



Brazen Indulgences

AN UNTRACEABLE SUCCUBUS NOVEL



ERIN RFLYNN

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Brazen Indulgences

AN UNTRACEABLE SUCCUBUS NOVEL

ERIN RFLYNN

Nothing makes people more vulnerable than having to open up. And for someone like Jasmine Stewart who has so much hidden, it's terrifying to have people know her secrets.

Especially when people generally don't react well to learning them.

But life goes on, and when you have people who truly love you, they won't let the darkness eat you and help you get back on your feet. She has to rely on their strength now to keep things going given how many threats the demons face.

This isn't the first time she's overcome the odds and shown people she isn't someone to mess with... And it won't be the last. We all wish it was, but no one could be so foolish to think that.

Maybe this time it won't be so bad to take on too much because she won't be lonely doing it. She was never alone in the battles to help demons, but that's not the same as feeling as if you're all on your own.

And she's not anymore.

Untraceable Succubus is a crime series where the sex is hot and often, and the main character kicks some serious ass on the road to finding out if she can have real love in her life even if it comes from multiple men.

*This book is part of a series and cannot be read as a standalone. Like all my books, this is not light and fluffy and includes dark themes and events some may find triggering. Reader discretion is advised.



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1

“You will be okay, child,” Elijah whispered as I poured out my grandparent’s ashes over my mother’s grave.

But I didn’t think I would be. Too much had happened. Too much in me had been broken.

Too much of me couldn’t be put back together, and I think I’d always known that if I was honest.

It was five days after Elijah, Mason, and Kiera had broken into my condo in Berlin and found me catatonic. They’d given me a couple of days to settle after my talk with Kiera, thinking that had all been too much for me, but then realized no one had heard from me at all and I was ignoring important calls which I never did.

They found me in the same spot I’d been in after learning about my grandmother’s death and completely unresponsive. Alive, but dangerously close to my body eating myself. I hadn’t moved. Hadn’t eaten. Hadn’t even had anything to drink and that was dangerous for supes.

It could kill me as a supercharged demon.

Elijah had fed me power and Mason had used magic to heal me somewhat—somehow and then I sort of remembered

Kiera crying that I couldn't give up on her. That snapped me out of it.

Somewhat.

I couldn't stand for Kiera to cry. She was such a good person and had been through so much. It always hurt me like a... A puppy whimpering for hugs. She clearly wasn't helpless like a puppy or so fragile, but she was pure even after being touched by so much darkness.

And I couldn't be the one to make her cry.

I didn't feel better after the ashes were gone and it was done. I felt empty.

I moved to stand back by Elijah, grateful he was there with me. It was nice when he put his arm around me and muttered that now I could close this chapter of my life and look forward, especially since the murder charges had been dropped against Angela.

Maybe. Maybe I could now but in that moment, I just felt broken.

"I don't want to be with Dylan," I heard myself saying, shocked that it was at the front of my mind right then.

But it was.

He was.

"What? I thought you two were—"

"I don't want to be with him," I rasped before walking over to my mom's headstone and placing a kiss on it. "Goodbye, Mom. Find peace and some nice soul up there who treats you right to be happy, okay? Just be happy." I walked

away, feeling Elijah's confusion. "I don't want to talk about someone abusing me in front of the three people who started my life with abuse."

"All right," Elijah accepted quietly and waited until we were by the vehicle we'd rented. Unfortunately, we'd had to do this all like humans so there were hoops with that. "Dylan abused you?"

I twisted my hands together and sighed. "Maybe. Kiera—"

"You told Kiera everything. She let me know." He sighed when I didn't say anything. "I'm glad you did, child." He smiled when I looked up and couldn't hide my shock. "She's worthy of your trust, but it was your decision to make."

"You're so fucking confusing. Seriously, all men and ancients. You made it seem like I would betray everything if I told my best friend many times but then pushed me to tell six guys *way* before I was ready and..." I shook my head. Still, I'd done it. I couldn't keep blaming everyone else.

"This is your fear talking, Angela. Dylan is—"

"Why won't you trust me and hear me that I don't want to be with him?" I choked out. "I'm not *running*. I'm allowed to say no!" I got mad and shoved away from him, thinking of how Kiera phrased it so perfectly. "For so long I *had to* say no to having relationships. Now things have changed. Yes, it started with Dylan, and that confused a lot, but it's that I didn't *have to* say no anymore.

"No one asked me if that meant I *wanted to* say yes, Elijah. Mason's right that everyone's desires confuse me as to what the fuck *I want*. But I said it a lot that I needed things to

slow down. That I wasn't *ready*. That I needed time. I don't care how he framed it as caring for me, he walked all over me saying no."

I went into more detail how clearly I had explained to Dylan how I got overwhelmed and then the buffet before. I didn't want to bring up old stuff, but it was a clear example that Dylan did not listen to me as I wanted in a partner.

Even before with Aidan and telling him things, the two of them talking and sharing information.

"He's selfish," I said quietly after a few minutes of giving Elijah time to process what I'd told him. "He never even came to apologize to me for what he said at the meeting."

"He came over to—"

"To what? Stop by?" I argued. "Try to catch me? He didn't fucking text or call. He used work and do what was *easy*. *Am I not worth more than easy?*"

His eyes went bug wide. "Yes, yes, you absolutely are. I thought—I thought there was more to it."

I shook my head. "He got so angry with me for lying to him—assumed I was a liar so fast. I get it, that situation was crazy. The guy walked right in before we opened. It was the craziest fucking thing I've ever seen. I get confusion and a whole lot of reactions, but he *immediately* thought I was lying because I'm a liar."

Elijah frowned. "I don't think that's fair of him."

"I don't either because I've never lied. I've always told him there's more to me or what's going and I couldn't tell him." I snorted. "There's tons I don't know about him. I don't

know his fucking address. I don't know what kind of car he drives." I nodded when Elijah's eyes flashed shock. "That's what I'm saying. None of this was normal dating or—he just started announcing we were things.

"And I wanted that too. I wanted to be that with—I'd never had that option and I wasn't—I liked him. I have feelings for him, but I didn't like what was happening, and no one was listening to me that I didn't like it. I didn't want things like that." I couldn't stop the tears from falling. "I get you all did it because you want me happy, but you weren't listening to me and that hurt too.

"I was telling you to help me. I was saying it was too much and to stop and none of you listened. And then his desires were that he wished he picked someone with better morals and then yelled at me that I wasn't even trying. All I do is try. I'm not the bad guy here. I didn't do anything wrong. I don't want to be with him if he's going to treat me like that and I get to say that."

"You do, you absolutely do," he whispered, trying to hug me to him, shocked when I didn't let him and simply let tears fall down my cheeks. "I'm sorry, Angela. I'm sorry I didn't listen."

I bobbed my head, feeling like a child, but in a lot of ways, I was. Emotionally I wasn't—I didn't have the capacity to act emotionally like an adult a lot, and I needed to accept that to grow. The twins had helped me see that and that it was okay.

I was only a jerk if I lied about it or ignored the problem. That was pretty fair to me.

“I’m asking for your help,” I whispered. “I’ll break it off with him but protect me. He doesn’t need to be who we deal with from ISLE. Or you deal with him. I don’t want him at shit. I don’t want him at home base. I can’t handle—I need help. Please.”

“Yes, absolutely. I will inform everyone that we’re—I will handle it all.” He sighed when I let him hug me then. “Please just stop crying, child.”

“Only if you’re nicer to Kiera.” I bit back a smile when he sighed. “You hurt her by being so dismissive, Elijah. She’s not a kid with a crush. You can thank her for her interest, but tell her that you don’t feel the same. She’s our MVP too, more than my best friend. She gets way too much shit and—”

“That we agree on, and I think we need to change management of the Berlin club,” he said, wincing at whatever was on my face when I glanced up at him. “She is a rockstar. I did not mean that—she’s too young and will get hurt now that people are pushing back. I have an idea and I’m working on some things. Let me see what pans out, but I will make it clear to *everyone* this is because Kiera is exceptional.”

“Fine but make it damn clear that she is getting more support or something, not taken over.”

“No, not at all. I was thinking we all need a layer of extra help. Each VP has three directors under us and to clarify better what’s under us.” He sighed when I couldn’t hide my confusion. “No one was taking care of over five hundred properties, and Lewis is pulling more and more out from records. We’re going to have back taxes and more to handle.”

“I’m sorry that I—”

“No, you are not taking responsibility for this one,” he said firmly. “We messed up. Rita thought Arthur was handling it and he thought she was. Natalia admitted she thought I had it covered as legal, and I said I would look into something once and I probably did. I think we should restructure a bit and make departments clearer.”

“I’m sorry,” I said again, failing them as the big boss.

“You take too much on yourself, child,” he sighed. “You did such a good job that Germany is now the fourth-largest GDP in the world and we run it. And a business that has a bigger footprint than a *lot* of countries. Restructuring and shaking things up are normal. The mistake is that it’s overdue and that’s not on you. It’s on the seasoned, ancient VPs that promised you we had it while you were in the field.”

I settled with that for several moments before sighing. “Thank you.” I felt worlds better after he said that.

We had one place left to go before we could leave this small town and I never had to return. I made the mistake of thinking it would be the easy part as we got in the car, and that was the moment I jinxed us.

“This bill—there’s a mistake here,” I told the woman behind the counter of the facility my grandmother had been staying at until she died.

“There’s no mistake, I checked it myself,” she told me, not even looking up from what she was doing.

“Well, then you’re *blind* because there’s an extra eighty-four thousand dollars on here that makes no fucking sense,” I

snapped. “What the fuck kind of miscellaneous fees are those? You want a raise?”

“Watch your language,” she sneered.

“You can’t just tack on an obscene amount of money and not explain why,” I told her.

She let out a huge, dramatic sigh as a few people tried to hide chuckles behind her. “It’s to cover all of the extras we had to handle to get her cremated and everything boxed up. We had to deep clean the room and—”

“Right, but all of that was included in the steep monthly fee that was already paid, and there was none of that extra when her husband died,” I reminded her. “So again, you cannot just add *eight-four thousand dollars* and give me attitude like I’m quibbling over pocket change.”

I almost reached over the counter and decked her when I felt her desire to have me arrested for making a scene. What an absolute monster to use someone’s death to try and get extra money like this.

“Fine, whatever, I’m not paying it,” I drawled, tossing the bill back to her. “Tell the director to email me when there’s a real bill, but I’ve already cut off the autopay.”

“You’ll be on the hook for it and we’ll sue,” she warned me, her voice cold. “Can your family handle that pressure?”

I froze, my eyes going wide from what I got off of her next. I threw back my head and burst out laughing. I grabbed the bill back and pulled out my cell phone, smirking at her as I called the police.

“Is that wise?” Elijah muttered under her breath.

“Yes, because if they would do this to me, they would do it to others, and most people can’t just pay eighty-four thousand dollars. And they would actually be grieving and in a bad place. I’m not letting assholes get away with this shit.”

“Get out of here right now,” the manager demanded when she realized I’d called the police. “I’m telling you to leave the property and you have to!”

“Nice try,” Elijah chuckled, ready to fight now.

I went right to the policeman when he arrived and explained what was going on, showing him the bill.

He nodded along with what I said and then came over to the counter with me and made everyone identify themselves. “So you called for us before things got out of hand?”

“No, I’m reporting fraud and *extortion*,” I purred, nodding when he couldn’t hide his shock. “They believe I’m the woman’s great-granddaughter. And clearly, they know that her granddaughter, Angela, was once accused of murder.” I was glad when he glanced at the paper again and there was recognition in his eyes.

“The woman over there made it clear it would be better if the bill was paid so there weren’t any legal proceedings my client would have to deal with,” Elijah added.

“Except I’m *not* related to the family,” I chuckled darkly, smirking when the woman flinched. “And Angela is no longer wanted for murder.”

“That’s true,” the cop confirmed. “We recently revisited the old case and found out that—it was ruled self-defense.” He

pulled out his notepad and studied me. “Do you know how to get in touch with her?”

“She’s dead,” I said, feeling a weight off of me that I could actually tell people that and maybe, just maybe, feel as if all of this was in my past now that my grandparents were gone. “She passed years ago from an aggressive form of cancer.” I glanced at Elijah for help.

“Twenty-five years ago?” he muttered, as if he was trying to remember the exact date. “Twenty-four or twenty-five.”

I answered the unasked question I saw in the policeman’s eyes. “My mother was friends with Angela. They met after those boys tried to rape her and her *god-fearing* grandparents said it was her fault and kicked her out. They traveled a bit, and she’s the reason my parents met and fell in love. Her one regret was that she never had the chance to explain what really happened and clear her name.

“My mother tried to but couldn’t and instead found her grandparents were in a bad spot and paid for this overpriced facility for them even if they didn’t deserve it. I only found out Angela’s name had been cleared when I requested information since I was going to be traveling here to settle the account and wrap things up.”

The cop nodded as he jotted it all down. “Can I ask why your mother didn’t come herself?”

“She has trouble flying, and it’s a long trip from Germany to here at her age,” I said, glad when he clearly understood that. “I have business in LA, so this was supposed to be a quick stop off, and I arrived to find eighty-four thousand dollars added to the bill without explanation and threats of

suing me and my family wouldn't want that. It makes me think something is in the water of this town."

The cop snorted but then tried to be more professional. "I promise you that there are lots of us that are just fine. I do find it interesting that someone tried to reopen the case years ago. There were no notes to that," he muttered.

"Yes, well, my mother was called a *Nazi* when she called after Angela died and said it was clear that the *bastard* lured in three boys to suddenly want to become a murderer after teasing them," I drawled. I nodded when he blinked at me as if he couldn't believe that. "My mother was quite shaken from it."

Elijah snorted. "Especially given how gentle of a soul Angela was. Those *boys* were monsters that scarred that woman for life. She did what she did that day to survive and the damage it did to her, plus her grandparents kicking her out after—cruel doesn't cover it. Nor how this town treated her."

"You knew her as well," the cop said gently. "I'm sorry for your loss."

He got the wrong idea though which was a bit funny because Elijah didn't even look forty, and given the *math* we were giving him... Never mind. He was on our side and that was all that mattered.

"Fix the bill," he told the manager. "And I'm filing a report. This is not the first time I've heard of *extra charges* being tacked on like this, but normally it's a few hundred dollars that you at least lie about better. I think after this I'm going to have a talk with the judge and get an audit going on here."

“I’d also investigate how things go *missing*,” I muttered. “I didn’t know the woman or really care about her jewelry, but she had none left somehow, not even a wedding band. I wonder how often the people who work here are seen at pawn shops the next town over.”

I bit back a smirk when all three women behind the counter had the desire that the cop not check. Fucking monsters.

Seriously. There were too many monsters in the world.

2

“Can we talk?” I asked Kyle later that day when I found him at the new home base... Which was actually the one back in Atlanta we’d used before the case in Rome. Kyle really liked the place and made a remark we should make a few permanent home bases so we could stash people if we needed to instead of always hopping around.

Which a lot of people jumped on, so clearly I wasn’t the only one who needed more stability.

Plus, we moved by portals, so what did it really matter where the fuck everything was? Yes, we needed something close to the location we were working for logistics like vehicles, but we didn’t always need everything there.

Honestly, it hurt my brain to calculate the amount of hours we’d spent breaking down and putting our systems together over so many jobs. We didn’t have to do that anymore now that we were out.

He glanced up at me from what he’d been looking over but then really studied me. “Let’s take a jog. We both need to move more. I want to scope out the neighborhood if we’re really going to be setting up shop here, and I could use good eyes.”

That actually wasn't my forte, but I agreed that we needed to move more, and getting away from all the ears to have a proper talk sounded nice.

"Let me change," I agreed and used the portal to head to my villa. Mason was going to be using it as his house, but after what happened, he begged me not to stay alone in my apartment, at least for the time being.

That was fair. More than fair, so we were sort of living together. I was fine with that because he wasn't hovering.

"Can I make a suggestion?" I said when I saw him staring at the floors of the kitchen.

"Always."

"Call a contractor to go over the full villa and give you recommendations of what needs to be updated and handled. Kiera knows how to be an adult of that stuff or even some on the team like doing that sort of thing. I made that mistake when I renovated my place in Berlin. I redid the floors and *then* changed out appliances and guess what happened?"

"The floors got fucked up?" he guessed, wincing when I nodded. "I would think that the contractor's fault."

"It was, but it took time even if it didn't cost me more, and I wasn't the one doing it. It's worth a professional outlining how they would do the flow. I should have listened instead of telling them what I wanted on whims. You don't have to listen but..." I shrugged.

"Thanks, muffin."

I snorted. "You want to fix up my house that I forgot I had. I should thank you." I smiled when he simply winked at

me. I thumbed over my shoulder. "I'm going for a run with Kyle, so I'm changing first."

Concern filled his eyes. "I figured you would be home and rest after what you dealt with this morning."

"I'm okay mostly," I muttered. "I came to a decision about Dylan, and I want... I want it over. I can't make the break if people are just going to bring him around. It's time to—I need to speak up."

"Good for you, muffin," he said gently. "And it doesn't need to be forever. I know you have real feelings for him. You can say for now or—"

"I think everyone else made what was between Dylan and I more than it was," I admitted. "I don't know." I shrugged. "I think I would have wanted it if it didn't happen the way it did and explode the way it did. I don't feel like any of it was my... Choice?" I shook my head. That wasn't right either.

"Not to make this about me, but you are choosing me, right?" he hedged.

"Yes." I nodded when he still looked unsure. "Yes. We hit a rough patch and I want to work through it. I want you in my life, Mason. You and the twins." I sighed when his eyes flashed shock. "Everything else is very complicated. If it was just Aidan and me in a bubble, yes, I would want that man, but it's not."

"Don't cry," he whispered, coming over and hugging me. "I understand. I do. I also see how badly Dylan hurt you and is behaving. I think we all thought it was more because his feelings are genuine." He was nodding when I leaned away.

“People don’t fool me much. I’m not perfect, but I see a lot, Jasmine. He loves you.”

“He didn’t show it to me well.”

“Yes, well, that was his mistake, not your fault.” He kissed my forehead and left it alone.

I was glad he did, going off and changing. “Um, I can bring back dinner? What are you in the mood for?” I glanced at his setup. “What are you working on?”

“The twins are actually off tonight too, and I was going to suggest that we start a show on Netflix,” he hedged. “You never have time for that, and I thought we should try for one night a week to simply be and relax.”

“I don’t really watch TV,” I admitted. “Or movies.”

“Right, because you never make time for yourself and save the world. I’m saying it’s way past time to make time for yourself.” He hurried on when I opened my mouth to object. “Once a week. After dinner. Just to relax.” He nodded and gave me a sexy smile like he was excited. “Think about what you want. We can watch anything. There has to be something you’ve wanted to see when people talk about it.”

“Okay,” I accepted after a moment. “We can figure out what to watch.”

He shrugged. “Whatever you want.”

“I can’t decide for the four of us,” I argued.

“We want you to. I already talked with the twins, and they want to see what you pick. They didn’t realize you hadn’t really watched TV or had movie nights with friends. We’re

older than you, but we've had a taste of that normal. That's what we want." He glanced away and tapped his leg. "It's nice to have real friends, not ones who want a powerful warlock in their pocket."

I agreed but then left, feeling bad for keeping Kyle waiting.

He was ready to go when I arrived, not questioning what took me so long and simply tossing me a bottle of water.

We headed out and started at a good pace. I was still thinking of how to say what I needed to when he got tired of my dragging things out.

"Dylan reacted badly to you being the owner, right?"

I tripped over my feet and almost face-planted, but he caught me at the last moment. "You knew?"

"Yeah, and you're not a normal demon. You think you're a succubus. I've known for a while, Jasmine." He sighed when I couldn't get my feet, mouth, or anything to work. "I'm your right hand and basically head of security. Of course, I fucking know or I'd be shit to protect our team and everything. Seriously, I'm good at my job."

That was actually pretty fucking fair and I muttered as much as I got moving again. "I didn't like telling them before I told you and Kiera. I'm sorry."

"It upset me, but we're good. I know it's not easy."

"Thanks." I cleared my throat. "It was the times I went off the map to go flying, right? Elijah would be gone too, and all the VPs worried too much."

“Go flying?” It was his turn to trip, but he recovered before I could catch him. “You can fly? Like Superman kind of fly?”

“Oh boy,” I sighed. “So if you and Kiera—I can’t believe you guys never talked to each other about this at all. If you had, you would have gotten the full picture.”

“We love you,” he said firmly as if it explained it all. “Caring about you and protecting you were more important than our curiosity.”

I stopped and faced him. “I think you exactly just pinpointed my main problem with Dylan. He says he cares about me, but solving the puzzle I am and getting his answers were so much more important. Yes, he protected me with ISLE, but he let stuff out to Aidan and others and... You’ve known Kiera for *decades* and you guys never risked talking about it. That’s love.”

“You weren’t ready,” he muttered, blushing a bit.

“Thanks for seeing that.” I cleared my throat when we started jogging again. “I’ve actually been ready to tell you and Kiera for a while. At least the part other than being the owner. That seemed selfish to tell you and risk—knowledge isn’t always good to have.”

“We both thought that was why you kept things from us. We both knew you were keeping more, and we both knew more than we should. That was it.”

“And yes, Dylan didn’t react well. To—well, he seemed to handle my third form well.” I backed up and told him a lot of

what I told Kiera except a lot of the emotional stuff and even about my family. Kyle and I liked to keep that stuff in the past.

Oh, and I didn't tell him about my dad.

But I did tell him about killing Lucifer, and I felt a lot better when he went and puked in someone's bushes. Yeah, that seemed about the right reaction.

I actually understood that reaction and freakout.

"Seriously, Jesus, I get why you—I'd have needed a lot more than a few days' mental breakdown from that, Jasmine."

"There's more of the personal stuff which I'm sure you figured out," I muttered.

"Yeah, but—you've got Elijah for that."

I didn't even judge him. He did *not* want to talk about family stuff. Our family was Heavenly Entertainment. That was it.

So if that was what he needed to survive whatever he'd been through, I was fine with that. Seriously, I was. If I needed him to back me up and be there for me, he'd do it, but... We all needed to be more understanding of each other at times.

"Man, I had way more faith in Dylan than that," he said when we were done and walking back to the house to cool down. "I'm really sorry." He let out a long breath. "So you've officially ended it?"

"I'm going to after this. I wanted to talk to you and Elijah first. You guys push and I did try to say—look, what happened happened. I'm saying now that I'm out. I'm not running. I'm

not playing. I'm breaking, and I need to cut some things off to survive. Dylan is one of them because it's not healthy for me."

He pulled me closer and gave me a one-arm hug as he kissed my hair. "I'll tell the others. No more him at home base and wiggling into—fucking idiot. You don't stick your foot in your mouth like that and not even send flowers. He seriously thought just dropping by trying to catch you was enough? Like bygones?"

"He didn't even text or call," I rasped.

"He's got his own issues then because he really did care. I don't know what—that's just messed up. Seriously."

"Thanks for taking my side."

"Jasmine, I'm always on your side, even when I disagree with you. Okay? Always."

I believed that. Even when the idiots were pushing or didn't hear me, they had been trying to help me.

I ended up going off on my own and calling Aidan to have the same talk with him that I was ending things with Dylan and please respect it. That I didn't like how they had teamed up to pressure me in the past and I wouldn't be as forgiving of it now.

"You're worrying me that I'm next, and I haven't been able to reach you, darling," he whispered.

"I had a breakdown," I admitted, tears in my voice. "My grandmother died, and after what Dylan did—everything that's—I broke." I told him the short version of what happened that day when Mason, Kiera, and Elijah found me. "So I don't know what I'm doing, Aidan. I'm sorry, but I don't. Being

with you when you're on the council is a lot more difficult than..."

"It is," he whispered. "I'm sorry."

"Me too. If it was just Jasmine and Aidan, I would be with you. I'm not saying I won't be, but—Sloan was never meant for the spotlight like that. Hell, I never planned for Jasmine to be this much in the spotlight, but I knew it would probably happen."

"What comes next?"

"I don't know," I whispered. "I want to invite you to the TV night Mason is setting up, so I might have a night off a week to relax, but it... I feel like I'm leading you on or promising things will be okay."

He was quiet a moment. "You're not jerking me around. I would rather you invite me if you truly want me there and know that things are still rocky. It's when the communication is completely cut off that I act so badly. I want to be there for you too and honestly, I've never had a TV night. It sounds nice."

I bobbed my head. "Then join us. Really. I don't know what we're doing, but he wants me to... Have a bit of normal and calm. I clearly need it." I snorted. "It's going to be weird enough that we're mostly living in Italy but on US time."

"People do things like that all of the time around the world. It's why so many huge cities like New York are always open," he said gently. "I will talk to Mason and bring something nice for dessert. We can watch whatever you want and relax. It sounds nice."

“Thanks, Aidan.”

“Thank you for wanting me there.”

We hung up and I stared at my phone, pulling up my messages. I opened the chain with Dylan and saw the last one was what I sent weeks ago. That really did say it all. Even if he was pissed at me for what I said, he didn't even care enough to check in. We were done.

But I wasn't going to be blamed for running or being unfair again or anything else.

Me: I apologize for what I said about going to your boss. That was out of line, and I didn't mean it. I was angry and lashed out. It was the only thing I've lied to you about though. But you're right and this relationship is over.

It took me four tries to get the wording correct without adding in more that wasn't needed or seemed nasty. I wanted to end it peacefully so maybe one day we could look back on the memories of each other and not hurt. So there was something else I wanted to add.

I thought about “Good luck with ISLE,” but that sounded I was rubbing in the mess he had there.

“Be safe,” was also tricky because he said he took the corner office job so he could be with me—or at least that was what he'd told others—and that could seem like I was rubbing it in his face that he took the job and didn't have me. I thought that might be a bit much, but we did tend to miscommunicate like that.

Apparently.

I went with “I wish you all the best,” and sent the text before blocking him. That might seem childish, but he had enough other numbers in case of an emergency or real problem.

I didn’t need to be the one who handled them and certainly not with him anymore.

Covering my face, I cried for a good half an hour now that it was done and we were over. I felt *relief* and stronger for having ended it. I wasn’t as upset with myself for being pushed around. I didn’t think that was how relationships were supposed to feel.

But I also felt loss. I’d liked Dylan. I did still like him. There had been a lot of moments that had meant the world to me, and I’d seen him as a potential partner. He’d taken a damn bullet for me. The sex was amazing, and I’d felt like he’d valued me.

At least at first. I honestly felt like he liked me better when he thought I was a nobody stripper. It was like the more he realized there was more to me, the more he wanted to lock me in as his turf... But the less I thought he liked me as a person. He said I was impressive, but he would look at me like he’d never seen me and his desires...

That last one hurt the most. Wishing he’d chosen someone with more morals, and I fought to take down bad guys all of the time and save people, was one of the most horrible criticisms and judgments to have. Seriously.

It would have cut me less if he’d just thought me a whore.

I looked at the time when I calmed down and made some calls. I ordered what I needed and then realized I had a bit of time to kill before dinner was ready. After a bit of back and forth, I decided to talk to Mason about my idea instead of just buying him something he might not like. So I went to my apartment just to shower and change, grabbing some other things I would need as well.

Then I picked up the food from one of the clubs and thanked them before laughing that I couldn't carry it all. So I borrowed their cart and used it to load it all up before pushing it through the portal into the villa.

“Yeah, this got weird,” I sighed when Mason simply blinked at me. “And it’s probably going to be weirder when I tell you that I wanted to buy you a housewarming present, but then I chickened out that you might not like the one I wanted to buy you, so can we shop together for my idea so you get the one you like? I mean, even if it’s my house? Please don’t laugh.”

“I think it’s amazing,” he said easily as he came towards me with a smile. “And I smell a lot of butter?”

“You didn’t say what you wanted for dinner, but you love seafood. One of the clubs was having a king crab night, and they had enough at the tail end, so I got some trays put together for us. Oh, I invited Aidan if that’s—”

“He told me and we talked. It’s fine if you’re fine with it?”

“Yeah. It—it sounds nice.” I shrugged. It did.

I wasn’t lying about that.

“Um, I hate to ask, but there is something I wanted to ask—you sort of alluded to it before—I don’t even know if it’s possible but—”

He was kind and didn’t make me keep rambling. “Blocking desires.” He sighed when I nodded. “I can do it when I’m present. So if something troubling is happening or going on, I’m more than happy to help out. I want to work on that, but it’s not something—I’m familiar with power-blocking charms which are common for warlocks when they meet.

“There’s not much trust among monsters, so they wear a sort of barrier. I don’t know if that will work with you, but it could also limit what you could do in a moment, especially since you shift forms. It’s something we’d need to test.”

“You don’t mind?”

“Not at all, muffin,” he promised, smiling when I did. He told me to go get our guests and he’d set up dinner.

I blinked at him a moment but then nodded, going for the portal. He made it sound like a dinner party or something, but then I realized it sort of was.

Evan and Owen were all hugs and kisses when I arrived, checking on how I was with worry thick in their eyes. I told them the truth that I felt fragile but better. They brought some amazing-smelling cheesy bread they picked up from some trendy place in Denver.

Then I went for Aidan, and he had a few cheesecakes in different flavors.

I smiled as we all gathered in the kitchen, Aidan and Evan talking about the wine Mason picked while Owen and I were

sticking to sparkling water. “This is nice, really nice.”

They stopped and all smiled at me, agreeing.

“Mate, you’re spoiled,” Owen chuckled when he saw what we were having. “Seriously, this looks amazing.”

“Join us any night you have off,” Mason said easily. “Living at home base for all of the crazy was too much, but it was nice to have people around and not be stuffed in a small studio apartment on my setup all day. See real people instead of code and everything virtual.”

“Yeah, that was a bit too much traffic and crazy and we own a nightclub,” Evan said with an awkward chuckle.

“So what show did you decide on?” Aidan asked as we dug in. “This bread is fun. It’s not focaccia, but it’s not boring garlic cheese bread. It’s—is the cheese braided in? Lovely.”

It was really good. Then I remembered his question. “I didn’t get a chance to think about it yet.” I cleared my throat and admitted that I ended things with Dylan.

“How was the conversation?” Owen worried.

I snorted. “I texted him.” I got angry when they all gave me disappointed looks. I unlocked my phone and tossed it to Evan since he was next to me. “I haven’t deleted anything. Look at the log.”

He frowned but wiped his hands before picking it up. His eyes filled with anger after he tapped it a few times. “Yeah, I’m not sure he deserved the fucking text.” He waved my phone and glanced at the others. “There aren’t any fucking calls. No texts. For weeks. Not since before the attack and she killed Lucifer.”

Owen snagged the phone and quickly tapped it, scrolling through what was probably my call history. “That fucker. He told me...” He shook his head and leaned over his twin and set my phone next to me. “Sorry, love. A text seemed colder than I would have thought you, but it was kinder than he deserved. He told us he’d been trying and trying to talk to you, but you were blocking him.”

I snorted. “And I’m the liar?” I shook my head when they asked me what I meant, wanting to change the topic. “What shows do you like?”

“Nope, we want to know what you want,” Mason said firmly, getting where my head was. “Cartoons or naughty anime. We’ll watch any of it.”

“I don’t care if it’s cartoons, but what is naughty anime?” Aidan asked, glancing between us.

I simply shrugged while the other three chuckled. Oh boy.

Mason promised to show us another time but wanted me to have a chance to see what I wanted.

I sighed. Heavily. “I don’t want to watch family shows. It makes me feel too much or think too much and you said this was relaxing.”

“Totally fair,” Owen accepted. “I tend to be the same. I also don’t like nightlife stuff. We get enough of that, and most of the shows make all nightclub owners seem trashy and sleazy.”

To be fair, a lot of them were, but I nodded in agreement. Yeah, I didn’t want to watch anything with adult entertainment

themes or strippers. “Definitely nothing angels and demons or Heaven and Hell. Blerg.”

“Again, fair,” Evan chuckled as he cracked some more legs. “These are exactly what I needed, love. I’ve had a bit too much of the same on the go lately. Damn, I needed a night off to just relax and eat too much.”

I was glad we were all getting what we needed instead of feeling selfish. “I don’t like when they try and make you feel bad for the criminals. I mean, vigilantes—obviously that’s a bit different to me. But like mob shit annoys me. Or like prison shows where they try to make you feel bad for someone who murdered four people.”

After some back and forth, we decided on Game of Thrones. Sex and fighting and nothing offensive for any of us, and it was super popular and not based in reality at all.

It kind of ticked all of the boxes.

Plus, Owen, Evan, and Mason had all started it but gotten too busy to keep up with it. So they were happy to restart it in the hopes of getting to finish it now that the final season was coming out soon.

After we finished stuffing our faces.

3

“Put down the phone or one of us will take it away, darling,” Aidan threatened... Again.

“I think someone doesn’t know how to relax,” Owen teased me as he took my phone out of my hands.

It was the third time they’d busted me in twenty minutes. I sighed, giving him a look to go easy on me.

“Do you not like it?” Aidan worried.

“No, it just started and it’s too early to tell,” I muttered. “The quality is good and the costumes—as someone in entertainment, I appreciate the costumes and work involved.” I shut my mouth and tried to focus, but I got antsy.

“That lasted ten minutes,” Evan chuckled when I stood a bit later.

“I feel like I should be doing something,” I grumbled. “It’s distracting. This is—”

Aidan paused the show—somehow having the remotes even if it wasn’t his house—and gave me a concerned look. “We’re teasing you. We’ve all been where you are and had too much going on that it’s hard to relax. Or apparently, this is

your first time. So what—you told me you like to read. You work on computers. You can sit still.”

“Her hands aren’t busy,” Mason muttered, studying me closely.

“We can fix that, love,” Evan teased, wincing when Owen cracked him one. “Sorry, it just—sorry.” He met my gaze and gave me a soft smile. “Really, I’m sorry. I just wanted to lighten the mood.” He got to his feet and quickly moved the coffee table and plopped down. “Let’s do some yoga while we watch.”

“Yes,” I sighed, loving the idea and glad someone got it.

“I’m going to watch her doing that instead of the show then,” Aidan drawled. He cleared his throat when I shot him a look. “But it’s worth it. Teach me patience, darling.”

I moved off to the side a bit so I didn’t block Mason and Aidan’s view even if I started on the floor. I moved my body as I watched and focused on the show, feeling myself able to switch gears now and relax.

Until about fifteen minutes later and I glanced up to see all four men watching me instead of the show.

“Seriously?” I huffed when they didn’t seem to feel sorry at all.

“I only looked when your ankle went behind your head,” Owen admitted. “Like how? I mean, I know people can do that, but you didn’t even seem to try hard and it was like how I stretch my fingers. Ouch.”

That was the comic relief I needed, laughing and lowering my leg before going and plopping on his lap. I watched the last

little bit of the episode from his lap getting snuggles. We had cheesecake after and everyone agreed to call it an early night, probably to not push me or leave it at something easy.

I appreciated that. I thanked them for coming, feeling a bit weird about hosting with Mason basically, but no one made a thing of it, so really it was just a nice night.

“How about a dance, muffin?” Mason asked me when they were gone.

“Yeah, okay,” I agreed after a moment.

We had the space after all.

He pulled out his phone and tapped it several times before setting it on the speakers in the kitchen that I had seen before. “*Señorita*” by Camila Cabello and Shawn Mendes started and he grabbed my hand and spun me before moving his arm around me. My bare feet made it a bit hard to do fast turns and spin much, but he went more the tango style where it was a lot of fast footwork.

And I loved it.

We danced a few more songs before I realized there was something I wanted, something I wanted to do to finally punish him.

“I’m going to take a soak,” I told him. “Why don’t you finish up the kitchen and join me?”

“I’d love nothing more.”

I got everything ready and made a note that upgrading the master bathroom to what I had in my condo in Berlin was

something I was going to insist on first. It was a large whirlpool tub, but it was older and basic.

I was too spoiled for basic, and I had to deal with too much shitty and run-down when I went undercover.

He came in about five minutes after I was naked and in the tub. “You are so beautiful.”

“Thank you.” I licked my lips as I eyed him over. “Come please me. I want your fingers inside of me. Just that.”

His eyes flashed shock, but then he nodded. He took off his glasses and set them on the counter—able to see more with his magic and powers then—before coming and kneeling next to me.

“Am I what you want?” I asked as his hand moved into the water.

“You’re all I want, Jasmine,” he whispered as he leaned in. He lowered his forehead to mine, understanding that I wouldn’t kiss him right then. He fingered me until I had a small, quick orgasm. “Sorry, you deserve better than I’ve been giving you.”

Good, he understood this was punishment time. I stood, letting him look his fill of my naked, wet, turned-on body. Then I pulled him to his feet and lowered the front of his pants.

His eyes flashed shock as I grabbed his semi-hard cock and stroked him as I stared into his eyes. He went completely hard fast and desire filled his eyes. “Can I touch you?”

“No.” I swallowed when pain filled his eyes, but he nodded.

He still enjoyed the hand job, especially when I did it faster and let his dick touch my skin. But right as he was about to finish, I moved both of us so his spunk landed on the floor and the edge of the tub instead of on me or even in the water I was in.

“Don’t ever betray my trust again,” I warned him. “I don’t give it easily, but I want to give it to you *fully*. You have no idea how hard it was for me to do that, and *you* sabotaged that—sabotaged *us* with what you did. Don’t do that to us again.”

“I’m sorry,” he rasped, his voice cracking.

I didn’t judge him for that, mine had too.

“I know.” I let go of his dick and pulled him closer so our bodies were touching, moving his arm around me. “I know. I’m not trying to linger on this or rub it in. I’m trying...”

“You’re trying to explain that there are now speedbumps on our path and I need to accept that,” he murmured. “I know, Jasmine. I do. I truly do and I’m sorry. I’m sorry I broke your trust when it was the first real time you gave it so openly to a lover.”

And that was why it hurt so much.

“I don’t want us to have sex until I feel like I can trust you like that again,” I admitted. “It sounds ridiculous in my head given how fast—I feed on fucking sex but—what you were doing was—”

“I get it,” he whispered. “I completely get it especially how I fucked up on New Year’s.”

“That’s not part of punishing you,” I mumbled. “I’ve never had the *option* before and you were willing, but then you

wanted to—you turned into the troupe that sex for a lust demon would make it all better. I know that’s not what you really meant, but now—everything is so broken inside of me. I want that feeling back.”

“I know. I know you do. I want it too,” he breathed. “I completely understand and get it. I know—can I join you in the tub?”

“Yes,” I chuckled, realizing it was silly for us to stand there like that. I moved away and swallowed loudly as he took off his now wet clothes. “For the record, not having sex with you won’t be easy for me. In some ways, I feel like I’m punishing myself for failing you that you didn’t have faith in me.”

Sadness filled his eyes instead of being happy at the compliment that I wanted him that much. “It wasn’t your failing at all, Jasmine. It’s mine. It’s not realizing I had darkness in me like that. You accept your darkness. I’ve spent so many fucking years denying I could have any darkness because that could make me like my father that I turned into a repressed asshole too far on the other side.”

“You’re not that bad,” I said, failing at making light of the conversation or upset at least.

He got in the tub behind me and sat down, clearly wanting me to sit in between his legs. I wanted that closeness after making my point if he was willing, so I took the offer.

“I’m falling in love with you, Jasmine,” he whispered in my ear. “Everything I said wasn’t just drunk rambling.” He moved his hands over my arms and then down along my ribs, cupping my breasts and pulling me to lean back against him.

He kissed along my neck as he teased my nipples. “I won’t rush you like they did. I feel too much to make that mistake. I want you happy and happy with me.”

“I want that too.” I reached behind me and moved my hands to his ass, digging in my nails until he hissed. “Please me until you have to wash me and then eat me until I pass out.”

“This demanding side of you is too fucking hot,” he groaned against my skin. “Seriously, it’s making me more desperate for you. Did you get this from me?”

“No,” I chuckled, leaning my head back on his shoulder as his fingers moved to my pussy. “You mumbled in your sleep that you wanted me to be the boss of you and it made me want to a bit. Plus, I figured I got to be demanding if you got me to put a ring on your finger magically.”

He froze. “Is that part of my punishment?”

Even as locked down as he was, I felt his hurt. Shit.

“No, a bad joke. Sorry.” I turned my head and kissed him softly. “Honestly, it’s because you’ve been pushing me to think about what I really want instead of focusing on everyone else. I think you’re right and I do need to do that more. Maybe it’s silly to start like this and mostly with you, but I know you’ll let me. Aidan would. The twins would.”

“If you get shot down when you first start trying it’s going to be—you’ll retreat.”

I nodded, swallowing loudly. Or cut them out like I had Dylan.

No, Dylan was way more complicated than that.

“Focus on me if I’m pleasing you,” Mason demanded.

“Mmm, some of you getting aggressive with me was actually hot. I actually thought about you having me over your lap and spanking me before using the toy on me.” I chuckled when his dick twitched against my back. “Once you settle with some of your demons, the proverbial kind.”

“Did you really like it when Aidan did it to you?” he checked, snorting when my body clenched around his fingers. “Okay then. Good to know.”

“Not all of the time, but the situation was pretty perfect for it and the amount of control and—it was fun.”

“Like fun we’ve had?” he asked under his breath, almost to the point someone sitting that close couldn’t have heard him except my hearing was that good.

“Not much could ever top that first night and what you did to me, Mason. You *treasured* me. Feeling that as a lust demon is—it’s some of the best orgasms I’ve ever fucking had.”

“I want your body and juices on my tongue more than air,” he breathed in my ear as his desires slammed into me. I came. I fucking orgasmed right there.

Shit, the man really did know how to give me everything I needed.

He took amazing care of me before we fell asleep, which was why I gave him another hand job in the morning. I didn’t let his spunk touch my skin, but I didn’t make it a thing either by turning us at the last minute. I was pretty sure he got the message that I wasn’t allowing it again yet, not that I was giving him a slap like the night before.

He made us a quick breakfast and we got to work on the piles of everything we had. The portal activated, and I glanced over to see Rita come through with storm clouds practically above her head.

She froze, glancing between us. “I apologize. I thought this was still home base. They said to find you here.”

“Yes, but I’m not staying at home base until I settle a bit. I’m also not staying alone in case—until we’re sure I don’t have another mental break,” I explained.

“Oh, child,” she sighed. “I’ve lost count how many mental breaks I’ve had. And I’ve never killed a fucking archangel. Give yourself—you’re doing better than I could at such a young age.” She came over and kissed my hair. “I apologize for just walking in like that.”

I was about to respond, but I realized she was saying it for Mason.

“It’s fine as long as it’s not everyone, and clearly it’s an emergency,” he accepted easily. “Thank you for saying it though.”

“What’s wrong?” I asked her now that we had that handled.

“We do have a problem.”

“We always do,” I drawled.

“Yes, well, we started to have the first demons released from vampire covens. No one wanted to go first or admit to anything, but Gavin actually stepped up after what happened with Sloan. He went right to a coven that he knew had a few

demons and asked if they were going to hand them over and accept punishment or death.”

“Good. Glad he keeps his word on something,” I mumbled. “So we need places for them?”

“Yes, and we might need a lot, plus people to watch them which we didn’t figure in but yeah, people get messed up in captivity.”

“Right.” I sighed when I felt her worry beating on me. “Someone doesn’t want to leave.”

“That’s what they’re saying. That she’s there of her own free will and who are we to order our people around like slaves,” she bit out.

“I expected this,” I chuckled darkly, nodding when she couldn’t hide her shock. “I went over with...” I blew out a harsh breath. “I can’t actually remember. I thought Elijah, but it might have been the angels. I wanted the legal aspect.” I waved her off when she opened her mouth to ask. “We’re not forcing anyone to leave, we’re simply doing a welfare check then.”

“Smart,” Mason praised.

“Like police do if they receive a report someone is not answering their phone or there’s shouting in the house?” Rita checked, nodding when I did. “Well, Gavin and a few other council members want to discuss it. It’s also a tricky situation for them.”

“It always is,” I sighed. “Give me two minutes to change and I’ll meet you at corporate. We’re having them come onto our turf from now on after they misbehaved, right?”

“Yes, and they’re being rather gracious about it since we’re picking them up via portals.”

I snorted. “Yeah, they’ll turn that around to basically say we’re their cab drivers next time they get the chance.” I simply shrugged. There was no real winning in life.

Just trying not to lose as much as possible.

We arrived at corporate to find it was five vampire councilmen waiting with Elijah, Natalia, and Joshua.

“Sorry to be the last to the pissing match that’s apparently about to happen, but let’s take this to the conference room so we don’t scare the kids, shall we?” I said sweetly.

“Brat,” Elijah sighed, looking like he might strangle me and amused. “Our conference room is set up with maps. Now that the first chip fell, we figured it was the best way to organize. We could use the help of your security teams since we’re on an expansion freeze.”

“I’ll let Kyle and his teams know to be ready and take your orders for as long as you need them,” I accepted.

We were off the elevator by then, and I let Elijah lead the way to his super huge conference room. It was more like a lecture hall, but it worked out well to have one just for updating people and getting the parts of corporate on the right page a lot of times. Especially with training that legal had now and again.

“So what is the extra trouble that brings five very busy men into this?” I asked Gavin. “The guy is connected? Someone’s friend? Don’t be shy, and just tell us so we can get back to our lives.”

“Such a fucking brat,” Joshua chuckled, the tension in his shoulders relaxing some.

Gavin glanced with the others and let out a slow breath. “He’s connected but not with any of the council. He’s actually older than O’Malley and should have been offered a junior seat. We can’t ever catch him red-handed in anything, but he doesn’t directly challenge us in anything either.”

“We think this will be the chance he takes to change that,” a different vampire said.

“Got it. So you can’t be the problem here nor the bad guys,” I muttered, studying Gavin and his desires.

He wanted this guy gone though. Like dead. The coven leader was bad for vampires and the council and was too good at stoking unrest while Gavin liked order and people staying in their lanes.

“I’m not offering to be your assassin—we won’t ever work for you like that—but if I get the chance, make one thing clear to me.”

“You won’t step on our toes,” he promised, clearly understanding what I’d gotten from him. “No one on the council even.”

I nodded. “Impress me then.”

He didn’t play coy, telling me how they had reviewed the footage we’d given them and aides hadn’t just lost their jobs but their standing and one had lost their head. They’d made it clear to the other aides, their families, and even a lot of friends that we were powerful allies they were smart to get in with early, not anyone they could ever leash.

I exchanged a glance with the other demons and was glad we were all on the same page and were happy with the win. “Okay, then if I get the excuse and valid reason, I’ll take it even if it causes trouble.”

“Why?” Gavin asked, the rest of the question implied.

Why take that on ourselves when we had enough headaches? The answer was simple but not the one I’d give him. A vampire that the vampire council with very loose morals didn’t like wasn’t someone good for demons either.

“Because you kept your word with us,” I answered instead. “You cleaned up the mess made, and I heard you went yourself to a known problem and confronted it. We won’t ever be shopping buddies—especially because I hate shopping—but you kept your word with us and that carries a lot of weight.

“So as long as you realize this is the cookie I’m giving you for being a good boy and not something to spin around later that I’m your pretty pet, understand that this is how we roll.” I shrugged when anger filled his eyes. Yes, that was shitty and petty to say, but that was the world we lived in, and I got that crap all of the fucking time. “I would ask you stay here though.”

“She’ll wear a live feed you can watch,” Elijah added, shaking his head when the guy argued. “If you go in with her, it makes it look like we needed your permission—which we don’t—or you waited to consult us. You did, but we both know that’s smart, but if he’s an asshole, he’ll spin that.”

“Fine, but why is the youngest of you going on?” a different vampire asked.

“Because if the oldest goes in, it gives him too much validity,” Gavin answered, his gaze on mine.

I glanced at Elijah and waited until he nodded. “Yes, but as you saw from the fight before, I’m also more powerful than the average demon my age. It won’t be long before people figure it out, but we’re not announcing that I’m a child of an angel and a demon. And both were no slouches.”

I left it at that no matter the slew of questions I was sure they had.

4

Twenty minutes later, I was at the coven house with a team and ready to throw down for whatever we found.

“You have no right to be here, so turn around and get lost,” the guard at the door told me.

Before anyone could even think to react or even smirk, my hand shot out and I collapsed his throat. The guy crumbled to his knees and tried to suck in air as I ignored him and looked at the other guy.

“I just identified myself as a councilwoman of the demon council. Please be smarter than your friend here and speak to me with some fucking respect or you’ll piss me off.” I raised an eyebrow at the guard when he opened his mouth. “Would you speak to the wolf shifter council members that way?” I smirked when the guy froze. “Of course not.”

“I apologize for his rudeness, Councilwoman, but you don’t have the authority to order us to let you in,” he said, dipping his head to me.

“That’s debatable, but I didn’t actually order that,” I reminded him. “I said I’m here to see the demon that resides

here. If you don't want to let us in, fine, but then bring her to us."

"Our leader informed the council that—"

"She doesn't want to leave and is very happy here," I interjected. "Yes, I heard. I'm also not a fucking idiot and would just trust the word of the coven leaders. They are *all saying that*. Like, no shit that's their response. We're doing welfare checks. I want to speak to *her* and hear it from her lips. If she wants to stay, great, awesome."

"Really?" he hedged.

"Yes, really," I drawled. "I'll leave the information on how to contact us if there's ever a problem like *you know* how to contact your council. We're doing it for all the demons we can. If there's not a problem here and she's willing, great." I leaned in when he still hesitated. "But if you don't let me see one of mine and she's in this coven, I will burn it to the ground to get her out. And yes, *I can*."

"I will inform the coven leader of this—"

"Why?" I purred. "Does he own her?" I smirked at him when worry filled his eyes. "Let him know what's going on in his house if you want, but enough with the games. Bring her here *now* or I go in and get her. I'm a busy woman, and your coven leader is just a fucking coven leader. This is not the only coven we're visiting either, savvy?"

"Yes, Councilwoman," he accepted, talking into the radio and informing whomever that he needed Synda, who was the demon, and the coven leader to the front entrance immediately.

The coven leader came on the radio and I snatched it from the guard. “Get to the door now or I will burn this coven house to the ground to speak with one of mine. I’m a councilwoman doing a welfare check on a demon and I’m well within my rights. Enough with the games. I want to see her with my own eyes and speak with her that she’s fine. Do it or die. Clear enough for you?”

He took his sweet time but wasn’t stupid enough to take more than ten minutes.

That was fine, we had people cloaked checking out the place.

Duh, of course, we were.

He didn’t dip his head to me, clearly expecting me to greet him like I was beneath him. “I’m—”

“I don’t care. I asked for *her*,” I said, pointing to the woman being escorted behind him. I smiled at the woman. “Synda, was it?”

“Yes, that’s me,” she whispered, glancing at the coven leader like she was scared she said the wrong thing.

“Nice to meet you, hon,” I greeted, moving closer and extending my hand. “I’m Councilwoman Jasmine Stewart. Demons have officially organized and have a council now, so we’re doing some due diligence and welfare checks, okay?”

“I’m in trouble?” she worried.

“Not at all,” I assured her, reaching forward and taking her hand when she didn’t want to shake it. I was immediately overwhelmed with too much. “Do you want to stay here?”

Her eyes flashed shock and she gasped. “Yes, of course!”

“You heard her, now leave and—” he chuckled as he moved his arm around her.

“Let her go and step back,” I told him, my voice cold and deadly. “And if you don’t start addressing me properly, I will rip off your leg and beat you with it.” I smirked at him. “Can vampires heal from that?”

He swallowed loudly and moved away.

“No, please, don’t leave me,” she whimpered, reaching for him.

I caught her by the shoulders and made her focus on me. “He’s fine. He just didn’t speak to a councilwoman as he should.” I waited until he nodded. “Synda, are you treated well here?”

“Oh yes, he loves me very much.”

I swallowed loudly as I felt her desires. Tears filled my eyes as I cupped her face. “Honey, that’s not love.”

“It is,” she argued.

“It’s not.” I gestured over to where Kyle was standing. “Do you see that man?” I waited until she glanced over and nodded. “I love him. We’re not in love, but he’s one of my best friends. Focus on me. Focus on my desires when it comes to him and see the difference.”

But she couldn’t. Horror filled me as I realized that she not only didn’t know how to use her powers that were like *breathing* to a demon, she was like a hollow doll inside.

“It’s different because I love him.”

I swallowed loudly when I felt the coven leader's smug satisfaction. "Prove it to me then. Tell me how you met, what he does for you—everything. Prove to me that your love is real and that he doesn't abuse you and I'll only check your IDs are updated and leave you with him."

Hope shined in her eyes and her mouth got ahead of her brainwashing to be careful as she blabbered on about how perfect their love was.

The more she talked, the more bile that gathered and wanted to come up.

He had bought her when she wasn't even a demon yet, so underage, and groomed her. She had been fourteen and he'd groomed her, touching her way too young, and then luck was she was a lust demon, and he kept her instead of disposing of her *as he had others*. To her, that proved their love was real and meant to be.

To us, that meant he'd committed a lot of fucking crimes.

But it was so much worse. He treated her like a doll. A doll he fucked and used as a weapon whenever he wanted, and otherwise they all laughed at her and she didn't even understand it. What she told me was... It was so damn obvious.

"We found three other underage women that were bought and said to be born of angels and humans," one of the demons with us said. "One is *eleven* and he's already grooming her."

"You have others?" Synda gasped, looking at the coven leader with such pain in her eyes. "But you only did that to find me? You told me so."

“He lied, honey,” I said gently. “He doesn’t love you. He’s been using you.” I knocked her out before she could understand what was going on. She’d been held for over a hundred years and brainwashed since she was fourteen.

I honestly didn’t know if we could save her, but it wasn’t something we could do easily or just by talking to her. It would take a lot to deprogram someone like her.

Fuck.

I handed her off to one of the other demons and knocked out the coven leader before he could even react. I turned to the guard who had called him and gave him a hard look. “Lock down the coven. Your council will be in contact. No one enters or flees or it will be your head.”

“I don’t have the authority to do that,” he worried. “The coven leader set it up that if the council was to get involved...”

I nodded that I understood, glancing at Kyle. “Get more here and catch any rats fleeing. I’ll talk to the vampire council and see how they want to handle this.”

“Yes, Councilwoman.” He swallowed loudly, nodding to Synda. “And her?”

“We’ll try our best but he—the program he built was effective.” I glanced at the guard. “Are there any other demons?”

“No, he kills them if they’re not lust demons as he thinks they’re the only ones he could control. They’re not easy to find before they turn,” he said, shaking with fear at all of the rage pouring off of us.

Good. He should be scared.

We opened a temp portal and brought them to corporate. I headed up to deal with the adults while the others brought the coven leader and Synda to the basement where we had cells for... When we needed cells.

“What did you get off of her?” Rita asked, worry in her eyes, but then darted a glance to the vampires.

Right, they needed this explained to them. I let out a slow breath and decided to focus on Gavin since Aidan trusted him. “Think of it as being drunk or high when you were human. You say the first thing that pops into your mind and then immediately think ‘I shouldn’t have said that’ or something. It’s your self-control—impulse control even that understands societal rules.”

“He brainwashed her, and you can sense the opposite is what you’re saying?” he surmised.

“He is as smart and the best person to lead the council as O’Malley said,” Elijah muttered.

I nodded in agreement. “Yes, it’s like that. Her desires were immediately repressed and she spoke the answer.”

“It’s a bit like dealing with those dolls who had the string in them decades ago,” Rita added. “You could get maybe a dozen responses and they don’t fit the moment. We feel that.”

I nodded again. “Yes, that’s actually a much better analogy. Her brain didn’t fire to think through what was being said. It was knee-jerk to answer, and her desires were not to disappoint him. She barely registered what I was trying to

do...” I let out a shaky breath and focused on Rita. “We need to have Ally sit with her. I don’t know we can save her.”

Rita blinked back tears. “That bad?”

“She’s completely devoid of—it was like talking to an abused child but yeah, like a doll. That’s dangerous in the body of a demon over a hundred. And he never let her explore her powers. She has no idea what to do besides Hulk smash shit to protect him.”

“Fucking monster,” she seethed.

“Yes, and two of the underage girls he had are US citizens,” Elijah muttered, focused on his phone. “And still technically human. We’ll have to loop in ISLE.” He waved off the protests of the vampires. “They need to know this is something that people are doing. This guy had a *process*. Is an angel doing it and selling his kids?”

“It could get a lot of us busted on a lot more than one coven leader,” Joshua agreed. “We don’t need to tell all the agents.”

I sighed, knowing that meant me. “I’ll talk to Director Stevens personally. He still wants to talk to me about Sloan and more.”

“How is she doing?” a different vampire asked. “We are happy with the progress being made, but she hasn’t been in touch or answered our requests for—”

“Leave her alone,” I snapped, more venom in my voice than I meant to show. I let out a slow breath. “She’s *young* and never wanted to be in the spotlight. O’Malley’s attention has made her—she’s not in a good place, and she’s been through

too much already. None of you should be contacting her directly. I don't call your fucking aides."

"We structured it originally so Gavin could call Sloan and they would coordinate," Elijah added. "Not anyone on the council just contact her. Aides have been trying to get in touch with her. What the hell is wrong with you all that you can't even keep a phone number quiet and she'll have to change it? That was an *emergency* line that our people needed. It was given to you because this was an emergency."

They did not give a single shit about any of that and were simply annoyed their chance at the one they wanted as theirs was gone.

Fuckers. Seriously, what a bunch of fuckers.

And they wanted us to handle the cleanup of the coven. I wasn't the only one who looked at them like they were fucking nuts.

"Fine," I agreed before the others could argue. I shrugged. If we got to do the cleanup then we got the information and leads on other bad things.

Plus, I was going to take as much down from that coven as I could. I knew the vampire council wanted us to do it so they could leave it all on our laps, but... Fine. Seriously, let them be another example if the guy was connected.

But what did the vampire council really do besides fuck up then?

"We are suspending the councilman who did such unsavory things to Sloan," Gavin informed me as Elijah pulled up the maps of covens.

We knew that was as much as we were going to get plus the “compensation” already given, but honestly it was shit. He used power on Sloan and our other demons for hours to fuck with us.

“I took them back to their estate to grab the information we wanted,” Rita told me as we all got settled in.

“Who ordered food?” I asked.

“I did,” Joshua answered.

I wasn’t the only one who groaned. I pulled out my phone and opened my message change to Lewis, my right hand. “Who wants *actual food*?”

“I didn’t order fucking Play-Doh,” Joshua grumbled.

“Play-Doh would be more filling than your kale and salads and gassy fucking bean everything,” I bitched. I snorted when all the other hands went up, glancing over to the vampires. “Are you guys all proper and boring or are you guys good with some of our kebabs? There’s a place near here that’s banging.”

“We’re fine with whatever,” Gavin accepted after they shared a few looks.

We got to work, and Joshua’s order came first along with refreshments. Then mine came and we dug in.

Rita threw some fries at me after I said something snarky, and Elijah actually held up his fingers for a touchdown signal when I caught one in my mouth instead of just making a mess. We all threw fries at Joshua when he lectured us about our eating habits yet again.

“You all truly like each other,” one of the vampires said, glancing between us as if he couldn’t wrap his mind around what he was seeing.

I nodded, wiping my mouth and gesturing to the demons in the room. “This is the original family we formed, plus Ally and Aurthur. The seven of us started all of this and built it from the ground up. It’s been the blood, sweat, and tears of decades of killing ourselves together to make this happen with the owner—our leader.”

“That’s why we were never going to fail when so many others have,” Rita said firmly. “Where even other established councils have failed and been completely taken over.” She gestured between us again. “We’d all die for each other. You can’t buy someone to betray the others when that’s how they feel. We *have* all almost died for each other at one point or another. The bond doesn’t break then.”

“Amen to that,” I muttered, shivering as I remembered how I’d almost killed Rita and Joshua at different times when I’d shifted forms when I’d been scared and in denial that I could. I hadn’t meant to, but I was just so strong and terrified of what I was.

I still was.

We spent the rest of the day marking which covens had actually done as they were supposed to, and I think the vampire councilmen understood better why we were so angry when one coven released twenty demons. *One coven* had *twenty demons* as pets and protection. They fed off the constant pride of the inflated egos of the vamps and had a place to live, but also protected the coven.

And had no lives of their own.

What a shit fucking deal. They basically lived their lives in dorm rooms and were fed basic, bland nothing.

That wasn't a life worth living.

So we had piles of messes all over the place, plus the covens that basically replied acting like they'd never heard of demons, much less had had any step foot in their covens. Sure, that wasn't suspicious.

We decided those would be checked out immediately with cloaking charms, but once again we were stretched too thin. We couldn't leave this alone now that we had started it, and we couldn't leave people in bad spots, but we couldn't risk our people to do it.

So what the fuck was the answer?

I didn't know, but it was my answer to have since I was the boss.

Awesome.

5

“Hey, I got the packets and—”

“Let’s have a talk, *Jasmine*,” Tracey greeted me the next morning.

I swallowed a sigh, my brain still catching up given how late I’d worked once again. I glanced over at Mason when he went ridged, clearly hearing it as well and knowing it wasn’t what I wanted.

“And let’s skip the part where you deny it,” Tracey added when I didn’t respond fast enough. “You’ve always respected me before, so don’t play me for a fool now. I won’t forgive it after all of the years we’ve trusted each other.”

“I wasn’t going to, and you’re no one’s fool,” I muttered. “It’s sorta just not the day for it. There’s a lot more shit than you know, so if you want to be read in as the Tracey I know and do trust, I’m fine with you coming over and just having a talk. If you’re pissed I didn’t tell you and have an axe to grind, that’s a whole other situation and one that—”

“I’m not pissed, and there’s no axe as long as you promise you were going to read me in,” he said after a moment.

“I was. Maybe not on me specifically, but on what really went down since I know you have a lot of contacts and a far reach.”

“Yeah, that’s part of what I want to talk to you about. I’m getting a lot of demons calling me for info, and I want the real answer before I start *giving* answers.”

That was more than fair and I said as much. Tracey promised to chill a bit and he was fine with keeping it low-key so I could just fill him in.

“I hate to let him into where we’re staying like that, but Tracey’s helped me out a lot and for decades,” I explained to Mason. “I’m basically a councilwoman and never told him except I wasn’t yet technically and yeah, so this isn’t something to pull rank on or bring him into corporate.”

“I agree. Handle it how you feel is best, Jasmine, and I’ll back you. I just don’t want you to meet anyone alone right now. Everything is way too volatile for that.”

I completely agreed with that, and while Mason wasn’t any match for Tracey physically, he was a force to be reckoned with because of his magic, and that made him great backup... Especially since the other person wouldn’t ever know it.

Ten minutes later, I was bringing Tracey through the portal into the villa.

“Things got so fucked so fast recently with coming out as a council before we were ready that I needed to get a full-time ‘me’ with what I was doing,” I told Tracey when he locked in on Mason and gave me a shit look. “He’s also my lover, but he’s complicated like we are, so don’t dig into him, okay? I’m

not hiding him from you like I am from others because I trust you, but don't pull this thread."

"Fair," he agreed, offering his hand to Mason when Mason came over. "Tracey. Glad I could get you a better ID."

"Yes, that's not my forte, so I greatly appreciate it. Jasmine speaks very highly of your work and integrity. I was fine with you coming into our home then."

Tracey shot me a surprised look. "You guys live together?" He winced when I couldn't squash what I was feeling fast enough. "Shit, sorry."

I nodded. "Yeah, things spun out."

"You live long enough and everyone has a mental breakdown. I've got about fifty years on you from what I'm guessing your age is. I've had a couple too." He cleared his throat and thanked Mason when the warlock offered him coffee. "I actually had one a few years ago, and that was part of what Gino came after me about. Some other shit too. It's..."

"Fucking asshole. I seriously want to put him in the ground, but the fucker went underground, and we've been a bit too busy."

Tracey accepted the coffee from Mason and let out a slow breath. "Seriously, tell me what the fuck is going on. Are you—which are you really?"

"Jasmine," I said gently and then let out a slow breath.

And then I told him. Not everything but everything he needed to know.

When I was done, we were on another cup of coffee and Tracey just let out a long whistle.

Yeah, that about summed it up pretty fucking accurately.

“I want to come out of the cold,” Tracey said after several minutes of settling with what I’d told him, nodding when it was my turn to be shocked. “I’ve talked with a few of my team and they’re of the same opinion. A few of my extra contractors that I’ve used for this job with you have hinted that they plan on asking for a full-time gig with you guys and they’re going to ask me for a referral.”

I thought about that a bit too long, Tracey’s desires hitting me hard. “Yes. My answer is yes. Sorry, I’m thinking about something a senior VP said and how I could orchestrate this.” I glanced over at Mason.

“What are you thinking of, muffin?” He studied me and then nodded. “Smart.”

“You won’t be offended?”

“No, not in the slightest. I don’t care about the title or rank.”

That was a relief. I focused back on Tracey. “Mason might have more experience—I don’t know whose dick is bigger here, but he is radioactive. Like nuclear radioactive, so he has to stay in the dark. You don’t. You have trouble but—”

“Yeah, ‘trouble’ is a bit of an understatement, and it’s getting worse with—”

“We’re not just the demon council. We’re the German government,” I informed him, dropping the last big bomb I would on him. I chuckled when he coughed so hard he had to

thump himself in the chest. “Yeah, and not like the warlock’s puppet whoever is in charge of France. We’re the government and have been. We have the next person set up that will be elected.”

“Wow, okay like... *Wow.*” He blew out a harsh breath. “What do you—how do you—what do you—”

“Breathe, Tracey,” I said gently as his mind practically imploded. I gave him a few minutes and a lot of deep breaths. “I’m thinking of a director position for you. Basically, what we need is someone with your skill set *protected* and able to have a team to do what you do but for all demons. That is how too many get trapped. You can’t live in this world without an ID, and there’s no help for them normally.

“It’s how too many get trapped. Yes, we’re getting them out now, but it’s—we just pulled twenty out of one vamp coven.” I nodded when he winced, having to look away. “They had no idea how to survive besides being kept as fucking dogs in dorms because otherwise they would end up in the human system for something and dead from not feeding. It’s all too rigged against demons.”

“You don’t have to tell me that or sell me on it, Jasmine. I’m one of the people who fell into the traps of that human system,” he grumbled, crossing his arms over his chest.

“If you had someone as knowledgeable as Tracey and a real team under him, you could have someone put into place in different embassies or different government shops who did nothing but approve papers,” Mason muttered, smiling as he did a double take. “Of course, that’s where your sexy mind was.”

I reached over and touched Tracey's hand. "But we're overloaded. We weren't ready to come out yet and you have only seen a fraction of the attacks already going on against us. There was no good time to pull back the curtain, but we didn't have a choice with the shit ISLE was pulling, and it was only going to get worse. So if I do this, I need to know you can take this over.

"I need you to be the boss with this, and you'll have to cut off other clients who aren't demons. It's too complicated, and we know that they'll use you now to try and get to us and..." I sighed when I felt his desires, sitting back in my chair with a huff. "It's already happening, right? Who already threatened you or tried to pull shit?"

"Several," he drawled. "Plus, people are just stupid, and any sort of anyone good with computers or manipulating information, they all assume we do the same everything. I've been getting calls and demands to just hack you guys and shut you down like it's a fucking light switch to turn off. That's not even my fucking gig. I'm good at manipulating bureaucracies and exploiting cracks in paper trails."

"I can get you and your team out today and someplace safe," I told him easily. "That's not a problem."

"You can just pull a safe house out of your ass?" he drawled.

Mason burst out laughing before coming over and giving me a hug, kissing my hair. "Sorry, sorry. I know it's not funny, but it is a concern most people would have, and you have the other problem."

“Some things fell through the cracks when we were acquiring clubs, and apparently we have over five hundred properties no one was properly taking care of,” I explained to Tracey. “And we’re not sure on that number. The legal department is going over all of the past contracts and—it’s another headache.”

“Sooo, I might be able to help with that,” Tracey admitted, nodding when I simply raised an eyebrow. “One of the people calling for information is a group of twenty demons that’s basically a pack with a leader. I’ve done a lot of work for the leader getting them IDs and such.”

“Okay, how does that help us?”

“They’re contractors,” Mason muttered.

“Do you read minds?” Tracey asked him, not snark and a bit too much curiosity.

“No, just auras a bit,” Mason mumbled, before going back over to his system.

Luckily, Tracey backed off.

“The problem bringing in people we don’t know is people would take advantage of the situation we’re in,” I reminded Tracey. “People screw us over when they see us distracted, try and get information to sell—locations of where we’re stashing important people. All of it.”

“Not this crew. Not the leader. He’s got a good group and runs a tight ship,” Tracey promised. “I don’t help assholes and bad people. You know that.”

“Right, but you also have previous customers threatening you and trying to force you to hack us now,” I reminded him,

trying not to have an accusation in my voice.

“Fair, but we both know that people don’t stay nice either. It’s not my fault that a young pup I helped twenty years ago became a huge asshole that I won’t help anymore. Or that someone gave my number out.”

Both points were totally valid and I said as much.

I told Tracey to pack up his people and get ready to move along with a list of demons he would trust to bring in like the contractor guy while I handled things at corporate with the ancients. He couldn’t hide his shock, but Mason told him that I wasn’t kidding, and this was really how fast things moved because there was so much to do. So if he wasn’t ready to go, he had to tell me now.

No, he wanted the help now and knew the place might just be temporary. He just asked it wasn’t in the US and had great internet.

Yeah, we could handle that.

Elijah was actually walking out of the conference room in my department with Lewis and someone I didn’t recognize when I arrived to speak to Lewis first. I raised an eyebrow at that and simply pointed between the two of them before sighing.

“There’s been a development, and Lewis has been working overtime with others to help since you’re not on a current case,” Elijah explained.

“The properties,” I sighed, knowing that Lewis was all over that and had jumped on what Kiera had set all up. “I have

something to discuss with you on that and something else. Your director's idea."

"Right, let's step back inside," Elijah said to the man with him, waving me to join them. "If you can get everything to transfer and who you can spare for his team, Lewis."

"You're taking people from my team for something?" I hedged, an edge to my tone.

Oddly enough, Lewis took the question. "We have several that are ready for promotions. They're overqualified for their positions and honestly, it's been a bit rough on them that they've not been promoted when they've done such a good job. But we've not had anywhere *to* put them. Now we can, and I can very easily boss around a lot of newbies to help you on cases and do my job. I enjoy it even."

"Sorry," I sighed. "They know it's not because I don't value them, right?"

He reached over and patted my arm. "Everyone knows you value them and would go to the mat for them, Jasmine. We all know that. Always. The safety and great pay were always worth more than a better title or promotion. We also know there's a cap at the company because the top spots aren't ever going to change. They're fine, but it's time to move our people up instead of bringing in new for those positions."

That was completely fair and I was glad for it.

I went in first and waited for Elijah to introduce us.

"This is Chun," he said, gesturing to the ancient demon. "I know him from old and am bringing him on." He chuckled when that set off *all* of my alarm bells.

“She’s as distrusting as you said,” the very attractive demon said, meaning it as a compliment.

“Forgive me, but the timing is tricky, and we all know people offering to help us now won’t—”

“I didn’t offer,” Chun corrected. “Elijah and the other council members are wisely calling in some favors.”

Okay then. We shook hands and then sat.

Elijah smiled at me. “The mistake I made with Bella—no, not Bella. She was too—I couldn’t read her, but we understand now that she was gone. But a few in her group could have been brought to our side if we had reached out to them first and talked to them.”

“Well, *clearly*, we’ve been sitting around counting our toes and people that fucking old shouldn’t act like fucking babies to throw a fucking fit and just open their mouths,” I seethed, hating that Elijah and the others took it on themselves.

“You’re right, but we’re also reaching out too,” Elijah accepted, Chun looking amused for some reason. “I know Chun from old—”

“Forgive me, but your young one is about to explode from tension and is worried that I’ll look down on you if I know she had a mental breakdown recently and you treat her with such respect,” he cut in, giving me a kind look. “I don’t, for the record. I was a young one that Elijah saved and took under his wing. That’s what he’ll be too kind to tell you.

“That’s what the other ancients are doing. Those of us who they helped; they’re calling in that favor to help them

now. Elijah has helped a lot of demons over his years and taught us how to adapt. Unfortunately, a lot of us haven't done the same. I regret that. I'm taking this chance that he has offered and clearing my sins for that by helping now."

I read between the lines. "You don't want to be part of the fight or council, which everyone will assume of an ancient involved. But what we need is more adults we can trust to handle too much, *but* most won't want to be 'aides' or whatever with our setup."

"Exactly," Elijah confirmed. "First, there aren't five hundred properties. There are over three thousand already and it's a huge mess."

"I'm so sorry," I rasped.

"Stop," he ordered. "This is not your fault. You were acquisitions. You did your job. We messed up inside. It's done and we're going to fix it."

He waited until I nodded and then explained with that many properties, he had already put in the paperwork to form a subsidiary, Heavenly Properties. It was pretty open-ended. We could flip them to sell, rent them out—whatever we wanted. Hell, we had some impressive land that was ours if we detangled it from the neglect.

And we had a *lot* of capital to invest in this area.

"It's not fair, but people judge adult entertainment," Elijah said gently. "Even if they don't judge it, they don't want to get involved with it so they're not judged. Chun is going to get Heavenly Properties up and running with the crazy we're handing over. Under Rita since she's in charge of the clubs.

But we'll have different directors under each of us that will be involved in both.”

“Got it. So not completely separate but a cover so people can act separate or not pulled in fully. We don't need two fucking legal departments and could make things much more complicated if we tried to,” I nodded when he did. “Right, on that, I have good news and actually something that could kickstart this then.”

I told him about everything with Tracey and what he'd said about the demon contractor group he knew. Both were glad to hear it, but also Chun specifically was taking this over because he was an architect, contractor, builder, and just about everything else possible when it came to houses, housing, or things needed for a house.

Cool.

No, really. I was super impressed that he knew how to design a house for real, not simply draw one, all the way to fixing the garbage disposal as a certified plumber. That was really awesome and someone who spent their extra time on this planet well.

I also told Elijah my plan for Tracey and to have an actual department under me that was IDs and making sure everyone had better papers. Even a way for demons not with us to get papers so they didn't have to go to covens or packs for their “protection” scams.

“We're agreed that it should be your department,” Elijah told me. “People are looking at you like you're the weakest link because you're a junior VP. We're changing that. The big

boss agrees. You're not a senior VP like the rest of us, no more difference. You're also the VP of Expansion and Security."

"Not the acquisitions?" I hedged.

"Expansion and acquisitions aren't really all that different but, Natalia will officially take over acquisitions as the face of the company. It should be her. You've been too split on focus with everything going on when you're on assignment. It's also easier for areas we simply want to acquire, especially now with expanding into properties. We're going to have a director just for that eventually."

"Okay," I accepted. Yeah, I hated that tedious part. "The first thing I'll ask for as the security head is at least twenty properties to always be available as safe houses for whatever we might need. All VPs have the list and can use as well with security teams knowing the locations and ready to protect them."

"You want bug out locations in case a club is ever raided or there's a problem in a city we deal in?" Elijah muttered, jotting down notes.

"Yes. And I want the managers to know their specific location to get everyone out to," I confirmed.

"Smart," they both said, Chun continuing. "I'll meet with this contractor that you spoke with and see what terms I can come to with them. I doubt they're just sitting around waiting for anyone to off them this, but the great thing of adding this is anyone rescued can be added to this job."

"I don't understand," I hedged.

“Young pups jump on construction sites all of the time without a lick of knowledge,” he told me. “Day workers without any training just to lug shit around. Anyone can paint. Painting well is a different problem, but we can train them. So it’s a way for them to get an honest job right away and keep them out of trouble.”

“If you think you can manage all of that and babysit, good luck to you,” I said with a dark chuckle. That was not a job I wanted.

The man gave me the same look.

Fair enough.

6

The restructuring was a fabulous idea that was clearly needed. The other VPs all agreed and were all over it to get more “adult” help under them, all like Chun who they knew well and debts were owed to them. And no one was saying they were in for the long haul or committed to the cause.

No, they weren't signing up for this war, only to defend the kids if needed and protect what we'd built. They were a thick line of defense *if needed* so we could go out and fight the battles needed.

Plus, a lot of them needed jobs and their lives cleaned up. They'd gone too far off the grid, and that just wasn't possible to live nowadays. They couldn't travel besides with portals. Everything was tracked. They couldn't cash in stuff or even get at their safety deposit boxes without risking issues as you needed to show IDs for shit like that.

So they were getting a lot out of the deal, as well as we were going to unentangle a lot of shit they had going on too.

Tracey and his team were all in, especially the extra contractors that wanted stability and protection. They were in a spot where they were taken out too often for knowing too much or trusting the wrong person, just like the vampire

council even said was a knee-jerk reaction after putting security in place.

Yeah, great for those of us who worked in security or knew how to handle bad situations. I really wanted to help you if there was a chance you'd kill me after instead of just fucking paying me.

Thanks.

But now that we were public, there came annoyances as well. We all agreed that we weren't going to be like normal councils and only be around when it was time to punish, but there to help as well. So we let all of the councils and ISLE know that if a demon was picked up in something or involved in anything, we were to be informed.

Immediately.

If they didn't, they wouldn't like how we responded.

So Sunday afternoon, the first of those situations happened. ISLE was called in by the local police because it seemed like a shifter hurt a human but was a demon. It meant there were eyes and we had to be careful. Fine, it ended up that I was already heading out of corporate after dropping off something, so I was going to deal with it.

There was no chance Dylan was going to be involved in some random violence like that, so it should be fine. Even if he did stick his nose in it, I wasn't going to hide from him or ISLE when I hadn't done anything wrong.

Hell, I still had to speak with Director Stevens, but he'd been ducking me since he was busy too.

So nothing shocked me more when *he* was actually at the scene.

I arrived and was glad to see it was all contained, no one taking pictures or any chance of the demon's face being plastered all over. It also meant I didn't have to worry about mine. I went over to the guy, squatted down where he was sitting, and introduced myself, checking he was okay.

He blinked at me for a full minute, unable to get his mouth to work before simply nodding.

I handed him Lewis's card. "Call him later this week and touch base, okay? We're going to start offering our people safe ways to get their papers updated and handled so they don't put themselves in dangerous situations to survive."

"Um, thanks," he mumbled, taking the card from me. "We really have a council? Wow, I never thought that would happen." He cleared his throat and seemed to realize himself. "Councilwoman."

I smiled. "I'm glad you're okay."

He snorted. "I just couldn't pound the guy back because humans were around. He knew that. He wanted to start shit with me because there were witnesses and I would out myself as not human. Luckily, there were cops right there and they tased the guy, but then ISLE came and here we are."

"Good. If you need to feed to heal or just need a safe place to feed, Lewis can fill you in on what we've got set up."

"You're going to help us feed too?" he whispered, his eyes going bug wide.

"It's not free, but yes, we have a lot in place."

He snorted again. “Nothing in life is free.”

“No, but this is *safe* for us,” I promised, tapping the card. “We’re trying to get the word out before we have more get trapped by covens and packs.”

He nodded and hurried to tuck the card in his jacket pocket. “Yeah, I hear that. I’ll pass it along for sure.”

“That probably won’t be the permanent number. We weren’t ready to come out yet and don’t have it all in place. If there’s any confusion, just tell people to call Heavenly Entertainment corporate. They’ll get the right people if they call the main number.”

“I’ll tell people, Councilwoman. I’ll tell everyone. Thanks. Really.”

I winked at him and stood, glancing around to see who the person with ISLE was that I needed to talk to... And that was when I locked gazes with Director Stevens who had been watching the whole interaction with interest.

It was weird that he was there, but I was glad that I could maybe kill two birds with two stones and get back to finishing what I needed to for the vampires so I was finally done with that drama.

“Dylan threatened to kill me if I touched you after you broke his heart over *text* and said you were going to have revenge sex with me,” he announced loudly in front of *everyone* there.

I stumbled in approaching him, actually taking a step back in shock. Then I was *pissed* he was bringing up personal shit. “Does no one in ISLE seriously know how to keep

professional? Are none of you able to behave yourselves fitting the situation?" I gestured to what was going on around us.

He adjusted his neck and opened his mouth, but I wasn't done yet.

"*Clearly not*, so I'll add asking us to train you on how to act professional to the list of things you're begging from us including like our tech," I seethed, feeling better when he flinched. "The last time I saw ISLE, Deputy Director Hammond called me a *liar* in front of his people and mine and I'm still waiting for that apology." I nodded when Stevens frowned.

"I don't know about this," he admitted.

"*Shocking*," I drawled. "And yet you felt it your place to make a scene about what happened?" What he'd originally said hit me though and I frowned. "And that's not even what I said after he called me a liar and his desires were that he didn't pick someone as immoral as me." I waved off whatever he was going to say and moved closer, glancing at the other ISLE agents there. "I guess maybe I sort of did.

"Or he could have taken it that way. I'm not sure. I was angry and hurt, so I lashed out. Which is why I did apologize and explained that before I ended things. Either way, that is between the two of us and not fuel for public spectacle, so I would appreciate you leading by example and keeping personal out of work. If you would like a conversation about what happened as *his friend*, we can have that later."

He glanced around before glaring at me like he was pissed I was calling him out in front of everyone. Was he kidding

me? I hadn't started this.

I gasped as his desires hit me, not able to control my reaction in time. "Though it's not a conversation we can have alone, so I'll have to see if someone can block me from feeling how much you want to *hit me* for hurting Dylan. Right, of course, it's the lust demon's fault. I would have thought the director of ISLE was smarter than ever jumping to conclusions like that."

He flinched. "What does that mean?"

Now I wanted to smack him. "Did you stop to ask what Dylan did that made me break up with him?" My heart hurt when he simply stared at me. "Seriously? I know he's your friend, but you have spent time with me. Do you think this was what I wanted?" I shut my mouth when my voice cracked, hating that it did in front of so many others.

I turned on my heel to leave, warning him over my shoulder to handle the situation professionally instead of letting his bad judgment cloud something else or he'd piss me off.

He gave chase though and reached the spot where I had used a hidden portal before I could activate it. "Yeah, we need that conversation."

I glanced at him and let him see how upset I was. "This was part of the problem. I don't answer to you. Either of you. Fucking ask for things or try to not just walk all over me." I turned away when tears burned in my eyes and activated the portal, hating that I would still give him what he wanted.

Mason was in the kitchen when I walked into the house and relief filled me as I headed towards him... Until horror filled me.

“I’m so sorry,” I rasped. “We were hiding you. I messed up.”

“It’s okay,” he whispered, hurrying over to me. “It’s okay, Jasmine. Whatever is...” He hugged me to him and kissed my hair. “Why are you bothering with him? You don’t owe him answers.”

“I can’t let this risk our fragile relationship with ISLE,” I worried, annoyed I was shaking. “We barely have one. We broke ISLE according to a lot of people who don’t want us to gather. Now they keep starting shit with us when they see us professionally. He blasted me about Dylan when I went to handle something as a councilwoman. He wants to hit me.”

“Jasmine, please, breathe,” he said loudly, making me realize it wasn’t the first time.

I blinked at him and we were kneeling on the kitchen floor, his hands holding my arms firmly like he’d been shaking me a bit. I nodded I was with him.

“Deep breaths in and out, okay? Slow and we’ll handle it. We’ll fix this if it means Elijah puts Dylan in the ocean.”

“I don’t want that,” I choked out. “I just don’t want to be with him. I can’t keep—I didn’t say I wanted revenge sex with his boss. Everything gets so twisted and it’s always my fault. I was upset he didn’t bother to make effort, just trying to catch me like it was simple and he hurt me. He really hurt me.”

“I know he did. I know. We all know how badly it hurt you,” he whispered.

“And then he said I was a liar in front of everyone. I didn’t lie. He didn’t want someone without morals like me. I got pissed. I said if he’s always working, was his boss too? I didn’t mean—I mean, yeah, I was—I was angry, and I don’t even know what I meant. I wanted him to hurt too. I didn’t say I was getting revenge sex to break up with him.”

“I know. We all know that, Jasmine. Dylan hears what he wants. He’s wrong here, not you.”

“I just wanted to go help that demon. We can now. We can help people now and make sure—do you know how relieved he was?” I rasped, tears falling freely. “There was someone finally that he could turn to. We’ve never had that. He had someone on his side. I wanted the win. Can’t I just ever have the win?”

“You get them. We’ve had a lot lately,” he reminded me. “We got another ten demons out yesterday, right? Some young ones that have a whole future in front of them now. Several were thrilled at the idea of cleaning the clubs during off hours and just having somewhere safe, learn how to use their powers.”

I nodded as he talked and listed the wins we’d had even over the past couple of days. It took a few minutes of him talking to settle me fully, but then I felt like I had a grasp again.

“You’re an asshole,” I told Phillip as I plopped on the chair at the kitchen table. “Seriously, what is it with you assholes just saying whatever...” I shook my head and rubbed

my forehead until it hurt. “I can’t have you sign an NDA. You can’t as the director of ISLE, but know if you share *this*, poke at it or—I don’t care that you’re the director of ISLE, I’ll gut you.”

“It could risk people she loves if you run your mouth about her having panic attacks or something being off with her,” Mason defended when he sensed whatever Phillip was feeling... But I didn’t. He nodded when I glanced at him. “I’m blocking him.”

“And if you tell anyone what you think you know about him, I will kill you. I promised him my protection. You’re here because you and Dylan can’t fucking behave, and I have to get personal to fix that. That’s not *my fault*. You shouldn’t have —”

“You’re right, okay?” Phillip snapped, adjusting his neck. “I was a jerk. I’m sorry. What the hell is going on? Seriously? I’m missing—this is not what Dylan—he blew up that you were running again because he messed up and threw our sex in his face and more.”

I couldn’t make my mouth work before looking at Mason. “You heard what we last said to each other. I know I’m emotionally stunted but is that—”

“He was falling in love and you weren’t, Jasmine,” Mason muttered. “I don’t know if he spun out but—Phillip would know if Dylan was lying to him. No, that’s not what happened. We both know that we can be in bad spots and see things other than they are.”

It annoyed me that somehow Dylan was the one in a bad spot after doing damage to me. I glanced at Phillip. “Your

word this stays between us?”

“Can I talk to Dylan about it?” he hedged. “He’s not in a good space.”

“No, he can’t keep his mouth shut either,” I snapped. “A lot of this stems from that!”

“He can’t give Dylan any new information,” Mason suggested. “Let him correct Dylan’s wrong ideas. Maybe that can settle this crazy and Dylan can just accept things are over.” He sighed when Phillip snorted.

And I got annoyed again. I pulled out my phone and unlocked it, pulling up our messages and tossing my phone to Phillip. “For someone saying he loves me or whatever, you might want to look at the lack of saying *anything* before you keep thinking I’m the problem here.”

He easily caught it and had about the same reaction as Aidan and the others.

“No, she didn’t delete anything off, so don’t even say it,” Mason muttered. “She blocked him after sending that text because it was what she needed.”

“I’m so lost,” Phillip sighed as he set my phone on the table and sat. “What is going on?” He growled when I didn’t answer. “Yes, I promise, okay? I’m not trying to hurt you. I was an asshole because one of my oldest friends and right hand is a mess when I need him to help me.”

I wasn’t sure really how to start, and then I just went with being blunt, gesturing to where Mason and I had been on the floor. “I had a breakdown. Two actually. Dylan doesn’t know.

He wasn't here for them. It wasn't over him, but the situation with him certainly didn't help."

"I wouldn't call it two, more like one, but it got paused because of your always diving into battle instead of handling your own health," Mason defended. "You were just starting to recover when it spun out again. It's all the same breakdown."

I gave him a soft smile. "Thanks for defending my honor that the score is really only one, not two."

"It's not a scoreboard but so you understand that it will keep happening if you don't take better care of yourself," he warned, his voice a bit hard... But not for me.

"What caused the breakup?" Phillip asked.

I shrugged. "Dylan got the full packet on me and didn't react well. He was an asshole and then didn't bother to apologize or handle it." I told him about him trying to catch me and then making things worse when he finally did after we caught the murder and what happened after.

"To be fair, that was the craziest situation ever," Phillip muttered. "Even I was asked if people were joking that the guy walked right in before you opened."

"We did too," I growled. "We admitted we weren't sure. I was careful with my words, and I didn't say the guy confessed. We admitted that it all seemed hinky, but we still called. *Immediately*, he just called me a liar, saying I was a liar, and his desires were he wished he'd picked someone with better morals.

"I'm not giving him more ammo that I had a mental breakdown but knowing that, do *you* think that's someone

healthy for me to be with?” I nodded when Phillip winced. “And I never lied to him. I’ve even said it to you that there’s more that I hide. I have to. I protect people. You don’t fucking tell me everything either. *So what?* There’s tons I don’t know about Dylan too!”

I exploded on Dylan’s friend since he wasn’t there and we never got the real breakup fight. I yelled at Phillip that Dylan pressured me into going out, saying it would protect me and the people who would get hurt. And I forgave him a lot and thought his feelings were real because he took a bullet for me and worried about me, but guys who abuse their partners love them too.

Plus, he never gave me what I asked for. I asked for time or space, and he’d *say* he’d give it, but he wouldn’t, making comments about me running when I asked for it again because he hadn’t given it to me the first fucking time. It wasn’t my fault that things were easy with the twins or Mason because they listened to me. I went to them because they didn’t push me.

I had so much on my shoulders and they weren’t selfish with me and I did my best with them. Dylan wanted everything the way he wanted it, when he wanted it, and to boast he got it. That wasn’t love to me. That wasn’t a love I wanted, and I was allowed to say that without being the bad guy.

“Feel better now?” Phillip asked when I was finally done.

“No,” I mumbled, hugging myself. “I feel stupid it took me so long to figure out how to say what I’ve been feeling.

I'm too old for Kiera to keep having to explain my own emotions to me."

"I don't know if what Dylan did was emotional abuse or just being really stupid and everything has been too chaotic," Mason said gently. "I agree it crossed some lines that were red flags and if everything was okay, would have been clear signs. I also wasn't there, and you've said you don't read the situations well always."

I nodded, that all seemed pretty fair.

"But you've been emotionally abused, muffin." He opened his mouth but then shut it, catching himself. Right, now we were telling people that I was the child of an angel and demon, so my real family was tricky. "You've had a lot of problematic situations. A lot of this was triggering for you and made you feel trapped. Whatever was going on, he clearly wasn't listening."

I felt better when Phillip snorted.

"I'm sorry I took the shots at you that I did. You *really* didn't deserve that even after hearing a fraction of that. I don't know what the fuck is going on with Dylan. I know he spun out about being the one to cut open ISLE, but it was needed. No one thinks he's a traitor."

"People do," I sighed, shrugging when he gave me a shocked look. "I've felt it around some of you guys. People are assholes. I've had people say it to me a lot too because I bust bad supes or strippers. You get the shit for arresting supes and shifters. It doesn't make you in the wrong, but it still hurts. Hell, Dylan was calling me a liar and I didn't fucking lie to him."

“You both had everything too volatile to start such a deep relationship when it was your first,” Phillip muttered.

“Yeah, exactly what I said. Repeatedly,” I reminded him.

He looked like he had a lot more to say, but I was glad he left after promising he’d handle everything with the demon who had been hurt by that shifter. So basically, to do his job and keep things professional.

Seriously, and women were the ones who brought drama to everything?

7

A few days later I was being shown around one of our clubs in my Rae cover that I never got to use for the last case. Luckily, it was a club that I actually hadn't spent time at since we tore down old clubs and rebuilt. So while it was the typical design and layout of a Heavenly Entertainment club, my curiosity of how this one was going was genuine.

And so far, I wasn't finding anything wrong, but it all felt... Off.

"The new girl asked a lot of questions," Matty told the manager, Lisa, thinking I was too far away to hear. "She might be a corporate plant."

"No, she's too young," Lisa answered. "There's no way this chick is coming from corporate when I've been overlooked again and again. They don't let you through the door unless you're over two hundred." She snorted. "Or apparently if your demon parent fucks an angel like Jasmine's. I can't get over that shit."

"It explains why people say she's so powerful. You've met her, right?"

“Yeah, and she is powerful for under a hundred. Rae is like forty at most. I checked into her and the story’s legit. It’s a shame for Stacy, but she should have updated her fucking papers,” Lisa grumbled. “The young ones ask a lot of questions if they’re smart so they don’t get caught in anything bad. It’s business as usual and let her do her thing for the few months she’s here or if she stays.”

That whole conversation felt off. If things were on the up and up, asking a lot of questions would be a *good* thing because I was focused and ready to do a good job. People didn’t like questions being asked when they had something to hide.

Well, unless they were introverts and socially awkward like I was, but when it was regarding business, it was a red flag.

A big one.

And I was not happy that there were any red flags at one of the clubs I was majority fucking owner of.

I’d met Lisa years and years ago. She’d been the manager of the Jackson, Mississippi club for... A couple decades now? It was one of our first clubs. Our first in the US if I remembered it right, and I normally did.

It *was* weird that she was a demon and hadn’t been promoted to corporate. Fine, some didn’t want to and wanted to keep managing clubs, but they got bumped to bigger clubs, not just saying in a place like Jackson.

Unless they wanted that. No shade if they did. Good for them and we wished them the best.

But demons were pretty well known for having a strong drive for wanting more. Shocking as that might seem, we tended to not be all that chill and just ride the status quo.

And one of the first things out of Lisa's mouth was her bitching she hadn't made it to corporate yet? Natalia was right that something was up with this club.

When I'd suggested that Natalia do a bit more in-depth with the managers of the clubs and even get any gossip she could to help our sweeping for rats, a demon who worked there, Stacy, actually approached her on the side. There wasn't actually a problem with Stacy's papers.

No, Stacy wanted to transfer clubs and didn't want Lisa to know that.

That was another red flag.

Stacy didn't really have a reason, just she didn't like Jackson and the vibe of the club was off. No one did anything to her or was ever mean, but she felt like they weren't her people. Fair enough, but if her gut was telling her not to let Lisa know, that was a failing of Lisa as a manager.

Or there was a problem at that club.

Natalia didn't think it was our training program or Lisa accidentally slipping as a manager after that many years of being one. So she pulled everything on the club and there weren't any glaring issues.

But there wasn't anything that stood out as great either. The club made money, but it was one of our lowest earners. Fine, Jackson, Mississippi wasn't exactly a high-income area. Natalia showed me numbers, and the average household

income was under forty grand, and a quarter of the city lived in poverty.

However, there hadn't been any growth in the past few years. That was odd.

Really odd. We had a good business model, and even when other areas were hit hard, we normally weren't. Even bars turned a good profit in areas that weren't in high-income areas.

The club also had a high turnover—for our clubs at least. Not enough to have flagged us or set off flares, but it was near the top. So it wasn't any one thing, but a combination that made it clear something was going on there, and given we were worried about rats or ways for bad people to find weaknesses to get at us... We needed to get the answers.

Which meant I was taking Stacy's place under the guise that she got a ticket and the police realized there was a problem with her ID and corporate got involved to help her. They pulled me from a different club that I hadn't been getting enough hours from, and I was going to cover while everything got squared away and the heat was off of Stacy.

If things were fine and there wasn't a problem with the club, Stacy would simply like the new area she was working in better, and we'd put a new dancer at this club permanently. If things weren't fine... Well, there was a range of what could and would happen.

I got ready and did my normal first dance of "Say My Name" by Destiny's Child for the joke that I was new. I did a few more and was shocked when two of the shifter dancers stole private dances right out from under me. Not that I

couldn't handle multiple guys and I would have passed them on—as were our guidelines—but one said I was still working on my moves as a new girl.

Not cool.

I went right to the manager. “I don't know if this is some sort of test to see if I follow the rules, but I do.” I told her what happened, and she gave me a look that she gave *zero* fucks, muttering that she would speak to her and make sure that it wouldn't happen again. That it was probably my misunderstanding, and the dancer didn't want me to be overwhelmed my first night at a new club.

Right.

Yeah, no. Bullshit.

The whole night was off like that. I still made good money though, and that proved my point that the numbers weren't adding up. I put my tips in the provided envelopes with my name and in the lockbox so they could all be totaled and split for the tip share.

And I witnessed someone skimming. Fine, it happened. Maybe she had something going on or maybe she was just a bitch, but she clearly knew where the cameras were and how to work it. I didn't know her name, but I would make sure to get it and have whoever was going to be working with me on this keep a watch on her.

But I wanted more eyes inside. There was more to it, and I couldn't put my finger on it.

They knew I was a demon, so there was no problem using the portal hidden in the manager's office that we kept from the

humans. I walked into the home base we were using in Atlanta and switched my glamour back to Jasmine. I wanted to talk to Kyle and get his insight, maybe figure out a way for him to get in with some of the demons that worked security.

I locked eyes with Mason and immediately knew why I'd felt so off.

And I'd missed it for hours. Damn it.

I grabbed my normal phone that was there protected so it didn't get me busted and texted Natalia that I wanted to see her at home base. I wasn't surprised when she came through the portal with Kiera seeming like they'd been waiting for me to be done. "They're using magic."

"What?" Natalia asked. "You felt it?"

"No, I didn't feel desires," I told her firmly, nodding when she couldn't hide her shock. "The whole night was off. Pieces aren't fitting there, and I get why you couldn't put your finger on it and something just seemed weird. It wasn't until I just saw Mason that it hit me. It's like when he's holding people off from me. I didn't feel the manager's desires nor other people."

"The customers?" she asked.

I frowned. "Muted. It was weird. I felt weird. There are a low number of demons that work there, right?"

She nodded. "It's mostly shifters and vamps. That's weird for us. Fine, it happens, but *why there* of all places?"

"Because they don't like this feeling," I surmised. "If they haven't been around a warlock or witch to understand what this is—and not many of us have—I would feel like I'm

having an off day. Hell, if I wasn't so busy looking for what was wrong and simply was dancing, I would have been worried something was wrong with *me* that I didn't sense desires."

"What else?"

"The manager's pissed we haven't rolled out the red carpet for her to come to corporate," I drawled.

Natalia snorted. "I've flatly turned her down when she said she wanted a promotion. A few years ago, she said it was time or she would walk. I told her politely to walk then because the club she manages is stagnant and that's not corporate material. I get it's not a huge area, but we don't really have stagnant clubs."

I nodded in agreement. "I saw a dancer skimming the tip share."

"Brazen," Kiera muttered.

"They put my age at forty," I told her. "Most wouldn't have the vision I do at forty." I tapped my arm where they both knew I had dampeners from Elijah to make it clear he locked away more of my power so I read weaker for this. "I want someone inside as a customer."

"That's not your norm," Kiera hedged.

"No, but I'm not worrying about a murderer," I chuckled. "And this is just a quick gig. We could pull them all in and question them all we want, but this is the easiest way to keep business going and not let gossip get out that we're having problems. Plus, I had a few private dances stolen as well."

“Did you report it?” Natalia checked. “Maybe they were testing you.” She sighed when I told her what happened. “Yeah, they have problems there all right. But something on her or in the club blocking it would absolutely have messed with anyone being able to tell.”

“Besides shifters, and if they’re in league with her...” Kiera shrugged as if that said it all.

And it really did. Plus, we didn’t just sit around and do nothing else.

The next day, I did some digging and found that there was a global energy company that had some other products that would be a good excuse for some new faces showing up at the club. I would need to dig a bit to see if it was plausible, but any city had people coming and going for business.

I actually asked Owen and Evan if they could spend some time there as the same person when I wasn’t working to get what they could of the employees and see what they wanted. To say they were shocked I wanted them to go watch other women undress was an understatement.

Like I cared. They weren’t going to touch or do anything bad. They had *ample* chances at their own damn club.

I also wanted to talk to Rocco, the Alpha of the ancient cheetah pack in Rome we were dealing well with. He was doing the same at the LA club, and so far it seemed like we’d gotten all of the problems handled there. If he went in a few times to act like a baller when I was working, the tip share should jump drastically.

If it didn't... Well, we knew it was a regular thing, and Lisa was turning a blind eye or getting a piece of the action, and that would be enough to arrest people and make big moves.

And luckily, we always had several backup managers ready to go for clubs who either covered vacations or emergencies like these. Normally, it was people waiting for a new club to open who would take a permanent spot, but we had a handful who liked never settling into one club and always something different. Taking a few weeks here or there, or then working with helping at corporate.

That would have been what I wanted too if that was the place I was in at in my life. How Kiera constantly handled the same thing day in and day out even at such a huge club like Berlin... I just didn't know. I'd be exhausted from how tedious it could be but also tired from the monotony.

A few of Kyle's guys were going to speak with the demons who had worked at the club previously and see what they could get out of them. All they had to do was make it clear they weren't in trouble or under suspicion and we wouldn't tell anyone what they said, and most people wanted the chance to clear their conscience.

Most truly did. The whole thing about people feeling guilty for snitching was bullshit. That came from bad people. Most *good* people didn't like sitting on bad information that could end up hurting someone.

That was probably the leading cause of ulcers.

I laughed when I went to feed from the angels and a few were a bit miffed that I didn't invite them to the "fun" of my

undercover work when they wouldn't get in the way.

“How are you?” David asked me when we were alone later. He gave me a look not to lie to him. “We've been worried.”

“I am too, and being able to say that finally is a big step for me. I hear everyone that this will only get worse unless I really take care of myself and what's going on with me. I am. Slowly. I'm not jumping into everything as heavy, but I won't be able to focus if I leave too much to everyone else that they can't handle either.”

“We would like to help,” he told me, nodding when I couldn't hide my shock. “We've never had children and we're not your biological uncles, but we would like to join in this fight. No, cause. It has always hurt my soul that demons were so mistreated and a lot of times by my own siblings. Other supes took advantage of that. You—we have a chance now to help.”

“I'm never too stupid or prideful to turn away good help,” I chuckled when he seemed ready for me to argue. “I just don't know how you can or what is the best way for you to help.”

“We can be of use in many ways,” he chuckled, kissing my forehead.

“Of course, you can, I just—”

“You're overwhelmed and stretched too thin. Yes, that is what we want to help with. I simply wanted to speak with you first since we were the first to meet and how we all became friends.” He cupped my face before giving me a slow, deep kiss. “I could never disrespect you by going around you as

others have. It hurts you too much after all you've been through."

I was too sensitive to it. That was what he was saying nicely. "Thank you, David." I kissed him and it got heated, feeding from him as well since I knew he could take it. I was confused when he suddenly pushed me away.

He cleared his throat and looked away. "Sorry, you make me lose my head, dear sweet Jasmine."

"Oh, I didn't mean—"

"Never apologize for making me feel as a man should," he said gently. "The design flaw wasn't *yours*. I'm... It's not even my fault. It's also—we were going numb. We were fading in a way and turned robotic. You and your friends have brought us back to life. It's simply surprising at times when I have such strong reactions or urges."

Fair enough and not my problem to solve. They all had made that clear and that they didn't want me to change the way I behaved. It was their cross to bear as they phrased it repeatedly.

I had my own.

I thanked him and agreed they could help all they wanted or had time for. Knowing the angels they had lots of time or would make it to protect me.

That made me feel special.

Really special, and I needed that.

8

Saturday morning, I walked into ISLE headquarters after checking that the director was in. I waited until then because I hoped it would be quieter and less likely I'd see people I didn't want to... And I didn't mean just Dylan though he was top of the list.

There were others that had been at the raid of the vampire coven in LA that didn't have the best opinion of me. Others who were talking trash about me since they were fans of Dylan.

I just didn't want to deal with any of it.

I honestly wanted to make Director Stevens come to me, but I was a prideful pain in the ass sometimes no matter how well I did compared to others. I wasn't going to let my personal life stop progress that supes needed.

But I was salty since I didn't think ISLE deserved the help I was about to give them either.

Regret swarmed me when the elevator stopped at the third floor and Dylan stood there looking as handsome as ever. Shock was all over his face, and for a moment I had hope he would be too surprised to move and I could get away.

Nope.

He stuck his hand to stop the closing doors at the last second and got on. He opened his mouth to say something but saw what button was pushed, and his desire to smash the elevator overwhelmed me.

“Don’t,” I whispered when he opened his mouth, steam about coming out of his ears. “It’s professional.” I glanced at him and couldn’t hide my disdain, studying him as if not able to see the person I’d once known even.

I’d made one shit comment when I’d been hurt and I’d apologized. And yet he truly thought I was here on a Saturday to fuck his boss?

Seriously? How had I been so wrong about him?

“Right, no, you’re *living* with Mason at your villa,” he bit out. “Why would you need Phil?” He snorted when I didn’t do anything but watch the floors go by. “Nothing to say to that?”

“I don’t answer to you nor need to explain myself to you, Deputy Director. Though I think it’s a shame that you aren’t learning from your mistakes that your mouth has gotten you in enough trouble. Especially since you don’t bother to clean up the messes you make and instead blame the other person for everything.” The instant the elevator doors opened, I walked off.

Phil was dropping something off on his assistant’s desk and froze when he saw us. He let out a heavy sigh as if realizing he wasn’t going to have an easy Saturday to get caught up on work now.

Yeah, I felt the same.

“I have matters we need to discuss, but going forward, I’m going to ask you come to me,” I told him. “I know it’s inconvenient, but given how hostile ISLE is for me, I just—”

“I get it,” he agreed. “What did you need, Dylan? Can it wait?”

“What do you need to share with him on a Saturday when you can be alone in his office?” Dylan demanded, ignoring his boss and still focused on me.

“We’re not fucking,” we both snapped, shocked the other said it.

So *clearly*, Dylan had said more to Phil. Wow.

I let out a slow breath and met Dylan’s pissed off gaze with my own. “I made *one* shit comment because you hurt me. I’ve apologized. Seriously, enough. You haven’t even apologized or—”

“How could I when you’ve *blocked me*?” he bit out.

“Why didn’t you before I did?” I snapped. “That was part of the reason I ended things. You just—we’re not doing this here. I’m not doing it at all. You’re just going to blame me for everything and yell at me. Break a fridge or—” I turned to Director Stevens. “Do you want to come get this information later?”

“No, he’s not going to your house to—”

“Get a fucking grip, Dylan,” Phil snarled. “I’m over this. Seriously, you’re being an asshole to her and me. You have the chance to talk to her after she *blocked you* and she’s shaking and upset. You aren’t getting that you are the problem. People don’t normally block each other after they end things.”

“She’s never had a relationship before,” Dylan snapped. “She doesn’t know how they go.”

“Wow, everything really is my fault,” I whispered, blinking at him in shock. “I’m not a fucking idiot. I know how breakups work even if this is my first one. I did it partially because I didn’t want to keep staring at my fucking phone crying and wondering why you didn’t care enough about me to call or even text!”

He flinched and made me realize that I was crying.

Fuck.

I went for the elevator, but he blocked it. “Move.” I growled when he didn’t. “Move or I will make you move.”

“I can’t. I can’t let you leave when you *finally* admitted that you cared about me that much.”

I met his gaze and didn’t hide how destroyed I was. “You are so fucking selfish.” I nodded when he flinched. “All you care about is what you want. How you want things to be. There were two people in our relationship, and you kept saying you wanted to be good for me and to me, but you *weren’t*. You weren’t *healthy* for me to be around. You were selfish. You wanted me to be easy. I don’t want to be with you!”

And then I moved him. I grabbed his arm and flung him across the reception area, not caring about the damage I was doing and more.

When I reached downstairs, I turned to hand off what I needed to give Phil to the security guard and then froze. This was ridiculously valuable and sensitive information, and I was

going to just give it to some super low-level guy who watched the front?

Was I really that messed up and fucked in the head now?

“Ma’am, are you okay?” the guy asked, worry in his tone.

“Sorry, bad day,” I whispered, shaking myself out of it and heading for the door. Right as I reached it, I turned to see Dylan rushing off the elevator.

Part of me expected him to order a lockdown or something so I was stuck in the revolving door, but he didn’t, just taking a step towards me. Phil had been on the elevator with him and grabbed him back, whispering something in his ear. I didn’t want to know. I pushed out of the door and headed across the street to the portal we had in their parking garage now that we used if we needed to.

Mason instantly knew something was off when I arrived home. Honestly, I was so upset and down on myself that I couldn’t seem to get my mouth to work.

He cupped my face and gave me the sweetest, softest kiss. “Can you give me your trust today? Please? Yes, I want to show you that I’ll never abuse it again, but this is for you. *Please*, just shut off your brain and let me help you today?” He smiled when I nodded. “Change for causal and pick whatever glamour won’t get us noticed. I’ll use the charm as well.”

Okay, that sounded odd, but I just assumed we were going out in public. I didn’t really want to, but I got too lost in my head when I stayed at home.

No, I really, *really* wanted to go out in public when I saw where he was taking me.

“This is one of my favorite places to come reset myself when I was having a hard time,” he told me.

I nodded, totally understanding it. It wasn't just that it was a popular dog park with so much fun and life, but there was a shelter hosting an event trying to get people to adopt. There were gobs of *puppies* there with bandanas and all kinds of cuteness like they needed anything more than just to be their perfect selves to have everyone want to cuddle and keep them.

I went directly for the one who gave me the biggest puppy dog eyes but seemed shy. I knelt down by the pen and simply let my hand be near him. “Yeah, it's scary. There's so much going on and it's so loud. There's too many people, and I bet it's so overwhelming for your little ears and senses, isn't it?”

I felt like the little baby understood me, slowly coming closer and sniffing my hand before nuzzling my fingers.

“You have a magical touch,” one of the workers told me quietly. “He hasn't trusted anyone like that yet and certainly not so fast.”

“We recognize our own,” I said sadly as I picked up the cute little bugger. “But you'll find someone who will adopt you and give you all the love you need.”

“I think he just did,” she chuckled.

“I wish. I work way too much, and I'm gone far too often and—it wouldn't be fair to him.”

“Right, but I could,” Mason hedged. “I'm going to have a stable place now.”

“No, not for me,” I chastised. “Don't do that to yourself.”

He gave me an amused look. “I know I’m desperate to get you to love me, but even I wouldn’t use a puppy like that. I was looking up this event because I was kinda thinking it might be nice to have a buddy. Someone to keep their ears alert and—we have a ton of friends who would love puppy snuggles when they visit.”

“If that’s what you want, I would love it, but I don’t think it’s a spur of the moment decision to make,” I muttered after a moment, worried he was going to get upset.

“Nope, I totally agree. The cuteness got me,” he chuckled easily.

“Plus, I’m not sure this little guy is up for the hustle and crazy we have. *We* are introverts, but we’re needed too often.” I rubbed my nose against the puppy’s. “Right, baby? You want a quiet cottage with someone retired who has nothing but time and love to give you. All the snuggles and toys.” I went to hand him off to the worker, but he cried for me and I held onto him.

“I know that look,” she chuckled, shaking her head.

“You know this shelter?” I asked Mason.

“No, but I’ve seen them host events here before when I lived here,” he said cautiously.

“Call Kyle. He’s tapped into shelters and who’s on the good list.”

He frowned. “What are you thinking?” He sighed at whatever he got off of me.

I shrugged. “Kiera learned not to let me near shelters a long time ago. Kyle can donate and keep his distance. I funded

the shelter she took me to for like five years because they needed help.” I gave the puppy more kisses. “Yes, you can have my money, baby boy. I cannot say no to your cuteness. Don’t tell anyone I’m a huge softie, okay?”

“I didn’t bring you here to donate,” Mason worried.

I shrugged again. “I think I’m supposed to do it more for tax... Things. I don’t know. Lewis is the adult in my life with all of that stuff. Whatever, I have the money.” I held up the puppy to Mason when he went to say something again. “They save babies who would be killed at other shelters. Seriously, I can’t think of anything better to help fund. I already give enough to ocean cleanup when I recycle.”

He caved and called Kyle, the worker looking at me like she didn’t know if I was kidding, crazy, or serious.

When the puppy yawned, I actually cradled him like a baby in my arms and rocked him as I started softly singing.

Kyle showed up and shot me a look before talking to one of the coordinators. He seemed happy with whatever they were telling him. He was way more into this scene than I was. I noticed a few of the guys on his teams had come with and were playing with some of the adult dogs available to be adopted.

He came over by me and snorted when he saw I was still rocking the puppy. “It might actually be a good idea to foster dogs. At certain places you own.”

Where we were putting the rescued demons. Therapy animals were a tried and tested way to help people.

“I’m not against it, but we’d need one person to be like the house parent to really handle everything,” I said quietly under my breath. “The people coming in aren’t going to always be in a good place, Kyle. One accident or mistake and it would make things so much worse.”

And none of us would forgive ourselves if we’d let a poor dog die because we rescued a demon who lost control and was too strong. Hell, humans had accidents and tripped over dogs and hurt them. We did something like that and we could kill a dog in a flash.

“Good point, but I do like the idea of each house having a set parent. Not fostering dogs, but adult dogs who live there. If both sides are coming and going, that’s a bit too much, but dogs could sniff out problems too,” Kyle mumbled.

“I’m not against it, but I’m not in charge of this, and you shouldn’t be either because you’re just as big of a softie.”

At least he didn’t deny it.

“And what is this handsome boy’s name, love?” Owen asked as he moved up next to me. He chuckled when I simply blinked at him. “Mason told me he might have started some trouble and asked my thoughts.”

“I didn’t even ask,” I admitted, glancing over at the worker who was still watching me to make sure I didn’t abscond with the puppy.

“Mudbug,” she answered.

“That’s pretty adorable,” Owen cooed. “He’s a good soul.” He booped the puppy’s nose. “And look at those paws! He’s going to be a big boy.”

“Yeah, I hope he finds a good home,” I muttered, my heart aching at the idea of never seeing him again.

“I think he has,” Owen said quietly.

“I can’t.” I shook my head when he chuckled. “Wasn’t it you who just said not to pile things on? I’m barely holding it together, Owen. Taking on the responsibility of a living being, one who is a rescue and needs the attention of a puppy is—”

“Oh my god, I need to adopt this puppy right now,” Evan said as he jogged over to me. He scooped him out of my arms and gasped as the puppy woke up. “Well, hello there, handsome!” He glanced over at Owen. “You felt it, right? The vibe of this little guy?”

“Yeah, I think he’s the guy we’ve been looking for,” Owen said, before looking at me. “We were talking about getting a pup. We weren’t thinking *puppy*, but now we have more people who are around that could help.” He looked over to Mason. “You mind watching him if we’re both at the club at night, mate?”

“No, I’d love it,” Mason agreed. “Or if you guys are doing inventory—whatever. I think it would be great. The place I’m staying at has a nice yard and it’s not like it would be a hassle to drop him off.”

No, especially not since I was staying with him. Maybe we could figure something else out for regular portal usage instead of leaving my dried blood on the wall and whatnot. Then again, it was pretty easy for them to text someone at home base for help and to get to where they needed. That was probably how they were there now.

“You were really thinking of adopting?” I checked.

Evan came over and kissed my cheek. “I’d adopt this ball of love just to get you to visit more and have such a happy smile like when you were holding him. Don’t worry about us. We’re adults.”

And that was how they adopted Mudbug, even loving his goofy ass name.

I was a bit concerned when they needed to fill out an application and they didn’t adopt to people who weren’t local and a list of issues... But they weren’t issues for long.

And *then* I was concerned how easily supes could get around those very valid and reasonable restrictions.

Sure, it was Evan and Owen, and of course they would never do anything bad to the dog, but that didn’t mean others wouldn’t and they used their charms to get around that. They reminded me humans had the same charms of being attractive or having money. Them being elves didn’t always play into the mix of them getting what they wanted.

Fair enough, and the place did seem overwhelmed since they had way more puppies than normal. A mutt mill had been shut down in the South somewhere, and they’d agreed to help out not knowing ten litters of young puppies were basically going to arrive before the event.

Yikes.

But they were a reputable shelter, and everyone was happy with how much they truly cared.

They handled everything with the adoption and then I gave a large donation. The woman checked twice that I meant

to give that much and I didn't type it in wrong. She couldn't seem to wrap her mind around someone donating five figures at one of their events like that via Venmo.

It all attached to my bank account, so it wasn't like I kept money in there.

I went to hand Mudbug over to Evan, but he started crying again.

"Can we help you get stuff for him?" Mason asked Evan and Owen. He cleared his throat when I glanced at him. "I've never had a pet. I wasn't allowed them and then I wasn't anywhere stable. Or I was ready to move in a flash."

"Us too until the past decade, and then everything has been going into the club," Owen agreed, Evan nodding as well. "Sure, we've never done this either. It might not be as scary then."

More people figuring it out sounded smart. Evan took the bag of puppy food and all of the information needed but frowned at the type of food. I gave him a glance when we were near the portal.

"I think it's the cheap stuff," he muttered. "I get it since shelters are always low on funds, but that was where my head was."

"I think you're supposed to do raw food now?" Mason hedged.

I snorted. "I can't even cook for myself. That's like vegan for dogs. If you can, great, but most people rent and can barely handle their own food in the fridges and freezers they get. If

you have a house with extra, that's lovely and good on you, but don't be prissy about it."

"I think a mix could be nice," Owen cut in. "Someone at the club does a kibble food, but all of their treats are fruits and veggies. Their vet said it's the best reasonable balance and good for their dog."

"Oh, I like that," I said firmly. "Smart, reasonable, and easy to add to." I winced as I remembered Mudbug wasn't actually *my* dog. "Right, but whatever you think is best. He's your dog and—"

"We can all be his family," Evan said easily. "We'll have to get some stuff for your place as well if he's going to be staying there." He blinked at me and then chuckled. "You are too adorable, love."

He sensed my excitement. I was ridiculously excited at the idea of shopping for a puppy bed and toys for Mudbug.

So much for not getting attached and the woman from the shelter being wrong.

We went back to their condo and took their SUV to PetSmart. Mudbug woke up when he heard others barking when we went inside. He whimpered and snuggled closer to me.

"I got you, baby boy," I promised... And went right for the toys. I held up just about every damn toy that was labeled for puppies, and once Mudbug sniffed and gave his approval, I tossed them in the cart Mason was following me with.

"This is bad," Mason sighed. "You're too fucking sexy to be this adorable on top of everything else, muffin. Seriously,

I'm just falling deeper at seeing you have this softie side."

I covered Mudbug's ears and gave him the harshest look I could manage. "He's too young to hear your flirting. Please behave."

Mason simply raised an eyebrow and moved around the cart before leaning in and giving me a soft kiss. "He knows what that is since you've been giving him tons. He's fine."

Mudbug answered by licking Mason's face as well.

Oh dear. Well, apparently, we all had a new boss and he was a retriever/shepherd mix. The shelter wasn't really sure.

Which reminded me that we needed to order a DNA test.

9

“You okay?” Owen asked me later as we were sitting in his living room and Mudbug was curled up sleeping on my lap while Evan and Mason set up everything for him.

“This is really nice,” I answered, giving him a smile.

“I mean from earlier,” he clarified, nodding when I winced. “Dylan texted me demanding to know where you were because you left ISLE crying.”

“I really don’t get what’s going on in his head,” I grumbled. “Why he seems to fucking care now is beyond me? Or he’s just saying that, but he’ll go back to ignoring me until I say what he wants?”

“Can I be brutally honest?”

“Always.”

“He fucked up. Full stop. Besides the shit comment you made and a few things I’ve seen that gave him confused signals, I didn’t see anything that was on you.”

“But?” I pushed.

“No but. In addition, I think it’s a case of right people, wrong time. I don’t think Dylan understands what he’s doing

because he's drowning too. ISLE was his whole *life*, Jasmine. And it went up in flames right before his eyes. Even before you, he was worried about it. He took the case where he met you because there were red flags and problems. He told you that."

I nodded, he had. I thought about what Owen said for a while. "You're saying that if I'd met Dylan a year ago when his life wasn't a hurricane and mine was more stable even with all of the secrets to come later, things wouldn't have been so toxic?"

"Yes."

I was shocked at how sure he was. "I don't see it. I just see the hurt and blame. Maybe I can later."

"That's fair, and he was an asshole how he handled things, but I think he knew he was and waited for things to cool off before he tried again. That's not the way to handle it, and your life won't ever be 'cooled off' given what you are and a councilwoman now, but his bear was cautious to not blow it up more. I think in that regard, he was trying to do what was best for you."

I nodded. I could have seen it. I did see it that way originally, but it just kept getting worse. We kept sliding into a deeper hole that was getting worse. I also didn't want to keep talking about it. My life was more than Dylan, and we honestly weren't together that long.

I let out a heavy breath. "I've got a ton more work to do. I was just going to drop off some valuable intel to Director Stevens to be nice and help ISLE. But honestly, what I found

was disturbing, and I need to get back to it. I'm more than a VP or councilwoman."

"You're in charge of the German government," he muttered, swallowing loudly when I nodded. "That's such a hard fucking pill to swallow, love. I mean, I get it, but I don't *get it*."

I shrugged. "Most would be pissed at us for rigging a democracy, but honestly we can't ever be a dictatorship the way we structured it all. And we can't fall into the bullshit traps of everyone buying off senators and representatives here. We truly only care about the people of Germany. We can't push everything we want through because the people don't want it. It could get us caught."

And that kept us honest and from getting too big of a head. I'd seen it many times with Ally and Arthur when they wanted to overstep and be the boss of the country. It came with being ancient and having seen civilizations rise and fall.

But if they couldn't convince the people of the country that it was truly the right move... What was the point of doing it? That was why people revolted against governments as well.

So yeah, it was all a crazy conspiracy, but it kept us honest too.

I stood and handed Mudbug over to him, but he whimpered in his sleep. I hugged him to me and gave him a kiss on the head as my phone vibrated in my pocket. "I have to go, baby boy." It went off again and I sighed, checking to see who it was, answering immediately when I saw it was Elijah and horror filled me. "Puppies can go through portals, right?"

“Yes, any living being is fine as long as it’s not like newborn, just popped out,” he promised. “I need you at home base. Stevens is here and wants the information, and you told me I need to see it. Bring the puppy. Kyle says it will make me smile. I doubt it, and I enjoy proving Kyle wrong.”

I sighed when he hung up, always such a pain in the ass. I glanced at Owen who nodded, seeming amused. Mudbug woke up and wanted... I wasn’t really sure. My attention? Anything I would give him including food and toys?

I grabbed a toy just in case as I held him and headed for the portal. Owen told them we’d be back and where we were going. I activated the portal and started singing to Mudbug as we went through so he didn’t get fussy.

He sniffed the air and whimpered, trying to get closer to me, and instantly I was on alert, glancing around at what could be upsetting him.

Right, Director Stevens was a predator shifter. I found him and flinched when I saw Dylan was standing there with him.

“He opens his mouth for more than work questions and I’m allowed to squash him,” Elijah informed me. “He needs to hear whatever had you spooked. Nothing more.”

Yeah, right. I gave him the look he deserved. He promised to shield me from Dylan, not bring me into things when he didn’t warn me Dylan was there. I was about to remind him of that except I did a double take when I saw the signs of sleep deprivation.

And he was down on the tank, a mistake Elijah never made.

“I feel like I should pick a fight with him so you’d have an easy way to feed,” I hedged, rubbing the puppy’s back so he settled.

Elijah didn’t deflect, nodding that he knew I was chastising him. “There is a particularly rough fight about to start soon that I plan to feed on and then sleep hard. If we can handle this, so I’m asking you to be gentle with me right now.”

“Okay, but you have to hold the puppy because it will amuse me,” I teased. I chuckled when Elijah gave me a look that it wasn’t happening. I went to push but then winced. “Wow, my head was full of puppy, and I forgot I don’t have the stuff with me.” I passed him off to Owen. “Two seconds.” I went for the portal and activated it.

“Stay,” Phillip growled.

It took me a moment to realize he was talking to Dylan.

Wow. Things had really taken a turn there.

I grabbed what I needed and then at the last second found a dirty sweater dress that was in the hamper. I figured that might be good for Mudbug to have so he didn’t forget me.

When I came back through the portal, I heard a soft yowl cry and was instantly by Mudbug.

“You are so fucking adorable,” Owen chuckled.

“He knows it,” I cooed as I picked up the puppy.

“He meant *you*,” Elijah drawled.

Oh.

I shrugged it off and handed Owen the sweater dress. “It’s dirty, but I thought—puppies are supposed to have scents of

the people they love, right?”

“Yeah, especially since clearly you’re his *favorite*,” Owen drawled, nodding to how the puppy couldn’t get enough of me.

I stuck my tongue out at him. “He has good taste.” I danced over to Elijah and handed him the disk drive. “When I finished kicking out the spies on the vampire council and getting all of the information back—which took a lot longer than they assumed it would, so please remind them that they’re stupid—I decided to be smart.”

“You checked what they had on us,” Stevens surmised. “And clearly found something.”

“Bingo,” I sang, tapping Mudbug’s nose. “They have information. Too much. They have drawings of headquarters and sketches of high-ranking agents.”

“There was a spy before the cleanup.” He wasn’t the only one who went tense when I clucked my tongue. “Now?”

“I don’t know. I think it’s stupid to assume it was before. You were looking for traitors and selfish people. Would someone loyal to the French government register as a traitor? Or selfish? No, they would think they were loyal and brave.” I nodded to the disk drive as I kept dancing. “The name and all the information of the operative is on there.”

“You think we should keep them in play,” Dylan said.

“Yes, it’s my lying, deceptive nature without morals after all,” I purred.

“Don’t poke the bear,” Elijah grumbled, snorting at his own pun.

Oh boy. He really needed sleep if he was making dad joke-type puns and slipped in what he said. I wasn't the only demon there who gave him a look like we couldn't believe he'd done that.

"I was thinking we might be able to have some operatives shadow since they might know too many ISLE agents," I told Elijah, nodding when he did a double take. Yeah, not demons... Germany.

"Smart. Yeah, I'll think on it and see what the others think." He scrubbed his hand over his face. "Did you get the information back?"

"Okay, I'm not going to crack you for asking when you're this tired, but now you have to hold the puppy. I want that as your apology." I held out Mudbug to him, making it clear that I wasn't kidding.

I mentally pumped my fist when Elijah sighed and caved.

"You are a handsome little gent," Elijah praised Mudbug. "Give your mom a lot of love and help her settle her heart, okay?" He brought the pup up to his face and gave a firm nod. "Good man. I'll bring toys. Do your job well."

"Yeah, that's how it goes with dogs," Kyle drawled.

"It worked with you when you were a pup," Elijah threw right back.

Oh dayumn.

He handed the puppy over to Owen and gave me a look. "Melissa needs to speak with you. She's specifically who Lewis was saying to transfer over to Chun's new division, but she won't even consider it without talking with you."

“I love a loyal one,” I chuckled. “Yeah, she deserves the promotion and whatever. I’ll bloody Chun if he’s not good to my people.”

“He will be, but the rush is he needs her now.” He sighed when I simply raised an eyebrow. “We’re up to four thousand properties.”

I ignored when Dylan coughed, knowing what that meant for more than corporate. “*How?*”

“How did we let so many slip through the cracks? You know how. We’re all too overloaded,” he grumbled.

“Actually, I meant how did we get that many,” I replied with the same tone. “Are we really sure that—”

“Yes. A big problem was that the legal department didn’t know the full list of assets for the ‘as is’ sales until after someone was already in prison or the audits were done. Then they were put on a spreadsheet and information was stacked somewhere—we know how they slipped through.”

He flicked my forehead when I opened my mouth to ask more questions, amused when I rubbed it even though it didn’t hurt. “Ouch.”

“And the ‘how’ is that you’re *excellent* at your damn job. Every club we opened wasn’t only one club taken over. There were some clubs you went in and shut down and we didn’t open one.”

Yeah, that was true, and I nodded.

“That last case in Canada turned out ten places, right?” Kyle added.

“Really?” I asked, not able to hide my shock.

“Yup, that one owner had two apartment buildings he was landlord of that are shitholes, but that’s land. His house and two vacation homes. The other owners you took over had more than one too.”

“That’s surprising,” I admitted.

“Yeah, but I’m used to people shocking me,” Kyle chuckled. “How many places do you own?”

I opened my mouth but then slowly closed it before ticking off fingers as I thought of them. I went through both hands before I was back on the left hand again and got stuck. “I don’t know. Lewis is the adult of my life. I’ve gotten a fair few from side shit I handled quick without a safety net that was too tricky. A few I think he sold though.”

“That condo in New York overlooking Central Park,” he told me... Which was hysterical that he told me when it was my stuff. “That place went for fifty-five million.”

Director Stevens whistled and Owen made a noise behind me.

And I was about to make it worse. “I have no idea, Kyle. I don’t have the time to get into it.”

“I think I’d make the time to get into something worth fifty-five million dollars, love,” Owen said quietly.

I gave him an amused look. “Oh, should I have done that instead of finding out France was spying on ISLE? Or handle those ancient demons who tried to take over the club? Or handled everything with the vampire council so we could get

the help getting... How many demons have we gotten out of covens now?"

"Two hundred and thirty," Elijah said, looking as tired as I felt.

I nodded and focused back on Owen. "So what part would you like me to give up to focus on that condo I—I honestly don't remember how I got that one even. While you're telling me to rest more and want me to take a night to watch TV and now play with a puppy so I don't have another—" I blinked at him when he moved his hand over my mouth but then flinched, remembering who was in the room.

Right, Dylan was there.

"Another what?" Dylan asked darkly.

"You were to be mute or I squashed you," Elijah warned.

I stared in Owen's worried eyes and thought *fuck it*. I moved his hand off my mouth. "It was my mistake and he's not acting rationally. I don't want him in your club harassing you both or risking your delicate cover because of me."

"He wouldn't do that," Owen said quietly, both of us knowing we couldn't trust Dylan like that anymore.

Or maybe we never should have.

"I had a breakdown."

"I know."

I swallowed loudly and petted Mudbug, focusing on the puppy as my heart beat in my ears. "You knew."

"Yeah, I heard about the thing with the vampires as Sloan and you had a meltdown."

“And you didn’t contact me?” I asked, trying to make my brain put the pieces together.

“You were fighting ancient demons for fun on Christmas and ignoring me when I tried to talk to you, so—whatever, we all have meltdowns,” he answered. “It couldn’t have been a big deal then.”

“Jesus, you win for most selfish asshole,” Stevens muttered.

Yeah, and if his friend was the one who said it of all people, I felt a bit better.

I met Dylan’s gaze. “Elijah and Mason had to break into my condo and found me unresponsive. It wasn’t *whatever*, and if you stopped thinking about everything in terms of being about *you*, maybe you’d get that. You didn’t try to talk to me. You just stared at me. You waited for me to forgive you like I have before because it’s difficult for me to have people upset around me.

“I get overwhelmed with people’s desires to be forgiven or to not be upset anymore, and I do it because it stresses me out then too. But I didn’t this time because you went too far and kept being an asshole. So your answer is just to show up again on New Year’s Eve? Just watch me like a creeper until you wear me down? How does—”

“I’m not a creeper and I don’t—”

“Is that really all you heard from what she just said?” Owen asked as he moved in between us. “You need to take a good look in the mirror, mate. Everyone here is upset with *you*

on how you're even handling this conversation. For fuck's sake. You didn't even ask if she's okay now."

"Clearly, she is," he snapped. "She's playing around adopting puppies with you and being—"

"I can't keep doing this," I whispered, giving Elijah a look. "I can't. Go sleep and let me know what's decided. I'll talk to Melissa." I closed my mouth and then shook my head, pulling Owen with me to the portal.

"No, I'll stay and—" Owen tried to argue.

"Don't talk to him about me," I interrupted. "I ended things. It's done. I said more than I wanted to and just—every time I see or talk to him, I feel worse. Don't give him more ammo. Please."

"Okay, I won't," he whispered. "Let's go."

I activated the portal and went through... But Owen didn't come for another minute. He shook his head that it wasn't worth it when he did, and I could only guess. I didn't have it in me to ask.

And I really didn't care what Dylan had done now. I just wanted less Dylan in my life. Honestly, it had been better when he'd been ignoring me.

Sort of.

I messaged Melissa and made sure Mudbug was settled before I headed out. Owen stopped me at the portal and gave me a soft kiss.

"What was that for?" I asked, liking the way he was running his fingers over my neck as if checking... I wasn't

sure. He was hard for me to read like all elves.

His eyes said I was too good to be true.

“How about dinner when you’re done? Just us and something quiet. We can walk Mudbug for the night and then...”

“Adult time?” I chuckled.

“I was thinking more I have a book I really want to read if you can do some of your computer work on the couch? Is there anything you can review on a tablet or something like that?”

I bounced that around. “Not normally. Maybe we could figure out something.” I shrugged when he raised an eyebrow. “Kyle and the guys set up stuff by an overstuffed recliner. Maybe I could have a few screens at the end of a loveseat and or something. I don’t know.”

“I’ll talk to Mason. It’s a good compromise. Otherwise, maybe I could just read in a desk chair next to you.”

“Or the sofa by me,” I hedged, not really getting what was going on.

“Maybe.”

I left, but my mind was still on the conversation. Was it the physical contact he wanted?

The text I received confused me, but I did as Melissa said since I trusted her. She was a sloth demon who had worked for me for... A while. She was under Lewis and handled a lot of logistics, including most of my personal life tedious bullshit. The best part of that?

She got to feed off of it.

Yeah, really. She was a delicious woman who fed off the laziness of bureaucracies. While the rest of us avoided the DMV and places like that, she loved to go there and have a free buffet. They were places full of too many people who didn't give a single fuck about their jobs or performance anymore and simply cashed their paychecks.

So... Sloths.

She'd go get a full feed and then use her power to make people hop to whatever she needed. She was the epitome of efficiency, and she was honestly one of my favorite people solely for that reason.

She was also loyal and a sweetie so yeah, it was easy to be won over by her.

"What am I missing, darling?" I asked as I came through the portal.

She chuckled, glancing up from the piles of everything surrounding her on the folding tables. "This is currently the headquarters of Heavenly Properties. We're all in agreement that if we're going to expand, we need to do it right and get another headquarters built. That takes time. For now, this is what we have and it's well protected and we can spread out."

"This isn't good for your back," I worried, taking in her setup. "Are the old farts making you do everything paper again? We need to be digital and—"

"I actually prefer it for this sort of thing because it's always one agency or another that needs a certain page of something, and then I can have them all grouped as I want,"

she interjected. “Not all of our brains function in 1s and 0s, Jasmine. Some of us like labeled files and color coding. A quick file name in a short folder can be limiting when there’s a lot of nuance.”

I held up my hands in surrender. “You do you, boo. Just tell me what you need and how I can help.”

“That makes you the perfect boss,” she purred before grabbing a chair and pulling it closer to me. “Are you really okay with this? I know Lewis was pushing for us to be promoted, but taking all of us at once seems—”

“I think it will be fine because you’re not just dropping us and bailing. You’ll be around to answer questions and look over newbie shoulders.” I gave her a look not to even say otherwise. We both knew she would. “And I am sorry that your career has been more stagnant than you would have liked.”

She snorted. “That was a few of the guys, and Lewis being sensitive to how volatile everything can get around him. I’m fine. Everyone was fine. There were a lot of changes, and people are inherently greedy, seeing the opportunity for more. If you pulled in people for positions instead of promoted from within after being loyal for so long, yeah, I would have been peeved.”

“Validly.” I was glad when it was clear she was settled with it.

She picked up her phone from the table and frowned. “Elijah is texting me asking how many properties you personally own. He wants to win a bet. Do I want to know? Do you want me to answer?”

“Is it over twenty? I think if you tell him that it will be enough to win and show the people he was talking with that I’m overwhelmed and unable to be the adult in my life.”

She snorted. “It is over twenty, and you’re not able to be the adult in your life because you’re the superhero in everyone else’s fucking life. People need to stop being petty with you and just help you.” She smiled when I sat down in the chair that she offered. “And on that note, I don’t want to give up taking care of your personal properties.”

“You’re busy enough to—”

“Jasmine, you saved my life from a fucking hell that I was completely sure I would die in,” she rasped, focusing hard on what was in front of her. “Let me do this so you can keep your focus where it needs to be and save more. I can’t do that. I’m not built for that. I’m built for this. So please, let me do my part because I value what you do. And you go be the superhero.”

“Thanks, Issa.” I leaned in and kissed her forehead. “Call him and put it on speaker. Tell Elijah whatever.”

She looked at me as if I was playing with fire but did as I said. “She has over twenty. Does that win whatever bet is going on?”

“No, that’s not it. How many? Let her see the list and tell me how many she has even been to,” he instructed.

“Weren’t you going to sleep because you were in such a bad spot?” I drawled.

“She has sixty-two and—”

“I do?” I asked, blinking at her. “Really? Since when?”

“A while,” she chuckled. “You haven’t picked up any new ones lately as you’ve been too busy with work and ISLE and saving the world. Our world especially.”

Fair enough.

“And no, she hasn’t been to most of them. Maybe a quarter of them.” She grabbed her laptop and pulled open the right file before handing it to me.

“Do we have pictures of these places?” I asked as I scrolled through the list. “Is this place in Thailand any good? I’d love to have a nice quiet—”

“Jasmine, can you focus please?” Elijah sighed.

“Sure, I can be a monkey to dance for you,” I drawled. “I only know a few of these. So what? I barely get to be at the condo I love. Why are you asking?”

“And who is he asking around? What is this bet even for?”

Right, I hadn’t even thought to ask that since I always trusted Elijah, but... “This conversation is over. Enough with sharing information about me. I would think as my attorney, you were tighter-lipped than you have been lately. Clearly, we need another discussion in the sparring room. I’ll get it set up after you rest. You’re going to need it.”

I reached over and hung up the call.

“You okay?” Melissa asked gently.

“No.”

And I was tired of that being the answer.

10

“Before you rush off to whatever is next, I did a bit of hunting in my free time,” she told me, rooting in her bag and handing me some files. “I know you’re busy, but I don’t like the plan for all the rescued demons. We’re spreading everyone out and that’s easy to pick us off. I think we need a better plan.”

“I’m all ears,” I told her honestly, accepting the files.

“I’ll help in any way I can. I was honest with Chun that I’ll be his help however he needs, but my soul is on this mission with you.”

I leaned in and kissed her hair. “I’ll review it tonight. Owen wants me to relax a bit, so I’ll have the time to sit on the couch.”

“What’s in there won’t make you relax but hurt your heart,” she warned.

That was normally how things went. Still, I thanked her and left.

I arrived back at the villa and found Owen, Evan, and Mason all sitting at the table, clearly waiting for me. “I feel

like the mom who's coming home to find out the kids broke something and it's not a vibe I like."

Evan cracked up laughing which made me feel better. "Nothing like that, love. We're kinda still catching up on how cool you are."

I was confused at that, so I was glad when Mason elaborated.

"I called Kiera to find out what else you liked so we could have something nice for dinner," he told me. "She told me not to be stupid and waste time cooking unless I wanted to and simply order from any club and they'd bring it to us. Or to home base and I could get it there so not every club knew this location."

"It's a bit overwhelming," Owen added.

"Well, I'm glad you didn't want to be with me for the perks but yeah, there are a lot. My teams get them more than like the legal department that's nine-to-five. But overall, anyone who works directly for corporate and not just the company get those kinds of perks as long as no one abuses it. The VPs are sort of expected to abuse it so we're focused on where we should be instead of grocery shopping."

"Though apparently there's someone for that according to Lewis," Mason muttered, staring at his phone. "He's kind of treating me like a house husband?"

"Ignore him, and that's not a reflection on you. That's his dream of being a kept boy toy by a rich woman who gives him everything," I explained as I sat down with them. I cleared my throat and decided to explain more so I didn't sound as spoiled

as I was coming across. “Some of it was set up to hide how much I eat. I don’t eat what normal demons do, even ancient ones.”

Understanding lit up Owen’s eyes. “They assume you order one huge spread from a club because you finally have the time to eat while on assignment or have so much going on.”

“That’s normally true, but they don’t know about all the takeout and fast food too. Or if I’m not on assignment and doing all this behind the scenes—the kitchens of the clubs don’t talk to each other. They won’t know if I eat like that three times a day. Yes, it costs us more to have that setup, but treating our people good keeps them loyal. Mostly. There are always some assholes.”

Mason hurried onto the topic they had wanted to focus on when he saw I was getting uncomfortable. “So what are you in the mood for? Are there certain clubs that have the best of what you like?”

“You’re not my house husband,” I hedged, worried he would feel like that.

He reached over and rubbed my shoulder. “I actually like taking care of you. I just didn’t understand Lewis’s tone. I do now and it’s fine. It would be *nice* to get something stable and regular set up. You do need more help and someone to manage more. Let me. I get spoiled with it too.”

I nodded and then spilled the beans. All of them. I told them which made the best breakfast just for me when the kitchen was getting slow before they cleaned up for the night.

I was all over the world on assignments, so a lot of times I was waking up when other clubs were shutting down.

I told them which buffets were the best and my favorite meals to get. I actually sent Mason everything I had bookmarked on my Jasmine phone including the calendars for specials and such. It made me realize something as I pulled up the Jackson, MS club that I was investigating.

They had nothing. There were none of the special nights and extras... Which we didn't allow. How had that fallen through the cracks?

I texted Rita and she admitted it was her oversight. She listened to a manager who had a lot of years with us that it didn't play well in that area instead of calling it a red flag. She was talking with her people and now was going to have a director specifically for special events at clubs and to get more eyes in there so nothing like this happened again.

Fair enough. We did have a lot of clubs and we couldn't keep them all under a microscope and do what we did.

Elijah was right and this reorganizing was way overdue for sure.

As long as we were taking steps now.

"Jasmine?" Evan said, giving me a worried look when I glanced at him.

"Sorry, what?"

"You were just in your head a bit dark, love," he muttered, studying me closely.

I sighed. “Nothing bad, just annoyed there’s so much to fix instead of...” I shrugged. The ancients were right that I couldn’t keep taking it on myself because I was the big boss. I’d had a lot of talented help.

But we weren’t simply a huge company. We were so much more and had done something no one had ever managed to pull off. We were going to make mistakes. We’d made less than others to get this far and now we were quick to fix them.

They all were really excited to try the Chinese fusion buffet one of the clubs was having. I made the call since they were on the tail end of the time, making it clear that we always handled it that way. It was something they could easily add on or do at the start of the food so it wasn’t during the rush times. And I mostly picked what they had excess of.

“So appreciate the spoiling, but don’t be a pain in the ass,” Mason muttered, all three of them nodding.

“Unless it’s an emergency like what happened with the angels,” I admitted. “When I get like that... You saw how I was panicking. I get so in my head that it’s hard for me to focus. They have to feed me what I like and right then.” I shrugged.

“Dylan is texting me that he wants to come here,” Mason muttered. “ISLE has more baddies that they can’t track down and they want you to. Elijah said it’s your call and we had enough on our plates.”

“We do. I’m sorry, but we do, and I don’t want him here.” I cleared my throat. “Sorry, it’s your place but—”

“I don’t want him here either,” Mason said firmly. “And it doesn’t have to be him. We should be building a relationship with the tech guys. If they can’t find someone or there’s a problem that they’re stuck on—that’s the time to get us. I get they want to solve these cold cases, but they also want the win for the new director.”

I sighed, understanding the politics of it. “We need a shield. I can’t have Lewis shield this one. This is too volatile for him. That’s my answer to Elijah. If he has another ancient demon he trusts, that’s who needs to be the shield for these programs and what we’re doing. They can meet with whomever and read the room and people. The more meetings I have—”

“The less time you’re doing what you need to do and only you can do it,” Evan agreed. “They want the win of acting like you’re theirs and they have direct access to you being their pet. I don’t like the way a lot of people are phrasing too much of this. We’ve been hearing whispers and rumbles all over. Fuck, even from elves, and we are not tapped in there for obvious reasons.”

I texted the VP group chat with the decision and they seemed to agree that it was getting out of hand.

But how to handle it before it did get out of hand and we were the bad guys?

Well, more than we were always blamed for being or for organizing.

Yes, we were the bad guys for forming a council and protecting our own. The hypocrisy that it came from most other councils wasn’t even amusing.

It was disgusting.

I had an idea and talked to Melissa while the others got dinner handled. She loved it and promised to handle it and even the shit the other VPs would give me.

Yeah, they would.

Oh well.

Dinner was amazing, and then we went to the angels so I could feed but also so they could meet Mudbug. Owen and I slipped away so we could have some alone time. He read his book and I looked over what Melissa gave me.

She was awesome. She'd gone hunting all right, and I was the perfect hunter to handle such sick, *sick* prey that preyed on people.

Nice.

"Mudbug is with Evan and down for bed," Mason told us when he came back. "I'm going to crash too." He gave me a hesitant look.

"I'll be there in a bit," I said after looking at the time.

"You're more than welcome to stay, Owen."

"Cheers, mate," Owen replied as he tucked the bookmark in what he was reading. "You wrapping up then?"

"Not just yet," I said as I put the files to the side and moved closer to him. I gave him a heated kiss... That he didn't fully return.

Well, he did but not with the same passion.

“Aww, love, I want you,” he whispered when I leaned back and gave him a confused look. “I always want you and desperately.”

“Okay, good then. Time for sex,” I chuckled.

He grabbed my hand when I reached for him and brought it to his lips. “You’ve *had* to have sex for so long to feed, I just worry that it’s... Routine for you?” He searched my eyes. “Do you want to have sex right now? You’re tired, and it was like flipping a switch when Mason said it was almost bedtime.”

“I like having sex with you. A lot,” I defended. I shrugged. What else was there to say?

“What about just a bit of a cuddle or—we don’t have to have sex, Jasmine. This was lovely, and I would be happy with a kiss goodnight and spending the night. I miss you.”

“You’re trying to teach me something and I’m too tired to hear it,” I said with a frustrated sigh.

Then it hit me. He had already taught me this. He was just following up and not being selfish with me. He’d said it over and over again that I did what everyone else always wanted because it was what I sensed.

What did I really want? How did I know what was me if I didn’t listen to myself more?

I nodded that I understood and realized what I wanted more than anything was to thank him for not being selfish with me. That I wanted to show him that I valued how patient he was with me and it meant a lot.

He smiled as he sensed whatever he did from me and gave me a soft kiss.

I pushed him back against the sofa and then straddled his lap, kissing him and letting him undress me. He touched me everywhere he wanted, but still seemed hesitant like I thought dates ended with sex, so we needed to have it.

No, I understood now.

So instead I thanked him with a blowjob.

I slid off his lap and between his knees, smirking when he moaned and let me undo his fly. I pulled out his cock and licked him like my favorite dessert.

“Aww, love, ya fucking undo me,” he moaned as I deep-throated him.

I swallowed him down as much as I could, ignoring the tension I felt in the other room. Mason needed to get over his shit about this. Seriously, I loved giving head too much for him to fuck with something I actually knew I liked doing.

He finished down my throat and looked like he wanted a lot more of me.

I blinked and I was up in his arms. “Good?”

“Better than *good*,” he chuckled. “Now I’m going to gobble you up with the warlock who is fuming I was selfish again. Because I want to. Any objections?”

“I was going to do that again,” I admitted as he carried me up the stairs.

“I don’t know if I can handle you doing that twice,” Mason said as we came into the bedroom. “I heard you. I get it. You’re right, but... Can we not push me? Please?”

That was fair and I nodded.

“She really does love doing it,” Owen told him. “You can feel it.”

“I believe you. It’s just—”

“I get it,” Owen said gently.

I was glad. I wanted everyone to get along and help each other even if it meant helping us over our shit.

And apparently, my reward for that was two of the sexiest men I’d ever known touching, teasing, licking, and sucking almost every inch of my body before I couldn’t take anymore and passed out.

11

“*Where’s my guard?*” the woman I was there to see worried in Portuguese as I came into her room.

Well, according to Google translating for me.

“She’s fine. Napping,” I told her. “I really hope you know English well enough to understand me because we didn’t have time to find someone who—”

“I understand it,” she said, her accent thick. “I not speak it well.”

Fair enough.

“Your husband is a monster.” It was hard not to judge her when she gave me a look like *no shit*, but I was damn sure this woman was trapped. “The good news is his mistress has someone on the inside of his guards and they’ve been poisoning him.”

She snorted. “Good. Finally, she’s...”

“You want to say ‘useful’ probably but there’s bad news.” I nodded when she sighed like there always was. “I need to know first how you married such a monster. We don’t have that intel.”

She gave me a shit look that I would accuse her but then sighed.

And she didn't know enough English to tell me well.

It took a bit with Google, but at least we managed. Her story was one heard more than it should be. She was too pretty for her own good and caught the wrong attention. Her family was poor and had no way to protect her when a powerful man demanded she be his. And that was that. She had been sixteen when her now husband saw her at a damn market and just declared she was his.

And she'd been a prisoner ever since.

"You know how he makes his money, right?" I checked, nodding when she swallowed loudly. I read my phone as she rattled off in Portuguese.

She had children now and they were dead without her. He didn't believe in divorce, so as horrible as it was, she had stopped trying to run after her first baby was born. She hated him too, but she had to protect them.

I nodded. "The bad news is the mistress got him to change his will. You and the kids get nothing. She gets half, the guy helping her gets the other half and takes over. And from what we can tell, you and your kids get dead."

She went pale and I hated to be so blunt, but crashing her appointment at the spa while she got a massage didn't give me a lot of time.

"I can't give you all the details, but the Spanish government is tired of your husband and his deep pockets to buy his way out of all his trouble."

“You are not them. What do you care?”

“I care because your husband sells *children*,” I bit out. “My country can only do so much without taking out the sources and the ones who keep up these human trafficking rings.” I backed off when she nodded. “I’m here to offer you a deal. We will take care of the mistress and inside guy. We’ll get the will changed. You will get everything.”

“And you get?” she asked, understanding that there was a price for it and this was the time for negotiations.

“We get the compound. That’s what we want, and it will be protected by the government here for victims. The problem is the victims get put back into the corrupt system too often. We’re going to be dirty this once and try to hop around that. I want everything to take down the whole network. All the pieces your husband has.”

“And my children get?”

I was impressed she was worried for them first and phrased it that way. Plus, it was true. This woman was full of the desire for nothing more than her children to live and be safe. She didn’t care if I threw her in jail forever for being party to the crimes she couldn’t stop and was actually a victim of as well... As long as her children were safe and not used as pawns.

“You will start a new life in Germany with them,” I told her. “Some of the assets will be seized by Spain for all his crimes and to pay victims. Mostly they want to see who will try and take over. *However*, you will still get a sizeable chunk of the accounts. Plus, if you agree to give me personally a few of the houses, I will give you eighty percent of the sales.”

Her eyes flashed shock... And a good deal of anger which surprised me. But then I realized she was so used to corruption and bad guys, she thought I was doing the same.

“You misunderstand,” I said gently. “I’m doing this to protect you. I have diplomatic immunity. You turn them over to me and those governments can’t just seize them which they will want to. Badly and have grounds to since he will be dead and you’re just...”

She rattled off in Portuguese that she understood. She was an uneducated woman from a poor family. She was no threat, and that was how she’d ended up in this mess.

“My people will put in the work, but I have to pay them too. Eighty percent is fair. Especially when we’re going to do a lot on the other end to protect you. You’ll have to change names, but we’ll have clean people to guard you and help you get acclimated. That costs money that isn’t approved in the public funding for the German government.”

She nodded. “I understand. I ask for additional thing.” She waited until I nodded this time. “Make bitch pay. She hurts my children.”

I smirked at her. “Oh, she’s going to be arrested for his death. I promise. She’s not getting off or out of this shit. She’s not the victim in this like you are.”

She was in. Fully in and signed the agreement without even reading it.

Unfortunately, that made her a bit too naïve, and I was glad I was the “good” guy in all of this. I didn’t think I could be the *actual* good guy when I was letting a murder take place,

but... That fucker deserved way worse than the slow poisoning he'd been getting.

And just for what he'd done to his poor wife. She'd been sixteen when he'd abducted her and taken her as a slave really.

He hadn't been that young.

No, he'd been in his *forties*. Gross. That just made it all so much worse. So now that he was in his sixties, his young mistress was trying to be all slick.

As I'd said, Melissa had done a good job hunting. Sometimes the people who handled the numbers and logistics found out the best way to get the dirt and know who the scum were. That was how she'd somehow learned that the will was changed and the mistress would get it all. Something had been filed through a public record... Something and she'd pulled that thread to find it all ready to unravel.

Mostly because we hunted assholes like this who abused people and treated them like property. But also because of the timing and what we needed.

The compound in Spain wasn't even something people knew about and it was absolutely insane. It was a hundred thousand acres out in the middle of nowhere, and the guy had to have been some kind of fan of Ancient Greece or something because the compound was... Like nothing I'd ever seen. Even the twins thought it was insane when I'd shown them pictures at breakfast.

And they'd seen a lot.

It was based off some designs of palace compounds or something, *but* the main structure was a replica of the Biltmore

Estate *with additions*. Yeah, the hundred-and-seven-five thousand square-foot house wasn't *enough* for the guy, so he added on two huge wings.

Of course, he did. And French-style architecture at a Spanish compound was... How did no one know about this? Seriously, how many hands had this guy greased?

Plus, he had a large residence for all of his guards. There were also guest villas—two dozen of them grouped together on a man-made lake. Then there were family residences that... I had no idea. His kids were going to live in after they grew up? In-laws after he abducted brides for his sons?

There were also a dozen guard houses built around the expansive lands and a few facilities for keeping the children they were trafficking.

Crazy didn't begin to cover it all.

I warned her that we were going to move fast so to make sure she was at the same location as her kids and always with the papers she needed... Which she looked at me like I was a moron. Of course, she didn't have access to anything like that.

Right, my bad. Controlling assholes didn't give up control ever.

So the plan was changed. Once it was done, we'd handle the people at her location and get a few trucks. She understood that it was anything she could take in under thirty minutes and onto a private jet with her kids. We could get her all the papers later once they were safely in Germany.

It wasn't like we had to worry about the government or anything.

Aidan was at home base when I arrived to hand off what I needed to and update Kyle on his part.

“He’s here because of an issue in New York City with some demons and thought we’d want to handle it quietly,” Kyle explained.

I nodded. “He’s welcome here and behaves well. It’s Dylan and Bain that need to be shown the door. Bain hasn’t done anything wrong, but we haven’t heard from him since the shit went down with his mom and council. So we’re not letting him in.” I went over to Aidan and gave him a kiss on the cheek.

“You smell ready for battle and a bit of relief,” he muttered.

“Part one is done, but honestly that was the easiest part,” I told him. “And it’s a quick job that’s off the books even for us.” I shrugged when Kyle snorted. “The opportunity and timing were great, but I’ve got to be in my cover working in six hours.”

Aidan glanced at his watch. “I have a few hours I can spare if I can help?”

I opened my mouth but then closed it, glancing at Kyle when I felt his desire that I let Aidan help. “How good is your persuasion with humans?”

“Very good given my age, but I don’t like doing it,” he hedged.

I told him the abbreviated version and he simply blinked at me. “I’m not telling you to have her kill someone. She’s already doing that. We just need her to finish it. Now.”

“You are never boring, darling,” he sighed and then nodded.

Even better.

Ten minutes later, we were sneaking into the compound. I used my power to have him call his lawyer and instruct him to revert the will all back to his wife. That he thought the mistress was doing something to him and he was going to the doctor the next day and blah, blah, blah. He signed some stuff and faxed it, sending emails, and even recording something on his phone so his kids were protected.

Except the mistress hadn't actually done anything to make him change his mind. She'd convinced him that since he'd had kids with poor trash who could barely read, no one would ever take them seriously and his empire would fall apart. That bastards with someone higher class and from the right family was better.

Like her.

Duh.

Except she was connected, and he couldn't control her as he wanted. So she was on the pill and jerking the guy around.

But he was still more than willing to betray his kids. He knew what would happen to them. I mean, there was no way around him basically signing their death warrants.

Then again, the guy had made his money selling countless children into slavery. He didn't care.

The lawyer was glad that the guy had come to his senses and finally saw through the “slut's” bullshit. Oh boy.

Right as I finished up, the mistress came in and gave him a drink with the rest of the poison to take him down.

I glamoured to be one of his security after I called the Spanish police—clean ones waiting for the call—and Aidan went for the dirty guy before he could take charge. Before anyone could figure out what was going on, EMS and the Spanish police were there to declare the guy dead, take away the mistress and her accomplice, and get the ball rolling on what we needed next.

They were going to handle the attorney part in a bit, the story being that she gave him the drink because she heard he was going to make the change, but he drank it after calling the lawyer. When that happened, people tried to take the wife and kids for control, but the only clean guard got them out and to Germany where a deal was made.

Done and done.

And we were going to round up all the bad guys who we couldn't trust in Spain's prisons because of the corruption. So that was a pickle.

Aidan asked if we had any problem with them simply disappearing and never being found again.

No, no, we didn't, and I had a feeling some vampires wouldn't need to feed from bags of blood anytime soon.

Such a shame with people who kidnapped and sold children to monsters. Really, I felt—I fucking loved it. Anyone with a soul would have wanted the same thing.

“Boss, I'm pretty sure I'm looking at something stolen,” one of our guys said in the earpieces we were all wearing.

“Like I think this is a Monet.”

“Lovely,” I drawled. “Shit, we didn’t consider that. And our art expert isn’t available.”

Yeah, because Ally was being the Chancellor of Germany and was needed all week publicly. There was no way to get her out and handle this.

“That is absolutely a Monet,” Aidan confirmed when we were standing in front of the painting. “And it was stolen about a decade ago, thought to be lost. If there’s one, there are others.”

“I’m not trusting your council with this,” I muttered. “Nor the Spaniards. Fuck.” I pulled out my phone and swore again, connecting to Director Stevens.

“This is shocking given how we left things,” he answered.

“Yeah, well, there’s a bit of a side project going on and we hit a snag. Do you have someone in ISLE who is like an art expert and would know how to quietly return something we found? And not like abscond with it because our art person is tied up. I can give some good PR to ISLE if that’s what it takes to make it worth it.”

“Boss, we found crates more of art and some of the tags on them are of museums.”

“Of course, they fucking are. Tell me this asshole walked out of the Smithsonian’s storage or something and just really give me a fucking migraine.” I cussed up a storm when he confirmed there were a few of their items according to the crates. “I was being a smart-ass. You go in time-out. No more bad news from you.”

“I assume you’re not speaking to me,” Stevens drawled.

“No, sorry, more fun news, and I’ve got like four hours to handle too much before I have to be back undercover.”

“How big is this? Elijah just gave me a lecture that we need to stop making everything the big dogs, and you called me. Are you telling me to delegate this?”

Aidan winced and shrugged when I looked at him. “This is too big for underlings.” He looked at his phone. “I can push back what I have today so you can keep your cover. Tell him to send Dylan and we can work on this with whatever team. I promise. Let me help take this off your plate.” He moved his hand to my shoulder when I hesitated. “I want to. You saved all those kids. Let me help.”

“Thanks,” I sighed. “Yeah, okay, send Dylan if he’ll fucking behave with whatever art experts you have. I promise I’ll get you good PR with this. We’re helping the German and Spanish governments with this.”

“I’ll be there too. If there are governments involved, I’m on scene.”

Fair enough.

I let out a sigh that could be heard across the huge compound it was so loud and tired. “Every fucking time I think I’m finally done and can just do my own shit—do you know how many years I’ve done things without ever seeing ISLE? Now it’s—”

“This was how it always should have worked,” Aidan reminded me gently. “That’s the change. It’s unfortunate because of how it’s affecting you personally, but this was how

the system was set up to work. I wish it did with the vampires. I know ISLE wishes it did with other councils.”

That made me feel better at least.

I spent the next ten minutes giving out orders and handling more and more. Relief filled me when we got word the wife and kids were all safely on the plane and it was taking off with our teams.

Phil and Dylan had matching looks of shock and complete befuddlement after Kyle gave them the rundown, both focused on me.

Phil shook himself out of it and recovered first. “You took down one of the biggest child trafficking monsters in the *world* in...”

“Today,” I answered. “Yeah, just now.”

“No, he’s asking when did you start this?” Dylan asked, pinching the bridge of his nose for some reason.

“Melissa gave me the information Saturday night,” I answered. “I got with Kyle Sunday morning. We went from there.” I shrugged.

“So you pulled off this *massive* operation in under forty-eight hours and you just call us in to help with the art?” Phil pushed, gesturing all around.

“I’m missing the disconnect,” I muttered, looking at Aidan.

“It would take most organizations months to pull something like this off,” he replied.

“Ahhh, right, well you have to worry about funding and bureaucracies and oversight and bullshit,” I explained with a bright smile. “Lots and lots of bullshit. *We* don’t have to do that.” I pointed to myself. “*I* am the boss and the funding and the oversight. I don’t like bullshit, so we skip the bureaucracies and just get the bad guys.”

Kyle snorted. “And *then* there’s a bunch of messes the other VPs come in and clean up when she pisses people off.”

I narrowed my eyes at him but then smiled when he simply shrugged. “That’s normally true. I can’t deny that. But there’s not this time so suck it.”

“I’m very sure there are a few Spanish officials who—” he started to snitch.

“Right, thanks for reminding me that I need to get the dirt on them. Corrupt fuckers. That one guy must have some kind of tie to this place. His desires were not to dig too deep or shoot me. Like geez, that’s not obvious.” I looked back at Phil. “So yeah, this is now ours for the demons we’re rescuing. We’d like to strip it and get going on what we need, but stolen art.”

“Boss, news just broke the guy is dead,” someone called over. “There’s gotta be a leak for that fast.”

“Get the finalized press release to Elijah,” I ordered. “Add in that ISLE helped in the cleanup since some of the kids trafficked were supes. Whatever he wants to add to make it work.”

“Wait, don’t lie about—” Dylan interjected.

“Did she fucking say it was a lie?” Kyle seethed, shoving Dylan too hard so he stumbled back several steps and fell. “She didn’t fucking lie. There were supe kids found with the others. We’re going to handle that too.”

“Take a walk,” I snapped, toning it back when Kyle shot me a hurt look. “I woves you too, but no thumping the deputy director of ISLE, especially not when people are watching, okay?”

“You’re not a liar,” he grumbled, shooting Dylan another pissed look. “No more than every other fucking demon, and it’s not *our fault* that we have to lie so much.”

“What did he mean by that?” Aidan muttered as Kyle stormed off.

That shocked me, and it took me a moment to get my mouth to work. “It’s not a rule of *demons* that we stay hidden from humans. It’s all other supes that have rules and laws about it. All the other councils have declared that humans can’t know about demons because it’s safer for *their people*. Which makes it a bitch for us to survive. And easier for all the other species to do shit to us. Capture us. Subjugate us.”

He blinked at me a moment and then let out a slow breath. “I never once understood that the law we have handicaps you and leaves you vulnerable. It’s written that there will be huge punishments for any who let out secrets.”

“Right, but by your own laws, it’s written as secrets that will hurt *vampires*. You guys like us not organizing. It’s made you have to behave more. Not have as many of us as pets,” I reminded him. “You guys would all be lumped in with us, or

supes couldn't be seen in the light they are if demons were part of the package.”

“It's also one of the main things that has kept us from being able to organize,” Joshua said from behind me, his energy dripping all over me. “Elijah is less than thrilled, Jasmine.”

“He's not the boss of me,” I mumbled as I turned to face him, wincing at the deep frown he was wearing. “It's under my purview.”

“Mm-hm,” he grunted. “Ally has some choice words for you. Expect a spanking.”

“Technically, I did this all on my own, and the guy's wife signed it to me, so the company isn't liable,” I offered. “And some of the other properties we'll be selling for her and the kids to have money.”

“Yes, and protection in Germany from what I've heard,” he chuckled darkly.

“Do you want to see the pictures of the scores of kids we saved?” I threw right back.

Instead of helping, anger filled his eyes, and he grabbed me by the front of my clothes and lifted me up over head. “And if you *die*, who will save the next of them, Jasmine? If you *break*, what of the rest of us? If any part of this council or company breaks now, we are lost. All is lost.”

“I don't believe that for a second,” I whispered, shaking as his power leaked all over me. “You guys wouldn't just let everyone else go back to being easy pickings and all alone.”

He bared his teeth to me and slammed me up against the wall. “No more going rogue, Jasmine. Not anymore now that we’re out. We said we’re a team. So it’s time to be a fucking team, *child*. If Elijah’s love won’t get you to agree, then by god, I will beat that into your thick skull.”

Except we both knew he couldn’t, and he was pushing too hard on me that I wanted to fight back.

“A relay race is a team too,” I bit out. “I’m passing the baton to you next or whoever else can take it. Too often you guys say ‘team’ but make it clear I should ask for *permission* because I’m the youngest. When have you ever asked me like that or checked your plans with me?”

He let out a slow breath and then suddenly was hugging me. “You fool. You stupid, child. No one is saying you have to ask us. Just tell us so you aren’t always the main target when you do these crazy things. We would not survive if we lost you.”

I simply kissed his cheek.

I hugged him back because I loved him too, kissed his cheek, and handed the baton over to him. That was always how things worked with this crazy dynamic we had.

12

“I put you on the schedule for tomorrow,” Lisa told me. “There’s a big party that we’re adding last-minute. It should be good money for everyone, so you’re lucky I’m including you.”

“I can’t.” That was all I said because there was so much wrong with what she said that it annoyed me after an already rough day, so I was worried what else might come out of my mouth.

“That’s not good enough. You’re coming in and—”

“I’m unavailable,” I cut in, looking at her. “It’s something I can’t bail on or reschedule.”

“What is it?” she demanded.

“That’s not your business,” I answered. I sighed when she opened her mouth. “You’re manager here, not the boss of my life. I don’t ask you what you do on your days off because we’re not friends. If I could move it around to help out, I would, but I can’t blow this off.”

She realized she’d played this wrong with me and tried again. “Look, it’s a bunch of out-of-town executives for the energy company that’s big here. They’ve made some global deal or something and they want to celebrate here with these

contractors or whomever. It's a good thing for the club and all the girls who work here. You're going to upset people if you can't be flexible—"

"I'm very flexible with notice, but I *can't* this time," I told her firmly lowering my voice. "If you had told me yesterday, I could have changed things, but I confirmed the appointment, and I'm not fucking with my papers for any damn job. You get me?"

"Yeah, but I might know how to get you what you need and still come in," she muttered.

I gave her the look she deserved. Only an *idiot* would blow off what they knew for a "might" and from someone who hadn't shown to be trustworthy at all. "I'll pass and go with my guy. You'll have to ask someone else." I finished with my costume and left before she could say anything else.

"Stupid fucking bitch," she said when she thought I was far enough away. "You'll regret this."

No, I wouldn't because I'd set up the damn party, and the people coming in weren't as good of actors as I was. They hadn't trained to be cool under too much pressure. It was easy to play an easy part when there weren't too many variables.

Me suddenly being there was a variable.

Evan, Aidan, and several others, including some of the cheetahs from the ancient pack in Rome, were coming in to act like they were tied to the energy company. We had glamour charms for some of them, but the goal was to confuse them with a mix and also the power that would be there so we could maybe figure out what the magic Lisa was using was.

I went on stage and focused on my set, shocked when I felt so much anger in my direction that it almost made me lose my grip.

“You just got here, sugar,” one of the employees near the stage. “What are you rushing off for so fast?”

“I apologize, but the other dancer reminds me of someone who has my heart,” a silky smooth voice that was like honey on my ears that I knew well said.

Intimately.

“Did she do you dirty?” the woman chuckled. “Go get a private dance then and hash out your feelings.”

“My feelings are the problem, not the woman,” Mason grumbled. “Excuse me, I don’t want to ruin the mood.”

“Nothing ruined,” she pushed, putting her hand on his chest to stop him.

I caught that when I spun around, and that was when my normal routine stopped and I worked the pole in a way that I could watch what was going on.

Mason stepped back so her hand fell. “I don’t like the objectification of women and them being seen as entertainment. I thought I could get past it, but I’m not there yet it seems. I’m sorry.”

I knew he wasn’t saying it for her, but because he knew I could hear him.

I let go of the pole and moved to the end of the stage, squatting down with my knees together so I didn’t seem to be instigating him. “Honey, you’re looking at it with a focused

lens of someone who looks down on everyone and simply has excuses that they're a jerk."

"I don't feel like I am," he whispered as he turned to face me. His silver eyes were bubbling with emotion, and the pain on his face was the only reason I couldn't get annoyed with him.

"I was having fun dancing," I told him. "If someone objectifies that, it's their thing. I could walk down the street and people have a problem with it. That's not on me, right?"

"Yes, but it's hard to be around. I don't like women being mistreated."

"Because you see them as being forced. No one's forced here. We're all willing and having fun, honey. And there's nothing wrong with being entertainment." That fire came back in his eyes and I hurried on. "Actors are entertainment. They make movies. They get paid millions of dollars to do it." I felt better when he eased down and there was more curiosity in his gaze.

"That's fair," he hedged.

"What about singers? Don't people pay to go to concerts for entertainment? Race car drivers. Hell, you go to the opera for entertainment and those people are respected as legends. So your idea of entertainment is what's got you stuck." I waited until he nodded again. "MMA fighters are wearing about as much as I am and punching each other bloody.

"People get off on that too. People go too far with that. It's just not dancing and is exciting so people don't judge it as often, but people do judge it. You get what I'm saying? It's not

what we're doing but what people put on it. So don't put the extra on it and you'll be fine. We'll still be here when you're ready and even if you need help to get past whatever has been living rent-free in your head."

"Thank you, I'll think on that," he accepted, giving me a quick wink before heading out.

I went to get off stage since the songs from my set were done and I didn't want to be in the way for the next dancer. The woman who had talked with Mason followed me, and I found Lisa talking to someone else backstage as well.

"You sound like you're corporate with all of that," the woman said, making it clear that wasn't a compliment.

I raised an eyebrow at her. "A lot of what they've said to me stuck. Don't we all work for them because we like their message and the way they do things instead of other places?" I turned to head out front to be available for private dances and bottle service but froze when Lisa snorted.

"Spoken like a kid who's just too easily influenced and can't think for herself," she drawled.

I gave her the look she deserved. "So clearly, you're not someone they rescued." There was more I was going to say, but I was shocked at how insulted she immediately looked.

"No, I'm not a fucking idiot who got caught in more than I could handle," she snapped.

"Those fools deserve what they get if they can't learn any basic self-preservation," the dancer next to her added. "Demons who play the victim card make all supes look bad and weak."

“So do people who talk out their fucking ass about shit they could never understand,” I seethed, taking a step towards her. “You should learn some *basic self-preservation* and not talk on what you don’t know.”

“What don’t I know?” she chuckled, clearly looking down on me.

“Well, for one, you grew up in a fucking *pack* as a shifter. You *were* taught things like basic knowledge about what you are. Right? Demons *weren’t*, idiot.” I took a step closer when she did, making it clear I wasn’t going to back down. “There are classes taught to psychologists just on how to help humans who have been adopted and the struggles they can have accepting it. How to tell them so it’s not traumatic.

“That’s simply that they were adopted by other humans. Our fathers were fucking *angels* and we pop out demons. Which isn’t a thing according to the rest of the world. Do you have any idea how fucking traumatic that is? How difficult it is to wrap your mind around it? And that’s before you learn you feed on *sin*. And for me, I don’t even believe lust is a fucking sin nor something to be ashamed of.

“So that’s a huge mind fuck. And, until recently, there wasn’t any sort of council for us or safe place to go. So while your parents and pack were helping you handle being a shifter, learning your abilities and control—I was on the run because I killed three humans who tried to rape me. Then a vampire tried to sell the virginity of a lust demon and I had no idea about any of this because I grew up in a human-only area.

“Basically, I’m saying you don’t fucking know anything and to shut your mouth before you really piss me off.” I shot

Lisa a look that most would flinch from, but she was too stupid. “And it is against corporate policy to have such a hostile work environment like this, *and* it’s very clear that victim-blaming won’t be tolerated. So this better be the last time I ever hear shit like this.”

Anger filled her eyes. “You work for me.”

I snorted. “No, I don’t. I work for Heavenly Entertainment. You’re just the manager here, and they have extras for easy exchange if one is rotten.”

She moved closer and got in my face. “One word from me and they’d fire your ass so fast your head would spin, so I’d lose the attitude.”

“No, they wouldn’t,” I purred. “I was just dancing at another club doing great and that manager was thrilled with me, people from corporate even checking me out when they did an inspection. So I bet they’d have a lot of questions for you if you suddenly just fired me after all of that. I bet they’d be in here tomorrow wondering what is going on.”

She curled her lip at me but stepped back at least. “I wouldn’t brag too much that you’re excited to be some snitch for corporate and be their good little dog.”

“Actually, I have no desire to be a snitch for them at all. I’m fairly chill and leave things alone for everyone to figure out as they want. That’s how fucked this whole conversation has been if you’ve got me close to reporting it because I’ve never reported anything.” I glanced at the three of them and snorted. “No wonder you only have a couple of demons working here.”

“Whatever, you need to get up there and do your set,” Lisa told me with something dark dancing in her eyes.

“I just did my set,” I told her, making it clear that I looked down on her that she couldn’t even get that right.

“No, your next set.” She chuckled when I simply raised an eyebrow. “We have a bit of fun with the new kids and some light hazing. We’ve all done it.”

Yeah, sure they had.

“Normally, I would have no problem, but after this conversation, I think I’ll make sure I know exactly what’s going on,” I replied. I continued when she opened her mouth. “I can’t be an idiot caught up in something I can’t get out of, right? Since it would be all my fault then and not the assholes who broke the rules or did something illegal?”

She bared her teeth at me like it was a real threat, but honestly I had a hard time not just laughing in her face. “You just dance. You dance until you have to tap out. Don’t be dramatic like we’re going to have someone abduct you off stage. It’s just an endurance test.”

“The longest is like twelve songs,” the first woman chimed in.

I smirked at Lisa. “And I bet it wasn’t you.” I turned and headed towards the DJ to load a playlist to cover me the rest of the night.

The first few songs were nothing, a normal set and barely had my heart rate going I was in such good shape and used to it.

By the sixth song, I felt like I needed to slow down on my normal amount of flips on the pole and like I was jogging.

I smirked out at the dancers and Lisa when I was doing my twelfth song and not even near stopping anytime soon.

It was probably about song thirty that I knew I was going to be sore later and wanted a bottle of water. I'd honestly lost track of the count, so I couldn't be sure. But I thought it was around there.

And yeah, that was about two hours of dancing straight.

Pole dancing and not just grinding.

Shit, this is the workout I've been needing to push myself. I swallowed a snort, realizing we could make an event out of it with gambling and taking bets how many songs. A charity event for how long I could dance for.

I would need a different cover and glamour just for it, but it would be worth it. I was *working* my body and pushing hard. This wasn't my normal dancing hard to get out what I was feeling, but top-level just running.

"Okay, I'm calling it," Lisa announced after about three and a half hours.

"I'm not done," I panted, smiling because my body ached but felt good more than my pride or pushing her buttons.

"You are. The stage is covered in your sweat and I'm not—you're not being a stubborn idiot who breaks something on my watch. Call it."

I glanced around and nodded. I wasn't wearing shoes, so it wasn't like sliding in heels, but I was *dripping* sweat, so that

was fair. “Thanks, I didn’t notice.” I wanted to roll my eyes when she was shocked I said something. *I wasn’t the bitch in all of this.*

She was.

Or did no one ever thank her when she actually did her job and protected her people? They all seemed really tight with her, so I found that surprising.

Except they weren’t. I overheard a few laughing in the dressing room once we were closed how pathetic Lisa was dripping with jealousy at how good I was. Then I caught more outside in the parking lot, a few of the dancers telling security while they were escorted to their vehicles.

It seemed security didn’t like Lisa either... But at least dealing with one stupid demon was better than a whole bunch of them.

So Lisa cut off her nose to spite her face. She was making it so other demons didn’t want to work at that club so she could get her kickbacks, but then no one was having her back. Fool. Absolute fool.

And yes, she was getting kickbacks. I was able to confirm it that night while I was on the stage for so long. Instead of depositing tips into our envelopes, I saw several dancers hand her a cut *while she watched me*, and they pocketed the rest.

Honestly, we didn’t need the undercover party anymore, but I wanted to see what else they could pick up on and fill in the rest of the blanks if possible. Plus, they were all kind of excited as if they were playing James Bond for a night.

I couldn’t take that away from them.

I also needed the laughs, and I was pretty sure there would be stories from that night coming out for a while.

13

Mason was waiting for me when I got home, and there was so much swirling around him that I was instantly on alert. He stormed over to me and slid his hand in my hair so he was cupping my head before kissing me in a way I wasn't sure he had before.

Possessively.

I moaned as he devoured my lips, making it clear that I was his.

“You were so beautiful that I hated anyone else seeing you that way,” he whispered before brushing his lips over mine. “I’m trying. I’m trying hard, muffin.”

“I know. Tell me what you need.”

That got me another hot kiss full of promise more than laying his claim. “I want to see what you do in those private rooms. That’s why—it upsets me the most.”

“Watch the accusations,” I warned. “You having trouble with this doesn’t mean I do anything wrong.”

“No, I didn’t mean it that way.” He let me go and stepped away, scrubbing his hand over his head and giving me a serious look before turning away. He grabbed a chair from the

kitchen table and moved it to the living room so I had lots of room. “Give me my first lap dance, Jasmine.”

“Wait—what?” I set down my bag and everything I had in my hands and moved closer to him.

He nodded and plopped down on the chair. “I don’t know because I’ve never been to a strip club before tonight. I don’t... It’s not my thing. Until you. All I know is from movies. And what sexist assholes who hate women and demean them say. Warlocks.” The look he gave me begged me to help him.

“You have no idea how fucking hot I am that I’m your first,” I admitted, nodding when he couldn’t hide his shock. “I have a few backup costumes at my apartment in case something rips and I need to grab something. I’ve never worn them. How about I bring them here and you can pick what I wear?”

“Thank you, Jasmine,” he whispered, taking off his glasses and wiping his eyes. “I’m so scared I can’t move past this and will lose you. I thought it wouldn’t matter because you went undercover and it wasn’t day in and day out. I hate how I’m being and—”

I went over to him and kissed him quiet. “Ease up, Mason. You’re making this bigger than it is. I promise. We’re talking and we’ll do it together. I got so upset because you just did whatever to make your point and it hurt me. You want to give me kisses like that after I dance, fuck, do it. If you want to demand attention after I give it to other men—do it. We can figure this out.”

“I’m going to fall in love with you before you’re ready,” he warned.

Which I was pretty sure was his way of saying he was already there.

I wasn’t sure it was before I was ready as I seemed to be there right with him.

Wow, that was quite the change from the way I used to be.

I quickly ducked into my apartment before coming back. I held up the options for him. These weren’t themed costumes like I normally had to match songs and sets. These were fillers that could work for anything.

“This,” he decided as he touched the fabric. “Fuck, I want to see you in this.”

“Really?” I nodded, but was surprised. It was revealing—they all were—but it actually covered the most. It had the stretchy lace vibe with sparkles and glitter, but it was one-leg pants. The other leg was completely missing... And so was most of the ass on my left side. I thought the contrast was alluring instead of just a thong or something.

The top was the same vibe except my right side was mostly missing. The left had a sleeve for the crop top that was basically one-shoulder. My right breast was a bit precarious in it but would hold because of the clear strap that connected on the back.

“Let me go change.” I licked my lips as I stared into his pretty eyes. “We’ll go shopping and you can pick out a few outfits for your collection that I’ll wear only for you, okay?”

He swallowed loudly. “Yeah, I’d like that.” He ran his fingers over the material. “Do it just like you would for them, okay?”

I nodded but then stopped, giving him a soft kiss. “I’ll give you three passes to break the rules and do what you want to me. I’ll *trust you* to do that.”

“Thank you, muffin.” He chuckled when I pulled away. “You’re hungry. I love how that always tells me that you’re hungry or not.”

“I’m always hungry,” I drawled.

“I’ll order something so it’s ready for after the dance.”

That was smart. I should have picked up food on my way home, but I’d been so wiped. I didn’t have the heart to tell Mason that all I wanted was a hot bath and to crash when he was trying so hard.

Maybe I could get him to give me that bath after?

“I want the real you, Jasmine,” he said when I was almost to the bedroom. “They never get that.”

I could handle that, dropping all my glamour.

I changed and set up the music, running him through the normal speech I gave about where hands had to be and not touching. He nodded that he understood even as his eyes raked over my body.

“Hey, focus,” I chuckled.

“I heard,” he promised. “There’s just not much blood in my brain.”

Good to know.

I started the music and danced around him, running my hands over his body and then mine. Sliding my leg over him, I straddled his lap and kept moving. I flipped off of him and did a bit of floorwork before going into the splits. I slowly stood so my ass was up in his face.

“Don’t move,” he growled. “I’m using my pass.”

“I understand,” I accepted. I swallowed a moan as his hands moved over my ass and his long fingers went under the outfit and immediately found my pussy.

“I want to fuck you in one of those private rooms so every time you’re in them, you think of me inside of you and not whoever gets to see you be so perfect,” he told me.

“What else?” I pressed back against him when he didn’t answer. “Tell me your darkness, Mason. We all have it.” I decided to give him an inch too. “I wanted to rip her hand off for touching you. Completely tear off her arm for thinking she should ever touch you.” I gasped as his fingers move faster and his thumb flicked my clit.

“I wanted to blind every man there for seeing you move that way, knowing they would think about you moving like that naked for them as they had you,” he confessed. “I wanted to jump on the stage and show them you belonged to me.”

“What else?” I whimpered.

He stood and was suddenly plastered to my back as he kept fucking me with his fingers. He roughly grabbed my hair so my head turned to face him and he kissed me. “I wanted what you gave Owen. Over and over again. I wanted it until you passed out this time. Until I couldn’t get hard for you

anymore which would be so many rounds your mouth wouldn't be able to handle it.”

I came. I orgasmed as he massaged my breast and said something so demanding and possessive.

Licking my lips, I stared into his pretty eyes. “I'd do it. I've never tried that, but I would for you. I'd blow you until I couldn't anymore. I'd do nothing but be on my knees and stroke and suck you until you were completely sated.”

“Don't fucking offer me that,” he bit out before finger fucking me again, rougher this time.

And then he sat back down with his hands on the chair like we hadn't just shared that. He was back to locked down and in control Mason.

Yeah, this was a dangerous game, and I was pretty sure he now knew that and how much I was into it.

I went back to dancing, but after two songs he paused me again.

He swallowed loudly. “Touch me, Jasmine. Please?”

Gladly. I pulled him out of his pants and kissed him as I stroked him.

And then I let him finish on my skin by my hand which was a thing with warlocks. He could track me again and we had a connection. We probably still did from the other thing he'd done to trick me, but this time it was about more than that and that I was letting him back in.

“You won't regret it,” he promised after he recovered.

“If you make me, I don’t know that I’ll be able to let you back in, Mason,” I warned. It wasn’t an ultimatum or a threat. It was a worry because of the place I was at mentally and emotionally.

I was glad when he seemed to understand that.

“You’re exhausted,” he whispered as he stood with me wrapped around him. “I’m sorry I didn’t notice sooner. I’m sorry I was so selfish.”

“You’re going through something, and I appreciate you trying so hard to accept this because I need it. I like this part of my life a lot,” I muttered, kissing along his neck as he carried me to the bedroom and then master bathroom. “That’s not being selfish.”

He didn’t say anything, probably thinking he should have done better. Maybe, but we all did the best we could. Mason was by far the harshest critic of himself.

And it was a flaw I had too, so if I was saying someone was too hard on themselves, they really should listen.

He started the bath and let me soak before going for the food. When he got back, he washed me, promising to do my hair in the morning before lifting me out and drying me. “Why are you so extra tired tonight? Did something happen?”

“Bitches being petty,” I grumbled but then snorted. “And my stupid pride.”

I told him as we ate and he seemed amused. No one was perfect, but he appreciated it when I gave it back to people. Plus, he was a supportive partner and was on my side.

I thought we were just going to bed after that, but no, that wasn't enough for Mason to spoil me. He ate me out and used that amazing rechargeable wand on me until I couldn't stand it.

"Thanks for trusting me again," he whispered as we snuggled down for bed.

"I want this to work," I told him as I hugged his arm around me. "I need you, Mason. Please. You're the only reason I've made it through all of this."

"You're doing great."

Apparently, he really wanted me to know that because I woke the next morning getting more of that amazing treatment. When he was done, I pushed him back to the bed and straddled his head.

"Clean up the mess you made."

"Gladly," he groaned.

When we were done, I realized there was something I really wanted. I brought us into the bathroom and started the shower. "I did something a long time ago that I'm not proud of. It bothers me that I did it still and I've always felt that... I gave up?" I shook my head when he opened his mouth. "I sold my first time."

He swallowed loudly. "Why?"

I did a double take, realizing he was upset not because I'd taken money for sex, but because I was in a bad place. "It was how I got to Europe—Germany and did what I... I saved it for a while and fed..." I shook my head. "So much went wrong after the wolves took me. I hid among humans, but they were

just as bad. Someone told me everyone was going to fuck me over and I might as well get paid for it.”

“And you listened,” he said quietly.

I nodded but checked the water when his stare was too intense. “He was a married man who wanted to keep me like a mistress. It wasn’t... Owen said something about my just defaulting to sex because of what I am.”

“You get that’s why I’ve taken the path I did too, right?” he hedged. “It wasn’t just about me and testing myself.”

I nodded and stripped before getting under the water. I about checked my mouth for drool as Mason did the same. He stuck his head under the stream and then pushed back his brown hair, looking delicious as water dripped all under him.

“When you stare at me, I feel like everything bad anyone has ever said about me was such nonsense that I can’t believe I ever listened,” he whispered as he moved closer. He cupped my cheek. “I will give you the first time you never had, muffin. I get what you want and are trying to say. Tell me when you’re ready, and it will be like our first time, not just our first time together.”

I searched his eyes. “You don’t think it’s stupid to try that?”

“No.” He said it so easily, but with such confidence, that something relaxed around my heart.

And I knew Mason was the right man for me. I thought the twins were as well, but I *knew* Mason was meant to be with me.

“I’m ready,” I whispered as I slid my hands up his chest and behind his neck. “I want to be together with you like that. I want you inside of me so you know true heaven and won’t ever think of anything but me.” I brushed my lips over his. “I want us to be together in every way.”

“Me too.” He kissed me deeply, his hands everywhere and heating up my skin as they moved. “You’re almost done with undercover, right? Get that off your plate and let’s have a night just for us. I’ll handle everything.”

I nodded but then stared at him. Why had he said it like that?

“Some of the shots they took at you last night landed,” he said gently. “I don’t know what was said, but I felt it later. You were... Emotionally licking your wounds? I don’t want that on your shoulders when I give you what you need.”

“Thanks, Mason.”

He made us breakfast, and I finally got to shop with him for the idea I wanted to give him as a housewarming present. He picked out the seed starter and an indoor planter shelf, both of us agreeing on the spot and that it was the perfect fit.

“What would you think about working with the twins more?” he asked when we sat down to eat. “And maybe have a project just for you? Like I want to work on the house. I’m meeting with the contractor that Tracey brought in, and he’s going to do a full inspection, but there are parts I want to do—learn. Or maybe just painting. We could do it together.”

“No, I think you need to do that,” I said after a moment. “I get where your head is, but I don’t want to.” I reached over

and took his hand when he seemed hurt. “What we did yesterday taking down that monster? That’s what I need more of. I want more time on my computer. I *like* that and the wins help me. A lot. That’s what I’ve realized.”

He squeezed my hand and let it go. “Good. I’m glad you were thinking about it seriously.”

“I have. I do want to work on a project with the twins, but more to be sneaky since they sense a lot as elves. But also to get me training harder. Last night—even if she was a bitch hazing me, I woke up sore. That was a fucking workout and a half. I want to start having nights just doing that. Rotate around clubs and push myself physically.”

“Dancing more,” he muttered, swallowing loudly.

“Just on the main stage.” I searched his eyes. “It’s the private dances you don’t like as much, right? That’s intimate and normally topless.”

“Yeah,” he sighed. “I think I would really like you to try and keep those for only when you need to be undercover.”

“Done.” I nodded when he did a double take. “I don’t really like lap dances. It’s part of the sexy goddess fun and yes, stripping, but I only did it to find people to feed from when I was flying solo. I don’t need that anymore, and I know the twins and Aidan don’t like that part either. I’ll gladly say that I’ll cut that out unless I need to for undercover.”

“Thank you, Jasmine,” he whispered, taking my hand and bringing it to his lips. “Really, thank you.”

I nodded. “But I do want to do the endurance stage dancing. It was killer, and I think it could be a good draw.

Good promo. I might have to have a cover as a supe for it, but whatever. I also want to work with Kiera on going over my choreography. They were doing it at the club and not paying. I know lots do that, but it annoys me. We need to do a review of all of the dancers as well.”

“Okay, so you have a lot of projects you want to get into, I got it,” he cut in when I ramped back up.

Just as we finished, Evan texted saying Mudbug was asking for me. I chuckled, impressed the puppy learned to talk overnight, but went and got them through the portal. It gave me the chance to talk to him about my idea of working with the demons we had working security. The background checks were all done and we were handling the red flags, but there were always people who slipped through.

But they couldn't get by an elf.

Or like the Jackson club I was undercover with was a perfect example. There weren't any demons on security and we needed to fix that. Evan agreed and said he could give me Tuesday and Thursday mornings to beat up whoever I needed.

Perfect.

I worked on a bunch of everything for a while and then changed to head into corporate. I wanted to ask Elijah if he had an ancient to work with to be my shield with ISLE and handle the requests to get involved in problems... Among other things.

He was actually near my office tapping his phone. He glanced up and nodded. “Good, I was just messaging you.

There were twelve supes who didn't sign the new addendums to their contracts."

"I remember. We did as we said. We fired them and they got severance."

"Their councils are objecting to the decision and the addendum."

"Shocker," I drawled.

He snorted. "They're demanding a meeting and we reverse our decision."

"Oh, they can't meet with us about having demons as pets because they're so fucking busy, but this they have time for? How fucking predictable and pathetic. Fine, invite them to my party." I pulled out what Melissa had sent me this morning and handed it to him.

"What did you do?" he sighed.

"People *really* shouldn't piss me off," I answered with a dark chuckle.

Elijah simply sighed.

But he didn't disagree.

14

“Where is Sloan?” a vampire councilman demanded as he stormed over to me Saturday morning. “I don’t see her here and I told her to be here!”

My hand shot out before anyone could blink or think to stop me. I grabbed the guy around the throat and launched him across the room, chuckling when his body dented the concrete. “Gavin, I suggest you handle your people or you will have less of them.” I turned and smiled brightly at him. “And if you tell me you wouldn’t have flattened someone who spoke to you like that from another council, I’ll laugh.”

He ground his jaw but kept his face pleasant. “I might not have resorted to that but yes, I don’t tolerate people making demands of me.”

“It’s not a reflection on *me* that we’ve reached this level,” I purred as I went over to the councilman coughing up blood. “I’ve used my words *lots* that people need to stop being stupid and cut the shit.” I kicked the face of the vampire, knocking him out. “Unfortunately, people only seem to listen when I do this because I’m younger than all of you, a woman, and just a demon.”

“I understand,” Gavin accepted.

“Good, because the next time he orders one of *my people* to do anything, it will be the last time he has a mouth to order anything or anyone,” I warned him, looking around the room filling up before meeting Gavin’s gaze. “And this insanity that some are spreading that we’re under the vampire council, or beholden to you in some way, *ends today*, or I will give proof of the real situation. As you would to protect yours.”

“Again, I understand.” He didn’t like it, but the man believed me.

Which was why threats given in person were always so much more effective.

“We were told Sloan Chen was going to be here today and available to us,” a different councilman said.

“And he gave them her full name,” I bit out before lifting my foot over the councilman’s head.

“Jasmine,” Elijah growled.

Fine, I brought my foot down on the man’s leg. It shattered, but he would heal. I met the gaze of the councilman who opened his mouth. “The vampires have no oversight on us any more than they do you, idiot. If you were a fool to believe someone running their mouth about what they could make happen without checking yourself with the right people, that’s on you.”

Rage filled me when I felt the desires of several people that they already had Sloan’s number now that I was going to be so damn *unreasonable*.

“He gave out her number to people,” I told Gavin. “Like she’s his pet. How about I tell someone you know well that?” I

smirked when Gavin flinched.

Yeah, Aidan was going to have a field day with this shit. He wasn't there because he was only a junior councilman, and it worked well for the vampires that most didn't know he was one. So any public council gathering like this he wasn't included in.

I was glad right then too because he was honestly a liability and kept me from acting how I should.

"I now have Sloan's phone and she has a new number," I told people loudly. "And if you call the number, you will get me demanding why the fuck you have it and how you got it. Once I come find you and pop you for believing such nonsense that one councilman was in charge of us." I glanced around and nodded to Natalia to get us started.

She was the public face of the company and honestly the one who had been most on board with my idea.

When I'd talked to Melissa, I'd told her to arrange a crazy rumble of sorts with five of my personal properties as the prizes. There were a few catches because I was actually pretty damn good at my job and smart.

First, the team had to have at least fifteen guards of the same council to enter. More were allowed, no maximum, but all registered guards, and they had to prove it... Which gave us the list of names of their fucking guards, so they were stupid as shit if they did it.

But they did. Of course, they did. For prizes so good and a chance to get access to us when we were blowing them off?

We had a mad dash of councils signing up their own guards to do this.

Assholes.

Second, the prizes were going to be awarded by first in first out. So whoever fought me first and won got the best property that was actually worth about thirty-five million. That greed overruled their common sense.

Then again, people with too much power seemed to lose their common sense pretty damn fast.

And lastly, at least half of their council members had to show up and watch the fight if their guards were entering so there was no bullshit later that it was rigged or it wouldn't have been that way if they were all there. No crap. I was doing this to stop a lot of the crap and rumors we already had with the vampires.

We sent out all of the invites, and councils signed up immediately. There was one I sent out first before the others so they got an advantage to sign up right away because I still had an axe to grind.

I glanced around and locked gazes with the head of the tiger council, knowing the self-important asshole wouldn't miss the chance to be seen when he thought his people would win. "Did someone strip-search the kitten? I don't want to get a knife thrown at me by a coward when I'm fighting again. Since apparently, he's too good to get his pretty nails dirty."

It was hard not to laugh how easily he got super pissed.

Oh, but I wasn't done yet.

I looked over at Gavin. “At least I come at people head-on when I use violence. People start it with me and I respond. I’ve *never* thrown a knife at someone’s back, so I don’t think I’m the one we should worry about here.”

“You also like to overreact as you obviously caught it and handled it,” the tiger bit out.

I smirked at him. “Yes, but you didn’t *know* that I could. You didn’t care that I could. You did what you wanted, kitten. So I’m not taking shit about *my* impulse control or behavior when you’re still defending throwing a knife at someone’s back.”

“Let’s get started or we’ll be here all day,” Natalia interjected. She moved people back and had some of our guards blocking them to make sure no one tried to pull anything. There was a large roped off area in the warehouse we were doing this in as our fighting ring.

And it needed to be large since I was taking on teams of the councils’ guards with this fun.

I smiled at the tiger who came in first, his desires loud and strong. He didn’t want to be there. He was annoyed he was being pulled into this, and he just wanted it over with no matter the outcome so it was just done. “Interested in a job?”

“I’m sorry, Councilwoman?” he asked, doing a double take as the room went dead quiet with shock.

“We’re expanding and we could use good people. Do you get four weeks paid vacation? We offer that to start. Plus, we pay more than you guys get. We checked. There’s also a relocation program to help you get settled in Germany if you

want where the schools are fantastic for kids and no Alpha's to deal with or—”

“You're *recruiting*?” someone bellowed, finally snapping out of their surprise.

I glanced around and gave my best innocent look. “Oh, *now* that's a problem? There are dozens of you here that came to try and 'recruit' Sloan, and we all know it wasn't with a good employee benefits package. I thought it was completely on the table since you're so ready to do it to us, right?”

I snorted at what I got from them, glancing around and locking gazes with Bain's mom, Councilwoman Watson. She dipped her head to me and I responded in kind.

“For the record, you are the *only* wolf council member here that doesn't have her phone number. They all called in favors to the vampire council they knew, and a few have plans to abduct one of my right hands.” I shot a look to the head of the tiger council, letting him know that I knew he had the same shit plan before focusing back on her. “So that's who your members are.”

“That's rather disturbing and to a level I wouldn't have expected,” she admitted. “And embarrassing that I'm associated with them in any way if I'm honest. I knew one planned to talk to her, but I thought it rather crass when we were invited for some fun. But I was also overruled that we should have a team compete.”

Because she knew it was a trap. Smart woman. I would bet anything she was wise enough to know to leave her cell phone and any devices at home.

Yeah, she seemed the type to learn from the mistakes of others or have enough information to know what's what. Or at least have some sort of encrypted phone with normal Wi-Fi turned off.

I had a dozen people roaming around with remote access terminals, or RATs, getting whatever I could. But apparently, now some called the remote access Trojans. That wasn't really the same if you were simply gathering information... However some of the devices were dropping worms for me to have access later, so it was a bit of both.

I preferred to have my bases covered like that.

I turned back to the tiger. "So like I was saying, four weeks paid vacation, and we normally start our security at six figures depending on what job they're qualified for. No Alpha's to pay tithes to or answer to. Supe citizens in Germany are simply like other citizens, and we have certain rules working for us because we're also the council, but I doubt we're stricter than what you're used to."

"That's how you did it," the head of the tiger council cut in. "That's how you were able to form because Germany was completely stripped of supes after World War II."

I blinked at the guy before slowly turning to his big boss. "You *just* figured that out, kitten? Seriously?" I glanced over at Natalia. "Were people still not caught up on that? Are they really that—"

"Please just fight, Jasmine," she begged, pinching the bridge of her nose and trying to hide she was laughing. "I beg you."

“I bet you burn more calories laughing around me than during your actual gym time,” I teased, pumping my fist when that did it and she broke.

And so did a few other demons, Elijah, Rita, and Joshua simply shaking their heads at my antics.

There were *several* desires to take me out suddenly for making people feel stupid. They wanted my address and to handle me now that they were really getting that I was a threat and not just a young idiot they could take advantage of in some way.

Nice of them to finally catch up. *But* it gave me an idea to set up a fake residence for them to “find” as a trap.

“We’ll talk interview soon,” I told the tiger I was about to fight. “Any other takers?” I snickered when the answer was all of them. I had one last thing to say, looking up at the tiger councilman. “You look so far down on us, me especially, for being so young and pointing out your faults. You’re so much more sophisticated, and it’s an *honor* for them to work for you.

“All that crap you think is important and blah, blah, blah, you’re better than the rest of us. But we have something you don’t, kitten. Well, a few things, but one really important one that you still don’t seem to understand. Want me to clue you in?” I waggled my eyebrows at him when he simply crossed his arms over his chest. “Money. We have a *lot* of fucking money.”

“I’m more than capable to look into a company,” he drawled like I was being crass.

“A private company? Can you?” I chuckled. “A German company that you wouldn’t have a tie to get our tax records? And you think we record it all?” I clucked my tongue when he opened his mouth. “I’m personally worth more than your whole council, kitten.” I nodded when he frowned. “You signed up your people in the hopes of getting one of my properties. I have a lot more.

“I also can access your tax records. I doubt you claim it all, but no one with a brain wants to piss off the IRS, so you claim enough that it matters. You list your property, and even if you all have some Cayman Island accounts, I get the gist.” I shrugged. “I’m worth all of you combined. And I’m not even a hundred. Maybe you’re not the bestest and smartest and awesomest one here, huh?”

“Oh good, more people want you dead now,” Elijah grumbled.

He was right, but just to put the final nail in the coffin, I focused on the tiger guards I was about to fight.

“They signed you up to fight knowing you could be hurt and don’t even plan on letting you have the prize. They’re going to take it. You all deserve better. Way better. Even if you don’t come work for us, I hope you take this to heart and get out.”

I glanced over at Watson and let her see that telling the guards that would show up was one of the main reasons I held this spectacle. The councils were forgetting it was their job to protect their people and do what was best for *them*, not the councils.

I saw the understanding in her eyes and was glad she wasn't mad, but that she saw someone she would fight alongside with.

Nice.

I glanced back at the head tiger councilman one last time. "Except I am on the side of the little guy. It's in the rules you signed that you, nor anyone on the council, can take possession of the prize, nor any monetary gains from the competition, or *I* get to recoup the value of the prize in any way I see fit." I tilted my head and studied him. "How much do you think your life is worth to me, kitten?"

Elijah cursed under his breath. "That's why you were so damn picky about the wording on that clause. You're not allowed to pull fast ones on me, Jasmine."

"She didn't," Natalia defended. "She was practically singing how fun it would be to announce it. You just didn't hear because there's no way she would lose. You know that better than anyone. You spar with her. I'm ancient, but I'm not stupid. She's better trained than anyone here."

"I wouldn't go that far," I admitted. "Someone is always better at everything. I'm a dedicated student." I clapped my hands together and looked at the tigers. "I don't get off on hurting nice people, so if you're knocked out and not in a ton of pain when you wake up, know I actually liked you."

They seemed shocked to hear that, but Natalia gave the countdown, and they snapped into fighting mode.

They were fast and worked well as a team. I'd give them that. It wasn't a hard compliment to give. I would say it to

them even... Once they were conscious again.

I had them all knocked out in no time.

I dove over by one when it was over. “Rita, medic here. He tried to duck and I clipped him funny.”

“We got it, Jasmine,” she promised, already there with a team. She reached over and patted my back. “You pulled your punches—everyone knew the risks.”

I shot her a look not to pump me with bullshit. “They were signed up for this. I’m not killing someone or leaving them permanently injured because other people forced them to do this to try and smack me down.”

Shockingly, one of the other members of the tiger council came over and helped the guy, forcing him to shift to heal even unconscious. He gave me a look that the head guy couldn’t see, and it was clear that he wasn’t on board with the current agenda of the council either.

Well, at least someone was willing to jump in like that.

I was less than thrilled when I realized Phil, Dylan, and several of the top ISLE brass were there. We hadn’t invited them, and I found it rude that they showed up anyways.

And I also didn’t want to piss them off. I shot Elijah a glance and then looked to Phil, making it clear that he better handle that or at least cover what else I was up to before I hacked ISLE on *accident*.

He nodded that he had it, and it was good timing at least because people were shocked at the outcome. Tigers were known for having their shit together and being the best among shifters.

Still, Natalia started the next fight right away so people were distracted.

It went about the same. Faster even since the hawks didn't work as well on a team.

I swallowed loudly when wolves were next.

"I heard you were taken by wolves and are scared of us," the guy who came into the area first said. "What did they do to you? Did they have fun with you? I'm sure you'd enjoy it."

Asshole. "Scared of you? No, not even a little bit, pup," I said with a dark chuckle before chugging a bottle of water. "The ancient ones I met in Rome gave me pause, but you're just a barking prick I'm going to enjoy hurting now."

"If you ever taunt *anyone* about crimes wolves commit, especially against a woman, you will not only lose your job, but your standing in your pack and more," Watson seethed. "I will fight you next and permanently wound your wolf so he limps so you never act like such a monster again and remember wolves have more honor than you are behaving with."

I let out a whistle. "You done did pissed her off. Not much going on in that head to piss off two of the most powerful women in our world, huh?"

Natalia counted it down and I wanted it over with the wolves, so I wasn't as careful.

And yeah, I made that guy hurt. A lot. He had over a dozen broken bones.

I gave a nod to Watson in thanks for the backup. She did the right thing publicly which always carried a lot of weight

with me.

The wolves had a *lot* of guards show. Probably most of them, and when I realized that was intentional since the council knew that I'd been taken by wolves, I was fucking livid.

Always dangerous.

"I have a bone to pick with you," Rita said when there was a break so dozens of wolves could be dragged out... And apparently, no one had thought to bring people to do that.

Of course, the council members weren't going to do it.

I raised an eyebrow at that. "I thought Ally was spanking me about the Spain thing?"

She snorted. "We're all smacking you for taking that risk, Jasmine. No, I mean you adopted a puppy and didn't even send me a picture? I thought you loved me."

She was distracting me, but it worked, my anger at the wolves chilling.

"Kyle snuck a picture of Elijah holding him," I purred, nodding when the other ancients couldn't hide their shock. "It was his punishment for doubting me and saying something stupid. And I technically didn't adopt the puppy but yes, I'm a new mom. I'll send pictures to the group chat. He's fucking delicious with big floppy ears and just—love at first sight."

I might have said more, but I caught sight of David and did a double take. I couldn't hide my shock but tried to curb it, shooting the other demons a worried look.

Except they clearly knew.

I couldn't even bitch when I'd sprung this all on them. The way Joshua smirked at me, I knew he was making a point.

We were all too busy and had too much going on to have things sprung on us. I sighed and nodded as I kept his gaze. Fine, he was right. I needed to stop flying solo so much.

As long as they stopped acting like my parents and remembered we were all teammates.

Which, clearly, Rita agreed with when she cuffed him upside the head at my shock.

Nice.

15

“I find it ironic that you’re using this event to recruit when you’re threatening to fire all shifters,” the head of the tiger council said loudly, cutting into our fun. “We were also promised that you would discuss these illegal addendums and —”

“Do not lie to demons, child,” Joshua sighed. “You’re full of desire that we all assume someone slipped up and misspoke and that can lock us in to have the discussion. Except we don’t do that, *and* we all feel your desire to pull a fast one on us.” He smirked at the tiger. “Did I explain that plainly enough for you, or do I need to be blunt and say you’re full of shit?”

I tried to cover a chuckle by clearing my throat but failed. Damn, Joshua had had enough.

“No one promised you anything,” Rita added. “And coming from someone who didn’t even read the details and rules of this event, I wouldn’t take your word on much. *You* were the one ignoring us for a meeting when *we* had something to discuss. Now you think you can just push that aside and demand what you want?”

“How childish,” I chuckled darkly. “Absolutely rude and trashy of you, kitten.” I smirked at him. “We’re not getting rid

of the *very legal* addendum. We're not changing our minds for the twelve who wouldn't sign it." I snorted when shock flashed in his eyes. "Yeah, we had..." I glanced at Elijah. "How many do we employ? How many shifters signed it?"

He snorted. "Thousands. All but twelve. Everyone else wanted the protection from *their councils* so they wouldn't be pulled in and used to try and get to us like the bears did with a single dad who lost his mate. We didn't allow him to become a pawn, and now he's a German citizen and has our protection."

It was hard not to laugh when every bear councilman there had Elijah's death in their desires for outing their misdeeds.

He smirked at the group, easily able to find them because of their desires. "Thank you for pushing such a strong, *loyal* family to want to become ours instead of yours." He glanced around the whole room. "Which is what the rest of you are doing instead of what you think you are. Over a *thousand* of our shifter employees have come to see our legal department to ask questions."

Rita sighed when too many people were confused. "Questions on how to not get caught up in your webs. They've been asking how to legally move to Germany and what it entails to remove themselves from your hierarchy and come into *ours* when they are not demons." She focused on the bears specifically. "Can you be a council if you have no people left under you because your leadership was so bad?"

Now they wanted her dead too.

Those jerks. They were getting the focus off of me. Of course, they were.

“It was a smart play,” Watson praised, shocking most of the room.

“Why don’t you go join their council and be one of them if you’re going to keep taking their side on everything?” a different wolf blasted with a growl.

I cut in to back her up this time. “So she should have to leave her pack, position, and all she’s built because you’re shit at your job? Am I hearing that right?” I snorted when he looked at me with a warning to shut up. Fuck him. “There is a bylaw in every one of your charters that part of your role is to keep *peace* to protect your people.”

“Awww, she does listen when you lecture her about important stuff,” Joshua said quietly to Elijah.

Except we all heard it, and it was hard not to laugh.

I gestured to Watson. “She was smart enough to try and get in front of things and make this work, realizing the reality for wolves, and her first priority was to keep them safe. You still think there’s some way to break up what we’ve done and shut us down.”

“And wanting as much of the spoils of what we’ve built for the council selfishly,” Natalia added, not hiding her disgust.

“There is no shutting us down,” I told them all firmly. “There’s no turning us against each other because we would rather die than stab each other in the back.” I met the tiger head’s gaze. “I would give my *soul* to save any of the council, and they would do the same. We’ve all risked our lives for

each other, so it's not talk. You cannot turn us against each other. You've got no card to play."

I gave them a few minutes to settle with that, ready to get back to the fight because I was tired of repeating myself. I really was.

Elijah gave me the shock of my life with what he said next. "And we're not just an influence on the German government like the warlocks are to France. We *are* the German government. A demon is the chancellor, and we control Germany."

"Elijah," I hissed, shocked he of all people told them that.

"Their desires are all now to get involved with the German government and have them force us out," Rita defended. "And with magic and anything else they can. Too many of them reside in the US because they couldn't control the ancients of old cities. That could bring conflict between the US and Germany because they're too stupid to understand what's really going on."

Pride. It always came back to people having too much fucking pride.

Joshua snorted at what hit us next. "Fine, tell everyone. Go *right ahead* and tell the humans that supes control the German government."

All the shifters and vamps there flinched when the demons all smiled.

"We don't keep demons a secret; *you* all want to," I purred. "Please, tell them. Tell everyone. Let one of your people be stupid and slip it. Fuck, that would be awesome

because all the other councils would hate you and beat your asses, and we'd finally get what we truly want."

"You'd be dead if humans knew demons were real," someone snapped. "They would turn all of their hate onto you."

I snorted, hearing it echo. "You don't even believe that. If you thought that true and a way to control us really, you would have done it long ago. We're the children of angels, and *seventy percent* of people in the world believe in angels and heaven. Please, tell them."

"They'll call us Nephilim and you'll all be screwed," Rita added. "You've *always* believed that." She snorted when I couldn't hide my shock. "I thought you knew that. It's the councils' biggest fear. We won't be seen as demons when we can feel sin, track it. Humans won't understand feeding on sin when they barely believe the truth about vampires. They will call us Nephilim and love us."

"The angels will never allow that," someone else tried.

"Do not speak for me or my brothers," David blasted as he stepped out from the group. He stopped covering his power and let them feel it. "There are many of us who do not like the way other supes have treated our family."

"Still treat them instead of doing what is right," Nathaniel added as he did the same with his power.

"We *suggest* you all start following the wise lead of Gavin and the vampire council who saw our family as the allies they could be," David advised. "And you will release our children from captivity. If you do *not*, you won't have the 'annoyance'

of having to actually follow the law where demons are concerned. You'll be but a memory, and you won't end up seeing us again."

Because they wouldn't be in Heaven. That was what he was alluding to even if he hadn't ever been there either.

Someone snorted. "So you didn't do it. You had angels save your asses."

"No, we did it all on our own," I chuckled darkly. "They found me during a takeover last year and asked to join in the fight." I glanced around but couldn't lock in on who said it. "And you have your packs or covens to take care of you. You understand the hypocrisy if you look down on us if we had gone to our parents for help, right?"

I glanced at the other demons as if asking, "Is this me?"

No, it wasn't.

"Councilwoman, we're done," Kyle announced, moving closer and waving one of the RATs at me. "We have all of the information."

I glanced over at Elijah who was smirking and pointing to Phil. I looked up at the lion and he snorted.

"We weren't coming around your people with electronics when we weren't invited. I've learned from underestimating demons."

"Smart man," I praised. I took the RAT from Kyle and smiled. "Good job." Glancing around, I smiled at the people. "We knew you weren't really going to come talk to us about your people having demons as pets." I waved the tablet around. "Now we don't need you to. Sloan *is here*. She's just

glamoured because we have this thing known as glamour that we use easily.”

“Well, I feel better that we won’t be the only council you hacked,” Gavin drawled, most people shocked he would admit it. “Oh please, it’s the same trick they did to us. Now that the others will experience the same, they’ll figure out it was done to us.”

“We did save you from the human governments that were spying on you,” Rita said. “I would think that alone was worth making your covens actually behave and keep peace with us by releasing our people and taking their very fair punishments.”

“Or you could choose the path of the coven leader I met with this week who wouldn’t release them and lied to my face,” I mocked.

“What did you do to him?” Watson asked, amusement in her eyes, but I could feel the fear in her desires.

“He’s dead. Very dead,” I answered honestly. “There was more to it than a few demons who were well treated but pets.”

Rita snorted. “Much more. Most of the coven leadership is dead, and we’re tearing that coven apart. We weren’t the only ones they hurt. It was rotted to the core.” She looked at the head of the tiger council. “We actually save four of your underage tigers. He abducted them. Other species as well like he had a fucking zoo.”

“And you didn’t inform us?” he bit out.

“I *personally* called your office when they informed us,” Phil snapped. “They said your office kept hanging up on them

like they were robocallers, so they let us know, and your aide told me that he'd let you know when you had a free day."

"Ooooh, I got fifty on Phil," I chuckled.

"I've never seen either of them fight," Rita muttered.

I snorted. "Neither have I, but Phil works out and believes in leading by example. He made it clear that ISLE was stepping up their game and has been from what I heard. Kitten seems the lazy type to let his guards handle things."

"And he's back to wanting you dead," Joshua chuckled. He flinched but then burst out laughing. "Phil's upset you'd only bet fifty dollars on him."

I smirked at the other demons who knew us well and laughed. "Fifty grand. We bet in thousands. Your pride feel better now?"

"Immensely," he admitted, giving a half shrug before looking around. "The demons turned over all the shifters that coven had captive. We all alerted your councils. *They* are not the problem here. I suggest you start focusing on your own houses as ISLE did and cut out the rot as well."

"Let's finish the fights, or we're just going to be here all day yelling at them, and half won't listen," Natalia said, looking upset.

I waved the RAT at her. "They will. Or Sloan will make them later today."

"Nice to know ISLE is still corrupt and will let demons hack us," the tiger snapped. "I'm fairly sure that's illegal."

“Oh, kitten, you need to read what you sign,” I mocked. “Read it when you get back to the office and let me know if I just did something against it.”

“You *all* agreed to any security procedures we found necessary to keep peace among the groups and for the safety of everyone involved,” Elijah said with a grin. “We found *hacking* your electronics and getting all the information we need to keep the peace among all of the groups necessary.”

There weren’t any more fights after that. They fully understood they’d walked into a trap and were the fools. Instead of staying and letting it play out or accepting we won that round and moving forward—like the vampires had—most stormed out, barking at their people to follow like they were dogs.

Which was why I kept recruiting, loudly announcing that they could always fill out applications online and call into corporate.

I caught Watson slipping Joshua something on the way out but pretended I didn’t. I was going to hang around, but it was clear ISLE was going to wait for the chance to talk to us once all the others were gone.

And Dylan was in that party.

Yeah, I got gone. Kyle had already made sure our people with the RATs were gone before announcing we were done and they were waiting at home base.

Joshua came through and handed me a slip of paper. “I don’t think it’s a trap. Her desire was we help.”

I looked down at the note and saw it was an address. I nodded. “Let’s go check it out.”

Shock rocked me when I saw there were almost two dozen shifters from different councils waiting for us.

“We want to help and hand over the demons,” she said in way of greeting, gesturing to those with her. “But we’re not in charge. We’re not the majority, and as shitty as it is, if we keep pushing—”

“You’ll be out,” Joshua surmised, nodding as the others did.

“And you’re right that all of us or our families have had a hand in keeping demons vulnerable,” a panther shifter said. “Watson told us about your conversation and you’re right. We owe penance for that and we want to help.”

“Forgive us for not jumping with joy and simply believing that,” Rita muttered as she joined us with Elijah and Natalia.

He bobbed his head but then sighed, rubbing his hands over his head. “Look, we don’t allow it. It’s in our laws too. And I *personally* had talked to the former head of ISLE that I found the lack of demons working there to be disconcerting when we heard again and again that they protected you, helped demons when they needed it.”

“I heard the same,” Watson said when we all snorted. “We all did, and we’re sorry we didn’t push, but you understand how much comes with our positions. Not being corrupt is fucking harder and keeps us busy while trying to do our actual jobs.”

“What are you offering?” Elijah cut in, getting to the chase faster than he normally did.

He was still tired. I could feel it coming off of him. Damn.

“Help,” Watson said again. “I don’t know what we could really help with.” She met my gaze. “I planned on giving you the names of four wolves who are licensed therapists and help packs when they go through something traumatic. I thought that could help your rescued demons.”

“Immensely,” I agreed before swallowing loudly. “Unfortunately, there are a handful we don’t think we can save because they were brainwashed. Some of the covens were taking them young before they even turned into demons and...” I nodded when several people swore.

I was glad they all truly felt that was horrible. There were a lot of people who would willingly be kept as a pet or trophy wife/husband. That was very, *very* different than brainwashing children to be weapons basically.

“You took down human traffickers,” another councilwoman said. “If you’re the German government—my daughter told me about it. She works in that area with a government agency and was thrilled a huge out-of-country source of the problem was off the board.”

“We’re dismantling the whole network as much as we can,” Rita said. “If your daughter or their agency has any information that could help us, we want that.”

We shared a glance and agreed they were on the up and up, their desires pure and full of the drive to do good when they kept being blocked from that.

“While we’re getting the locations, we’re going to check of all your packs, prides, and such—can you do anything with dirt we find?” I asked.

“It depends,” Watson sighed.

“And it depends on how bad the dirt is,” someone else grumbled. “The heads are pretty much locked in, and none of us have the power to oust them. We might be able to get one of someone dirty out if you get us something good.”

“We can’t have ISLE take them all out when we find dirt,” I muttered, sharing a look with the others.

“That’s going to have to be a long-term goal, Jasmine,” Elijah said gently. “If we start taking out council members after we did the vampires—we’ll have war. We’ll *win*, but some of ours will die in the process.”

“Yeah, okay.” I blew out a slow breath before looking at Watson. “We seized the compound for that raid, and we’re going to use it as a safe haven for the demons we’re saving. We could use a lot of help, and honestly all we need is for you to vouch for people. We’ll pay them. Just get us manpower to pack up and have ears or cook and—everything.”

“I know several small and honorable packs that are hurting for money and would *love* side jobs,” she told me easily. “They don’t want to be in the spotlight to work for your clubs, but if you have other jobs available, yes, I will *personally* vouch for them as clean.”

They all said the same and meant it.

Well, that was a turn of events that I was pleasantly surprised about.

That didn't happen very often, and we gladly took it.

16

I worked constantly in my role as Sloan over the next week. I went into work as Rue and handled other things as Jasmine, but the majority of everything was diving into what we'd been let into.

A few of the council members were actually not idiots and tried to ditch their phones as if that would stop what I'd planned... But it didn't help much. I didn't get everything from their phones like pictures and files, but my worm had already gotten in all their apps.

That gave me all their logins. Access to everything else including—but not limited to—their email, banks, and social media.

So I didn't care that we could skip the dick pics and other nonsense people always had on their phones. Some of it might have been helpful, but really not needed.

And it was only a few of them. The rest, I got it all.

I did get a chance to spend a lot of time with Mudbug at least. He was on my lap a lot and very helpful in making me take breaks. Even quick ones to play with him or let him out to pee. The little bugger was making me have a bit of balance,

and everyone seemed relieved about that so they didn't have to be the ones harping on me.

It made working more enjoyable. My eyes didn't hurt. My back got a rest—all of it. I was a bit sleep deprived but not as bad as normal, especially since I had a few nights dancing.

And I was horny. Like *horny*.

Not just I wanted to feed. I wanted good, hot, and sweaty sex.

Like yesterday.

A week after the “fights,” I was informed my afternoon and night was spoken for... And Mason wasn't coming.

Yeah, that one threw me, but I trusted the twins. They said it was so Mason could watch Mudbug, but we all knew they were lying. Clearly, they were up to something Mason wouldn't like.

My curiosity won me over and I agreed.

“You've been saying again and again that you wanted to thank the angels for what they did,” Evan said after giving me a shower.

One without sex that I pouted through.

“Right, did you think of something?” I asked, not expecting that to have been the topic he brought up.

“Yes, we did,” Owen chuckled as he wrapped me in a towel.

They wouldn't tell me any more than that as they brushed out my wet hair. But whatever it was, they were both super excited.

I understood when I ended up at Nathaniel's house in only the towel and all of the angels were there.

"We can't let you be horny anymore, love," Owen whispered as he pulled the towel off of me. "And you're going to overload them with fun."

"How selfless of you," I teased.

"Very, which is why we're in charge," Evan muttered as his hand moved over my breast. He pressed his lips against my ear and nibbled on it. "On your knees, love. Suck me off and let them feel it."

I was hit with so much desire that I whimpered, having missed this feeling even if it had controlled me too often. Life was about balance, and to correct one mistake, sometimes we went too far on the other side.

It seemed like that was where I was at if I was a lust demon and as horny as I'd been for as long as I had been.

I slowly sank to the floor and opened my mouth, shivering when their lust hit me full force. Evan didn't hesitate, pulling out his dick and moving it to my lips. I greedily sucked him, humming as I took as much of him down my throat as I could.

Owen moved behind me and put a toy over my clit. I whimpered as it started basically sucking me as well. Then something cold and metal—but small—slid in my ass. "Oh, love, you like that. You like that you can't see it."

I nodded and sucked Evan harder, digging my fingers in his thighs and pulling him to me as well.

"Shite, gonna," he groaned before finishing.

I barely got a chance to gasp for air before Owen had me on all fours and my head in his groin. Evan took his place behind me and did more to me while I sucked off his twin.

I came when he pushed a dildo in my pussy, screaming around Owen's cock. It felt *so good* and the lust was so thick that I was on cloud fucking nine.

The second Owen finished and I swallowed it, Evan took the toys away and fucked me hard.

He plowed me as he pulled me up on my knees. "Look at them stare at you, Jasmine. Feel how much they want you. We all want you."

I came. Staring at the angels and seeing that they would give anything to have me, feeling their lust even if I couldn't focus on their desires, and I just orgasmed.

Evan finished and Owen lifted me up, sitting on a chair without arms so my feet could easily touch the floor. He guided his dick inside of me and nodded for me to take over.

So I did. I rode him like a champion as his twin used a toy to fill my ass as well. I came a few times and then couldn't keep the rhythm. Owen stood with me and moved me to the table, fucking me with his dick and the toy until I screamed my head off and he finished inside of me.

Evan brought me to the couch and laid me over the back of it before thrusting in my ass.

"How does it feel?" David asked. "Tell us what you love about it, sweet Jasmine. Tell us what you want most."

So I did. I was drunk on their lust and told them how much I *adored* his fat cock in my ass and that I wanted him to

be rougher with me. I begged Evan to completely plow me with all his strength and make my entire body ache.

And he did. He gripped my hips and fucked me with every inch of his strength. He came deep inside of me and both of us were gasping for air.

“Let’s take a break,” Evan said when we were done.

“No, please, Owen, fuck me again,” I begged. “Please? Shit, everyone just fuck me until I pass out.”

“Nope, just the two of us,” Owen argued. “The angels know not to listen.”

“We could see if Aidan is available?” Evan hedged.

“No, then we’re just as bad as Dylan,” Owen snapped. “She’s drowning in lust and hormones. That’s not fair.”

“I’ll calm down and tell you,” I promised. “We can take a break.” I chuckled, shaking my head. “He might not even be available. I’m so rude to him when I do stuff like this.”

“He loves it,” Evan drawled, most of the angels nodding in agreement.

I wasn’t sure if I completely believed that. No one liked to be called in last-minute or not given more thought, but I could see Aidan liking that I was horny and called him to sex me up.

Yeah, that sounded like something he would enjoy.

Apparently, the twins went too far with the plan to have it catered *and* Nathaniel had put in a hot tub on his veranda.

I cleared my throat and looked around. “The renovations look great.”

“Don’t you dare apologize,” Nathaniel warned. “Thank you. I’m glad I had the excuse to redo things out here. I always feel wasteful when I update things that don’t need it, but I simply get bored.”

Right, yeah, that was where his mind truly was when the back of his house, veranda, and part of his fucking yard were all destroyed when I fought Lucifer. Sure it was.

Still, I did appreciate the soak in the hot tub with the twins. Everyone agreed the angels not join us *and* it was fresh water just for me.

It seemed like overkill when they weren’t jerking off in the hot tub and sperm didn’t stay alive forever on surfaces or in water... But again, angels had gotten women pregnant from anal sex.

I appreciated them being overprotective with me.

Aidan was available for a while and showed up just as we were done soaking and I was thinking about getting some more food.

Except something tastier walked in. Nummy.

“You asked for me and I’m not crashing, yes?” he checked as he gave me a soft kiss.

“Yes, and I think I owe you a few apologies that I keep treating you like a fuckboy.”

He chuckled and deepened the kiss. “Darling, call me for all of your fucking needs. Truly, I understand, and my feelings aren’t hurt.” He moved his fingers over my mouth. “I can feel how knotted up you are. I’m being understanding. You’ve called me to comfort you and spend time as well. I have

missed you and I would like a nice night relaxing. We didn't have TV night this week."

"Yeah, I actually missed it," I admitted, nodding when he and the twins seemed surprised. "I do like that we have a night like that. The yoga during the show even helps. It was a great idea, and I genuinely enjoy all of you there. I was bummed to miss it."

"That's music to my ears. Especially because I found a new cookie shop that stuffs its cookies with even more sugary goodness. I'll bring you a bunch next week."

"Thanks, Aidan." I smirked at him and dropped to my knees.

Yeah, he was *exceedingly* happy I'd called him when I was done blowing him.

He smirked at me as he ran his tongue over his teeth. "Have you been naughty? Do you need to be spanked, darling?"

I opened my mouth to tell him yes, but Owen cleared his throat.

He had a tight smile when I glanced over at him. "There is nothing wrong with telling him you're not in the mood for that tonight, love. I know Evan and I want to see it too and you feel that. You feel the lust from the angels even if you don't know their desires."

"Next time," Aidan said as he plucked me off the floor. He went so far as to boop my nose when I focused on him. "We can show them all another time."

I sighed. “It’s not like I don’t want to do it. It’s just hard to...” I nodded. Yeah, I wasn’t in the mood to play that way. I wanted rough, crazy sex, not submission and games like that. “Thanks.”

“Even this old fool can learn.”

Yeah, he really could.

But he also came with a lot of tricks that made him worth the hiccups.

And I didn’t mean his naughty fun.

He spread me out on the table and feasted on me until I was crying actual tears my body was such a mess.

“I hope you call me for that anytime you want, darling,” he said with a chuckle as he teased my nipple. He flinched when I cried out. “Did that finish you?”

“I’m still coming,” I screamed as my body orgasmed again. He wasn’t even touching my pussy and—it was insane like my body had orgasms to still pay out for what he’d done but wasn’t able to yet.

“Delicious,” he praised when it was finally over and I was completely spent. “There is something I want. Ridiculously want.”

“Yes,” I panted, willing to do whatever he wanted besides like mate or something.

“Good. Rest and then we’ll have the next round of fun.”

I fed from a few of the angels to “heal” even if I wasn’t injured. What had been done to my body was a lot, so it sort of made sense.

“Owen, sit on the sofa,” Aidan said about half an hour later when it was time for more fun. “Jasmine is going to straddle you while Evan takes her lush bottom.”

“And what will you be doing, mate?” Evan asked.

“Her mouth.” He chuckled when I shivered.

All three of them inside of me at once? Yes. Please.

I nodded to Owen that I really wanted to and moved to the couch with him. I whimpered as they both pushed inside of me, filling me so good. Then I leaned to the side a bit and opened my mouth for Aidan.

“This is even better than I fantasized about,” Aidan whispered before feeding me his dick.

Yeah, for me too. I came apart for the three of them, and when they finished inside of me, all I wanted was more.

I was a greedy bitch like that sometimes.

Fine, most days.

“Shit, that was another level, love,” Evan praised when we were done.

“Another fantasy?” Aidan asked me.

“If I can,” I hedged as I moved off Owen.

Aidan offered me a hand and moved me away from the couches. “A handstand please?”

Ohhhhh, someone was getting pervy with my flexibility.

Nice.

I did it and he moved behind me and pushed inside of me. He held my shins to his chest and thrust a bit too hard for me

to keep my balance.

So he just picked me up instead. I held onto his legs as well and went along for the ride. He felt when I'd had enough and carefully moved my upper body to the sofa but kept holding my lower body up as he kept screwing my brains out.

There were several other yoga poses like that he wanted from his desires, but he didn't, focused on what I wanted instead. He fucked me until I couldn't anymore, his ancient strength and power finally doing me in.

In the best way, of course.

He gently showered me and told me to rest when my eyes were heavy. He woke me when we were done to say he had to get back and go to an event on his schedule, but he would have preferred to join me in bed and sleep.

And he wasn't lying. He would much rather have held me and gotten snuggles than go be fabulous at some NYC event.

A man after my own heart.

I thanked him and promised I'd talk to him soon before he left. The twins made sure I ate some more and I fed from the angels, all of them *super* happy to experience all of what I had.

I wanted more to eat and maybe spend more time with the twins, but working so much caught up with me and I zonked out.

I woke alone in the master bedroom in the villa, but the sheets next to me weren't cold. Mason hadn't been up long.

Had I not stayed over by the twins? Or they didn't stay over?

I was in a nightgown, so I rolled out of bed, used the bathroom, and headed downstairs to get the answers.

"Did you have a fun time?" Mason greeted. His voice was fine, and if I didn't know him well enough to recognize the tension in his shoulders, I wouldn't have a clue that something is wrong.

I let out a slow breath and moved into his view, waiting until he looked at me. "I appreciate how much you hold back from me knowing that I'm struggling and need to figure out what I want more." I waited until he nodded. "However, you know everything about me. You've seen me at my worst and I'm open to you. You need to try and open up to me more too."

He flinched. "I don't think that wise right now. I understand what you're saying, but—"

"Now is *exactly* the time," I told him firmly, getting annoyed when he didn't respond. "Fine, don't bother asking

me about last night then. If you're going to lock yourself down from me when I can't do the same, don't bother."

"My feelings aren't fair," he argued.

I stormed around the kitchen island and grabbed his arm so he faced me. "Have I been a bitch about that or understanding? You cheat sometimes when you hide this shit, Mason. Let me *in*. You have darkness. Stop trying to deny it and ignore it. That's what builds it up into something so big. You have to deal with it too. Let me help you deal with it!"

He swallowed loudly and nodded, moving me up against the island and putting his hands on either side of me so I was blocked in by his body.

Then he stopped blocking his feelings.

His jealousy slammed into me. He wanted to know how many times I had their cocks in my mouth, and he wanted it more than they got. He wanted to do to me what they did. He wanted *everything* with me—from me. Mason wanted to try everything he never had and make me addicted to him more than I already was. He wanted to be the best in my bed and give me what I wanted most.

There was so much to go through and absorb of what he was feeling. It took several minutes, but once I had a handle on it all, I simply brushed my lips over his.

"Tell me you want me to blow you, Mason. Say it," I whispered, moving my hands to his hips. "Accept you want it and ask me to give it to you. Stop fighting it." I massaged his hips when he didn't say anything. "You're not going to turn

into a monster because I suck your..." I blinked at him as I felt why his desire was so deep. "Never?"

He swallowed loudly. "No, I've never received oral sex. I worried I couldn't control that part of me if I ever experienced it." His eyes went wide at what he sensed from me.

I chuckled. "Yeah, you think you're bad and you've got darkness in you? I'm itching to demand your first blow job or throw a fit and tell you to get out." I leaned in and ran my tongue over his lower lips. "But I won't. The darkness is in all of us, Mason. They're just thoughts or crazy that take up space in your brain rent-free." I flicked his earlobe with my tongue. "Give me your first. I want it."

"Yeah, you really fucking do," he panted, not hiding his shock.

"I've given you firsts too. You know how much that means. If you weren't ready, I would never press you, but you are *dying* for this." I nipped his ear this time as I ran my nails over his abs. "Trust me. Trust me to give you exactly what you need as I've trusted you."

He shivered. "Suck me off, Jasmine."

Yes. Please.

I brought him out of the kitchen and lost my nightgown. He was only wearing pajama pants and his glasses, so I took off the glasses first so he could see more—see everything with his magic even.

Then I kissed his body all over. I kissed his muscles and moved around to his back before facing him again. I ran my

tongue over his abs—everything he loved before slowly going to my knees and taking his pants with me.

“Don’t hide it,” I warned as I felt his desires pull back. “Trust me like I trust you.”

He swallowed loudly and gave a quick nod, his silver eyes bubbling with emotions.

I took my time licking him. I started with giving the head of his cock a kiss and licking up the drops there for me. Then I ran my tongue around him before licking up and down the length. I stroked him as I took each of his balls in my mouth. I teased him and did everything a woman should to her man.

And then I did it all over again just to make sure he got the full experience. He was so on edge and ready to finish by the time I finally swallowed him down that it was like catnip to me.

“Jasmine,” he breathed in warning when I barely had bobbed my head a few times.

I swallowed it down with a happy hum.

But I wasn’t remotely done with Mason.

I moved him to sit on the sofa, but he frowned when I didn’t sit with him and knelt again. I smirked at him before yanking him forward a bit so he was reclined better and moved his dick between tits.

He licked his lips and simply watched, still hard and ready for me.

And then I sucked the head of his cock as I let him titty fuck me.

He loved it. He fucking loved it from his desires. He wanted to be inside of me even more now and couldn't believe I was doing this for him.

Couldn't even think of living without this now that he'd experienced it.

He held out much longer this time, and damn was it fun.

I laid my head on his thigh and smiled up at him, panting and licking my lips as I teased his balls. "One more time and you'll have nothing to be jealous about."

His nostrils flared and I saw the darkness, that need to make me his and own me. "You sucked them each twice?"

I happily hummed. "It was amazing. We had a lot of fun."

"You received more than you gave, right?"

"Oh yeah." I snorted. "I don't think there are actual numbers for how many orgasms I got."

"Good."

I licked my lips when I felt his desire to move my mouth onto his cock. "Do it. Do it, Mason. Show me what you want."

"You're playing with fire, Jasmine," he warned, his eyes filling with heat and a bit of fear.

"Yeah, but I do that a lot and come out just fine," I promised. "Be demanding with me. I'll be the same." I shook my head when he opened his mouth to argue. "I want to. Fuck, I want you to thrust in my mouth so much that I'm dripping wet, Mason." I nodded that I wasn't kidding. "Do it."

I placed his hand on my head and that was the final straw. He was gentle but held my head and moved my head as he

wanted, thrusting up in my mouth as well.

“Swallow it,” he demanded after a good while and finally finished.

Gladly. I greedily took everything he had to give me and licked him clean.

And he was still hard for me. Nice.

I moved up on his lap and pinned him down, leaning in until our lips were barely touching. “If you let any other woman give you that, I will fucking kill both of you. Only I suck you off. You only fuck *my mouth*.” I gave him a soft kiss. “I will give you what you need whenever you need it if you stop *hiding* from me.”

“I could never want another woman after having you,” he swore to me.

“You’ve not had me fully yet,” I reminded him, biting back a groan when his desires went back to possessive. “Do it. I trust you. Do what you want to me.”

“Fuck, you break me,” he groaned before standing with me and moving us over to the wall. He turned me so I was facing it, and pressed me up against it before shoving his fingers in my pussy. “This is mine too. Only the men I give permission for or if you have to feed can worship it. If you give it to anyone else, I will use magic to trap you here and remind you who you belong to.”

“Yes, yes, I’m yours,” I whimpered, moaning as his other hand teased my clit while he shoved fingers in my ass as well. “Please, let me come.”

“Not yet,” he growled. “I want my hand covered with your juices. I cannot believe you were fucking dripping from sucking me. That is so sexy that I can’t stand it.”

“I loved being your first,” I panted. “It was the best blow job I’ve ever given. I wanted to suck you more and make you addicted to me too.”

“I already am.” He bit my earlobe and then breathed in my ear for me to finish.

And I did. The damn warlock was using his magic on me, and I didn’t mean his powers. I meant as a man and my lover.

I groaned when I felt his desires to fuck me with every toy he could get his hands on, wanting to experience all of it with me. I had a different idea though, turning around so my back was to the wall and doing the splits so my ankle was on his shoulder.

“Not yet,” I chuckled when he thought that meant sex. “We’re being very dirty all around third base.”

He got the idea and rubbed his cock against me until we both finished. “It’s all over your skin, you’ve swallowed it, and now I just need it to be inside of you.”

I nodded. “Both holes and soon.”

He moaned before attacking my lips.

I swallowed my shock at how much he wanted to fuck my ass. He’d only kind of tried it a few times and that sounded weird, but the two women who had let him hadn’t liked it. So it wasn’t really anal sex if you... Yeah.

Basically, the engine started, but the car never went forward. I wasn't about to call that going for a drive.

He whisked me off to the shower, and I caught several things from him since he wasn't blocking me. I came to a conclusion when we wrapped up, leaning in and kissing him.

"Let's have fun today. Let's go into town and be tourists," I suggested. "We can see who is available—Kiera would love to come wander with us. The angels—whoever. We can just have a day to enjoy life."

"That sounds amazing," he agreed, giving me a quick peck. "I was going to talk to you about getting a car here so I could do just that."

"I don't know it's safe for you to do that alone," I worried. "I know you put down all kinds of magic with the angels here, but Naples isn't like LA."

"True, but I can activate portals now with what I did," he reminded me.

"How about not for a while until you at least get the lay of the land?" I compromised. "Yes, let's get a vehicle, but someone from home base will *always* be up to get some air and pizza. Please?"

He was quiet a few moments but then nodded. "You're right. I want to stop running, but I can't just pretend it's all okay now."

Good. He'd done nothing wrong, but he was probably the most hunted warlock given who his dad was and a prize he was because of it. Mason was powerful and really good at

magic. Everyone who knew even a little about magic and had seen him do anything had made that clear.

I had no idea really and didn't care. I wanted the man for his heart, not his magic.

Oh boy, I had it bad when I was talking like that.

I texted people and asked who was up for some fun and which portal we'd meet them at. We dressed casual and to do a lot of shopping and walking.

We had one stop to handle first since I didn't have any Euros. I actually brought us to the airport in Rome since more would be open even if it was Sunday. My cards would work fine, but not every place took them, especially street vendors and small places.

And those were normally the best to experience.

Lewis was waiting for us when we arrived. He was always up for fun but more than that, I felt his desire to make sure for himself that I was on the mend. I hugged him and thanked him for helping Mason get acclimated, telling him we'd have him over for dinner soon.

"Or let's have dinner at an actual restaurant since you have some of the coolest places in Europe in your backyard," he countered.

I nodded. Lewis wasn't a fighter, and that made him never want to risk issues, so he stuck to where he knew things were safe. Mostly Germany and close to corporate. Yeah, for Lewis, I could have dinner in Naples.

Hell, for myself. I needed more fun and balance, which Mason clearly agreed with from the grateful look he gave

Lewis.

Kiera showed up with Natalia. Kyle was too tired, but a few of his guys came with. A few of the angels, and some others from Corporate, including Mindy who was Elijah's right hand in the legal department.

Awesome.

Apparently, she *adored* Italy, Naples especially, and was more than happy to play tour guide with her partner.

We started with Sfogliatella since it was breakfast for a bunch of us. It was a pastry that reminded me of a croissant, but a lobster tail shape. They were to die for, and we got a bunch of options from some smothered in goodness to others stuffed with nummy. We also got a bunch of Babà, which was a rum-soaked pastry and delish.

Kiera and I laughed as we saw how we were already loaded up and had barely started.

Mindy brought us to a coffee place next, and we were better with it after some of us had caffeine. It might have been the afternoon in Germany too, but Kiera managed a club that was open into the early morning. Yeah, she didn't wake at seven.

Next, we had frittatina which was deep fried pasta and *ridiculous*. I ended up making a deal with a few of Kyle's guys that I would buy for them if they made some runs back to home base to drop off. Yes, for them, but I wanted one area just for Mason and I to get later.

Kiera added her stuff to ours and made it clear she'd eat anyone who touched her carbs, which made all of us laugh.

Then it was arancini which was stuffed rice balls that were filled with beef, tomato sauce, and mozzarella cheese. They had other varieties we tried, but that was the winner for me. By far. Mason agreed from the noises he was making.

We checked out a few of the sights as we ate, but Mindy worked it well that we ended up right by a hole in the wall pizza place. She said it was just as good as the ones everyone recommended for being trendy, but you had to wait like an hour during meal times.

No thanks.

We ordered so much that she told them in Italian that we had a vehicle nearby to take it home to friends.

Whoops.

It was worth the strange looks. When the first few came out, we sat to eat them, and I was just tickled at how good it was. I smiled when I received a text from Evan that they were glad I was having fun but couldn't make it... And to get him pizza.

Fair enough. We could manage that.

We had more helpers come just to grab pizza and ask for dessert. I nodded, seeing how tired they all were. Getting the compound handled had been too big of a task for how fast we'd taken it on. We had part of it already rolling and rescued demons there with assigned rooms.

So yeah, my people got whatever they wanted as long as I didn't have to drag it all around.

After seeing how much pizza we could eat before we exploded, we had fried pizza which was kind of like a calzone

but deep-fried. And, yes, it was delicious.

“Why did we bother wearing sneakers if all we’re going to do is sit and eat?” Mason joked, letting out a huge laugh when most everyone gave him a look to shut up.

Yeah, we didn’t get many days off, so if we wanted to spend it stuffing our faces, we did.

As opposed to normal days where we did it *while* working nonstop.

We took a break from all of the savory to have gelato, and the place was dangerous it was so damn good. For real, I thought Kiera was going to move in with us so she could take a quick ride into town and get it whenever she wanted.

Like she couldn’t just take a damn portal.

“We always need this in our freezer,” I muttered before taking another bite. I chuckled when several people nodded. There was something so different about fresh, small-batch gelato from Italy that nothing else could compare to.

Granted, I loved all ice cream. I loved frozen custard and all the options... But gelato was gelato and in its own category.

A lot of places were closed because it was Sunday, but we still had a ton of options and fun. I loved the farmer’s market Mindy brought us to. I might hate kale and only eat salads with meat, but only a monster didn’t love fruit.

And the fruit there was so fresh that we might as well have picked it ourselves.

Mason was amused and trying to hide it as he wrapped up. He shook his head when he saw me watching him, moving down a few stalls before letting a chuckle slip out. “I thought the stereotype of Italians talking with their hands was like a cliché everyone was dramatic about. But *everyone* we’ve spoken with here moves their hands when talking. It’s kinda hard not to laugh.”

I nodded, having spent some time in Italy before. “Like you want to tape their arms to their sides and see if it makes them mute.”

He laughed so hard he leaned into me and then gave me a hug. “I wasn’t going to take it that far, but damn that’s funny. Now I want to know the answer.”

“I’m glad you’re having fun,” I muttered, blushing when I realized how normal and awesome this was. It was so far out of *my* normal that it was a bit awkward for me. I really liked it though. I wanted to do things like this more often, and Kiera felt the same way from her desires.

Fuck, Kiera.

I’d totally forgotten to follow up with Lewis about options she could buy from corporate to fix her housing situation. And now it was all with Chun and there was a lot there.

I texted Melissa and asked her if she could meet up later and if she wanted any pizza from Naples.

She replied that of course she did because she wasn’t an idiot and to bring her treats too. She was working and I could stop by anytime for whatever I needed.

Apparently, none of us knew how to turn it off and take a break.

We had Cuoppo next which was a fried street food with a tempura-type batter, so it wasn't heavy. I had several orders of the seafood option which was fried cod, anchovies, squid, and shrimp.

Then it was their sub sandwiches. I didn't think they were called that, but... They were sub sandwiches and amazing.

And the guy who served us talked with both hands and gestured wildly. Yeah, it was hard not to be amused after what we'd discussed earlier.

Kiera wanted to check out the booze, so Mindy brought us to a great place. I bought a bottle of wine for Aidan since I absolutely owed him alcohol and knew he liked wine. I also got several bottles of Limoncello—which was made with lemons—and Meloncello made from melons. I'd only had Limoncello, so I was excited to see there was something else like it.

We actually sat at a café after that and ordered pasta, pasta, and more pasta as we people watched and took in the ambiance.

The angels and others from corporate headed out after that, but Kiera stayed with Mason and I for a bit longer.

“We're going for more pizza and dessert, right?” she checked, nodding when I snickered.

Of course, we were.

Mason had tapped out a while ago and didn't eat as much as we did. Hell, I was eating twice as much as Kiera. It was

just all so good, and I didn't care if it was over the top or one of the gluttony demons could feed off of me.

I just wanted it all in my happy belly.

I was about to call it when we found a shop with buffalo mozzarella. I bought a lot but to go. We didn't have enough food for later. That was a crime when it was all so good.

No, we *abso-fucking-lutely* did. When I arrived at home base to pick up what was ours and bring it to the villa, I burst out laughing that we took up the whole kitchen table. They'd brought the food to share into the dining room but left Kiera's and my purchases in the kitchen with a sign saying not to touch.

And the table sat *eight* and was overflowing.

"You are never boring, muffin," Mason sighed and then did a double take. "This is the first time I've said that and you're not hungry. Wow, I didn't think that was possible."

"I ate half of Naples," I drawled. "Even I have limits." I narrowed my eyes at people when they had a variety of reactions. "Oh, fuck off. None of us are delicate eaters."

I had the last laugh reminding them that they were the first to go with the new training on Tuesday.

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Melissa came over for pizza and so we could talk privately with Kiera. She was polite with Mason but admitted she had a thing with warlocks as well and asked for his understanding.

He was totally fine with it and excused himself to get some work done.

“It’s always lovely to see you, but why are you here?” Kiera asked Melissa.

I answered instead. “I know you don’t want to live in downtown Berlin anymore and want something quieter. I talked to Lewis about what we had available as corporate given what I felt you wanted and was hopeful there was something you could easily purchase for not market value.”

“Wow, thanks, Jasmine,” she whispered, looking a bit shell-shocked.

I reached over and rubbed her arm. “You’re more than my best friend. All the VPs agree you’re a rockstar and we haven’t been taking care of you the way we should. You do *way* more than other managers do. You’re constantly jumping in and giving your all. I’m sorry I didn’t notice sooner you needed a change.”

“I don’t think I knew,” she sighed, rubbing her forehead. “It’s always racing and running and crazy, but when we were at the place in Atlanta—the new home base—I realized that was more my vibe now.”

Melissa caught on to where my head was. “Well, you know it’s a lot more properties than we thought, but Jasmine also has a bunch of properties that she does nothing with.”

I nodded. “If we can find one you like, you can have it.” I sighed when they both blinked at me. “Kiera, I forgot I had them. I didn’t buy them, and you’ve saved my ass so many times and helped me out—I’m honestly a bit shocked I didn’t have a breakdown sooner now that I’ve talked with other demons. That’s because of you. You’ve been keeping me going for decades. Let me do this for you.”

“Depending on what you have,” she hedged before looking at Melissa. “Does she have any that aren’t like the thirty-five million dollar places she offered as that prize or whatever?”

Melissa nodded. “This is the one I love most. I would take this place in a heartbeat and I’ve been there a few times. It’s upstate Vermont right on the water and just—all I feel is peace when I’m there.”

Oh crap. I felt like I should apologize. I opened my mouth to do that, but she gave me a look not to bother.

“I couldn’t handle an eight thousand square foot house on my own. I also can’t afford five million dollars no matter how great my pay is.”

“Yeah, that’s out of my price range as well,” Kiera muttered. “And a bit bigger than I was thinking.” She took the laptop still and looked it over.

I was shocked to see how nice the place was. I didn’t even know that I had it. It was nicer than the villa we were in. Wow.

We went to go see it and Kiera fell in love. She was completely in love with the property... But she had the same concern as Melissa. It was too big for one person.

“Would you be willing to rent from me or work something out?” Kiera asked Melissa. She shrugged when I couldn’t hide my shock. “You have to be a cunt to not like Melissa. We’re both pretty quiet. I was actually thinking of asking Lewis since I know he wants to move too.”

“I wasn’t thinking of moving until everyone is saying we should group up,” Melissa admitted. “I was actually thinking of asking Mindy since we’re always working on stuff together and haven’t wanted to kill each other yet.”

That probably seemed harsh, but it wasn’t like they ever worked on anything calm. It was always something rushed or crazy *or* rushed and crazy.

“I like Mindy,” Kiera accepted. “Is she living with that partner we met today? He was nice, but I don’t know I want to jump into living with a couple.”

“No, and they won’t,” Melissa said quietly, clearly not wanting to betray a confidence. “She has issues from when she was held captive. She does get screaming nightmares. Rarely, but yeah.”

“So do I,” Kiera and I said at the same time. That was more than acceptable and something we completely understood.

“And I’m fine with Lewis,” Melissa agreed. “We might need an extrovert among three introverts.”

“The fridge would always have food with him around was where my mind was,” Kiera admitted. “That man likes to nest and get his nervous energy out. For real. I stress clean, but that man just needs order.”

“Like a pain in the ass?” she worried.

“No,” I answered firmly. “As long as you’re not rude, which none of you are. Like clean up after yourself. He has a problem with messes. It’s not like the cabinets will be arranged crazy or he’ll follow you around with coasters. It’s more if you leave wet clothes in the washer for two days and your shit leaks into his.”

“Yeah, more than fair,” Melissa accepted.

I was shocked when they called Mindy and Lewis and asked them to come by and see the place. They both loved it as well, wanting different rooms because of lighting and everything. They each had their own full bathroom even if it wasn’t directly attached to their room, and there were still two and a half more baths.

They wanted to make one room a home office since Melissa and Mindy could work from home a lot. Lewis could as well but preferred to be on top of things at corporate. Kiera agreed as long as there was a desk for her to use as well since

she hated doing books and paperwork at the club where everyone found her.

“So we’ll just all pay you rent,” Melissa said to me, glancing at Kiera. “We’ll try this out and see. I don’t want to commit for too long since I haven’t roomed with anyone in forever, and I’d feel stuck if I was paying you rent and you needed it for the mortgage.”

She was nervous because she rambled that fast, and I could tell Mindy and Lewis felt the same. They all got along, liked each other, and worked well together.

That was still vastly different than *living together*.

“I’m fine with whatever you all want,” I told them. “I can’t survive without all of you most days, and Kiera is my best friend who explains to me what I feel. So yes, rent is fine—take out whatever updates you want.”

“It would be really nice to have a fireplace in my bedroom,” Lewis hedged. “This is Vermont after all. Winter is gonna be *cold*.”

Yes, because *Germany* was known for being so hot after all.

Kiera agreed, excited and giving me a huge hug. We had a five-way group hug that left me feeling lighter and glad something I’d received from an asshole was being put to good use.

Lewis already had something pulled up on his tablet. “I would like to suggest this first-floor living room with the view be more the quiet lounge. Downstairs with the wet bar can have the huge TV and be more for guests and being louder.

Not a hard rule but a general one. Noise would echo around here with the gorgeous ceilings.”

They all agreed, wanting to set up the one wall with their books and everyone could use them as long as there was no folding of pages and such. It was kind of amusing as I got the chance to see a bit more into their personalities and quirks.

Like Mindy made it clear there needed to be a larger and better washer and dryer. She was finicky with her bedding and clothes and wanted steam as an option.

Fair enough, and I didn’t even wash my clothes unless I had to undercover.

Lewis wasn’t happy that the garage only had three spots. I told him that he was not bringing his vintage car collection here for them to have to deal with when he was weird about them.

“No, I just meant we’ll each need a spot for normal cars,” he clarified.

“I don’t have one,” Kiera and Mindy both said, Kiera continuing. “Though maybe we get one for Mindy and me to share for emergencies.”

“You can have keys to mine,” Melissa offered. “I barely use it. I pay too much to park it and feel like it’s a waste, but once a month or so I just need to go for a drive and feel...” She shrugged.

We all nodded. We all had things like that.

They handled more and more details, and it left me feeling warm and fuzzy that things were working out as they were.

Which really helped when I was called in to the club I was undercover at suddenly. Well, “called in” was generous, more Lisa sent me a fucking text ordering me to come cover someone.

When I asked what was going on since supes didn’t get sick and there weren’t any humans at that club, steam about came out of my ears when she was a bitch with me. Apparently, I was being ungrateful that she thought of me and I came to that club because I wasn’t getting enough hours.

So why was I bitching about the chance to get more fucking hours?

Right, because last-minute on a Sunday night to basically cover the last half of the club being open would make most people thrilled?

Bitch.

I still went, ready for this to be over and clean up the club. Being called in worked in my favor because it was a slower night and Lisa was sloppier than normal.

So were others.

I actually witnessed a guy in the kitchen spit in the food Lisa ordered, laughing that it was his special seasoning for stupid demons. I learned so much that honestly I was pretty pissed how bad this club had fallen through the cracks. I’d promised that we would *never* be like other establishments and be the best.

The club in Jackson, Mississippi made me a liar and I didn’t like that.

“Are you okay?” Mason mumbled as I went to crawl into bed with him once I got home. “You’re so annoyed that it woke me.”

“Shit, I didn’t know that was even a thing,” I sighed, leaning over and giving him a kiss. “Sorry. Go back to sleep.”

“It’s fine. I might not remember it all.” He lifted the bedding and got me tucked in next to him, hugging me like I was his favorite thing ever. “Tell me what happened.”

“The club is really a disaster, and I swore we wouldn’t be like other places. I’m—I failed. A lot. All over. And I’m tired of having to constantly see that.”

“You did your job, Jasmine. You saved the people and took it over. If it’s not being *run* the way it was meant to, that’s not your fucking fault,” he said firmly. “The others have admitted it. Natalia and...”

“Rita,” I offered, though really Ally as well. I snorted. “And Joshua. The chef spit in the manager’s food and is a complete asshole. Hates demons.”

“Yeah, that’s not your fault, and they need to do better. They’ve admitted it. I know it’s hard, but you could do the same at a different club and find it pristine and following what it should.” He sighed when I simply nodded. “It’s like you need another couple of you just to do this for your clubs. I heard they switch out dancers all of the time. You told me that. So let them. Have several undercover.”

“Smart men are the best,” I praised.

He kissed my hair. “Good, now get some sleep.”

I did and the next morning I was in corporate early to discuss what I was finding with the other VPs.

“I think a big part of it is that we’re too split,” Arthur said, he and Ally calling in because they had to play human that day. “And honestly, corporate is too distracting from what we’re already handling. This isn’t thirty years ago when running a government was simpler. Now just handling the social media bullshit and always being on guard because everyone’s phone records anything we do is—”

“It’s all over the top,” Ally agreed. “I think Arthur and I should be strictly government and council. We have two dozen ancients we’ve called in favors from and are willing to help for at least the next few years as long as they’re not the face of the fight. Let them take over or however you think it’s best.”

They outlined some other things that were going on, and I nodded along with as I took it all in, sharing glances with the other VPs there with me.

“I think Natalia, as the face of the company, should handle guest relation issues, training, and corporate events,” I decided after several minutes. “Have a director for each or whatever, but those—to me—are the correct grouping. Rita will have Heavenly Properties under her with Chun as the director. So she—”

“Should take over acquisitions and construction,” Rita cut in, gesturing between her and Elijah. “We agree.”

“Also, maintenance of the clubs and the structure. Checking out furniture and all of that,” I added, nodding when they did. “I’m going to be handling security going forward, but I want to have personnel under me as well.” I shook my

head when they all started arguing. “I’m the only one who’s an actual dancer. I don’t mean this to be a shit, but it took me no time to figure out the club was all out of whack.”

“We’re trying to get more off your plate though,” Elijah sighed.

“I want it under me, but I think I want to promote Kiera to handle it, be a director under me.”

“There’s no one I would recommend more,” Natalia agreed. “But she loves managing the flagship club.”

“I don’t think that’s as true anymore,” I admitted. “I think she did it because she could do it best, but she will get run all over like Elijah was saying. If we can get an ancient to shield the manager of that club since it’s basically at corporate and people will be stupid there—we have a lot of talented managers. I think two full managers for Berlin even.”

“It is our biggest club,” Natalia agreed. “One of the ancients I called in a favor to does have experience running a place, but a popular bar back in the day.”

“Still, that’s a huge help,” I muttered.

“I think I should handle the inside of the clubs,” Joshua cut in. “The furniture, carpet—all of that upkeep. Rita will have enough with all those other properties, and I already handle the vendors.”

That was fair. And smart. I said as much.

“Which ancient demon am I getting to help with security?” I asked.

“We didn’t think you wanted—weren’t you promoting your own people?” Ally asked.

I realized the disconnect. “I want someone ancient to be a shield between me as Sloan and ISLE or the councils. They handle that part, and people won’t fuck with them the way they would little, female Sloan. Also, they won’t handle the tech or systems but our actual security guards at the clubs and corporate.”

“Oh, then I don’t have a problem with you taking over personnel,” Ally said firmly. “Yes, that works well, and I know exactly who should work with you. He’s way more patient than you but cuts through the bullshit. We approached him to join us originally, but he said he couldn’t ever play parent. Smacking people around is more his speed.”

I snorted. That was most demons but whatever. “Okay, let’s get a meeting set up with Kyle and me. I want it clear that we’re not promoting Kyle because of his age and would deal with him the same as I would. This guy shields us but understands Kyle needs to be our right hand.”

“He’ll like that even better. He’s not an eighty-hour work week kind of person,” Ally drawled.

“That might be the perfect person to deal with ISLE and the councils because to them it’s all their stuff and always an emergency then,” I admitted. “He could have the best grasp of all of us on what is actually an emergency.”

“Yes, that is one of his best qualities,” she promised.

Even better.

And his name was Orion. She told me she’d get it set up.

“Okay, let’s get something ready to announce the changes,” I told them. “Mason made a comment that I need a few of me to be switched out between the clubs and give us the dirt so we never, not *ever* find ourselves in this situation again. And I agree.”

“That would be great, but not everyone can be a super spy like you, Jasmine,” Natalia told me. “I couldn’t do what you do. It’s *rare* to be able to handle what you do. It’s why the world isn’t full of good spies.”

“Yes, we know I’m nuts,” I chuckled. “But going in like I have this time isn’t a big deal. I think it needs to be someone way more powerful than they would expect. So people willing to wear dampeners. The moment they wrote me off as like forty, they ignored me, and that’s an advantage.”

“Or someone we can add extras to with the help of your warlock,” Elijah muttered. “Or can work with the angels for inside information. They like the vibe of the clubs anyways. That was where you met David.”

Fair enough.

We left it at that, all of us glad we had so much settled and finalized after saying we were going to flip things on their head. After talking to Elijah on the side that he made it clear that I was done working with the vampire council and did more than we originally said so they should shove it, I headed home.

I stopped right after I’d walked through the portal and swore under my breath.

“What’s wrong?” Mason asked.

“I don’t think those fucking bloodsuckers paid me as Sloan. I think we forgot that because I’ve got too much on my damn plate.”

Rage filled his eyes. “So not only did they not keep to the terms of what you agreed to, but they gave away Sloan’s number and demanded she appear for their whims *and* they never fucking paid you?”

“I’m pretty sure.”

“I’m burning their estate to the fucking ground,” he growled.

“Good thing we both can use fire so we don’t even have to stop and get accelerant.”

I was only half kidding. Fucking vampires.

19

“I feel like I’m being called to the principal’s office,” Kiera worried after she came through the portal a few hours later.

I snorted. “I thought we could take a walk on the beach. That’s not the setup for me to yell at you. Goof.”

She agreed, and Mason said he’d have lunch ready for us when we got back. We walked for a bit before she finally let out a long breath.

“You felt that I don’t want to manage Berlin anymore, right? I’m so sorry, Jasmine. It’s fine and—”

“Yeah, I did, but you have nothing to be sorry for, so shut it,” I said firmly, smirking when she couldn’t hide her shock. “I don’t handle personal stuff well, but I’m good at being the boss.”

“Brat,” she grumbled.

“You not wanting to run Berlin anymore makes me fucking thrilled because I was worried I was going to cross a line in our friendship with what I wanted to do.”

“Huh?”

I chuckled and turned to face her. “I want to promote you to a director position under me,” I told her bluntly, smiling when her eyes went bug wide. “We’re restructuring. Ally and Arthur need to be solely the government and we’ve made mistakes.” I let out a huff. “It was always a mistake to have Ally in charge of the dancers. Natalia ended up handling most of that—neither of them are dancers.”

“Yeah, and Rita was a bit too hands off with the managers,” Kiera added, giving me a look like she wasn’t sure if her input was welcome.

“I fully agree, and Joshua needs to get on his chefs because there are problems there as well. We’ve *all* dropped too much being stretched too thin and being too stupid or prideful to see it.”

“You guys pulled off what no one else could have.”

That was true, and I acknowledged it as we went back to walking.

“I need you, Kiera,” I admitted. “I need you to keep the dancers in line and check in on the managers like we should have been already. This club in Jackson is a fucking disaster—one of *my clubs*. The first we put in the US. I can’t let it be like that. Demons were asking for transfers because they couldn’t feel comfortable there. There were so many red flags that—”

“Jasmine, I’m in,” she promised. “That’s like my dream job. The customer service and now bending to every pompous asshole who wants to test us—I just can’t. I would for you, but I don’t think I’m the right person anymore.”

“We’re going to switch someone else but also with an ancient demon who will handle that bullshit. You’re too young and female for this world—supes especially. Everyone agrees you’re a rockstar and it wasn’t a reflection on you—”

“No, I totally agree. My feelings and professional pride are fine. I promise.” She grabbed my hand, comforting me by holding it as we walked. “Tell me about this club and what you need from me.”

Just like that. Damn, she really was an amazing friend and person.

I snorted. “And you didn’t think you deserved one of my fucking houses. The way you undervalue yourself is the only way you’re not perfect. Seriously.”

“Pot. Kettle,” she drawled.

I wasn’t as bad as she was, but she’d been through a lot and very different from what I had.

I focused on work and told her about Jackson and then what I wanted from the role. She was pissed about that club and motivated to make damn sure that no other club was behaving like that.

I also told her that I wanted to work on having a few people like me that could work at the clubs for a while and get all of the dirt. She loved the idea, having a few ideas even from seasoned dancers at Berlin who were in a bit of a rut.

“If anyone could start a successful spy school, it’s you, Jasmine,” she said as we walked into the villa.

“I agree,” Mason chuckled from the kitchen. “I hope you don’t mind, but I was craving fried chicken, and one of the

clubs had a buffet of that.”

“We need a day of meat to counter all the carbs we had yesterday,” Kiera joked, thanking him for getting it and letting her join us.

I was really glad she liked him now. She’d been all about me picking the twins—and she still liked them best—but part of that was her apprehension of warlocks. Now that she’d gotten to spend time with Mason and especially with them taking care of me to recover, their relationship was easier.

Basically, she liked him because he was good to me, and he liked her because she was a great friend to me. It actually made me feel warm and fuzzy that both of them cared about me so much like that.

We ate and talked a bit, Mason nodding along even if he wasn’t directly involved. He wanted to help though and said if Kiera ever had a gut feeling about someone but didn’t want to go through proper channels and start trouble that she could always come to him. We could both tell that it wasn’t even about protecting the company that was mine, but willing to do something nice for my friend.

“I think we need to change how your dances are paid out,” Kiera said when we were wrapping up. “It’s always irked me.”

I nodded. “Flat monthly fee?”

“Yes. God, yes, that’s so much easier and—no one’s got time to keep track of every time they do a dance. I’ve had lots admit that they forget and they don’t mean to. They’re not trying to stiff the system, but I can’t tell you what I had for breakfast Friday, and we’re not the only busy ones.”

“No, that’s much smarter,” I agreed. “Natalia was the one who said pay it out like rights to the song. You know best as a dancer and manager. Get me a list of things you want to go over.”

“If it were me, I’d want to audit some clubs under glamour before the announcement was made and transition happened,” Mason muttered.

“I was thinking the same,” Kiera told us. “Natalia’s great, but she treats everyone like we’re too old to be stupid or deal with bullshit. That’s not the world. Unfortunately, sometimes the people under us are more like kids that you have to set firm boundaries with. Even the good ones. Not everyone is on board for the mission and this is just a job. That’s fine. But they want to milk their jobs.”

Again, totally fair.

She headed out and was excited for the next stage in her life. She wanted to schedule a time with me where we could go over the dances and I could teach them to the choreographers. She was truly thrilled and so was I that it had gone so well.

The fact my next meeting went to shit almost ruined that.

“I’ll deal with the kid if you have faith in her, but I’m not working with a warlock,” Orion said firmly, shooting Natalia a glance that he wasn’t kidding.

“If he’s this pleasant with the councils, we’re going to end up at fucking war,” I grumbled, rubbing my tired eyes. “And no one is going to be working with the warlock directly besides me or Kyle. We’re protecting him and—”

He snorted. “You need to learn from the story about the scorpion and turtle.”

“Well, this is the first warlock I’ve really interacted with much and he’s my lover, so I trust him enough to be in my bed, and you’ve never fucking met him.” I snickered when I felt his desires. “Sure. Let’s do it.”

“Jasmine,” Natalia sighed.

I bat my eyelashes at her. “I could always use more exercise, and if he’s as good as he thinks, it should be fun.” I glanced at the clock. “I have a bit before I go back undercover.”

“You’re an idiot if you’d really fight me,” Orion drawled even as he got to his feet.

Yeah, that was his desire. He’d heard from Ally and Arthur how I was an amazing fighter and beat Elijah all of the time, and the ancient couldn’t wrap his mind around that. He was dying to get a crack at me and mock Elijah. Apparently, he and Elijah were also a bit like oil and water. Both didn’t have a lot of patience, and while they respected each other, they didn’t really like the other.

Mostly because I got the feeling they were the same side of the coin, and only one cranky asshole should be in any friendship.

We went down to the basement with all the training rooms.

He snorted when I only took off my shoes and jacket.

“If you give me a lecture on my arrogance when you’re completely sure you will win, without a sliver of doubt in your

brain, then I'm going to punch you extra hard," I warned. "I don't know he will work. Blunt and cutting through the bullshit is great, but he's offensive and not flexible."

He did not like me saying that, kicking off his shoes as well before storming onto the mats with me. "This is dangerous for me to get involved. I'm going to put myself front and center with the councils to protect you. If you can't take a bit of an interview as well, then you're not worth it."

"I completely understand the sentiment, but you don't have to be an ass about it." I held out my fists to him to tap to start the fight and he seemed to consider that before bumping my hands.

He came in fast, but even with so much of my power dampened, I was a skilled fighter and knew how to see the signs. I went low and didn't try to strike, figuring he was ready for that and wanting to study his style instead.

He didn't have much of one. He might have had some slight boxing training, but he was a brawler, not a "fighter" in that way.

I danced around him and dodged his hits and kicks again and again.

"You're good," he admitted. "Patient. That's shocking in a young one."

I nodded. "Not for everything, but I don't get in fights I don't think I can win. I run. I run and live to fight another day. It's our fucking tagline here."

"It's how you make it to being ancient," he agreed. "But you don't know you can win this fight."

And he didn't mean between him and me.

"Nothing is for certain, but I think we can. There's more that you won't get read in on since you're not on the demon council or meeting the big boss ever."

"It's Ally," he snickered.

"It's not," Natalia and I said together, both of us nodding we weren't kidding, but I continued. "And don't ask. Only the seven of us know for security reasons."

"I don't want to know anything that would be a reason to torture or kill me," he said firmly. "I can't imagine a demon older than Ally, but you're not lying, so it's good you've got that big of a gun." He came at me again and I flipped out of the way.

This time I did go for him, kicking him the moment I landed and then throwing a back punch to clip him. I wanted him to think that was all I had or I rushed a lucky chance.

He fell for it and tried to overwhelm me with his strength. He wanted to grab me and crush me instead of fighting.

"Bad move," Natalia sighed, knowing how I hated when men tried to use their size and strength like that in a fight instead of having good sportsmanship.

I popped him in the face before he could enclose his arms around me. He completely left himself open to do what he thought was his finishing move. Instantly, his brain seemed to disconnect from his body since his nose was probably lodged somewhere bad and he stopped moving.

I jumped out of the way when it had him off balance and he fell forward onto the mat, knocked out before he landed.

“That’s not going to feel good on his face.”

“You didn’t hit him full strength, right? Ally has a soft spot for him. She admitted as much.”

“No, I’m always scared I’ll knock someone’s head clean off even in this form,” I replied under my breath. I shot her a worried look. “Is he really the guy for this job?”

“I don’t know,” she sighed, rubbing the back of her neck. “He’s not at all like Ally was telling me. I wonder how long it’s been since they’ve spent any real time together. How much he’s changed even?”

“Ally taught me to doubt everything and test everyone,” Orion groaned from the mat. “Shit, kid, I’m going to be tasting cartilage for weeks. Did you really have to fuck up my pretty face?”

I snorted, Natalia rolling her eyes. Awesome, so he was a snarky shit just like me.

“Who pissed you off, boss?” one of the guys from Kyle’s teams asked as he walked in with a few others. He looked amused but then frowned. “Sorry, didn’t mean to step in anything.”

“You’re good,” I promised. “He was testing this was all legit and my grit just like I tell you guys to.”

“Well, he couldn’t have been too bad or there would be blood all over the mats,” the guy joked.

“I’m trying to watch that since Elijah bitched that the mats have to be replaced every time I work out here.” I snorted when no one said anything, not wanting to get in the middle of that or risk being on Elijah’s bad side.

Fair enough.

“Apparently, I need to thank you for not making me bleed while digesting my humble pie,” Orion groaned as he rolled over. “Shit, everything is spinning. I need a minute and then you can tell me what’s really the deal.”

I snorted. “It’s such a guy thing that you’re dropping the mask because I proved I have a bigger dick than you.” I rolled my eyes when several of the guys snorted. “The proverbial kind. Whatever.”

It took him another ten minutes to heal enough that the world wasn’t spinning on him. I didn’t help him up though, simply putting back on my shoes and muttering to Natalia that he wasn’t a workout and I had to get going soon.

Natalia found me hysterical.

Orion did *not*, but at least he kept his mouth shut and didn’t double down on his mistakes. That alone was fairly impressive.

Ally was coming off the elevator when we reached it. She took one look at us and went over to Orion, smacking him over and over again. “I told you not to be stupid with her. I *told you* there’s more to the story than we could tell you and to treat her like you would me. Did you learn nothing from me?”

“I thought it was a test that I did learn from you and wouldn’t take anything at face value,” he defended, blocking his body but not fighting back. “Plus, I never thought you’d work like this with a kid under a hundred. I wanted to make sure she wasn’t doing something to you.”

“Ugghhh fine, but enough with the stupid, O,” she groaned. “Jasmine’s been going through a really rough time and we’ve let her down. I have, okay? I called you because I need your help to shield her like I should have. You’re jealous that I adopted another lost puppy and might love her more. I love you both.”

He hugged her when she went to smack him again. “I’ll be good. I missed you too.”

She sighed again and hugged him back. “You’re such a dummy.”

“Seriously, is he your kid or something?” I blurted out, unable to like register what I was seeing. Ally was awesome and I’d known her a long time, but this was completely new for me.

“You’re out in the field too often,” Natalia chuckled. “We get to see this side of her now and again when someone she knows from way back blows through town.”

Fair enough.

Ally ended up sitting down with us for just a bit since she’d only been able to sneak away and gave Orion the outline of what was needed.

He was in as long as we gave him a new ID and handled some of the problems with his papers since he’d gone off the grid for too long. Yeah, that happened with the ancients more than was smart. They tended to duck out when things got complicated, and I understood that as someone who had the default setting to run.

However, too many of them had thought computers would be a fad they could just wait out. They'd called that one completely wrong, and when you lived thousands of years, a few decades was nothing. So some of them blinked and had no idea how to navigate the system and couldn't risk starting a ton of shit.

I gave all the information to Tracey while they were still talking and promised it would be settled. Ally also promised that she'd have the meeting with Director Stevens and Orion since I needed to take a big step back from ISLE.

Right, I'd been saying that, but why were they going to that extreme now?

"Kiera didn't tell you?" Natalia hedged.

"Tell me what?" I sighed.

"Dylan has come to the Berlin club several times since you broke up with him to try and talk her into helping him see you."

I couldn't get my mouth to work for a full minute. "He had all of the chances to talk to me and he didn't take them because he had me. The moment I end it he's burning every bridge he has to get access to me? How does that make any sense?"

Orion of all people snorted. "It doesn't. The fucker is off his rocker."

Yeah, that was what I was seriously starting to think too.

20

The next morning was the first Evan was coming into corporate to observe my new training with our security who worked at the clubs. I wanted him to get as much off of them as he could when they were focused on fighting and other things. It was something elves did exceedingly well.

Honestly, if I could get a few elves to spy on our clubs for corporate, it would be awesome. But that could risk Evan and Owen, and we didn't have the connection to make it work. Elves were fairly reclusive since the downfall of their monarchs who were still in power. They were either in their kingdoms and no one was allowed in, or they risked living with humans and avoided supes like the twins had.

I waited until everyone that had been ordered to attend had checked in, giving a few shit looks for coming in right at the time or just before. A couple were smart and apologized with fairly valid reasons like one thought we were meeting in the lobby and going somewhere. Another had worked the night before because someone had gotten in a car accident and basically was on no sleep.

Yeah, the morning in Germany would wreck someone working nights in the US. I gave him a pass to attend another

time and get some sleep. We had organized this, so it was people who hadn't worked the night before or would switch to days here and there so Evan—or maybe Owen—could check them out.

But there were always a few assholes. Always those jerks no matter how good the majority or company. They gave me looks like they didn't give a fuck if I was annoyed they were late and made it clear they would try to stick it to me.

Right, they were such badasses and so awesome that all they could come up with was coming three minutes late to required training? Not even ditch it because they'd get in real trouble, but just stroll in after we were supposed to start?

Fucking dipshits.

And one of them had signed the wrong name on the addendum that our employees wouldn't talk to the councils. His desires that we didn't call him on it were so loud that it was almost amusing.

Well, he was out of a job after this was over. Hell, I was taking him to ISLE for fraud. I wasn't going to do it in front of everyone because that would get around and out this training as a net to catch bad apples.

It was meant to actually work with them and train but yeah, it was more than that.

Duh.

“We've found some areas that have become lax when we've been auditing the clubs,” I told them loudly. “And as we've warned you, we also anticipate people coming to challenge the clubs and some issues now that we've come out

as a council. That means our security needs to be in top shape to protect our employees and I include you in that.

“Someone who is well trained keeps *themselves safe* first and foremost. So while some of you see this as an annoyance and waste of your time because you’re so awesome, you also can’t take me.” I gave them a minute to settle with that. “You *cannot take me*. I’m under a hundred and stronger than all of you, better trained than most of you.”

I shook my head when I felt the anger and rage from that handful of jerks. Always with the fucking pride.

I met their anger head on with my gaze. “So what, man? Is it that I’m younger? Female? Who fucking cares? There will *always* be someone who can take you even if it’s not me. I have someone who can take me too. That’s life and reality.”

“This isn’t fight training but damage control,” Orion cut in, giving me a curious look.

I nodded, forgetting he was there. “It’s both. There’s a lot to learn from sparring, but sparring with someone better than you is very helpful. But yes, eventually, I do want to hold these at a club and let them try to figure out how to handle the situation there.” I glanced around at the confused group. “How do you handle a demon who is supercharged like me?”

“Do you attack me directly? No, that would be stupid. You should work as a team, but what else should you do? Who gets people out? Who does what? That’s what we need to start training for better. If a team of the tiger council guards shows up—who have their shit together, believe me—and try to take the club, how do you *delay them* and get everyone out?”

Even a few of the jerks seemed to think this wasn't as much bullshit then.

Idiots. I was too busy to waste my time.

“For now, I'm going to give you a one-to-ten ranking,” I told them. “If you care more about your pride of what that number is than what it represents, you're an idiot. We need people to be seven or higher given the change in climate and the threats coming at us. So if you're *not*, you need to focus on how to fucking fix that. Fast.”

One of Kyle's guys was there with me as my aide and called the first name.

The shifter looked put out that we were naming him first, but I promised it was just alphabetical. He chilled a bit then and we squared off.

Unfortunately, he was a four. He signaled his hits way too easily and took what he thought was easy without seeing that I was leading him into opening himself up. He was strong and probably played sports, so he took that as being able to take hits and not understanding fighting was different.

“Is my point made, or do I need to really hurt you and lay you out before you could realize it was happening?” I asked as I studied him.

“No, I get it,” he said quietly. “But what do I do about it?”

“We're going to help you with that just as we do the dancers,” I promised. “And not just for the clubs. Knowing this has saved my life many, *many* times. We want our people safe.” I nodded when he thanked me and the next person was called.

I was glad when she was kick ass. We didn't have many female security, so I was glad when the ones we had were aces. The world was sexist and most thought men for security, but I understood it when it was a strip club. Most would assume she was a dancer, and she probably got hassled a bit too much. I wouldn't have wanted that, but she didn't seem to care from her desires.

"Awesome," I praised as I stepped away. "Give her a nine." I nodded when her eyes flashed shock. "You're patient with controlled movements and clearly wanted to use your endurance to tire me out while not wasting your energy. That works well on the vast majority of people. Hell, I use it all of the time. It's the smartest way for you guys to handle things so backup can arrive and less of a chance you're injured."

"Thank you, Councilwoman," she said, dipping her head to me.

"Where did you train?" I smiled when she hesitated. "You're a shifter, but you could hold out against untrained demons, give them a run for their money for sure. That's impressive."

"I was kicked out of my pack young for not mating who I was told to," she admitted. "I fell into an underground supe fighting ring. That's where I was trained."

I nodded. "If you know how to contact any of them, we're looking for trainers. I don't have the time, and everyone we have is busy." I gestured over to Orion. "We called in more help already so yes, I'm serious."

"There are a few who might be willing," she admitted. "I will call and make the introduction."

I thanked her and we moved on. It was hard not to get annoyed when the guy was clueless and I marked him as a one. So basically, he filled the doorway. Yeah, that was fine for checking IDs and even restraining rowdy humans but... How could you ever work a security job and not have a clue how to handle a fight? Seriously.

And it annoyed me that we'd hired him.

Overall, it wasn't as good as I'd hoped but not as bad as I feared. A lot of work was needed, and at least most of them seemed to understand that.

Even a few of the bad apples who had started off like jerks.

I called it but then told that guy to hold up, saying his name rang a bell and there was something in his background check Lewis wanted to go over. He seemed shocked, and the nerves coming off of him made it clear to everyone there that it was legit.

"Don't bother running," I sighed when he took a step away and his desires were full of it.

Luckily, someone else grabbed him before he could, and the guy had ranked pretty low, so it wasn't hard. The demon who handed him over gave me a look as if saying I should tell the group. Yeah, now that it went like this, the rumors could be worse than the truth.

"He forged his addendum and signed a different name, already contacting his council," I explained. "This isn't a witch hunt or anything other than training, but he came here worried we would find out, and we can sense that."

Everyone seemed to accept that pretty well and headed out.

“Tell Lewis that you need his addendum and what’s going on before turning him over to ISLE,” I told the demon who had been aiding me.

“Got it, boss.”

“I want to speak to my council,” the shifter growled, trying to lunge at me while being restrained.

I gave him a dead look. “I don’t fucking care what you want, you piece of shit. You’re not getting out of this. You didn’t even have the balls to reject the addendum. You’re *on camera* signing it. It still would have held up in court, idiot. You had the intent and witnesses signing it. Just because you put a different name and signed it so sloppily that we couldn’t tell doesn’t mean shit.”

The look he gave me like *I* was the moron who didn’t understand reality was not even funny. He didn’t even understand how he could be in trouble for fraud. He thought we were taking him in for being a council spy.

Idiot. His council hadn’t even really told him to do anything yet. He’d talked to an aide when he’d finally had the balls to call them.

Maybe it was harder to find good spies than I’d thought.

“Sorry we missed the fun in Naples,” Evan said as I approached him.

“We’ll do it again,” I said easily. “If nothing else, just for the food. I ate enough for like fifty humans. Seriously, even

like professional competitive eaters. Kiera and I were just stuffing carbs in our mouths like we never had before.”

“Glad you had fun,” he chuckled. “Your baby misses you.”

“Can we go see him?” I asked, smiling when he nodded.

We went to his condo, and I got a chance to play with Mudbug while he gave me all the dirt he got off people. He got a lot more than I would have thought. Demons could sense desires, but in a group it wasn't easy, and the person had to be focused on it right then. Elves got a bigger picture, like Evan told me who had worries weighing on them but not about the training or being in corporate.

Which meant they could be vulnerable. Was it something financial that a council could exploit or their lover was acting weird and maybe they were a problem? It could be nothing. They needed a new computer, and buying something like that could be overwhelming and worried people they'd waste their money. Evan was honest that it wasn't conclusive like that, but it was enough to give us needed information.

We talked for a bit more and took Mudbug for a walk, both of us laughing as he played in the light dusting of snow Denver had had.

I wanted to stay longer, but there was so much to do. I said as much and promised to see him soon, giving him a soft kiss and swallowing shock at what I sensed from him. Elves were harder for me to read, but his desire was so strong that I felt it.

And it wasn't about anything naughty.

Evan wanted to keep doing what he had today instead of being a nightclub owner. He felt more fulfilled doing something useful to help people and keep supes safe. Plus, the nightlife of owning a club was grating on him. He wasn't having fun with it anymore and didn't know how to tell Owen that he wanted to sell the club.

Wow. Just... Wow.

Apparently, I wasn't the only one who was making major changes in her life. Part of me wondered if I was the catalyst for others around me. Mason. Kiera. And now Evan?

I wasn't making it something selfish or like I was awesome. It was easier to push for what you wanted even if it was hard when you saw others around you doing it and it worked out for them. Change was terrifying and hard. A lot of times it wasn't worth the outcome, and that was why a lot of people stayed in their ruts or unfavorable circumstances.

I didn't blame people for that most times. I knew too many looked down at those who didn't change their circumstances, but it wasn't as easy as fucking opening a damn door. There was a lot of *risk* in doing that, and more times than not, people could make their situations worse.

That was too big of a risk for most.

It had been for me for a long time.

Evan didn't seem ready to discuss it or know what he was really feeling, so I didn't address it. Just because people felt something it didn't mean they wanted to talk about it or even think about it.

I respected that as long as it wasn't something dangerous or worrying.

I spent the rest of the day digging into the council members who came to the fights and we dropped worms on. Not just personally, but there were still some shifter species that we didn't have all of the locations of their pack houses or whatever they called them. Not every group lived like that, but the councils still had all of their registered addresses.

Not that I thought every shifter was registered with their council. No, it would be stupid to think that, and I wasn't stupid.

But they needed the strength of a group if they were going to hold and control a demon, so I wasn't worried about a random deer shifter living in a city. The chances of them holding a demon there were probably less than one in a billion.

Maybe not even that.

The angels had been a *huge* help since we'd started getting locations. They didn't need cloaking magic, and while they couldn't use portals without us, they could move across distance fast. David had tried to explain it to me, but it wasn't an easy concept to wrap my mind around since I couldn't see it. It wasn't like they ran super fast or something, it was more... Like warping?

They sort of zipped to a spot they could see. Not teleport but... I honestly didn't know. The way he described it was he could basically jump to anywhere he could visually see and repeatedly. So if we dropped him off a few miles from a location with a portal, he could zip there and back and let us know if any demons were there in no time.

And they had been. All of them had been doing it for days. We knew more and more places that had demons, and honestly it was terrifying but also exciting that we could get them all out.

As long as we were careful. If we went in on some, others would kill their demons not to get caught with them once they saw us making a move. No matter what we did, we were going to lose some demons, and that made figuring it out even more difficult.

Granted, now we knew who to punish when we did, but we had to be very, *very* careful.

Or I could be a complete asshole and try something over the top.

Yeah, I went with the second option.

The first Wednesday of the month, the panther council met at night to go over certain agenda items more than holding court and stuff. So I crashed the meeting.

At least I let the other VPs know first, and most of them went in with me.

“We’re tired of your games,” the head of the council told me when I walked in. “You aren’t invited and—”

“Eighty-seven of your packs are holding over three hundred of our people,” I cut in. “Do you want to discuss this like adults and figure out a way that doesn’t have this ending with a lot of dead panthers, or do you want us to go in and get them?”

“And don’t bother trying to warn anyone,” Elijah added. “We’re jamming your communications, and we will be until

this is resolved. We're not risking your order is to kill the demons they're holding."

"If they do, our response will be to kill all of you," Natalia purred before clucking her tongue. "Oh, don't be so affronted. You're idiots for not having seen this coming. We've warned you. We've asked for you to do what the vampires did. You didn't and turned up your noses at us."

"And how would you react if we'd done that?" Ally asked, her tone making it clear that we knew. "You were raging against us because we fired *one* of your employees for not signing a fucking addendum. If we were holding over three hundred of your people, you'd start a war. You couldn't win it, but you'd start it."

"Don't even bother lying," I drawled when some seemed to scoff. "So this is how it's going to go. You're—"

"Wait, I thought we were talking like adults?" Ally hedged.

"Yes, we are," I chuckled darkly, gesturing between the demons. "If they don't agree, they're dead." I smirked at the panthers. "And we'll know if you're lying. You can't be stupid enough to think you can pull one over on us, or do I need to kill one of you as an example?"

No, I didn't. That actually surprised me. They fully believed me. Maybe their panthers sensed all of the rage and violence pouring off of us.

After a bit of back and forth, they all agreed to personally get on the phone with every group leader that was holding demons and order the panthers to hand over the demons

unharmd or the punishment would be much, *much* worse. They had argued against their being any sort of punishment and having to pay for their sins, and I lost my temper.

“Fine, then you as their leaders will pay it,” I had snapped. “You will be held in the same way as those demons had. For as many years as they were. How long do you think that will be for over three hundred demons? How many do you think were raped and beaten? You can take as much as us lowly demons, right?”

I had moved when they hesitated, picking up the head of the council and slamming him into the wall.

“I would enjoy breaking you, cat. Give me reason, and I will make it my mission to do it before doing the same to your fucking family.”

That was when they broke. They weren’t willing to protect their people from the “threat” we were. It was disgusting for two very big reasons.

One, we weren’t a threat, but trying for justice.

Two, if we were, they should have been willing to do whatever it took to protect their people or they shouldn’t be the people in charge.

Either way, we’d won. We loomed over them as they made the calls and promised them we already knew the situation and they would die if they hurt our people anymore. Apparently, the leaders believed them because we didn’t lose one demon when we’d gone to get them. Some of them had been in bad shape, but it wasn’t something new, and all the panthers had stood down to do what we wanted.

Though they weren't happy about it.

Yeah, like I gave a fuck given what they were doing and the fact we had to go get our damn people. It was really, *really* hard not to burn those places to the ground.

"I'm too old to have this little of control over my fire," Ally grumbled as we met up after about twenty of the rescues. "I almost burnt that one down."

I snorted, giving her a look that she wasn't the only one. But we didn't do it, and now we had more demons saved. That was progress.

That was some great fucking progress.

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After a bit of back and forth on how to handle the Jackson club, we ended up deciding to close it for a few weeks with a lie of a gas leak. Cliché, but it worked, and we could handle the internal cleanup and questioning easier if the public didn't think it was anything to do with the club.

All it took was a quick conversation with the fire chief and a large donation to their retirement fund and they were on board. From now until forever, there was a gas leak, and we were perfect corporate citizens who acted just as they should.

We'd already picked up a lot of the employees, but the fire department had called in others to spread the word that there was a problem and they needed all the different managers to handle things. Plus, employees to check their lockers and open them because they didn't know what had caused the issue.

"You really can't be that shocked, right?" I chuckled when Lisa came barging into the office and I was sitting there. I snorted when she was, her face damn comical even. "You said enough shit about me that I thought I should at least face you personally instead of keep playing Rae."

"No, that's not possible," she argued.

I clucked my tongue as I stood. “You wear a magic charm to hide your desires and everyone’s around you to cheat and you think that’s the only thing out there?” I grabbed the steak knife off her desk I’d left there and cut the dampeners on my hand so the power Elijah had hidden returned to me in a rush.

Most would think it was stupid to share that secret with her... But she wasn’t going to be alive long enough to tell anyone.

Something she clearly knew from the way she jutted out her chin. “You’re an idiot to be smug when I’ve been pulling the wool over your eyes for *years* and fooling all of you corporate assholes.”

I bobbed my head as I set down the knife. “Yeah, you were finally useful, Lisa. You found a way to slither through our careful maze of success to fuck things up. But you make mistakes every time you turn around, so you shouldn’t be smug either. Seriously, you made so many misjudgments I’m honestly floored you got away with it for as long as you did. But you had to know it wouldn’t be forever.”

“Long enough to make a lot of money off of you,” she sneered.

I rolled my eyes. “You make over two hundred grand managing this club. You were already making bank. You were squashing the club’s growth and your chances at bonuses and promotions to steal from your own fucking dancers. You did *not* come out ahead. There are other low-income cities that we have clubs in and they still make good money. Better money than you did.

“You shot yourself in both feet to skim, and the best part? The absolute best fucking part of it all?” I smirked at her, almost giddy to tell her this part. “They fucking hate you. I heard security and dancers laugh at you. I watched chefs spit in your food. None of them were even your friends. They think you’re stupid trash and easy to manipulate and I have to agree with them.”

My hand shot out and hit her throat when she launched for me. She grabbed her neck and tried to gasp for air now that it was collapsed. I ignored her struggles and activated the portal, nodding for Kyle to take her when he came right through.

He took her out and several other people that we snuck into the office right under the eyes of the human EMS that were outside. We grabbed who else came in and got them to cooperate while other teams rounded up everyone who worked for that club since there weren’t any humans that worked there.

That alone should have been a damn red flag, and I made sure to point that out for the future.

Once we had everyone, I went through with a few of my team and shut it all down like we would have had to if there had been a real gas leak. They would handle going through the motions of pretending contractors came out to fix the problem and everything. Right as we were going to head through the portal in the office, someone started banging on the front door loud enough that I heard it.

“Well, someone’s bold,” I chuckled darkly as I went to check who was so stupid. I opened the door and simply raised an eyebrow when I found a bunch of tiger shifters, one looking

vaguely familiar. It didn't click until he moved aside and I locked gazes with the head of the tiger council. "Awww, kitten, I don't have time for you today." I bounced my head around and smirked. "Or ever really."

He didn't react, but I could sense his desire to smack me.

The feeling was very, *very* mutual.

"You have illegally detained one of our tigers. I'm here to make sure she's released immediately and—"

I chuckled darkly. "So now I can add fraud to the list of charges. Lovely." I smiled brightly when he seemed confused. "She was in contact with you against the addendum. Clearly, she wasn't going to follow it." I snapped my fingers like something just hit me. "Right, I already knew that and was taking steps. There's so much corruption with the councils it's hard to keep it all straight."

"She alerted her council that there was a troubling situation at her employment and thought she was going to be illegally taken," he argued. "And obviously it was the wise decision and—"

"Just stop, kitten," I sighed, rolling my eyes. "I have the fucking phone call. She didn't alert the council. She called *you*. And none of this is illegal. It's all in their contracts, and we've informed ISLE of the situation. Just stop. Stop trying to act like you're the boss and you're ahead of everything and awesome. None of that is true."

"Well, I just got you to admit you're illegally wire-tapping me," he threw right back.

“Did I?” I chuckled darkly. “Who said it was illegal?” I leaned in like I was going to whisper a secret. “I also have diplomatic immunity. You understand how that works, yes?” I winked at him and leaned in the doorway. “Plus, it’s fucking *hysterical* that you’re lecturing me about anything illegal when your people are holding demons against their will and you won’t do anything about it.

“And unlike your bitch tiger, Matty, they didn’t do anything wrong, and they aren’t being turned over to ISLE. You allow abductions, rapes, and abuse of demons.” I shook my head when he growled. “Oh, kitten, you’re still a step behind and it’s cracking me up. I’m honestly enjoying it. You really are an embarrassment to tigers having nothing but fluff between your ears when I know lots of smart tigers.”

“You knew he was coming,” someone else said.

I glanced over and saw that lead guard that I’d fought against, giving him a wink. “Give the lad a cookie. Yes, we did, but I thought to corporate. I didn’t think he’d be able to explain coming to Jackson, Mississippi, but clearly he underestimated us and thought we’d admit this club had corruption.” I tilted my head and studied the head of the council. “What do you think we’re doing while you’re here talking to me?”

“Nothing, you’re all talk,” he growled.

“Oh, kitten, I’m a lot of things, but only talk is not one of them.” I frowned and slowly closed my mouth. “What is your name? Calling you ‘kitten’ isn’t as much fun when you’re this dumb. I feel bad for kittens.”

It was hard not to laugh at the rage in his eyes that I pretended not to know his name. I knew it was Graham. Of course, I did if I'd dug all into him. He just couldn't tell because I was more powerful than him, but he was an idiot. That was what he was focused on.

I pulled out my phone and dialed Elijah, putting it on speaker.

"We've got them, Jasmine," he greeted.

"And the tiger councilman's son?" I asked, smirking at Graham.

"In custody along with several others. The piece of shit had four lust demons as his personal sex slaves plus others we found in the pack house. They had twenty demons that they barely let feed and had working security like damn dogs."

"Well, if he's anything like his pathetic father, no woman would touch him willingly," I said brightly.

"Is he standing there, Jasmine?" Elijah groaned. "Tell me you aren't poking him to—"

"I'll be in corporate soon," I sang as I hung up the phone, still smiling at Graham.

"You have lost what little mind you had," he bit out. "And you will regret this."

I took a long, slow breath as I eyed him over. "You came here to flex your muscles and try to use your position to get a petty win when you've been striking out. I've got your son and proof of his crimes. Which of us has the real power here? You're so busy trying to take us down that you don't even realize your house was being knocked out from under you."

“Release him this moment,” he snarled.

I snorted. “Or what? What do you have to threaten me with?” I moved out of the doorway and walked right up to him. “You could hurt me? We both know you won’t win that fight. You’re going to come after me with your money? I have more. I have the German government backing me. You have... Not that, kitten. Hell, you don’t even have your members loyal to you since I learned about your son from them.”

That wasn’t actually true, but I didn’t smell of a lie to him, so he believed it which was so much better.

“Go try and pressure ISLE, but my money’s on Director Stevens. He wants access to our tech more than anything the tigers could give him.” I turned around—intentionally giving him my back to say he wasn’t a threat—and went inside, locking the door behind me.

I hoped whatever demon gave him access to a portal to get there so fast didn’t get him home. That would just make my day, but it was probably more likely that he would be at corporate raising a ruckus soon.

Demons needed to make money too, so I didn’t blame the ones who acted as a portal service for anyone who would pay. I really didn’t.

Hell, they should charge more because the gig could be dangerous with people wanting to keep the demon just for that access.

I headed to corporate and promised Elijah that everything was fine and I never even touched Graham. He could stew and bitch all he wanted, but we were in the right.

“Make sure he gets dropped a lot as you question him,” I told the demons holding Graham’s son.

“You’ll regret this, bitch,” the cat hissed at me.

“Your father just told me the same thing, but he was at least smart enough not to speak to me that way,” I said with a dark smile. “You’re lucky that we’re taking you to ISLE when we’re done because if I had my way, I’d feed from you the way you let those demons feed.”

He snorted. “Of course, a slut only thinks about sex. They wanted it. All they wanted was sex all of the time, and you’re going to threaten me with more sex?”

I sighed, doing my best to control my anger. “It’s a miracle you and your father have survived as long as you have with how stupid you both are.” I walked over to him and got in his face. “You were snatching young demons without any clue. That’s like smacking you around as a baby. If I feed from you, I could kill you, dipshit. So can ancients.” I nodded when he couldn’t hide his shock.

Why did these idiots not think demons were scary? I wasn’t sure if they were just that ignorant, self-inflated, or stupid.

Fine, I was the only demon I knew who could feed in the special ways I could, but I was *not* the only one who could feed someone dry. Those lust demons had done it when we’d rescued them in LA. It was absolutely possible.

I moved away from him when more bile came out of his mouth before I punched his head off or something that would cause trouble for us.

I handled several things, pulling out my phone when it rang but shocked at who it was. “Yes?”

“Did you really take Graham’s son into custody?” Gavin asked me. “I doubt it’s because he insulted you like he said, but tell me you aren’t trying to start war.”

I snorted. “What else did he say to you?”

“He blasted me to get you under control and use whatever leverage I had to make your council behave,” he answered. “Clearly, people just hear what they want because I wasn’t vague at your fight setup that you didn’t answer to us. I told him the same and he accused me of lying. It’s not vampires putting a lot of these rumors out. The shifters think we helped you so we had allies and weren’t outnumbered.”

“We know that,” I interrupted. “We do, *but* some of your members have played that rumor up like they own us and *Sloan*, so if councils want tech help, they need to be nice to your vamps. We have recordings of it, so it’s not just whispers or guesses. But yes, you don’t have to prove to me that people don’t listen or use their brains.”

“Yes, it would be nice if more did.” He cleared his throat. “Is Sloan well?” He sighed when I snorted. “Yes, my intentions were not honorable towards her, but the child had grit and did help us immensely. I didn’t like that one of our own members traumatized her and she’s had such difficulties because she helped us. I’m mortified as the head of this council even.”

That was pretty nice of him to say, shocking to admit even. I let out a slow breath. “She’s doing better. I think if she can figure out how to balance her feelings for O’Malley and

not get trapped into vampire shit, she'll be much better. She's not built for politics and being front and center, but she likes him. She's talking to someone about what your councilman did to her and it's helping."

"Good, I'm glad. So what did you pick up his son for?"

"His dad is on the council, but the son is the head of their family pack. And they were holding twenty demons in their pack house, four lust demons personally for the son. Everyone knew it. Everyone laughed that no one would touch them because Daddy was on the council. I doubt they're laughing anymore."

Gavin was quiet several moments. "Sloan said something to me that stuck and she wasn't wrong. I put vampires first—always. Fighting with demons is bad for vampires. I'm not a nice man, and I don't care about what others should."

I remembered saying it, but what shocked me was it stuck with him and he was bringing it up to someone else. "She has a way of calling them like she sees them but with a spin that's not meant to insult you, just facts like she sees life in code."

He grunted in agreement. "But while I might not help kittens like she said, I've never kept anyone captive. I've killed or taken people out who were in the way, but there is a level of evil waiting for someone who keeps people prisoner and uses them like they're not living beings. I might not ever save those kittens, but I also could never stomach someone who would abuse them."

"I get why Sloan said you're not her favorite person, but you're someone she would trust to get things done the way he said he would," I told him. "And I agree with you that it's a

different kind of evil to do that to anything living. The problem is too many were raised that we're not to be respected as living beings since we're demons as if the humans got it right and we're evil."

He snorted. "None of you pop out any eviler than the rest of us. We feed on blood and you on emotions basically even if they're packaged as sins. You're just another type of vampire in my mind, stronger ones since you were born."

"Say something else nice and I might just think you're buttering me up for something, Gavin," I teased, smiling when he snorted again. "Sloan is monitoring the situation with those who hacked you. Not officially and not something the council should know like we work for you, but she told me she's checking in to see if they're planning on making a move."

"Thank her for that. I'll let my council know what's going on and to stay out of the shifter business. Happy hunting."

I thanked him and hung up.

And that wasn't the only call we received. Off the record, someone from all of the other councils reached out for the real story, and we made it clear that it was real and just the start of what we were planning since councils didn't follow the lead of the vampires. That we were going to get our people out, and if any stood in our way or tried to get rid of the evidence, we had no problem getting rid of them.

Painfully.

It worked because over the next few days, a few other councils did what we'd forced the panthers to do. They asked

if we knew who had demons and worked on getting them turned over safely.

“I told you they’d be chicken the moment we went after one of their families,” I chuckled as Natalia got off the phone with the head of the snake council. They were the latest to make it clear they would help. “It’s pathetic that it’s come to this, but at least we finally pushed the right button.”

I went to check on the compound after that and was shocked to see Bain there and in charge of a bunch of wolves who were helping out. I was glad he was okay, but I didn’t go by him, wanting to leave that alone and maybe he was just someone that I could be friends with later when my life calmed down.

Councilwoman Watson came through though, having those packs get in touch and jump on the opportunity for work. And not just with the compound, but Chun said they were hard workers getting houses cleaned out and stuff sold. He even let them keep a bunch of stuff like cars that now needed fixing, or like one house had a bunch of mountain bikes and the pack was thrilled for that.

I had no problem giving bonuses to hard workers that didn’t make trouble for us.

Hell, I was impressed when Chun had most of it dragged to a warehouse we owned—and hadn’t known about—and set it up like a Goodwill almost. He had Lewis launch an internal website that employees could access and had the pictures of everything we were wanting to get rid of.

Some of it we were willing to give away for free as long as someone would use it. The rest of it was for a cost but not

much. People didn't value things if it was all free, but we didn't need the money nor have the time to charge for a bunch of no-name clothes that people could use.

The weapons found were trickier, but luckily we could hand them over to the German government with no questions asked as we had before.

One of the packs owned a paint store and could get bulk for us at a great price even with them getting a cut. So that was a huge score, and all around things were working out. I wouldn't say they were working out *well* because everything was exhausting and people were putting in a ton of work to make it happen, but it was working out.

Plus, there were always hiccups and negatives as well.

Like we couldn't save Synda. Every time she woke, she raged for the coven leader and was more beast than person. She wasn't eating food or feeding, and her mind was just—she didn't understand life the way someone had to so she could survive.

Or fuck, even start to heal.

And honestly, it wasn't even us separating her, it was his betrayal at learning he had still been buying humans that would turn into demons. Something broke in her conditioning with that and there was no putting her back together.

Not safely. The VPs all agreed if we thought there was even a chance, we would have taken it, but we couldn't risk the lives of our people when we didn't see hope. Ally made the call as the oldest and put Synda out of her misery.

And then she stabbed the coven leader until not an inch of him didn't have something sticking out of him and all of his blood was on the floor. We'd gotten everything we could out of him, and we were going to kill him but... I understood her needing to make him feel pain.

I'd wanted to do the same.

So we had a lot of progress and things were getting better, but we couldn't ever, not ever, forget the losses and sacrifices it had taken to get to where we were. And at least it seemed to make everyone a bit kinder to each other.

“The demons we saved in LA are doing much better and ready to become house moms of the twenty safe houses,” Natalia told me in a meeting the Wednesday after Valentine’s Day. I was a bit bummed that nothing had happened with Mason on the holiday and having trouble focusing, but I snapped out of it when I heard that.

“Really? They’ve agreed and are good with it?” I checked.

She nodded. “They all love the idea. They want to make sure to personally meet the manager of each club who could come to them and agree that adopting an adult dog or two would be great. Even for them. They all said a dog might have been the only thing that could have helped them more after they’d been rescued.”

“That’s amazing. Yeah, let’s do it.”

“We’re at over fifteen hundred at the compound now,” she continued, nodding when I couldn’t hide my shock. “The snakes had a lot. Almost every group, but there aren’t as many of them, and after we made it clear we’d crush them...” She shrugged.

Yeah, self-preservation was a powerful thing.

There were also updates on other matters that I hadn't had a chance to circle back to much. The club in Canada was designed and ready to be built the moment spring hit, same in Denver. Both of the temp clubs were doing well and everyone was being trained, the right people hired and things going well.

And good progress was made in Rome. All the groups were on board, and we finally had all the proper permits from the government. It took way too much back and forth, but once they realized that we were going to clean up the area, they stopped blocking us.

What else was there really to *do* with a shitty area like that? Build a sign we were moving in criminals? Like... Yeah, governments were their own worst enemies a lot of times.

New leadership was put in place at the LA coven where so much had happened. There were a bunch of vampires who weren't involved in anything bad that wanted to transfer, and from what Natalia heard, a lot of bad wanted to transfer to LA thinking things were ripe for the pickings.

Plus, some payback for us.

Good luck with that. We could kill some more bad vampires easily.

And we had everything handled with the Jackson club. We had people covering the ones we were pressing charges against or simply firing. Lisa was going to be very dead, so we had a manager covering. It wasn't even about the stealing with her, but she'd used magic to get away with shit and broke the rules against her council.

None of the other councils would put up with that shit either, and we'd found a list of other crimes. We couldn't show leniency for someone who wouldn't even be sorry when there was so much else on the line, so many *lives* on the line.

I left there and went to check in on Kiera since she was moving. I had offered to make any repairs and adjustments to the house before she did, but she was so in love with the place that she wanted to start sleeping there and things could come later. Her bathroom was already renovated with a fancy tub she wanted, and the fireplace could be done in the spring when it wasn't such a hassle.

She did have two others she could use, simply not in her bedroom.

We sat outside and smoked a couple of cigars when the movers we had through corporate were done.

"Dylan came to find me at the club several times," she informed me.

"I heard. I'm sorry."

"Don't be mad at me, but I talked with him," she told me, ignoring when I gave her a shit look. "It's not getting better for him. He just didn't get it."

"And you think talking to him would? He's not listening to anyone."

"He did to me," she admitted, nodding when I did a double take. "I don't think he fully gets it yet, but he seemed to hear me that he's way more inept at relationships than he thought. He had a bit too much of stupid bear stuck in his head, and even his relationship with that ex was pretty

dysfunctional. There were times they didn't talk for a few weeks because he was on assignment."

I snorted. "Yeah, she didn't actually love him."

"Something I pointed out." She let out a slow breath. "He gets he fucked up. He just can't get over you moved in with Mason." She waved me off when I went to argue. "We know the truth. From his perspective, he fucked up and you just wrote him off and moved in with Mason. That's where his anger is coming from."

"Fuck him," I grumbled. "Even if that was what happened, I had every fucking right to do that."

"Which I told him as well. You guys weren't married. You *barely* were dating and had one actual date really. He had more misfires than things that went well and he needed to stop glossing over it all."

I nodded settling with that for a bit. "So where did you leave it?"

"I have no fucking clue," she admitted. "That's one stubborn fucking bear."

Great.

"At least he seemed to accept he fucked up more than he realized and you weren't playing games." She shrugged when I shot her an annoyed look. "He's older than us by a lot. He's got this idea in his mind—and part of it is being a bear—that women start shit for attention and to be chased. He thought your shit comment about the director was that and then you're living with Mason."

“I’m sorry he bugged you, but I don’t want to talk about this anymore. It’s not settled and he’s still being stupid. There’s just no point then.”

She looked like she would disagree with that but left it alone.

I was glad for that at least.

I left her to unpack and went to visit Mudbug, glad he was happy to see me and full of nothing but goodness.

“Dylan came to the club to talk to us,” Evan informed me.

“Wow, he’s making the rounds now that he has easy portal access,” I drawled. I sighed when he gave me a confused look. “I just had the same conversation with Kiera. Let me guess—nothing’s really resolved?”

“That is one stubborn bear,” he grumbled.

I laughed. None of this was really funny, but hearing that was what they both thought after dealing with Dylan made me feel better that it wasn’t me. At least there was that.

I wasn’t sure what else to say or that I wanted to talk about Dylan, so I was glad when my phone vibrated and I had a distraction.

Mason: How about tonight being the night? I have everything planned out if you can make it work?

I stood for some reason, holding Mudbug to me as I reread the text. I realized Evan was asking me what was wrong. “I’m having sex tonight.”

He stared at me for a full minute. “Love, we can have sex whenever you want. You don’t have—”

“No, I mean with Mason. We’re going to have sex tonight. Finally.” I headed for the door but then turned around, trying to hand off Mudbug to him. “I have to go do... I have no idea.”

He grabbed my arms and gave me a soft kiss. “Jasmine, you know how to have sex.”

I huffed at him. “Yes, I know this. I’m damn good at it which you well know.” I winked when he nodded. “We’re... We’ve gone slow. We’re—he’s trying to give me the first time I’ve never had.”

“Okay, well, first, answer the man if today works for you because nothing is worse than waiting.”

“Yeah, I feel the same, and I thought he would do something for Valentine’s Day since this is my first I could have like a relationship. But no one did anything and it kind of hurt.” I winced at blurting that out, Evan being one of the people included in that.

“Kyle and Kiera both told us that they’d rip our heads off if we did anything for the ‘Hallmark holiday Jasmine loathes.’ That’s a direct quote. I wanted to do simple with flowers, but Kiera said she would shove them up my ass after you got flowers from a serial killer.”

“Loveable idiots,” I sighed. “I hated the holiday and mocked it because I couldn’t *have it*. That’s even obvious and basic psychology to me.”

“You’re right, and we should have checked with you, but you asked us all to not risk rocking the boat basically.”

“Ignoring me on Valentine’s Day seems like it would rock a lot,” I grumbled, but then leaned in and kissed his cheek to take the sting out of my words. “I get it, but then let’s have it next month or something. I was excited to at least get some damn chocolate.”

“You are too adorable. Now text him.” He took the puppy from me and nodded to my phone as if I might forget how to contact Mason.

“Right, yeah, I’ve got this,” I muttered, not feeling like I did at all.

Me: Sounds great! I thought maybe you changed your mind. What should I do?

Mason: Not at all. I wanted to wait until it felt like you could take a night off.

Mason: Just tell me what time you’ll be home for dinner?

I blinked at Evan as if that would somehow help me.

“Oh good god, you’re so damn adorable, and I wished I’d waited as well now,” he muttered, moving next to me so he could read over my shoulder. “Tell him a time.”

“Right, but I have to do more than show up, right? I should get like—I just got waxed. Like... Spa? I should spa or something. How could he just spring this on me?”

“Because I think he knew you’d be freaking out like this,” he chuckled.

Yeah, that was fair.

“Maybe making this a big deal was a bad idea,” I worried.

“No, it’s not, and I’m sure Kiera or Natalia or someone has a hookup for a spa that—”

“Lewis. He has all the best everything using my money normally.” I hurried to text Lewis that I needed something somewhere and then handed the phone to Evan when Lewis called me to ask what the fuck that meant.

“She’s having a romantic date with Mason, and she wants to relax and be pretty,” Evan said. “Can you hook her up so she can show up fabulous like normal?”

“I’m insulted you’d have to ask even though you barely know me,” Lewis replied. “I’ll have her set up before she can portal here as long as I get to pick her outfit.”

“He’s making us dinner,” I told him. “Don’t put me in a ballgown.”

“Fine, and I won’t put you in high heels so you can be his height. Something cutesy and feminine. Love you.”

I sighed as he hurried to hang up. “He’s up to no good. I didn’t even tell him how long he had.”

“I’ll text him now so he doesn’t go overboard.”

He was Lewis, so he still did.

I had a full body scrub and soak before I quickly showered and had a trim. They did my nails and toes at the same time which they honestly needed, so that was nice. She did my hair

and makeup right as Lewis showed up with my outfit and accessories. It was off the shoulder with lace and ruffles, but it was flattering with some wedge sandals and cute earrings.

I turned one way and then the other, giving Lewis a kiss on the cheek in thanks. Yeah, this worked for sure.

I paid, giving a fat tip for fitting me in at the last minute and stuffed everything else in the paper tote Lewis had brought with. It was a shop run by supes, so I went right through the portal to home... And took off my glamour.

If I was going to do this like my first time, I wanted to do it as the real me.

Maybe that was silly, but it made sense in my head.

I set the bag off to the side and smoothed down my hair before walking into the kitchen. I gasped as I saw flowers on the counter and table.

“Wow, Jasmine, you look amazing,” Mason said from my left.

“I wasn’t sure what to do, so I went to the spa,” I admitted, feeling stupid for saying it, but it was fairly obvious I was all done up.

“You are so damn adorable,” he chuckled as he moved closer. He tapped his thigh in that nervous way as he eyed me over like the best thing he’d ever seen. “Did you seriously go to the spa for a date with me?”

I nodded, gesturing to what I was wearing. “And Lewis went shopping for me.”

“It’s very flattering.”

“So is what you’re wearing.”

It was. He was wearing gray slacks that complimented his silver eyes and a purple shirt that actually matched my eyes. It worked nicely with his brown hair. I blinked at it though and met his gaze.

“I hoped you wouldn’t glamour for me,” he admitted, tapping his thigh again before adjusting his glasses.

“I wanted it to be us.” I wasn’t sure what else to say and started to feel awkward.

“Right, good,” he agreed, leaning in, kissing my cheek and taking my hand. “I didn’t want to be cliché with pasta in Italy, but I thought something you liked, and easy would be nice.”

“Everything you make is delicious, so whatever you like to cook I’m thrilled with, Mason. Thank you for doing this.” I felt better when he blushed slightly.

“Well, you’ve been spoiling me so much with lavish spreads and amazing food that I wanted to do something too.”

I smiled when he pulled out my chair for me and I saw a large dish of alfredo with two large pieces of salmon on there. Yum. There were breadsticks that I would swear he bought from Olive Garden. They tasted just like them, and those were some of the best breadsticks ever. For real.

We all knew it too.

We had sparkling water since I wasn’t partial to wine. He liked it now and again, and I knew he wanted to learn more about it, having talked with Aidan a bunch about it.

“I want to ask you about work, but you work for me,” I said with a sigh. “But then I don’t want to be boring on a date and talk about my work. We know each other too much for like a first date, and we wouldn’t be having sex if it was—well, most people wouldn’t. That was all I had and that’s weird to say but—”

“How was Mudbug?” he interjected, looking like he was having a hard time not laughing at my rambling.

Yes, that was the perfect, safe topic.

I told him how the puppy seemed to be bigger every time I saw him and I saw him most days, but I was worried the twins were sneaking him too many snacks. Then he asked about the spa, admitting he’d always wanted to go and have like a self-care day, but some people still looked down on men for doing that.

I snorted. “Not this spa. It’s run by supes and they adore Lewis. That man has something done like every other week. I wish I was better with that.” I cleared my throat and reached for another breadstick. “The body scrub I had today was amazing. It’s more than skin they get off of you, and it’s like mental cleansing as well. We can book an appointment in a few weeks?”

“Yeah, I’d like that.”

We shared a smile, and he told me about getting the seeding shelf set up and the plans for his garden. He was really excited about it, and him happily talking was incredibly sexy. I realized I was staring at him like dessert while finishing my meal.

“Shit, I didn’t feed,” I whispered in horror. I blinked at him as my eyes burned with tears as I jumped to my feet. “I’m ruining this.”

“Jasmine, it’s fine,” he promised as he took my hands in his. “Let’s go there for a drink and you can teach me to smoke a cigar. I’ve never had one and you really like them.”

I’d already had one that day, and I didn’t normally have more than one, but I wasn’t going to tell him that when he was being nice to me. I let out a slow breath and nodded, giving him a soft kiss. “And the flowers are really pretty. Thank you.”

“Anything for you, muffin.” He smothered a chuckle but mostly failed. “You’re still hungry. Text David or see if they’re at someone’s house and we can bring cigars over.”

I nodded, letting out a slow breath before going over by my stuff and doing just that. Yeah, I could handle something so simple. I could handle all of this.

It wasn’t like it was my first time having sex after all.

No, it was simply my first time having sex when I hadn’t rushed it and with someone I was pretty sure I was falling in love with. I was fairly sure I was more scared about that falling in love part than the actual sex.

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The angels *clearly* knew what that night was for us because they kept the feeding chaste and were careful touching me besides hugs and kisses on the cheek. We had a nice scotch with them that I brought with and cigars, a bit of after-dinner fun around the fire pit on a cold Denver night.

We also didn't talk about anything heavy. They didn't give any updates or talk about helping us rescue demons, nor spying on our clubs. It was asking Mason about the villa and talking about home renovations they'd done over the years. One of them was very into it and offered to translate what the contractors said if he wanted.

Hell, they even talked about baseball and spring training which was like the most wholesome conversation I might ever have had with the angels.

We said goodnight and went back through the portal.

“How about a dance?” he seemed to hesitate but then sighed. “Do you want me to still call you Jasmine when we're ___”

I moved my fingers over his lips and nodded, touched he was worried about this. “Yes, I'm Jasmine. I'm making peace

with Angela, but now that I actually told that stupid town that I grew up in that Angela died, I'm ready to just be Jasmine. People change their names all of the time. It's who I am."

"Good for you. Really, I mean it." He gave me a soft kiss. "How about a dance?"

"Always."

Wedge shoes didn't work well for that, so I took them off and we moved to the area rug by the sofa. I thought we were going to go all out like normal, but he put on something soft and easy, holding me as we swayed together.

It was ridiculously cute and sweet... And exactly what I needed.

I leaned my head on his shoulder and danced with him, realizing there was one thing I wanted to make this perfect. "Don't hide from me tonight, Mason. You use it as much as I do glamour."

"That's more than fair," he agreed, letting out a slow breath before letting me feel his desires.

And fuck did he want me. All he wanted was me.

I angled my head and he did too so we could kiss. It was soft and seductive, not rushed but filled with so much promise.

"I love you, Jasmine," he whispered.

"Really?" I breathed, shocked he was actually saying it even if I suspected he was there.

He nodded, leaning away so we could see each other better. "I know you're not there, and that's okay. I know how you feel about me, and years of feeling what everyone else

wants—you need more time to heal before you can tell someone something so important.”

“Thank you.” That was amazing for him to realize and accept, and I kissed him again.

“I just wanted to say it to you before you learned from my desire, and I know I’ll have the desire for you to say it back. *But* I want you to hear me right now that I don’t want you to until you’re ready. That is what I want most, muffin, okay?”

“Okay.” I slid my hand in his hair and kissed him again. “Thank you for loving me and being so amazing to me.”

“You are more than deserving,” he promised.

“Mason, take me to bed.”

He softly groaned and then I was up in his arms. He carried me upstairs, and I gasped as I saw the trail of rose petals in the hallway to our room. Then they were all over the room and bed.

“This is…” I wasn’t sure what to say. “Amazing” didn’t seem to quite cover it but also sounded cheesy in my head. So I went how I felt about him as well. “Perfect. This is perfect.”

He set me on the bed before moving around the room and lighting candles he’d set up. Then he stopped in front of me and kneeled. He let out a slow breath and put his hands on my legs under the skirt. “I want to finish inside of you. I want you to be the first time I have sex bare.”

I went to immediately tell him that I wanted that too, but then realized he was leading me to something. “What does it mean if you do that?”

He smiled at me like he was proud that I was learning to protect myself better. “It makes you mine.” He cleared his throat when I flinched and then hurried on to elaborate. “It’s not mating. It’s like a claim to other warlocks that you’re mine and they risk the wrath of whoever you’re with if they touch you. We can sense it.”

“There’s more,” I hedged.

“Yes, but I *swear* to you that it’s not bad, it’s not trapping you or anything. It’s... A perk. I just want...”

He wanted to know I would let him do it before he told me the benefits. I fully understood that. More than he knew given how many had tried to use me after learning I was more than a demon but the ultimate weapon.

I leaned in and gave him a soft kiss. “I want you to finish on me, in me, and down my throat, Mason. All of me is yours now just as you’re mine. It’s not a promise forever, but what we are now.”

“You’re now and forever my goddess,” he whispered, cupping my face before taking the kiss up a notch. “But I don’t want to feel conflicted the first time we’re together. If you want to give me head in the morning, fuck, please do. Tonight is giving us the perfect first time and making you mine.”

He pushed me back on the bed and moved over me, his hand massaging my breast as we kissed. His other hand moved to my ass as he ground our hips together.

“Can I take off your dress?” he whispered against my lips.

I let out a small giggle, almost nervous, but nodded.

He stood, and I had an amazing view of him undressing first, both of us knowing that I loved every second of it and he was doing it slowly for me. Then he pulled me to my feet and took off the dress before my undergarments.

“You are the most beautiful person I have ever laid eyes on,” he murmured, as his hands moved over my body. “Why you ever gave a geek like me a second look I will never understand?”

“I’m sorry mirrors are all broken to you,” I said with a snicker as I scooted back on the bed. I yelped as he grabbed my ankle and pulled me back.

“Oh no, I want to kneel before you this time,” he whispered as he did just that and kissed up my thighs. He gave soft licks to my clit until I was begging him for more. “I want you dripping for me, Jasmine. I want your body begging for mine the way your sweet mouth is.”

I came. I just fucking orgasmed from his damn seduction.

He brought me twice more before moving me back on the bed. “Will you give me the greatest honor of having your first time?”

I nodded. “I need you, Mason.”

“Shit, don’t throw fuel on my fire,” he warned as he spread my legs.

And I felt it. I felt his need crash into me. He wanted this to be real and have me as his. He wanted to have me whenever he wanted and to see how much prettier I could be in passion. He wanted everything and every piece of me.

For some crazy reason, that didn’t even scare me.

Idiot. Men were way more dangerous than anything else in the world.

He licked my nipples as he pushed inside of me, both of us moaning deeply. His eyes about rolled up in his head as I moved my leg between us and he leaned down. I took off his glasses and set them on the nightstand so they were safe. Then I kissed him with all I had.

Mason started pumping his hips, trying to keep in control and make it last.

I chuckled as I sucked his lower lip in my mouth. “First times are supposed to be fast and a bit awkward. Finish inside of me. I want to feel you come inside of me, Mason.”

He broke. He completely fucking broke right in front of my eyes and I loved it.

Mashing his mouth to mine, he gave a few more hard thrusts and grunted as he finished. I tightened my pussy around him to make it better and held onto him when he was spent.

“Okay, we’re going to both need to quit our jobs because we’re just going to have sex all day every day after I know sex can be like that now,” he declared, his voice completely serious.

I burst out laughing, hugging him tightly.

Then I rolled us so I was on top, licking my lips as hunger filled his eyes.

“I assume you want another round then?”

He reached up and pinched my nipples before running his hands over my body, eyeing me over possessively. “I can’t keep up the idea it’s your first time when you’re being so fucking alluring and melting my brain. Yes, I want you all night. A virgin couldn’t take that, but you—I’m too fucking greedy now that I’ve had you.”

Fair enough.

I moved my hips and tightened my body around him in a way he loved. He sat up too and did everything to my breasts as I rode him. When I got close, I pressed my lips to his ear and told him all of the places and ways I wanted him to take me.

He finished before I did, shocking both of us. We chuckled and then he apologized profusely, promising that he would never be so selfish with me.

I licked my lips and studied him. “Will you give me what I really want then?”

He moaned, sensing it from me. “Jasmine, that’s a present for me.”

“Maybe, but I want it too.”

He nodded, gently pulling out of me and going for the vibrating wand. He teased my clit with it as he fingered my ass, making me orgasm again and again.

“You’re sure?” he checked.

“I don’t think I’ve ever wanted to have anal more, Mason,” I promised him. “Knowing how much you want it and have never had it—yes, I’m sure.”

He turned off the toy and slowly pushed in my ass as he moved over me. I lowered my shoulder as he wanted, completely letting him do what he wanted with me.

“Please stop throwing fuel on my fire, muffin,” he bit out.

“I want you out of control,” I purred. “Do everything to me, Mason. I’ll still accept you just as you do me.” I gasped as he thrust in harder. “Yes, please, give me all of you.”

So he did. He slammed into me harder than he thought he should, trusting what I was saying and my desires. I came so fast that he was floored at how much I enjoyed being with him. I didn’t hold back my reactions either, letting him hear how much I enjoyed it even if I sounded like bad porn.

He pressed his lips to my ear as he got close. “You’re mine now, Jasmine. All of you is fucking mine. I won’t ever let you go and you can’t hide from me.”

It sounded like a threat, but really it was a promise... And yes, there was a difference.

I moaned at his desires. He wanted to consume me—wanted my feelings for him to consume me. His ultimate goal was to have me as addicted to him as he was to me even if he knew it was over the top and obsessive instead of healthy.

And all I wanted was more.

Decades of being rejected or not being what people wanted when they learned more were partially healed with how much he wanted me. Yes, the ancients and even angels accepted all of me, but this was different. That was family and friendships.

Mason wanted me down to my soul.

“Please, more,” I begged... And I didn’t really mean the sex. I wanted him that obsessed with me. I wanted him to want all of me. It wasn’t scary when it was him.

He pushed up and grabbed my hips tighter than I would have thought he had the strength to. He dug his fingers in and groaned when he felt how much I liked it, plowing me roughly until he finished deep inside of me.

Then the warlock had a new trick for me that I’d never experienced before.

Mason pulled me up to my knees and nipped on my ear until I squealed. “I know you care for the twins and Aidan, and I would never keep you from them, but let me show you why I can give you *everything* you ever wanted.”

I wasn’t sure what he meant until I felt magic, and then it was like he was in front of me too. I *felt him* thrust in my pussy while he was still behind me. It was like I was being sandwiched between two of him and stuffed completely.

And *then* it was like his mouth was on my nipples. On my neck. All over my fucking body doing everything to me while it felt like he fucked both of my holes.

I screamed in pleasure.

I begged for more.

I pleaded for him to never stop.

I asked him to do everything to me.

I orgasmed again and again harder than I ever had before.

Fuck, this warlock was going to be the death of me.

“Come on me,” I sobbed when I couldn’t take anymore.
“Come on me by your hand and I’ll rub it in my skin.”

“You’re accepting it this time?” he checked. “You’re putting a ring on my finger?”

I nodded, blubbering that no one had ever made me feel so good, and I wanted him as mine.

He gently pulled out of me and lowered me to the bed, rolling me over so we were staring at each other. The smirk of victory would have scared me if it was anyone else as he stroked his dick.

Honestly, it did even when it was him. Mason had a lot more darkness in him than I’d thought. I knew that now. Part of him wanted to own me. Part of him *liked* that I was the most powerful demon ever born, and that was fitting for him as the most powerful warlock ever born.

His eyes flashed power as he finished, watching his cum land all over my debauched body. “Do it.”

“Yes, Mason,” I panted, smirking when he shivered at my obedience. I rubbed it over my breasts and then picked up some with my fingers. His eyes were glued to my hand as I licked every drop up, moaning at the taste. “Do you want to give me anything else, butter?”

“Butter?” he murmured as he still watched my fingers.

“Yeah, I’m muffin. That makes you butter. Nothing is better on a muffin than butter. You melt me. I can’t live without you. And you make a mess all over me.”

His nostrils flared and he closed his eyes as he let out a slow breath. “Get your fucking ass in the shower before I lose

my mind.”

“Oh?”

He leaned over me until we were nose to nose. “Yeah, I’m going to fuck your ass *again* in there and finish on it. Then I’m going to take care of my muffin as she deserves.”

“Whatever you want, butter,” I purred, knowing I was pushing it too much. I swallowed a yelp when darkness filled his eyes and I felt like prey no matter how strong I was.

I hurried as much as I could on shaky legs and turned on the shower. I was confused why he wasn’t right there with me, but I peeked out to see he was changing the sheets since we’d made a mess and there were bits of rose petals all over.

Damn, he really did think of everything.

He fucked me against the tiles while kissing me deeply before spinning me around and fucking my ass again. It was everything I’d hoped for when I thought of sex with Mason. He finally went soft after he finished on my ass and rubbed it in my skin.

Seriously, supes were such a kinky bunch.

“Are you sated?” he checked as he shampooed my hair. “If you aren’t, I could fuck you magically and with your toy as long as you want.”

“Shit, that sounds like fun for another night,” I moaned, rubbing my ass against his groin. “What do you want with the woman that’s yours?”

“You seriously are trying to see all of my darkness,” he growled. He knelt behind me and buried his face in me,

fingering me and eating me like the best thing he ever had.

I finished so many times after already climaxing so much that I blacked out for a moment. He made me black out in *pleasure*.

I was so fucked.

He finished showering us and then spoiled me by brushing out my hair, working in leave-in conditioner, and then drying it. Then he rubbed my body down with moisturizer and tucked me into bed.

And I woke him with a blowjob and begging him to fuck me again. Which was something he really, really, *really* liked.

He had me in the bed twice.

Then he had me on the counter.

I rode him at the table.

We fucked on the couch.

Just everywhere. We had sex everywhere for days. The moment we could go and had the energy... We had sex.

And all we ate was each other. Not really, but it felt like that.

Unfortunately, I had to go into the office at one point and handle things, but then I was excited to get back home and more of Mason.

Fine, yes, I was addicted, but I wasn't about to join a program for it.

Neither was he.

The air was off when I arrived home though and Mason was staring outside, tapping his leg. He turned when he saw me and simply pointed to the patio.

“Someone let him through the portal here?” I asked when my eyes landed on Dylan.

“No, he drove here,” Mason answered, nodding when I did a double take. “No one would let him get to you that has access, so he used a public portal in Naples and rented a vehicle.” He swallowed loudly when I looked at him. “I told him he wasn’t welcome inside, and he scented too much when I opened the door.”

Shit. Dylan would be able to smell sex, and given how much sex Mason and I had been having... It was probably fairly potent.

“He was shaking and then sat down and started pounding the bottle of scotch he brought for you,” Mason told me. “I didn’t know what to do or if I should warn you not to come home.”

“You’re fine, and I’m sorry my shit is leaking over.” I gave him a soft kiss and then went to handle the bear I was starting to hate.

Tears were running down Dylan’s cheeks as he looked up at me. “Why him? Why couldn’t you love me like that? Why couldn’t you love me like I wanted?”

I lost any soft feelings at seeing him cry when he said it all like that. “From the moment we met I told you and *kept telling you* that I couldn’t be what you wanted. *You* kept promising

that you'd make it work, be flexible, and be what *I needed*. So which of us was really the fucking liar, Dylan?"

He turned his head like I'd slapped him.

"It's not about whether I could love you or not. It's that *your love* wasn't healthy for me. Why can't you get that? Your idea of love isn't what I want, isn't what I need. So stop making me the villain, the liar—the problem. It's not about my being emotionally stunted or a succubus or never having a relationship before. It's *you*. You were the piece of the puzzle that didn't fit."

Tears flowed freely, and he used the back of his arm to wipe them.

"I told you more than you ever told me and let you in more. So stop making this my fault. We didn't work. Just because you want something doesn't mean I have to give it to you." I let out a slow breath. "I don't want your idea of love. It hurt me and I wasn't happy. I don't know how else to say it so you get it. Just please finally hear me because I don't want to hate you because you can't accept I couldn't love you."

There was nothing left to say, so I walked back inside and locked the door behind me, not caring if he sat there forever or drank himself unconscious. I was done with being the problem.

And I wasn't going to keep someone in my life who kept putting me in that role when so many others saw me as the solution to what was wrong around us.

The End

THANK YOU for reading this book!!

Thank you so much for reading the next book in Jasmine's journey. I loves all of you lots for your support and wanting more of my books. Please, *please* leave a review. It really helps me out to know which series people are eager for. I appreciate the time it takes!

Next is Sera... There is more to probably say, but I'm sick and this has to get on Amazon in less than 2 hours and I'm cursing myself for being stupid.

Thanks for understanding, enjoy Turkey Day or whatever you celebrate, look forward to my normal Black Friday crazy book give aways!

All my best,

Erin and Vader

Find A New Series To Love...

Accidentally Wolf: Seraphine Thomas 1

Gives New Meaning To Workplace Injury

Special Agent in Charge, Seraphine Thomas, lives for her job at the FBI. One of the youngest female agents with her own team, she thrives in undercover work to make the city she loves safer. But Sera's on-track life is thrown into chaos when she's attacked during a bust gone bad and is left figuring out what it means to be a werewolf.

Right away, she learns that she's more powerful and able to do things that she shouldn't be able to do so quickly after her transition. The rules of her old life don't seem to apply to much now that she's a shifter, and knowing who she can trust is even more complicated.

When she's transferred to a special branch of the FBI made up of paranormals policing others of their kind and given a promotion, things start looking up—until her abnormal level of power creates a list of enemies for her before she's even learned who her allies are.

Upended Life: Artemis University 1

My name is Tamsin Vale and my life is about to get real... Really complicated and ridiculously dangerous. Which is almost funny given at nineteen I already know too much of the darkness of the world and people, the secrets they keep.

Or so I thought.

Turns out those quirky abilities I've been keeping secret expose me to a world I didn't know existed. Sure, I knew I wasn't human—but how exactly do I find out more without ending up in the wrong hands?

And I'm not so sure I'm in the right hands now given some of the reactions to finding me. They say I'm the last fairy. I'm not sure I should trust them when their thoughts are mostly of power and how to use me.

But I'm also not sure I have much of a choice. My powers are dangerous and I don't know how to use them. They promise to teach me what I need to know and give me a chance at something I've never had before.

A normal life. I don't think anything about Artemis University and those who attend is normal, but it's still better than the life I've been living if they keep half their promises.

I think hoping they'll keep half is generous.

Artemis University is a hot burning reverse harem, university-age paranormal academy series with darker elements, strong language, violence, and a heroine who follows her own moral compass of what is right... And who she ends up giving her heart to.

My name is Inez Garner, and my story has sort of been told... But not. I'm turning twenty-three and find out I'm not human; I'm apparently a vampire. Sure, who hasn't read that story? Oh, but I'm a princess. And there's a zombie apocalypse—although I'm debating where the line is of apocalypse vs. post-apocalypse. There's also a quest that I'm compelled to be on, and it might all be coming from the Goddess.

Awesome. It seems She has big plans for me. And I have to deal with ghosts. When I kill corrupted—the nice PC name people call zombies, as it's not their fault they eat people—I then have to deal with their ghosts. Which is super when being hunted for years by some guys I don't want to know better.

Add to everything, I have to apologize to heroines for judging them when they fall in bed with the hot guy and buy the story he gives. I get it now. Sex is splendid. I'm not one to believe a con, but he's got answers I need, like why I have no memories before I was eighteen.

Plus, the fangs sort of sold it for me. I hope he forgives me for shooting him.

House of Garner is an apocalyptic hot burning WhyChoose romance with darker elements, strong language, violence, and a heroine that doesn't let anyone get in her way.

Undisclosed Assets: Untraceable Succubus 1

A succubus working as a stripper sounds like a cliché or start of a bad joke, but Lola Chase is in a human only province in Canada for other reasons. Someone is murdering women society looks down on, and she's there to stop it. As a demon,

she's bottom of the supernatural food chain and knows how often people ignore crimes against them.

From the start there isn't much to go on, and she ends up getting in a bit of trouble following any leads she gets. Things get complicated when an ancient, big name vampire takes interest in her and getting away from him proves to be much harder than her normal admirers.

Thankfully, although her cover is a stripper, Lola loves to dance and the fun she has helps balance out the stress and worry of the case.

Plus, she finds some very hot men to play with and feed from. The question is whether or not she can balance it all and find a murderer before he kills again.

Untraceable Succubus is a murder mystery series where the sex is hot and often and the main character kicks some serious ass on the road to finding out if she can have real love in her life even if it comes from multiple men.

Demon of Death: Enchantress 1

Soraya Devil is the Enchantress, one of the most powerful magics in the world... But she's so much more than that, and everyone's constantly attempting to unravel her past and secrets. She's not worried though, as many have tried and never find out the truth.

It's safer for everyone that way.

The owner of Paranormal Investigations—among other companies—she has her own answers to find. Though she’s continuously pulled in too many directions, she always answers the calls that make even her magic tingle in warning at the danger.

When a sprite begins killing people in Chicago, she has to team up with SPU—Supernatural Police Unit—to figure out who summoned the demon and why before more die. While that’s enough of a challenge, the main hurdle is the team lead on the case who loathes all magics. But when he can’t seem to get past his hate and do his job, can Soraya make an ally from an enemy, or will the evil unleashed in the city she loves win the day?

Rough Beginnings: Karma Bakery 1

Starting a New Business Takes Magic

Imagine there weren’t three main gods of Olympus, but four. A sister who went through something so horrible, so traumatic she left and was written out of history.

Arabella Baker and her two adopted daughters are moving to Boston to open a new business and start over. Things will be different this time with the new names and new life. The twins will live on their own at college—though still right in Boston—and experience something a bit more normal. The store she bought has a hefty price, but the location is fantastic, and she got the best spot in the new development... Which apparently comes with an immensely attractive man who owns it all.

Nothing goes smoothly in opening a new business though, sample days, crazy busy, and fluff interviews taking dark turns. Honestly, it leaves Arabella asking one main question—why did she think opening in such a large city and right before the holidays was such a great idea?

Meave: Naughty Witches 1

Leaving NYC and a troubling past, Meave Washington is starting over. She has a good plan, but she's probably bit off more than she can chew. So she embraces the chance of fate that lands help at her feet—and if he's smoking hot, all the better.

Distracted by a text while driving, Ashton Perry injures Meave. He's horrified that he could have killed someone, and steps up to make it right... And not just because she's the most beautiful woman he's ever seen.

Sparks immediately start flying and the desire is undeniable but it's not that simple to take the leap. But Ashton's barely a man, and Meave is hiding something important. When the woman is older, age isn't just a number and Meave isn't sure Ashton can be who she needs.

Ashton steps up to prove he's not just a man, but the man his bewitching lady deserves. He doesn't care what she is—only who she is. And he'll do whatever it takes to prove it.

Naughty Witches is a burning paranormal romance novella series with strong female leads, fun so sexy it raises the temperature, and mismatched people who find HEAs that give

us all hope fate won't forget us. Each book is a new pairing in the same world, with an overall series arc.

The Turning: Dr. Kelly Murphy 1

One Bite Can Change Everything

Graduate medical school, start competitive internship, don't get cut from the program, become a surgeon. It was a great plan. One Kelly Murphy loved and had dreamed of most of her life... And it was blown to hell in a night with an uninvited bite.

Now she's missing three days of her life, trying to handle her freaked out best friend and parents who called the police when she went missing, all as she realizes she's not the same person she was before. She's different. Like has fangs different.

When he shows up on her doorstep claiming to know what happened to her, Kelly's not sure that makes things any less confusing. But at least he can guide her, right? Either way, she has a plan and a choice she didn't make won't stop her... Even if she might have the urge to bite her patients from now on.

Owned: Secure Settings 1

Kate Boyle has lived through more loss than most people twice her age. She's strong and independent, so letting people in to help her handle her grief or problems is next to impossible for her.

The owner of a successful company, Secure Settings, Kate devotes all her time to keeping people safe and rescuing those who can't save themselves. When she gets the call that her grandpa died and she's now inherited his ranch, a storm of epic proportions starts. Smart enough to know she can't watch out for danger while grieving, she calls in a favor for help.

Jared and Dean Acker just got out of the Marines and are a little lost as to what comes next for them. So when they're asked to back up a friend of a friend, they're in... And meet the woman of their dreams. Now, if they could just convince her.

Wounded: In My Dreams 1

Authors Dream Of Their Happiness Too

Gas station coffee is the highlight of Lily Slone's boring outing until fate intervenes... Along with the barrel of a gun and a lost soldier who saves her life.

Jasper Hutson—a homeless Marine, discarded by his family after returning home from the war wounded—reacted on instinct. But this one act brings him to Lily's attention, and not because he saves her life. She sees something else in him. Something no one else sees.

Refusing to give up on him when everyone else does, Lily offers Jasper a place to stay and an opportunity to get back on his feet. That one offer will change her world. When they grow closer and Jasper makes Lily's life so much easier, she's not sure she can go back to living without him.

As life moves forward and they get into their own rhythm, Lily discover something about Jasper that he's kept hidden.

Will she continue to reach for her happily ever after or will they both remain wounded?

About the Author

Erin is a born Chicagoan who has lived in several states which gives her an interesting perspective from which to write characters. Still a loyal Cubs fan, she also cheers for her alma mater, the Illini from her home outside Boston. To date, she has published hundreds of paranormal books in different genres that have dedicated readers who await each release to her numerous series. With her canine editor-in-chief Lord Vader Flynn at her side, she has no plans of stopping anytime soon and looks forward to new adventures and worlds on the horizon.

ErinRFlynn.com

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NAUGHTY WITCHES

Meave
Briony
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DR. KELLY MURPHY

The Turning
The Transition
The Decision

SECURE SETTINGS

Owned

Claimed

IN MY DREAMS

Wounded

Alone

Broken

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