

NIGHTMARES AND DESIRES
HAVE MORE IN COMMON
THAN YOU'D THINK

FANG ME HARD

USA TODAY BESTSELLING AUTHOR
GAJA J. KOS

FANG ME HARD

SAINTS OF SINNERS

BOOK ONE

GAJA J. KOS

CONTENTS

Kolovrat Universe

Prologue - Leif

1. Serena
2. Leif
3. Serena
4. Serena
5. Leif
6. Serena
7. Serena
8. Leif
9. Serena
10. Serena
11. Pascal
12. Serena
13. Leif
14. Pascal
15. Serena
16. Serena
17. Pascal
18. Leif
19. Serena
20. Serena
21. Leif
22. Serena
23. Serena
24. Serena
25. Leif
26. Serena
27. Serena
28. Serena
29. Serena
30. Serena
31. Pascal
32. Serena
33. Leif
34. Leif
35. Pascal

Acknowledgments

About the Author

Also by Gaja J. Kos

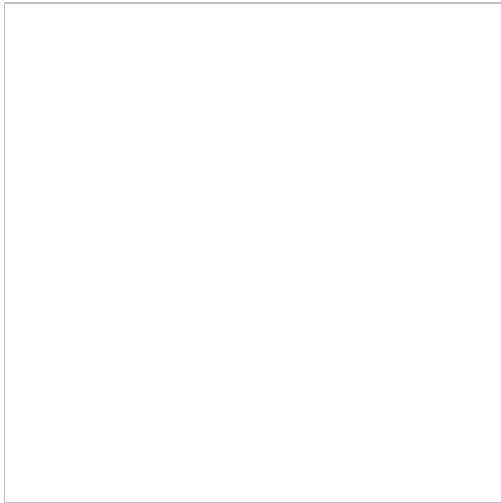
Copyright © 2023 by Gaja J. Kos

All rights reserved.

No part of this book may be reproduced in any form or by any electronic or mechanical means, including information storage and retrieval systems, without written permission from the author, except for the use of brief quotations in a book review.

This is a work of fiction. Names, characters, places and incidents either are the product of the author's imagination or used fictitiously, and any resemblance to actual persons, living or dead, business establishments, events, or locales is entirely coincidental.

Cover designed by Bianca Bordianu at Moonpress Design



KOLOVRAT UNIVERSE

The *Saints of Sinners* duet is part of the “Future” portion of the Kolovrat universe and takes place after the War that had brought supernaturals out into the open.

Each series (or standalone title) within this universe is its own complete work. You don’t need to have any prior knowledge, simply dive into what feels best to you at the moment.

However, if you want to see the larger picture and enjoy the many crossovers peppered throughout my books, I do recommend eventually picking up all the available titles.

KOLOVRAT UNIVERSE

PRESENT

BLACK WEREWOLVES SERIES

Slavic Gods Urban Fantasy with Romance

Novels:

The Dark Ones

The 24hourlies

The Shift

The Ascension

Novellas:
Never Forgotten
Chased

Also available as a box set:
Black Werewolves: Books 1–4

NIGHTWRAITH SERIES

Demon Standalone Paranormal Romances

Windstorm
Blackstorm
Nightstorm

Also available as a box set:
Nightwraith: The Complete Series

SUCC

Noir Standalone Succubus Open Relationship Romance

FUTURE

WOLF CALL: ICRA MUNICH

Werewolf Urban Fantasy Suspense with Romance

Shadow Moon
Darkening Moon
Transient Moon
Phantom Moon
Burning Moon

Also available as a box set:
Wolf Call: ICRA Munich (Books 1–3)
Wolf Call: ICRA Munich (Books 4–5)

SHADE ASSASSIN

Demon and Vampire MFM Romance

Shadow World
Shadow Lies
Shadow Heart
Shadow Reign

Also available as a box set:
Shade Assassin (Books 1–2)
Shade Assassin (Books 3–4)

ICRA FILES: BERLIN

Vampire and Werewolf Paranormal Rockstar Romance

Rock This Wolf
Down With Vamps
Long Gone Witch

FREE PREQUEL: Fang Deep in the Blues

Also available as a box set:
ICRA Files: Berlin Complete Series

STARSEED

A Steamy Zodiac Reverse Harem Paranormal Romance

Star Kissed (prequel)
Star Touched
Star Shunned

SAINTS OF SINNERS

A Dark Paranormal Rockstar MFM Menage

Fang Me Hard

Burn Me Deep

HEAT OF THE NIGHT

A Dark Urban Fantasy Shifter Romance

PARADISE OF SHADOWS AND DEVOTION

A Mermaid Standalone Paranormal Romance

DESTINY RECLAIMED - FREE

Urban Fantasy Standalone Novella

For Leeroy, who passed away as I was writing the final chapters of this novel.

You came to me when I was deep in my own nightmares and shadows, and you were with me for fourteen years as I journeyed into the light.

In so many ways, you were the one who guided me there.

Thank you for your love and companionship. Thank you for being the best, most incredible doggo a person could ask for.

I can only hope you felt all of my love too, as I held you when you entered a light of your own.

PROLOGUE - LEIF

I have a secret not even my bandmates know about.

We had a wild period back in the day when shit took off for the Whiskey Jet Preachers, just to see what it was all about. To live that supernatural rock-star life, experience every fucking thing our money and recognition brought, and indulge in the stereotypes some people love to hate while others hate not being able to be themselves.

The drinking. The sex. The bitten necks. Flirting with death and lust through the roller coaster of endless nights we created.

It was like a shot of rock 'n' roll straight to the vein.

We were all part of it. To some degree or another, we all walked into the out-of-this-world fucking dream our reality had become, and we didn't hold back.

When the heavens open up for you and you ascend like a god in the spotlight, when the impossible becomes not just possible but also the fucking truth you're living and breathing every second of the day, you don't curb the hunger.

You give in.

You give in, and you take until it loses its shine, until it doesn't blow your fucking mind any longer, and the pull just isn't there. Instead, you're magnetized toward something else. Creation becomes the more powerful drive. Growth. New visions. New sounds. New heights that have nothing to do with bloodstained dressing rooms or soaked panties with numbers written on the fabric stuffed in the pocket of your jeans.

Wild times are something that eventually get left in the past.

For my bandmates, I guess it's true. The whole rock 'n' roll Whiskey Jet

Preachers period is just a crazy-ass story to tell over drinks that seems so far removed from the present it holds no more weight beyond a few laughs about the old times.

Except I kept one part of it with me.

In me.

Or maybe it was there the entire time.

Prowling beneath my skin like the predator I am.

Demanding to be let out.

I thought I had it handled. I thought I was in control.

But control doesn't explain why my skin feels stretched too tight over my bones. Or why the taste of blood coats my tongue from where my fangs punch into my lip when I can't rein them back in.

And it definitely doesn't fucking explain why I feel like I'm running out of time until all that's left around me is carnage.

CHAPTER ONE

SERENA

I didn't need to be a mind reader—or even pay attention to the sewage of words coming out of my boss's mouth. The look on Adela's wrinkly, witchy face said it all.

My nightmare was coming true.

Nightmare.

Huh, now wasn't that just such fucking irony...

The only thing that would have made this even more hilarious would have been if she fucking hexed my flesh along the way to offer me a slow, painful death. Who knew, maybe fate still had that in store for my unfortunate ass and was just waiting for the divine moment to deliver the punchline.

I didn't really want to put much stock in karma, but fuck if I wasn't getting my fair share of it over the past twenty-five years. Even if I had no idea why. Guess I must have done some pretty bad shit in the previous life because this one—

“Serena, are you even listening to me?”

The rarely present sharpness in Adela's tone sliced straight through me and, for better or for worse, made me snap out of my mental snark.

“I get it,” I bit back. “I'm fired. You can save your fucking breath.”

Adela's steely blue eyes narrowed. “Drop the attitude, girl. You're lucky fired is all you are. We could sue you for damages.”

Because that was all a broken succubus like me brought. Damages.

I rubbed a hand harshly over my face, not really caring if I smeared my makeup since I clearly wouldn't be wrapping my body around a pole tonight. Not in front of an audience, anyway.

“Look...” I sighed—and, like Adela said, dropped the damn attitude.

It would have been easy to shift my blame and anger on the wizened, seedy strip-club-owning witch who loved a good profit more than she loved her damn trio of kids, but it would also have been a load of crap.

No matter what I thought of her lacking personality, Adela gave me more chances than most people. She wasn't responsible for my fucking failings.

That was all on me.

I cracked my standard bitch face mask open just a tiny bit to let her see how honest I was with what I was about to say, how much I meant it. And it wasn't because she threatened me with damages I could never afford to pay either.

“Adela, I really believed a group setting would be safe enough for my... faulty wiles. We did everything by the book. We kept me away from any private dances, we made sure there were at least thirty guys in the club before you even let me perform.” I shook my head, my long, blonde strands feathering their usual soothing caresses over my bare shoulders, but failed to truly ease the discomfort stirring in my gut. “We were good for months, Adela. *Months*. I never latched on to any of the patrons, I swear. All I did was feed on the sexual energy they'd already put into the atmosphere, energy they had absolutely cut cords with and couldn't be linked back to them.”

The lust I sipped on while performing was like scraping chocolate shavings off the surface of a cake. Barely enough to keep me fed, but definitely contact-free. No direct link established to any of the men who frequented Der Schmetterling.

“I don't understand—”

“Why twelve of them have now come down with nightmares?” Adela softened—like me, revealing a part she rarely let other people see. She sighed. “They were the most regular in attendance when you were dancing. Maybe it's been going on longer than we're aware. I have my guy running checks on everyone, but nightmares aren't something that's easily noticeable.”

Until they start sapping away the guys' life energy.

Until the screams start, ripping through their bedroom walls and staining the night.

Because that was what I was.

A succubus who gave you a taste of pleasure—before drowning you in a well of unending terror.

Whoever had come up with the expression that a little party never killed nobody had clearly never crossed paths with me.

“I’m hoping we caught on to the problem early enough that the... symptoms...won’t be permanent,” Adela said gently, though I could tell how little she believed her own words.

As far as I was aware, no one came back from the nightmares once my power’s infestation took root.

I’d told Adela all of this when she’d first hired me. I’d also told her that as long as I didn’t feed directly on anyone or throw out my convoluted magic with a specific target in mind, we were safe.

We really should have been fucking safe.

Of course, Adela had also been thinking more in terms of money than client health back when she’d offered me the contract. I couldn’t blame her. Even without direct use of my powers, as a succubus, I was potent. A magnet for lusty patrons to throw a hell of a lot of cash at me.

Few people would have passed up the opportunity to put me in the spotlight, even if I was faulty.

A shiny, pretty thing with a core of rot. As long as no one saw the latter, no issue, right?

The thought landed like a shank between the ribs.

“I’ll get out of your hair then.” The chair let out a disgusting screech as I stood, ramming into it with the backs of my knees. “I hope the guys come back all right.”

“They’ll come back,” Adela said, but I was already out the door.

Of course they’d be back. They’d be back to drown their misery, to try to squeeze some pleasure out of life, but all they’d truly be doing would be throwing crap down a hole that could never be filled.

Maybe Adela would make bank on them for a bit longer. Hell, some people fell into all things excessive when shit got rough, including spending. For all I knew, these guys just might amp up their visits, put their hands on every girl they—

Shit.

I turned on my heel and walked back to the still-open office, bracing a hand on the purple frame before I could actually set foot across the threshold. Adela’s head bobbed up from the papers she was already perusing—potential new dancers’ applications, no doubt.

Can’t leave a gap in flashing tits.

“Yes?” she asked tensely, not quite able to mask her expectation of me blowing up in her face.

But that wasn't why I came back.

My fingernails dug into the weathered, sticky laminated frame that had seen way too many years of neglect. “Just keep eyes on the girls the affected guys interact with, yeah?”

Adela gave me a tight-lipped smile and nodded.

It was all I was going to get, but it was enough.

I blew out a long breath, knowing that in this, at least, I'd done the right thing, then marched away from Adela's office for good.

The evening at Der Schmetterling was in full swing, with the group act occupying the main stage, which left the dressing room blissfully empty. Michaela, the only one of the girls who still had time to spare since she was slotted for a solo act—just as I was supposed to have been right after her—was probably getting herself fingered by the bouncer we all pretended wasn't really her boyfriend. Their pre-show ritual filled me with a sense of admiration...and left a gaping hole in my chest that almost matched the ones I gifted my victims.

Broken succubi didn't get love.

We hardly even got sex unless circumstances flipped the switch to shut off my morals and made me not give a fuck if the guy I rode ended up with a lifetime of nightmares.

Fucking bad people got really old really fast, though.

Not that it would ever provide me with the kind of stuff Michaela had, even if I still were into that shit.

Honestly, could you imagine a scumbag, human trash of a guy who deserved to be in prison but managed to keep his sleazy ass out of a cell giving his girl some pre-performance fingering to fire her up?

Yeah, didn't think so.

The standard was usually me claiming full control just to make myself come. Any sort of female pleasure lay firmly beyond the scope of those assholes if they were left to their own devices.

Literally shaking my fucking head to clear out these useless thoughts, I grabbed all of my clothes from the dressing room and shoved them in the large overnight bag I kept stuffed in a drawer beneath the vanity. I didn't even bother changing out of tonight's stage outfit. Just kicked off the platform heels in exchange for black loafers, pulled a pair of black shorts

over the shiny thong, and topped the look off with my leather jacket.

It was Friday night, anyway. People wore all sorts of crap as their party gear.

I tapped the jacket pockets to make sure my cell and keys were in there. It was just a routine move I'd done countless times, but there was a finality to it tonight that made me uncomfortable in ways I refused to acknowledge. I scowled at my reflection in the large mirror before giving it my back to pick up my dancing heels. I tossed them into the bag, then swiped all of the makeup off my vanity and let it scatter among the other contents before I zipped the lot of it up and got the hell out of the room like my ass was on fire.

You'd think someone with a long past of being discarded wouldn't get sentimental about leaving yet another place behind, but fuck it. I was.

I was sick and tired—so fucking tired—of having shit taken away from me.

The sadness boiled into anger as I stomped down the hallways leading to the back door. Thumping music bounced off the dark blue and purple walls, but I barely heard a thing over the pressure building in my ears.

By the time the fresh night air hit the exposed, heated skin of my face and abdomen, I was fuming.

All the broken pieced of me that I'd tried so hard to bury came punching to the surface.

Fuck. This. Shit.

Fuck this fucking *life*.

My hands balled into fists, the straps of my duffle bag biting into skin—as rough and jagged as the memories ricocheting within my skull.

What's wrong with you?

You don't belong with our people.

No wonder your parents gave you up.

Abomination.

You will never be a part of our society.

Useless.

There's no place for you here.

I'm done cleaning up your mess.

Leave this city.

The best you can do for yourself is find people as broken as you are.

You're lucky fired is all you are.

Pathetic.

All of my attempts to prove my worth, to be good, to appease people as if they had authority over me, as if they were *more*, had turned me into a pathetic, powerless mess.

My stomach twisted with disgust.

I was done playing nice. I was done trying. Done grasping for fleeting strings of hope that always snapped in my hands.

I was an apex predator.

I was what nature made me.

I came into the world created this way.

I turned toward the club, black horns rising from my hair like my rightful crown.

Why shouldn't I reign?

CHAPTER TWO

LEIF

I pushed my Harley well over the speed limit, the wind whipping at my helmetless face.

One of my favorite perks of being a vampire. We had hard fucking heads to crack.

Not that it made it any less imperative to keep as many senses as I could open wide as fuck to filter through the necessary information. While a fall wouldn't end me, death wouldn't be so easily avoided if a cop decided to pull me over.

It just wouldn't be mine.

My mouth watered at the thought, and I firmly corrected myself, fortifying my focus on my surroundings to pull this damn ride off and get me to my fucking destination.

With the grip on my savagery running out like sand through an hourglass, it would have made sense to use my vampire gifts to run instead of opting to take the bike through Berlin's streets. No cops to watch out for. No restrictions to abide by, placed there by a society that thrived on being constrained.

On top of it all, it would have saved me another few minutes in this race.

Minutes that felt more vital with the rising pressure stretching my skin too tight over my bones.

Yeah, it would have made sense to give myself that freedom. That edge.

Except that tapping into anything tied to my primal side right now was a sure way to throw myself right off the cliff.

I gritted my teeth against another singeing pang that constricted and stretched me at once.

Vampires knowing nothing but hunger was a fucking cliché written into movies and books that had little to do with reality. We craved blood as much as the average human craved food. A necessity, not an obsession. The only time it got risky was when we lost too much life force. If we starved.

Again, nothing so vastly different from what the species who ate meat, grain, plants, and all that other less-than-appealing stuff went through.

But this hunger—the one strumming through my veins and burning me from the inside out...

It was different.

It *was* consuming.

Blood alone couldn't sate it.

And being a fucking idiot, I'd let it fester for too long.

I could damn well stake myself for missing the last Sanguine Society meet because I was busy slapping away at my upright bass on stage with the Whiskey Jet Preachers. I should have known better than to push my limits.

No spotlight was worth illuminating the festering darkness.

No love for music was powerful enough to subdue the cacophony of my beast.

The past few days, I'd come up with too many excuses to count, blowing off my bandmates and any other sort of social interaction. The Jekyll to my Hyde was slipping.

Every nerve in my body was wound up tight.

Every person I walked by was a prime target for the hunt.

Which was why I took the most offbeat path possible through Schmargendorf, fucking praying no one else crossed my path. I could already feel those final threads holding me together fraying with every slice of time that slipped by.

Harley or not, the temptations were written in the godsdamned air. I doubted even folding myself into a fucking locked trunk would create much of a barrier—or pose as a deterrent. I'd rip myself free the second someone got too close.

If I managed to last until the actual start of the Sanguine Society gathering, I'd give myself a fucking medal.

Better yet, I'd give myself the prey I deserved—one that wouldn't have me despising myself more than I already did.

Or leave me locked up tight in an ICRA cell.

Fighting like fuck against the urge to find that prey right *now* because

then it would be neither of those things, I focused on my riding.

Just a few more minutes.

That was all.

I took another shortcut that wasn't quite as unpopulated as I would have liked but would get me to my destination faster. The vast expanse of parking lots filling the space between me and the row of one-story buildings should create an acceptable buffer for the time it would take me to clear the damn area.

I kept to the farthest edge of the lot, crushing the mix of weeds and trash that littered the narrow strip of gravel bordering the cutoff beneath my wheels. Train tracks snaked just beyond the edge, running below street level until they'd rise again once more at the intersection ahead.

My mark. My milestone.

Once I crossed to the other side, there would be just a couple of more turns to get through, then a straight, blissful stretch into the thickest darkness Berlin had to offer. One often assisted by the witches who made sure no stragglers wandered into the area while the Sanguine Society claimed it for their own.

The presence of people pelted at my awareness, their pestering pulse unbothered by the rumble of my engine filling the lot.

Sometimes, I wished sound could drown it all out. That it could wash away the crap as I'd seen it happen countless of times in the crowd from the stage—the loosening of bodies, the new rhythm their heartbeats took on. No matter how far down the shithole someone was, if they gave themselves over to the music, they left the gig changed.

Except I was too far gone for that purity to survive longer than a blink of an eye in the wasteland of my flesh.

I kept riding, my muscles tight at the beckoning call of so many lives just laid out there to snatch away. All it would take was a split second to change direction and I could claim them all. Sate the raw, burning anguish raging beneath my skin.

Snarling, I blocked out pulse after distant pulse—

Until I crashed against one signature that differed from the rest.

One that stirred something deep within me and lured my gaze across the darkened lot to a silhouette of a woman.

I stopped dead in my tracks, my Harley idling beneath me. Captivated, I cocked my head to the side and started peeling away the layers to unravel her

mystery.

A succubus.

But also not.

Something far more sinister lurked within that tight body of hers.

She stood facing the rundown industrial shack of a place that reeked of low-cost lust, her fingers curled into fists, and the most fucking magnetic set of black horns adorned her blonde head like a crown.

She looked ready to tear the building down.

Tear the people down.

When she dropped the duffle bag she'd been holding in one clenched hand to the ground, it was a statement.

A howl for a hunt no one could hear, but one I could feel in my bones.

My fangs punched out at the delicious violence that rolled from her and cascaded through the night.

No blood had ever tasted as exquisite.

No flavor had ever ridden me as hard and as high as her depths.

She took a step forward, the promise of terror pulsing from her in a wave, but I was faster.

Her darkness didn't belong to the people inside the club.

No.

That darkness was *mine*.

CHAPTER THREE

SERENA

My twisted succubus magic sang its tenebrous tune, sliding across my skin like silk as I unveiled myself more and more into who I truly was.

The sensation wasn't unlike stripping off the pieces of the sparkly costumes I wore on stage, but the skin I revealed there, under the artificial lights, even if mine, was still a disguise. A pretty blonde sex doll for the patron's greedy eyes to track over, believing it was the real deal. To either sate their hunger for a woman they could never have or build it. Build it right until they came in the fucking men's room or in the hands of those women who didn't mind following them off the premises for extra cash.

But they had no idea.

They had no idea they never truly saw me bare.

And they had no idea that the hunger coursing through their veins was nothing compared to mine.

I licked my lips at the promise of how good it would feel to be sated. To give my body, my *soul*, what it had been craving all this time.

Right.

It felt so absolutely *right* to take that step toward the strip club that had wanted to tone me down—and even then, when I had bowed to their dictate and dimmed the brilliance of my endless void, they had rejected and discarded me.

As if I wasn't a fucking goddess of sin and terror.

They should have paid in screams for their disrespect, every single last one of them, instead of having me creep out the back door like a disgrace.

Luckily, some mistakes were easy to remedy.

With phantom fingers, I stroked the translucent veil of magic threading through my skin. The interlaced cords of my bloodier heritage, irrefutably entwined with the succubus strands, purred beneath my touch, delighted by the recognition I at long last offered. The dark, ruined love, but love nonetheless, I had for their shadowed pulse.

Still marveling at the sensation, I cocked my head to the side and eyed the hideous building in front of me. Scenarios ran through my mind one after the other, each more entertaining than the last.

I was high on power, thrumming with the rapture that came on the wings of dropping my fucking barriers. And the world that opened up before me...

Gods, there were so many ways to bring them all to their knees. So many lovely, lovely ways to fill Berlin's nights with their screams.

I moaned at the visual.

Beautiful. Absolutely beautiful.

I almost wished I didn't have to settle for just one. Wouldn't it be a wonderful gift to be able to roll time into a loop and torment the club fuckers with fresh bouts of creativity over and over before I released their ravaged bodies into a slow death? A playground of my own to sample and savor the endless possibilities?

Mmm, divine.

For now, though, what I had in mind would do.

With a smile slashing across my face, I took another step that unfolded into a march as if gliding on the wind. I could already feel my fingers wrapping around the door handle that would open up the gates to me reclaiming what was rightfully mine. Reclaiming who I rightfully was.

I reached out to transpose the image onto the physical plane, connect skin to handle and seal everyone's fate, but the satisfaction of the touch that should have been my coronation never came.

Something hard and man-shaped tackled me from behind, knocking me straight off my damn feet.

A snarl broke free from my lips as I caught myself against the dirty building. Who the fuck dared to attack me?

But the guy was undeterred.

His arms wrapped around my torso, the caress of leather searing against my exposed midriff in a manner that felt so good it just pissed me off more.

As the world around me blurred the next second, I realized this wasn't just any asshole who saw a blonde chick in a skimpy outfit and decided to

have his way with her.

Nope, it was a fucking *vampire* asshole.

Rage punched through every cell in my body. I thrashed in his arms, scraping my nails over whatever bit of him I could make contact with from my disadvantageous position and kicking out like hell with my feet. As I managed to land blow after blow with little effect to show, I seriously regretted not having my stage shoes on any longer.

The nice hole the killer heel would have dug in this asshole's shin haunted my thoughts, but I wasn't about to lament over could-haves. I had other arsenals at my disposal.

Even if I was slightly too pissed right now to even hate-fuck the guy to death.

Before I could make my next move, he hauled me higher up along his body. An *oof* of air escaped me when his shoulder dug hard into me just beneath my lower ribs, and faster than I could recover, I found myself dangling head-down from his back.

Fucking *dangling*.

Unacceptable.

"You motherfucking asshole." I threw punches at his spine, his godsdamned kidneys, but the guy was an impenetrable wall.

The ground below was a gray streak as the bastard kept moving with singular determination to who the fuck knew where. I screeched my frustration into the night before a cold, chilling calm settled over me.

He fucked with my plans. Stolen away my retribution, the godsdamned meal of lust and suffering that belonged to me.

It was only reasonable that *he* would claim its place now.

I didn't have to touch his asshole dick to make him suffer. The dark chasm of power I'd never before dared to open offered itself up to me like a diamond ring in a velvet box.

I could destroy him without a single touch.

I could make him crawl. Beg. Push so much pleasure into his body that the nightmares would be nothing in comparison to the terror of not being able to sate himself—the need that would eat into his flesh and never let go.

Desire could be pure beauty.

Or it could be the most destructive force in the universe.

This asshole was about to find out just how deep that ravenous, insatiable urge could go.

I reached into the darkest place of me—and found myself hurtling through the air.

My scream lodged in my throat as survival instincts kicked in just in time for me to soften the godsdamned fall and roll across the roots and grass. I threw my hair back and glared at the vampire—

Who was watching me with murder etched into the lines of his unfairly beautiful face.

Sharp fangs rested against his full bottom lip, only emphasizing the death darkening his eyes to the exact shade of night stretching out behind him.

Faintly, I caught traces of footfall, distant screams, and voices echoing in whatever the fuck this slice of woodland was—Grunewald, probably?—but for the life of me, I couldn't tear my gaze off the vampire who'd cavemaned me all the way over here.

As I watched him fixate on me like I was about to be his next meal, I couldn't help but wonder if I had been too hasty in dismissing the hate-sex angle. He was tall, built in that just-the-right-amount-of-broad kind of way that left my mouth watering at the thought of him moving atop me as we fucked. Perfect to hold on to, perfect to surrender control to, even if for just a few minutes of submissive illusions no guy had ever come close to sating.

Except for all the beauty the vampire's packaging offered, I could also see there wasn't a shred of a man beneath his skin.

He was all predator.

All monster.

And my own inner darkness wanted nothing more than to show him who would come out on top if we clashed.

I'd been tossed around and treated like trash for long enough. Even a fucking vampire, no matter how big or godsdamned scary he was supposed to be, had the right to kick me back down.

That part of my life was over.

Hell, maybe my life would be over too if I failed this challenge, but at least I knew I would do everything in my power to take this asshole with me and depart from this fuckfest of a world with dignity, if not glory.

The patrons at Der Schmetterling would have been easy pickings. A lioness chasing gutter rats. But the vamp...

He was an adversary.

"Run," he warned in a voice as low as sin.

And I did.

Hunger rose within me, dark and potent, as I played the role that would bait him until he was mine.

Mine to feast on. Mine to drain.

Mine to kill.

My feet pounded across the uneven terrain, the cool night air saturated with more and more screams, whipping at my heated skin. Fear that wasn't mine filled my lungs, and threads of death coiled through the trees like every monster's aphrodisiac.

I didn't know what kind of parallel universe I'd tumbled into, but it sounded like a fucking party. Except the fun I was looking to have rested somewhere else.

In *someone* else.

I could feel the vampire behind me—prowling, taking his time as if he had the upper hand.

I smirked.

Cocky, cocky.

Didn't he know that assholes who were full of themselves fell the hardest from their thrones of blown-up self-importance?

I laughed at the visual of him begging on his knees before me once my power contorted his body into a cage of unending lust.

The melody of my amusement must have snapped something within him because between one second and the next, the vamp was behind me, his hard body pushing into mine.

I allowed him to tackle me but twisted mid-fall so that I landed on my back with him on top. I locked my legs around his hips and stared at the harbinger of death above me.

A dangerous charge filled the air, warning me I had mere seconds before those beautiful sharp fangs would tear into my neck.

He didn't see me. Not yet.

All he saw was the pretty, enticing prey he'd caught.

I smiled as his hard cock dug between my legs.

This was going to be even sweeter than I could have possibly imagined.

“Surprise, asshole,” I purred.

Then cracked open the vault within and set the rejected magic that was never meant to see the light of day or the gleam of night free.

CHAPTER FOUR

SERENA

The vamp's carnal grunt overpowered the scream-filled air like the main fucking act he was for the audience of one fucked-up succubus.

I laughed wildly as his back arched—as the pain of pleasure twisted his overbearingly handsome features and transformed him even more into a monster of the night.

With his fangs gleaming white in the moonlight, the corded muscles of his neck bunching, and a body so deliciously thrumming with the war taking place beneath all that smooth, dark skin, he was a creature on the verge of losing control.

More than that.

He was on the verge of losing control at *my* command.

Nothing more fucking beautiful than that.

He ground his hips into my pelvis, and my mouth watered at the feel of his cock between my legs. The hard length of his arousal promised more pleasure than I'd experienced in an entire fucking year. I paused for a moment, holding him captive in my power but not pushing him farther just yet.

Why shouldn't I give myself some relief while driving him insane with need?

It wouldn't fuck with my intentions, not really.

Even if he spilled his cum into me a hundred times, it still wouldn't sate the fire I'd slipped under his skin.

The feel of my pussy clenching around him wouldn't be a reward. His orgasm wouldn't bring true release. Having him fuck me would only punish him more, but me...

I'd enjoy every thrust.

A wicked smile playing on my lips, I trailed my gaze from his waist up his powerful torso, then to his head, still thrown back with the force of my attack riding him hard. My vampire was fighting it—as I'd imagined he would.

But that wouldn't do any longer.

Not because there was any chance of him escaping the curse of nightmares that would drive him to death. No, that fate was already set in stone. But him resisting the compulsion of my power now that I wanted to feel his dick driving inside me instead of sating my hunger at a distance just meant wasted time.

Time he could already be worshipping my body, ripping himself apart for a taste of the fucking dark goddess of lust that I was.

Delayed gratification could go fuck itself.

I craved to suck in the fucking ambrosia of his desire while the thickness of his cock grazed my walls with punishing thrusts. Wanted to drink all the delicious, velvet-dark hunger he had to offer when he spilled inside me—just to get hard again and repeat the cycle all over.

Unable to resist, I traced my fingers across his abdomen, pushing up his black shirt along the way. A faint green light coated my skin where it met his, but I couldn't even be bothered to question the phenomena.

This vampire was the singular, most exquisite meal I could have.

One where I could take everything I'd always dreamed of. Everything my power yearned for.

For a heartbeat longer, I observed his stunning form against the backdrop of the night. Listened to the melody of his grunts that were far, far sweeter, far more potent than all of the screams still ricocheting through the woods combined.

With his leather jacket open and hanging to the sides as his back continued to arch, the powerful expanse of his torso on display, and the black hair he'd swept back catching the glint of the moonlight, he looked like a fallen rock star.

It didn't even matter that he was still above me or that I was flat on my ass below as he continued to straddle me. With the power resting in my hands, he might as well have truly been brought to his knees while I stared down upon him from a throne of darkness.

The image uncurled another hot stream of hunger in my belly.

It was almost a shame to ruin him. But my toys were meant to be broken, or they would never be mine at all.

I scraped up even more magic from the recesses of that inner well I'd never before touched—never even knew existed until now as it kept opening up deeper and deeper—and sent it hammering into my vamp's flesh.

He snarled, and my eyelids fluttered shut at the pleasure of the sound before they snapped open as his hand clamped tight around my throat. The sight that greeted me sent an explosion of adrenaline through my body.

Where he'd been turned to the sky before, his face was now fixed down toward me, his obsidian eyes crazed and fangs bared.

Fuck.

My tipping point tipped him all right.

Tipped the dial of his lust from fucking me right back into killing me.

His grip around my neck tightened.

My pulse skyrocketed, but I'd be lying if I said it was pure fear that sent my blood racing. The promise of my death written in the raging cold violence pouring off him made me wet enough to soak not just through my own shorts but also seep into his fucking jeans.

He choked out my moan along with my air.

I clawed at his arm, bucking my hips, but with every grind of his cock between my legs, it got harder and harder to think straight. Which I needed to. Because if I didn't get this fucker off me, I *would* die. Then who'd get to enjoy living out her life knowing the kidnapping asshole had met his fate through night after night of terrors that consumed his mind?

Hell, I wasn't even convinced anymore if I'd blasted the resilient fucker with enough of my powers. I needed to feed on him too. Needed to make sure —

As I fought against him while feeling myself grow weaker with every second his fingers were squeezed around my neck, more and more of his lust infused the space. It wasn't just me edging him on. This was him. Loving how he held my life in his hands. Aroused by the potential of my end that was closing in.

I latched onto the essence and funneled it straight into me.

The volatile blend of his energy revitalized my strength with a vengeance that sent fire through my veins.

I snarled and reached down between us, cupping his junk and squeezing like hell. The second the asshole budged, I knocked away his arm. I'd

surprised him enough to actually liberate my neck, but the second it was bared to him, those fucking fangs descended like a godsdamned comet.

“Screw you,” I screamed, rolling to the side as much as I could with his body still mostly atop me.

I wiggled forward on my belly, but the prick just grabbed me by my hips, then shoved my head down into the dirt.

Cuts bloomed all over that side of my face.

I felt him still behind me as the coppery scent wafted in his fucking direction—

Then his weight was atop me, his cock digging into my ass and his breath caressing my neck in stark contrast to the promise of pain the scrape of his fangs whispered of.

A clearly disconnected, fucked-up part of me wondered why he hadn't ripped out my throat yet.

Frenzied vampires were simple creatures. Attack. Drain. They didn't harbor the capacity for finesse.

My best bet was that my own powers *were* fucking with the usual clear-cut chase that should have ended with blood spattered everywhere and a fully gorged vampire standing over a mangled body.

With the way his fangs were running alongside my vein, it felt like he was...savoring the kill.

Savoring me.

I'd known he was turned on by a kill, but this reached a whole other level.

Levels I couldn't help but fucking like, regardless of whether I'd caused them or if they'd bloomed from his own fucked-up preferences.

One thing was certain, though. I still wanted to get out of this alive.

Alive and sated.

“Fuck me,” I whispered, my voice laced with all my twisted succubus strength.

He groaned under my command and rolled his hips, coaxing a moan from my own lips. I bucked back against him, greedy for more.

All of this was fucking messed up, and the old me that still lived somewhere within my soul recoiled at what the hell I was doing. But with the vampire's weight on me, with the promise of pleasure, pain, and death riding the night, I was too turned on to give it much thought.

More screams peppered the forest like a distant drum announcing the pounding rhythm of battle. Fangs teased my neck, the anticipation of them

sinking in softened by the brush of his lips. Or maybe it was heightened. The two vastly different caresses created an opposition of sensations that made my nipples and pussy beg for attention.

Even without me pushing any additional powers into him, the vamp sensed my arousal. Hell, he probably smelled it. And I was good with that.

I wanted him to fuck me senseless.

His weight lifted off me, and the cool air whisked against my feverish skin. The second the vamp fully straightened to undo his zipper and give me what I craved, I pulled on all my agility as a dancer and bolted like crazy.

Was I tempting fate, making a predator chase me even more?

From what my vampire had shown he was capable of, I knew I couldn't just claim I'd come out of our throw down victorious. Things weren't that clear-cut, far from it.

But I also knew that I'd never felt more alive than I did right now.

Baiting death.

Death that came in the form of pure, sculpted sin I felt in my blackened soul was mine to enjoy.

CHAPTER FIVE

LEIF

I watched her run with a dark grin on my face and my dick straining against the zipper with enough pressure that it would have hurt had I not been beyond paying attention to something as unimportant as pain.

More than the twin hungers ravaging my body, I was captivated by the succubus fleeing into the woods. Blonde hair bouncing in the dark. Long, tanned legs that filled me with images of them spread wide, carrying her forward in the perfect balance of elegance and uncertainty.

The taste of her darkness trailed behind her, but so did a twisted sense of innocence.

Calling to me. Beckoning me.

She wasn't as far gone as I was, but the sharp pieces of her soul complemented mine with profound clarity. If I hadn't known those energies were a real fucking deal for a fact, I'd wonder if I wasn't just making shit up—a delusional fuck giving himself excuses for being drawn to the succubus on borderline obsessive levels.

I dragged a thumb across my lower lip, eyeing that pert ass of hers as she ran deeper into the pooling shadows of the trees and contemplated if I'd drink her first or fuck her before I'd let myself pierce a vein and claim her blood as mine.

Because once I had her, I wouldn't stop.

That I could stand here thinking was a miracle on its own, but I wasn't going to get myself caught up in the why. I'd just take this gift for what it was—a means to make the hunt even sweeter.

What little sanity I still had left in me yelled from the top of its fucking lungs that I'd regret this.

The girl hadn't signed up to be chased. I'd stolen her. Snatched her up like a fucking fanged caveman.

I already lived with the weight of my sins coating my skin in lead every single day. Already crossed a line, a huge fucking line, when I zoomed across that damn parking lot and took possession of this furious, beautiful queen full of vengeance and bloodlust. If I pursued her now...

I'd never be able to forgive myself.

But maybe I wasn't meant to.

Maybe I needed to throw myself off this cliff and have my existence ended because of it.

No matter how many times it had crossed my mind, I'd never quite reached the point of willingly forfeiting my life. I was too selfish a bastard for that, continuing this loop of savagery and guilt-poisoned regret instead.

Maybe this was a gift from the fucking Universe.

A fucking divine path.

Who was I to deny its call?

When the succubus cast me a look over her shoulder, her blonde hair whipping with the motion and face painted with a silent question of why I hadn't yet pursued, that was it for me.

It was like a fucking audible *snap* sounded within my flesh, erasing every other possibility until I was left with a single one.

Her.

I launched into action, going full vampire as the predator within me took over. The distance between us dialed down to zero within seconds.

I grabbed her by the shoulders and rammed her hard against the nearest tree.

Teasing hints of her blood bloomed in the air, indicating her flesh must have split against the bark where her leather jacket had ridden up, but her cry of pain was laced with pleasure too.

She truly was a fucking queen.

A goddess.

Her succubus wiles rode me hard, but they had nothing on how much *I* desired her. I'd fuck her straight into her death, make her exit this world on an orgasm that could shake the fucking stars from the sky.

From the blown look of her pupils and her heavy breaths that fell upon my face as I snarled into hers, I knew she'd let me.

She'd fight me through the fuck like a divine, wild tomcat. Maybe...

maybe she'd even get the upper hand in the end as she drove me into a frenzy, turning my baser nature from traits of a predator to those of her prey.

My mouth fucking salivated at the challenge.

Fangs aching and blood racing at the thought of going up against someone who wouldn't just fall dead in my fucking arms, I broke our eye contact and dragged my gaze down her body.

The second my gaze caught on her full breasts cradled within two triangles of shimmery silver fabric, she lashed out with a fist.

If I were anyone else, the hit would have landed. Those breasts were created to blind a man. But with my senses heightened more than they'd ever been in my life, with the urge to possess her still sharpening me into a fucking ruthless machine that wouldn't let anything throw it off its course until it achieved what it was fucking programmed to, all I had to do was throw out my arm to stop the blow from connecting.

I captured her wrist and pinned it above her head, then quickly did the same with the other.

She struggled against me, but as powerful as her arcane succubus magic was, her physical strength was no match to mine. Not even close.

A slow smile spread across my face as she rubbed her thighs together—not that I needed the visual confirmation of just how aroused she was when I could smell it on the air.

Even sweeter than her blood.

Before the night was over, I'd be tasting both on my tongue.

I shifted my grip to free one hand and ran it down the center of her body as she spewed curses in my face. The venomous words turned breathier the lower I got, her bra catching the moonlight that spilled down between us and reflecting it in smooth waves of shimmers with every rise and fall of her chest. By the time I shoved my hand into her shorts, aiming straight for the wetness between her folds, her words dissolved into the most beautiful fucking moans I'd heard in my long-ass lifetime.

She undulated against me, fucking my hand as I pumped my fingers inside her, making sure to also rub my palm against her clit.

It didn't take long for her to come apart.

Her orgasm coated my hand, and tension fled from her body. It would have made her the perfect victim had I been looking for someone subdued. With her, though...

I wanted to torture her.

I wanted her to fight back.

Wanted to feel her hatred for me lashing at my skin with all the murderous intent she harbored in that tight body of hers.

So before she even rode out the last of the echoing waves of her orgasm, I kicked it up again. I rubbed her hard, knowing she was still sensitive enough that I was filling her with more pain than pleasure as I mercilessly worked her clit.

Her scream lit up the night.

She thrashed against the tree, and I only pinned her down harder as I gave her the kind of finger-fuck only a vampire could. Her shorts came apart at the seams as I used my fucking top speed to work her clit and pussy, her panties long destroyed.

Her pain levels climbed, but so did the electric undercurrent of pleasure.

“You fucking asshole,” she screamed, then shoved so much of her wiles into me that I came right in my pants.

I grunted as the release failed to bring any actual relief—just the humiliation of jizzing in my godsdamned jeans like a teenager.

“You’ll pay for that,” I growled, hardly recognizing my own voice.

The look in her blue eyes screamed to bring it on. To do my worst.

Because she was ready to do hers.

Keeping my hand clamped over her pussy, I went for the neck with my fangs extended, except she twisted at the last moment, making me collide with her lips instead.

Her blood spilled into my mouth where I’d split her soft skin, and as we clashed, her tongue smearing it over mine. Hunger and arousal warred within me, the kiss I gave her as punishing as what she returned.

She tore away from my lips. “Fuck me.”

I sank my fangs into her neck.

She screamed and ripped her hands free from my grip, trying to claw at me—though I wasn’t entirely sure if she was pushing me away or bringing me closer. Her blood overpowered my senses, making me fucking high on its divine taste.

I’d never had a succubus before, but somehow I didn’t think just any old succubus had the fucking nectar running through their veins that my dark goddess did.

As I swallowed mouthful after mouthful, I reached down between us and freed my cum-slicked cock from my pants. Her hips met me halfway as I

grabbed one of her thighs and angled her for entry. The second I slid into her tight, wet cunt, it was as if a thousand bombs of ecstasy exploded within me.

Her blood.

Her arousal.

The heat of her flesh.

The hold of her pussy.

My mouth fell away from her neck as I groaned and thrust into her like a fucking animal.

Her nails sank into my shoulders, her touch somehow piercing straight through the fucking leather. The connection between us flared even stronger, and she threw her head back against the tree, the arch of her new position placing the rivulets of blood running down her neck on clear display.

Without breaking the rhythm of my hips, I focused on the crimson trails like a man obsessed.

Blue eyes fixed their searing intensity on me, but I couldn't tear my gaze from the sight of her perfect white skin marred by the savagery of my bite. By the blood that sang to me as if it had been designed and destined to coat my tongue.

My fangs ached even as I fucked her harder. The feel of her wetness made me more feral, filled me with even more need. I couldn't even distinguish if it was her shoving more of her succubus power into me or if this crazed drive to claim everything from her was all on me.

A powerful tug at my core momentarily sapped my strength. Her nails sank into the nape of my neck, but her hold was no match to the lure of life thrumming through her veins—a melody that had only gotten louder the more I possessed her.

She was a drug, she was the most exquisite fucking drug, and I was craving a hit.

So I fell upon her.

My fangs ripped into her soft skin, creating two more punctures to match the set I'd already given her. I latched my mouth on to her neck, determined that this time, I wouldn't let go.

Choked curses rapped against my ear.

My cock throbbed as I drank her with a growl, her blood blinding me but also fortifying me against all attempts the dark goddess threw my way to knock me off course. There was nothing that could keep me away from her now. Her blood had sunk its hooks too deeply inside me. My hunger for her

felt powerful enough to surpass even death.

I almost wished this war of ours wouldn't have to come to an end, but all the switches in me had flipped.

Her blood was mine. Her life was mine.

She was mine to consume.

Mine to destroy.

Every inch of her body, every drop of her blood, and every vibration of her soul belonged to me.

Her pussy gripped me harder, and the pressure in me erupted. I spilled into her, thrusting and grunting like I wanted to fuck every last part of this burning pleasure out of me.

As her climax ripped through her and blasted mine into a fucking supernova, I could feel my goddess fading.

Fading.

Until I felt her no more.

CHAPTER SIX

SERENA

The world pulsed out of reality in an eerie silent vacuum of darkness before an explosion stronger than anything I'd ever felt detonated within me, sweeping through my insides and setting every fucking part of me alight.

I landed hard on my ass, blinking at the retreating man-shaped blur.

It took a second for my mind to catch up with what was happening.

Running away. The vamp was running away. He'd fucked me, drained me. I was pretty sure he even married me to death for a moment there. But he'd also fed me.

The weakness that had ridden my flesh while he'd stolen away my blood was now fully gone, replenished by the mind-blowing surge of energy our joined orgasm had poured into me.

Holy fucking shit.

I tipped my head back against the tree and laughed. I won. I wasn't entirely sure *how* since the cool presence of death's kiss felt like a very real gateway into an unchangeable fate that should have locked me in—which had me considering that my wiles perhaps truly weren't a match for the vampire's hunger—but none of that mattered.

Because. I. Fucking. Won.

This was the craziest, most invigorating experience of my damn life. Knowing the vamp would keep paying right until his bitter, tortured end for stealing and hunting me just made everything that much sweeter.

Another laugh tumbled from my lips as I gazed down at my ruined clothes. My shorts hung in tatters from my hips, my pussy on display and cum glistening on my thighs as it seeped out of me. I didn't even give a fuck

if it was just my succubus nature reveling in the messy aftermath, because the sight was so fucking erotic I had half the mind to bring my fingers to my clit and give myself a victory orgasm.

Right as I considered doing precisely that, sharp voices resonated through the darkness, and a prickle of warning ran along my spine.

I shouldn't be here.

The message was irrational, echoing from a place within me I rarely listened to, but it was also clear.

What the vampire and I had done was somehow wrong. Punishable.

I could feel the foreboding energy rolling across my skin.

Whoever it was out there, prowling the night, couldn't find me here.

With not much to do about the state of my clothes, I scampered to my feet and ran as silently as I could away from the voices and the carnage the strip of woods had turned into.

My keys jangled in my pocket. I quickly fisted them until they were silent while mentally chanting my gratitude for having the sheer dumb luck of sticking them into my jacket instead of the duffle that had been left behind at Der Schmetterling's parking lot. My phone was a steady weight in my other pocket, and I busied myself making plans to text the bouncers to get my shit out of the open and store it for me—if someone hadn't snatched it up already.

Running through the scenarios helped me keep my cool as those damn voices proved to be not nearly as far as I would have liked.

A part of me was furious that I was running.

But unlike with my vampire, intuition also warned that this would be an altercation I wouldn't be able to just walk away from. Nor would my death be as glorious as it would have been had I gone down fucking and fighting.

So I shoved down the stupid pride before it got me killed and kept hightailing it out of the woods.

I didn't bother sticking to the darkest paths since it would have offered no advantage given I was certain it was more vamps I was running from. They were created for the night. Shadows wouldn't grant me more cover. They'd see right through them as if they weren't there at all.

For me, though, the moonlight made a hell of a difference.

The last thing I needed was to trip over a goddamn fallen branch or root and alert every fucking one to my whereabouts. As long as I kept silent, I stood a fucking chance.

With that in mind, I moved as swiftly as I could across the wooded area

toward the glimpses of civilization. Okay, it was a road and a few buildings that looked shabbier than the fucking club I'd danced at, but I'd gladly take it over my current environment.

Just as the trees fell away, a weak moan caught my ear.

I kept running, then cursed myself when my damn feet turned around of their own volition. I quickly padded to the source of the moans and sucked in a breath when I saw a young woman lying among the shrubs. Even with the shadows concealing her, I could tell her neck was a shit show.

The vamp who fed on her clearly hadn't cared if she lived or died.

But it also struck me as weird that he didn't go for the grand finale.

I'd ridden my vampire hard with lust, infected his body with a different need, which contributed to the unconventional outcome, though it was possible even he thought he'd killed me when he'd dumped me on my ass. This woman, though...

She had been easy pickings.

Why would a vamp leave his kill before the actual kill?

"You're fucking crazy," I muttered to myself, even as I was bending over to scoop up the human.

Between her drained blood, tiny physique, and my own succubus strength, it was laughably easy to carry her in my arms. Another sting of awareness pinpricked my spine, and I secured my hold on the girl, making sure to apply pressure to her neck with one hand before getting the fuck away.

I crossed the road, then squeezed myself through the first gap I could find between the one-story buildings just to put something more concrete between us and the prowling vamps. It was tempting to force open a door and hide behind walls, but without wards or some kind of concealment spell, we'd be even more fucked than if we kept going.

Running rabbits were always better than sitting ducks.

Not that I'd accept a fate of a fucking rabbit.

Moving one foot in front of the other, I racked my brain over the options. One, I could still ditch the dying human and give the vamps a nice distraction that would cover my ass while I got free.

Annoyingly, the second I considered dropping her, my hands just tightened around her body in a clear "fuck you" to that plan. Maybe if I told myself it was because she was the key to getting answers about what the hell went down tonight, I could live with whatever savior complex was riding me

right now.

The second option was to somehow get back to the strip club. Vamp speed or not, the fucker couldn't have possibly carried me too far from where he'd snatched me, and I was getting a rough idea of where I most likely was anyway, the buildings in the distance stirring some faint recognition. Yeah, I could get us back to the club.

But what good would that do?

I wasn't welcomed there any longer. The dancers wouldn't know how to help the girl because none of them were healers, and the bouncers really were just muscle.

Which left option three.

I jogged on to the first point that felt safe enough for us to stop and lowered myself to the ground, the human still in my lap. With the hand that wasn't holding her fucking neck together, I rummaged around for my phone and dialed the number I honestly never thought I would again in my life.

"Decided to return to the fold, *sorellina mia*?" my adoptive brother's voice slithered down the line like he'd been ready for me to reach out.

With his psychic abilities, the asshole probably had. I wouldn't put it past him to sip on a scotch while waiting for me to actually make the decision to ring him.

Fucking prick.

"I need a healer ASAP, Giovanni. I know you have men everywhere."

They were like damn cockroaches, and I suspected the fuckers had just multiplied since I'd last had a glimpse into the internal workings of Giovanni's organization.

He hummed. "You're still playing at making a life for yourself in Berlin?"

"You know damn well where I am," I snarled.

I might have put a whole county between us, but when you were as clairvoyant as Giovanni, there was no true escape. The only reason he hadn't come dragging me back to work for the mob he'd set up for himself was because his arrogant ass believed I'd come back on my own anyway. With my past and my consistent outcast status, he'd convinced himself that he was the only one who could offer me a home.

What he couldn't see with his oversized, fat head, what no amount of clairvoyance helped him accept, was that I'd rather fight every single day of my life—*have* a life of my own to fuck up—than hand myself and all of my

freedom over to him with a nice little bow on top.

“Are you sending that healer or not?” I snapped.

“One job.”

My stomach twisted at the inevitable, but it had nothing on the fury that roared through my veins.

I gritted my teeth. “One job that lasts no longer than a single night of my life.”

“Deal.”

The line went dead, and I was left to ruminate over my choices as I waited for him to send whatever demon or warlock was closest to my location. That Giovanni hadn't asked for specifics just showed how closely he kept an eye on me, how honed his sight still was.

He couldn't track my movements every second of the day since that would have required his full attention, but with enough focus, he could see and feel the exact damn street I was on at any time he so pleased.

To say it was disconcerting would have been the understatement of the century.

Pushing the thoughts away, I returned my attention to the girl. Even on the brink of death, I could see the appeal she must have had for the vamp who'd ravaged her neck. There was that essence of innocence written in her soft feminine features that would have made her a fucking wet dream for a fanged asshole.

I cocked my head to the side, studying her more. The fact that she hadn't crossed into the underworld yet, even as the flow of her blood against my hand slowed, hinted that my initial assessment of her species might have been off. She still struck me as human, but she couldn't be that entirely. There was some sort of magical heritage in her, something supernatural that was supporting her survival right now. But she wasn't powerful either.

I wondered if her lineage was kinder than mine or if her pronounced humanity was a curse in its own right.

A stirring in the air kicked me out of my thoughts, and I was grateful for the heads-up about the demon's arrival. As soon as the big-ass fucker manifested in physical form, I snorted out a laugh.

Of course it had to be Matteo.

“Taking on charity cases, or are you just that desperate to get back?” he quipped, his power pooling around his fingertips as he approached the dying girl in my lap.

I wanted to spill out the truth, tell him that I had no idea what possessed me to save the stranger, just that she was important somehow. But with Giovanni undoubtedly watching, it was more imperative than ever for Matteo and me to play our parts.

If my brother ever found out one of his demon enforcers had been the mastermind in orchestrating the grand fuckup that had given Giovanni no choice but to send me away until things settled down—and me a chance to escape his clutches—death would have been a mercy compared to the punishment Matteo and I would get.

The one good thing was that my brother always considered me valuable only for my pussy. Since Matteo had zero interest in that, being mated to and faithful to another man, Giovanni never paid the two of us much attention.

Even clairvoyance couldn't save assholes from themselves, though in this case, I was grateful for the massive blind spot.

I scowled at Matteo. “I traded in a favor for you to heal her. Doesn't mean I have to listen to your shit unless you want to tell your boss he'll have to reduce the weight of the deal on my end.”

“Bitch,” Matteo spat, but though he'd played it well, I could feel the affection beneath the insult.

The sentimental asshole was as happy to see me as I was him.

I bit the inside of my lip to keep from grinning and fixed an annoyed mask on my face. Matteo got to work, kneeling beside us and directing his healing powers into the girl. I found myself clutching her tighter as her body twitched, silently hoping this would work.

Sometimes, not even the best healers could get the flesh back up and running if the damage was too extensive.

But as Matteo straightened and the girl continued to breathe, I realized her soul wasn't meant for the lord of the underworld just yet.

I bit back on the thank-you that wanted to escape my lips and snarled instead, “You can crawl back to your boss now.”

“You'll follow me soon enough.” Matteo smirked.

But his words had been a warning.

A single deal with the devil was one deal too many.

Giovanni wouldn't be as eager to let me go a second time.

I had to escape the net long before it could fall.

CHAPTER SEVEN

SERENA

Was evil queen bender a thing?

Because I sure as shit was feeling like I was coming off one.

The shower I'd taken once I'd tucked the girl in bed had done wonders to wash the night off me, but along with the blood and dirt that had spiraled down the drain, so had my fucking attitude. I'd spent a good amount of time standing under the spray and contemplating my life choices...

Because what the hell had all of that been?

First, I was ready to drain every single person at Der Schmetterling, even *innocent* people, then the next thing I knew, I was running through the woods stained with screams and pain, all the while taunting a fucking vampire to bite and fuck me straight into death just because he felt like an equal adversary?

I rubbed a hand down my face while my feet kept carving a figure eight into my tiny scrap of living room floor.

That was some crazy shit right there. Even when I'd still been riding bad guys into death and wielding my damn pussy like a hitman did their favorite gun, I hadn't been quite so unhinged.

No, unhinged wasn't the right word for it.

It felt like madness, sure, like reckless freedom and a power trip that had put me on top of the world. It was a villain origin story, and its explosive, going-full-dark-side main piece at once. But even as the whole ordeal seemed so detached from the reality I was living that it was almost hard to comprehend it had been a real experience, something vital *had* shifted in me tonight.

Now that the urge for retribution had passed and I was coming down from

the high, I still wasn't the same mousey succubus who bowed her head to every single piece of shit who wanted her to bend and break to fit their desired mold.

I might not be willing to walk around the world murdering people just because I could, but I also had no intention of crawling back into a skin that didn't fit me anymore either.

All the pain that had lived inside me had cracked free and now slithered like shadows beneath the surface. No longer syphoning me, but in some odd sense coexisting.

Right alongside an itch I couldn't shake no matter what—an itch that made me not regret phoning Giovanni. Yet.

I'd checked on the girl for what must have been the three hundredth time over the past few hours as she slept in my bed. Morning had begun to creep over Berlin, and I blew out an annoyed breath, knowing I couldn't rush the healing process but wanting her to wake the fuck up regardless.

No one ever said I was the most patient person in the world.

Though right now, I was pacing my tiny apartment like a fucking addict.

I caught my reflection in the mirror by the bedroom door, my hair nearly dry and hanging wildly down my shoulders, the bite marks still visible on my neck from the savage way the vampire had bit into me...

Unwillingly, I licked my lips, then shook myself straight.

This wouldn't do.

Just as I wasn't Giovanni's toy to play murder family with, I wouldn't allow that damn vampire to chain me to him without him even fucking trying. No, no, everything from this point forward would unfold on my terms. If anyone believed differently, they could go get fucked.

A ping from my computer sent me stalking to the small square table set by the narrow window overlooking the street. I parked my butt on the chair and curled one hand around the cold cup of coffee while I opened the email.

I'd come across a post on social media what felt like lifetimes ago, highlighting the importance of getting busy. Sure, they might have been talking about how to keep yourself from obsessing about when your desires are going to manifest, but it seemed like solid advice for my current situation too. As soon as it popped into my head when I'd put the girl to rest and realized I was hovering over her like fucking Frankenstein over his monster, I threw myself into a hunt of a different kind.

One I'd really thought I was done with for a while—until Adela had

called me into her office and fired my damn ass.

I needed a job. And what better way to make myself busy than to dive down that tedious hole. I'd reached out to what contacts I had linked to the shadier scene in Berlin. The whole "I know a guy who knows a guy" thing, which was usually the fastest way to put some money into my pocket.

Though as I read through the info the email delivered, it became clear that what had panned out had been more in the "I know a girl who knows a girl" vein.

Even better.

There was an unprecedented sufficiency in the way women operated, and though I didn't favor any genders—had equal shit experiences with them all—something about working for guys rubbed me the wrong way after my brief talk with Giovanni.

I read through the paragraphs in the email outlining that they needed someone for bartending who could be discreet, could work nights, and didn't mind getting paid cash under the table. Since I simply required something to tide me over until I secured another proper job the authorities would be pleased with, that was more than fine with me.

I typed back that I was interested, included some of my past experiences that would highlight I was the perfect person for the job, then, before I hit send, silently thanked this Gisela woman signed at the bottom of the email for being up in the early hours of the morning. She'd kind of saved my sanity right about now, and I needed a dose of something good. Something stable.

Before I could stare at the screen for too long, willing the confirmation to come through, a sleepy moan lured me toward my bedroom.

The girl was just coming to as I stepped into the room, stretching on the bed with her eyes still closed. I opened my mouth to give her a warning that would save her from the fright of waking in unfamiliar surroundings, but what was I about to say?

Don't freak out?

The person usually freaks out.

You're safe?

Coming from an unknown voice, yeah, I doubted it would have the desired effect.

Maybe I should have just brewed a fresh coffee and let the ultimate smell of comfort welcome her into consciousness, but it was too late now.

The stranger blinked, revealing stunning emerald eyes that immediately

locked on to me.

“Whoa, I’m not dead,” she mumbled.

Okay, so clearly, she wasn’t the freaking out sort.

“You almost were,” I said, being an amazing conversationalist.

But the girl just nodded, then frowned. “Did anyone see me? Being almost dead?”

Weird question.

I shoved away some of the clothes overflowing in the chair by the window and sat on the edge. “You were thrown in the bushes, so I doubt it. I got us out before the vamps came.”

She must have known which vamps I was talking about even better than I did because she blew out a relieved breath. The kind that made me even more curious.

And reminded me I’d picked the right person to save.

Unfortunately for me, she was also clever.

“You’re not part of the Sanguine Society hunts, are you?” Those emerald eyes studied me with piercing intensity.

It wouldn’t do me any favors to lie, so I simply shook my head. “Got dragged there yesterday. So I’m hoping you could clear some stuff up for me?”

“Dragged?” She propped herself higher and shoved her still matted brown curls away from her face.

I ignored her question. We’d come to that later.

“What’s the Sanguine Society?” I asked instead. “And why were you so relieved no one saw you bleeding out in the shrubs?”

I couldn’t help but add that last bit. Because it bugged me more than a bunch of asshole vamps hunting people.

She chewed on her lip, for the first time losing some of the ease she’d had around me. Damn it, I wasn’t about to let her clam up.

“I saved your ass, girl,” I reminded her.

She laughed. “Yeah, yeah, you did. Okay, I guess you being there kind of fucks with the ‘no telling outsiders’ rule since, technically, outsiders don’t know these hunts exist...”

“What, they’d come hunt you down if you spoke to anyone?”

“Their way of ensuring anonymity when all of our faces are on display.”

I got the distinct feeling she was talking more about the hunters than the hunted. Societies of the supernatural variety usually entailed powerful

members. I was willing to bet my best platform heels that I wasn't wrong about this.

"So, the Sanguine Society..." I prompted.

"The Sanguine Society is pretty much what you saw." The girl spread her arms wide. "A way for vamps who have darker impulses to let their inner predators out. It's a tightly run ship, with a founding council in charge that makes sure everything runs smoothly. They set up the hunts, monitor them, and punish whoever oversteps."

So my instinct to run hadn't been wrong. I had a feeling, with me not being an actual member, I would have fallen straight into the latter category.

"Why I was so relieved," the girl went on, her fingers fumbling with a loose thread on the comforter, "was because I wasn't slotted for a death run."

"A death run?"

"Yeah, when you sign up to be hunted, there are two camps. One is for those of us who just like the thrill of being hunted through the woods and getting our necks bitten. The other belongs to people who go all the way."

Cold sweat slicked down the nape of my neck. "They sign up to die?"

"A lot of people want a way out of life, and this saves them from doing it themselves. Others get off on it." Her nose wrinkled. "It's like the ultimate high for them, to die at the hands of an orgasmic bite of a vampire."

Her distaste was plain, though even as horror rocked through me at the thought of people who clearly weren't in the best mental states signing up to get killed, I couldn't help but remember my own thoughts. My own experience.

But I was a predator, not some weak mortal. The power balance was vastly different. For someone high up the food chain, going out in the glory of a fight with someone worthy wasn't the same as a person just handing over their life.

I couldn't help the disgust that rose at how many souls must have signed up for these death runs. Hell, after the night I had, I was glad I hadn't unleashed myself upon the club. There was nothing valuable, nothing gratifying about taking down pitiful prey. At least the people at Der Schmetterling wouldn't have gone to their deaths willingly. The ones the girl was talking about...

"So you signed up for a regular run?" I asked her in part to kick myself from the spiral of thoughts, in part because curiosity over her reaction was still burning a hole in me.

“I always do. Which means that what went down...” She shook her head. “If the organizers saw me, if they saw what happened, they would ban the vampire who hunted me from the Sanguine Society. He hadn’t killed me, so he wouldn’t be killed in punishment in return.”

The pieces started falling together.

“You believe he’d come after you?”

She let out a humorless laugh. “I know he would. He’d take his revenge for being banned out on me. And since it would happen outside of the bounds of the Sanguine Society...”

“They wouldn’t really give a fuck.” I exhaled, leaning back in the chair and knocking off a t-shirt.

I didn’t bother picking it up from the floor, too caught up in the information coming my way.

“As long as he doesn’t threaten the Society in any way, it’s not really their shit to deal with.”

“Fucking assholes,” I muttered, which earned me a small chuckle from the girl. I glanced back at her. “Why would you sign up to get hunted by a bunch of unhinged pricks?”

She chuckled again, though it was far warmer this time. “Not everyone is like Henning. The majority of the vampires in the Sanguine Society play nice. Well, as nice as predators out for blood do, but they all respect the rules. They’re sacred. The hunts mean too much to them to jeopardize their membership in the Society. I mean, it’s this or the risk of hunting rogue and getting hauled away by the Interspecies Crimes and Relations Agency.”

“But not this Henning asshole?”

“He used to be perfectly fine, but he’s toeing the line more and more lately. He never went as far as he did yesterday.” Her hand flew to her throat, where nothing but healed skin greeted her touch. “How did you save me?”

As much as I wanted to answer her very valid question, I still couldn’t let the subject drop.

“Why not out the prick?” I demanded. “You could totally do it in a way that couldn’t be tied directly back to your incident... Maybe we could even set someone up to take the fall.”

Like a soon-to-be-nightmare-ridden vampire who’d had the audacity to steal me away in the middle of the night. My mouth watered at the thought of putting him in an even more shitty position. To experiment and see how much it would take to bring him to his breaking point.

The girl gave me a soft smile. “Just let it be. He ran instead of killing me. It’ll hit him soon enough how close he came to forfeiting his life as well.”

I wasn’t as placated by the thought as she was, but it was clear I wouldn’t be able to force the issue. Even if he *had* almost killed her precisely because the asshole fucking ran instead of getting her help.

“I’m Serena, by the way,” I said to break some of the tension that had built in the space.

“Nicole.”

“You wanted to know how I saved you?”

Another olive branch.

“I do. Though I admit, I’m more curious to know how you ended up at a Sanguine Society hunt.”

She said it so shamelessly I couldn’t help but laugh. “Fine. I’d just left work, pissed as hell and wondering if I should go back in and eat everyone...” I pointed a finger at myself. “Succubus.”

It was a watered-down version of events but a good enough explanation without me laying my whole sorry-ass life story at Nicole’s feet.

“Anyway, I was contemplating feeding on the patrons when a damn vamp came out of nowhere and hauled me over his shoulder like a sack of fucking potatoes. The next thing I knew, I was in the woods, screams going off everywhere, and a bloodthirsty vamp looking at me like he was staring at his next meal.”

“Jesus.” Her eyes rounded. “I wonder who it was that would go against the rules like that...”

I shrugged. “A handsome fucking bastard, and he knows it. Tall, dark skin, dark hair shaved on the sides and slicked back on the top, kind of has this biker meets rockabilly look to him—”

Nicole’s gasp cut me off.

“What?”

“Girl, how are you even alive?”

My brows rose. Her own survival hadn’t stirred as much of a shock in her as mine apparently did.

“He drank me then fled,” I said slowly, simply.

“Whoa, wait a minute...” She sat ramrod straight, her gaze fixed on my face like she was seeing a fucking ghost. “He had his *fangs* in you, and you’re *still* breathing?”

I frowned. “Think I can’t fight off a vamp? I’m not fucking powerless.”

“Sure, you might be powerful. But fighting off—” She shook her head, a hint of fear in her eyes. “Not him. Not Leif...”

My annoyance gave way to knife-sharp intrigue.

“What makes him so special?” I asked, feeling that whatever came out of her mouth next wasn’t just one of the answers I was searching for but had the power to shift so much.

Nicole swallowed audibly. “Leif Nilsen is the worst of them all. He’s a sadist, Serena. The one only hardcore members play with. And he only ever hunts to the death.”

CHAPTER EIGHT

LEIF

“All right, guys, I think we got it,” Aric’s voice rolled through the studio as the last of the music rang out.

I leaned my double bass against its stand by the wall, my mind still turning over the walking bass line I’d come up with that was close but not quite right.

Kind of like I was feeling right now.

Shoving the thought away, I glanced at the guys who’d already gone on a hunt for drinks. Hints of whiskey and beer tinted the air, glasses clinking on a job well done. Although we initially got together to rehearse for the upcoming gig, we ended up diving into recording the first demo for the new album. We’d all been so tapped into the setlist, the music still alive in our veins, that when Aric had spontaneously whipped out a guitar riff and fitted to it the pieces of lyrics that had come to him over the past month, none of us so much as blinked before putting in our contributions.

For me, it was a way to get lost. Something to give myself to entirely that painted over the irregularities riding my already fucked-up ass.

Music had always been an anchor for me, though as time flew by and the sounds consumed me, I still hadn’t been able to shake that off feeling.

I crossed into the lounge of the studio, grabbed a bottle of blood, and leaned against the wall as I took the first sip. Compared to what I had yesterday, it tasted like fucking trash.

I forced myself to swallow more, hoping to drown the flashes of memories shooting through my brain like cursed meteors. Worst of all, I’d jacked off what must have been five times today, and *still*, my body was acting up. Wanting more.

Fuck, I'd really fallen off the bandwagon yesterday.

But those were thoughts that had no place existing here. Not in the studio. Not in the fucking slice of normal life I'd carved for myself and tried hard to keep untainted.

This was sacred.

This was mine.

I took another swig from the bottle, draining nearly half of the crap, when my gaze landed on Aric. He was sitting on the couch with his girl, his fingers drawing lazy caresses atop her thigh as the attraction and affection between them practically scorched the damn air.

The darkness in me wanted to say the guy had it easy. But I knew his story. The one he'd tried to hide even from us until the past had come hunting for him and dragged it all out in the open.

While he might have volunteered to be made into a vampire all those decades ago, Aric's maker had been one serious piece of shit who'd taken Aric down a path that could have easily consumed him if he hadn't had the willpower to break free.

That—and morals.

Thinking back to the blonde queen I'd dragged to the Sanguine Society hunt, fucked, and then drained, morals were something I was severely lacking.

I placed my bottle on the first empty surface that crossed my path and headed out to get some air. As soon as the door shut behind me and cut off the noises coming from within the studio, I folded down on the concrete step. Sunlight poured onto my skin, but its warmth hardly had any impact on the storm rolling within me. My gaze caught on my Harley, and I cursed when the bike that had represented a sliver of freedom just reminded me of how I'd had to track back to the fucking parking lot in the middle of the night, boxers slicked with cum, my dick hard a-fucking-gain, and the succubus's taste on my tongue.

I supposed I should have called myself lucky the bike had survived being left in such a shitty area, but all I felt were jagged shards of memories cutting into me and making me bleed all over. Making me hunger all over.

Just that this time, it wasn't for blood.

"Why so broody?" Gina, Aric's girl and a longtime Whiskey Jet Preachers fan, sat on the step beside me.

I hadn't even heard or felt her approach, which spoke volumes about my

state.

I dragged a hand through my hair and gave her a genuine half-smile. “I’m just having a shit day.”

More of a shit life, with this duality constantly clawing at me, but today was worse than usual. I didn’t even know if my long-legged prey had bounced back or if I’d left her there to die.

Fuck.

The darkness was leaching into my daytime, fraying the threads of normalcy I usually held on to. Normalcy I cherished—for those moments when I could forget about who I truly was.

“Want to move some of that heavy energy?” Gina stood without waiting for an answer and offered me her hand.

I laughed. She was impossible to refuse.

Made me wonder how the fuck Aric had stayed away from her for an entire decade.

Actually, it had been kind of painful to watch him want her for years, to see him pining after his girl—because that’s what she’d been right from the start. His girl. He’d just been too damn stubborn to embrace it.

I accepted Gina’s hand and let her lead me across the parking lot until we turned onto the tree-lined sidewalk. The steady hum of traffic from the surrounding streets filled the background with its low noise and saved me from the silence that would have made my errant thoughts all the worse.

“You ever feel like two parts of you are at war with each other and you’re afraid the wrong one will win?” I asked, unable to help myself.

Just as doubts crept in and I wanted to backtrack, Gina met my gaze with a knowing look that shut me the fuck up.

“I used to.” She returned her attention to the street stretching ahead of us. “Way back when my parents died, the wrong one did almost win. Then I walked by a club and heard this music... Music that lured me in, mesmerized me, and made me remember there was more to me than the pain, the anger, and the darkness.”

“You’re talking about your first Whiskey Jet Preachers gig?”

She nodded. “I’d been in a shit state, and instead of landing in a fight like I’d planned to, I ran into someone who just triggered more of the darkness. Hearing you guys play that night... You made my body remember what it felt like to be alive. That I didn’t need to bash someone’s face in just to get through my godsdamned days without losing it.”

Sometimes I forgot Gina hadn't always been with the Interspecies Crimes and Relations Agency. ICRA might have recruited her early on, but she hadn't always worn the badge of a model citizen—even if her crimes had never reached quite as far as mine. Although there was a bloodthirsty streak to her still when someone threatened those she loved. Or when she was left frustrated by a grave injustice.

When Aric's life had been on the line, she'd been ready to tear down the entire fucking world for him.

But no matter how much Gina might get this chasm splitting me right along the center, I couldn't exactly open up to her either. At the end of the day, she *was* law enforcement. And the shit I did, the Sanguine Society as a whole, no matter how religiously we followed our own rules...

She wouldn't have been able to just let us continue exploiting people with a death wish.

“What if I don't have anything like that?” I asked, though even as I said it, I could taste the lie.

Images of my succubus flooded my mind. The challenge in her eyes, the defiance in her body. But most of all, how she'd *wanted* to play. Wanted me to do my worst so that we could meet at the height of our inner predators.

Fuck, I was seriously wishing I'd manage to stop in time. That she was still breathing.

Gina opened her mouth, but I cut her off before she could say a thing. “Can you tell the guys I need an hour to clear my head?”

She looked at me like she wasn't too keen on me heading off by myself but eventually nodded. “Just come back, Leif.”

She meant it in more ways than one. I couldn't give her a promise on either.

“I'll try,” was all I said before I tapped into my vamp speed, safe now that I'd been sated, and tore southwest down the streets.

Though it was late in the afternoon, my hope was strong that the place would be open. Seedy clubs tended to get a hell of a lot of daytime customers slinking into dim spaces to forget about mundane crap and jerk off under the table like it was the height of their fucking lives.

The more I remembered the desperation I'd smelled in the air yesterday, the sounds that had filtered out from the rundown building, the harder it was to imagine my goddess being a part of that scene. But her clothes, the faint smell that had clung to her before our run had whisked it away...

I wasn't wrong.

I blasted into the strip club at vamp speed, ignoring the shouts from the bouncers as well as their pursuit.

Bad move, not hiring any vampires to man the door, but I wasn't complaining.

Following my instinct, I cut across the main space and into the back, then tore down a fucking hideous dark blue-and-purple corridor until I collided with a door, easily forcing it open.

"What the fuck," the woman sitting behind a desk positioned in the middle of the room snapped.

I shut the door behind me and wedged a chair under the handle within the span of a second. I didn't need any interruptions for this, though I wouldn't back away from a fight if it came to it.

A tang of magic danced through the air in warning.

I fixed my gaze on the witch. "I'm looking for one of your employees."

"You can look from the main room where the rest of the patrons are," she snapped. "Who the fuck do you think you are to come barging in here?"

"Blonde, blue eyes. Looks to be in her early twenties. She was here yesterday."

The witch looked at me like I was stupid. "I have five girls who fit that description. Blondes with pouty lips that make guys think of sticking their dicks between them always sell the best."

Fists pounded at the door behind me, but I'd lodged the chair hard enough they'd have to break through the fucking wood to get in.

I leveled a menacing stare at the woman. "I'm pretty sure none are as remarkable as her. She's a succubus—"

"Her?" Recognition clicked, and the witch laughed, though the sound was dryer than sandpaper. "Oh no, I'm not giving out information on *her*."

"Why the hell not?" I snarled, my patience with this woman running thin. "I can just wait out there, like you said, until she's scheduled to dance again. I'll make sure to create a real pleasant atmosphere for your patrons."

She didn't balk at my death stare or my spoken threat. Years of running a seedy club would have probably hardened anyone, though her display was still admirable.

The woman rose from her chair and stared me right down. "She doesn't work here anymore. You can wait for a year, but you won't see her on my stage ever again."

“Then give me her name. If she’s not your employee, what’s it matter to you anyway?”

“Forget the girl. Unless...” Her lips parted in an O. “Unless it’s already too late for you. Is it?”

“What do you mean?”

“Look, if you’re so adamant on finding her for vengeance or just another fuck, I don’t need Der Schmetterling’s name smeared all over Berlin while you’re out searching. I’m already doing enough damage control as it is because of that girl.” She reached for a piece of paper, but before she could bring a pen to it, I snatched her wrist in my grip.

“What do you mean it’s too late?”

She had the audacity to fucking smirk. “Why do you think I fired a *succubus* from a strip club? That girl is broken.”

I tightened my grip. No one insulted her; no one—

“Rein your Neanderthal back in,” she said with a sharp, saccharine tone. “You want to know why it’s too late? Because that girl can’t feed on, let alone sleep with anyone without them croaking it in the end. You’re a dead man walking, vampire. But maybe if you fuck her again, you can beg her to suck you dry on the spot. Because, honey, you won’t want to suffer through the alternative.”

CHAPTER NINE

SERENA

I was crazy. I had to be. But since my talk with Nicole this morning, the urge that had been scratching at my skin since the hunt just burned hotter.

Hearing about Leif, about the nightmare he was even within the parameters of the Sanguine Society...

Nicole had tried to talk me out of it, but since she was as stubborn as I was, she also quickly realized the futility of her attempts and went along with my plan instead.

Aside from Matteo, I never really had friends, but I had a feeling Nicole and I were kicking off something good here.

I observed her as she walked up to the vampire guarding the entrance to the hands-down *villa* the Sanguine Society claimed for their seat. It rested on the western side of the Havel river, close enough to Grunewald Forest to make it easily accessible but also sufficiently far as to not be tied directly to the hunts, unlike the villas peppered throughout the eastern side would have been.

Nicole had even made me put on my best damn clothes for our little afternoon trip to Fang Central.

Got to fit in if we're going the personal invite route, she'd said with a wink that told me she didn't exactly hate the concept.

She went for the ball-busting, high-earning lawyer look that took me by surprise at first with all the power she exuded. A far, far cry from the young woman who liked to play victim at the hands of bloodthirsty vamps. Then again, people got their kicks from all kinds of stuff. Giving up power wasn't an uncommon kink.

I ran my hands down the soft pink dress she'd stuffed me into. It fit me

like a second skin with its bodycon cut that ended just below my butt and a deep plunge neckline that reached nearly to my navel. Sexy as fuck while managing to look tasteful at the same time. I'd bought it a couple of months ago for a pink-themed night at Der Schmetterling when I'd been working the floor with my succubus magic locked up tight and had nearly forgotten it existed since I was more of a jeans-and-leather kind of girl.

But Nicole had zeroed in on the dress like she'd been magnetized to it, then paired it with white platform pumps and a pearly white cross-body bag boasting a light gold chain for its strap.

I looked like a walking Barbie doll, but apparently, that was what these vamps were into. Not femmes fatales in blood-red, nope. Nicole had explained that while not all members of the Sanguine Society had taste, the founders definitely didn't fall for the cheap tricks the population looking to get bitten often resorted to.

She cast me a look over her shoulder when the vamp opened the front door for us, and I followed her into the opulent foyer, my heels clicking loudly against the marble tiles. We sat side by side on a beige sofa loosely resembling a seashell that probably cost more than what I paid for a year's rent.

"Someone will be with you shortly," the vamp announced with a—I shit you not—mini-bow, then blasted back outside.

I took in the lavishness of the villa, the tall ceilings and chandeliers sparkling suspiciously like diamonds. My brows rose of their own accord. Talk about cognitive fucking dissonance.

I'd imagined the vamps picking up their victims at some seedy dive where lost souls congregated and offering them a high—or a way out. The villa didn't reek of desperation. Didn't fit the bleakness of the landscape people who were willing to throw their lives away resided within.

I wasn't delusional. I knew people didn't have to look the part to sign up for death. There were no rules for how a person wanting to take their own life by vampire should appear. Those urges didn't discriminate based on appearance, age, wealth, or any other markers or labels.

But I still didn't see them forming a line outside of a villa either.

"Do *all* members sign up here?" I asked in what I hoped to be a vamp-safe whisper.

While I couldn't see any fanged friends around, that didn't mean they weren't lurking just beyond the double-winged doors to our right. Still, the

question gnawed at me too avidly to just sit here and wait in silence.

Being curious beat being ignorant any fucking day in my book, although I probably could have gone for the Q and A sooner—especially with the whole NDA in place.

I wasn't supposed to know shit since Nicole wasn't supposed to share anything but the vaguest crap. If these guys found out I'd crashed their party yesterday, which had effectively put me within the okay zone for Nicole to talk to, I highly doubted I'd get out of this place with my skin intact.

So, between catching some sleep, food, and getting dolled up for our visit, Nicole had come up with a cover story just in case they decided to dive deeper—something the two of us, unfortunately, had not been able to do.

She shot me a cryptic smile. “This is by invite only. And solely for those with an impeccable reputation and track record to use.”

Meaning members who ranked the best.

I had to bite back a whistle.

“You're that tight with the Society?” My whisper was even lower now.

I for sure wasn't supposed to know about the Society by name, though hopefully, if anyone caught my slip up, they would consider it society without the capital fucking S.

“I play well.” Nicole flattened her hand elegantly against her thigh, the dark blue gemstone on one of her silver rings reflecting the light. “And I've been playing for a long time.”

Before I could question her further, especially since she seemed a bit too fucking young to be playing a long time, a vampire with classically handsome features strode through the massive double-winged doors that had previously been blocking our sight farther into the villa.

“Nicole,” he said with a fondness I never would have pinned on someone running illegal hunts to the death. “Lovely to see you, as always.”

Nicole and I stood as if yanked up by strings.

“Same, Leon.”

There was respect in Nicole's voice but also affection.

Could it be that she had the hots for the vamp? Because if that was the case, with the way he was looking at her...

Well, then, she *definitely* could have confided in him about Henning. Succubi didn't just have awesome lust sensors. I could always pick up on affection, and I got a strong feeling this guy would rip that vamp's head clear off if he knew what the fucker had done to Nicole.

Unless...

Another vamp sidled up beside Leon.

Unless Leon didn't hold *all* the power in his hands.

If his hands were free at all.

Nicole had mentioned the Society was run by a founding council. If bouncing around from country to country, attempting to integrate into various supernatural groups, and spending time in my brother's organization had taught me anything, it was that people *really* fucking liked to make shit difficult for themselves—and everyone else—by playing politics.

A clusterfuck of rubbing shoulders but also elbowing each other for no other reason than not being able to withstand the mere thought of giving a shred of power away. Of letting someone else's decision stand, even if it was reasonable. Right, even.

Ever seen someone argue their balls off just for the fucking sake of it?

Yeah, that was the energy I was talking about. A fucking stupid power play that actually *took* power from the person under the delusion of claiming more of it.

Why would the founders of the Sanguine Society be any different?

Just as I decided it probably was best not to butt into Nicole's business and just let it be, the newcomer vamp sliced a sharp look at us both that was so cold and transactional goosebumps prickled my skin.

Yeah, okay, maybe I really was going to take Nicole's word for it and drop the whole Henning subject, no matter how much it bugged me. If she believed outing the fucker would do more harm to her than good...

Well, with the way Mr. Creepy was looking at us, *dissecting* us, I was more than inclined to believe her.

Much like Leon, the vampire was handsome in that old money way, except there was no warmth to him. Like zero. The guy was a fucking iceberg that would sink you and let you freeze on the bottom of the ocean without a second thought.

Or let a scorned, booted-out-of-the-Society vamp rip a young woman's throat out in retribution.

I suppressed a shudder.

"Ms. Martens informed us you have an understanding of vampiric needs and are keen on providing blood from the vein?" he asked, the words so glacial it was a wonder they didn't come out in a cloud of tiny, needle-sharp icicles.

I had to admit, I was kind of impressed by how regal he made our cover story sound. Not that there would have been anything wrong with him saying I got all hot for vamps going primal and drinking from me, but that clearly wasn't his style.

I inclined my head. "That's correct, yes. I have always taken pleasure in providing for your kind."

That last part I'd added on instinct. He'd probably figured out I was a succubus. Driving home the point of pleasure being involved would only give more merit to my case—even if the guy looked like he wouldn't know pleasure if it smacked him in his impassive face.

But the move had worked as planned because, after another moment of piercing me with his steely gray gaze, he said, "Very well. Follow me."

Nicole cast me an encouraging look, and her handsome vamp stepped aside in a clear gesture to let me pass.

Without following me.

Great.

Nicole got the good guy for herself while I was left trailing behind Mr. Creepy through the villa.

He led me through a series of chambers—I couldn't really call them rooms since every one of them was three times the size of my apartment—the clicking of my heels the only sound penetrating the dead silence. The entire time, Mr. Creepy didn't spare me so much as a glance, let alone a word. If this was how they treated people who came here by personal invitation from esteemed members, I honestly didn't want to think about the kind of welcome mat everyone else got rolled out for them.

Or maybe I was just unfortunate enough to get the fucking council. Higher up the ladder rarely meant better.

Eventually, we entered something that resembled an office, but only in the real loosest of terms. Honestly, it looked more like a fucking courtroom, with two more dudes reigning from behind a long table polished to the nines. They both looked at me with an assessing gleam to their eyes, acknowledging me only with slight dips of their chins.

I stood like a damn inanimate Barbie before potential buyers while Mr. Creepy took his sweet time to claim the seat between the other two councilors.

Yeah, I definitely got now why Nicole hadn't wanted to stir shit within the Society. Leon aside, if these three were the main representation of the

council, they would kick Henning out without second thought—and not give the fucker another thought either. He'd take his fury out on Nicole because, in his mind, she would have been the reason for his revoked membership, and since it would happen in regular life beyond the bounds of the Society, it would be fair game as long as he didn't implicate them in any way.

It didn't even matter how high-ranking a member Nicole was. Maybe they'd regret losing her. But I honestly didn't see these guys caring for anything beyond the Society and their own gains.

Not that far of a cry from Matteo.

Shit.

The thought should have been enough to have me turning in the other direction, but I found myself walking up to the table instead, my chin held high.

"You are here to pledge yourself to our cause? To honor the vampiric nature and claim the position the blood rushing through your veins has bestowed upon you?" Mr. Creepy asked, though it sounded more like a formality.

They already knew why I was here, knew I was going to say yes; otherwise, they wouldn't have let me through the door.

I doubted anyone came this far just to turn them down.

I didn't think that was exactly survivable, even if I hadn't truly gleaned anything concrete about the Society yet.

Still, I let my voice ring out loudly in confirmation. "I am."

"Take a seat." He gestured to the lone chair set opposite them.

I complied, sinking onto the thick padding, and folded my hands in my lap while Mr. Creepy procured a leather folder. He slipped several printed pages out and spread them on the table before me. After I read through the documents outlining the rules, the nature of the hunts, even touched on the structure of the Society, and I filled in my information and signed all that was to sign, Mr. Creepy pulled out one final sheet of paper. One that smelled of magic and tingled my skin even from afar.

The NDA.

As I stared at the paragraphs, the signature at the bottom calling to be completed by its other half, Mr. Creepy snatched my hand with terrifying smoothness. He lifted it damn near to his lips, and I had to bite my tongue against telling him to fuck off.

I hadn't come this far just to mess shit up now, no matter how revolting

his touch was to me.

The fucker stared straight into my eyes as he flicked out his fangs—then brought his mouth down.

With a single tip, he pierced the skin on my index finger. Blood welled crimson in a perfect bead.

“Sign your name.”

He released my hand, and I did as I told, kind of feeling like I was signing away more than just my ability to tattle on a vampire hunt club.

But for whatever I was giving up, I also knew what I was gaining.

Mr. Creepy—or Orion Althan as the document had named him—collected the papers and gave me a slow, cold smile. “Welcome to the Sanguine Society, Serena Vernier. May we hunt you well.”

CHAPTER TEN

SERENA

Did I even want to know what it said about me that I almost wished I'd stayed at the Sanguine Society HQ longer? Willingly spent more time in Mr. Creepy's company?

Because from where I was standing, it certainly fucking beat being rooted to the spot just outside the doors leading from the employee area of the fight club, my gut twisting like fucking crazy as I stared at the stage set ahead.

No, no, nope, I did *not* sign up for this shit.

The impulse to run the fuck in the other direction shot straight into my feet, but then I remembered two vital things.

One, I was in a place ruled by pain over pleasure.

Two, I wasn't the faulty succubus who carted around her shame like bad BO she hoped nobody would notice any longer.

Maybe I just needed to reaffirm this shit for a while for it to really sink in after having spent my entire life bending to be the acceptable person everyone had demanded of me. But fuck, some things were much harder than others to forget. To let go of.

Memories clawed at me with wicked sharp talons—digging into me as if seeking retribution for all the years I'd kept the pain locked down. For years, I looked firmly in the other direction, relying on the damn good system I'd built for myself to keep me safe. Keep me away from that one part that bore a wound so deep not even darkness could fill it.

With an exhale, I forced myself to let the what-had-been go and ease into my new skin instead.

The process wasn't easy or seamless, but I kept pushing on, adamant about getting through this—to write my own outcome instead of ghosts from

my past shaping it for me.

I'd baited, fucked, and fed on a vampire as he drained me to the brink of death. Then I marched into the villa of the very fanged councilors who ran the nightmare hunts beneath the stars and signed up for a membership to do it all over again. Because it was fun. Because it made me feel alive—sang to my soul in a way that had resurrected the sides of me I'd believed I'd murdered long ago.

A bit of music wasn't about to make me tuck my tail and run.

It wasn't as if I was a fan of some underground band I'd never heard of before, anyway.

I let my gaze drift over the stage, already prepped for the live act I hadn't been expecting when I'd signed up for the job, then continued my perusal of the club. The fighting pit at the center spoke of the many matches that had taken place here, its stained ground marred by old blood, cracks, dents, and scorch marks. Around it extended a wide standing area before seats rose at a gentle angle toward the walls, mimicking a semi-amphitheater. A long-ass bar that would be my home for the next six hours or so filled one of the gaps among the sloping seats, a med station for the fighters the other.

The setup was rudimentary at best, but given the nature of the events, I highly doubted anyone found it lacking. Nobody was here for comfort except the kind pain could bring.

"Ah, there you are. Come over, girl," Gisela called, manifesting behind the bar from wherever she'd disappeared to while I'd been busy squeezing my body into my new uniform.

The rough warmth of her voice had me ungluing my feet off the floor, and I was grateful to find that it took no effort at all to honor the demon's call.

Not only was Gisela in charge of the hiring process, but she'd also been the one to let me in through the employee entrance earlier and showed me around the back, carving out some extra time in her schedule before the other girls arrived to help me get my bearings. For that alone, I liked her a whole fucking lot.

I skirted around the pit and parked my butt on the barstool opposite her. The cold wood kissed my butt cheeks the tiny shorts could never contain.

"Looking good." She gave the black crop top that pushed my boobs to extreme heights an appreciative nod. "I have a feeling you'll do well here."

I wasn't *entirely* convinced of that just yet, but I wanted to make it my

reality.

Thankfully, Gisela either didn't notice my hesitation or decided to go along with my play because she simply petted the bar with the palm of her hand like a pet and said, "This is all yours. The girls working the floor have a separate bar over there to get their orders from."

She pointed to a door near the one I'd walked out of earlier. There was a window with a broad ledge beneath it, suited for one person max to get an order.

I hadn't seen any of it before, which made me wonder if there wasn't some sort of magic coating to keep it hidden from anyone who wasn't staff.

When I turned back to Gisela, she winked. "Which means no one will be getting in the way of your reign back here. You worked as a stripper before, yes?"

I loved how there was zero judgment in her tone. Too often, assholes still frowned on the profession as if it was worth less just because we took our damn clothes off.

I'd love to see the assholes work the pole without dropping down like a three-day-old turd.

"I did, yes. I've been working as a stripper on and off for the past six years, but I also have experience as a hostess and bartender," I said to Gisela, reciting what I'd already put down in our email correspondence.

Gisela smiled. "Then you'll have no problems claiming the spotlight solo here. You have all the skills we need. But I still want to show you a few tricks before the rest of the girls get here just so that you don't end up wanting to take your murderous rage out in the pit by the end of the night."

I let out a low chuckle. "They get that demanding, huh?"

"You'd think we were some five-fucking-star service they paid thousands for, not a ten-euro door fee." Gisela rolled her eyes, then grabbed a glass from the far side of the bar and set it with the others in front of her. "The more the bloodlust rises, the needier these assholes get. You got to make sure the fighters get priority treatment, and that's usually when the rest of them become entitled dicks."

I'd run into my fair share of people with entitlement issues. Including those who salivated at performances then treated those very performers as if they were beneath them the split second the gig was over.

I wasn't talking just about my stripper life either.

I slid my gaze to Gisela and playfully narrowed my eyes at her. "You're

saying you know the gateway to keeping my sanity?”

“Sexy one”—she deeply inclined her head, her mass of black curls tumbling over her shoulders—“I know the portal that will make you the queen of this bar.”

I did my best to hold back my laugh, adamant not to give in first, but fuck, Gisela was a worthy adversary. I cracked hard, but as soon as my howling laughs filled the space, hers also joined in.

She hip-bumped me. “All right, let me show you my secrets.”

As we fell into the rhythm of Gisela showing me the ropes with admirable smoothness and efficiency, more and more movement stirred throughout the club until chords and a few drum kicks blasted from the speakers.

My spine snapped straight.

The chords continued, and a baseline wove through the beat—empowering, seductive, driving.

Shit, I’d almost forgotten how live music felt. How it brushed against my skin and vibrated through my entire body, leaving no part of me untouched.

I snorted under my breath even as a thread of fear slithered along my bones.

What a fucking lie.

I remembered *everything*. I remembered every fucking thing in such vivid detail I could live through it a thousand times in my mind.

But when those memories were attached to something that had thrown me on a downward curve that I’d wanted nothing more than to erase out of existence, wipe clean from my past...

I glanced from the snacks I’d been lining up to look at the three guys who’d claimed the stage. This was just a sound check, with jagged snippets and freaking notes thrown all over the place. But simply hearing that shit saturate the space was enough to send my body thrumming.

When the singer’s guitar rang out in a grungy riff, followed by the warm darkness of his voice, sound check or gig, it made no difference to me.

The music hit my ears, my skin, my fucking core, and I forgot all about my task, transfixed by the guy’s presence. I could tell he was just half-assing it, but holy fucking shit, if this was him taking it easy, I could only imagine that the actual performance would have enough fire to burn the damn place to the ground.

His curly blond hair and warm autumn eyes should have given him an air of sweetness. Instead, they only highlighted the cocky, dangerous edges of

his handsome face and powerful athletic body.

Honestly, he looked like the definition of a golden boy jock, except the appearance was nothing but a honey trap. A fucking delicious honey trap I wanted to run my tongue over—

“That’s Pascal,” Gisela said straight into my ear and fucking laughed her head off when I startled. She gave me a knowing look. “The guy is hotter than the fucking sun. And he’ll burn you like it too. Talented, but one-hundred-percent asshole.”

I snorted. “Aren’t they all?”

Gisela hummed under her breath. “There are assholes. Then there are assholes who know they’re the best. Who are well aware that there’s merit behind their fucking self-importance.”

“The best?” I arched a brow and took the packet of pretzels the music had made me forget about off the counter before placing it in its rightful spot. “The guy is playing at an underground fight club...”

Hardly the height of achievement.

A playful glint shone in Gisela’s eyes. “You’ll see.”

She vanished from behind the bar before I could question her further, fucking demonic particle form giving her an easy escape, and reappeared on the other side of the club, where she promptly started bossing the other girls around to get the place in shape before the doors opened in twenty.

I laughed under my breath. Some people just had the kind of vibe you couldn’t help but love.

I breezed through my own shit, the tasks easy enough to run on autopilot, and watched the rest of the sound check. It wasn’t just that I had to face my fucking fears and this was, at least on paper, the safest damn opportunity I’d get to make that first step. I didn’t think I could look away even if I wanted to.

Pascal’s eyes briefly locked on mine during one of the songs, and the smirk he shot me definitely backed not just my previous assessment of the guy but Gisela’s too.

Though as I heard a bouncing echo of her voice ride through the air when the music quieted for a beat, I reminded myself that killing off the club’s star act probably wasn’t the wisest.

I might have ended the cycle of holding myself back, but even predators knew which prey to pick and which to let go. As much as I wouldn’t mind seeing that cocky smirk between my legs, the music that poured out of him

was too fucking precious to take from this world.

Music I'd need to banish from my memory once morning came.

The old pain had already started to kick in in the background, a stark reminder of what I was missing out on. Of what I could never have.

Damn it, *this* was why I'd been so disciplined.

This was why I never allowed myself to go beyond a single song by an artist.

Music wasn't just addictive. It was magic. It was pieces of someone's soul strung together into a unique expression of absolute beauty. It was raw yet smooth. Vulnerable and powerful.

It was a person's heart but also something that transcended into so much more.

I blew out a long, supposedly calming breath and reminded myself that one night wouldn't end me. I was still sated from my hunt and fuck with Leif. The club would be packed with bloodlust, which hit differently than sexual lust.

For this one night, I could forget my rules. Forget that once I left the club, I'd be leaving the music behind too.

If it ripped me up tomorrow, well, that was tomorrow's problem to deal with. Because I sure as shit couldn't deny myself this slice of pleasure I'd never again have. It was better to experience something incredible once than never, right?

And maybe if I kept telling myself that long enough, I'd start to believe it. At least until the regret for things I couldn't have punched me in the gut.

But when the band wrapped up, a couple of their crew sweeping in, and I damn near mourned the loss, I knew I'd made the right choice to stay no matter what payment my decision would come to collect later on.

Sealing the lid on the weaker parts of me I didn't want to be attached to right now, I glanced at the time. I still had quite the buffer before the doors officially opened. Gisela was busy strutting around the club, for some reason trusting me to get my own shit straight. She hadn't been wrong in that assessment.

I ran her instructions through my mind once more just to make sure I had everything set up the way she'd said, then dove into tinkering things a tiny bit to better suit my own ways. Gisela's system was brilliant, I had to admit. The tweaks were designed to handle a large crowd, so there wasn't all that much to do. Past experience of working in bars taught me, though, that you

couldn't dismiss your individuality.

As a succubus, I had even more of an advantage in distracting the crowd by showing off my body. No murderous wives needed.

I included some intentional bending over in the process of getting drinks, placing a few of the bottles lower on the shelf so the assholes would get a fantastic shot of my butt, then made a couple of adjustments at the bar too so that those crowding it would be blinded by my cleavage. Sometimes buying yourself a couple of seconds per person was all it took to have shit running smoothly.

“Hey, Blondie.”

I glanced up to see Pascal sauntering over like he was the fucking king of this place. Not without reason, because fuck, was he hot.

He dripped sex in that infuriatingly casual way, like his dick was made of gold and gave you the kind of rough, wild ride that backed the claim without him even trying.

Which meant my pussy needed to cool it ASAP. This guy was *not* for us to play with.

He rapped his fingers against the bartop and flashed me a cocky grin. “I’ll take a shot of tequila off you.”

“Sure thing.” I began prepping the drink, grateful for the distraction, but Pascal’s hand fell on my arm and halted me before I could pour the tequila into the glass.

“You misunderstand, sweetheart. I said”—he dropped his voice so deliciously low the warm night of it rolled across every inch of my skin—“I’ll take a shot off *you*.”

CHAPTER ELEVEN

PASCAL

I could see the moment it clicked for her—that slight widening of her blue eyes, the way her full mouth parted just enough to make my dick twitch. But even more fucking beautiful was what came the second after.

Blondie wasn't shying away from a body shot.

It wasn't in her job description to cater to our whims—even an asshole like me had the capacity to honor the staff's limits—but she wasn't about to back away from the challenge. My dick got even harder as she grabbed what she needed like it meant absolutely nothing to her, then hopped up on the bar in those tiny shorts that left little to the imagination and had my blood racing.

“The doors open soon, so make it fast,” she threw at my face.

I smirked. If she thought the attitude was going to put me off, she'd see soon just how wrong she was about that.

She poured the salt just above the waist of her shorts, stuck the lemon wedge between her lips, then surprised the fuck out of me when she poured the tequila right down the center of her stomach.

Blondie really was pushing me. And I fucking loved it.

I braced one hand on the counter, enjoying the sight for a moment longer in clear defiance of her command. The pissy look on her face was a reward in itself, but it was the peaking of her nipples that made me even more smug than I already was.

“Well,” she snapped like all she truly cared about was the diminishing timeframe.

A dark chuckle tumbled from my lips.

I raked my free hand through my messy hair, then bent over. With slowness that took every fucking ounce of my control, I licked the salt off

her, then followed the trail of the tequila up her skin, nearly all the way to the black top her full breasts strained against.

Got to love a girl who was bold enough to go braless in a dive like this.

She shivered under my tongue, voiding her previous attitude, and I didn't even have to think about what I was going to do next. I fucking vaulted onto the bar and settled myself on top of her to claim the lime. My cock dug between her legs as I leaned down and slammed my mouth over hers, taking the lime with enough aggression that would make any other girl shove me off.

Not Blondie, though.

Her fire matched mine, and she burned through it all right alongside me until the end of the ride.

Finishing off the lime, I straightened and smirked at her, earning myself a dry look from her beautiful face.

"If you're done, I have work to do," she snarked without actually snarking.

And fuck, if that coldness didn't just turn me on more. Because I knew what a fucking lie it was. How much effort had gone into it. After all, I still had her body beneath me. Still felt the heat of her core against my dick, saw the heavy rise and fall of her chest, the slight flush in her cheeks.

Stunning.

I braced one hand above her head and leaned over, my dick grinding into her body. "Thanks for the shot."

"I'll put it on your tab."

Again, she delivered the statement without flinching, and fuck if I didn't roll my hips a bit just to point out that I could see through her act. As her back arched, I let out a low chuckle.

You can pretend all you like, Blondie, but I can see how much you want me to fuck you right on this bar.

I had a feeling I wouldn't even need the rest of the evening if I had her clawing at my back and matching my aggressive thrusts.

The thought made me pause.

I'd never, never even fucking *considered* skipping club nights.

It wasn't good for my health. Or for those around me.

I needed the violence. The blood. It was the only thing that ever soothed the raging fire inside me.

Blondie stoked those flames on a level I couldn't understand—and it

made even less sense that the more I burned for her, the more the fire consumed me...

The less volatile it got.

What the fuck?

Masking my frown into a smirk, I climbed off her. She observed me with a dry look before pushing herself up and sliding off the bar. The way her butt jiggled when she landed on her feet was fucking criminal, and if I weren't so caught up in my own thoughts, I would have fucking leaped over the hideous wood separating us and claimed that fine piece of ass for myself.

Blondie kept her back to me and clearly had no intention of turning as she busied herself with the already clean glasses lined up on the shelf. The darkness in me crooned to not let her win. To make her look at me one more time. But as I overheard someone mentioning they were about to let the crowd in soon, I decided to let her have her victory.

If anything, walking away from this fight fouled the mood that had slipped into my veins when I had Blondie beneath me and twisted the flames into their usual angry blaze that drove me among these walls time and time again.

Normal. This was normal.

And I was going to stick the fuck to it.

I'd never had a girl mess with my mind, and no matter how good it might have felt, I wasn't about to start now. When you ran as hot as me, you needed firm support systems in place to keep you on track. Wandering into the unknown after a fine, bouncy ass would lead to more trouble than was worth handling.

That didn't mean I wouldn't fuck her in a heartbeat.

But I'd be damned if I did it in a way that shook up the foundations I'd worked too hard to build.

The fact that a part of me still wanted to just let go with Blondie and see where shit would take me pissed me off even more. I harnessed that anger and sent it coursing through my veins as I marched into the back. I stripped off my clothes, then pulled on the black jeans, white wifebeater, and distressed leather jacket. The guys had already changed and were downing beers on the couches we'd claimed for our own since the first night we played the venue together.

This wasn't really their scene, neither of them exactly ticking time bombs of aggression, but Ealar and Lucas were as much outcasts from the Fae world

as I was. Lower on the power scale, which immediately marked them as prey within the Fire court, they opted to live in the mortal realm. Even if, unlike me with my diluted blood, they could actually evanesce into our native realm.

But what was the point of heading there if you'd just lose your head?

I'd appreciate the fight, but these guys wouldn't have stood a chance. The Fire court had been all kinds of fucked in the past, and even if on the surface it was far more civil now, we all knew fire couldn't really be controlled, contained, or tamed. The realm was just as lethal as its namesake. The assholes were just better now at hiding it from their Air, Earth, and Water brethren who believed our ways were unacceptable.

The Blackened Stone, as messed up as it might have been, was a refuge for those like us. A home away from home where we could let our true natures run free.

I glanced at Ealar and Lucas, their postures chill and easy laughs filling up the space.

Some of us more than others.

I probably should have considered myself lucky they'd even agreed to form Phoenix Chains with me. There was usually some sort of harmony, some connection between band members that allowed the group to function. The gap between them and me was so damn massive it felt like an insurmountable canyon. But music...

It transcended even our differences.

One fundamental thing with fire—it wasn't just destruction that it craved. It was creation that it brought into existence through the drive, the passion, the urge to light up the world with something new that was just as powerful.

And it was that purest expression of our nature that had pulled the three of us together.

We all burned to alchemize what lived within us. Give it form through our bodies, our voices. Be the conduits, the transformers, fucking channels of fucking manifestation.

Gods.

Because what was music if not a divine fucking creation?

"You dipshits ready?" I asked with a grin.

They fucking hollered their responses, beer bottles lifted up in a toast before they moved their asses off the couch and rolled into action.

Fifteen minutes later, we claimed the stage.

My fingers flew across the strings, the riffs pouring out of me raw and

demanding. I loved playing with my main band, loved the spotlight it gave me, and the challenge of giving someone else's words music, marrying the two into something that felt whole instead of just slapping shit together and pretending it fit.

But this right here, this was where my soul bled.

The grunge riff built up, and I stepped to the mic, letting my voice spill out the lyrics.

No one beyond these walls knew I shredded and ripped my heart into songs that were all my own, and for that, I was glad.

Anyone could have sold me out to the tabloids for a scoop that would give them a nice little financial boost. Guitarists like me might not be as interesting as front men, but the media would still eat up the story. Dirty little secrets, after all, were what empty people fed on.

These fuckers in front of me, though, they wanted to keep their activities in the dark above all else—and the dark was precisely where my music belonged too.

The words I sang were as rough and as volatile as I was. They weren't intended to see the light of day but designed to bounce off the walls of a packed club that smelled of booze, fire, and blood.

This was my domain, and I claimed every atom of it.

We flew through our set, the fighters in the pit changing almost in perfect sync with our songs. There was magic here, some fucked-up alchemy that put us on a single track we traveled together.

Sweat slicked my skin as I gave everything to the music.

We closed the set moments after the last fight ended, claiming that final applause over the fighters. I was an asshole like that, and I didn't even care. I soaked in the crowd screaming for an encore, but it wasn't the music I created on stage they were really asking for.

I set my guitar on the rack, downed some water, then shrugged out of my leather jacket and wifebeater. Saluting Lucas and Ealar in passing, I marched up to the pit.

The crowd parted like fucking water for me.

I claimed my spot in the ring, a smirk on my face as the people went fucking nuts. I almost felt sorry for the guy the draw had assigned to me tonight. Being ignored, basically invisible except for existing as a tool in the crown event of the evening sucked.

But this was my time. My moment.

I'd never be Fae royalty. Hell, I'd never even see my fucking ancestral homeland, but here, I *was* king.

The pressure in the atmosphere built in sync with the countdown displayed in flaming numbers overhead, the deafening silence folding inward in an energetic vacuum—

A vacuum that then exploded like a fire blazing through gasoline-rich air as the bell chimed and sent me blasting forward.

Where every fight had had the demanding rhythms of our music behind it, mine was silent. It didn't need a soundtrack to hype up the crowd when I was thrumming with it. My fists laying out the beat, my body the harmonies.

Every wretched soul in the club belonged to me. Every pair of eyes fixed on my body. But it was Blondie's gaze that I felt burning into my skin.

My smirk deepened.

Bet she didn't expect the pretty guy with the guitar to have it out in the pit. No one did. That was part of the beauty of it all. When you healed as fast as I did, when you could repair the flesh and bone casing of the body regardless of how many times it broke, it gave no one as much as a single reason to question how I spent my nights.

I rammed my fists into my opponent's face over and over, relishing the crunch of bone and the hot spills of red that stained my knuckles.

But for the first time, as I left the asshole lying bloody on the floor with the crowd roaring my name, it wasn't enough.

CHAPTER TWELVE

SERENA

He was as mesmerizing in the pit as he'd been on stage. I'd done my damn best to keep my attention on my job throughout the fights—which, in all honesty, had turned out to be much easier than I'd initially thought, with people demanding drinks left and right like dying men in a desert.

Gisela hadn't been kidding about the onerous clientele. Though the extra workload had definitely come in handy.

But then Pascal stepped into the pit, standing tall with that damn chest I wanted nothing more than to lick on display... and I'd fallen into a trance right alongside the rest of the crowd.

Silence stretched for a long moment as he faced his opponent, thick, almost reverent, as if everyone collectively held their breaths in anticipation of something sacred.

When the bell announced the beginning of the fight, I understood why.

Pascal moved as if he was a blaze of merciless violence—not rooted in chaos, but perfection, his body a magnificent instrument that oozed power with every flex of his muscles, every elegant move of his long limbs. There was such beauty in his roughness, in his darkness, in the pain he dished out with precise blows and hit.

“Well, are you giving me that beer or not?” a guy I vaguely remembered putting in an order snapped at me.

I poured him a large from the tap on autopilot and slid the pitcher to him, accepting the money in return. I'd done this enough times tonight that I didn't even spare a glance at the till, my gaze glued on what I could see of the pit with the crowd pressing in around it like they were living for every second of

the fight.

And shit, what a fight it was.

The guy mumbled something along the dumb blonde bitch lines I was pretty sure was supposed to insult me. I could have tugged on his essence, on that thread of lust that rose as he looked at me, regardless of his less-than-favorable thoughts. But why bother with cheap hits when there was a damn fire god dominating in the pit?

The more Pascal put into the fight, the more beautiful he was. His knuckles were stained with blood, the planes of his handsome face hard, almost otherworldly as shadows flickered across them whenever he called on his flames.

He wasn't the smirking, cocky musician any longer.

He was an instrument of agony and death.

And shit if I didn't fall for his spell.

The range of who Pascal Evers was hit somewhere deep.

It was irrational, it was ridiculous, but for the life of me, I couldn't shut down this fascination. The desire he stirred that had nothing to do with my hunger but pure lust to be taken by someone of such magnitude.

Between the raw, demanding music he'd poured out, the beauty of his brutality in the pit, and an edge of something I had yet to put my finger on...

Pascal Evers was danger.

Danger I wanted to fall into headfirst.

I watched the fight in a daze, and it took everything I had not to roar with the rest of the crowd when he knocked out his opponent and left him lying bloody and scorched on the floor. His piercing stare sliced across the club, and I held in a breath as our gazes locked.

A second.

A second was all we had before the sweaty, drunk mass of supes high on violence descended on the bar. The severed connection delivered a blow to my gut, but I couldn't really think about it, scrambling to get everyone's fucking orders.

After several long-ass minutes, when I managed to find my flow, Pascal was nowhere in sight. I wasn't sure if I was relieved or devastated.

Shit.

The more alcohol I poured, the more assholes I dealt with, the more I wondered what the fuck had happened.

One night, I was letting out the lethal glory of my death-kissed succubus

with a vampire who made me feel more alive than I ever had. The next, I was coming undone from the music and violence of a half Fire Fae with a smirk I wanted to wipe from his face with a blow job that would undo *him*.

I shook my head and mixed a diesel for a burly-looking guy, then moved on to the next order as more and more thoughts spiraled through my head.

Last night, I could understand. Hell, I'd signed up for the fucking Sanguine Society because it fit the part of me I had kept shackled for far too long. It was still crazy, the lot of it, but in a twisted way, it also made sense.

Leif was a dick of a vamp. A glorious dick, but a dick nonetheless, who'd thrown me over his damn shoulder and, with it, initiated a challenge between predators I couldn't just refuse but burned to live up to. He was a dead man walking, a dead man with nothing more to lose, who would become only more lethal as my nightmares took hold.

I'd felt that in him.

Leif wasn't about to wallow in the pain.

He would transmute it and unleash it upon the world.

And I wanted to be there for it. Taste it. Consume it.

But Pascal...

Pascal had wrecked me with his music before we even spoke a single word. Maybe I should kill him for that alone. With his riffs and bleeding lyrics, he'd trespassed into parts of me he had no right to access. Parts that were vulnerable. Weak. A stark reminder that I might claim all my dark glory, but it wouldn't erase the side of me that was soft.

The side that *felt*.

I was so lost in my own head that I hadn't noticed the crowd thin until it was just me behind the bar and the rest of the employees cleaning up an empty club. Gisela gave me a thumbs-up from across the space, where she was supervising everyone like a queen. Within these walls, it wasn't far from the truth. I could see how everyone looked up to her, which made me wonder if she was in charge of far more than the girls tending to the crowd's whims. I managed to give her a tight smile in return before diving into my own cleanup.

By the time I was done, I actually felt exhaustion setting into my limbs. Gisela appeared on the other side of the bar just when I was about to leave and set a thick wad of cash on the counter.

"Don't forget the tips." She tilted her head toward the jar I'd tucked on a shelf behind me.

I snorted a laugh. “Didn’t think I’d ever see the day I’d damn near forgot money.”

With a chuckle, Gisela perched her butt on one of the high chairs. She watched me grab the wad of cash, then the tip jar.

“I’ll bring this back.” I tapped the glass with a finger.

There was no way I had enough place to stash all the coins without walking through Berlin tinkling like crazy.

“I expect you to.” A lazy smile stretched across her face. “When you show up for your next shift.”

My lips parted. I hadn’t really given much thought about my employment status. This was supposed to be a one-time deal to tide me over.

But now that she mentioned it...

“You want me back?”

“You rocked the bar, girl. Having you here would be a favor to the entire club.”

My gaze slid toward the now-dismantled stage. Could I handle being here if Pascal played again? Would I survive subjecting myself to his music a second time?

I chewed on my lip.

Fuck it, ever since I walked out of Der Schmetterling, my life had been nothing like before. Music...

It didn’t have to be like before either.

I could try not to hide. Could try not to run in an attempt to protect myself.

If shit got tough, what was dealing with another period of crap in light of missing out on an opportunity to actually *have* a life that *wasn’t* crap all the damn time?

I met Gisela’s gaze. “You got yourself a deal.”

“Wonderful.” She slid off the stool and rapped her long nails against the counter. “I’ll be in touch soon.”

She vanished into thin air, leaving me huffing out an amused laugh under my breath before I made my way to the employee area in the back, my money in tow. The weather forecast had said we were about to have another uncharacteristically hot night, so I just threw the leather jacket over my work clothes and called it quits. I stuffed the money and jar in my large purse, wedging the latter between my spare clothes where it wouldn’t jingle too much, then waved a farewell to one of the girls who’d just walked into our

changing room.

The edge of tiredness I'd glimpsed in her was one my body mirrored. I honestly couldn't wait to grab a shower and throw myself in bed. Tonight had been one hell of a ride, and it fucking showed.

I slinked through the back of the club and out into the night air, already fantasizing about going into full hermit mode, when the vision vanished, replaced by a tall, finely cut figure.

Cigarette smoke coiled around him as he turned, drawn by the *thump* of the door shutting behind me.

I just stood there like a fucking deer.

Never, *never* had someone impacted me like this.

Pascal flicked his cigarette onto the pavement, where it rolled down the slight slope, and I found myself eyeing the damn thing rather than facing the intensity of the Fae ahead. But my brilliant plan shattered to irreparable pieces when Pascal swallowed the distance between us in three long strides.

He hooked a finger under my chin. "Hello, Blondie."

His gaze seemed even darker, hungrier than when he'd been in the pit.

I ignored how much my body liked that. "If you're looking for another body shot, the bar is closed for the night."

He traced that damn finger along my neck, then right down the center of my breasts, all the way to the navel. The memory of his tongue following a similar path hit me, along with the scorching heat of his touch.

It faded away for the briefest second before he switched fingers, his thumb now hooking behind the waist of my shorts.

I couldn't help the very audible, very traitorous breath I sucked in.

"What if I want another kind of taste?" He tapped my pussy with a fingertip.

Fuck.

Fuck-fuck-fuck.

I forced myself to roll my eyes. "Everyone wants a taste of a succubus. We're built with sex appeal already installed. Doesn't mean every walking dick out there gets to experience the real deal."

His dark laugh blasted through my mask of disinterest.

"Something tells me you're as built for pleasure as you are for pain." He backed me against the door. "And don't you dare say your body is not begging to have me claim you."

Had this been anyone else but Pascal, I would have kneed him in the balls

for being so direct. For touching me like he had the right.

But fuck, it was like the standard rules didn't apply within this field of buzzing energy established between us. It was a world of our own. A familiarity that really should not have fucking existed between two people who had just met but definitely tugged us closer.

"If we do this, you'll die." The warning fell from my mouth before I could shove my morals into a tight box.

It had become increasingly hard to convince myself to stay away from Pascal after he'd licked the tequila shot off me, his cock digging between my legs and that overbearing arrogance of his stroking my body.

I wanted him. I wanted him so fucking badly.

This madness of the most delicious kind that had gripped us now only fortified my desire for him. Because having him crowding me against the door, his finger still pressed against my pussy...

It felt right.

It felt so fucking right that it made me wonder if I hadn't entered this life with the sole reason to experience this moment right here.

Everything in me screamed to surrender to the pull, to go down the illuminated path of my fucking destiny—

But there was also no way I'd be able to hold back. Not a chance I wouldn't feed on his flames if we took this even a single step further.

Besides, it wasn't as if I'd ever been able to fuck anyone without them being impacted, whether I intentionally fed or not.

"I'm not kidding," I whispered. "The price for having me is death."

Pascal smirked, the huff of his bitter laugh riding the space between us. "I don't care, sweetheart."

I could taste the truth of it in the breath that fell on my lips.

His derisive look spilled into something carnal, like a fire fueled by gasoline. "I'd rather die knowing I had my cock buried deep inside you, carrying the sweet taste of your pussy on my tongue, than fuck my hand and watch you walk away."

CHAPTER THIRTEEN

LEIF

I wasn't sure if I came here to eat her or eat her out. As was my shit luck, neither was going to happen because the place was fucking empty.

Fucking. Empty.

Where was she, anyway? Somewhere out there with another guy between her legs, damning him right into death while he gave her his dick?

The thought sent my blood sliding like daggers through my veins.

And probably not for the reasons it should have.

Snarling at myself, I stalked through the small apartment like a caged animal. There was a starved, voracious emptiness inside me, pressing me to take action. To do *something*. Its decaying pressure grew with every damn moment I spent without her in reach.

My roiling emotions couldn't be helping this crap either because I'd at least been handling it for the better part of the day. But as soon as I'd left the studio behind, the landslide had started to roll, and I knew that simply willing it to stop would do nothing.

But what the fuck was I left with when she wasn't fucking here?

Furious, I ran through Serena's stuff, but all that shit decision did was fill me with her infuriatingly magnetic scent.

Gods fucking damn it.

It wasn't just her blood I craved; it was *her*.

Something I'd have to deal with real soon because like fuck was I letting her pert ass get away with putting a timer on my life with nothing to stop it.

That bitch of a witch had laughed in my face when she explained just how *faultry* Serena was. Part of me wanted to snap her neck for insulting the succubus while the rest burned to wring Serena's fucking neck instead.

I probably should have gone for both. What were two more deaths in the line of many, right?

It wasn't as if I'd have long to deal with the weight of my guilt.

Reality descended on me like a thousand vultures. I grabbed the rickety kitchen chair and hurtled it at the wall with a roar.

Fuck this fucking existence.

Every time I bounced back after a hunt, I got pumped with a new surge of energy to set my life straight—an infusion of willpower and drive to fight this damn battle within me and *win*. Because that was what it was ultimately about.

I'd never be a good guy. I'd never go carefree through my days. I had too many stains on my soul already.

But damn it, when the hunger went away and the version of me that the rest of the world knew came out into the light, I at least wanted to try. Wanted to not die a fucking monster.

I couldn't believe I'd fucked that up so bad.

Frustration boiled within me, and I thrashed the kitchen until all that was left were fragments as broken as I was, then got the hell out of this cursed place. The last thing I needed was for ICRA to show up and haul my ass away.

Gina's words came back to me, her thinly veiled plea to come back, but there was no coming back from this, was there?

Gods, I couldn't believe I'd been so blinded by my urge to claim that damn succubus. Maybe this was supposed to be a fitting punishment for breaking the Society's rules, but it still left a fucking bitter taste in my mouth.

I had to find her. Had to finish what I couldn't bring myself to do during the hunt.

I was sure now that she was still alive. Her scent in the apartment was too fresh, too rich for a girl who supposedly died in the woods yesterday. And even if it hadn't been for the echoes of her presence tipping me off, deep down, I *knew* I'd left her strong enough to survive. Which I supposed was almost a bigger mistake than taking her in the first place.

If she tattled to the Society...

A bitter laugh rolled from my lips, and I vamp-blurred down the street and into the first alley to ram a fist into the building.

If she tattled to the Society...

For fuck's sake, what were they going to do? You can't exactly kill a

vamp twice.

My phone buzzed in my pocket, but I ignored it as I kept hunting through Berlin. Street after street, I prowled through the shadows until they turned into night. I thought I'd caught her scent a couple of times, only to lose it again a few seconds later.

Vamps were hunters by nature and had the senses to go along with it, but we still didn't have the fine-tuned instruments werewolves did to stalk their prey through packed cities. Now had she been trailing blood, the story would have been far, far different...

But of course I wasn't about to get a lucky break like that.

Getting more pissed by the second, I powered through the streets some more, only this time, there was absolutely no sign of Serena. Not even the faintest trace. I could circle back. Maybe she'd gone back home from wherever the fuck she'd been, but my gut was telling me otherwise.

Serena was holed up somewhere, and the chances of me finding her... They weren't good. But if I gave up my hunt, then what?

Part of me *did* want to head back to the studio. Hours had gone by since I'd left. If fate favored me for once, the guys had already gone home, and I'd have the place to myself.

Granted, there was always a chance I'd walk in on Aric and Gina fucking like crazy, but I had my vamp hearing to warn me off once I got close enough. Those two weren't exactly known for being silent.

Yeah, the studio was my best bet.

Running my fingers along the thick strings of my bass and letting its full, rich sound fill me was what had kept me going through the years. What had saved me in the beginning, though *saved* was a term I used loosely.

The most painful truth of it all was that for a brief period of my life, when I'd devoted myself to the Whiskey Jet Preachers entirely, it really *had* felt like there was another path for me. One that existed under the spotlights and didn't turn dark the second I walked off the stage.

Meeting the guys, getting the band together, and experiencing our music take off had been a whole other world for me. Even when the money and fans started rolling in and the guys collectively indulged in the wild side of rock 'n' roll... It should have catered to my dark side, but I felt light instead. Like maybe, fucking maybe, I found a way to channel everything that I was. A lifestyle that didn't make me feel like I was balancing on the tip of a fang the entire time.

But the guys had grown out of the reckless rock-star phase.

Our music remained. The gigs remained. The rush of getting up on the stage in front of screaming fans. But it wasn't enough.

The Society had offered me an outlet for my inner predator, but the contrast those nights painted to the life I wanted to live only made things fucking worse in the long run.

You could say I'd royally fucked myself over with the choices I'd made. Except that they were only ever meant to be temporary solutions holding me together until I figured my shit out. Or at least found better support systems.

I'd been traveling deeper and deeper into the dark. I should have known that one of the ledges I'd crossed would be lethal.

Gritting my teeth, I headed down another road, slowly making my way back to the studio. Music. I needed to focus on my music and get through this fucking night. I headed toward a dark intersection I vaguely recognized, then started to turn right when a hint of a smell stopped me in my tracks.

Her.

Everything disintegrated.

My plans, my paths, it all fell apart as I locked on to the scent of the woman who had tricked me into feeling normal in my darkness—and through it, obliterated those last threads of actual fucking normalcy.

She'd given my predator a gift that was poison.

Given me the out I'd been craving when the hardest times hit, but also dreading because I didn't want to go down like this.

Because, like a fool, I'd clung to the smallest bit of hope.

Fucking hope.

That was all over now. Serena had ripped away my choice—the possibility of fighting on.

She'd sealed my fate.

And now I was about to seal hers.

The streets as I tapped into my vamp, moving faster than the fucking cars. I didn't even give a shit where I was going, what stood in my way. My instincts sharpened, took over, guiding me forward without me having to even think about my own survival as her scent pulled me in like fucking gravity.

Only this time, she would be the one falling off the edge of a cliff.

When I rounded another corner, my gaze landed on a large warehouse-like building, but contrary to what I expected, the sight unfolding in front of

my fucking eyes lit a match to my cold, merciless killer, setting me ablaze in a roar of fury instead.

Whispers of arousal tinted the air until I saw red.

But even as the rage took over, even as my whole body shook with violence, that fucking scene just became clearer.

Serena's back was to the door, a godsdamned siren in the flesh as she gazed at the man looming over her.

For that alone, I would have ripped out her neck. But this was worse. So much fucking worse.

Because the man she was luring in, the man she just fucking bit her lip for...

Was my bandmate.

CHAPTER FOURTEEN

PASCAL

Her mouth parted, breasts rising and falling in the most fucking spectacular way, with her nipples pressing hard against the fabric. But though I noticed it all, nothing could truly tempt my gaze away from her face. From drinking in how I'd shattered her, blasted through her attitude and rendered her speechless.

The power of it rushed to my head, and I knew, I fucking knew then and there that this encounter between us wouldn't end any other way than precisely how I'd stated it.

Tonight, she was mine.

If she didn't know that yet, she would soon, because there wasn't a chance in all the fucking realms I was letting her go. I wasn't some sappy romantic, but I could have fucking sworn the very air between us flamed with attraction so powerful it wouldn't take no for an answer.

"What do you say, Blondie?" I dragged my thumb slowly along the waist of her shorts, then rested my hand on her hip.

Her breath hitched.

"Serena." She sucked her full bottom lip between her teeth, and shit if the move didn't go straight to my cock. "It's Serena."

"Serena." I sampled her name. It was as alluring as the woman gazing up at me from beneath long, dark lashes. "Will you be my blend of destruction tonight?"

She shook her head, more in disbelief than outright telling me to fuck off.

I leaned into her even more, caging her sinful curves between my body and the door. My dick, which had been straining against my jeans since the moment she'd walked out here, now dug into her lower belly, just proving

my point.

I wanted her.

I was running mad with wanting her, and it had fuck all to do with the fact that she was some sort of succubus.

I knew what coaxed desire looked like. This sure as shit wasn't it.

The pull between us ran deeper, created of depths beyond what her species was capable of. It was irrational in the sense only the best things ever were—and it was regret in the making if I were to let it go.

Serena rested a hand on my chest. "I'm not joking, Pascal. Combine me with lust and I become lethal. You *will* die."

"Mm-hmm, you're not joking. Never thought you were. And *I'm*"—I reached around, wedging my hand between the door to cup that firm ass of hers and drag her to me—"dead fucking serious. Every night I walk into this club, I'm inviting the possibility of my end. I might be the best, but someday, someone is going to come along who'll be better."

"The fights aren't to the death." She frowned.

"No, they're not. But when that someone comes, someone who's better than me, I won't stop." The truths I'd never spoken before kept falling from my lips and onto hers—hers I wasn't yet allowed to touch, but I would be. "I don't back off, Serena. I'll burn myself to the ground before losing the one thing that's kept me sane. If it falls apart, I fall apart. And then what?"

I could see it all clicking for her behind those gorgeous blue eyes.

She'd been in there. She'd watched me sing, watched me fight. Among all the attention, I'd felt her like my personal north fucking star.

An anchor, but also the destination I was meant to reach.

Because Blondie didn't see me as entertainment. She didn't see me as a brute—not even as someone who put themselves out there for the fucking glory of it.

That gaze of hers reached farther than my bloodlust, my arrogance.

Right to the volatile, jagged depths of my ruined soul.

"Give me this, Serena." My lips hovered a breath above hers. "And I swear I'll make it worth your while."

"Okay."

Her voice was just a quiet whisper, but it unlocked *everything* within me with the force of a blazing hurricane.

I slammed my mouth against hers, grounding into her tight, curvy body—
"NO!"

A hand landed on my shoulder, tearing me from the heat of Serena's kiss and sending me stumbling across the parking lot.

I twisted around with a snarl, and surprise slammed into me when I saw Serena standing wide-eyed by the door, a familiar figure pinning her there with his face contorted into a thing of nightmares that didn't fucking compute with the man I've known for fucking years.

"Leif?" I asked, but friend or not, I couldn't rid myself of the sharp edge that laced my voice.

He had no right to interfere. No fucking right—

"You don't know what she is," he hissed, all fanged-out and ready to spill blood.

If my anger wasn't rising to dangerous levels, I probably would have wondered more about the killer staring at me through my friend's face. But the fire that lived in my veins, in my soul—

It wanted Serena.

And it would blast through anything and anyone standing in the fucking way.

"Get out of here, Leif." I advanced on him.

If I had to fight the guy, I would.

"If you fuck her, Pascal, you're dead," he snapped. "No pussy is worth giving up your life for."

"I disagree." My gaze slid from Leif to Serena.

She'd recovered from the shock of the rude fucking interruption, but there was something in her eyes, something in the way she held herself that captured my attention far more than the fuck-ass, annoying situation we found ourselves in.

The saying it takes one to know one had never been more on point.

Because I lived the fucking duality the side of her that had slipped out now revealed.

Blondie had given me attitude before, but there had been something vulnerable beneath it. This Serena, the one she'd shifted into as her gaze bored daggers into Leif, was all killer.

She was me in the pit, but colder. More regal.

If I was uncontained and untamed fire designed to burn down worlds in a blaze of chaos, she was the cool caress of death that could take out the entire universe with a single bat of her lashes.

But the bottom line was that we were both walking polarities. Both

holding within ourselves opposing forces in an unending power struggle.

The artist, the creative, the fucking rock star shining in the spotlight with a smile that melted panties within seconds. And the guy whose DNA was all violence, demanding to feel the kiss of blood on my skin, the crunch of bone, the satisfaction of ruining something. Someone.

Then there was the feisty girl with humor, sass, and a soft heart that saw a person right down to their soul. Standing opposite an uncontested queen of death meant to reign above us all.

I understood now what had drawn me to her.

Like will always call to like, but in our differences, in the way she was still composed while I'd been struggling more and more lately, not seeing the point in constantly fighting to keep the scales balanced, she would also be my salvation.

Speaking of dualities...

I slid my gaze back to Leif.

He might not be aware of the other side of me, of the shit I did within the Blackened Stone that catered to my inner beast. His, though, his was very much on display. And it clashed fucking wildly with the chill Whiskey Jet Preachers' bassist I'd spent well over a decade with.

Despite the annoyance still riding me, I smirked.

Leif, Leif, Leif...

Clearly, it was time for our monsters to meet.

CHAPTER FIFTEEN

SERENA

I glanced between the two men. One wrought of untamed fire, the other of ice-cold night.

One craving me with a burning passion, the other yearning for my death.

It shouldn't have surprised me that Leif wanted retribution for pushing my powers into him. I wasn't sure how he'd figured it out, but he knew. He knew I'd claimed his life with every touch of our skin, with every orgasm he wrung from me, and the ones he'd offered in return.

But more than seeing the murderous agenda in his eyes, what surprised me was the familiarity between him and Pascal. They knew each other. What were the fucking chances of that? Stumbling on two blackened souls two nights in a row—souls that were connected yet unaware of the poison sheltered in each other's hearts?

Intrigue rose within me, and I leaned against the door I'd almost gotten fucked against while Pascal reclaimed his spot in front of me, boldly standing in Leif's face.

I didn't forget what Pascal said in response to Leif's "No pussy is worth giving up your life for" statement.

I disagree.

There had been such conviction, such *truth* in those two simple words that the part of me that wasn't engrossed in the standoff was still reeling. No one had ever been in my corner the way Pascal had. No one had seen me, hell, *valued* me the way the Fire Fae I'd barely known for one evening had.

"This is a surprise, isn't it?" he drawled with all the cockiness I'd seen him wear like a crown inside the club. "I know what drew me to Blondie, but

what about you, Leif?”

Leif’s eyes flashed—the only thing that blazed through his stone-cold mask. “You don’t know what you’re doing. She’s tainted.”

Pascal’s fist punched out so fast I barely saw it. But Leif had. Faster than I could even register that Pascal was standing up for me, *defending* me, Leif twisted away from the blow that would have bashed in his fangs.

Fangs he now bared at Pascal.

The Fire Fae laughed darkly. “How the fuck were you hiding this?”

He motioned to the vampire, leaving no doubts as to what he was referring to. The predator out on display Pascal had clearly never been privy to before.

The side of me that was pissed as fuck for being labeled as tainted wanted nothing more than to open my mouth and spill out Leif’s twisted little secret. Except the damned vow I’d taken with the Sanguine Society snapped like a rubber band inside me, warning me off.

Hell, I wasn’t about to risk the consequences—no matter how much I’d enjoy outing the vamp—just to see him fall.

Pascal was sharp enough to figure shit out, even if not into the exact details I’d experienced on my own flesh. And fuck, if I didn’t take pleasure in seeing Leif with all his fucking attitude toward me struggle.

Because one thing was clear. The monster I’d seen, the monster who’d chased me through the woods and had given me the best fuck of my life...

He was meant to be a secret.

“You don’t know what you’re talking about,” Leif snapped at Pascal. “You’re the one who’s out here playing the bad boy and chasing old times like we haven’t evolved.”

“Obviously not the only one.” Pascal planted himself more firmly between Leif and me, but I could still see the dark, mocking lines of his profile. “You know Serena. And you’re doing a mighty good throwback to the bitey old days yourself, Leif. I’m pretty sure Aric and Ewart wouldn’t have batted an eye if you still wanted the kind of after-parties we used to have. You could have just said so. But that’s not it, is it? Biting and fucking fans isn’t what you hunger for, my friend...”

Leif looked ready to tear into Pascal’s neck for the comment, but he held himself back. I begrudgingly admired the vampire. With the rage I could feel coiling within him, it must have taken every ounce of control not to melt through the ice he’d encased himself in. I’d have failed a thousand times over

already.

Pascal, though, seemed ready to test just how far that control went. “I remember the moans, the blood, the girls draped all over you. But what I remember even more are the ones who liked to run. Their scream-laughs when you hunted them backstage before fucking them against the wall of whatever room you cornered them in.”

A tick worked in Leif’s jaw.

He almost slid his gaze over to me, but Pascal spoke before that attention landed.

“It was fun, wasn’t it? Much like the ones who gravitated toward me, wanting not just my dick but the dick attitude that went along with it. The ones who liked to play at snapping back while getting wetter and wetter with every derisive comment I spat in their face, showing them who the true king is.”

Shit, even *I* was getting wetter and wetter hearing Pascal speak. There was something in the way he carried himself, in the way he talked, that established his power stance was definitely with merit.

I’d seen way too many men think way too highly of themselves, getting off on power trips they had to manipulate people into. Use them in ways someone who truly had clout would never touch.

But Pascal was the real deal.

He commanded the very fucking air around him just by being.

I squeezed my legs together, cherishing the tiniest bit of relief I got from the friction.

“That was in the past,” Leif said tightly. “We left those parts of ourselves in the past.”

I would have laughed at the blatant lie he was trying to push out as the truth if Pascal hadn’t beaten me to it.

He raked a hand through his hair and smirked at Leif. “We both know that’s bullshit. You don’t go around fucking someone like Serena if you’re walking the straight and narrow. Because you did fuck, didn’t you?”

Leif clenched his jaw.

“Oh, for fuck’s sake,” I muttered, unable to help myself.

Him hating me was one thing. Him trying to pretend last night didn’t matter was a whole other level on the dickhead scale.

He must have heard me with those vampy ears of his because fury briefly washed across his face before he gritted out, “Yes, we fucked.”

“Then we’re in the same boat. We’re both drawn to her darkness, to the edge she can offer. And she’s exquisite in that, isn’t she?”

My lips parted at the scorching hot look Pascal graced me with. When Leif’s piercing attention joined in, just for a moment hungering for me in a way that could have ended with his cock rammed deep inside me, I had to fucking swallow a moan.

These two...

Shit, I’d never met anyone with such intensity. Not a single fucking soul who was made from the precise notes that played together with mine.

I’d run away from music most of my life, but this... What we created together was the most dangerous, most addictive melody of them all.

Leif dragged his gaze from me to Pascal. “You can still get out. I’ll take my death. You don’t have to.”

“I want to.”

Even the distant traffic seemed to have stilled, the silence that filled the lot absolute.

Leif sucked in a measured breath.

Two.

Three.

The crackle of violence danced through the night, but Leif reined it in before it could split his skin in half and drown everything in its path.

Pascal, though. Pascal stood like a dark prince in the eye of an obsidian firestorm.

“I want what she offers, Leif. If it makes me die, then fine. I’d rather live fully for one night than drag through my life with something always missing. This”—he jabbed a finger at the fight club, his outlet, whether Leif knew what it was or not—“is like putting a boutique humbucker on a shitty beginner guitar. You can pretend to get what you’re craving out of it, but we both know it’s bullshit. Nothing beats the real deal. And I sure as shit don’t want my life to be a fucking beginner guitar.

“If I can choose between that and the rush of playing the perfect Custom Shop Strat, even if it brings me down in the end, there’s no doubt what I’d go for. And I think you know the feeling. I think you went for it with Serena. You just weren’t aware of the whole of it. I do. And I *still* choose her.”

The tightness of Leif’s body was almost painful to watch as Pascal’s bleeding honesty landed, but it was also mesmerizing. Because fuck, I wanted to be the one to crack it. To break through the constraints and unleash

the monster thrashing within just to have him hunt me.

“So why don’t you choose her again too?” Pascal asked Leif, catching me off guard with the question.

When the vamp didn’t answer, a dangerous smile played across Pascal’s lips. “Tell me, do you kill girls, Leif? Or do you get off on scaring them within inches of their lives? Hunting them with the sweet taste of their fear trailing behind them? Knowing their life is in your hands when you sink your fangs into their trembling necks?”

I sucked in a breath at how close to the truth Pascal had hit. Leif, though, he didn’t flinch—only his fangs glinted in the night.

But that was a confirmation all on its own.

Pascal smirked and approached me, wrapping an arm around my shoulders. “Did you hunt Blondie too? She has that streak of innocence to her but also so much fire that you know she won’t just break. A toy you can play with over and over...”

I should have snapped at him, but all his talk of using me as a toy just got me more turned on. Shit, I was usually the one in power when it came to sex. To men. These two...

They brought up whole other aspects of me.

The idea of them using me for their pleasure tingled through my flesh until I was just about ready to beg the damn gods for Pascal to give out a demonstration. To shove me to my knees and ram his cock down my throat, fucking me raw until tears ran down my cheeks—tears he’d swipe away with his thumb while a cocky, dark smirk played on his face.

As if sensing what my body craved, he skimmed the fingers of his free hand over my stomach, casually, almost carelessly teasing the waistline of my shorts. As if I truly was a doll in his possession he could play with whenever he pleased.

Though I’d managed to keep my powers locked down, my horns crowned my head regardless.

“Beautiful,” Pascal murmured, then traced the outer curve of one horn with his tongue.

With. His. Tongue.

Fuck.

Fuuuccckkk.

His dark chuckle uncoiled through the night as he realized just how thoroughly he was wrecking me. For all my experience as a succubus, no one

had ever really flipped the tables on me. People had wanted the idea of me, the fantasy of immense pleasure I could offer. Pascal, though...

He wanted *me*.

“If you’re already damned, Leif...” Pascal slipped his fingers into my panties, finding me wet as hell as he slid right over my clit to the very core of me. “If you’re dying no matter...then why not give yourself at least a taste of life where you don’t have to hide?”

CHAPTER SIXTEEN

SERENA

My entire body tightened as Leif looked me over. The desire behind his gaze was a brutal, violent war of hunger and resistance that crashed against the ice and lined a spiderweb of cracks across his composure.

He was furious with me, but he also craved me.

This wasn't just the power I'd shoved into him, the magic that had transformed his lust into an unending curse that could never be sated, that was driving him to want me.

I was the woman he'd snatched from a parking lot because, on some fucked-up level, I must have called to him. I was the woman who'd played his game, who'd baited him.

The one who had survived where all others had died.

"She wants you," Pascal murmured, pumping his fingers into my pussy.

A moan rolled from my lips as he stretched me so damn fine with those long fingers, the night filling with wet sounds of my arousal. I should have hated how vulnerable he made me, yet it felt so right being coaxed into existence by Pascal's touch instead.

In this game, I had already surrendered my power to the Fae the moment he'd slipped his hand into my shorts and presented me to Leif like he owned me. I wasn't about to half-ass it, not when my entire body burned hotter than his flame.

Pascal hummed appreciatively under his breath. "She's soaked for us, Leif. So wet. So willing. And so fucking tight."

Leif's gaze darkened.

"The way she's squeezing my fingers." Pascal groaned. "I can tell she'll feel so good coming on our cocks."

My gaze locked on Leif's. Even as I was fucking panting, our connection was a fixed, steady point. An unmovable anchor that held us both captive.

His lips parted, those sharp white fangs an invitation and a promise—

“No.” A glacial wall so thick it extinguished all heat snapped into place. He slid his attention from me to Pascal as if I no longer held even a speck of interest. “Fuck her if you must, but I want nothing to do with this. With *her*.”

The harshness of his rejection cut into my skin and left me bleeding.

But beneath the hurt, the queen within me, the one who had met Leif in those woods monster for monster, who had taunted the predator into a game of seeing who would come up on top, rose.

She wouldn't stand for such fucking disrespect. The blatant lie of someone who was afraid to man the fuck up and claim what he desired, so he turned it into an insult instead.

He had a chance at tasting freedom precisely like Pascal had said. Hell, for experiencing both of them at once, I would have even granted Leif relief with his release. I had forced the hunger into him, but it was still my power to command when we were together. I couldn't change his death, but I could write other desires over that bottomless, starved pit. Desires that served rather than ruined.

I would have made it worth his fucking while.

Instead, the asshole chose to suffer.

Fine. With. Me.

Fixing my gaze firmly on Leif, I rolled my hips against Pascal's hand. I rode his fingers and rubbed my clit against his thumb until the molten pressure in me left me panting just short of an orgasm.

“Let the big bad vampire run,” I said on a moan. “He clearly can't handle this. Handle us.”

Pascal's low chuckle caressed my skin. He planted his lips in a devastating pattern up my neck, joining me in the taunt.

The murder that poured from Leif was the sweetest track laid over the foundation Pascal and I had set.

Or it *would* have been had the fucker taken action on it.

Instead, Leif's face shuttered once more, and whatever mechanisms he had in place snapped shut so tight he cut off the desire that was eating him from inside out entirely.

Sexual energy never lied, and I was enough of a succubus to know precisely when someone was brimming with it. But I also never met someone

with the ability to fight it—to erect a barrier so thick it severed the internal from ever seeing the light of day. Or the beauty of night.

Once someone had me, once the hooks of lust sank so deep they would keep riding him even through the nightmares...

I always and forever remained the ultimate prize. The one thing they desired above all, the one person who could dull the unending hunger, even if just for those moments he'd have his cock inside me.

How Leif was not giving in when it wasn't only my wiles making him gravitate toward me...

Or was it *because* he also still possessed a will of his own? Possessed a desire for me that was purely his—but also his to crush?

The fact that *I* wanted him to only made the situation worse.

All the men I'd ever fucked were a one-and-done deal. I never came back for seconds. Why would I?

But with Leif...

I craved to be on that ride till the end.

“She has nothing I could possibly want.” His cold voice sliced through the air.

I snarled, ready to lunge at the vampire who was already a blur in the night, but was saved from turning myself into a pitiful sight of a scorned fucking woman by the harsh pump of Pascal's fingers that threw me straight over the edge.

I came hard on his hand, my hips bucking and dragging out the friction until my entire body thrummed from the force of my release.

Pascal's desire skyrocketed as I came apart, and my succubus latched onto the energy, tasting it not with the hunger of someone who hadn't fed in ages but someone who appreciated the finer things in life. He grunted at the seductive stroke of my succubus magic as I sampled his taste.

“Fuck, Blondie.” He pulled his hand from my shorts and rammed me hard against the door.

Embers of tenebrous recklessness danced in his eyes. I dragged my gaze down his handsome face, across the rough rise and fall of his chest, to his cock tenting his jeans.

I licked my lips as thirst to see him, to feel him, drove me hard.

When I flicked my gaze back up, there was no mistaking where we were headed. Pascal ripped off my shorts, the button clattering across the pavement as the fabric slid down my legs and grazed me in ways that made me yearn

for his touch instead.

Behind me, the door rattled.

“Find another fucking way out,” Pascal snarled with a viciousness that sent the person on the other side scurrying away.

I didn’t even care if it was one of the other girls he’d just scared off. My senses were in overload from the Fire Fae in front of me, my mind, body, and soul craving him so deeply it was as if my powers resided in him instead of me.

Because I knew he could do anything.

That *I* would do anything.

Just to have him.

When he retreated a step and the fresh air chased away the heat of his body, I shivered—then burned all over under his slow perusal.

Pascal dragged his teeth across his lower lip, taking in my trembling body as if he was memorizing every line. The smug, slow smile at seeing the effect he had on me nearly made me beg.

He fisted his cock through his jeans, a groan slipping from his mouth, then reached for the zipper.

I was so fucking hypnotized by the display, the anticipation, that it took me a second to catch up when all of the sudden, Pascal wasn’t standing in front of me anymore.

I barely managed to look down at his kneeling form, the devastating, handsome lines of his face when he looked up at me, before I was stepping out of my ruined shorts and panties on autopilot, the movement guided by Pascal’s large hands that then traced a scorching patch up my calves.

My thighs.

Until he gripped me under the butt, and I found myself straddling his fucking shoulders, my pussy right there in his face.

“Fuck, you smell amazing, Blondie,” he growled, his gaze fixed on my core before he flicked it back up. “All swollen and glistening for me.”

My damn pussy pulsed at the praise, and my breath hitched in my throat, words failing me.

I wasn’t the queen of nightmares any longer.

I wasn’t power embodied.

I was a trembling mess of need in the presence of a king, and I knew that before the night was over, I would be the one on my knees, my lips channeling the worship.

CHAPTER SEVENTEEN

PASCAL

Blondie gazed down at me, her long hair tumbling over her shoulders and calling to me to fist it in my hands as I fucked her into oblivion, but no matter how much my cock strained against my jeans, there was something I wanted more first.

Her cunt was dripping wet and fucking beautiful. It felt like a privilege to be between her thighs, to have her balanced with her back against the door, her legs wound around my shoulders. I would have said it was her succubus power that had brought me to my knees, but I'd been dreaming about taking her ever since she faced me off at the bar and challenged me to lick the tequila off her body instead of a regular belly shot.

“Pascal...”

My name on her lips was a whisper. A plea. A curse. A moan.

Leif was a fool to leave, but if that left more of her for me...

I chuckled under my breath.

Who was I to complain?

I swept my gaze from Blondie's perfect pussy, up her midriff, and across those perky tits all the way to her face—and remembered the hurt I'd glimpsed there before she'd looked ready to rip Leif to shreds.

He might have done me a favor, but he'd been a dick to her.

“He's an idiot, Serena. Leif is a fucking masochistic idiot,” I growled. “He doesn't deserve your body. Your pleasure. And he sure as fuck doesn't deserve to come into this pretty pussy ever again.”

An echo of that same hurt flashed briefly through her eyes, but on the wings of it came an inferno as my devotion to her, my fucking admiration, registered.

I surged forward and buried my face right into that sweet pussy I'd been praising.

Serena cried out, her fingers tangling in my hair and hips instantly moving to meet my lips.

Fuck, I loved it. Loved how her body spelled out precisely what she wanted, no reservations, no shame attached. I wanted her to fucking ride my face until I was barely breathing, just so she'd soak me in her cum.

Her taste exploded in my mouth, only edging me on to devour her. I slipped my tongue right into her pussy, fucking her with it before licking my way hard to her clit. I sucked on the sensitive nub, then threw in an edge of teeth. Serena rewarded me with a throb of pleasure that electrified the air and smeared my chin with a fresh pulse of wetness.

It was messy, it was raw, and I was fucking here for it.

I ate her out until it felt like she was everywhere, my name a rapt prayer that rolled off her tongue and rose to the stars as if this was the first time a god had ever answered.

I didn't think it was possible, but my dick got even harder.

I always fucked by taking, but with Serena...

Worshipping her felt just as right as claiming her did.

My fingers dug into her ass as she shattered on my tongue. I lapped up her orgasm, working her with my mouth until her body gave in to me fully, gentle shudders raking through her as she gradually descended from her high.

"Gods, Pascal..."

Her pupils were blown as she looked down at me, lips parted, and the most brilliant flush gracing her cheeks under the faint streetlight. Seeing her like this only made me want to give her more.

It didn't escape me that she hadn't even fed through her own climax. Like she'd been so lost in it, even something that should have come naturally to her had faded away. But just in case she *had* been holding back...

I brushed my lips against her inner thigh, then carefully set her on shaking feet. The orgasm had stripped her of her attitude, but it had also unveiled a raw fire inside of her that I was drawn to more than fucking anything. The need to *have* possessed me like a curse that offered liberation and I freed my cock faster than she could blink, letting my jeans hang around my ankles.

None of this was elegant.

None of this was a carefully laid out seduction.

But that wasn't what either of us was here for.

We were meeting each other as we were.

Grabbing her by the hips, I lifted her against the door. On a gasp, she spread her legs just as I settled between them. Her heels dug into my ass, spurring me on at the first touch of my cock against her wet pussy.

I held my position at her entrance just for a second longer, gazing into her eyes as I teased her with the tip.

Succubi were built for sex and came with all the perks of someone who specialized in carnal pleasure.

But for some reason, or maybe precisely because of it, I found myself asking, "Do you want me to use a condom?"

Surprise flashed across her face as if no one had ever even considered it.

Considered *her*.

Which just pissed me off.

She was a goddess; she didn't need anyone to take care of her, but fuck if I could deny the surge of protectiveness that roared through me when I saw her like this.

Serena traced her thumb along my jaw and shook her head. "I want to feel every inch of you."

Her soft voice was my undoing.

I thrust my cock inside her tight pussy. Serena's scream carried through the night, and I grunted as I bottomed her out, as she clenched around me in the perfect fucking way, like our bodies were created to sate each other.

One moment, for one fucking moment, I allowed myself to take it all in—then I moved.

With long, demanding thrusts laid out in a rhythm that felt like a match to our souls, I fucked her until her nails were digging into my skin, our bodies so flush while she held on tight that I could feel every fine curve of hers against me, the heat and sweat building between us.

It was hypnotic, a drug that rushed through my system that had nothing to do with a succubus's magic but was purely the woman writhing in my arms.

We went hard and fast, the fucking a match in the pit, but also a merger of two blackened hearts born into a wrong fucking universe.

Serena's power electrified the air, and I could have sworn every point of contact between us glowed like godsdamned emeralds.

She was close. So was I.

And I wanted her.

Shit, I wanted her.

She was bewitching, divine; she was the dreams I hadn't even known I had taken form—and as I ground into her again and again, she was mine.

The most exquisite fucking moan fell from her lips.

“Fuck, Serena.” I thrust into her again. Again. “Fuck, the way you feel...”

Her pussy gripped me as she came on my cock, her power slipping beneath my skin and giving me the edge I didn't need but welcomed.

I came so hard, the stars above us had nothing on the ones I saw dusted across the temporary darkness as Serena took everything from me. As my body *gave* everything.

I rolled my hips in another languid thrust, then just rested inside her, holding her to me and appreciating how our bodies fit.

While we caught our breath, I could feel her power taking root inside me.

It wasn't even an invasive presence because it was *her*. An echo of the pleasure and power I had given funneled through her, then returned bearing her mark.

My death sentence.

My freedom.

But most of all, as I reached deep inside where those coiling embers always hissed in a need I could never fully sate...

Peace.

I was at fucking peace.

An unexpected laugh rolled from my lips, and I moved in to claim Serena's mouth, savoring how soft, how willing...how fucking mine she was.

When I pulled back, her lids were heavy, her lips swollen, giving me a sight I knew I'd keep with me until the last fucking days.

“I don't know how long I have”—I brushed the tip of my nose against hers—“but I want you there until the end. Be mine until there's no me any longer.”

She tangled her fingers in my hair. “I promise.”

CHAPTER EIGHTEEN

LEIF

Fucked.

Everything was so fucked.

After I blew off some steam when I'd marched away from Pascal and the night air had shoved clarity into my head, the depths of the situation had hit me hard.

I wasn't just marked for death.

I'd fucking outed myself, trying to save a friend who didn't want saving.

I unlocked the doors to the studio and let myself in. The silence that enveloped me conveyed that no one else was here, but I still didn't feel alone. The weight of the evening, of everything that had gone down, trailed beside me like a shadow I couldn't shake.

Pascal knew.

He *knew* the shit I'd never wanted my bandmates to find out about.

Something tight gripped my chest, and I snarled as I rubbed my hand over my heart.

This wasn't supposed to be happening. None of it.

For whatever reason, Serena hadn't given up my secrets, but it had been more than clear that Pascal saw the monster lurking beneath my skin.

And I'd witnessed his.

What the fuck was that about anyway? With his Fire Fae heritage, he'd always been hot-headed, sure, but wanting to *die*?

That just didn't fucking compute with the cocky-ass guitarist I'd spent countless hours in this studio with.

I'd been half-tempted to drag him away and chain him up if that was what it took to keep him from fucking the siren of nightmares and death, but

something about the way he'd confronted me made me hesitate. Back off.

And now it was too late.

Flashes of images I wished I could wipe from existence assaulted my mind. Pascal's fingers dipping below the waistband of Serena's shorts. The flush in her cheeks when he fingered her pussy, and the darkness in his gaze telling me how much he loved it. Then the offer he'd made...

Shit.

I'd seen Pascal fuck plenty of women back in the day, but we were also possessive assholes. If a girl was with one of us, she was with one of us. We didn't share. Naturally, they could circle through the whole damn band like a groupie who didn't discriminate and was just out for rock-star cock, but we never, ever fucked one together. Having a woman's attention divided just didn't sound appealing.

If anything, it was a pissing contest waiting to happen, and I had enough wars in my life all by my damn self without adding in one that took place between two guys railing a girl at the same time.

But the thought of us having Serena...

I roared into the darkness.

Why the fuck was I even thinking about this?

I stalked into the live room, not bothering to flick on the light switch. I wasn't ready to face all of this in godsdamned light. Because the bottom line was that by now, Pascal had undoubtedly stuck his damn dick into Serena—and sealed the contract on his death.

Fuck, I hated myself for leaving him there. Hated myself more with every second that had gone by for letting him go down that path.

But between the razor-sharp edges he'd let me see, the smell of blood coming from the building, and the wounds on his knuckles that hadn't yet had time to heal...

Pascal was fighting his own demons. He made a *choice*—something I hadn't had the chance to—and stood by it.

Who the fuck was I to get in the way of that?

I paced the live room and tried to breathe through the ice-cold rage and violent helplessness slipping through my veins right alongside the desire I refused to acknowledge. But all the movement did was stir the echoes of the guys that still lingered in the space and make my fucking head spin.

For all the crap I'd done, I guessed I was a softy too because shit, the Whiskey Jet Preachers losing me was one thing. They could find another

bassist to fill my spot. One person made a dent but didn't mark the end.

Both me and Pascal, though?

We'd sever off half the band once we succumbed to Serena's curse. More, since Pascal was the main person behind mixing and manipulating our tracks.

And it was the worst damn timing.

After the crap we'd been through when Aric's past had caught up with him and nearly stole him from us, he was ready to go bigger. To claim the kind of spotlight we'd previously decided wasn't for us. We had hardcore fans, plenty of people to devour our music and sell out the venues we played, but we weren't packing stadiums or touring dozens of foreign countries.

None of that had interested Aric.

I knew now it was probably because it would have been too bright for the dark stains on his soul he thought he carried. The kind of bright that wouldn't hide the marks through blindness but highlight the voids of his shadows.

If that had been Aric's reason for holding back, I understood.

Maybe even went along with it so willingly because of my own crap I didn't want to world to see. But despite the shit I was trying to hide, there was something about the idea of unleashing the Whiskey Jet Preachers onto the world that was appealing to me. Something new to devote myself to.

I'd just never live to see the day.

And if Pascal and I were on the path of wrecking Aric's vision...

I grabbed my bass.

I'd give them music. I'd give them everything I still had in my tarnished, broken-down soul to live on when I could not.



“Leif...what have you done?”

My mother's trembling voice made me look up from the blood soaking into my lap.

My fangs hurt in my mouth, the taste of blood still on my tongue making me hungry in a way I'd never been before in my life.

Footsteps pounded from the house until they spilled into the backyard. My father took one look at the girl that had been laughing as we played and swore. He lunged forward, knocking me aside.

I snarled at him as he scooped her up.

Mine. She was mine.

My fingers dug into the grass as I pulled myself back up. I shot forward in a burst of vampire speed—

A kick landed in my stomach.

I fell onto the grass on the backdrop of my mother's scream. I half-registered my father snapping at her to shut up before the neighbors came running. Then he was a blur, nothing but the smell of blood remaining in the yard as he carried my friend inside.

I bared my fangs at the empty air.

He took her.

He took what was mine. He stole from me.

Her heart was still beating; I could hear it from inside the house.

I scrambled to my feet, catching my mother's gaze by accident. The disgust was so plain on her face, there was no mistaking it. I'd never had her stare at me that way, but even my seven-year-old mind understood.

She hated me.

She could barely look at me.

Tears burned at the backs of my eyes, but the part of me that shattered at the lack of love couldn't overpower the cold anger coiling in the pit of my stomach at having my blood taken away.

I took a step toward her. She turned on her heel, her shoulders shaking as she left me alone, bloodstained, hungry—

Trapped.

I snarled and thrashed at the magic barrier containing me, even as every contact made a thousand fires erupt through my flesh. I felt like my skin was nothing but boiling blisters when my father walked back out of the house, his white shirt speckled with blood that should have belonged to me, his fangs extended, and eyes so cold not even the heat ravaging my flesh could thaw them.



I woke up with a start, my body coated in sweat and ruthlessly tangled in the sheets.

Fuck Serena.

I fought my way out of the duvet, but when it took too long, I just ripped the damn thing and left it lying in scraps over the bed and floor. I marched into the bathroom and headed straight for the sink to splash some cold water on my face. I kept doing that until my damn hands were numb and trembling. Though I was pretty sure the latter didn't come from the freezing water.

I braced myself against the sink and stared at my reflection in the mirror.

I looked gaunt.

Haunted.

My hand balled into a fist, and the next second, shards of glass flew everywhere, my skin splitting on impact in a series of vicious cuts.

Fuck. Serena.

Fuck. Her.

It wasn't nightmares the bitch was giving me.

No, of course I couldn't have it that easy.

Instead, the plague her curse unleashed was memories.

CHAPTER NINETEEN

SERENA

I'd never dated a day in my life, so I had zero personal experience to fall back on in that area, but looking at the string of texts on my phone that spanned across the past couple of days without ever tapering off...

It was hard to pretend what I shared with Pascal was just sex.

I wasn't entirely sure what to make of that, but I'd be lying if I said everything inside me didn't light up whenever I saw his name flash across the screen.

The sounds of the restaurant I was in faded as my attention lingered on the last photo Pascal had sent over. A selfie with his guitar, his blond curls mussed, and that smug expression that made my entire damn body tingle gracing his handsome face.

"It should be illegal for anyone to look so hot." I texted back.

Pascal's answer came at once. "If that's the case, then you're breaking the law right alongside me, sweetheart."

I smirked, then quickly snapped a selfie of myself. I had to admit, pulling the whole wink-while-sticking-out-your-tongue face wasn't the easiest, but I did a damn good job, if I could say so myself. Playful, with just the right amount of dirty that I knew he'd love.

"Blondie, Blondie... Why don't you stick that tongue out some more and I'll paint it with my cum..."

His words sent a shot of heat straight to my core.

Damn, I should have known not to play with fire while I was out in public. But fuck, I couldn't remember ever having this much fun.

I chewed on my bottom lip.

The main question now was...just how much further did I want to take

this?

For some reason, after being with the asshole vampire and then Pascal, my powers felt more tamed. Sated. Even as desire surged through my veins at the thought of Pascal coming on my tongue, it felt oddly safe to experience it. Like this rush was mine and mine alone, and no other person in the vicinity would be impacted.

For the first time, I actually felt...normal.

“Why not go for a whole money shot?” I typed back. “Scared you’ll miss the mark?”

“That’s it. I’m not waiting till tonight. Tell me where the fuck you are, beautiful, and I’ll make sure to come.”

I chuckled. “Tough luck. I’m having lunch with a friend and the dessert will be of the cake not cum variety.”

“Tease.”

He paired the word with a selfie that made it clear who the fuck the tease really was between us. My mouth watered as I scanned the expanse of his bare torso all the way to the damn hand he’d stuck in his jeans. Fuck.

Before I could compose myself even the tiniest bit, Pascal wrecked me with another bomb.

“Why don’t you have dinner with me tonight?”

My brows rose, fingers hovering over the keyboard. We were meeting up anyway, but me just going to his place versus the two of us having dinner....

Another text came through when I didn’t reply fast enough.

“Come on, Blondie. You look like the kind of girl who enjoys a good steak and a beer to go along with it, and I know just the place.”

Damn, he wasn’t wrong. But...

“Pascal Evers, are you asking me out on a date?”

“Damn right I am. And you know I won’t take no for an answer.”

My face felt like it would split in half with the massive grin that had taken up residence there.

“All right, fine. I’ll go on a date with you,” I wrote like it was the biggest damn chore when in reality, I felt fucking giddy.

Giddy.

What the fuck?

Just to keep some more of my cool, I added, “The steak better be good, though, Evers.”

“Only the best meat for my girl.”

I snorted loud enough to gain the attention of the adjacent table.

After a quick thought, I fired back one last round.

“I’m your girl now, am I?”

“From the moment you first gave me attitude, Blondie.”

Just as I laughed under my breath, another text popped up on my screen.

“The way your nips pushed against that tiny top when you saw me helped too.”

“Asshole,” I muttered under my breath, but I was grinning like a damn Cheshire cat.

“Well, don’t you seem to be in a great mood,” Nicole drawled, taking a seat on the opposite side of the table.

I chuckled and indulged in one last glance at the text exchange before I put my phone on silent and slid it into the marvelously deep pocket of my lightweight blazer. This was girl time now. To be entirely honest, I’d been more than a little surprised when Nicole had asked me to grab lunch with her. We’d gone for the much-necessary drinks after my initiation into the Sanguine Society, but chatting over a couple of martinis wasn’t exactly in the same league as lunch.

Apparently, though, life truly wasn’t as predictable lately as it used to be—and I had every intention of enjoying every damn moment of it.

“I have a date tonight,” I half-sang, grinning my damn butt off.

Nicole shot me a playful pout. “I could use one of those to perk me up a bit.”

“Hard time at work?”

Her outfit suggested she’d come straight here from the office—and was probably going to head back there once we were done. My mind was still kind of blown that she truly *was* a lawyer. A high-profile one at that.

The image clashed with the visual of the girl I’d found ditched in the bushes after the hunt, but hey, everyone had their own ways of getting their kicks. We hadn’t delved into our pasts much, but given that Nicole looked about my age, she must have busted her ass off through law school and killed her Referendariat afterward to land the position she did as fast as she did.

Although everyone could see just how brilliant she was if they spent even as little as five minutes with her.

Before Nicole could give me an answer, the waiter made a beeline for our table. Nicole ordered a coke and Currywurst with a side of french fries, while I opted for the avocado pine nut salad that had caught my eye earlier and

flavored water.

As soon as we were alone again, Nicole leveled her gaze at me and let loose a long sigh. “One of the firm partners wants to edge me out of my case. He’s the only one I’ve ever had any issues with.”

“Can he do that? Isn’t it up to the clients to decide?” I asked since this really wasn’t my field of expertise.

I’d lived in four countries in the past twenty-five years, all with different legal systems, but never really had any issues—not the kinds that I could take to lawyers anyway. And sure, I’d seen a ton of them around Giovanni, but for all his desire to have me by his side, I’d never been part of *that* slice of his life or business.

“Unfortunately, the bastard has the kind of smooth tongue to convince anyone of anything. A good quality to have in court,” she said kind of begrudgingly, “but he leverages it within the office as well. My client wanted *me* specifically, but they don’t stand a chance against the bastard’s persuasiveness. He’s ripped two cases like that from me already. I didn’t know what to expect back then, but I’m fighting back now.”

A prickle of warning crawled down my spine.

Frowning, I glanced around the restaurant, but there was nothing out of place. I shrugged the feeling off and focused back on Nicole.

I lowered my voice, “You get hunted by vamps on the regular. I don’t think some lawyer guy with an overblown ego stands a chance.”

The ease in her laugh was everything.

She shook her head, still smiling. “You’re right. I’m just pissed because I don’t need the distraction. Or the waste of energy.”

“I bet Leon would do a good job of taking off the edge and giving you a boost at the same time.” I winked.

Nicole grunted. “*If* he ever participated in hunts.”

I glanced toward the bar where our waiter was carrying out a full tray of drinks, ours among them.

I leaned across the table. “Even the Society leaders have to blow off steam somehow. It would be masochistic to supervise the hunts without having some sort of relief for themselves.”

“A vamp version of blue balls?”

“Precisely. That’s not a viable way to live.” I leaned back as the waiter approached, and once I thanked him for my drink, I leveled a wicked smile at Nicole. “Maybe you should put in an offer.”

“You’re making him sound like he’s real estate.” She snorted.

“Tall, gorgeous, fanged real estate that comes with the bonus of orgasms.”

I wasn’t giving her false hope. I’d been there, seen the way he acted around her—felt it with my succubus senses that he wasn’t just fond of Nicole.

He *wanted* her.

“You’re sure you’re not the lawyer here?” she drawled. “Because you make a damn fine case.”

I winked. “Think it over. I need to use the bathroom real quick.”

“Leaving me to stew...” Nicole snarked with warmth.

I laughed and left her to do precisely that. I made my way through the restaurant, which had become way more packed than when I’d first arrived. The bathrooms were on the far end, tucked around the corner and out of sight. No one needed a reminder of bodily fluids while they were eating.

Sadly, I’d been in way too many dumps that had done precisely that.

I slipped into the women’s section, did my business, then stopped in front of the mirror to wash my hands. The reflection staring back at me was full of life—almost unrecognizable. Since I was blissfully alone in here, I gave myself a smile, just observing how the joy looked on my face.

The door swung open, and I dropped the expression, reaching for the paper towel dispenser instead, when every hair on my body stood on end. The languid, fluid movements, the impeccable designer suit I caught sight of in the mirror—

I turned around, and I could have sworn my thrashing heart bruised my ribs as I looked into the eyes of the man I’d hoped to never see again.

CHAPTER TWENTY

SERENA

“**B**uon giorno, sorellina.”

Fear crawled through my body, a sticky, disgusting sensation that threw me right into the churning depths of my past. It felt like sliding toward the edge of a cliff with nothing to grab onto, nothing to prevent me from tumbling into the ravine that would break me all over again.

But just as the tightness in my chest threatened to spiral, I remembered.

Remembered the rush of rising up to Leif in those woods. How we had met in the death-tinted air, not as predator and prey, but embodying both at the same time, each of us hungering for the other because we knew we were equals. Two reigning nightmares who had found their match.

Then I recalled the embers of freedom burning bright within me when Pascal had fucked me against the door of the fight club, claiming me in a way I'd never been claimed before. How he hadn't looked at me, not once, as something tainted and broken but fucking magnificent. An answer to his dreams. A partner to walk on the wild side with.

I wasn't some powerless pariah any longer.

I pulled my body straighter and faced the shadow of the past I had no intention of ever returning to.

“A file would have sufficed, Giovanni,” I said dryly.

The slight annoyance in his eyes only fortified my new state. He quickly smoothed out his expression into the standard Mafia don shit, but I'd caught his slip up. Seen how the lack of the response he'd expected from me bothered him.

It took a fuck load of effort to keep the smugness from my face, but with Giovanni, wars were waged over a long period of time on numerous

battlefields. One win meant little in the face of all that was ahead, and if I wanted to come out of this still holding on to my freedom, I'd need to play my cards right.

I parked my hip against the edge of the broad sink and drawled, "I don't really see personal visits to your henchmen as a viable option for running a business..."

"You're family. You know I always make time for family." His words were dagger-sharp—a warning any wise person would heed if they wanted to keep their damn heads attached to their necks.

But it was also one I wasn't about to cower from, even if a small part of me *did* continue to tremble under the weight of the worst-case scenarios.

Because that was what Giovanni was.

A walking, breathing worst-case scenario that rained upon you from fucking clear skies.

Which was also precisely why I had to see this through to the end.

Bowing to Giovanni...

I might as well sign my life over to the egotistical asshole.

"Cut the crap, Giovanni." I crossed my arms. "I said I'd do a job for you. Give me the information, and I'll take care of your mark. Our deal didn't include letting my fucking lunch go cold."

Another flash of irritation—one he covered up sooner than the first but still not fast enough.

I was playing with a damn live wire and knew it, but fuck if I was going to let him terrorize me just because he believed he could.

Fortunately, my gamble paid off.

Giovanni reached into the inner pocket of his impeccable suit and pulled up his phone. "Fine, be a brat, Serena. Just remember to bring your professionalism to the job."

I snorted. "I'm fucking people to death."

"Even in that, you can be an amateur or a queen." He tapped something on his phone, then slid it back into the pocket. "I expect you'll deliver the latter."

My phone buzzed in my blazer. I didn't give Giovanni the satisfaction of looking at it just yet.

Instead, I asked, "What's the timeframe?"

"Until the end of the month to start the process."

Start the process was just a pretty way of saying fucking my mark.

I was half-tempted to make a snarky remark, but that would *really* be testing the limits. No point in breaking the good streak I was on.

“It’ll be done.” I pushed away from the sink and brushed past Giovanni, halting only when my hand was on the door. “I trust we’re done here?”

A skin-crawling smile pulled on Giovanni’s mouth. “Enjoy your meal, *sorellina*.”

I marched out of the bathroom with my head held high and back to the table I shared with Nicole. It would have been futile to pick another spot and pretend I wasn’t here with her. Giovanni had already seen me before his little ambush. If I moved tables now, he’d only gain an interest in the woman I was having lunch with.

So I pretended like my heart didn’t race for the lawyer who was fast becoming my friend, pretended like I didn’t give a fuck if Giovanni saw us together because that signified she meant nothing. That he couldn’t hold her over me in one of his sick power plays.

Mercifully, lunch went by in a rush as Nicole shared more about her workplace. At first, I had a hard time focusing on the conversation, but the more she shared, the more mental space curiosity took up. By the time we drank our coffees and got the bill, I had banished Giovanni from my thoughts, though the weight of my phone continued to burn a hole in my damn pocket.

Nicole and I said our goodbyes and headed in opposite directions. Her back to the battlefield her office currently was, while I decided to walk in the sunshine, trying to figure out which spots in Berlin had the most magical interference.

I didn’t doubt for a fucking second Giovanni had his eye on me and would continue to do so until I opened the damn document he’d sent over. If he couldn’t see me with his psychic gifts, I’d be able to let him stew for a bit longer and give him a nice middle finger while I was at it. Although...

Damn it, I didn’t want him perving on my date with Pascal if he thought I was ignoring him.

Sure, there was more than a fair chance Giovanni would already be busy by then—he *did* have a whole fucking mob to run, after all—but with the way I’d stood up to him today, with how I was still brushing him off by not looking at the file...

I grunted, then hopped on the first tram that would take me home.

Some wins were just perceived victories, leading you to lose more than

you gain. Though I had to admit I was kind of grumpy that I couldn't stick it to Giovanni one more time. The bastard would have deserved it.

I used the tram ride and the short walk to my building to talk my ego down and make the right choice. Wasn't easy, far from it, but it would pay off in the long run.

After all, I had one damn amazing evening ahead of me.

When I let myself into my apartment, the place was still as much of a mess as it had been when I had left it. Gods, sometimes I wished I could get myself some of those domestic spirits who loved doing chores because I sure as fuck didn't feel like cleaning all of this up.

I blew out a breath and let my gaze sweep across the destruction scarring what had once been at least a passably nice home. It had shocked the hell out of me when I'd first come here from the fight club two nights ago and saw what had become of the place.

For a moment, I'd even considered it had something to do with Giovanni—which, I wasn't about to lie, had terrified the crap out of me.

But the second I'd actually set foot inside, I felt the fury.

The rage.

But also the lust.

Leif.

Leif had ransacked the place. Either before he'd found me with Pascal or after.

I was still curious as hell how the two of them knew each other, but that was something I planned on getting answers to tonight. What was a dinner date if not a chance to bring up some personal questions, right?

I moved through the sea of broken furniture, then crossed over to the bedroom. At least the fucker had left my bed intact. I perched on the edge and pulled out my phone.

Holding a middle finger up in the air for Giovanni to see, I opened the email he'd sent over. The thing had been secured through the tech witch he'd recruited and kept secret from the world. I would have felt sorry for the guy if he weren't just as rotten as my adoptive brother and had gotten off on watching me fuck the esteemed, soon-to-be-dead "guests" Giovanni had invited into his fort under the pretense of striking business deals.

I grimaced at the memories.

My body had been an instrument of death. Not fucking free live porn for assholes.

Of course, that certain asshole had been too valuable for Giovanni to punish as he would any other guy who dared interfere with my work.

“What a fucking crapfest,” I muttered under my breath, shoving those flashes of my past aside.

Following the usual protocol, I called some of my power to the surface and let it touch the phone to go through the authentication process that would unlock the content. Time to see who the latest thorn in Giovanni’s ass was.

The magic embedded in the tech recognized my signature with a gentle pulse. Within seconds, I wasn’t staring at a screen filled with garbled words but a name with a photo attached beneath it before lines of text outlined the details.

Details I didn’t even see as the blood drained from my face.

“Shit.”

This wasn’t just a job.

It was the destruction of the one good thing I had going in my life.

And possibly my life as well.

CHAPTER TWENTY-ONE

LEIF

“I don’t know what’s going on, but you two need to sort your shit out.”
Aric’s voice sliced over the silence once we reached the end of the song.

His gaze landed heavily on me before sliding over to Pascal on the other side of the live room.

The damn Fae had that standard, unbothered air about him that just pissed me off more, and he faced Aric as if he couldn’t see the tension in our singer, who was an inch away from snapping.

Aric Sutter was plenty of things and had moods just like every other person in this world, but this was different. He looked ready to grill Pascal and me until we were nothing but crumbling crisps.

Worst of all, I was aware I’d fucked up. That I deserved it.

But I sure as shit wasn’t the only one.

“What?” the other culprit drawled.

I bared my fangs at Pascal without even thinking about it.

“This. Fucking this.” Aric threw a hand in my direction, then ran it through his swept-back hair, his signature Gretsch still slung over his shoulder. “We’ve gone through a lot of crap as a band, had our personal differences, but none of it has ever, fucking *ever* interfered with our music. Whatever animosity is happening between the two of you, it needs to end.”

Ewart peered at us from behind his drum set, the incubus’s usually sunny disposition gone as the tension in the rehearsal room kicked it up a few additional notches.

Pascal being Pascal just shrugged it all off, ignoring Aric’s sharp gaze. He swung his guitar off and set it on the stand.

“Not my fault if Leif is being pissy,” he commented before reaching for a beer and taking a long swig. “I’m seeing someone he disapproves of.”

Aric’s brows rose while I barely held back the impulse to punch Pascal in the fucking face.

As if *that* was the whole story.

I disapproved of his girl.

Sure.

Forget about the fact that this girl gave me nightmares I couldn’t wake up from for hours until I was sweaty and shaking and fucking sick from reliving my past.

Forget about the fact that not only was I going to die from the sweet touch of his sweet girl, but Pascal had gone down that path voluntarily. Just fucking throwing his life away.

I’d actually gone over to his place yesterday with every intention of carrying a normal fucking conversation between the passably normal fucking people we were in daylight, but Pascal had refused to hear a single word about Serena or the plague he’d taken on by fucking her.

He’d tried to shut the door in my face, but before he could, I asked him why. Why was he choosing suicide by succubus.

The fucking asshole just barked a laugh and drawled in that damn cocky tone of his that I really had to be living a sad existence if I didn’t understand that participating in high-risk activities wasn’t courting death. It was amplifying life.

It was a load of crap.

The prey who signed up for the Sanguine Society’s standard hunts were amplifying life. Death was always a possibility with a vampire, even within a group as strict as ours. But it wasn’t the expected outcome, let alone a guaranteed one. And *that* was participating in high-risk activities. *That* was amplifying life. Unlike the death group, where we all knew that life played no part in its goals.

I burned to lay all of that out to Pascal, NDA be damned. Wanted to confront him. Tell him he had a big fucking issue if he didn’t see what was really happening. It might have been too late to save him, but shit, my skin crawled with wrongness at just leaving it. Leaving *him* if he was struggling.

But even if I still saw Pascal as a friend, it was obvious he didn’t return the sentiment any longer.

Which was precisely why I refused to bleed open the part of me that was

entangled with the Sanguine Society.

Anything I would have given him, he'd use against me. Because Serena was a hill he was willing to die on.

Fucking literally.

And in that, I was his enemy.

"Are you even fucking listening?" Aric growled, actually snapping his fingers in front of my face.

I snarled on instinct, then reined myself in when I realized that this entire damn time, I'd been vamp still and staring at Pascal like I planned to hunt him—and had definitely not heard a single word Aric had said.

His fangs slid out, the primal part of him on display and a reminder that Sutter might not have the heart of a killer, but he could be just as lethal.

"We have a gig in two days. Get your shit together because we're *not* giving our fans a subpar performance or a pissing match on stage." He leveled a deadly look at Pascal and me, then stormed out of the rehearsal room and into his office.

"Damn, guys." Ewart whistled once the door slammed shut behind Aric. "What *is* up with the two of you?"

Pascal crouched by his pedal board, tweaking a few settings. "A stick crawled up Leif's ass, that's what."

"Come on, man, he's always intense." Ewart's comment was somewhere between a blunt observation and a half-compliment.

I snorted, even if Pascal was still pissing me the fuck off. "I always look out for you guys. The woman Pascal's seeing is bad news."

"What, think she's in it for the money? Scandal?" Ewart rubbed the tip of the drumstick behind his ear.

"She's a succubus. She's in it to suck him dry."

The words were out before I considered who I was speaking to.

"Fuck, I didn't mean it that way..." I rubbed my hand down my face. "It's not that I think your kind's like that. But this woman—"

"You fucked her, didn't you?" Ewart's voice was devoid of its usual warmth but softened somewhat by understanding. Even if it wasn't exactly correct. "That's what this is about. You want her, but she's with Pascal."

"I don't want her."

"Yeah, he does." This from Pascal.

He finally stopped tinkering with his damn pedal board. Though seeing his fucking smug expression only made things worse.

He cut a look at Ewart. “I’d even be down with sharing her. It would make my girl happy instead of hurting. But this fucker”—he jabbed a thumb in my direction—“decided to treat her like trash the instant he found her with me.”

“She cheated?” Ewart asked, swirling toward me.

“We’re not together. Weren’t together.” I clenched my teeth, wondering why I was even answering the damn stupid questions that were so far off the mark it wasn’t even funny.

Plus, Serena hurting?

Right. I’d seen her in those woods. I’d tasted her fucking darkness—saw the delight she took in pushing her damn curse into me. The only thing that could be hurting was her damn pride because no matter how much it was eroding me from the inside, I wasn’t about to fall at her feet like a fucking puppet to play with and discard once she had her fun.

She wasn’t getting my body, my pleasure, or my fucking predator again.

I’d made a choice that night when I’d walked away.

I wouldn’t hunt her. Wouldn’t seek out retribution. Because I could see she *wanted* me to come at her. She *liked* coming face-to-face with the monster encased in my soul.

So I’d make sure she never again would.

“She’s bad news, Ewart,” I said as simply and as honestly as I could. “Not because she’s a succubus, though I’ve got to say it doesn’t help that she used her powers on me without my consent.”

Honest confusion swept across his face. “Okay, I get that consent is a big deal, but... What’s really so bad about getting the best orgasm of your life?”

I held back the surge of temper that rose in a dark wave.

Ewart was all about pleasure. He was the kind of incubus who always took care of his partners. Shit, I’d heard their moans, even tasted the pleasure he’d left them in their bloodstream whenever they offered themselves as a drink to me afterward. He fed without truly taking anything from them because he always gave more.

He wouldn’t understand what I was talking about, and I certainly wasn’t going into fucking details. If Pascal knew, fine, but I wasn’t about to start advertising my fucking shadows.

Just like I wasn’t about to acknowledge the fact that thinking of that godsdamned night was giving me a hard-on. Again.

“Guys,” Ewart pleaded, “just talk shit out. I love you too much to see you

like this.”

When his attention flicked toward the office, I knew he was including Aric in this too.

I’d be lying if I said it didn’t make me feel like shit to be impacting the band like this. I’d vowed to give them as much music as I could before I died. But that wasn’t all, was it? We were still here, still together. I didn’t want to fuck the guys over.

At the same time, though, seeing Pascal stirred something so fucking dark within me, I wondered if the monster I let loose at those hunts was even it. If there wasn’t something worse lurking beneath my skin.

Because I wanted to rip into the bastard, tear him to fucking shreds. With words, with fangs, I didn’t even care.

I just hated that he looked like he was having the time of his fucking life while everything in mine was falling apart.

Hated that he was acting like any of this was *fine*.

Without sparing another look at Ewart or Pascal, I walked out of the studio. The second I hit the parking lot and the evening pressed against my skin, the relief I’d thought I’d get turned into a constriction that made my fangs ache.

I pulled my phone out of my jeans and sent a text to the emergency line I never thought I’d use.

I need a hunt.

I tapped the phone against my thigh until the buzz indicated a new message.

Five days. Unless you require a premium.

A premium. Fuck. I wasn’t that far gone, was I?

Indulging in the hunts was an outlet. A way to let loose the pressure building inside.

A premium meant I was spiraling.

It was a single human offering, a single death picked out just for me. It was a means to rein back those who were about to lose themselves to bloodlust. A last-ditch effort to save a vampire before an execution.

Fuck, I wasn’t that weak.

I wasn’t that fucking hopeless. Spineless. A slave to my baser nature.

I let my fingers fly over the keyboard.

Five days will suffice.

I just hoped to fuck I’d actually make it through the nightmares, the gig...

and the fucking ice-cold burn in my veins that told me nothing would sate it except for a certain succubus.

CHAPTER TWENTY-TWO

SERENA

“Interesting design choice, Blondie,” Pascal drawled as his gaze took in the state of my apartment, the dark undertone hinting he wasn’t above bashing in the face of whoever was responsible for ransacking the place.

Which was precisely why I hesitated to give my answer.

For some reason I couldn’t quite fathom, stirring more animosity between the two didn’t feel right.

Honestly, after the way Leif had treated me, I should have leaped at the opportunity to have someone like Pascal in my corner who’d make him pay for the attitude. For treating me like *I* was the problem when he had been the one to start shit in the first place. But as I thought of that possible outcome, I didn’t find any pleasure in it.

I also refused to lie to Pascal.

So, in the end, the truth came out with careful neutrality. “This would be Leif’s handiwork.”

“That fuckin—”

“I wasn’t here when it happened,” I added quickly when raw violence crackled off Pascal. “It was like this when I came home from the Blackened Stone.”

“Prick,” he muttered, then, to my absolute fucking surprise, turned around and started *cleaning* the place.

I just gaped at him, standing there in my skintight black leggings, crop top, and leather jacket, my purse slung over my shoulder, all ready to go. Except Pascal clearly had no intention of heading out the door for our dinner date just yet.

“Do you have a broom and dustpan?” he asked, golden hair falling down his forehead as he looked up at me from his crouch.

I shook myself straight before actually nodding, then spun on my heel and hurried off to grab the supplies. By the time I got back, some sense had returned to my brain, but the second I made a move to use the broom myself while Pascal was still collecting broken pieces, he cut me off and extended his hand in a clear demand.

Gripping the damn handle, I narrowed my eyes at him, but the arrogant Fae wouldn't back off.

“Fine,” I grumbled and handed him the broom with a scowl that just made him grin in that cocky way of his.

As he began working on sweeping up one corner of the kitchen, though, I knew that I wasn't going down that easily. For fuck's sake, I *hated* cleaning, but something about Pascal bossing me around brought out my bratty side that refused to just take the order.

I placed my purse and jacket on the nearby chair, then put my own plan into motion.

Making sure I was well within his eyesight, I bent over at the waist and started collecting the larger items scattered across the floor. I placed them in a neat pile, then strode to the cabinet under the sink to grab a couple of trash bags—the move, of course, executed with another perfect bend that put my ass on display.

I didn't have to check on Pascal to know precisely where his attention was fixed.

Hiding a smile, I turned and gave him one bag while I carried my own to the pile I'd created and started chucking things in.

“So, how do you know Leif?” I asked as I went through the motions.

Without breaking his stride, Pascal glanced at me with an eyebrow arched. “Don't tell me you haven't looked me up, Blondie.”

“I have not,” I said with more smugness than I felt because it had been a damn difficult battle to keep myself from scouring the internet for any and all facts on Pascal Evers.

Maybe if he'd been someone else, I wouldn't have held back. As it was, that path rested within dangerous territory I didn't want to take myself into. The fact that I'd be returning to the Blackened Stone when he played again this weekend was pushing it enough.

“You really haven't looked me up?” Surprise briefly colored over his

cockiness.

When I shook my head, he swept some more crap onto the dustpan and dumped it in the trash bag I'd handed to him earlier.

"Phoenix Chains isn't the only band I'm in." He shook the dustpan clear. "Leif's the bassist in another band I play guitar for. The Whiskey Jet Preachers. We're kind of a big deal in Germany."

My stomach clenched.

Two musicians?

What the fuck were the damn chances that I landed on *two* musicians?

Something Pascal had said the night Leif had confronted us came back to me. *I'm pretty sure Aric and Ewart wouldn't have batted an eye if you still wanted the kind of after-parties we used to have.*

That should have been my clue right there, but my brain clearly hadn't been firing on all cylinders. Too stunned that the showdown was even happening.

I shoved aside the discomfort and focused on sating my curiosity instead. "And you had no idea?"

I didn't have to explain what I meant. Pascal knew well enough.

"Nope." He dragged out the *p* with a pop of his lips. "Don't get me wrong, every single one of us assholes participated in some wild times back in the day. When it became clear we could get away with a whole bunch of stuff, we indulged like fuck. Pushed the limits. But it was all still rock-star bullshit if you ask me. And once things kind of tapered down and the parties and groupies lost their appeal, Leif was..."

He laughed, shaking his head and thrusting one hand through his curls.

When he looked at me again, I could see the bewilderment entwining with a dry kind of amusement. "Leif really was a regular guy."

My brows arched.

It was hard to imagine the vampire as...regular. His darkness was too vast, too majestic for me to comprehend how he could have possibly kept it hidden. It struck me as trying to keep your chest from moving while taking a breath.

Impossible.

"Yeah, I know." Pascal huffed and dedicated himself to cleaning up another area of the kitchen. "I've been thinking how the fuck he'd fooled me so well. How I hadn't seen anything."

Thinking of Nicole, of the two vastly different versions of her I'd seen, I

might have held an answer to Pascal's questions. But with the Sanguine Society NDA in place, I also couldn't offer him shit.

A deep, twisting sensation stirred in the pit of my stomach.

Nicole...

I swallowed, locking away the intrusive thoughts I'd decided I'd deal with later before Pascal showed up on my doorstep. They kept knocking at my brain, though, and I busied myself with cleaning—a fucking sentence I'd never thought would apply to me in my damn life outside of bartending—grateful that Pascal seemed fine with letting the whole Leif subject go.

After a few minutes passed in silence, though, he had to go and ruin it all.

“He wants you, you know.”

The words made me tense in the damn spine.

I forced myself to relax and said, “I don't fucking care.”

“You do.”

The next item I cleared away—bits of a wooden plate rack—I might have thrown into the bag with more force than necessary.

“I don't want to talk about Leif fucking Nilsen any longer.” I turned and faced those stunning autumn eyes boring right into my soul. “I'm here with you, Pascal. This is *our* evening. And it's you who...”

Who chose me.

Who had seen me for who I am and asked me to stay.

“It's you who I'm with.”

His gaze dipped down to my chest as if he could see my racing heart and nodded. “I just wanted you to know that I'm on your side. If you want to go after Leif, I'll help you. If you want to forget him, we can do that too.”

I didn't answer because there was no answer. Not yet, at least.

I grunted and dropped to the floor, pulling my legs beneath me. “It's not like he's going to be around for long.”

“Neither of us will be, beautiful.”

My head snapped up.

Pascal gazed at me with something I refused to acknowledge, but one thing was sure. He wasn't regretting his decision.

“Have the nightmares started yet?” I asked softly.

He shook his head. I'd explained to him what would happen, what he could expect. And for some reason, I was relieved to learn that he wasn't thrown into that vortex yet.

“Tell me when they do.”

“I will.”

He grabbed a handful of cartons, courtesy of Leif destroying my food stores, and brought a flame to his hand. The ash fell into a saucepan dented beyond repair like gray snow.

I watched until the last of the flakes settled, then dove back into work, silently cleaning my apartment alongside Pascal and ignoring the weight that made my chest feel like it was nesting lead instead of organs and bones. After an hour, the place looked a lot less like a furious vampire had gone through it, though some scars remained.

Of course they did.

Pascal came up behind me and wrapped his arms around my waist. “How hungry are you?”

“I could eat,” I admitted, though my body was quickly going from craving steak to wanting something else to enjoy.

His lips seared a path down my neck. “What if I want to eat you first, Blondie?”

My fucking toes curled.

Breathing heavily, I turned and shoved Pascal away. His eyes took on the shade of evening right before nightfall, and the beauty of it almost threw me off course until an arrogant smirk tugged on his mouth.

“Feisty.” He dragged his teeth along his bottom lip.

Fuck him; why did he have to be so hot?

I gathered all the damn self-control I could, walked up to him, and planted a hand on his chest. I lifted myself on my toes and brought my mouth within a breath of his.

“Taunt me all you want, Pascal Evers, but this time, it’ll be you cursing my name.”

Dragging my hand down his chest, I dropped to my knees, then flicked my gaze up at him. The expectant, heated look in his eyes was pure fucking fire, and I allowed a smile to stretch across my face as I undid his jeans.

“If you wanted my cock, sweetheart, you could have just said so,” he drawled. “I’d never say no to fucking that sweet mouth of yours.”

I hummed, feigning that I was considering what he’d said, then hooked my fingers behind the waistband of his boxers.

“You see, that’s where you’re wrong.” I tugged, letting his cock spring free. “You think you’re in control, but this is *my* fun. *My* pleasure. It’ll be *me* fucking *you* with *my* mouth until you’re grabbing that table behind you with

white knuckles and coming down my throat so hard you'll forget your own name and know only mine."

"Shit, Serena..."

Anything more he might have said was lost in a groan as I took him in my mouth all the way down to the base. Hollowing out my cheeks, I made a slow return down his length and topped it with a swirl of my tongue around his crown.

His hands shot behind him, gripping the table just like I'd promised he would by the end. That he couldn't get even through a single stroke without the support made me smug as hell, though it wasn't long before I was locked in a struggle of my own.

Having Pascal like this...

I closed my eyes, savoring how his cock felt in my mouth against my tongue. I lost myself to the sensations; the present moment was all that existed, all that mattered, because it was everything to me. A slice of reality so pure it would have been heaven to live in forever. But if all we had was the present moment, then I craved to feel its every last detail in the deepest, fullest, most all-encompassing way.

Pascal's pleasure burned the air, the energy seeping into me and turning the heat between my legs into a molten blaze. My panties were drenched, my clit throbbing. When I snapped my eyes open to take in the handsome planes of Pascal's face and saw the way he was gazing at me with hooded lids and lips parted, I came so hard my power erupted.

His dick twitched in my mouth, then he spilled down my throat, cursing my name and gripping the table just as I'd promised. Though the thought I'd initially started with had nothing on the glory of reality.

Pascal was fucking breathtaking.

The vulnerability that shone through highlighted the beauty of his roughness, and I couldn't help but think that Pascal Evers was a fucking diamond, forged through forces that should have destroyed him but had shaped him into a beautiful singularity instead.

His body still trembled when he tucked himself back into his jeans and pulled me to my feet. "I knew you were the girl for me, Serena Vernier."

I might have wrecked him with my mouth, but his had undone me in a whole other way.

Speechless, I couldn't do a thing but let him pull me to him as he wrapped an arm around my waist. He leaned his forehead against mine and

began swaying me gently to music only he could hear but transferred seamlessly into my body.

“Come to my gig,” he muttered against my lips.

I jerked away, the bliss that had drifted through my bloodstream gone in an instant.

“At the Blackened Stone?” I said as if I didn’t already know the answer—and that definitely wasn’t it. “You know I’ll be there anyway since I’m working.”

Pascal cocked his head to the side, clearly seeing that something was up, but that didn’t deter him from voicing my personal nightmare.

“No, beautiful. I want you to come see me play with the Whiskey Jet Preachers.”

CHAPTER TWENTY-THREE

SERENA

I froze, *hating* just how much I froze, but it had nothing on the violent churning that had taken over my gut.

I'd come a long fucking way, but this still felt...

It felt like a point of no return.

Because the truth was that no matter how much I might have embraced my darkness once I'd stepped fully into it the night Leif had hunted me, it wasn't all I was. I understood that now.

Which meant I couldn't just forget what had happened.

Or not care what could happen.

I'd just found my fucking stride; I didn't want to break myself all over again.

"I don't know," I started to say, but Pascal's hand landed on my cheeks the next moment, cupping my face with such passion that any other objections I would have voiced evaporated in the heat of his touch.

"I want you there, Serena. I want to kiss you before the show. I want to see you in the front row, standing right in front of me. I want to fuck you backstage when I'm still high on the music, when your body is still thrumming with my riffs."

Fuck, fuck, fuck, how was I supposed to say no?

The thought of watching Pascal on stage, witnessing the version of him that existed beyond the walls of the fight club...

I wanted those smoldering, filthy looks he'd cast my way. I wanted to watch him above me, knowing that the fucking fire god playing his guitar was mine. That he'd claim me as soon as he walked off the stage.

Most of all, though, there was this odd urge inside me, a desire not just to

attend the show for me—but to be there for him.

Maybe if I placed all of my attention on Pascal, it could work. Maybe I could keep myself locked down enough, focused enough, I could get through a couple of hours.

I swallowed, then leaned my forehead against his just as he'd done when this conversation started. "All right, I'll come."

Pascal kissed me with a tenderness that was still raw, still alight with flames, but also so fucking gentle that it broke me. I surrendered to the kiss, surrendered to him.

And wished with all my heart it would be enough.



Fighting on two fronts had been one hell of an energy drain. From the moment Pascal had accompanied me back to my apartment after our dinner two nights ago and left me with a deep, long kiss and a promise to meet up before the show, my mind had been turning a thousand thoughts per second. Even the sleep I'd managed to catch was ridden with restlessness, though the waking hours were the worst as I circled through the same things over and over.

Pascal's gig. Giovanni's mission. How to hold up my end of the deal with each of the guys and not ruin my damn life. Or anyone else's.

At this point, I wasn't even sure anymore which of the two battlefields was harder.

When I glimpsed Nicole's text on my phone, I was gripped by a serious urge to say fuck off to everything, pack my bags, and just leave the damn country.

Yeah, running sounded pretty damn amazing right about now.

I poured myself a hearty dose of whiskey and sat behind the small table by the window overlooking the street. The chair rocked beneath my butt, thanks to Leif all but wrecking it, but it held my weight. After a few swallows of whiskey that burned all the way down my throat, I looked at the text again.

I asked him out. He said yes!

Leon had said yes. The man Nicole was in fucking love with had agreed to go on a date with her. I could practically hear her joy radiating from the two lines of text.

The one damn friend I had, the one person who I actually believed just might be the one constant in my life, was getting her dream guy.

And I was on a countdown before I'd have to ride his dick on my brother's command and leave him for dead.

I groaned and threw back the rest of the whiskey.

In this state, it probably wasn't wise to go to the WJP concert anyway. An emotional succubus was a volatile blend in itself, but with my track record...

This wasn't just a case of me chickening out. It was the damn universe closing one door while a fuckfest of crap poured through the other.

Right as I wanted to shoot off a text to Pascal to cancel, a knock sounded at my door. The tug in my belly let me know who stood on the other side even before I ambled over to open it.

I probably should have pretended I wasn't home, but for the fucking life of me, I couldn't act against the pull that was dragging me toward the door on phantom strings.

"Hello, Blondie." Pascal cocked his head to the side. "You're drinking and didn't think to invite me?"

I let him pass, closing the door behind him. "I'm not sure I'll be able to go tonight. I had some bad news, and I just don't think I'm in the right headspace to handle being at a gig."

"Is it Leif?" Pascal crossed his arms, leaning against the doorframe separating us from the kitchen. "I get that you don't want to be around the asshole who..."

Who flat-out rejected me.

It shouldn't have stung as much as it did, but in the grand scheme of things, coming face-to-face with the vampire was the least of my problems.

I shook my head. "It's not Leif. It's just..."

Letting out a frustrated sound, I marched past Pascal to get some more whiskey. I swigged it straight from the bottle, detesting this fucking weakness from the bottom of my fucking rotten heart.

Pascal snatched the bottle when I was done, taking a drink himself, then parked his ass on the rickety chair before pulling me into his lap. The wood groaned, but being in Pascal's arms...

Shit, I knew he wouldn't let us fall.

Let me fall.

"I have some bad experiences with music. With...concerts," I admitted.

His brow furrowed, but he didn't say a thing, simply tucked a strand of

my hair behind my ear.

More words tumbled from my lips before I could change my mind about baring myself like this. “Working at the Blackened Stone was difficult enough. I had no idea there would be live music when I took the job. If I’d known...”

I spread my arms wide.

Yeah, I would have totally avoided the fuck out of it.

At the very least, I could have avoided the handsome Fire Fae holding me in his arms, who was a musician for a freaking living, instead of getting tangled up with him and sinking even deeper, but as soon as our energies had met, it had been damn impossible to walk away.

“It may sound ridiculous to you, but I try to keep away from music. It’s a part of life that I can’t really enjoy, so instead of making myself suffer with something I can’t have... I work hard to pretend it’s not there at all. You can’t miss something if you don’t know it exists, right?”

“But didn’t you say you worked at a strip club? How could you avoid music if you danced?” Pascal asked, and I was grateful he went for the easier question instead of poking right into the damn wound.

“I was careful to never get attached. I picked songs at random, something I could move my body to, but made sure to never look up the artists. Switched up the songs before they could go too deep under my skin. I always liked the beats, but I also always chose something I wouldn’t be playing just for the enjoyment of it.”

I blurted everything out like I had zero cool, but Pascal just nodded in understanding, clearly not giving a fuck that I wasn’t the usual Blondie with a bratty edge that he liked so much.

Another wall inside me cracked.

“When I was fourteen, I was living in Paris with the succubus community. I was coming fully into my powers, and they were training me to...well, be the kind of succubus we all soon found out I could never be.” I licked my too-dry lips.

Pascal silently offered me the whiskey. I drank deeply, then set the bottle on the table behind my back.

“There was an incubus a couple of years older than me and another succubus about my age who lived in the same building that I hung out with. The girl, Annette, listened to a hell of a lot of music. I swear it was as essential as breathing to her. Not a day went by that I didn’t hear her blasting

it from her room or see her outside with her headphones in and the world tuned out. The girl was a like a fountain of different genres, full of appreciation for the diversity the artists brought...”

I choked a bit on the words, on the affection that continued to exist in echoes somewhere deep within me, regardless of the fact that it had been more than a decade since I’d last seen her ringlet curls bobbing to some tune.

“But there was one band she particularly adored, and I had to admit, I fell in love with their sound too. The guys were all perfect teenage girl crush material, the songs so catchy I eventually started listening to their albums on repeat. Within a few months, I was hooked. Their lyrics were the soundtrack of my dreams of a better fucking life. Of actually having a life where I enjoyed myself, where I was invincible.

“When Annette and I found out that they were touring and Paris was one of their stops, we asked Maurice if he was interested in going, then the three of us came up with a plan and put it in motion. Maurice got the tickets, Annette schemed our grand escape, and I looked into transportation since there was a chance we’d be too late for the metro on our way back. It was quite a bit of work on all parts, but we did it.”

The memories weighed heavily on me, but I wasn’t about to stop now.

“Concert night rolled by, and we found ourselves at the venue—and among the first ones in. Annette wanted to go to the front of the stage that still had a tiny gap for her to squeeze into. Maurice went with her, watching over her as always, but I wasn’t feeling quite as adventurous back then, if you can imagine”—I let out a bitter, brittle laugh—“so I stayed a few rows behind where it felt nice and comfortable with still enough space around me to dance a bit. Once the music started, though, I got so swept up in the energies, I hardly remember what went on. All I know is that at some point, I found myself standing in the second row, right in the middle, the music pouring down on me from the stage and the pleasure from the crowd crashing into me from all sides. It was magnetic. It was hypnotic. It was a fucking trip.

“I’d never felt so damn good in my life, Pascal. But the taste of it all, coupled with my already heightened state, became overwhelming. My power flowed out of me. I couldn’t hold it back; it was like a dam had broken inside me. Before my friends realized what was happening and could intervene, I’d already touched every single person in that venue.”

Pascal went still beneath me. “Living Sunset? That was the band?”

I nodded.

“They all died while on tour,” he said slowly, the pieces coming together. “Cardiac arrest. Everyone assumed it was bad drugs, too much alcohol, and exhaustion.”

“Except it wasn’t just them,” I whispered. “Every single person at that concert, including my friends, got hit with my power. Pascal, *everyone* died.”

CHAPTER TWENTY-FOUR

SERENA

Everyone died, and the one thing I had that made me happy, the one thing that had given me the feeling that life didn't have to be the miserable mess it had been up until that point, that there was something more for me out there, had turned into a nightmare.

A nightmare that might not have killed me but one I could never escape. Because it had cost me *everything*.

The experiences I'd perceived to be shitty before had been nothing compared to the fate that had unfolded for me after. Although maybe... maybe there had been no other path for me anyway. How long would I have been able to stay with the succubus community before my differences became too stark for them to accommodate? Before they realized I'd never turn into the person they wanted me to be?

But that concert.

Maurice.

Annette...

A shiver raked through me.

"You were fourteen. *Fourteen*, Serena," Pascal growled. "You were being trained by people who wanted to *change* you instead of honoring the fucking magnificent creature you are."

He placed a hand on my stomach. Heat uncurled under his touch.

"Are you hungry now? Have you been denying yourself what you need?"

There was a low, seductive drawl to his otherwise demanding words because we both knew the truth.

With him, I never held back.

With him, I finally had everything I wanted.

“No,” I whispered, dropping my gaze to my lap. “I feel complete.”

I didn’t even know why the admission made me so fucking vulnerable, but I also didn’t have time to dwell on it.

Pascal grabbed my chin and forced me to look at him, fire dancing in his autumn eyes. “Then you know it will be different. You’re not fourteen anymore, beautiful. You’re not malnourished from denying your true nature. And if you enjoy my music, I sure as fuck won’t let you stay behind. Especially now. The band won’t be the same once I’m gone. You won’t have to torment yourself by knowing there are gigs taking place you can’t go to.”

A knot tightened in my throat, but I refused to acknowledge the deeper implications of that.

“Ride out this last blaze with me,” Pascal urged. “I’ll fuck you until the very last possible second if that’s what it takes to give you the security you need to enjoy yourself. Because you *will* enjoy yourself, Blondie. That’s a fucking order.”



The venue loomed before me, a sinister concrete box even the bright afternoon sun couldn’t paint in a better light. I barely noticed the people migrating between the back entrance and the truck parked there as tension crept into my body to the point where every muscle was so taut it felt like all it would take was the smallest jab and I’d shatter all over the fucking ground.

“Oh no, we’re not having any of that.” Pascal’s voice coiled around me like a whip.

Or maybe that was his arm, forming a hot, steel band around my waist and steering me into an alley that branched away from the club.

He spun me around and crowded me against the wall, his face so close to mine I had no choice but to focus on him.

“Remember what I promised,” he murmured, then his mouth was on mine, his hand slipping beneath my skirt and tugging aside the flimsy panties.

I sucked in a sharp breath as his fingers entered me.

Sex had been the last thing on my mind when I’d walked that damn death march toward the venue, but on the second pump of Pascal’s fingers that grazed all the right places, I was already dripping wet, a moan spilling into our kiss.

He tore away from my lips, his pupils blown even as a dark, smug expression settled on his face. “That’s more like it.”

He kept working me with his hand, bringing me right to the edge of orgasm when he suddenly pulled back.

“F-fuck,” I stammered, my breaths coming out hard.

It was only due to Pascal still pinning me against the wall that I was even standing. My legs were shaking so fucking badly, but worse than that was the need to have what he’d just denied.

“What’s the matter, Blondie?” He raked his gaze down to my breasts—braless again, thanks to the deep red crop top that held them just right—then flicked his attention back up, a mocking streak threading through the autumn colors of his eyes.

As if he wasn’t sporting a massive hard-on that tented his damn jeans.

“Are you fucking kidding me?” I snarled and shoved him in the chest.

Pascal shrugged.

He. Fucking. Shrugged.

A well of power rose within me, and I could have sworn I caught a hint of emerald green sparking at my fingertips like a wayward aura, but I was a bit too preoccupied with a particular Fire Fae who thought it was hi-fucking-larious to leave me high and dry to pay it much attention.

Whatever it was, it wasn’t about to give me what I needed, so it would just have to wait.

“Give me my orgasm,” I snapped at Pascal.

He barked a laugh, then shook his head. “You’ll have to take it from me, sweetheart.”

Deep down, I knew he was just riling me up, that it was all part of his nifty plan to actually get me through the doors of the venue, and that I was playing right into his hand by taking the bait, but I didn’t fucking care.

Horns rose from my hair, power crackling through me. On a snarl, I grabbed hold of Pascal and turned us until it was him backed against the wall. It probably looked ridiculous as hell with our height difference—the bastard’s lips might have even twitched—but when I slammed my power into him, the groans he spilled into the air stripped him of his attitude and wove together the most satisfying music.

Wherever my power touched, Pascal’s desire for me answered.

I traced a hand down his chest, all the way to the solid length of him. I cupped his cock through his jeans, rubbing my palm just enough to give him

a taste of friction and nothing more while our lust created an infinite loop between us. It flowed from me into Pascal, enriching the energy, then came curving back out and into my own body. As I fed on his arousal, he also received all of mine.

“You play a dirty fucking game, Blondie,” he growled, then the world around me spun.

Before it even registered that I was turned in the other direction, Pascal bent me over and threw my skirt over my ass. The panties he just pulled aside, and the next moment his thick cock was filling me as I held on to my balance for dear fucking life. He pounded into me hard and fast, wrecking me with his demanding thrusts that were crude in the most perfect way.

When it registered that we were out in the open, *again*, that anyone could walk past the alley and catch the rock-star god fucking me like I was his toy, my orgasm hit so hard that Pascal cursed and faltered in his rhythm.

Right as I felt the surge of his own climax following mine, he pulled out and turned me around with rough hands. He shoved me down, my knees scraping against the concrete. I barely had time to open my mouth before he rammed his cock down my throat and spilled his release.

I swallowed every last drop.

When I released him from my mouth with one last swirl of my tongue, Pascal leaned against the wall. He raked a hand through his hair, a breathless laugh falling from his lips.

“You really are perfect, you know that?” He gazed down at me.

I licked my lips, then rose to press them against his. “You’re the one who’s perfect.”

He’d known what I needed. And had given it to me without a second thought.

Never, fucking never had anyone done something like that for me. The weight of it hit me so hard I was left speechless, but luckily, Pascal seemed in a heaven of his own right now, and the silence that wove between us was far from empty.

After another minute or so of us sobering up from the high, we straightened out our clothes and fixed each other’s hair. We still had that freshly fucked look no amount of tinkering could get rid of, but neither of us was particularly bummed about it. I grinned at him, earning a panty-melting smile back, then Pascal simply took my hand and guided me out of the alley. This time, as we approached the venue and went through the security check,

my steps didn't falter.

Pascal squeezed my hand as if he knew precisely which observation went through my head and was...

Happy about it.

He exchanged quick hellos with the crew, but we didn't linger, heading through the back and inside the building instead. With our fingers still firmly linked, Pascal led me through the corridors until we ventured into one that harbored a partially open double door at the end. I glimpsed just the smallest slice of the main floor through the open wing, and the tremors that surged through me had nothing to do with fear.

Pascal tugged on my hand to make me face him and brought his palm to my cheek. I leaned into the touch, savoring the warmth, the warm, fiery dark scent of him.

He stroked my cheek with his thumb.

"You have no idea how much it means to have you here." He brought his mouth to mine in a kiss that was chaste but burned brighter than a supernova. "Thank you."

Refusing to choke on the emotions that threatened to rise, I just kissed him back, slowly, gently, as if he hadn't fucked me raw just minutes ago.

But this was the beauty of it. Of him.

Pascal Evers encompassed so much, I fell for him time and time again.

"Just head through that door." Pascal pointed at the entrance to the main floor I spied earlier. "I need to grab my stuff and I'll see you in a minute, beautiful."

He sealed my lips in a searing kiss, then he disappeared into the dressing room just off to the side. Heat still swirled through me as I headed for the entrance, my heart kind of pounding at the thought of standing in the front row and seeing Pascal on stage—

Then it ricocheted like fuck through my chest when instead of walking out onto the main floor, I smacked right into Leif.

CHAPTER TWENTY-FIVE

LEIF

The nightmares must have spilled into daytime because the woman who bumped into my chest, the rush of scorching desire that whipped through me at the touch of my hands against her bare shoulders when I reached out to steady her, couldn't possibly be real.

She couldn't possibly be here.

Her blue eyes widened when they fell on my mine, lips parting and luring my attention to their inviting, soft fullness, but I didn't linger there. Not when holding her in my arms had transformed the nightmare into a vision of dreams I refused to acknowledge but ached for in my damn chest.

My fingertips tightened against her shoulders.

"You," I whispered, unsure whether the word was a curse or a breathless fucking adoration of the unguarded moment I'd caught her in.

That stunning vulnerability, though, burned away into nothing as Serena clenched her jaw and stared me down. "Hello, Leif."

"What the fuck are you doing here?" I hadn't even realized I'd backed us into the hallway and was now looming over her while her spine was plastered against the wall.

Her nostrils flared, and I hated, I fucking *hated* how beautiful I found her when she was pissed at me like this.

"I'm here with Pascal."

Her words sank daggers into my flesh.

"You're here with the man you're killing." I kept my words low to avoid Aric's vampire hearing in case he was nearby but projected enough hatred into them that Serena flinched. "Haven't you taken enough already? Haven't you done enough damage? What, you came to the gig to see just what you're

ruining?”

“Pascal asked me to, Leif.” There wasn’t as much harsh fire in her response as I would have expected.

Not that it changed anything.

Whatever messed up relationship the two of them had going on, it couldn’t erase the truth that she was nothing but death in a pretty disguise. A tormentor whose beauty was as stark as the punishments she delivered.

She was irredeemable.

I shoved away from the wall, from her, and marched into the dressing room, slamming the door shut behind me. Pascal was in there, because of course the asshole had to be there. He paused with his in-ear monitor in hand and cocked a brow at me.

“Based on all this brooding darkness”—he gestured to me with a wave of his fingers—“I’m assuming you saw Serena.”

“How could you? How could you bring her here?”

He set the in-ear monitor in its box and placed it on the desk beside him, taking his sweet fucking time before giving me his attention again.

“What, so now we suddenly can’t have girlfriends at our gigs?” He crossed his arms, leaning against the edge. “Maybe you should try telling Aric that and see how well it goes over.”

“Don’t play fucking stupid with me, Pascal. Gina has always supported Aric—”

“And Serena is supporting me. Just because you don’t like *how* she’s doing it doesn’t mean you get to shit on our relationship.”

“Relationship.” I snorted, though what came out was more of a fanged snarl. “You’re fucking delusional, Evers, if you think dating a black widow is any sort of real connection. Maybe she likes your dick enough to stick with you till you croak, but if she genuinely cared for you, she wouldn’t have let you fuck that poisonous pussy of hers at all.”

Pascal, the asshole, just laughed. “That stick up your ass crawled really high up today, didn’t it Leif?” He pushed off the desk and came to stand in front of me. “And why do I get the feeling it hasn’t got so much to do with who I’m with but who you’re *not* with.”

“I don’t want Serena, you fucker.”

“Yeah, yeah, heard it all before. Didn’t believe it then, not buying it now. Don’t forget that I saw who you are, brother.”

I ground my teeth together, involuntarily thinking back to that shitfest of

a night. I'd exposed myself because I'd wanted to save Pascal. Just so he could go and Serena anyway.

Nothing. It had all been for nothing.

And I fucking abhorred that these belonged among our final moments together, and I couldn't fucking put a lid on my anger.

"She's unlike any woman I've ever met," Pascal went on, not bothered in the least that I was a fucking fang-tip from going dark. "And I *know* you see it too. You feel it. I meant what I said, you asshole. We could have been in this together. We could have had the best fucking time of our lives, then go out as our true selves, no hiding, no judgments. Hey, I still will. But you fucked it up, man. You keep treating her like a problem, but I know Serena didn't fucking attack you out of the blue."

I opened my mouth, but Pascal cut me off before I could form a single sound.

"She warned me, you know?" He smirked with a huff, like he knew precisely the pressure points he was poking. "She tried to warn me away from her, convince me that being with her isn't worth the consequences. She tried to get me to live. So don't you *dare* try to spin it like any of this is on her. *We* are the ones who used her, not the other way around."

His words hit closer to home than I wanted to admit.

If Serena hadn't risen up to me, if she hadn't fought back... Would I have even stopped in time? Or would she have wound up just another one of the many bodies the Sanguine Society had to clean up after a hunt?

Hunger punched a hole in my fucking stomach at the flashback of her blood on my tongue. Of her coming on my cock. She might have pushed all of her damn power into me, made me crave her like an addict, but I'd wanted her first.

I hungered for her long before her succubus wiles entered my bloodstream.

Maybe Pascal was right. Maybe we did both use her. He might have learned outright that fucking her would be a death sentence when I hadn't, but taking an unwilling girl off the street and bringing her to a Sanguine Society meet with the intention to kill was a death sentence too.

"Fuck." I twitched, wanting to drag a hand down my face but stopped myself before I could.

I had no idea if it was pride or something else, but for the fucking life of me, I couldn't let Pascal know how much I agreed.

Because there was a massive difference between us.

Pascal was *enjoying* this. He didn't give a fuck about the consequences, about what his death would do to everyone else.

I did.

And it was tearing me the fuck apart.

"If it wasn't Serena, it would have been something else." He flashed me another knowing smirk that I ached to punch right off his face. "How long do you think you would have been able to keep that darkness in you a secret?"

"Forever," I snapped, but the word tasted like a lie.

The night I took Serena, I'd been fucking losing it, hanging on by a thread. And it hadn't been the first time it happened. Leashing the primal part of me had become harder and fucking harder with every year that went by.

Pascal looked at me like I was full of bullshit. Like he knew, he *knew* how unhinged I truly was.

"What's your fucking damage anyway, Pascal?" I snapped in defense. "I thought we had a good thing going. Why do you want to die so fucking much?"

"Did we really now?" he drawled.

I wanted to rip him open and pry the answers out of him, but I snapped my mouth shut at the sound of approaching footsteps. When Aric entered the dressing room, the tension between us lingered, and he leveled us with a narrow-eyed glare.

It would have been easy to spill everything to him. Tell him that Pascal's girl, the one he invited to our fucking gig, was the band's destruction. But throwing Pascal under the bus would hurt Aric more than it would Pascal.

This conversation wasn't one to have out of spite.

It didn't matter how fed up I was with Aric looking at me like I was the problem. I wouldn't shatter his dreams, his fucking aspirations, just to sate my damn ego.

I'd fucked up enough as it was.

"Remember what I said about having a pissing contest on stage?" Aric warned.

Ewart ambled into the room behind him, pausing at the door when he saw the three of us in a standoff.

"Don't worry, you won't have any issues with me," I snarled, then pushed past Pascal and locked myself in the bathroom like some fucking schoolgirl.

Unlike a schoolgirl, though, I rammed my fist into the tiles until they

cracked.

Memories swarmed me—the latest nightmare crawling to the forefront of my thoughts until I got sucked right back into it.



Agony, unlike anything I'd ever felt, burrowed through my flesh. No hunger I'd ever felt had hurt this much. Had felt like I was coming apart until there would be nothing left of me.

There was barely anything left of me anyway.

Another surge of magic overpowered me like a wave on a beach I shouldn't have been on. It dragged me under, scraping my skin and jumbling my insides until I would have thrown up had there been anything in my stomach.

My lungs burned. My bones ached. My flesh crawled.

I was pretty sure I was screaming, but I couldn't even be sure of that. Because everything was just...pain.

I didn't know how long I'd been tumbling through the dark, but when light blinded me, and I found myself on the cold, stained floor, the shock was so severe I convulsed.

I thrashed there for what felt like another eternity until a voice said, "All right, now let's try again."

The room was blurry, and I didn't know if it was from the tears that must have run down my wet face or because the man standing on the other side of the cage had damaged something permanently inside me.

A buzzing sound slapped my ears, then a frail woman was being shoved inside the cage. The blood pouring down her arms and legs called to me like a beacon. I snapped to attention, dragging myself on hands and knees toward her, hunger riding me hard.

My stomach growled, and a matching snarl tumbled from my lips.

This was bloodlust, I knew now.

Just as I knew, with what little of my mind had remained sane, that the man had starved me to purposefully induce the state. It wasn't a coincidence. Nor was the woman a reward for what I went through.

But my body craved sustenance.

It wasn't even pleasure that I felt, not anymore. Not even the smallest

satisfaction merged with hunger. All that existed was the burning, hollow sensation in my stomach, fueled by the weakness in my flesh that fired my need for survival.

I. Had. To. Feed.

Shaking, I crawled forward.

More. More.

The woman was sobbing, but the delicious scent of her blood overpowered the salt of her tears. She backed away from me but couldn't get far with the bars slamming into her back.

I bared my teeth at her, the fear she put into the air giving me the strength to pull myself across that final stretch. I was too weak to rise, so I snatched her ankle with my hands as she screamed, then sank my fangs into her fleshy calf.

The moment her blood touched my tongue and I felt the smallest sense of relief, magic surged, and I was once more lost to nothing but skull-shattering agony.



“Sound check’s about to start.” Ewart’s voice, only slightly muffled by the door, snatched me from the visions.

I swallowed heavily, my body shaking like crazy, and raised my gaze from the sink I’d been clutching to the ruined tiles just to the side of the mirror. They were stained dark red with my blood.

Nausea roiled in my stomach viciously enough to make me gag, but the hunger I now harbored, the hunger that had become a constant companion since that damn Sanguine Society hunt...

It was untainted.

Because it had nothing to do with blood and everything to do with the warm flesh of a succubus who had been my undoing. My end.

Even as my hatred for her blazed with ice-fire, I latched on to the sensation of craving her and used it as a lifeline to crawl back from the depths of the very nightmare she’d given me. It was fucking twisted how she was my destruction but also my salvation. Right now, though, it was the latter that counted.

The more I let my desire for Serena take over, the more it released my

body from the hooks of the past that had sunk so deep it had been unable to distinguish memories from reality.

I wasn't the lost boy locked in a cage.

I was Leif fucking Nilsen, bassist for the Whiskey Jet Preachers, and I had a gig to pull off like the fucking professional I was.

"I'm coming," I yelled, then quickly cleaned up the blood from my hands—and wiped it off the tiles.

There wasn't much I could do about their cracked state, but even if the guys noticed, it wasn't as if they'd never taken their anger out on inanimate objects.

After checking my reflection in the mirror one last time, I let myself out of the bathroom. Pascal was just heading out the door, his back turned to me—which was a fucking gift in itself—while Aric gave me a long, scanning look. I dipped my chin to reaffirm that I was all right. That I wouldn't fuck up this evening or deliver anything but my best. Just like we agreed.

After another second or so, Aric gave me a nod that was curt as fuck, but he was also satisfied enough with what he saw that he slipped out of the dressing room after Pascal without grilling into me. Ewart, though...

With his incubus senses attuned to people's moods, he wasn't fooled in the least. Shit, I just hoped he hadn't been checking up on me while I'd been lost to those damn memories...

There was a slight tightness around his eyes that hinted my wish had most likely gone unanswered, but Ewart didn't say anything. He just slapped a hand on my shoulder and gave me a squeeze before letting go and following the guys out into the corridor and around the bend that would take us on stage.

I let the guys walk ahead of me and start setting up for the sound check while I lingered in the shadows and watched the three women occupying the front row. They all turned to take in the guys, Gina's gaze on Aric like he was a magnet tuned to her specific frequency, while the teal-haired friend she'd brought along took in a broader view, her expressions clearly stating this was the first time she'd gotten the chance to see a band set up for a gig.

But it was the third woman, the fucking blonde beauty wrapped in a blood-red top and matching short skirt, that interested me—the one I couldn't tear my gaze from once it had settled on her form.

She watched Pascal as he claimed his spot right in front of her with such blazing adoration that something powerful stirred within me, like a band of

white-hot iron coiling through my guts.

When he grinned back at her and fucking palpable energy passed between them, I knew what that branding sensation in me was.

Jealousy.

CHAPTER TWENTY-SIX

SERENA

My breath came out in embarrassing rasps as I leaned against the wall of the now-empty corridor. Fuck, why did the asshole vampire have to impact me so much?

If I hadn't known better, I would have thought he had incubus wiles of his own and had slipped the allurements into my blood to make me crave him the way I did. But nope, fucking nope, it was just my messed-up ass wanting the dickhead even when I had every damn reason not to.

I let the anger wash away most of the unwanted desire, then straightened myself and walked through the door leading to the main floor. If it hadn't been for Pascal fucking me in that alley, I might have run in the other direction, but I was feeling feisty as hell right now. And also confident in ways I would have once believed could never exist in the setting I was currently in.

The damn ice storm that was Leif wasn't about to take this evening away from me.

Or from Pascal.

I strode across the wide-open floor, a hint of wonder expanding my lungs as the atmosphere enveloped me. The crew was on stage, laying and taping down cables, fixing up the drum set in the back, and just doing a bunch of other stuff I couldn't quite discern from way over here but wanted to. I wanted to capture it all.

Briefly, I registered the two women standing in the front row, smack in the middle, but I was too enthralled by what was unfolding beyond them to give them any more of my mental space than that.

There was...there was a silent kind of magic in witnessing the prep work

under the bright lights that illuminated the entire hall. Back at the Blackened Stone, the crew had been far smaller, the setup faster. Here, it was like being granted a view of the cogs behind the face of a complex clock. Numerous pieces were being moved and shifted to produce the final result the crowd was going to see.

When I'd been at that cursed Living Sunset concert, I'd caught a glimpse of this when the crew had swept across the stage after the opening act in final preparation for the band we'd all gathered there for. But with the anticipation from the crowd saturating the space, my own restlessness in waiting for the show to start, and the background music streaming from the speakers, the whole atmosphere had been different. Maybe it was my distorted memories, but it had seemed like the crew felt it too, that it had seeped into their movements, making them faster, more rushed.

I genuinely wondered what it would be like today.

After a couple more minutes of simply adjusting to the freeing but also kind of terrifying sensations coursing through me, the movement on the stage had slowed, with the crew mostly vanishing off to the sides and clearly waiting for the band to come for the actual sound check.

Which meant it was time to move my ass too.

I shifted my attention to the two women I'd been a bit too preoccupied to pay attention to earlier. They were chatting among themselves, one dressed in a stunning cobalt halter dress that highlighted the rich, dark glow of her skin and really, *really* complimented her curves, while the other wore skintight leather pants, a lacy black crop top, and a lion's mane of teal hair that fell down to the small of her back.

I hesitated just briefly before heading over.

Pascal had said I wouldn't be the only one at the sound check, meaning one of these two had to be Aric Sutter's girlfriend. And I was determined I wouldn't be a socially awkward fuck huddling in my own corner the whole night. Especially when we had, what, five hours to go until the actual show?

Even more so because I wanted to experience it all up close.

Ignoring that slight out-of-place feeling that persisted, I strode to the barrier separating the front row from the stage and greeted the two women.

Their welcoming energy encouraged me to keep going. "I'm Serena."

"Alina," the teal-haired one offered with a small wave.

"Gina." The other smiled.

Ah, so this was Aric's girlfriend.

She barked out a laugh. “Serena. Alina. Gina. We make a mean rhyme.”

“Maybe we should start a band,” Alina quipped, and I couldn’t help but chuckle even as the thought of just how disastrous that would be threatened my mood.

“I don’t recall seeing you at any shows,” Gina said, the words straightforward but holding zero shade, only curiosity. “Are you a new fan?”

Okay, first damn hurdle. I wasn’t about to spill my guts like I did with Pascal, so I opted for the one truth I could share.

“I’m not usually in the music scene.” I shrugged like it was a preference instead of a necessity. “Pascal invited me to come see him play tonight.”

Gina pursed her lips. “I’m going to skin that bastard for not telling me he got himself a girlfriend.”

“Not all of us here are with the band.” Alina hip-bumped her friend.

“Yeah, yeah”—she waved her off—“but we’re talking Pascal. With him, after-parties are for acquaintances. He never bothered to invite anyone to come *before* the show, so I’m guessing Serena here has to be special.”

A teasing glint entered her eyes, and she flashed me a fanged smile, which...kind of baffled me. I would have pegged her for a werewolf, but my radar must have been off.

“Long story,” Gina said softly. She must have seen the confusion on my face. “Bottom line is that neither of us”—she gestured between herself and Alina—“are what you’d call normal.”

I cocked my head to the side and looked at the teal-haired woman.

She winked. “Astrology witch.”

“I—never heard of that before,” I admitted. “What does it mean? Not astrology”—I snorted, earning a laugh from both of them—“I know *that*, but...”

“My magic?” A cute smile tugged on her lips. “There’s a whole bunch of stuff, but the main point is that I’m attuned to celestial energies. I feel all the transits, the influences, even the minor shifts they can cause in a person’s magic. Plus, I see people as walking birth charts.”

When I perked up, she laughed.

“Libra Rising, Leo Sun, Cancer Moon,” she said with a little bow, then cocked her head to the side. “You also have a very interesting Pluto placement...”

She trailed off like she wasn’t convinced she was supposed to be laying my soul out like that.

Honestly, I was interested as fuck, but also not sure if the information would be of the pleasant variety or if it would just point to the darkness I was made of.

To save us both, I whistled in appreciation—which I truly did harbor for her unique skills. “Damn, girl. Reading people has to be easy for you, huh?”

“That’s why I work for the Interspecies Crimes and Relations Agency.”

I tensed, but Alina hadn’t noticed as she added, “Like Gina here. She’s the ass-kicker out in the field while I provide the insights.”

Okay, fuck, why was I standing here with not one but *two* ICRA agents when I had enough sins to keep me locked in a cell for the rest of my life?

But...

Pascal had spoken fondly of Gina, and he was no saint either.

Still, no matter how cool she seemed, how cool they *both* seemed, I made a mental note to tread more carefully. At least I didn’t feel like I was about to commit a massive crime in front of them, thanks to Pascal’s pleasure continuing to hold me in balance.

“Okay, I guess I can join the not-exactly-normal group. I’m a mixed-blooded succubus, so I’m a bit on the wonky side as well. I can give people pleasure, or I can give them nightmares.” I decided to offer up that bit of truth.

Partially because I didn’t know all the things Alina could read from my energy and didn’t want to come across as if I was hiding something, partially because I liked being a member of their unusual club.

Someone who defied normal with the attitudes these two had was a fucking star in my books.

Before we could go any further than that, Gina’s head snapped toward the stage as if she’d been pulled by an invisible force. I followed her gaze past a tall incubus with black hair and piercing blue eyes that flashed with recognition when they landed on me to a good-looking vampire with backswept rockabilly hair and a smoldering expression—all of it just for Gina.

The desire and love that pulsed between the pair somewhat distracted me from the fact that there was a freaking incubus in the band. But just as I started reminding myself that no, not every single one of them was an asshole like the ones I’d met in Paris, Pascal sauntered onto the stage.

He was so fucking handsome I felt it like a punch in the gut.

His gaze locked on mine, and a smile spread on my lips without any

conscious input. Pascal grinned back at me, all gloriously cocky, arrogant, and so fucking hot, then shot me a panty-melting wink.

I was still recovering when a roadie came up to him and handed him a guitar. They exchanged a few words, then Pascal started tinkering with the pedal board and the knobs on his guitar. I couldn't hear any of his sounds yet, though the space had come alive with drumbeats and a few notes that traveled from Aric through the speakers. Then Pascal joined in, his finger flying over the fretboard with mesmerizing ease before he called the roadie back to him.

I braced my forearms on the barrier and just enjoyed watching him interact with the crew.

Every once in a while, he'd cast a look my way that warmed me all the way through. He was present, deep in doing his stuff, but it was as if a cord ran between us, keeping us linked.

At some point, I realized Gina was just as absorbed in watching her guy right in front of her as I was with mine.

Mine.

For some reason, in the constellation we were in, that felt even more amazing to think.

When I glanced away from her, ready to indulge in some more Pascal ogling, my gaze caught on the dark shadow moving across the stage like a blade.

Breathing became a thing of the past as Leif cut it straight for his double bass. Even as he was blatantly ignoring me, packed tightly in his own world in a clear need for control, there was something regal about him. Echoes of the vampire I had seen unleashed on that Sanguine Society hunt.

Leif had an air of power to him that was impossible to hide.

Like the only reason the world hadn't fallen to its knees before him was because he hadn't bothered to give the command.

And fuck, why did it have to make him so magnetic?

Alina tapped me behind Gina's back, her eyes wide.

"Are you...are you with *both* of them?" she asked over the disharmonious clash of instruments as all four guys fine-tuned their sound.

Leif's head snapped in her direction, but I pretended not to notice.

Fucking vampire hearing.

I shook my head like I wasn't assaulted by memories of being with both guys.

"But...I see the threads," Alina whispered.

When I gave her a confused look, Gina swept in with an explanation. “Alina’s magic allows her to see bonds between people.”

That was when the guys went from a clash of discordant sounds to joining together into a song. It washed over us, over whatever else Gina or Alina would have said, but even as I burned to finish the conversation, I couldn’t help but be pulled into the tide of the music.

The filthy riffs coming from Pascal’s and Aric’s guitars drowned the sound of my own thoughts, and when Aric took the mic, I had to admit, the guy knew how to sing—even if his voice didn’t resonate through my entire body quite like Pascal’s had.

Actually, I couldn’t recall any voice ever impacting me like that.

With the way I came alive when Pascal joined in to back Aric, I could have sworn my ears were fucking attuned to the frequency and richness of his tone.

Combined with how he looked as I gazed up at him, so close yet just beyond reach, standing on the stage like a fucking bad boy deity, I was well and truly a goner. Though the entire time, the sleek, cold shadow that was Leif continued to prod at the edges of my awareness.

But I wasn’t about to pine over the asshole, so I consciously steered myself to surrender to Pascal’s fire instead.

His gaze bored into mine as he sang the chorus alongside Aric.

“Baby, don’t lie. Don’t waste your breath.

Don’t pretend I don’t make you shiver.

When I slip a hand between your legs,

You know you’re mine,

Soul, body, and mind.

You know you’re mine.

Now let our stars align.”

When the song came to an end and the guys dove into another round of refinements, the music continued to buzz through me. It wasn’t a threatening sensation, and at the smallest of doubts that maybe, maybe it would become too much, all I needed to do was look at Pascal and I had my anchor.

Though I was almost hesitant to admit it, I was...

I was having fun.

Within minutes, we were graced with an explosive snippet where they all united once more, and I found myself shaking my butt along with Alina and Gina. The rhythm was infectious, impossible to deny, and though I was well

aware there was a deadline on my pleasure, on the whole band as they were right now, I was still grateful to have this moment.

“I don’t get it,” Alina muttered under her breath when the song cut off somewhere after the second chorus and plunged us into a brief soundless gap while the guys talked among themselves and with the crew.

When I leaned across the barrier to see her a bit better, Alina was giving Leif some serious side-eye.

“Yeah, I noticed it too.” Gina peered at me. “You’ve got him worked up like crazy.”

“So worked up that he’s actively ignoring me, you mean?” I pointed out the very fact both women had obviously noticed.

Leif wasn’t outright hostile to me, but he was also making sure to never, and I mean fucking never, even remotely look my way. Even when he had to communicate with the guys in the sound booth behind us, his attention hadn’t so much as grazed me. Like he was blocking out everything but a very narrow line of sight.

Alina let loose a long breath. “The threads running between the three of you are strong enough to make me think...”

“What?”

“Never mind. I’m still kind of new to this whole seeing bonds between people thing. But I could have sworn that what the three of you have is powerful in a way that I’d believe you were already together, and together for good at that, if not for...” She waved a hand in Leif’s general direction.

I chewed on the inside of my cheek. What if she wasn’t wrong about the bonds, just misinterpreting what they meant?

Could she be seeing that I’d marked them both for death?

That it was my power running through them, tying them to me in some way?

But I wasn’t about to go sharing that either. I liked talking with the girls. Announcing that I had death-marked Leif and Pascal by fucking them didn’t seem like something that would bring us closer. It would just place me in a cell.

I wasn’t ashamed of who I was. I wasn’t ashamed of my power any longer. But right now, the darkness didn’t belong.

“Leif wants nothing to do with me,” I said, “so I guess that’s that.”

“But you feel pulled toward him, don’t you?” Alina asked.

I shrugged with feigned indifference. “I’m not sure I want to be. Not only

has he made up his mind, but Leif's kind of an asshole who paid me attention only when it suited him, then cast me aside like trash. Why would I want to be with someone like that?"

There was so much compassion in Alina's eyes that I nearly choked on it when she said, "I don't think you have much of a choice."

CHAPTER TWENTY-SEVEN

SERENA

“No choice?” I stiffened. “What do you mean I don’t have a choice?”
Pascal’s attention sharpened on me as if he sensed something was up, but he was pulled into another conversation a second later, and I was kind of grateful for it.

Alina’s words had landed hard, pressing points deep within me that I’d felt like phantom pains—and had ignored this entire time.

It struck me as imperative to get this answer.

“There are many threads, many bonds, pathways, and ties a person makes through life,” she explained, “but the ones running between you, Leif, and Pascal are more prominent than the rest. They remind me of the cord Gina and Aric share. The cords I...”

She shook her head, then reached past Gina—who was looking at her like this was the first time she was hearing the comment about her own connection too—and placed her hand atop mine.

“Even if you decide to ignore him, even if you move to the other side of the fucking world, the bond you have will remain. Trust me, it’s not something you can break. Your soul will always crave its partner.”

“Wait a minute,” Gina breathed, “you mean that all this time I was soul-linked to Aric? That’s why no matter how many years went by, the attraction never stopped?”

Alina nodded, and I could have sworn Gina’s eyes teared over. She looked at Aric, and something cracked in my damn chest at the love that poured from her.

I swallowed deeply and met Alina’s gaze.

“I have what they have?” I asked in a voice so quiet, so small, I hardly

even recognized it.

“All bonds are different, unique, but essentially...yes.”

As the stage once more became a cacophony of sounds, the three of us moved even closer together like a rosette. Alina’s gaze darted between Pascal and Leif, her eyes glistening with power before they settled on me again.

“You were meant to find each other. You were meant to meet. And your path isn’t over yet. If you fight it...” She bit her lip, her expression leaning toward somber for a brief moment, as if some harsh memory had raked through her mind. “All I’m trying to say is that these bonds exist for a reason. And it’s not to hurt you, no matter how it may seem.”

The heaviness that seeped into her tone made me think it didn’t have so much to do with me but stemmed from something personal.

Had she been dealing with a difficult bond of her own? Or maybe even bonds, as in *plural*?

Whatever it was, that irrational inclination to trust Alina, to confide in her, only deepened.

Not that I had any qualms about being with two men at once, though the idea of me being linked to them on a soul level wasn’t quite what I’d expected.

Bonds were shackles. I’d spent my entire life freeing myself. Being tied to someone, *two* someones, even for the few months it took for the nightmares to bring them down, kick-started the impulse to run in the other fucking direction.

Except I couldn’t.

If anything, actually, it was the exact opposite.

And after all, hadn’t I already done this with Pascal?

Hadn’t I promised to be with him until the end?

Even without a bond in place, that was a commitment I *had* made. One I’d make a thousand times over because I liked his company. I liked spending time with the fiery guitarist.

I glanced up at him, and when his gaze locked on mine, I let my lips curve into a smile. We remained locked like that for seconds that stretched with the intensity of our connection.

The guys were luring me in like magnets, but bigger than the issue of me being pulled toward them was the fact that I couldn’t just snap my fingers and get them both on board since one of them—I slid my attention to the other side of the stage where Leif was bent over his bass with stark devotion

—kept avoiding me like the fucking plague.

“So, what am I supposed to do?” I asked Alina. “Even if I wanted Leif, you’ve seen how he is.”

She cast another look in his direction, then lowered her voice so that I barely heard her over the rapid drumming that had started up—but at least that meant Leif would struggle with hearing her too. “The bond you share goes both ways. The pain of resisting it goes both ways too.”

“What if he’s a glutton for punishment?” There was just something about Leif that made me consider he wasn’t quite as unapologetic about who he truly was as Pascal.

Before I could ponder on it more, though, Gina joined in with a whisper, “I’ve had some experiences in that area. Aric might not have been ignoring me with the drama that Leif is...”

I couldn’t help but snort at her comment.

“...but he had resisted me for a damn long time. So much in fact, that I couldn’t even tell if I’d been imagining his fondness for me or not. If it was just my rock-star crush making me think he liked me when there was nothing actually there.”

Seeing them now, I never would have figured Aric had been anything but head over heels in love with Gina.

“But he came around,” I said almost more to myself than her, though Gina answered me just the same.

“He did.” A wide smile lit up her entire face.

“Okay”—I blew out a breath—“that’s good to know, because I—I do want Leif.”

You would have thought admitting something I’d fought tooth and claw not to would bring discomfort, but instead, for some reason I couldn’t comprehend, I...relaxed.

Maybe it was because the truth was now resonating not just through me in those deep, shadowed parts I hadn’t wanted to acknowledge but existed outside me too, weaving through physical reality and lessening the gnawing sensation that had been eroding me from the inside out the entire time.

I didn’t have to pretend. Didn’t have to convince myself that I hated Leif’s guts and that I was only pissed he was ignoring me because of my pride.

The shit he did hurt—but it hurt *because* of how much I wanted to be with him.

Even if it was just for a couple of months, *I wanted him.*

And as I let my admission ring free among us, I could have sworn the entire atmosphere within our group changed too.

Hm, maybe it hadn't been just my guys I'd been destined to meet.

It wasn't logical or rational, but shit, if it didn't feel like something monumental had shifted. That standing here in bold defiance of my trauma, having the confidence and trust in myself that I could not just survive a concert but enjoy it, feeling as if I belonged in the not-standard club Gina and Alina formed, and learning the things I had...

The trajectory of my life didn't feel quite the same as it used to.

"I think I know what might help," Alina said, her voice lighter as it responded to the new energy we were in.

When I raised my brow, she discreetly motioned at Pascal. "For starters, I think you should definitely ride that after the show."

Gina shot her a curious look.

"What?" Alina tried—and failed—to give off a nonchalant vibe. "Orgasms always bring me clarity when I get stuck."

Gina snorted. "Clarity on riding more dick."

Alina blushed bright pink, which made me think I might not have been all that wrong about her situation.

She also might not have been entirely wrong about mine.

The main difference was that being with Pascal wasn't a means to fuck my frustration over Leif out of my system. I wouldn't taint what we had by using the Fire Fae like that.

But I also *did* desire to have him fuck me within an inch of my life, and it wasn't because I had to sate my succubus either.

I just wanted to give in to how he felt.

"She totally went there right now," Gina deadpanned, and Alina burst into a fit of laughter when I leveled a playfully dry look their way.

"If we keep talking about sex, I'm pretty sure your vamp boy toy over there is going to call the sound check short by all the annoyed lust he's throwing this way," I countered.

Gina's eyes went wide, and she flicked her gaze to Aric, who was watching her with that smoldering expression that promised some fucking fine, ravaging sex. As much as I wanted to tease her further, a part of me was just happy that she had a mate who craved her like that.

Within a few seconds, my words became reality. The vampire blurred off

the stage, snatching Gina by the waist, and blasted away faster than Alina and I could form a laugh. I caught Pascal's attention on me—gentle hints of how satisfied he was with seeing me having a good time.

It shouldn't have warmed my damn heart as much as it did.

“Okay, you know my crapfest now. So what's *your* deal with multiple dicks, huh?” I asked Alina quietly.

She tensed, but when she saw I posed no threat, her whole body deflated.

She leaned against the curved top of the safety barrier. “I found out a couple of months ago that I have three soulmates.”

“Three guys all for yourself? Sounds pretty damn amazing to me.”

Especially since Alina didn't seem like she had the same hang-ups I did around bonding, although something definitely *was* making her hesitate.

She glanced around, but when the music picked up as the drummer really let loose, she said close to my ear, “Mm-hmm, it *would* be amazing if I hadn't already married one of my soulmates years ago, believing he was the one. Making *him* believe he was the only one. Trust me when I say I'd rather have kept things that way over meeting a fox shifter one day in his store and wanting to fuck him right there.”

The tendrils of desire curving around her spoke differently.

She wasn't just lusting after the other guys, no matter how physical this attraction might be.

There was a difference in the texture of her want, speaking of far, far deeper emotions, though without actually touching the currents with my power, which I'd never fucking do, the details were lost to me.

“So your husband isn't on board?” I guessed.

She chewed on her bottom lip. “Well...”

“You totally fucked your hubs and the fox shifter at the same time, didn't you?” I purred.

“Nooo.” She swatted at me, laughing. “Fuck no.”

“But you'd like to,” I said gently.

Because it was true. This part of her energy had been pretty clear to read when I'd mentioned the possibility.

She dropped her shoulders on an exhale, then looked at me with her head cocked to the side. “I would. I can't really deny how...how fucking right it feels. It's like our energies were meant to come together.”

My gaze drifted toward the stage. The kind of right Alina was talking about...

I remembered when Pascal had invited Leif to join us. It had felt like my soul was fucking soaring for that brief second Leif had left his desire unguarded before he'd shut it all down.

We exchanged a solidary look, then both leaned on our forearms braced against the barrier and watched the rest of the sound check in companionable silence.

After a while, Aric deposited a well-fucked Gina beside us, winked, then blurred away.

"Have a good time?" I drawled while Alina just snickered like hell.

"I think your fanged front man is a bit late to fine-tune his sound after he was busy tuning your moans." I tipped my head toward the stage where only the drummer was still talking to some of the crew, Pascal and Leif nowhere in sight. "If the concert is shit, I'm holding you responsible for it."

Gina threw her head back and laughed so hard that tears streaked her cheeks when she finally looked at me again.

"Shit." She wiped at her tears. "I'd say I'm sorry, but, eh, I'm not much of a liar."

Pascal sauntered up to us from the side and wrapped a deliciously masculine arm around my shoulder. I almost purred at the power and possessiveness of his touch.

"I see you already met our Whiskey Jet Preachers veteran." He gestured to Gina.

"Fuck you, Evers. I'm not that old." She scowled. "And fuck you for not telling me your cocky ass convinced a damn brilliant woman to date you."

"She is damn brilliant, isn't she?" He gazed down at me with a hint of fire touching his scent, matching the desire that blazed in his eyes.

I forgot how to fucking breathe as he leaned in and claimed my lips, his tongue meeting mine in a filthy kiss that had me moaning.

"Ugh, get a damn room," Gina's mock-appalled shout filled the air.

Pascal chuckled and turned to her with narrowed eyes. "Says the fan who just got bent over a stack of road cases."

"As if you don't plan to do the same with Serena," she countered without missing a beat.

A wicked, wicked grin played upon his lips.

"I'd already bent her over before we got here." He crooked a finger under my chin, lifting it up. "No, I think I have something else in mind for her right now."

“Shelve those plans for later,” a voice called out from behind. “It’s my time to meet your girl.”

The desire I’d felt sputtered out in a heartbeat.

I clung to Pascal, who watched me with a question in his stunning autumn eyes and a frown weaving between his brows, but the answer he was looking for wasn’t one I could give.

Because when I looked at the smiling incubus who’d joined our group, all I saw was the heavy night pressing down on Paris’s foggy streets and my feet pounding against the pavement as I ran with only one thought in mind.

Save my fucking life.

CHAPTER TWENTY-EIGHT

SERENA

Not the same, not the same, not the same, I chanted, but even as I wanted to believe the words, there was a chance *same* was precisely what I would get.

The hatred of my kind for what I represented hissed through me with a vengeance I hadn't felt since I'd left France behind.

I'd thought I could do this.

Thought I could get through the evening even when I'd seen there would be an incubus on stage. But now...

"This was a mistake," I whispered and tried to wiggle out of Pascal's arms.

It was Alina who stopped me.

"No," she said quietly, but her voice carried so much power it pinned me to the spot. "You were meant to be here."

Logic would dictate to ignore her words and get the hell out, but the same part of me who knew she'd been telling the truth about the bonds trusted her in this as well.

So instead of doing the rational thing, I settled in Pascal's embrace.

Ewart looked between Alina, Pascal, and me in confusion, then his expression smoothed over. He raised his arms in a placating gesture to show he wasn't a threat.

"Oh fuck, I'm not one of those jerks who shits on anyone who's less than *pureblooded*," he spat the insult I'd heard plenty of times with so much hatred that there was no mistaking he was deeply disgusted by the eugenic beliefs that ran among the older—and some more prominent, newer—incubi.

While that wasn't what had set me off, those precise assholes *had* been

the ones out for my blood after news of the concert incident had spread like wildfire through our community.

I believed Ewart didn't care about my mixed heritage he must have picked up on.

But I was also convinced he wouldn't be as open and welcoming if he knew the truth.

"I'm Ewart Renz," he offered me his hand.

Tentatively, I reached out and shook it. "Serena Vernier."

"Ah, with that surname, I can understand why you would be hesitant around my kind."

Not everyone I'd met in the central succubi and incubi community in Paris had been bad, and I always detested generalizations, but...

The faction who thought of themselves as elite had definitely left an impression.

If they had only hunted me for the deaths I'd caused, I would have understood. Condemning all those people might have been an accident on my part, but I *had* committed the crime. Whether willingly or not didn't matter when there were thousands of lives I'd snuffed out. Still, the official punishment for it had been to banish me from Paris.

The elite, though...

They weren't satisfied with that. So they turned driving me out of town into a hunt with the intention of killing me. Because to them, I wasn't just lesser.

I was an abomination.

Locking those memories down, I said to Ewart, "I was born in Austria, actually, but I did live in France since I was adopted into the community there when I was still a kid. I didn't bother to change my surname when I moved away."

With where my life had led me after, a surname change had been the last thing on my mind. Not that anyone would have dared to come after me with how protected I was, though it seemed the elite didn't really care if I lived or died as long as I didn't bother them with the *taint of my presence*.

"You're right, though. Past experiences have made me more...vigilant," I summed up.

I could feel Pascal's interest in the information he hadn't been aware of, but he didn't start a whole discussion around it. Actually, he acted as if none of this was news to him. I snuggled even closer under his arm in silent

thanks.

“So, we’re good?” Ewart asked.

Now that my brain could separate the past from the present, I found it far easier to say, “Yeah, we’re good.”

For this night, we were good.

The rest...

The rest didn’t matter right now, and it wasn’t as if I’d ever show my face to another Whiskey Jet Preachers concert again.

Meant to be here.

I used Alina’s words like a mantra until they coated a bitter taste the thought of the future left me with and I was able to shelve it at least somewhat out of sight.

Pascal pressed a kiss to my temple, hugging me tightly.

“Come on then, guys, we’re all good, some freshly fucked”—he arched a brow at Gina—“some of us cock-blocked”—this time, Ewart was the recipient of an ultra-dry look—“and we all have a few hours to kill. I vote for beers.”



Everyone had been on board with Pascal’s plan. Alina, Gina, and I spent the whole time until the venue doors opened chilling with the guys backstage, though Leif had been noticeably absent.

Whenever he did walk into the lounge area stocked with food, drinks, and blood, he made sure to stay as far away from me as possible.

It hadn’t escaped my notice that Aric was giving Leif the side-eye, but he’d also left the brooding vamp to his own devices. Honestly, it was kind of disorienting to see him in such a different setting. In a different light. Much like during sound check, those edges of the monster I’d met in the woods, the one who’d confronted Pascal and me at the Blackened Stone, shone through, but there was also a weight he seemed to carry that...took me a bit by surprise.

The Leif I knew was glacial yet volatile. Wrought of power so sharp it would cut down anyone who wasn’t its equal.

This version, though?

He almost seemed...defeated.

I didn't know if that was because I'd death-marked him or if he'd been like this long before our paths crossed, because the feeling I got from that heaviness...

It made me think it had been around for a while.

What most definitely *was* my fault was the palpable rift between Leif and Pascal. At the very least, Aric and Ewart knew I was the cause—of that, I was positive—but neither made me take the heat for it.

Even if I would have deserved it.

Whenever my thoughts dipped in that direction, though, Pascal was there, bringing me back into the light with his fire. His affection for me was written in every smile, every gaze, every kiss. And shit, if he didn't look like he was having the time of his fucking life.

No matter the crap that was rolling through me, I had come here tonight because of him and also *for* him. It would serve no one if I gave into the temptation of brooding and transformed into Leif number two.

A few minutes before security started letting the crowd in, we said our goodbyes to the guys—mine laced with an extra-long kiss from Pascal that left me breathless—and went to claim our spot in the front row. It wasn't long until the space was brimming with voices, excitement, and a whole bunch of girls who were holding on to the security fence with victorious, gleeful smiles while others packed up close behind us.

"I feel kind of bad," I muttered to Gina, who was standing to my right.

We'd positioned ourselves strategically so that we'd both have a good view of our respective guy, with Alina taking up the space on Gina's other side.

"Why would you feel bad?" Gina frowned.

More of the crowd poured in, but the reason they put me on edge was one I wouldn't have even considered a potential issue.

"All these people have been waiting out there for hours." While I steered clear of live music, I wasn't stupid. I knew how long people queued to get the best spots. "And here I am, standing in the front row, and I don't even know the songs."

Gina scanned the numerous lines of people that now extended nearly to the middle, then offered me a smile.

"When I first got together with Aric—officially, I mean—and had already been to a few of his shows as his girlfriend, a similar feeling had wormed its way in. I mean, I was a longtime fan, as Pascal had so kindly pointed out,"

she added with a wink, “but I also wondered if it was wrong of me to be in the front row, taking away that experience from someone else, when the lead singer was who I went home with every night. How was that fair, right? That I had it all? It felt like I should have been satisfied with dating Aric and, you know, leave the concerts and this experience”—she gestured to where we were positioned, to the stage that was so beautifully close—“to the fans who *weren't*. That they deserved to at least be close to him in the one way fans can be instead of me hogging the space when I already had Aric in so many other ways.

“But then I remembered something he’d once said to me. *We can choose our own reality, the rules we play by*. So I said fuck it. This”—she tapped the safety barrier, a fierce expression taking over her face—“is the reality I choose. These are the rules. Why should it be wrong to watch the love of my fucking life, who just so happens to be my favorite rock star, from the front row? This is what I want. It’s what makes me feel alive. And it works for Aric too.

“So let me tell you... There’s nothing, absolutely *nothing*, wrong with adoring your guy from the front row, no matter what other people might think. Just because Aric and I are together, it doesn’t mean I have to step aside. If anything, it feels like I belong here even more *because* we are. Because I want to be here not just for me but for him too. And Aric...well, he really fucking loves stepping on that stage and seeing me gazing up at him.”

“At least you know the songs, though,” I drawled, but there was a smile playing on my lips.

“Like I said, forget about all that crap. That’s just a bunch of gatekeeping, if you ask me. The only people who matter here are you and Pascal. And I seriously doubt he’s interested in your knowledge of lyrics.” She shot me a wolfish grin. “I’ve seen you two. I’ve seen him. Just like with Aric and me, Pascal *wants* you standing down here and looking up at him like he’s a god. So you know what? That’s precisely what we’re going to do.”

There was really no arguing with the points Gina made. So I dropped all my hang-ups and decided, once and for all, that I was going to fucking enjoy this night to the max.

The opening act was a blues musician—apparently, one Gina loved listening to, and Aric had kept a damn good secret from her. We hadn’t seen him at sound check or anywhere in the back, so Aric must have done a hell of a lot of maneuvering to surprise his girl. But even I could tell the effort was

worth it.

The moment the guy stepped on stage, Gina was caught somewhere between screaming and cursing out Aric while both Alina and I laughed.

The dude was good too. I loved the kind of distorted sound of his three- and four-string guitars and the warm but gravely voice he sang with.

“He’s legit the best contemporary delta blues musician,” Gina filled me in during one of the gaps between songs, her voice full of wonder.

It was easy to take her word for it.

There was a smooth, somber darkness to the music that left me hypnotized.

When the guy wrapped up the set, I was actually shocked to find that forty minutes had gone by, the time distorted by the pulsing bass lines and soulful melodies.

Old school rockabilly filled the air once the applause died down, and the crew cruised across the stage to set it up for the Whiskey Jet Preachers. The excitement buzzing through the crowd heightened—as did mine.

My heart raced at the thought of how soon I’d see Pascal, and I felt kind of ridiculous. After all, not even two hours had passed since I’d last seen him. But one glimpse at Gina told me I wasn’t the only one fucking drooling over the prospect of seeing her guy on stage.

Oh yeah, for tonight—and after Gina’s pep talk—I’d decided Pascal wouldn’t be anything less than my guy.

To pass the time, and probably to save both Gina and me from our rock-star-crushing selves when the minutes started to drag, Alina pulled out her phone and roped us into a group selfie session. We did a range of shots from drop-dead gorgeous bitches to goofy assholes, and I exchanged phone numbers with Alina so that she could text me the pics later. Gina wanted in too, so by the time we settled in rapt, silent anticipation in those final minutes, my phone not only had one new contact in it but two.

Hell, it might have been wiser to keep my distance, but again, that was a problem for another time.

I’d decided to be all in, and this was part of the deal.

When the lights went out and the guys walked on stage, I screamed right alongside Gina.

Even in the dark, I could see Pascal’s signature smirk aimed in my direction. I screamed even louder.

Pascal grinned, then the whole venue exploded in a combination of light

and sound.

The opening song rolled out like a tidal wave, the riffs almost punishing with their relentless drive and seeping into what felt like every pumping heart gathered within these walls. I could feel the energy coursing through the crowd, and I found that I was part of that too.

Not as a succubus, no. Not as someone who fed on energy or pushed hers into other's bodies and heightened what they felt.

I simply...was.

One more soul in the ocean of many that the music united.

The entire time, my gaze was glued to the fiery guitarist in front of me—who flirted openly with zero shame and eye-fucked the hell out of me.

Okay, I might have eye-fucked the hell out of him too. But shit, the way he was up there, cocky, arrogant, but also so fucking bright, his delicious chaotic energy blazing like a beacon...

I knew I was in trouble.

CHAPTER TWENTY-NINE

SERENA

Pascal came all the way to the edge of the stage and braced one foot against the monitor. Dragging his teeth along his bottom lip, he looked straight at me, then let his fingers fly through a killer solo.

Oh yeah, I was most definitely in trouble.

Not the kind that would murder everyone in sight, but definitely one that would end up breaking my heart.

Because this...

This was divine.

As one song rolled into another, as I caught precious glimpses of all of the guys in their element and breathed the damn magnetic connection I shared with Pascal, it was a high unlike any I'd ever felt.

Like I'd told Gina before, I didn't know any of the songs—mainly because I hadn't dared to look up the band beforehand—but I also found that I didn't need the familiarity to have fun.

The riffs moved through my body, consuming and enriching me at once.

And I had Pascal.

I had someone who lit up with pure fire whenever his gaze landed on mine.

Someone who fucking shone through the connection that we shared.

Never, not once in my life, had anyone responded to me like this. It was addictive, freeing, like the whole world cracked open, no longer constraining me but letting me soar.

There was no hunger in the pit of my stomach. No lack deep within.

I didn't keep myself on a leash as the magnitude of the experience saturated my every atom, but I also didn't lose control.

With the music, the palpable draw extending between Pascal and me, and even Leif's presence as he leaned over his double bass, delivering a fucking breathtaking sight of a musician fully immersed in his art, I found that I was oddly...complete.

My body moved to the riffs of its own accord, and I even found myself singing some of the choruses I'd picked up along the way.

There was such magic in the harmony between the guys that, at some point, my phone was in my hand just to capture a few of the moments.

I didn't think about whether I could ever look at those shots without breaking apart. Not now, not here.

Because with every song, I felt lighter. More liberated. More...myself.

Like I was part of a vast universe with endless paths where everything was possible.

The sensation remained within me even as the guys finished the last song of the set and bowed to the audience. We all clapped and cheered long after they walked off the stage and the lights had come on again.

Right as the crowd began to settle, a security guard came up to Gina, Alina, and me and ushered us to the side of the floor where they let us through the security barrier. I spotted a few other people lingering by the door leading backstage, but before we could move to join them, a warm arm that smelled deliciously of sweat and fire formed a steel band over my collarbones.

Pascal pressed me against his hot, sweaty body and licked a carnal path up the side of my neck.

"Fuck the after-party, Blondie," he muttered into my ear. "I need you. Now."

Something I'd figured the moment his hardness pressed against my back, though I wasn't about to lie—hearing him say the words just turned me on more.

He dragged me away from a snickering Gina and Alina, and I hardly registered where we were headed when we cut across the side of the stage and into a shadowed nook somewhere beyond.

Pascal shoved me against the wall with desire blazing in his eyes, then pushed a hand beneath my crop top and cupped my breast, grazing the sensitive nipple with his palm.

Going braless certainly had more than a few perks, and every time I was with Pascal just solidified the plan to never, fucking ever wear a bra again.

“Fuck, these tits are driving me insane,” he groaned, and I moaned right along with him. “I played the entire set with a fucking hard-on, seeing you down there all hot for me.”

That damned skilled hand I’d admired working its magic on the guitar for two hours was now bestowing its skills on me, and holy fucking shit, was it getting me off.

“And you were hot for me, weren’t you?” He rubbed his thumb over my nipple, then slid over to the other. “Do you have any idea how maddening it was, seeing these beauties hard?”

After another second of playing with my nipple that damn near made me orgasm, he switched to paying attention to my entire breast. The warmth of his palm seeped into my flesh as he cupped it with just the perfect amount of possessive strength.

“Do you have any idea how distracting it was to have these perfect tits bounce right there before me?”

I was way beyond words. Way, way beyond fucking words, so I just whimpered.

“I wanted to drag you up on the stage, bend you over, and fuck you right there.”

Our mouths met in a hungry kiss wrought with teeth and tongue and so much craving, my already wet panties were soaked, and the pressure that had been building low in my core was ready to catapult me into an orgasm.

Pascal pushed me harder against the wall, his body driving into me even as he continued to knead my breast, his other hand firmly gripping the curve of my hip.

I...

I shattered.

I came under the force of his touch, his kiss, creaming my panties and writhing as I struggled to keep myself up.

“Get on your knees, beautiful,” Pascal murmured.

He pulled away from me, licking his lips as he watched me obey his command. Not that I could have done anything else with how shaky my legs still were.

When he had me on my knees before him, his eyes glistened darkly. “Take off the top.”

I grabbed the hem and pulled it over my head, letting my breasts free.

Pascal shifted slightly to the side as he observed me, allowing more light

to pour onto my body, and hummed in appreciation.

“Stunning.” He dragged his thumb across his lower lip, his gaze slowly, so fucking slowly, dipping down to the pronounced rise and fall of my gently illuminated breasts. “Absolutely stunning.”

Excitement blazed through my veins at being exposed in the shadows of our alcove while so much life existed in the light just beyond Pascal’s back. Oh yeah, this was most definitely a theme for me, but I didn’t give a fuck about confirming I clearly had a serious public sex kink going on with Pascal. Not when it felt this damn good.

He took his sweet time doing nothing but enjoying the sight of me—my hair tumbling over my bare shoulders and snaking down the side of my breasts, my skirt riding high up my thighs. Hell, I even knew I was gazing up at him like he was my fucking master, but you know what? Right now, he was.

There was nothing I wouldn’t do. No command I wouldn’t follow.

I wanted to be his to rule over, his instrument for pleasure. His girl in any and all ways.

A dark smile took over his face as if he’d somehow read precisely what was running through my head. When he stepped forward, I shivered in anticipation.

Still looking every inch the cocky rock star, Pascal undid the zipper of his jeans, shoved down his boxers with a crassness so fucking perfect I moaned, then took his gloriously hard cock in his hand.

I licked my lips at the sight of his dick just in front of my face, but when I leaned forward, eager for the feel of him in my mouth, Pascal clicked his tongue.

“I put on a show for you, beautiful,” he purred darkly, “now you’re going to return the favor.”

The ironclad command had my whole body tightening.

I spread my knees and raised the front of my skirt, flashing him just a glimpse of pussy.

“Just like that, yeah.” He stroked himself. “Show me how fucking wet watching me on stage made you.”

I was mesmerized by his movement, but thankfully reaching between my thighs was such a natural response it required zero conscious thought because I sure as fuck wasn’t convinced I was even capable of it.

The man I had panted over from the front row was now fisting his

handsome cock, his blond curls tumbling over his forehead, lips parted somewhere between a cocky smirk and overpowering arousal.

I was so fucking wet I worked myself harder than ever to get the rough friction my body so desperately craved. I rode my hand, my breasts bouncing with the movement.

I didn't care how fucking needy I looked.

If anything, Pascal seemed to love seeing me this deeply undone.

He groaned. "I want to come all over those fucking tits."

"Please," I moaned loudly.

Too loudly.

A shadow blocked out the rectangle of light spilling into our hidden corner.

I glanced past Pascal, my fingers halting on my clit, when I recognized the tall, silently imposing silhouette that could belong to only one man.

CHAPTER THIRTY

SERENA

Pascal cast a look over his shoulder, smirking at Leif without pausing the rhythmical strokes down the length of his cock.

“Come join us, brother.” His voice was heavy with the weight of pleasure. “There’s enough room for us both.”

At first, I thought he was referring to the alcove we’d snuck into, but when Pascal’s gaze grazed my breasts, it hit me just what he was talking about.

I looked at Leif almost pleadingly because there was nothing, nothing I wanted more than to be covered in their cum.

Leif’s attention fell upon me like cubes of ice sliding across heated skin.

I braced myself for his rejection. For the insult of being shown his back when he walked away.

Instead, Leif dropped his hand to his zipper.

I forgot what breathing was.

Faintly, my mind registered the decadent satisfaction on Pascal’s face as Leif came to stand beside him, but I was too enraptured by the vampire’s hand in his boxer briefs, the imposing figure he cut now that he was even closer, towering over me. He rubbed along his length, just the tip of his cock visible above the band, and shit, if I wasn’t consumed by the sight.

Drawn by a pull I couldn’t refuse, I looked up into his eyes.

Gods, the intensity nearly floored me, but my body had other things in mind. My knees shifted wider, my fingers playing with the wetness of my pussy.

Leif’s lips parted, the tips of his fangs gleaming white. Despite the physical distance between us, there was no separation. He was devouring me

with his gaze, the sensation of his touch falling upon my body even as he continued to stand side by side with Pascal.

We remained suspended in the moment, teetering on the edge of something profound.

Then Leif shoved down his boxers with a toe-curling groan, freeing himself at last.

I swear I fucking died.

The two most handsome fucking men I'd ever seen, two guys I craved with a hunger beyond anything I'd ever experienced were here, side by side, their handsome fingers running along hard, perfect cocks.

Fuckkk.

The image burned itself into my memory forever.

Leif moved his hand in long, purposeful strokes all the way from the base, along the thick, hard length, his thumb grazing the tip at the end.

On his left, Pascal was rocking his hips in sync with the slow movement, meeting every stroke with a thrust.

And a grunt.

Holy fuck, the *grunts*.

Pascal didn't bother holding back, his rich, melodic voice penetrating me with a vocal manifestation of his pleasure. But even Leif...

Shit, hearing his voice join with Pascal's—not as loud, but no less arresting...

Lightheadedness came over me.

It was far from unpleasant, though. More like a floating, weightless state, supported by the visual, the sounds, the fucking orgasmic pressure swelling within me. I could feel my eyes going heavy with lust, but no matter how much of a wreck I looked, I didn't fucking care.

I had two rock stars fisting their cocks above me with the intention of coming all over my breasts.

This was a dream. It had to be a fucking dream.

I was high on the sight of them, fucking my own hand as they fucked theirs, and I didn't want this trip to ever fucking end.

Thumps, clangs, and voices cushioned us from the outside, where the crew was packing up the gear and dismantling the stage, which just heightened *everything*.

Another hit of pleasure slipped into my bloodstream. I tossed my head back on a moan, then licked my lips and looked from one guy to the other.

There was no way I could ever get enough of them.

They were working their cocks in unison, yet each was so vastly different from the other.

Leif, composed of hard, beautiful lines, staring at me with stark devotion that swept my breath away, while Pascal was the embodiment of his fiery, reckless abandonment, his eyes blazing with carnal fire I felt all the way down to my core.

As I knelt there, my hand between my thighs and drinking in the two guys standing over me, it was as if all the pieces had come together.

Like the three of us had opened some sort of vortex of energies where everything felt right.

The fragrance of sex and sweat permeated the space, the very air brimming with our approaching releases.

As one, the guys stepped closer, and I arched my spine, pushing my breasts out even as I continued to pleasure myself, my fingers stretching my pussy and my palm rubbing against my clit. Harder. Faster.

A reflection of how their strokes built up too as we all mirrored one another, pushing the boundaries of how much our bodies could take. Every single action found its partner, the distance between us binding us together rather than separating, every piece of our experience fueling the others.

We were frantic now, rushing toward our climaxes, all of us a mess of movement, moans, and hungry gazes.

“Leif, Pascal...” I moaned.

“Yes, beautiful. Fuck,” Pascal panted as Leif closed his eyes on a groan.

Hot cum streaked across my breasts.

Pascal’s.

Leif’s.

And as it branded me, I came like a storm.

The orgasm rolled through my flesh in a blaze of hot, unleashed pressure that made my sight go black.

When I returned to reality, breathing hard and my body shaking, I found two rock-star gods staring down at me.

Faint threads of green light wove infinity symbols between each of the men and me, although there was a fainter, almost echo-like connection flowing from between the two guys as well, binding us in a triangle through which our energies flowed with no disruption.

Passion.

Lust.

Craving.

Satisfaction.

That last was the strongest, the flavor heady, pulsing not just through the bonds my succubus magic had established but crafting its own.

Then the threads snapped, and the emerald glow vanished on a gust of wind that stirred the alcove as Leif bolted, plunging Pascal and me into the dark.

CHAPTER THIRTY-ONE

PASCAL

Pain spread through my ribcage.

A burning sensation that crawled upward, closing my throat and infusing me with so much pressure, I struggled to breathe.

The comforter clung to me like binds tight enough to bruise as I pushed myself into a sitting position on the empty bed. I tried to find some relief, give myself the slightest fucking reprieve, but I couldn't even straighten my damn spine.

Hunched, I clawed at my chest, my fingers sliding against hot, sweaty skin.

I was fucking shaking like crazy.

I gasped for oxygen with a yell I was unable to release leeching onto my jaw, my eyes stung as if they were doused with acid.

That burning pressure was ripping me apart.

Gods. Fucking. Damn. It.

On a ravaging heave, I grabbed fistfuls of the comforter, seeking out any sort of thread that could keep me tethered, but no matter how much I fought to focus, no matter how hard I battled to find an anchor, my mind was reeling with broken fragments of the dream that had felt so much more than that.

Real. It had all seemed so real.

But how the fuck could it have been anything other than my imagination?

I'd been too young to remember. Too fucking young when those bastards...

The pressure swam over me and swallowed me whole.

I didn't even know when I'd curled over my knees. When the fucking tears started falling. Or how long I remained there, sobs raking through me

like I had zero control.

I wished I could say that it felt like my body wasn't mine, but shit, I was more connected to it than ever.

And it hurt.

It hurt so fucking much that not even a whisper of the anger I lived with could rise in the ocean I was now drowning in.

All I could do was float on the vicious, violent currents that were tossing me around like a rag doll.

The grief burned through every fucking atom of my body.

My bones ached, my chest cracking open over and over again. Maybe I was thrashing; I couldn't even tell. A faint smokey scent offered threads linking me back to the present, but with the next wave of agony, they just fucking disintegrated—

I wished I could too.

I wished I could just let go, fall apart beyond the point of returning.

How I was even still here when the anguish was so much bigger than I could possibly contain, I couldn't understand. All I knew was that it kept rushing from me, that fucking ocean breaking out and encompassing everything until I felt it with terrifying clarity.

The gaps. The holes.

The fucking alcoves were wrought of voids so deep, I got sucked into them over and over.

Drowning would have been such a fucking mercy, but I kept getting spat out on the other side, only to be pulled into another vortex again.

Phantom assaults of magic blistered across my flesh.

Just like in the dream, I felt parts of me being sewn shut—sealed with layers of unbreakable power.

Fire tamed.

A bond severed.

The loss hit me so hard, I just broke all over.

I never cried a day in my fucking life, and now I was wondering if it wasn't decades of tears pouring out of me. This couldn't be fucking normal.

But I couldn't stop either.

I couldn't resurface from the hurt.

It dragged me deeper and deeper under, the roaring forces deafening—

Then silence.

I curled up on my side on the singed bedsheet, my gaze landing on the

sunlight that coated the bedroom with golden rays. I was wrung out, beaten up, empty.

But even as I knew I'd only found a small island of serenity within the raging ocean, just a sliver of calmness that would disappear when the tides rose again, at least for a moment I felt it, deeper than ever before.

The relief of peace.

CHAPTER THIRTY-TWO

SERENA

The villa had nothing on the gathering. Nothing.

Where the Sanguine Society's headquarters had surprised me with their upscale elegance I had a hard time marrying with a bunch of borderline, blood-driven vampires, there was an eerie but also kind of organized ordinary vibe to the hunt that stunned me even more.

Was organized ordinary even a thing?

Looking at the people who trickled toward the woods before me like they were strolling into a museum while at the same time mindful of maintaining the prescribed distance between them, the terminology sure as hell fit.

For some reason, it also disturbed me on a visceral level.

Maybe because succubi felt so much, yet the reigning sensation here was some sort of odd detachment that didn't really harmonize with the occasion.

Though I didn't doubt that would change the second the hunt kicked off.

I'd already been a part of one, after all. Even preoccupied as I'd been back then, I'd heard the screams, the moans. The fear and the pleasure.

And that was precisely what was fucking me up in the head. The contrast was too stark, the people too in control in light of what they came here to do.

Then again, wasn't I exactly like them?

Was there really any difference between the other prey and me, or were we all playing by the rules of the Sanguine Society to get what we wanted?

I could keep telling myself that I was different, but the bottom line was that I was still here for a reason. Just because my goal carried a personal meaning didn't mean theirs had none. They couldn't see any more inside my head than I could in theirs.

My feet carrying me forward with measured steps, I thought of how close

I was, of how this night might turn out...

Goosebumps prickled my skin.

And yet, as I kept going, I didn't rush. Didn't do a thing beyond approach the forest line like I was in a trance. Huh. This wasn't magic at play, but fuck if it didn't feel that way with the sensation of something larger hovering in the atmosphere.

I approached the woods on the marked path—just like everyone else, following the protocol the notice I'd received the previous day dictated.

Oh, did I mention that said notice had arrived through an encrypted channel similar, though not quite the same, to what Giovanni used?

Of course, it made me wonder if this was a factor in why my adoptive brother saw a council member as a threat large enough to be eliminated.

After I offered up a drop of my blood to the witch standing sentry at the beginning of the woods, the magic coating the area ahead dispelled.

A part of me questioned how Leif had been able to bring me here that night. As pissed as I'd been, I would have remembered him stopping to offer blood. Maybe it wasn't the witch that was the gatekeeper, just the figurehead passing the offering to the ward where the true power lay.

But as I took in the sight before me, I realized the rules and protocol that applied to prey might not even be the same the predators abided by.

The divide between the two was clear.

The humans and non-vampire supes stood on one end of a small clearing among the trees, the vampire population of the Society on the other—with the seven-headed council lording over them all from the center, of course.

At first glance, it looked like a logical move to keep the groups separate until the action started. And it was. But though there was nothing visibly different in the treatment or positioning between the hunters and the hunted, on some fucking energetic level, it was obvious that the latter were guests and the former the members this entire thing was catered to.

Even regulars like Nicole—who had, thankfully, gotten here sooner than I had—carried an edge of...

I wouldn't have exactly chosen the word *less*, but they weren't oozing the VIP vibes the vampires were either.

No, the Sanguine Society had been built to assist vampires. To play to *their* needs.

The hunted were simply taking up a role that so happened to bring them pleasure—and gave the Society a nice working system.

Since everyone in the prey group was standing in a neat line, I was relieved when I took my spot about a dozen bodies away from Nicole. Unwillingly, I let my gaze graze the handsome vampire holding court with the other Sanguine Society leaders.

Leon stood just off to the side. Part of them, but also somehow...softer. Less brutal.

Maybe less power-hungry.

A thread of anger coiled through my gut again. Seriously, why the fuck, of all people, did *he* have to land on Giovanni's radar?

If the Sanguine Society was involved in other stuff besides running these hunts, or if Giovanni's hunger for death had something to do with that encrypted system, why the fuck couldn't it be one of the other pricks I was meant to take down? Why Leon?

Nicole's messages burned a hole into my fucking soul.

They'd gone on a date. Just yesterday, she and Leon had their first date, and I had to avoid her calls, resorting to sporadic texts under the pretense that I was busy because speaking with her directly would have been too fucking much.

Actually, I wasn't even lying about the busy part.

I'd allowed myself one day, just one day, to bask in all the Whiskey Jet Preachers concert left me with.

Releasing myself from the paralyzing grip of the past. Rewriting the weight of that experience I'd been dragging with me with an alternate reality. An alternate possibility of existing.

The lightness. The music. The *fun*. The guys.

Shit, the guys.

If that had been the height of my time here on earth, you wouldn't find me complaining.

The night of the WJP gig had given me so much.

And yet it didn't end there.

It was also waking up tangled in the sheets with Pascal and seeing his sleep-tousled hair and morning-soft features. Then him bending me over the table during breakfast. Us sharing a cup of coffee while I was dressed in one of his shirts like the biggest romantic cliché but one that had made me feel so fulfilled I wouldn't have exchanged it for anything in the world.

So I'd given myself that gift.

I embraced one day of thriving in a life that would never truly belong to

me but *was* mine for that brief segment that no one could take away.

Then I'd locked those feelings in a tight box where I could keep them safe and devoted myself to a different slice of reality.

I had a deadline.

I had a fucking deadline, and I couldn't stall indefinitely.

Giovanni expected results, or the bastard would come calling.

My thoughts had tumbled over one another, snarling and snapping in a futile fight. It was either kill the vampire and rip apart the friendship I'd created with Nicole—if I even survived killing a member of the Sanguine Society should they find out I was responsible for the death—or have Giovanni hunt me down with the full wrath of a megalomaniac scorned.

Worse, a megalomaniac who believed I was his. That being under his control, using me for his benefit, was the best for me.

I wouldn't get out of his grasp a second time.

Shit, I fucking wished I could just fuck Leon dead and never give the deed a second thought, but glancing at Nicole, who claimed her position in the live hunt group after the council gave a speech I hadn't even heard a word of, I knew I couldn't stomach it.

Because I couldn't be tapped into my darkness all the damn time.

As good as it had felt to let loose that night with Leif, the following days had revealed there was so much more to me. So much more *for* me.

Even if I'd lose this particular constellation once the nightmares claimed the guys, that part of myself who existed on a far broader range than I could have ever imagined would stay.

Maybe I could bury it for a while, keep it at bay. But there would come a point where the softer side would rise, and it would break me.

It would fucking break me to keep this secret from Nicole.

I'd want her to know what happened. What I'd had to do.

And it would be within her fucking right to pass the information on to the Sanguine Society in retribution for stealing away her fucking love.

So I came here with no answers but a mission.

"Serena Vernier," Orion Althan, aka Mr. Creepy, called out.

My feet carried me to the far side of the open space.

This had always been my plan, my intention behind signing up for the Sanguine Society. But in light of everything that had happened, everything that was still going on, it felt even more like the right path.

Memories of Leif standing over me backstage flashed through my mind.

Him running away after the deed had been inconsequential compared to the magnitude of the moment we'd shared. The energy that had flowed through the three of us.

But it wasn't just the sex.

It was him, on that stage, devoted to his bass with breathtaking beauty. It was the tangible pull that existed between us even when he had been ignoring me. It was Alina's words, the truth I felt all the way down to my soul.

I wouldn't be able to walk away from him.

I didn't want to.

I heard Nicole's sharp intake of breath as I continued walking, leaving her in the other group, but her horror was background noise, drowned out by the intensity of a stare coming from one of the vampires sizing up their prey.

I locked my gaze with Leif's and smirked as I stepped firmly among the people requesting death.

CHAPTER THIRTY-THREE

LEIF

The death group.

She'd walked straight into the center of the death group like my personal temptress. Hunger rose as our gazes remained locked, Serena holding her head high in a challenge she somehow knew I couldn't refuse.

I wanted to.

I fucking wanted to erase her from my life after what she did to me, after Pascal *chose* her brand of torture. If I should be killing her, it should have been as punishment for fucking up my bandmate.

Not for pleasure.

Hers or mine.

But as the final words from the organizers I hardly heard took over the woods, I knew no other asshole would be sinking his fangs into my succubus.

I claimed her without a sound, my feet swallowing the distance until I was standing in front of her, our gazes bound and an unspoken deal struck between us.

Using the cover of the excitement and movement happening around us to mask my words, I said, "If you do this, it's going to kill Pascal."

"I'm killing him anyway. What difference does it make?" she snapped, but I couldn't ignore the bitterness in her tone.

Could she...could she really care for Pascal? But if that were the case, she wouldn't be standing in front of me now, marking herself to die.

There was nothing left to say.

The entire gathering had been called because of my message.

I needed this.

Lie, a voice inside me said.

I needed to hunt Serena, yes. But when I'd joined her and Pascal backstage, when I came on her breasts, seen her shatter before me in the most fucking beautiful orgasm, that all-consuming hunger I'd been fighting to keep at bay lessened.

I craved her differently.

I craved *everything* differently now.

But it still didn't make a difference.

When Orion Althan declared the beginning of the hunt, Serena ran.

I watched her go, my fangs extending as the sight of her fueled my inner predator. She truly was exquisite. Her long legs ate up the terrain, that perfect ass of hers luring my gaze and giving me ideas that almost made me break into a sprint after her.

Not yet, though.

Not just yet.

The trees began obscuring my view of her, and I let them. After the gig, I could find her anywhere. I felt it in my bones as surely as I knew I would taste her life before the night was over.

When all that was visible was only the glint of her long blonde hair under the moonlight, I snapped the leash on my predator.

I cut through the woods, through the sounds of the hunt claiming the landscape. Nothing could dissuade me from my path. I was a fucking bloodhound locked on Serena's scent. On the thump of her heart, beating faster with arousal and just the faintest edge of fear.

The combination was like a drug to me.

I didn't know if the memories wrapped in nightmares and the endless hunger she'd put me through were urging me on or if they all fell aside as I hunted her. Inconsequential either way.

Because from the moment I saw her standing in that front fucking row, from the moment I'd seen her on her knees in front of Pascal, her pussy bared—she was mine.

When she'd come here, standing among the prey, I'd nearly lost it.

I always hunted to the death. Breaking that pattern felt grander than simply switching up my preference. But more so, the mere *thought* of someone else sampling her blood...

I would have murdered them on the spot.

Seeing Serena stride into the death group...

It had been a statement.

It had been an offering.

It had been a prayer I hadn't known I'd had answered.

With a burst of speed, I shot after her deep into the heart of the woods. Most of the others had already succumbed to their hunters, the more persistent ones darting in other directions where the trees were thicker, the landscape offering more places to hide.

But Serena hadn't chosen any of those. She only wanted me to pursue her.

A thick silence coated the space here, highlighting the *tap* of her feet... and the small, almost moan-like gasp of surprise when my fingers enclosed her upper arms.

I turned her around and pressed her to me, my cock so hard with fucking need it was painful. Her magic swelled—somehow, I could feel it rising—but this time, I was ready for her.

This time, I was faster.

My fangs sank into her neck, and along with her blood, I embraced her power.

Instead of it forcing itself into my system, I welcomed it. Accepted it as mine.

With each mouthful of her life that I drank, the hunger I felt for her body increased too.

The next thing I knew, I was tearing away from her neck, leaving it bleeding, and ripping the crotch of her jeans with my bare hands. Her eyes went wide, then darkened in a way only someone who has carried a monster within them as well could.

She liked this, the little queen.

Wanted my worst because it matched hers.

The thought should have dissuaded me, should have been a fucking slap to the face, thinking we were anything alike. But we were. And tonight, we would even out the field even more.

A life for a life.

Taken with violent passion as she had harvested mine.

Grabbing her by the neck with one hand, I forced my fingers inside her pussy. She was so fucking wet for me it was surreal. Serena thrashed in my grip, moaning, but her hips met my hand as I fucked her without mercy.

Her pulse beat wildly against my fingers, the warmth of her blood lubricating the seam of our skin, and I tightened my grip around her throat to

the point where she knew all it would take was a little bit more and I'd plunge her into death.

She came on my hand so hard she soaked me.

I barely managed not to come in my pants—again. But the intention of ruining her as profoundly as she'd ruined me gave my control enough support to get through her orgasm without succumbing to mine.

Even as the power licked at the arousal building within me like it was giving me some sort of metaphysical fucking blow job.

I shuddered, then realigned myself. I released Serena from my grip but didn't offer her a reprieve as she gasped for breath. Roughly, I spun her around so that her back was to me, then forced her to bend over.

She was still breathing heavily when I positioned her just right, kicked her legs apart, then scooped up her wetness and spread it over her ass.

She bucked against me and, fuck, she won this round because I slipped my fingers inside her even when I had other ideas in mind.

On some level, I was too far gone to care.

Let her win.

Let her win every fucking round because the way she was moving against me, the way she belonged to me in this moment, that was where the true power lay.

In her submission.

In my dominance.

In our equality as we surrendered to the roles we wanted most.

When I couldn't take any more, I withdrew my fingers, dropped my jeans, and forced her down until she was on all fours before me.

I gave myself a second to appreciate the sight, then lined up my cock with her ass. She whimpered as I entered her, clawing at the ground. I pushed myself in to the hilt, ramming into her so hard that round ass of her pressed against me, and I almost shot my fucking load.

She was too good.

Felt too fucking good.

Everything inside me was driving me to claim more, but I held back. I wanted to draw it out. I wanted her to plead and beg and fucking break before I came.

But I should have known who I was dealing with.

When I didn't deliver what she wanted, Serena reclaimed the power and took charge. She moved against me, the sway of her body so mesmerizing

that for several moments, all I could do was curse as she slid along the length of my dick.

Somewhere in the background, movement stirred. My radar picked up on the presence of several of the council as they patrolled the wood. I bared my teeth at them, warning them off, then rocked my hips.

They could watch for all I fucking cared, but not even the smallest essence of her power would touch them.

Because *everything* Serena was belonged to *me* now.

My thrusts became harder, relentless. Serena moaned loudly, the sounds jagged at the end as I fucked the breath right out of her. I reached around and fondled her breasts through the thin top that concealed nothing while she snaked a hand between her legs to play with her pussy.

Though *play* was hardly accurate.

She fucked herself as hard as I fucked her, and there was a savage streak to it that sent a shot of lust right down to my dick.

I cursed into the night as Serena's orgasm whipped through her, out of her, and threw me off a cliff so steep it felt like my body cleaved in fucking half.

"You're not done screaming for me yet," I growled into her ear.

I pulled out of her, my cum dripping from her ass, and flipped her around.

Rising to my feet, I grabbed her chin roughly between my fingers to bring her up with me, then tilted her head to give me the access I craved. Serena snarled as I pierced her skin with my fangs again and added another set of marks on her long neck, but her body was caught between war and surrender.

So I drank.

I drank as my cock got hard again.

I drank as she came under the pull of my lips against her skin while I claimed the blood that was rightfully mine.

Our bodies rubbed against each other somewhere between need and a fight. Serena was pushing me away as much as she was bringing me in. Me—I just held her. I held her in the bands of my arms, my mouth firmly against her neck.

She shoved her magic inside me, and I could have sworn the whole fucking woods shone green. But even as my dick twitched and I came all over her stomach, smearing my cum between us, I didn't let go.

Serena fought hard, but as more and more of her blood filled my mouth and flowed down my throat, not even the pleasure she claimed from me had

the power to replenish her strength fast enough.

A few more seconds, a few more mouthfuls, and what she came here to give willingly, I'd claim.

One.

Two.

An anguished sound locked in my throat.

I couldn't.

My lips parted from her neck, fury making me snarl into the night.

I couldn't fucking kill her.

If I was already condemned, I at least wanted *her* to live.

So even as I felt the council's gaze on me, even as anger boiled my flesh, I swept Serena into my arms and ran.

CHAPTER THIRTY-FOUR

LEIF

I clutched Serena's body against my chest. She'd come to at some point, her strength returning right as I paused just for long enough to put my fucking dick in my pants instead of running around like an exposed maniac. But despite the opportunity that had presented itself to her, she'd had the sense not to struggle.

Maybe it would have been better if she had. Then I could have dumped her, ended this fucking mess, and got the fuck away.

Instead, all I did was hold her even closer as I ran at full vamp speed, with only one destination in mind.

My ears were attuned to every sound Berlin housed as I moved through the streets, my body prepared to react at the smallest indication of a threat. What I did wouldn't go unpunished by the Sanguine Society.

I just didn't know what the sanction would be.

Vampires in the death hunt were prone to kill *more* rather than less, and for that, the punishment was death. Not finishing off the victim...

It shouldn't even be a crime, but it was. Because it meant disrespecting the victim's wish.

They didn't want to survive the bite. They didn't want to be left to heal.

Had...had Serena really meant it?

Had she really chosen to die at my fangs?

Not that it mattered much where the council was concerned.

She'd stepped into the death group. She had been obligated to die.

I'd certainly crossed a line there. Not once, but twice now. Although the first time it had happened, no one had officially marked me as part of the hunt since I'd been too late for the lineup, and Serena must have gotten out

before the council could find her there.

She wouldn't have still been breathing otherwise—or been given the chance to swear into the Society.

We'd gotten away with breaking the rules once.

We wouldn't have the same luck again.

The sole thing worse than breaching the death contract and leaving her alive was that I'd stolen her. Snatched her up and fucking ran.

Maybe my infringement could work in her favor, because she'd been unable to fight me at that point, but gods fucking forbid she pleaded for my case.

Shit, she was just crazy enough to do that, though.

Condemn me, then fucking take care of me like I mattered.

But if she went against the council, if she somehow turned their attention onto her instead of me, made herself complicit...

No, I wouldn't let that happen.

With my existence on a deadline, it didn't make much of a difference what the Sanguine Society did to me, but I wouldn't let them hurt Serena.

I put on an extra burst of speed and cut straight into the familiar building behind some guy who'd just walked out, slipping through the doors a moment before they had the chance to close.

I hit the stairs, zooming up the landings so fast I could feel Serena's nails digging into my skin, but even now, she didn't protest.

It was only once my fist was already pounding against the apartment door that I stopped.

On the fifth knock, Pascal swung it open, standing there in nothing but a pair of boxer briefs. His gaze widened for a split second, then he ushered both of us in and took Serena from my arms.

"Is she hurt?" he barked.

Before I could answer, Serena said, "I'm okay."

"Fuck." Pascal pinned me with a hard stare while holding Serena as if she was the most precious thing in the world. "What happened?"

I released a slow breath, wrangling the unwelcome roll of emotions under control. "She needs to rest."

Pascal looked at me like he was going to burn me alive, but when Serena stirred in his hands, that faint scent of fire that had escaped into the air died down. He turned on his heel and walked away while I just fucking stood there, trying to process this fuckfest of an evening.

It was like someone threw me on a fucking roller coaster and blindfolded me so that I couldn't even see the next bend.

One thought remained a constant, though.

I wouldn't allow things to get worse.

The plan had always been to do shit right, to make some sort of fucking amends. The timeframe had shortened drastically, but it wasn't too late yet. I could still do the fucking good I ached for, could still prove I wasn't all gone, all lost to the darkness in me.

When Pascal returned dressed in gray sweats and a black wifebeater, Serena was nowhere in sight. I heaved a sigh of relief.

"What's going on?" he demanded.

I shook my head. "Doesn't matter. Just take care of her and make sure she leaves me the fuck alone. We're done. This"—I waved a hand to encompass the whole situation the three of us were in—"is over."

Pascal crossed his arms across his bare chest, fucking flexing like the biggest dickhead in the world, and looked at me like he had some wisdom or shit that I didn't. "Still haven't gotten off that high horse of yours, Leif?"

"The fuck do you mean?" I bared my fangs, so fucking done with this shit.

"What is it going to take for you to realize that there are no rewards for sticking to a life you dislike when your soul craves something else. All you end up with is a bunch of missed opportunities and regrets."

"Oh, yeah?" I walked up to him and got in his face. Not that the asshole seemed bothered in the least. "What about honor? Integrity? Responsibility? Fucking morals? You're telling me those don't count?"

He snorted. "That's just shit people tell themselves because they're too afraid to go after what they desire. You know what true responsibility is? Owning up to what you want. Fuck, claiming it. Otherwise, you're just one big walking lie."

"Coming from personal experience?"

Pascal leveled a heavy gaze at me. "Wouldn't be telling you this if I weren't."

Shit, fuck, why was I taking this out on him when I knew he had crap of his own he was dealing with. He wouldn't have gotten involved with Serena if it were otherwise.

I'd thought I'd let go of all the anger I felt toward Pascal, thought I could be a fucking friend whether he wanted me to be or not. Because I'd seen him

at the gig, I'd fucking seen him be more alive than I ever had. And for once, all that fire he delivered to the stage hadn't been for show or even an outlet.

I hated how I sounded like some sappy poet, but the Pascal I'd witnessed flirting with Serena in the front row had been *light*.

I hadn't known how burdened he'd been until I saw him *unburdened*.

So, why the hell was I arguing again instead of just letting him be with his girl? Live his own version of life?

If our values didn't align, I didn't have to go on a damn mission to disprove his, but shit, was it hard when there was so much fucking anger packed in the too-small-container my flesh had become.

"Look, I get that you're pissed at Serena." He ran a hand through his curls. "I get that you're pissed for getting a death sentence you didn't expect. But that's already done. If you want her, if you feel as free with her as I do... Then stop resisting. Stop acting like you'll get a badge for doing the 'right thing' by staying away, because we both know that's bullshit. You're just shooting yourself in the foot in the name of something that doesn't exist.

"Who says you can't be with the woman you crave? Who the fuck has the authority to decide it's wrong?"

"No one, Leif, no one. This is your life and yours alone. Go fucking live what's left of it."

"With a killer, you mean?" I snapped. "Condoning what she does?"

"With someone who accepts you for who you are. Someone who sees your true self and wants you. All of you."

I shoved the turbulent emotions deep enough that I didn't blow up in Pascal's face as I said, "If that's your choice, I respect it. But I'm not giving in, Pascal. There's shit you don't know about, shit you couldn't possibly understand. I'm not going to just embrace becoming something I fought my entire life to not be."

I spun on my heel and went for the door.

My hand was already on the handle when Pascal called out after me, "Punishing yourself won't make up for past sins. You can only stop making mistakes in the future."

"Whatever future I have left."

I walked out, slamming the door shut behind me and trying to pretend Pascal's words hadn't cut as deep as they had.

CHAPTER THIRTY-FIVE

PASCAL

I watched Leif storm out, then just stared at the fucking door for a minute longer.

Gods, I craved to beat that fucker until he stopped tormenting himself. Clearly, he'd fucked Serena. Drank from her more than any regular old vampire would.

Just as it was obvious that the whole thing between them had been consensual.

Grunting in frustration at the asshole, I walked across the apartment until I found Serena curled up in an armchair in my home studio, her body swimming in the white sweats I'd given her to change into.

I leaned against the doorframe. "What do you need, beautiful?"

"He saved me, Pascal. Leif could have killed me, *should* have killed me, and he chose to let me live." Her face strained as she said it, but I didn't get the feeling it was just the message that pained her but saying the words themselves.

As if...

"What are you two involved in?"

Pain flashed briefly through her eyes, the corners of her mouth tightening.

She shook her head. "I can't tell you. It shouldn't even be an issue now that Leif has... He broke the rules for me. Again. But this time, people *did* see."

I pursed my lips, then strode over to sit on my trusty old barstool set by the long rack holding my favorite guitars.

"How much trouble are you in?" I asked. "Both of you?"

"I don't know, Pascal. It could be minor. It could be bad."

“Well, fuck.” I raked a hand through my hair.

I’d fight every fucker who tried to hurt Serena. But I’d also get my knuckles bloodied for Leif.

He was a pain in the ass. A stubborn fucker who needed a good shake to set him straight.

But he was also my friend, and that bond between us was unbreakable.

If anything, I felt it even more since Serena came into our lives.

She chewed on her bottom lip. “No matter what...*they*...do, Leif can’t be alone in this.”

“He won’t.” I sighed.

It would be pointless to go after him now. I had a feeling that if he didn’t want to be found, he wouldn’t be. I knew that I wouldn’t, and for all our differences, we were in many ways also the same.

Besides, after the exchange we’d just had, I doubted Leif would be willing to listen to anything else I had to say right now.

I wasn’t about to leave Serena for a futile fucking mission.

Or risk my words not landing the way they were meant to with Leif.

“I’ll find him tomorrow, I promise,” I told her.

After a brief hesitation, she nodded.

I twisted around and grabbed my jumbo acoustic off the stand. “In the mood for some music?”

Serena nodded again.

I quickly tuned the guitar, then let my fingers move over the fretboard in a meaningless lick just to warm them up a bit. After that was done, I let them fall away from the neck, braced my right arm on the curved body of the Gibson, and looked at Serena.

“This came to me yesterday.” I drummed my fingers against the wood like I was fucking nervous or something. “So it’s kind of raw, but I want you to hear it.”

“I’d love to.” She curled her feet under her and offered her full attention, which struck me harder than a crowd of thousands.

I strummed the F# power chord.

*“Take these broken shards of me;
They’re all I have left.
I can cut and make you bleed,*

What would have gone unsaid.”

I prolonged the E5 at the end for another bar before doubling up the strums when they darkened into an E minor for the chorus.

*“I’m drowning in the dark.
I’m drowning in the dark.
But when it’s yours,
But when it’s yours,
It hurts so good.
It hurts so good.”*

After the net of seventh chords, built on a combination of added notes and targeted strings to bring out the somberness the song required, the chorus rounded with another E minor—but unlike at the beginning, the added A# gave the chord a dissonant quality that resonated out into the silence of the apartment and carried my words farther in an almost ghostly echo.

Serena watched me, breathless and so, so still, focused on me as if I was the sole thing in the entire fucking existence.

*“You broke me down and made me whole,
Through a killer’s tenderness.
A hurricane of fucked-up dreams,
I never should have even had.”*

My head dropped down, swaying with that additional bar of E5 that carried me into the chorus, and when the E minor hit, infusing me with its tranquil darkness, I tipped my chin back, chest open, as if somehow by surrendering like this, the music could enter me even more.

*“I’m drowning in the dark.
I’m drowning in the dark.
But when it’s yours,
But when it’s yours,
It hurts so good.
It hurts so good.”*

The vibrations seeped even harder from the guitar’s body into mine as I built up the bridge.

*“The pain you give,
I give in.
It’s setting me free.
I’m unworthy.
Undeserving.
Why don’t you run from me?”*

I hadn’t even realized I’d closed my eyes as I sang, tapping into the end range of my voice, until they snapped open, and my gaze landed on the gorgeous blonde, a tear streaking down her cheek.

I sang one final verse.

*“I’m the fire that destroys.
You’re the blaze in the night.
Twin flames of twisted souls.
Watch me die on your high.
Watch me die on your high.
Watch me die on your high.”*

As the last chord rang out and silence swallowed the apartment, Serena whispered in a small, fragile voice, “I don’t want you to die.”



Wow, what a ride, huh? Thank you so much for reading *Fang Me Hard* and getting to know our troubled trio. If you enjoyed the book, please consider leaving a review or drop a recommendation to your bookish friends!

The story continues in *Burn Me Deep*, the second title in the Saints of Sinners Duet. Make sure to [pre-order your copy](#) to get in on the action as soon as the book releases.

The waiting, though, doesn’t mean you have to leave Berlin and its music scene behind.

If you desire to spend more time with the Whiskey Jet Preachers guys, learn about Aric’s dark past, and see how he and Gina got together, I invite you to get a copy of *Rock This Wolf*.

With this complete paranormal rockstar romance series, you get to enjoy three full-length books (and a prequel novella), filled with scorching hot tension, rockabilly, murder, and a front row seat to the life of a badass werewolf agent who just so happens to be a hardcore fan(g)girl of the vampire she’s tasked to investigate.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

This book. This. Damn. Book.

Looking back, I can hardly comprehend what an unfoldment *Fang Me Hard* brought.

From letting it simmer in me for a long, long time, my heart leading me back to the Whiskey Jet Preachers, the music, the live gigs—even more so after spending the summer feeling live music slip under my skin with one of my favorite bands. To falling head over heels in love with our main three characters and their paths, individual yet so interwoven. To realizing that, unlike I'd initially planned, there was no way this could be a stand-alone because the story just kept opening up to me and demanding I give it more space to bloom instead of placing restrictions upon it.

Then came the hardest part, having my heart broken as my pup passed away just as I was writing the final chapters.

In so many ways, *Fang Me Hard* is a journey through shadow work, and the fourteen years of companionship I had with Leeroy signified precisely that for me.

So I finished writing the novel in tears, sailing on the heavy current of that final goodbye as I strummed and sang Pascal's song that I'd composed months ago with the ending, yet somehow felt it had been meant not just for him, but in that moment, aligned with me too.

Yet, despite the pain, I have so much gratitude.

For the novel. For the process. For the memories.

And, of course, for the people who helped bring this darling into existence.

A massive thank you to my rock-star editor, Michelle Rascon. There is always such excitement present when it's time to send another book over to you, and I couldn't be more grateful to have you on board!

Lloyd T-Taylor, for the spotlight-worthy polish on the final words. Thank you for having my back!

Boris, for hitting the road with me and traveling whatever distance

needed for the shows, for going to sound checks and after-parties with me, and, of course, singing right alongside me from the front rows. I love you!

Leeroy, for being there with me from the very first book I ever wrote, offering me your doggy companionship, and distracting me precisely when I needed a break. As I once said, I loved you with all my heart here; I love you with all my heart in heaven.

Merkaba, my Aries baby, thank you for carrying on the author doggo torch and just being such a damn cutie who never fails to make me laugh. I can't wait to see what more adventures life brings our way!

The guys from The BossHoss, and all the amazing people from the crew and fans that I met over the course of this summer, thank you for adding even more layers to the already profound experience of hopping from concert to concert and just enjoying my ass off as I traveled around Germany.

And, of course, a massive thank you to each and every one of my readers. I feel so much gratitude that you're out there, enjoying the stories I write from my heart and soul.

With love,
Gaja

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Gaja J. Kos Author Image



USA Today Bestselling Author Gaja J. Kos writes steamy urban fantasy and paranormal romance, rich with sizzling tension and soulmates who come in pairs, menage, or reverse harem constellations. Why choose, right?

As a Zodiac enthusiast and shameless summer babe, she thrives on finding magic in everyday life. She loves binge reading high-heat series, seeing her favorite rockstars live in concert, and spending time with her husband and two Chinese Crested dogs.

For more information on Gaja's books, you can download your free guide and reading checklist at gajajkos.com!



ALSO BY GAJA J. KOS

KOLOVRAT UNIVERSE (URBAN FANTASY & PARANORMAL ROMANCE)

PRESENT

BLACK WEREWOLVES SERIES

Slavic Gods Urban Fantasy with Romance

Novels:

The Dark Ones

The 24hourlies

The Shift

The Ascension

Novellas:

Never Forgotten

Chased

Also available as a box set:

Black Werewolves: Books 1–4

NIGHTWRAITH SERIES

Demon Standalone Paranormal Romances

Windstorm

Blackstorm

Nightstorm

Also available as a box set:

Nightwraith: The Complete Series

SUCC

Noir Standalone Succubus Open Relationship Romance

FUTURE

WOLF CALL: ICRA MUNICH

Werewolf Urban Fantasy Suspense with Romance

Shadow Moon
Darkening Moon
Transient Moon
Phantom Moon
Burning Moon

Also available as a box set:

Wolf Call: ICRA Munich (Books 1–3)

Wolf Call: ICRA Munich (Books 4–5)

SHADE ASSASSIN

Demon and Vampire MFM Romance

Shadow World
Shadow Lies
Shadow Heart
Shadow Reign

Also available as a box set:

Shade Assassin (Books 1–2)

Shade Assassin (Books 3–4)

ICRA FILES: BERLIN

Vampire and Werewolf Paranormal Rockstar Romance

Fang Deep in the Blues (prequel)
Rock This Wolf
Down With Vamps
Long Gone Witch

Also available as a box set:

ICRA Files: Berlin Complete Series

STARSEED

A Steamy Zodiac Reverse Harem Paranormal Romance

Star Kissed (prequel)

Star Touched

Star Shunned

SAINTS OF SINNERS

A Dark Paranormal Rockstar MFM Menage

Fang Me Hard

Burn Me Deep

HEAT OF THE NIGHT

A Dark Urban Fantasy Shifter Romance

PARADISE OF SHADOWS AND DEVOTION

A Mermaid Standalone Paranormal Romance

DESTINY RECLAIMED - FREE

Urban Fantasy Standalone Novella



FANTASY ROMANCE

THE UNSEELIE REGIME

A Dark Fae Reverse Harem Fantasy Romance

Lure of the Tides

Dark of the Depths

Curse of the Seas

SHADOWFIRE TRILOGY

YA/NA fantasy romance

Evenfall

Emergence



SCIENCE FICTION

SCAR FORCE: DELTA FACTION

Standalone, slow-burn enemies to lovers romance



FANTASY

THE IRON HEAD TRILOGY

YA epic fantasy

The Fox

The Heart

The Bird

FORGED IN FLAMES

Anti-hero epic fantasy



CONTEMPORARY ROMANCE

SILVER FOX CLUB

Steamy May December standalone novellas

Cotton Candy