



THE
MONSTER'S
DESIRE

JILLIAN WEST

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Jillian West

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Nadia

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Thank you!!

Also by Jillian West

Author's Note

The Monster's Desire was written to stay in line with the same feeling as The Monster's Den. I've *tried* to keep this entire world light-hearted and action based. If you have no triggers or things you prefer to avoid you can skip the paragraphs below and jump right in.

>>Spoilers Below This Point<<

There is no cheating and no OW/OM drama. No abuse or bullying by any of the characters. These men are monsters, but they treat the FMC well.

Here's what you will find.

This book features a FMC who is a sex worker. You will only see her on page with those who end up in her harem. There are claiming/mating bites. There is humorous murder. One of her mates is a reaper and he does reap souls throughout the book. There is a birthing scene with a secondary character that gets a little dicey. If you've read my previous books, you'll know I'm not about heartbreak. Everything ends up okay.

There is parental physical abuse to a secondary character. (This happens off page and is only briefly discussed on page with no details.) There is exhibitionism/voyeurism, breeding kink, and pregnancy in the last chapter and epilogues.

You can reach me at JillianWestAuthor@gmail.com or via social media.

Please don't hesitate to ask if you have any questions or would like anything clarified.

If I've missed anything that should be listed, please reach out to me on social media or email me and I'm happy to correct it.

*This one is for anyone who feels like a hot mess 99% of the
time.*

You never know when you'll swoop in to save the day!

Chapter One

Nadia

My sweaty chest heaves as I pant, writhing and wishing I was tied to the wall, so I'd have something to lean against. The padded leather cuffs dig into my wrists as pain sizzles across my ass. The sharp sting on my rear end deadens the ache in my hands.

I groan, wiggling my hips.

Another couple of smacks like that, and I'll hit subspace. It's not something I'd feel comfortable doing with every client—hell, it isn't something I'd entrust to every sexual partner I've had—but I trust Sam. Which is weird, because he's a demon who enjoys tormenting me, but he's also a very attentive lover.

Another forceful smack lands, this time across my lower ass cheek, where it meets my thigh. I suck in a sharp breath, squeezing my eyes tight, despite the fact I'm blindfolded.

“That's a good girl,” Sam murmurs, kissing my jaw. He cups my tits with both hands, flicking calloused fingers over my nipples, making me clench my knees. My legs shake violently as my toes dance around the floor.

The blindfold doesn't allow me to see what's happening, so I'm baffled when another painful slap lands on my right ass cheek. I've only got one client in the room with me, and I can feel him framing my front. So, who the hell keeps smacking my ass?

“You're thinking again, love.” Sam kisses my jaw once more.

“That was very close to breaking my rule.” Okay, so it’s super freaking cliché, but I don’t care. If I choose to kiss my partner, that’s one thing. But while I’m tied up and unable to see what’s happening, I’m very clear about my limits. I don’t feel guilty about that in the least.

He gently rakes his teeth down my throat. “Always so feisty.”

Another playful slap lands against my ass, but I can feel Sam’s warmth radiating against my front. I swear, sometimes it feels like the world is screwing with me.

I’ve been at The Monster’s Den long enough that my schedule is completely booked with regulars. However, once a week, I see Sam. The thing about Sam is, he never wears the same face twice—or the same body, for that matter. It’s weird as hell, even for the supernatural world. I’ve got no clue what type of demon he is or how he can afford a new glamor every week, but that’s not the kind of thing I focus on too much.

Or I didn’t before I started having a tiny crush on him.

It’s weird, I know.

I’ve never developed any type of attachment to a client before, and the strangeness factor is ratcheted even higher because I don’t know what he looks like.

“Ass back for me, doll.” This time, Sam’s voice comes from behind me, but I can still feel his face brushing mine as he licks down my neck. I comply, spreading my feet and popping my backside farther toward the voice. “That’s my good girl.”

A long, forked tongue flicks over my drenched sex before hands land on my hips, pulling me farther apart.

I gasp, even as my arms ache from blood loss. No matter how intense any of our sessions have gotten, Sam never fails to check in. He’s excellent at pushing me to the line, but never dipping a toe across it.

“Do you like being tongue fucked, love?” he taunts, his warm breath fanning against the shell of my ear.

“You know I do,” I moan as fingers brush my clit from the front while I’m still getting teased with his mouth from behind.

The mystery only makes me more obsessed with him.

Some of my clients are self-conscious about their monster forms, but I do everything in my power to put them at ease. It’s beyond frustrating that I’ve managed to reach that level of vulnerability and trust with all my regulars *outside* of Sam.

I’ve put a lot of thought into it.

Originally, I was convinced he’s some type of hybrid with tentacles. Only, what I’m feeling now is most definitely a tongue.

Sam licks his way from my jaw to my right tit and sucks my nipple with teasing flicks.

What monster has two tongues?

Sam grips my pussy lips, teasing them up and down while brushing his finger over my clit. Pleasure courses through me as several painful smacks land against my ass and thigh.

“More, please,” I sob. The leather cuffs dig into my hands as I dance around, wiggling about as I chase my orgasm. It’s very clear there are four hands touching me. Two pulling my hips up and forward from behind and two on my front. I don’t care if he’s an arachnid demon, as long as he keeps tonguing my pussy like I’m the sweetest thing he’s ever tasted. “Sam, just like that! Please, *please*, please.”

“You beg so fucking beautifully,” he growls, sounding truly demonic. “Come, love.”

My nipples throb as my cunt locks down. I come, violently trembling as Sam wraps an arm around my middle. He holds me up enough that the cuffs are barely a thought in my mind as I sob against his chest. He circles my clit in teasing taps of his fingers as my pussy clenches in waves.

“I want your cock,” I beg.

Sam hums. “Soon, very fucking soon. But I don’t think you’re ready for that just yet.”

“I am,” I assure him, nodding wildly.

“You say that every time, doll,” Sam’s voice comes from behind me as he slurps, loudly licking his lips. He has two tones. Both are deep, but one is growly, while the other is gravelly.

It’s a mystery that grows with each session that we share.

“Just a moment and we’ll get these off of you.” Sam brushes his lips against my cheek. Fingers tickle their way down my spine as Sam also manages to kiss his way over my shoulder. It’s mind-boggling. Who needs multiple partners when one demon can be in two places at once?

The warmth disappears from my back and front simultaneously. I hang, suspended by the cuffs clipped to the ring that dangles from the ceiling. This is always the worst part. I imagine he’s changing from his monster form back to the humanoid figure that changes each session.

Sometimes I wonder if I would be as enamored with him if he wasn’t so mysterious. I think I would. None of my other clients are nearly as attentive to every nuance of my body.

“All right.” He tenderly removes the blindfold.

I blink in the fluorescent light. It’s not bright or overly dark, but it’s always an adjustment.

Sam’s warmth meets my back once again as he carefully unbuckles my right hand while his left pulls me to lean against his chest. Once I’m where he wants me, he massages from my upper arm down to my wrist.

“You know the deal. Flex your fingers for me and make a fist.”

I snuggle back against him as we repeat the process on the other side. He’s always very exact with the amount of time we spend together. There’s a set routine, and I know what’s coming next. He turns me to face him and bends down, lifting me. I wrap my hands around his neck and my feet around his ass.

His glamor today is a slender blond with shaggy hair and blue eyes. He's hot, but I've learned during my time at The Den that physical appearance matters very little to me. The best sex I've had has been with some of the most unassuming monsters, and I haven't even taken that step with Sam.

Despite what people believe, sex is only a small facet of my job. Half the time, I feel like a highly paid therapist.

Other times, the client wants someone to look pretty and impress their friends or business associates. Those are actually the least enjoyable appointments.

Maybe I've gotten jaded, or maybe I've grown into my own.

Either way, I'm lucky because I can now afford to be selective with the clients I see. I could survive just doing work as a fertility witch, but I'm not in a relationship, so I see nothing wrong with continuing to work at The Den for as long as I enjoy it.

"We never managed to shut off your brain completely this session," Sam murmurs, running his hand down my back. "That's definitely something to rectify next time."

"I'll see you again?" I snuggle deeper into his chest as he takes a seat on the couch near the door. I hate this part of every visit, because I know he'll be leaving soon. There isn't another client on my roster who causes an ache in my heart when it's time for them to go.

It's so bizarre.

It's actually becoming a thing for people close to me to insinuate that it's time for me to cut him out of my schedule. Especially the coworkers with more experience in this type of work.

They've beaten it into my head how dangerous it is to grow attached.

And it's not like I don't know that.

I've had regular clients who missed an appointment and never came back.

I don't let myself think about that happening with Sam.

I would be devastated. He's the one who keeps things at arm's length between us.

"You know I'll always come back to you." He tenderly massages my shoulders.

I shouldn't let myself light up at his words, but I do.

He chuckles, holding me to him with a firm, but comforting, grip.

"We got right to it this time. Tell me about your week. How's the new roommate situation?" Sam asks.

Oh look, another perfect example of how I treat him differently than my other clients. I don't go past surface level with anyone except him. It's not like I immediately trusted him, but he's been my client for three years. That's a lot of weekly sessions. He pats my hip, and I remember he asked me a question.

"Emerson? She's good. Her daughter is adorable. So damn cute, but I've learned kids don't sleep in for shit," I grumble, burrowing deeper into his shoulder. No matter what his glamor looks like, he always smells exactly the same. It's a combination of gasoline and leather, which doesn't sound all that appealing, but somehow, he pulls it off in a way that makes my thighs clench.

"The wolf pup is an early bird?" Sam asks, chuckling softly.

"Yeah, she seems to rise with the sun every damn morning. I honestly don't know how Emerson does it." I have serious doubts I could work late nights and be cheerful enough to greet my child by six a.m. But, I suppose, that's one of those things you learn to adapt to when you procreate.

Emerson is human, but her daughter, Ember, is a wolf shifter. She's almost two years old, but she's smart and already talking up a storm.

"She's all tangled up with my bosses. I can't believe you haven't heard about it," I say nonchalantly, but truly, I'm

baffled.

It's been the talk of Haven lately.

"How do you feel about children?" I'm not sure if he's just making small talk, or if he's trying to redirect my not-so-covert question.

I shrug because he doesn't like it when I lie to him—he can always tell—but I'm not sure that's something I'm willing to discuss at the moment. I spend a lot of time creating birth control spells and even more time helping female monsters get pregnant.

I'm twenty-eight, and, unlike most supernatural creatures, witches don't have prolonged lifespans. Nor are we immortal. There are certain spells and ways a witch can extend their life, but I don't mess with that type of magic.

His fingers meet my chin, carefully tilting my face toward his. He nuzzles his cheek to mine, and I grunt. It's hard to keep the lines between us firm when he's tender. Aftercare is one thing. A swarm of bubbly butterflies in my stomach every time we make eye contact is another.

"Children?" he asks again.

"I don't know." I sigh. "I'd need a partner for that, wouldn't I? I'm very single and have been for too many years to count." My eyes squeeze shut at that admission. It's frustrating to be emotionally vulnerable with someone who never extends the same courtesy.

"If I thought you could handle everything I need from you, then I would scoop you up and never leave," he murmurs, kissing my cheek. "Until then, we'll settle for these scraps of stolen moments."

"You're always so cryptic." I push up on my knees to look at him. "If you could tell me what you need, that might be a good first step."

"I have," he says, laughing and shaking his head. "You weren't ready to hear it, and I have doubts you ever will be."

I frown so hard, I can feel my own forehead wrinkle. He's frustrating as hell when he doesn't speak plainly. "You've never—"

"It's that time, doll," he says in the lower, gravelly tone that always comes when he uses that nickname for me.

I fight the urge to pout. I'll see him again in a week, but that feels like forever. My chest gets tight, but I give him a forced smile and carefully climb out of his lap.

I aim for the hook where I left my robe and pull it on quickly.

"See you again soon." His voice echoes from behind me. I shiver as he squeezes my hips, and then he's gone.

Chapter Two

Wraith

The very last thing I want is to be here. It's been five human days since our session with Nadia, and my nerves are frayed. It's considerably worse the longer I go without seeing her. Time moves slower in Hell, making it feel like an eternity has passed. There will be no respite until she's in my presence. I'll continue to become more and more agitated until I can lay eyes on her.

I've never been very good at playing my cards close to the vest.

That's why I have Knight. We've been a team for more years than I can count. Millennia pass slowly in Hell, but that's neither here nor there.

The sin eater is my other half.

Knight is one of three of his kind in all of Hell. They're even rarer than reapers, and we're practically endangered. There's a unique bond that occurs between reapers and sin eaters, but considering we discovered it by chance, there's no way I would out that information in front of the demons in the pit tonight.

Knight sighs. His shoulder-length, straight blond hair falls around his face as he leans on the wall, glaring at Nero. His eyes glow white with annoyance as his lithely muscled frame flexes. He's always moving, and now is no exception, especially since the pride demon has something we want.

"A simple yes or no will do." Nero smiles, like he thinks he's winning this little exchange.

“The two of us against your horde?” I reiterate his ludicrous statement.

“Your cluster against my horde,” Nero clarifies, but we both know Malice won’t fight unless it’s absolutely necessary. Meaning, it will be Knight and me taking on his army of demon lackeys.

“Are you sure you’re willing to lose that many of your prize fighters tonight?” Knight uses his forearms to push up on the fence and swings himself up to sit on the brick wall that separates the fight organizers from those they deem cannon fodder.

“You’re truly that confident?” Nero scoffs, plucking at the sleeve of his over-priced suit. “You might be immortal, but I can make you wish you weren’t.” The predatory smile that crosses his face sends a shiver of unease down my spine. I wish that prideful fucker would get in the pit and let us have a go at him, but fucking up a few of his army will have to do.

“The relic if we win?” I ask for clarification. “It will be ours to do with as we see fit. You’ll relinquish it to us immediately following our victory.”

“And if you lose?” Nero asks.

“You get to watch your men pummel us to your heart’s content.” Knight smirks, staring directly into the pride demon’s eyes. His long hair billows in the wind, but Knight doesn’t move a muscle as the showdown continues.

I glance between the two, watching to see who will blink first. I’m tired of being trapped in Hell, and our plans in the human realm are taking a little too long to come to fruition. Meaning, we have no choice. We won’t leave the pit tonight without victory.

“Are you afraid my cluster can demolish your horde, High Lord Nero?” Knight taunts, quirked a blond brow.

Malice is going to be exceptionally fucking pissed. The third member of our group is a nightmare. They’re more feared than even reapers.

My kind reap tainted human souls for punishment, but due to the immortality of supernaturals, we generally recycle demons who have become too vile to exist. Their essence gets dumped into the Bowels of Hell with the humans, and they're wiped of all that makes a demon a demon. Memories, thoughts, even powers, in some cases.

I don't think too much about it, as it isn't my role in Hell to do so, but an uncomfortable shiver slides down my spine at the thought.

"Fine." Knight shrugs. The showy bastard pushes himself up and does a backflip in the air before landing on his feet. "Find some other way to entertain your audience, since you're unsure—"

"We have a deal," Nero snaps. "Perhaps a little pain and suffering will remind you to be humble."

"No demon is humble." Knight walks along the brick ledge. He reaches me and jumps down, landing in a crouch. "Ready to win this?"

I nod. I'd do much worse to finally exist in the same realm as my love without the laws of the universe pulling me back, time after time.



I knew before I stepped into the pit that I'd be prohibited from using my powers. Knight is too. The only one of the three of us who can is Malice, since his power is at will. Well, ours are too, but not to the extent of the nightmare.

Nightmares feed on terror and fear. He could send an arena of monsters to their knees if he wished to put on a show. Rather than participating, he's watching from the comfort of the viewing deck.

The lazy bastard.

I have no doubt that he'll jump along for the ride if we secure a portal to Earth.

He'll simply watch and bide his time, only joining in if absolutely necessary. However, I know he's developing a bit of an addiction to a certain fae. I can't imagine he'd turn down the chance to interact with her without the laws that garner his kind slipping through the veil.

Not all demons can pass through the veil between the human realm and Hell, but our cluster is a bit of an enigma.

Reapers are regularly drawn to the human realm, for obvious purposes. Perhaps a few millennia ago, it was more common for sin eaters and reapers to work in tandem. But since they're practically extinct, the universe has had to do without their part in things.

I'm not sure if the others were recycled into some other type of demon on their resurrection, or possibly they found peace and simply ceased to exist. It's impossible to tell. But the risk isn't one I'm willing to take.

Knight is a valuable member of our operation. He cleanses the soul of its sins, making for an easier transition. It's actually quite convenient, as the process purifies the soul, preventing me from suffering any nasty side effects that would likely occur without Knight doing his part. It's also why I'm the most prolific reaper in our realm. There are no consequences when I opt to devour a soul rather than reaping it, which normally wouldn't be the case.

The universe, or some higher power, might call us to where we're needed, but we aren't obligated to judge the soul unworthy. Don't get me wrong—in many cases, they are. But I've refused to reap a soul on more than one occasion, and the first started with *her*.

Nadia is the very reason I'll fight my way through every demon in Nero's horde. I doubt he'll continue sending the entire legion once he realizes we aren't fucking around. It would look incredibly bad for him. Then again, pride demons aren't known for using their better judgment.

My chest heaves as I sidestep a lust demon just before he can dose me with his venom. I spin, slamming my foot into his

back, and his silvery-pink magic spews into a gluttony demon instead.

I don't get a moment to revel in that success as several lesser demons swarm attack. They're disturbing little creatures without a free thought between them. Lesser demons are basically animalistic in nature. They pledge to a higher demon and do their bidding, lest they be slaughtered and recycled into the pit.

I grab a small purple and black demon that looks like an alligator. My claws dig into his scaly shoulders as I spin, tossing him into several other crawling creatures.

"I wish Malice would say *enough is enough* and get his lazy ass down here," Knight says, breaking the neck of a basilisk. The crunch is gruesome, even from several feet away. His boot lands firmly in the face of an envy demon as he stares at Malice, giving him a look that indicates he'd like our brethren to get the fuck up and help us end this.

In my distraction, I allow a claw to rake across my cheek. A low, menacing growl escapes as I spin, shivering my hand through the wrath demon's thick armor plate that lines his chest. My hand clutches at his still-beating heart as I remove it from its cavity. He's immortal, but that's going to take quite some time to regenerate.

Malice's smoky tendrils dance around the arena, and I finally let out a breath of pure relief.

"Oh, look. You finally decided to join the party." I spin, slamming my fist into the head of a lesser demon.

"Motherfucking finally," Knight says from somewhere behind me.

My cluster is essentially unstoppable when we're together. But I have no doubt tonight is going to get worse before it gets better.

Chapter Three

Nadia

I always know shit is going to hit the fan when my nan gets weird.

Seers are unique because they don't live on one plane of existence in one fixed time.

It makes me feel guilty to admit, but I'm grateful I didn't inherit her gifts.

Being a witch with my type of magic is controversial enough.

Constantly reliving moments in time, especially ones that may or may not end up existing in our reality, doesn't interest me in the least. She doesn't talk about it often, but she has said enough that I know it must be overwhelming to remember so many possible futures and outcomes.

It makes my brain hurt when I think about it too much. She can actually recall events and memories of things that never came to fruition.

It's freaking wild.

I edge my way down the alleyway toward the back parking lot of The Monster's Den. She told me exactly what time to arrive tonight, but she was clear that I'm not to intervene.

So, why the hell am I here at all?

Watching the horror unfolding before my eyes serves no purpose. I clutch the coarse brick of the wall as I take it in.

Dead wolves litter the ground behind The Den, but I'm far enough from the action that no one notices me.

Nan stands looking completely at peace. She's holding my friend Emerson's daughter.

Ember is currently in animal form. Her furry face rolls from side to side as she whines, desperately trying to escape Nan's hold.

I'm sure I could focus just a little magic without anyone picking up on it, right?

Yeah, I could totally do that, and no one would be the wiser.

Ember is the one factor that needs to be removed from this altercation so the rest can play out. It's obviously why I'm here. At least I think so.

It can be extremely frustrating to deal with a clairvoyant. They know how you'll react, even before you do, because they've seen it.

I raise a hand, blowing a sliver of shadow magic toward the pup.

Most of the town of Haven believes I have fertility magic.

I wish I did.

Blood magic—especially the kind that presents with shadows, like mine does—is rare. In the supernatural world, it's dangerous to be an oddity.

I take another deep breath and close my eyes as I focus my intent. I'm only trying to encourage Ember to wiggle out of Nan's hold, and then she can head for the back door of The Den.

A sizzle goes through my entire body. My eyes pop open, and I determine my coaxing worked.

Ember races toward the back door.

I exhale heavily, shaking the extra energy out of my hands. A slow smile crosses my face. I'm *fairly* sure I served my purpose here tonight.

Nan might be seventy-plus years old, but she's got keen eyesight, or she's already seen this play out. She winks before focusing back on the confrontation at hand.

I move to duck back around the brick wall, but end up squeaking when a cool hand wraps around my mouth from behind.

"Nadia," the slimy voice says.

"Kash," I hiss, yanking his hand off my mouth. "What the hell do you want? Do you know what—" I cut off when I realize I'm not supposed to interfere with whatever happens tonight with Emerson.

Kashius is a warlock with the paranormal council. He's been a client of mine for a while, or he was before our last visit, when I not-so-politely told him to fuck off because I wouldn't be seeing him again.

There are some things I don't dabble in, and he was definitely buttering me up to see if I'd be interested in immortality or anti-aging magic. They're both too dark for me to be interested.

"I knew you weren't a fertility witch." He chuckles haughtily. "Come along. You and I need to have a chat."

I'm not sure why I let Kash drag me down the alley, past several abandoned buildings, and into the heart of the warehouse district. Not that The Monster's Den is far from this area of town, but the farther I get from my workplace, the more anxious I become.

Having the paranormal council discover that I'm a blood witch is not high on my to-do list.

Fucked. I am so incredibly fucked. And not in the good way.

Why the hell don't I have a protector who will murder for me? It would come in handy at the moment.

Aline has Atlas always ready and willing to look after her and guard her secrets. Emerson has Dread and the other owners of The Monster's Den.

Where is my hot, psycho, will-do-anything-to-protect-me fuck buddy? Hell, mates kind of creep me out because of how both parties tend to lose their autonomy, but even that doesn't sound so bad right now.

"I'm surprised you didn't put up a fight. That must mean you understand that you'll never be able to overpower me." Kash's straight white teeth flash in a predatory grin.

Yeah, he's hot for a warlock, but the man obviously doesn't have a lot of workable brain cells. Blood witches are more powerful than nearly any other magic user. The fact that I haven't gone dark with my gifts is the only thing saving him right now. I've worked hard over the years to keep my magic pure. I'm not about to taint my soul for this asshole.

I settle for punching him in the face.

"Naughty little witch, you really shouldn't have done that," Kash snarls, wrapping his arms around me. He twists my wrist behind my back at an awkward angle. I definitely should have gone for magic. I struggle against his hold, but he's six-foot-something, and he's stronger than he looks.

He opens a heavy wooden door that squeaks and scratches as it moves before shoving me in first.

I stagger forward, desperately trying to twist out of his hold, but everything goes black.

My hair falls around my face as I wake with a hell of a headache.

Kash is going to regret ever approaching me when I'm done with him. If I was a viler type of witch, I'd suck out every drop of his blood through his pores and each orifice, like his eyes and nose.

However, I'm not sure I want that type of ugliness on my eternal soul.

I'll reevaluate those feelings, depending on what happens next. The painful throb that rips through my temple as my eyes flutter open does make me vaguely consider it again.

The low, echoing tone of chanting draws my attention to a few feet away. Kash kneels in a red pentagram that I'm pretty sure he drew with my blood.

That asshole.

The tune of summoning, combined with the flickering of candles, points to the fact this day has taken a turn for the worse.

"Malice, I beseech you," Kash says before continuing his lovely moaning and mumbling to call a motherfucking demon.

My mind races as I try to figure out how the hell I messed up so badly. This isn't good. My head rolls around as I try to formulate an escape plan. It needs to be easily accomplished, and it needs to happen now, which isn't looking so hot.

I'm seeing double and my vision is blurry. The pounding in my skull doesn't help with thinking rationally. My chest rises and falls in rapid movements as ice seems to slide through my veins. Trying to stay quiet, I suck in a shallow breath. If he notices I'm awake, then he might try to knock me out again.

Being conscious might give me the opportunity to save myself.

Demons in the human realm are one thing. They have incentive to play by the rules and behave, so they won't get sent back to Hell. Those who are summoned are a completely different story. They're still essentially feral, or that's what I've heard.

I'm in real trouble here. No one knows I'm with him. He's part of the council that investigates supernatural crimes. If I go missing, then they could theoretically assign him to my case. *Yeah, it's no great wonder there why it would never be solved.*

My only hope is that Nan is seeing this. Once the conflict with Emerson settles down, I'm sure she'll send someone to save me. She might be having a vision of me right now.

Why the hell didn't she foresee this happening?

Haven has too much shit going on. Then there's the fact that seers don't get to choose their visions or what's shown to them. It really is a terrible magic to have.

No matter how dark the price I'll have to pay, I won't allow myself to be a prize exchanged to a demon for immortality.

Witches and warlocks aren't meant to live for an eternity. It's too long of a life, and our powers grow out of control, corrupting the mind. The more I think on it, the likelier it seems this isn't Kash's first summoning.

"How many lives have you traded to keep that youthful exterior?" I croak. Damn, my mouth is dry, and my throat aches with even that short question.

Crap, I was supposed to stay covert and plan my escape. Why does everything feel muted and fuzzy?

My shadows form around me, soaking up every drop of my spilled blood.

Confusion rattles around my throbbing brain as I try to determine how this is going to work. My magic reabsorbs any blood I spill and converts it into energy. So, if Kash is summoning a demon, as I suspect he is, then I have no idea how he managed to keep my blood solid without it dissipating into shadow.

I work with dyes to keep the nature of my magic a secret, but the mixture always has to be used immediately. Maybe that's what he did—used my blood, mixed with dye, to draw the summoning circle.

I have no idea. There isn't much accessible information about blood witches these days. Theoretically, he could know something I don't.

The echoing pop of a portal being opened startles me out of my thoughts. My eyes fly to the glowing white disruption. The smoky red-and-black rings that line the inside indicate that it is, indeed, a portal to Hell.

Crap!

I blink a few times, hoping it's my fuzzy vision and brain fogginess making me see things that aren't really there.

Nope.

It's definitely a portal to Hell.

My luck really isn't great lately.

I'm not sure what I've done to offend the universe or the powers that be, but I'll be so repentant if I survive this. I'll be a perfect fertility witch. I won't grumble when I get calls to help some poor female wolf get pregnant. I won't complain when an ancient fae asks me to patch up his elderly sperm. I'll be gleeful in every job necessary to populate the supernatural world.

The first being to exit the portal is nothing more than a smoky mass of dark shadows, and a shiver runs down my spine.

I recognize immediately that it's a nightmare.

I've never seen one in person, but I've read about them. Nightmares feed off the fear and guilt of those around them. Nan gave me a book when I was studying supernaturals in high school, and it said that nightmare demons are feared even among their own kind.

"Well, isn't this quite the intriguing find," the demon says in a dark, raspy tone that makes goose bumps break out all over my skin. He seems like the kind of monster to play with his food before making the kill.

My fingers dig into the uneven wooden arms of the chair that I'm tied to. Yeah, things went from questionable, to bad, to really freaking terrible in the blink of an eye.

"High Lord Malice," Kash says in a sniveling tone that makes me wish I could vomit on his shoes on command.

“Seriously? Ohmigod, I’m embarrassed for you at this point,” I mutter as my head rolls around. Did he drug me while I was out? That must be why it’s practically impossible to keep my head up straight.

“You look like shit, little witch.” The demon floats closer. A dark, clawed hand appears, and he turns my face from side to side. “Kash, my friend. I’ve got to say, I think you fucked up *big time* here, buddy.”

“We’re not friends,” Kash says in a much stronger tone. “I summoned you. You’re under my control.”

“I can assure you, no man rules over me,” Malice says with a hint of humor. Looking at me, he says, “No female, except one and, sorry, little witch, that’s not you either.” He boops my nose, glancing back to the portal. “They’ll be along shortly. I don’t know what detained them.”

“No problem,” I mutter as he releases my face. Kash drugged me. I’m almost certain of it. “You’re lucky I’m not sucking every drop of your blood out your eye sockets, you slimy piece of shit.” I glare at Kash, so he knows I’m talking to him.

“Of course, you’re feisty,” the demon says, laughing heartily.

The portal flickers as if it might close, but two huge demons come hurtling through at the last possible moment.

“Ahh, you made it,” Malice says, chuckling darkly. “Let the party begin.”

Chapter Four

Knight

My eyes fly to Wraith as he siphons through the air. In Hell, he wouldn't be able to teleport short distances, like he can in the human realm, but even back home, he has the ability to phase through solid material, such as block or flesh. He's going to say it; that cliché motherfucker can't help himself. The way he's studying Nadia makes it clear it's coming.

Malice is still mostly in nightmare form. He floats to one of the decaying walls and leans against it before crossing his arms, like he's just itching for the show we're about to put on. His white teeth are the only thing fully visible in the darkness of his shadows as he smirks wickedly. If he wasn't one of my oldest friends, that look would terrify me.

Wraith completely ignores the complaining warlock and proceeds to Nadia. She's tied to an old wooden chair with strips of dirty cloth. It makes it very difficult not to slaughter the warlock without warning.

"Who did this to you?" Wraith asks, squatting down in front of Nadia's chair. And there we go. I knew it was coming. He's wearing his robe, and he has the hood up. I bet he looks just as terrifying to her as Malice does. "The dirty fuck of a warlock?"

"I didn't do it to myself," Nadia snaps and frowns. "I'm pretty sure he drugged me, because nothing is making sense right now."

I chuckle. "I'll bet not."

She's unaware that she's met the two of us on many occasions.

Wraith and I have as much of an addiction to the little witch as Malice has to the sad-eyed fae. Aline is beautiful, as most fae are, but she's a bit too cold for my tastes.

I much prefer the chaotic witch with more secrets than a cluster preparing to overthrow their Lord in Hell. She's messy and imperfect, but I love the way her entire body shakes as she laughs. The way her eyes glimmer when she's about to make a sarcastic joke. There's also the fact she doesn't take herself too seriously. Fine, I'm truly fucking besotted, and I can't bring myself to care.

I suppose we'll see if that changes once she realizes we're here to make a deal. Months of planning have finally paid off. The wretched warlock took more coaxing than either of us imagined.

He finally did as he was told, *partially*.

Under no circumstances was he to injure or frighten our tether, but here we are. He will suffer rather than being absorbed and allowed to live out his days in Hell. Oh well, he made his proverbial bed and now he gets to lie in it.

"I was under the impression it was quite the romantic gesture to ask that question." Wraith gives me a look of pure confusion.

It's difficult to make out his face in the low light with the hood, but I can sense his confusion by the way he tilts his head like a bewildered puppy. The poor fucker is completely socially inept. It comes with the territory as a reaper. They're feared, even among our own kind. We're in a warehouse with two people, and she's already stated she didn't do it to herself. It's not rocket science.

"It's totally romantic if you don't consume my soul to give that dick immortality," Nadia says with a hopeful lilt to her voice. "It's the sexiest thing I've ever heard." She nods and groans as her head rolls back. "That was a bad idea. So bad, in fact, it bordered on downright awful."

I spin around, aiming for the warlock. “Did you drug her?”

Nadia is never loopy. Not even on the rare occasions I’ve been able to coax her into subspace.

“She’s the most powerful type of witch in existence.” Kash crosses his arms. “I couldn’t risk her getting the upper hand.” He’s majorly misreading his cards. It’s going to be a stark realization.

“You couldn’t risk injuring our tether,” I snarl. “Which we made blatantly fucking clear.”

My eyes glow white. It fully illuminates the dirty floor of the warehouse he had the audacity to bring Nadia to.

Are we to blame for this?

Perhaps.

We have been coaxing him to do the summoning spell for some time. However, we were very clear his sacrifice was not to be injured under any circumstances; otherwise, she would be deemed unworthy. Fat fucking chance of that happening, but it was the best we could come up with.

“Your tether?” Kash sputters.

“He’s a little slow, isn’t he?” Malice asks.

“Would you mind untying me?” Nadia asks in a weak tone that I instantly hate.

“Fuck, no. That’s not happening,” Kash hisses. “You’re my ticket to immortality. I’ll no longer need to make yearly sacrifices.”

“Of course, love.” Wraith ignores the warlock completely as he unties her ankles first. As soon as he’s done, he immediately moves to her wrists.

“What the fuck is this?” Kash snaps. “Malice, I command you to stop him.”

“You may have chanted, but her blood was the sacrifice to summon me across the veil,” Malice replies in his normal bored and disinterested tone. “You may want to check the fine print on your spells in the future.” He floats over, grabbing the

leather spell book the warlock used before heading for Nadia and Wraith. “They piggybacked in through the portal used to summon me. You’re going to want to close it before any even more vile creatures find their way through.”

“What?” Nadia sputters.

“It’s this one.” Malice taps a finger against the notebook. It’s weird as hell when he manifests certain body parts out of his shadows.

The warlock keeps hissing commands no one pays any mind to.

Wraith carefully assesses Nadia’s scalp. “She has a deep wound.” He’s vibrating with tension or rage, and that doesn’t bode well for the shithead.

“It’s fine, my magic is reabsorbing all the blood I’ve lost. A little like it’s cannibalizing my energy.” Nadia frowns. “That sounds gross.”

“Read this,” Malice instructs her. “We weren’t exactly in an isolated area when you summoned me, and any being could pop through that portal after us.”

“You injured and drugged her,” I say as my fists clench. “You were warned.”

“I’m serious, little witch.” Malice’s head swivels back to look at the portal. “There’s some nasty shit in Hell, and I’d rather that it didn’t make it into this realm.”

Nadia snatches the book and begins to read. She’s not chanting, but it’ll get the job done.

“No fucking way are you stealing my demons.” Kash raises a hand of dark blue magic. I take a step forward, assessing him as he extends it like he’s about to attack.

I move faster than his eyes have a chance of tracking and break his neck. I twist a little too strongly, and the next thing I know, his mouth is facing mine. Which is surprisingly convenient, since I need to eat his sins immediately.

I suck in a deep breath, causing black smoke to pour from his mouth into mine. Kash makes for quite the delightful meal.

I'm going to be stuffed to capacity once I gorge on his sins.

“What the hell did you do that for?” Wraith growls.

“He was about to attack. The three of us could weather his magic with no issue, but . . .” I step back, nodding to Nadia. “I'm not sure she could in her depleted state.”

“He's going to pass over. Malice, jump your ass in there before this entire plan goes to shit!” Wraith hisses. “She's wobbly. Keep her upright.” He directs the last bit at me before heading over to devour the warlock's soul.

“Hello, doll. Sorry about that unpleasantness,” I murmur, wrapping an arm around her lower back.

“Is he about to make out with Kash's corpse too?” Nadia frowns across the room. “Today went to shit so fast.”

I snort. “My mouth never touched his. Wraith is going to suck out his soul, then Malice will dive into his shell at the exact same instant in time. Would you like a better view?” I guide us closer, explaining as I go. “It really is a very delicate procedure. One second too early, and you get booted out; one second too late, and the body instantly starts to decay. Trust me when I say there's no coming back from that.”

“Intriguing,” Nadia mutters. “By any chance, would it be fine if I just go?” She tosses her thumb toward what I believe is the exit. “It seems like you've got everything under control here.” She nods awkwardly, and her hand flies to her forehead. “Damn, I keep forgetting about that.”

“Did you seriously have to break his neck?” Malice asks in Kash's voice. His head is twisted around toward his ass, and the image is rather gruesome. “It's going to take hours for me to fix this. I have places to be. A naughty little fae to check in on.”

“Talk to Knight. He's the one who fucked this up. We were supposed to keep his soul alive long enough for you to command us to stay,” Wraith says, pulling his hood down. He really does have an unnecessary affliction for things that help enforce that grim reaper stereotype.

“That is a valid point,” I say. “Hmm, how about you, doll? Your blood somehow overrode his part in the summoning spell. Would you like to command our vessels to your service in the Earthly realm?” I flutter my eyelashes at her for good measure. I even dig my teeth into my lower lip to seem extra enticing.

Nadia blinks, giving me an incredulous frown.

Malice chuckles darkly. “I think you might be coming on a little too strong.”

“Okay, that’s creepy. I might never recover.” Nadia takes a wobbly step back. “Heads aren’t meant to face that direction. Drugged or not, I’m sure of it.”

“Oh, come on. We’ll gladly do your bidding if you do ours,” I try. “We’ve murdered your attacker.”

“And replaced him with a nightmare,” Nadia says in an exasperated tone. “Are you stuck in there forever now?” Her eyes fly to Malice like *he’s* the one who will be truthful.

I snort. That motherfucker loves mind games.

“He’s not.” Wraith steeple his fingers in front of him. “Stuck, that is. He’ll be able to exit at will once he’s played his part. However, the council will look into a missing agent with additional fervency. He needs to fool his coworkers for long enough to fulfill his stake in this delicate game.”

“My life isn’t a game,” Nadia says as her fingers dig into my arm.

A wide smile crosses my face. There’s that backbone I’m so fond of. She rarely backs down, which I find greatly arousing. The only time she’s reasonably submissive is during our sessions. I glance down, willing my cock to cooperate. Now really isn’t the time.

“Would you prefer to take the blame for the council agent’s death?” Malice grins an unfriendly smile. It’s goddamn disturbing is what that is. His face is still in line with the warlock’s ass, and that type of unnatural angle isn’t helping shit.

“I didn’t kill him. He would have killed me. He sacrificed me to you assholes without a second thought.” Nadia slaps my arm away from her lower back, but she wobbles without my support.

Wraith immediately siphons across the room, offering her assistance.

“Calling your saviors names, love?” Wraith tilts his head. “That’s not very polite.”

Nadia goes rigid at the nickname. He called her that a few minutes ago, but I’m guessing the drugs are beginning to wear off.

He’s called her “love” while wearing a lot of different faces over the years. Perhaps it’s the familiarity in the cadence of his voice that does it, because she blinks repeatedly, like she’s desperately trying to figure out where she’s heard that before.

“Have we met?” She stares up at him, swiping a dark, wavy strand of hair behind her ear.

“Oh, this is going to be good.” Malice rubs his hands together. They’re still facing the wrong direction from his face, and it’s impossible to tell exactly how we fucked up this plan so badly.

“We’ve met many times, but never with my true appearance.” Wraith offers a timid smile. “Well, not that you would remember.”

“Christ, who nominated you to speak?” I ask incredulously.

“Oh my God.” Nadia glances between the two of us. “You’re my . . . Sam? Wait, how is that even possible?”

“When the two of us are called to the human realm to reap a supernatural soul, we intertwine—”

I cut Wraith off to clarify, “In a totally non-sexual way.” Not that I’m opposed to men, but Wraith is a little too much like a brother for me to ever see him in that light.

Nadia's head swivels to face me. "You called me *doll* . . ." She looks at Wraith. "And you called me *love*. Holy shit."

"Sin eaters are even rarer than reapers. If the knowledge that we can possess one body was known, it was never passed down to us. We've visited you many times as one." Wraith brushes his fingers over her cheek. "But we met for the first time the night you were to turn thirteen."

"Jack said I should have died," she whispers. Back then, she was just a big-eyed, innocent pre-teen without a serious sin to devour.

Wraith took one look at her and refused to reap her soul. As such, she got to live to see another day, with an extra secret buried away inside her.

Nadia has secrets galore.

I adore it. Really, I adore anything that can surprise or intrigue me after so many years of existing.

"The portal seems to be closing on its own, but I'm a little concerned that you performed the wrong spell," Malice says.

"We're slipping," Wraith announces as his hand becomes see-through.

"Thank fuck we secured the relic," Malice says helpfully.

Wraith shoots Nadia a hopeful look. "Would you like to command us to stay?"

Nadia glances between the three of us. "Why would I do that?"

"If you don't, I can assure you I'm going to spank your ass red the next time I see you," I inform her, raising my eyebrows so that she knows I'm serious.

"I'm not sure that was the best course of action." Malice snickers, bending down to look at Kash's grimoire that Nadia dropped at some point.

"You know, I think I'm good. I'm not really a take-charge kind of girl." Nadia slowly begins to back away. Apparently,

the drugs have finally begun to leave her system. “I don’t think I’ll be doing any commanding today.”

Malice chuckles. “After they saved your life? That’s kind of cold.”

“From what I heard, you all set this up,” Nadia says indignantly.

Well, she’s got us there.

“Little witch, before you go, could I inquire as to which page you read?” Malice frowns at the book, nudging it with his heel, since his hands are still on the opposite side of Kash’s body.

“The one on the right page. Left is opening, right is always closing.” Nadia gives him a look like he should know this.

“That does make sense,” Malice says in a strangely melodic tone. “Unfortunately, in this case, the summoning spell was at the top of the left side and the closing at the bottom. It appears congratulations are in order.” The delusional fucker claps, but his head is still facing his ass.

“Why?” She sounds truly perplexed.

“She just tethered the two of you to her. Can I just say thank *fuck* I was in this vessel!” Malice cackles.

“What?” Nadia chokes out, still backing away. “No way, I don’t do anything dark with my magic.”

“Tethering for a demon and a blood witch isn’t inherently dark,” I tell her truthfully. “It simply means you’ve blood bound us, which is exactly what we were hoping for.”

“I’m honored.” Wraith nods like she meant to do it.

Malice snorts. “You poor, delusional bastard.”

The look of horror on Nadia’s face assures exactly the opposite, but what’s done is done. I personally couldn’t be happier with this turn of events. I’ll be a loving and doting partner to my adorable spitfire witch.

“Today went to shit so fast,” Nadia laments.

At the same time, I say, “Today is my favorite day in all my long existence.”

I frown.

She scoffs.

I’m going to spank her ass for that. She just bound us to her for the rest of her life. Sure, to solidify our claims, we need to seal it with a claiming bite, but that’ll happen soon enough.

I can wait. Immortality tends to lend itself to patience.

“Since you insist on being stubborn and refuse to command us to stay, I need you to know—if you require help, or us at all, all you have to do is call. We’ll be obligated to answer you, even across the veil.” Wraith brushes disappearing fingers over her cheek.

I groan as my eyes start to itch. It’s always the first symptom I notice. “Are you sure you don’t want to keep us?”

“When I see you again, you’ll be carrying my babies before you know it.” Wraith leans in to kiss her cheek.

I begin to feel the achy pull to the other side in full force. It’s bloody annoying.

Nadia gasps, staring at where Wraith last stood. I’m not sure if she’s shocked by his words or his sudden disappearance.

“Mine too.” I chuckle, sauntering over. “I’ve asked this before, but can I kiss you?”

Nadia frowns. “Are you going to eat my soul?”

“No, you dramatic woman.” I grin. She really is adorable at the most inconvenient times.

“I guess. That’s my thank you for not—”

Her words cut off as I wrap my hand around the back of her head, pulling her mouth to mine.

I’m much taller than most of the demons we’ve possessed to spend time with her. It takes quite a lot of bending to make

the kiss possible, but as she moans into my mouth, I slide the other hand down to squeeze her luscious ass.

Her fingers brush my bare chest, and I really fucking hate the laws of the universe as I feel the strong yank toward Hell.

“I’ll see you again soon, doll.” My magic sizzles. “Forget us and all that happened here until you see me again or if you’re ever in dire trouble. If that happens, remember that you have two monsters ready to rip apart anyone and everyone to keep you safe.”

And with that, I’m pulled to Hell.

Chapter Five

Nadia

“Thanks for walking me home,” I say, but I have no idea why Kash is escorting me home in the first place.

“No problem.” He nods awkwardly. I’m not sure I’ve ever seen Kashius without the utmost self-confidence. It’s bizarre. “So, you know, try not to get yourself into any trouble.” He bumps his shoulder against mine.

I squint up at him, trying to figure out what the hell is going on.

I remember Emerson and The Den.

Then Kash . . . My brain throbs and everything goes hazy. My hands fly to my temples, but the whooshing pain increases in intensity the more I focus on the memories.

“What happened?” I clutch at the back of my head. There’s no blood on my fingers, but I think that’s what’s crusty and dried in my hair.

“You . . . uh, you don’t remember?” Kash’s forehead wrinkles as he looks down at me. There’s something off about him, but I can’t place it. “You fell into the brick wall when you were . . . um. Stuff happened and—”

“Crap, you saw me outside The Den?” That’s not good. No one was supposed to know I was there. Add in the fact I don’t trust Kash as far as I can toss him without using magic, and this is bad.

“It’s between us, little witch.” His dark hair bobs as his head wobbles up and down.

If my brain wasn't throbbing, then I might have some idea what is so weird, but as it is, I don't care.

I need to shower today off and then sleep for a few days.

“Right so, keep yourself alive.” Kash spins around and walks away without another word.

What the hell was that about?

I glance back at him and toward the house. I need a good night's sleep. Everything will make more sense after a twelve-hour nap.



Last night was a cluster of a mess I don't even want to think about.

Emerson was turned into . . . something. Nan briefly explained she thinks Emerson might be a vampire, but she's also pregnant. Which means the birth control spell I gave her epically failed.

My magic, in general, has been acting weird lately, but I have bigger fish to fry.

Something is also extremely off with Kash.

The last time I saw him as a client, I explained I wouldn't be seeing him again. However, I woke up to the weirdest text from him.

I ignore it initially, but when my phone rings and his number pops up, my mind races. He's with the council, and he can make Emerson's new undead existence hell if he wants to.

“What?” I snap, hoping that sleazy fucker will get a clue and leave me the hell alone.

“Little witch, not a morning person?”

“Why are you calling me, Kash?”

“I need a favor.” His voice sounds weird. “Do I happen to have any pets?”

I pull the phone away from my ear and actually frown at it. It's his number.

"Do you have any pets?" I repeat.

"Yeah, I think I do, and I'm going to be unavailable for the next . . . while." He snorts. "I'm not about leaving helpless beings to starve to death."

"Are you high? Did you get drunk on witch's brew?"

"Gods, I wish," he mutters. "Listen, an emergency came up, and you're the only person I know in town who might save poor Jimmy or little Sally from certain death."

"I-I . . ." I don't even know what to say. I blink at the phone in pure confusion.

"Thanks. Just let yourself in and, you know, re-home them if you can. Got to go." The phone disconnects, but I'm still completely freaking flabbergasted.

I look from the phone to the ceiling, wondering what the hell that was about. Maybe the warlock has finally gone off the deep end?

It seems like a real possibility.

Pushing myself out of bed with a groan, I aim for the bathroom.

Goose bumps pebble over my skin as I step into the cool air of my room. I'm in the process of drying my hair when my phone rings. It reminds me I need to call and check on Emerson. At the very least, see if there's anything I can do and let her know I'm here if she needs me.

I'm not expecting to field a call from Octavia. She runs the town council, ensuring all the citizens of Haven are safe under the sanctuary laws. The fact that I greatly respect her vision and execution of protecting every monster in town is the only reason I agree to her request.

Being a fertility witch is such a pain in the ass sometimes. Apparently, I'm taking a trip to help ensure some human woman delivers her half-elf babies without complication and possibly renew their sanctuary ward while I'm in town.

Nan stands across the kitchen in her gauzy, ankle-length dress. She's in her early seventies, but you can't tell from looking at her. Her long, straight dark hair shines with health and vitality.

I hope I age half as gracefully as she has.

She blinks, tilting her head, and I grow more uncomfortable. It would be really convenient if her eyes went white or something when having a vision, because sometimes it's impossible to tell. Is she just staring me down because my tits are hanging out? Or is she having some type of life-altering prophetic vision?

I doubt I want to know. Her glimpses into the future almost always have life-or-death consequences or life-changing repercussions.

"I thought you were leaving?" Nan blinks several times and heads over to make herself a cup of tea.

"I am," I agree. "I have to stop by The Den and let Aline know I need some time off. She's going to be pissed."

"You best get to it," Nan says, swirling her spoon around with her magic.

"Are you sure I shouldn't stick around? With everything going on with Emerson? Are you sure you'll be safe without me?" I texted both Emerson and Dread, my boss, to see if they need anything before I head out of town, but I haven't received a response.

I'll only be a few hours away.

If they need something that badly, then I'll just drive back.

"You're procrastinating again, my dear." Nan chuckles a low, throaty sound. "You know I'm capable of looking after

myself.”

I nod.

I really do know that. She’s old, and with age comes more control over our power. That’s true for most witches, but my magic is different. I’ve spent a lifetime considering it a curse, especially since the paranormal council discovering my gifts would be a nightmare I don’t think I could come back from.

“You love to drag your feet.” Nan laughs. “I imagine that’s why you’re still working at The Den.”

“I love my job.” I jab a finger at her chest. “And I love you. Don’t be a pain in the ass.”

“I love you too,” she assures me, coming closer, so she can pull me in for a hug. “The gods don’t give someone the type of magic you’re blessed with unless there’s a very clear purpose . . .”

I sigh, giving her a tight squeeze. “Yeah, I know, but you’ve seen how witches with blood magic are treated.”

Pretending to be a fertility witch is the perfect cover. My magic is perfectly capable of making women ovulate or fixing up damaged sperm, but it has much darker possibilities.

Blood magic can heal and give life, but it can also take it to convert into pure energy, which can then be used for anything I’d like. That’s why I’ve spent most of my life pretending it doesn’t exist.

I use small amounts for spells when someone needs something, but I’ve purposely avoided using large amounts of it. After all, the first person who learned what type of magic I have tried to kill me. It didn’t take long to realize it doesn’t really qualify as a gift.

“I think you’ll have a fine trip.” Nan gives my forearms a squeeze before stepping back. “But you need to get moving.”

“I know.” I sigh loudly. “Fine, I’m going to grab my bags, but promise you’ll call if you need me?”

“I do, but I won’t need you. I might give Thornton down the road a call.” She wiggles her eyebrows.

I snort.

Thornton is a warlock. He's handsome enough, considering he's in his fifties. I'm pretty sure he's Nan's fuck buddy.

"I'll never be able to mentally will away that image."

"Don't make me recount my days of working at The Den," Nan taunts, moving over to grab her tea.

"On that note . . ." I give her a final kiss on the cheek and move to head out before she can traumatize me even further.

I complete Aline's fertility treatment, and we settle at her desk. She isn't pleased when I inform her that I need an undetermined amount of time off.

"You couldn't have given me any warning?" she grumbles, swiping long pinkish-blond hair back from her face. "This place is falling into shambles."

I laugh, shaking my head. "Feeling a little overdramatic today?"

"Do you really want to try me right now? You're already on my shit list."

"I'm sorry," I assure her. "I wouldn't go if I had any other choice. It's a favor for Octavia."

Aline's light gray eyes narrow as she studies me. I have to force myself not to squirm in my chair. I know she's hiding from her own baggage.

Kash has always been our paranormal council liaison, but the fact he's hanging around town more often and popping into The Den more regularly is clearly making her uncomfortable.

I'd never rat her out, but she's lived in fear for as long as I've known her.

Even if he hadn't gotten all *let's talk about creepy illegal magic*, I was still planning to phase him out of my schedule.

It's not worth making Aline uncomfortable. Although I did briefly worry that he would make a scene about it. At this point, I just don't care.

"I'll finish up as soon as I can and get back ASAP." It's not like I really want to leave Haven, but luckily, my assignment is close by.

Shit, I have to check on Kash's pet before I leave. I'm not convinced that cruel asshole has enough compassion to care for a pet. That entire conversation still has me baffled. It doesn't matter. I'm not going to risk leaving some poor animal stranded, despite my feelings on its owner.

Kash freaking knows that too.

"What do I tell your regulars?" Aline asks, pulling up something on her computer.

"That I'll be back to work as soon as I'm done in North Falls," I say with a grimace. I've got a handful of regulars who will be disappointed, since my schedule books up so quickly. My regular clients fill my available nights weeks in advance.

Not to mention, Sam. I wish I had some way to contact him. A weird feeling bubbles in my gut when I think of him showing up, only to be turned away because I'm not here.

What happens if he never comes back? My body goes rigid at the thought, but ultimately, I have no choice.

I consider leaving him a note, but honestly, that seems a little too pathetic for my liking. He's the one who pops in once a week, and I'm always the one waiting for him. He could have given me his number or some way to contact him if he wanted me to have it.

"Tell them I'll make it up to them when I get back." I shrug. "I'll work an extra night or two for a few weeks to accommodate anyone who lost out on a night."

"You know I'm just giving you a hard time because it's short notice." Aline continues studying her computer. "You can quit or take a break at any time. Your clients can pick someone else, wait until you're back, or they can fuck off."

I chuckle. She's come a long way in the time I've known her. She's stronger. It's good to see her finally growing into her own.

"All right," she grumbles. "Get out of here, so you can get back."

"Thank you," I singsong, pushing myself out of the chair and heading for the door.

I'm not sure why I can't shake this anxious feeling. I'm usually pretty chill, but driving four hours to an unknown town with unknown monsters is putting me on edge, *and* I still need to stop by Kash's house.

Chapter Six

Nadia

Kash has kept a place in town for as long as I've known him. I've always assumed the council pays its minions well, because I know he has more than one house in more than one sanctuary city.

The paranormal council rules over the supernatural, keeping our existence from the humans. There is a code of conduct, and it is enforced, but places like Haven have their own sets of rules and expectations.

I really wish I had it in writing that Kash instructed me to do this.

I look shady as hell standing outside the two-bedroom house. It makes me feel slimy that I used to find him attractive. Sure, he's not the best sex I've ever had, but it wasn't the worst, and he's *hot*. Unfortunately, I'll never be able to see him that way again. I'm a firm believer that an ugly inside makes the outside unattractive.

My hands glow with white light that quickly changes to smoky gray shadows. The less energy or magic I use, the lighter the color my shadows appear. The lower lock quickly disengages, but when I try the handle, it's clear the deadbolt is flipped. There's no keyhole, which is weird.

My stomach churns as I consider that Kash might be home. This might be a setup of some kind or . . .

God, I actually don't even know the possibilities.

The lock quickly responds to the call of my magic. This time, when I try the handle, it opens with no resistance.

The house is dark, and it smells exactly like Kash. His spicy scent is heavy in the air. Strangely enough, it was one of the things that drew me to him in the first place. Before his awful personality ruined all his appeal.

“Here, kitty kitty,” I call out, awkwardly sidestepping the coffee table. “Or come on, pup?” I’ve never actually been inside his place. It looks exactly like any other older house in Haven. I only know which one is his because he complained regularly about Tomas, the snow leopard on the right, being a terrible neighbor.

The kitchen is tidy without a dish or piece of silverware left in the sink.

How totally bizarre.

It’s unnatural to be that pristine.

Following the main hallway, I find three closed doors. I’m guessing one leads to the bathroom and the others to bedrooms.

“Okay, this is incredibly weird. I don’t even know why I’m here, but if there’s a hungry pet or something then it’s time for you to come out.” Goose bumps rise on my arms and my eyes fall to stare at my skin.

That feels like a questionable sign, at best. And a very bad sign, at worst.

I shake off the discomfort and try the door on the left. It’s a bathroom. It’s immediately evident that no animals are hiding in there, so I close the door before heading for the door farthest away. I’m a blood witch. I’m capable of protecting myself. Who the hell knows why my system is so on edge?

Light, smoky shadows form around my body as I shove open the door. I call out, making my best attempt at a soothing voice.

The house is deadly silent. I’d hear an animal moving to respond, or I think I would. I steel myself, heading inside the room and walking a circle around the queen-size bed. There are no pets. I don’t even remember seeing a water or food bowl in the kitchen.

Okay, I'm going to check the last room and promptly get out of here. I leave Kash's bedroom door open, just in case I missed any pets that want saving, and move to the last door.

I am in no way mentally prepared for what I find as the door swings open.

“Oh, that slimy motherfucker,” I hiss as my eyes widen. A greenish-gold nose pushes to the bars of the cell built into Kash's spare bedroom as serpentine eyes meet mine and my heart stalls. “Oh shit.” I stumble back as smoke spills from the wyvern's nose.

I'm surprised I don't piss myself. It doesn't matter who you are—or what type of magic you have—dragonfire will burn straight through skin and bone.

The wyvern and I have a tentative understanding filled with distrust on both sides.

I'm not one-hundred percent sure he won't skewer me with his talons or burn me into a kabob. He's not sure I'm truly here on the up-and-up.

“You're free to go.” I pull the door to the house closed behind me. I'm seriously impressed he managed to shimmy his way out of it. It looked like it would be impossible, but he figured it out.

The beast sits back on his haunches and blinks. It's extremely unsettling.

“Why the hell would Kash send me here to see this?” I ask more to myself than anything.

Wyverns are shifters . . . I think.

The creature's head tilts. It's kind of alarming, because he looks like he's trying to determine if he'd like to punish me for Kash's crimes.

“Hey, asshole,” I snap, jabbing a finger at his snout. “I let you out. Just remember that.”

He bows his head low and huffs a breath before extending his wings and taking flight. It's incredibly moving, watching his scales glint in the light as he stretches toward freedom.

Kash better be ready, because the next time I see him, I will be inflicting pure pain and suffering.

If my life has a motto lately, it's probably something along the lines of "Welcome to the shit show."

I spend the early afternoon making the drive to North Falls. Well, just outside of it. I'm not sure I'm mentally prepared to jump right into the fire, especially after the conversation I'm currently wrapping up with Octavia.

She called again to inform me the North Falls sanctuary ward is in worse shape than she initially mentioned. Oh, I'm sure there is some poor human woman about to give birth to a litter of half-elf babies, but I'm starting to think I was set up.

I never should have helped Nan reinforce the ward in Haven. Not all witches have magic that can create or restore runes and wards. Come to think of it, I should probably be less helpful in general. It would save me a lot of work in the long run.

I follow the instructions Octavia gives over the phone, and we finally disconnect. Since there isn't a hotel inside the ward, Octavia made arrangements with the North Falls town council to ensure I'll have a place to stay while I'm working.

I'm not supposed to meet with them until tomorrow, but I purposely arrived a day early. Getting the lay of the land is important when you have no clue what you're walking into.

The only hotel within a reasonable distance of the early morning meeting leaves a lot to be desired. Then again, beggars can't be choosers and all that. There are three items left in the vending machine when I check.

This place clearly doesn't have room service.

I sigh, heading back to my suite to grab my purse and keys.

I drive for what seems like forever in my quest to find sustenance. It's proof my life is on a steady decline when the only place I find before running out of gas . . . is a gas station that boasts a full deli.

The phrase jack-of-all-trades, king of none, comes to mind, but the sparsely populated area doesn't lend itself to being picky.

Yeah, I'm seeing a pattern here.

I warily eye the building before deciding that packaged snacks will have to do. It's better than nothing, and my stomach is starting to eat itself.

I climb out, clicking the lock on the door, and pump myself up to head in.

I'm meandering toward the building when a giant of a man in only a pair of low-slung dark jeans comes around the corner as I'm approaching the door.

He's a beast of muscles and tall as hell. His blond hair is long and shaggy. It's wild around his shoulders as he pauses mid-step.

Yeah, he's barefoot.

That's not weird or anything, since he walked out of the freaking woods . . .

How would a human handle this situation?

A human woman would likely gawk and make sexy eyes at the incredibly handsome mountain of a man. He has broad shoulders with a trim waist. Damn, those jeans hug his ass and thighs like they were made for his climb-worthy frame.

His nostrils flare as he breathes in my scent.

I take a step back at the look on his face. *Come on. There's nothing to see here. Just a not-quite-fertility witch trying to get sugary snacks to keep herself from starving.*

A woman and her child approach from their parked vehicle, and the beastly man opens the door for them.

He follows them inside and . . .

Lets the door close violently *right* in my freaking face.

Awesome.

At least it's better to recognize he got looks rather than personality. Knowing that upfront is helpful.

It's never a good thing to get your hopes up, only to have them demolished later. Not that I should be getting my hopes up in general. This is a quick job, and then I'll be heading back to Haven.

The deli actually does smell delicious as I finally make it inside. I follow the scent of freshly baked bread back to the counter.

A smiling older woman greets me when I stop to study the sign.

I disregard the big guy, who is chugging a bottle of water, and instead peruse the options on the board. The plastic of his bottle crinkles as he devours every single drop of liquid. It's kind of obnoxious, but I'm hungry enough that I ignore him in favor of sustenance.

Placing my order goes smoothly enough.

I wander up and down the aisles, grabbing armfuls of candy, chips, snack cakes, and anything else that looks good. I shove a few bottled drinks in between my elbow and my side and take my ridiculous amount of saturated fat to the counter with exactly zero shame.

I patiently wait my turn by checking out the old decor. The mom from earlier is counting out quarters, and it makes my heart ache. Shoving as much shit as I can into my free arm, I grab a twenty from my back pocket and wave it at the man behind the counter. I try to covertly nod to the woman, but she catches my movement and spins around.

Fuck my life. This day just keeps getting better and better.

“Oh, I’m sorry, is my misfortune holding you up?” the woman hisses.

I take a giant step back, because she looks really pissed that I was trying to be kind.

“Nope, take your time. My food isn’t even done yet.” I give an awkward head bobble while rolling my lips together to keep from saying anything else that might set her off.

“Food’s up,” the older woman in the deli calls out.

“I didn’t plan that,” I say with wide eyes. I mean, come on, I couldn’t have planned that if I tried.

The woman does not seem as impressed as I am by that clutch timing.

“We don’t need your charity,” she says.

I nod my agreement again. “Not charity. I was trying to put some good energy back into the world. That’s all. No harm intended.”

The woman rips the twenty out of my hand and drops it onto the counter. The little girl eyes my armful of snacks, and I feel like a righteous asshole. I nod to the cashier and hand the girl the popcorn on top.

“You’re not allergic or anything, right?”

“Nope.” She grins, grabbing the bag before following her mom out.

I drop my armful of shit on the counter. “I need to pay for that.”

The mountain of a man stands, glaring daggers at me from near the exit. “Add two waters to my tab,” he growls, spinning and pushing out the door.

I again do an awkward little nod at how bizarre this place is. Yeah, I never should have agreed to come here.

I pay for my snacks and run back to grab my sandwich before heading out to my car. I drop everything into the passenger seat and prepare to pump gas.

Turning around to grab the nozzle, I face plant into the beast man's bare chest.

"Oh shit," I mumble against his pec. My eyes fly up and up some more before making eye contact.

"You shouldn't be here," he growls.

My face must show my confusion because he scoffs.

It's not like I really want to be here. I have a job to do, and then I'm out.

"You're literally in my personal space. I'm going to go with *you* shouldn't be here." I try to sidestep him to grab the gas nozzle, but he's so huge, I have to keep sidestepping until it just becomes a whole ordeal. "Excuse me."

The dick smirks, shaking his head.

"Your kind never lasts long here," he says before taking off for the woods.

"Thanks for the friendly advice," I call out to the jerk's back as he disappears around the building. "Or the dickheaded warning, depending on how you look at it," I grumble to myself.

They say *no good deed goes unpunished*.

I flipping hate that saying.

Chapter Seven

Nadia

Apparently, I have no sense of direction. I circle back around the gas station for the third time. I'm completely baffled as I try the road I know isn't the road I used to get to the store.

However, I've spent the last hour or so trying different streets, and I'm super freaking flummoxed. It was evening, but I think I've driven around for so long this technically qualifies as night.

The road is completely dark, since there's very little around. There aren't street lights or homes to give ambient lighting. Nah, it's just pure nothingness and the moon. My headlights illuminate the road, but only for a short distance.

I'm humming along with the radio and considering it might be time to bust out some magic when I see three wolves dart across the road.

Okay, darting might be too generous. One darts, one hobbles, and the third looks torn between the two. They're all small, like adolescents or maybe teenagers. I really don't think they can be adult wolves based on their size.

Slamming on my brakes, I pull off the road and aim the lights toward the woods.

The illumination sure doesn't penetrate very far.

Am I really about to follow an injured animal into an unfamiliar forest? Though it sounds crazy, I'm not human; I've got my own protections if need be.

My car door opens, and I pop out of the vehicle before I can convince myself this is a terrible idea.

The ground is littered with the wolf's blood. Something got one of them good.

My magic itches under my skin. It aches, calling to me that it wants to be used.

With a swipe of my hand, my magic pulls the energy from the blood and it slowly disappears. Witch light is a small ball of minimal brightness. It's comparable to a small LED light.

I summon two, one to hover along each side of me.

I might feel compelled to help the pup, but I'm also not one of those too-stupid-to-live humans with more heart than brains.

I'm not going to barrel forward with no clue what I'm walking into, or that's the plan until I hear a young girl sobbing. That's apparently when I become one of those idiots who runs toward danger instead of away from it.

My magic floats out like tendrils of smoke, checking the area for danger. There's a deadly poisonous snake twenty feet to my left, so I duck a little farther to my right. I'm barely fifty feet inside the tree line when the small clearing becomes visible.

"We need to go for help," a boy in his late teens says. He's trying to drag a young woman away from the boy on the ground.

"Stop, George," she hisses. "I'm not leaving him. If you want to go for help, then go. We'll be fine. Hurry back."

"Jenny, come on." George yanks harder, trying to drag her away.

"Just go," the kid on the ground says. "Get her to safety."

"No, Brock. I'm not leaving you," Jenny says.

Brock is bleeding all over.

My magic aches to use all that freshly spilled energy. Being a blood witch sucks sometimes. I'm literally dragged

forward by my magic.

The guy, Brock, is seriously jacked up. You don't bounce back from that kind of damage without a hospital or a healer. Maybe a vampire, but no vampire would be willing to patch up an unknown shifter, so that's basically irrelevant.

I'm none of those things, but my magic doesn't seem to care. Three sets of glowing eyes find mine when I get close enough for them to register my existence. Jenny is probably in her late teens or early twenties, and the guys are likely around the same age.

This would be a lot less awkward if they weren't butt-ass naked, but shifters in general are much more accustomed to nudity than a lot of the other species.

The low warning growl that comes out of the kid on the ground surprises the hell out of me. He's literally bleeding out and he's warning me?

He's a future alpha.

"Who are you?" Jenny crosses an arm over her chest.

George takes a step in front of her, and I avert my eyes.

"You ran out in front of my car." I approach slowly with my palms raised. Unfortunately, my magic thinks it's needed, and instead of dancing over the forest floor, it all flies up to dance around my fingertips.

That earns me another round of ferocious growls.

"You're wolves," I say, hedging my words. "I'm a witch. I can heal him. He's not doing well."

"You're a healer?" Jenny pops around George's shoulder with her head tilted.

"Hardly." I shake my head. "My magic is . . ." Okay, so blood magic isn't quite death magic, but it's also not far off.

"He'll die before any of us can go for help," I say calmly. Hopefully, the sincerity in my words translates to the stubborn teenage brains in front of me, because I'm not exaggerating. I don't know what punctured his heart, but even the anti-aging

kind of immortal that most shifters are will die if their heart or brain is damaged. “You guys live in North Falls?” Jenny nods. “I’m here to renew the wards and help rebuild the protections around the city. I don’t have a lot of time left, though . . . My fingertips are buzzing, and that means my system is anticipating collecting a lot of energy.”

“You’re a death witch?” George chokes out.

“No, I’m a blood witch.” I grimace, because very few people in my real life know that fact. I get a few hours away from home, and apparently, I think it’s safe to spew out all my personal information.

“Help him,” Jenny begs.

They’re young—they likely have no idea what a blood witch is—but luckily, they’re no longer growling at me. I’ll take that as a win. My hand falls to the metal cuff that appears around my wrist when I need it. I yank out the pin. Okay, it’s like a tiny mini-dagger, but *pin* sounds so much less *violent*.

I’m nearly to Brock when a vicious snarl breaks the air behind me. Brock’s heart is barely beating, so I ignore the growling.

I assume it’s their alpha or one of his enforcers.

I’m sure they’ll let him know I’m helping.

Right?

Are teenagers these days intelligent enough to make sure their alpha doesn’t kill the witch saving their friend’s life?

Shit, I sure hope so.

“Put a claw out,” I hiss at Jenny and George. Neither listens. “Really? No one wants to help me save your friend’s life?” Maybe teenagers are getting dumber . . . It doesn’t seem like the way evolution should go, but whatever.

Shoving up the sleeve of my cardigan, I drag the pin across my wrist. Blood pools, but the second it leaves my skin, it drips into black smoke. Normally, it would be a medium gray color.

It instantly clicks that it's not going to be enough.

The thundering of a very heavy wolf approaching at my back makes my heart thump wildly. Oh good, that'll help with blood flow. Brock's heart hasn't increased its rhythm. Shoving up the other sleeve, I repeat the process on that arm.

"Stop," an angry voice growls. Lovely, it's a voice I recognize—Mr. My Personality Is Severely Lacking—the guy from the gas station.

"Alpha," Jenny bows her head respectfully, "she's helping him."

Blood pours from the gashes in my flesh. It spins into smoke so dark it seems to repel all the light in the little clearing. The metallic smell fills my nostrils, which is a good thing. No need to smell the manly delicious scent of the dickhead alpha.

"How do you know?" His voice is distorted, likely from his teeth still being extended.

"I'm helping," I grind out, making fists and relaxing them to help the blood flow. "I followed them to keep him alive."

"We mistakenly wandered onto the wrong property," George says. Aww, the poor guy lies quite unconvincingly. Better luck next time, *maybe*. He really needs to work on his bluffing skills. He's worse than me.

"You think I can't smell the sex all over the three of you?" the alpha scoffs.

Jenny huffs.

Shifters are so fucking bizarre. Seriously . . . Where else would you find a giant of a nude man glaring down two equally naked teenagers while the third bleeds out, and no one blinks twice or even acknowledges it's weird?

Well, not outside of me.

I think it's super weird, but I also know shifters, and this is nothing for them. Just another Tuesday or whatever day of the week it is.

“Someone needs to slice me open farther.” My skin is already attempting to stitch itself back together. I know from experience that it hurts way worse if you have to cut the new skin open immediately after healing.

George stumbles back a step, making Jenny roll her eyes. “I’ve got you.” She shifts her hand into claws.

“No,” the alpha growls. “I’ll handle this.” His giant cock swings as he steps forward, and I focus my magic on the still dying wolf rather than the impressive alpha package.

My magic aches to stroke it, and that’s so mind-bogglingly inappropriate that I blush furiously in response.

Thank God shifters aren’t telepathic. That would just make this disaster even more awkward.

Alphas can communicate with their pack through the pack bond, but I’m not a part of his pack, so I’m golden.

So good.

Extremely fine, despite the fact I’m getting light-headed.

The alpha presses his massive frame into my body from behind. I’m much shorter than him, so my ass brushes his thighs as he curves around my back. His large, rough hand slides under my forearm as his warm breath hits my neck.

My lungs stop working at the feeling of his muscular body pressed against mine.

This is *so* not the time.

Wolves have notoriously good senses of smell. The last thing I need is to fill the air with the scent of my pussy. Hell, wolf noses are probably so sensitive that they can pick up my pheromones in the air with no actual arousal needed.

Nope, not today, forces of evil . . . pick someone else to screw with.

I glance up at him over my shoulder as aching discomfort sizzles across my tender flesh. My magic immediately floods my system, offering a fair bit of pain relief.

The alpha moves to my other arm and raises an eyebrow.

I nod my confirmation, and he slices that skin too.

I gasp as his claw rakes over the healing flesh. My knees wobble at the visceral feeling of hot lava being poured over the wound.

“What happened?” He rumbles out the words in his deep, growly tone.

My body sways as I lean into him for support.

“You got the healing skin,” I hiss through my teeth. “That always hurts a thousand times worse.”

The alpha wolf simply nods.

Black smoke eventually disperses away from Brock. His heart begins to thump in a slow, but steady, rhythm. His eyes fly open, and Jenny falls to her knees at his side. Once my shadows fully curve away from his middle, Jenny gasps.

“He’s completely healed,” she says in a tone that indicates it’s an accusation. “You said you’re not a healer.”

“She’s not.” The alpha snorts a derisive laugh. “Is he safe to move?”

I give a shaky nod.

“If I pass out, can one of you tote me to my car?” I try to point, but my arm shakes wildly. “I think it’s like fifty yards, or so, that way. I’d rather not wake up alone in the dark woods. There are snakes.”

The alpha swipes a hand over his face, shaking his head at something. He curses behind his fist.

It’s incredibly distracting, because he really is a delicious specimen of pure male perfection.

Chapter Eight

Nadia

The next several minutes are spent breathing in through my mouth and out through my nose. I have no idea why it helps me feel more stable, but I've learned over the years that it does.

The alpha goes over, talking to the two teenage boys.

I look at Jenny. She's standing around, looking extremely uncomfortable.

"Can I talk to you?" I stagger a few feet away.

"What's up?" she asks pensively. Her shoulders hunch, and she looks uncomfortable with me now for some reason.

Oh, I'm sorry . . . Did my shadows, which saved your fuck buddy's life, disturb you? Too bad.

"Do I owe you some life debt now or something?" Her eyes dart over to her alpha, who is busy helping Brock off the ground.

"Hell, no." I laugh. "How old are you?"

"Eighteen," she murmurs. "Almost nineteen."

I nod. Good for her. I hope she keeps living life to the fullest. I keep my voice low to keep the wolves from overhearing. "Human contraceptives are notoriously ineffective on shifters. Do you have a contraceptive spell?"

A shiver of discomfort slides through my system as her head shakes. She blinks at me with wide eyes. No one, especially at her age, should have to leave that up to chance.

Dipping a finger into the opposite wrist, I nod to her bare abdomen. “I can handle that for you, if you’d like?” I offer. “You need to decide quickly, before my blood dries . . .”

She nods. “Fuck, yes. Absolutely. I mean, please.”

I draw on her skin, placing the runes I know by heart.

“It’ll last for a year,” I say, feeling woozier by the second. “Be aware it’s a consensual spell. If you and your partner actively acknowledge that you wish it to dissolve, it could become ineffective.”

“You are a healer,” Jenny says with wide eyes. “There are a few other girls who would want this too.”

“Give me a couple of days to settle in, then come find me . . . I’ll see what I can do. It’s active as soon as the blood dries.”

“Thank you,” she squeals, tossing herself at me. I wobble, but eventually pat her awkwardly on the back.

Shifters are so strange.

“The three of you will take yourselves to your own homes. Now!” The alpha’s words ring out with the power of his command.

Jenny jogs toward her men and shifts mid-stride. The teens disappear back the way we came. *I think.*

“Why are they headed back toward the danger?” I ask with genuine confusion. “I don’t have enough blood left to heal them all again tonight.”

The alpha snorts a laugh. His long blond hair falls around his face as he shoots me a disapproving look.

“Ask your shadows which way your car is,” he suggests. “Go on.”

The massive wolf alpha prowls toward me, looking every bit the predator I know he is. He could rip out my throat, and I’d have no chance of stopping him in this state. Let’s hope he’s feeling generous after my good deed.

That would be such a bummer.

I've been pretty consistently reminded in my life that it's dangerous to go out of my way to help people.

Huh, I guess I am too stupid to live, because somehow I always seem to be drawn to do the right thing, no matter the risk.

"Why did you help my wolves?" he asks, pouring all the strength of his alpha compulsion into his words.

His head cocks to the side as he studies me. His eyes glow a yellowy color that indicates his wolf is very near the surface.

"They're barely more than pups." I hate that tingly feeling that comes from being forced to answer. "It's not like the universe was going to let me get back to my hotel tonight, anyway . . . not without doing whatever bidding it deemed needed to be done."

"What?" he growls in a low, menacing tone.

"I spent the last hour or two driving around, trying to find my hotel. I might have a crappy sense of direction, but I can assure you, it's not that bad." My vision gets hazy, and I stumble a step. "I hate that alpha bark crap. You couldn't have just asked nicely? What the hell, jackass? I did you a favor, and you bark at me? That's so uncalled for."

The alpha's eyes cease to glow, and he laughs, shaking his head at the star-filled sky.

That's just unacceptable. He looks far too devastatingly handsome while also letting his insanity show. It's inconvenient and distracting. And also, kind of appealing. No one should be that hot with their crazy on display.

"Blood or fuck?" he asks, suddenly very close. He wraps a muscled arm around my back and pulls me into his chest. "Feed or fuck to replenish what you so freely gave to protect my pups?"

"W-what?" I stutter. "We probably need to have a completely different conversation, if those are your kids, because they were definitely—"

A calloused hand clamps over my mouth. “They’re part of my pack so they’re mine,” he murmurs, dipping his face into the crook of my neck. “You smell fucking fantastic.”

“Thank you,” I mumble into his hand.

“How do you prefer to feed?” He repeats the question. He finally removes his hand from my mouth, and I blink at him for an awkward amount of time.

“You owe me nothing.” Not many pick up on the demon blood in my ancestry, but clearly, he has. One of my relatives definitely took a dip in the demon pond. Most likely with an incubus or a succubus. It’s how I’ve managed to stay under the radar working at The Den. The sex charged atmosphere replenishes my magic without me having to do much. The same can be said for fertility witches, making it the perfect cover.

“Little witch,” he barks, drawing me out of my hazy thoughts.

“Blood,” I say without the ability to hold back the word. I’m drained to the point I don’t think the small buzz I’d get from sex would touch how empty I am.

“Pity,” he mutters. “Get on with it, then . . .”

Blood witches can consume blood to replenish our magic, but in general, we do not have fangs.

And yet, mine slide out at the invitation.

It’s like a teenager popping a boner when their girlfriend comes out in a bikini.

“I knew it.” His very nude body is exceptionally hard against mine. His strong forearm wraps under my bottom, lifting me. My legs twine around his waist as my heart pounds violently in my chest. My tongue involuntarily runs over my teeth as I study his neck. I’d also really like to know what he *knew*. “Sink your teeth in, little witch,” he growls. His eyes glow, signaling either his wolf is very unhappy with his form of repayment or . . . I don’t really know.

That’s probably the only option.

Wolves don't care to be fed on.

My teeth ache as I dive forward.

My mouth latches to his throat, and I let out an embarrassing little moan as my tongue flicks over his skin.

Awesome, Nadia, way to make this even more awkward.

All reasonable thought flees my mind as my teeth sink into his flesh. The delicious flavor of alpha blood fills my mouth, making me whimper. A large hand squeezes my ass as the other cups the back of my head. My tongue flicks over the salty skin of his neck as I gulp greedily.

My hands dig into his shoulders, and after several strong pulls of his blood, I'm no longer on the edge of passing out. The alpha groans wickedly as I take a few more satisfying drinks. My teeth pull out of his vein, but my mouth stays close to catch the last pulses before his skin heals itself.

Obviously, we're going from dancing the line to full-blown crossing it. My tongue teases over the wound, cleaning his flesh for him as his hands cup my ass, dragging my pussy over his very hard erection. Yeah, not even the material of my clothing can hide how impressive he is.

Ahh, hell.

I haven't even been in town an entire day. I have no clue if this alpha is someone of importance.

The awkward feeling doesn't let up as I clear my throat and wiggle to be let down.

"Thanks," I say as my knees wobble and threaten to give out.

"It was my pleasure, little witch," he rumbles, smirking down at me. How the hell does he manage to call me that without it sounding insulting? I've had men call me that before, and it always sounded patronizing from their lips. Not that it doesn't from him, but it's lined in just enough raw sexual desire that it's really hard to convince my system it's time to get back to the hotel.

“See ya around.” I give an awkward little wave and head off toward my car.

The low rumbling laugh sends a damn shiver down my spine.

“Wrong way, *again*.” Those massive paws wrap around my shoulders in human form, and I’m guided . . . a completely different way than I expected.

My headlights finally come into view, and I blow out a relieved breath.

“I’ll be seeing you very soon. Safe travels,” he whispers against my throat. His warmth disappears from my back an instant later, and the sound of his paws hitting the dirt fills the air.

Some freaking introduction to North Falls.

Chapter Nine

Nadia

My eyes flick up to the dilapidated building and back down to the piece of paper I haphazardly scribbled the address on when I talked to Octavia this morning. She assured me I didn't need to keep my hotel room, because the council would be putting me up somewhere in North Falls.

This is where I'm supposed to be. Unless I wrote it down incorrectly, which I don't think I did. Something about this place is sending my hackles up.

My magic immediately perks up, taking notice. The ward around North Falls is so thin, it's nearly undetectable, but even then, I should be in and out in less than a month.

The front door opens, and a man stumbles outside, still righting his shirt. Okay, so it's a hotel or possibly apartments. Which is good. This place is entirely too massive to have all to myself.

You know what I'm not expecting to find as I saunter through the front door?

A sex club.

Four women immediately swarm me. It's much different from the atmosphere back home at The Den, but it is familiar enough to make me smile.

"I'm not a customer." I stifle a laugh. They're quite friendly with their touches. All except one back away with a huff.

“Are you Nadia?” the petite blonde asks. She’s wearing a thong and a corset and not much else. She’s got on a killer pair of heels strapped up her ankles, and she’s still not as tall as I am. I’m fairly certain she’s a nymph.

“That’s me,” I agree. “So, this is where I’m supposed to be?” My job back in Haven isn’t a secret, but I almost wonder if it’s a dig at my employment preferences. Like, maybe they know I’m a sex worker, so they put me up at the local sex club? That’s kind of insulting, since it’s clearly not the job I was contracted to do.

“Yeah, I’m Scarlett. It’s great to meet you. Come on, I’ll show you where you’re staying.” She starts down the long hallway, and my eyes have trouble not glancing into every room we pass.

The sex in the air feeds my magic. Not to the level blood would, but it provides a nice little buzz of energy.

There’s a massive orgy happening in a room to the left, and a large glass picture window opens into what can only be described as a torture chamber.

Holy shit. That monster knows just how to land the leather flogger he wields with god-like precision. I’m a little jealous of the female he’s punishing. She’s dancing around on her tiptoes, and it’s clear she’s loving and hating every second of it.

It makes my heart twinge as I think of Sam. We were supposed to have an appointment tonight.

It’ll be the first one I’ve missed.

I follow Scarlett through the hallways until she opens a door that leads to a flight of stairs that head down. Okay, that’s a smidgen creepy. I’ve only ever seen stairs like this leading to a basement.

“This is one way into the apartment,” she says, grimacing a little. “It’s not necessarily the door you’re likely to use, but I did want to show you that it exists.”

“Thanks.”

“Okay, so, follow me again.” Scarlett leads us out onto a large patio and out the door with zero concern about her state of undress. There’s a pool with random people milling about and doing other things. It’s like ten in the morning . . . I’ll bet, similar to The Den, this place never sleeps. She follows a small gravel path to a door and nods at it before handing me a small keyring. “You can use this key to get in through here. Or you can come in the front. We’re open all the time.” The gravel path dead ends at the parking lot that must be at the rear of the building. “You can park down there, and it’ll be much closer for you to bring in your stuff.”

She fidgets around a bit.

“Thank you.” I try to smile. My face fails at its job. It ends up feeling more like a grimace.

“No problem, we’re so happy to have you,” she says, rushing me. My magic swirls around us in a light gray shimmery stream, but Scarlett is just a huggy person, and my magic is severely overreacting.

I pat her back placatingly and try to disperse my shadows before she notices them.

“I’ve got to get back to it.” She nods back the way we came. “If you need someone to show you around town, just let me know. I’m happy to do it.”

“That would be great,” I agree. “Do you know where I can find the council building?”

She blinks like a deer in headlights for several long seconds. “You know . . . you should probably call and schedule an appointment. Or find Echo . . . Echo will help you.”

Who the hell is Echo? I don’t even get the question out before she’s scurrying away. I stare after her, open-mouthed. All right, that wasn’t weird or anything.

Christ, maybe I should call Octavia? This sanctuary city is nothing like any of the others I’ve been to over the course of my lifetime. Maybe they need to clear out the town council

and install more effective leaders, if this is how the place is run.

I vaguely wonder what my friends think of this place.

Shelby and Carina moved here a few years ago. I was annoyed when they didn't choose to move to Haven, but Shelby wanted somewhere with cooler weather, and North Falls definitely gets that.

I know they rented a small shop space somewhere in town, and they have a rental property.

Come to think of it, staying with them might be the way to go.

Letting myself into the small apartment, I take everything in. It's not nearly as run-down as it appears from the outside. A small set of stairs off the entryway lead me down to a lower level with a bedroom and bathroom. It has dark wood paneling, which makes it look dated, but the furniture is obviously new and the carpet is clean.

The upstairs area is small, but it does have a kitchen, a dining room, living room, and a half bath.

I toss myself into one of the dining room chairs and bury my face in my hands. I need to call Nan and check in.

A loud, repetitive banging draws my attention to the back door. Or maybe that's the main door? Who the hell knows? Because I don't.

There's no peephole, so I yank it open.

My jaw falls. It's not Scarlett, that's for damn sure. There is a preternaturally still man standing poised to knock again. His dark hair is thick and long on top. It falls over his forehead in a purposeful way. The sides are shorter and clipped the same length as his beard.

"Echocio Diamonte," he says in a droll tone. His thick lips purse, showing his displeasure with this entire exchange.

"That's a fun fact," I tell him once I've finally located my brain cells. "If you're here for services, you've got the wrong

office. I'm not on the books . . ." I pause to check him out again, and my mouth forms a word of its own volition. "Yet."

Echocio takes a step back, the bored look finally faltering into straight-up confusion. Snorting a laugh, I move to close the door. A pale hand wraps around the edge before it can click closed.

"I'm afraid this conversation isn't over." He pushes the door open so that he can see me. The man hasn't even pretended to breathe while in my presence. He's a vampire; there's no other possibility.

I don't let myself think too carefully before uttering the words. "Well, come in, then." I head back to the small dining table near the kitchen. I take a seat and look at him expectantly. "So, you told me who you are, but why are you here?"

Echocio takes a seat without making a single sound. It's unnerving as hell. Most vampires that I've interacted with do their best to blend in with humans. They fake the shit humans do that becomes noticeable when they're missing . . . like blinking and breathing. He does neither, which means he's an ancient vampire, or he just truly does not give a single fuck.

Come to think of it, neither of those are great signs, considering I just invited him into my home. Or rather, the place I'm staying for the next undetermined amount of time.

"You may call me Echo. I'm your bodyguard for the duration of your stay," he says in that tone that indicates he could not be more displeased with our newfound relationship.

"That's unnecessary." My eyebrows rise, and I grimace while simultaneously trying to force a polite smile.

Faking excitement isn't one of my life skills.

Doing stupid shit?

I definitely get a gold star in that department, as evidenced by the fact there is a vampire at my table.

"Apparently, it's fucking not," he growls. "I'm your vessel, so use me as you wish."

My jaw falls open, and I stumble back as my chair slides wildly behind me.

“Oh, fuck no.” I jam a finger at his stupidly strong and unmoving chest. “I’m not that kind of witch. See yourself out.” My magic spills out in a dark cloud, swirling around me and again being overly dramatic. It looks way cooler and more impressive than it is most of the time. It also clearly shows when I’m on edge. It’s hard to have much of a poker face when your magic gives you away at the most inopportune times.

Echo studies me with a predatory intensity that rivals the alpha wolf. It might be more intimidating, because this fucker is legitimately deathly still. “I’m not going anywhere.”

“Would it kill you to pretend to breathe?” I ask as I take my seat.

“I’m your council appointed protection during your stay in North Falls,” he says in a firm tone. “Whether you choose to take advantage of my services or not . . .” He shrugs. “We’re stuck with each other.”

“Okay, well, I’ll take it up with the town council. I’ve never needed a spy at my side before . . . What is up with this town?” I run my hands over my face, pulling back my hair from where it’s falling into my eyes.

“I’m sure you’ll find out before long,” the vampire guard muses, stretching back in his chair. “I thought all blood witches creamed their panties over having a live vessel.” He smirks. “Well, in my case, semi-alive.”

“You’re just a bundle of fun to be around. Has anyone told you that lately?”

The vampire stares me down over the old dining table.

I don’t falter.

Okay, fine.

After thirty-three seconds of unfettered eye contact, technically, I am the first to look away, but only because he literally doesn’t have to blink . . . ever.

“Why would any council appoint anyone a vessel?” I muse mostly to myself, but I speak aloud, in case the vampire wants to help shine some light on this ridiculous situation. It’s an archaic and outdated custom that hasn’t been widely accepted for hundreds of years.

“You’re not just a blood witch. You have demon blood,” Echo says, his eyebrows rising. I don’t know what look that is on his stupidly handsome face, but it seems very serious. It would be nice if I knew what the hell it meant.

His brows pull together as his thick lips turn down into a frown. Possibly, he thinks I’m slow on the uptake, or it could be his general state of being is that of a stuck-up asshole.

Actually, it’s more than likely that both are true.

“Okay, well, great chat.” I stand to indicate this little meeting is over. My arm awkwardly swings toward the door to confirm it’s time for him to go.

The smug bastard simply arches an eyebrow at me. “What part of *your full-time security* confused you, baby darkling?”

I can’t even with this guy.

I snort. It’s a very unladylike sound that I should be embarrassed about, but I can’t bring myself to care.

This place is freaking strange.

Spinning around, I head for the stairs that lead to the small bedroom.

“You’ve got an appointment to meet the council in less than two hours.”

“Do not follow me,” I call over my shoulder.



Sneaking out of the apartment is easier than I expect. I use the back stairs that head directly into the heart of the club and, thus far, I’m good.

I grab my phone out of my dress pocket and dial Shelby. I need directions to wherever she is. She opened a small shop somewhere here in North Falls, and I need to see a friendly face right now. She chuckles through the entire conversation, but gives me easy-to-follow directions. We disconnect as I hit the main street. I'm fairly sure I can find my way from here.

Most sanctuary cities are on the smaller side. This place is no exception. It's clearly a decent-sized town, but it's no metropolis. That would make reinforcing the ward basically impossible with only one blood witch, especially with how drained it is.

Goose bumps pebble on my skin as I march down the sidewalk. It's cooler here than it was in Haven. North Falls is higher up in the mountains, and I'm guessing that has something to do with the ridiculous temperature difference.

I meander the streets, looking for the landmarks Shelby mentioned and curse under my breath when I catch sight of my stalker over my right shoulder.

I toss a middle finger in the air and keep on walking.

"You're being followed by a vampire," Shelby says.

"I did, in fact, notice that." I toss myself into one of the club chairs in her office. "This place is nice."

"Don't try to distract me."

My eyes rake in the small, but nicely furnished, room.

Shelby leans against the dark wooden desk in stretchy leggings and a soft T-shirt. Her blonde hair fans around her face as she leans into my personal space. We knew each other for years before Nan relocated us to Haven.

"Why is the council's vampire following you?" she asks as her eyes search my face.

"He's my appointed bodyguard." My eyes roll so hard, they practically get lost inside my skull.

“Right,” she says dubiously.

“I don’t want to talk about it,” I grumble, resting my head on my hand. “I’ve got an appointment in less than an hour, but I wanted to see you.”

“Are you really planning on staying there?” she asks in a condescending-as-hell tone. It sends my hackles up. I haven’t kept my profession a secret, but it’s not like I tell everyone I know, either. It’s very much something that depends on the person.

I haven’t told Shelby, because I know how she was raised. Sentinels are notoriously snotty. It comes from their heritage. Being related to angels seems to ensure they think they’re better than everyone else. For the most part, I ignore it.

“It’s not that big of a deal. I’m not even going to be here for that long.”

Shelby snorts. “I can’t imagine being forced to live in that shithole. I’m really not convinced it’s safe.”

“I’m more confused by this entire situation and why I need a bodyguard in the first place.”

Shelby laughs, but it sounds forced. “They probably aren’t taking any chances. The entire ward feels thin enough to evaporate at any time. It’s impossible to miss. They don’t want to risk losing your gifts before the job is done.”

“My apartment is in—”

“A whorehouse,” she says, laughing. “Yeah, I heard.”

“Don’t call it that,” I snap, frowning. God, could she be any more condescending? “I was going to say a basement.”

Shelby is very much a product of her family and the culture of the community she grew up in.

Sentinels tend to be self-righteous assholes about, well . . . everything outside of how they do things. One of the guys at work, Saber, is half angel. That probably explains why I can only stand to be around him half the time.

“Everyone deserves to make a living,” I say defensively. That disdainful look is really starting to rub me the wrong way. “As long as the choice is at their discretion, and they aren’t being forced, then honestly—”

“Are you ready?” Echo asks, making me jolt.

That silent fucker.

I didn’t even notice him popping in.

“Carina isn’t back with lunch.” Shelby jabs a finger at the vampire. “How did you get past my protection spell?”

Echo looks extremely unimpressed with my old friend. “I waltzed right in the front door. You offer a service to the public, meaning all laws of lore regarding my kind do not apply. You’ll find we simply don’t come in, because we purposely choose to avoid your closed-minded bigotry.”

My stomach chooses that moment to make a rumbling sound. Echo sighs like a ninety-year-old man who realized it rained on his newspaper.

“Let’s go,” he says. “I’ll feed you after our audience with the council.”

“Please be careful.” Shelby pulls me in for a hug before stepping away from Echo with a disdainful frown plastered on her face.

“I’ll try.” My mind is still focused on eating, and for whatever reason, my thoughts fly to the alpha wolf in the woods. A shiver slides through my entire body as I recall the warmth of his body pressing against mine as I fed from him.

Echo takes a step toward me as his nostrils flare, breathing in my scent. My cheeks heat, but then I realize that reaction wasn’t for him.

I’ve got nothing to be ashamed of.

Obviously, he should be embarrassed . . .

Who wants an overly sensitive nose?

Echo waits patiently as I say my final goodbye. He guides me out a different hallway than the one I entered through.

Right outside the back door is a corridor that has several back staircases leading up to the second-floor apartments.

The exposed brick is rough against my skin as he cages me against the wall.

My eyes widen as he leans in close. “I think you’ve got some confusion about where my personal space bubble ends,” I say coolly.

“Does that brain inside your pretty little skull function properly?” he hisses, his dark eyes turning milky white.

“Um, what the hell?” I push with both palms against his chest.

“You obviously have a death wish,” the vampire murmurs, a little too close to my throat. “Why else would you willingly come to a town where every other ward sealer that’s tried to replenish the barrier has been murdered?”

My jaw falls open.

I blink at the still-white eyes that stare into mine. The look on his face says he’s not lying or bullshitting me just to get a rise.

“Obviously, I had no clue about that, but I have no interest in following in their footsteps.”

“None of them intended to die, either,” he whispers.

“Were you their guard too?”

He scoffs. “They’re all dead. You think the leaders were lenient toward their lackeys who failed to complete such an important job? Fuck, no. Meaning, if I don’t successfully keep you alive, then I’m staring down my final death.”

I blanch. “Yeah, that sucks for you.”

“You’re goddamn maddening.” He wraps a clawed hand around my throat, squeezing tightly. “Listen to me when I say this—I am not ready to cease to exist. If I tell you to do something, then it is in your best interest to obey.”

My girlie bits love the sound of that. Damn submissive tendencies. My knees try to clench together, but Echo is too

close. His lips fan over my cheek as he shakes his head.

“You’re quite the mystery, baby darkling.” He releases me, moving to yank on his sleeve. “Come along. Do not unnecessarily piss off the town council. Nothing is as it seems. Remember that and the rest of my advice.” He takes off down the long corridor, and I have no choice except to follow.

I need to speak to Octavia and plan my exit from this shit show of a town. Immediately.

If the poor human needs help safely delivering her half-elf babies, then she can come stay in Haven for a few weeks.

Echo wasn’t joking. There’s something very wrong with this place.

Chapter Ten

Echo

N adia is going to hate me before this day is over.

Live long enough, and you learn not to grow attached to mortals. They age and die pathetically quickly.

Yes, even witches, unless they're willing to dabble in the type of magic that keeps them youthful and vibrant for many lifetimes.

There's something pure in Nadia that makes it clear she's not that type of supernatural. It's terribly inconvenient how fascinated I am by that.

North Falls isn't the idealistic sanctuary that Haven is. Everyone has an agenda. After all, supernatural creatures are wired for survival.

I move as slowly as possible to allow for her short legs to keep up. She doesn't have the benefit of superspeed.

My head tilts as I listen to her grumble under her breath. I can't decide if it's annoying or incredibly cute.

My fists clench as we approach the town council building. Warning her of what's coming would be a great way to get us both exterminated before Constantine can even swing his pompous gavel. He's a demon. He has no need for the ridiculous device, but this town is filled to the brim with insanity. A demon with a love of old-fashioned wooden gavels is the last thing I'd point out when mentioning the absurdity filling this hellhole.

“Hey.” Nadia makes a grab for my arm.

My eyes fly down to the connection as I roll my shoulders back. “What?”

“Are wyverns shifters?” Her head tilts as she blinks up at me.

“What?” I scoff, yanking my arm away and readjusting my sleeve.

Imogen is likely to remove the little witch’s hand from her body if she sees her touching me. My maker is not pleased with what’s coming, but she’s a good lackey. She’ll follow Constantine’s instructions and spend the time silently fuming. What she won’t do is give the world the luxury of seeing her squirm.

“Are all wyverns shifters? I had a weird interaction with one recently, and I was just wondering.” She shrugs.

I have to fight the urge to take her by the shoulders and shake some sense into her. Is she fucking mad? Doesn’t she understand the shitstorm she walked into?

No, you dick. She doesn’t, since you’ll give vague warnings all day, but you won’t truly tell her anything, because then she would run and you’d have no choice but to chase her.

Fucking hell, I hate this goddamn place. Which is another shady-as-fuck reason that I’m not warning the witch. I’ve got my chance to escape, and I won’t miss it, even if that puts Nadia in the line of fire.

Vampires are not selfless creatures. After several hundred years of being at Imogen’s beck and call, there’s finally an end in sight.

A shiver of unease slides through my system.

In order for us to make it out of this alive, there are a whole lot of things that will need to beautifully fall into place. My luck isn’t that great. If I was human, I’d say I’m not holding my breath, but technically speaking, I don’t need to breathe.

I snort.

“So, you’re just going to continue to look at me like I’m stupid. Okay, good talk.” Nadia rolls her eyes, stomping off toward the door we need to head into.

I might not be a gentleman, but I am her vessel. Using my speed, I zip past her, opening the door before she can blink.

She jolts, registering my current location, but simply raises a hand, flipping me off.

I chuckle.

She moves to enter, and I lean close as she passes. “Yes, to my knowledge, all wyverns are shifters. My apologies, your question threw me off for a moment.”

Her breathing hitches, and I grin in response. It’s a very stupid move.

Imogen Diamonte comes to a halt three feet in front of Nadia. Her face contorts into what I believe is a smile. That look always precedes pain on my part. My entire body goes rigid, despite my efforts to hold back the response.

“It seems like you’ve *finally* arrived,” Imogen purrs.

It’s nearly impossible to hold back my revulsion. An involuntary shiver runs through my entire body as I focus on keeping my face steady. No one should be able to cause a fight-or-flight reaction with such a simple sentence, but my maker is talented that way.

My shoulders pull back as I paste on a mask of indifference.

After all, it’s the only expression of mine that she can stand to see.

Chapter Eleven

Nadia

The cunt-y look on Imogen Diamonte's face indicates pretty quickly that we're not going to be BFFs. She's an undeniably beautiful woman, but the sourpuss look on her face suggests she's been sucking on lemons. Or possibly eating rotten ass. I mean, who am I to judge? Maybe I should offer her a stick of gum. Damn, I don't even have my purse.

My head bobbles between Echo and Imogen.

For the love of all things holy . . . is she his partner or his mother? Due to their lack of aging, it's impossible to tell without asking for clarification, which I will absolutely *not* be doing.

The woman is already looking at me with murderous vibes.

That's a big *nope, no thanks*, type of question that I'm not making the mistake of stumbling into.

Echo stands with his head bowed respectfully. His hands are clasped in front of him, but his posture is purely rigid.

Imogen huffs and waves a hand dismissively at him.

Echo's eyes meet mine like he's trying to convey something. Exactly what is lost on me.

"You're early, you'll have to wait," Imogen says in a thick accent I can't quite place. Wait, she said we "finally arrived," so which is it? Are we early or late? "You'll remain here. Someone will come for you when we're ready for you." She gestures to a set of three chairs near a door. She doesn't wait

for our agreement. The door closes quietly behind her, and I take a seat in one of the chairs that line the wall.

My mouth opens, but Echo slaps a cold hand over my face. He gives a brusque shake of his head, indicating I shouldn't speak. I'm not dumb. I get that vampires and other supernaturals have excellent hearing.

Echo must think I'm the most foolish witch in existence as he quickly points to his ear and his eyes fly to the meeting room.

Rolling my eyes, I give him a nod to let him know I understand.

He yanks out his phone, typing out something and handing it to me. It's a file or document with pictures and information on the five council members I'll be meeting with. I speed-read my way through each listed council member, but my blood runs ice-cold when I realize they're all vampires and demons.

There's not a single shifter, fae, sentinel, or witch on their town council.

That seems like a bad sign.

My hands shake as I hand his phone over.

He takes it, stepping back until he's leaning against the wall and looking like he stepped off the pages of some men's high-fashion magazine.

My gaze falls to my own outfit. The knee-length wrap dress is comfortable, but it doesn't scream professional, now that I think about it. The leather sandals I'm wearing are, again, comfy, but after seeing Imogen and Echo, it's clear I'm *very* underdressed.

Why am I self-conscious?

I'm doing these assholes a favor.

The ward isn't in good shape. They've allowed it to deteriorate to the point I'm not sure if I'll be able to do the job in one trip. Add on what Echo said in the alley, and I don't even want to anymore.

The human can come to Haven if she needs my services, and the monsters in North Falls can hire some other witch to fortify their ward.

An incubus in full demon form opens the door and hungrily checks me out before extending a hand to invite us in.

My shadows slither back from wherever they disappeared to while we waited.

Popping off the chair, I hurry to make my way inside. The pulse of desire I feel as I pass the sex demon is alarming. Usually, my magic protects me from being influenced by other supernaturals. My hand feels drawn to the demon with the platinum blond hair, and then I'm patting his wickedly muscular chest.

I mouth the word *wow* like a total loser.

"Garth," he says with a smirk plastered to his handsome face.

"Nadia," I say, almost in a trance. Demon magic is potent in the air.

My shadows have been a little too quick on the jump lately, but they seem to be enjoying a leisurely vacation at the moment. They lazily swirl around my hand and over him, since we're touching, but Garth isn't fazed. He laughs under his breath and nods for me to head inside.

Echo zips to my side, hissing at Garth. His fangs are super freaking intimidating and only a few inches away from my face. Cool hands wrap around my upper arms, and I'm swiftly moved across the room.

The council sits at a long table. There are three men and two women. The men hold the middle seats, and the women are on either end.

The five leaders in front of me are not a very diverse representation of the town residents.

My magic must be having an off day. I get a light pulse of warning, but nothing that matches the level of dread I should

feel when I'm in a meeting surrounded solely by vampires and demons.

A prickle of unease jolts through my body. Well, nice of my senses to finally catch up with reality.

"You may sit," Constantine Abraxas says. He's seated in the middle of the others. A wrath demon, who's quick to anger and even quicker to torture for the fun of it, is the one in charge of this meeting. I almost wish Echo hadn't given me any information on the members of the council. The little I read is making it extremely difficult to relax.

My eyes unintentionally flick to Echo. How the fuck could my "partner" fail to prep me for this meeting? He should've warned me ahead of time or said nothing. This in-between bullshit is making me uneasy.

"What have you been told to expect from us?" Warren asks in that smooth vampire voice that signals he's using compulsion.

My eyes don't leave his as I answer. "I know from experience how meetings are supposed to go."

"That's not what I asked, now is it?" Warren asks. "What have you been told about this council?"

"Very little," I hiss. My hands fly up as I rub at my aching temples. "This is the least welcoming town I've ever been to. Big shock that no one wants to work for you guys. Ever heard the saying *you get more flies with honey*? I'm not obligated to help you with your ward." I jab a finger toward the town council.

Garth snorts from somewhere behind me, while Echo blows out a heavy breath, like my stupidity is physically painful.

Constantine laughs and shakes his head. "We were told you'd be plucky."

"Told by whom?" I ask.

The greed demon at his side eyes me with what I think is appreciation. Lysander Godfrey is a beautiful specimen, if

you're into vain and disgustingly shallow. Physically speaking, he's gorgeous, but the majority of supernaturals are.

I've learned my lesson before—the pretty ones are always dicks. The alpha wolf is a perfect example.

Warren quirks an eyebrow at me. “Do you know who we are?”

He's still forcing answers? Guess we know exactly how this entire exchange is going to go.

Starting from left to right, I spit out their names and species.

Imogen looks bored as she taps away on her phone. Valaine Vossen, the only other female on the town council, is a succubus. She's busy reapplying her lipstick while fluttering her eyelashes at herself in a compact mirror.

The three men are the only ones who seem to be taking this meeting seriously.

“The ward surrounding the town has nearly collapsed. Shouldn't we be discussing that?” I ask. “I have other business to attend to while I'm in town, but I am willing to help.”

Unless I run, which is honestly starting to feel like a more realistic reaction, but they don't need to know that.

Imogen gives Echo a nod.

He shoves me down into the only chair on this side of the table. I'm going to end up throat punching that guy . . . I can feel it in my gut.

“You'll attend to the ward beginning today,” Warren says, lining his tone to force compliance.

“Of course,” I agree as my magic buzzes. It sure doesn't lash out to protect me or even insulate me from being forced to agree due to his compulsion.

“Nadia, may I call you Nadia?” Constantine laughs as I say nothing. “You're the fourth blood witch to enter North Falls within the last five years. It's gotten to the point the paranormal council will no longer send us active agents.”

No one is even supposed to know the nature of my magic. My mouth opens and closes a few times. Combine what he just said with what Echo told me earlier about them all being dead, and a true shiver of fear runs down my spine.

I focus, willing my magic to do *something*—really, *anything* will do right about now—but it completely ignores my command.

Which is ridiculous; it's supposed to be available for use when I need it. Unfortunately, my magic has never been particularly good at cooperating. She's like a spoiled cat that *occasionally* comes when called.

My stomach rolls as I experience real fear for the first time in too long to remember. I'm in a room full of top-tier predators, and my magic isn't coming to my aid. What the hell is wrong with this place?

"They all failed. We were told you're quite intelligent. You understand the repercussions, don't you?" Constantine asks, raising his eyebrows. They're still compelling answers out of me, but I do think my magic is shielding me, at least a small amount.

That sounded like a thinly veiled threat, but I'm not going to play directly into his hand.

"The ward will fall within the year if I'm unsuccessful," I tell him truthfully. "What caused the others to fail?" Now isn't the time to betray Echo. Seeing what the council is willing to share seems like important information to have.

I'll demand answers from Echo later and possibly convince him to help me escape this town.

"They've all been slaughtered." Imogen's face breaks out into a feral grin. "Of course, we have no idea why anyone would try to hurt them."

"Right," I agree. "That's why you've issued me a guard?"

Constantine nods. "He's more than your protection. Echo will be your vessel."

“No.” I shake my head, trying to remain calm and respectful. My magic is still being temperamental, and that’s concerning. “I have no need for a vessel. I’m more than capable of successfully completing this job without using that archaic and, quite frankly, barbaric practice.”

Echo stands at my back. He gives my shoulder a warning squeeze.

“You will sever the sire bond between Imogen and Echo. Then you will tether him to you,” Warren instructs. My magic recoils at the thought, but it doesn’t fly out in a blaze of glory to defend me. Is there something in this room that has the ability to drastically affect my power? “Now!”

My body scrambles into motion as I push myself off of the chair.

Imogen looks furious.

“Now,” Constantine demands, glaring at her in return.

She rises and comes to stand next to me.

“If anything negative befalls me because of this . . .” Imogen gives me a dangerous smile. “I’ll rip your throat out.”

“I’ve never actually done this,” I say as my eyes fly up to Echo’s. “I understand how, but . . .”

“Get a move on,” Valaine calls. “I’m hungry.”

For the love of God, what I would give to be able to suck every drop of blood from their bodies.

Fucking compulsion.

Chapter Twelve

Nadia

Being a shadowborn witch isn't anything all that special. I get a few shadow powers, but for the most part, they're darker than I'm comfortable using. Any variety of witch can have shadows; it's determined by where we're born under the moon cycle, but certain abilities or affinities tend to stick to their own sides.

For example, seers and fertility witches tend to have lightbringer affinities. It's not impossible for either to be shadowborn, but it is rare. It's one of the things that makes me stand out as pretending to be a fertility witch, because they don't normally come with shadows.

Blood witches are more likely to be shadowborn, but it's not enough of a guarantee that it outs my magic.

All witches are some balance of light and dark. It's impossible to tell where someone falls on the spectrum just because they have light or shadow abilities. Unlike the fae, who are born with their alignment already decided, either Seelie or Unseelie, a witch tends to ebb and flow into each side throughout their life.

If we do more light magic, then our soul becomes lighter.

If we focus on dark magic, it leaves a stain on the soul. Not all dark magic is inherently evil or bad, but it does tend to be worked for personal gain and without concern for the repercussions on the world.

My soul is very confused at the moment.

A large part of me is horrified by the thought of having a vessel.

The other, dark and dirty, part is dangerously intrigued.

My magic flirtatiously slides over Imogen's skin. Which is kind of strange, because my magic is literally an extension of myself. Sometimes it fixates on things I have no interest in. It's why I view it as a separate entity, even though Nan swears that's impossible.

Shadows circle Imogen, and as soon as they disappear under her skin, I can see something . . .

I never know how to describe a person's soul. Maybe it's just her heart, or even her power, since there's a lot of debate on whether vampires are soulless creatures.

Imogen is ancient, and I don't mean that in an insulting way. There are more sire bonds flowing from her than I've *ever* seen. A fair number of them have been severed, but her side of the connection is still evident.

Her soul? Power cavity? Heart? I don't know, but it's clear she's not an especially good monster, even for a vampire.

Her aura is dark in a way that suggests she's a bold and powerful woman. She's distrustful of others, even those who have given her unwavering loyalty.

"Get on with it," Imogen hisses. Her hands clench at her sides, like she's bracing for the inevitable pain.

My magic plucks the different strings. I'm pretty sure it's testing the strands to determine which one is Echo's, but honestly, that's just a guess.

I'm able to pick out his string with little difficulty, so I don't know why my power is feeling particularly coy about doing the damn thing.

Echo's line starts a brownish-black, like all of her sire bond strands, but the farther away from Imogen it gets, it transforms into a dark orangey-red.

My magic is still doing its own thing and completely ignoring my instructions. It's not like I can verbally say *do this*

or *do that*.

Nan swears magic isn't its own entity, but to me, it's like a stubborn twitch or when your leg goes to sleep and you try to tell it to walk and instead you nearly fall.

We're connected, but magic is wild and unpredictable.

My shadows eventually comply and swarm Echo's sire bond.

Imogen gasps as the cord severs.

Echo whooshes out a breath against my shoulder. He rarely breathes, so feeling the cool exhale against my skin is unexpected.

My magic apparently understands what needs to be done next, because the giant cloud of dark swirling smoke flows out of Imogen and splits into two pieces. Half careens into Echo, and the rest pulses as it flows inside me.

Echo looks utterly bewildered for half a second while my smoke, instead of diffusing through his skin, pours down his open mouth. The pang in my heart is unexpected.

"Bite me," I say, my voice echoing with my power.

Echo stares at me for several painful seconds before he zips forward. Moving my hair to the side, he strikes my throat without further confirmation.

The pain sizzles like fire before evaporating into mind-blowing pleasure.

This is so not the place to have an unsolicited orgasm.

"Stop," I hiss.

Echo doesn't immediately comply. The flick of his cool tongue over my warm skin is tantalizing. My nipples bead, and my pussy throbs with his venom.

As his fangs retract, I'm teetering precariously on the edge. His tongue flicks over the wound, and he looks like he's heaving breaths.

Which makes no sense, because he doesn't have to breathe, but it does make me feel pretty damn pleased with myself. Although I'm not sure why.

"I need to drink from you," I say in that tone that indicates it's not just me speaking.

"Go on," he says, raising an eyebrow, like I'm being purposely slow or difficult.

"I have a pin I use when I need to do magic." Yanking the pin out of its compartment, I hold it up, showing Echo.

I'm not sure if he realizes I have fangs. Here's hoping he meant what he said about being a team. He nods his agreement, and my magic hums in approval. I stagger forward like I'm wasted.

I don't even care if I look like an idiot because, once I'm no longer compelled, this town can officially blow me.

My instincts scream not to let this council know about my oddities. I'm completely on board with that plan of action.

I'm having a serious conversation with Octavia as soon as I get the chance. She sent me here. She can sure as hell send reinforcements to get me out safely.

Echo bends his head low, and I position my mouth close to his throat. The pin slides over his skin, and my mouth immediately latches on to his neck. I will my embarrassingly tiny baby fangs to stay hidden.

Magic soars through my system with every swallow of his blood.

Echo groans as my tongue flicks over the wound. The skin begins to knit itself back together almost immediately, and I pull away. My chest heaves as magic hums through my entire body.

"Complete the fucking ritual," Imogen hisses, glaring at me. God, she's really intimidating with the veins on her neck bulging and that cold, dead look in her eyes.

This wasn't my idea. Why the hell is she looking at me like that?

My mouth opens to tell her the ritual is complete, but my magic pulses with displeasure. Okay, then, it feels like being a bratty teenager today, despite the fact I'm closer to thirty than I am to twenty-five.

"Get on with it," Constantine says.

"I invoke the bonds that tether." My eyes meet Echo's.

"I accept the bonds that tether." His stare bores into mine. It's actually a rather intimate moment, despite the council witnessing it.

The warm, fuzzy feeling that fills my chest as we gaze at each other makes me uncomfortable. I shake my head, blowing out a breath.

Why did old blood witches pick the most cliché sayings ever created to end their bindings? My mouth itches to explain that wasn't necessary *at all*, but I think I'm trying to distract myself from how closely I just bound myself to an unknown vampire.

"Was it successful?" Warren's words ring with the power of his compulsion.

My chest aches with the urge to tell him to suck a dick. My mouth involuntarily responds. "It was."

"Yes," Echo agrees.

"Give us a demonstration." Valaine leans forward in her chair. She's finally interested in this clusterfuck of a meeting, and only once I've stripped Echo of his free will. I'm going to need to burn this council to the ground on my way out of town. "Come on, then."

My eyes fly to hers and my eyebrows raise. Really? He's not a fucking pet. He's a person. Maybe a soulless person—I'm really not sure about that. It doesn't matter. It's not right to play with someone's free will.

My magic literally will not let me speak as I try to instruct Echo to tell his town council to blow me. It also won't let me have him tell Imogen to go suck on another lemon.

Apparently, it's also not okay with having Echo rip out Constantine's throat.

Huh, today sucks worse than yesterday.

I thought the disaster with the wolves was bad.

"Now." Warren isn't screwing around. He pours his dominance into the command, and my system jolts with my inability to ignore it.

"Give me a piggyback ride." I shrug at the frown on Imogen's face.

Valaine scoffs.

Echo gives me a frustrated look. I've sent exactly zero demand with my words, but he knows as well as I do that we have to fake it.

He lifts me easily and maneuvers me onto his back. He doesn't squat in front of me so that I can climb up. No, he hefts me with little effort and spins me over his shoulder. His hands proprietarily grip my ass as he walks us several steps up to the table. He bends low in respect.

"Put me down," I tell him.

He quickly follows my instructions.

"You'll begin working on the ward today," Warren says. "Start at the peaks. The ward is thinnest there, and several human hikers have mistakenly stumbled inside the barrier."

"The surrounding areas have noticed a spike in missing and deceased adventurers." Imogen's face breaks into a cutting smile.

"Give her the list of closing commands." Constantine smirks like he won something.

Warren glances down at a sheet of paper. "Do not leave North Falls. Do not speak of this meeting to anyone outside the sanctuary ward. If you run into trouble, you are to tell them you are doing work on behalf of the council and direct any problems to Echocio."

My system jolts with each command. My hands clench with each additional instruction.

“You will not call for help or alert any friends or family to what happened here today. If you speak to anyone from Haven, you’re to tell them whatever they need to hear to let the matter drop. You will put them at ease and stay uncommitted when asked of your future plans to return home.”

I get a small pulse of excitement; the vaguer the terms, the easier it’ll be to twist the command. My magic buzzes lightly, but I’m pretty sure one of the council, or Garth, has the ability to mute magic. I’ve never seen a monster with that gift before, but that is the only thing that makes any sense.

“I’ll handle it,” I agree.

Compulsion is nearly impossible to fight. I’ve never had such an ancient vampire issue a compulsory command. It’s like an itching in my mind when I try to brainstorm ways around what he just instructed.

“We’ll let you get to it.” Constantine grins viciously. “Expect an invitation in two weeks’ time. Sooner, if you fail to meet expectations.”

Echo bows his head. I’m well versed in protocol, but my shock makes me slow to react. Imogen cuts her eyes to me, and I quickly dip my head in pretend reverence to their status.

They swiftly exit the room, and Garth appears at my side.

“They seem worse than they really are,” he says in his melodically sexual tone. “I’d love to show you around town when you have time.” He shoves his veiny hands into the front pocket of his jeans, and I remind myself that he’s on the opposite side of this war. Yeah, he’s ridiculously hot, but this is clearly a setup. God, this town is gross.

“Thank you for the offer.” I force a smile. I’m sure he’s been instructed to seduce me. I guess one council spy wasn’t enough? My magic playfully teases his skin. “Give me a chance to get settled in. It’s going to be a solid bit of time setting up the ward before I can focus on maintenance.”

“Understandable,” Garth says, rocking on the heels of his boots. “We’ll touch base soon.”

Echo growls low in his chest. The next thing I know, he’s lifting me and wrapping me around the front of his strong form. He moves faster than my eyes can track. Everything slides by in fuzzy images and hazy shapes. It’s several minutes later when I’m slammed against the wall just inside the door to the apartment where I’m staying.

“You know he’s a fucking plant from the council,” he says, staring straight into my eyes. He’s so close, his lips practically ghost over mine. “Do you want to die? Have you got an urge to cease to exist? Did I get stuck with the only suicidal blood witch to come to town so far?”

Blinking up at him, I try to refocus my eyes. Witches aren’t meant to zip around at vampire speeds. He’s lucky I didn’t puke all over him.

“He was tasked with trying to seduce me,” I say, rolling my eyes and giving his chest a little shove. He doesn’t release me. Instead, his cool forehead dips to rest against mine. “I get that.”

“We’re fucking doomed,” he mutters as his eyes slide shut.

“Yeah? Whose fault is that?” I snap. “You set me up so freaking bad. I did the best I could. If I’m confrontational, it will immediately set off red flags. I’d rather pretend to be agreeable until I understand what I’ve walked into.”

Echo sighs, nodding against my cheek. “I need to feed before you drain me dry. Do not leave my apartment.” He pulls me off the wall, setting me down on the couch as my mouth hangs open.

“This is *your* apartment?”

“Didn’t you check the closet? You know what? I’m going to eat. Don’t leave.”

An uncomfortable prickle runs through me at the thought of Echo feeding from someone who isn’t me. My gut tightens with an unfamiliar pang. I liked the way he felt with his body pressed against mine as he held me against the wall.

Something inside me doesn't like the idea of him being that close to anyone else.

The tether pulls tight between us. His cool hands rest against my lower thighs as he leans close. My nose twitches with his fresh scent. He studies me with a look I can't decipher. My chest rises and falls rapidly while his jaw grows tighter.

I've never been territorial over anyone, except Sam, and even that was a recent development.

No matter how badly this situation sucks for me, it has to be even worse for Echo. The town council essentially forced him to be my walking, talking magic reservoir. It's shitty on a level you don't see often in the modern world. He doesn't say a word as his eyebrow arches, as if he's waiting for me to object.

I'd pretty much rather die than admit how much I want to command him to stay. He scoffs, spinning and striding out on long legs.

"Thanks, asshole. You totally promised to feed me if I cooperated," I grumble, tossing myself back into the couch cushion.

Chapter Thirteen

Nadia

My shadows dance out of my skin and set to warding the apartment. I need a sound barrier and a protection ward up immediately.

I don't bother getting up as I pull the pin from my wrist cuff and slice. Blood trickles into smoke and spills out across the room to do its job.

I'm exhausted on a bone-deep level as I heave myself off the couch. I circle the apartment, covering the ground level windows and doors in runes before heading downstairs.

Dipping my finger into the blood of my wrist, I etch the sigils over the wood surrounding the frame of each doorway. There are no windows down here, which makes a lot more sense when I consider it belongs to a vampire.

My skin burns as it knits back together. I'm woozy and exhausted as I face plant onto Echo's bed.

Peeking out the door that leads to the parking lot, I check for anyone shady. Nope, no lingering creeps or stalkers.

My magic urges me forward with a level of insistence that's hard to explain. It's extremely annoying. I need a nap. The strange itch of Warren's compulsion hits when I think of blowing off starting on the ward.

If I have a hope in hell of working on it today, then I need to eat and replenish my energy. I dart down the gravel-lined path and cringe every time the rocks crunch under my feet. Quickly sliding into my car, I head for the diner. Carina went to grab us lunch earlier, but I didn't get to eat.

Echo is a shitty host. There's no food and nothing to drink in his apartment. Well, except for copious amounts of alcohol. Which was tempting, considering this shit show of a day, but it would be empty calories.

North Falls is captivating in its own way. Downtown sidewalks lead to shops, restaurants, and other businesses. The mountains in the background make for a truly beautiful vibe.

A thick forest surrounds the small town. If you keep driving through the city center, you get to a massive lake that's fed by several streams.

The parking lot for the diner is relatively empty as I pull in. My stomach gurgles, and I quickly climb out of the car. The light-headed feeling only gets worse the closer I get to the door. The diner is old, like the rest of the town, but it's not rundown or dirty.

"Sit wherever you'd like," an older waitress says as she eyes me.

Do I look drunk? Possibly.

I stumble toward a booth on the right side of the diner.

Before even sliding onto the bench, I smell the alpha wolf. He gently grabs my shoulders and guides me down the aisle toward the back wall.

I'm carefully shoved into the women's room, and the wolf follows.

"What the fuck happened to you?" he growls in his low, rumbly voice.

"I met your town council," I say before I can stop myself. "What's your name?"

I've had this wolf's blood, but I don't know his name. It's very on par for my life at this point.

“Ridge,” he says, shoving his face into my neck. He’s close to the same place Echo drank from me.

“Nadia,” I reply.

“I know,” he rumbles. “Why do you smell like the council’s errand boy?”

He pulls back and his eyes glow that yellowy-green color.

“He’s supposedly my bodyguard,” I say, swallowing thickly. Telling this wolf any of my secrets is a stupid idea.

“He fucking sucks at his job,” Ridge growls. His warm hand wraps under my bottom. I’m lifted and pulled into his chest. “Drink, you’re tapped out.”

“I just came to grab some lunch. I hear they have a turkey club that’s to die for. I was really looking forward to it before I got roped into that shitty meeting.” I bite my lip to shut myself up. Something about Ridge puts me at ease on a level that’s not okay.

“Drink, little witch. Or I’ll feed you another way.”

I’m not usually all about unapologetic dominance in someone I don’t really know. But damn, it looks good on Ridge. My shoulders pull back as my head shakes.

“I’ll be okay,” I say, but my fangs pop out, so also . . . fuck my life.

“Now,” he barks.

My teeth strike his throat. I moan, wiggling against him as I drink.

Ridge lets out a low growl that signals he’s not displeased with the pain. His hands cup my ass under the hem of my dress.

My back hits a nearby wall, and I whimper against his skin. My tongue dances over his throat, flicking and sucking every available drop as his flesh tries to close around my fangs.

My brain processes that I’m being greedy, and I pull back. The last gush of blood fills my mouth, and I swallow like the

thirsty bitch I am.

Ridge's large frame cages me in, and he grinds his denim-covered erection into my core. "I never had a bite fetish until I met you." His eyes glow with his wolf, and he smirks before diving in to capture my mouth in a filthy kiss.

I have no idea why the hell I'm up against a wall, grinding on the wolf's impressive cock, but I'm also not judging myself too harshly.

I saw that dick; it's something to be smug about. I often use sex as a stress reliever, and I'm fairly sure this wolf would be a damn good fuck.

Ridge holds me with one hand. The wall helps as leverage, keeping me stable while his other hand slides up, untying my dress. The thin lace bra and panty set I put on this morning does little to obscure the view of my goods.

"You're already slick," he growls into my mouth between kisses. I nod mindlessly as the wolf licks his way down my neck until his warm tongue flicks over my lace-covered breast.

The door behind us opens in a flash, and instead of some poor woman who needs to pee, it's Echo. He doesn't look pleased.

Nope, he looks very frustrated.

Yeah, me too, buddy.

To make this moment even more awkward, three wolves follow him inside. The wolves simply look on in shock. Their gaze flicks from me to the vampire to their alpha and back again. I'm not overtly modest, quite the opposite, but I still toss an arm over my tits.

"Out," Ridge barks with every ounce of alpha command.

Two of his enforcers comply, while the third asks, "Are you sure, alpha?"

"Get out," he growls, covering me with his bulky body. Once the very confused wolf exits, the alpha emits a low, feral growl at Echo. "You too, fucker."

“What part of *don't leave my apartment* was difficult for you to comprehend?” Echo completely ignores Ridge.

“I was hungry,” I say petulantly.

“She was stumbling around on empty,” Ridge says as he carefully puts me on my feet. “Do you know how to take care of anyone but yourself?”

Once he's tied my dress, Ridge spins around to glare at Echo.

“I had to top myself off so I could feed her,” Echo says in a bored tone.

“I eat human food, asshole,” I add helpfully. “Before you ambushed me with that disaster of a council meeting, you promised me food if I behaved.” I jab a finger at his chest. “You're a liar.”

The wolf snorts a laugh. His large hand wraps around mine. “Turkey club?”

I nod, biting my lip as I study his handsome face. I have the weird urge to pull my hand up to tease it through his beard.

I make a fist instead. It would be excellent to punch Echo in the balls right about now.

“Let's handle feeding you using the other method,” Ridge says, preparing to walk past Echo.

“Let go of my tether,” Echo hisses.

Ridge's entire body goes rigid. “What?” His eyes bounce between the two of us. The tension in the room ramps up to the point my skin prickles with unease. “You finally found someone stupid enough to break your sire bond with Imogen?”

My eyes bounce between the two men. Oh yeah, they definitely know each other, and these guys are not friends.

“I didn't do anything.” Echo smirks. He didn't do a damn thing to stop it, either. I'm definitely going to punch him in the balls when we're no longer tethered. “The council ordered me to be her vessel.”

“You agreed?” Ridge asks, releasing my hand as he turns to face me.

“I tried to decline. Warren felt very . . . *compelled* to make sure it happened,” I say, glancing away. He suddenly feels as cold and distant as the fucking vampire, who’s still smirking. “I was given zero warning of what I was walking into when I came here, and now I’m stuck until I finish the job.”

“Played the long game and you won,” Ridge says to Echo. His massive hands shove Echo’s chest. “You finally broke the bond to your lunatic sire.”

I frown.

Ridge would have made a much better bodyguard. He’s not as shady as the vampire, and we agree on most things he’s said so far.

“No care or concern for how that affects the poor witch you’ve tied yourself to. Do you think Imogen will let her live? You stupid fuck,” Ridge growls, his eyes turning bright yellowy-green.

Standing around watching the two of them fight is getting me nowhere. If they’re going to go at it in this confined space, then I don’t want to be around to watch it play out.

I push out of the bathroom door and head to the counter to place my order.

I make it to the front and grab one of the menus with a grimace. The sound of fleeing customers fills the restaurant. Over that, Ridge and Echo can be heard fighting and snarling at each other.

“You should definitely bill them for the damages and pad it with bad attitude charges.” I toss a thumb toward the commotion. “That’s what my boss does when anyone fights in the club back home. They aren’t allowed back in until they’ve paid the bill in full.”

The older woman sighs, nodding to my menu. “Do you know what you’d like?”

“Does hanger always turn you into a petulant child?” Echo asks, taking a seat next to me on the couch.

“How many times a week do you get punched in the throat?” I volley.

“Twice today alone,” Ridge assures me as he takes a seat in the chair at my side.

My wards are working; I felt him the instant he tried to enter.

“I have to get to the peaks and start fortifying the ward,” I say. I’m not sure how much of that is the compulsion talking and how much is delusional hope that I’ll survive this town if I’m quick and efficient.

“You’re aware every other blood witch who touched the ward has been brutally murdered?” Ridge’s long blond hair fans around his face as he leans forward, like he’s imparting some secret information.

“Yeah, I heard all about it at the meeting.” I shove my takeout box on the coffee table. “Unfortunately, it doesn’t seem like I’m going to be able to get out of here anytime soon.”

“More compulsion. I should have seen that coming. You’re not going up there alone with fucking Echocio Diamonte,” Ridge growls. His eyes glow with his wolf. “Better known as Echo, because all he knows how to do is echo the fucking council.”

I grimace at that. It’s a horrible nickname once you understand the meaning behind it.

“He literally can’t hurt me,” I gently remind Ridge. His body is coiled with tension, though I have no idea why. Perhaps he doesn’t want me to die until we’ve finished what we started earlier. That’s thoughtful. I wouldn’t mind a good sweaty fuck fest, either.

It would certainly improve the disaster my life has become over the last twenty-four hours.

“My life is intrinsically tied to hers now, mutt. So, you can lose your prejudice and bias against my kind,” Echo says.

The dangerous growl that comes from Ridge makes me jolt. “It’s not your kind, it’s you.” His teeth elongate and his claws grow.

“Leash your beast,” Echo says dismissively.

My dress rides up my thighs as I push myself off the couch. Ridge’s eyes immediately follow the movement, and he bares his teeth at Echo. His clawed hands reach for me, but he’s very careful not to dig into my soft flesh. My knees go on either side of his hips.

I’m a little confused about why this wolf alpha is having such a violent reaction. Maybe he feels like he has to protect me as repayment for saving Brock?

My pussy rests over his cock, and he pulls me to his chest. Bending his head down, he takes a deep breath of my scent at the juncture of my neck. A freshly humanized hand wraps in my hair as he tilts my face, so I have no choice except to stare into his eyes.

“I’ll be accompanying you to the peaks.” Ridge’s tone ensures this fact is not up for negotiation.

“Of course,” I agree. “I’ll take any backup I can get.”

“You’ll not distract her while she works,” Echo says haughtily. “Pace the woods like the animal you are, but do not get in our way.”

Ridge ignores the angry vampire and, instead, pulls my mouth to his for a deep, dirty kiss that mimes mouth fucking. My hips involuntarily roll over his thickening cock. There’s a weird warmth in my chest as his tongue rolls around mine. He’s an excellent kisser, which I’ve found is a great indicator that he’ll be a generous lover.

“You taste so fucking sweet,” Ridge groans, palming the back of my head.

My tits ache as my chest rises and falls in rapid movements.

Echo lets out a grunt behind me. The next thing I know, his cool hands land on my thighs. He lifts me from behind with no problem, zipping us across the room before Ridge has a chance to object.

“Meet us there or don’t,” he says, pausing by the door. “Lock it on your way out, mutt.”

Chapter Fourteen

Nadia

Echo drives much like I'd expect an ancient immortal vampire to drive. He zips around the precarious mountain curves, as though his passenger isn't very much mortal.

"Ridge Hawthorne is an elder," Echo says with zero prompting.

"What?" My mouth does an impressive impression of a fish. "He looks thirty or thirty-five."

"How old do I look?" Echo asks.

Okay, I walked right into that one. Wolves and other shifters do age, though it's much slower than a human. The only exception to that is the literally freaking ancient wolves before they began breeding with humans and watered down the lines. We call those ancients or old-blood wolves.

"Thirty?"

"I was turned at thirty-two. I'm nearly three-hundred and fifty," Echo says with a smirk.

"Sorry." I glance out the window at the winding mountain road. "That's a long time to be tied to that stellar example of a maker."

"Mmm, you've no idea," he says, his voice slipping into an old accent I don't recognize.

"Did you purposely set me up to break your sire bond?"

“You think I have that type of power or sway?” he replies incredulously. “No, Constantine was tired of losing witches. The barrier is on the brink of dissolving. They need you to be successful. Imogen wasn’t pleased that I would be the next guardian. However, she quickly realized that I am the most capable option.”

“She’ll never have that level of control over you again,” I say absently. “I’m sure she’s not going to be very happy about that.”

“I’m Imogen’s greatest failure,” Echo says, shifting gears. The road curves up the mountain, and on the right side, there’s a small pull off that must be the parking lot. Gravel crunches under the car tires as he pulls into a spot. “The only of her progeny that didn’t inherit one of her ancient gifts.” He stares out the window. “Much to her disgust and horror.”

“Fuck her.” Unbuckling my seat belt, I glance down. “I probably should have changed into the hiking attire I brought. You whisked me right out the door. I didn’t even think about it.”

My car is still packed with shit back in the parking lot of Echo’s apartment.

Echo eyes me carefully. “I’ll carry you, it’ll be much quicker.”

“That’s not necessarily a good thing,” I grumble as he appears at my side.

The door quickly opens, and Echo quirks an eyebrow at me. “Come on.”

“I really should have worn pants today,” I mutter as he wraps an arm under my bottom and lifts me out of the vehicle.

“You’re perfect just the way you are, baby darkling,” Echo murmurs against my head as the trail begins to speed by too quickly for me to pick out any identifying landmarks.

“That’s so insulting,” I tell him, trying not to let the pace disorient me.

“What? Why? One of your ancestors definitely fucked a demon. You’ve got demon and witch blood.”

“Yeah, I do know that,” I grumble.

“Then there’s the fact that something about you smells very much like a vampire, even though you’re clearly not. I can hear your heart beating. At first, I assumed it was your blood magic, but I’m beginning to think that’s not the case. Tell me more about that,” he prompts. There’s no compulsion in his words, but for whatever reason, I still feel obligated to answer. Maybe it’s the connection between us. I’m not sure.

“I’m shadowborn, which is obvious. When I turned thirteen, my mother realized I was a blood witch and . . .” I blow out a heavy breath. “Tried to kill me? Actually succeeded? I have no clue. All I know is Uncle Jack found me and brought me back or managed to save me using his blood.”

“He’s a vampire.”

“He is,” I agree. I don’t know why I’m even telling him this story. It’s my most painful memory. Maybe it’s because he was vulnerable about his connection to Imogen. “He couldn’t subdue my mother. It got ugly and . . .” I snuggle into his shoulder as he guides us deeper into the forest. “She died that day instead of me.”

“Shit,” he says, nuzzling his cheek to the top of my head. “So, your uncle killed his sister? Can a witch or warlock be turned into a vampire?”

“Not to my knowledge. I mean, I guess, if you’re willing to take the risk. The higher the percentage of supernatural blood, the larger the chance of dying a painful death rather than being successfully turned. That’s what I was told. Anyway, Uncle Jack isn’t related to me. He was my mom’s friend? Boyfriend? Fuck buddy? Who knows. He was around a lot, but after that, he . . .” I pucker my lips and blow as I try to put it into words.

“He acted in the moment and felt guilty?” Echo offers.

“I think he resented me,” I admit. Shortly after that, Nan moved us to a different town. Eventually, we ended up in

Haven, which incidentally, is where she grew up.

“It wasn’t your fault.” His tone is different, more sincere than I’ve ever heard from him.

“I know.” My gaze moves to our surroundings. It’s a mistake as my eyes register exactly how quickly we’re moving.

“Don’t worry, baby darkling. I’m fully capable of avoiding trees and keeping you safe.” Echo laughs. “Our souls are literally tethered. Isn’t immortality one of the benefits? I mean, outside of having an active vessel?”

My jaw falls. I hadn’t considered that. I honestly don’t know all the details. “But wouldn’t it go both ways? Maybe I could pull energy from you to survive a moderate wound, but if I died, then would you die too?”

“It’s not like they gave me a handbook of what to expect,” he mutters. “Just a very clear statement that, if you fail, we both die. If I fail to protect you, then I’ll cease to exist.”

Well, that’s not exactly comforting, now is it?

Several hours later, I’ve bled my fair share, and Echo has too.

Ridge has prowled the two peaks we’ve completed, but he hasn’t interfered.

“We should’ve started at the farthest mountaintop from the parking lot,” I grumble as Echo lifts me. “That way, when we’re done, we would have been closer to the car.”

“Yes, perhaps,” Echo agrees. “I didn’t realize you’d be worse than a desiccated vampire.”

“It’s not fun work. I learned that real quick. Nan is too honorable for her own good. She volunteered to replenish the ward in Haven. I wasn’t going to sit back and let her do it alone. That was a big mistake.” I’m pouting, but I know Octavia wouldn’t have put me in this situation if she knew what the outcome would be.

I yawn into his chest. He gave me his comfortable knit sweater a while ago because it really is chilly up here, but it's not doing much, and my legs are freezing.

Echo is only in a white button-down, but the cold clearly doesn't bother him like it does me.

The main cornerstone and one of the two runestones are done. I just need to complete this smaller one, and we'll have completed a quarter of the ward. Normally, I would never go this hard, because I've spilled more blood than is healthy, but also, I need to finish this shit fast. People are dying because the ward is failing to keep them out.

"You're like a sleepy kitten," he muses into my hair as he heads up the top of the last peak.

"Get us close to the runestone, and we can just sit this time," I mumble.

"Are you too tapped out to do this?" Echo asks, finally slowing down.

"No, I'm cold because someone didn't let me change into proper mountain climbing attire," I say. He's no warmer than the conditions around us, but it is convenient that he's able to hold me up. I'm close to empty. Not there yet, but after this, I will be.

My mind races as I realize I still have to contact Octavia and get the information about the pregnant woman I'm supposed to check on. I wonder if there's a way to alert her that something is off without breaking any of the rules. A sharp pain jolts through my temples.

"Come on, mutt," Echo calls to the woods off the path. "Perhaps you're needed, after all."

Ridge pads forward and nudges my hand with his snout. It seems really uncool to pet a wolf that's also a shifter, but maybe he's okay with it. His head tilts like he's assessing me.

"I can manage," I assure him.

The utter confusion on his face makes me snort. The giant alpha wolf looking baffled is officially the cutest thing I've

seen in a long time.

Ridge immediately trots off, transforms back into a man, and prowls toward us. I keep my eyes above his very generous alpha package. I'm totally a respectable woman. I nearly snort at the thought. I think blood loss is getting to me.

"Put her down, bloodsucker," Ridge says in his deep tone. My eyes bounce between them as tension radiates around us.

They continue to posture, neither of them willing to blink or look away first. No sane witch wants to be in the middle of a fight for dominance between a wolf and a vampire.

I'm confident they could do significant damage to one another, and I have no interest in being caught in that crossfire.

"He does look kind of warm." I pat Echo's chest to hopefully offset some of the sting of my words.

"She drinks blood too," Echo replies drolly.

"Come here, little witch," Ridge instructs.

My knees wobble a bit as I get used to standing on my own again. The corded muscles of his chest and stomach flex as he holds a hand out to me. His massive shoulders are tight with tension until I'm close enough for him to grab.

"Up you go," Ridge says softly. "Feed."

Once I'm wrapped around his warm chest, I study his handsome face. "I thought wolves didn't care to be fed on."

"They don't," Echo says. "You apparently fall outside of normal parameters for this particular wolf."

"Eat," Ridge says. His eyes glow the yellowy-green color. "Now."

The command in his words leaves me no choice. I don't worry about Echo seeing my baby fangs . . . No, I strike.

"Right," Echo says from a few feet away. "Why did you use the tiny blade if you've got fangs?" He snorts a laugh. "Is that from what we spoke about earlier? An unexpected side effect?"

Ridge growls. “Shut the fuck up.”

“Sure, you can tell me later.” Echo shakes his head and smirks. “Don’t want you talking with your mouth full.”

The warm, rich flavor of alpha blood replenishes me quickly. My teeth retract, and after the skin closes, I lick his flesh clean.

“You’re so warm,” I whisper, kissing his cheek. “Thank you.”

“I’ll hold you for a while,” Ridge rumbles. “To help you keep warm. Your skin is ice-cold.”

“Direct hit,” Echo says, laughing.

Ridge ignores him.

“Can you slice my wrist?” I ask as the wolf walks us over to the runestone.

Ridge complies. He pushes up Echo’s sweater and slices my skin with a sharp claw. My magic immediately buzzes through my system, giving me some relief from the pain. Dark smoke circles the runestone. Dipping my pointer finger into the blood that hasn’t yet turned to smoke, I draw the sigils in a careful pattern.

It takes less than ten seconds for the blood to soak into the stone and evaporate from sight. Now that’s done, it’s just a whole lot of waiting and bleeding.

Ridge takes a seat on one of the polished stone benches that circle the lookout. Echo stands staring out over the edge. The scenery is beautiful. It’s lush and green, and you can tell it’s full of life by the sounds of the forest. My magic can pick out lifeforms or signatures, but I’m currently exhausted. Who cares if there are deer or squirrels watching?

“I suppose I’m on my own for sustenance?” Echo asks coolly.

“Best of luck catching a deer,” Ridge says, his eyes flashing with his wolf.

“Shocking.” Echo takes a seat on the ground near us. “Well, I hope you have enough to fuel her, because I’ve nothing left.”

Ridge is a comfortable pillow. My face nuzzles against his chest, and I don’t judge myself too harshly for enjoying being all up on him. Sure, we just met, but also, I saved his pup’s life, and he’s become a reliable source of food and magic replenishment. Twenty-four hours doesn’t exactly a pattern make, but he seems like a pretty reliable guy.

My heart pangs when I think of Sam.

I can’t help but wonder if he’ll return once I make it back to Haven. It’s a silly thought. I don’t know that I’ll even survive North Falls. The more I obsess about Sam, the more light-headed I feel.

“If I pass out . . .” I mumble. My eyes are heavy. I don’t know if I’ll be able to stay awake. “Just cut me open again. Until I close the runestone, all my magic will flow into it to replenish the ward.”

Ridge grips me tightly as Echo curses.

“Call it if you’re that weak,” Echo says.

“I’m mortal,” I say around a yawn. “I’m not about to die. Just maybe take a nap. I didn’t get much sleep last night, and I drove all day yesterday. I’m exhausted, but I can finish this column.”

My eyes pop open as my magic starts to hum in a way that indicates imminent danger. The strange pulsing going on can’t be confused with anything else.

“Some type of trouble is headed our way,” I murmur as I scan the tree line.

Ridge stands, setting me down on the stone bench. The normally cool stone is warm and pre-heated from Ridge’s body heat. He shifts to his wolf and prowls around, scenting the air. He snarls and howls. I’m not a wolf expert or anything, but I’m sincerely hoping that call is for reinforcements.

“I’m drained,” Echo hisses. “What a fucking disaster. I’m actually thankful to have the beast as backup.”

“You can have the little bit I can spare,” I tell him, shoving my still bleeding wrist at his face.

Echocio studies me intently for a few seconds. “I’ll manage. I’m much more difficult to kill. You truly trust me to keep you alive?”

I shrug. “You said that we’re teammates. I tend to trust people until they give me a reason not to.” I mean, he kind of has, but I don’t have a lot of options at the moment.

Echo pulls my wrist to his mouth and takes several small pulls of blood. The cuts today are nowhere near as drastic as the gashes I needed to heal Brock. Echo groans. His tongue flicks over his teeth and his eyes flash white.

“Such a contrast to the master I’ve served for three-and-a-half centuries.” He runs a cool finger over my cheek. “I told you, we’re a team. Try to protect yourself while I kill a few brazen demons.” He rolls up the cuffs on his shirt, like he’s about to have dinner and doesn’t want to risk staining his sleeves. The dark tattoos lining his forearm flex as he moves. I’m strangely transfixed by the way his veins pop out. “And I guess a few vampires interested in meeting their final death.”

My ears are weak in comparison to Echo’s and Ridge’s. I don’t pick up the sound of the pounding feet until they’re nearly on top of us. The horde of lesser demons spills out of the forest several seconds later, and the putrid smell follows.

Ridge viciously attacks. He mauls an envy demon with brutal efficiency. It’s small and malformed, but its teeth are horrifying. There are at least two dozen demons heading for us.

Echo moves too fast to register, but I do see the bodies fall as he finishes them off.

My magic pulses again, and instead of focusing on the tree line, it’s focused on the cliff. I spin around in time to see three higher demons climb over. I try to hit them with a pulse of wind, but my magic is unable to do anything to help.

The runestone hasn't been closed.

Fuck my life.

My fangs pop out, but honestly, they're more embarrassing than anything. I've got the world's tiniest pair of incisors. They just happen to be pointy at times.

"Want to switch?" I call over my shoulder to Echo. He's at my side in an instant. "I don't suppose you have some type of weapon you can give me?"

Echo snorts, shaking his head at me. That's not cool. Laughing derisively when I ask for a weapon to help with the fight is the opposite of helpful. If we don't die, I'm definitely punching him in the throat for that.

Echo and one of the higher demons circle each other. They go at it as I carefully meander toward the runestone. My magic aches to fight. My wounds have sealed themselves, so I'm not losing any extra energy, but I'm not able to aid them until I do the closing runes.

Ridge comes out of nowhere, tackling a demon on my right side. He's still in wolf form, and I glance away as he rips out the demon's throat.

Blood splatters everywhere as Ridge pounces on the next demon. My magic finally perks up, turning the spilled energy to smoke to help with the ward.

Holy shit, that guy was far too close. What the hell is up with my magic? It can't even give me a heads-up? Apparently not. I'm baffled by what has changed recently.

I'm probably not helping matters. I have yet to do anything right since getting to this town.

This particular disaster, I'm blaming on Echo. I'm not dressed appropriately at all. I need my boots. They've got a spell to hide my daggers. I'm in flipping sandals right now.

If you're going to wear a dress, at least dress up and go for stilettos. A stiletto to the eye will stop someone in their tracks. A high heel to the cock? That's how you make them turn tail and run the other direction.

I mentally add *order more high heels* to my to-do list. I need to get to the column, so I can close the circuit and conjure something.

I'm only five feet away from the stone when a huge, black, furry arm appears at my side. It blocks my face from something.

A garbled cry comes from the creature attached to the arm. It's a bigfoot. One of the few left in this world, and he just saved my life. There's an arrow protruding from his arm, and the spiky end is only inches away from my face. Wow, that tip is super pointy. It made it all the way through his forearm, and I'm pretty sure his skin is stronger than mine.

"Thank you." My eyes meet his. His face is humanoid but covered in dark fur. He's one of the fae that live on this side of the veil. All the yeti and bigfoot are. He'll have a human form, and his monster form is what I'm seeing now.

He nods, accepting my appreciation.

"You saved my life," I tell him as the battle rages behind us. My magic swarms back to me, but that apprehensive feeling I get when someone means me harm is absent.

"Mate dying." It sounds like a weird shriek, like all bigfoot in monster form. "Need help."

My heart stalls. Please tell me this isn't the woman I originally came to North Falls to help. It doesn't matter. Either way, he just saved my life, meaning I owe him big time.

"Okay," I agree, pulling my shoulders back. "We have to get to the runestone. If I don't close the circuit, my magic will continue to flow here to strengthen the ward. It won't matter how far away I am."

"Got it," he says.

A huge bird the size of a full-size truck flies over the peak.

I shiver, taking a step back.

"Holy shit," I whisper. I've never seen one in person, but thunderbirds are terrifying. Electric blue lightning shoots from its eyes and mouth, connecting to its wings.

“Okay,” I hiss. “Please let that guy be on our side.”

It could be a lady thunderbird, but honestly, it’s massive even for its species . . . so, yeah, I’m going with it being a guy. I learned about them through books and pictures. Those images did not do them justice.

“Friend,” the hairy man says.

He’s still got an arrow through his forearm. He lifts me with little difficulty in his injured arm and stomps to the runestone before placing me back on my feet.

It’s pandemonium as Ridge growls and snarls.

Vampires and demons attack all around us. The bigfoot viciously fends off the ones who get close. I’m drawing the closing pattern on the runestone when the thunderbird swoops down, scooping up someone from directly behind me.

That was also way too close for comfort.

The curved beak of the thunderbird’s mouth digs into the throat of a demon before he’s quite unceremoniously tossed over the rocky ledge of the mountain.

Echo curses from somewhere in the melee.

“Friend,” the bigfoot says.

I don’t know who he’s talking to, but I spin around and yell, “I’m ready.”

My shadows dance over the fae and, once again, my magic believes he’s not a threat. It’s been acting wonky lately, but it’s never failed me in some way I couldn’t come back from.

The thunderbird is another shifter, but I believe they’re elven in nature. The magicals are truly incredible to see in person. The massive bird flies low in the clouds. Lightning pours into his wings in bluish-white streaks that would have devastating effects on any other creature.

“Nadia,” Echo growls from behind me. It very much sounds like a warning.

“We should go while he’s still busy.” I give a nod to the bigfoot. “Quickly, because he’s going to be really pissed.”

The fae picks me up and barrels off the side of the freaking mountain.

Okay, so he saved my life only to kill us both? That was a terrible plan.

“Brant,” he says, patting my back. He’s still got a damn arrow poking out of his arm. So, it’s not exactly comforting, but I appreciate the effort.

“Nadia,” I choke out. “I don’t want to die today, Brant.”

“Won’t,” he says in the weird shriek that is his voice. He runs, weaving in and out of trees. The forest seems to shake around us as he lumbers down the steep mountainside.

Branches and twigs scratch against my skin as we move. Turning my head, I glance to see where we’re headed.

I really wish I hadn’t.

He runs toward the edge of a steep drop-off and . . . *jumps*.

Chapter Fifteen

Nadia

We're in the air for several long seconds before the thunderbird catches us. He holds on to the bigfoot in a move that has to hurt. His talons are sharp and jagged, but if the bigfoot feels any pain, he doesn't show it.

Air beats against my face as we fly, and I try to remind myself that his mate is in trouble. They won't let me die, because they need me alive. My magic isn't worried that they're a threat. It was very clear about those demons and vampires. They intended to harm me.

We fly for several long minutes before beginning to descend. My stomach flip-flops as we plummet toward the ground. When we land, my teeth gnash together, and my brain feels like it rattles around my skull.

The ground shakes as the thunderbird touches down in the clearing about twenty feet in front of where he dropped us. Fae and elven magic works differently than how shifters transform from their animal form. One second, I'm looking at a giant bird, and the next, a giant puff of black smoke dissipates to reveal a slender man with black hair and glasses.

"Hurry." He pivots and runs into the woods without waiting for us.

Brant, the bigfoot, takes off with me still in his arm. Fifty yards into the forest, the lights from a small house become visible. The closer we get, I can make out a collection of fae and elves standing around the cabin. They're all tall and slender, a trait of both their kinds.

Brant runs for the door and the crowd parts. He sets me on my feet and transforms into his human form.

Okay, so that's just bizarre.

In human form, he's slender, with blondish-red hair.

I would not have accurately guessed him out of a lineup. That's for damn sure. Well, not unless he had that arrow protruding from his forearm, which he definitely still does.

The cabin is lit with a warm yellowish glow that spills out the windows. It's a modest home, and the thunderbird doesn't hesitate before opening the door and heading inside.

My magic pulses wildly and my fingertips tingle.

"Oh, shit," I hiss.

I don't hesitate or wait to be invited inside.

There's a beautiful woman on some type of bed or cot, right inside the living room, and she's dying. Her face is so pale that it's clear she's not going to last long. One brownie has her face buried under a sheet, giving the poor woman some modesty, and trying to stop the massive amount of blood flow. Two others stand aside, rocking a set of freshly born babies.

Oh, fuck!

This is significantly worse than I expected.

First time dads are often overly dramatic, but not this time.

"Everyone needs to bleed," I say, spinning to make eye contact with the thunderbird. "Nadia. You are?"

"River Belfort." He slices his inner wrist.

Okay, fuck me. The Belforts are the line of elven royalty.

River grimaces. "Octavia couldn't reach you, but she said you were in town. We spent the last half hour searching for you. Please save her."

"You need to bleed too," I tell Brant. "And maybe a few of your guests outside."

Brant doesn't hesitate. He rips the arrow out of his wrist. It makes a grizzly sound as it tears through his flesh and maybe bone. Spinning around, he marches to the door. "Bleed for your queen," Brant snarls.

A shiver runs down my spine. He's not my king, or even my alpha, but the command in his voice almost has me spilling blood that I can't afford to lose at the moment. My hand cups the brownie's shoulder, and I gently pull her back.

"They're beautiful, Milania. You're going to be fine," River says to the woman. He leans over and brushes a kiss on her forehead. "You'll hold them soon."

My lip wobbles, watching the intimate moment, but also . . . no pressure, right?

I don't ask for permission; my magic is insistent that there isn't time for pleasantries or even questions of consent. Normally in Haven, I use a dye that's been saturated in drops of my blood. It helps keep the true nature of my magic hidden, but there's no time for that.

River growls as I bunch the sheet, baring her middle, but keep her lower half covered. I'm light-headed as I draw runes across her stomach. I don't want to know whose blood I'm touching, but my magic ensures my finger stays wet with someone's lifeblood as I work.

The gatherers must have heeded their king's request, because a potent buzz of energy hits me square in the chest. My hand lands over Milania's heart, and I focus on pouring all that excess life energy back into her. I have no idea why her body isn't healing.

"Is she human?" My eyes bug as I blink at River. Fuck, how did I forget that very important fact?

"Aye, she is," Brant says from behind me. "Does that change things?" His tone is ice cold.

I go rigid.

I thought I'd be seeing her in a midwife capacity and maybe help by magically encouraging the babies to come out if they were getting too large for her to carry and deliver

safely. I've never had a life-or-death emergency with one of my human patients.

I need help.

More specifically, I need Nan. She always manages to stay calm even under the direst of circumstances.

Glancing over my shoulder at Brant, I say, "I honestly don't know. I've never used my magic on a human, not outside of fertility magic. I promise I'll do my best . . ."

He nods and moves to his mate's other side.

A dark swirling mass appears at the door to the cabin.

My jaw falls as I glance from the new mother to the reaper standing in the doorway.

That's a really bad sign.

"*Hell*, no." I spit the words before I can stop myself. My magic yanks me across the room, and I'm drawing sealing runes before the grim can fully manifest. "You're not needed here. See yourself right the fuck back to wherever you came from."

A low, raspy chuckle fills the air as a pair of white irises flash in the space right outside the still open door. My instincts scream that my magic isn't enough to keep him out if he wants to make it inside. Ripping the pin out of my bracelet, I slice my skin and redraw the runes a second time. This time, I add a protection rune to all three sides. I'd do the floor, but I don't think taking my eyes off him is smart.

The white eyes flash before darkening to a shade blacker than night. My magic still flows to Milania, but my focus is on the reaper.

"How do you know she's worth saving?" a low, growly voice asks. "She could be a murderer."

"She could," I agree. I don't blink as I stare into the spot I'm sure holds a pair of dark eyes that burn back at me in return. "That doesn't matter today."

“Ah, I see. You’ve claimed her soul already,” the masculine voice says, his tone lined in humor.

“No. I’m not that kind of witch.” But I am, aren’t I? Echo is tethered to me as my vessel. Maybe not willingly, but I’m already teetering a little too close to the edge of going dark.

“Are you sure you wish to take my meal?” the reaper asks. His tone is oddly melodic, and I still can’t blink. Why does he feel so familiar?

My magic doesn’t seem as enamored. It lines my voice when I speak. “Find another meal. You’ll not reap here.”

Silence fills the air as my magic pulses.

Is my magic seriously posturing against a grim reaper right now? This town has destroyed my self-preservation skills.

My heart races as I stare into the black abyss of the grim’s eyes.

Finally, a faint shadow of the hood covering his head nods. “I will not,” he replies. “It’s been too long since someone stared straight into my true eyes and didn’t flinch.”

The trance fades away as I take a heavy step back. My feet and arms feel like lead weights as I stagger.

“You’re spent. No matter how much blood they shed, it won’t matter. You won’t be able to save her,” the reaper says in a level tone. “And yet, I feel I must honor your commitment.” I can practically hear the smirk in his tone. “Tell me, is she that important to you?” His head tilts like he’s appraising me.

“I lost my mother when I was young. Those two won’t even have the chance to remember her if she doesn’t make it,” I whisper, swallowing around the lump that’s formed in my throat. “I’m committed to doing everything I can.”

A claw manifests from the long, flowing robe. A pale palm appears from the other sleeve, and the reaper slices his flesh. Barely three drops of blood drip from the wound before it seals. My fangs descend and my tongue reflexively runs over them.

The reaper takes a step forward as his hood rises. He pushes through the protection barrier of the door with little effort.

I swallow thickly as my chin tilts in the air. This could go very badly.

My heart races, which is likely sending my blood out dangerously fast.

“Next time you need us, don’t wait until it’s dire to make the call,” he murmurs, swiping his blood over my lips. My tongue flicks out, lapping it up. The taste slams into me with the force of a freight train, but it’s the level of his power that has me stumbling back. I stagger my way over to Milania. My head spins around, and it’s then I realize everyone except for me is frozen in place. They aren’t blinking or breathing.

The reaper is gone.

I ignore the utter fucking craziness of what just happened and again draw runes over the new mother’s skin.

Healing, health, life.

A strange urge inside me isn’t satisfied with simply healing her womb. I repeat the pattern over her forehead, her heart, each arm, and her legs. As I finish, my hands fall to the bed. I grip tight to keep from keeling over.

Being a conduit for the blood everyone else is spilling doesn’t normally take my energy, but it’s almost more than I can handle at the moment.

A light popping fills the air and time seems to start. A baby cries, and the low murmuring of River’s voice fills the air as he reassures his mate. Her heartbeat stalls, and for five long seconds, I hold my breath.

How did I fuck this up?

Oh god, tell me I didn’t accidentally draw the rune for flatulence in my half-delirious state. Oh, well. She just gave birth to two babies. If she’s gassy, then these motherfuckers better grin and bear it.

If she wakes up at all.

This is not good.

It's a very serious moment, but I deflect with humor whenever possible. It's a defense mechanism. You don't survive nearly being murdered by your own mother without developing some very questionable coping skills.

It's several agonizing seconds of pure silence before her heartbeat begins to pound.

My magic pulses with excitement as the slow, steady thump turns into a racing cadence. Oh *fuck*, that's not right either. A human heart beats on the slower end of the spectrum in comparison to species like wolves and fae.

A low, feral growl sounds outside the cabin. My tether to Echo snaps tight in my chest. My hand flies to rub away the radiating pain. He's here and he's *furious*.

My shadows form a coffin-like shape around Milania.

Maybe I could try to escape while they're watching to see what will happen next? My hand clenches the sheet as my other falls to keep myself upright.

Come on. She really needs to be okay, but there are no guarantees.

I'm in the dark as much as they are.

Commotion outside draws my attention, and I stagger to the doorway. Several fae and elven males are blocking Echo and Ridge from coming any closer.

"For fuck's sake. We're all on the same team here," I call out to the men involved in the testosterone pissing match.

A sharp gasp fills the air behind me, and I spin around in time to see Milania sit straight up. Her lips are a deep rosy color, and her cheekbones are slightly more pronounced, but it's the pointed ears that send my heart racing in my chest.

Holy fucking shit.

She's fae.

That was not my doing.

I'm not getting blamed for this.

Not today, Satan. Not today.

That's the last coherent thought I have before everything goes black.

Chapter Sixteen

Ridge

Ten Minutes Earlier

Being immortal isn't the gift many humans would believe, especially when you're an ancient shifter who's spent lifetimes waiting to find their mate.

I long ago gave up hope, and that was prior to females of my kind growing rarer. I've lived a life of relative isolation and celibacy for so long that my reaction to the little witch immediately made me suspicious.

For fuck's sake, my wolf thinks her miniature fangs are adorable. Wolves and vampires are often cliché in our distaste for one another. She's not a vampire, that much is clear. She's got a heartbeat and a similar body temperature to any other human or witch.

Her coming here was clearly a setup. North Falls is so far outside of a tourist destination that I'm surprised delivery trucks still manage to bring necessities regularly. I'm sure the council's compulsion has something to do with it.

"I can't believe she took off with Brant," Echo says indignantly. "It's like she's desperate for my palm on her ass."

"Try it, and I'll decapitate you," I growl, stomping through the woods after him in human form.

I don't know what the fuck that was back there, but even thinking about the creature sends an uncomfortable shiver down my spine. I've seen a lot during my thousands of years, but that shit was disturbing.

“Hey guys, thanks for waiting around for your teammate,” an eerie voice says, appearing beside Echo.

The vampire spins, hissing and swiping with his claws, but the creature turns to smoke.

I barely hold back the snicker, but again, whatever the hell that is creeps me out too. I likely would've had a similar reaction.

The shadowy demon from the peak forms from nothing. He's wearing jeans with no shirt. I think. It's hard to tell with the smoky lines appearing and shifting.

“That was uncalled for. We all have the same goals. I mean, I think we do. Would you like to explain why your soul is tethered to my witch?” he asks.

“Who the fuck are you?” I growl before my wolf feels the need to clarify. “She's not *yours*. She's *mine*.”

“Nadia has been busy.” He chuckles. “I'm Knight, resident sin eater, at your service. Well, not yours, but Nadia's, so I'm thinking that's the same thing at this point.” His hair bounces as he nods.

“Make fucking sense when you speak.” Echo rolls his shoulders back, continuing in the direction of Brant and River's cabin.

“I asked you a question.” Knight flickers into shadows and reappears in front of Echo. “Why the hell are you soul-bound to my witch?”

Echo doesn't say a word. His head tilts, and his dark hair falls over his forehead as he glares at the sin eater.

“She's not your witch,” I growl. Clearly, she's mine. The fact that's all I can seem to focus on is mildly alarming, but my claws still elongate, showing my wolf's displeasure.

Knight's face contorts into a frown as he twists his head, like he's listening to something. “Right, she's going to need you, chop chop.” He becomes more transparent, but it's clearly his back that's facing our direction as he heads off at a rapid pace.

“I wasn’t aware sin eaters truly exist. I thought them nothing more than lore and fanciful stories.” Echo spins to face me with wide eyes. “We might just survive the council yet.”

“Don’t get your hopes up,” I mutter, stomping to follow the unknown demon. “Just because he helped us eliminate a horde of lesser demons and a few newly turned vamps doesn’t mean he won’t stab us in the back at the first opportunity.”

“Fair enough.” Echo keeps pace at my side.

I miss a step as Knight disappears from in front of us. A warm breath fans over my neck from behind a millisecond later. “I’d never be so petty. That witch is going to be carrying my little demonic babies before you know it. I would never kill her mate. That would piss her off. I’d simply allow the next attack to be successful.”

“That’s comforting,” I snort, jogging toward the cabin. I transform in mid-air, purposely allowing my paws to dig into the sand as I pivot.

“Bloody fucking wanker,” Echo says.

“The human realm is delightfully entertaining,” Knight says, but his voice comes from in front of me, not behind.

It’s clear he’s a formidable opponent. We’d best watch him carefully.

Which won’t be troublesome at all, considering he turns to fucking shadow.

Nadia passes out while I’m too far away to reach her. Echo makes a similar grab, but he stumbles when he sees she’s cradled to the chest of a reaper.

My wolf isn’t afraid of death, nor am I. There were many years where dying felt like a respite we’d never taste.

We continue, passing Echo. “Give her to me,” I growl. I try to will away my fangs and claws, but I’m still mid-

transformation from my beast to human form.

“She likely won’t wake for hours.” The reaper brushes his lips over her forehead. It’s a strangely intimate move that sends a shiver of unease down my spine.

“Don’t hurt my mate.” It comes out as more of a plea than has crossed my lips in centuries.

“How many times do I have to repeat myself?” Knight mutters. “That’s Wraith, and believe it or not, we’re all on the same team.”

“What team is that?” Echo asks quietly.

“The one where we keep Nadia safe and fill her full of our spawn.” Wraith nods, but it’s his deadpan delivery that has me taking a step back. My wolf has the opposite reaction. He wants her full of our pups, but he’s not big on sharing. “What? You want the same.” He looks at Knight, who chuckles.

“Yes, but they aren’t used to your crazy. You’re going to scare them away.” Knight crosses long, thin arms over his bare chest. He has straight blond hair to his shoulders and a slender frame similar to Echo’s. Despite the curved horns, he’s very humanoid at the moment. Whatever the fuck he turned into while we were fighting is the shit of nightmares.

“I’m not crazy. I’m protective,” the reaper says so indignantly that Echo snorts, swiping a hand over his face. “I’ve even mostly stopped stalking her over the last year. We only interact now when she knows about it.”

My beast perks up. He likes the idea of hunting the little witch, especially of watching her when she’s unaware.

“How is this possible?” River says.

All four of our eyes fly to Milania.

“That’s going to be a problem.” Knight raises his eyebrows at Wraith.

The reaper still cradles Nadia to his chest, but he raises a hand, snapping. Everything in the room freezes, except for the four of us and, possibly, Nadia. It’s impossible to tell with her passed out.

“Holding time is going to drain me faster than I want to leave her.” Wraith sighs heavily.

“What the fuck?” Echo studies the very still Milania. “Did you do this?”

“Do what?” I move closer, checking her out with renewed interest, since everyone seems concerned.

“Does it not bother you being butt-ass naked, with your cock swinging?” Knight snorts, swiping a hand over his face.

“No,” I say simply. My nose twitches as I approach, but it’s the elongation of Milania’s face and the pointed ears that have me staggering back a step. “She was human.”

“Yes, well, now she’s not.” Wraith shrugs.

“How is that possible?” Echo leans over, sniffing her. “She smells full-blooded.”

“Yes,” Wraith agrees.

“How?” I snarl, spinning to face him.

“That is distracting,” Wraith says to Knight, but he nods to my nude form.

Shifters are completely confident in our bodies.

“Every group needs one barbarian.” Knight laughs, gesturing at me. “He’s also vicious as *fuck* in beast form. So there’s that.”

“Thank you.” I give him a nod of appreciation.

“Jesus Christ, I’m surrounded by idiots,” Echo mutters. “Answer the question of how that human woman is now a fae female.”

“It wasn’t either of us, but I think you know that.” Knight raises his eyebrows.

I glare at him. I know nothing of the sort.

The infuriating asshole shrugs.

“Blood witches are rare.” Wraith nuzzles his cheek to the top of Nadia’s head. “They’re often the mouthpiece for the gods, or possibly evolution, depending on how you choose to

view it.” He shrugs. “Who knows why. It’s a myth that they’re all inherently bad or drawn to dark magic. What is blood but a conduit of life?”

“Stop talking in riddles!” Echo snarls, spinning in a circle with his hands behind his head.

“I was trying to be plain. Omegas died out of the monster community in the human realm many hundreds of years ago. Did no one correlate that to the mass extermination of blood witches?” Wraith glances between me and Echo. “Really? It’s a widely known theory in Hell.”

“Gods,” I mutter.

“If they exist, I’d assume they’re very pissed at their creations for upsetting the balance of nature. Nadia isn’t the only blood witch in existence, but she is one of several hundred that have started popping up within the last few decades.” Wraith gives her a fond smile. “Fertility witches can’t activate dormant omega genes, especially since they’ve been watered down for multiple generations, but blood witches can.”

“You’re saying Milania had dormant fae DNA?” Echo asks.

“I’d imagine so. Otherwise, I don’t see how that transformation could have been successful,” Wraith says.

“They did immediately claim her as their mate.” I eye River and Brant. They fell in love the moment they scented her. I attributed it to loneliness, but perhaps they picked up on something the rest of us missed.

“Omegas always gave birth to one of each of their mate’s species. Well, as long as that partner contributed DNA at the time of conception,” Echo says.

I don’t have the first clue what that means. Maybe I *am* a barbarian. I scratch my jaw. I guess they mean one of those babies belongs to Brant and one to River. That’s kind of cool. I bet they’ll be pleased.

My wolf perks up in my mind. He’s not opposed to the idea of pups. He’s less convinced he’d be okay with our

offspring sharing a womb with a couple of demons. I snort. It sucks to be Echo in this situation. He won't ever be able to reproduce.

"We're fading." Wraith waves a hand at me from where it rests on Nadia's hip. "You'll need to take her."

"Make it clear to everyone here today that, if they value what she did, they should keep their fucking mouths shut. The new fae should stay home and heal and *not* expose her new transition to anyone who doesn't already know about it." Knight moves over to Wraith's side. He brushes his lips over Nadia's cheek in a move that signals tender familiarity. "We'll see you soon, doll. Don't wait so long to call for us the next time you need us." He runs his hand over her hair.

"How exactly do you know Nadia?" Echo asks at the same time as the reaper speaks.

"I already reminded her of that," Wraith says. He steps around Knight, offering me the slumbering witch. He pats my shoulder. "Only she can summon us across the veil. Unless we're reaping, the only way we can reach her is when she calls for us."

"But how do you know her?" I growl, rocking her against my chest. It's totally a bizarre thing to do, but now that she's in my arms, a warmth I'm not expecting fills my entire being.

"She won't remember that part until we're together permanently. It's a protection for her when we aren't around to keep her safe," Knight says cryptically.

"But you know each other well?" Echo grinds out, obviously frustrated with all the secrecy.

"Well enough to kill anyone who hurts her," Knight says.

"I refused to reap her soul the first time we met." Wraith bends close to kiss her forehead. "Make sure they understand what's at stake." His eyes fly to the frozen occupants of the room. "I'll slaughter every single inhabitant of this town if they do anything to endanger my mate."

"Fuck," Echo mutters. "Do you think I need to compel them? It might be ineffective, especially on Brant and River."

I scoff. “Try putting a little faith in monster kind. Manipulation will gain you no loyalty.”

“I like the wolf.” Wraith seems to blink out of existence right before my eyes. Sound returns a second later, and it’s jarring, now that I can recognize how completely silent it was.

“Okay, that’s weird as fuck,” Echo says, shaking his head.

My eyes fly to River. He’s technically their pack leader. “I need to speak to you.”

“Of course.” He kisses Milania and nods to one of the rooms off the living room.

“Sure, head off naked for an important conversation.” Echo snorts. “Shifters are so bizarre.”

“Would you hold her? I don’t want to wake her while we speak.” I move closer, and Echo takes her out of my arms. It’s difficult to convince myself to let her out of my sight.

“You better pray he has no spies from the council,” Echo mutters, nuzzling his cheek to the top of Nadia’s head. I’m unsure if he’s speaking to her or us, but the look on his face makes it clear he’s fond of her.

“My people are loyal to no one above me.” River’s chin tilts in the air, looking and sounding like every bit the king he is.

Echo sighs, but he doesn’t follow us out. I hear him place himself down on the couch as I formulate the best way to convince the elven king it’s in their best interest to keep all of this between us.

Many people in North Falls know where Echo lives. The same cannot be said for myself. He puts up a minimal fight, enough that he can assure the council he tried to bring her back to somewhere they regularly monitor, but he doesn’t physically fight me for her.

My house isn't huge, but the view definitely makes it worth it. It's on the edge of pack lands, right on the lake. I get to watch incredible sunsets every night.

I'm far enough away from the pack house that no one visits without a purpose. I might be *an* alpha, but I'm not *the* alpha. Fuck all that noise. I've never had any interest in leading a pack. I leave that to my little brother and have for too many years to count.

Echo stands, leaning against the wall as I place Nadia in the middle of my bed.

"I need to shower off the dirt and blood," I inform him. "Don't leave her until I get back."

He sighs, but nods.

It takes me less than five minutes to shower, but I tie up my hair before getting in. Man or not, no one is taking a three-minute shower with hair to their shoulders. I dry off, anxious as hell to climb into my bed next to the little witch.

As I'm about to join her, my eyes fly back to the dresser. Is it appropriate to snuggle completely nude? For shifters, it is. She's unconscious. I also don't want her to be afraid when she wakes up in an unfamiliar place. I head over, grabbing a thin pair of sweatpants and yank them on before crawling into the bed behind her.

"You may want to remove her sandals." Echo gestures as I prepare to pull the blanket up over the two of us.

I flip him off but slide down to handle that. Her skin is cold against mine, but I always run hotter than humans or witches. Not that I've been around many of her kind.

My wolf is intrigued by her pink toenails. I run my thumb down the soft skin on the top of her foot. His interest in everything to do with her is slightly concerning.

Then again, we did call her our mate earlier. I've waited for so long that I no longer feel confident in my ability to differentiate. It has been a very long time since I've wanted anyone, though it significantly diminishes the word to describe

what I feel for her as wanting. Yearning might be a better descriptor.

No, it was likely just in the heat of the moment.

Keep dreaming. Okay, my wolf is confident she's our mate. She's a beautiful woman. Any male would be lucky to have her by his side.

"I'm tapped out, which I'm sure you know." Echo raises an eyebrow.

"Not happening," I grunt, snuggling up to Nadia's luscious ass. My hand slides over her dress as I bury my face in her hair. How is it she never smells like blood? You'd think she'd end up stained in the scent from all the bleeding she did today, but even when she was sliced open, I could barely pick it up.

"If she's anything like a drained vampire, then she'll heal faster if she can nurse while she sleeps." Echo pulls his foot down from where it was resting against the wall. "Just a tip. Take it, or don't." He's gone faster than my eyes can register in human form. Normal wolves don't register heat signatures, or in the case of a vampire, cool spots, but shifters do. My eyesight in human form is superior to a normal person, witch, or fae, but nowhere close to when I'm shifted.

My head tilts as I wait to hear proof that he's actually leaving. The door opens and clicks closed behind him.

My entire home is going to smell like death from the bloodsucker. My wolf chuffs his annoyance and possibly a reminder that the little witch has fangs. She's not dead, though, nor is she undead.

Whatever. I truly couldn't care less what they call themselves.

Nadia grunts in her sleep, wiggling her ass against my cock. I curse under my breath, staring at the ceiling. It's going to be a long fucking night.

The fact that she's short sure is convenient. I wrap my left arm around the top of her head and transform a single finger into a claw before bringing my right wrist to her mouth.

I barely slice the skin, but Echo was correct. Nadia lunges forward. Her fangs dig into my wrist as she laps at the blood. It appears she's still asleep. It's very cute.

A low rumble of satisfaction leaves my chest. We like caring for our mate.

Nadia lets out a contented sigh as I stare at the roof.

It's the little mewls and whimpers that she releases over the next several hours that solidify the fact.

I'm totally fucking fucked.

Chapter Seventeen

Nadia

I'm hot as hell, and there's a hard dick nestled perfectly between my ass cheeks. It's trying to push my thong straight up into my skin. Wiggling my hips just a bit repositions the tip perfectly against my lower lips. That's much more enjoyable. I grind a little, sucking in a shocked gasp when my eyes fly open.

I'm in an unfamiliar bed with a very hard body wrapped around mine. My mouth is dry, but the unmistakable metallic taste of blood lingers.

This isn't good.

Memories of the last couple of days fly back, and I exhale in pure relief.

It's Ridge.

I'm in Ridge's bed.

I reasonably trust him. Not that I know much, but he hasn't tried to kill me yet. That's one step up from pretty much everything else in this town.

I've got plenty of experience sneaking out after a one-night stand. The majority of partners I've snuck out on were humans, or monsters who didn't give a fuck and didn't want the trouble of kicking me out in the morning.

Ridge either has extremely thick curtains, or it's the middle of the night. I'm not sure where we are. Running would likely be stupid, since I'm pretty sure I'm on pack lands.

It's a slow process disentangling myself from the cuddly wolf in human form. My bare feet hit wood flooring, but I can't help myself. I gawk at his muscular frame like I have the right. Blond hair falls around his face as he sleeps silently. He looks oddly peaceful with his lashes falling over his tan cheeks. He has on a pair of sweatpants that hang low on his hips and, even unconscious, his muscles are evident.

Okay, way to be a total lady perv. I shake myself out of the trance that his incredible body pulled me into.

It's dim in the room, but my eyes are adjusted enough that I make it to the door without any trouble.

The only problem? I don't know where I'm going. My cell phone is either still in Echo's vehicle, or I have no idea, but it's not here.

This is a major problem of my generation. I know exactly three numbers by heart. The rest, I only vaguely recognize when they pop up with someone's picture as I answer a call. It's the middle of the night, but Nan is old school. She answers any call from any number. She also doesn't lock her front door, but that's another story, considering the house is warded.

I make it to the end of the hallway and a long, straight set of stairs that leads to the first floor. Nan's house is old like this one, and the wood floors creak when you hit certain steps, no matter how carefully you put your weight down. She owned that house in Haven before I was ever born, but when my grandpa died, she left and didn't go back until we needed somewhere to settle after everything happened with my mom.

As my fingers slide down the cool wood of the banister, I'm fully expecting Echo to pop out or Ridge to come stomping down the hallway.

The living room is spacious and has a fireplace that isn't lit. Moving past that, I catch sight of the kitchen. Most people I know don't have house phones. We don't need them, since we're glued to our cells at all hours. However, I dance around in pure excitement, or possibly relief, when I spot a corded telephone hanging on the wall next to the fridge. It only takes

me a few more seconds to realize that having a phone isn't a guarantee there will be service, but I'm still going to try.

I open the fridge and frown because there's no bottled water. There are three different kinds of beer and several brands of soda. None are diet, so I grab one at random and carefully pop the top. The cracking fizz makes me freeze as I tilt my head, trying to see if I can catch any movement.

My ears are weak compared to a supernatural's, but the house is basically silent. I'm pretty sure I'd hear someone coming. I close the fridge, taking a long sip of the sugary soda, and pad over to the phone.

I place the can down on the counter, and my hands shake as I make a grab for the handheld device.

This model feels like it's circa the 1990s, but there's a dial tone when I bring it to my ear. It's the style with the numbers on the receiver, so I pull it away to type in Nan's number.

It begins to ring, and my eyes dart around, looking for anything to focus on. I cringe a little when I spot the numbers on the stove clock. It's almost three in the morning.

"I wondered when I would hear from you," Nan says, answering the call. "How are you, my dear?"

"I-I'm . . ." My voice stalls as I realize I can't say any of the things I want to. Warren and his stupid compulsion. "I love you."

"Oh, sweetheart. I love you, too." She sighs. "Tell me about your day."

"Did you see it?" I ask with a quaver in my voice I can't shake.

Nan and I are a team. I love that old lady like nothing else in this world. She's always in my corner, and I have zero shame about how much she means to me. I'm the reason she lost her only daughter, but she never once blamed me. I couldn't understand why she didn't see it coming. Why she couldn't save all of us from that horrible day, but seers don't choose their visions. They have no control over what they're shown.

“Bits and pieces.” She hums. “I saw two sweet babies. Tell me, did that go okay?”

I scoff a terrible sound between a snort and a cough. “My magic is acting strange. Some weird things happened.”

“That’s magic, in general. Are you safe?”

“For the moment,” I mutter, twirling the cord around my finger.

“Did the hunk with the man bun carry you off into the night? Because I don’t know . . . If that was me,” she laughs, “things might be looking up.”

“Nan!” I snort.

“The wolf with the tight buns. Please tell—”

I squeak, turning in a circle at the sound of the floor creaking behind me.

“Tight buns, really?” Ridge leans against the doorway to the kitchen, looking like sex personified. His blond hair is in a tie, but pieces fall around his shoulders while his sweatpants hang low on his hips.

I lick my lips.

“Ahh, so it is the handsome alpha wolf,” Nan says. “Then, I’m afraid I can’t say any more. Call anytime. I love you more than you know.”

“I love you too,” I assure her, but she’s already hanging up.

The phone clicks as I shove it into the receiver. My eyes dart around, looking for a method of escape. Wolves and their ridiculous super hearing.

Ridge swaggers his way across the kitchen barefoot. My eyes are greedy for the stacked lines of muscle that make up his torso. The top of my head barely reaches his pec, and I’m not short. He’s just unnaturally tall.

“You and I need to talk.” His eyes flash, indicating his wolf is close to the surface. Leaning closer, he rests his hand on the wall above my head. His woody scent hits me, and I don’t know what to do with *my* hands. They want to feel all

over his strong chest or tease the indents of his abs and obliques. They settle for fidgeting awkwardly between us.

I'm not a quirky or anxious person.

I'm generally pretty confident in my skin and my sexuality, but he's going to want answers. Answers I don't think I can give, because I don't even know what the hell happened with Milania.

"That's okay, I should probably get some rest. What a crazy day, am I right?" I duck under his arm and move to bolt somewhere.

Huge hands cup my hips, pulling my back into his chest as I face away from him. "It's good to see you're replenished. We didn't like seeing you so weak."

My silly heart races.

I know better, or I should.

Men will say just about anything to get what they want from you. The difference is, it's usually focused on what they can give you to make themselves more desirable. It's been a long time since a man was worried about my well-being.

"Where's Echo?" I ask, trying to ignore how solid and safe I feel leaning against him. The pieces of hair that have fallen from his tie dance over my skin as I look up at him over my shoulder.

"Are you really interested in the vampire? After he used you to break his sire bond?" Ridge's hands tighten on my hips and lower stomach, but his hold isn't painful. "Imogen will have to be dealt with. Say you get lucky and survive what the council asked of you—it won't matter. She'll never let you live. Echo is her kicked puppy, the most loyal of her progeny because he knows he's the least favored. He's probably with her right now, spilling everything that happened."

My magic has been hiding, but that dirty bitch spills out of my pores at the thought. Light-gray, smoky shadows dance around my frame as my gut wobbles. It's the tether. There's no other reason why that would bother me. All his bullshit about being a team is exactly that.

I freaking know better.

My own mother tried to murder me. I've gotten very good at trusting no one.

I trust Nan implicitly, but everyone else is a different story. Nan seemed to trust Ridge, or possibly she couldn't risk interfering in the situation. This is why prophetic magic sucks.

I'm not the seer.

I can't tell if she would warn me or not, because giving a message could influence future choices I make.

"Echo is free to do as he wishes. I was simply asking a question." My chin tilts in the air as I spin around to face Ridge.

He smirks, giving me something that manages to be a dubious frown while also accentuating his ridiculously handsome face. His fingers tease up and down my sides as his palms rest on my hip bones.

"What should we do while we wait?" His eyes flash with his wolf.

I take a step backward, spinning to walk away, but he leverages his grip on my hips, pulling me back until we're chest to chest.

A low growl rumbles out of Ridge, vibrating in the air between us. "I would suggest *not* running right now, little witch. It's been a long day, and my instincts are on edge."

"Oh," I whisper as my nipples tighten. There is legitimately something wrong with my brain. There has to be. There's no other reason his words would send a thrill straight to my sex. His nostrils flare in response. He looks surprised for a half a second before that look changes to pure sexual heat. "So, theoretically speaking, if I were to run, what would happen?"

"Are you sure you want to taunt me?" he growls.

My thighs clench. I think I do want that. I nod shakily, licking my lips.

His hand lands on my throat, sliding around into the hair at the base of my skull. He uses the perfect amount of pressure to send a zing through my entire body as he tilts my head back so I'm forced to stare straight into his eyes.

His blond eyebrow quirks as his lips tip up in a playful way.

“Try it and find out.” With that, he releases his hold. He crosses his arms over his bare chest. He's not a hairy guy, considering he turns into a wolf on a regular basis, but damn, do I ever want to trace that happy trail.

I'm still in my dress from yesterday? Today? I have no idea, and at this point, I don't really care. I take several steps, swaying my hips as seductively as possible.

“I think I'll just head back to your bed.” I wink over my shoulder as I hit the door that leads to the living room.

Ridge's low chuckle fills the air, but I keep moving. The wood is cool under my feet as I scan the room.

I have two options.

I can make it easy, or I can give his wolf a little thrill by making it fun.

The door out of the house is on the right. Without letting myself think it through too fully, I make a break for it.

Chapter Eighteen

Nadia

The door isn't locked when I try the handle.

I slip out without bothering to close it quietly.

He has supernatural speed. There's zero chance I'll make this escape without him catching me, but that only ratchets my enjoyment higher.

The grass isn't wet with dew yet. The moon is high in the sky and full enough to cast a warm glow.

Ridge lives in the middle of the forest, which I probably should have seen coming.

I'm just inside the tree line when I hear the stomping of his feet across the wooden porch. My wrap dress flaps as I jog through the underbrush, ducking and weaving to avoid branches.

I can't call my witch light, because that would draw him right to me.

Yanking the tie on my dress, I slide out of it as I move. My shadows rise, taking the dress and floating off in the opposite direction.

Ha, take that wolf super senses.

Hopefully, it'll buy me a little extra time.

Adrenaline pumps through my system, making my hands shake as I scan the forest floor, trying to keep from stepping on something that would hurt. My magic is fairly sure I'm not

about to step on any poisonous snakes or randomly stumble into a black widow's web.

“Come out, come out, wherever you are.” Ridge's deep voice echoes all around me. “Oh, little witch. I do love to hunt, and you're my perfect prey.”

Goose bumps break out all over my arms.

Maybe losing my dress was a bad idea.

I'm prancing around unfamiliar woods in a demi-cup bra and a thong.

My clit aches.

I do love a little danger. It never fails to increase my desire. All the things he might do to me when he catches me race through my mind.

I've never had the chance to try true primal play. Maybe a quick chase here or there, but this is an entirely different level.

Here's hoping he's not shy about keeping things true to form. I'm not afraid of a little animalistic fucking in the woods. My thighs clench at the thought. I'm not even against him taking me in partially shifted form.

A low rumbling growl comes from behind me. I shiver in response, slapping a hand over my mouth to keep from squeaking. My right foot lands on a small branch that crunches under my weight.

Oh shit, that was loud. I keep moving, spinning between a row of thin, but close together, saplings.

My toes hit the ground as I pivot, taking a left and teasing my magic closer. If my dress makes it too far away, it'll be obvious it's not me.

My senses are heightened. I can't tell if it's only been a minute or two or way longer. I do know my thighs ache as I jog. I'm not in bad shape, so it makes me question if I'm accurately guessing time.

I don't want to drag this on for too long. I could accidentally stumble into someone else's territory like the

pups. Or so they claimed. Quite unconvincingly, I might add.

“Do you know what happens when an alpha wolf slips into rut?” Ridge taunts. His voice is much closer than it was before. I change my tactic, making a quick turn back to the right. Hell, I’m so lost, I might be running toward his house. “Have you ever taken a knot?”

No, I haven’t. My head shakes, even though I don’t know if he can see me.

Shifters are rare at The Den, unless they’re demon or fae shifters. I’m intrigued by the possibility, though. It’s not always possible, especially since an alpha’s counterpart is an omega, and they don’t exist anymore.

“The longer you run, the harder I’m going to fuck you into the forest floor,” Ridge says, sounding amused.

My nipples bead as my tits bounce. There’s more light up ahead, which leads me to believe, if I keep going straight, I’ll spill out of the trees.

Stretching a hand back, I unhook my bra and toss it up. My shadows wrap around it, and instead of trying to lead Ridge farther away, I use it to taunt him.

My magic is like a sixth sense when it’s cooperating. It pulses, letting me know he’s less than fifteen feet behind me.

He snarls.

The sound of his feet hitting the earth intensifies as he picks up the pace.

“Keep running, and I’ll spank that naughty ass red before fucking it,” he taunts. “You do understand that you don’t have a chance, right?”

“Fuck you,” I hiss. I totally would have a chance. My magic gives me an edge, but it’s not something I would use now, because I really like the idea of being caught.

Cool air tickles my skin as I move, but it’s barely a thought in my mind as my tits jiggle. The forest is dead silent outside of me heaving in deep lungfuls of air and Ridge’s steady pace

as he follows. The wildlife must understand an alpha predator is hunting these woods tonight.

My clit pulses as my thighs rub together. Okay, maybe I'm *trying* to give it a little friction. I'm wet and hypersensitive. I've seen his cock. It's impressive. My eyes squeeze shut as I imagine how thick and hard he'll be sliding inside me.

An embarrassing moan slips out as I get myself together. Men like the chase. I don't know why it's important to me, but I want to make this good for him too.

"Come on, sweet girl. Why continue to drag this out? We both know I'm going to catch you. Don't you want me to mount that naughty pussy and fuck you like the dirty little cock tease you are?"

I nod. That does sound hot as hell, but I still don't stop. I wouldn't mind that spanking he promised. Well, unless he's one of those sadists who won't let their partner come. That would suck.

"You're going to scream for me."

Okay, that's even hotter. My knees clench, and he gets so close that I can feel his warm breath on my back.

I squeal, making a move for the break in the tree line.

My heart feels like it could pound out of my chest.

I stumble, my hand landing on the rough bark of a tree to my right. A root or fallen twig jabs into the arch on the bottom of my foot. I whimper, barely able to catch myself before hitting my knees.

Ridge grabs me. His hand wraps in my hair as he snaps my head back with considerable force.

It's not more than I can handle, and he has the decency to get close enough to my scalp that, while it stings, I'm not concerned he's about to rip out a handful of my hair. His left arm wraps around my middle, and I'm lifted into the air.

"All I can smell is your dripping cunt." Sharp teeth rake over the tender skin where my neck meets the top of my

shoulder. “I should probably apologize for how hard I’m about to fuck your world up.”

“Promises, promises,” I scoff, shoving at his arm with all my strength. It doesn’t budge. I kick, slamming my head back into his neck, but it feels futile. I fight with every ounce of strength I’ve got, and it’s still not making a difference. I have no idea why that’s so sexy, but it really is.

My legs dangle in the air, but they bounce around as I move, and it only teases my clit even more. That hand holding my hip would feel so much better working my pussy. Every single nerve ending in my body seems hyperaware of every touch and movement. My anticipation grows as I dream about what is coming next.

Ridge uses his hold on my hair to tilt my head as he curves around me to meet the middle. His eyes sparkle as he laughs against my lips. “We love that you’re not afraid of us. My wolf would like to hunt you sometime. He promises to go easy on you.”

He doesn’t give me the chance to object, not that I would have. His wolf is massive. I saw him tear demons apart, but I don’t fear his beast.

His tongue teases mine, making me moan into his mouth.

It feels like his cock is trying to break through the material of his sweatpants as it grinds against my ass. The hand holding me up slides to the side of my panties. He slices through the material with a claw as I try to catch my breath. He releases my hair, moving to the other hip.

I blink when I realize I’m back on my feet, completely nude. What, why? I thought we were getting to the good stuff.

“The next time I catch you, I’m going to toss you down on your hands and knees and slam deep inside you. I’m going to rut you full of my cum. *Unless* you tell me no now.” He palms my tit, flicking his thumb over my nipple, and my pussy tightens around nothing. My tits heave as I study his face over my right shoulder. I’m slick and aching for him. The urge to wallow back into his bare chest is strong. “If you’ve

reconsidered, then run a hundred yards back to the right. Get inside the house and lock the door.”

“I want you.” I stretch a hand behind me so that I can squeeze his cock.

He snarls.

I give him a wink and take off back toward his house, but only because there’s soft grass in that direction.

I’d rather be fucked into that than the dirt.

“Your cunt is mine,” he growls. “I hope you’re ready to be fucked by a beast.”

I call my dress to me from wherever it’s been, zigging and zagging through the grass now that the ground is much softer.

It’s a half-hearted effort.

I want to know what it’s like to be taken by an alpha wolf under the stars. My dress billows in the air. I snatch it at the same time a strong, but strangely hairy, forearm wraps around my middle.

“Fucking hell, little witch. You’re dripping for me.” He pulls my hair to the side while my feet dangle in the air and nips at my neck.

“I am,” I agree. “I want you. Now, I want you inside me now.”

“Have you ever fucked an alpha?” It’s the same question from earlier. Maybe he wasn’t close enough to catch my head shaking in response.

“No,” I gasp as he slides his fingers down to tease my lower lips. “But several types of tentacled monsters, a few demons—”

“You’re going to want to stop talking before I hunt each and every one of them down and rip out their throats,” he snarls, cutting me off. “I’m going to fuck you so thoroughly, the shape of your pussy will be molded perfectly to my cock.”

That is completely impossible and, rationally, I know that. The dominance in his tone still has me nodding my agreement.

“Good girl.” He chuckles, kissing my neck. “Drop the dress.” I comply, tossing it down while Ridge puts me back on my feet and climbs out of his sweats. His sticky tip bounces around my hip as he hands them to me. “Put them down with the legs toward us,” he instructs. I don’t hesitate to follow his command. “On your back for me, little witch.”

I’m apparently super freaking agreeable tonight because I don’t bristle at his continued instructions. I kneel, rolling over and getting myself situated on the dress. My feet are dirty, but I bring them to rest on his sweatpants. Our combined clothes don’t make for a bad blanket.

Ridge watches me, with his glowing eyes glued to my sex.

I scoot my knees a little wider and watch in awe as he palms his cock. It’s thick and heavy and so veiny that my pussy leaks.

I wish my eyesight was better in the low light, but I can see all I need to. There’s a bump at the base of his shaft. All alpha shifters have knots.

My brain fritzes a bit. That thing will swell even larger inside of me. I’m not opposed to some pain with my pleasure.

I want to fully meet all of his sexual needs. A little discomfort can be easily rationalized when the end result will be purely enjoyable.

My clit pulses. It would be great if he could get inside me now. Like, *right* now sounds just about perfect.

I run my nails over my nipple, down my stomach, and spread my pussy wide open for the feral-looking alpha. My fingers tease down my very slick core.

Ridge pounces. He lands between my spread thighs as his forearms hit the ground beside my head. His lips meet mine as I lunge for him. His tongue fucks into my mouth as my clit gets blissful pressure, but it’s intermittent. My feet bounce against the ground as I beg into the frantic kiss.

His warm skin brushes my stomach as he moves an arm down to jerk the head of his cock against me. My pussy gets

wetter and warmer. I'm pretty sure it's his pre-cum dripping against me. All shifters run hotter than witches.

Whatever he's doing is awesome, and I love it, and he should continue doing it. I whimper the words against his lips as his chest brushes my oversensitive nipples. My hands land on his lower back, scratching as I try to maneuver him from my clit to my hole. "I need you!"

"So impatient." He sounds extremely smug. "Don't worry, I am too." He palms my tit, jerking himself against my clit and holding himself over me with his knees and abs. "I want to shove my cock in so many places all at once."

"Pussy," I beg, digging my fingers into his tight ass. "Let's start there."

"Fuck, I like that idea. Of stretching your tight little hole around my thick cock." His words are at odds with his actions. He scoots down, wrapping both wrists under my thighs as he pulls me apart. His eyes glow as he breathes me in. The animalistic way he tilts his head makes my skin prickle. "Fuck, little witch, I'm about to eat you up." His hands wrap up around my legs, and then he's flicking his tongue against my clit. My back arches off the ground as he works me just right.

It goes on for ages as he teases and tantalizes my cunt until I'm shaking and clawing at his hair. He teases a single finger inside me, twisting it in and out as my feet bounce against the ground, and I beg for him.

The moon and stars are a beautiful backdrop, but even the cool night air isn't helping, because I feel like I'm burning up from the inside out. I sob that out with my pleas for him.

"Gods, Nadia. I want to devour you. Eat you alive. Claim you as mine." His words echo with his wolf as he pulls his finger free and moves that hand to work my clit. His tongue is thick and teases inside my opening, but it grows longer and thicker as his hands change to claws. He's careful with me, but I'm so close to the edge that I thrash around, begging and sobbing with little care about getting nicked.

“Come all over my face,” he commands, stretching his left hand up to tease my nipple. My tits bounce as I try to ride his face from below and, just as my pussy starts to contract around his tongue, he pulls away.

“No!” I sob, bowing toward him. “You said to do it.”

Ridge kneels, licking his lips. Hell, half his lower face and beard are shiny. He grabs my arm, pulling me up. He sits back on his feet while kneeling and brings me to squat over him.

“I’m afraid, if I fuck you, I’ll go too hard. You’re delicate, and I’m half-fucking-feral with the need to own your sweet cunt.” He pulls my mouth to his as his tip bumps my lower lips. “Ride my cock.”

I shiver, grinding enough that his hard tip slides through my pussy, notching at my hole. His hands cup my hips as I brush my nipples over his hard chest.

“Take every inch you can,” he growls. “Fuck, you’re perfect for me.”

I grind down, trembling against him. “Damn,” I gasp. His crown is *thick*. The twinge of pain makes sense.

I’m so wet, it’s unreal.

It should make this easier.

“Yeah, that’s it. Let me in,” he says in a soothing tone. His hand moves to caress my cheek as he stares into my eyes. His fingers slide through my hair, and the moment is intimate in a way I’m not used to at all. I want a dirty-as-fuck romp on the forest floor. I don’t know how to process tender. “This is why you needed to ride me. It’s a tight fit, little witch.”

I rise and fall on my knees, but his cock is massive. I’m not making any real progress.

“Toss me down and fuck me,” I beg. “Please? I need you to slam deep.”

“We’ve got time.” Ridge shoves his tongue into my mouth, but it’s the way he holds me like I’m precious and completely protected that has my chest heaving. “You really want me to take over? I was trying to be a gentleman and keep you off the

ground.” Grabbing my feet, he wraps them around his back before lowering me until my ass hits solid earth. He hovers over me on his forearms and grins, shaking his head. I have no idea what’s so humorous, but I jolt a little when I catch sight of his elongating teeth. “Trust me.”

“I kind of do.” We have some weird connection when I stare into his eyes. There’s no other reason I would have admitted that. My chest gets tight, but then he pulls out and slides back in just right.

My breathing hitches as he grips my jaw in his huge hand, running his thumb over my lower lip.

“You’re fucking beautiful, but more than that—you’re mine.” He slides his thumb between my lips, and my tongue swirls around it. He moves that hand to tease my clit with rapid circular strokes that have me making the most ridiculous sounds.

I arch toward him, desperate for more of his impressive length. He’s got some damn annoying self-control, but I want the beast.

“I want you to fuck me deep,” I beg. “Get rough. Every time I sit down tomorrow, I want to squirm because you bruised my pussy.”

“Ahh, fuck,” he growls, his eyes flashing. “Be careful what you wish for.”

My hands dig into his lower back as my feet bounce against his ass. “I’m beginning to think you’re all talk. That’s not a good look for an alpha.”

“Is that right?” He chuckles darkly. The next snap of his hips into mine takes all the air from my lungs. Holy shit, that’s borderline painful. “You’re awful mouthy for a witch who can’t even take all my cock. How am I supposed to bury my knot inside you?”

“Try harder,” I moan. That discomfort is quickly turning to pure bliss with each powerful stroke. He’s stretching me to capacity, but it feels like heaven as my tits bounce.

Ridge grunts, dipping low enough to seal his mouth to mine. I use my feet on his rear end to grind over him while he's buried to the hilt. The kiss is frantic and dirty. His chest rumbles with a sound I've never heard before. Okay, I have, but not outside of a cat. That's a fleeting thought as the vibration hits my nipples and he brushes my pulsing clit.

"That's right, scream for your alpha," he taunts, slamming into me deep. "Make sure everyone knows you're mine."

"Fuck, fuck, fuck," I sob as he holds me in place, pulling back and plowing in again. It's so intense, it doesn't even seem like reality.

"You still don't think you'll feel me tomorrow? The way my crown keeps bouncing against the bottom says you will." A lopsided, playful smile crosses his face as he looks at where he disappears inside me. "Fuck, little witch. Seeing me wet with your pussy is almost too much."

I nod my agreement, thrashing under him as he hits my G-spot just right. Pleasure coils tight as I teeter over the edge into pure bliss. "I'm . . . H-harder, right there!"

His weight falls atop me again, pushing me farther into the ground. Wrapping his free hand around my throat, he growls dangerously and squeezes with the perfect amount of pressure to send me soaring.

"Come all over my cock, little one." I like it when he calls me *little witch*, but I guess *little one* is okay too. "I'm going to fill you full of my cum. Everyone will know who you belong to." He shoves his mouth to mine as I convulse. His shaft swells even larger as he moves to lick and suck his way down my throat, filling me with hot jets of cum. "Milk out every single drop." He grunts, continuing to work his still-hard shaft in and out. He releases my throat at some point, running his fingers over my jaw.

It's super intimate, and I'm so sensitive that every graze of his pelvis makes me shudder and whimper that it's too much.

Ridge doesn't stop. He continues plowing into me and, eventually, my system goes from overstimulated to deeply

interested.

I'm a big fan of alpha wolf stamina. Alpha cock too.

Ridge pulls me up until I'm squatting over him as he kneels. He wraps an arm around my lower back as my hands fall to his chest. I blink, staring up at him, but he grins. "It's been hundreds of years since I've been inside a woman. I've got a lot of positions I want to try out." He smirks. "And I really want to feel your tits bounce against my chest while you impale yourself on my cock." I moan as he thrusts up into me. His torso is so much longer than mine that my face falls against his sweaty shoulder as he grinds me over his throbbing length. "Ride me, little one."

I nod.

Damn, maybe I died and went to get-dicked-down heaven.

Ridge is pure carnal perfection, and he's absolutely correct. There's no way I won't be feeling him for days after this.

I grin at the thought and get to work bouncing on his thick shaft.

Chapter Nineteen

Echo

I've been gone for several hours.

I'm whatever one step past anxious is.

My need to get eyes on the confounding witch is alarming.

I'm not sure why I'm so drawn to Nadia. Perhaps I can blame it on the connection tethering our souls. It might also have something to do with the fact she freed me from the hell of being bound to my maker.

Whatever the reason, it doesn't bother me nearly as much as it should.

I've served a true monster for centuries. Being bound to the baby darkling is a step up from the existence I've known.

I felt her sorrow when she told me about her mother. Felt the remorse she carries, despite it not being her fault. A witch can't choose their magic any more than a shifter can pick their beast.

Guilt and sadness are not emotions I'm familiar with, nor have I been in quite some time. The maker connection overrode many of my own impulses and feelings.

Imogen hasn't felt guilt a day in her long life. Not even if she was faced with all the horror she's inflicted on those she supposedly cares for would she be able to fake an ounce of real emotion. If a truly soulless creature exists, then it's my maker. She'll be a problem before this is all over.

It took too long to jog back to town, since I was running on empty. Then even longer to feed and travel back to the peaks

for my vehicle.

I park haphazardly in Ridge's driveway and exit in a hurry. I'm on the porch about to head into the house when noises from the forest catch my attention.

Shifters are baser creatures.

It could be any wolves fucking.

My head cocks.

I listen intently for sounds of Nadia and Ridge inside his home, but I pick up no heartbeats. My gaze slides to the side as I spin, scanning the tree line.

That wolf has a death wish. After such a long existence, he's desperate for someone to end his suffering.

There's no other possibility.

He's of an ancient wolf line—some of the oldest shifters in the human realm. He'll be difficult to kill, but not impossible. If nothing else, I'll remove his head and heart and keep him close.

It'll be an agonizing existence for him to experience for the rest of time. Every time the organs attempt to regrow, I'll simply remove them again.

Problem solved.

I stumble a step as I catch sight of them. *She's his fucking mate.* The line at River and Brant's cabin wasn't a bullshit throwaway comment.

My head hangs as I stare at my boots.

This is a fucking disaster.

I had a feeling his beast was drawn to her. Shifters in animal form only show interest in their mate. I really hoped I was wrong, but as Ridge stares down at her with his head cocked and his eyes glowing from his wolf, it's very clear. She's in his lap, but he still makes her seem tiny.

On one hand, it's a good thing because he'll be an ally. On another, it's a disaster in the making because shifters are

notoriously bad at sharing. I wonder if she warned him about her profession. Not that I particularly have any right to judge. I don't love the thought of her going back to that occupation, but perhaps, that's a bit of my own history tainting the well.

My eyes are glued to Nadia as she writhes on the alpha barbarian's lap. In the next instant, he lifts her, tossing her down and pinning her to the ground as he slams into her like a feral beast.

It would be convenient if she looked like she was in distress or, at the very least, not enjoying herself. That would be a solid reason to step in and rip that asshole off her. His forearm frames her head as he kisses her. It's a brutal kiss that has their tongues tangling in the air as he holds her in place.

Nadia bounces under him with each pump of his hips into hers, but he cradles her like she's precious. Which makes me want to rip his head off all over again.

I frown, shaking my head. I'm losing my bloody mind. My thoughts circle in a loop of hating the barbarian wolf and how badly I ache to take his place.

Ridge fucks her through her release. The naughty thing gets so loud, I'm sure the entire pack knows what's happening. He kisses her in a soft way that I'm shocked a shifter can manage. It's the tender touches he offers as he caresses her cheek that make me slightly uncomfortable. They barely know each other. There's no reason he should be gently worshiping her under the moonlight. She's not his. She's certainly not mine, either, but he has no right to treat her so reverently.

Not that I want him to fuck her like the animal he is. I take several steps forward. I don't think I've ever been so close to snapping, not once in my long existence. Nadia is driving me mad, which is something not even Imogen managed to accomplish.

I showered during my five-minute stop at my apartment. I thoughtfully brought Nadia several changes of clothes, like a good soul-bonded vampire should.

Ridge should *not* be smiling at *my* witch when I went out of my way to be thoughtful for the first time in centuries.

It becomes clear he has spotted me when he pulls back until he's kneeling, looks straight at me, and winks. That motherfucker is still inside her.

My fangs and claws descend as I plan the best way to incapacitate him long enough to pour some concrete. I'll also need a deep hole and enough time for said concrete to dry once he's buried inside.

I can't remove his head at the moment . . .

Nadia might find that traumatic.

See, I can be a thoughtful and conscientious tether. If I do something stupid, then I could fuck things up by destroying her trust in me.

I'll have to murder the brute once she's no longer around to witness it.

He pulls her up, helping her flip over on all fours, and slams back inside her. He gives me a look that indicates he wants me to see how much she trusts him. Also, apparently, how little he cares about breaking her. Witches are on par with humans, but he fucks into her in a way that makes it clear he's not concerned about hurting her.

I take several more steps forward before I can stop myself. He's taunting the wrong vampire. The closer I get, the tighter the tether between us pulls. It's surreal and utterly intoxicating, feeling her pleasure coursing through the link.

Nadia gasps, catching sight of me, or perhaps, she feels me as I do her? It's impossible to say with any certainty, but the thought succeeds in making my cock painfully hard.

Ridge pulls her top half up until they're both kneeling and writhing around together. Fuck, her tits are fabulous. The way her cunt is stuffed full of his cock is enticing as hell. I wouldn't mind a taste. I lick my lips.

The useless mutt glares, his eyes flashing like he read my thoughts.

Luckily, I know that's impossible.

I shove my hands into my jeans pockets and aim for the closest tree. If they're going to fuck in the woods while the council has it out for all of us, then I might as well provide security.

After all, my existence hinges on keeping her alive. It has nothing to do with my growing obsession to the shadowborn blood witch. It's absolutely not because the expression she makes as she comes again seems burned into my retinas.

It's also not because she selflessly allowed herself to be kidnapped by an unfamiliar bigfoot and thunderbird to save a dying woman.

Yeah, it's not like I'm fucked or anything. Right?

The wolf ruts and snarls while Nadia sobs and begs the next few hours of my never-ending existence away. If I were human, the back of my skull would be raw. The number of times I've banged my head against the coarse tree bark would've certainly killed me if I weren't immortal. At the very least, I'd have brain damage.

They finally settle as the first visages of light break the horizon. Ridge scoops her up, heading toward his house without a backward glance in my direction.

"You're welcome for having your back," I mutter low enough that only he will pick up my words.

Ridge turns, flipping me off with the hand on Nadia's ass and continues on like nothing happened. I follow them, pondering ways to broach the many different conversations we need to have.

I'm unsurprised when he carries her into his shower.

I lounge against the wall as I run through the facts. I've never been close enough to the inner workings of the council to know what's going on.

The inhabitants of North Falls love to call me the council's echo, but I was physically incapable of rebuffing Imogen's demands until Nadia severed our bond. She'll always be my maker, but the tables have turned.

I'm no longer hers to command.

Imogen won't allow that slight to stand. She may have agreed because she continually defers to Constantine, but it's only a matter of time.

Once Nadia has served her purpose, Imogen will strike. That's something I won't allow. Our destiny is tethered together. I'm far from altruistic. It's simply a fact that I can't survive without the little witch.

There's also the added component of the demons. It's clear they know Nadia and are willing to fight to keep her alive, but according to the reaper, only she can summon them, and she doesn't remember they fucking exist.

My hand flies to my temple, rubbing away the low throbbing ache. I've been perpetually drained dry over the last day and a half. All the pieces of the puzzle are only adding to my frustration.

It's not something I'll be able to determine alone.

Nadia is the one with answers, and it's about time she gives them.

Ridge comes out in a pair of sweats, while Nadia is in one of his long, white T-shirts. The thing resembles a dress on her curvy frame.

"Hey," she says, smiling and waving when she spots me lounging. Her face scrunches as she frowns, yanking her hand down. It's distractingly cute.

What the fuck is going on in my head recently?

"We need to talk." I cross my arms over my chest. That ten-minute shower didn't nearly wash away the scent of her pussy. The fact that her smell is corrupted by the wolf's pisses off my monster. We prefer smelling her.

"Okay," she says, but she takes a step back.

I changed my mind. His scent is nothing in comparison to how she snuggles back into his chest, allowing him to toss an arm around her neck. It hangs between her breasts, and he links their hands together.

We've known each other for the same amount of time. There's no reason she should be so comfortable with him.

Our souls are fucking tethered.

"Did you feed? Are you topped off?" she asks.

"I did."

"Did you run to the council and tell them what happened?" Her eyebrows rise as she studies me.

Now that *really* pisses me off. It's clear that insinuation came from the wolf.

"I did not. I fed, retrieved clothes for you, grabbed my car, and came back to watch the two of you fuck the next several hours away." I smirk.

She shrugs unapologetically. "We needed some stress relief."

"Did you warn the wolf what you do for a living?"

"She's a fertility witch," Ridge rumbles.

Nadia flinches, her discomfort filling the link between us. I'm unused to feeling remorse, but I do think that's what I'm currently experiencing. It's a strange bubbling in my stomach that I'm unfamiliar with.

Her chin tilts up, and she looks at Ridge over her shoulder. "I work at a sex club in Haven called The Monster's Den."

Ridge's face shows a mix of emotions, from confusion to possibly hurt. He hasn't dated anyone in all the years I've known him, but he'll have to understand witches don't anticipate mates like shifters do.

"I'm sorry I wasn't around to look after you. You'll never have to go back there again." The clueless bastard actually bends down, nuzzling his cheek to hers.

“It’s not like that.” She spins to face him. “For the most part, I’m happy with my job. Yeah, it involves sex, but it’s also a lot of just companionship for lonely monsters.”

“I forb—” Ridge clears his throat. “I would prefer it if you would consider other options.”

“We fucked, it’s not like—”

Ridge growls, swatting her ass. “Don’t belittle our connection, or I’ll give you a hell of a lot more than a playful slap on your ass.”

Nadia squeaks, smacking his hand away.

Ridge laughs, kissing her.

As Imogen’s progeny, I’ve stood guard on many private moments. Her weakest child to command, always treated the worst. I’ve seen all types of intimate scenes and never felt an ounce of jealousy or discomfort.

Until now.

I shake away those thoughts; they’re useless.

“I took us off topic,” I say, clearing my throat. “We have bigger issues to address.”

“Command him as your vessel,” Ridge directs. “Demand he answer truthfully and ask if he has betrayed you.”

“Fuck you,” I hiss, pushing off the wall.

Nadia spins to face me, but she puts a hand on the wolf’s chest, shoving him back as he tries to advance.

“We don’t trust you. No one fucking trusts you,” Ridge growls.

“Oh, the two of you are a team now, are you?” I taunt.

“He hasn’t done a single thing to hurt me, and I don’t exactly have loads of allies in North Falls,” Nadia says.

“We’re soul bonded,” I say indignantly.

“Don’t forget why I can’t call in reinforcements of my own.” She rolls her lips, giving me a look that says she blames me for Warren’s compulsion.

“I did all that I could. You think you’re the only one he can compel or command? I gave you as much warning as was possible under the circumstances.”

“I understand that. I also get why you’d take any opportunity to be free of your connection to Imogen,” Nadia says, pushing wet brown hair away from her face. “I don’t even blame you for it. But I was ambushed by that situation.”

“I had no choice,” I grind out. “Warren is even older than Imogen. His compulsion would have overridden any attempt I made to shield your mind. It would have gotten us both killed.”

“Bullshit,” Ridge says.

“No, I don’t think it is.” She sighs. “They specifically asked if I was prepped for the meeting. Normally, my magic gives me a fair amount of protection from compulsion, but it was almost like something or someone was blocking my power.”

“I don’t think there’s anyone on the council with that ability,” I tell her truthfully.

“Then, I have no idea. The other blood witches that came to town—how far into replenishing the ward did they make it before being killed?” she asks.

Ridge growls.

“Half to maybe two-thirds of the way through.” I shove my hands into my front pockets. “Just enough to keep it from falling completely. It would have fallen by now without their intervention.”

“Okay,” Nadia says, sighing heavily. “We were attacked, and I hadn’t even completed a quarter of the ward.”

“It doesn’t make any sense in the first place. None of us want the ward to fall. It would lead to a mass exodus. Those who stayed would have to live as humans.” My head shakes involuntarily.

“There could be a group working against the council,” Nadia offers with a shrug. “They’ve got enough bodies to

sacrifice that they could be a real problem.”

“That’s true. No one in North Falls likes the council. Most simply do what they can to survive under their tyrannical rule,” Ridge adds.

I glance away. He’s right about that. There’s no one strong enough to overthrow them, and as a result, most with any intelligence try to stay out of their periphery.

“It’s not even daylight. Perhaps you two should try to get a few hours of sleep. Nothing will be accomplished at six in the morning.” I roll my eyes.

Nadia nods her agreement, and they head to the mutt’s bed.

I settle back against the wall. My mind has always been my most valuable asset. It’s kept me alive this long. Normally, I can strategize the best outcome of any situation. Unfortunately, I don’t yet have enough pieces of the puzzle to accurately surmise how any of this will play out.

The witch and the wolf sleep for two or three hours. Banging on the door wakes Ridge, drawing my attention from my thoughts. I’ve continually pondered the idea. If there’s a group working against the council, they could be possible allies. Except that they don’t want Nadia to succeed.

The main question is: why?

Ridge stomps downstairs while Nadia groans, rolling around the bed and complaining it’s too early to be alive. I snicker. She’s quite adorable with the bedhead and kitten-like stretches.

“You know you’re flashing me your pussy, right, baby darkling?” I chuckle. She continues stretching out her arms with little care. “We’ve got company. Are you able to magic yourself up some pants? I left the spare clothes in my car.”

My head tilts as I listen to the commotion downstairs. I don’t wait for her reply. I’m instantly in motion and suddenly

staring at two very confused teenagers. Ehh, they may be in their early twenties, but they're definitely no older than that. I vaguely recognize them from around town, but not well enough to know either of their names.

"Jenny?" Nadia comes down the stairs in shorts, a tank top, and a weird over shirt that falls down her arm, showing off her delectable neck. It's the wrong outfit choice when so close to a perpetually half-starved vampire. "Brock? Well, you look better than the last time I saw you."

I frown, glancing between the witch and the two wolves who've joined us.

I did spend a fair amount of time wondering how Ridge came upon her.

"Alpha," Brock bows his head low, "we have a problem."

Nadia huffs out a heavy sigh, coming to stand at my side.

"Could we speak alone?" Brock asks.

"Oh, shit," Nadia whispers, taking a step back. "You didn't happen to turn into a fae, did you?" She looks at Brock, who simply blinks in response. "Ohmigod, no way. An omega?"

Jenny laughs. "No, but ever since you gave me that contraceptive spell—"

"Jenny," Brock hisses, grabbing her hand and nodding at me.

"He's with me." Nadia crosses her arms over her chest. "So, spill whatever you came here to say."

"Smell me," Jenny says.

Ridge steps forward and leans close to her neck. "Well, fuck."

"What?" Nadia's eyes bounce between them. "Someone speak! Witches don't have the best olfactory senses."

"She smells sweet." Ridge steps back, heading to Nadia's side. "Her scent has subtly changed. It's not an extreme difference. Not yet, anyway, but it reminds me of the cloyingly sweet scent omegas used to have."

“Fuck,” Nadia and Brock say in unison.

Brock’s eyes widen. He’s likely too young to be familiar with the smell.

“Seems you’ve got some explaining to do, baby darkling,” I mutter, swiping a hand over my face. Could this shit show get anymore complicated?

Jenny’s phone goes off and she yanks it out.

“What do we do?” Brock asks. “Someone is eventually going to notice. It’s not severe right now, but will it get stronger?”

“I didn’t do anything, except give her a contraceptive spell. You guys are young. No one needs that hanging over their heads when they’re just trying to have fun and enjoy life.” Nadia’s shoulders pull back and her chin tilts in the air defiantly. “Tell them it’s a new perfume. I have no idea, but I’m not getting blamed for this.”

My eyes fly to the possibly newly turned omega wolf. Her chest rises and falls in quick movements as her hands tremble around her phone. “There’s an actual emergency. Can you help?”

“What the fuck is happening now?” Ridge growls.

Nadia simply nods, stepping toward the wolves because she legitimately has zero survival instincts. I really did get stuck with the only suicidal blood witch to come to North Falls.

That fucking figures.

Chapter Twenty

Nadia

The darkened room immediately sets me on edge. Brock and Ridge don't join us, but Echo is at my back. His hand rests on my hip and his grip tightens.

"What the hell is this?" Echo asks.

"My friend, she . . ." Jenny's head shakes. "She needs a healer."

"Yeah, or a coroner," Echo mutters.

I ignore them both as my magic pulls me forward. Someone isn't in good shape. I don't ask for permission. My hands buzz, guiding the way, and when I spot the woman on the bed, my gut drops. Pure rage takes over pretty quickly after that.

"I hope you're both ready to bleed," I mutter, pulling the pin on my bracelet that manifests as soon as I need it.

"Fucking lovely," Echo grumbles. A second later, a dark stream of smoke appears from behind me. I give him a grateful smile over my shoulder as I slit my wrist.

Jenny's blood joins the party a few moments after that. I hope whoever did this is ready to suffer, because retribution is coming.

I stagger out of the small house, looking half drunk. Maybe my life in Haven has been insulated to the point I thought the

supernatural world was better off than it really is. It's hard to tell, because Haven is run by decent monsters. This place is a clusterfuck very close to what I imagine Hell would be like. Maybe even that is a stereotype.

“Where are you going?” Echo hisses from behind me.

“To replenish,” I say without looking back. “I'm looking for someone named Drake?” I point at the group of four or five enforcers standing in a semicircle.

One of the guys eyes me up and down, shoving his hands into his front pockets. “What are you willing to do for that information?” He laughs.

I stagger closer, running a hand down his chest. He grins wickedly. “How about I won't suck every single drop of blood out of your body through your eye sockets? Does that work for you?” I pat his T-shirt. “I'm waiting.”

“Damn,” one of the other wolves mutters.

“He's the big guy over there,” the cocky one says, nodding closer to the tree line. “Black hair. Nasty scar on his right cheek. I don't think you should mess with him. He's a mean son of a bitch.”

My jaw slides side to side. “Yeah, I know.” I take off without a backward glance.

“Are you about to cause a scene, baby darkling?” Echo appears at my side. He makes a grab for my arm, but I shake him off. “I'm technically not supposed to intercede if you get yourself into major shit while on pack land.”

“Good, that's actually a great idea. Don't interfere.” My magic laces my last few words with my command. The tether between us pulls tight.

Echo growls.

I ignore his fury, taking the last few steps to the mountain of a wolf. “Are you Sabine's father?” I stop dead in my tracks. My magic jets out, and swirly shadows envelop him.

“Who the fuck are you?” he growls.

“It seems you owe me quite a bit of blood.” My head tilts, studying the disgusting man.

“Oh, this is going to be great. I can just feel it. Are you that desperate to get yourself killed?” Echo groans. “I’m already starting to itch, so I’m going to relocate to just inside the tree line. Pack lands don’t have the same UV shield that covers the downtown area. I have no interest in burning to a crisp in the direct sunlight.” He continues muttering under his breath the entire way. I can’t see him, because he moves too fast, but my ears register him getting farther away.

I grimace a little.

I’m not a great tether.

I hadn’t even considered whether he’s one of those vampires that the sun can be a problem for. It was extremely overcast at the peaks yesterday.

My shadows still firmly encase Drake, but a number of them take off toward the woods. My forehead wrinkles as I frown after them. I don’t know what is wrong with my magic lately, but Drake isn’t going to end up the odd omega. His fate is definitely going to be more gruesome than that.

The wolf finally looks alarmed at the sight of my shadows swirling around his massive frame. He might be a big guy, but he’s a tiny little man at heart. No one with a dick ever needs to hit a woman with a fist.

Consensual rough sex is one thing, but that’s not what this is. A shiver of unease runs through my system at the thought. Thank God, since they’re related.

“Who the fuck are you?” Drake growls again as I prowl closer. “And what the hell are you doing?”

“We’ve already been over this,” I inform him, shoving dark hair away from my face as it whips in the wind.

Drake growls and his eyes glow, signaling his wolf. His entire body begins to contort like when a shifter shifts. My eyes widen as I step back. I infuse every bit of focus I’ve got into commanding my magic to stop him.

“Now would be a good time to cancel your command.” Echo sounds breathless. His anxiety and frustration radiate in my chest, thanks to that silly tether between our souls.

A low growl comes out of Drake as he lunges. A claw extends, and it seems to be pointing precariously close to my throat.

“I don’t know what the hell you’re doing to me, but you better stop before I rip out your fucking throat,” he snarls, staggering a bit.

My shoulders pull back. Okay, so my magic is doing something. It’s just a mystery what exactly that is. Good, he deserves it and more.

The wolf continues to transform. His face elongates, sprouting extra hair and longer teeth.

“Now would be an excellent time to call your demons or release me,” Echo snaps.

My eyes turn toward him. What demons?

Echo looks furious, but I’m still royally confused. Now isn’t the time for him to start talking nonsense.

“Look out,” Echo snarls, pointing at something.

My head snaps back just in time to see a fully formed wolf barreling toward me. His muscular shoulders flex as he lunges off the ground, using his back legs to propel himself at my chest.

My hands rise, as does my panic. Yeah, I could definitely use some help right now. Fun fact that I’m apparently just learning about myself: I guess I freeze under pressure, because my magic sure doesn’t do a single thing to save my damn life.

A feral growl breaks the air to my right and Ridge comes out of nowhere. He tosses himself in front of me in full human form. Which seems dangerous. Wolves have teeth that can rip human skin to shreds.

“Shift,” I hiss, slapping the giant alpha in the back.

Drake hits Ridge, but the alpha wolf doesn't even stumble a step. The wolf's claws do rake down Ridge's arm. I step aside to see what's happening because I'd really rather Ridge not get hurt trying to protect me.

Ridge has his hand wrapped around Drake's throat, but I gasp when I notice time has stalled *again*. Thank goodness, because Drake's teeth are only inches from Ridge's face. My alpha wolf definitely saved my life just now.

I spin around, trying to figure out what the hell is happening.

"Hello, love." The reaper bows his hooded head. "Is there a specific reason why you always wait until it's a life-or-death emergency to call for us?"

"Yeah, doll. Talk about trusting us with clutch timing." The man at the reaper's side feels familiar, but my brain throbs when I try to remember why. My hands fly up, a groan escaping as I grip my aching skull. "Oh shit, I forgot about that. Feel free to remember us."

The heavy pressure immediately subsides, and I glare at the demons. I vaguely remember the reaper is Wraith and the sin eater is Knight.

Knight has blond, straight hair to his shoulders. He's slender, with a lithely muscled frame and he's tall. He has a bit of stubble covering his jaw.

I glance at Wraith, and he pulls the hood back, giving me a timid smile. He's got a wide, strong jaw and no facial hair. His hair is short, and it may be spiky because of the hood, but it currently sticks up in a million directions. His eyes had two settings at Milania's house. They were either dark voids or glowing white orbs, like an alien in a sci-fi movie.

Wraith still gives that same timid smile. It's ridiculously adorable, considering he's a soul devouring machine. I'm also super freaking embarrassed that I didn't recognize him at Milania's. I'm guessing Knight had to release me from his command for the memories to come back.

“I can’t believe you made me forget how you lied to me,” I snap, spinning to face Knight. “Yeah, Sam, my ass.”

“It was a better answer on the fly than Dean.” Knight chuckles. His lithe chest flexes as he saunters over to appraise the Drake-and-Ridge situation. “Or both, which was that guy’s bright idea. And, yes, while we were in one vessel. Two names, can you imagine?”

“I’ve seen limited television in Hell,” Wraith says indignantly. “It was the first thing that came to mind.”

“You lied to me.” I seem really stuck on that fact. “You were going to blame me for Kash’s death,” I huff.

It’s also really difficult to be angry, because they’re Sam.

My Sam. The Sam I spent three years getting to know. Every single week, I spent time with him. There’s a whole lot of emotion there that I’m not sure I’m ready to unpack, but what I can’t manage to be is afraid of them. I kind of feel a little guilty that I didn’t initially command them to stay, but I was in shock.

“Nah, we just hoped you’d see how convenient it is to have demons ready to murder for you,” Knight says, meandering closer to Drake. He scratches at his jaw. “This asshole smells like a delicious meal.”

“How’s the new mother?” Wraith tilts his head, studying me as he comes closer.

I don’t retreat. Now that I know he’s Sam, I don’t think I could truly fear him if I tried.

Half of Sam.

Whatever, it’s clearly complicated.

“I haven’t had a chance to check in on her.” I gesture to the frozen, snarling wolf. “My magic has been acting strangely lately. Do you two have anything to do with that?”

“We don’t,” Wraith says.

It’s absurd, but I believe him.

“Do you think it would be uncalled for if I ate this asshole?” Knight bounces on his toes. “Seriously, he smells like I wouldn’t be hungry for weeks. I assure you. His soul is tainted to the point where I’d be doing the world a great service.” He flashes a panty-melting smile my way.

My knees get all wobbly just from that grin on his stupidly handsome face. I blow out a breath and say, “I was trying to dispose of him, but at the risk of sounding redundant, my magic isn’t cooperating lately. I don’t understand what’s going on.”

My shoulders slump.

I came to North Falls and somehow devolved into the witch who constantly needs saving. That’s not a great feeling. I’ve always been extremely self-reliant. I’ve had to be because people who get too close are a risk to my secret.

“That is interesting.” Wraith wraps an arm around my lower back and yanks me toward his chest. I don’t fight the contact. His gasoline scent hits me, and it’s so familiar that my hand slides inside his robe, searching for his skin. The reaper immediately pulls the string.

I laugh. “Are you hot with the robe and a suit jacket?”

He shrugs. “The robe is more lore than anything. I don’t always wear it.”

“He does,” Knight interjects.

“Often, but not always. Would you be willing to fill me in on what’s going on?” He rubs my back in tender circles that remind me this is Sam.

It’s weird that he’s even asking. At The Den, he was more demanding or commanding . . . I don’t even know the right word for it.

My heart flutters.

I vaguely wonder how much of each of their personalities spilled into Sam. I already know Knight is the sadist who enjoys begging and eating me out from behind. Wraith is more

of a pleasure Dom, and he's tender. Like a big grim reaper teddy bear.

"Nadia?" Wraith runs a finger over my cheek.

I nod. "This town is fucked. The council compelled me into taking a vampire vessel. I also can't leave town." A heavy breath whooshes out. I guess I'm spilling everything, but they're here in North Falls, and apparently, they don't fall under the guidelines of my compulsion. It makes me emotional having someone around that I feel completely safe with. "Then there's my magic. It's totally gone off the rails, and I don't understand why."

"You've reached maturity. Of course, your power was going to increase during your twenty-eighth year." Wraith nuzzles his cheek to the top of my head.

I nod because that does make sense. It's also seriously inconvenient that it's so difficult to control right when I need it the most.

A creepy sound comes from Ridge's and Knight's direction. My jaw falls as I stagger back, pushing against Wraith's chest to get us farther away from Knight. I'm not sure what the hell is going on, but his head has fallen back, and some creepy, horrifying creature has popped out of his neck. It looks like something from a disturbing-as-fuck alien movie. Its mouthful of razor-sharp teeth open, and black goo seems to fly from Drake right into the monster's ever-expanding maw.

Images and scenes flick in and out of view, moving from the wolf to Knight's monster.

"It's okay," Wraith says, patting my back gently. "He's not a threat to you. I hope you realize by now that neither of us is. That vile being is another story completely."

The monstrous side of Knight slowly begins to subside, disappearing back into his still thrown back neck. It's surreal when his chin tilts toward his body.

"It didn't look like that when you fed on Kash." I jab a finger at Knight. "That was super creepy."

“He was extra awful.” His blond hair bounces as he shrugs. “He deserved to meet my monster.” He looks at Wraith. “You’re up.”

“Of course.” Wraith releases me, aiming for Drake.

Knight swaggers forward like some male model with his perfectly sculpted abs and chiseled chin. “Are you scared of me now, doll?”

Hardly.

I think I might have been on the verge of daydreaming about what he can do with those huge, veiny hands. Which is completely bizarre, but still totally true.

Chapter Twenty-One

Knight

It's been a long time since a meal filled me up like the shifter did. No wonder our darling little witch was so dead set on taking him down a peg.

"Are you scared of me now, doll?" I ask, meandering closer as I study every nuance of her posture.

That would really suck, especially since we're tethered. She straight-up tied us to her before refusing to command us to stay. If I was a lesser monster, it may have hurt my feelings. However, I do love a good chase.

Nadia rolls her eyes, huffing out a breath. "Do I need to be?"

A hearty belly laugh escapes.

"Of my monster? Not in the least. You're a puny, bite-sized meal to him. Now, my palm is a different story. You keep getting yourself into trouble. Why have blood-bound demons at the ready if you only call for us when shit gets dicey?" I frown, realizing her attention is on Wraith.

"Why is he always making out with your murder victims?"

A terrible sound between a snort and a scoff comes out as I pull her into my arms.

"He's devouring his soul." She doesn't fight my hand on her ass, and I revel in the contact. "Unlike when he reaps, that fucker is being devoured. He would have gotten 1260 years in the pit before his soul could be rehabilitated. That's on the

higher end of any number I've seen in centuries. Wraith is simply extinguishing his soul so that it no longer exists."

"Huh," Nadia says. "Why didn't I die the day we met? When I was a kid, I mean."

"Ehh, technically?" I grimace. "You did, but Wraith shoved your soul back inside your shell as the vampire—"

"Uncle Jack," she says, cutting me off.

"Yes, Jack dosed you with vampire blood, and voilà. You survived." I squeeze her hip to let her know just how grateful I am for that fact.

"Wow," she whispers, clutching at me for support. "Thank you."

Wraith has finished his meal, and he approaches slowly, as if he's also concerned she might be afraid of him. "Of course."

"Would someone like to explain exactly how I accidentally blood bonded the two of you to me?"

"Your blood summoned Malice. You were meant to close the portal, but you accidentally read the spell for tethering." Wraith comes closer, and once he's within reach, he runs his fingers over her cheek. "We're not upset. It's not a dark or evil thing to be shared between a witch and her demons."

Nadia laughs. "A witch and her slightly delusional demons."

"You're awfully sassy. Just remember, you still owe me a trip over my knee." I slap her ass.

She shivers in response. "Thank you."

I laugh, giving her a dubious look. She won't be thanking me when I'm done with her backside.

"Not for that." She stretches up on her tiptoes to kiss Wraith's cheek. "For showing up when I really needed someone I can trust."

It's very difficult not to do something exceptionally cliché, such as pumping my fist into the air. My shoulders pull back as pride thrums in my chest. I'm about the furthest thing in

existence from a pride demon, but fuck me, those words from her lips fill me up with energy like I am one of those ridiculous fuckers.

“I think I should command—” Nadia cuts off as Wraith seals his mouth to hers. He wraps a forearm under her ass, lifting her into his chest. It’s actually a rather smooth transition for a virgin. I’m proud of him. He’s clearly been learning during our sessions with her.

“Once you command us to stay, I’ll only be able to return to Hell to deposit souls.” Wraith palms the back of her head. “There’s something we left behind that I’d rather not risk falling into the wrong hands. We weren’t expecting your summoning.”

“Didn’t I just see you a few days ago? I mean, the time in Haven was only shortly before the time here in North Falls, right?” She frowns. “God, is that all it was? It feels like it’s been ages since then.”

“Time moves differently in all the realms. Heaven is the slowest, followed by Faere, then Earth, and finally Hell. Since time moves fastest in Hell, it’s been quite a bit longer for us, doll.” I shrug at the look of shock all over her face. “It’s just the way of the universe.”

“How long?” she asks, blinking huge blue eyes.

“Several weeks since Haven, but it’s no matter,” Wraith says, like he didn’t sit around complaining the same way I did.

“Shit.” She blanches. “What about your friend? Is he still in Haven?” She gasps, slapping at his arm. “Okay, that makes so much more sense. I couldn’t understand why Kash called *me*, of all people.”

“That would be Malice.” I chuckle. He’d never truly put Nadia in danger because he knows the two of us would obliterate him if he did. “But what exactly did he do?”

Nadia goes on to explain about the wyvern. If her magic wasn’t acting shady, then I wouldn’t be quite so furious right now. Malice was fully capable of releasing the creature in his shadow form without putting Nadia at risk. It’s hard to get the

jump on a nightmare, but I owe him a solid right hook or a kick in the balls.

“Wait, how are you holding this for so long? The other night, it was only a few moments that you held time for.” She frowns, running her hand over his neck, and an unnatural pang of jealousy rips through my chest.

“I just got a massive boost from devouring that rotten creature’s soul,” Wraith says calmly. “Although, I don’t think I should hold it much longer.”

“You should return to your original location,” I suggest.

Nadia nods. “But when can I call for you again? Please don’t make me forget you this time.” She kisses Wraith’s cheek and comes to me.

“I won’t. That was solely for your protection.” I pull her to my chest, but my gaze moves to Wraith. “How long do you think we need? A day in her time?”

“Preferably less than that. Maybe twelve hours,” Wraith says. “I’d rather not be away for too long, and if you need us sooner, then don’t hesitate to make the call.”

“Okay, come back to me in twelve hours,” she whispers, staring up into my eyes. “By the way, I fucked Ridge. I’m not going to apologize for that. It was good sex, but being that the two of you are Sam, and we’ve always discussed my partners . . .” She shrugs. “I’m just being transparent.”

My hand tightens on her ass. That’s another thing Wraith and I went over after the incident at the elven king’s cottage. For the moment, she’s as bound to the vampire as she is to us. The wolf is a completely different story. He’s likely stuck with us for life, since I could detect no lie when he referred to her as his mate.

It’s not necessarily a bad thing.

Blood witches are hunted in the human realm. Having a solid group of men surrounding her at all times can only make it easier to keep her safe.

I get very close to her ear and murmur, “Oh, yeah? Did he fuck you in wolf form, because I’m not even going to lie, that’s the shit my dirty little heart lives for.” I nip at her ear, licking my way down her neck.

“No, human form, but he was half feral.” She groans, clutching at my chest as she dances on her toes.

“You’d best head back to where you were when Wraith froze time, but don’t think this gets you out of telling me all about it.” I slap her ass as she spins, walking back to stand behind the alpha wolf.

Wraith restarts time and the useless scumbag shifter’s corpse falls to the ground. It’s only a husk of what he was before.

“Holy shit,” Ridge growls, staring at his hand like he’s making sure none of that decay transferred to him during the contact.

“Nadia, behind you,” Echo yells. “Could you release me now, so I can save your ass?”

My head swivels in her direction, but it’s too late. A massive alpha, who looks strangely similar to Ridge, holds her in the air by the throat.

Ridge snarls, “Put her down, right fucking now!” His words echo with his alpha command. “Trace, I’m not fucking around.” Several more wolves approach. They’ve got thick frames. They’re likely enforcers.

“I’ve heard all about how she was looking for Drake. He’s dead, and she smells like blood and death,” Trace growls, digging his extended claws deeper into her neck.

Wraith snorts. I’ll bet he’s getting a nice little kick out of knowing she smells like him. She’s in no real danger. Not with the two of us around.

Ridge’s chest heaves as his face morphs to his wolf and back again. His eyes glow and his claws elongate. “Let me make something very fucking clear. Nadia is my mate. Even if she did kill Drake, I choose to take her punishment, as is my right by our laws.”

Trace stumbles a step. Nadia claws at his wrist and forearm. Oh yeah, she needs to breathe.

My eyes cut to Wraith. I can see him all the time, so it's impossible to be sure if he's visible to the others or if he's currently hidden, like I am. He looks like he's on the verge of sucking the soul right out of the wolf holding Nadia.

"Don't fucking try me, little brother," Ridge growls, his eyes flashing. "I want no part of leading this pack, but continue to disregard our laws, and I'll knock you down a peg if I have to."

Oh, that makes sense. Ridge is clearly the more dominant of the two, but if he refused the role, it would have naturally passed to the next youngest alpha.

"You have no claiming bite," Trace snarls. "That means you have no bond to step in as her mate."

Nadia continues to kick. I barely hold back the chuckle when she lands a solid slam of her shoe into the alpha's gut. I'm sure he barely feels it, but now that I notice it, her face is turning a bit red.

"The witch didn't kill the alpha." I step over and reveal myself to the rest of the eyes in the clearing. "I did. She's turning a little rosy, and you've got the wrong culprit."

"I helped." Wraith has his hood pulled up, and it's extremely clear when he makes himself known. Everyone, outside of Ridge, stumbles back. "Set her back on her feet, otherwise Drake, the corrupt-as-fuck shifter, won't be the only meal I gorge on today."

"You have three days to make your claim," Trace growls at Ridge as he sets Nadia back on her feet.

I disappear from sight again, getting close to Ridge's ear and filling him in on Drake's more horrid sins. He needs to understand what was happening right under the alpha's nose. If Trace isn't a capable alpha, then he needs to be removed from the equation. If he knew and didn't stop it, then additional measures need to be taken.

“Get her the fuck out of here,” Ridge snarls, glancing over his shoulder at Echo.

“I’d be glad to, *if* the little witch would command her shadows to stop restraining me,” the vampire hisses.

Nadia coughs, rubbing at her throat. “I release you from interfering.”

The vampire zips over, studies Nadia for a half a second, and very unceremoniously tosses her over his shoulder before disappearing from sight.

“Don’t make a single move to get involved,” Ridge growls at the enforcers lining Trace’s back. “This isn’t an alpha challenge. I owe my little brother some retribution.” Ridge pivots, landing a hell of a left hook. Shit, immediately followed by a solid right. Then he’s tossing himself at his brother. “You and I are going to have a heart-to-heart talk.”

Trace hits the ground with a heavy thump. Ridge lands over him, continuing the barrage of punches, but he obviously doesn’t want to kill his brother, because he moves to landing hits against his core.

The enforcers stand, blinking, and they don’t interfere. Perhaps this is normal brotherly behavior, or possibly, they don’t want to be on the receiving end of those solid punches.

“We’re slipping,” Wraith says, but he doesn’t sound angry about it. I’m not either. She commanded us back in twelve hours. Meaning, we need to secure the relic and lock down our apartment in Hell before making the trip permanently to the human realm.

I rub my hands together. I can’t fucking wait to finally sink inside my naughty little witch. With that, Wraith and I are pulled back to Hell.

Chapter Twenty-Two

Nadia

Echo chucks me into his car for the most uncomfortable ride in existence. Fury wafts off him in waves. My chin tilts in the air as I glance out the window. Okay, so I definitely look like an idiot for getting myself into something I couldn't control. However, my magic has never failed me so epically until I came to North Falls.

I need to get out of this town, which is practically impossible with the council's compulsion. I should have tested whether I could ask Wraith or Knight to pass on a message. Maybe they could pop into Haven and visit The Den.

"I'd like to check on Milania, if that's possible?" I ask to break the incredibly awkward silence.

Echo grunts. "Once we move to the next runestone. You're more optimistic than me if you don't believe the council has eyes on us at all times."

"Is that where we're headed?"

"Hardly. We're going to my apartment to regroup. They're probably wondering why the hell we were on pack lands to begin with. The last thing we need is to draw them directly to the newly turned fae." His hand flexes on the steering wheel.

Echo also has strong forearms, at least the one currently flexing as he drives. He's covered in black tattoos. His right hand has a galaxy pattern that swirls into planets around his wrist and up his forearm.

"Why do you live there?" I ask conversationally, but truthfully, it's been bugging me. I'm surprised he didn't live

with Imogen. At least, until the maker bond is severed, it's rare for progeny to be away from their creator. I mean, as far as I've been taught, it is. "I'm sure Imogen isn't used to letting you out of her sight for long."

Echo scoffs, pulling his hand down to shift gears. My knees actually clench as he downshifts. I'm not sure why that's so sexy, but here we are. "It's my job, or it was before I became your walking, talking blood bag. I manage the club and keep everyone in line. It's not like I'm scheduling appointments, but that's the employment I was given."

"I'm sure it's not so bad." My eyes are still focused on the way his forearm flexes as he downshifts again. "I love my job. Even on my days off, I still end up at The Den or Venom. That's the nightclub, but to be honest, that might be because Haven doesn't have a lot of other nightlife."

Echo shakes his head. "North Falls is not Haven. The Mirage is an apt name for what that place provides."

My heart drops. I don't like the sound of that one bit. "And you actively help the council keep that place in business?"

I'm all for sex work and monsters fucking each other to their hearts' content, but I draw the line at coercion.

"As I've extensively pointed out," he says in a clipped tone, "I was physically *incapable* of denying a command issued by my maker until you dissolved our bond. Now I get the joy of being commanded by an altruistic, but suicidal, witch."

I scoff. "I'm neither of those things, but I am going to burn that damn council to the ground on my way out of town."

"Not everyone at The Mirage is innocent." Echo sighs, taking a turn that leads us into the main area of North Falls. "Some are reasonably indebted to the council by their own choices and deals they struck. A few, I feel especially bad for, but if you get us all murdered by pulling another stunt like today, then they'll truly have no chance at respite."

I bristle, tossing myself even farther back into the leather seat, but he's right. It's freaking bizarre. I don't like needing to

rely on anyone else, but at the same time, I'm not so independent that I can't see the value of having a team.

"I'm sorry that I commanded you not to interfere." I gasp as Echo whips his car into the back parking lot near the pool and his apartment. "Not immortal. Just a reminder."

"You're such a pain in the ass, baby darkling." He pulls into a spot, shutting off the car. It's still bright out. I start to freak out a little, but my door opens and my seat belt gets unclipped before I can do much more than blink.

Echo lifts me and zips us inside. The ward sizzles, letting me know someone crossed it while I was out. I wait for any lingering feelings to indicate someone else was here while we were gone, but outside of Echo, it's clear no one was.

"Stay." Echo places me on my feet. He's gone in the next instant, and I feel him leave the ward through the door. It's strange.

He's only gone a few moments, but I need a drink. He's got quite the freezer stocked full of liquor and the cabinet next to the fridge, from what I remember.

There's a lovely bottle of half-empty vodka in the front of the cabinet. I grab the handle, yanking it down. I drop it on the counter and look around for a tumbler. Eventually, I give up and drink from the bottle. My nerves are completely shot.

"What the hell did you do to me?" Echo growls.

I jolt, nearly dropping the bottle. I guess I was so preoccupied that I didn't pay attention to the ward. The vampire grabs the bottle, setting it down on the counter. His hand lands on my hip as the other wraps in my hair. He tilts my head back until my eyes meet his milky white orbs.

Oh shit, Echo's monster is fully in charge.

"What do you mean?" I lick my lips nervously, sucking off the last drops of remaining alcohol.

"What did your shadows do while they were restraining me?" His arm lifts and he shakes it in my face. "Not even a hint of irritation. I just stood in direct sunlight for over five

seconds. My skin should be blistering right now, if not breaking open in spots. The UV shield around the town keeps the sun from being deadly, but it's still a painful experience."

I blink, studying his forearm. There are no signs of what he described. My magic pulses, and I'm reminded of how shitty I felt in the clearing for not considering that he might be one of those vampires the sun can be problematic for.

"You made me swallow enough shadows that I thought you were trying to drown me in them." He nips at my neck, causing my entire body to shiver in response. His tongue flicks over my neck, and my nipples tighten painfully.

"Yeah, well, I thought they were restraining you, but I did feel like a terrible tether for not considering the sun," I admit, shoving my ass back into his pelvis.

"Is that right?" he muses, teasing his hand around to the button on my shorts.

"Yes," I agree.

I'm not sure if he mistakes that for consent or if he's just excellent at pushing boundaries, because he pops the button, handling the zipper before I can blink. "You smell absolutely fucking delicious, and my addiction to your scent is growing over time."

"I'm sure it's the power in my blood," I moan. My head rolls back against his chest as he slides his hand down the front of my shorts, cupping my sex and squeezing my lower lips.

"That's not it." His tongue flicks over the column of my neck, making my tits throb. "I'm beginning to think it's the tether. Or just the smell of your slick cunt egging me on." His middle finger teases my clit over my panties. I bite my lip to keep from begging him to move lower. "Do you have any idea what I can do when my tongue moves at super speed?"

The moan escapes, despite my best effort, and he grins against my neck and shoulder. I'd normally be a little concerned. Logic dictates keeping a hungry vampire away from your throat is a good idea, but there's something about

the thrill I get from having a predator so close that makes me sure I am too stupid to live.

“No, but I’m totally open to finding out.”

Echo growls and the sound vibrates against my back. My body has a visceral reaction as my core tightens around nothing.

“Such a responsive little thing, aren’t you?” Echo murmurs close to my ear. He squeezes the lips of my sex, and I thrust my ass against his thickening length. “Shall we remove these?” He snaps the band on my panties, and my hand falls down, disintegrating the fabric. “Nice trick.” He chuckles. “How about the top?”

I repeat the process up top, and my heavy tits bounce as they’re freed from their confinement. My nipples tighten in the cool air. Echo licks the shell of my ear as one hand cups my left breast and the other teases over my sex.

“You still smell faintly of the mutt.” Echo works his palm over my clit while sliding a finger down to test my hole. “I don’t like it.”

“Then, do something about it.”

He nips at my neck, lifting me while spinning around. He takes a few steps and sets me on the edge of the counter that has no top cabinets. My hands wrap around the cool surface to keep myself upright while Echo drops to his knees. The long black hair on top of his head falls over his eyes as he pulls my hips forward. My feet come to rest on his back as he crudely licks his lips.

“Hold on tight, baby darkling,” he says, smirking. “I might not stop with just a taste.” His tongue slides out, licking slowly from my hole to my clit. His forearms are trapped under my thighs, but he still manages to pin my pelvis down with his strong hands. He works my sex in different patterns and pressures until my feet bounce against his back as I beg.

At some point during his torment, I release the counter with one hand, burying it in his hair. “I thought you were

going to show me what you can do. Teasing is no fun for either of us.”

The speed of his tongue increases until I’m a wriggling, sobbing mess. Sweat breaks out on my hairline as my pleasure coils tight. My tits ache, feeling heavy and tender.

“Not impressed?” he asks, licking his lips.

“Ungh,” I moan, trying to shove him deeper into my sex.

“That’s what I thought.” He moves his hand from holding my hip down to pulling apart the top of my sex. His thumb teases my clit as he switches to tongue fucking me.

My hair falls around my arms as my head falls back. “Deeper!”

Echo works me over as electricity zips through my entire body. My pussy milks his tongue, but I’m desperate for something more. He growls, lifting me with my thighs hanging over his shoulders, and slams my back against the wall. I’m high, but my head doesn’t touch the roof as he licks and sucks me through my orgasm.

I can barely see straight again before he’s tossing me over his shoulder and heading down the stairs to his bedroom.

Chapter Twenty-Three

Echo

The little witch bounces as I toss her onto my mattress. Her dark hair fans around her, and my breath catches in my chest. I don't need to breathe. It's an unexpected response. But she's fucking beautiful. Sure, her exterior is a nice bonus, and yet, it's not the part of her that I've got an unnatural addiction to.

I strip out of my clothes faster than her eyes can process. I check her feet, but she lost her flats at some point. Watching her heavy tits heave makes my balls feel tight. I stretch a hand down to work my cock. Here's hoping I didn't majorly misread this situation, because I need some fucking relief.

"Wow." She licks her lips, staring at my frame with hooded eyes. "Is this a vampire thing? Are you waiting for an invitation?"

I chuckle.

Me.

I don't think anything is funny unless I'm being sarcastic.

I toss myself down on the bed and pull her until she's lying over my lap. My cock bounces around her soft lower stomach as I pin her legs with a forearm. "I forgot. I swore I was going to make sure you remember the consequences of commanding me not to intervene in *saving your fucking life.*"

She moans, wiggling against me. "Get on with it, then. I'm pretty sure you're all talk."

I growl, landing several stinging slaps on her luscious ass. She begs louder the harder my palm lands against her tender flesh. My free hand wraps in her hair, tilting her head back. Her eyes are closed as she pants like she's truly enjoying the bite of pain I offer.

I'd much prefer to bite her in another way. My shaft leaks, jolting against her skin. She holds herself up with one palm on the bed and stretches the other between us until she's fisting my cock in her small hand. Her thumb circles my crown as she works me with just enough pressure to make me crave more.

"I am sorry, by the way." Nadia trembles as I land several harder slaps on the opposite cheek. "Come on, I want you inside me."

I smirk. "Beg pretty and maybe . . ."

"Please, Echo! Fuck me, please?"

"What do you need, baby?" I murmur, yanking her up by a handful of her hair. She twists, tossing a knee over both of mine. Her hand lands on my chest as she grips my cock, positioning it between her slick lower lips. She grinds against the bottom of my shaft, biting her lower lip, and I ache to dig my fangs into it.

"I need you to stretch me out," she says, blinking up at me from under her lashes.

My grip tightens at the base of her skull. It's really fucking strange how constricted my chest feels when I stare up at her. She's incredibly enticing with her hard nipples bouncing with each ragged breath.

I vaguely wonder if she's just this good at her job, or if she wants me as much as I crave her. All thought flees my mind as she sinks down on my tip.

"Fuck," I hiss. Both hands move, digging into her hips. I give her a little shove farther down my shaft. Oh, good God. She knows just how to swivel her hips to make my fangs descend.

"You're looking a little bite happy," she moans, sealing her lips to mine. Every time I lift her, she falls farther down my

throbbing length. My hand wraps around her back as I palm her head in the other. She's not afraid to tease the remaining inches of my shaft as she works her clit. She's so slick, it feels like she should be able to take all of me, especially after seeing her with the mutt. "You're so hard," she says into my mouth.

"Mmm, I am. All for you, darling darkling."

"I can't decide if that was cute or horrifying." She shoves my chest, and I fall until my back slaps against the mattress.

I clutch at her luscious hips as she grinds over my length.

The vision of her stomach moving as she works me over sends my monster rising to the surface. She wasn't afraid of my fangs. I wonder if the same would be true with my eyes completely white. Her head falls back as she rides my cock like I'm just here for her pleasure. The thought would turn my stomach with anyone else, but for her, it only intensifies my obsession.

"Fuck me just like that," I growl.

Her puffy pink lips part as she moans, "I'm so close."

I cradle her with an arm around the top of her ass and roll us. Her back hits the mattress, but her legs hang off, as mine did. I lift her with my forearm, holding her to me as I crawl us up the mattress.

I yank a pillow out, shoving it under her head.

She smiles bashfully. "Are you going to fuck me now, Mr. Diamonte?"

"Yeah, I am, but I actually like hearing my name from your lips." I seal my mouth to hers. Her tongue flicks around mine as they tangle in the air. I hook my forearm under her right leg, pulling that calf to rest on my shoulder as she leaks around my throbbing length. I'm about to embarrass myself if I don't get my shit together.

"Grind against my clit, just like that." She gasps. "Fuck, Echo. Pound me deep."

I grin against her cheek as my eyesight goes hazy. That generally means my eyes are milky white. "Are you sure you

can handle me at super speed?”

“Yes, so much, yes! Bruise me until all I can feel is you.”

I grin. She’s clenching around me in a way that makes it impossible not to give her exactly what she demands.

“Remember, you asked for this.” I thrust deeper and harder on each rhythmical snap of my pelvis against hers. My fingers brush her cheek as my cock grows impossibly hard. She’s so slick and warm, but it’s the look on her face and the sounds she makes that do me in. I’ve spent several hundred years not truly being desired by anyone, and it only ratchets my need higher. “Clench that slick little pussy *just* like that.”

Nadia thrashes, digging her toes into my lower back as she begs.

“Scream for me, baby,” I growl, bumping her face with mine. My fangs throb with the same ragged pulse of my heartbeat. My heart never pounds, but it’s beating significantly faster than normal. “Can I bite you?”

“Oh fuck, yes,” she sobs.

I don’t think it through. Instead, I strike her throat and moan as I flick my tongue over her sweaty skin. Her blood is incredibly potent, but I’m fairly sure it’s the fact her baby fangs dig into my shoulder that creates a circuit, feeding me her desire and emotions as mine flow into her. The most powerful orgasm I’ve ever experienced rips through me. It’s nearly impossible to keep fucking in and out of her as she locks down on my cock.

My fangs retract, and I lick over the bite to seal the wound. The little witch does the same as I tremble over her.

She stares up at me from under dark lashes, and that look is dangerous as hell for both of us. It makes me ache to make her mine in ways that would get us both killed.

Chapter Twenty-Four

Nadia

“Ugh,” I groan, gently shoving away Echo’s arm. His fingers slide in and out of my slick, very satisfied, pussy. “Why are you so annoying? I was enjoying that nap.”

Echo laughs a little ominously. “Oh, baby darkling. You let me fill you full of my cum. I need to keep it where it belongs. Let’s pray we aren’t summoned by the council until my scent fades from your body.”

“Um, fuck them. Who I’m intimate with is none of their goddamn business,” I hiss, slapping away his hand that’s still playing in a mixture of our juices.

Echo isn’t fazed in the least. He continues shoving his cum back inside my body. “Don’t be a difficult darkling,” he says with a smirk. “How am I to seed your belly if you don’t keep my cum inside your womb?”

I sit up, slapping his hand away. “You’re a vampire. There are no baby vampires. Don’t be ridiculous.”

“No baby vampires recently, but ancients are able to create dhampir.” He grins wickedly. “I’m honored you would consider breeding with me.”

“You’re so full of shit.” I laugh, shaking my head.

He’s not an ancient.

His maker may be one, but he’s not.

Imogen is extremely old and powerful, though. A slight shiver of unease slides through me.

Echo's face turns deadly serious. "I'm not. Did your council, or lessons, teach you nothing?"

I bring my wrist to my mouth and my fangs slide down.

Echo snatches my hand before I can slice my skin to get blood for an extra refresher on my contraception spell.

"Absolutely fucking not," he growls, pinning my hands to the mattress above my head. His thick cock notches at my entrance, and he slams his hips into mine, impaling me on his shaft. "You're going to let me breed you, darling darkling."

A pathetic whimper I'll be embarrassed about later escapes. Why is that so hot? It really shouldn't be. I'm like ninety-nine percent sure my contraceptive spell has me covered, except there's the fact that my magic has been weird lately.

Echo's eyes turn white as he fucks into my body in powerful strokes that make me bounce. The tether between us pulls taut, and I can feel his emotions radiate in my chest. His mouth finds mine as his pelvis brushes my clit on each deep, punishing stroke. Damn, he's really got that primal, animalistic vibe down. He fucks into me like he's trying to slam me through the mattress, and for whatever reason, it only makes the entire experience a million times hotter. There is clearly something fundamentally wrong with my wiring since coming to North Falls. I've never had a breeding kink before, but damn, if my pussy doesn't clench around him at the thought.

The link between us is so clear, it takes my breath away. The infuriating man is desperate to be loved and wanted, which actually makes me feel like an asshole. Also, I'm totally not letting a vampire knock me up over some lingering guilt. Not going to happen. I'll give him a back rub or something to make up for it, but procreation is a whole different level of commitment.

"Don't dishonor what we have by trying to use that spell when I'm not around to stop you," he whispers against my lips. Does the tether allow him to read my thoughts, or am I just that transparent?

All thought bleeds away as he grinds against my clit. My body shivers as my back arches off the mattress. He slams his tip into my G-spot over and over again. One hand pins my wrists to the bed, and the other grips my throat. He twists my head to the side, licking down my neck.

“You know I require your consent to bite you,” he whispers against my pulse.

“And you know that you have it. Consider this explicit permission from here until I rescind it. As long as you make me come hard.”

Echo laughs darkly. “I’ll make you see stars.” His fangs strike in a vicious bite that burns with a painful ache. Warmth coats my insides, starting in my neck and pulsing its way throughout my entire system. My nipples ache as they brush Echo’s chest. My pussy leaks around his thick cock as my pleasure coils tighter and tighter. His venom makes every pleasure center in my body pulse.

“Oh fuck,” I whimper as he slams into my G-spot just right.

Echo knows exactly how to roll his pelvis to brush over my clit with each rhythmic stroke. A bizarre pang of jealousy hits, but it’s the tether. I shake that shit off and focus on how hard he’s about to fuck my world up.

“Shit, baby darkling,” he says against my throat. “I’m going to be dripping out of you for *days*. You’re already so full of my cum that it spills out on every stroke.” His fangs retract and his mouth finds mine. The kiss is dirty and frantic. The way he teases my tongue while slapping into my G-spot sends me over the edge.

Rolling waves of pleasure jolt through my system while he holds me in place. My tits bounce as he slams deep and grinds just right.

“Yesyesyes,” I sob one long string of begging. “Just like that.”

“Come all over my cock, darling.” Echo growls. “Come for Daddy.”

I'm sure I give him a look that says *shut the hell up*, or maybe it's some combination of *don't stop* and *just a little harder*. I can't be sure what comes across, but he laughs against my cheek, pinning me to the mattress.

"That is so not becoming a thing," I groan as my body finally starts to settle.

"Mmm, yes, I actually think it is," he muses, kissing me and speeding up his thrusts. He moves so deeply and so quickly, it pounds my body into an unexpected orgasm. His eyes are lost to his monster, and it turns me the hell on.

His tongue finds mine as I'm coming down from the toe-curling orgasm. His hard body slams into mine one final time as he comes. His hand finally leaves my wrist and yanks my head to the side again. He bites, sucking small sips of my blood as his tongue runs over my neck, and lazily rolls his hips through the jumping of his shaft.

I run my now free hand through his hair as he growls against my cheek.

"I'm surprised the wolf didn't try to stake me while I was distracted," Echo murmurs, moving to kiss me. He offers one final peck and rolls to the side before stretching out languidly.

My eyes have a mind of their own as they take in his form. His cock still glistens with both of our juices, and I have the urge to lick it off. Or possibly to climb on and ride him until I come again. I've always had a high sex drive, but it's been a little ridiculous lately.

"Do you have any idea what you've done?" Ridge growls. It's a low, feral sound that sends a shiver down my spine. My eyes fly up and it suddenly makes sense what Echo said. I have no idea when Ridge came in. "We've been called to a party at Constantine's. All fucking three of us."

Vampires are always pale, but despite his normal skin tone, Echo turns a shade similar to cotton. Yanking the blanket out from under me, I cover up. It's complicated, because Echo is also lying on it, but I feel entirely too naked right now.

“Bloody fucking hell,” Echo whispers, swiping a hand over his face.

“You need to feed now,” Ridge says. “Shower, then feed. Do everything you can to smother her scent.”

Echo nods. “I’ll do everything within reason,” he says pointedly. My magic is a jealous bitch. Dark shadows immediately engulf his body. Echo laughs. “Don’t worry, baby darkling. I’m very aware of who I belong to.”

My magic pulses with delight, but I frown. I don’t especially like the sound of that. “You aren’t my servant.” I roll to face him. “I’d never take away your free will.”

“For hundreds of years, I served a maker who was very much a vile kind of monster.” He leans in close. “I’ve just been with someone of my own free will for the first time since I was turned.” His hand brushes over my cheek. “Please remember what I said—you and I are a team.”

My heart sinks.

Imogen is going to die before I leave town, even if I have to sweet-talk Wraith into doing it for me.

He’s right.

That bitch is the most vile kind of monster there is.

Echo’s lips brush over mine tenderly, and in a flash, he’s off the bed. “You’ll handle covering my smell, I’d imagine?” He grins at Ridge.

“I’ll do what needs to be done to cover your *mistake*.” Ridge spits the words.

Echo sighs, shaking his head, and he’s gone in a blink. The closet door opens and slams, and a cool rush of air follows him out.

“I don’t love that you made it seem like he’s a mistake.” I frown, giving him a serious look.

“Come on, little witch. I’ll start the water for you.” Ridge stomps off toward the attached bathroom and is back before I’m even out of the bed. He yanks off the blanket and extends

a hand. He pulls me up, nodding to the shower. “Get in. I’ll strip and remake the bed, then join you. This is going to require some creative thinking to manage.”

My face flames as I spin around, heading for the warmth of the shower. I don’t even know why.

Ridge is handsome and kind, but I don’t owe him shit. We barely know one another. I grab a towel from the cabinet and toss it on the closed toilet lid before climbing into the shower.

My body aches as I step under the hot spray.

I quickly get to work, cleaning myself up.

Echo’s shower is clean and well-kept, but the entire building is old and has that lived-in feeling of age. The fact that I’m using Echo’s body wash might offset some of his smell, right?

I honestly have no clue.

My sense of smell is practically on par with the average human.

I’m rinsing conditioner from my hair and soaping my body for the third time when Ridge’s warm frame presses against my back.

The rush of cool air that follows him makes me shiver, or maybe that’s due to his warm palm caressing my side and lower stomach. I spin around, and his thick cock brushes my skin. His dark blond hair falls around us as he leans over me.

“You’ve still got a little soap right here.” He tips my head back into the hot stream of water. His calloused hand runs over my cheek as he brushes my hair back. The faint yellowish-green glow of his wolf pulses in his eyes. A low growl echoes out of his chest. “Oh, little witch, what a dangerous game you’re playing . . .” He sounds lost to his wolf. The heat of his warm breath fans over my neck and shoulder. He bends down, caressing his cheek against mine. “Do you want the vampire dead? Is that why you fucked him?”

I bristle, glaring up at him. “I fucked him because I wanted to. I don’t know what your problem is, but just because we had

sex, it in no way gives you the right to dictate my partners. I'm open to rational discussions, but that requires communication on both of our parts."

Spinning around, I grab the shampoo again. I don't know if Echo's scent is still strong enough for a supernatural to pick up.

Ridge wraps a hand around my shoulder, turning me to face him. His eyes glow a much brighter shade, indicating his wolf is present and agitated.

"I don't wish to control you," he murmurs. "But my wolf does. He can't comprehend why you don't want us as we want you."

"I do want you, you big goofball," I huff. "But I'm not sure I'm cut out for monogamy. More than that, you never asked or mentioned you expected it. I can't read your mind. Don't try to guilt me after the fact."

"That wasn't my intention. I understand the two of you have a connection due to the tether, but I think you and I do as well."

"Yeah," I agree, still trying to soap my stomach. "None of that will matter if I get Echo killed by his awful maker because, spoiler alert—they won't be letting me walk out of this town if that happens."

Ridge growls low and feral at the sound of Echo's name. "Are you purposely trying to taunt me, Nadia?"

"No, I'm trying to get clean," I say.

"You'll need a much stronger scent than soap to mask the vampire." Ridge smirks. It reminds me of the cocky looks he shot my way that first night at the gas station and in the woods after. He's ridiculously hot when he smiles like that.

I can't let him distract me. "Then, why the hell are we wasting time in here?"

"Is it a waste?" His huge hands wrap under my ass and around my back, lifting me into him. His cock bounces against

my sex as he pins me to the wall. He brushes the hair away from my face and stares down at me.

“You need to feed,” he murmurs. “While I fuck you full of my scent.”

Oh, well, that doesn't sound terrible.

I have no freaking clue why I'm so drawn to Ridge, but dammit, it doesn't make what I'm feeling any less real. I should've realized how territorial shifters can be. In my defense, I thought we were on the same page about hooking up, but not even a second later, my stomach drops at the thought of hurting him.

“I didn't mean to hurt you—” I start, staring at his bare chest.

Ridge cuts me off. “Now isn't the time. Bite me while I cover you in my scent.”

I give him a shaky nod as he stretches down so I can reach his throat. The hot water batters my left side, keeping me warm, but my right side tingles in the cool bathroom air.

Ridge's woody scent fills my nostrils as I plaster myself to his strong chest. His lips brush mine before his tongue slams into my mouth. The kiss isn't gentle. No, it's a deep and dirty claiming, like he's trying to erase Echo from existence and, at this moment, it works. Ridge's muscular chest melts into mine as he slams me against the wall with eager force.

My fangs descend as my arousal skyrockets. My pussy clenches around nothing as I wiggle against his pelvis.

Ridge pulls back, and my mouth eagerly follows his. “Sorry, little witch, we need to hurry this along. You still want me?”

“I do,” I agree truthfully.

“Bite me while I'll remind you how good I can make you feel.” The arm banded under my ass lifts me higher. My tongue flicks over his throat, and I don't even have time to consider it. Instead, I strike. My fangs puncture his skin as his blood fills my mouth.

Ridge growls, shoving me harder against the wall. I don't have the venom vampires have to make the bite pleasurable, but he doesn't seem to mind as his cock grinds up into my dripping core.

He tilts his hips and slams home. I whimper, arching toward him as I stretch over his intense girth. There's a fine line between pain and pleasure. The first few thrusts might qualify as painful, but his blood fills my mouth, and I start to feel a little high.

Alpha wolves have extremely potent pheromones, and Ridge's affect me on a whole different level.

"I guess we've leveled up to blood and fuck." He squeezes my ass. "Huh, little witch?"

I nod. After several long draws, my fangs retract. My tongue dances over his flesh, sucking every drop of his essence I can manage.

The arm around my back moves, and he slides his hand into my hair, tilting my head back. He buries his face in my neck, inhaling deeply. "I guess it's better than nothing. I can't decide if the bloodsucker's scent is permanently burned into my nostrils, or if you really do still smell of him."

He frowns, looking so disgusted that I snort a laugh.

My hands dig into his strong shoulders. "You should definitely make me smell like you, then."

"Fucking gladly," he growls, shoving his mouth to mine. My back slides around the cool tiles as he works into me so deeply that he bumps the bottom with each powerful stroke. "We want you to smell like us from here on out." His eyes light with his wolf, making my heart race.

Uh-oh. He makes me feel weirdly melty inside, which is in no way my normal style. I'm definitely in over my head with the mountain of an alpha wolf, but fuck, does it make me nervously excited at the same time.

Chapter Twenty-Five

Ridge

My wolf is being highly problematic. He's got unhealthy delusions. The most prominent involves sinking our teeth into the little witch, preferably while fucking her full of our pups. I'm not opposed to either idea, but I do think the frantic need to claim her has only been spurred on by that fucking vampire.

When I came upon them, it was clear neither noticed me. I spent a fair amount of time frustrated that Nadia didn't sense me breaching her wards. Although, to be fair, she was otherwise engaged. It would have been the ideal time to stake that fucking vampire. I did consider that might be traumatic for Nadia, so I held off.

For the time being.

"Ridge," she gasps, clawing at my shoulders. "Harder!"

I shake my head, clearing the murderous thoughts, and focus on fucking her so well she completely forgets he exists. My hand wraps around the back of her head to give her cushioning while my other digs into her hip as I watch her slick cunt swallow every inch of my cock. My knot throbs, desperate and aching to slam inside her.

We don't have time for that. There's every possibility she can't physically handle a knot. My wolf is sure she can, but that fucker gives questionable advice at times.

She's meant for us. The universe will have ensured that she's our perfect fit. His logic is sound, but also we don't have the time to waste.

“You’re so fucking tight,” I growl, bumping my face against hers. “My wolf is busy dreaming of planting our pups in your stomach. Of breeding your slick little cunt full of us over and over again. He wants to lock you down, so you can never escape.”

“What is it with all of you delusional men? Does this entire town have a breeding kink? Is it contagious?”

I growl. We don’t like the word *all* in reference to her partners. She can have the demons, because they come in handy in a crisis, but we’re not sold on the council’s errand boy. She clenches her pussy, and my beast wants to rut. It’s not possible in this position, so I carefully lower her to the floor before pulling my cock free.

“Hands on the wall. Ass out,” I growl, pulling her wrists to rest above her head. My free hand caresses her hip and stomach, popping her ass back even farther.

A feral snarl escapes as I position my crown at her opening. She’s got a slim hourglass frame that’s doing wild shit to my brain. We wouldn’t mind fucking her with the rounding of a big pregnant belly. Aww, fuck. The thought sends my wolf from feral to full-blown rabid as he fights me for control.

I slam home as her head falls back.

My wolf has been riled ever since Trace demanded I claim her within three days. My little brother is on my shit list, but it is part of our laws that I must be bonded to her in order to take her punishment if the need should arise.

The thought makes my wolf even more feral with the drive to protect her and to claim her so that the world understands she’s ours. Being a shifter is complicated. We’re very much one and the same, and yet, we also have different goals and ideas on how to manifest those into reality.

She’s mine, my wolf adds petulantly. *I want time with her too.*

Fair enough, I have no problem letting him take the reins every now and again, especially considering he would protect

her with his life.

“Jesus Christ, Ridge. Are you trying to tear me in half?” She moans long and loud. “Just kidding, that feels great.”

I pull out until only the crown is inside her and plunge deep on the next stroke. My tip bounces against the bottom, and yeah, I’m pretty sure I’m about three seconds away from going into complete fucking beast mode. My knot hits her lower lips, and it’s nearly impossible to keep from bucking up into her.

“Clit,” she groans, “let me tease my clit.”

I release her wrists.

“Keep them there for me, and I’ll do it.” My fingers fall to tease her swollen nub, but as she bounces, they brush over my knot. I have to grind my teeth to keep from squeezing it. It craves the pressure her delicious little hole could provide.

My forearm moves, pulling her up. Not all the way; that wouldn’t work with the height difference. Her heavy tits sway as I circle her clit with more pressure on each stroke. My wolf is insistent that we inform her she’s ours. She’s never getting away. We will hunt her down and drag her back if necessary. The craziness only gets more severe from there. “My brother gave me three days to claim you. I could and would murder him if I had to, but for him to maintain his authority with the pack, I generally don’t buck against his rules.”

It’s not my favorite thought, because I am fond of my little brother, but the need to keep my mate safe and happy trumps all else.

She gasps, “Ridge . . .”

“I technically should be alpha, which already puts him in a dangerous situation if his wolves don’t recognize his authority.” I lick over her shoulder to keep my fucking mouth occupied. She’s probably not ready for the rest just yet. My wolf struggles against me, fighting for control. “You’re our mate.” It’s not my voice that growls out the admission against her skin. “And we fully intend to claim you.”

That fucker. He’s going to scare her away.

“What?” she gasps. “Okay, but I’m there. Harder?”

“Can I bite you? Claim you as mine?” My voice echoes with the wolf.

“I manifested that shit to the universe.” Her head shakes. “Yes, bite me, Ridge. Please, please, please.” I side-eye her, completely fucking perplexed, but my wolf takes over. Our jaw elongates as my hands turn to claws. “Oh, fuck me. You . . . wow. That’s a different kind of grower.”

My beast strikes, digging into her soft flesh while I’m still trying to verify if she realizes I meant a claiming bite. Her pussy locks down, and it becomes impossible to move in and out. Her warm, wet heat milks in waves as her presence fills my soul. It’s a strange fluttering feeling that takes over my chest as her pleasure floods the newly formed link. The pressure ends up being too much as she grinds her ass against my pelvis. Heat licks from my balls down my spine as my cock kicks, filling her with hot spurts of my cum.

We snarl, licking over the bite. “All ours, little witch. I can’t wait to truly hunt you.”

I fight my wolf for control as my legs tremble, but I’m the only thing keeping us upright. He’d pin her to the shower floor and fuck her like the true beast he is.

I grunt, thrusting as much as I can now that she’s extra slick.

“Holy shit.” She shudders out a breath, pulling an arm down. She grabs my hand. “No more. It’s too much right now. Being able to feel what you’re feeling. God, that’s intense.” Her voice shakes, and I hold her tighter in response.

I need her to know that I’ve got her and always will.

I pull her all the way up until her back rests against my chest and kiss her as I finally start to come down.

My wolf is purely content and utterly filled with pride. He claimed our mate for us. I sure as fuck hope he realizes that means we’re going to have to share her.

My fingers dance over her cheek as she smiles at me over her shoulder. She snorts. “Are you up for the move to Haven? If we survive this little dinner party and this town in general, then I can’t stay here.”

“Why?” I ask. I’m not necessarily stuck on staying in North Falls, but I have been here several hundred years now.

“My nan is getting older. I can’t abandon her, nor would I feel comfortable asking her to move. She’s practically elderly.”

I laugh. “That’s all right, little witch. I’ll gladly relocate. I can’t wait to meet her.”

“She’ll likely pinch your butt,” Nadia says, stepping forward. My still hard cock falls from her cunt. She spins to face me, and her soft hands land on my chest. Her blue eyes stand out starkly in comparison to her dark lashes. She truly is the most beautiful woman I’ve ever seen. “I’m pretty sure I wished you into reality. I was complaining recently, and I wished for a hot-as-fuck, stoic protector—”

“You’re both completely fucking insane,” Echo growls from the doorway. “Do you have any idea what you’ve done?”

I’m still grinning at her words. I’m pretty sure she’s delusional, since I’ve been alive a lot longer than she has, but Echo’s words sober me up real fucking quick.

Nadia climbs out of the car, and the silky material of her dress brushes my forearm. While Nadia and I showered, Echo procured dinner-party attire for all three of us.

“I’m telling you right now,” Echo says, pulling on his shirt sleeve nervously as he glances over his shoulder. “This is a bad fucking sign.”

“I’m not sure,” Nadia says. “My shadows aren’t concerned, but they haven’t exactly been reliable.”

“Come on.” I wrap my arm around her lower back. The silky, cream-and-silver dress contrasts her dark hair and blue eyes perfectly.

She’s absolutely stunning, but I agree with Echo. Had I fully considered the situation prior to acting, then I wouldn’t have bitten her. At least not immediately before a meeting with the council. I haven’t been summoned before them in years. My bite is fully visible on her right clavicle and the backside of her shoulder. My monster wanted no doubt in anyone’s mind about the fact she’s taken.

We approach the front of Constantine’s mansion.

Nadia stays tucked in close to my side as we approach.

Echo continues fidgeting on her other side. I’m not shocked. Imogen will undoubtedly be in attendance. I’d be surprised if all the council wasn’t present. There are valet attendants and waiters loitering around the entrance.

“Whatever you do,” Echo murmurs close to Nadia’s ear, “do not antagonize Imogen. No matter what she does to me, you can’t react.”

Nadia frowns, opening her mouth like she might protest, but she sucks in a sharp breath as her shadows spill back to her from wherever they’ve been. “Yeah, I changed my mind. It’s going to be a shit show.”

“Fucking lovely,” Echo mutters, striding through the door the attendant holds open.

“I’ll be by your side the entire time,” I assure her.

She gives me a nervous smile, squeezing my waist where her hand rests. “Just be safe. Don’t get yourself killed because of me.”

“Oh, little witch.” I chuckle. “I’m very fucking hard to kill.”

Chapter Twenty-Six

Nadia

“You successfully completed the first cornerstone.” Constantine smiles dangerously. “Only three more to go.”

Imogen stands across the room talking to Warren and Lysander Godfrey with a drink in her hand. Her reddish-blond hair falls around her lithe frame as she wobbles a little.

I grimace. That doesn't seem like a great sign. She almost looks plastered. I'm not one-hundred-percent sure vampires can get wasted. Not on alcohol, anyway. I guess, with enough determination, anything is possible.

“I heard you were attacked,” Constantine says in a conversational tone that sends a shiver down my spine. “It appears your personal security was able to keep you alive.”

Echo glances away, carefully studying Imogen and the two male council members. My magic, the jealous bitch, doesn't like it very much. Clearly, it's influencing my need to claw the female vampire's eyes out.

Constantine chuckles, drawing my attention.

“We had some unexpected backup.” I give Constantine a plastic smile. “It was lucky that Ridge happened to be prowling the woods. He was able to come to our aid.”

“Intriguing.” Constantine laughs. “And that somehow led to a claiming bite?”

“Nadia is my mate.” Ridge wraps his arm around my lower back, pulling me into him with the hand on my hip. “I have

every incentive to ensure she succeeds. Having a fully functional ward can only benefit North Falls.”

His words are completely logical, but I don't think Constantine is the kind of demon swayed by rational thought.

“That's true enough.” Constantine claps Ridge on the shoulder. “Enjoy the party. We've got quite the live show coming up shortly. I'm sure you're going to love it.”

My gaze follows the demon as he swaggers away with a jaunty skip in his step. I find it highly suspicious.

“Yeah, that's fucking disturbing,” Echo mutters in barely more than a whisper.

“Agreed,” Ridge growls.

I swallow thickly. Those two rarely agree on anything, which makes it even more ominous.

The evening event drags into nighttime. I repeatedly ask if it's possible we can graciously leave early, but Echo makes it clear we can't leave until we're dismissed. Hopefully, the council understands I'm a mortal witch, who requires sleep on a daily basis. Considering they're all demons and vampires, I'm going to guess they don't often think about the fact most beings sleep to rest and reset.

“It looks like everyone has mostly started to leave,” I say around a yawn. Maybe my magic severely overreacted when we were coming in?

“The three of you will join us in the parlor,” Warren says, his words lined heavily in his compulsion.

Ridge growls.

My magic pulses, but it leads toward the room Warren is gesturing to. That's not helpful. Echo strides forward at my side. Ridge's warmth eventually envelops my back, but I'm fairly sure he's only following because of me.

That's a major problem.

My brain registers the sight as I stumble forward, trying to make sense of what I'm seeing. There's a giant platform with a mattress. It's definitely a bed. There are no pillows, but there is a blanket, and the four-poster style canopy has no curtains.

Before I can blink, two men I don't recognize are yanking Echo to an empty area to the left of the raised area. Imogen appears in front of me, ripping me away from Ridge. I put every ounce of strength I have into not panicking.

I'm a sex worker. If they want a show, well then, they can take notes, especially the bitch with her claws digging into my forearms. I can fuck both Echo and Ridge in front of an audience to stake my claim, and it won't make me uncomfortable one single bit. Or that's what I tell myself, because I'll be damned if I let these assholes continue to bully and intimidate me.

My heart drops when Garth appears behind Imogen, quirking an eyebrow.

"Tonight's entertainment is a real treat," Constantine says, sounding every bit the unhinged lunatic I know he is. "It's a dual double feature."

I spin around at the commotion to find Ridge struggling against several large men. They're likely shifters of some form.

"Continue being problematic, and I'll simply have Imogen break the witch's neck." Constantine smirks, gesturing toward me. "It's your call."

Echo and Ridge stop fighting back. A shiver runs down my spine as my stomach drops.

"Now, the rules are simple. Garth gets to have his way with Nadia for all of our viewing pleasure while the wolf and the vampire fight to see who will come out victorious." Constantine claps. "She only needs one bodyguard. Two is redundant, and we all know that's not my style."

My jaw falls as my gaze flicks from Ridge to Echo. The bond between me and Ridge pulls tight as the tether does the

same with Echo. This town really is fucked up on a level that's difficult to comprehend.

Garth has the good sense to grimace when I glance back at him. Incubi gain no energy from sexual experiences that aren't consensual, and if what my friend Arsyn told me is true, then it's actually physically painful for an incubus to attempt.

Okay, game plan—call my demons and have them help us get the hell out of here. My eyes slide shut as I focus all my energy into calling Knight and Wraith.

“Are you going to cry, little witch?” Imogen asks in a condescending-as-hell tone. She slurs her words, and I really think she might be drunk.

My eyes pop open.

I'm going to murder her before all this is done. Then I'm going to set fire to her headless corpse and laugh like the psychopath I apparently am.

“Nah, I'm not afraid of putting on a good show.” I wink. Her nails dig into my flesh and blood pools. She doesn't realize it, since the fluid immediately transforms into black smoke.

“This miniature version of a battle royale has no rules, except that you may not begin fighting until Garth has the witch fully nude. You can watch until then and allow your misery to percolate.” Constantine gestures to the platform. “Get on with it. I can't wait to see how this plays out.”

Garth rolls his shoulders, and I genuinely don't know if he's the operator or the machine. It's likely he's as much at the council's mercy as the rest of us.

“Let's do this,” I say seductively. If there's one thing I'm excellent at, it's making men feel desired. Also, listening to them complain about their problems, but whatever. I'm busting out a different set of skills tonight. “If you could release me?”

Imogen glares disdainfully, but her nails retract nearly immediately.

Garth swipes a hand over his face and extends an arm for me to go first. My dress puffs out as I spin. I do my best to send calming thoughts through the bond to Ridge. And reassurance to Echo. They're not allowed to kill each other. My magic hums in agreement, and my knees go a little weak. Fucking finally, we're on the same page.

Garth's hands land on my hips once I hit the top step. Music and conversation fills the air, like the party guests decided to get back to their mingling. The incubus lifts me, twisting me in the air and tossing me down on my back. The sparkly dress, that I actually really freaking like, flies up around my thighs.

"I will murder you before that asshole ever gets the chance to stick his dick inside her," Ridge growls.

"Yes, well, you can try," Echo replies. "I'll certainly be doing the same in return."

Garth rolls his eyes but pounces. It's a physical struggle not to push him away. He's hot. All sex demons are, but I'm not interested in expanding my harem. I have four cocks attached to four stubborn dicks that I occasionally like from time to time. More than that would be overkill.

"I sure hope you have a plan," Garth whispers against the shell of my ear. "Because once one of them successfully kills the other, they'll be coming for me."

"How altruistic of you," I say, wrapping my feet around his legs.

"I'm not stupid. I want in on whatever plan you've got brewing. I've got no fondness for the council." He speaks so low, it's hard to pick up all his words. "I believe you met my mate. Scarlett earned a bullshit debt with them that we're both working to pay off."

I gasp, digging my hands into his shoulders. This entire place is corrupt to the point it's disgusting. What Echo told me about The Mirage sits heavy in my mind.

Okay, so, I think I believe him.

“I’ve changed my mind. This is tedious,” Constantine says. “Release them. Allow the entertainment to begin.” His voice turns our direction, growing louder, but I can’t see him. “Better hurry it up, Garth. You know how little I enjoy being disappointed.”

My magic pulses in response to his implied threat. I’m really over the bullying. Warren never said I couldn’t attack him. My shadows spill out, and I focus on keeping them as clear as possible.

The sounds of fists hitting flesh fill the air. My heart races as I fight the urge to shove Garth off me. I have five targets. The members of the council need to be replaced. I seriously don’t get how a town filled with monsters hasn’t risen up and fought back.

“Do something to help,” I whisper, patting Garth’s arm.

“Like what?”

“Dose them with lust, so they’re all preoccupied.” I can feel my own eyes rolling. Really, evolution should dictate that monsters are smarter than this.

“Oh, fuck yes,” Garth growls, sounding truly satisfied by the idea.

“Come on, that should be common sense,” I whisper as my magic latches on to Constantine and Imogen. Warren, that slimy bastard, isn’t within reach just yet.

“My magic won’t work on Valaine,” Garth says against the shell of my ear. “But Lysander Godfrey has it bad for her. So, I’m going to focus on him.”

I nod as he pulls back. The next thing I know, he’s rolling us until I kneel over him. His hands land on my hips, and I struggle against the urge to slap them off. An ache fills my chest, a crossover from Ridge’s emotions.

I fucking hate it. There’s no way I’m going back to work after this. I don’t know why it took me so long to realize that, but I can’t stand feeling his discomfort. Shit, I’m going to be eternally patching up elderly fae sperm and helping she-wolves conceive. Which is fine. I vaguely remember

promising the universe I would be a perfect little fertility witch if I survived Kash. I probably shouldn't go against my word.

My head swivels, taking in the scene. Ridge and Echo fight back-to-back. Holy shit, they aren't fighting each other.

Thank God.

Constantine lets out a dangerous sounding growl, and a shiver runs down my spine as my eyes fly to him. My jaw falls. Oh shit, his demon form is extra creepy.

Imogen screams, and my eyes bug when I catch sight of her. Her eyes, mouth, and ears all stream blood.

Good, that cunt deserves a wake-up call.

“Are you sure you want to posture against me?” Constantine's voice rattles around the room with the power of his monster. An involuntary shiver runs down my spine, but my shoulders pull back as I once again call for my demons. “Snap her fucking neck.”

I don't know who the command is directed toward, but I suck in a sharp breath, willing my magic to work faster. I call for my demons again, but they don't magically appear.

I really hope whatever or whoever the council has that intermittently blocks my magic isn't here, doing that exact thing at this very minute.

Chapter Twenty-Seven

Wraith

“Get back in the fucking jar,” Knight growls, jabbing a finger at the djinn currently on my last fucking nerve.

This showdown has gone on for the better part of five minutes, and my patience is running very thin.

“Fuck you,” Athos snorts. “If you’re so fond of it, then maybe *you* should climb inside.” He rubs his hands together. “I’m free, motherfuckers. No way you’re getting me back in that thing.”

Knight snarls, swiping a claw at the infuriating monster. “We have places to be!”

My skin sizzles, calling us to Nadia. “Get in the container before we shove you back in forcefully.”

“No, I think I’ll pass on that,” Athos says, turning to grayish-blue smoke and swirling away.

“Our witch is in mortal danger,” I hiss. “I’ll reap your soul if I have to, just to be done with this situation.” Technically, since Nadia bound us, we don’t need the relic, but it’s valuable. Extremely so, now that we know the jar holds a wish-granting djinn. “We’ll let you back out once we’re settled in the human world.”

“Fuck you! Would you go back in that tiny, cramped jar? It’s worse than Hell! I’m your built-in backup,” Athos says, smiling dangerously. “I thought we were friends. Friends don’t force friends back into the jar.”

“We don’t have time for this,” Knight mutters. “If you betray us, we will murder you.”

“It’s been ages since I was allowed to participate in a good bloodbath.” His light blueish-silver skin glints as he moves. “Let’s do it.”

Nadia’s terror rips through my chest as my eyes meet Knights. “Let’s go,” I growl, grabbing the jar. “Hopefully, you’ll be sucked through with us.”

“As long as you hold my vessel, I will be,” the infuriating djinn says.

“That’s good enough for me.” Knight disappears in a cloud of black shadow.

A half second later, I’m ripped through the veil too.

“Fuck, it’s been so long that I forgot how disorientating siphoning is,” Athos grumbles.

I immediately halt time. There are so many souls, it takes considerable effort. Twenty-four individuals, to be exact, and that’s in this room alone.

“Oh, thank God,” Nadia whispers.

“You can thank your demons.” Knight crawls onto the bed next to her. “Right after I spank your ass for being all up on someone who isn’t the wolf or the vampire.”

“It wasn’t exactly like we had a choice.” She wraps an arm around his neck, pulling him in for a kiss. “And it’s not Garth’s fault, either. The council is to blame and they need to be handled . . .” She goes on to explain exactly what happened before we arrived, and it feels like my blood boils inside my skin.

“Point me to where you’d like me to start.” Knight chuckles darkly. “That table smells especially delicious.”

“Yeah, that’s them,” she confirms.

“I’ll help.” I stride forward, climbing the steps to the bed. “This is extremely valuable. Keep it safe for me while we handle the problem?”

“Of course.” She smiles so brightly that my heart beats funny. I brush my lips over hers, handing her the canister.

“Now I see why we were in such a rush.” Athos appears at my side, bending at the waist. “It’s a pleasure to meet you.”

“Holy fuck,” she whispers with wide eyes. “You brought a djinn.”

“It couldn’t be avoided.” I raise my hood. I prefer reaping when others don’t have to see what my face turns into while I feed.

“Athos,” he says, smiling widely. “Your reinforcement, at your service.”

“She’s not interested in your affection,” I mutter, yanking on my sleeve. “She’s already built her pack.”

“Thank you for coming.” Nadia stares straight into my eyes. They’re currently in void form, but somehow, she instinctively knows exactly where to look. It makes my heart beat in a strange pattern. I bow my head, preparing to suck the souls out of a few monsters who thought they could hurt my witch. A small hand grips the front of my robe as I move to spin around. She gives a little tug. I bend to make it easier as she kisses the hell out of me. “I really love that I knew you’d come. I didn’t even have to question it. I trusted that you’d be here if you got my call.”

I smile, shaking my head. She’s exceptionally cute and not afraid of me at all. She shouldn’t be, but it is surprising, considering I could suck out her soul if I’m not continuously careful.

The tether between us would never allow for that. Nor would I.

“Can you unfreeze Echo and Ridge?” She licks her lips.

“You realize you’re straddling an incubus while the sin eater sucks the life force out of a succubus, right?” Athos asks, drawing my attention.

“The sins,” I correct.

Nadia glances down, frowning. “Oh, you can unfreeze Garth too. He’s just trying to pay off his mate’s debt.”

Now I’m the one frowning. I swipe my hand over the demon with a death wish, and he pops into our timeline, or unfreezes, as Nadia put it.

“Would you care to return my jar to me?” Athos asks, nodding to the container she still holds.

“Holy fucking shit, that’s a reaper,” Garth says with comically wide eyes.

“Indeed, and your grubby hands are on my witch,” I say in warning.

“Oh, fuck me. That’s disturbing.” Garth jolts. He must have caught sight of Knight. It is quite unsettling if you’re not expecting it.

“Goddamn,” Knight mutters, having moved on to the next monster. “This female vampire is good to go, but honestly, I think I’m going to puke. I’ve never been this full. The succubus was a snack compared to this hag.”

“I’m coming,” I grumble, moving to bring Echo and Ridge into our timeline. I don’t fully understand how my magic works, but that’s how I choose to view it.

I’m pleasantly surprised to see the two of them fighting outside foes. They stagger when they spot me, but both manage to stay upright.

“Glad to see you made it.” Echo shakes out his hand, glancing down at his bleeding knuckles.

“Of course.” I nod, heading for the especially terrible vampire.

“Hey, wait. Don’t do Imogen just yet,” Nadia grumbles. My eyes fly to her as she climbs off the mattress. “Damn, this jar is heavy.” She immediately steps over to Echo with Athos’s canister on her hip. “I don’t know how his magic works, but if you want to kill her, then I wouldn’t take that away from you.”

Echo’s mouth opens and closes several times. I move on to the succubus instead. She’s not at the level I’d feel

comfortable devouring, so I simply swipe a hand to reap her. Her light gray energy slowly flows into me. I'll need to deposit her soul in the pit within the next few days. Next, I move on to the male vampire Knight has just finished cleansing. He's the one responsible for Nadia's compulsion.

"Oh yeah, fuck. I'm definitely going to puke." Knight staggers over to the window and shoves his head out.

"Does that have negative effects on the environment?" Athos's nose scrunches as he frowns at Knight, who is busy heaving.

"Not once he's cleansed the sins." I cross my arms over my chest. "Although, I've seen him eat the sins of ten or twelve monsters and never need to purge."

"Will my compulsion die with Warren?" Nadia asks Echo as I weigh the male vampire. He's getting devoured. I move my mouth only a few inches from his and suck slowly. He's a vile creature, so it takes a while, but I continue until the final remnants of his soul flow into me.

"It will," Echo says from behind me.

"Leave Constantine and Imogen for last, please?" Nadia asks.

I nod my agreement, moving to the greed demon instead. He's not terrible, as far as monsters go. I reap him for rebirth in the pit. He'll be cleansed for a few hundred years and be able to try again.

I turn back, and Ridge is cradling Nadia in his lap with her legs off to one side as she clutches the container between them. He sits on the edge of the bed, running his hands over her cheeks.

Athos sits next to Garth, who I may still kill. I'm undecided on either of those two.

"This guy is probably going to require a second culling," Knight says, staggering away from the demon, who must be Constantine. He heads back to the window, and I tune out the sounds of his retching.

“Did you want me to continue with the female vampire?” I ask Echo. He’s kneeling in front of Ridge and leaning into Nadia’s shoulder. He pulls back enough to run his fingers over her cheek.

“I swore I’d kill her if I got the chance, but . . .” His head shakes. “I’d actually prefer not to have that on my conscience.”

My eyebrows rise. That was unexpected. She’s clearly his maker. I simply nod my agreement, heading to handle her disgusting soul. It smells putrid, even after being purified by Knight.

Thinking of my partner seems to summon him closer. He grunts but moves to cull Constantine again before tossing himself onto the bed at Ridge’s back. “Are you going to be able to hold those partygoers? Or are they going to pop in, wondering why we just massacred their council?”

I glance at the remaining people. They thought they’d get one type of show, but clearly, they’ve gotten another.

“I’ll manage,” I grunt. I position myself to devour Imogen’s soul and, as her life force flows into me, I end up feeling rather rejuvenated. Bringing up a sleeve, I wipe away any lingering smoke. “Only Constantine is left.”

“Devour him,” Nadia says. “I mean, please.”

“Anything for you, love.” I take the few steps over to the last demon.

“Wait.” Echo pushes himself up. “Can you unfreeze him long enough for me to ask him a few questions?”

“He could attack,” Knight says contemplatively. “Are you sure there’s a benefit to knowing whatever it is he’ll have to say?”

“I think we should at least try,” Echo says.

“I’ll keep close and refreeze him if necessary.” Standing at his side, I nod. “I’m here, I’ll just be invisible to his eyes.”

Constantine staggers as he joins our timeline. “What the fuck happened?” He swipes a hand over his fully demonic

face.

“Why haven’t you allowed any of the witches to finish replenishing the ward? Why call them here only to ensure they fail?” Echo asks.

“It’s not the council attacking the witches, you stupid fucking fool,” Constantine snarls, clutching at his chest. “What did you do to me?”

I’ll bet he’s feeling quite strange without the weight of his sins pulling on his soul.

“How did you find out about Nadia’s magic?” Echo asks. It’s clear he’s lined his words with every ounce of his compulsion.

Constantine’s eyes flash. “Fuck you.”

Echo repeats the question, and even though it’s not directed at me, I still have to fight to keep from answering. My head swivels to study him. It’s quite unexpected. I’m generally immune to the influence of most magic, but he just smacked Constantine with ancient levels of compulsion.

“A warlock on the council owes us a few favors,” Constantine finally grinds out.

“Kash?” Nadia pipes in.

Echo repeats her question.

“Yes,” Constantine growls. “You know I’m going to fuck her in front of you before I rip her heart out,” he taunts Echo. “I’ll lick her blood off my claws as I fuck her raw. She’ll be so desperate for me to end her suffering that she’ll beg for death.”

Echo thrusts his clawed hand into Constantine’s chest.

I swipe a hand over them both and move to yank Echo back.

I unfreeze Echo while Constantine’s bloody heart drips on the floor and move to suck out the remnants of the awful demon’s soul.

This is why sin eaters and reapers make the perfect pair. Without Knight cleansing his sins, it would be dangerous for

me to devour him. Technically, he's supposed to be recycled, but I don't feel an ounce of guilt over extinguishing him. If the universe didn't want me to have the ability, then I wouldn't have it. Sure, most reapers would have to risk death to devour a soul rather than reap it, but that's the beauty of having Knight at my side.

I continue devouring Constantine. His shell looks like a withered husk by the time I step away.

"Well, that was dramatic," Garth says, looking at Nadia. "Please remind them I'm on your team."

Echo zips from the room, likely to clean up.

"It's done." I cross to my favorite witch.

"What do you think is going to happen when the town realizes we just offed their council?" she asks.

"Likely, there will be some push back from their loyal followers," Echo says as he comes back into the room noticeably less bloody than when he left.

"You mean those of us they've bullied into complying for the last several hundred years?" Garth scoffs.

"Good point," Echo mutters.

"I could, uh, get rid of those bodies for you?" Athos suggests.

"No one is making any wishes," Knight grunts.

"Once I unfreeze time . . ." I glance at the audience at the back of the room.

"Allow me and Echo to handle them." Ridge stands, placing Nadia on the mattress. "Garth will notify everyone at The Mirage that they're now free of their debts."

"Under the condition they keep their mouths shut about the council's sudden departure from town," Garth mutters, pushing himself up. "Those assholes are going to be the problem." He gestures to the group at the back of the room.

Echo nods. "I agree, they're the ones most loyal to the council. We could just make it a good old-fashioned bloodbath

all around.”

“Wraith and I could dispose of them in a much less bloody manner, but I’d caution against wiping out so many monsters at one time. Five is pushing the limits of keeping things under wraps.” Knight scratches his jaw. “Even then, someone is eventually going to miss them. I suggest we get the fuck out of town before then.”

“Are you a blood witch?” Athos asks Nadia. She nods as her shadows swirl around her. “That’s perfect. Simply spin an illusion. Make them believe they saw a great show and are leaving completely satisfied by your performance.”

“I don’t know how to do that,” she says, shaking her head.

“I can help with that.”

“If you betray us . . .” Knight rolls to face Athos. “I don’t think I need to remind you of what will happen.”

“Always with the threats,” Athos mutters. “I’ll merely help her influence their minds. No threats or wishes necessary. Although, you fuckers forgot to feed me, and I am quite peckish.”

Nadia laughs. “I’m sure we can find you something.”

The spell Nadia spins takes less than fifteen minutes. It’s reaching the maximum of what I’m capable of holding while keeping the room in a bubble, but I am extremely full from gorging on so many souls at once.

The showgoers pop into our timeline, and none of them make a scene. It makes it clear her spell is a success. Athos stays partially formed with his bottom half a swirl of smoky shadows. Apparently, he didn’t fuck us over. At least not so far.

Ridge and Echo, along with Garth, carefully corral the guests out before leaving to secure meetings with River, the

elven king, and several other leaders that live within the sanctuary ward.

“I’m beat,” Nadia says around a yawn.

“We’ll take you to where you’re staying,” Knight says, wiggling his eyebrows. “Tell me, is there room for the two of us?”

“Three,” Athos adds petulantly.

“Is there a reason you haven’t released him?” Nadia gestures to the djinn in question.

“We have no idea how, and he’s incapable of telling us.” Knight stretches his arms behind him.

Nadia’s eyes stay glued to his bare chest as he flexes, and Knight smirks.

“I think, perhaps, I’m not the only one hungry,” Athos says, chuckling darkly.

“It sucks that they can’t release you. You’re free to explore the house. I’m sure there are servers somewhere. They’re probably still putting away all the food and drinks.” She nods to the doors.

“I am interested in those prospects, but I haven’t been in this realm in . . .” Athos shrugs. “Many hundreds of years, by my guess. I’d prefer not to be abandoned. Someone worse than the two of you could come across my jar.”

“We’ll not abandon you,” I assure him.

“We won’t,” Nadia agrees. “While we’re waiting for Ridge and Echo to return, I think we’ll explore and try to determine exactly what Constantine was up to. I’d also like to get away from those creepy, shriveled-up bodies. They’re kind of grossing me out.”

“I’ll dispose of their shells,” I offer, bowing my head. I also need to deposit the two souls I reaped into the pit in Hell, but that won’t take longer than a few minutes.

“I’ll raid the pantry for snacks.” Athos laughs, making his way to leave the room.

Knight smirks at Nadia. “I guess that leaves you and me free to explore.”

I frown. That sounds way more enjoyable, but alas, work must be done.

Chapter Twenty-Eight

Knight

Nadia and I work in companionable silence for a while. Constantine was clearly the type to flaunt his wealth and standing. His bedroom holds nothing even remotely interesting. He had some darker kinks, but that's not the kind of information we're after.

Nadia squeals in surprise, or possibly delight, as we locate Constantine's personal office on the second floor.

It's obvious the downstairs version was for show or for meetings with guests.

Nadia spends a while magicking the locks and, once we're inside, we set to work. I don't know what we're expecting to find, but as a dutiful, bonded demon, I still attempt to survey his filing cabinets.

She grunts, slamming one of his desk drawers. As she leans over, with her hands on the top, I do a double take. She clearly used magic to adjust her dress. It's no longer the slightly longer version she wore previously. It's now short and flirty, landing well above her knees. Her long hair falls around her shoulders as her head shakes.

I briefly wonder if she found something she didn't like, or maybe she's upset we haven't found anything. It takes way too long for me to parcel out that she's not a demon. She very well might be struggling with what happened earlier.

I take a few steps, sliding behind her and pulling her hair to the side as my hands land on her generous hips. I tease my lips down the now exposed column of her neck and gently bite

her shoulder. “Are you okay? Would you like to talk about what happened earlier?”

“I’m okay.” She shrugs, making her hair fall over my arms as I hold her to my chest. “They deserved what they got.”

“Oh, doll. Don’t have a single doubt in your mind about that. They were more vile than most monsters I’ve come across, even in Hell. This isn’t something you should let weigh on your conscience.” I nuzzle my cheek to the top of her head from behind, offering her the comfort and reassurance that I can.

I’m the worst person possible for this job. Five monsters is a normal Saturday night reaping session for me and Wraith. Neither of us will lose a wink of sleep over taking out those assholes. The two monsters that’ll be reborn in the pit will have a chance to do better next time. Hopefully, they’ll succeed without the toxic influence of the other council members. Even those two weren’t pure enough to consider sparing completely. I murmur that against her neck as my lips tease over her shoulder.

“Do you think the human realm paranormal council will investigate? I mean, how could they not? We just murdered five monsters.” She shudders out a breath.

“I don’t think you should worry too much about that.” I lick Ridge’s bondmark. “We can handle whatever comes our way. From the little I’ve heard, it’s clear it was time for a change.”

“It was, but I also don’t go around planning massacres.” She trembles, and I hate that I can’t tell if it’s from my touch or the weight of her concerns.

“Let the paranormal council investigate, if they’d like. They hold no jurisdiction over us. Reapers and sin eaters fall outside of their purview.”

“It’s a little intimidating to realize how powerful you two are.”

“Sorry to inform you, but you’re just as capable of wreaking havoc as we are.” I grin against her skin. “It makes

me hard as a rock, or possibly, that's your curves in this delicious little number."

She groans. Grabbing my right hand, she slides it toward the apex of her thighs. "I was obsessed with the mystery of Sam and what he'd feel like inside me."

Her admission makes my heart pound.

"That goes both ways, doll." My fingers slide over the silky material of the dress, teasing her plump pussy lips. Her breathing gets ragged when I push where she's most desperate for my touch. "I've got a full-blown fucking addiction to the sounds you make when I tease you." I nip at the shell of her ear as she grinds back against my thickening length. "I fucking love that you're as desperate for me as I am for you."

"I really am." Her hand stretches back, cupping my cock, and a low growl escapes my chest. "I remember how much you enjoy eating me out from behind."

Normally, I would call her out for trying to take the lead, but I couldn't give a fuck less right now.

I nod against her throat. "Hands on the desk. If you're a good little fuck toy, I *might* give you what you're desperate for."

My cock thickens as I stare at her shape. She stretches out languidly, and I bite my lip to keep from spanking her naughty ass. She loves to push boundaries. Let's face it—I enjoy it just as intently, because it means I get to punish her.

I fist her hair, keeping it out of the way as I unzip her with my free hand. She's not wearing a bra, and the three strings of visible material barely qualify as panties.

"Fuck," I groan, licking and kissing my way across her shoulder. The thin straps of her dress fall down her arms. It's been a lot of years since I was inside anyone. I've got to make sure she's good and satisfied before I shove my cock into her tight little cunt. Otherwise, I'll ruin our first true time together.

"You asshole." Wraith's voice appears before he does. Where Malice and I rely on the shadows for siphoning, Wraith doesn't have the same rules to follow when it comes to the

universe. He appears on the desk with his hands stretched back behind him.

I laugh because I knew he'd be along shortly.

“Well, that was super surprising,” Nadia says seductively. “And also extremely hot. Do I finally get to see what’s under the robe?”

I work on sliding her dress down and off her arms while scratching my stubble over her shoulder. The fabric falls to the floor as I tease and tantalize her flesh. She steps out of it while working her hands inside Wraith’s robe. The look on his face is pure anticipation.

“You know you’re about to fuck up his world, right, doll?” I chuckle against her shoulder as my left hand pulls her hips back. “He’s never—”

“Knight,” he growls in warning.

“Never what?” she asks, tossing back the sides of his robe.

Wraith quickly shrugs out of it and the silly coat he always wears underneath it. His hands land on her face, brushing her hair back. It’s quite a tender moment. I take the opportunity to slice her panties on either side, using my claws to make the process quick and seamless.

“I hadn’t held interest in sex,” he clears his throat, “ever, really, until I met you.”

“That sounds worse than it was,” I pipe in. “You should clarify what you mean by that.”

He grimaces. “Of course. It wasn’t until we saw you many years later that a spark of attraction grew. The first time we met, that was purely us saving your life. We didn’t come across you again for a long time. Eventually, you came up in conversation and we opted to check in on you. Only, I miscalculated the time difference between Hell and the human realm. As such, we found you to be much older than we anticipated. You were well into your twenties and—”

Thankfully, she takes pity on him, cutting him off. “That’s significantly less creepy than watching me for all those years.”

Nadia works his belt as Wraith continues gently petting her head. He truly is clueless.

“That would be inappropriate.” He nods. “No, the first time we met, I was simply intrigued on why any mother would attempt to—”

I slap the shit out of him in the stomach, shaking my head. What the fuck his problem? Now is not the time for any of that bullshit.

“Oh, of course. I’m sorry.” He grimaces. “I often have trouble reading the room.”

“How about you just stretch back and let me make you feel as good as you’ve made me feel over the last few years?” She slides his zipper down.

“I’m not opposed to that idea in the least.” He smiles bashfully. I’m pretty sure Nadia could eat him alive and he’d be here for it. She pulls his jeans down, and Wraith pushes up to make it easier. Her shadows yank at the bottom and then he’s nude.

I get back to work, shoving her forward before hitting my knees behind her. My true tongue flicks out, teasing from her clit to her hole. I briefly consider beginning to prep her ass. With four of us, she’s certainly going to have to get creative with positions and orifices.

“Holy fuck,” Wraith groans.

Nadia chuckles. I can’t see what she’s doing, but I’m fairly sure she’s blowing his mind. At least, that’s what it sounds like from the highly satisfied noises he’s making.

I pull her ass cheeks apart. My forked tongue flicks over her clit, but I’d really like to fuck her cunt with it. I wrap my arms around her legs.

“Keep her steady,” I growl.

“Got it,” Wraith mutters.

I lift, placing her feet on my knees. The height difference becomes much more manageable in this position.

“God, that’s so weird.” She laughs. “Your entire face is buried in my ass.”

“Yeah, and it’s fucking hot,” I growl, biting the crease where her right cheek meets her thigh. “But I think I should focus on getting you ready to take both of us in your juicy pussy.” My fingers tease her hood as I bury my face in her cunt.

My thumb works her clit as I shove my forked tongue deep into her hole. The length in demon form makes it easy. I’ve got plenty of practice making her scream, and it feels like barely any time passes before she’s shivering and begging. It’s mostly muffled.

My left hand slides up, cupping her lower stomach and applying the perfect amount of pressure. She sobs out her release, soaking my face in her cunt.

“Oh, shit. I’m going to come,” Wraith warns.

I pop up, kissing over her lower back and move to tease her tits. My rock-hard cock bumps her thighs through my jeans. She’s bunched in a kind of squatting position with her feet still on my knees.

“Come down my throat,” she moans.

I move to the side to fully appreciate the view. She’s really into it. Wraith looks like he can’t decide if he’s enjoying himself or if he’s horrified by the thought of filling her mouth. His muscles bulge and I decide he’s trying to be a gentleman, and as such, he’s holding himself back from fucking her throat. Normally, I’d give her a little shove for him, but she’s got one hand wrapped around the base of his cock while the other scratches down his abs.

“Yeah, I’m there,” he growls, still petting her hair like a total lovestruck weirdo.

I continue teasing her clit as I lick my lips clean. Wraith comes, shouting out his release. I barely hold back the chuckle. I place Nadia’s feet on the floor before kicking off my boots.

I work on getting my jeans down next. Bending down low to kiss over her neck and shoulder, I fist my cock against her tight little ass. I smirk as she wiggles her hips like she's trying to reposition me at her cunt.

Wraith growls, consistently praising her dick-sucking abilities while I check out the room.

“Come on.” I pull her up as Wraith comes down from his orgasm. “He's clearly ready to lose his virginity.”

“Oh shit,” Nadia moans, shivering against my chest.

“On the couch,” I direct.

Wraith disappears and reappears on the couch as I wrap an arm around her middle, pulling her over to the sofa.

“Do you want this?” Her head tilts as she studies him. “Because there's no need to feel pressured.”

“Please,” he growls, making a grab for her hips.

She nods, moving to kneel over him. She pulls his mouth to hers, and they share a kiss so dirty my cock leaks. Fucking hell, I want inside her with a vengeance.

Nadia grabs his cock, sinking down slowly. Wraith shivers, a dangerous sound escaping his chest. She smirks over her shoulder at me. “I heard you were both going to fuck my cunt?”

“Good goddamn.” My balls are already tight and heavy. I again hit my knees behind her. “Lick.” I shove two fingers in her mouth from behind, and the way she teases them makes my cock drip against her ass. “You're so fucking perfect.” I can feel her mouth curve into a smile as I yank my fingers free, moving to slide them along Wraith's cock. She's unbelievably snug, but she'll stretch. Pussy is forgiving and legitimately the one creation in the universe that makes me believe God might exist.

Nadia whimpers, her head falling back against my shoulder as she rises and falls. Wraith teases one of her nipples while the other works her clit.

“I’m going to bite you,” Wraith says. “We’re already partially bound to you, but you’re meant to be our mate.”

She doesn’t reply. Instead, she nods, shoving her mouth to his.

My jaw falls when her teeth dig into his lower lip first. Holy fuck, I didn’t see that coming.

Wraith snarls. His eyes flash white, lighting up the entire area around us as he palms the back of her head. Her pussy contracts over my fingers and his cock. It gets so snug, I’m barely able to move.

Wraith latches on, biting into her lip in return, and I fight the undeniable wave of jealousy that pulses through my system. Nadia screams, coming hard. My hand is literally soaked in her pussy. She falls to rest against his chest, grinding over him as she rides out her orgasm.

“I love you.” Wraith kisses her temple. She blinks up at him, but he covers her mouth with his palm. “No, you don’t have to say anything. I just needed you to know that.” She nods. “I came again when you did.” His cheeks are rosy. “It was unavoidable, but I think Knight has been more than patient.” The next thing I know, Wraith is lying across the couch instead of sitting on it. “You should face my feet.”

Nadia complies, and I help her face the end of the couch before climbing over Wraith’s knees.

She wraps her hand around my shaft, jerking me against her clit. “Do all demons have to bite the lower lip to bond?”

“It’s one of the preferred locations,” I admit.

There’s a weird, shaky gravel to my tone that betrays my anticipation. My hands fall to her hips, lifting her and dropping her on Wraith’s cock. She stretches her free hand up, wrapping it around my neck. She pulls my mouth to hers, and I bend low to make it possible. The naughty little vixen knows just how to tease my crown as she kisses the fuck out of me. A low, feral growl escapes my chest as her teeth dig into my lower lip. It completes her part of the circuit.

“Lie back,” I growl, gently shoving her until her back rests against Wraith’s chest. My palm hits the couch next to his head. Nadia still works me with her fist, but I shove my fingers into her mouth again. Once they’re good and juicy, I move them to soak my tip. “Let me know if this hurts.”

“I will, but get to it.” She pinches her own nipple while spreading her lower lips with the hand that was on my cock.

“Yes, please,” Wraith groans.

I work my length, carefully guiding my crown alongside Wraith’s shaft. I barely thrust, but the pressure is unlike anything I’ve ever experienced. I’m afraid to go deeper and simultaneously desperate to.

“Fuck me,” Nadia begs. “Don’t back out now.”

“Never, doll.” I shove my tongue into her mouth. The hand holding my cock trembles as I pull back a bit and plunge deeper on the next stroke. Her walls stretch, perfectly accommodating both our cocks. She’s filled with Wraith’s cum, but that blissfully makes it easier. Our tongues dance as I determine the best way to fuck into her.

Wraith groans. He’s completely trapped.

I pull away from the kiss, moving to her neck just below her ear, and strike. My fangs dig into her soft flesh as the taste of her blood fills my mouth. It’s an indescribable aphrodisiac. My cock swells, but I do everything in my power to hold back my impending orgasm.

Nadia claws at my back as her cunt grows impossibly tight, and I focus on trying to grind against her clit. I lose the battle, so lost to the sensations that I mostly groan against her skin as my cock swells, kicking inside her with each spurt of my cum.

“Fuck,” Wraith growls.

The next thing I know, I’m lying on my back on the couch with Nadia against my chest as Wraith fucks into her.

“I wasn’t expecting that,” she whispers, licking down my throat. “Can I bite you? Your blood smells delicious, all of a

sudden.”

“Always,” I assure her.

“Yeah, I’ve heard that happens, but holy fuck,” Wraith rambles, falling atop Nadia.

She bites my throat, and an unexpected orgasm zips through my system. The bond between us radiates with pure pleasure to the point I can’t tell who it comes from, but it ultimately doesn’t matter. I give in to the carnal bliss and let Wraith fuck Nadia on my cock.

Chapter Twenty-Nine

Echo

No one is ever especially pleased to see me at their doorstep, but finding me in the middle of the night seems to set everyone I come across even further on edge. We likely should have left it solely to Ridge, considering most everyone in town likes the mutt.

It doesn't matter. I don't need to be liked by any of these people; only respected enough that they honor their word to keep Nadia out of any future stories they may recount.

River and Brant easily agree. The elven king will make a fine member of the future replacement council. He's fair and reasonably levelheaded. The two monsters share a look when I state exactly that.

River simply nods his agreement.

"Is the witch okay?" Brant asks. The bigfoot shifter looks at me expectantly. "Milania wants to see her. I mean, not right now, because she's asleep, but she wants to thank her in person."

"Nadia is fine." My tone comes out clipped to my own ears. I sigh, shaking my head. "She asked about coming to visit, but it wasn't possible before tonight."

River glances around, carefully checking to ensure we're alone. "You're sure they're all dead?"

I nod. "Quite positive. I can give you my word."

Brant swipes his reddish curls back from his forehead. "How is that even possible?"

“They would have killed us all. We had assistance from a reaper. The same one Nadia sent away the night Milania gave birth.” I glance between them. “This town has suffered enough. We stick to the story that we have no idea where they’ve gone and keep under the radar as much as possible.”

“Someone will eventually take notice that Milania is no longer human,” River says pensively.

“They will,” I agree. “It’s inconvenient, but keep her home for as long as possible. Blame it on the fact that she just gave birth and do your best to keep her out of sight. I believe Nadia will be working swiftly to finish the ward and, once that’s complete, we’ll be getting the fuck out of here.”

“Will she be safe?” Brant asks.

Unsure if he means Nadia or Milania, I frown. “I believe you’ll have a better chance once Nadia is no longer in the picture. I don’t think I need to explain what will happen if you betray our trust.”

“Ahh, there it is.” River chuckles derisively. “At least she’s someone worth defending. Trust me, we have no interest in harming the woman who saved our mate.”

Brant nods. “Without the council standing in the way, we can help make North Falls a safe town for monsters and humans alike.”

“I’ll try to bring Nadia by prior to leaving town. Be aware, it’s highly likely Milania has latent omega DNA.”

River’s jaw falls.

“It seems to be something in her magic that activates those once-dormant characteristics. I wouldn’t be surprised if Milania displays more of those qualities over time.” I yank at my shirt sleeves. “So, keep that in mind and plan accordingly. The reaper said, without that, it’s unlikely Nadia could have saved her.”

“Thank the gods,” Brant mutters, looking quite pale.

I awkwardly pat him on the back and prepare to take my leave. I have other leaders I need to visit before I can get back

to my tether.

I'm nearly to my car when I hear River say, "I never thought I'd see the day he turned on Imogen."

My head shakes as I fight the urge to zip back inside and slaughter the both of them. They've built opinions of me based on who I've been as a puppet. A puppet whose strings were pulled by a vile woman I physically couldn't contradict due to the nature of our bond.

I sigh. They have every right to be leery. What they think ultimately doesn't matter, even if it burns my pride. It's not that it hurts my feelings that all the citizens of North Falls think so little of me.

I'll be relocating with Nadia to Haven as soon as the ward is complete. The slate will be wiped clean, and I'll have an entirely new opportunity to prove that I'm not who I was previously forced to be.

I finish my rounds, finally making it back to Constantine's mansion. I haven't been gone long. No more than two hours, at maximum, but I've fulfilled my obligations and I need to set eyes on my witch.

My portion of the collective mission was successful. And the last few monsters I visited were considerably less disrespectful to me and my position. So, that's a bonus.

As I zip into the massive kitchen, I shake away the lingering bitterness.

I blink at the djinn currently stuffing his face. "Where are they?"

"I'm pretty sure they're fucking somewhere on the second floor," he replies, scooping a huge amount of ranch dip onto a cracker. "I'm undecided on the flavor, but the texture is a significant improvement from the last time I was in this realm."

I blink at him, but hold myself back from saying something condescending. My head cocks, listening for sounds to indicate exactly where they are. “Thanks.”

I zip out of the room and up the stairs. My hearing guides me to the left side of the upstairs corridor. I don’t bother knocking. They’re clearly otherwise engaged.

The reaper and sin eater have quite the Nadia sandwich going on. I watch shamelessly, approaching slowly. Wraith’s head swivels nearly completely around to face me. It’s creepy *as fuck*, but I toss my palms up to assure him I’m not a threat. He nods, which also weirds me the fuck out, and then slowly twists his head back in the opposite direction.

I continue until I’m near Nadia’s head and kneel, giving her temple a quick kiss. My cock is like stone, but it has been for the last hour. I’m genuinely fucking baffled. The tether never linked us so strongly before. I can only assume . . . actually, I have no idea.

“You’re such a good girl,” Wraith growls, slapping into Nadia’s ass. My eyes bug when I catch sight of the knot at the end of his shaft. “I’m going to breed you full of my babies.”

Nadia opens her mouth, likely to protest, but Knight shoves his forked tongue in instead. They share a dirty kiss that doesn’t help the state in my trousers. He winks, and I simply shake my head. Everything changed, and yet, I’m completely fucking giddy to find out what giant upheaval comes next. It seems a pretty consistent theme with the darkling.



Wraith eventually decides he’s done for. He wraps himself up in his robe, taking a seat on one of the club chairs near the desk I’m perched on top of.

Knight still lies across the couch with Nadia’s nude form resting on his chest. They fucked her into exhaustion. She was tired prior to leaving for Constantine’s fucking party. She’s mortal. She’ll always require more rest than any of us.

“Why the fuck do you have a knot?” I ask Wraith after a few minutes of silence pass.

“We both do,” Knight says smugly. “Never had one before she sank her teeth in, but here we are.”

“They appeared when we bonded,” Wraith says in his low tone. “She clearly also has omega blood in her lineage, which is an interesting piece of information when added to the rest of the puzzle.”

“Damn.” I swipe a hand over my face. It’s like the universe imagined all the ways it could put someone at risk in our day and age and shoved every single one of them into Nadia when creating her.

“I was unaware you had claimed her as your beloved. I didn’t notice the change in her scent until you were already gone.” Wraith bows his head. “Congratulations.”

My jaw falls.

“W-what?” I stutter. I’ve faced down Imogen’s soulless eyes as she told me all the ways she would make me suffer and never stuttered. Seems I’ve lost my poker face recently, and I can only blame the massive number of changes in such a short period of time. No one can adapt this quickly. Not even monsters.

“You claimed her at some point between when we saw you on pack land and when we arrived here tonight,” Knight says, like this should be clear.

“Jesus Christ,” I mutter. “No wonder they tried to force me and Ridge to kill each other.”

“I did wonder a little about that.” Nadia sleepily rubs at her eyes. “I think it was us biting at the same time, but then Ridge arrived and we had to get here.” Her shoulders bounce. “I don’t know how to untether us, so you were probably going to be stuck with me, anyway . . .”

“For the love of God,” Ridge growls, pushing himself off the wall and making himself known. “Put her out of her misery.”

I shove off the desk, heading over to kneel at Nadia's side. It's a similar position to where I was earlier. My fingers tease over her cheek. "I wouldn't have allowed you to sever the link between us."

She stretches a hand around my neck, pulling my mouth to hers. Her tongue swirls around mine in a way that makes it difficult not to rip her right off Knight's cock and impale her on mine. She moves back, licking her lips. My eyes seem glued to her tight nipples on her heavy tits.

"Your tits are fucking huge," I groan, shaking my head.

Ridge laughs. I'm unsure when he joined us, but I no longer feel the staggering need to remove his head from his body. Perhaps it's the newly formed link with Nadia at the center.

"They'll get even larger when she's swollen with my pups," the wolf says.

Nadia opens her mouth. I slam my lips to hers until she grins into the kiss. "Keep dreaming, assholes. Keep freaking dreaming."

"Oh, love." Wraith chuckles. "No need to dream. It's absolutely happening."

Nadia pushes up on a forearm to flip him off over her shoulder.

"Sorry to break up this tender family moment." Athos appears in a cloud of blue smoke. "You've got quite the collection of monsters on the front lawn."

"What?" Nadia gasps.

My teeth grind together as tension immediately coils in my entire body. That doesn't sound good at fucking all.

"Do we have a plan?" I glance between Wraith and Knight.

Ridge, the lucky fucker, managed to be nominated to stay with Nadia. He's helping her get herself together and acting as the last line of defense if this lovely mob decides to choose violence over survival.

"My goals include providing assistance to ensure my jar remains undamaged, as well as unclaimed by someone worse than those two." Athos nods to the demons. "Then I plan to tackle the giant block of gouda I found. It pairs beautifully with the dirt-like crackers." He beams. "I love human food."

My eyelids flutter as I barely hold back the snarky response that sits heavy on my tongue. I'm supposed to be cleaning up my act and ensuring I'm worthy of my beloved.

Instead, I settle for, "I wouldn't know, as I don't consume human food. However, we appreciate your assistance."

"Dude, are you feeling all right?" Knight pops up right in front of me. I barely hold back the jolt as he manifests from nothing to solid. "Did they body snatch you? Blink once for no or repeatedly if you need help."

I snort, shaking my head. It's been a lot of years since anyone questioned my well-being, and it makes me strangely warm inside, even if I am the butt of his joke.

"He's fine," Wraith says. "Let's do this while Ridge still has Nadia distracted. She won't be happy if we have to murder this group of monsters, meaning we should be quick, so she never finds out."

Knight snorts.

We funnel out the door and down the steps.

"Oh, just so you know, they can't see us," Knight says in barely more than a whisper. "Let's see how they behave when they don't know Daddy's watching."

"Wait, which one of us gets to be Daddy?" Wraith whisper hisses. His head tilts under the hood of his robe.

I swipe a hand over my face to hold my composure. Now would be a terrible time to laugh at something the gathering audience can't see.

Knight chuckles softly. “We can both be Daddy.”

“I’ll be the drunk uncle.” Athos materializes in a cloud of blue smoke. “And by the way, they can see me.”

I take the stone steps down toward the circular driveway. Athos was correct. There’s a gathering of fifteen to twenty supernatural creatures. I recognize nearly all the faces.

Garth steps forward with Scarlett at his side. The nymph bounces on her toes when she spots me. We’ve often butted heads, considering she’s the self-appointed union of one for The Mirage employees.

“Where is she?” She jabs a finger at me. Her red painted nail trembles slightly. Considering the sun won’t rise for at least an hour or two, a human wouldn’t be able to pick up the tell from several feet away. But my eyesight is excellent.

“Who?” I ask distractedly. Ridge is supposed to be helping Nadia clean up, but based on the heavy pulse of arousal that smacks into me through the bond, it’s very clear they’re more focused on getting dirty.

“Nadia is fine.” Garth pulls Scarlett close to his side with a hand on her hip. That’s a weird combination, and I’m fucking flabbergasted it took me so long to realize why he’s her best client.

“If that’s true, then we want to see it for ourselves,” Shelby says. Ahh, the stuck-up female sentinel is here. “I want to see with my own two eyes that she’s okay.”

Carina, a female witch, stands at her side. She and Shelby run the shop. They’ve been here several years. I had forgotten about their connection to my witch.

“Take the sentinel.” Knight shrugs. “Tell them one person to verify she’s fine. It’ll also give us the opportunity to scan the crowd and gauge their true intentions while they don’t realize they’re being watched.”

“Come along.” I step back, extending a hand for Shelby to head up the steps. “Just her. I’m not bringing the lot of you in with no idea of your intentions.”

“That’s hurtful,” Garth mutters. “I totally had your back earlier.”

I scoff. He did less than nothing during the incident.

“Are you really surprised? Echo has always been a dick,” Scarlett adds. “He’ll continue to be a dick for the rest of eternity.”

I exhale heavily, raising my eyebrows at the suddenly sheepish sentinel.

“Or until someone removes his head,” Scarlett whispers. Garth swats her ass and she squeaks.

“It’s now or never,” I clarify for Shelby.

“I’ll go.” Carina straightens her shoulders.

God, what do they think I’m going to do? Murder them as soon as they make it out of the line of sight? That’s ridiculous. It would infuriate my beloved.

“I’ve got this.” Shelby strides forward, and I physically can’t keep from rolling my eyes. So damn dramatic and completely unnecessary.

Wraith’s head faces me at an unnatural angle, and he gives a nod as I follow the condescending Daughter of Heaven up the stairs.

We make it into the mansion, and I can pick out Nadia’s begging moans from the foyer. It doesn’t take long to make our way to the second floor. They’re in a guest bathroom off the main hall. I shove the door open and steam billows out.

The frosted glass shower doesn’t obscure nearly enough for Shelby to be confused about what’s happening.

“Fuck, yes, just like that,” Ridge growls, slapping into Nadia from behind. “Such a good girl, taking your alpha’s cock. I’m going to fill up your pussy. Breed you full of my pups.”

Shelby staggers back, letting out a heavy breath. I smirk, giving her a condescending-as-fuck look in return.

Nadia moans. “Ohmigod, Ridge!”

Shelby huffs, grabbing the door handle and yanking it closed. “I can’t believe she fell for your bullshit and helped you take out Imogen.”

My jaw rolls from side to side as my fury reaches dangerous levels. My monstrous side is officially done with everyone in this godforsaken town.

Wraith manifests in front of me as I hiss at Shelby. “You’ve seen she’s fine, and it’s time for you to go.” He nods toward the stairs. “And, in the future, I would avoid verbally attacking Nadia’s chosen mate.”

Shelby’s mouth falls open, but Wraith puts up an arm, blocking her from me before gently guiding her out.

I stretch back against the wall to wait for Ridge and Nadia to finish.

“I guess there’s probably something I should admit,” Shelby says as they make it to the front door.

My head falls back as it shakes. Of fucking course, there’s more.

Chapter Thirty

Ridge

Nadia and I share a shower in which we end up dirtier than either of us started. My wolf is purely fucking content as she snuggles into our chest while we congregate on the couch in Constantine's living room. It's an ostentatious space that gives me the creeps now that he's gone. Fuck, it would have made me equally as uncomfortable when he was alive.

Echo sits at my side. He's so riled that I toss an arm over the back of the cushion, allowing him to cuddle closer to Nadia. He leans against her chest, running his fingers over her bare ankle.

Shelby stands with Carina at her side. They've lived in town for a while. I recognize them by name, but not much else.

Carina sighs, glancing at Nadia. "We've got a lot of information, but a few pieces of the puzzle are still missing."

"This is creeping me out," Nadia mutters, linking her hand with Echo's. "I knew them when I was in my teens, but apparently, I don't know much, because I've got no clue what's happening right now."

"Carina and I joined the paranormal council in the years we lost contact." Shelby's wings flutter behind her. "I would have warned you to stay the hell out of North Falls, but you were already here."

"What?" Nadia's entire body jolts. I don't like it one fucking bit.

Wraith tosses back his hood. He glances our way from where he's been staring at the unlit fireplace. I'm fairly sure he's thinking the same thing I am. Maybe it makes me a true monster, but I'm not above taking out a couple of council agents to keep my mate safe. It doesn't matter if they're female. If they put Nadia at risk, their chances of survival will plummet.

"I tried to think of any way I could scare you into leaving town, but Echo was always up your ass." Shelby sighs heavily. "The North Falls ward has been on the edge of collapse for nearly ten years."

Carina nods. "Way before we were active agents. Blood witches are the ideal candidate for sealing a ward. Though other types of witches can manage in a bind."

Nadia chokes, coughing and nodding awkwardly. "Clearly, because I'm not a blood witch."

Carina gives her a dubious look that has Wraith taking a step in her direction. She raises a hand of blood-red magic. I'm not the only one frowning.

"If you're a blood witch, then why the hell haven't you repaired the ward?" I growl.

"I'm not shadowborn." Carina ignores my question, staring at Nadia. "But my magic still recognizes yours."

Nadia smiles tightly. "I think you're confused."

"Stop," Shelby groans. "We're obviously not going to rat you out to the council. We all just need to be on the same page."

"Why allow the ward to continue to fail to the state it is now?" I repeat.

"My assignment wasn't to touch the ward," Carina says, like that should be evident.

"Start explaining. We want a clear idea of what you know and what has been happening," Wraith says in a clipped tone.

"We asked to be assigned to North Falls after the last blood witch was murdered." Carina frowns, shaking her head. "She

was a close friend. She tried to warn me that something was off with this entire town. I was on assignment and didn't receive her messages until she was already gone."

"Would you like to guess who the agent assigned to North Falls was?" Shelby asks.

"Kash?" Nadia suggests.

"Correct," Carina says. "We've been suspicious of him for three years. We came to North Falls deep undercover."

"How very covert of you," Echo says dryly.

"We believe Kash was allowing the jobs to be partially completed to keep the flow of witches coming. We're unsure what use he had for blood witches, specifically, but it's clear he needed them for something." Shelby crosses her arms over her chest. "The council still believes it was the town paranormal council murdering our agents. They never believed Kash was to blame. They set us in place to monitor the council."

"But they refused to send any additional blood witches, since we're so rare." Carina shrugs. "We've spent the last few years watching the council and, more specifically, Kash."

Nadia shudders out a heavy breath. "Kash is dead, so how do you explain the demon and vampire attack on the peaks?"

"Shit," Carina whispers.

"He attempted to sacrifice me to a High Lord of Hell in exchange for immortality," Nadia informs them.

My claws elongate as I process what she just said.

"And you somehow bound them to yourself instead?" Shelby sounds every bit the stuck-up sentinel she is.

"Don't make assumptions." Wraith frowns.

"That's what that one is best at," Echo says bitterly.

"Fuck you," Shelby hisses.

"Never, under any circumstances. I'd cut my own dick off first," Echo deadpans.

“We’re not that type of demon,” Wraith says, getting us back on track. “We were able to step in during the summoning to intercede on her behalf. If it had been another cluster, then Nadia would likely be dead.”

“Back to who attacked me.” Nadia glances between her old friends. “Kash is dead, meaning he didn’t plan that attack.”

“He did not,” Carina agrees. “I set that up in an attempt to scare you into leaving town.”

Shelby’s wings flutter as she pulls her shoulders back. “We couldn’t risk outing ourselves, but we wanted to warn you of what you were walking into.”

“I almost fucking died,” Nadia grinds out. “If Brant hadn’t intervened, I would have taken an arrow to the face.”

“You had two bodyguards.” Shelby’s wings bristle. “We truly had no intention of hurting you.”

Nadia scoffs.

“What do you intend to tell your council?” Echo lines his words in his compulsion, which I swear to fuck, seems to have gotten more powerful since he claimed Nadia.

Shelby glares. “They’ll be informed the council had to be removed due to the risk they posed to not only civilians, but also their own council agents.”

I frown. That does get confusing with the town council and the paranormal council. Ehh, it’s not my problem. Nadia runs her free hand over mine that rests on her stomach. She smells delicious. Her scent now carries hints of the four of us, but I’ve quickly grown just as addicted to it as I am to her in general.

“You’re going to take credit for our kills?” Wraith asks in a level tone.

“They didn’t want to hear us when we explained who the problem was. They’ll likely give us a promotion.” Carina shrugs. “They like things wrapped up neat and tidy.”

“I’m exhausted.” Nadia snuggles back into my chest. “Thanks for letting us know.” It seems like she’s desperately

trying to hold herself back from saying more.

“We’ll be sticking around while the town builds their new council.” Shelby crosses her arms over her chest. “Will you be able to assist Carina in completing the ward?”

Nadia sighs but nods her agreement. The two undercover council members leave, and the mood is somber. Overall, it’s a good thing the paranormal council is unlikely to come for retribution on behalf of the town council. On the other hand, I don’t like having to place our trust in anyone outside of our group.

“Shouldn’t we head back to your apartment?” Nadia bumps Echo with her shoulder. She’s staring at him like she’s desperately trying to figure out how to comfort him.

“It would be cramped.” I run my fingers through her hair. “My house is a much more feasible option.”

“Yeah, but if your brother tries to punish you for Drake, then I’m pretty sure I’ll have to kill him.” She snuggles deeper into my chest.

“You wouldn’t need to,” Wraith pipes in, taking a seat on the opposite couch.

“We’d be glad to handle it for you.” Knight winks, making his way into the room with a plate of cheese and crackers. “After all, it’s part of our binding contract.”

“Wait, what?” Nadia squeaks, sitting up to stare down her demons.

“When you blood bound us, that was a binding contract.” Wraith clears his throat, but his cheeks are pink.

It makes me mildly suspicious. Nadia seems to be equally perplexed, because she jabs a finger in their direction as Knight takes the seat next to Wraith. Her mouth opens, but no words come out.

“You soul bound us to you in the warehouse that night with Kash.” Knight shrugs, grabbing a cracker and shoving it into his mouth.

“Meaning what?” Echo grinds out.

“There were no terms discussed verbally,” Nadia says a little breathlessly.

Wraith grimaces. “Correct, meaning your soul would have had to accept our terms, as ours did in return.”

“Okay, and what were these terms?” Nadia asks.

“We agreed to protect you above all else, kill anyone who threatened you—” Wraith starts.

“Give you good solid dickings,” Knight interjects, winking like an idiot. “Although the soul binding contract lists your terms as hot, psycho, will-do-anything-to-protect-you fuck buddy.”

“Ohmigod,” Nadia snorts. “That’s actually ridiculous.”

“Our terms were much more streamlined.” Wraith gives a smile that indicates he’s in pain.

Knight nods. “Our command into the human realm and your agreement to carry our spawn. You really got the better end of the deal.”

“What?” I chuckle, pulling a hand up to cover my mouth.

Nadia goes stiff in my arms. “Is there a time limit stated in the contract?”

“It’s a soul binding agreement,” Wraith says, completely avoiding answering the question.

“Wraith.” She jabs a short finger in his direction.

“You’ll be pregnant within a year, but please remember that I love you.” The poor, clueless fucker gives her puppy dog eyes if I’ve ever seen them on an actual person.

“Holy shit,” Echo whispers.

“Truly, and I’ve never experienced that particular emotion before. It makes what I feel for you extra special.” Wraith continues nodding and smiling, like he can mentally force her to be excited about the bomb he just dropped.

My nose falls to run along the column of Nadia’s neck. My wolf has been obnoxiously sure that we were capable of

breeding her this entire time. A low growl rattles out of my chest at the thought.

“I have a birth control spell.” Her head shakes, sending her hair flying across my face.

“It will have been rendered inert,” Knight says. “Hey, don’t look at me like that. Your soul agreed to the terms. No coercion or trickery needed.”

“Holy fuck,” Nadia whispers. “This is the universe punishing me for screwing up Emerson’s spell.”

“Your roommate?” Wraith leans forward, tilting his head. “The one with the wolf pup?”

“She did live with us.” She swallows thickly. “She ended up bonding my boss, but she’s also pregnant with four babies. I gave her a contraception spell. Ohmigod . . .” She buries her face in her hands.

“She’s clearly got omega blood,” Knight says around the mouthful of food he’s busy chewing.

“Yeah, I just realized that,” Nadia says in a shaky tone. “That puts her in even more danger than the circumstances that led to her being brought back. It’s the only reason I gave into Kash’s request to check if he had pets . . .”

I have no idea who any of these people are. I listen intently as Nadia and the demons discuss the residents of Haven. They’re going to be our neighbors before long, so I track the facts as well as I can.

Nadia has a friend, who used to live with her, named Emerson. Before Nadia realized her magic was acting strangely, she gave this friend a contraception spell that failed. The same friend almost died not too long ago, and Nadia’s nan helped bring her back, but because she’s a seer with knowledge of the future, they’re going to let the pregnant chick be surprised when she finds out she’s popping out four babies.

The conversation continues a little about Kash, the warlock who tried to sacrifice Nadia to a demon for immortality. My blood boils at the thought as my wolf replays visions of us

ripping out the warlock's throat. Apparently Knight already handled that for us, but I'd be happy to dig up his corpse and piss on it, just to be sure.

"Luckily, we already had a plan for Malice to take over for Kash once we made it into the human realm." Knight sets down his empty plate. "Kash was a little too interested in you for obvious reasons, but it was his focus on Atlas that moved up our timeline drastically."

"We've been dotting mates, even prior to you binding us." Wraith gives a serious nod. "We knew you would be displeased if your friend's mate was caught. Kash was suspicious that Atlas was the cause of the disappearing monsters."

"Shit." Nadia shakes her head. "Thank you. I don't think Aline would survive it if something happened to Atlas. I've always thought they'd be cute together."

There's more discussion, and it's clear Aline is important to Nadia. My wolf and I are in agreement that it's a good thing the demons had a plan to off the council agent.

"It's no big deal." Knight tosses his booted feet up on the coffee table. "Malice is head-over-dick in love with the little fae. It was nothing to make sure we reaped the souls, so they couldn't hang around and cause any trouble as ghosts."

"Wow, the revelations keep on coming." Nadia climbs out of my lap, making her way over to sit with Knight and Wraith. "Seriously, thank you for looking out for my friends."

"It's nothing." Wraith bends, kissing her cheek. "I do feel like we need to let you get some rest. The ward needs to be handled swiftly. Once it's complete, we can make our exit."

"Don't forget about me." Athos materializes next to the fireplace.

Nadia snuggles closer to Knight's chest. "We'll add freeing you from the jar to our to-do list."

The demon covertly flips off the djinn while palming the back of Nadia's head.

“I could do with some sleep also,” I admit.

“I’m not sleeping in Constantine’s bed,” Nadia mutters.

“I saw a few guest rooms that would work.” Echo shoves himself off the couch, gathering the sleepy little witch.

I follow. My wolf and I won’t be left out of the cuddle pile. Even if we have to share a bed with the bloodsucker.

The next several days go fairly smoothly. We spend time at each of the remaining cornerstones. It’s clear Nadia is furious with Shelby and Carina, but they still work together to fortify the ward.

Echo packs up his belongings. He’s obviously hesitant that we’ll leave him behind.

I feed our little witch. She truly is close to a desiccated vampire after a day of replenishing the ward.

Nadia licks over my neck, sheepishly cuddling close to my chest. I palm the back of her head. That naughty little tongue of hers is going to get her into trouble if she doesn’t stop teasing me.

Three days of working the cornerstones, and each night, she uses her exhaustion as an excuse to avoid letting any of us inside her. Her hips gyrate over my semi-hard cock, and I quirk an eyebrow.

“You might not want to start something you aren’t prepared to finish.” I chuckle.

She groans. “One of these days, I’m going to shove my foot up those demons’ backsides for that silly contract. I’m horny as fuck, but it’s not worth the risk.”

My hand slides into her hair, tilting her face up to mine.

“What risk? The one where I breed you full of my pups? It’s quite possible it’s already happened,” I growl, bumping my

cheek against hers. “I’m not even going to lie—it’s all I’ve thought of during your long hours replenishing the ward.”

“Is that right?” Her pupils are huge, round saucers as she licks her lips.

“Oh yeah.” My teeth rake over her neck as I pull her head farther to the side. “It’s played out in all of my many fantasies, especially since it’s clear you’re ovulating.”

She grunts, shoving at my chest. “That’s so weird. How can you be sure?”

“My wolf can sense that you’re fertile. It’s been nearly impossible to keep from mounting you and fucking you full of our cum,” I tell her truthfully. My voice is deep and more gravelly than normal. “It’s been a battle to keep my paws off you.”

Nadia shivers. “Seriously?”

“Yes.” I nod.

“I don’t even know if I want kids,” she murmurs, burying her face in my throat again. “Definitely not so damn fast.”

“That is something to consider.”

“But I also know how sweet my friend Emerson’s daughter is. First thing in the morning or right before bed, she turns into a cuddly little bundle of pure baby wolf snuggles.”

I snort. My wolf and I are equally enamored by that idea. “I’ve waited a very long time for exactly that. We’ll need to look into purchasing a home in Haven.”

“What?” She laughs. “You don’t want to live with Nan?”

“Don’t try me. We’ll have our own house.”

“That does sound nice.” She runs her fingers over my chest. “A family does too.” My heart races at her words. “I won’t be going back to my job at The Den. Not in the same capacity as before, anyway.”

Thank fucking God.

My head falls back as I say a silent prayer of appreciation to the universe. I don't know what I would have done if she tried to go back to seeing clients. It probably would've involved Wraith devouring every single fucker who tried to get a spot on her schedule. Then when they no-showed for the appointment, one of us would jump in and take it.

"Thank you." I nuzzle my face against hers. "I wouldn't have handled it well, but I am trying to evolve. The only time I truly want to own you is when we're both nude."

"How romantic." Echo comes up the stairs with a black duffel bag on each shoulder.

"Shall we retire to my house?" I ask the cuddly little witch.

"Yep." She smiles brightly, and my heart beats funny. She looks at Echo. "Is that all? We can pack my SUV full too."

I frown, because I also have belongings I'll need to transfer to Haven. But I have the good sense to keep my mouth shut. I can make multiple trips if need be.

"I have a few more, but I have been trying to keep things light." Echo sighs.

"I'll help," I offer, gently moving Nadia aside before pushing myself off the couch.

"That's very sweet." She lights up, and my stupid heart races so loud, the vampire snorts. "You're all stuck with each other. It's best to get along."

"Well, that's true enough." The vampire smirks. "I'll put up with the mutt to keep you."

Chapter Thirty-One

Nadia

Ridge's house is surprisingly homey. It has four bedrooms and plenty of space for all of us without being right on top of each other.

The main problem is that I have to get back to Haven at some point. I spent several days working on the cornerstones with Shelby and Carina, then another couple of days fortifying the ward on my own. As bad as it sounds, I don't plan to make any return trips to North Falls. I need to be sure everything is good and wrapped up in a tight little bow when I make my exit.

I miss Nan something fierce. Though I've spoken to her and Aline, I'm still strategically ducking and weaving to avoid Emerson's calls. I get updates through Nan, and that's enough for me. I feel like a giant asshole, but I'm not about to bust out everything I have to tell her over the phone.

I'm lying on Ridge's couch, watching the crackling fire, when there's a knock at the door. Wraith runs his fingers through my hair, tenderly calming my racing mind. It still very much feels like the other shoe could drop at any time.

If Shelby and Carina don't keep their word, or God forbid, one of the former council has an ally who notices they're missing, it could be a complete disaster.

Echo shoves himself off the couch, aiming for the door. I sit up, and my jaw falls when Milania, River, and Brant make their way into Ridge's living room.

“Thank you.” Milania rushes me before I’m even fully upright. Her long, thin arms clutch at my back as she rocks from side to side. “I cannot thank you enough.”

“No, I’m sorry I wasn’t there sooner.” I study her slender face. She looks the same, but her features are more pronounced. “I’m so glad you’re here. I really wanted to see you before we leave town. Please, have a seat.”

Brant comes over, cradling a tiny baby to his chest. “Would you like to hold her?”

My silly heart races. “Yes.”

River takes a seat on the opposite couch while Milania grabs the baby, handing her off to me. Wraith wraps his arm under mine as Milania places her in the crook of my arm. My whole damn heart melts as I stare down at her. Her tiny nose scrunches, like maybe she doesn’t like being handed off to a stranger.

My eyes fly up to see Echo holding his phone. “Wait, what are you doing?”

“Documenting the moment. The next time you claim you don’t want offspring, I’m going to show you the look on your face.” He laughs. “If that doesn’t work, I’ll zoom in on Wraith’s face. I’m physically incapable of carrying a child, but that look nearly has me wishing I could.”

I roll my eyes, laughing at his ridiculous antics.

“Thank you.” Wraith gently rocks his arm that’s still under mine. “What’s her name?”

“We were hoping you’d bless them, Nadia.” Brant clears his throat, shoving his glasses up. “We’ve got Miriah and Malcolm.”

“Oh, that is an old tradition.” Knight swaggers into the room. He’s shirtless, like always, and my hormones are all out of whack because all I want to do is climb on his impressive cock. I’m beginning to think they’re tormenting me on purpose.

“Would you bless them?” Milania repeats Brant’s question.

I nod. It feels like forming words would take a lot of effort.

“You’re aware that her magic could interact with their DNA,” Wraith says slowly, like he’s carefully choosing his words.

“We are.” River nods. “I’ve been appointed to Constantine’s position as town council leader. I can assure you, our entire goal is making North Falls safe for every monster in their truest form.”

“I’d be honored.” I finally manage to choke out the words.

Miriah grunts and I lift her, nuzzling my cheek to hers. Okay, maybe I wouldn’t mind a sweet little baby or two. Definitely not four. I’m not freaking Emerson, with infinite patience, but I could probably handle one at a time. Holy shit, I think my ovaries are weeping at the sight of the adorable bundle of baby in my arms.

The blessing of a newborn is an old custom that fell out of practice when blood witches went into hiding. I prefer to think of it as us flying under the radar rather than the truth that we were hunted and often indoctrinated into the paranormal council in order to survive.

The ritual is super simple. It involves a drop of blood on the baby’s forehead and a simple prayer or blessing. I’m just finishing up with Malcolm when the front door slams open. The baby frowns, like he might fuss for the first time in our presence.

Ridge stomps inside shirtless, but it’s the extreme pain filtering through the bond that has me gasping.

“What happened?” I step back from Milania and aim for my alpha wolf.

“Nothing,” he grunts, wrapping his hand around my ass as he pulls me to his chest.

“Bullshit! You smell like blood,” I frown, “and sweat.”

“I needed to handle paying our debt to the pack before we leave.” Ridge nuzzles his cheek to mine.

“For Drake?” I grind out. My shadows swirl around my arms as I link my hands behind Ridge’s back. I immediately recoil. His back is sticky with what I think is blood.

“We’re heading out.” River holds Miriah, but he bends low in thanks. Brant and Milania quickly follow his lead, leaving with a few final words of gratitude.

I step around Ridge, trying to catch sight of his back, but he continuously turns with me. It makes it impossible to get a look at the damage.

The door closes and Echo appears at my side. “I can heal those for you.”

“Heal what?” I snap. My shadows spill out of my skin, showing my displeasure.

“No.” Ridge shakes his head. “They must mend naturally. Carry her up to bed and get her ready. I’m claiming your slick little cunt after I’m clean.” He dips his mouth to mine, kissing me with a ferocity that has my knees clenching. His long hair tickles my cheek as he stares into my eyes and palms the back of my head.

“Fuck me,” Athos grumbles from somewhere. “I need headphones.”

“Go for a walk,” Ridge rumbles. He gives a final peck on my lips and jogs off toward the stairs. My jaw falls when I catch sight of his back. It’s clear by the wounds what happened. His fucking brother whipped him.

My fists clench, but Echo grabs me, tossing me over his shoulder before I can make a break for the door. “Ridge volunteered. You have to remember that his brother isn’t technically supposed to be alpha of that pack. With us leaving, it was a minor inconvenience for Ridge, but it could save his little brother’s life from being challenged once we’re gone.” I bounce around, clutching at Echo’s pockets as he takes the stairs. Everything he said makes perfect sense, or I’m sure it does in shifter logic. It doesn’t lessen the pit in my gut,

though. “It was a worthy price to pay, so a daughter no longer has to live in fear. Think of it that way.”

I nod my understanding as my back hits the mattress. Echo yanks his shirt off over his head. He quirks an eyebrow as he slides a tattooed hand down his muscular chest.

Aww, hell. I think I’m about to get fucked by all four of my mates at once. And my birth control spell is likely completely ineffective. A shiver runs through my entire body at the thought. Ridiculous hormones and cuddly babies. Also delusional monsters. They’re all to blame for this debacle.

Chapter Thirty-Two

Wraith

I manifest next to Nadia as Echo sucks on her cunt. Knight appears on the opposite side, and he's already nude. Why didn't I think of that? A quick thought of focused intent and my cock falls against my thigh.

Nadia lights up when she spots me. My heart beats irregularly as she smiles. A low growl escapes as I dive for her puffy lips. Her naughty little tongue flicks around mine as she gasps into my mouth. She's really enjoying whatever Echo is doing to her pussy. Her soft hand wraps around my shaft as she begs into the kiss. Her tits bounce, and I lean up enough to get a view of what he's doing. He's fingering her with three thick fingers while licking her clit.

Knight sucks on her right tit, sliding a hand down to hold her in place. Nadia is slender, but I can't wait to watch her body change and grow once she truly is pregnant with our offspring.

"Just like that," she begs. Her hand tightens on my cock as she jolts. She moves her free hand to cradle Knight's head as he flicks his tongue against her tight nipple. "I'm going to come so hard."

I kiss her cheek and move to cup her left breast. My tongue flicks over her nipple as she mostly just holds my cock. That's okay, we've got all the time in the world to address that.

Nadia comes, screaming out her release as her scent floods the air even more fully. She's barely done convulsing when Echo moves back until he's kneeling.

“Pull her up for me,” he growls. Knight and I share a look, but he shrugs, so I comply. Echo doesn’t move to shove his cock inside her. He keeps working his hand in and out as her face falls to rest on his chest. “Can I fuck your ass?” He bumps his cheek to hers, smiling predatorily. “Because I’d really like to tear your ass up.”

I frown, but I’m fairly sure that was a euphemism and not his actual plans.

She nods her agreement. “It’s going to take some prep.”

Echo grabs a bottle of lube I hadn’t noticed, tossing it at Knight, who kneels behind Nadia. I briefly consider freezing time so that I have the chance to mentally prepare for everything that’s coming next. It’s a selfish thought, but I often need some additional time to process things.

However, Knight smirks, leaning in to kiss his way over Nadia’s shoulder, and I get distracted by that.

“I’m going to stretch that tight little asshole out now, doll,” Knight informs her.

“Come on over and join the party.” Echo chuckles, nodding at me.

Nadia grins, giving me an encouraging smile. I knee walk over until I’m once again at her side. Echo’s cock is trapped between them as he continues to tease her pussy. I have no idea what we’re waiting for, but my guess would be the alpha wolf.

Nadia grips my cock, running her thumb over the crown, and my mouth falls to kiss and lick over her shoulder.

“Fuck, doll. Do you have any idea the number of times I’ve dreamed about slamming my cock inside your tight ass?” Knight groans, working in and out with his fingers. “That’s coming soon. Echo isn’t the only one allowed to fuck your snug little asshole.”

“Have you experienced double penetration?” Echo asks. “Outside of the two of them the other night?”

“No, not with two dicks, but I’m open to it.” She shivers, grinding her hips like she’s riding them. To me, she asks, “Do you think you could stand up, so I could suck you off? I have no idea what’s going on, but I’m desperate to taste you.”

I nod, pushing myself off the bed. If I was the same height as a normal human, then I doubt this would work. As it is, it only takes a bit of turning by Echo and Knight, and then my naughty little witch is flicking her tongue over my tip.

I curse as my head falls back. Her mouth is warm and wet, but it’s the way she teases the slit that makes my knees weak. My hand falls to cradle her head. Who knew such a tiny woman could bring literal monsters to their knees? I guess I should have realized, considering the number of times I’ve fallen to them to worship her body.

“You are hotter than normal,” Echo says conversationally. I’m envious of the way he and Knight are able to touch Nadia without turning into the bumbling idiot I feel like.

Aww, fuck. Nadia cups my balls, tenderly pulling them and rolling them around in her grip, and my legs shake. Her thumb brushes my slightly swollen knot, and the feeling is indescribable. I’d never known the appendage was missing until it appeared, and now all I can dream about is what it’ll feel like when I bury it deep inside Nadia’s slick little cunt.

Although, after the whipping Ridge endured, I’m fairly sure that’s something he should get to experience first. Nadia gasps, begging around my cock, and the shaking in my thighs amps up several degrees.

“Come all over my hand,” Echo growls.

Nadia’s tongue cups the underside of my shaft as she whimpers and moans. Her warm breath fans over my length, and it makes me ache to thrust deep into her throat.

Instead, I run my palm over her head, stilling her motion, so she can catch her breath. I eventually pull out completely as Knight disappears from view.

“Where did he go?” Nadia asks breathily.

“Likely to wash his hands.” Echo laughs, pulling her up and spinning her around. “Let’s get my cock up your ass.”

Nadia blinks, nodding as her back rests against his chest. “Like this?”

“Indeed.” He moves until his legs hang off the end of the bed. Nadia’s legs are wrapped back toward the headboard. “Kiss her. Play with her clit. Do something.”

I nod, hitting my knees in front of her. My mouth is instantly drawn to her heavy tit as my fingers brush her extremely slick core. She claws at my shoulder to the point I believe she succeeds in breaking the skin.

I freeze.

How did I mess this up?

I generally get to tease her from the front when Knight and I share.

“Holy fuck, that’s intense,” she groans.

My eyes widen as I realize she’s sinking down on Echo’s cock. I get back to work on her pussy and eventually shove a finger inside her dripping hole.

“I forgot how weird that is,” Echo says into her shoulder. “Goddamn, this is going to be a tight fit.”

I nod my agreement. It’s strange to feel him filling her up through the thin wall of tissue.

“I’m a big fan.” She nods wildly, staring straight into my eyes. “Tease my clit, more, please.”

I shove my mouth to hers as my cock bumps her hip. I work her slick, hardened nub until she sobs into the kiss. My tip leaks, dribbling against her skin as she rises and falls, taking more of Echo on each drop of her hips.

“I’m all the way in,” Echo grunts after a while. I don’t say anything, and he bumps me with his foot. “Want to make her scream?”

Nadia falls back against Echo’s chest. The sight sends a jolt directly to my balls. Her pussy is pink and glistening. And

it's oh-so empty.

I nod, climbing over them. Nadia grabs my shaft as soon as it's within reach. She jerks my crown against her core as my hand hits the mattress next to Echo's head. The tips of my toes push against the floor as she guides me to her opening, and I thrust.

Nadia wails, but her sounds quickly turn to begging moans as I determine exactly how to grind into her. My knot brushes her lower lips, and it's nearly impossible not to buck it inside her.

Echo's swollen length pushes against mine through her tissue, and the feeling is quite strange. I don't hate it. All I can focus on is how warm and wet she is while she ripples around me.

"I'm going to bite you." Echo licks her neck. I catch sight of his milky-white eyes as Nadia begs him to do exactly that. The second his fangs strike, her pussy clamps down in a way I don't have a hope of fighting against. My cock throbs, swelling even harder. I feel practically useless as she claws at my ass, grinding my pelvis against her clit.

"More, harder," she begs. "I need more of you."

I'm still trying to determine which direction qualifies as up as my load empties deep inside her.

"Jesus Christ, Wraith." She scratches at my shoulders. "Pound into me right there."

I do my best. My tip bounces against the bottom, and the feeling sends a shiver through my entire body as she clenches and milks the final drops from my balls.

Knight appears at my side. "She's going to be nice and slick, huh?"

"Yeah," I agree shakily. She truly is, but the feeling is hot as fuck. Each time I thrust, a combination of our cum spills out around my shaft. My knot and balls are coated, and it fills me with pride. I don't care if it's weird, because it's true.

Knight chuckles darkly. “Lean to the left and keep your weight on that forearm. You want to try all three of us at one time?”

“I’ll try anything once. More, if I enjoy it.” She flutters her lashes.

“Fuck,” Echo mutters. “Better make it good, assholes.”

Her hole convulses around me in a way that makes me very sure what he just suggested is an impossible feat. I’m genuinely afraid of hurting her. Satisfied for the moment, I pull out nearly completely. They can enjoy her for a bit.

Knight pats my shoulder, pushing me closer to Nadia. I don’t understand how he reads me so easily. I wish I was able to read situations like he is. “We’re both going to work that slick little cunt until she screams.”

Nadia nods encouragingly. I pull out until only the tip is inside her and move to the side, making room for Knight.

“Fuck, I’m never getting off this mattress, am I?” Echo snorts, still licking Nadia’s throat. “It’s a good thing I don’t need to breathe. You’re all heavy as fuck.” Nadia laughs, slapping his thigh. “Not you, darling.”

Knight squirts a generous amount of lube all over his cock before taking a similar stance on the right side. Where my left forearm rests against the bed, his right does the same. “What do you say if it’s too much?”

“Red,” she huffs. “I remember my safe word. Now, fuck me!” She wiggles her hips, making me groan.

Knight chuckles. He slides his length against mine, and the moment he breaches her opening, four sets of agonized gasps fill the air.

Nadia goes rigid, but Echo slides his fingers between us. He taps her clit in circles, and it’s wild to realize how warm her skin is compared to his. The difference seems much more considerable than normal.

“Are you all right, doll?” Knight licks down her neck.

“Maybe,” she moans.

I hold myself up on my forearm, afraid to move, and instead cup her breast in my free hand. My fingers flick over her tight nipple as Knight's hair tickles my arm.

"You should move," Echo suggests.

"Yeah, that." Nadia nods wildly. "Now, move now."

Knight is braver than I am. He holds himself up and pulls all the way out before thrusting in again. The pressure is intense, taking over most of my other senses.

Nadia is slick and my cock is leaking. The idea of fucking her full of my cum again has me giving an involuntary roll of my hips. I'd really like to breed her. I've waited a millennium to meet my mate. I'd like a family and to worship my little witch for eternity. My head tilts. I vaguely wonder if we mentioned that her lifespan is now intrinsically tied to ours. Oh well, I'll surprise her with that good news later.

Nadia claws at my back. "That's it. Holy hell." Her eyes meet mine. They're hooded and slightly glassy, but as she licks her lips, it makes me desperate to make her scream. Her hand wraps around my head, pulling my mouth to hers. It's complicated because Knight is still tonguing her tit, but we make it work. "I love you." She nuzzles her cheek to mine as we pull back, and my heart tries to beat out of my chest. "You've been important to me for a long time. I just needed you to know that."

Words won't form, so I nod shakily. I send my feelings through the bond, hoping and praying she can decipher the meaning.

"How moving," Echo mutters. "Now, how about you lazy fuckers get back to fucking her?"

"I love you too." She stretches up to kiss Knight. He growls into the kiss, working his shaft deeper, using his abs as leverage.

"Me too, doll. Me fucking too." Knight laughs, pecking her lips a final time. "I like you all sweet and compliant."

Nadia laughs, running her hand over my neck. Right, I'm supposed to be fucking her, but my heart still pounds

erratically at her admission. I'm a little afraid my life is now complete and something terrible will happen. I've never had the opportunity to live in the good. But fuck me, Nadia is everything I've ever dreamed of.

“What an intriguing find.” Ridge’s deep voice fills the air. “Once they fill up your sweet cunt, I intend to lock my knot inside you.” He crawls on the bed, kneeling above Echo’s head. “I’ll keep all three of our cum locked in your pussy *all night long*.”

Nadia gets slicker as her channel convulses around my throbbing length.

“Aww, fuck, doll,” Knight groans.

“She is our perfect little fuck doll, isn’t she?” Echo muses. His cool hand brushes my pelvis as he strokes her clit. Group sex is a mess of limbs and bodies, but it’s not as uncomfortable as I initially expected.

I pull back, staring at where I disappear inside her. The sight of both Knight and I stretching her hole to capacity is almost too much. I snap my hips harder, lost to the scent of her pheromones flooding the air.

“Scream for me.” I fall back down, kissing her ferociously as my cock swells.

“Oh fuck, are you trying to tear me in half?” She scratches at my neck. “Just kidding. Keep doing that!”

Knight and I work in and out in tandem.

Nadia does scream. I wouldn’t be surprised if the entire wolf pack can hear her begging moans.

Echo curses a stream of words that don’t make any sense.

“You’ll be carrying our babies soon, love.” My cock jumps, spilling hot spurts of cum inside her.

Knight lets out something between a moan and a growl. Echo does the same as the pressure becomes more intense. All three of us continue moving with jerky strokes.

“I believe you’re in heat,” Ridge says to Nadia as my eyes pop open. “My wolf is sure of it.”

“I did wonder,” Echo says.

Knight pulls out, rolling to the side as he catches his breath.

“It’s not impossible, considering we’re almost positive you have omega blood,” I assure her, kissing her cheek. “Also, I love you too. I was too caught up in the moment to respond.”

Nadia grins, running her hand over my neck. “I know.”

Our mouths meet for a slow kiss that has me grinding against her.

“Mine,” Ridge growls. His claws rake over my shoulder, and I turn to smoke, reappearing across the room.

“Someone has a sharing problem.” Nadia chuckles. Her eyes meet mine. “Are you okay?”

I nod as Ridge rips Nadia off Echo’s cock. He gently lowers her to the floor before crawling on top of her.

“I care about you too. There’s no reason to be growly and violent,” she says, but Ridge slams his mouth to hers for a frantic kiss as he powers into her.

There’s a slick sound as his hips meet hers, and it only makes my chest rise and fall even more rapidly. I love that she’s full of my seed. I don’t even mind that the wolf is going to be the one to lock it inside her. I’m obviously a damn good packmate.

Nadia shrieks as Ridge thrusts the last bit. I’m guessing he just slammed his knot inside her. My head tilts as I watch her rake her nails down his back. Thick red lines raise but quickly disappear. He still has dark red, swollen ridges that haven’t completely healed. Those are from the whip. I’m sure it was laced in something to ensure he couldn’t immediately heal himself.

I lean against the wall, watching as fur sprouts on Ridge’s arms and legs. His claws grow as the room lights up with the yellowy glow of his wolf.

“All fucking mine, little witch,” he snarls. “Take my knot. Aww, fuck.” He pushes his mouth to hers, and Nadia whimpers into the kiss as her feet dig into his ass. “Come all over my cock.”

Knight appears at my side. “Am I right in assuming you’ll be able to tell as soon as a spark of life takes root?”

My eyes fly to his. “I hadn’t really considered it, but yes, it’s likely.”

“Damn, that is wild.” Knight’s head tilts, watching how violently Ridge slams into Nadia. I have no idea if his comments are related to my statement or the way Ridge uses Nadia like he’s not afraid to break her. He should be. I’d devour his soul without a second thought if he truly injures her.

Echo snorts, shoving himself off the bed and aiming for the shower.

Nadia moans, thrashing around like she’s coming around Ridge’s knot.

“I’m really fucking glad Kash thought he could sacrifice Nadia to Malice.” Knight bumps his shoulder against mine.

I grin, nodding my agreement. I’m also quite anxious to get to Haven and check on our clustermate. We may have ended up in different packs, but Malice will always be our brother.

The next several days are spent almost exclusively fucking. Nadia is insatiable and none of us mind a bit. It’s early in the morning, but Nadia sleeps on my chest. I don’t require rest like she does. However, I love the way she cuddles close and the fact I can stare at her for hours without it coming off as creepy.

She’s utterly beautiful with her lashes fanning over her lightly freckled cheeks. I’m obsessed with the tiny mewls and grunts she lets out when my touches wake her.

“Nice tits, little witch.” Athos appears next to the bed in a swirl of silvery-blue smoke.

Ridge lets out a feral growl, but Nadia mutters a sleepy, “Thanks.”

I glare, but Nadia’s eyes pop open, catching my gaze. Her eyes crinkle at the edges as her fingers brush my chest, and I give her a quick peck on the lips.

“Sorry to interrupt the adorableness that is the five of you in one giant, butt-ass-naked puppy pile.” Athos laughs. “But you’ve again got quite the crowd brewing on the front lawn.”

“Fuck,” Knight groans.

“I’ll check it out.” I carefully move Nadia aside, levitate out of the bed, and manifest my clothing. I leave the hood down for the moment. If I allow them to see me, then I can always pull it up if the need calls for it.

“They’re not a threat.” Athos chuckles. “They’d like to schedule appointments with the healer.” He snorts and disappears.

Nadia grunts, sitting up. Her hair is wild and messy, and she’s still full of all our cum.

“I’ll tell them you need a few minutes.” I kiss her cheek and siphon outside. I stay in the shaded area of the porch.

I frown, taking in the crowd. Athos wasn’t kidding or exaggerating. They’re all female supernaturals. They stand in small clusters, talking animatedly amongst themselves.

I leave my hood back and allow myself to become visible. “Nadia was sleeping. She’ll be down shortly. I don’t think I need to make threats about what will happen if anyone tries to harm my bonded mate.”

“And I thought Echo was disturbing,” a woman with blonde hair says, making her way up the steps. “Hey, I’m Jenny. You helped Nadia take out my friend Sabine’s dad.” She holds out a hand, and I blink at it for several long seconds. I gather my wits and shake the female wolf’s hand. Now that I

can smell her up close, it's clear she's a shifter. "Thank you. He was the most awful kind of wolf there is."

I bow my head, releasing her hand. "Of course, and I agree."

The door opens.

Nadia steps outside, glancing between me and the female wolf. She looks a little like she might claw Jenny's eyes out, and a depraved part of me loves seeing her as territorial as I feel.

Jenny gives Nadia a sheepish smile and shrugs. "You said to give you a few days to settle in and you'd see what you could do about helping us have some control over our reproductive rights."

Nadia takes a step back as she swipes hair out of her face. "I did, but you also know how my magic changed you."

"That's a chance we're willing to take," one of the women calls from the group on Ridge's front lawn.

Nadia gives the woman a soft smile. "Glad to see you looking so much better."

"I can't thank you enough." The woman comes forward, and I realize she's not much older than a teenager. "I don't think anyone would have stopped him if you didn't."

Nadia swallows thickly, stretching out a hand for mine. "This is Sabine. Drake was her father." My eyes widen. God, I wish I had the chance to devour him again. She's quite petite and delicate for a shifter. It makes his actions even more difficult to fathom. "Go ahead and let the guys know. We definitely won't be leaving today if I have this many patients to see."

"Of course, love," I agree, pulling her hand to my mouth.

"Ahh, God. I cannot wait until I meet my mate," Sabine says in an airy voice.

I'm sure she has some lasting damage from her asshole father, but it's clear she still has hope, and that makes me very

happy. I give a small smile and head back into Ridge's house to let the others know we won't be leaving just yet.

Chapter Thirty-Three

Nadia

The number of female supernatural creatures who have gone without a healer or other type of witch is astounding to me. It's not necessarily difficult to understand why the witches chose to leave North Falls, but it doesn't help my opinion of Carina *at all*.

I don't let myself think too much about Shelby and Carina. They were friends when we were teenagers, nothing more and nothing less.

We end up spending nearly two weeks longer than planned in North Falls. One morning, Scarlett pops up at Ridge's house, informing me that my old friends have disappeared completely.

How shocking.

They stayed long enough to ensure the ward wouldn't fail, and then they scurried off without another word.

In the grand scheme of things, it doesn't matter. North Falls is thriving under River's leadership.

Ridge's brother, Trace, even took a seat on the council, along with Scarlett and Garth.

The evening we actually manage to leave town is a more emotional farewell than I'm expecting. Milania and Scarlett pack a giant picnic basket and shove it at Ridge as we prepare to depart. I've delivered babies before, but I've never felt so connected to someone as I do when Milania hugs me tight. Things could have gone in a completely different direction, but the universe was in our corner that night. It makes me

grateful for my magic. It may have cost my mother her life, but it's ensuring the lives of future generations, and that makes it mean something.

Speaking of my magic, we're all interested to see if North Falls ends up with a staggering number of omegas. Only time will tell. I've promised to come back in eleven months to renew all the contraceptive spells I placed.

The longer that passes without serious fallout from the town council, the more hopeful I become. Also, I wouldn't mind seeing the twins for their first birthday. I feel like I changed on some soul-deep level when I came to North Falls, and as I climb into Echo's car, I'm ultimately okay with that.

I'm in the passenger seat of Echo's car. Athos's jar is in the back seat, but the djinn is nowhere to be seen. Ridge drives my SUV, with Wraith and Knight as passengers, since Echo's car is rather small.

We drive for several hours before Echo grabs my hand. He places it on the gearshift and interlaces his fingers with mine. His left arm is stretched over the steering wheel and, honestly, it's sexy as fuck. We're driving at night to avoid any issues with the sun. Likely, my shadows wouldn't allow him to be injured, but it's also not something I'm willing to put to the test.

He runs his thumb over my inner wrist, and I'm completely freaking blown away at the giant butterflies that dance around my stomach. Yeah, that warm feeling in my chest is bizarre too.

I thought I'd be renewing a ward and delivering a baby or two, but everything changed in the blink of a damn eye.

We pull into Haven in the middle of the night. We'll be staying with Nan for a bit while the guys search for houses. I'm not destitute, but I also don't have the type of money houses in Haven go for. It's a sanctuary city, meaning there's limited space and availability. There's practically no new land to build on, so unless they get lucky and find someone willing to sell, then we might have to look outside the ward.

Nan jokingly said on the phone last night that she would be happy to help me extend the ward if it came down to it. Echo pulls his car into one of the tiny parking spots that I would never attempt to park in if I was the one driving. It leaves the small back gravel area for Ridge to park my SUV. It's actually kind of sweet.

Don't even get me started on how sexy it is watching him shove the car from reverse into first gear as he parks perfectly.

He's out of the car and helping me out of my seat before I can do more than unbuckle. "Do you know what I realized on the drive to Haven?" He dips his lips to mine for a slow, teasing kiss.

"What's that?" I ask as he pulls back.

"That I truly fucking love you," he murmurs against my lips. My heart stalls as he fucks his tongue into my mouth again. "Please, don't say anything at the moment. I simply needed you to know that." He wraps a cool hand over my mouth, preventing me from responding, but I do send him an unfettered glimpse of my emotions in the bond. "Come on, I can't wait to meet Nan." His hand meets my lower back, and he guides me to the back door.

I blink repeatedly when Thornton opens the door as we reach it. "Nadia, you look well. Did you have a good trip?"

"I did." I smile politely, glancing around for Nan. Please tell me they weren't having a last-minute quickie right before they noticed we'd arrived. "Glad to be back in Haven, though."

"I can only imagine." He shoves a hand at Echo and they make introductions. Wraith and Knight appear a second later

and the process repeats. “You’ve left the mountain with all the bags.” Thornton chuckles. “I’ll help.” He sidesteps the four of us, patting me on the back. “She’s missed you terribly.”

“Me too,” I acknowledge, stumbling toward home. I don’t mean the house, either. Nan is home. She always has been. It’s strange to realize, but my guys are now too.

“Hello, my dear.” Nan shuffles out of the kitchen, and she’s fully dressed. She wraps me up in her arms, but I frown when I spot the pile of luggage next to the front door. “You’re all more than welcome to come in.” Wraith and Knight move to come inside, but Echo doesn’t. “Ahh, I did wonder about that.” Nan kisses my cheek. “Invite your vampire in.”

I keep my arm wrapped around her lower back but turn to face the door. “Come in. She might pinch your butt, but she’s already welcomed you inside.”

Echo smirks. “Apparently, it needed to come from you, darling.”

I frown, because that doesn’t make any sense. Nan makes introductions as Ridge carries in Athos’s jar.

Thornton comes in with several bags. He drops them and grabs two of Nan’s suitcases from inside the foyer.

“Why is he carrying your bags out?” I ask, swallowing thickly.

Nan pats my hip. “I’m going to stay with Thornton for . . .” She smiles. “Indefinitely.”

“What?” I gasp. “No way, this is your house.”

“This is our family home.” Nan pulls me in for another hug. “And I greatly regret not filling it with a whole yard full of kids. It’s huge. It was fine when Emerson and Ember were here, but you’ve got to admit, it’s lonely when it’s just us.” I open my mouth to protest, but she squeezes me tight. “I could never bear the thought of it after I lost your grandfather, but trust me when I say there’s no need for you all to look for another house. I couldn’t sell it, but it’s totally different to offer it to you. I mean, unless you don’t like it.”

“No, of course we do,” Wraith says, bowing dramatically. “We’d be honored.”

“I’m going to help the mutt carry in our things.” Echo smiles in our direction. “I’m sure these three will be glad to ensure the house is filled with children.” Within the time it takes me to blink, he’s gone.

“We’ll definitely do our part.” Knight chuckles, shoving his hands into his back pockets as he rocks on his heels. “But don’t let us run you out of your own home.”

Athos appears. “Trust me, no headphones can drown out that one’s screaming.” He nods at me and my face burns. This is my damn grandmother they’re talking to. “Run while you can.”

“It must be genetic.” Thornton makes his way inside, grabbing another set of bags. “Don’t discourage her. I’ve been trying to talk her into moving in with me for years.”

“Ohmigod,” I groan. “Nan, I’m never going to recover.”

“Don’t be dramatic.” She kisses my cheek. “I love you to pieces.”

“I love you too,” I assure her.

“My advice is to watch out for Emerson. She’ll eventually calm down, but she’s currently on the warpath, and you’re her target.” Nan pats my back and heads for the door. “We’re glad to have you in Haven.” She bows her head at Wraith. “And thank you for refusing to take her from me all those years ago.”

My eyes actually well up with tears at the thought.

Wraith siphons over, pulling me into his arms. “I always protect her with my life.” He nods. “And the two members of the family that will be joining us in the near future.”

My jaw falls.

“Dammit,” Ridge growls, stomping inside. “I told you not to tell her yet.”

“Come on, he couldn’t lie to Nan,” Knight says, covering for Wraith.

“Oh, no, of course not.” Ridge bows his head. “My apologies.”

Nan simply cackles, spinning around and heading out.

“Oh, holy shit,” I whisper.

“I fucking love you.” Ridge stomps over, pulling me into his arms for a filthy kiss.

Damn, I went to North Falls for a month and came back with four mates and knocked up.

That figures. And surprisingly enough, I couldn’t be happier about it.

Chapter Thirty-Four

Nadia

The first real time I lay eyes on Emerson after her change into a vampire is when she spends the better part of half an hour berating me for my epic screwup with her birth control spell.

I end up spewing everything that happened in North Falls, and I think she forgives me.

Maybe?

Technically, it's not all me.

It wasn't like I made the choice.

My magic just so happens to have a mind of its own. We talk a little about how excited she is while simultaneously being terrified.

I get it. If Wraith is right, then I'm carrying twins. It's not something I've let myself obsess about too much in the last week that I've been in Haven. Mostly, I've decided that I would be excited if he's right. I mean, I should have gotten my period a little over a week ago, so I'm fairly sure Wraith knows what he's talking about.

I'm feeling all over Emerson's wiggly tummy when Dread stomps into the room.

I jolt, but my shoulders pull back. He can growl and snarl all he likes. He wanted her full of his pups, and would you look at that? Here we are. I mean, at least one of those babies belongs to him, so he should really be thanking me.

“How the fuck are we supposed to keep this a secret?” Dread snarls, pacing back in the opposite direction.

Emerson catches my gaze, rolling her eyes at the hellhound currently losing his shit.

I shrug. “You can’t, so I think it would be silly to try.”

Dread stops dead in his tracks, spinning around to face me. He growls low and dangerous, but I know it’s not me he’s snarling at. He’s worried about his family. “They’re four different species.”

“I know.” I nod my agreement. It’s not what he wants to hear, but I’m not being purposely difficult, either. Truthfully, I just don’t see a point in trying to hide it. Everyone with any prior knowledge of omegas will be able to put two and two together.

Dread continues his low growling, but I snort. I don’t think I could be afraid of him if I tried.

Wraith manifests between me and Dread. “I’d highly recommend you stop glaring at my mate, unless you have plans to meet my monster today.”

Dread’s red eyes narrow as his claws elongate. I don’t think he understands that Wraith can freeze time. It gives my reaper an unhealthy and kind of unfair advantage in any fight.

I’m a little impressed that Dread doesn’t look away from Wraith’s gaze. I mean, he’s got his hood up and everything. That shit would terrify me. Well, if I didn’t know he’s a giant grim reaper teddy bear. Although, there’s every possibility that only applies to me. A wide, slow smile spreads over my face at that thought. He really is quite melty for me.

The two continue to square off.

I roll my eyes. “I’m sure your dicks are the exact same size. Please stop with this ridiculous measuring contest *before* whipping them out.”

Emerson snorts.

“Dread is a friend. He’s allowed to growl and snarl, especially because I understand he’s only concerned for the

safety and well-being of his mate and unborn children.” I push myself off the couch, sliding under Wraith’s arm. He immediately pulls me into his side. It’s unreal how petite I feel with his hip practically pushing into my waist. “Thank you for being all growly and protective.” I pat his chest. “It’s super hot.”

“Really?” Wraith’s head tilts and his tone is oddly hopeful.

“So hot,” Emerson chimes in.

I snort.

Dread growls, sliding around us before tossing himself onto the couch next to Emerson. “Only I’m allowed to be sexy while being growly and protective.” His deadpan delivery has my head shaking as I hold back the laugh that wants to escape.

“We’ll all be around to help you through whatever comes next.” Wraith turns us to face the now cuddling couple. “We’ve discussed it many times. Nadia isn’t the only blood witch who will be introducing omegas back into the monster community. I’m fairly sure it’s been happening for a while all over the world. She just happens to be the one closest to us.”

Dread nods, scratching at his scruffy beard. “You shouldn’t see any patients until you know they don’t have omega blood.”

Wraith hums, his head tilting. “That’s one option, but the rarer the designation, the more danger anyone falling under that classification will be in. The other option is to saturate the community to the point they’re no longer considered a commodity.”

“Hmm,” Dread grunts, nodding like he’s thinking that idea through.

“There’s a djinn stalking Charity.” Aline comes into the room. Once the door closes, she leans against it, crossing thin arms over her chest. “And it’s hysterical.” A bright smile I’ve never seen before crosses her face, but my eyes are drawn to her stomach. On most females, it wouldn’t be noticeable, but she’s clearly got a small rounding of a baby belly.

I mean, I think that’s what it is.

I stumble toward her. “Holy fucking shit.”

Wraith’s arm tightens around me, like he’s attempting to hold me in place. He releases me when he realizes it was a purposeful move.

I bite my lip as I stagger forward.

It seems highly inappropriate to ask because of her fertility issues, but also . . . God, it would make my whole damn year if she was pregnant.

“Is something wrong?” Wraith sounds truly perplexed.

“She is indeed carrying four eggs,” the nightmare from the warehouse says, appearing at Aline’s side. He bows low. “Thank you for all you did to help my mate.”

I squeal, bouncing around on my toes. I rush Aline as she smiles.

“It’s good to see you,” Malice says to Wraith. “I’ve missed you.”

I barely even process what he’s saying as Aline hugs me tight. She’s not usually a huggy person, but she holds on to me like she needs the contact just as much as I do.

“Are you excited?” I bite my lip.

“What do you think?” She laughs. “It’s all I’ve dreamed of for years.”

“God, I’m so fucking happy for you,” I whisper. “Wait, did he say you’re carrying eggs?”

“Thank you,” Emerson says from behind me. “Can I just say, I’m really happy I’m not the only one who needed that explained?”

“I feel like I’ve missed so much.” There’s a weird quaver in my voice that betrays my emotion.

“Well, you’re here now.” Emerson comes to stand at our side. “And that means it’s time for us girls to catch up.”

“Should one of us rescue Charity?” I ask, glancing at the door.

“I’ll find the djinn and give him a job.” Dread shoves himself off the couch. “I’m tired of everyone loitering and never working.”

Aline snorts, then bends in half, laughing harder than I’ve ever seen her laugh.

It really is good to be home.

Epilogue

Knight

Even in my wildest imagination, I never imagined that Aline and Emerson would go into labor on the same night.

My beautiful mate is in her element. It's wild to see her take charge and step into the role of healer. She might bitch and complain about some of her tasks as a fertility witch, but it's pretty damn clear she's got the talent and the experience to make sure everything runs smoothly.

Nadia is still very much baking our babies. Then again, she's a witch. I think she'll make it to at least four or five months before she gives birth. What might be unusual in the human world is actually quite normal for supernatural pregnancies.

It seems pretty clear *someone* should have realized monsters often give birth on a full moon.

I laugh hysterically as Malice appears from the shadows. It's his second attempt to subdue Wraith, but the reaper managed to escape the first attempt.

Malice grabs Wraith, putting him in a headlock. I snort, shaking my head at the insanity unfolding in The Den tonight. Everyone has lost their goddamn minds.

"Come on," Malice snarls.

"No," Wraith growls, slapping at Malice's hands. "I don't need to see that. I'm here. Here is fine. I can assure you that, if you need me, I'll be in there before any of you can blink." He

punches Malice in the kidney. “I can monitor their souls perfectly well from here.”

I cackle.

I really missed that nightmare.

Malice was calm and collected *until* Aline started to cry as she pushed. “I need you in the room. What if one of them tries to die on me? Be a goddamn decent clustermate and shove their soul back in their shell. That’s what you’re going to do!”

“Have more faith in the female anatomy.” Wraith rolls his eyes, but he allows Malice to siphon them out of the room.

My hands rub together as I vaguely wonder if I’ll be as fucking out of my mind as Aline’s and Emerson’s men are.

Probably. And I’m completely okay with that.

Saber stomps up to my side, and my hackles immediately rise. It’s something in his energy that sets me on edge. “You might want to intervene.”

I turn to face him. “Intervene in what, exactly?”

“There are a couple of vampires I’m guessing your packmate knows. They’re pretty ancient and he’s really not. He’s probably going to need some help.” Saber sighs. “It’s like the universe decided to toss everything at us all at once.”

My eyes meet Ridge’s. He’s playing with Emerson’s daughter, Ember, on the floor in the room the baby shower was held in. He was teaching her how to shift single body parts, like her tail or ears.

“Saber is going to get you a snack while we handle something.” Ridge scoops up the child, bringing her into the hallway. He hands her off. “Where is Echo?”

“Check the back entrance.” Saber frowns at the wiggly Ember. “I’m not really a kid person.”

Ember growls, chuffing her displeasure as her ears twitch. They’re quite fluffy in shifted form.

Ridge and I chuckle. That child is a handful. I’m utterly ecstatic at the prospects of what demonic little beings we’ll be

stuck with for eternity.

“You’re in love with Vivie. She’s going to be popping out a few before you know it.” Ridge nods at Ember. “It’s best to practice now.”

Ember crosses tiny arms over her chest. “I like cheese and meat.”

Saber frowns so deeply his forehead wrinkles. “I’m sure we can find the snacks from the party.” He looks at me. “I recommend checking on Echo.”

“Shit,” Ridge growls, spinning around and heading out.

I disappear from inside The Den and manifest outside the employee entrance. I stay invisible to the two vampires currently stalking Echo. He looks completely unbothered by the two ancient and deadly predators sizing him up.

“You killed our mother,” the female hisses.

“Retribution must be paid,” the male at her side says. His back is to me, but his claws are elongated. It’s likely he’s lost to his monster.

“Actually, I didn’t,” Echo says in a bored tone. “Although, neither of you would have any room to talk if I did. You both ran as soon as the sire bond was severed.”

“Imogen gave us eternal life.” The female prowls closer. “How dare you turn against her?”

“I was her puppet for three-and-a-half centuries. You barely spent fifty years by her side.” Echo crosses his arms over his chest. “Leave, and we can forget this ever happened.” The power of his compulsion fills his words. It’s impressive, considering he’s nowhere near the age of the thousand-year-old bloodsuckers.

The female takes a step back, but the male lunges. He wraps a clawed hand around Echo’s throat. Echo raises an arm, knocking away the male’s claws. His right leg twists, pivoting and slamming a foot into his attacker’s chest.

Ridge slams open the back door of The Den. The female immediately lunges a clawed hand at Echo’s heart. Well, that’s

simply not okay. My little witch would be heartbroken if I allowed her vampire to meet his untimely demise on my watch.

I siphon over, but I'm nearly too late. Echo hisses, attempting to block her attack, but she's already penetrated his chest cavity.

I sigh.

Killing females isn't my favorite, but I'm holding her heart before anyone can blink.

Ridge pounces, and the male vampire's head rolls around on the ground. It continues for so long, it's becoming awkward, but luckily, the female vampire's now heartless corpse falls atop it. I drop her heart because it's warm and squishy feeling.

"Holy shit," Echo mutters, clutching at his torn open chest.

"Are you okay?" I ask at the same time Ridge says, "You're welcome."

"Thank you." Echo blinks owlshly.

"Don't mention it." Ridge glares at his bloody hand. "Seriously. Nadia isn't to hear about this. I'm fairly sure it would upset her."

Echo snorts, shaking his head. His chest finally starts to knit back together.

"Would you siphon home and grab us some clothes?" Ridge looks at me. "We should probably shower and get back inside before Nadia notices we're missing. And you should wash your hand and change too."

"What's the plan for those?" I gesture to the dead bodies.

Mattias, an older ghoul, approaches slowly. The look on his face spells pure interest. "If you don't have other arrangements, then I'd be happy to take them off your hands."

"Sure." I shrug. "Have at it."

"I thought ghouls only consumed human flesh?" Ridge asks, frowning.

“Don’t ask questions you don’t want the answers to.” Echo slaps Ridge on the back and they head inside.

I chuckle.

How’s that for pack bonding? Nadia would be so proud. Too bad she’ll never hear of this.

Epilogue

Wraith

I'm fairly sure there's nothing in the world that compares to the frantic energy that comes when four men huddle around a bedside to watch their mate give birth.

Malice is always levelheaded, except apparently, during the birth of his children.

I visit both rooms during the deliveries, but I do my best to keep my eyes on my feet. I have no great interest in being exposed to childbirth prior to witnessing my own being born.

I have to physically hold myself back when the hellhound snarls at Nadia and Meena.

Nan is tough. She points at the door, giving the beast a look that would melt the skin off a lesser man. "Continue to be problematic, and I will stick you to the wall in the hallway. I won't release you until all four of your children are born."

Dread frowns, swiping his hand over his face. He sure does begin pacing back in the opposite direction without another word.

It's several hours later before the chaos completely dies down. In all honesty, it seemed to go quite smoothly.

I'm leaning near the door when Saber opens it a few inches. "This child is done with me," he says, shoving the small girl into my arms.

"I thought I was invisible," I mutter in confusion.

"Yeah, I'll thank my sentinel DNA." Saber shrugs. "I've always been able to see the three of you."

I assume he means Knight, Malice, and me.

Ember wiggles, stretching toward her mother. “I want Mommy.”

“Would it be all right to bring her a little closer?” I ask.

Nadia nods, coming to scoop the child out of my arms. “Do you want to meet your little brothers?”

“I guess,” the small shifter says with a huff.

I chuckle. That was exceptionally cute. I wait for my mate to hand off the girl and pull Nadia into my arms. She’s utterly exhausted. It’s time for us to gather our pack and get home.

Our packmates join us as we head for the exit.

I frown when I realize all three of them are in different clothes than what they started the night in.

“I’m more than happy to walk you home if the dragon has become unreliable in his duties.” Athos floats along at Charity’s side. They approach the back door from the long hallway where the offices are.

Both Charity and Nadia have been chipping in to handle some of the administrative tasks while Aline takes time off. I have noticed Bane, the cranky dragon shifter, often walks Charity home following her shift.

“I’m good, thanks.” Charity gives a tight smile. “Contrary to popular belief, Haven is really safe, and I’m completely capable of walking three blocks on my own.”

“The last time you walked home alone, the wyvern kidnapped you,” Nadia mumbles sleepily. She cuddles closer to my chest. My heart pounds rapidly, like it does every time I realize how lucky I got when she claimed me.

“Oh, you hush.” Charity smiles at Nadia. “That wyvern is my mate. It was quite the romantic introduction.”

“Being kidnapped?” Echo snorts derisively. “Hey, darling, why didn’t I think of that?”

“Because I definitely would have kicked you in the balls?” Nadia mutters.

“I fear you may be mistaken,” Athos says sincerely. “I’m nearly positive you’re my—”

Charity spins around, shoving a finger at the djinn. “Don’t even say it.”

“My mate.” Athos smirks.

“I’m moving.” Charity’s head shakes. “I’m taking my kid and my wyvern and leaving town. This is insane.”

“He wasn’t lying,” Knight adds helpfully. Charity glares so intently that Knight shrugs, shoving his hands into his back pockets. “My bad. I’m just saying he believes that you’re his mate.”

“The fuck he is,” Bane growls, stomping inside the back door.

Nadia snorts. “Okay, so I’m beat. Someone will get Charity home safely?”

“I’ve got it.” Bane steps forward, extending an arm to the half-fae female. She sighs but lets him pull her into his side.

“That was hurtful,” Athos mutters. “I was going to discuss romantic ways of asking if you’d accept my jar.”

“What?” Charity gasps, spinning to face him. “You’re serious?”

“Of course.” Athos crosses his arms. “It’s the greatest affection my kind can offer.”

“We’ll talk about this more soon,” Charity says, smiling over her shoulder as Bane drags her out the door.

“She’s so damn pretty,” Athos says dreamily.

“Take me to bed.” Nadia pats my chest. “I’m freaking beat.”

I don't hesitate to siphon us away from the craziness and straight home.

“Wilma and Norma?” Knight suggests a few weeks later.

“You've lost your vote in naming rights,” Nadia scoffs, grabbing an apple slice off the tray of snacks she's currently devouring. She's got the small rounding on her lower stomach that signals she's taken.

Fine, whatever.

Maybe it's slightly barbaric to be fascinated with her ever-growing shape, but I couldn't give a fuck less. Every male who looks in her direction can clearly tell she's claimed. We didn't just bond her—we bred her—and my God, I'm elated by that fact.

Honestly, I can't wait for her belly to grow even larger. Demons only gestate three months, but shifters usually last around five. We have no definitive answers, but we'll manage.

“Winifred and Magda?” Knight tries again, wiggling his eyebrows at our mate.

Nadia snorts but frowns at her breasts. “You distracted me. I dripped caramel on my boob.”

“I'll be happy to lick it off for you.” He continues wiggling his eyebrows until it becomes obnoxious.

She glances between us. “Want to get dirty in the shower?”

“Yes.” I nod, grabbing the plate and tossing it on the end table. I scoop up my beautiful little witch, and then we're siphoning through the shadows.

Knight meets us in the main bathroom with the shower already running. “Damn, I love second trimester hormones.”

Nadia laughs, yanking at my shirt. “I'm barely six or seven weeks along.”

I bite my lip to keep from telling her that she's likely nearing the halfway point based on our estimations. I bend down, allowing her to pull my shirt off over my head. She blinks up at me under her lashes, and I melt inside.

"I love you."

"I know." I nuzzle my cheek to hers. "And I love you more than life itself."

"Suck up." Knight laughs.

Sometimes it's very inconvenient that my powers don't work on him. I settle for flipping him off with the hand wrapped around Nadia's back. My little witch pushes up on her tiptoes, licking my chest, since she can't quite meet my neck, and all thought quickly fades to how I can get inside her as fast as supernaturally possible.

Epilogue

Echo

T rue terror rips through me as Nadia grunts through the never-fucking-ending contraction.

I swipe a hand over my face, desperately trying to hold my composure.

Wraith, the silent fucker, appears at my side. He squeezes my shoulder, giving me an encouraging look.

I fight the urge to slap his hand away or possibly rip his damn throat out. My nerves are clearly getting the better of me.

“She’s fine,” Wraith murmurs in a soothing tone that makes me want to deck him. “The female body naturally knows what it’s supposed to do.”

A low growl fills the air and, initially, I think it’s the wolf, but Ridge blinks in surprise too.

Nadia jabs a finger in our direction, and it’s clear that sound came from my beloved. “I’m never doing this again, so don’t even think about it.” She grunts, pushing herself up on the bed. “Oh, the female body is a wonder. It knows exactly what to do. It’s fucking fantastic. Except, nature forgot to include natural pain relief in this magical, life-changing experience.”

“You’re nearly ten centimeters dilated.” Nan pats Nadia’s leg with the hand that doesn’t have a glove. “Suck on some ice chips and cool off, child.”

Nadia snorts, shaking her head. “You’re so damn lucky that I love you.”

“I’m going to wash my hands and grab some tea. Call me if you feel the need to push.” The older witch heads out, winking at me on her way by.

Good God, I think I need a vat of wine or several hundred stiff drinks. It takes a lot to get a vampire drunk. My hands shake, so I shove them into my front pockets.

“I don’t think you even needed me,” Willa says. She’s technically Haven’s doctor, but she’s also a vampire. It’s not a profession I would have normally attributed to my kind, but she’s got decades of experience, and that’s a good thing.

“You’re not leaving,” I growl, taking a step forward. “You need a doctor when a baby is born! We’re having two! We should have twice the doctors.”

Knight snorts. “It’s not terrible logic, but yeah, you’re losing your shit.”

Willa smiles, meandering toward the door. “I’m not leaving. I’m simply going to sit for a few minutes. Enjoy your last few minutes alone as a family of five.”

Wraith shoves me toward Nadia’s bed. “Sit with her and touch her. I know you’re worried, but everything is going well.”

Blowing out a breath, I attempt to get my shit together. I make my way over, carefully sliding on to the bed at Nadia’s side. Her hand is warm in mine as I link our fingers.

“I love you.” She stretches her head over to rest on my chest while patting my stomach. “And because of that fact, I’m going to ignore how you just insinuated that midwives, much like myself and Nan, don’t have the qualifications to safely deliver babies.”

“Oh shit,” Ridge snickers. “You walked right into that one.”

“I’m youngish and reasonably healthy. I’ve had no complications that indicate we need a doctor, but I also agree

that I feel better knowing Willa is here. Oh, hell. Another one is coming,” Nadia groans.

I run my thumb over her inner wrist, trying to give her comfort, but she squeezes my hand to the point I’m pretty sure she would be breaking my fingers if I was human. I’ve experienced much worse agony in my long life, especially when Imogen was on a decade-long torture bender.

God, what I wouldn’t give to take Nadia’s pain away.

“I’m pretty sure it *is* possible.” Ridge holds Violet in his massive hands. He’s got her pulled up close to his nose. “You said you were the only one of Imogen’s progeny without an ancient gift.” He shrugs, pulling our daughter down and resting her in the crook of his arm. He nuzzles his cheek to hers. “I’m fairly sure we figured it out.”

“Power of the super semen,” Knight snorts.

“There’s no possibility.” My head shakes. “It quite literally defies the laws of nature.”

“Laithe fathered Larke.” Nadia gives me a soft smile. “And Violet clearly has fangs. If you’d like to blame that on what happened to me when I was a teenager, then I’m fine with that.” She cuddles closer to my armpit.

“They’re both mine,” I assure her. “Because they’re ours. I still can’t fathom how my DNA got all muddled up with the mutt’s, though.”

Ridge laughs, cooing down at our daughter. “She’s got a tail and fangs. She’s a whole new breed of monster.”

“It’s clear Nadia’s magic somehow combined mine and Knight’s essence.” Wraith shrugs, rocking Hazel against his chest. “Blood magic does weird shit. I don’t know what to tell you.”

“It does awesome shit,” Knight corrects. “She’ll be practically unstoppable when she’s older.”

“I’d love it if I could hold Hazel now.” Nadia raises her eyebrows at Wraith. I can only see part of her face because of how she’s lying on my side.

“No,” Wraith says vehemently. “Not yet.”

Nadia scoffs.

“To be fair, she did try to devour Willa’s soul.” Knight grimaces.

“Yeah, but you two caught it in time.” Nadia sits up. “She’s my child. Whether or not she needs to nurse is irrelevant. Skin on skin contact is important.”

Malice appears in the corner. At first, he’s just a dark, smoky mass. “May I?” He gestures to Hazel. “I have experience because of Gemma.”

Wraith cuddles the baby closer to his chest.

“Let your clustermate hold our daughter,” Nadia says, huffing like she can’t believe it’s an issue.

Wraith eventually hands off Hazel to the nightmare.

Malice’s eyes widen as he stares down at her. “She’s a devourer.”

I frown because I’m completely unfamiliar with the term.

“We did realize that,” Wraith grinds out. “The major concern is that she could accidentally hurt Nadia.”

Malice disappears in a smoky cloud and reappears, handing Hazel to Nadia. Wraith moves to push himself out of the chair, but Malice raises a hand. “She spent four months growing inside Nadia’s body. I’m sure she was just overwhelmed, and that led to the unfortunate incident with the doctor.”

“Exactly.” Nadia snuggles Hazel to her cheek, and we all hold our breath.

Well, except for the nightmare.

“You wouldn’t hurt Mommy, would you?” Malice coos, booping Hazel on the nose. He looks at Nadia.

“Congratulations, little witch. They’re beautiful.”

“Thank you,” she says. “Now, make Ridge hand me Violet so that I can finally get pictures holding both my babies.”

Ridge quickly complies.

Malice snorts. “And Dread was worried his children being different species would draw attention? Please. Nadia just birthed the first devourer I’ve heard of in a thousand years.”

“We’re aware of that too.” Knight’s jaw is unusually tight.

“She’s just a baby,” Nadia says. “Stop being dramatic.”

“What is a devourer?” I ask, studying our girls cradled in Nadia’s arms.

“They both cleanse the sins and devour the soul without reaping.” Wraith grabs Nadia’s phone, continuously snapping pictures.

Ridge snorts. “Oh yeah, I’d like to see any little fuckers mess with our girls when they’re older.”

My head tilts as I think that through, but eventually, a wide smile breaks out. He’s absolutely right. They’ll be fully capable of slaughtering any little assholes. We won’t even need to lift a finger.

I run my hand over Hazel’s head, and her dark, void-like eyes immediately lock on to me. Her tiny mouth breaks into a grin, and it’s totally clear our babies aren’t like normal newborns.

God help us. I can’t wait to see what the future holds.

Epilogue

Ridge

Nadia squeals somewhere in the distance as my head tilts, scenting the air. We're in the forest next to my home in North Falls. We've made the trip yearly since we met, but this year is extra special, since we left the girls with Nan for an entire week. They're nearly six now, and Hazel and Violet assured us they were happy to stay with their great grandma.

There's rustling off to my right. My head tilts as I scan for movement or sound. Nadia curses under her breath as a branch crunches. I laugh, shaking my head. She's not covert at all, but I'm fairly sure that's because we all want her to be caught.

"Gotcha," Knight's voice rings through the cool night air.

"Oh, screw you. That's cheating. Back to your starting position," Nadia grumbles.

My head shakes as I prowl toward her. With Knight and Wraith able to siphon, she gave us all explicit rules for this little witch hunt. We all started in four different directions fifty yards from the house. It technically put Echo farthest from the forest we knew she'd run to, but with his speed, it seemed like a fair compromise.

Nadia's complaining is muffled. I'm guessing Knight is kissing her. There's a slap, like a palm hitting a naughty naked ass, as Knight's chuckle fills the air. "Go on, then, and let me get back to my starting block."

Nadia huffs. My ears can pick up every nuance and movement, even if I can't put eyes on her just yet. My cock is

already thick and heavy. I quite like the animalistic nature of tracking her through the woods, especially since I know it'll end with me burying my knot in her tight little hole.

Fine, I can admit I'm still not great at sharing, but I did concede to allow my packmates to participate. It's a full moon, lighting up the starry sky with its dim glow.

Nadia runs directly in front of me from right to left as I stare up at the canopy of trees. A slow smile breaks across my face. I fucking love that woman.

"Run, little witch," I taunt, but the sound is very clearly my wolf. My fangs and claws elongate as he fights for the right to be in the driver's seat. I prowl toward the direction she moved. She's nearly to the edge of the tree line. Memories of the first time I took her file through my mind. God, how fast life moves and how quickly things change.

Nadia stands frozen. She could make a break back to my house. It's technically her safe zone, but her head tilts as she smirks at me over her shoulder. Her shadows swarm me as I stomp forward, and the dirty little vixen manages to jerk me off with a tendril of magic as I move.

"Are you coming? It feels like you're taking forever," she sasses, winking before taking off for the clearing. My eyes widen as I spot Echo about twenty feet away with a huge quilt or blanket laid out over the grass.

I up my speed, wrapping an arm around her middle when she's only a few feet from the blanket. She flails, kicking and struggling against my hold. My free hand pulls her hair to the side, and I bite her neck.

"There's no need to struggle." I lick her sweaty skin. "We both know I'm going to fuck you full of me, and you're going to love every second of it."

"She'll most definitely end the night filled with all four of us," Echo muses, approaching slowly. He stops in front of Nadia, pulling her mouth to his.

"Looks like we made it just in time." Knight chuckles.

Echo steps to the side, and I lower Nadia to the blanket.

Once her knees hit the material, she immediately flips over onto her back. “All right, go ahead and worship me.”

It’s hard to get all four of us to agree on anything, but we all pounce. I aim for her pussy, but Wraith shoves me out of the way.

“You do have an obsession with eating me out.” Her soft hand wraps around my cock, gently tugging me closer. I knee walk over as she twists to the side. “Why don’t you fuck my throat like this?”

I groan as my head falls back. Yeah, I like that idea.

“Do a push-up over her head,” Knight suggests.

“No, pull her up.” Echo is already in motion, doing exactly that. “Hands and knees.” Nadia scrambles to comply. He looks at Wraith. “Slide up under her and let her ride your face. I’ll prep her ass.”

“What do I do?” Knight asks petulantly.

Echo laughs. “Let her jerk you off or suck on her tits?” He tosses a bottle of lube on the blanket and begins to strip out of his clothes.

Nadia and I are the only ones who went full nude for this hunt, but that’s because I wanted to shift. Only, it didn’t last long enough for me to need to. I promise my wolf we’ll handle that before we leave North Falls, but all thought bleeds away as Nadia grabs my hip, yanking me closer. Her warm tongue flicks playfully over my crown and the tip dribbles pre-cum.

My hand falls to cradle her head as she works me deeper, and I don’t know what to do with myself. I ache to thrust down her throat, but I tenderly praise her as she works me farther into her mouth with each slick suck.

She begs, sobbing around my length as she rides Wraith’s face and Echo stretches out her tight ass. It doesn’t take long before her moans turn to full screams as I fill her mouth. Feeling her pleasure only ratchets my own higher as she whimpers around my cock.

“You’re looking a little feral.” Nadia stares up at me as she struggles to catch her breath.

“I’m okay,” I lie, but my claws also elongate. It’s not difficult to tell I’m struggling.

“You can have her cunt,” Knight says. “Your wolf is so damn needy every single time she’s ovulating.”

“What?” my mate squeals.

“He truly is,” Echo mutters, pulling Nadia up until she’s kneeling. He catches my eyes, winking. “Go on, then, ride the mutt, so I can fuck your ass.”

I have no idea what Wraith and Knight are doing, but Nadia tackles me to the blanket. She wiggles her dripping cunt over my shaft before placing my tip at her opening. She sinks down, and my wolf fights against my tightly controlled strength. Hair sprouts on my arms as my fangs lengthen.

“It’s okay.” She runs a finger over my cheek. “You can have a turn later.”

I can’t see my own face, but I’m fairly sure we give her puppy dog eyes as my cock bottoms out. “Love you, little witch.”

“Love you too, alpha.”

Epilogue

Nadia

“That’s it, little witch, ride my cock,” my alpha wolf growls. He’s partially shifted and his claws dig into my thighs. The bite of pain helps distract me from the slight ache in my ass.

Echo pulls all the way out and thrusts until his hips slam against my ass cheeks.

“Keep slapping into her like that, and she’ll be taking my knot whether or not I planned it,” Ridge growls.

Knight chuckles around my tit. “No one wants to wait for that thing to go down.” My hand tightens around his length as Wraith pulls my mouth back to his cock. I got distracted, but I wrap my fingers around the base right above his knot and get back to making him moan.

Being fucked under a full moon by my four monsters is definitely a high point in life. Ten out of ten, would recommend.

“Run your thumb over the slit.” Knight wraps his hand around mine, helping me jerk him. He always uses considerably more pressure than I probably would without his guidance.

“Fuck, little witch,” Ridge snarls. “I’m about to breed you full of my pups.”

I grin around Wraith’s cock. I’m no longer appalled by the idea of a yard full of children.

“Goddamn,” Echo moans against my shoulder. “Don’t clench or I’m going to . . .”

Ridge pinches my clit, and I explode. Pleasure zips through my entire body as I lock down on Ridge’s and Echo’s cocks. My vampire strikes my shoulder, sucking deep pulls of my blood as I try to remember to jerk Knight and suck Wraith.

“I’m there too.” Knight pops up, aiming his tip at my tits. He loves coming all over them. I think because he knows he’s more likely to get to fuck me next, since no one else wants to be covered in his cum.

Wraith takes over with a hand in my hair. It’s taken years to get him comfortable enough to make me choke on him. He swells to the point I feel like a snake unhinging my jaw, but my body is so overloaded with pleasure that I barely notice the warmth of Knight’s cum hitting my tits.

“Definitely breeding you full of my babies,” Ridge growls, working my hips as he fucks up into me from below.

I choke on the extreme volume of cum Wraith spills into my mouth as Echo grunts against my shoulder, shaking and barely thrusting.

They definitely know how to make me feel like a queen.

Violet stomps through the front door with her arms crossed. I grimace at Echo, who shrugs. She doesn’t say hello, simply heads up the stairs toward her bedroom. I stand up, handing our three-year-old to Echo.

After five kids, I’ve finally decided I’m done. I’m no Aline. I don’t know how she keeps her sanity intact with nine little monsters, but I’m not about that life. I lean close, brushing my lips against my vampire’s and aim for my oldest daughter.

Unlike Hazel, who mostly sticks at home with us, Violet has a completely different personality. She’s outgoing and wears her heart on her sleeve. She’s also sixteen now.

Jesus Christ, I feel old. Although, I did learn recently that I stopped aging. Wraith believes it was the blood bond between me and my demons. Echo is convinced it's a side effect of the tether. Whatever it is, it doesn't bother me as much as I would have expected. I'm just grateful that I didn't have to work any questionable magic to stay youthful, especially since our kids are all immortal.

I finally make it to Violet's door and knock gently. It's not all the way closed, and I spot Hazel consoling her sister.

"I could devour him if you'd like." Hazel blinks, tilting her head in a way that reminds me of Wraith. "He wouldn't be a very satisfying meal, but I don't mind."

"Come in, Mom," Violet calls. "And no, don't be ridiculous. It's not his fault he doesn't like me."

I stumble a step. Damn, I was really hoping we had a few more years before significant other trouble became a thing. "Who are we talking about?" I take a seat on Violet's other side, and she immediately snuggles into my chest.

"Velyn," Hazel says, blinking her beautiful void like eyes. "He's in love with Ember."

"Yeah, he told me I'm way too young for him." Violet shrugs.

Well, I do agree with that.

God, being a parent is super complicated. I know from experience that forbidding something and making a huge deal out of it can often backfire. It makes whatever is being placed off-limits seem even more desirable.

I try to keep myself level as I say, "You only have a year and a half before you turn eighteen. Once you hit that milestone, age isn't such a huge factor, but he definitely is too old for you at this stage in your life."

"Yeah," Violet huffs. "I know."

I hug her tighter, so she knows I'm not trying to hurt her. The problem is, I really don't think she does know. I was her age, and I remember getting into much worse trouble than

either of my girls has. It's also complicated because they've barely aged in the last two or three years. They look like they're in their early twenties, but due to the accelerated aging that comes with being a supernatural, they still have a few years to go to reach maturity.

"But you guys finally said we could date," Violet mutters.

I squeeze her even tighter. We've had a fair number of conversations about consent and safe sex, but we venture into the conversation about appropriate ages of dating partners for this stage in her life.

"I love you, but Mom makes everything weird." Hazel tosses a thumb toward the door. "So, I'm going to go."

Violet snorts. "I love you too. Thanks for threatening to murder Velyn for me."

"Anytime," Hazel says, heading out.

"I love you so much," Violet says, rolling her head up to look at me as she rests against my shoulder.

It makes my heart pound.

I wasn't sold on kids like my guys were, but when it became clear they'd be in my future, I promised myself I'd be nothing like my own mother.

Those memories are even more difficult to comprehend now that I know the level of unwavering love I feel for my kids. Ultimately, I think my mom was mentally ill. I like to think it wasn't her, but her sickness, that I saw that night.

"I love you too. I'm always here if you need anything," I say with a weird hitch in my voice.

"I know. I think I'm going to call Gemma and Rogue," Violet says.

Aline's daughters are close to my twins. It's easy enough to see I'm being dismissed, so I kiss her forehead and head out too.

I close the door and jolt when Wraith manifests at my side. "Apparently, Velyn gets to live to see another day," he says

softly.

I snort.

Life is absolutely an adventure in Haven.

I guess we'll just have to wait and see what happens with the next generation of monsters.

Thank you!!

If there's interest in more stories in this world I have plans for a holiday novella for Charity & solid concepts for the next generation. I try to work on books in the order they are requested by readers (if at all possible). If you'd like to see more in this world then feel free to pop into my FB group, send me a DM, or email. Otherwise, I'm heading back to omegaverse after this.

I really appreciate all of your support!!

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