodded, then walked to the exit.

I sat on his words for another half hour before leaving. I'd rarely considered my powers a gift. The burden of time was too much. Knowing that I may be able to save mega tragedies only to cause another. Just like my parents. I had the

power to stop previous wars, genocide even. I wanted to, but I had no way of knowing the consequences.

As I walked back to Emily's apartment, the temptation to drink hit me. But I made it to her building without making any liquor stops. Thinking hurt, and I wanted the pain gone.

I opened the door and locked it behind me, then strolled into Emily's room. She hadn't moved since I left. I released a deep breath as I took her in. So beautiful, so pure. The keeper of my heart.

After removing my boots, socks, pants, and shirt, I climbed into the bed beside her. She smiled as I gently placed my head against her shoulder. The connection between us soothed me. Within seconds, she rolled over to wrap her arms around me.

"Love you," she mumbled before falling asleep again.

"I love you," I whispered, even though she was out. It didn't take long before that calming warmth that was her whisked me into a deep sleep.

It was a testament to how tired I was that I didn't hear the scratching on Emily's apartment door. Or the loud opening of said door moments later.

"Morning, sleepy." Emily snuggled close, and I slowly came to the next morning.

"Morning." My gruff voice earned me a kiss on the nose. This was the life I wanted but never let myself have. Waking up next to someone who cared.

"I'm gonna make us coffee." She pressed another kiss to my face, and I decided I'd join her in a few to make breakfast. Her pattering of feet could be heard as she walked down the hall until her scream stopped her. I jumped out of bed and raced to her.

"Holy hell," I cursed. Emily stood in her living room, wide eyes focused on the massive body of a lion lying on her couch. The lion's eyes opened slowly, as did his mouth in a great big yawn.

“You see it too? Right? I’m not crazy?” she whispered, and the lion jumped off the couch and stretched its long body.

“Unless we’re both crazy, I see it too.” Taking cautious steps, I made it to Emily’s side. The lion’s golden eyes appeared to narrow as I grasped her hand.

“I don’t think he wants you touching me,” Emily commented, and I didn’t give a fuck what the lion wanted. He was fast, but my power was faster.

“Wait.” The love of my life stopped me from calling my power forward.

“Yes. I understand,” she said, nodding, then took a step forward, pulling me along.

“I would appreciate that very much.” She continued talking, and she wasn’t talking to me.

“E. Can you hear him?” Just as I asked, the lion’s head moved up and down before lowering to another deep stretch. Guess couch sleeping wasn’t good for a lion’s body either.

“It’s weird, but yes. He’s the same lion who saved me at the zoo. He said he felt the connection to my powers. Long ago, his ancestors aided Rhea. They were her companions. That’s why we see so much art and statues of Rhea with lions and lionesses.”

The lion grunted before strolling to Emily, who lifted her hand.

“He wishes to honor Rhea, for she was kind. He says he sees her in me and will be my companion.” The lion brushed his head against her hand, and not once did she tremble. In the middle of her living room, Emily and the lion bonded.

Not sure how we’d explain that to her landlord.

## Chapter Twenty-Eight

Emily

“I’m not going back. I belong where you go.” Amari the Lion, as he told me was his name, didn’t see the issue with a lion living in the apartment.

“You can’t stay here. My sister will freak when she sees you, plus I have nothing to feed you or clean up after you with. If you pee here, you’ll ruin my furniture.” I paced back and forth in front of my new companion. Vincent made us some breakfast. Amari ate all the bacon, which I didn’t think was the best meat for him.

“How did he get out anyways?” Vincent asked from the kitchen table, having calmed from the initial shock of a lion in my home.

“I don’t like his tone. Does he doubt my ability to protect you?” Amari grunted at Vincent.

“No, he doesn’t doubt you. We’re just curious about the amazing ways you came to be here with us.” I stroked the lion’s ego a bit, and he relaxed.

“I am an excellent hunter and actor. I played sick, and the doctors were foolish enough to believe me. Before they could inject me with sleeping liquid, I jumped up and ran. I could feel you and followed the feeling to this tiny enclosure. We will need more land, you and I.” Amari walked into the kitchen, then back in under a minute. Apartment life was not great for a lion.

“What did he say?” Vincent asked while setting his coffee on the table.

“He played sick and left. He said he could feel me and followed that feeling to here. He also doesn’t care for the apartment.” I sighed, then walked to my person, who waited with open arms.

“I’ll take him to Phillip. He’ll likely have a place set up for him, or a solution. You get ready for work, and I’ll meet



you for lunch.”

“Amari, go with Vincent. He’s going to use his power to take you somewhere safe without the whole city noticing you.”

“I must stay with you. It is my duty.” Stubborn lion.

“I wish you could, but our situation will need more thought and processing. Please go with Vincent.” I walked over to run my fingers through Amari’s thick mane. Part of me was still shocked that I could do this. Touch a lion and understand him. But most of me felt oddly comfortable. Like this was a natural thing for me.

“I love you.” Vincent’s arms wrapped around my waist, his lips pressed against my cheek. “Let’s go, big guy.” He released me and offered his hand for the lion to touch. Amari turned his head, not happy with this turn of events.

“For me, please. I’ll check on you later.” I swore the lion rolled his eyes, then scooted his head to connect with Vincent. I stepped back and waved them off as the lion closed his eyes when the orange magic brightened.

Once they vanished, I plopped into a chair and stared at the carpet where they’d just stood. It was amazing how complicated my life had become in just a few weeks. Powers, Vincent, and all the revelations that came with that. Now I had a lion friend.

Chasity rolled out of bed and shut herself in the bathroom without a good morning or hello. Another something that I didn’t know how to deal with. She was almost old enough to go on her own, and while I loved her, I couldn’t take care of her without losing myself completely. Did I know what that meant? Nope.

When she finally emerged, looking fresh and styled, I decided to make my move.

“Hey, got a sec?” I called out, and she scoffed before slamming her bedroom door. Using my powers, I opened the door and asked again.

“Fucking door. What? What do you want?” She stomped out while tossing a red sundress on.

“What do you need, Chasity? Believe it or not, I do care about you. I want you happy and safe. But I recognize we go together like oil and water. So what do you need?” My fingers fiddled with the hems of my sleep shorts.

My sister stood there, eyes narrowing at me like she was waiting for the angle or trick.

“No trick, Chasity. I want to take your life into consideration. Do you want to move out of the city? I can find a job anywhere. Do you need to switch schools? I don’t want you in the foster system, and you aren’t old enough to cash in your inheritance. So what do you believe will help us get through the next few years together?”

“I can live on my own.” Arms now crossed over her chest, she tapped her foot.

“I have no doubts. You are smart, and cunning, and get whatever you want. But is that what you really need? Right now, your focus is on school and being a teenager.” Albeit a naughty teenager. “Once you’re on your own, you’ll have to work, pay bills, rent a house or apartment. It’s not easy.”

“I know that. I’m not stupid. Why do you think I’m still here? Just stay out of my way, ok? Don’t bother me, and I won’t bother you. I’m not going to get in trouble, or pregnant, or in jail. I’ve got plans, and those would fuck it up.” She waited for me to agree, and oddly her wishes felt ok. She didn’t need me, and she didn’t need another mother.

“I can do that. Breakfast is in the kitchen. I’ll be back to cook dinner later. If you need anything, just send me a text or something.” We were a very dysfunctional family. I waited for her to stomp off now that we agreed on how things proceeded, but she stood still.

“When Mom and Dad died, I didn’t need another mom. I’d rather be estranged sisters than have a forced caretaker. Just do you, ok? I’ll be fine.” With those last words, she left

for her room, and a deep exhale rushed out of my lungs. I guess that was as close to a truce as we'd get.

An alarm beeped in my room, and I cursed. I had fifteen minutes to toss on scrubs and get to work.

“You've got this, E. It's all working out. Lions, time traveling, superheroes and all.” I rushed to my room and was ready with ten minutes to spare. I didn't say bye to Chasity, which made me feel like a failure, but it was what it was. I poured a to-go cup of coffee and left.

When I made it to the hospital, there were a few patients who needed extra attention. But overall, it was an easy day. When my lunch break came around, I waited in the picnic area outside for Vincent.

Minutes turned to an hour, and he hadn't shown like he said he would. I bit back the fears and intrusive thoughts that he left me. He wouldn't do that.

Suddenly my phone beeped and a notification from the Hero Society popped up.

**Your time to shine, let's get you suited up.  
Headquarters in thirty minutes. - Draco**

Calmly, I walked back to the nurses' station and made up a lie to end my shift early. A kind blonde woman who'd just started offered to take over my patients until the next shift. She needed the money, and I thanked her with a hug before leaving to get suited up.

## Chapter Twenty-Nine

### Vincent

I searched for Emily at the hospital but found Phillip—holding an older watch version of the communicators we had in the future.

“She’s on a job.” He handed it to me, nodded once, then strutted out of the hospital. Her location beeped on the watch, and I found a private place to jump from.

I arrived in the bushes across the street from the largest bank building in Seahill. You’d think criminals would learn not to mess with this city with all the heroes residing in it, but they still tested us.

I noticed Leon first. His gray leather-looking pants and long sleeves were designed for speed, and a tight-fitting mask covered his face. The hero resembled a linebacker and carried three adults on his shoulders, out of the building. The man had super strength and speed. In my timeline, he spent most of his time with the retired spy Lilith, his wife. They sailed and did hero work, and I appreciated their simple life. They had each other, and that’s all they needed.

Emily stepped out of the building next, wearing tight pants, knee-high combat boots, and a long-sleeve thin hoodie over her pink hair. She too wore a mask, a pink one. We heroes didn’t pick names, but the public loved to give us them anyways. The hero suits were added after the first round of heroes in the beginning. People feared what they didn’t understand. So, the costumes became a safety necessity.

Cops surrounded Leon as he set the men down, then raced off, taking Emily with him. Some cops were on our side, and some were still suspicious. Giving statements or being taken to the station wasn’t the best idea.

Not fast enough to catch up with them, I jumped to headquarters but five minutes in the future.

“I can’t believe I did that.” Emily’s high-pitched excited voice echoed down the hall of the training room.

“You did great. Just gotta practice your aim.” I walked in as Leon rubbed the back of his head.

“Vincent! I just did my first real hero work. Like, I got this rocking outfit and everything.” She rushed up to me and did a spin. If the hardening in my jeans was anything to go by, I liked what I saw.

“She took out two guards holding guns to the hostages. Tossed computers and various things at them after ripping the guns away with her thoughts,” Leon added as he lay on the training mat to stretch. I glanced from him to my love, and the bit of cheeks beneath her mask turned pink.

“You’re a natural.” I wrapped my fingers around her waist, tugging her close.

“It feels nice to belong and be useful.”

“I want to hear every detail,” I said, and she pressed her lips to mine in response.

“More kissing couples. Great.” A young man with black hair strolled out of the elevators.

“Hi, AJ.” Emily eased back, but her palms flattened against my chest.

“Don’t worry, kid. It’ll be your turn soon.” Leon shrugged and AJ scoffed.

“Not if your wife and the others keep crashing my dates,” he accused with his finger pointed to the floor above. Perhaps Lilith and the others were here. Leon raised his hands in surrender. No one, not even Leon, could talk his wife out of crashing AJ’s dates. I’d heard the stories from future AJ that Lilith declared any woman who couldn’t deal with her, didn’t deserve him. He did find a mate, and they were always touching in some way. Holding hands, sitting on top of each other, kissing, snuggling. As much as he joked about the PDA now, he did just as much in my time.

“I’m not needed for anything else, right?” Emily shot Leon a look, and he shook his head.

“I’m gonna change, then we can head out. I wanna celebrate or do something. I’m a total badass now.” She pecked me on the cheek, then scurried off to the showers and locker room.

“You’re the future guy, right?” Leon hopped up, then leaned against a treadmill. His brown eyes scanned me for a second with an emotionless expression.

“Yeah.”

“I used to think my powers were the worst after hurting my friend. But you and Phillip, I don’t envy either of you.” Yeah, I didn’t envy me either, so I kept my mouth shut.

“Yeah. Guess if you need anything in the future, I got your back. Heroes help each other, past, present, and future.” He gave me a lift of his chin as a goodbye and, slowly for him, walked to the elevator. I waited silently in the training room, completely lost in thought. I had walked through every hall, into every closet of Terratrex, and found nothing. Phillip wasn’t lying when he said they locked up the information about the satellite. Days passed and I had no plan. My gut twisted with every thought of a future without her.

“All clean. Can we go somewhere? Somewhere fun, like oh, maybe the roaring twenties or something? I noticed all those era costumes before; I bet we could find something cool from those racks.” Emily nearly skipped over to me, her green eyes bright like the forest on a summer’s day. It was risky to take her into the past, but the attire at my hero apartment would camouflage us enough to get away with it.

“Anything for you.” I wanted to spend time with her, and I didn’t care when that happened.

“Awesome!” She latched onto my waist as I visualized my apartment. When the tingles subsided, we opened our eyes to the dark space. I walked to turn on a light when the bathroom door opened and someone walked out.

I nudged Emily to my side, ready to fight, when my heart stopped.

“No need for theatrics, Vincent. I’m only here to talk.” Chasity. My soon to be ex-wife Chasity walked to my bed and sat on the edge. I turned the kitchen lights on in a daze.

“I signed your papers, but I want the apartment and money. I deserve it for putting up with you.” She flicked something off her pale blue dress with her dark-colored fingernail. A tiny peep came from the apartment door, and like a lightning strike, it hit me that both women were in my apartment. Seeing Chasity, here, in an apartment she shouldn’t have known about or had the PIN to the pin pad, short-circuited my thoughts.

“Well, how about that? I never guessed you had it in you to be a homewrecker, but I guess that Goody Two-Shoes persona had to break sometime. Well done, sister.”

## Chapter Thirty

### Emily

Somehow, I remained on my feet as Chasity looked me up and down without a single hint of emotion.

“I am curious how he brought you back from the dead, but these heroes are an odd sort. Bringing you back to fuck you is a weird way to get back at me for wanting a baby. Either way. I want it all, Vincent. You can have your divorce and fuck my sister if I get what I want.” She stood, flattened out her pencil skirt, blew him a kiss, and walked right past me.

So many thoughts, so many words and emotions, and I swayed.

“Shit. E.” I saw Vincent rush to me, but my vision blurred, and I fell before he could catch me.

“Emily. My Emily, open your eyes,” a gruff voice called to me, and I tried. It took a few flutterings of my eyelids before my vision cleared.

“Fuck. I’m so sorry, E. I—” I pressed my fingers to Vincent’s lips before slowly sitting up. His mouth parted to speak, but I pinched his lips shut.

“I know it wasn’t on purpose. I know who she is and what she’s like. Did it shock the fuck out of me? Yes. Obviously. Did I like what she said? No. I do feel guilty despite me not being the only thing that’s dissolving your marriage. We’ve both seen your penis. It is what it is.” I tried not to think about that part of our story often. “But what I do want to talk about is the bringing me back to life part.” Although part of me did want to know why she wasn’t fazed to see an apparently dead person again. Like her sister. Her dead sister.

“E.” Vincent shook his head but wouldn’t budge. Days ago, I would have plugged my ears if someone talked about my future. Things were different now.

“This is why you’ve been working so hard lately. You’re trying to figure out how to change my fate, aren’t you?” I knew the answer without him saying it. I dropped my fingers from his lips only to search for his hand.

“I can’t lose you.” His voice broke and I climbed into his lap.

“You won’t lose me.” The words felt as hollow as they sounded coming out.

“It’s either I save you and doom everyone else or I let my soulmate, my safe person, die.” My arms wrapped around his shoulders tightly. Orange flecks caught my attention as Vincent’s head dipped into my neck. His emotions were taking us somewhere.

The sound of crickets hit my senses first. The scent of fresh air and a cool breeze were the second thing I noticed. When I opened my eyes, I saw trees and a mailbox sitting in a bush. Vincent’s head rose, then glanced around us.

“Our park,” he commented, those strong hands going beneath my thighs, taking me with him as he stood. My focus darted around, finding nothing familiar about our park.



“Look.” He turned us to face the bench we were just sitting on. My mouth fell and my heart pounded, seeing the memorial plaque with my name engraved on it.

A second later, the oddest thing happened. My heart found a normal rhythm. My whole body relaxed, and I felt warm. It was as if the earth took a blanket out of the dryer and laid it over my shoulders.

“Vincent. I’m not afraid.” From the depths of my soul, I saw that plaque and knew it wasn’t going to be this way.

“E.”

“Vincent. Feel my heart, feel how calm it beats. I know what that says and what my sister and whoever else says. I know this sounds crazy, but that’s not our fate.”

“How do you know?” He shook his head before sitting on the bench with me on his lap again.

“A feeling. Which I know sounds lame, but Vincent, I need you to trust me. Believe in me, in us.” The more the words tumbled out of me, the stronger they felt in my heart. “We were always supposed to be together.” I couldn’t lose him, and he wouldn’t lose me. “I’m asking a lot. I know. I know how you think. You see all the bad that can happen and have a hard time trusting the good. But V. My V. Look at us.” I pointed my finger from my chest to his. “We were brought together, across time, through a magical fucking mailbox. We became friends, we trusted each other, which led to being each other’s safe person and finally soulmates. This, what we have, is beyond time. We are timeless.” His lips clashed against mine as soon as I finished. I wished I had more words, more proof that what I felt was real. That somehow it would work out. But I didn’t.

So when he took me back to my apartment, I made sure to show him with my body, heart, and soul. Every kiss, every touch, rattled the timeline.

“I love you.” I peppered the side of his face with kisses as he groaned into my neck. I held him close, pouring all the love and comfort I possessed.

Despite the guilty feelings of calling out of work, I took the rest of the week off. Shit was going to happen during the Terratrex event, I knew it. Perhaps Vincent would share the load of stopping them. We'd work together to save the day.

Vincent strolled out of bed with slightly less tension in his shoulders than yesterday. He was scared, and hell, I was too. But we weren't giving up.

"I got a text to come visit Amari at Draco's." I jumped up to make him a cup of coffee, but he gently picked me up and set me on the table, his body nudging between my thighs.

"We'll go after breakfast."

"I haven't made any yet. I think there's a can of cinnamon rolls I can make." My mouth watered thinking about that cream cheese icing. The fridge popped open, and the can rolled onto the floor. Stupid powers.

"We can have that for second breakfast." His fingers ran up my thighs, and goose bumps rose as those gentle hands coasted over my sex.

"Vincent. I'm pretty sure my sister is home." We had sex in the bedroom while she was here, but this was like public space of the apartment. What if she woke up early for some weird reason?

"Don't make any noise." He stared into my eyes, his gaze never wavering as he lowered himself to his knees. Oh boy. I could stop him. And maybe I should. We could walk the few feet down the hall to the bedroom.

But then his head descended, and the only moving I did was to take his long hair out of its bun to hold on tight.

## Chapter Thirty-One

Vincent

Alright, I'll admit it. The lion grew on me.

Was he a dick? Yes. I thought house cats were assholes, and lions were majestic creatures of the wild. Amari had the confidence of a beast that could in fact eat people, but also—dare I say—swagger. The lion knew he was the shit and acted as such.

He also loved every female and eyed the males like meat. But after spending four hours with him at Draco's mountain cabin, I saw the sheer devotion he had for Emily. He would do anything for her, including deal with the other males around. Males like me.

Amari wasn't domesticated by far, but he respected the boundaries of his chosen.

"Maybe we can get him a little mask or a cute bow tie." Emily laughed while scratching his back. Rose sat on a bench beside her with a teacup in hand and a smile on her face.

"Stop." Emily laughed and I assumed Amari responded.

"He likes the idea. He doesn't want to be recognized and have to escape from the zoo again." Of course he would.

"So tomorrow is Terratrex's big reveal. Phillip said we're to help you." Draco stepped to my side, and I nodded. I got the text from the seer this morning that the Hero Society was a family, and we help each other. A notion that was true no matter the year in time. Despite that, I'd been trying to find the answers on my own and pushing everyone away. Too many moving pieces to control, and the thought of them changing something because I wasn't there to stop it had me gasping for air more than a few times.

Then Emily's words came back to me about controlling it all. I couldn't, so with a heavy weight settling in my gut, I

decided to include whoever wanted to help. Phillip's text came two minutes after the decision. I wanted to call and ask how the future changed, but I knew his answer would likely drive me crazy.

I didn't know how the event would go. Perhaps, it would all work out.

"They're gonna demo the satellite at the park downtown. In my timeline, something goes wrong and the sun's rays, which were supposed to go into space, turn to the park, setting the whole space on fire. It spread two blocks over and threatened to continue, but the Hero Society stopped them." I spoke loud enough for the ladies to hear.

"And Emily died." Draco spoke low enough for only me to catch. I nodded once and kept my lips shut.

"The pain is indescribable, watching your soulmate die." He continued the low-timbered conversation as the lion jumped up and pressed his head into Emily's side, knocking her down. The lion shot a glance my way, and I read the look instantly. He heard us and wanted to keep Emily and Rose from paying attention. Like I said, he grew on me.

"The time shift?" I heard stories about the whys of the heroes' magical time shift but never asked for the real truth.

"Rose died hours after our wedding during the big battle. I was still immortal then, but if I could have died with her, I would've." I kept quiet as his gaze shifted to his smiling wife, as if checking this reality were real, unlike the memories flowing through his mind.

"You went back in time for her?"

"I did, as did the villain for his woman. Winning the battle left him empty without his love. In the end, we chose love over war, over revenge, over fear. He almost didn't do it. He was scared that even if he got to see his woman again, she'd reject him after he'd killed her friends and caused a war." My chest tightened with every word. "But he realized living in a world, even a world he created, was pointless without her." I nodded without realizing I did.

“Phillip gambled with Rose’s life, with so many others, for a better future for all of us. He let his sister die because he believed in love winning every time. Love changed the heart of the villain. I have this life, with my wife and a baby on the way, because of that gamble.” He leveled me with a stare that spoke more than his words did before his hand landed on my shoulder, squeezed once, then walked to his wife. Emily floated a big brush from a nearby table over to brush her lion’s mane.

Phillip always bet on love, but I didn’t know the other side of that gamble. What if he’d bet wrong? That other future ceased to exist the moment they changed it. I couldn’t look at how things unfolded even if I wanted.

“It is a good idea. I’ll start saving for some land for us,” Emily said to Amari, but her gaze was on me. “Yes, he’s coming too.” She continued her silent conversation about us living in the woods with him. My favorite time in space flashed through my head. The side of the mountain was all trees, and not too far from Draco’s cabin. Allowing myself this daydream, I closed my eyes, visualizing the view of the bay and the city shimmering in the early morning. Emily sat in the grass, while the new king of the forest hunted squirrels. My body felt lighter, like I weighed less than a feather. My chest relaxed, and my skin warmed in the rising summer sun.

“Vincent,” she called out before lifting her hands. I chuckled as I walked to her. My Emily.

“You’re not my Vincent.” She smiled, her fingers caressing my face before falling to her rounded stomach. When Chasity mentioned kids, I would have burned in hell before procreating. Now, thoughts of Emily having my child had me enamored. I’d walk through hell barefoot to have that future.

“Remember that day at Draco’s cabin? How pretty I looked with my pink hair, blue shorts, and creamy long-sleeve shirt? I laughed with Rose, and you could feel my soothing powers from where you stood?”

I closed my eyes as her fingers lightly trailed over my eyelids. Her warm touch settled into me, and my whole body tingled.

“Vincent.” Her voice drifted off, and I opened my eyes and stared into her beautifully freckled face.

“You’re perfect.” I pulled her close, and she kissed me first.

“Where’d you jump to?” She eased back, her fingers lifting to cradle my jaw.

“What do you mean?” My hands lowered to her ass.

“You left us a few minutes ago. Did you get new info on Terratrex?” She chuckled and my movements stopped.

“I left?” I glanced around and saw I stood exactly where I’d been when Draco walked to his wife. He gave me a curious look but didn’t say anything as I released Emily.

“Yeah. You closed your eyes, and your power did its pretty orange vanishing thing.”

The images, the land, and Emily sitting on the grass.

No, not images. But a future. Our future. My powers took me to her, and she guided me back to this moment without telling me it was real. Cunning little woman.

“Right. Everything’s good. I was seeing if anything changed tomorrow. Nothing yet, but I believe in us.” Everything had changed. My heart raced and my whole body itched to jump again. To find my way back to that future and revel in it. I needed to find Phillip and see if that future was probable.

“I love you,” Emily whispered as her fingers pulled me close by my belt loops. “I’m ready to head back. Maybe we can do breakfast for dinner.” She sucked her bottom lip between her teeth, and I decided the seer could wait.

I saw the future I wanted, and I’d be damned if I let anything take it away from me now.

## Chapter Thirty-Two

### Emily

There's an odd out-of-body experience that takes over on the day you know you're going to die. I woke up next to Vincent, who proceeded to worship every inch of me before shoving his face into my neck as we found release.

We cleaned up, dressed, and sat down for coffee and packaged muffins I bought yesterday. We didn't talk, but that magnetizing draw between us had parts touching without realizing it. Toes, elbows, hips, hands. The balance Draco talked of between us ran through us like a current.

“Do you want to say bye?” Vincent's chin lifted toward Chasity's room, and I shook my head. I left her a letter by the coffee maker just in case. In the event of my death, she'd be given her inheritance. Not that she knew she could have it now. Part of me honestly worried she'd take me out if she knew. I had complete faith that she'd be ok if I died. Maybe happier. Some might say I was a coward for not speaking to her, knowing my potential fate. I did my best and tried to hold space for her inner battles. However, her scars weren't an excuse for the wounds she inflicted on me.

“No. Let's go to HQ.” I walked out the door and heard Vincent close it behind me. As we stepped out of the building, Vincent wove his fingers between mine with a smile.

“Let's play the game.”

“What game?”

“Grateful for.”

“I can't, you ruined it.” I blushed and tried to take my hand back, but his fingers tightened.

“I'll start. I'm grateful that you're grateful for my dick. There, now it's out in the open.” He spoke at full volume. Where were the heroes to save me from this goof?

“I’m grateful for fresh air,” I tried, and yep, I was thinking about his dick instead of air.

“I’m grateful for magical mailboxes.” My gaze shot to his.

“I’m grateful for desperate days.” If I hadn’t been so desperate, I wouldn’t have written the emotional letter that connected us. One of my worst days paved the way for the best thing in my life.

“I’m grateful for your corny jokes.” He smiled through the words, and I appreciated this more than I’d ever find the language to convey.

“I’m grateful for smiles. Sometimes I worry my face will break from smiling from your teasing,” I called out with a swing of our joined hands.

“I’m grateful for your chaos,” he stated, and I tilted my head as we neared Pizza Pazza. I was chaos? “You are a messy eater, you take care of others like it’s your life’s mission, you wiggle when you’re excited, and are quick witted.” He paused to open the door to the restaurant. “You constantly surprise me. I never know what you’ll say or do. You are chaos in a perfectly pink package that I will always cherish.”

Would it be weird to ask him to marry me right now? Because I was tempted. How was he real? This massive, gorgeous man, with sexy long hair, a big dick, and kind heart jumped through time and loved me. Like... no one on earth could say that.

So I did.

“I’m grateful for you. My massive, gorgeous man, with sexy long hair, a big dick, and a kind heart, who jumped through time and loved me.”

We made it into the elevator and pressed the button before he tugged me via our joined hands. Our lips clashed seconds later, and I wondered if there was a pause button on the elevator. We could be quick.

The elevator doors opened, and it felt like our little bubble burst. The Hero Society symbol of the helmet with the



wings on the side greeted us as Vincent led me down the hall to the hang-out area. I wasn't sure who was tackling Terratrex with us, but I knew it wouldn't be everybody. If every hero came out to stop the satellite, the company would blame everything on us. It would look like an attack.

"Oh, brownies," someone called out as we entered, and I instantly found my best friend in the room. Vincent released my hand as Selene pulled me in for a hug.

"Just know that Jude and I got your back if you die." She wasn't joking, and I couldn't help but laugh. She was a reaper, and Jude controlled the dead. Between the two of them, I was safe even in the afterlife. I glanced over her shoulder and saw the ex-ringleader himself. He'd shaved his dark brown curls, which only made his bright blue eyes stand out more against his tanned skin. His head dipped down once before shifting to talk to Leon.

Selene stepped back but remained close as Draco whistled once for the attention of everyone on the sofa.

"Terratrex's reveal starts in four hours. Gwen is at the park with Arthur, talking with the techs. She'll use her metal powers, and Arthur is there to put out fires if needed. The goal is to stop Terratrex from killing people and destroying the city. Leon, you get anybody out of there who is in the destruction path." He pointed at Leon, who gave a single nod at the leader of the heroes. I swore these men were all silent communicators. A nod here, a chin lift there.

"Emily, your powers would be useful, but we'd understand if you chose to stay here," Draco added, and I blushed from the few eyes darting my way. All of them were willing to risk their lives for this city.

"I'm a hero, and this is what we do, right?" I stood tall and felt Vincent's body heat brush against me. I leaned back for support. One way or another, something big would happen today. Everyone in the room felt it.

"We're going off Phillip's sight and Vincent's future. However, futures change. Our main objective will remain no matter what. Save Seahill and its people." He rattled on about

setting up a perimeter. Vincent and I would join the gathering crowd in the park, while Gwen tried her best to show them how their machine was faulty. As Griffin Enterprises' top robotics engineer, she knew a thing or two about this type of stuff. Metal and machinery was her thing. Her little robots would also interpret the machine's energy if it helped.

We all left headquarters, some in their hero attire and the rest of us dressed casually. Selene and Jude walked with us to the park. Their powers weren't necessary in this fight, but Selene was my ride or die bestie. Her husband was there for her and therefore my ride or die as well. Their support wrapped around me, warming me, as we found a place in the excited crowd before the metal stage.

My hands trembled as two stagehands checked mics, and I wiped them down my shorts to relax.

"I believe in us, E," Vincent whispered against my ear. I reached for him, and our hands gripped each other tightly. I sucked in a breath, then released it slowly. I still had that feeling things would work out, but that didn't mean it was easy to look death in the face as the CEO of Terratrex walked onto the stage.

## Chapter Thirty-Three

### Vincent

“If I make his microphone float and scare everyone off, will that change anything?” Emily whispered as the CEO stood in his hot-looking button-up and slacks, talking about climate change.

“I don’t think it’ll deter them. They’ll pass it off as a joke and keep going. Terratrex only cares about money. They’ve got a lot invested in today and think they’ll get even more.”

“The wait is making me feel antsy.” Her head started popping up and down as she lifted onto her toes, then back down, over and over.

“We can go.”

“No. My nervous system is telling me danger, danger, and I have to burn it off. Moving helps work off the stress hormone triggered from that response.” I loved it when she broke out the medical talk. She bounced beside me, and as the minutes ticked by, the tension in her relaxed.

“Are you ready to see our Solar Automatic Repelling Satellite, or SARS as we’ve been calling it at Terratrex?” he shouted, and a screen rolled down behind him. Images of smiling engineers working on the satellite zoomed in first, followed by a ten-second clip of the launch into space.

“With SARS, we will be able to reflect those harmful rays from heating up the Earth.” With a cost, but of course the public didn’t need to know that.

“How about we just switch to less fossil fuel emissions!” someone called out from behind us. Suddenly random people in the crowd took off their shirts to reveal green tank tops. I tucked Emily close at first, then I read their shirts and the signs they lifted above their heads in sync.

“Spend money on policy change, not satellites for the rich!” they chanted. Protestors, I could get behind that.

“We are on the same team. I’d love to sit down and talk more about how Terratrex is donating millions to green energy every year. We are also combatting fossil fuels with our electric SUV, arriving next year.” The CEO plastered a grin on his face, laughing as some of the protestors stuck up their middle fingers at him. He continued with his presentation despite the noise.

“Tension’s getting heavy,” Jude commented from behind at the same time I saw security guards slowly move closer to the protestors. Perhaps it wasn’t Terratrex that fucked this one up, but a riot. The media never said what really happened.

“Keep an eye out,” I warned everyone as a video from the satellite came on the screen. Selene nodded, then shifted her head to the right.

“Be back,” she grumbled, then slid out from the crowd with Jude on her heels.

“Live feed, folks. Don’t worry, our green friends, after this demonstration, your climate worries will disappear. You’ll see the reflecting mirrors expand to the right there.” He pointed to the video, but movement below the stage caught my attention. A six-inch robot ran across the ground with an eighteen-inch metal dragon carrying a wrench in its mouth behind him. Pops and Cora, Gwen’s personal robots.

I saw the white-haired hero scowling at two techs. Her husband, or maybe boyfriend in this time, stood close. Those robots were up to something under her command. My chest tightened, seeing so many unpredictable pieces moving on our puzzle.

“See, my friends, SARS is perfectly safe.” I glanced back to the screen as the machine’s lens had a red filter over it, and light beamed away from the reflecting mirrors.

“The satellite will be set on a timer, with our scientists keeping up with potent sun flares for extra protection around the globe. But we’ve turned the time off for our demonstration, as you can see. We have the ability to turn it off at any time. SARS is also equipped to be self-

maneuvering, able to adjust if something comes within a ten-foot radius, as well as driven by remote if necessary to avoid other satellites.” The CEO nodded at the techs still being glared at from Gwen three feet away. Thirty seconds later, the satellite shifted and the mirrors tucked in.

I waited for something to happen, but the CEO moved on to talking about their upcoming electric cars. The demonstration of SARS was over. Perhaps Gwen fixed something and now the whole incident wouldn’t occur. I thought about jumping time to see what would happen, but Selene and Jude returned to our side.

“The ghosts in the park are leaving. They don’t seem to have a reason but feel a current so to speak.”

“There’s ghosts in the park?” Emily honed in on that tidbit. Selene rolled her eyes.

“Did you not read the piece I did on this park? People used to get mugged and killed all the time in this park. It had a whole community of people who were killed in the later 1800s because they were thriving and the rest of Seahill at the time didn’t like it. The park was the cover-up. Yeah... I know. The park’s ghosts like to talk a lot. I get some of the best stories here.” Selene patted her friend while Jude scanned the park, seeing said ghosts. If they felt something we didn’t, then the incident wasn’t over.

Perhaps there was more to it than we knew.

Then our answer came.

A loud smack echoed from the speakers, and all eyes were on the screen. At least five feet of metal stuck out from the satellite. The whole screen started spinning. Shit.

“Any chance you can use your powers to stop it from here?” I asked Emily, and she squinted at the screen.

“Nope. I have limits. Though I’m honestly surprised I haven’t hit anyone by accident yet.” And because she thought it, someone in the crowd hollered like they’d been smacked on the head.

*“Karma!”*

*“Stop this project!”*

*“Even space doesn’t want it!”* The protestors started yelling, and the rest of the crowd was either holding up their phones to record, leaving, or staring with their mouths open.

The CEO tried to ease the crowd’s growing worries, but the techs were arguing off to the side, with Gwen nowhere to be seen.

“Let’s get out from the crowd.” I nudged our group to the right. Things got dangerous when a crowd panicked. White hair caught my eye as Gwen walked up to us, her blue eyes glancing back and forth to the stage. Arthur wasn’t nearby, but I assumed he was doing something.

“Cheap bastards. They didn’t use the recommended Kevlar and aluminum while building the satellite, so it’s going to be taken out by space junk. As long as it remains shut down, it’ll float in space like the other junk out there.”

Good news.

Another smack, louder than the last, had everyone silent. This couldn’t be good.

## Chapter Thirty-Four

Vincent

The satellite was struck again, and the reflecting mirrors opened. Beams of light shot everywhere. Into space, at Earth, toward the moon.

It was then the crowd panicked.

“Stupid. They programmed the satellite to retreat with signs of trouble. Pops told me they coded it to follow the signals to the bay. That thing is going to do as programmed. With the size and speed, it’ll take a couple blocks of the city, plus the floods that will come after.” I guess things had changed; that satellite was moving on the screen, its sights set on Seahill bay.

“We need a plan. Leon can get there fast, but unless he runs back and forth, we won’t make it.” Jude jumped into the conversation as I watched the CEO race to a blacked out SUV behind the stage. Asshole. The crowd ran out of the park, with a few still recording on their phones.

“What if we bring it here?” Emily asked, and my heart clenched.

“What do you mean?” Selene asked, and Gwen stepped forward with a nod.

“Pops and I can change the coordinates. Then with my power and yours, we can manually guide it. Probably even slow it down,” Gwen chimed in and didn’t even wait before running to the abandoned tech station. Her robots jumped onto the table as her fingers started typing.

“You’re bringing it right to you.” I turned to the love of my life. That future of us, of her alive, frayed in my head with the thought of her literally calling this flaming satellite shooting beams of sun rays to her feet.

“I know, and I’m gonna need you, V.”

“Leon will get everyone out of the park. Jude, Selene, y’all clear out. I’ve got this.” Emily took control, pointing at each of the heroes.

“Not a chance.” Selene stood strong with her arms across her chest, but Emily shook her head.

“I’m sorry,” she whispered before their bodies lifted, their eyes wide as they were forced out of the park. Emily moved them. Holy shit.

“I love them, but Bella needs them alive. Their powers won’t help here.” She exhaled loudly, as a body blurred past, then stopped in front of us.

“I got everyone out. I’ll stand by. Might be able to stop it or get you all out of the way.” His strength and speed might come in handy.

“We’ve got sixty seconds!” Gwen hollered from the other side of the stage. Arthur pushed his glasses up his nose as he walked over to our group with her. The little metal dragon curled around Gwen’s legs, and I knew from future Gwen that meant she was nervous. Me too. Hell, we all were.

“You and me. Let’s do this.” Emily stepped forward with her eyes on the sky. With tight fists at her side, she stepped into the shadow the satellite caused in the grassy area. Gwen raised her hands, then joined my woman. Arthur grabbed the robots and took them to safety outside the park.

A beam of yellow light shot down fifty feet to our right, and the trees were incinerated instantly. Arthur sprinted from the exit to put out the growing fires with his water power. My heart raced, but there wasn’t anything I could do besides believe in Emily. In us. Jumping time wouldn’t work until I knew what happened. More beams shot into the sky, the bay, the top of a building across the park.

“V,” Emily whimpered, and I was there, at her side.

“I’m here, I’m with you. Always.”

“I feel it shifting. It’s working.” Gwen grit her teeth as a tan form weaved around fire ahead.



“Amari.” Emily wobbled as her lion crossed the distance in no time. He’d felt Emily’s distress and came. I liked the big guy even more.

“I feel stronger with you all here.” She exhaled and my hands warmed. A feeling deep inside me called to her, to touch her. No time to waste as the satellite broke free of the clouds and stopped spinning. I placed my hands on her shoulders. My brave Emily. New to her powers, she stood ready to save the city. I loved this woman from the depths of my being.

Suddenly, a yellow hue glowed from my hands and spread over Emily and Amari. I gasped as the satellite slowed, the metal warping as it descended. Emily and Gwen were so close, and everyone’s heart still beat.

I heard a crack behind us but was too focused on giving Emily whatever power I could.

“Watch it!” a male yelled, and I saw a blur before Gwen’s body was snatched away and a large branch fell where she stood, knocking Emily and me to the ground. Shit. Leon stood on the other side of the park with Gwen in his arms, eyes wide. I shook my head. He wouldn’t make it, not even with his speed.

Amari stood in front of us and roared at the once again full-speed satellite. Seconds, we had mere seconds before it crashed into us.

“Amari,” I called the lion, and he came over. I pulled Emily into me and grabbed hold of her cat companion. My power was already shared between us somehow, so the orange glittering flecks coated our bodies as the heat from the hot metal brushed against us.

“I love you,” Emily whispered as I closed my eyes. We’d either jump time or die together. Either way, I wasn’t living in a future without her. Maybe that made me a horrible human for condemning the world to more of Terratrex’s terrorizing projects in place of her. I didn’t care. It’s an impossible task to take on every single problem of the world. More heroes would rise to save the day. There would always be those who stood against the darkness of our world.

Whatever came, I'd have Emily by my side. Like she said, together, we are timeless.

Heat blasted us and all sound ceased.

"Oh no, I'm dead. I'm dead." Emily's frantic voice had me opening my eyes to see where we were. My grip tightened as a huge chunk of red hot metal floated in the air, inches from my face. Sweat coated my forehead, and I gulped, afraid to move.

"We're not dead, but we didn't jump time either," I whispered, and Emily's head shot away from my chest.

"Cheese and fucking crackers. Fucking hell," she cursed and gripped me tighter.

"No, Amari, I don't think your roar stopped it," Emily scoffed as I leaned back an inch to peer around the satellite.

"Holy shit." I had no words, no thoughts to what I saw. Fire, frozen in patches around the park. Leon's body showed he'd been in the middle of running, but he was still like a statue. Emily glanced around and stilled when she saw it too.

"Did we just stop time?" She breathed.

"Yeah, I think we did."

## Chapter Thirty-Five

Emily

I did not have “time manipulating with my boyfriend” on my life’s bingo card. Granted, I didn’t have “almost get squished by a satellite” or “have a lion friend” on my life card either. Just one of the many surprises, I guess.

“How long do you think it’ll stay like that?” I asked, my whole body scared as shit to move.

“I don’t know. I didn’t know this was possible.”

“My roar was very noble. Perhaps it was a gift for my loyalty,” Amari chimed in. I still couldn’t believe he came. I really did need to save up to get a place so he could stay with us. A life at the zoo may be better, or even taking him back to the wild, but if he wanted to be with me, I’d keep him.

“I wonder if we should try moving.” I tried scooting to the side, just a few inches, and the satellite trembled. Oh boy.

“Any chance of time jumping us now?” I mentally crossed my fingers since I was scared to do it in reality.

“I’ve been trying. Apparently, my powers, or our powers, think this is better.” I wasn’t sure I agreed with them.

“Did you feel my powers when I touched you?” he asked, and I subtly nodded.

“My whole body warmed, and I felt stronger. Like you were giving me your power, and it supercharged mine.” Honestly, it felt like I’d been plugged into a super engine. I knew I could stop the satellite. I felt invincible with him. The other half of my soul.

“The balance,” I whispered as it hit me. I continued as the metal’s heat made us sweat. “Our powers come from the Titans. Draco said that made us different and that the balance was important. We hurt when we are apart, but when we are together, we are practically one. Your energy flows into me and mine into you. He said we had great power and that power

needed a balance or it would be too much for one person.” My mind raced with all the thoughts, putting everything together.

“I think we have powers that we can access together. Like... your gifts come from Kronos, fucking Father Time essentially. He could do anything with it. Yes, I read up on him. You have those powers too, but it was too much for you to do on your own. You needed a balance.”

Together, we were a powerhouse. Which scared the bejesus out of me, because that was a lot of pressure. However, right now I was beyond grateful for it.

“What were you thinking when you tried to jump?”

“That I loved you and that we’d live together or die together. No future was worth existing without you.” I fucking loved this man.

“Perhaps love is the key.”

“Phillip says to always bet on love.” Vincent smirked but I got behind the notion.

“Amari, Vincent’s grip may hurt, but please hang on as we move together with love, ok?” I pleaded with the lion not to snarl or pull away. This wasn’t going to be easy, and there wouldn’t be enough time to do anything if time started moving at a normal pace. We’d be squished.

“With love?” Vincent sounded confused.

“Yeah. Like think about how much you love me. Like you did before.” It sounded logical to me.

“I love that you’re a dork sometimes, and I can’t wait to spend the rest of my life with you.” His hold tightened around me before his lips pressed against my head.

“I love you. I’m glad I picked up the pen palling hobby.” I tilted my head to look into his eyes. A silent agreement passed in our gaze. Time to move.

“I love waking up beside you. I love that we’ll have many more together.” He scooted back an inch, and I didn’t take my eyes off him as I followed. Amari huffed as he crawled forward with us.

“I love you, E.” We made it out from under the satellite, his arm around my waist as we slowly stood. My muscles didn’t like that. Perhaps I needed to add yoga or something into my life.

“I love you, V.” I smiled and glanced around. If I hadn’t seen the fiery stillness around us, I wouldn’t have believed it. And I had friends who talked to ghosts; nothing should surprise me at this point.

Vincent took a step back, and the world around us trembled.

“Quick, tell me something you love about me!” I shook him as the world around us began to move again. It was like a slow motion scene in a movie. Which would have been cool to watch if we weren’t still in the danger zone.

“I love your bubble butt. Now let’s haul that ass out of here.” He dug his foot into the ground and, before I could protest, released Amari, who’d readied himself for a sprint, and tossed me over his shoulder. Time picked up its pace as Vincent and Amari took off.

The ground shook, and suddenly time found its normal rhythm. The satellite struck the ground, and broken mirrors shattered further, chasing us as we fled. Amari made it to safety, but that busted tail end of the satellite had it in for us as it flipped over.

We didn’t make it this far to die now. Not a chance, Mr. SARS. I imagined the whole satellite flopping to the ground. *Come on, Titan powers, don’t let me down.*

It trembled, and like someone had flicked it with giant fingers, the satellite fell to the side. The ground shook and fire blasted from the metal as it finally stilled.

“I did it!” I hollered as Vincent carried me through the burning park. I hated that my favorite place was up in flames, but I was glad I wasn’t burning with it.

“They made it!” I heard Selene’s voice over the nearing sirens and relaxed onto Vincent’s back. My friends

were ok. Once Vincent's feet hit pavement, he set me down, and before I could suck in a breath, his lips were on mine.

"I ran very fast. I will require many back scratches later in reward." Amari's voice entered my head, and I couldn't help but laugh.

"It's like a dream. Did that all really happen?" I pulled back and looked around as the heroes who were there for us walked over. Selene scowled at me, but I knew she'd get over it. Gwen sat on the ground with her metal dragon curled on her lap. Her boyfriend Arthur gave us a wave with the hand that wasn't holding hers.

"I'm so fucking sorry." Leon stepped into view with a big frown, and I shook my head.

"You were amazing. Everything worked out the way it was supposed to. I'm so glad you saved Gwen." I walked over and gave him a hug. I hoped he didn't take on the what-if in this scenario. We were ok, and that was all that mattered. He did his job and did it so well.

"I'm so proud of you." Selene waited her turn, and as soon as I let go of Leon, her arms found me. It was her hug that finally broke me. Tears sprang free, and I sobbed as the reality of today finally hit me.

My friend, my best friend, came with me too so I wouldn't face death alone. Not only did I make it out alive, but I'd risen from the flames.

"I can't believe you pushed us away. I'm gonna send a ghost to haunt your apartment for a month or something." She cried against my shoulder, and I laughed a full-body shaking type of laugh.

"As long as it doesn't breathe on me, I'll be ok."

Man, it was good to be alive.

Chapter Thirty-Six

Vincent

“Great job, everyone.” Phillip walked into the restaurant as the servers brought over pizza. It was Emily’s idea to celebrate with pizza after saving Seahill. It reminded me of pizza nights after winning a game with my middle school baseball team.

“Futures look ok?” someone asked, and I’d been wondering the same. Emily lived, and Terratrex would continue work. I’d been afraid to look ahead in case things were worse than before.

“Everything is as it was always meant to be.” He sat across the table from me and winked.

“I’ll be back.” I leaned over to Emily and called my power. The restaurant was empty, and the kitchen staff knew what we were. They were paid to keep quiet. I had to see, to know what that wink was about. I jumped back to my hero apartment first. The bed was made, and the costumes that lined one side of the room were gone. The place looked empty.

“Right on time.” Phillip opened the door and strolled in with a smile.

“It’s weird when you do that sometimes.” I glanced while looking around for any trace of my old life.

Past-Phillip winked so I’d come here to meet future-Phillip.

“I knew you wouldn’t relax until you saw the effects of that day.” He shrugged and waved me on.

“We’ve got a few stops before you head back for pizza. Come on.” I left the room and followed. We took the elevator to the restaurant floor, then left for the city in a black SUV. Everything looked ok. The same actually. The buildings, the way people dressed, the sun shining.

“First stop,” he announced as we pulled up to a hotel. Alright. Phillip handed the valet his keys as we walked inside.

“We’ll be back in five,” he told the man in a tan uniform.

“Don’t think I’ve been here.” The lobby of the Florence Hotel looked like an old-time fancy hotel from a Hollywood movie. Marble-looking floors glistening under bright chandeliers. High back red velvet chairs with people smoking cigars like they were the most important people in the room.

We stopped to the side of the concierge desk, and I nodded a hello at the desk woman.

“Why are we here?” I looked around and noticed it before Phillip answered. Still, he pointed his finger at the painting anyways.

A life-size painting rested on the wall to our right. Two people dressed in luxurious clothes stood together. An older gentleman with salt-and-pepper hair and a mustache. Very mafia-looking to me. And a young woman with brown hair and blue eyes. I knew that face. Above the artwork was a gold engraved sign.

*Frank and Chasity Florence*

Chasity... holy shit.

As if she heard my voice in her head, the real-life version screeched as a smaller female trailed behind her, writing things down in a notebook. She looked the same. Pin straight brown hair, blue eyes, and a body most men would die for. Her clothing looked different, but only in a more expensive way. It was the shiny and massive diamond on her ring finger that caught my attention the most. I’d given her a ring for our anniversary since I didn’t remember our actual wedding. It was a modest size and what I’d been able to do at the time.

“Not green cashmere, Linda. Sage green. Sage,” Chasity scoffed before hiking her designer bag over her shoulder. She glanced my way once as she walked by and rolled her eyes before ignoring me. What else could I do but stand with my mouth gaped.

“Without you around to slum with, so to speak, she found the sugar daddy she always wanted. She owns a fashion



line and spends daddy's money. She has the life she always wanted. She fucks her husband every Tuesday, as long as his health is ok, then a parade of other guys on the other days." Phillip added the rest of Chasity Florence's story, and I laughed.

"Marrying me was holding her back."

"She was young and thought you were hot and rich when you paid for the drinks with a hundred-dollar bill. Your fears of her taking over the world were valid, but she never wanted that much power. She only cares about herself." I guess I should have known that. The what-if games I'd played in my head were worse than any of reality. Taking over the world came with a lot of responsibility, and Chasity was allergic to the word.

"Why'd she roll her eyes at me?"

"You may not be married to her, but you are in the family. A family she doesn't like to acknowledge." If I was in the family, that meant the future I visited...

"Next stop." Phillip knocked his hands on the desk before walking back to the SUV. He drove a few blocks over and parked in front of the park. Emily and my park, to be exact. It looked... the same as it did in the future. Trees had grown back like I remembered, and the ground where the satellite hit looked as if nothing touched it. The sculpture that memorialized the fallen Hero Society member had been replaced with that of a familiar-looking lion.

Everything else looked the same: the five benches and the koi pond.

"The park was ruined and needed a lot of work. Since it meant so much to you and Emily, you bought it." We stopped in front of a bench. It'd be a lie if I said I wasn't nervous to look at the engraved metal plate on the bench. What if it looked the same with Aemilia on it? My chest hurt remembering how it looked before, but I inhaled and glanced as I exhaled.

*E < 3 V*

“See, not bad. It’s still y’all’s home away from home if you will. You both visit every time you’re in the city for hero work.” He clapped his hands together and walked off again. Time to head to our next stop. I gave the bench one last look and smiled. I tilted back to see if the magic mailbox was there, but it was gone. Maybe it burned up in the fire or we took it to our house.

We ended up back at the hero headquarters, the training room to be specific.

“I can’t believe you cut off their power source with an axe. That was so cool.” Two females walked by, completely covered in dirt as we stepped out of the elevators.

“Terratrex deserved it.” They laughed all the way to the locker rooms.

“Bad shit can always happen. However, as long as there are those who are willing to fight, then we’ll be ok. Terratrex lived on, but so did the heroes. You needed to trust in love, Vincent. To trust that good things can happen, as can the bad. If you only focus on the bad things, then you miss out on all the good in your life.” Phillip placed his hand on my shoulder, and I thought I wanted to hug the male. He gambled on love, and it once again was a solid bet. I should have trusted him, but if I did from the start, things might not have turned out as they did.

I guess that was the game. Trusting the journey to lead you to where you’re truly meant to be.

“Shit. What happens to the past me?” I didn’t live in Seahill, but I’d be moving in a year. If I stayed in the past with Emily, technically there would be two of me in the same time.

“It’s an odd feeling, but you and Emily started a whole new timeline. The previous one no longer exists. It’s a complicated thing, but essentially the older you merges with the now you, like what happened with us time changers before. You’ll have the memories of the before, but everyone else won’t. Chasity doesn’t remember a life married to you. It’s like it never happened.” I got to stay with Emily in the past without running into my old self. I’d been traveling throughout

time for decades now, and it still surprised me. Speaking of surprises.

“How come you remember?” I shouldn’t doubt the seer, but I was curious.

“I still remember all the futures I’ve seen. The ones that could have been and all. I don’t have any memories of experiences from the other timeline, but I remember the visions.” Sounded like a headache. “However, we did become best friends in all the futures.”

Glad that didn’t change. I’d been miserable in the other future, and the only parts that made me smile were joking around with him and working with the Hero Society.

“Should be satisfactory. If I remember correctly, there’s a hot pizza and pretty pink-haired girl waiting for you in another time.” He stepped back with a grin. I thought about Emily’s face and how she glowed with happiness after surviving in the park. “See ya soon, future best friend,” Phillip called out as I closed my eyes and left this time.

I felt the hard seats of Pizza Pazza first, then a soft hand touched my arm. When I opened my eyes, no one paid me any mind as they ate except for Emily.

“Everything ok?” Her green eyes softened, and I leaned in for a kiss. This girl, this time, this life. It was real, and it was mine now. It all worked out. Better than worked out, it was the future we were supposed to have all along.

“Everything is perfect.” I breathed against her lips.

“Great.” She beamed, then lifted up to whisper into my ear.

“While you were gone, I was thinking. Earlier, I wanted to fuck in the elevator, but the ride is so quick. But now...” Now we had the ability to stop time.

“First you want to have sex on pyramids or ancient Greece, now you want to stop time to fuck in an elevator?” I teased and ignored the look Phillip shot our way.

“Sounds like a very nice experience to be grateful for.”

I fucking loved this woman. As we ate and celebrated with the heroes, I couldn't help but truly appreciate the moment. The trials, the laughs, and the magic of it all. In the end, we'd likely never know how it all happened so perfectly. Phillip was great at straddling the lines of futures, but he wasn't a god himself. It was as if the stars had aligned, and Emily and I played out our roles.

However it happened, I would live the rest of my life grateful for the magical mailbox and the woman who taught me to live in the now, whenever that was for us.

**The End**



**~One hour later, in a lavish apartment across town~**

*Draco and Rose- Check*

*Lilith and Leon- Check*

*Echo and Asher- Check*

*Dorian and Esme- Check*

*Phillip and Mina- Check*

*Gwendolyn and Arthur- Check*

*Selene and Jude- Check*

*Hazel and Maddox- Check*

*Emily and Vincent-*

“Check,” a sultry voice announced as a red pen checked off the box beside Emily’s and Vincent’s names.

“Another job well done. Are your powers recharged enough to start the next couple?” The young assistant asked as she scanned down a list of possible names of those with godly gifts who needed their balance, with a pointed finger.

“Almost. That mailbox took a lot out of me, but the end result is as I expected.” The owner of the sultry voice answered then set down her completed list with a satisfied smile on her face.

“You always bet on love,” the assistant said, then left her list on the coffee table to make some tea.

“That I do.” The woman smirked, knowing that Phillip Griffin stole her line, knowing full well it was she who pulled the strings of the heroes falling in love. Together, the seer and the woman worked behind the scenes, turning the Hero Society into what it was today.

“I’m excited to see how you bring the next couple together. Someone should really make movies or write books about these heroes falling in love.” The assistant set the steaming cup of tea down before sitting to sip her own.

“A wonderful idea, because our mission isn’t done until every hero has found their balance.”

## Epilogue

4 years later

Amari

The tiny human gripped at my mane as her small head bobbed.

“Alright, enough kitty time. Let’s go lie down for a nap.” My Titaness scooped up the tiny human and cradled it against her chest.

“Love you, Amari.” Emily walked down the hall. Rest time was officially over. I stretched, careful not to ruin the carpet in the living room the humans cared about. The male stepped into the room and scratched my head. We’d just come to a truce where I allowed him to touch me. He meant something to my Titaness, and while I was the king of our domain, her smiles when we got along were important to me.

“Thanks for stopping the gunman this morning.” He leaned against the counter in the food preparation area. I nodded once and finished my stretch. We’d battled many evil doers these past years. The hero with glowing eyes who could move things with her mind, her mate who controlled time, and her fierce lion kept the city safe. She’d been shocked at first when her mate pointed out the eyes glowed in battle after that day in the fire forest. They shared power, the balance to each other’s immense gifts. I knew the power also came from our companionship, but I let them think it was all about them. I am a considerate leader.

Since the tiny human arrived, our battles have been fewer than before. Still, the three of us were a team amongst the Hero Society. My ancestors would be proud in my honoring the Rhea of our time.

The male moved us out of that tiny box of a home to the space we deserved. The shrieking human, Chas-something, left after graduation, and we hadn’t seen her since. I offered to

eat her, but Emily refused to spoil my good health with her rotten soul.

“I swear she falls asleep like that”—Emily snapped her fingers—“with you, Amari,” she said as she walked out of the tiny human’s room to the couch where her mate sat with open arms.

“I am soothing, a master of everything I do.” She knew this about me. She laughed and her mate kissed her cheek. The scents in the room shifted, and I did not want to be around for their mating rituals.

“I will protect our home,” I announced as their mouths battled against each other.

I walked out the open door as my Titaness closed it behind me with her thoughts. Her moans were heard as I walked along the mountains to the unobstructed view of the city below.

A king watching over his kingdom, all was right in the world.





Loved Summer but wanna know more about Selene and Jude?  
Enjoy Chapter one of Fall, now available.

<https://mybook.to/HeroSocietyFall>

## Chapter One

### Present Day

#### Selene

“I don’t wanna be here,” I grumbled to my animated friend Emily, who could not sit still at the sight before her.

“You just wait and see. That story you’ve been dying to write for the paper is here.” Her eyes never left the circular circus stage before us. Emily was a five-foot-seven ball of energy, with pink hair and freckles on top of her nose. Her smile was my favorite part of her physic. Emily’s smile could instantly make you feel better about life, like a cup of hot chocolate with whipped cream on top.

She’d used that cozy grin on me many times after the incident with Travis’s pocketknife. I’d killed myself in my insanity, but it wasn’t my time to go. Doctors fixed me up, pumped me full of blood, and put me on twenty-four-hour suicide watch. After that my parents had me committed until I was better. Emily was one of the nurses who took care of me. She made sure I ate food and kept me company. The worst place someone who has mental issues can be is in their own head. Over the few months of being in the psych ward, we’d become friends, bonding over the desire of death but grew strong enough to resist.

Emily had been a cutter growing up. Thankfully I hadn’t found an interest in that act. She had worked through her issues and wanted to help others. She didn’t have any friends because she was too much for people to understand ... like me.

Sometimes my long dirty-blond waves looked nice, like I put effort into my appearance. My normal black eyeliner was on point. Then there were times where I looked like I’d slept

under a bridge. Mental health was no joke, and in reality, everyone battles some form of insanity. I've found the best thing you can do while feeling like you're stuck in the mud is make mud angels.

This week was a good week. Hell, I've actually been having a good few weeks. My desire to flirt with death was manageable, thanks to the Hero Society. After they'd come out to the world, explaining that people with powers came from the ancient Greek gods and goddesses, who in their final breaths cast their powers into the genes of mankind, hoping the powers would protect us mere humans. The powers came to the host the genes deemed worthy of them on a person's sixteenth birthday. If a person didn't use the powers, he or she would go mad.

Like me.

A man named Phillip Griffin and his friend Draco came to my home a year ago on a business visit. They were the leaders of the Hero Society. Draco had been immortal until he helped two others from the society change time for the better of mankind and their crew. His immortality was a price he paid gladly for saving his woman and the world. He'd known every power that could come forth in the human genes of the gods.

I thought I had been going crazy for years. Turns out my power made me a reaper. I couldn't kill someone like most would assume but I could feel when death was coming for someone's life. Once they died, I was to take their soul on. Of course, I found out there was an afterlife for us once we die. It had been working without me bringing souls up or down. I just happened to have the gift, and if I was around the soul, then I would take it where it was supposed to go. If I wasn't around there were other spirits that did the job. So while I wasn't needed per se, I still helped.

Since I was able to speak to those who recently passed, as well as a journalist who wanted the truth in everything, I helped settle unresolved cases with the Seahill Police Department. It was either use my gifts for the greater good or slip into

madness again. I'd chosen to be a superhero and use those powers to help those who couldn't help themselves.

Most of the time the dead wanted to move on, but there were a few that refused. I'd try to help them so that they could move on peacefully. Forcing them to leave never worked in my favor. They tended to avoid me and disappear before I could grab them.

"Oh, it's about to start!" Emily's hands shook my arm, bringing me back to the present.

The lights dimmed on the plain black stage, signaling something was about to happen. Her fingers reached over and intertwined with mine. Sound started through hidden speakers all around us.

"Caw!" A screeching black crow flew past my head. My hair whirled from the bird's movement to the stage. A man appeared as if out of thin air, and the crow landed on his shoulder.

"That's him!" Emily whispered, squeezing my hand tighter.

What was it about this guy that intrigued her so? His head was tilted down, and an old top hat sat on his head. Fog crept onto the circle-like stage in front of us. My skin tingled and I hoped someone wasn't about to die on stage.

"As reality slips from your mind, your eyes widen with wonder, and your soul leaps onto the wind of a dream."

That voice. My spine straightened, and I stared at the man dressed in black with a ringleader's red coat. The timbre in his words demanded attention without yelling. A stomping sound shuddered throughout the small arena, just as his head popped up, and he looked into the crowd. At me.

"Prepare for the mystical."

His mouth didn't move, but the words came out like he'd said them. Then the crow on his shoulder laughed in the man's voice. That's not scary or anything. A talking crow being creepy on a mystery man's shoulders.

The lights came on and there were suddenly performers everywhere! Trapeze artists flew above, leaping into each other's hands, swinging back and forth. A woman on a tightrope jumped and danced along the thin wire. A smaller elephant with a small boy sitting on top of the elephant's back, lifted its body up onto a ball and walked around slowly. It was a spectacular show of all the various arts in performing. But there seemed to be something different about this circus than others I'd seen in the past.

Every player on the stage had an iridescent glow to them that did not come from the lights. The shimmer made their skin, hair, and clothes glow. The ringleader moved around the stage, working magic and orchestrating the acts in perfect synchronization. An eerie feeling enveloped me as I realized I'd seen that glow before.

"Do they always shine like that?" I whispered to my enraptured friend's ear.

"Always. They are so shiny, they almost look like ghosts."

Then it hit me. This was no ordinary circus. Emily was right even though she didn't know it.

This was a circus filled with ghosts. But how?

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## A Secret In Onyx

EVERYTHING I knew died when the end of the world came. People dropped dead, and electricity vanished. Those who remained alive were never the same again.

While on the run with my boyfriend Tor across the desolate continent, the worst humanity had left attacked. Torn from the one I love, I boldly raced for help at the last human safe zone.

Only it's not humans I found, but the Fae.

Now I have one month to rescue my boyfriend and release a savior princess from an onyx tomb or lose them both forever. A seemingly impossible task when Rune, a cursed, pain in the ass Fae warrior is assigned to train me. He's hellbent on freeing his beloved princess and I'm desperate to save Tor. But no matter how hard we snarl during training; we can't stay away from each other.

I thought the worst thing that could happen to me was the apocalypse.

I was wrong.

## DAWN (HERO SOCIETY #1)

Dawn has come, a time for heroes to rise. Draco has lived long and felt the pain of loss more than anyone in one lifetime could imagine.

Immortality was given to him as a gift, a gift that failed him and turned him into a shell of the man that has nothing left but to wait out the end of existence alone.

Until her.

Rose is an empath who sees more than who Draco is supposed to be: she sees him, and what they could be. Together, they will begin the search for others with extraordinary powers, to stop a war that's been brewing for over a millennia.

The journey is only beginning, and an unnamed enemy has started to make his mark on their world.

The dawn of heroes has finally arrived.

Only time will tell if it's too late to defeat the upcoming darkness of night that now descends upon all of mankind.

## THE FINAL KO

### I FIGHT FOR A LIVING.

Which makes finding a decent guy hard when you're a female MMA fighter. None of them have been my equal. I yearn for a man who can push me to reach new heights and challenge me. A man who will treat me like a lady then lift me up by my ass and impale me against the wall.

But when Arson Kade, MMA's top fighter and notorious manwhore, declares he's that man for me I have my doubts. Any sane woman would.

There seems to be more to Arson than the rumors that surround him, but will it make me fall hard or run for the hills?

I know I've got no choice but to hold on for the ride.

It's the main event and my heart's on the line.

But will it be the Final KO?



## THE FINAL CHASE

I never thought one day I'd make a bet about pedicures to a man and  
loose.

But of course, I'd never man like him.

Jake Wild. Owner of Wild rescue for exotic animals.

He's everything I'm not, my polar opposite.

I'm heels and my salon,

He's dirt and his creatures.

But much like the animals he cares for, he's got that carnal edge.

He's the type of man you crawl on your hands and knees for.

He bites, he's on the hunt, and now I'm his prey

A chance meeting and a bet started the undeniable attraction between us.

But I'm not giving my heart and soul away that easy, he's going to have  
to catch me first.

It's the ultimate game of cat and mouse,

But will it be our Final Chase?

## LONG DRIVE

There is a long road in everyone's journey in life.

For some people, it's a way to get from one place to another.

For others, it's a search for one's purpose in existence.

For me, the road was where I could find peace.

When everything in my life had shattered, I turned to the road.

And that's where I met him.

Killian Lemarque.

A beautiful truck driver, and my salvation.

One month on the road together is the deal, and when it's over, I will have hopefully figured out what I'm going to do about my torn reality.

But sometimes the road can change everything. Falling in love wasn't part of my plan nor his.

But here we are.

One Month. One Truck. One Long Drive.

## HOW YOU GET THE GIRL

As Hollywood's hottest actor, getting a woman in my bed is never a challenge.

But after seeing a feisty woman in bar who was looking for a one-night stand, I knew that her being in my bed wouldn't be enough.

She turned me down, and I thought I'd never see her again.

Fate had other plans though.

Alessandra Rose is now my lead makeup artist for the next four months. Literally, her job is to touch me every day for the duration of filming. Sounds like a win, right?

Nope, she stops me at every hint of a flirt. I'm in uncharted waters for once.

Her argument is good I'll give her that. I'm a good actor, so accepting that it's not all an act would be tough.

But I'm not going anywhere; here heart is my Grammy and him here to win it.

That's how you get the girl.

## INSPIRED

Call it pure desperation, or maybe we'd agree it was the lack of sleep that had me signing six weeks of my life away to be bossed around by a life coach. Either way, I was trying to get my life together, and Logan Woodland was going to help.

I thought he'd make me eat healthier, drink more water, and do yoga. What I wasn't expecting, was to be forced to see myself as I was and how far I'd fallen.

But then his program worked.

He'd shown me a life filled with passion and desire. A life where I was stronger and could be the woman I'd never known existed inside me.

I did have a six-week life-changing experience, but now, I wanted more than I'd signed on for.

Him.

## GUIDING LIGHTS

He sings of suffering. His eyes hold the pain of living in sorrow.

The moment our gaze meets recognition flares within.

We are tortured souls drifting in a sea of darkness.

He knows I have secrets that I'll never tell.

I am numb.

I am broken.

I can never be the guiding light through the darkness he thinks I am.

I have forsaken my past, I rely on keeping myself shut off.

I wish things were different, that maybe we could be each other's lifeline.

But destiny drags us down like an anchor.

He lives his life in the lime light of a famous rock star, and I live in shadows on the run.

I wished I'd known that before I fell for him, but now it's too late.

## BLINDING LIGHTS

She dances with a passion I'll never know.

Seeing her again tears me at the seams.

She was never mine.

My soul is stained with the darkness of death.

I have killed.

I have tortured.

I have lost.

Her soul is too bright for the shadows I live in  
and her determination to be the flame in my heart could kill us both.

Still, I want her, I crave her.

But not even her blinding lights can fight away the darkness threatening  
us both.

But I refuse to lose her, and this time I don't think I can walk away.

## EVERGREEN

It was supposed to be an easy stakeout.

Until a bunch of bachelorettes mobbed me, changing my life forever.

I couldn't get Andi Slaton, with her red hair, blue eyes, and cotton candy-flavored lip gloss, out of my head.

But when she offers herself to aid the FBI to help me take down the biggest criminal family in Tampa, Florida, my very sanity is put to the test watching her spend time with my arch enemy.

She's everything I want, I will be everything to her.

We will be Evergreen.

## About the Author

Jessica Florence writes the stories that her fellow nerds yearn for.

From Superheroes to Sexy Truckers, Jessica is known to give readers unique tales of hope where love conquers all. Stories that melt away reality and take you on a journey with the characters. If escapism is what you are looking for, then look no further. Jessica is the Queen of weaving the tales you may not normally pick up but find yourself not being able to put down.

Jessica's always had a love of reading, and her love of books lead her to start writing in the 9th grade. She quickly learned that storytelling was her passion. Inspired by movies, music, and her personal life she writes like it's the very air she breathes. Through her writing it's evident that she lives for the stories she creates.

Jessica currently resides in North Carolina, with her daughter, husband, two dogs, and farm . She loves to be outside, write in her hammock, and collect tea mugs.

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