

The Demon  
Lords of  
Blackwood

Furious,  
bound,  
and sinfully  
irresistible

# THE AIR

*No evil*

JEWEL  
KILLIAN

THE  
DEMON  
LORDS OF  
*Blackwood*  
BOOK ONE

HEAR  
*No evil*

JEWEL KILLIAN

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Hear No Evil

THE DEMON LORDS OF BLACKWOOD BOOK 2

JEWEL KILLIAN

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## Blurb

Demons don't know how to love  
And since I don't mix summoning and relationships, that's fine with me.

But that doesn't keep any of us from sneaking into each other's bedrooms at night.

And day.

And any time not spent tracking down Em's killer.

It was supposed to be a bluff!

Going to them after they took everything—my apartment, my job—it was a power move.

But now I'm here, living with three dangerous, powerful demons who can't decide if they want to bone me or bury me.

And as more bodies turn up, more secrets, and powers show up too.

They took everything from me but they might just be who'll help me put it all back together.



## Content Warning

Hear No Evil is the second in the Demon Lords of Blackwood Series and it ends on a bit of a cliffhanger. I've done worse, so you'll be OK. This is a why choose romance, meaning our female lead will have multiple love interests at the same time and won't have to choose. It contains dark themes such as murder, violence, and alcohol abuse. It also has graphic depictions of sexual situations which include light bondage, submission, blood, and breath play. If you're still here, welcome aboard.

Strap in and hold on tight.

Stalk me... I'm into it



Readers Group: [Jewel's Book Coven](#)

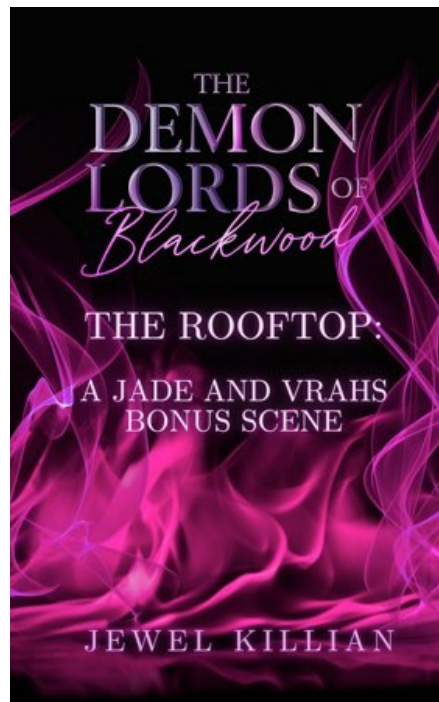
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This bonus scene continues Jade's and Vrahs's first night together. Hold on to your knickers, babe. This one might require toys.

[Get yours here!](#)

*To Will, you vanilla fuck. Broke up with me because I was too kinky. It's not like I wanted to sacrifice you to Lucifer or anything.*

*In this life, there is no better teacher than one's own enemy.*

# Chapter 1

JADE



**W**aking in the arms of a demon lord was not the goddamn plan. I'll admit it's better than waking up on the floor of my dead sister's condo, but not by much.

A thin layer of sweat breaks out along my spine, and I force myself not to stew on all the ways I royally fucked this up. I stay statue-still, uncertain if the demon at my back is still sleeping or just biding his time, waiting for me to wake.

What the hell was I thinking last night?

I wasn't. That's for sure. I let my cooch do the thinking for me.

That and Vrahs's chiseled face.

And abs.

And those arms...

Look, I'm not saying getting fucked six ways from Sunday by the head Demon Lord of Blackwood was a hardship.

But I'm also not saying it was smart.

In fact, it was really, really dumb.

And it's time to face the fucking music.

I take a shallow breath and crack open my eyes.

Pinpricks of sunlight break through the thick veil of a feathered wing. Vrahs must have encircled me as I slept.

Like a tomb.

A black feathered sarcophagus.

His arm presses into my middle, a dead weight pulling me closer, until my back is against his warm bare chest.

His smoky, masculine scent fills my nose, and he stirs, twining his legs between mine.

I remain still, barely breathing, gaze fixed on an arched window through a gap in the feathers, watching what I swear are large snowflakes floating gently to the ground.

My lip curls in disgust. Of course.

Of course it's snowing in May.

I fucked a demon lord, and now not only has hell frozen over, but Blackwood too.

All because I broke my rule. I *don't* mix sex and summoning.

And yet... Here I am in a demon lord's bed.

Vrahs's enormous super-villain-sized bed, which he had me on every single inch of and in every imaginable position.

That thought conjures a goddamn porn video of images to the front of my mind. Every delirious, depraved thing Vrahs and I did.

A soft inhale rushes through me as the flashes continue.

I squelch down the memories with the sheer force of my will before I get lost in the replay. Because the last thing I need is a change of heart and suddenly deciding another go might be worth it is the only possible outcome if I allow the Vrahs and Jade porno keep playing in my head.

To distract myself, I refocus on the snow, squinting to see between the feathers better.

Something is off about it. Something with the inertia of the flakes. The snowflakes aren't falling exactly so much as floating. And the individual flakes are huge, far too big for snow.

Oooh. A shallow sigh hisses out when I realize it is not snowfall, but



petal fall.

Delicate white petals, their scalloped edges carrying them on the breeze, drift downward like some storybook illustration.

How perfectly sweet.

How perfectly *appropriate* that the tree outside Vrahs's window should burst into blossoms just in time for me to see them drifting oh so magically on the wind from his bed of debauchery.

Lucifer's turd. This wasn't supposed to happen!

This was *supposed* to be a goddamn bluff.

I'd meant to march myself and Chonk into Blackwood Basilica, full of bluster and attitude, and get the demon lords to fly straight with the *threat* of living here.

The *threat* of making them please me.

Not *actually* falling into bed with the goddamn leader!

God, what is wrong with me?

Regret grips my chest as that porno starts up again, flashing through my mind like a film reel. We hardly slept. We hadn't needed to. We consumed and worshiped and found respite in each other's skin.

The spots across my neck and thighs where Vrahs had seen fit to sink his teeth into me over and over again ache. And with that reminder, another clip of the movie of last night plays in my mind. This time it's Vrahs portaling me to the rooftop and laying me out beneath the night and her moon.

I can't help the small smile at the new, familiar ache between my thighs.

A shudder creeps up my spine at the memory as I allow it to unfurl in my mind.

And the fucked up thing is, I don't know if it's a good shiver or a bad one.

"I thought your kind were late risers." The sound of Vrahs's rumbled words snatches something low in my belly, tugging it, flipping it, making my body conform to his, pressing into him without say so from the thinking part

of my brain. The demon lord lets out a low groan as my ass meets his hardening cock.

He responds by tightening that banded, steely arm around me and pressing me hard against his solid frame.

Damnit! This is exactly what I didn't want.

It would be so easy to let this happen again and fall into Vrahs's arms, his embrace, his glorious cock, as I had so many times last night.

I squeeze my eyes shut and gather up my resolve, because demon dong ain't gonna find Em's killer.

He shifts behind me, lips against my ear, whispered words and warm breath drawing out another shiver. "Greedy witch. You'd think all night might be enough to sate your—"

I push against the joint of his wing, and the second he moves it out of the way, I hop out of the bed like it's on fire.

And it kinda is. Goddamn demon lord in it, trying to make my brain and will mushy with lust.

"I'm not playing your game anymore, Vrahs," I say, crossing my arms over my chest.

His gaze flashes with laughter, crinkling at the corners as a smile curves his gorgeous full lips. "I wasn't aware I was playing any games."

I shake my head as more flashes of last night enter my mind. "Look, last night—"

"Some of my best work," Vrahs says with half a smile and that same playful gleam in his gaze.

"Oh, shut it. I told you before, I don't mix sex and summoning."

He stares at me for several moments, brows slowly coming together, creasing his forehead deeper and deeper with each passing second.

The laughter in his eyes vanishes, and his smiling lips form a grimace as that familiar icy hardness returns. He rips the covers off his body and stands, hovering over me, glaring down his nose at me. "You didn't seem troubled

by that imperative last night.”

“Ya, well, you fucking dick-matized me,” I bite out.

“That is *not* a word,” he says with a laugh and that detestably arrogant smile. The matching set to his “I know better than you” fire in his gaze.

And that’s the straw that broke this witch’s back.

He doesn’t have the decency to take this seriously. To take *me* seriously.

I rise to my toes and look him square in the eyes. “It certainly fucking is.”

How could I have been so damn stupid?

This demon has told me time and time again that I am beneath him. That I’m a lesser species with inferior magic and an inferior brain.

How could I let myself fall into bed with someone who doesn’t consider me an equal? Who, instead of abiding by their own laws and simply helping me find my sister’s killer, cut off every one of my resources?

He got me kicked out of my apartment, my haven.

My home.

And ruined the reputation I spent years building as the go-to witch for getting unsavory shit done.

He took my whole life away in a matter of days.

Why?

Because he didn’t *like* being summoned by a lowly witch.

Asshole.

I was stupid enough to let my vag do my thinking last night, and I take full responsibility for that. But I won’t be making the same mistake twice.

Vrahs stares down at me, ice-chip eyes tingeing toward fuchsia. His jaw sets, and as I glare at the powerful being I intentionally angered, I still can’t help but notice how well he wears his fury.

“Get out,” he snarls.

“Gladly,” I say, snatching a sheet and storming out.

## Chapter 2

JADE



**T**his place is a goddamn maze!

The moment I think I've found my way, I'm met with another winding hallway. Another choice of doors to go through.

I bang open yet *another* solid wood door, pulling the sheet tighter around me as I walk through. But everything in here looks like everything else before it. Stained glass, arches, and dark wooden beams. I can't even get my bearings from the outside view because all the glass in these windows is stained.

What's worse, is I've gotten myself so turned around, I don't know what wing of the basilica I'm in. A low huff that might have turned into a tiny, indignant growl drags out of me.

I've had some really shitty ideas before, but this has got to be the worst one yet.

Coming here, trying to play chicken with three demon lords.

I was bound to get hurt.

But right now, I don't really care about that inevitability.

I just...

"Gah! I just want to find my goddamn stuff!" I shout it at the ceiling, as if the beams might hear me. Might spring to life and point in the right direction.

Lots of buildings are alive with magic that way.

My old coven house used to make and serve a cup of tea for anyone who truly needed it.

But unfortunately, the lords didn't make Blackwood Basilica with that kind of magic, and the beams stay exactly where they should.

"Mmm, you smell divine, tricky witch." Thorne's throaty, seductive voice purrs behind me. "Like sex and desperation. My two favorite things."

I swing around, bedsheet whipping my ankles like it wants to trip me, and pin him with a vicious stare. "You would know all about desperation, wouldn't you?"

Thorne doesn't react, only smiles and leans closer. "What's got your knickers in a bunch? Seems to me, after the night you had, you should be in fine spirits."

Despite his best efforts at being charming, I continue to glare at him. What do I tell him? That I have a serious case of morning-after-regret? Buyer's remorse? That I never intended to let Vrahs in the way I had.

Obviously, I don't say any of that. "I hate getting lost. This goddamn labyrinth of a building has me all turned around, and I just want to shower and put some clothes on."

The demon lord's gaze sharpens on me. "Where is Vrahs? Why didn't he show you to your accommodations?"

I dunno, probably because I yelled at him and he ordered me out of his room?

"I'm not in charge of his schedule," I say bitterly.

Thorne steps back, eyes widening. "Jade, I'm going to ask you this once, and once only." The change in his tone and demeanor is sudden, weighing on me like a fist around my lungs. I'm tempted to back away or make a snide comment to release the tension Thorne is pumping into the doorway.

I don't. The hardness in his eyes and the thin line of his mouth warns me against taking this lightly.

So I stand there unmoving under the full attention of a demon lord as the

small hairs on the back of my neck rise.

Thorne's gaze bores into me and a vein on his temple pulses. I catch the barest shadow of his fists clenching and unclenching at his sides. "Did Vrahs hurt you? Did he do something you didn't consent to?"

My mouth falls open. I can hardly believe he's asking me that. "What—?"

"Did he hurt you, Jade?" The sentence is little more than a feral growl. He crunches on my name, making it sound more like a rockslide, or the roll of thunder on the horizon.

I'm not ashamed to admit the sound zings through my body like I just licked a light socket.

Thorne's gaze searches mine before dropping to the exposed skin at my neck and shoulders. I scramble to cover the bite-shaped bruises, but he snags my hands and yanks them away.

A possessive growl rattles in Thorne's throat. "Did he mar your flesh like this because he wanted to or because you did?"

I pull my hands free, which of course, makes my bedsheet fall to the ground. "What business is it of yours?" I hiss at him, stepping into his space fully.

His brows pinch together, and Thorne shakes his head. "I don't enjoy seeing my playthings damaged. Unless of course they've asked for it explicitly," he amends.

"I am not your plaything, you arrogant—"

"Oh, but you are, Ms. Greenly." He closes the distance between us, pushing me against the doorframe and leaning down until he is inches from my face. "And rest assured, I take very good care of my toys."

My hands tremble as I glower at him. "Are you going to show me to my goddamn room, or are you just gonna keep asserting your dominance like some 'roided-out gym bro?"

A flicker of laughter flashes in Thorne's gaze. "You should see my gym,

although steroids are strictly a human trapping. I much prefer the baser desires.”

I stare at him for several moments, letting myself sink into the memory of exactly how much I enjoyed him enjoying those baser desires.

He smirks at me. “You wear your lust beautifully,” he murmurs before he backs away slowly and bends to retrieve my bedsheet.

I yank it from his hand and wrap it around far too tightly.

Thorne crooks an elbow at me, and when I only stare at it, he takes my hand and places it on his arm. “Stay here long enough and you’ll get to know the basilica,” he says with an airy tone, as if we hadn’t both just relived that torture session.

Fucking mercurial demons.

I’m gonna get whiplash keeping up with their shifting vibes. If it’s not Ryker and his on-again-off-again moods, then it’s Thorne with his ability to switch gears on a dime.

We walk through the basilica in silence until Thorne stops at a door that looks like all the rest. Solid, dark-stained wood.

“Here you are. You’ll find all your things here, as well as any toiletries you might need.”

I eye him before turning the knob fully, and just as the door latch releases, Thorne stops me with a hand on my shoulder.

“I meant what I said, tricky witch. If Vrahs hurt you, I’d take great pleasure in making sure he learns his lesson.”

Thorne’s gaze seems sincere, and I suck in a quick gasp as his eyes dilate with...

Desire?

Or the desire to harm his fellow lord?

“I’ll, um... I’ll keep that in mind,” I murmur and push the door open, closing it lightly behind me without looking.

I didn’t want to discover which desire lit his face with power.



Chonk gives me a happy chirrup and hops off the made bed, winding himself around my legs. I give him a perfunctory pat. “I know, I know. You’re only happy to see me because I feed you. I get it,” I say as I find his food among the bags of our stuff.

Finding his cat-head bowl is another matter and eventually I give up and make a little pile of kibble in the corner of the room.

I cast a small ward to keep rodents and insects from finding the protein rich food and head to the shower.

The bathroom is the most modern looking thing I’ve seen in the entire basilica. White tile and chrome fixtures gleam like they’ve just had a good scrub.

The shower is huge, with multiple nozzles and countless perfumed shower gels and shampoos.

But the real showpiece is the oversized soaking tub that looks out into the garden below. In fact, I have a direct line of sight to a tree bursting with white blossoms.

The same tree I saw from Vrahs’s room, which means I’m in the same wing.

I file that away as a good start to my mental map of the place and start the water in the shower. I catch sight of myself in the mirror over the sink and gasp at the state of my... well, my everything.

Purple circles under my eyes and bedhead aside, my skin is positively glowing.

Like I had some kind of Hollywood facial at tens of thousands of dollars a pop.

I lean in close, examining my face. The pores on my nose and cheeks are smaller; the crease I keep between my brows is gone, and what’s most shocking is how even and glowy I look.

Lots of witches use glamor magic to correct all those things, but I can’t be bothered. Plus, I’m really shit at those kinds of charms.

“Fuck. I should get dicked down by a demon lord more often,” I murmur. My eyes travel to the swollen bite marks across my neck and shoulders.

They’re ugly and angry-looking, even though Vrahs didn’t break the skin. Same with the marks on my thighs.

In the moment, the sensation of his teeth on me was intoxicating, divine. But now...

Now it mostly just hurts.

It hurts enough I contemplate taking one of the healing potions I have stashed with my stuff.

I glance out to the bedroom, watching Chonk as he noms his crunchies, and decide to hold off on the potion and see how I feel after a center-of-the-sun hot shower.

When I’m feeling more like myself, and fresh as a daisy, I towel dry, wring most of the water out of my hair, and get dressed.

Today’s tee is vintage Aerosmith. My outfit is complete with a pair of slouchy ripped jeans and a black boots.

My phone chimes on the bedside table, and Chonk and I share a look before I retrieve it.

Ryker.

*Care for some breakfast? I’ll swing by your room in 5.*

My nose wrinkles at the presumption, but I am hungry. So when Ryker shows up exactly five minutes later, I don’t argue.

# Chapter 3

JADE



**C** honk strides ahead of us, tail high and curved into a question mark.  
Three demon lords...  
All before I've had coffee.

I don't think I'm gonna survive here.

"I wanted to apologize—"

"Save it," I say.

He gives me a curt nod. "I deserve that."

"Damn right you do."

He shrugs before stopping dead in the middle of the hallway. "I guess you don't want my company or my help to find breakfast, then."

I swirl my tongue in my cheek. *What a goddamn asshole.*

The whole lot of them... a demonic hat trick of asshole-ery.

"Say whatever you're gonna say," I grumble.

Ryker gives me a toothy grin. "That's all I'm asking for."

I purse my lips and motion for him to get the hell on with it.

He was the one who orchestrated all the bullshit. The frogs, the alarms, and getting me kicked out. Vrahs ordered it, but Ryker carried it out, and that ranks him just as high on my shit list.

"I know how you see me, Jade. And I know I have done nothing to deserve your trust, but I'd like to work to earn it."

I turn to study his expression.

The straight Roman nose and all those angles... like a perfect Old World sculpture.

Who knows, maybe he's the one the great sculptors modeled their works after.

I could almost imagine him sitting on a stool in a window-lit studio for Michelangelo...

*Don't get distracted by the pretty face, Jade. He's still a demon, and he still doesn't give a single steamy shit about you.*

I can't read his expression. I honestly have no idea if he's sincere or if this is yet another angle. Or, more likely, if this mood will shift in less than thirty seconds and he'll hate me again.

"It's hard to give you anything that even remotely resembles a chance when I never know what version of you to expect. The nice Ryker, or the Ryker who calls me awful names and tries to make me feel like I'm a lesser being because of my gender and species."

Another curt nod. "In truth, Jade, I don't know which version of me will appear when you're around, either."

I take a breath, squashing the urge to tell him just how much I don't care about his inner turmoil regarding whether I'm worthy of respect.

Instead, I close my eyes and count to three.

*One—do not provoke another demon before you've had your coffee.*

*Two—you just need to play nice until you get what you want.*

*Three—it doesn't fucking matter that you don't play well with others; suck it up and try harder. For Em's sake.*

I conjure up something to say that someone who *isn't* me might actually believe. "Sounds difficult for you. I hope you can resolve those internal struggles."

There. That wasn't so hard.

It felt a little awkward coming out of my mouth, but overall, I'd say I was

pretty convincing.

Ryker cracks a wide grin at me. “Was that as uncomfortable for you to say as it was for me to hear?”

I huff and flip him off.

“Jade, I’m trying to say this isn’t easy for either of us, but I am trying. OK?”

“Whatever. I need coffee,” I grumble and march onward, catching up with Chonk, who seems to think he knows where we’re going. But at this point, I trust the fat orange cat miles over the three demon lords.

And as luck would have it, Chonk does actually know where breakfast is served, and he leads me right to a large pot of the blackest, darkest roast coffee I’ve ever seen. The scent is so strong, my mouth immediately waters. I pluck the biggest mug I can find from the banquet style set-up and pour myself a cup of magic bean water.

The first slurp of the too-hot nectar is sinfully delicious, and I savor the slight burn as it slides down my throat. From the stack, I grab a small plate and pile it high with cut fruit, thin slices of various meats, and a perfectly toasted English muffin.

“I see someone’s appetite is back,” Thorne says from the corner of what I’m calling the breakfast room. He’s got a stupid hot smirk on his face.

The oval room with its bank of curving windows and the rounded banquet table reminds me of my living room. Across from the table are several plush armchairs, settees, and small bistro-style dinette sets.

The whole setup is like a very expensive hotel breakfast room.

Thorne sits in an olive green armchair partially obscured by the freestanding and massive double-sided stone fireplace in the dead center of the room.

I could imagine sweet, cozy winter nights cuddled up in front of that monstrosity with a mug of Irish coffee and a warm blanket.

*And three demon lords.*

Gotta shake my head like a damn Etch A Sketch to dislodge that tempting thought.

Another smirk from Thorne as he folds the newspaper he was reading and sets it aside.

“What are you, seventy? Who even reads a newspaper anymore?” I flop into the chair across from him, and Chonk, to my utter horror, hops into Thorne’s lap. Before my very eyes, the traitorous floof prances about in a circle before falling into a vague loaf shape right on the demon’s legs.

Dickhead.

Thorne’s smirk grows that much wider as he strokes my cat, who is purring like a damn motor boat.

I crunch into my English Muffin. “He clearly lacks taste,” I say, earning me a light chuckle.

“Chonk and I are old friends. Aren’t we, buddy?”

*Mrow.*

My mouth falls open. What a little shit! I thought Chonk and I had an agreement.

“Cats, more than most animals, live in the moment. They’re drawn to people who do too.”

“Oh?” I had a hard time believing Thorne didn’t live in the future, anticipating his next hedonistic binge.

He only nods. “And for your information, the Blackwood Blaze helps me keep my finger on the pulse of the city. I can’t expect to run it if I don’t know what’s going on, can I?”

I scoff at him, nearly breathing in a chunk of melon. “You mean to tell me you don’t already know and approve what goes to print? I find that extremely hard to believe. Gotta keep those donors happy, right?”

Thorne shrugs and picks up the cup of coffee next to him. “Believe what you like, it doesn’t make much difference to me. But the city you grew up in is infinitely different from Blackwood, and that’s by design.”

Before I can say anything about that, Ryker sidles up behind Thorne's chair, a bagel hanging from his lips. "I see you found your way to the solarium," he says around the bagel, eyes flicking briefly to my neck and back up to my eyes.

"Appears so." I sip my coffee and pretend it's not too hot.

"Brother, did you notice how marred Jade's flesh is after a night with our eldest brother?"

That gets my attention *real* quick. "Wait a sec. Are you three actually related?"

I can't fuck three at once if they're all brothers.

Could I?

Well, I probably could, but I don't want to think about that.

Shit, now I'm thinking about banging all three at once, and my cheeks are getting hotter.

It's complicated, OK?

"Would it matter if we are?" Thorne asks, a smile playing on his devilishly handsome face as he scratches at his scruff on his chin.

"I'm just getting to know my enemy," I say smoothly, and chomp into a ripe bit of melon.

Both demon lords keep their gazes on my face, and I squash the urge to let my eyes bounce from one to the next like I'm watching a ping-pong match.

After far too long, Thorne finally answers. "We aren't brothers by blood, only by oath, which to us is the only kind that matters."

I could understand that sentiment. I'd run from most of my family the moment I was old enough and took the only blood relation, Em, I could stand with me. Veruca was as close, if not closer, than any family I'd ever had besides my sister.

But now that I know, if it ever came time to bang all three at once, I wouldn't be doing anything extra weird.



Three at once is weird enough.

Ryker catches my gaze and, in a somber tone, asks, “Did Vrahs hurt you? He has a tendency to get carried away with his conquests.”

If the first part of the question didn’t annoy me, the last part sure as hell did. “First of all, it’s none of your goddamn business what I do in bed unless you happen to be in bed with me.” Before they can get a lewd word in, I barrel on. “And second of all—” I stand, so I’m not looking up at Ryker anymore. “Refer to me as a conquest again, and I’ll—”

“Tsk tsk,” Vrahs scolds from the solarium doorway.

My breath catches in my throat as I lay eyes on him.

How is he *more* attractive than an hour ago? Everything about him seems heightened, more beautiful, more dangerous. I find myself pitching forward slightly, angling my body closer to him.

“Be careful slinging threats, little witch, or we might have to take you up on them.”

And the stupid, ill-fitting nickname is exactly what I needed to get my head on straight.

I scoff at him, but not before noticing the gorgeous charcoal gray suit he’s wearing. God, he must get them made in Italy or something. I’ve never seen fabric drape so elegantly, fit so perfectly.

“You know, in boots I’m nearly six feet tall, right?”

“The diminutive has little to do with height, little witch.” He flashes me that Hollywood smile of his and proceeds onward to the buffet.

“Lord Vrahs!” a woman calls from the hallway.

All the lords stiffen at the sound of her voice, and I’m left wondering how she manages to put the three of them on edge like that.

I’d have to ask her.

“Yes, Vangie?” Vrahs doesn’t turn around but continues pouring hot water into a mug.

“The coroner just called,” she says, and now I’m really paying attention.

“There’s been another murder, and this time, the police and news outlets aren’t backing down.”

“What do you mean, they aren’t backing down?” I ask.

The woman, who only now steps fully into the room, glances at me before her gaze goes right back to Vrahs’s back.

She doesn’t answer me either.

Rude.

“Excuse me, Vangie. I know you heard me.”

She meets my gaze again, this time with an apologetic smile. “I’m sorry. You don’t have clearance.”

It’s all I can do not to snort-laugh at her. “Clearance? What is this? Quantico?”

At that, everyone in the room goes still. Preternaturally still.

“Oh, you’ve got to be kidding me. This is Blackwood, for Lucifer’s sake.”

Vrahs finally turns around, slowly dipping a tea bag in his mug. Vangie, Jade is cleared to know any and all details regarding the murders.”

“Noted,” says the woman I’m guessing is Vrahs’s assistant.

“Finish your meals. We’re addressing this as soon as possible.”

# Chapter 4

VRAHS



**J**ade looks uncomfortable, flanked by two fully human city officials.

It's not obvious to anyone who doesn't know her. She's good at hiding her feelings.

And that's precisely the habit I'd like to rid her of.

Thorne gave her a crash course regarding how much these humans know about our world, and she retained it all without a single error.

Even so, she seems nervous.

“So, what, you were just planning to keep this hidden? Cover it up? Don't you think we should know when some kind of supernatural predator is hunting humans?” the chief of police, Chris Oiler, complains after I bring him up to speed.

I'm readying my politician smile, about to smooth things over, when Jade tenses across the table.

I know what that means. I've been on the receiving end of it enough times to know. She doesn't want to smooth anything over.

She's going for the nuclear option.

It's not the most effective use of our time, but I do like a bit of chaos. Especially where Jade is concerned.

I fold my hands over my middle and sit back, ready for the show.

She leans forward, her gaze sparkling with the anticipation of cutting

Oiler down to size. She stares him down, unblinking, like a hunter watching its prey. “Interesting how you only take it seriously when human lives are in jeopardy. But let’s not forget, his first victim was a witch. My sister, in fact. Which your whole department denied and tried to make me think I was crazy for insisting Em didn’t kill herself.”

I can’t help but smile.

It’s not the approach I would have taken.

But, fuck, she is magnificent. Poised and brutal, she says what she wants, regardless of the consequences, or her victim’s social station.

She’s been doing it since the moment we met.

In that way, Jade reminds me of the demonesses of old.

All that remains are stories of the heroic, iron-willed females who sacrificed everything to make sure our species survived. But as sure as I know the sun will rise and set, I know Jade has a strength born not of this realm.

Now, that’s not to say I would have chosen the aggressive route, but hell, if she doesn’t make doing so look divine.

However, Oiler is no pushover, and he fires right back. “How were we supposed to know? The killer went to great lengths to hide all evidence of foul play.”

I share a fervent glance with my brothers, agreeing to stay silent and watch how this plays out.

Mostly for fun, but also because when not at the receiving end of Jade’s ire, and even sometimes when you are, it’s incredibly impressive.

Infuriating.

But impressive.

And I’m hopeful that if I’m quiet, I might lull her into revealing exactly how to get her back into my bed.

I have no idea why she was so cold this morning, especially after the night we had.

But I'm nothing if not a patient demon. Especially when it comes to getting what I want.

And I very much want Jade.

Any way I can have her.

Jade stares down at the chief, dark pleasure lighting her gaze and effectively cutting his rebuttal down to the roots. "All you had to do was listen. I was telling you something was off. Day in and day out, I shouted at anyone who'd listen. And what did I get for it?"

She yanks up the sleeve of her awful t-shirt, showing my beautiful mark.

It's a skillful bit of magic, if I do say so.

She points to the edge of the portrait where her skin is mottled with gray-purple. "These are bruises in the exact shape of Sergeant Adamson's fingers."

Ryker cocks an eyebrow at me, asking if he should step in.

I shake my head, while Thorne's eyes slowly close as he occupies himself with soaking in all the anger and rage boiling in the atmosphere.

Chief Oiler stares at the bruise, his human eyes unable to see the magic of my mark. "Did anyone see him grab you?" he asks with a huff.

Jade's brows pull together and her cheeks flush.

I bite the inside of my lip to keep from laughing. Oiler has no idea the hell he just unleashed. I almost feel sorry for him.

Not enough to do anything. But almost.

"I should have guessed you'd be *that* kind of cop. The whole damn police department saw him grab me and kick me out of the precinct; so if you're thinking about concocting some kind of coverup, you'll have to get everyone—and I mean every last person in the department—to go along with it. But you know there's always one. Always that one person whose conscience just won't let them keep the truth hidden, and you can bet your last ass hair I'll be right there. Waiting for the perfect moment to make telling the truth look like a real tasty treat to them so they can blow the whistle on your crooked ass. So maybe consider saving your time and don't even bother trying. Because I am

not the fucking one.“

Oiler pushes away from the table, standing so quickly his chair scrapes across the marble floor of my conference room. “I run a clean department, *Ms. Greenly*, and I don’t appreciate you making insinuations otherwise!”

Jade doesn’t move. She isn’t intimidated by an alpha male show of bravado.

She only smiles up at him. It’s a cold, joyless grin that I can’t help but appreciate. “I’m so sorry, Chief Oiler. Was I unclear? I wasn’t insinuating jack shit. I flat out said it.”

“Chris, sit down,” says Jameson Forbes, Blackwood’s elected mayor. At least, according to the human population.

He’s a new mayor, only in office for the last six months. This is only our second meeting with the man, and I have to give him credit where it’s due. It took Oiler a full five years before he could be around just one of us without going green. Even longer before he could stand being in a room with all three of us.

Demonic energy is overwhelming to humans, especially when they’re not used to it.

But Jameson strode into the Basilica on his first official day and jutted out his hand like we were just men and not infinitely powerful, extra dimensional beings.

And that made me more than a little suspicious of the man.

“We’re on the same side of this problem,” Jameson drawls, his suit bunching at the shoulders as he leans closer to both Jade and Oiler. “Throwing stones and assigning blame won’t help.”

Oiler sits down and Jade retreats from the edge of her seat.

“Blackwood is an interesting city,” Jameson continues, once he’s sure no one is ready to throw punches. “With such an insular, closed community, it’s easy for news to get warped, misconstrued even.”

At that, Thorne sits up straighter. “If you’re about to suggest that we lie to

the people of Blackwood, or intentionally misrepresent the facts of these murders in the media..." He is so beside himself at the prospect, he can't finish the sentence.

It takes all my considerable power not to roll my eyes at him.

Thorne's pet project has always been that insipid newspaper. When we first came earth-side, he became fascinated with the oral traditions of storytelling. Over time, those traditions turned to print, and now he considers himself a champion of the printed word.

His bedchamber is a veritable tomb for all kinds of printed works.

"I'm not suggesting we lie outright, but we need to cover ourselves. Spin the events so you and the supes you protect stay hidden from the humans living here, or the enemies you shield them from," Jameson says easily, not at all affected by Thorne's outburst.

"You make a point," Thorne says. "But I hate the idea of sullyng the paper's reputation as a reliable news source."

This time, Ryker drops in. "We have to tread carefully or there will be mass hysteria, brother."

"Maybe there should be. Maybe everyone in Blackwood should get the fuck out until we figure out what's going on."

Jade weighs in. "Why? So the killer can move on to another city and start again? Nope, this shit ends here and now with us." She levels a stern glare at Jameson who, to my utter and complete delight, backs away, pressing his back to the chair.

What is it about Jade Greenly that makes the man, who is unbothered by me and my brethren, bothered?

And does that have something to do with why she could summon us without ripping her psyche apart and burning through all the magic her body houses?

"Feed the media whatever story you like as long as it protects our interests. And you..." She turns to Oiler, who stiffens under her scrutiny.



“Get your goddamn police to work with us instead of cock blocking me at every turn.”

Thorne lets out a small snort of laughter, and I kick him under the table.

Oiler doesn't respond except with a sour expression. He pulls at his collar as I turn and level the full weight of my unmasked demonic gaze on him.

The man's eyes go as wide as the vacuous space between his ears, and he fills the room with the stench of crippling, primordial fear.

Humans are so very good at sensing when they are the lesser species in the room.

“I believe the lady gave you a directive. Decorum dictates you decline or accept it.”

The color drains from his face, and his throat bobs up and down over and over as he tries to make himself speak.

When he's finally able, he shifts his attention to Jade. “I'll make sure they work with you,” he says in a clipped, wavering voice before standing and running out of the room, hand clasped over his mouth.

Ryker lets out a small chuckle. “You almost made him puke right on the conference table.”

Jameson speaks before I have the chance. “He deserved it. He should never have come to this meeting if he couldn't control his emotions. Defensiveness is never appropriate.”

Jade turns her green gaze to me. “I like this one,” she announces, jutting her thumb at the new mayor.

# Chapter 5

JADE



**I** only agree to go to the morgue because no one is as motivated to find Em's killer as I am.

The lords might miss something. The police already have. And I can handle the sight of a corpse better when I know it's coming.

Plus, Jameson agreed to let Ryker portal him there, and I kind of like the idea of not being the only one getting fucked by demon portal magic for once.

Jameson is tall, like the lords. Unlike the three lords, who all give off expensive but deadly vibes, Jameson has a distinctly different vibe. I can't quite put my finger on exactly what, but I'm hoping it means he'll embarrass himself when we reappear in the morgue.

I give the mayor a shit-eating grin as I touch Vrahs's arm, making the connection for the portal.

He nods at me, ginger hair blowing in the wind of the forming rift in space-time.

"Good luck," I say with a smirk, and the mayor's dark eyes bulge.

It's the last I see of him before I'm sucked in as well.

I can hardly wait to see his face on the other side. Fortunately, I won't have to wait long. Portal travel is instantaneous, which is exactly why it's so hard on humans.

Except, something feels very different about this trip.

I should already be there. I shouldn't have so much time to think about Jameson puking on Vrahs's shoes.

I wiggle my fingers, making sure I'm still touching Vrahs, that I haven't lost the connection to his portal magic.

His arm is solid beneath my fingers.

But something is still very wrong.

"What's going on?" I eke out in the weird space between destinations.

Nullspace.

Am I stuck here?

Are we?

I turn, facing Vrahs on my left, his wings spread out through his suit jacket, horns curling around the sides of his head. But he's facing straight ahead, not looking at me. He doesn't even seem to realize I'm here.

"Hey!" I yell, tugging his arm hard.

He turns slowly, eyes seeming to track something in the distance before coming to rest on mine. "You're safe, Jade. You're safe with me."

Eyes locked on mine, I see just how sincere those words are. How much he means them. And for a moment, I believe him.

"What's going on?" I repeat.

"I paused the portal," he says simply, expression neutral.

"What? Why? What?! You can do that?"

The mask of arrogance veils his features once more, and his voice goes hard and cold. "I'm a demonic lord of the highest order, Jade Greenly. There isn't much I *can't* do."

"Fine, whatever. Why did you pause the portal, then?"

"We need to talk about what happened this morning."

My eyes about fall out of my head. "We most certainly do not. We need to get to the morgue and look for clues, not waste time psychoanalyzing our feeeeeelings."

A small smile lifts the corner of his mouth. “I already told you. I paused the portal.”

I scrunch my nose at him. “Yeah, I heard you. And I told you we need to *be* at the morgue.”

Vrahs sighs, about a millimeter away from rolling his eyes at me.

I can tell because the feeling is fucking mutual.

“I paused *time*, Jade. When we arrive, no one will know we were absent. Now, if you don’t mind, please explain what the hell happened this morning.”

I suck in my cheeks, jaw setting in place. “You were there.”

He hovers closer, lifting my chin. “I was. And I thought we’d finally come to an understanding.”

I jerk out of his grip. “Last night was a momentary lapse in judgment. Nothing more. Now, if you please.” I gesture to the fuzzy nullspace border he’d made.

His face goes dark, like he pulled a shadow over his eyes. A snarl twists his mouth just as he twists his arm out of my grasp.

And rips away the connection I had to his portal magic.

In less than a second, I go from being comfortable inside a small pocket of nullspace, to being forcibly ejected and hurtling through space-time.

I land flat on my back in the conference room queasy, and pissed off.

I let out a guttural cry as I do my best to choke back this morning’s breakfast.

“That sonofabitch!!”

I can’t believe he left me here!

My hands shake with equal parts rage and fatigue, and I try to hoist myself off the marble floor.

When I’m upright, and the conference room stops zipping around me like a janky carnival ride, I take a few breaths to think, or rather, talk this shitstorm through.

Morgue is too far to walk. I’d have to drive to get there, but by the time I

do—and get through whatever security measures they have to keep random people from looking at dead bodies—the demon lords will have likely already portaled back.

I could just wait here for them to return with their findings. But I don't trust any of them as far as my dead sister could throw 'em, so...

I chew on my bottom lip, the reality of exactly what I have to do dawning on me slowly.

“Fuck,” I murmur to myself.

I might know what I need to do...

But I'm not even sure I have the ovaries to do this.

I take another big breath and shake my arms and shoulders out.

*You can do this.*

Witches shouldn't use portal magic.

Our systems can't handle the sheer quantity of magic that ripping a hole in the fabric of space-time requires.

Buuuut...

Like the frog infestation Ryker so kindly primed me with, and every demon I've ever dismissed from this plane, I could definitely try.

Although frogs and demons are way fucking different than doing it to myself.

I shake off the self-doubt.

I don't have time to waste worrying about it. It either works or it doesn't.

And...

If it does work, it'll be the ultimate power move. I can hardly wait to see Vrahs's face.

If it doesn't...

Well, I don't really want to think about the possibility of turning myself into a sentient pile of pink, bloody goop.

Instead, I close my eyes and focus.

Like every other time I reach for my magic, I don't really *feel* anything.

It's simply there, doing its job. The same way I never feel myself smelling something.

I just smell it. Using magic isn't an experience, I just use it.

I roll my neck on my shoulders, loosen my stance, and pull together the mental image of an invocation sigil.

Drawing it out would take too long. Plus, I don't have any chalk. And, if I do survive this, power move or not, I don't think Vrahs would take too kindly to me scuffing up his marble floors with summoning sigils.

Once the image is clear in my head, I tweak the elements needed to turn it from invocation to a return portal.

And...

Voila.

A shimmering strand of fractured space-time hovers in the air right in front of me. No wider than a few hairs, an untrained eye might miss it, mistaking it for a trick of the light, or a weird reflection.

If it weren't for the otherworldly breeze whipping the papers across the conference table into a frenzy, *I* might not have seen it.

*Focus. You're only halfway done.*

Conjuring a portal is one thing. Making sure it gets me where I want in one piece is a whole other can of worms.

I just need to tell it where I'm going.

But the thing about that is, I've never actually done it.

With the frogs, I just had to make sure they went back to whoever sent them. Return to sender spells are very low on magical expenditure. Likewise, with sending demons back to their realm after a summoning. I wasn't conjuring a location in the demon realm for them to return to. It was more like sending them backward along a path I'd already opened.

I'd never done this before.

But that never stopped me from doing stupid shit before.

I do what feels natural and put my energy into visualizing the morgue.

Turns out, creating a photorealistic image of a place I'd only been a few times is far more difficult than seeing the sigil I'd drawn a thousand times.

The image refuses to materialize, going fuzzy and grainy, or wiggling and warping until it disappears entirely.

I ball my fists at my sides, scrunch my face in concentration, and imagine the white subway tiles, the industrial three-compartment sink, the bank of people-drawers on the far wall, and the three exam tables in the middle of the room.

I recall the burn of the disinfectant in my nose, the repugnant scent of formalin, and the red meat and penny smell of so much exposed blood and bone.

The chilled, over-circulated air and the white-noise hum of commercial refrigerant compressors switching on and keeping our dearly departed at a balmy 36 degrees.

I make my whole body, every sense, part of the conjuration.

And the image of the morgue clears. It stays still, unmoving in my mind's eye.

And I waste no time stepping into the rift.

I instantly regret it.

Regret isn't a strong enough word.

I'm lamenting every choice I've made that led to this.

Regretting being born because despite a sepia-toned version of the morgue just on the other side of nullspace, nearly within my reach, the portal doesn't want to release me. It rips at my limbs, pulling and wrenching me in all directions like some medieval torture rack while also siphoning the breath in my lungs and crushing my chest as easily as a fist around a soda can.

*It's only for a moment. You can do this. You can do this!*

Except I can't, and it's definitely not just a moment.

I can't move. It's like being caught naked in a sandstorm. I'm blinded, suffocating, and my skin is raw, shredded by the portal...



And my own arrogance.

The moments drag out longer and longer until my lungs burn. My eyes feel like they might burst in my skull.

I can't do this.

I'm not supposed to be here and the goddamn portal knows it.

In front of my watering eyes, the vague, desaturated image of the white-walled morgue disintegrates, blowing away like embers on the wind.

Into the void of nullspace.

I stare out into the nothingness and offer a last thought to my sister.

*Well, Em, I tried my best. I guess I'll see ya on the other side.*

# Chapter 6

THORNE



**W**hen Vrahs arrives without Jade, I have to go to my happy place. But the thought of ripping Vrahs limb from limb still tempts me, even from the serenity of my mental fortress.

It would be just like him to screw up the beginnings of the good thing Jade and I have because he's too pig-headed to back off, or give her what she needs or whatever reason he has for not bringing her along when we all know she wanted to come.

And he said he would.

I stare at him hard enough he feels it and meets my gaze. "Where is she?" I ask between gritted teeth.

She needs to be here.

Needs to see the latest victim for herself.

"Jade wasn't feeling well. She decided to stay at the basilica."

I can't help the low snarl in my throat at his blatant lies.

Jameson notices, and I don't give a single flying buttress that he does. "Is everything alright?" he asks.

"Yes, perfectly fine," Vrahs lies again. "Let's get on with it, shall we?"

The coroner, who I hadn't noticed going pale, runs to the far end of the room and spews into a big metal sink.

"Sheeesh, you'd think the one paid to look at dead bodies could handle a

dead body,” Jameson whispers.

All three of us lock eyes on the man, because we all know it’s not the cadaver that made the lovely coroner lose her cookies.

It’s us.

“Sorry, you guys are coming on kinda strong today,” the coroner says as she rinses out her mouth and dries her face with the rough, brown paper towels she seems to have in abundance.

Why anyone would put cheap paper products anywhere near their skin is beyond me.

Before the coroner can tell us what she’s discovered, Vrahs stumbles forward. He’s inches away from smacking his head on the slab, and if it wasn’t for Jameson catching him by the arm and pulling him upright, he would have.

“Are you OK?” the coroner asks.

Ryker and I share a loaded glance before turning to help Vrahs.

“Jeez, I thought you of all people would have a strong stomach for this kind of thing,” she mumbles, turning to fetch something from the sink area.

“What is it, brother?” I murmur under my breath, because everyone on this side of the table, likely including Jameson, knows it’s not the dead body causing Vrahs’s sudden “fit”.

No. It reeks of a sudden and viciously depleted constitution.

“That cur of a witch is drawing on my life force, my *power*, somehow.” The words wheeze out of him as his skin goes a ghostly shade and sweat beads on his forehead.

“And you absolutely deserve it, don’t you?” I hiss in his ear.

He heaves forward, a groan ripping from him. “I don’t know what she’s doing, but it’s going to rip me and all of nullspace asunder.”

“Mm, you’re being dramatic, brother. Whatever she’s doing to you, you earned it fairly for leaving her behind.”

With a crack and a flash, the tricky witch herself appears behind Vrahs’s

doubled-over body.

“Hiya, boys. Miss me?” she says with a wink, hands on her rounded hips.

Jade pretends not to notice Vrahs bent in half and coughing, and pushes her way through us to get to the slab.

“Oof, looks like a messy one. What have you found so far... Uh, sorry, I didn’t get your name.”

The coroner reaches over the table and takes Jade’s hand. “It’s Amanda Jean Peterman-Cleary, but you can call me AJ.”

I watch the women exchange pleasantries, despite Vrahs’s continued labored breathing.

Jade asked for the coroner’s name first thing. I hadn’t done that, and I’d met the woman several times before.

That likely makes me a bad person in their customs.

But if neglecting to ask for someone’s name makes me bad, I’d hate to think what beating demons to bloody pulp for fun made me.

“Nice to meet you, AJ. I’m Jade.”

“Right, you too. Uh, sorry, should we wait to start until—“

Jade waves the coroner’s concern away. “He’s fine. He’s just being a baby. Please don’t let his fragile disposition keep you from your job.”

At that, I can’t help but let out a small chuckle.

“Alright, what the hell is going on here?” Jameson finally asks.

Ryker is the first with a semi-reasonable answer. And what a shame too, because I was going to make the story as embarrassing as possible for Vrahs. “Jade changed her mind and used the portal Vrahs already created to travel here on her own.” He pauses, giving Jade a cheeky grin. “It’s a very impressive bit of magic. However, without forewarning, Vrahs wasn’t able to properly prepare himself. The effect was unsettling.”

“Yes, we’re lucky Vrahs didn’t soil himself and add a layer of eau d’feces to the other lovely scents in the room,” I say with a smirk.

Vrahs stares at me with a glare that promises pain while Jade gives me a

half smile before turning her scorn to Vrahs.

“Actually, that’s not at all what happened and don’t go trying to cover up your poor behavior.”

Vrahs gets himself together enough to glare back at the witch. “There’s no need to bring our personal problems into—”

Jade cuts him off, something I’ve seen very few people do with much success, myself included. She throws her hands up in the air, letting them slap down on her thighs. “Then you shouldn’t have made our personal problems part of our business relationship.” She yells at him, eyes ablaze with her fury.

So dramatic.

I love it.

“This is *exactly* why I don’t mix sex and summoning.”

Vrahs has the presence of mind to at least look the slightest bit remorseful.

“Now, if it’s alright with all of you, I’d really like to hear what AJ has to say about the latest victim.”

Jade spins around to face the slab once more, leaving Vrahs fuming at her back.

I stare at Jade’s back as the coroner—rather, AJ—starts in on the myriad of wounds on the new victim. I’m not paying attention. How can I when my tricky witch is standing mere feet in front of me, smelling like victory and hubris? Nearly humming with satisfaction.

I take a good long whiff of all those delicious emotions and let them flood my system. My head spins like I’ve had three too many whiskeys, and my vision goes black for a moment as my pupils blow all the way out.

Whatever Vrahs did to fuck up with her, I’ll make sure he fixes it.

Because now that I’ve had the barest taste of Jade’s flesh, her power, her mind...

I refuse to go without.

# Chapter 7

JADE



**A** J, who I wish was here the last time Vrahs left me stranded in some place I didn't want to be, isn't as annoying as I find most normies.

Probably because someone already clued her in on the way things really are around here.

Hopefully, they'd also gotten her up to speed about nullspace and how whoever did this hid most of the victim's injuries there, the same way demons and other supes hide their true appearances.

As the pocket-sized coroner explains about body temp as it relates to decomp, and what the angle of the wounds might mean, I decide that if she can hold her own when we show her what was *really* there, I'll ask her out for friendly drinks at Pip's.

Because if she's badass enough to do this morbid, physically demanding job well while also barely being over five feet tall, then she's someone I need to know better.

I'm sure, given her height, she's faced more than her fair share of being underestimated and talked over by taller, louder men in the room. And when it's not that, it's likely the "nice" ones trying to help but only getting in her way and undermining her.

Em was short.



And before she blew up on social media, she worked a regular office job and came home with stories like that every other day.

Aside from AJ's short stature, she has medium brown hair and a small pixie-like face that makes me think she might have some fae blood in her line somewhere.

I won't hold that against her, though.

"So, that pretty much covers it. She died from apparent blunt force trauma to the head. One clean blow, about the size and shape of a stair tread. Judging from the bruising on her buttocks and the back of her shoulders, I'd say she fell backward, landed on her butt and shoulders, and her head collided with the first step, instantly severing her brain stem. She likely felt no pain."

I nod, glancing at the mangled body, and then back up to AJ. Could she keep her shit together once we show her the truth? When she's confronted with the reality that the woman likely died in a great deal of pain.

For me, seeing the mutilated body under such cold, glaring light made me the smallest bit grateful that Em hadn't suffered the same fate.

Her death had at least been painless.

"You should prepare yourselves," Ryker says to AJ and Jameson as he steps forward.

Not Vrahs.

I expected him to take the lead on this.

Interesting.

"I'm sure we'll be fine," Jameson scoffs.

I hope he's right.

Ryker hovers both hands over the body, and the air in the room shifts.

The skin along the back of my arms breaks out in goosebumps, and I have the strange sensation of being watched.

"Don't be alarmed," Ryker says as he continues making intricate motions over the body. "You're feeling nullspace pouring into this plane. It's

unsettling, but harmless.”

I keep my gaze trained on the body, curious whether it will appear different to even me once it's no longer being shielded.

Ryker steps closer, hunching lower so his hands are barely an inch over the body. He grunts, and his forehead breaks out in a sheen of sweat.

“Thorne, help him,” I order, and to my amazement, the demon lord listens, stepping forward and repeating all Ryker's motions.

“The amount of protections placed to keep us from doing exactly this is far more than what an average magical user could manage on their own.” Ryker grunts through his tight jaw.

“Well, it can't be something two demon lords can't untangle,” I say, only half convinced I didn't just say it to make myself feel better.

“Right?”

Thorne meets my gaze. “You'd be surprised.”

I turn to Vrahs. “Help them.”

He shifts his stare slowly from the body to me, glaring at me with a stony stare I've never seen on him before. It's like he's pulled a sheet of flint over his gaze.

I can read nothing in it.

And I find that extremely unsettling.

“I cannot,” he says simply, without his signature disdainful tone.

“What do you mean, you can't? Help them.”

That glacial stare stays on me, but it conveys no emotions. Where once it was lit with blue flames and frosty winds, now it's nothing but gray rock. I shift my weight from foot to foot, almost wishing for the Vrahs I first summoned back. The furious, indignant, and convinced of his own righteousness, Vrahs.

Because at least with that guy, I knew where I stood.

Not a single muscle in his face moves when he says, “In getting here, you siphoned off enough of my magic that I am unable to help. To do so would

risk my life.”

I—fuck, I didn’t know that was a thing. I only waste a half a second feeling guilty about it. “Well, if you hadn’t left me behind...”

I expect him to swing back and meet my zinger with one of his own.

That’s what we do. It’s our thing.

But he just keeps looking at me with those cold, dead eyes.

I turn back to Ryker and Thorne. Both have sweat pouring down their faces.

“Can I help?”

I ask, but I’m not sure I want to know if I can. If whoever or whatever was so powerful their magic bested two demon lords, I’m not too keen on throwing my hat in the ring with them.

Plus, what can my witch magic do that these demon lords...

Hang on.

“Yeah, I bet I can. Apparently, I’m full to the brim with Vrahs’s power. Just tell me what to do, and I’ll do it.”

Ryker and Thorne shake their heads in near unison. “There’s no way you’re full of our power. We’d be peeling you off the walls if that were the case. Thank you, but I don’t think you can help, itchy witch,”

I march around the table to AJ’s side and hover my hands over the body like they were. “Tell me what to do,” I repeat.

Thorne lets out a huff. “Fine. Follow along with our movements and concentrate on pulling what’s hidden into the light.”

I let out my own huff. “I need something more concrete than that, Thorne. Am I concentrating on pulling her out of nullspace, or lifting the veil of space around her, or...?”

Ryker growls, fuchsia power rising in his eyes. “Damn it, witch, do whatever feels right.”

I nod. I might not feel much in the way of magic—mine or Vrahs’s, apparently, swirling in me—but I sure as shit know how to follow my gut.

So, I take a moment to memorize the motions of their hands and duplicate it once in my mind before trying it with mine.

“Is this right?” I ask, fingers splaying out over the woman’s face.

“Close enough,” Thorne grunts. “Now concentrate.”

My fingers keep working, and I close my eyes, going within. I start the way I always do, picturing what I want to accomplish.

Behind my eyes, I imagine long golden trails of my magic wrapping around this woman’s body in endless coils before tightening like a constrictor, and shattering the magic that holds the truth of her injuries in nullspace.

It’s easy.

The moment the bad mojo shatters, the image behind my eyes slips into gray scale and goes fuzzy at the edges before disappearing entirely.

Huh. That’s new.

Does it mean I’m done?

I crack open an eye and gauge the room. Ryker and Thorne are still frowning with effort, and Jameson doesn’t look the least bit unsettled.

So...

I close my eye again, and go within again, all the while still performing the strange motions with my hands.

But as I refocus internally, a new image greets me.

One that I didn’t conjure into existence. One that I’m not imagining myself.

There are no fuzzy edges on this, no skewed colors.

It’s like I’m looking through my eyelids at the woman on the slab.

But now, the snarl of wards and protections placed around her body, keeping her partially bound in nullspace, are clear. The spells twist around her like thorny branches, interlocking and growing from each other, doubling back and rooting in another so I can’t tell where the goddamn beginning and end is.

“Fuuuck,” I whisper. “I’ve never seen anything like this before.”

“It doesn’t matter.” Vrahs’s flat voice pierces through my concentration, but the image of all those branches stays as clear and steady as ever. “Use what you stole to help my brothers undo it.”

I don’t have the slightest idea how to do that.

“Don’t overthink it,” he continues. “Let it be free to do what needs doing.”

“OK.” That I could do.

I go inward, further than before, sinking deep into my stance, my bones. My power.

I can’t feel the difference between what’s mine and what’s Vrahs’s, so I unleash everything I have, opening myself wide and letting whatever wants to flow out of me and into the spells and wards around the victim.

The demons on the other side of the table let out a sigh as my combined magic syncs with theirs.

I see it first, my golden sparks curling over a great, thick ribbon of shiny fuchsia power. Both flow from me, over the victim, and meet up with two other ribbons of fuchsia.

Thorne’s and Ryker’s magic.

The ribbons steer clear of each other, working at the gnarled mess of magic on their own.

But I have this nagging feeling in the back of my mind that letting everyone do their own thing isn’t gonna cut it. These spells were top tier and we need to give ‘em everything we’ve got.

“I’m gonna try something,” I murmur and without waiting for Thorne or Ryker to reply, I nudge my gold flecked ribbon toward its closest neighbor.

“Don’t!” Ryker yells and aims his power at the opposite side.

“We have to,” I say and veer toward the other ribbon, Thorne’s.

“No! Jade, we can’t let our powers collide! We’ll tear a hole in—“

“In the wards? Good, that’s exactly what I’m trying to do, numb nuts.”

“Our magic must not mix, Jade!” Thorne repeats.

I hear him. I understand what he’s saying.

But I also *know* that he’s wrong.

“I need you two to trust me,” I say, sucking in a breath and releasing everything else I have in me.

My ribbon grows thicker, wider, and the gold sparks like fireworks around it.

The demons’ ribbons of power shudder briefly before changing direction.

“Stop! Jade, you must stop this!” Ryker says as his power hurtles toward mine.

“I can’t.” I won’t. This *is* the way. I know it.

The instant ribbons touch, they braid and twist together, forming a massive rope of magic.

No, not a rope.

It’s a fuchsia snake with gold flecks over its scales.

And it does exactly what I’d seen before, wraps around the victim’s body, paying no mind to the barbed black thorns scraping along its belly.

Once it’s fully corkscrewed itself around the woman and all the magic surrounding her, it tightens its hold with one great squeeze.

The black vines and thorns and branches explode in a spectacular cloud of smoke and dust.

I stumble back, sweaty, breathing hard, and a little woozy. A dry cough rattles through my chest before I can finally say anything. “I told you.”

Thorne and Ryker are both slack-jawed and staring at me, but unharmed.

And, to my delight, AJ isn’t the one who loses her shit at seeing the true state of this poor woman’s body.

It’s fucking Jameson.

Heh.

Wuss.

Did I know that using a person at the other end of a portal as a focusing

object would strip gobs of life force and magic from them?

No.

Am I grateful that I picked the biggest, most powerful demon on this side of the planar divide to take it from?

Absolutely.

Because just I got to wield the biggest, most powerful demon lord's magic and make it do shit it wasn't supposed to do.

And it was the biggest rush of my fucking life.

# Chapter 8



RYKER



I stare at her over the autopsy table.

She's covered in a thin layer of sweat. What we'd accomplished required no small effort.

She's sweaty with the effort but also glows with power. Radiates it like a warrior or a queen.

Or a demoness.

She has a raw, devastating beauty, and clearly finds a thrill in wielding power. It is unlike any human I've ever seen. She stands there, back straight, head high, and positively radiant.

My cock jumps at the thought of taking her, right now, in front of all these people.

Or portaling us both back to my apse and worshiping her the way she deserves.

Because she's not merely alight with her own magic, but with ours as well.

And that's...

That's something I don't know how to process.

When Vrahs, Thorne, and I agreed to link our power so many lifetimes ago, we didn't fully understand all the consequences of that action.

We did it hoping to strengthen ourselves.

No one had ever done it before, but we were younger and more reckless, and we assumed it would create a greater pool of communal magic we could all pull from. We assumed, incorrectly, that merging our magic would make a kind of giant pot, full of magic, available to us at all times.

We also thought linking would bond us so we could never betray one another. Never act out of our own self-interest, only that of the group.

We were wrong.

Joining our magic made our power glow the same color and our scents merge. It strengthened us. Not by miles. But we became strong enough to defeat our foes.

We cannot dip into each other's power like we expected. We cannot merge our power, and we found no well of infinite magic to draw from.

And linking didn't magically increase our bond.

The bond we share now was born naturally from years of fighting for the same cause.

And yet...

And yet this woman, this *witch*—who by all accounts, shouldn't have the capacity to summon us, let alone draw magic from the strongest of us—somehow linked with my and Thorne's magic to make something greater than all of us individually.

She did what we'd failed to do so long ago.

It shouldn't be possible.

But there she stands. Sweating, smirking, and eyes glowing with the same shade of red-purple as ours.

"Well, that was fun," she says with a goddamn smile before nodding at something behind me. "One of you better check on him."

Thorne turns to deal with whatever is going on back there, but I can't tear my eyes from her.

How had this thirty-year-old witch managed what three demons couldn't?

The coroner angles herself closer to the body and starts postulating about

what might have caused damage, but I don't hear her.

I can't.

"How did you do that?" I finally get out.

To my surprise, Jade startles at my voice, or the question. I'm not certain which. She scrunches up her nose in that way of hers that lets me know she's not happy with something I just did.

"What?" I ask. The sharpness of my tone reaches my ears a moment after I've asked.

She shakes her head. "If dickhead Ryker is coming out to play right now, tell him he's not invited," Jade says with a shocking amount of authority. She turns away and sets her gaze back to the body, and that just makes me want to grab her by the shoulders and shake her.

How dare she ignore me? Turn her back to me?

How dare she not answer my question?

And how dare she be so cavalier about it?

I stare at her, willing her to look at me. She refuses, instead listening intently to everything the coroner woman has to say.

My heart quickens, lips pull back, ready to snarl at her disrespect. Ready to show the witch her place among us.

It's a long moment before I act.

"Excuse me," I grumble and leave the room, portaling back to the basilica before I make an even bigger ass of myself.



JADE

ASSHOLE.

What kind of arrogant prick tries to make a murder investigation

conversation over a mutilated body about himself?

Ryker, that's fucking who.

The moment he's out of earshot, I catch Vrahs's stoic stare. "You need to deal with him."

He gives me the same dead-eyed stare and doesn't even bother making a sarcastic quip about it. Vrahs merely fixes his eyes back on the body without a single spoken word.

"Honestly, I've never seen this kind of mutilation before. Not even with industrial machining accidents." AJ's calm professionalism and idle curiosity already assured her an invitation to Pip's. But her unsolicited observation backs up my own.

"The first victim, my sister, had no wounds other than the marks used to kill her while the second and third bodies were progressively more—" I struggle for the right word. "Abused."

"Whoever is doing this is finding himself through the act. Like a supernatural serial killer."

"Yeah, but what is he discovering?" Thorne asks.

"The gorier he makes it, the more he gets out of it," AJ answers.

I nod, agreeing fully. "I guess that makes it our job to find out exactly what he's getting out of it."

I glance at Vrahs. He shows no signs that he heard me at all.

Fine. I'll just go on like he's not here.

"Gimme a sec. I want to try something," I say and close my eyes, trying to see through my lids like I had before.

It comes easily.

I don't have to struggle with doing it wrong the first time. It's just there, right behind my eyes.

A short-lived side effect of housing Vrahs's power, I'm assuming.

The woman lies on the slab, insides on the outside. The thorns and black vines are gone, but I'm looking for something else.

Something I couldn't see before.

Something that might tell me what whoever did this was after.

"What are you looking for?" Thorne asks.

"I'll know when I find it."

In some distant part of my mind, I'm aware of how desensitized I've grown to this. I'm standing here, scanning this poor woman's hamburger meat body for some arcane clue about her demise, and I haven't wanted to barf once.

Jameson, on the other hand...

Unfortunately, I don't see anything arcane. Whatever the person who did this wanted, they didn't leave a trace of magic behind.

And that's too bad. I assumed he'd have been overconfident since he'd hidden the worst of the damage in nullspace. I figured he wouldn't bother to clean up after himself or hide his tracks.

But apparently, he did.

"I got nothing," I say with a huff.

AJ pats me on the shoulder. "That's OK. I'm sure you did your best."

And I don't know why exactly, but something about the way she said those words makes me believe them.

The voice that usually pops up in my head to say I could have tried harder or that a better person would have been able to didn't pop up this time.

"AJ, you wanna grab a drink at Pip's Brews and Blues after your shift?"

Her eyes widen. "Oh—I..."

"I know it's outta nowhere, but—"

"Oh, Jade, I'm straight, unfortunately. Like *super*, unfortunately. I've tried to stay off men, believe me. Fuck, would my life be so much easier if I could quit men, but I'm just not built that way." She blushes as she looks up at me.

"Actually, I meant it in a friendly way, and I know *exactly* what you mean about being unfortunately straight. Wouldn't a pretty lady with

emotional intelligence and a sweet laugh be so much fucking easier?”

“Exactly!” she says with a grin. “Well, in that case, I’d love to join you. I worked the graveyard shift, so I’m off right about now. That is, as long as you don’t mind looking like an alcoholic strolling into the bar at ten a.m.”

“I stopped caring what people think of me a long time ago. Come on, let’s get outta here.”

AJ hops off her step stool, washes her hands and we stroll out of the morgue side by side, leaving Vrahs and Ryker to portal Jameson—if he ever stops retching in the corner—out on their own.

# Chapter 9

VRAHS



The circles I'm pacing around my desk aren't helping me think any clearer.  
Because there's only one way Jade Greenly could have stripped the magic from my body.

And it's the same reason she could summon us.

Or, more accurately, why she could summon *me*.

My brothers are simply an unfortunate side effect because we tried to share our power.

I refuse to accept this.

I won't have it.

Thorne is blithely oblivious.

Ryker might know. It might be why he stormed out. But it could just as easily be for his own circuitous reason.

Once again, I go to the shelves behind my desk, searching for a book that might hold a different answer. A better option.

But as before, I've read all there is to read.

Searched all the family trees, all the records we have on lineage that go as far as the Rift.

No other option exists.

Jade Greenly wasn't able to summon us because of some long-lost demon



bloodline running through her veins.

She ripped the power from my body in her foolhardy attempt to use portal magic, not because she's some reborn or reincarnated demon queen.

If only that were the case.

If *only* she were a demoness of old, waiting to find her true form, her true power.

Jade Greenly is a mere witch.

A mortal.

And she's my godforsaken mate.

Her infernal connection to me is what initially allowed Jade to withstand our demonic energies. Impossible for any other witch. Had they tried to summon us, their psyche would have fractured. They'd be little more than a babbling husk.

And that same confounded connection is how she stole my power.

It's the ultimate affront, taking from me what I worked lifetimes to achieve...

And she did it so smugly.

With such careless indifference and in front of so many.

And she's supposed to be my mate?

The one true match for me?

The person who's supposed to be my best partner, equal in wit and strength and power...

Demons haven't had true mates since...

Since there were female demons.

And as much as I enjoyed rutting with her last night, as much as I think she's probably a decent witch — HOW CAN I, THE MOST POWERFUL DEMON IN THE MOST POWERFUL ORDER OF DEMONS, BE MATES TO A MORTAL WITCH!?

I roar at the ridiculousness of this, shove all the books off my desk, and push the laptop off too. When I don't feel a semblance of catharsis, I toss my

chair at the window.

The glass shatters, and shards of blue and red and yellow rain all around me.

The destruction of such beauty has the intended effect, and I am marginally more calm.

I sink into the sofa on the other side of the office, free from the glass. What am I going to do?

I can't tell her.

I can't tell the others.

That woman *can't* be my mate.

A fuck, yes.

A violent, toxic, short-term relationship, certainly.

But this?

I can't abide this.

I won't.

And Jade Greenly must never know how vulnerable I am to her.

How much risk I bear because of this confounded happenstance.

She can never know.



JADE

APPARENTLY, PIP'S CHANGED THEIR MENU AND NOW SERVES BRUNCH, SO NOT only did we not look out-of-place going into a bar at ten in the morning, but it was a little too crowded for my liking.

I doubted the people beside us wanted to hear the ins and outs of mortuary science, but...

I've got a killer to catch.

Pip's has a local pub vibe. Dark wood everywhere and tables that are a little too close together. The servers know all the regulars' names and might just give you shit if you forget your pleases and thank yous.

It's a great place to come for a brew, but today, the mood is considerably more somber. And given the loss of one of their own, it's perfectly understandable.

I'm surprised they didn't close for the rest of the week.

Sherry hadn't been my regular server, but seeing her section empty on a busy day stings.

"You OK?" asks AJ as she brings her mimosa to her mouth.

She'd changed out of her work clothes into a ridiculously cute yellow sundress. Frilly, and super feminine and perhaps not quite suitable for the mild May weather, but she looks great in it.

I've tried to do the cute, feminine look, believe me. I end up looking like a giant in baby doll clothing. It's not a good look.

I nod. "Yeah, I'm OK. It is strange being here, though. The previous victim was a server who worked here."

AJ nods, putting her drink down to meet my gaze. "Did you know her well?"

I stare at her a moment, because just like before, her words have a strange effect on me. I want to tell her. Want to open up to her.

I didn't spend a lifetime developing snark and sarcasm as a deflection method to suddenly want to let all my walls down.

I think it's how earnest she seems. She's genuinely curious, with no ulterior motive that I can tell.

With the demon lords, I'm always subconsciously thinking about what their angle is. What they have to gain from the interaction, or how they might twist my words against me.

But with AJ...

I don't know. She makes me feel at ease.

No snark.

No evading.

“I didn’t know her well. But…”

She gives me a sad smile. “Loss is hard, even when it’s an acquaintance. It forces us to confront our own mortality.”

I take a sip of my water. “Even harder when you’re close. I spent five weeks in a drunken heap after Em’s murder.”

I press my lips together. I can’t believe I just admitted that to a virtual stranger. What is it about this tiny woman that makes me so comfortable spilling my guts?

“I can’t believe I just told you that.”

Her smile broadens, but it doesn’t make it to her eyes. “Yeah. I have that effect on people. It’s funny. Most people like it. They enjoy having someone draw out their secrets. People appreciate unburdening themselves.”

“Hm, well, I’m not big on sharing feelings. Hell, I’m not big on feeling feelings except the stabby ones.”

AJ laughs and takes another sip.

“So why *do* you have that effect on people?” I can’t help my curiosity and pat myself on the back for not asking the horribly rude and invasive “what are you?” question that most supes hate.

“My mom was part fae.”

Ha! I knew it!

AJ pauses, looking like she wants to say more but doesn’t.

“Go on, out with it. It’s only fair.” I’m spilling my guts here. Well, for me, anyway.

“Heh, yeah. I guess it is only fair. My mom didn’t use her natural charm for good.”

“That’s not uncommon, though, is it?” The fae have a certain reputation among supes.

Humans think they’re all cute and winged and wish-granty. Or tall, sexy,

white-haired models.

And they can be. But only if it serves their purposes, and a fae will *always* make sure deals serve them.

“Why do you think I live here and not in the fae city?”

I chuckle, but it comes out like a scoff. “I left my coven because I didn’t like their practices either.”

AJ shrugs. “That’s what Blackwood is, right? A city of outcasts.” She polishes off her mimosa and leans in. “You know, you’re the first person to say something about my little gift.”

It’s my turn to shrug. “Like I said. I don’t really like feeling my feelings, let alone sharing them. Being so open with you was a big red flag that something hinky was going on.”

She pulls her bottom lip between her teeth. “Yeah, that’s what I’m saying. Even the most closed off, repressed—“

“Hey now, I didn’t say I was repressed.”

“Well, you’d have to be if you’re not even feeling your feelings, but that’s not the point. I’m saying, in the moment, no one notices the effect of my charms. No one has ever called it out before, let alone asked me about it.”

Just then, the server arrives with my omelet and a ridiculous stack of strawberry pancakes for AJ, complete with a mound of whipped cream in the center at least five inches high. But it’s not just covered in whipped cream. Any part of the pancakes the whipped cream doesn’t touch has a thick dusting of powdered sugar as well.

Looking at it almost gives me a sugar high.

“Yum!” AJ’s eyes go wide like a fae in a candy shop, and she drags her finger through the top of the whipped cream, and pops it in her mouth with a cheeky grin.

I’m not about to food shame, but that much sugar so early in the day would make my stomach twist itself in knots.

“So I guess it’s true about fae and their sweets, huh?”

She shrugs and cuts into the stack. “Dunno. I left the fae city when I was really young, so I wasn’t raised in the culture. I just know I love sweets.” She drags a forkful of fluffy pancakes through the whipped cream and shovels it all in her mouth.

“Mmmmm,” she groans, and I look around to make sure no one around us heard the sex noise she just made.

“So, do you have any other gifts that might help us find the killer?”

AJ shakes her head, licking the powdered sugar off her lips. “Fraid not. I’m less than a quarter fae, so the magic is pretty well diluted. I’m lucky I got any charm at all.”

“OK, well, in your professional medical examiner’s opinion, is there any kind of instrument or tool that is consistent with—”

AJ stops me with a finger.

She covers her full-to-the-brim mouth and says, “The killer didn’t use a tool or implement. I saw no tool markings.”

“So what? You think he used magic to tear the bodies apart?” It’s a solid idea, but if it didn’t leave any magical residue, we’re back at square one.

“No, I said there were no tool marks, but I didn’t say there weren’t any marks.”

I roll my eyes at her. “Well, quit holding out on me, short stack.”

AJ’s eyes bug at the new nickname, as if she could tell I was *never* letting this one go. “I guess it’s my fault for ordering pancakes.” She shakes her head, steering the conversation back on track. “The marks I found are consistent with both blunted nails and claws.”

The implication makes a chill run down my back. “Someone did that with their bare hands?”

AJ nods. “I think we’re looking for someone who can shift. There are two distinct sets of nail and claw marks—”

“Well, wouldn’t that mean two people?”

“It would, if I didn’t also see a third set of marks that was like a mashup

of the two. Broad and blunt, but longer, deeper marks, as if the blunt nails were mid-shift to longer claws.”

“Shit. Do you think it was a wolf shifter?” I say, keeping my voice low. Some powerful wolves can partially shift their hands to claws when they’re trying to be aggressive or just out of control.

“What’s that about wolf shifters?” asks a familiar voice from behind me.

I twist in my seat to see Veruca, smiling with her new bone—er—boyfriend Noah, standing right next to her.

Noah, the wolf shifter.

Fuck.

# Chapter 10



JADE



Once the server has new place settings at our table, V and Noah join us.

V's in her magic-shop-owner best, with a long floaty pink skirt and a wrap top in pale blue. She completes the look with a pale pink carnation tucked into her delightfully frizzy red hair.

Her outfit makes Noah look kinda drab by comparison in jeans and a snug-fitting white T-shirt.

“Hi, I’m Veruca.” She holds out her hand to AJ next to her. “I own the magic shop a few doors down.”

AJ takes her hand. “Oh, Drunken Witch, right? I’ve been there a few times. I’m AJ. I’m a medical examiner for the city.”

Veruca’s brow furrows a bit, and I know exactly what my best friend is thinking as she shifts her gaze to me.

I shake my head the slightest bit.

*No, V, she’s not a boring normie.*

“And I’m Noah.” He reaches across to shake AJ’s hand. “I work in data analytics. Pretty boring stuff. Pays good, though.”

AJ’s nose twitches, and I bet she’s getting a whiff of Noah’s musky wolf scent.

She glances at me, the question in her eyes.

But I don't know her well enough to know if she's asking whether he's a wolf shifter, or whether I think he's the wolf shifter responsible for killing all these people.

And Em.

That last question has my stomach flipping inside out, and I tuck my hands under the table to hide them balling into fists.

I give AJ a small shrug and hope that covers it for now.

"I'm glad I ran into you here, actually," Veruca says as she peruses the menu without a care in the world.

I'm happy to see her this way. Happy she's taking a break from her work. She deserves that. More than anyone, V deserves her happiness.

I just hate to think she's picked a serial killer as her newest bone/boyfriend.

"Why's that?" I ask.

As she answers, I use V's distracted menu gazing to have an eye conversation with AJ.

I eye point at her, then nod my head toward Noah, and eye point back at AJ.

She gets it instantly and gives me a nod.

"Because I've tracked down a source who knows all about antique razor blades. I sent them pictures of the blade they found at..." She lets the rest of the sentence trail off.

The blade the police found at Em's murder scene.

It's only a few beats before V picks up where she left off, and that makes me wonder if that's how it'll be from now on.

If that's the social equivalent of the stages of grief.

Avoiding the subject, to dancing around it, to a brief pause.

If so, it won't be long before there isn't even a pause.

"I'm hopeful I'll hear back soon. At the very least, he'll know what decade the blade is from, and from there, he can determine sources and

buyers. It's likely he'll know a fair bit more than just the decade, though, so fingers-crossed."

As I listen to her, I keep my senses tuned to Noah.

He doesn't seem especially tense by Veruca talking about a murder weapon. He likely would if it was *his* murder weapon.

"Good. That's good news. Let me know when you know more."

He doesn't smell particularly sweaty or anxious, like someone who was hiding the fact that he killed the sister of the person sitting next to him.

My heart ticks up a few notches, and I take several slow breaths, squeezing my fists under the table for good measure.

AJ leans in, her gaze intent on Noah. "So, what brings you to Blackwood?"

The question is so innocuous, so deceptively innocent.

As an onlooker, I see nothing particularly charming or magical about the way AJ asked it.

And yet, Noah lowers his menu and meets AJ's gaze earnestly.

"I was abjured from my pack for not following orders."

AJ's eyes widen. "That sounds serious. As I understand, wolves need their pack to survive. Why not just follow the order and stay safe?"

And again, I could never get away with asking the same question. From me, it would seem intrusive and nosey. But coming from AJ, it was natural and honest.

"I refused to stay in a pack that subjugated and abused omegas. As soon as I could, I did everything I could to get those omegas out of there. I'm happy they cut me out and glad to be free of the monstrous pack I was born to."

AJ and I share a weighted stare.

That was a lot heavier than I expected. A lot more good natured, too.

"Did you two decide on anything?" the server asks, jarring me back into the restaurant and out of my head, spinning tales about murderous wolf

shifters and oblivious best friends, while putting their mimosas on the table.

“Yes, I’ll have the same thing she’s having,” V says, pointing to AJ’s plate.

“Good choice. And for you, sir?”

“I’ll have the meat lover's omelet.”

“Great. I’ll put those right in for you.”

“So, what were you saying about wolf shifters when we came up?” Veruca asks again.

In the seconds it takes me to formulate a response, I have a choice to make.

Lie to Veruca, my best friend.

Or be honest and tell her exactly what we think is happening.

Protect her from worrying about the first guy she’s shown interest in as more than a bone-friend...

Or lay it all out right here and now.

“Oh, I didn’t say wolf shifter. I said plant mister. AJ wanted to get into house plants, and you know my mom is a houseplant guru. I guess some of it rubbed off on me.”

AJ catches on quick and plays along perfectly. “Yeah. I unfortunately picked out the neediest, most difficult species as my first plant baby, and Jade suggested I start using a plant mister between heavy waterings.”

OK, this chic was scary good at lying on the spot.

V nods along. “I have some books on plant care in the shop if you want to stop by. And some lovely new copper and crystal misters.”

“Oh, nice. I’ll be sure to check them out.”

I’m fine with lying.

I’m fine with doing whatever needs doing to find this sick fucker.

But keeping Veruca in the dark about what we found and the implications to her new beau...

I’m definitely not fine with that.

# Chapter 11

JADE



**A**fter embarrassingly needing to ask for someone to cover the cost of my meal because some asshole demon *froze all my fucking accounts*, I head back to Blackwood Basilica.

This time, I drive my car all the way up the lawn and to the front door. I'm not doing a sneak attack thing again, and it's not my fault they don't have a garage.

Plus, if my car is easily accessible, then I won't have to fuck with portal magic again.

The first time was hard enough.

I legit thought I might die in nullspace.

Ripping power from Vrahs kinda made it worth it but I'm not trying for a repeat performance.

Chonk greets me at the main entrance, tail in a question mark, meowing his fat little head off about something or other.

"I know, I know, fat cat. You want to eat. Well, lead the way, I guess."

And he does. I follow him through the maze of stained glass corridors, but when I think we've come to our room, Chonk keeps on walking.

Down a long, narrow flight of steps to an underground level that I can't in good conscious call a basement.

Not with all the amazing equipment.

This is more like a state-of-the-art gym.

Not a musty basement full of forgotten boxes and off-season decorations.

“Holy shit,” I say, letting out a whistle as I take in the room.

They have every machine a person could ask for in triplicate. Weight sets, treadmills, elliptical, pull-up bars... all of it.

The only thing they didn't have three of is the octagonal sparring ring in the middle of it all.

“Fuuuuck,” I say, imagining Vrahs and Thorne going at it. I could absolutely see Vrahs decimating Thorne in that ring, while Thorne eats up every minute, relishing the sensation, the pain.

“You like what you see, tricky witch?” Thorne asks, startling me out of my X-rated imaginings.

“As a matter of fact...” I turn to him and my, oh my, doesn't he look absolutely delicious in workout clothes.

All three demon lords know how to wear a suit, and I know they all have fantastic bodies beneath their expertly tailored four-digit suits.

But seeing it...

My mouth waters at the sight of Thorne's bare chest. Broad and muscled... like his only hobby is weight training.

Fuck.

His gym shorts show that he doesn't skip leg day either.

Thorne smirks as he catches me staring at him. “You *do* like what you see. Care for a little grappling lesson, then?”

Fucking what? Would I ever!

Of course, I don't let on. I shrug out of my jacket, kick off my boots, and hop into the ring.

Thorne joins me, hopping over the ropes like no human ever could.

“You handled those ropes like you've been in a ring before,” he says while throwing a few punches in the air, warming up his gorgeous shoulders.

“I've never been in a ring. Guess I'm just a natural.”

“Heh, yeah. I don’t think so,” he says with a smirk before striking out with a kick meant for the back of my thigh.

I dodge it easily. “A sweeper? You think that 101 shit’s gonna work on me?”

His face splits into a grin as he bobs from foot to foot. I mirror his movements, keeping the same amount of distance between us. “Well, I wouldn’t want to hurt you. I have an unfair advantage, after all.”

I grin right back, and call on a bit of my—and Vrahs’s—magic. “Unfair how, exactly?”

“Oh, that’s right. I forgot you’re a sneaky little magic thief, aren’t you?”

I shrug. “Finders keepers. Plus, I’d say it’s fair, considering one of you froze all my bank accounts. I had to ask a friend to pay for breakfast.”

He shrugs right back. “Wasn’t me,” he says casually before dashing forward and hooking his elbow around the back of my neck.

But I saw it coming and continue the movement downward, ducking out of his arm before tightening my abs to hold my balance and giving him a nice tight scorpion kick right to the top of the head.

That move always works.

On humans, anyway.

But this fucker laughs as he grabs hold of my ankle, tugging it forward so I’m forced awkwardly lower.

Shit.

My leg is bent backward over my inverted body... and this dickhead is holding onto my ankle.

“Tap out?” he asks, like the smug shit he is.

Nope. Because what Thorne doesn’t know is, like every good little witch in my coven, I took ballet.

Something about connecting to the body helps connect to your magic. Whatever. I didn’t care about the coven’s reason then and I don’t care now.

I did like the flexibility and agility ballet gave me, so I kept with the



stretches.

I'm insanely flexible. I'm also strong. Add that to a little borrowed demon magic and...

"Hey! No fair!" Thorne gripes. "It's a grappling match, not a flying over my goddamn head and dashing out of reach match."

I bounce on my toes, full of electric energy. "It's not my fault you're shit at grappling."

A devilish smirk graces Thorne's features. "OK, witch. Gloves off, then. Let's see what you've really got."

"No holding back?"

"I won't if you won't," he says.

I do some quick street match math in my head. He's a good five inches taller than me, which puts his center of gravity right about...

"Oooof!" Thorne grunts as my shoulder collides into his hips, knocking him backward hard enough that he lands on his ass.

Quick as lightning, I get my knees under me and use the leverage to pin his hips to the mat. "Tap out?" I ask with a smirk.

He cocks half a smile at me, and before I know it, I'm on the mat. The reversal is so fast, I don't even know how he did it.

But I'm acutely aware of how he's pinned me.

With his hip, grinding mine into the mat.

He grabs a fistful of my hair and tightens enough to hurt.

Hurt in the best way.

I suck in a breath.

"Tap out?" he asks, pressing into me so there's not a single doubt he's enjoying this as much as I am.

It makes me suck in another breath, for a totally different reason.

"I'm going to ask you once more, Jade," he says, eyes on my exposed neck. "Did you want Vrahs to mark you like this, or did he do it on his own?"

I twist to look him in the eye. "We both left our marks on each other's

flesh, if that's what you're so pressed about."

A slow smile stretches his lips as he grinds his hard cock into the seam of my jeans. "Good. As long as it's reciprocal."

He releases my hair and slides his hand down the back of my neck, around my throat, before encircling it like the loveliest necklace.

I shudder with...

With, I don't fucking know what.

I know it's good, though, and I know I fucking love it when any of these demons put their hands around my neck.

I'm giving them the ultimate control.

At any moment, they could choose to keep me from breathing. Or to end my life.

And something about giving that choice to them turns my pussy into a damn fire hydrant.

"Would you like to continue this here, Jade? Or my bedroom?"

"Bedroom. I'm not interested in getting friction burns on my ass."

# Chapter 12

## THORNE



**T**he last place I expected to find Jade Greenly was in my private gym.

I say private, though it is meant for the three of us. But since I'm the one in it most days, I tend to think of it as mine.

I knew the witch was strong, but I didn't expect her to come searching for a place to work out.

It's possible she was merely lost.

But seeing her in my haven had been the turn on I didn't know was possible.

And with her permission to relocate to the bedroom, I'm about to show her what an incredible turn on it was.

I scoop her off the mat and swing her over my shoulder, giving her round ass a hard smack for good measure.

Jade lets out a delightfully satisfying scream.

She's tall enough that I bet she's never been tossed around like this before.

And isn't that a shame? Everyone should be tossed about in the bedroom at least once, and I'm about to show her what a demon lord can do.

I break the rules and portal to my room. I'm sure if Vrahs were in my shoes...

Well, he was in my shoes.

And that brings up a strange dilemma.

The three of us have never once shared a woman.

The opportunity or desire has never presented itself.

“Jade?” I ask while she’s still on my shoulder, my hand hovering over her ass.

“Yeah?”

“Witches are polyamorous, yes?”

She lets out a heavy sigh. “The witches in my coven are, yes.”

“I see. And would sleeping with Vrahs and then sleeping with me the following day bother your sensibilities?”

“Do you think I would have agreed to come to your bedroom if it did?”

“I suppose that’s a fair point.”

“Does it bother you?” she asks, surprising me.

“Me? Why would it?”

“Sharing a woman isn’t a thing most men do willingly.” There’s a bitterness to her tone, and she smells slightly of grief. I’m unsure why.

“I think you’ll find that demon sexuality is far more open and fluid compared to any of the males you’ll find native to your plane.” I end the sentiment with a snap of my fingers, and all of Jade’s clothes fall off her body in a neat pile next to the bed.

“How much do you want to feel today, Jade?” I ask, hand still hovering over her now naked ass.

Another heavy sigh. “I don’t want to remember who I am when you’re through with me.” Excitement floats off her body, charging the air with an electric current.

It sings to me.

A low laugh rumbles in my throat. “Mmm, such a lovely request, tricky witch. As always, your wish is my command.”

Faster than she can process, she’s lying across my lap, ass high in the air

as I sit on the edge of the bed.

I glide my hand down the backs of her gorgeous, supple thighs and back up again. Fuck, this witch is such a feast for the senses.

I could delight in her for hours. Days.

Until my time on this plane comes to an end.

I trace the curve of her ass with a feather-light touch, drawing circles and sigils into her flesh until she breaks into gooseflesh.

“Mmm... that feels nice—” she moans as I knead the muscles of her thighs and ass.

I switch back to soft, luxurious strokes, and when she lets out another moan of pleasure, I give her a firm, stinging slap.

“Ooooooh!”

A shiver of pleasure runs through me at the way her voice breaks, at the gasp she drags into her lungs, and I groan at the sight of her perfectly round, full ass cheek quivering with the force of my strike.

And now all the grief in her scent is gone. Jade smells only of desire-tinged pain.

If I hadn't already been rock hard...

I continue with gentle strokes, bringing them up to the small of her back as she relaxes once more, then lean closer to her ear. My voice drops. “People like us don't deal with emotions well. We don't like to feel them the way we should.” I stroke the back of her head, petting her like one might pet a cat.

She lets out a small moan at that.

“And sometimes, when we don't deal with our emotions, we deaden our ability to feel other kinds of things.”

Another slap on the opposite cheek, and both of us groan this time. As her ass bounces, and she fills my room with more desire, more pain, I have to force myself not to take this faster. Not to flip her over and fuck her senseless on the edge of the bed.

Because, fuck, do I want to.

Especially since she's so turned on, she's leaving a wet spot on my pants.

I go back to drawing sigils across her skin. "I know this because any other witch who stole and stored demon magic in their body wouldn't still be standing. Wouldn't have survived like it was any other day. She'd be screaming like her hair was on fire."

"Guess I'm just special like that, huh?"

I stifle a chuckle, because this is more serious than she realizes. "Human bodies aren't capable of housing demon magic, Jade. And the fact that you aren't screaming in agony, or making deals to get it out of you means you've repressed your emotions, refusing to deal with or even feel them for so long, your internal sensations have deadened along with it."

Another smack, closer to the curve of her ass, which is now a beautiful shade of pink.

Jade whimpers, and beneath her, my pants grow that much wetter.

And now there's anger, along with desire and pain in the atmosphere.

Another shudder runs through me.

My three favorite things.

I lean down as far as I can so my mouth brushes the top of her ear. "I intend to make you feel so much tonight that I break you open, tricky witch."

"No," she moans. "Please. I just want to forget, Thorne. I want you to erase me, just for a while."

My hand lands on her ass again, but this time, just as the moan forms in her throat, I slide my fingers between her thighs and plunge into her soaked and silky flesh.

Her cry turns from pain to pleasure, and it's the sweetest sound on earth. Jade's body arches toward my touch as she spreads her gorgeous legs for me.

And now I'm groaning, because there's nothing better in the world than this witch willingly parting her legs for me.

"I want you to come on my hand, Jade."

She groans again and my cock jumps at the sound. I've never been so

fucking hard for another woman, and if I weren't wearing loose clothes, I likely would have a neat line of zipper marks decorating the underside.

“Fuck. You don't know what you do to me, witch.”

She whimpers again as I stroke her sensitive flesh. “Please, make me forget.”

I plunge my thumb into her while my fingers circle her swollen clit.

I can do both. Break her open and make her lose herself in the moment. In the pain and pleasure of every sinful thing I plan to do with her.

She arches into me again, moaning. “Fuck, yes, Thorne. Right there.” Jade fucks herself with my hand, knees supporting her weight over my lap.

Just as she arches again, I land a sharp smack on her ass.

A feral groan rips out of her and red blooms across her ass cheek anew. I quicken my pace, turning the lazy fingerbang into a brutal finger fuck.

She buries her head in the mattress, muffling her screams, arching her body into my hand. “There you go. Come for your demon lord, witch.”

Her ass bucks hard into my hand and her muscles tighten around my thumb. I keep doing exactly what I'm doing, and when her release descends and she's screaming into the mattress, I land a final stinging slap across her quivering skin.

Guttural cries rend her open. Her body convulses as I give her every bit of pleasure she desires.

But little does she know.

This is just the beginning.

Jade falls limp across my lap, and I slide my hand out of her, giving her pussy a nice little pat on the way out.

I don't want her to think I'm leaving it for too long.

I don't give Jade time to recover. She told me what she wanted, and allowing her time to come back down to earth is not in line with making her forget herself in waves of delirious pleasure.

With a thought, Jade is off my lap and on the bed, spread eagle. I tie her



wrists and ankles to the bedposts with silk before she can say otherwise.

Not that she would.

She doesn't move, doesn't even look at me as I collect the tools of my trade. She's dazed and floating, and that's just where I want her.

"Are you ready for the second leg of this journey, tricky witch?" I ask.

She groans and gives me a small nod.

I survey the items laid out in front of me. "Jade, do you know the traffic light system?"

She hardly stirs. "Mmm?"

"This is going to be much more intense than our first trip to kink-town. I need you to know you can tell me to stop at any time. OK?"

She nods.

"You must say, OK, Jade."

"OK. I can tell you to stop whenever I want."

"And if it's helpful, you can use yellow light and red light as cues. Yellow tells me we're getting close to a boundary and I'll back off. Red tells me to stop immediately. Got it?"

She nods again.

"Jade. Verbal answers only."

"Yes. Green go, red stop, yellow caution. I got it."

"Good girl," I say, and her body tenses slightly. I see it in her abs and at the corners of her mouth. Noted. She didn't like that, and I won't say it again.

My gaze travels the length of her body. Her small breasts, the soft stomach, and her thick, shapely thighs that I just knew would look divine wrapped around my head.

"You're extraordinarily attractive," I murmur as I stare at her.

Neutral. She doesn't tense but doesn't relax.

Hmm. That sparks in me the desire to find the words she likes to hear.

Maybe not right now, not this play session, but I will.

I pick up the first toy laid out next to her, a black leather ball gag with a

purple ball.

Jade makes no reaction. She's still basking in after-orgasm chemicals.

And as much as I'd like to see the leather wrapped around her pretty face, I think I'll enjoy hearing her lovely screams more.

I toss the ball gag aside and pick up the next item.

The electrowand.

Boring.

We used it the last time, and we both already know what to expect.

I move on to the next item. A flogger. Not great for someone lying down unless I only wanted to draw it across her.

That leaves the riding crop.

I have plenty of other toys. Things that buzz. Things that separate. Things that pinch. But these are the items I'm drawn to tonight.

And the riding crop came out on top.

A long leather handle, at the end of which is a flat piece of leather used for slapping.

It makes excellent noises in the air.

Excellent noises on the skin.

And I think Jade will enjoy it the most.

I have an idea about what I want to do with it, but I'll have to warm her up first.

"Have you ever had a riding crop used on you before, Jade?"

She shakes her head. "My sexual partners to this point have been pretty vanilla compared to you," she says.

Fuck. I labored too long over the choice. She's come down off the orgasm high. But that just means I'll have to work hard to get her back in that same headspace.

"Would you like to find out if you like it?" I ask, my voice going low into the bedroom voice range.

She bites her lip, and fuck if it doesn't send a jolt of electric pleasure right

to my cock.

“Fuck, woman, you might just be the death of me.”

That earns me a smile. “Well, get on with it. I’m starting to remember my name.”

I pick up the crop and drag the end across her toes, over her ankles, and up her thighs until it raises gooseflesh.

“You’re quite reactive,” I mumble to myself and tap the leather against her more delicate flesh. I tap the top of her pussy and she groans, tucking her bottom lip between her teeth. So I tap her outer lips. I’m rewarded with a deeper, throatier groan.

I move on to her nipples, tapping each one and delighting at the delectable sounds she makes, the intense waves of pain and desire she fills the room with.

I’m drowning in her.

And the rescue boat is a long way off.

The first hard slap I give her lands on the top of her thigh. She arches into it, closing her eyes as she sucks in a gasp.

“Did you like that, Jade?”

“Yes,” she groans, so I give her a matching pink mark on the other thigh.

Another groan.

I drag the crop up her leg across the top of her pussy and back again, letting her know what I plan to do. Giving her time to tell me to stop.

I lock eyes with her as I raise the crop.

The action blows her pupils all the way out, but the edges of her irises aren’t green.

They’re fuchsia.

She gives me the slightest nod, and I bring the riding crop down on the padded top of her pussy.

She groans and again arches into the sensation.

Dark waves of her pleasure roll into me.

So I up the risk, up the pain, and drag the edge of the crop down to her most sensitive flesh.

She pulls in a shuddering gasp as anticipation builds, but she doesn't tell me to stop. Doesn't even say yellow.

I'm swimming in her pain and excitement. Her fear and desire.

Jade is the best drug I've ever tasted.

The best high there is.

And I'm never giving this witch up.

I raise the crop a few inches and crack it against her beautiful, wet pussy lips.

And Jade screams to the stars.

Precum drips down my cock. But it's not causing this gorgeous creature pain that turns me on.

It's how beautifully she takes it.

How divine her beautiful face looks when pain and pleasure twist across it.

And I tell her so.

"Fuck, you took that so well. I'm about to come in my gym shorts."

She's panting. Sweat makes her hair cling to her face. But she still radiates pleasure and power, and the room is still full of desire. So I keep going.

I drag the crop up her pussy, which drags a shudder from her. I trace it over her hips and to her thighs before choosing my next spot. The pink on her thighs is already fading, and I simply can't have that.

I land four quick, sharp slaps of the crop on each of her thighs. She gasps, but I'd already primed her for something far more intense.

Faster than she could see, I raise the crop and swat it at her delicate lips once more, then strip out of my gym shorts and plunge my hard cock into her before she's even stopped screaming.

I grab a fist full of her hair and twist her head toward me, planting my

mouth on hers as the last of her scream dies away.

My hips grind into her just as they did on the gym floor, and fuck if her pussy isn't as divine as I knew it would be.

She's the only thing I could think about since our last play session.

I've craved her since then, because I lose myself in her as much as she loses herself in the pleasure I give.

We're the same, Jade and I. Two ends of the same spectrum, the same coin.

"Fuck, you feel amazing," I groan into her mouth.

She responds with a sweet moan into mine.

This is far better than I could have ever imagined.

She strains against the silk ties holding her down, but not enough to break them, which she could, given the addition of demon magic.

No, Jade wants to stay subservient to my will.

And that's perfect for me.

I pull away from her mouth, and she stares at me with wide, wild eyes.

She almost looks scared.

"Are you OK?" I ask.

She nods.

"Say it."

"I'm—I'm OK."

"Are we good to keep going?"

"Yes."

Good. I'd hate to end our fun now. I'd do it. But I'd hate to.

With a thought, I release the binding on her ankles and wrap her thighs around my hips. I'm deep enough in her that my body rubs against her clit, and her eyes roll back with the dual sensation.

But really, I wrapped her legs around me because I wanted access to her tight asshole.

I let my tail free of nullspace and shift it to a phallus and let it find its way

to Jade's pretty, pursed mouth.

Her gaze flicks to it, then back to mine.

"Open," I order, and she does immediately.

I really want to call her a good girl but decide on something filthier.

"Fuck, you look so goddamn good sucking on my tail like a dick."

She smiles around it, swirling her tongue.

"That's right, tricky witch. Get it nice and wet for me."

After a few moments, I pull it out of her mouth, and she watches with those wide, green eyes as it disappears behind me.

They grow even bigger, like twin jade moons when I circle the tip around her asshole.

She's already so wet. I didn't need to bother with making her suck it, but fuck did she look good doing it. And it doesn't feel horrible either.

Not as good as getting my dick sucked, but it has its own advantages.

I grab her legs and put them against my chest, bending her in half.

She screams at the deeper penetration.

But she doesn't say yellow.

And when my tail enters her ass, all her muscles tighten around me.

I growl, trying to keep my shit together.

"Oh fuck, oh fucking fuck," she pants while I fuck her all the way into the mattress.

"Give it to me, Jade. Give me everything. Break open for me, witch," I growl.

She pulls against the bindings at her wrists, snapping them off so she can grab her legs and pull them closer, deepening the angle and her pleasure that much more.

Deepening mine as well.

"Fuck, Thorne!"

"Give me everything, Jade. All your ugly, all your hate, let it flow into me," I rumble as she screams her pleasure.

I clamp my mouth over hers, swallowing her scream.

Her body convulses around mine, and I'm wracked with my own bone-shattering release.

Jade goes limp under me, and I collapse on top of her.

And there is nothing else. Just her shaking body, the electric current of her sated desire crackling through the air, and her sweet, whimpering sighs.

I sigh into the pillow next to her head, and I'm hit with the notion that I could happily fuck this witch for the rest of eternity.

# Chapter 13



JADE



**T**he edges of the world are fuzzy, soft, like someone rubbed Vaseline on the camera of my mind.

I'm not totally here.

My mind is floaty.

I have the vague impression of being moved, being cleaned, drinking water, and being tucked into a soft, warm blanket.

But it's all in a soft focus.

Time doesn't register here.

I don't know where I am, but it's not here. My mind floats about, thinking thoughts, observing them, then discarding them without judgment.

Was Thorne right? Was AJ?

Am I so emotionally repressed that I can't feel things like the demon magic I stole? Or even my own magic?

If so, does it matter?

In time, the edges clear, coming into sharper focus. And I'm on the same couch as the last time Thorne and I played together. Wrapped in the same soft blanket.

"There you are," Thorne says softly.

I tighten the blanket around me, pulling it over my head like a hood. The world, even the dimly lit world of Thorne's masculine Zen bedroom is too

much right now. I curl tighter into the corner of his buttery leather sofa.

“You’re OK. You’re safe. You’re just coming down out of sub-space, Jade. Your body and mind need a bit to adjust, that’s all.”

I nod, and he hands me a piece of chocolate.

“Go on, the sugar will help.”

I don’t take the chocolate from him. I open my mouth instead.

He lets out a soft chuckle and places the square on my tongue.

I focus on it. The bitter notes of the deep chocolate flavor, as well as the sweeter, lighter notes. It melts on my tongue like the first snowflakes of winter. Delicate, smooth.

It’s several moments before I feel like myself.

“Hi,” Thorne says as I meet his gaze.

“Hey.”

“Are you OK?”

I nod but correct myself before he has to say anything. “Yes. I think so.”

“You won’t know the full extent of the damage we did until after you give Vrahs back his power, so—”

I scrunch up my face, making Thorne stop mid-sentence. “Hold on. I’m supposed to give it back?”

Thorne laughs. It’s too loud, but I also like the sound of it. “Did you think he’d let you keep it?”

“No... I—” I have to work to get my head around my thoughts. “I thought it would sort of naturally go back where it belongs, I guess.”

“Why would you think that? You stole it from him. You’ll have to return it, like anything else.”

“Fuck. No wonder he was so mad at the morgue.”

“Oh, was he ever. And, all that darkness your actions caused Vrahs to leak into the room? That was quite enjoyable.” He kisses the top of my head as a thank you. “You stuck him right in a tender spot, and you did it in front of all of us and the coroner and the mayor.”

Thorne's shoulders shake lightly, and a small smile curves his lips as he relives the moment.

"He's got to know that wasn't my intention, right? I was about to die in nullspace and blindly reached out to the other side of the portal for the biggest beacon I could find. I didn't mean to take his power."

Thorne's smile falters for a moment. "You didn't do it on purpose?"

I shake my head.

"It wasn't a fantastic power play?"

"No, Thorne. I was dying."

He didn't need to know that using portal magic to get to the morgue had actually started as a big *fuck you* power move.

So I don't mention that part.

He presses his lips together, deep in thought. "I know my brother well, witch, but in this case, I don't know how to help you."

I hadn't exactly asked for his advice, but now that he said he didn't have any...

"If you're honest and say it was a mistake—"

"He'll likely take that worse."

Thorne nods. "You're not wrong. But if you try to go toe-to-toe with him and bargain for it, you'll likely lose. Few can bargain with a demon and still come out on top. I'm afraid you'll have to figure out what to do on your own."

Thorne puts another kiss on the top of my head. "But I don't call you tricky witch for nothing."

I give him a stupid pout and pull the blanket tighter over my head.

He pulls me close, wrapping his powerful arms around my shoulder.

I'm enveloped in his sulfur, demon-y scent, and my head goes back to being fuzzy and light. I sigh against him, and he relaxes into me.

"Did you enjoy our session?" he murmurs against my ear.

"I did," I say into his chest.

“Is there anything you regret? Or you would want to change?”

I take a moment to think. “I think next time I want to be the one wielding the riding crop.”

Thorne tenses beneath me, but only for a moment. “Are you serious?” he asks, his voice strained, uncertain, and completely unlike him.

“Well, yeah. Unless you’re afraid of a little pain.”

He pulls me away, meeting my eyes with a fervent stare. “You’d be fulfilling a long-held dream of mine, Jade Greenly, if you were to use the tool on me that I used on you.”

My cheeks grow hot, and my arms are suddenly itchy. I rub them inside the blanket and dodge his unmasked gaze, skirting the honesty and vulnerability like I’m allergic to it.

I’m OK with playing with him. I’m fine losing myself in Thorne, but that glint in his gaze was too real.

Too raw and full of emotion.

And that’s not what I signed up for. I did not want this to turn into something serious. But a tiny voice in my head asks a one-word question I’d never asked before.

*Why?*

I immediately squash the question down and then move on to squashing the conversation.

“You’ve got some pretty fucked up dreams then, demon,” I say with a calculated amount of snark, watching as Thorne’s smile fades.

He closes his eyes for a moment.

“‘Tis the lot of an incubus, I suppose,” he says softly before getting up and getting dressed.

I want to reach out to him. I want to tell him I didn’t mean to make fun of him. That I was just fucking deflecting like I always do.

“I have some work I need to attend to. If you need anything, I’ve charmed my quarters to provide it for you.”

My throat gets tight, but I nod all the same. “OK.”

Thorne stands there for a moment, jaw flexing, eyes locked on me like he wants to say something more. Or wants me to say something more.

When neither of us does, he turns, dark gray suit jacket billowing out behind him, and leaves.

“This is why I don’t fuck and summon, damnit. Too many goddamn emotions. Too many things to get screwed up.”

I yank the blanket off me, pull on my clothes, and stomp out of the bedroom to find Chonk curled up on the sunny ledge of a stained glass window. He opens one eye, sees me, and hops off the ledge, giving me a loud *Mrrrrow*.

“Hey, you. Think you can help me find Ryker?”

*Mrow*. Chonk turns and prances down the hall. He turns back around to make sure I’m following before I actually follow him.

I asked as a joke, mostly. But here he is, taking me somewhere, presumably to Ryker. Whatever. I’m not questioning it.

I fucked up with Thorne...

I can’t deal with Vrahs right now.

My best bet is finding Ryker and getting him to unlock my assets.

Plus, it will be a perfect distraction from the other things I already screwed up.

I really hadn’t meant to steal Vrahs’s power. But knowing him—not that one could ever really know the guy with exactly two expressions, stoic and pissed off, and five words allotted per week—just saying I fucked up and took it by accident would be more of an insult than pretending I did it strategically.

I could just imagine going into his office, wide-eyed and remorseful. The second I said it was an accident, he’d fly into a rage.

Because there’s no witch on this plane capable of performing that level of magical manipulation accidentally.

Except, I guess I did.

So what does that mean?

Chonk turns a corner, then another, and for a while I'm certain we're never going to arrive at Ryker's apse.

"Everything in this goddamn place looks the same," I mutter as we pass under another vaulted ceiling with tile embellishments and another bank of stupid stained glass.

"It's like an old video game that ran out of storage to render backgrounds properly and just keeps repeating the same one over and over," I mutter to myself.

When Chonk parks himself in front of a set of double doors and lets out a spectacularly plaintive, *mrrrrrrroooooooooowww*, I cross my arms and wait for Ryker to open the door.

And when he does, I'm prepared to go into a tirade about taking shit that doesn't belong to him, namely my money.

The door flies open, and Ryker stands there, half dressed, looking sinfully delicious.

His hair is mussed, like he'd been lying down. The loose fitting sweatpants ride low on his hips, drawing attention to the perfectly sculpted line of muscles that hug his hips.

People have lots of names for those muscles.

Adonis belt.

Deep v.

Handlebars.

But I liked to think of them as cock frames because that's exactly what they do. Frame and point to the—

"Hey there, good boy. Are you here to see me again?"

Ryker's sing-song tone yanks me out of my thoughts. But not more than seeing him focused solely on the orange cat at his door.

"I have a fresh can of tuna waiting for you," the centuries-old demon says

in a tone that strikes me as giddy.

“Actually, he brought me here. And Chonk doesn’t need tuna. He’s on portioned controlled dietetic food.

Slowly, Ryker’s gaze meets mine. The liquid gold in his eyes does something to me, and I’m struck with the urge to go to him.

To curl myself around him and drag my hands all over those delectable muscles he so amicably put on display for me.

“Fuck, Ryker. Turn that shit off already. I’ve got something I want to discuss, and your magnetism is getting in the way.”

He curls a lip at me. “Don’t you think if that were an option, I would have already done it?”

His words hit me in a strange place.

He wasn’t doing this on purpose?

Ryker wasn’t using his pull on me as an intentional distraction.

“You can’t control it?” I ask. I aimed for a neutral tone to the question, but Ryker reacts the way he always does.

“Shut your filthy mouth, witch.” His snarled words wrap around me like rusty barbs, and the sting urges me to strike back.

To poke the demon bear.

“Yeah?” I snap, stepping into his space and forcing him farther inside his living quarters. “Well, why don’t you let me show you exactly what this filthy mouth can do?”

Ryker’s golden eyes bug out of his skull, but he says nothing. He also doesn’t retreat.

So I step closer, my breasts skimming his bare chest. The only thing between us is my t-shirt. Staring up at him, our breath mingling, I spit the next words out like a threat.

“I’ve already had your brother’s tail in my mouth today.” I hook my hand around his neck, pulling him even closer. My lips brush his. “And my ass while he fucked me senseless with his enormous demon cock. Why don’t we

see what your tail and your demon cock can do, shall we?"

And even though I don't truly mean it, even though I just had the fuck of my life from Thorne, my own words tempt me.

Blood rushes to my cunt like she's down for another ride.

My free hand slides down Ryker's abs, tracing my way down his etched cock frames, to the hard, pulsing cock below. "Say yes, Ryker," I whisper and give the head a squeeze.

It unfolds in slow motion. If I weren't chock full of Vrahs's power, I wouldn't have seen it at all.

And I have a choice.

Let it happen, or block it.

I smirk at the demon lord whose hand I allowed to ring my neck.

He pushes me against the wall, nose in my hair, hips grinding against mine.

"When I fuck you, witch," Ryker hisses in my ear. "And believe me, I will have that filthy little cunt of yours. It will be because we both want it, not some twisted game you're playing."

He releases my throat and puts three feet between us, turning his back on me faster than I truly realize what he's said.

I don't know what to make of any of it, so I just stare at his back, my mouth hanging open.

"Why are you here, witch?"

Unlike Thorne, who says it like a pet name, like it's the sweetest thing he can think to call me, Ryker says *witch* like it burns his tongue, like it's an insult.

Dick.

"I'm here because you froze my accounts, asshat."

He twists to meet my gaze with a smirk on his. "And? My orders haven't changed. I'm meant to be making your life hell for having the gall to summon demons above your ability and station."



“Oh, fuck you, Ryker. Thorne and Vrahs don’t seem to care about that anymore. And do you know how embarrassing it is having your card declined for a twenty-dollar brunch tab?”

“Your embarrassment doesn’t equate to the shame and—“

“Oh, shut up about a lowly witch summoning you! No one cares, Ryker. Least of all me.”

His eyes flash with anger, swirling the gold within like metallic whirlpools. “Stupid cur. Why do you pretend your actions have no consequences? Why do you insist it means nothing when you know exactly how dangerous this is? You know it so well, you tried to use it to threaten us.”

Well, now he’s just talking nonsense. “What are you talking about now?”

“Telling other demons a witch successfully summoned us is exactly the sort of rumor that gets other power-hungry demons looking for us. Eventually, one will succeed, and when they do, they’ll try to take the city from us.”

“Well, you’re in luck because I haven’t told any demons anything.”

“No, but you’ve told your witch friend. And who knows how many people she’s told?”

“Veruca would never. She’s no snitch.”

“Maybe not, witch. But it’s my job to make sure you keep this secret. Whether I like it or not.”

His brow pinches together, jaw tightening as he glares at me.

And it dawns on me. “You don’t like it, do you?”

Ryker scoffs. “That is of no consequence.”

I go to him. Not as close as before, but enough he knows I’m serious. “Isn’t it though?”

Deep creases furrow his forehead, but he says nothing.

I don’t push it. I don’t voice my suspicion that he’s just as unhappy and conflicted at making my life hell as I am having it done.

# Chapter 14

JADE



**A**fter Chonk leads me back to my room—I have no idea how I would find anything without him—I spend the afternoon trying to patch up the relationships the demon lords destroyed with my clients.

It proves more difficult than I thought.

“Yes, Mr. Kilcher, I understand what you heard, but I can assure you I do not use children in my practice. I don’t even like children that much, to be quite honest.”

“All the more reason for you to abuse them by forcing them to make pacts with demons.”

Mr. Kilcher was my biggest fish.

My whale client. He had me on a five-figure retainer *per month* just in case he needed me for a cleanup job.

Corporate espionage is a brutal way to get ahead, but he’d paid me well to do it and now, he sits comfortably as the CEO of Blackwood’s biggest importer.

I got him there by getting him access to his rival’s import scheduling data.

He paid me so well for the service that when I stumbled across his competitor’s sorting facility schematics, I threw it in at a discounted rate.

And now he pays me to make sure no one finds out.

Or, at least, he was paying me.

“Mr. Kilcher, that’s not how demon summoning works. Only someone capable of bringing a demon to our plane can make a deal with them. A child could never—”

“I don’t know how your magic works, Ms. Greenly, and frankly, I don’t care. This is about optics. If news that you use children to make blood pacts with demons gets out, even if it’s not true, anyone who’s associated with you will have a black mark next to their name.”

“Oh, you know how fickle the news cycle is. Even if it gets out, any negative effects won’t last long. And you know what they say, all publicity is good publicity.”

“Ms. Greenly, we’re going in circles. I’ve tried to be kind. Tried to explain my position. And now it’s time I’m blunt. Your services are no longer needed.”

He ends the call abruptly, and I throw my phone to the bed.

Chonk gives me a stink eye as it sails over his head.

“Fuck!”

I stomp around the room, pacing, trying to get my thoughts in order. Trying to think my way out of this.

But he’s right.

Until I can prove the lies Ryker spread were just that none of my clients are gonna touch me with a ten-foot pole.

I let it noodle around in my brain for a while longer before I decide to let my subconscious do the work. The second I get back in bed, Chonk curls up next to me, tucking himself tight to my side as if he agrees with the decision.

More likely he just wants to leech my body heat while we nap, but I’m taking wins where I can.

I fall into a sleep so deep that when I wake, I have no clue where I am, or what time it is. I check my phone. Midnight.

I slept for six hours. Chonk is still curled next to me, but he's wiggled his way under my arm somehow. I press a kiss to his big orange head and let my eyes shudder closed once more.

A knock at my door startles both Chonk and me out of bed. He's on his toes, hissing and fur sticking out every which way as I cross the room to open the door. A quick glance out the window tells me it's daylight at least.

Vrahs stands there, looking down at me, not a hair out of place, not a wrinkle in his suit.

I don't know what to say. Dunno which attitude to adopt. So I stay neutral and wait for him to speak.

His brow pulls together before he clears the expression and fixes his neutral face in place. "Why are you still sleeping?"

I pull a hand through my hair, aware of how terrible I must look, but I don't answer.

Vrahs is unbothered. "You have something of mine," he says flatly.

I nod. "And you took a lot of somethings from me."

He scoffs. "What I did hardly compares to what you've done to me."

I shrug. "I'm not really interested in comparing, slights, Vrahs. Give me back my... oh, I dunno, my *everything*, and I'll give you back *your* everything."

I'm surprised by how well I'm articulating myself without coffee and a shower, but I guess my subconscious did the work for me.

Thorne warned me he didn't know how to handle this situation, knowing that I didn't take Vrahs's power on purpose.

And I'd been letting it stew on the back burner of my mind, apparently did its job because...

The way I saw it, if I told him it was an accident, then I wouldn't have any bargaining chips. But if I let Vrahs continue to think I did it from a position of power, well then I might just get back what he took.

Was it a stupid plan?

Probably.

But I was doing it anyway.

He shoves his way into the room, forcing me to back away several steps until my knees are flush with the edge of my bed. “Do you have *any* idea the danger you’ve put me in, Jade?”

I shrug. “Gimme back my life, and I’ll give you yours.”

“I run the damn city, Jade! I need my power to keep all the moving parts working together. To keep the city safe.”

I nod, pausing to think over his point. After several moments, I respond. “Hmm, well, it seems like it’s really important to you, then.”

He sighs, relief crossing his features, but only momentarily. He covers it with his smug, stoic mask before I can blink. “It is. Thank you for understanding.”

I keep nodding. “Sure. And if it’s that important, then you’ll have no issue giving me back my life then, right?”

Vrahs roars at me. “I don’t have time for games, witch.”

I get right in his face. “Who’s playing games, demon? I’m offering you a trade, and your stubborn ass refuses to even consider it.”

“I cannot give you back what I took.”

“Why not? Seems pretty simple to me. Just release my accounts and explain to my landlord that you were mistaken and that I am, in fact, a good and trustworthy tenant. Perhaps offer to pay him for the inconvenience and stress your rumor caused him. And then do the same for my clients. Maybe you can tell them you’ve had such a huge change of heart and you were so mistaken, you’ve given me a hefty retainer and you’re now one of my best clients.

“Sounds pretty easy to me. Or are you too arrogant to admit to a few humans that you were wrong? If that’s the case, you could always just blame Ryker. He was only following your orders, but the stupid humans don’t have to know that, do they?”

His eyes fill with icy rage, and I gotta admit, it's better than the cool indifference of yesterday. I expect Vrahs to do what he always does when he's mad at me and push me against a wall and say ridiculously sexy things to me.

Preferably while holding on to my neck.

What can I say, a girl likes what a girl likes.

He steps closer, and I brace for the moment he shoves me into a wall, staring him dead in the eyes.

His gaze fills with unguarded desire. "You are incredibly beautiful when you're being stubborn and bossy."

His voice sounds strange. It's soft.

Gentle.

I hate it.

"What? Shut up. Don't say stupid shit like that. That's not what we do."

In a flash, the softness is gone, replaced with ancient glaciers, cold and unmoving. "Give me back my power, witch," he commands, his voice going to that subsonic, demon-y place that makes my bones go all mushy.

"Well, I will as soon as you accept the terms of my agreement, Vrahs."

"I cannot do that!"

"Why!"

His face twists into a snarl. "Because then you'll have no reason to stay."

His words hit me like arctic water. I'm drowning in them as much as I'm shocked by them.

Vrahs seems just as disgusted with himself. His eyes go wide, mouth open in shock, horror at what he just said.

He storms out, leaving me to stare after him.

"What the fuck was that?" I ask Chonk, who is happily licking his asshole on the end of my bed. So, he's busy and doesn't reply.

What did he mean?

And why would Vrahs want me to stay?

He couldn't be hooked after one night, could he?

He's a centuries old demon. Surely he's had nights of more depraved shit than what we did the other night.

But why else would he say that?

And what the fuck am I gonna do about it?



# Chapter 15

JADE



“Sixty-three seventy-five, please,” V says to the witch, who’s buying a storehouse worth of French lavender.

“Look, all I’m saying is if I were in your position, I wouldn’t be complaining about it.”

“Veruca!” I scold under my breath, and eye point at the glut of customers milling around, all of them with perfectly functional ears.

I’d caught her up through text, and she said we’d talk about it when I got here, but I didn’t expect her to be working while we tried to talk about my demon problem.

“What? You wanted to talk.”

“Where’s...” Fuck what was her name? “Your new assistant? Can’t you take a break or something?”

“She worked a double yesterday, which is why I could go out for brunch, remember?”

“Right.”

I scan the crowd, counting the heads. At this rate, it’d be midnight until I could get her in private.

“Thanks, Jenna,” V says as she bags up the lavender. “Next.”

A short man with a kind face comes up with an arm full of books. “My daughter just came out of the broom closet. Do you think these are OK for a

beginner?”

My cold, dead heart almost swelled out of my chest at the support this middle-aged, out-of-touch man has for his newly Wiccan, or pagan, or not-a-witch-with-powers daughter.

Veruca gives him a wide grin and rifles through the books. “Lemme see here. You have *Divination for Dummies*, *Herbalism 101*, and *Setting Up Your Altar For New Witches*. All excellent choices, sir.”

The man beams at her.

“And since you’re a first time shopper, here’s a punch card. You, or your daughter, will earn five percent off each punch, plus a free crystal after five punches.”

The man grins so hard I can see his molars. “That’s great. I’m sure my daughter will come by for more resources regularly.”

“I bet she will. And how about I throw in a ten percent discount just for being a kick ass dad?” V says.

“Oh, that’s not necessary. I’ll happily pay full price.”

Ugh. This guy. Could he get any nicer?

“Please,” V says, twisting a lock of hair around her finger. “I insist.” She rings in the final total, and the man pays with his card.

“Thank you,” he says as he leaves.

“Next?”

As the next customer walks up, V continues waxing on about my sex life. “If I had three dem—uh—damn fine guys chasing after me and wanting me to live in their, uh, mansion, I wouldn’t be whining to my best friend about it.”

“First of all, I wasn’t whining,” I say over the woman buying some pretty tumbled stones.

“Whatever you say, babe.”

“And second, this shit is way more complicated than that, and you know it.”

V shrugs, handing the woman her velvet pouch full of clinking stones. “Sure, Jade. Whatever you say.”

“Ugh! Seriously? Don’t hit me with that right now, V. I’m looking for my best friend’s advice, and you’re gonna hand me a ‘whatever you say, Jade’?”

She gives me a stern stare over the rim of her glasses before making a motion with her left hand, drawing it around us in a big circle. “There, sound proof bubble. Happy? Now I can tell you what I really think.”

Well, kinda yeah. But also... ”What about the normies in the store?”

“Fuck the normies. They live in Blackwood. If they don’t know by now, then they’re intentionally avoiding what’s right in front of their noses. Like some other witches I know.”

“Yeah,” I say with a smirk before realizing she was talking about me. “Hey.”

“Oh hey yourself, Jade. You hit the proverbial motherlode, you dumb cooz. But you’re too caught up in your own bullshit to even recognize what a fucking jackpot you have.”

“What...? But you...”

“Yeah, I know, demon lords are trash, no good, and only out for themselves. But you keep putting them in their place over and over again, Jade. And you can’t stop whining about wanting to bone all of them. Plus, you reek like all three of them. So, and I hate to put this so indelicately, but either shit or get off the pot, girl, ‘cause your issues are giving me the runs.”

“Veruca!”

Honestly, I didn’t know she had it in her.

She only stares at me, mouth set in a hard line. “You know I’m right. And you know what Thorne said is right, too.”

I sigh, not sure I wanted to indulge her even more. “Right about which thing, exactly?”

She lets out a sigh, like she’s been waiting to lay this on me. “You’ve been closed off since I met you. Likely since you got to Blackwood, but who

knows? Maybe before. But I know that's not who you are. You're not the dead inside, unfeeling trope of a person you present. Now, that's not to say I don't understand why you do it. After what you went through in your coven, and leaving the only life you ever knew, I'd want to protect myself as well. I'd keep my emotions locked down so no one could hurt me like your coven hurt you."

"That's not—"

V holds up a finger. "Quiet. I'm talking. You think that's not what's going on, but it is. It's why you drank yourself into oblivion after Em died, so you wouldn't have to feel any of it. But I'm telling you, babe, you've got at least one demon lord wanting to test the waters. And one who'll admit the same as soon as he gets his stubborn pride out of the way. I'm not so sure about that last one, though."

"Ryker?"

"Yeah. He sounds all kinds of fucked up. Maybe even more than you, which is definitely an accomplishment."

"Yeah, yeah, we get it. I'm broken. New punchline, please."

Veruca rolls her eyes at me. "You're still not getting it, Jade. We're *all* broken. Me, you, the demon lords, Noah... all of us. And you've found three demons who've seen your broken pieces and are trying to show you theirs. Trying to see if they match up. Trying to see if you can make something new together."

I let out a long huff, crossing my arms. "Well, if that's the case, then why are they making my life so fucking miserable?"

Veruca shakes her head at me as she gestures for the next customer to come up. "They're demons, dumbass! They don't know how to love. Not the way we do, at least."

And that clicks something into place in my brain.

"Fuck. I think you're right."

"Think?"

It's my turn to roll my eyes. "Fine. You're right. They're only doing what they know. Just like I'm doing what I know, protecting myself."

Veruca nods, dispelling the bubble charm. "Yup. And it's time you all stopped acting from habit and starting acting like goddamn adults."

The customer presents her tarot deck and feels the need to add her two cents. "Give 'em hell. Whoever they are," she says, smirking at me and V.

Tough love or not, V had one thing right.

I needed to act like an adult.

Not some love-sick, boy-crazed teenager.

Enough with the bullshit. From here on out, it's all business, all the time. No matter what.

# Chapter 16

JADE



“**W**hy have you summoned us?” Ryker snarls as he settles into the conference room alongside Vrahs, Ryker, Jameson the mayor, AJ, and whatever the fuck that police chief’s name is.

“Settle down, Ryker,” I say in a mock-soothing tone. “We’re here because we’ve been splitting our energies, our efforts, at solving the string of murders happening in Blackwood, and I’m here to put a stop to that.”

The chief of police scoffs, scooting his chair back. “I agreed to meet with the lords, not some bitchy little—”

“Uh-oh. You don’t wanna do that,” I say sweetly, letting fuchsia demon power rise in my eyes.

The chief swallows so hard the sound echoes throughout the conference room.

“Name calling doesn’t really suit you,” I say lightly and continue. “Now, we need everyone to lay all their cards on the table. All the information you have about the murder, or regarding the killer, needs to come out now.”

The chief of police starts in on his rebuttal, but I cut him off.

“With none of that dick-measuring jurisdiction shit. Got it? We’re all on the same team here.”

His face twists like someone turned a port-a-potty upside down in front of



him before he begrudgingly nods.

“Good. AJ, why don’t you start?”

“Yeesh, talk about a tension breaker,” AJ says with her signature lighthearted tone. “Right, so…” She clicks the remote in her hand and a gory image of black and white viscera flashes to life on the far wall. “This is the last victim, identified as Cindy Jenks. The marks in her body indicate that whoever did this ripped her apart with bare hands.”

The police chief turns a shade of green that makes me smile.

“Bare hands capable of shifting forms.”

“Wolf shifter?” Jameson is the first to offer.

“Possibly,” AJ says. “But honestly, I’ve never seen claw marks like this. It could be any kind of shifter, or any supe with the ability to change form.”

“Even a demon,” Chief Oiler—that’s his name—says, staring right at me. The accusation isn’t subtle.

“Oh, babe, you’ve got it all wrong. I’m not a demon, and the last I checked, I wouldn’t kill my own sister, then lock myself in her condo for five weeks drinking anything I could get my hands on.”

The chief shrugs. “Guilt will do crazy things to a person.”

I stand up, leaning over the table, getting as close to him as possible. “I hear it’s pretty crazy what a fist backed by demon magic will do to a person’s nose, too.”

Thorne speaks up. “Jade, he’s only throwing out all the options. It’s what we’re supposed to be doing here.”

I shake my head. It’s more than that. He wasn’t suggesting a reasonable scenario. He was picking at a festering wound intentionally as payback.

Gaze still locked on the chief, I snarl, “If you think that’s what’s going on, then you’re dumber than you look.” The statement is for both Oiler and Thorne.

Thorne chuckles. “OK, fair enough. Let’s sit back down and continue where we left off, then.”

And sure, that sounds like a perfectly rational idea.

I should do it.

A tiny sliver of me wants to sit back down and continue.

But another part, the biggest part of me swimming in demonic magic, wants to show this asshole the broadside of my boot.

And then maybe shit on him.

Ew.

Gross.

Why would I...

Fucking demon magic.

Was that a thing they did?

Thorne's hand glides up my shoulder and over my collarbone before coming to rest on his, and all the demon lords', favorite spot.

My throat.

"Sit down, tricky witch," he murmurs next to my ear.

A shudder rolls through me, and thank fuck there aren't any wolves in the room, because that just threw my libido into uncharted territory.

Holding me back from giving this guy what he deserves by the throat...

Why is that so goddamn hot?

I'm a really fucked up witch, aren't I?

Stay the course, Jade. Grownup shit only. No getting caught up in hormones.

Thorne guides me back to the chair, but my eyes remain locked on Oiler.

"Insinuate that I had anything to do with Emerald's death again, and those will be your last words, Oiler."

The green tinge takes over more of his face, and the chief's pupils dilate wide like a prey animal watching the teeth and claws about to tear him to shreds.

"Right, um, where was I?" AJ clicks to the next slide. "Ah, yes," she says when the image of the previous victim, Sherry from Pip's, flashes on the

wall. “This victim doesn’t have the same severity of wounds, nor do the previous victims, which points at an evolution.”

“An evolution. What do you mean by that?” Jameson asks.

AJ meets his gaze, and her expression changes. It’s slight.

But I notice.

“With each murder, the killer learns something that changes the way he approaches the next murder. Either he didn’t get something he was after in the previous victim, or—”

“Or he likes playing with his catch,” Oiler says.

As gruesome as it sounds, and as much as I hate to admit it, he has a point.

“Well, I, for one, don’t want to wait until the next murder to find out which,” I say. “Given the new information, does anyone have any thoughts on the situation?”

No one offers a word.

“Nothing? Not even speculation?”

Vrahs speaks, leveling a distant gaze on me.

I like it and hate it. I like that he’s actually looking at me again and hate that his stare is void of his usual icy spark. “Speculation helps no one, Jade.”

Ryker this time. “AJ, are you able to extrapolate the size and shape of the claws based on the marks and show us a rendering of what they looked like?”

AJ smiles. “Excellent question, Lord Ryker, and I’m two steps ahead of you.” She clicks over to the next slide, and a set of long, curved claws appear on the wall.

About seven inches long, with tips that point inward and a serrated edge on the outer side of every claw.

I let out a low whistle. “I’ve never seen anything like that.”

I glance around the table, and judging by the human’s responses, they haven’t either.

But the demon lords...

Vrahs stands abruptly, gaze boring into poor AJ. “You’re certain that’s what the claws look like?”

She nods. “Positive. He left clear enough marks. I made a cast of the wound. It’s a perfect rendering.”

Vrahs pulls a hand through his golden hair. “Ryker—”

“On it,” Ryker disappears into a slip of a portal.

“Whoa, what’s going on here? You can’t just call us to a meeting and jump ship,” Oiler says.

Thorne stands, eyeing the chief. “How an idiot like you got an appointed position, I’ll never know. But we’re going to catch the owner of those claws, dipshit.”

Vrahs grabs my arm. “Jade, come with me. Now.”

I suck in a breath and get out of my seat.

“So bossy,” I say lightly, despite my insides quaking.

In a good way or bad, I’m not sure. But that’s the fun of it, right?

# Chapter 17

RYKER



I've never been more thankful for a conference table than just then.

Jade telling off that miscreant who calls himself a police chief was an unexpected turn on.

Seeing her back it up with my brother's power?

Unmatched.

My cock turned to steel under that table, and it took everything in me not to claim her body across it.

I fucking hate it and love it in the same breath. In equal measure.

How am I supposed to abide this?

She's not a demoness, but even if she were...

Demons don't court or love or fuck the way humans do.

We take what's ours.

We fight and kill and conquer.

And I don't know what to do with a soft, green-eyed witch whose bones are so brittle they'll break if I unleash myself and have her the way I'm meant to.

Who'll die old and broken and sick.

Who'll leave me here alone and bereft.

Worse for having known her.

I push those thoughts from my head and focus on the task Vrahs gave me.

It's been a while, but I think I still know how to pry my way into the right realm.

Demons, like humans, inhabit multiple realms. And the one I'm going to isn't the friendliest bunch.

At least, not the last time I was there.

But that's all in the past. I just need to focus on finding the leader and grilling him about why he's running such a shoddy operation.

The moment the three of us saw those barbed claws, we knew exactly what kind of supe they belonged to.

They're demon claws. A very particular kind of demon claw.



VRAHS

ONCE WE'RE WITHIN THE SOUNDPROOF WALLS OF MY OFFICE, I LET LOOSE ON the arrogant witch with stolen power.

“Did it make you feel good, brandishing the ill-gotten power at another human? Do you feel better? Or do you just feel like what you are?”

She crosses her arms and curls her lip at me. “Why don't you enlighten me? What am I, Vrahs?”

“A bully.”

The remark lands exactly where I aimed it. She steps back, and her mouth parts the slightest bit.

“I am not—“

“SILENCE! I am speaking, human. Learn your godforsaken place, for once.”

Her chin juts out, and I'm possessed with the urge to snatch it and lay a kiss on it.

I shake the thought off and glare at her. “Did you think showing off in front of two humans with power you stole from me will put you in my good graces?”

She shrugs, eyebrow rising. “I’m not particularly interested in currying your favor, Lord Vrahs.” She spits out my name in such a filthy way, I’m tempted to rip the clothes off her back and show her how a filthy mouth should be used.

“Return my power, witch, or I’ll—“

“You’ll what? Yell some more? Call me some more names? You’ve already taken everything from me, dickhead. There’s nothing left. No leverage. You have nothing on me. So how about you come to the fucking bargaining table like a grownup and make me a good-faith offer?”

A growl vibrates in my throat.

“How dare you speak to me with such—“

“How dare you continue to put your city at risk by acting like a child?” she yells before collapsing bonelessly into the sofa. “Lucifer’s titty twister, Vrahs, isn’t it exhausting? Isn’t it enough already? Grow the fuck up and admit that a stupid, mortal witch bested you, and let’s move the fuck on, OK?”

I gaze at her, slouched over on two cushions, exhausted. Purple rings her eyes again, but her cheeks have a fuller appearance and a healthy glow.

She’s tired, but not the way she was when we first met.

I’m grateful her fatigue hasn’t also loosened her tongue and she isn’t bringing up what I accidentally said before leaving the last time.

I hardly knew the words were coming before they were out of my mouth. And yet...

And yet they were true.

“I don’t want you leaving,” I say with more authority than necessary.

She doesn’t reply, just stares at me, that one eyebrow cocked over her blazing eyes.



“But I will release your assets.” I let out a breath. There. That feels marginally better. Now all that’s left is for her to agree.

“And?”

“And what? That’s all you’re getting,” I snarl.

“Well, then you’re not getting your pretty pink power back.”

Another rumbling growl. “Fine. I’ll speak to your clients.”

She nods.

I hold out my hand, readying for the power exchange.

“And?”

“I’m not giving you back your apartment, witch!”

“Then you’re not getting—“

“Why? Why must you have it so badly?”

She rolls her eyes at me, scoffing, and I’m again possessed with the urge to strip her bare and punish her for her disrespect. “Because it’s *mine*, fuckhead!”

Before I fully know I’m moving, I’ve yanked her off the sofa and spun her around so she’s bent over my desk.

She sucks in a sharp gasp and fills the room with her delectably spicy scent of arousal.

“Wha—what are you doing?” she asks, voice stretched thin as a rubber band.

“I’m making sure you don’t leave.” I rumble with a part of my voice I’ve never heard before.

Deeper than deep, it draws a violent shiver from Jade.

“What does that mean?” she asks.

“Stop talking, witch.” I didn’t say that.

I did. It was my voice. But a deeper, less evolved and primal part of me used it. The same part of me that thinks that taking Jade against my desk will convince her not to leave once I’ve released her apartment.

It’s its own entity. The way some shifters describe their animal aspect. It

craves Jade's touch. Her skin. Her cunt.

It craves her nearness, and there isn't a thing I can do about it.

I pull the jacket off her back and rip the rag of a garment she calls a t-shirt right down the middle. Her back arches upward as the tearing fabric reveals her skin, and I'm overcome with the compulsion to run my tongue along her spine.

I don't deny the beast within me and bend, laying my tongue flat against her warm skin.

The moan that drags from her as I drag my tongue along her flesh spurs a sympathetic growl in me.

"You're mine, Jade Greenly," I rattle against her ear, kicking her legs out wide.

She whimpers under me, and the sound smashes into the pleasure center of my brain.

"Tell me you're mine, Jade," I command, ripping the pants off her body.

Another whimper, and her ass arches upward against my throbbing cock.

I groan at the friction and release myself from the constraints of clothing.

My cock heaves out, bouncing on her ass cheek.

Her ass cheek with several handprints on it.

The beast within flies into a rage.

I spin her around, facing me. Her gaze is clear, wide, and full of lust.

And my goddamn power.

"Who marked your flesh?" I roar.

Her eyes flutter closed, and the sound washes over her. But she doesn't back down. Doesn't show a single hint of fear.

"Answer me!"

Her eyes flash to mine, blazing with my power and her iron will. "Your brother. And I fucking loved every second."

I can't control myself. My wings snap outward, falling out of nullspace. As do my horns.

The beast within takes control, and I let it.

My clothes shred as the change alters my body. Jade grows farther away  
as my bones lengthen and recombine.

I look down at her.

And she gazes in awe back.

At the real me.

## Chapter 18

JADE



**O**h fuck.  
Oh fuckity fucking fucktart on a fuckstick!  
I feel like I should look away. Like seeing Vrahs's true form is some big no-no.

But I can't pull my eyes away from all seven—fuck, I dunno, maybe eight—feet of hard, rippling red demon.

Red.

Not like cartoon red.

Like rich, deep carmine.

His skin is such a deep shade of red, it seems velvety. I'm tempted to run my finger down the bulging vein that travels the top of his biceps.

His face is harsher, angles more sharp, more severe.

But I still see Vrahs, despite all the changes. Including his horns, which now span the width of the desk.

I take in his nude and new body, the bulky muscles...

His furred, cloven-hooved legs.

"Are you fucking kidding me?" I whisper.

Vrahs looks down at himself.

But he keeps looking. Like it's the first time he's seen himself.

"Been awhile?"

His eyes flash to mine. “You’ve no idea what you’ve done, witch.”

His voice shreds into me, low and resonant and layered. A shiver skates down my spine, and Vrahs lunges for me.

I’m tempted to duck.

I’m not too proud to say that the huge creature Vrahs just shifted into scares me a little.

His hand is so big it covers my whole abdomen as he presses me into the desk.

“Give me my power.” The sound cascades around me, and I can’t help but lower my lids and enjoy the tingles.

Scared but also weirdly turned on?

What the fuck is wrong with me?

“Not a game, witch.”

“No,” I groan. “But your new voice has a direct line to my spine. It’s fucking incredible.”

With his free hand, Vrahs grabs my thigh, spreading me open, gaze lasered on my pussy. His pupils blow out, and a rumbling sort of purr rattles in his chest.

I’m already turned on, but seeing Vrahs’s visceral reaction to my body...

Pussy faucet on.

He strokes his enormous demon cock, that I’m just now noticing is *decorated*.

“Oh fuck,” I murmur.

The head has a barbell piercing going straight through it and the underside has a line of barbells going straight down like a ladder.

Jacob’s Ladder, I believe.

“Those are new,” I mumble, tongue suddenly thick.

Vrahs doesn’t hear me or notice. He’s too focused on lining our bodies up.

“Hey, hey, now.” I squirm under the hand still on my stomach. “You’re

not gonna put that where I think you're gonna put that, are you?"

His eyes are all pupil.

"Mine," he growls as I try my best to shimmy away.

"Not yours. Mine," I say. "And as the owner of this pussy, I'd like to formally request that you not destroy it with your foot-and-a-half long pierced demon dick."

He swoops closer, face inches from me. "Mine," he repeats.

"Yeah, yeah, I heard you. Thing is, I'm guessing that dick is meant for a big demoness. And as you can clearly see, I am not that. So maybe bring back your other body?"

"Mate." His lips graze mine as the word tumbles from him.

What?

What did the big dumb red devil with a suddenly limited vocabulary just say to me?

I kick out, connecting with his giant red balls, and roll off the table. He doubles over, both hands cupping his nuts.

A design flaw if ever there were one.

For good measure, I push the big demon over so he's half on the sofa in the fetal position.

"I don't know what the fuck is going on with you, or this big red guy, or that fucking word you just said to me, but I am not amused."

Vrahs, or whatever took Vrahs's place, growls and the walls shake with his fury.

"Oh, shut up, you big baby. You'll be fine." I grab what's left of my clothes and head for the door.

"Witch... mate," the devil moans.

"No. I'm not. And I don't want to see you until you're in your right mind again."

I slam the door behind me and search for Chonk, hoping he's there to guide me back to my room so I can put on clothes that aren't ripped to shreds.

But Chonk isn't here.

And neither is anyone else.

So I put the power I stole to good use and portal myself back to my room.

It's a lot easier with actual demon power. I hardly had to think about it before I appeared in the middle of my bedroom in the basilica.

"Thanks, fatty," I say as he snores on the end of my bed.

He's curled peacefully in a circle, oblivious to me and doing a fantastic impression of a fat orange donut.

I get dressed on autopilot while flashes of Vrahs calling me that awful word play on repeat in my head.

I can't stop it from looping.

And I don't like any of it.

Mate?

Like wolf shifters and vamp shit?

Is that even a thing demons do?

My stomach goes sour at the thought.

I made a vow to twenty-year-old Jade that I would never be *mated* to someone.

Not after everything I went through abandoning the coven that wanted to have me "mate" with as many men as possible to ensure the magical line continued pure and uninterrupted.

Fucking disgusting word and a disgusting—

Heavy, giant-sized footfalls stomp closer, and I have the absurd thought that I now know what Jack of Beanstalk fame went through.

"MATE!"

He's right outside the door.

How did he get here so quickly without portaling?

I glance at Chonk, as if he might have an answer. He's awake now, casually licking his toe, like he can't hear the Fee Fi Fo Fum motherfucker on the other side of the door.



With a single thunderous bang, Vrahs smashes the door in, and I scoot around the bed, putting it between him and me.

“What the fuck are you doing?” It’s nearly a screech.

Thick, darkened brows pull together. “Mate?”

“No! I’m not your goddamn mate, you caveman... Now get the fuck outta my room before—”

He leaps over the bed and his somehow still hard, metal-adorned, baseball bat-sized cock bounces right along with him.

His body blocks all escape routes, and Devil Vrahs draws a finger gently down my cheek. That low rattling purr starts again, and he traces down my jaw to my throat.

It happens too fast for me to stop.

“No!!” I squeak as his giant hand wraps around my throat. He lifts me up, and my feet dangle in the air. If I weren’t bursting at the seams with demon magic, I’d likely have a serious neck injury to look forward to.

As it is, Big Red isn’t pressing on my airway. In fact, hanging there was a really pleasant stretch on my back. And, I mean, Vrahs... he looks *really* good...

*Lucifer’s bleached poo shooter, Jade. Quit flirting with the giant trying to dick-skewer you to death and think your way out of this!*

*Mrrroow?*

Chonk’s insistent meow draws Big Red’s attention.

“Kitty.” Vrahs reaches for him.

With both fucking hands, letting me fall to my feet.

*I owe you one, Chonk.*

As his enormous red hands go for him, all I can imagine is this big, dumb, instinct-only version of Vrahs accidentally squishing him.

“Don’t you fucking Lenny my cat Vrahs!” I scream, and try to knock his hand out of the way.

It’s too late.

His palms are already inches away from Chonk's head.

*Mrow?*

Chonk stretches upward, bunting Vrah's palm with the top of his head and letting out a jet engine purr.

"Kitty likes me," he rumbles, and I take the opportunity to jump on the bed and run out of the room.

I'll have to steal a can of tuna from Thorne to thank Chonk properly.

He really took one for the team.

But relief is short-lived.

I'd gotten some distance in the maze of identical hallways, but soon enough, Big Red's thundering footsteps echoed behind me.

Leaving me one choice.

I couldn't portal while in the bedroom because he had his hand around my neck.

I don't want to be the guy's mate, but that doesn't mean I want to potentially amputate his hand at the wrist.

That might not be a real possibility. The portal might have just dragged him in with me, but I wasn't taking any chances either way.

I draw on Vrahs's magic within me and get myself the fuck outta here.

I'm aiming farther than just a room or floor away, so even with the demon magic, I really focus on the details.

The blue Queen Anne's chairs and bay of curving windows come into view and I step backward, hoping I don't end up shredded in nullspace.

The second the neon skyline comes into view, I collapse to the ground, kissing the Persian rug under my feet like a sailor after a rough go at sea.

I'm just about to rub my face on it the way Chonk rubs his face on chair legs and wall corners...

"Do you want a minute to be alone with your rug?"

I yelp, hopping into a crouch before blasting whoever is in my apartment without my permission with a concussive ball of formless magic.

It's an instinct, and the ball is out of my palms before I register who the fuchsia and gold ball is hurtling toward.

“Jameson!”

The orb, turbo-charged with a shit ton of demon juice, smacks the mayor right in the center of the chest.

He doesn't scream.

The mayor's face doesn't contort with pain as the concussive force pummels through him, exploding organs.

I run to his side, grabbing hold of his arm, preparing to support him as he falls.

Be there as he draws his last breath.

“It's OK. I'm here. I'm so sorry. I forgot about the demon magic. I-I... You're not alone.”

Jameson doesn't fall.

He doesn't even seem shaken.

We lock eyes, then stare at his chest.

There isn't a mark on it.

Not a single scorched fiber.

I run my hands over him, double checking, before backing away. “What the fuck just happened?”

He shrugs. “Fuck if I know. I'm just glad it did.”

I let out a shudder, allowing the adrenaline from thinking I was about to be the last person this man ever sees, to dissipate.

“You're sure you're OK?”

He nods. But I can't—

How is this possible? I dart toward him once more, unbuttoning his shirt.

“Um...”

“Shut up, I have to be sure,” I say.

It's a nice chest. Rounded pecs, the perfect amount of hair.

I run my hand over his skin, sinking into my power to see what else I

could see.

“Jade?”

“Quiet, I’m making sure you’re not about to explode all over my curated antiques.”

Like in the morgue, I slip into a kind of second-sight where I can see through my lids and through what’s physically there, to what’s magically present.

“Oh, fuck.”

# Chapter 19

JADE



“**W**hat? What!? I’m really trying to play it cool here, Jade, but you’re worrying me.”

I have no idea what I’m looking at.

But the urge to not look any longer is powerful, so I do myself a solid and listen, stepping away.

“For fuck’s sake, Jade! What is it?”

“I—“

Jameson grabs me by the shoulder, shaking me.

Kinda hard, actually.

“Tell me what you saw! Am I about to die?”

“What? Oh, no, nothing like that.”

Jameson releases me, letting out a tremendous sigh. He puts his back to me, presumably to get himself together.

After a moment or two, he faces me once more, shirt buttoned, face a normal amount of tense for the mayor of a city in the middle of a crime spree.

“If I’m not dying, then what the hell did you see in me?”

I collapse into a chair, overwhelmed by...

“Dude, I have no idea what I saw.” I try to keep it from coming out of my mouth. But I just can’t stop it. “What *are* you?”

Blech. I can’t believe I just asked that question.

“What the hell kinda question is that, Jade?”

“I mean, what kinda supe do you have in your bloodline?”

The mayor throws his hands up. “I’m a man. A human man with no powers or supes in my family.”

“Right. Well, I’ll believe that when Lucifer himself comes and tells me I’m his long-lost bride.”

Jameson lets out another enormous breath before coming to sit in the chair opposite me.

I stare at him, adrenaline finally waning enough to have a clear thought.

I’ve never seen a demon with my new second-sight. And Jameson is a new mayor...

He has no family here. No real ties to Blackwood outside of his position.

I swallow hard, acid rising in my throat as it occurs to me I might be sitting next to... “Are you the demon that killed my sister?”

The mayor’s eyes go wide, but he doesn’t answer.

“And why are you in my apartment?”

He stays silent.

“And why are you so good at deflecting demonic power?”

I stand, putting distance between us, taking on a loose fighting stance.

I do some quick street math.

He’s a little under six feet and fairly broad. He doesn’t look like he spends all day at the gym, but if he’s a supe, there’s no telling what he’s actually packing.

It doesn’t matter. If he comes for me, I’m ready.

The mayor pulls his hand across his face. “I’m not a demon, Jade, and I didn’t kill your sister or anyone else.”

I can’t tell if he’s lying.

“Why are you in my apartment?”

“I’m looking for evidence.”

“Uh, evidence of what, exactly?”

“Evidence that you and the demon lords are in this together to try to kick me and Oiler out of our positions so they can put themselves in our place.”

“What? Why would you think something so stupid?” I can’t help it.

He laughs, rubbing the back of his neck. “Yeah, now that I’m saying it out loud, it sounds pretty silly.”

“The lords aren’t interested in putting more on their plate. Besides, they need you and Barney Fife to keep the human interests at heart.”

“That’s not fair. Oiler—”

“Oiler is a dickfuck, and you know it.”

“I—I don’t know it. What is a dickfuck, exactly?”

“Oiler.” I can’t make it any clearer than that.

“Look, I’m not a demon. I didn’t kill anyone. And I have no idea why your Powerball 9000 didn’t blow me to smithereens.”

I can’t read him.

He seems like he’s telling the truth, like he truly doesn’t know what’s going on.

“I’m only gonna say this once, Jameson. If it turns out that you’re some kind of sleeper agent demon, or just a fantastic actor and liar, and I find out that you lied to my face, in my home.” I pause, letting the silence thicken the air.

“I will not hesitate to kill you.”

He stares at me for a long time.

Neither of us blinks.

“I believe you,” he says finally.

“Now, unless you have something of actual value to report, get the fuck out of my apartment.”

The mayor of Blackwood stares at me for a few more beats.

“Something else, Mayor?”

He smiles, letting out a little puff of air that might have been a laugh.

“No. I just see why they chose you.”



He heads for the door, and I stop him with a hand on his shoulder. “What are you talking about?”

“The lords. I see it now,” he continues toward the door.

“Hang on. You’re not just gonna leave like you didn’t just say that. What the hell are you talking about, Jameson?”

He smiles again, rubbing his neck in that way of his that makes him look relatable and humble.

An “aw shucks” thing.

“I probably already said too much.”

He gets to the door, and I let him leave. Too dumbfounded to press him further.

My head spins with the possibilities, concocting theories, scenarios.

If the demon lords chose me for something, did that mean the whole “how did you summon us” deal was a ruse? Something to trick me into trusting them? Or to hide their true motives?

No. I can’t believe that.

But I have no other explanation.

It *shouldn’t* have been possible for a single witch, even one with my chops and experience, to summon three demon lords and not get her mind erased.

Even with their sigil ring accidentally entering the summoning circle, I should be blabbering in an asylum somewhere.

And if they chose me, what exactly have they chosen me for?

All on its own, an image of Big Red pops into my brain, petting Chonk and calling me that awful word.

Mate.

I push the thought from my mind and go to my room.

I didn’t have answers, but I had a book that might.

*Demons of Lore and Yesteryear: A Compendium of Cultural Practices and Beliefs Volume 34* wasn’t exactly light reading.

In fact, I'd never once cracked open this book in my entire summoning career.

I liked my lessons set in the real world, not in black and white print. And especially not in book form. I like the search function too much to waste time turning pages.

But this book doesn't exist in ebook format, so I'll have to suck it the fuck up.

I open it randomly and nearly snap the book shut.

"You've got to be kidding me," I say, taking in the four columns of teeny text on each page. I flip through the book, hoping that it's maybe just that section with eye-bleeding formatting.

"Fuuuuuck." It comes out like a whine, and I mean every syllable of it.

I do snap the book shut and contemplate chucking it into the fireplace.

Four columns is torture!

And I don't have time to scour a million words to find my answer.

I've got plenty of things to worry about.

But if the opportunity arises, I'll be asking the first demon lord the moment I can.

# Chapter 20

RYKER



**T**he reaper plane looks nothing like I remember. Granted, it's been close to five centuries since last I was here. Where once there were only desolate brutalist buildings and barren, scorched earth, now there are green grasses and lush trees.

And blooming flowers.

The skies no longer crackle with unending lightning. It's clear and blue and dotted with cottony clouds.

It's...

Unsettling.

They must have a surplus of souls to make the plane look so...

Earth-like.

"Where's the head council?" I ask the first reaper I come across in the street.

He looks at me like I'm not speaking the same language. "We haven't had a head council since the Reckoning."

Reckoning? "OK. Who's in charge, and how do I find them?"

"That'd be Rygel. And you don't find him. He finds you."

The reaper heads off, but I stop him with a sharp whistle. He turns, eyes narrowed.

"I'd think someone of your lowly status would recognize a lord when he

sees one. Answer me fully, demon. Where can I find Rygel?”

The reaper looks me up and down. “We got rid of that dumb hierarchy shit when Rygel eviscerated the last council members. No demon is above another on this plane.”

That would have been excellent information to have before portaling here.

“Then I apologize for not familiarizing myself with your customs. It’s been an age since I was last here.”

The reaper just stares at me, expression blank. “Apologies are for humans and children.”

I let a snarl leak through my gritted teeth.

If they don’t respect titles in this place, then I’m betting they’ll respect brute strength.

“Don’t make me force the knowledge from your tongue.”

The reaper only stares at me. “I’d like to see you try.”

He’s a smaller demon.

One of the smallest I’ve seen.

“Be reasonable. It’s hardly a fair fight.”

At that, the demon with the boarish face snarls. “I’d wager my last batch of souls that you’ll come to regret that statement.”

“I have no use for souls, reaper. Why not just tell me—”

The bastard sucker punches me in the side of my head. I somehow both don’t see it coming or see how he could reach so high.

I block his next strike, reaching for his exposed middle, but the reaper anticipates that and side-steps me.

And then I’m on my back.

No clue how I got here, wings pinned under me with the reaper’s boot on my nuts. “Yield!”

He looks me in the eye as he applies more pressure to my crotch. “My name is Barbas, and I bet that’s the last time you ever underestimate someone

because of their size.”

He leans over, after removing his boot from my junk, and offers a hand to help me up.

I bat it away and get up on my own. “Who are you? How did you—”

“I told you. I’m Barbab. One of the three Champions of the plane.”

And now it makes sense. They didn’t use titles, but I’d definitely run into my equal. And he just made sure I knew it.

“You’ve sure taught me a lesson,” I say, brushing the dust off my pants.

“What business do you have with Rygel?”

“Is he another Champion of the plane?”

“He is.”

“And by talking to you...”

“I can help you with whatever you need. We don’t often get visitors to our plane. But when we do, I make sure one of us is here to greet them.”

Ah. I see.

A test. They let me portal here without issue, but wanted to test my muster before letting me into their inner circle. Makes sense.

“There’s a rogue reaper in my realm. He’s killing humans, ripping them apart with his claws.”

Barbab’s expression shifts from neutral to serious. “You’re sure it’s one of my reapers?”

“We think he’s hunting for souls.”

“Impossible. We did away with soul collecting for sport. He’d have no incentive to kill for a soul.”

“Well, he’s still killing people.”

“How do you know it’s a reaper demon?”

“The claws.” I pull out my phone and show him a picture of the coroner’s slide. “Our coroner made a mold of the wounds and—”

“Yes, I know how forensic science works,” he hisses as he glares at the picture of a perfect set of curving low-level reaper claws.

“Come with me,” Barbas says and heads off toward a tall dormitory in the distance.



## THORNE

I’M JUST ABOUT TO START MY WEEKLY CLEANING OF THE SEX TOY COLLECTION when Vrahs rips my door off the hinges and barges in. I know it’s him without looking because he has the most wonderful rage floating off him.

“Did the little witch make you mad again?” I say, organizing the toys from small to large.

“Left me!”

His voice is strange, lower than normal, if that’s possible. I glance up from the line of silicone and glass.

*“Peccatores et meretrices!”*

I step back several feet.

“Brother?”

The enormous red demon nods at me.

My mouth falls open as I realize what’s happened. “Vrahs! You’ve found your true form!” I go to him, unable to keep myself from touching his new flesh.

“Holy schnauzers, that’s a massive new cock!” I restrain myself from reaching out to boop Vrahs’s cock.

That would be weird.

“She left!”

“What are you saying? Who...” Oh, fuck.

“Mate. Left me.”

This is worse than I thought. Shit. I don’t know what to do.

This doesn't happen anymore.

Not since the last demones.

"Vrahs, friend, I need you to look at me. Can you do that?" I say slowly.  
"You're in your true form because your mate compelled it."

"Know this! Mate! Need mate!"

"And your brain is full of hormones and chemicals, driving you to claim the mate that brought your true form, and that's pushing higher reason and thought out the window."

"MATE!"

I step closer to the trembling giant, pulling on his arm so he looks at me.

His gaze stops frantically scanning for his mate and lands on me.

"You must get yourself together, Vrahs."

He pulls a grimace so big he looks like the demon emoji, but in red.

"I'm sorry, friend. You have to figure out how to put your new form away. Can you do that?"

"Mate!" He stomps his foot, and I'm tempted to laugh if it weren't so sad.

"I'm sorry, old friend," I say quietly and pull him into a tight hug. "I'll help you any way I can."

Whatever he did to make Jade leave, my only hope is I can convince her to come back.

Because without her, Vrahs will suffer.

He'll suffer until his true form takes over for good and tries to find her. And then he'll be lost to us forever.



# Chapter 21

JADE



**A**s I'm enjoying a cup of coffee, in *my* kitchen, at *my* window, overlooking *my* part of town, I catch movement from the corner of my eye.

Inside my kitchen.

Right next to me.

My hands go cold.

*You're fine. You're home. Big Red can't get you here. He doesn't have any power.*

I nod, agreeing with the self-soothing thought and glance toward the movement. But there's nothing there. After several moments of staring at the same spot to make sure the "nothing" doesn't come back, I promise myself that if it does, I won't hesitate to blow a hole in my kitchen, and go back to gazing out the rain-streaked window.

How odd. It rarely rains this time of year, but I love the soft focus glow it gives the neon city. The hazy, dreamlike smears of color on the horizon.

So much is different, and yet those pink and blue lights have the gall to stay the same.

More fluttering movement and instead of Big Red, my thoughts go to multiplying colorful frogs...

Shit. If those goddamn demons...

I spin around, half convinced it will vanish if I look directly at it again.  
It doesn't.

And it's not a frog. It's a feather, drifting across the floor as the air circulator kicks on.

I cross the kitchen and pick it up.

It's not a sharp flight feather, but a fluffy, black, downy feather.

So either a raven made itself comfy in my absence and started molting...

Or Ryker accidentally left me a present while he was here dropping off frogs.

"Ass," I mumble and blow the feather off my palm. It floats to the floor slowly, and as annoying as the bit of fluff is, I can't wait for Chonk to discover it.

Feathers make good cat toys.

Oh, my fucking shit...

Chonk!

How did it just occur to me that I left my dead sister's cat behind?!

True, he likes the basilica and demon lords far better than he ever seemed to like me.

But, still. He's *my* dead sister's cat, and he facilitated my escape. I should go back for him.

But, the demon lords won't hurt him. Even Big Red was gentle, and Chonk is happy there, so I guess that's something.

I'll get him back when I get the rest of my life back.

And on that note, I need to talk to Veruca.

In lieu of going to the Drunken Witch and bugging her, I call, hoping to find out if her source has made progress with the blade.

That's not true.

I know Veruca. And she knows how important this is. She'll call me the second she hears something.

The blade is just an excuse.

I'm really calling to feel out whether I should mention my suspicions about Noah and Jameson.

And maybe, possibly, tell her about Big Red.

She picks up her cell on the first ring, meaning she's not in the shop.

And that means she's likely with Noah.

Great.

I don't begrudge my best friend her bone-friend. But if that bone-friend turns out to be the guy who killed my sister...

"Any word on the blade?"

Veruca sighs into the phone. "Hello, Jade. How are you? I'm doing just great. Thanks for asking."

"Sorry. Any word on the blade?"

"Ugh, can't a woman be a wanton sex goddess in peace? I will let you know the second I know."

"Right. Do you think you could prod your source a little? Let them know we're on a time crunch?"

"I can try. He doesn't enjoy being bothered, though. We have that in common."

I barrel right on past her comment. "Tell him I'll double his rate if he gets me the answer by the end of the day."

Crisp sheets rustled in the background, like Veruca's getting out of bed. "I thought you said the demon lords cut off your assets."

"They did. But I'm working on getting them back."

Veruca pauses. "Um, do you think it's smart, promising things before you can make good?"

The question is so unlike Veruca.

She's not a pusher. Not a nagger. And she's never once second-guessed any of my decisions.

For fuck's sake, she let me mourn Em in peace for five weeks.

Alone.

And drunk.

Because she understood, that's what I needed.

"What's gotten into you, V? Why the grilling and second-guessing me suddenly?"

"First, I asked you one question. That's not grilling, you weirdo."

I know she's right. But I also know that I hate probing questions. "Sorry. You know how I feel about that kinda thing."

"I dunno, I guess I just... I worry about you, Jade. Even more now, it seems."

Why more now? Because of the demon lords? Because she has time to worry now? Because of Noah?

"Well, worry about yourself."

"Oh, believe me, I do that too."

Ugh. Is this the door? The opening I'm supposed to walk through to potentially break her heart about Noah?

"I'm actually serious, V."

"Uh, shit, Jade. I don't really like that tone."

It's not too late. I can still back out.

When AJ described the claws based on the marks in the body, the lords seemed to know exactly what they were looking for.

But that doesn't discount the possibility of a jacked wolf shifter who enjoys turning people into prey.

I'm not discounting anyone or anything until I can taste the truth of a confession with my own lips.

"Jade?" She pulls my name out into multiple syllables. "What's going on?"

Alright, I guess it's now or never. I hope she doesn't hate me for this. "I've got a weird feeling about your new bone-friend." Maybe that'll be all it takes. Maybe she'll understand that it's intuition and leave it at that. Then I won't have to explain, and she'll be on the lookout all the same.

“What kind of weird feeling?”

Oh, well, so much for that idea.

But how much do I tell her?

We’re too old for her to turn this into a *you’re just saying that because I have a boyfriend now and all my time isn’t solely yours* thing.

But that doesn’t mean she’s going to like it.

Or the info won’t hurt to hear.

“Fuck it. Look, if you get hurt because I didn’t let you in, I’ll never forgive myself.”

Veruca’s creaky floorboards echo in the phone, followed by the sharp *click* of a door closing. “Shit, Jade, you’re scaring me.”

“The coroner thinks the killer was some kind of shifter.”

“And... and you think it’s Noah?”

“No, I don’t think anything. But right now, everyone with claws is a suspect. In my mind, and that puts shifters at the top of my shit list.”

“Um—“

“Plus, he’s just rolled into your life—and mine, by extension—so he’s on my radar.”

“OK...?”

“I’m just saying be careful, Veruca. You’re my only best friend. OK?”

She sighs into the phone. “Yeah, alright, fine. Is there anything I should watch out for?”

That’s a really good question. Too bad I don’t have an answer for her. Ask him to shift and look at his claws?

Too direct. If he is the killer, that’s a sure way to get my best friend killed.

Unless...

“Actually, there’s a way you can help.”

“OK, shoot.”

“Do you think you can put some kind of magical tracker on him so you

know where he is at all times, even when he's not with you? That way, if the killer strikes again, we can rule him out." Or bring him in. But I didn't say that part out loud.

"I mean—"

"If you're about to moan about the ethical repercussion of putting a tracker spell on your new boyfriend and how that makes you look toxic—"

"I wasn't."

"Oh. Well, then it should be a snap for a witch with your expertise and resources." I add some syrupy sweetness to my tone to lube up the compliment.

"Ew, gross. Never do that to your voice again."

"Then you'll do it?"

"Well, all I was *going* to say is I don't need to put a tracking spell on him. I'll just share the location data from his phone to mine."

"Good. Good call."

That was far easier than spellcraft.

So now that the heavy news was out of the way, should I tell her about the other thing? The giant red problem of mine?

Eh, fuck that too. I'm on a roll. "So, I've got some weird updates from the basilica."

"What kind of weird updates?" she asks.

"Well, it's really weird."

Veruca giggles, a sound I've never heard from her mouth before. "Gimme a sec, Noah. I need to talk to Jade." Her muffled voice is still loud enough for me to hear.

Noah's reply is more distant, but I make it out all the same. "You're gonna pick her over... *thiiiiis diiiiiiiick?*"

Veruca's laughter makes it through loud and clear. "You're such a nerd. Seriously, gimme a few. I gotta talk shop with Jade, OK?"

He's too far for words, just pitch and sound, but I assume Noah agrees.

“OK, now what’s so weird with the demon lords?”



## Chapter 22

VRAHS



**M** ate.  
Want mate.  
Hungry for her.

So beautiful so powerful so worthy want mate need mate WILL DIE  
WITHOUT MATE.

Friend voice. Talking. NOT MATE.

Roar for mate.

Friend no... brother voice. Yelling. Pulling Vrahs.

Vrahs smash. Find mate.

Brother pulling more.

Vrahs smash more.

Other brother pulling... binding with magic.

Putting in dark place.

Can't see.

Can't SEE!

CAN'T FIND MATE IF CAN'T SEE!

ROAR FOR MATE!

Mate.

Mate.

Mate.

Please find Vrahs.  
Will die without you.

## THORNE

IF RYKER HADN'T PORTALED BACK FROM THE REAPER REALM, I BELIEVE WITH every ounce of my hedonistic flesh that true-form Vrahs would have killed me.

We stand panting and staring at each other outside the soundproof dungeon door.

“Did she—?”

I check myself for damage. “Yeah.” I barely dodged his path of destruction. Vrahs almost bashed right through me, trying to find Jade.

“So that means—“

“Yup.”

Ryker falls against the thick concrete wall, sliding down to the stone ground. “The fuck are we gonna do? It took everything to get him down here. I’m empty.”

“I know.” I’m down to the dregs of my magic as well.

“And Jade has Vrahs’s magic, so that means two of the three Lords of Blackwood are little more than declawed cats.”

“I know.”

“If Blackwood is threatened... if rival demons come searching, they’ll find us.”

“I know.”

“And we won’t have the power to stop—“

“*Peccatores et meretrices!* If you don’t cease telling me things I’m acutely aware of, I will rip your dick off, petrify it, and add it to my

collection of sex toys.”

Ryker stares at me, stricken. “Brother, your depravity is as creative as it is horrifying.”

I take the compliment and move on. “The real question is, what are we going to do?”

Ryker shakes his head.

“We have to tell her.”

He keeps shaking his head. “She ran from us—him. I’m sure as soon as she saw him, she got the hell out of here. She probably even left her cat behind. She doesn’t understand or care, and I don’t see—”

“Then we make her understand. The witch isn’t heartless. She will care once she understands.”

He’s still shaking his blasted head. “I don’t agree, brother. She doesn’t want us. We aren’t good matches.”

“Aren’t good matches? Brother, our witch compelled Vrahs’s true form. How can you say that?”

Our witch.

It flowed out naturally. Feels right. True. It settles in me well.

“We aren’t the same. She won’t understand.”

He keeps saying the same thing, so instead of saying the same in return, I ask for clarity. “What do you mean by that?”

Ryker glares at me like I should already know what he’s thinking. “We are the highest order of demonic beings, and she is a witch. We simply aren’t compatible.”

“This isn’t the 1400s. There are no laws, no inquisitors—”

“That’s not what I mean.”

“Then what?”

“We are demons, brother! We will not court her and offer her flowers and candy. We will not meet her parents and promise to treat her right. We offer her nothing which her culture demands.” He sighs, dropping his head into his

hands. “We cannot not love her the way she wants or needs, and we will ultimately disappoint her.”

I scoff at him, and Ryker glares back. “Do not discount—”

“So that’s what you’re worried about? Not being enough for her?”

He snarls at me.

“Brother, I... I understand your concern. It’s been mere days since we first met her.”

“Precisely my point. It’s not as though she’s a wolf who’s accustomed to things such as this. Witches don’t have true mates.”

I sink to the floor next to him and, with our eldest brother on the other side of the concrete wall, I make a confession of my own. “I don’t want to be rejected either, Shryke.”

Did I choose that moment to use Ryker’s former battle moniker for the potential emotional pull? Yes.

“You haven’t called me that in years,” he says as a fraction of the light and life filters back into his gaze.

Did it work?

That remains to be seen.

“I think she’s smart enough to understand a simple function of our biology.”

“She is. But what if she understands and still leaves us? The mere sight of Vrahs had her fleeing the basilica.”

“Did you see the cock on him? I don’t blame her one bit.”

At that, Ryker gives up the barest smile.

“I need you to stop assuming the canvas is bleak before we’ve even set out the paints, brother. For Vrahs’s sake.”

He nods once, and that’s all I need. I’ll pull him along until he believes on his own.

I have enough faith in our tricky witch for the both of us.

## Chapter 23

JADE



**V**eruca was zero help with the *mate* situation.

Well, that's not entirely true. She was very helpful in immediately getting on the *that's weird and gross and crazy, and they can't expect you to fall in line just like that train with me*. She even offered to come over and help me formulate a plan.

But I do my planning alone.

The finishing marks on my newest summoning diagram squeak into existence. Chalk and marble tile make awful bedfellows.

But since my room, and usual summoning spot, still has the diagram going for the lords, I had to move to the guest bathroom.

I've never had this problem before, because I've never summoned more than one demon at a time before.

But since I accidentally summoned three, and I'm also full to the gills with demon power, I figure why the fuck not, right?

I'm more careful than ever with this summoning. I'm not trying to accidentally rip a permanent hole in space-time or summon *every* demon. That might not be a thing that could really happen, but with the boosted juice I'm rockin', who the fuck knows?

Wiggling, I shrug the tension out of my neck and shoulders and go within, pulling on the ancient energy.

I've barely set my circle in place before that familiar snap and crack echoes off the tile.

My eyes fly open.

"Name your bargain, witch."

The wisp demon, more smoke and air than truly corporeal, floats over the diagram.

Before I'd even begun the summoning properly.

I hadn't even offered it my blood or spoke my intention.

"Or are you a witch? You pulled me here with more power than—"

"OK, this is not about me. How would you like to trail the mayor of Blackwood?" I grab my phone and show the wisp a photo of Jameson. "I want to know everywhere he goes. I suspect he might be hurting... killing people without his full knowledge."

"If I see him hurt or kill someone, should I stop it?"

"Can you?"

The wisp writhes in the air, smokey essence twisting and clumping, reforming into a corporeal state. "I can indeed," it says around a pair of cat-like fangs.

Its face is rather cat-like in portions too, reminding me of an anime character come to life.

"Then yes. If the mayor tries to kill anyone, or..." I contemplate my wording. Demons are such sticklers. "If he shifts forms, notify me immediately and do your best to preserve all lives involved."

That last bit is important. I can't have the wisp killing Jameson to save his victim.

If he's the one who took Em from me...

Then that's my job.

The wisp thinks about the job for a moment. "I accept," it says and dissipates out of my bathroom.

It agreed without an offering of blood.



How could there be a bargain if there was no blood?

It always goes the same. I offer blood. They take it and return the favor with a service.

That's how it is.

But if there wasn't a formal bargain, at least one that I was aware of, how could I be sure this demon will do what I need?

I stare down at the diagram alight with gold and fuchsia magic.

I couldn't summon *another* demon to make sure this one did its job right.

Right?

I guess I could put another diagram somewhere. And I have the power...

No. I'm not fucking around with a nesting doll of demons. Even if I have Vrahs's power.

I head back to my room to put my clothes back on. I might have demon magic, but that didn't mean I'd stop summoning in the nude.

"Oh, for love of... Motherfucking... Lucifer's crowing mother-in-law, what the fuck are you two doing in my goddamn room?" I yell at the demon lords standing in the middle of their own summoning circle.

Thorne smiles, elbowing Ryker. "Would you look at that? Our mere presence has our foul-mouthed witch at a loss for words. It took her three times to come up with that colorful turn of phrase."

The smug look on his face...

The breach of my sacred and personal space...

And, they scared the witch shit outta me.

All of it adds up to me snapping.

I throw a glittering gold and fuchsia ball of concussive force at them.

"No! Jade!" Thorne throws himself in front of Ryker and puts up some kind of barrier just in time for my powerball to explode into it.

Fuchsia and gold sparks fly outward and all the might of my powerball is redirected.

Toward me.

I don't even have time to kiss my ass goodbye before I'm thrown backward, collide with something solid and go right on through it.

The last thing I see is my guest bathroom.



## THORNE

FUCKING HELL. I LIKE PAIN. BUT I DON'T ENJOY GETTING BLASTED THROUGH walls.

I groan and try to open my eyes, but they burn and when I can crack them open, everything looks red.

I wipe as much blood as I can from my eyes and focus on finding Ryker.

“Brother!” I yell, but the sound is hardly more than a whisper over the sheets of cracking drywall falling in heaps around me.

And on me.

“Ryker!” I call again, scanning the debris. Conjuring tools and books and broken dishes and singed clothes, all covered in a thin layer of drywall dust.

Ryker doesn't respond. Only the sound of more destruction.

This is my fault. I shouldn't have come here unannounced. Of course, Jade would defend herself. Her home.

What have I done?

“RYKER!”

My leg twitches.

No, it moves. And I didn't move it.

“Mmphrmmrrhph!!!”

I spring up, or rather, I carefully pick myself off the floor to find Ryker under me.

“Brother!”

He rolls the eye that isn't swollen shut at me. "I told you she wouldn't—" "Oh shut up, you donkey," I say and hoist him off the ground as well.

I'd put everything I had left into that shield and she still caused this much damage.

An odd sense of pride rises in my chest. Of course, our witch could destroy so much, so easily.

"We've gotta find her."

"Find her? She clearly doesn't want to be found."

"Shut your hole, Shryke. I made a miscalculation. That is all. Now, help me find our mate before Vrahs loses himself to his true-form for good."

I put Ryker's arm around my neck to help navigate out of the rubble that is Jade's lovely apartment, but he snatches it away.

"I'm fine."

"You don't look it."

"Yes, well, neither do you."

"I'm sure I don't. But you broke my fall, so excuse me for offering—"

"I can't let her see me weak," he says and stumbles out of what's left of the living room. "Jade!"

I shake my head, but groan as the room spins and pain crashes into me.

Oh great. Now he's going to look like the hero by finding her first.

"Jade!" Ryker yells again.

"Tricky witch! Call out if you can hear us!"

"Jade! Are you OK?" Ryker adds.

I wade through the smoking, dust-covered carcasses of everything Jade owns. Wind whips through what's left of the apartment. Her unformed magic was so powerful, she blew out every one of her windows and threw us through a solid cinder block wall.

"Jade!" I yell again just as the dust settles enough to make out a witch-sized hole in the wall in front of me. I run past it, searching, scanning. Looking for any shape or color that might be her under pounds and pounds of

rubble.

My gaze bounces over the chaos. “Jade. Please.” I fall to my knees, scooping up broken chunks of wall and tile. “If you die in this bathroom...”

She should be here.

She’s just unconscious. I would know if she were gone. I could tell.

Her human body might be more frail, she might be more injured than us, but getting knocked through a wall didn’t kill her.

Not while she still has Vrahs’s power.

I have to keep reminding myself of all the reasons she’s still alive.

Or I’ll lose it.

She’s got to be here! Her body came through the far wall and it didn’t go through the opposite or there’d be two holes.

“LUCIFER’S COCKGOBBLING STEPMOTHER, WHERE ARE YOU, WITCH?!”

Tears sting in the wounds on my face as I furiously shovel debris out of the room.

Ryker’s calls grow distant, and I keep digging. Keep searching.

“Damnit, witch. Don’t do this to us.”

I move a chunk of teal wall and there it is.

My heart jumps into my throat at the sight of that mark.

Her sister’s face on her upper arm.

A roar tears from my throat, and I carefully dig her out.

I cry out when she’s free.

She’s unconscious, and I check her body for injury. There are no obvious wounds. I gently touch every part of her, making sure she didn’t break anything.

Vrahs’s magic kept her body protected, but the blast still knocked her out.

“Ryker! I found her.” I say and kiss her forehead.

“Where are you?”

“Bathroom. I think.”

As Ryker finds us, Jade's eyes flutter open.

"You gave us quite a scare there, tricky witch."

"Mmm," she murmurs, eyes falling closed.

"No, no. You gotta stay awake, Jade." I shake her shoulder, and her brow furrows.

"Please. Jade, you have to be awake."

"Hurts. Tired," she groans.

"I know," I say. "But you're the only one who can get us out of here."

"Mmm, big hot firemen."

I shake her again. "We don't have time for firemen or ambulance rides or hospitals. You have to portal us out of here and back to the basilica.

"Hurts."

The ache in her voice kills me, rips me through to my core.

"I know. But we can make you better in the basilica. You just have to trust us."

"She's drifting out again," Ryker says, crouched on her other side.

*Forgive me.* I strike her across the cheek hard enough to stun her awake.

"Fuck," she groans. "Read the room, man."

"Read the...what? Jade, we—"

"I like it rough, but now's not the goddamn time, Thorne."

"Right, well, punish me later, mistress. You must portal us out of here before it's too late."

"Lazy. Do it yourself. I'm busy being horizontal."

I grab her face in my hands, forcing her to look at me. To see the desperation in my gaze. "Jade, we can't. You're our only way out of here."

She lets out a tremendous sigh. "Gotta do everything around here myself. Stupid goddamn demons can't even portal themselves..."

She continues muttering as she forms the portal, and in moments, we're back in the basilica.

But we're not in the main hall.

Not in Vrah's office. Not my room, or Ryker's.  
In her altered state, Jade portaled us to the dungeon.  
To Vrahs.

## Chapter 24

JADE



**W**hy does it feel like I'm lying on a cold stone floor?  
Ugh, my fucking head kills.  
Almost like I got chucked head first through a wall.  
Oh...

Wait...

I'm not exactly clear on what happened or why, but I know at one point I was definitely sailing through the air.

And then Thorne told me I had to portal everyone back here...

To the basilica.

And I know I shouldn't have done that. I shouldn't be here.

There's a dull nagging in the back of my mind reminding me that I shouldn't have agreed. But I can't remember why.

It doesn't matter. I just want to sleep.

I open my eyes to make sure I got everyone here safe before letting myself fall asleep.

Except my eyes were already open.

I touch my face to make sure.

Yup.

I can't see.

"Oh fuck," I say into the darkness.



“It’s OK, Jade. Ryker and I are here.”

“I think... I think I blinded myself. Either with the knock to the head or the portaling. I dunno which, but I can’t see anything. It’s total darkness.”

I hadn’t trusted myself to portal properly with a potential concussion and apparent memory loss. So I did it the same as the first time and focused on Vrahs on the other side of the portal.

It was easier than the first time because I didn’t have to rip the power from him and using him as a beacon definitely made sure we arrived in one piece.

But focusing on Vrahs means I should see the windows of his office, or his bed, or wherever he is.

I see nothing. Not even the hint of shadow or shape.

“Where are we?” I ask, into the darkness.

“Um, Jade—” Thorne sounds funny. Could be me, though. My head feels like a balloon inside a drum that some post-punk drummer keeps pounding on.

My vision will come back, I’m sure. Probably just need time.

“You’re not blind,” Ryker says close by.

I reach out, finding his hand. “Well, I can’t see jack shit.”

Thorne speaks on my other side, and I find his hand as well. “You portaled us to the dungeon. It’s light tight.”

“Oh. Huh. Must have crossed my wires or something,” I say and lower my lids. I really need to sleep.

“Jade, there’s something else you should know,” Ryker says.

“Mmm?”

So tired.

“You, uh, you portaled us into the dungeon...”

Didn’t he already say that part? Man, I must have really conked myself.

“MATE!”

A shiver runs through me at the sound of that voice. Rustling echoes

through the darkness, followed by heavy footsteps.

Something rips Thorne's hand from mine, and a pair of impossibly large hands scoops me up. He nudges my head to the side and puts its face in my neck.

"Mate," he purrs the word.

Tired.

I just want to sleep.

And, I'd really like to know who's holding me, but I can't work up the strength to make my voice work anymore.

He cradles me against his chest, a chest so large I feel small against it.

Small and safe.

Protected.

I take another slow breath full of his demon-y scent and allow the darkness to seep into the edges and carry me away.

VRAHS

MATE!

Here. Mate is here! Must find must have must touch...

Touch her. Soft, warm.

She's here. I can't believe she found me.

Just touching her makes my head clearer, thoughts more connected.

I lift her from the ground. She should never feel the bite of a cold stone dungeon floor on her perfect flesh. She doesn't resist. Doesn't struggle, and I press her to me.

She leans in, and my chest breaks open.

"Mine," I rumble. Always mine.

Her body goes slack in my arms. Sleeping? Injured? I don't know.

“Is she OK?” I ask.

“She blasted herself and us through a concrete wall,” Ryker says dramatically.

“She might have a concussion. You probably shouldn’t let her sleep. And it’s nice to have you back, old friend,” Thorne says.

I grunt at that. I’d like to say more, to thank them for making sure I didn’t leave the basilica. Making sure I didn’t make an even bigger mess of things.

I’d like to say it doesn’t matter if she sleeps, because my magic will mend her, regardless.

But all I can focus on is the witch in my arms.

The feeling of her body pressed to mine, perfectly nestled against my chest, like the gods of old carved her from me and only now saw fit to reunite the two halves. Her breath raising her chest rhythmically perfectly matches my own slow breathing.

Her delicate, spicy scent is under-pinned with sweat and stress, and I want to make sure nothing ever makes her smell change like that again.

*Mate. If only I could see you. That would make this reunion everything it should be.*

Her magic hears my plea, and her whole body glows with pale gold and fuchsia light.

I can’t take my eyes off her.

She’s bloodied and pale. But she’s safe now.

*So beautiful.*

*Mmm, you’re not too bad looking yourself.*

I fall to my knees at her sweet voice in my head. Connected to me so deeply.

I’d meant to reach into her mind and access her dreams. I wanted to connect, but...

“What’s wrong?” Thorne asks, stalking over to me.

Before I can answer, Ryker does. “Can’t you feel it? They’re mate

bonded.” He sounds disgusted.

“And because we’re linked...” Thorne continues.

“So are we.” Ryker’s dark tone almost ruins this. “She didn’t want this, Vrahs. She ran from you screaming. It’s only worked now because she’s injured, and in my book, that’s—”

“SILENCE!” I shout. He’s whining so loud I can’t hear the witch’s voice in my head.

*Why is he so grumpy?* she asks.

*He’s afraid, much like I was. Like you were.*

*I’m not anymore.*

*Not now, but you likely will be. Once the link between us has stabilized, and my magic has healed your wounds, you’ll likely remember every reason you ran from me. You’ll be furious.*

*I’m not angry now.*

I brush a strand of hair from her lovely, bloodied face.

*I know. And that’s why I’m not going through with the remaining bonding steps until you’re in your right mind. I won’t have a mate who can’t consent with all her faculties. For now, rest. I’ll explain everything when you’re ready.*

She does, and I make sure she does so peacefully, batting away any anxiety-fueled dreams or nightmares that dare to form in her subconscious.

## Chapter 25

JADE



“I didn’t want this!” I scream at the naked demon standing in front of me.

He’s not big and red anymore.

But he’s still talking stupid shit about mates.

“Neither did I, you ignorant cow! My true form was in charge. If I’d had my way, you never would have known any of this.”

“I swear to fucking hell if you don’t stop calling me names, Vrahs, I will blast your dick right off your stupid body.”

It is not, in fact, a stupid body.

It is a gorgeous body.

But he knows that, and I’m not one to stroke an overly large ego.

Besides, I’m naked too, so I can’t really make fun of him for that.

I don’t know how long I slept or how long it took Vrahs’s magic to heal my concussion, but I’m in the driver’s seat again.

And I’m fucking pissed.

“Why are we even still down here?” I grumble.

Vrahs scoffs at me, like I should already know the answer. “It’s a dungeon, and right now, you’re the only one with the power to break out of it.”

Mmm. The thought of portaling out and leaving him behind...

All three of them.

Thorne stands from his corner of the dungeon. “Jade, I know you’re upset —”

“Upset? Upset?! Thorne, upset doesn't even come close to where I’m at right now, so I suggest you back off.”

“Sorry, can’t,” he says with a cocky grin. “I was trying to say before you interrupted me, that your feelings are understandable, logical even. Please allow us to explain what is happening before you leave us here to rot, OK?”

Ryker scoffs in his corner, arms crossed like he’s already decided that I’m gonna screw them over.

“Do you have something to say over there, Eeyore?”

Ryker stays silent.

“That’s funny because I just called him a donkey not too long ago,” Thorne says, stepping closer to me.

I ignore him, avoiding his stare, but he guides my gaze toward him with a finger under my jaw. “You have the power here, tricky witch. Quite literally. Please, allow us to explain.”

I stare into his eyes, searching for the lie. The trick.

I don’t find it.

“Fine,” I say and fold my arms over my chest. “The floor is yours.”

“Thank you.” He releases my jaw and goes to the center of the stone-walled room. “There is only one type of being who can take power and vitality from a demon. One being who can summon a demon lord through all the wards and precautions we’ve built into the basilica.”

I’m already way ahead of his point. “What are you saying? I’m not a witch? That I’m part demon?” I could deal with being part demon.

But if he was about to tell me I’m part fae...

“No. You’re the same tricky witch as always, Jade.”

“What then?”

Thorne pauses, a new thought dawning in his eyes. “Did you know there

used to be female demons?”

I'd never given much thought to the matter.

“Long before I and my brothers were born, demonesses ruled our realm. They ruled all the demon planes.”

“What does this have to do with—“

Thorne holds up a hand. “You said you'd listen.”

“Well, you'd make doing that a lot easier if you get to the point.”

He grins at me. “I must tell you the whole of the story for you to understand our situation, Jade.”

I gesture to him to get on with it. “This century please, before my tits freeze off.”

“Now who's the complainer,” Ryker says.

I shoot him a dirty look.

“Think of demonesses as our version of your Amazonian lore. Strong in body and will. Fighters, tacticians. They ruled our kind because they were most fit to do so. It was their magic that awakened our potential. Their magic that brought forth our true forms. They strengthened us, made us smarter and better. Faster.”

“OK, so what happened to them? Where are they now?”

“Like all good things, their time came to an end when a faction of males rose against matriarchy. They were outliers, extremists who didn't want equality, but domination. The faction grew quietly and made their moves so slowly, with such calculation, by the time the majority realized they'd wiped the last demoness line from the realms, it was already too late.” Thorne takes a pause, but Vrahs continues.

“That's what our history books say on the matter. It's my opinion that the males of that age knew what was happening, and while they didn't support the outliers openly, turning a blind eye to it was the strategy to support the movement covertly. And that's all the faction needed to get a foothold throughout all the planes.”



My mind whirls a thousand miles a second trying to put together what this means for this situation. “So... what? You think I’m a demoness somehow?”

Ryker stands and comes out of his corner. “The only demonesses who could compel a true form from a demon, making him into his highest, best self, were the demonesses who’d found their true mates. And she could only perform such magic with her true mate.”

Now Vrahs steps forward. “It explains everything. It’s why you could summon us. How you took my magic and formed portals. And how you ripped my true form out of me when I let my guard down.”

I stare from one to the other, looking, hoping for the lie. The trick.

“God, please, someone say April fucking Fools.”

“I’m afraid this is the way of things, tricky witch. You are ours, and we are yours.”

“Wait, all three of you?”

Thorne nods. “We’re linked. A pack, if you will.”

He’s smiling.

Smiling.

All three of them are. A proud smile from Vrahs. A sad one from Ryker.

“Why are the three of you smiling like idiots? Like this is a good thing?”

My hands are fists, shaking with the weight of my fury.

Hot tears well in my eyes.

Not of sadness or pain.

Tears of rage.

Of white-hot anger.

Not again.

Not this *again*.

“This is exactly why I fled my coven.” The words hiss out of me like a slow leak, but every breath quivers with barely contained rage.

“This? What do you mean? Witches don’t have mates,” Vrahs says.

I round on him. “No, but they have blood purity codes. And birth rate quotas. And every year I didn’t produce a full-blooded witch, was a year I was a witch in poor standing. Every year I didn’t *mate* with as many male witches as I could, I was a failure. So, you’ll have to excuse me if I bow out of your archaic practices, but I refuse to let you reduce me to my biological function in order to propagate your species.”

Thorne comes to me, grabbing me by the shoulders. “Look at me.”

I can’t.

I can’t bring myself to look at his lovely face. That I can still see how lovely it is only infuriates me further. Because as much as I detest the system, I know I’m still a part of it.

My body still reacts to theirs.

My eyes find their appearance appealing, even after everything they’ve done to me. Everything they want from me, now. I still could fuck them right here and now.

And that is truly fucked up.

“Jade!” His words bite into me like the crack of a whip, and I bring my gaze to his. “This is not that.”

More steamy tears slide down my cheeks, and Thorne shakes me. “Damn it, witch, listen to me.”

I shudder with silent sobs. I refuse to believe after all I did to escape that coven, all I sacrificed, after losing Em for this life here in Blackwood, I’m still in the same place. Forced to *mate* to make more magical babies.

And the worst part is that my fucking body keeps telling me I want to. Wants Ryker and Thorne to take off their clothes, too, and have a big ol’ demon-y orgy right in the goddamn dungeon.

I push Thorne away, and he lets me. He lets me get to the door.

As my hand closes on the handle, it’s Ryker whose whispered words stop me in my tracks.

“Jade, you’re pretty, but you’re fucking dumb.”

I turn to meet his long-suffering glare. “What did you just say to me?” I’m not offended. Surprised he had the stones to say it, now of all times.

“I said you’re fucking dumb.”

“And just why is that?” I ask, closing the distance between us, ignoring the pull of his magnetism.

“Because, like we’ve been trying to get it through that big, dense skull of yours, it’s not about that. And even if it were, it wouldn’t matter.”

I cock an eyebrow at him. “Go on.”

Ryker rolls his eyes at me. “We’re biologically incompatible, dummy.”

A long slow breath hisses out of me and with it the last bits of my resistance. I lean in, finally letting Ryker’s magnetism pull me.

“What is it about, then?”

“It’s about finding your match,” he says.

Thorne comes up behind me. “Your equal in all things.”

Vrahs joins them on my opposite side. “It’s about finding the one who challenges you and turns you into a slobbering hound for a single taste of her flesh.”

My eyes fall closed as a new kind of shudder runs through me. Not from fury, or the drafty dungeon, but of pure need.

I stand there, unmoving, between three demons whose only desire is to ravage my body.

Desire makes my thoughts slow, but I still know...

Hesitating, suspended in the moment just before, because if I allow this, everything changes.

And potentially not in a good way.

Vrahs leans closer, a low rattling purr coming from somewhere deep in his body. “I’ve missed you filling a room with your energy. And now that it’s mixed with mine, it’s all the sweeter.”

The three of them lean in closer. Ryker grazes my cheek with a single finger. Thorne glides his palm down the back of my arm. And Vrahs slowly

kisses his way down my neck.

“The power is yours, tricky witch,” Thorne whispers in my ear. “Tell us to stop, and we will.”

What, am I crazy? I’m definitely not saying that.

With a thought, I rip Thorne and Ryker’s clothes off and portal in a fluffy pile of blankets and pillows from someone’s bed.

Dunno whose, but I’m sure as shit not getting tetanus because I got gang-banged in a dungeon.

The demon lords still keep their distance, breathing heavy, dicks hard and waiting.

“Ground rules,” I say.

“Mmm, anything,” Thorne says, sliding his hand down my neck.

I stifle a chuckle. “Points for enthusiasm, but this is for Vrahs.”

The demon lord rattles acknowledgment against my ear.

“If you try to fuck me with that red submarine you call a dick, I will portal your ass to Siberia, got it?”

Another low purr. “Yes, witch.”

“Good. In fact, don’t even think about bringing Big Red back at all. And that goes for the rest of you, in case your true forms decide to show up.”

“Understood. Anything else?” Thorne asks, pressing himself into me.

Fuck, the whole dungeon is thick with our combined sexual energy. The charged atmosphere crackles on my skin, and the heady match head scent of demons only adds a layer of intensity. If I didn’t want these demons before, I sure as shit would now.

“Fucking you right now is not an agreement or acknowledgement of anything.” Think, Jade. Get your wording right. “I’m not agreeing to be mated to any of you. I’m only agreeing not to actively try to unmake our link, and to see how it goes from there. Agreed?”

Three “agrees” all around.

I take a breath.

Once I let this happen...  
I raise my arms over my head.  
“Have at it, boys.”  
There’s no coming back.

## Chapter 26

JADE



**T**hey descend on me like a pack of starving hyenas.

Hands and mouths and vibrating tails devour me like some medieval painting of a woman being dragged to Christian Hell.

I let myself fall into it, into them. I become a being of pure pleasure, sliding into that dreamy realm of altered awareness. Where the only thing that matters is sensation.

I can't tell who's who or where, and I don't care. We stand in the middle of the dungeon, a groaning, panting mass of limbs and tongues.

But of all the demon lords, it's Ryker who hoists my legs around his hips and takes me to the pile of bedding.

"I've been dreaming of this since you first opened your filthy little mouth."

I stare into his golden eyes, and the same phrase he's said countless times, doesn't sting. This time, the words he used to cut me down aren't aggressive and demeaning.

Ryker's tone is so different, his words slide over me like silken praise, earning him a shudder.

He lifts my chin, tilting my head to see him better. "I never thought I'd be enough for you. Never thought you'd agree to have us, even just once," he murmurs. "So trust me when I say, I intend to make every moment count."

His eyes are flames of need, and my pussy floods at the sight of it.

“Fuck, Ryker. I literally thought you hated—”

“Shut your filthy little mouth, witch,” he says with a deep, resonant snarl that sends a thrill up my spine. His fiery gaze stays on my lips. “And if you can’t handle that, I’ll keep it filled with demon cock.”

I groan at the promise.

Ryker snaps his fingers and moves to my side. “Thorne, eat her pussy until she screams. Now.”

BOTH THORNE AND I GROAN AT THE ORDER, AND BEFORE HE CAN OBLIGE, Ryker takes my left thigh and Vrahs takes my right. They spread me open like they’re trying to stuff a turkey.

Thorne growls at the sight of me on display, and that takes away any shyness I might have felt.

“A feast,” he rumbles before diving in. No preamble, no teasing traces down my thighs; he goes right for the finish line and doesn’t let up.

I squirm and buck under him, gripping the blankets as Thorne laps at me.

“What’s she taste like, brother?” Ryker’s question has a harsh edge, like he’s holding himself back from finding out on his own.

Thorne dips his tongue deep into me, and I clamp around it involuntarily. “Mmm, like honey spiced with Christmas.”

Both Ryker and Vrahs moan.

“A true assessment, though I’d add it’s not just Christmas spices. Our witch is full of every warm spice on this plane.”

Thorne nods in my pussy, and the extra pressure sends me over the edge I didn’t know I was teetering on. I arch into the demon lord’s face, chasing as much pleasure as I can. He responds by gripping my thighs and pressing me even harder into his face.

I swear as I buck and grind against him



There was a point in my life when I'd have given my left tit for a man who truly enjoys eating cooch. Guess I was barking up the wrong species.

I'm still quivering into Thorne's mouth when I'm suddenly ripped off the bedding and pressed into the hard cinder and stone walls.

My shoulders sing with pain as Vrahs leans close. His hips press me harder against the wall and another groan rattles in my throat. The sharp sting and burn of the rough stone makes my head delightfully spinny.

"Is this what you want, witch?"

I nod, unsure what exactly he's asking because I think I made it perfectly clear I was down for a demon orgy.

He drags his nose up the side of my neck, inhaling as he pushes me into the wall harder. Bits of loose stone crumble down around me. He grips my jaw, turning my head savagely to the side.

"Do you want to be made love to? Or fucked? Because only one of those is on the table."

I dig my nails into his shoulders, and Vrahs lets out a sharp hiss. "Do I give off pillow princess vibes?"

"You're not dealing with male witches, Jade," Vrahs says close to my ear.

Does he think I'm not aware of that? "What the fuck are you getting at?"

He turns my jaw, forcing me to meet his gaze. His fingers dig in and I suck in a breath at the dull ache of it. My pussy flutters at the pain and how close he is. His hard cock is sandwiched between us, so close, yet so far away from where I want it.

"Jade, you conjured a pile of blankets and pillows. If it's softness you crave, we are not the mates for you."

I roll my eyes. "I like being comfortable. But I also like getting my back blown out, and not getting tetanus from dark, dank dungeons. So how about we stop assuming things and get this show—"

I don't finish. I can't. Vrahs's mouth is on me, consuming me. The scent of smoke and leather, both wrapped up in the delicious burn of freshly lit

match heads, cloud around me. My brain goes foggy as his tongue forces past my lips and teeth, plundering me. And suddenly, all those scents explode on my tongue. Harsh and overwhelming, the smoke and leather and sulfur combine to make a delightfully masculine richness on my tongue. I groan as it fills me, greedily swallowing down the taste of a demon lord. Vrahs's kiss turns punishing, reaching a bruising fervor I'd yet to experience from him. Even during our fateful night together.

It makes my pussy throb with desire, and I hook a leg around his hip.

Who doesn't want to be wanted so much it makes a man—or demon—crazed with need? Violent with it? My eyes roll back and I match his intensity, dragging him closer, digging my nails into his flesh. A grin spreads his mouth, still clamped to mine as a low, rumbling purr vibrates through his chest and into mine.

When he pulls away, he takes a moment to stare into my eyes. I hold his gaze, and the tops of his sharp cheekbones tinge with pink. Before I know what's happening, Vrahs drops to his knees and buries his face between my legs. I groan at the sudden electric sensation as his wicked tongue finds my overstimulated clit, then Ryker is there at my side, hand on my cheek.

He pulls my face to his and swallows my moans.

His kiss is just as brutal as Vrahs's, but his scent makes an entirely different

flavor on my tongue.

And here I thought all demons smelled vaguely like sulfur. Warm, rich cashmere and sandalwood, like a woodsy sort of custard, melts in my mouth. I moan into Ryker, grabbing his neck and pulling him closer, while Vrahs sucks my clit and works at both my holes. His thumb presses against the lower wall of my vag while his finger presses upward from my backdoor. He moves his whole arm, fucking me while sucking and circling my clit.

My thigh muscles and abs contract. He's about to give me what I like to call a three-point-orgasm.

Kinda like a three-point turn everyone has to do to pass their driving test.

And now that I think about it, all men should have to have written proof they can perform a three-point-O before being allowed in my bed.

Ryker grabs the back of my head, pressing our mouths together harder as he consumes my pleasure. My screams don't echo in the dungeon. Ryker takes them all.

"Lovely. I'm so blessed to have been a witness to such ecstasy." Thorne grins sheepishly as he strokes his hard cock slowly.

When Vrahs finally stands, chin covered in my slick, he pulls me away from the wall. A cascade of stone and dust falls to the ground behind me. Vrahs holds my entire weight. Kind of him, since he's the one who turned my legs to Jell-O. Before I register what's happening, everyone is in different positions and Vrahs is lowering me onto Ryker's cock.

He grins up at me from the nest of pillows and blankets, stroking his gorgeous, hard cock. An inch or two before he's in me, Vrahs pauses.

"Are you certain?" he whispers in my ear.

I nod against him but catch Thorne's hard stare. "Yes. I'm sure," I say aloud.

Vrah purrs and seats me on Ryker's cock. Both of us groan as our bodies meet.

I plant my hands on Ryker's abs and start the work of being on top, letting my legs take most of the load.

Ryker's eyes roll in his head as I slide up and down on him, but after only a few bounces, he grips my hips.

"No." The word hisses out of him like a bladed threat. His fingers dig into the flesh of my hips and he keeps me still and steady. Behind me, Vrahs is warming up my ass again, but that's not what grabs my attention.

"Umm, what's that?" I ask, almost afraid of the answer, as Ryker's tail drifts into my line of sight. The shape isn't phallic, like I've seen from the others.

“This?” Ryker waves his tail in front of me with a wide grin. “Why don’t you tell me what it is, filthy witch?”

The end of his black tail is flat, about two inches wide. One side of it has an indentation of something...

I grab hold of it and look closer. The moment I touch it, the whole thing vibrates like a turbine engine, and I about come right there even though the thing isn’t anywhere near my—

“Lucifer’s cock-ring! Is that an impression of a pussy?”

Ryker shakes his head. “Not just a pussy, Jade. It’s an exact impression of your glorious cunt. It’ll nestle nicely against your outer bits, I think.”

I waste no time and jam the demon lord’s tail against my clit.

I see stars.

Ryker’s tail rips a devastating orgasm from me in exactly zero seconds flat.

Distantly, while I’m somewhere on fucking Pluto having my cells reorganized alphabetically, Ryker hands out stage directions. “Vrahs, take her ass while she’s still coming. Thorne, fill that disgusting little mouth of hers with demon cum.”

Neither demon hesitates, and as Ryker’s tail brings me to another screaming orgasm, Throne shoves his cock in my mouth.

Sulfur, pine, and winterberries overwhelm me I suck on Thorne’s pre-cum covered dick. He tastes like a snowstorm, like winter, and I pull him deeper into my mouth. Thorne moans and tentatively thrusts deeper. I nod around him.

I don’t have a gag reflex, and there’s nothing I want more than his impossible taste in the back of my throat.

Vrahs enters my ass with a growl and my back arches, goosebumps erupting down my spine at both the sound and feeling of being a double-stuffed Oreo.

Pinned in place by three demon cocks, I can’t move. So I let them do

what they will. Let them fuck me however they like.

Vrahs's hand circles my throat. Ryker keeps me pinned to his cock, thrusting into me while his tail vibrates every thought from my head. While I keep my eyes locked on Thorne.

"Such a good fucking witch you are, taking all these demon cocks," he coos, fucking my mouth, pushing that winterberry flavor all the way down to my soul.

I'm headed for another three-point-O.

My eyes roll back, legs go shaky. My body spasms over Ryker, and I claw at his arms as the first wave slams into me.

Fucking hell, I'm never having sex with humans again.

The pleasure decimates me, ripping me apart atom by atom. Vrahs roars behind me, and his hand clamps tighter around my throat. Ryker growls, his fingers digging in my flesh even harder as he explodes in me. Thorne unloads a river of winterberry cum down my throat, his eyes glued to mine.

"You're fucking perfect for us, witch," he says with a shudder as the last of my orgasm ebbs.

Vrahs and Throne help me off Ryker, making sure I can stand before letting me go. Demon cum leaks out of me, and all I can think of is getting to the bathroom before things get messy.

Er, messier.

"Thanks, boys," I say and head to the door. I sense the tension behind me and turn. The three of them are doing their very best not to look concerned that I'm apparently dick-dashing on them.

"Relax. A girl's gotta freshen up after taking all that demon cum."

Vrahs's power opens the dungeon door without any forethought from me, and I portal myself to my bathroom.

I still don't know how to do that "portal and cleanup" trick Vrahs pulled the other night, so I've got to do it the old fashion way.

And when I'm done, I take a look in the mirror.

“Lord Lucifer, what did I do to myself?” I murmur.

I touch my bruised, swollen lips with the pads of my finger, then the long finger-shaped bruises around my neck. I check my hips, and ten bruises mar my skin.

The fresh scent of winterberries drifts to me, followed by Thorne’s reflection behind me. “We should have instituted the traffic lights.” His gaze mimics mine as he finds each bruise and mark they left. He shakes his head. “I’m sorry.”

“Why?”

He gestures to my body as if I didn’t understand what he meant.

“I mean, why are you sorry for it? I’m not. I fucking loved every second of it.”

Thorne smiles at me, and I fall against his chest.

I didn’t want to think about what it meant.

The consequences of our dungeon orgy could wait until tomorrow. Right now, I just wanted to fall asleep cuddled against some delicious smelling demons.

I grab a robe and pad out of my room. “Show me where I can get some food,” I say to Chonk, making Thorne burst into a fit of girlish giggles.

“Have you been relying on the cat to navigate the basilica?”

I nod. What else was I supposed to do?

“Come on. I’ll show you where the kitchen is. Ryker and Vrahs are likely already there.”

When we reach the kitchen, there’s already a large selection of deli meat, rolls, and cheese spread out in the middle of the island. I grab a plate and pile it high with everything as Vrahs and Thorne look on from the other side of the counter.

“Glad to see you eating,” Ryker says.

I shrug and take a huge bite of a salami and provolone roll.

“Huh, that’s weird,” I say, nodding toward the window at everyone’s

back. “It’s been raining for a while. Longer than—”

A growl vibrates Vrahs’s chest, cutting me off. “How long has it been raining?” The question goes subsonic, and my ears ring at the impossibly low sound.

“I dunno. I noticed it when I portaled back home hours ago. I thought it was weird because it hardly ever rains this time of year.”

Vrahs steadies himself, grabbing the edge of the island. “No, it doesn’t,” he rumbles.

I glance from one demon to the next, a bit of roll falling from my mouth in the process. “What’s wrong with you three?”

“Rain is the first warning.” Ryker says.

“First warning? First warning of what?”

Thorne lays a hand on Vrahs’s shoulder as the demon lord tries to collect himself. He fails, only managing to pull in sharp staggered breaths.

“What the fuck is wrong with you three?”

“Blackwood is being ripped out of nullspace.” Rykers whispers.

“What!? How can you possibly—”

“The rain, Jade. It never rains in Blackwood except for a few weeks in April, and that’s because we exist outside of Earth’s ecosystem. Rain means we’re at least partially back in it,” Thorne says.

Vrahs finally looks up. His stare pins me in place. “Someone found my city, and they’re ripping us out of nullspace.” The glacial blue of his eyes turns colder, harder, like pale blue diamonds.

My plate of deli roll-ups clatters to the counter. “Well, put it back!”

“I can’t.” It comes out like a snarl. Like he thinks this is somehow my fault.

“The fuck do you mean you can’t? You don’t have a plan for this? A contingency?”

“I have layers of contingencies, witch.” He spits out the word like an epithet.

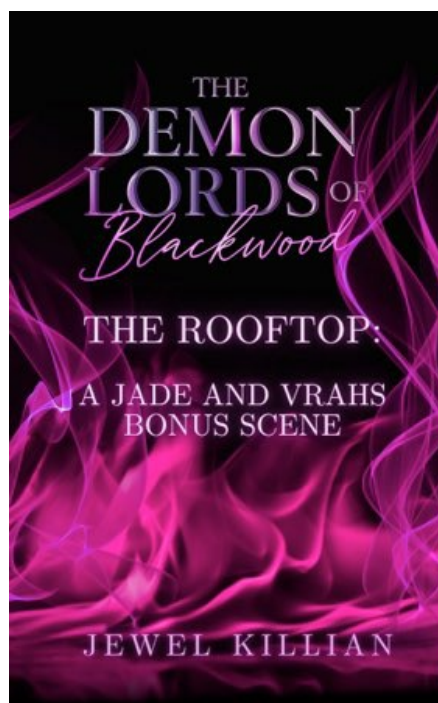
Great, that again.

“But I never thought there’d come a day when all three demon lords would be without their powers, unable to notice the earliest alarms. Never thought there’d be a time when we’d all be in a light-tight dungeon for hours and not see the first rains of the enemy’s beachhead. You say it’s been hours since you first noticed the rain? That’s hours of time they’ve had to infiltrate and counter my wards.”

Chunks of the granite island break off in Vrahs’s fisted hands as he stares into my soul and pins each speck of blame squarely on me. “And it’ll take hours more for Thorne’s and Ryker’s power to regenerate before we can do a single thing about it.”



Want a free story?



Need more? Here's a free bonus scene that continues Jade's and Vrahs's first night together. Hold on to your knickers, babe. This one might require toys.

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# Set in The Same Universe

## North American Supes Universe

I've been told these books are INCREDIBLY bingeable, plus they're all complete. Four stories all set in the same universe and may be read independently and out of order. Below are Eden, Lily, and Willa's books.

### [B Positive](#)

MF Fated Mates Vampire Romance Complete Duet

Find out how Eden Became a Vampire Queen

### [Monsters' Touch](#)

RH Demon Romance Standalone

Lily's story is sooooo close to my heart, plus REAPER DEMONS!

### [The Healers Pack Trilogy](#)

RH Fated Mates Wolf Shifter Trilogy

Willa is a mess, and I love her for it.

### Unrelated Works

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RH Witch Trilogy with a gargoyle, unicorn, and seer, oh my!

### [The Demon Queen](#)

ANOTHER RH Demon Trilogy because I can't fricken help myself