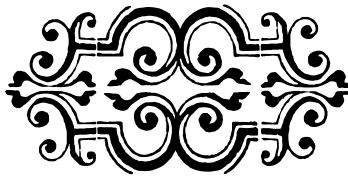


THE
DEAD
AND THE
NOT SO
DEAD

USA TODAY BESTSELLING AUTHOR
M SINCLAIR

THE DEAD AND THE NOT SO DEAD

Completed Trilogy



M. SINCLAIR

Lost & Bound Publishing

The Dead and the Not So Dead: Completed Trilogy

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The Union of Love & Madness

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DESCRIPTION

What's better than being Queen of the Dead?

Having four *really* attractive best friends that aren't romantically interested in you.

I'm joking—it sucks.

I couldn't fully blame them though. I mean, why would two powerful vampires, a century-old demon, and a lethal wolf shifter be interested in little old me?

Although, I couldn't discredit myself completely, because let's be clear—I'm *awesome*. The fun combat boot, leather-wearing type of awesome that hangs out with the dead because frankly?

The living are pretty annoying.

The Dead & Not So Dead series is a lighthearted, fast-burn paranormal reverse harem trilogy. It will feature one strong female heroine and six powerful men that plan on helping Narcissa rule and protect New Orleans by any means possible...even if it's from a threat from a different realm.

Completed collection features all novels in The Dead and the Not So Dead trilogy:

Queen of the Dead

Tea Time with the Dead

Dying for the Dead

Series Warning: You can bet that our characters will be swearing up a storm

in New Orleans. Expect elements of horror such as gore, violence, and an array of other topics dealing with death. Sexual themes are suitable for mature audiences. +18

A glossary for Declan's Irish accent can be found at the end of each novel.

Box-set includes an expanded bonus scene.

QUEEN OF THE DEAD

BOOK ONE



DESCRIPTION

Being Queen of the Dead has always come easy to me.

Lately though, something has changed, and I feel trouble coming like a storm rolling into the coast. I'm not too worried because I know I can handle anything with my boys by my side, even if I have to ignore my feelings for them and the friend zone they've thrown me into.

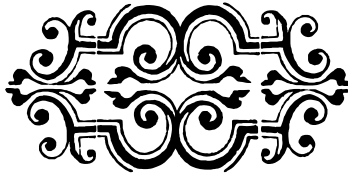
Though I do wonder why they're acting so weird about the local demigod of luck and voodoo priest's attention. I mean, they know I have to date eventually...right? Apparently, not if my friends have anything to say about it.

This is why I stick to the dead and not the living—far too complicated.

Queen of the Dead is the first book in the lighthearted, fast-burn paranormal reverse harem *The Dead & Not So Dead* series. You can bet that our characters will be swearing up a storm in New Orleans. Expect elements of horror such as gore, violence, and an array of other topics dealing with death. Sexual themes are suitable for mature audiences. +18

A glossary for Declan's Irish accent can be found at the end of the book.

PROLOGUE



Had humans always been this clumsy?

I stalked the human male from the shadows, moving with an ease and grace that was only possible in my incorporeal form. I wasn't positive he was the right choice, but his proximity to my goal made him a tempting option. The best so far.

It was moments like this that I wished I wasn't part of the larger plan. Moments where I wished to stalk up to her door and rip it off its hinges. Then she would scream. Then she wouldn't be able to escape me anymore.

I had to give her credit, though. She had been the only creature in existence to successfully murder me.

Even in my death, though, I knew I would be back, and when I resurfaced, it would be for the last time on Earth.

My last time and hers.

I would be able to keep and control her in my realm. Over time, she would learn to understand and reciprocate the strong, obsessive feelings I harbored for her. If she didn't? Well, that didn't matter much to me.

The human dropped the trash in the green bin to the left of his house. I slipped up behind him, and without hesitation I pressed through his weak physical barrier. I never had to worry about personal wards or property wards with humans. Their lack of knowledge regarding the supernatural made them easy targets. The boy groaned as my form stretched to fit inside his, and his eyes opened, affording me a new view of the world. *His* view.

The possession was complete.

With ease, I flipped through his memories and smiled at my choice. Yes,

he and I had something very much in common. When I was done with him, I might even consider letting him live. After all, he deserved a reward for being such a good vessel.

I walked around the front of the house and peered at the familiar neighborhood. Very little had changed, and that didn't surprise me. It wasn't known for being particularly modern. I stepped up the wide front steps, and a man, who my vessel regarded as his creator, looked at me in confusion.

"Come on boy." He shook his head in frustration. "We need to be out the door in ten minutes. This city won't run itself."

I grinned, realizing exactly who this man was.

This day really did keep getting better and better.

CHAPTER 1

NARCISSA



The dead were a petty bunch of bastards.

Now, you may have been wondering, *How the hell does Narc know the dead are petty?*

Well, that was an easy answer to give. Around the French Quarter of New Orleans, I was known as the Queen of the Dead. A pompous, ego-boosting title, heralded by my ancestors and gifted to me due to my necromancer abilities.

The funniest part? The supernatural community went along with this odd hierarchy my family had constructed. Not only went along with it, but relied on it to maintain the peace of New Orleans as a whole. So, considering the only living members of my family were my wonderfully vicious grandmother and myself, I had taken over ruling the dead.

Unfortunately, that included dealing with the *not so dead* as well.

Now, I don't want to completely misrepresent the rest of my family. Despite their deaths, they continued to be fairly helpful, and I always enjoyed my aunt's petty commentary mixed with my mother's daily insults. I had the ability to block them out, but honestly, when I was all alone in this massive home, I could use all the company I could get. Even if that company was dead.

I guessed I was never *truly* alone in the house, but the household staff were a tad awkward around me. It probably had to do with the illusion that I randomly talked to myself. *Often*. I didn't, of course. The dead talked a blue streak if you gave them half a chance, and my grandma knew that. But did she ever defend me? No. No, she absolutely did not.

You're probably wondering why I was ruling when my grandma was still alive. To that, I answer—*she doesn't want to*. There were many benefits to being the oldest relative alive, one of which was handing over the responsibilities you didn't want. In this case, she didn't want to be Queen, so once I was seventeen, I took over. It didn't help that I slipped into the position with an ease that would have surprised even the most seasoned leader.

I loved my grandma, and we had our issues, but we saw eye to eye on one thing for sure—she wasn't very much the 'leader' type.

Despite being one hundred and three, the woman was healthier than ever. That was how it worked as a necromancer, though—the more dead you were around, the healthier you were. It made for a thrilling and creepy life. Family members who weren't given 'the gift' lived normal, healthy lifespans, but my grandma, for example, wasn't expected to pass away for nearly four hundred more years. *I know. Crazy, right?* Before her, our most recent gifted relative was my great, great, times a million grandma. I was the first girl born after she passed away, so I received her abilities.

There were really only two rules in the family when it came to our gift. One, you had to be a woman, and two, the gift only resided in two people at a time. To be fair, they may have been more of a pattern rather than rules, but either way, my grandma and I were going to be around for some time. Something that had thrilled my mother, because it meant little responsibility for her, dead or alive.

It was a double-edged sword, though. She didn't miss the responsibility, but she resented our nifty tricks. Mommy dearest wasn't a fan. Instead, she and my aunt drank, often and throughout most of my childhood. She became a rowdy roommate rather than a parent. My grandma became my best friend, but she, too, seemed to lack any real child-rearing skills. So I grew up with essentially no parent figure in my life, despite the plethora of family members surrounding me. Dead and alive.

Don't even get me started on my ignorance when it comes to my father. Pair that with some emotional abuse, and you've got a bundle of repressed

emotions named Narcissa. My ability to bottle my feelings was nearly as good as my inability to recognize others' emotions. It was a fucking talent. Although, it did make things in my life fairly straightforward.

I had been completely unsurprised when I came home from school one day to find the ghosts of my mother and her sister drinking phantom tea in the living room and gossiping shamelessly about a neighbor down the block. Apparently they'd been in a mess of an accident when someone plowed into their car. They hadn't seemed upset about it, though. My mother even commented that she didn't want to live a life where 'my mother is hotter than me' anyway.

She wasn't wrong. Grandma was pretty smokin'.

Honestly, death had made my mom and aunt ten times worse than they'd been in life. They were more boisterous and petty than ever, and the funeral had been downright embarrassing. My mother critiqued everyone's memorial speeches while my aunt complained about how she looked. *Yes. How her dead body looked.* Morbid and tragically very much the norm for my life.

So yeah, I was very well aware of just how petty the dead could be.



The *not so dead* weren't always so great either.

For example, I was simply enjoying a cup of coffee on my porch just moments ago when a very familiar form began making its way down the path through the iron gates of my property. My wards would let him through because he wasn't an active threat to me. Why couldn't there be wards for annoying pests like human men? Instead, I sat here looking at one of my previous senior classmates with frustration while he presented me with a stupid smirk.

You heard that correctly, by the way. I'd just finished high school. In light of my life and occupation, it seemed both ridiculous and laughable from the start—but it hadn't been optional. For four years I'd sat in a hard plastic chair, bored out of my mind because of a human, state-mandated requirement.

I just didn't get it. I was going to be alive for half a millennium. I would

get my education at some point.

Also, considering there was no class labeled ‘Dead People 101,’ it had been rather useless.

“Now, Narc,” he chided, “why do you look so annoyed today? Don’t tell me you aren’t happy to see me.”

I snorted and narrowed my eyes. Jonathan Lourn was my neighbor from across the street, and he was painfully unaware of the community around him that was packed full with monsters and things that go bump in the night. It wasn’t that he was a bad person or had a terrible personality, it’s just that a girl gets tired of rejecting someone after the hundredth time. I had a very stern ‘no dating humans’ rule. Actually, I didn’t really get to date anyone, but that was a completely different issue having to do with some very overprotective friends who luckily weren’t here.

Lucky for Jonathan, that is.

It was just a terrible idea to date a human as a necromancer. Not only would they die in less than a century, which even at just shy of nineteen I could see going miserably in the long run, but usually they were so *weird* about magic. Pile onto that the fact that necromancers were rumored to be derived from succubae, resulting in a natural, very addictive appeal, and you’ve got a sticky, complicated mess.

So, yes. Jonathan was a tad fixated, but it would get so much worse if I gave him too much attention.

Odds were I would *never* date or marry anyone—not if my friends had anything to say about it. It wasn’t that there wasn’t any interest—the supernatural community of men liked me very much, *thank you*, and our effect wasn’t nearly as strong on them. They lived extended lifetimes like us and retained a youthful physical appearance longer. That essentially translated into being a super attractive power couple until *at least* two hundred. Cool, right? Definitely preferable over humans.

Plus, if the number of Grandma’s boyfriends taught me anything, it was that the turning centuries did nothing to slow down our sex life. *Gross, right?* Thank God my grandpa no longer hung around! I’d never met the man, but I imagined he would’ve been upset.

Grandma and I didn’t know for sure, but based on journals, we estimated that necromancer aging slowed around age twenty-five. At that point it seemed that each six years equated to one human year. Just like cats, you know?

Just kidding. They aren't really the same, I just liked bringing cats into the mix.

As a result of this slow aging process, Grandma appeared to be in her late thirties and was a total babe. Something, as I mentioned previously, my mother hated. Me? I found it hilarious and pretty damn cool.

But I digress.

As I looked over the man-child this morning, I found myself feeling very *meh*. It wasn't that he was unattractive, it was that he was boring. He looked like a perfect little Ken doll, everything in exactly the right place in the proper proportion. I liked my men a little rougher. A few more scars. A few more piercings. The type that growled and snarled just a bit more than Johnny here.

I mean, I was quite literally the Queen of the fucking Dead. I couldn't date some polo-wearing douchebag who accessorized with a cocky jerk attitude. It would ruin my reputation. Not to mention, my friends would probably devour him whole, some a little more literally than others. I needed them to be vicious, though. They helped me keep the peace.

As a rational magic user and member of this community, I knew that you had to be a little unhinged to impress any point upon the absolutely insane monsters around here. So while I really did enjoy watching GOT and cuddling with cats, I had to maintain my batshit crazy and semi-violent reputation to keep everyone in line.

My friends and I wielded fear like a blunt instrument. To the normals, we were a terrifying unit of powerful individuals ranging in age, experience, and power. There was no range of hotness, though. Every one of my boys was unfairly attractive. If I didn't have such a fear of messing shit up between us, I'd be hard-pressed to choose which I would jump first.

Our biggest secret? How cuddly and affectionate the five of us were in private. No one would take us seriously if they knew about our movie marathons, especially the Disney princess movie binge last weekend. It had been pretty awesome. Lean-to fort in the living room and drunk on cheap beer.

Honestly, I didn't know what I would do without them. So, I kept my hormones in check.

"Narc?" Jonathan asked again, drawing my focus back to him.

"I *am* annoyed, Johnny boy." I swung in the porch chair as I kicked my leather motorcycle boots up on the table in front of me. I had several pairs,

but these were my favorite because they hit a place on my calf that allowed me to keep a knife in it while still allowing me to show off my tan legs.
Priorities.

“Why is that?” he asked in a sincere voice.

“I was enjoying a fine cup of coffee, but now you’re making me interact socially.” I grinned as he scowled.

My eyes flickered briefly to the gate as my wards pulsed. A familiar and very welcomed figure strode forward.

Yikes. Bad luck, Johnny.

“I don’t understand why you won’t go to dinner with me, just once,” Johnny huffed.

I smirked. “You don’t eat at the same restaurants I do.”

How does ‘death and souls a la carte’ sound?

“I’ve seen you at that bar on Bourbon.”

“Stalking, are we?”

Jonathan jumped and let out a curse at the deep, rough voice in his ear. I bit back a laugh as Raphi rounded the human and sat next to me with a satisfied, predatory look fixed on Jonathan. His sugary scent wrapped around me as I offered him my half-filled coffee cup.

We drank our coffee the same way. We were cute like that.

“So, that’s it?” Jonathan asked, annoyed.

I tore my gaze from Raphi. “What?”

“He gets here and you’re going to ignore me?”

Raphi let out a deep rumble, and I squeezed his hand. “Jonathan, I didn’t ask you to come over, and now my friend is here. I’m sorry, but you should’ve made plans if you wanted my undivided attention.”

Not that Raphi had made plans with me, but he didn’t have to.

“That’s what I’m trying to do!” Jonathan exclaimed in frustration.

An actual growl, very unhuman-ish, came out of Raphi’s sculpted lips. His eyes flashed from a gold-speckled forest green to obsidian. Jonathan made a small noise and backed up on the stairs, nearly falling flat on his back. I watched as he shot me a hurt look and ran, stumbling, out of the gate.

How had he not put together the supernatural thing yet?

I sighed with pleasure. *Finally*, I had my peace back.

“I’m going to kill that kid,” Raphi said as he relaxed back onto the floral padded bench, letting his hand rest behind me. I narrowed my eyes at his murderous expression, which was focused on Jonathan even as he went into

his house.

“I’m offended.” I gasped with mock outrage. “Here I thought you were visiting me for the right reasons, like morning coffee and conversation.”

Raphi’s head snapped toward me as he frowned. It was such a fucking cute look. Raphi was the big bad wolf, in all senses of the word—a recently self-exiled alpha werewolf in New Orleans. He had a hard edge to him, a bit blunt for most, but he was extremely protective and passionate. Since he had no pack association, he was free to help me, and powerful enough to be scary.

We first met back in freshman year when he moved here with a few pack members. In most supernatural communities, the age of adulthood was seventeen. So on his birthday, when he officially left his pack, it was a no-brainer to offer him a position keeping these monsters in line. Plus, I’d never gotten along with girls very well, and Raphi stepped into the role of best friend.

Did I also mention he’s hot? No?

Well, he is.

Raphael Sanchez could be the poster child for a dark angel. He stood around 6’2”, which was short for most shifters, but that never stopped Raphi from being absolutely lethal. He wasn’t a fighter by nature, but by necessity. When we weren’t required to act like total badasses, I tried to encourage his softer side, and just this month we made progress when he told me he was considering writing again. He’d written for most of his life, but when he left his pack, he’d taken a break. When I offered to read his work, the man had fucking blushed.

I know! I fell more in love with him, too.

This morning, his skin seemed to be glowing with a golden, amber shine. Scars ran along his arms and neck, memories of the abuse suffered at the hands of the pack he’d left in New Mexico. Once, when we were talking about them, he’d mentioned the idea of getting tattoos to cover them up.

I told him the truth. I thought they were beautiful.

They only added to the gorgeous package that was him. I wanted to kiss, lick, and bite each part of him, and that wasn’t an over-exaggeration. The man just *did* it for me. His hair was always slicked back, like this morning, and the midnight color matched his wolf perfectly. His dangerous eyes were back to a dark green, framed by thick, dark lashes. Honestly, sometimes he was almost too pretty to look at. The man had better cheekbones than I did, and don’t even get me started on his perfectly sculpted lips. It was cruel and

unfair.

I mean, I'd been blessed by the goddess of death—shouldn't that warrant instant beauty or something? I suppose I should feel lucky, though, since she *could* have cursed me to look like a corpse instead.

"What are you talking about, baby?" He frowned, his dark brows pushing together. I was briefly distracted by his two gold snakebite piercings, which glinted in the light, if you were paying attention, but were small enough that you could overlook them.

I thought they were pretty sexy.

I narrowed my eyes, looking down at my watch to confirm my thoughts before speaking. "It's Saturday before noon, Raphi."

His jaw tightened as he decided to play dumb. "Yeah. It is. So what?"

I tilted my head. "So, I know for a fact you don't leave the house this early—not even to visit me—unless it's for a reason. So either you'd already planned to come over and scare off Jonathan..." I drew out, watching his expression, "...or you could smell him from down the block and just rushed over."

Raphi's jaw released as he took a sip of my coffee, then he stretched his massive arms above his head. A delay tactic if I'd ever seen one.

Raphi and the other boys lived in a house down the street that was owned by Alaric's family. Well, Alaric and Abel. They were twins. Their family was off doing whatever vampires did after a few centuries of being bored, so they'd taken control of the property.

"I was taking out the trash," he reasoned. I didn't miss the double meaning. "I'm just defending you against the evils of human men. You should be thanking me."

I chuckled authentically. "Oh? And how does your wolf feel about Jonathan?"

An answering rumble escaped Raphi's chest, as it did whenever I talked about his wolf. Raphi muttered a curse. I let my power drift out to gently surround us, something that always calmed his wolf down. As with many things, my powers could give and take. The balance was important. I fed off the dead, but I needed the living as well. It wouldn't do anyone any favors if I became saturated with too much raw power and lost my shit.

My power *loved* Raphi. It hovered around him protectively, as if to say, "Fuck off. If he dies, he's ours."

Not at all morbid.

Magic was possessive like that, though. Even for necromancers. While it was depressing, I couldn't really avoid the world of the dead, now could I? I was literally born to do just this.

"He's a possessive bastard," he muttered. I nodded and sipped my coffee. It was a long-established truth that Raphi's wolf was possessive over me, and apparently there wasn't a damn thing he could do to change that.

It made for some really fucking funny moments...and also made me wish that Raphi, the man, felt the same.

CHAPTER 2

NARCISSA



“I hate tourists,” I commented after a long moment. A tour bus rumbled past, spewing clouds of black smoke from its exhaust. Raphi chuckled as we sat back into the bench, relieved for the topic change. Neither of us were dressed for the day, but in the shade of my front porch, it didn’t matter.

I felt safe and secure on the porch, which wasn’t something I normally felt while walking the streets of good old NOLA. Maybe it was the wrought iron fence that surrounded the property or the heavy ferns that lined the fence and house. The protective wards helped too. It was funny seeing humans scurry quickly past because something felt ‘off’ about the home.

I supposed the sense of security came from more than that, though. It came from the small, traditional street lamps that sat on either side of the paved sidewalk leading to the porch steps. It came from the freshly painted white surface we sat on, echoed by the balcony above where the primary suite let out. It came from a sense of home. *My* home. And it would be this way for however long I lived. I was a creature of habit, and I didn’t see that changing anytime soon.

You might think that my concern for security was a bit much—after all, I *was* Queen of the Dead. But I was scared of the same thing that frightens the rich and famous.

Fucking crazy people.

Sure, I was powerful, but did that mean I wanted someone attacking me? No, because then I would have to kill them. I preferred to let people think I was crazy so that I didn't actually *need* to kill anyone.

For the record, I was generally a fucking nice person if you weren't being a dick, thank you very much.

Speaking of dicks... I stared up at the white-washed slats of the balcony and scowled. I was still annoyed my grandma had refused to take the primary suite, my attempts to even bring it up this morning once again unsuccessful. She claimed it looked bad for a queen to not have the biggest room. Odd, I know, especially since she'd been Queen of the Dead before me. But she'd insisted on giving it up, and now she was relegated to one of the smaller rooms where she would spend her retirement for the next four hundred years. A fun-filled, responsibility-free four hundred years.

Lucky bitch.

In all reality, though, living here with my grandma was fantastic. It was always interesting and eternally beautiful. The house's beautiful mix of Italianate and Greek Revival architecture, with its trademark white columns, had been the only home I'd ever known. I could feel the history and my ancestors vibrating through the land around us. It helped that most of our family was buried in a private graveyard out back.

Oh, you think that's weird? Come on! What was I supposed to do? Force the family spirits to float all the way over from a graveyard to visit? That would just be rude.

"What do we have planned for today?" Raphi asked after half an hour of comfortable silence. My head rested against his warm chest, and the gentle breeze and the rise and fall of his breaths had me feeling pretty zen. I didn't miss that his wolf vibrated in his chest with a soft, content purr.

Yes, I totally used his wolf's feelings toward me to get physically closer to Raphi. *Sue me.* The man smelled like freshly baked cookies.

"We have to meet with some hellhounds," I muttered with distaste.

Raphi growled, and I grinned at the feral response. I stood up, appraising his jeans and t-shirt, knowing he'd thrown them on last-minute. I smirked at his bare feet, and he scowled. A sudden movement to my right caught my eye, and I watched a spirit trail through the yard, an ephemeral frown on its face.

How fucking ridiculous—what, because they were dead they were

incapable of manners and respecting people's property? Bullshit.

Raphi's arms encircled my waist. "What?"

I looked up at his impressive height and pointed at the spirit he couldn't see. "Goddamned ghost walking across my lawn. Rude!"

The spirit looked up, squeaked, and disappeared. I smirked. I was a scary motherfucker. Ghosts knew that. I had sent far too many of them to the Other for it not to be so. You wanted to stay on Earth for the next millennium, I didn't give a rat's ass. But *don't* be a jerk about it.

Like Steve. I still planned to confront the ghost down the street. He'd been scaring the crap out of some human family for nearly two full weeks now.

Now, I would never send someone to the Other for walking across my lawn, but it was still very rude.

Also—*no*—I didn't know what 'the Other' was. I couldn't confirm it was Heaven, and I didn't think it was Hell, because the demonic realm was the inspiration for that mythos. All I knew was that when a spirit became too much of a problem or flat out asked me to release them from this world, I referred to that final destination as 'the Other.'

Nice, right? I literally worked with the afterlife and still could not give you an answer on the age-old 'life after death' question. I mean, there were plenty of freaky things in this world, and that didn't even begin to include any of the other realms. Take the demonic realm. It's real and defies rational explanation on a daily basis. So, yeah. *Who knows?* I felt like that question defined my life in a nutshell.

"You freaked him out, didn't you?" He didn't need to see the ghost to know that my words alone had sent the spirit packing. "You know, you look crazy to most people. Living *and* dead."

I grinned. "It's not a look. It's a lifestyle, honey buns."

"Be back in an hour," he said, chuckling at my sugar-coated term of endearment. He pressed a quick kiss to my head before jogging off, and I took a moment to watch his retreating form before I made my way inside. Ok, more like 'checked out his muscular butt' before I made my way inside. But who could blame me? Trust me, it was worth a look.

I took one last deep breath, enjoying the humidity and taste of life on my tongue. New Orleans was a lively city, especially the French Quarter, and not just in terms of the living. It had such a rich, decadent past that provided me with an unlimited buffet of options of the dead. It was also probably why

some of the most powerful necromancers ever known—my family—had decided to move here.

Or maybe it was filled with the dead *because* we lived here? Who knew? My grandma reported meeting another necromancer in Europe once, but she hasn't met another since. We were a rare breed, and on top of that, not welcomed. I mean, I *was* essentially the Grim Reaper.

Such a catch. Believe you me, I didn't know how I hadn't been snatched up already. Except for maybe the fact that my overprotective friends would probably kill anyone who tried that...if I didn't beat them to it.

No one would ever own me. I was far too fabulous to fall to that fate.

I stepped into the front hallway and admired my home. I wasn't naïve enough to think that everyone lived as I did, and I made sure it didn't go unappreciated. It helped that I had an interest in architecture that would probably serve to entertain me even a hundred years or so down the line. Maybe I would even make it big and create something completely original.

I silently scoffed. *No such thing as originality.* Everything is derived from something.

I let my hand trail along the chair rail molding as I made my way to the kitchen. One of the elements we as a family had been sure to preserve throughout the ages was the glorious and original woodwork of the home. It was a deep cherry color that shone on the floors and edged the cream colored walls. Ornate carpets, intricately woven in red and gold, sat in the hallway and the sitting room off to the left. The crown molding, a gilded gold, matched the original chandeliers that had been altered to work with electricity. It was as close as one could get to how the original construction would have looked.

Fine already! I'll admit it. I had a fucking crush on this house.

I couldn't help it; there was a lot of me in this house. I had helped my grandma pick out all new furniture once my mother had passed away. Mother still complained about the change on the daily, and *man* did it annoy the shit out of me. Her choices had been horrible. I simply chose a more elegant and neutral style of decor.

I shook my head, thinking back to the dated leather couches my mom had tried to put in such a classic home. She should have known better than that.

It sounded harsh, the way I talked about my mother, but it was also hard to mourn someone who was literally floating around your house complaining about shit.

“Sweetheart?” Grandma called from the kitchen. I smiled as I walked into a room filled with cherry wood cabinets and granite counters.

“Morning.” I smiled and kissed her cheek. As I mentioned, my grandma looked to be in her late thirties, at most. The two of us were often confused for mother and daughter, which we used to our advantage when the humans asked questions.

This morning, Grandma sat at the counter wearing her soft silk floor-length robe. She looked dramatically regal with a porcelain cup of black tea, a habit she’d picked up when she’d visited England for a summer. The woman had an aura of classic beauty and grace that was timeless.

But where my grandma had been graced with elegant, fine features, I had been cursed with the ‘cute’ syndrome.

My grandma had a long, regal nose. Mine was a motherfucking button dotted with soft freckles. Grandma had silky, straight hair that twisted and bent to her will. I loved my hair, but it was a force of nature, especially when you considered the humidity. It reached down to my mid-back where I had dyed the ends a bright red that was fading into a crimson, the rest of it midnight with an undercurrent of caramel in the loose waves. My grandma was around 5’8”, where I measured out at a petite 5’5”. Both my mother and grandmother had been blessed with curvy bodies. I had been given a leaner, more athletically toned body. No D-cups for me. I did work on my butt religiously, so I had to give my ass credit—it looked fantastic from the back.

In a nutshell, I was ‘cute.’ Short. Little. Button nose. Feminine features. Golden skin. Dark, wavy, soft hair. Cute. *Not sexy.* Cute. It didn’t help that I had long lashes and a pair of massive golden orbs speckled with emerald that took up most of the real estate on my face. I thought it made me look like one of those creepy fucking dolls, but others saw a sweet doe-eyed girl.

And don’t even get me started on the people who like to say my grandma and I looked ‘exotic’ just because of our golden skin. I couldn’t count with all my fingers and toes the amount of human men who’d given me that twisted compliment. If you want an exotic experience, go eat a crawfish! Suck the head and pinch *that* tail, okay?

Plus, my family had been here way longer than most, so really *they* were the exotic ones. Not me.

The details on our heritage were pretty sketchy—I had a lot of conflicting opinions from all my relatives—but I knew for sure that we’d owned this piece of land before this home had even been built. Since before America had

been ‘discovered.’ So *not* from a distant foreign land.

Rant over. Moving on.

The way I chose to combat others’ perception of me? Dress like a fucking badass.

“I don’t know why you insist on wearing those...” Grandma finished the rest of her sentence in a language I didn’t recognize, sipping her tea and offering me a smile as if she wasn’t talking crap. I was onto her, though. While I didn’t know two languages, let alone the seven she did...I would get there. I owed it to myself and the random ancestors floating around to educate myself with the ample time allotted to me.

Then the bitch couldn’t talk shit about my clothing choices.

I grabbed a container of grapes and looked down to see what she saw. Motorcycle boots and an oversized shirt with some jean shorts. Was it *Project Runway* worthy? No. Then again, it was fucking ten in the morning, so who the heck would expect me to look like Heidi effing Klum?

“Who knows.” I smiled, putting away the grapes after filling a bowl. “Maybe I’ll curb stomp some hellhounds today. The boots would really help drive the point home.”

Plus, I did own a motorcycle, so it wasn’t just a fashion choice. Also, the soles read ‘Shut Up.’ When I put my feet up, people got the message loud and clear.

I guess I was sort of a bitch, but then again, these monsters had some serious problems. It was hard to control them *without* being an asshole.

Grandma let out a solid laugh as I left the kitchen and headed upstairs with renewed energy. I always enjoyed getting ready for the show that was being Queen of the Dead. Not that I wasn’t always Queen, but when I went out in public, it required a little extra drama.

I passed the stained glass window on the second floor landing and threw open my bedroom door. The primary suite was one of my favorite places. Besides Bourbon Street.

It was a paradox. The leather-motorcycle-boot-wearing necromancer liked simple, elegant, cream colored decor. My bed was white with cream and lavender sheets that matched the pinstripe-patterned seating by the fireplace.

I moved to open up all my windows and the balcony door before going to my wardrobe. The one thing I disliked about older homes was the lack of closet space. It was my only complaint.

After grabbing a pair of black ripped jean shorts and a tank top, I skipped into the bathroom. I pinned up my hair and looked at myself in the mirror, frowning at how young I looked and wondering for the ten millionth time how anyone considered me a Queen.

I didn't even mean that as a diss towards what I did, because honestly, I rocked at keeping people in line. Especially the vampires that had been turned. *Those* guys were the undead. The born vampires were very much alive and simply had a taste for blood.

It was more that I just felt so young to be in charge of so much, and I found myself very thankful for my friends. If it wasn't for the boys, I wouldn't be nearly as confident in my ability to effectively enforce supernatural law on such a wide level. Talk only went so far. I mean, what was a Queen without her guard?

The tub was filled with warm, steaming water already, housekeeping predicting that I would want to take a bath. I literally had no idea how they did that. They were so good at being invisible, and all I wanted to do was talk to them. I mean, I wasn't *that* scary.

I slipped into the water and groaned at the contact. *This* was exactly what I needed.

"You should really reconsider that outfit," my aunt chirped. I opened one eye and looked up from the bubbles covering my body to find her sitting on the vanity chair. She and my mother were twins and took after my grandma in the looks department. Beautiful, not cute.

"I've told you a MILLION and one times that I can't wear a dress to this type of thing, Veronica. It would ruin my vibe."

She scoffed. "Your *vibe*?"

I closed my eyes, ignoring her, and felt her presence leave. For fifteen minutes, I simply enjoyed the peace of being submerged in warm water with no dead people talking to me.

CHAPTER 3

NARCISSA



Then I mentally began to allow some crazy back into my head to prepare for this meeting.

How to succeed at necromancy? Be crazier than the scariest person in the room.

Once done, I slipped on the jean shorts and tank top. I adjusted my boobs to show a little cleavage and braided my hair into a loose fishtail. I kept the makeup simple, darkening my thick lashes with mascara and liner and adding some rum-colored lipstick. Not pink, so perfect for this. I began to insert my piercings, exchanging the gold for black, and rounded the assortment out with the brow piercing. Don't know why, but people seemed to be more scared of me when I had it in.

After spraying myself with perfume, I gave myself a cursory assessment and nodded in approval. As I walked back into my bedroom and slipped on my ass-kickers and leather jacket, familiar voices sounded downstairs. Grandma would, as always, have them wait in the sitting room, crazy old bat.

And Dorian Westburrow, as always, wouldn't listen.

"*Chérie,*" a seductive voice called as heavy footsteps pounded up the stairs. I looked up from packing my motorcycle backpack to see Dorian looking very much like his namesake.

Ever heard of the Oscar Wilde story called *The Picture of Dorian Gray*? Yes. Well, this was the egotistical bastard who'd been going through a very dramatic tragedy phase and convinced Oscar to write his story. The incubus dramatized almost everything, and in that period of time, he'd felt a little down on himself. So he'd gotten creative.

I'd like to state first that he was not, is not, and never will be a player. He may have a sexy voice and lust-inducing powers, but the guy was a sensitive, broody daydreamer. In fact, besides the spectacular ego boost, he only had Wilde write the book because he found it to be an amusing test of a human's ability to derive truth from lies.

Wilde failed, unfortunately.

Not to mention, Dorian could very much look at pictures of himself without repercussion. In fact, he rather enjoyed the pastime. Along with being a brooding sensitive bastard, he also was entitled and incredibly vain. It was a winning combination, and if it wasn't for that goddamned adorable smile, I'd kill him. As it stood, though, I couldn't because of the very obvious fact that I cared about him. Also, he didn't ever hurt anyone with his powers, simply feeding off the sexual energy of our crazy city. It made me respect him more, because he was totally hot enough to get action several times a day.

Something I tried not to consider. Ever.

So, despite all his faults, he was *my* brooding bastard. He was also one of the most brilliant minds in this realm, repeatedly devoting his genius to advance medicine and technology. His powers allowed him insight into how patients actually felt and reacted to the medicine they were taking, especially those medications in early, experimental stages—he was only on hiatus right now to help me.

I guess that deserved some brownie points.

“Good mornin’.” I smiled as Dorian's pretty ivory face lit up with my greeting. He reminded me of a male model. His face was chiseled, almost haunted-looking, with dark gray eyes that seemed to burn like small infernos. There was a grace to how he held his body, which was eternally predisposed to a swimmer's physique. *Michael Phelps, eat your heart out.* Must be nice.

Despite having a longer lifespan, I couldn't eat donuts for every meal and maintain my current size. Goals though, right?

Dorian mentioned once that he would eventually die, but it would be at the time of his choosing. Cocky, right? In all reality though, he was simply

aging slower, like myself. As an incubus, he would end up in the demonic realm. His twenty-something appearance didn't stop me from making old man jokes though, and often. It was the only thing that could guarantee a fight—and fighting with Dorian was sexy.

Very sexy and very intense. Yes, I used it as an excuse to touch his muscles.

Despite being nearly immune to his sexy powers, I found myself attracted to him, but not just for looks. Although right now I really wanted to run my hands through his dark auburn hair. It was cruel of him to stand there in the mid-morning sun looking so handsome. Today, he wore a pair of dark dress pants and a black *American Horror Story* t-shirt. A pair of suspenders hung off his pants in a fashion that made him look like an alternative 1920s gangster. My eyes traced the steel-gray industrial bar on his left ear. *God*. Something about piercings just turned me on. Especially on these boys.

While Dorian was rocking the alternative mobster look, Raphi often dressed opposingly. He was a muscular guy, more comfortable than not without clothes on. *No complaints here*. I would bet my left arm that he was downstairs wearing dark jeans, motorcycle boots, and a black tank. The only addition to that standard uniform was a flannel shirt during winter. Never a coat, though. He ran at a very warm, perfect cuddling temperature.

“I heard Johnny-boy was asking for a beating today.” Dorian flashed me an amused smile as I scowled up at him. He was slightly taller than Raphi at 6’4”, and he never let you forget it. The man had been a giant in his day, and he still continued to find it amusing that people were shorter than him. At least his height matched his ego.

I jammed an index finger into his chest to back him out of my bedroom. “Leave the poor forgettable human alone, Dorian.”

Dorian let out a chuckle as he caught my hand with his own tattooed ones, the dark symbols simplistic against his skin. I had always wondered why he only had knuckle tattoos. I pulled away from him but followed him down the stairs.

“Can't I just mess with him a little?” he pleaded. “I mean, would it be so bad for him to truly question his sexuality? The modern age is so repressed! I could help him. All I would have to do is enter his mind, even in a dream, and then he would no longer be your issue. It would just be planting a seed, and then we could send someone along to keep him company.”

I let out another laugh, ignoring the usual flair of possessiveness from my

magic as I landed on the bottom steps. My magic had made it very clear that she wanted the boys' attention on her and only her until the day they died. And she was stopping there.

Maybe.

I caught Alaric's eye from across the room. My grandma was talking to Abel, his twin, about a piece of artwork that she'd bought at an auction. He smiled at me in passing as I made my way over to the aloof, stuffy vampire that I called one of my best friends. I tumbled right onto his lap, causing him to grunt before he leaned back, seemingly unfazed, into the sofa.

I saw the twitch of his lips, though.

Abel and Alaric Vladern were from a family of gruff Scandinavian vampires that used to be Vikings. It seemed Alaric had hung out with the rougher side of his family when growing up. Raphi, who was currently preoccupied watching Jonathan's house through the window, always poked fun at them with me. Well, mostly Alaric. Abel was too sweet.

"Baby," I cooed and ruffled Alaric's perfectly styled icy blond hair. The gesture incited a dangerous look, one that could kill. Similar to his twin, Alaric had a strong jaw and dark brows that only served to accent his icy skin and nearly white hair. Both of them were huge, clocking in at 6'6", and were built like tanks—tanks that moved super quietly in the shadows and could rip out your throat. On the other hand, I'd heard getting bit by a vampire was orgasmic, but I'd have to get back to you on that one.

Today Alaric and Abel both wore dark suit pants with matching vests over t-shirts. I found it distracting when they dressed so sexy, but I kept that to myself. Though it didn't seem to stop my dreams of being in between the twins as they drank my blood and screwed me senseless. Fun stuff.

I couldn't believe I was still a virgin. I had the imagination of a seasoned veteran.

"You seem upbeat," Alaric mumbled, his voice taking on a softer note than it did with others. He still had a harsh accent that often scared people, but with me he always took care to slow down, his accent turning into a seductive lilt. Unless we fought, that is. Then it grew choppy and got me all hot and bothered.

"It was a good morning." I smiled as his electric blue eyes darkened.

Wait for it...

"Because of Jonathan?" he asked. I scoffed and slid off of him, flicking him right on his chin as he scowled. Those sharp fangs poked out just

slightly, and it was super cute. I could never tell Alaric that though—it would be a death warrant. And a fucking fast one, at that.

Not really, but he would be pissed.

I had become friends with the twins much like I had Dorian and Raphi—because of their measured distance from any particular supernatural community. The twins' family was far too old to be part of a clan and stuck to themselves because born vampires were so dissimilar to turned. *Now they were stuck with me!*

I walked over to Abel and wrapped my arms around my little optimist.

Abel smiled down at me, a sparkle in his deep navy eyes, before he continued his conversation with Grandma. He shared the same dark, harsh lines of ink down his arms as his brother, and I wanted to take off his shirt to see it better.

Only reason. I swear.

Instead, I just listened to him talk to my grandma about a new auction and gala coming up. Ever the philanthropist, Abel was huge into helping charities and donating massive amounts of money to good causes. Causes that his brother researched and interviewed personally. The two of them ran their family financial firm from their home here in New Orleans and spent more time focusing on charities than their hedge fund. I wasn't positive why they worked, because they certainly didn't need to.

Abel was a huge romantic, pacifist, and lover, with the optimism of someone far younger than the five odd decades or so under his belt. His looks belied his true age, appearing—at best—maybe twenty-two. The two of them had been born around World War II and had been blessing people's lives ever since. Yet despite all of that, Abel was extremely dangerous and would not hesitate to kill. Especially for me. It was hard to not let that go to my head.

"You never answered," Alaric growled, and I turned to find him right behind me. I smiled a little at the perturbed tone in his voice.

"You asked if my morning was good because of Jonathan," I stated. I felt Abel turn with interest as Grandma laughed before leaving the room.

Traitor.

"Well, was it?" Alaric demanded. Raphi let out a small growl. I honestly think my answer would determine Jonathan's fate.

"No, boys," I chirped. "Calm down."

And they did.

Hm. Interesting.

I mock gasped. “Are you jealous, Alaric?”

The vampire snarled before heading toward the front door, and Abel chuckled as he lifted me up to follow. I shouted goodbye to my grandma, and we made our way beyond my protective wards.

I groaned and wavered slightly as we stepped outside the fence. My wards kept a lot of the extra spirits at bay, and stepping beyond their protection allowed them to bombard me all at once. I felt Raphi wrap a steadying arm around me—he knew exactly how this worked. After a moment, I shook my head and glared at all of them. Some spirits were so faint they just felt like a breeze of wind running across your skin. That didn’t mean they weren’t overwhelming, though.

“Hellhounds,” I stated, trying to remind myself—and the boys—of the task at hand. I needed to keep appearances up while we moved down the sidewalk.

Now, when I said people were scared of me, it wasn’t in the *‘you’re scary but we love you’* kind of way. No, I literally had shifter parents urging their kids inside as the five of us made our way toward the established meeting place off of Bourbon Street. It was around the corner from the main hub, so a full fight couldn’t break out, but we would still be alone.

It wasn’t a very long walk until we were entering into the French Quarter, and a scowl twisted my face. The strong scent of liquor hit me and masked my favorite scents behind me. Raphi’s sugary scent. Dorian’s citrus scent. Alaric’s pine scent. Abel’s cherry scent. Well, it was less their scent and more their life scent. Like an aura, but it smelled good.

I sucked at explaining my own magic. But just as blood had a certain taste or smell to vampires, so did someone’s life force to me. It’s the easiest way to explain it, honestly.

As the five of us made our way down the street, my smile turned into a smirk as humans openly ogled us. My monsters moved to the side, and the humans’ eyes shot down as I let my power slip out and down along the ground, making it seem as though dark wisps of shadows covered my feet. Humans wouldn’t be able to see it, but I was positive I looked like some dark overlord to the rest of the community. This shit was always so much fun.

Why I hadn’t made it to Broadway yet, with my dramatic flair, absolutely baffled me.

On a societal level, it was sad that the only thing that worked for the supernatural troublemakers was fear. My family—specifically, my grandma

—had tried the soft approach, and it had made them seem weak. So now I made myself scary enough that people didn't even think about acting up. It helped that I had enough power to make good on my threats if necessary.

If that didn't work, there were always the knives.

The door of the bar slammed open, rattling the liquor bottles on the wall, and I grinned as half the hellhounds present jumped. As predicted, they had over-committed for attendance. All of them—about ten—were facing the door, waiting for us. I met the Alpha with a penetrating gaze that elicited a low growl.

In a move filled with elegance and grace, I grabbed a chair and swung it to sit backwards, leveling a stare at the bastard. He had been sitting the same way, and now we were nearly eye to eye as I watched him with a predatory look, my hand slipping into my boot as I began to fiddle with my knife. The motion served several purposes. One, it sort of calmed me. Two, it was scary. Three, it added to the challenge I presented to him. He really didn't like me making direct eye contact.

“Is this a joke?” one of the guys behind him asked. “She's a fucking kid.”

My lip twitched as the Alpha's eyes shifted from anger to concern. I tilted my head, and when he didn't say anything to the man, I let my power slip out and wrap around the dissenter in a vise grip. The men behind the Alpha flipped out as the life was choked from their friend. There were rules to these things, and his disrespect hadn't been corrected.

“Stop,” the Alpha gritted. My power let go of the man. He fell to the floor, unconscious and spasming. He was alive—*barely*—but hopefully a bit wiser.

See? Some people would abuse this power. I only used it for emphasis. I was a fantastic fucking Queen!

“Do you know why we called you in?” I asked, studying the Alpha. As with most hellhounds, his eyes were a bright red, a trait of his demonic heritage. If it wasn't for his pack's obvious disrespect of the law, I would have called him attractive—even handsome. As it stood, though, he seemed like sort of a dick. Not the fun kind, either.

Oh good. Now I was thinking about dick. *So not the time to get turned on, Narc.*

“No,” he grumbled through clenched teeth in a lie so obvious Alaric chuckled. It made all the hellhounds shift uncomfortably. I knew my boys looked imposing in their relaxed position behind me, stretched out in their

chairs, unworried and bored. I bet the Alpha hated that. It was awesome, though, the dynamic my little group had. I could prove my dominance through my own power without fear of being overwhelmed by numbers.

Or committing mass murder of my own fucking people.

“Let me shine some light,” I said, grinning maniacally. “See, some of your men, around ten p.m. last night, were caught using their demonic influence on some college coeds. Wanna take a guess what they wanted them to do? Hint—it’s *very original*.”

The Alpha shook his head with a low rumble in his chest.

I spread my hands out while emphasizing my point with a point of my knife. “Not sure? Let me help. They were using their influence to *fuck* them!”

I paused for emphasis as the Alpha’s face turned chalky, almost green. So I continued, wanting him to realize just how bad of a position he was in. “Who would have thought, right? Not stereotypical at all of demonic realm folks, or men in general. I mean, it’s a real damn shame to represent such a beautiful place with such trash. You should really consider others and attempt to make your people proud instead of looking like such absolute shit heads.”

Several growls started before the Alpha lifted a hand to silence them.

“I was not aware of the incident,” he voiced painfully. “What would you have us do, Your Majesty?”

“Glad you asked!” I offered him an excited smile that had fear flickering in his gaze. *Good*.

CHAPTER 4

NARCISSA



I sipped on my bourbon as I watched the hellhounds from above. My legs were crossed comfortably, and a platter of cheese and fruit sat between Dorian and me. The demon read a massive text from one of the many shelves inside the shop below. A family friend owned the local café, so he allowed us to use this space to watch the hellhounds' embarrassment. Plus, the witch totally had a thing for me and was unashamed of it.

Alaric sat across from us, and Abel leaned against my chair, his feet hanging off the balcony as he peered through the wrought iron railing. Alaric was trying really fucking hard not to laugh at their punishment. Raphi stood behind me, his warm hands playing gently with my braid. My lips curled in a satisfied smile as I enjoyed my Saturday afternoon sunshine.

It was muggy and warm, but I knew it would only get worse as we worked our way through June. Then again, I sort of loved it, because the dead were cold. This weather felt alive to me.

"I can't believe you offered them this as an ultimatum." Dorian chuckled, looking down at them. The offending hellhound shifters attempted to talk to very drunk Bourbon Street patrons about sexual assault prevention.

It was either this or I chopped off their dicks. They made a good choice.

If there was one thing I hated, it was a man pulling physical dominance

over a woman to abuse her, sexually or otherwise. No matter the century, it was always the same bullshit, even if small strides had been made. Not that there weren't women who did the same, but I had a very specific bone to pick with men who did it.

Unfortunately, when you had a family that lived extended time periods and through multiple centuries, you gathered insight into society that had me cringing most days and feeling sick to my stomach often.

It was nearly noon now, and the street traffic was picking up. I reached my hands above my head, hitting Raphi on the nose. He let out a small rumble. *So growly*. I tilted my head up and smiled at him, those eyes melting to honey as he nipped at my nose.

"Ow," I complained as Dorian lifted an eyebrow and offered Raphi an indecipherable look. I was about to ask for a translation when the balcony doors opened. My face broke into a big smile, instantly recognizing the magic signature brushing over me in greeting.

"To what do we owe the pleasure?" I looked up at a very handsome and familiar face.

"I could ask you the same thing, little rose," Zachariah offered. He dragged out a chair as my men tensed. They didn't like Zachariah, and it didn't take a lot to guess why.

The voodoo priest was above the law—even mine—in every single way. He was the only priest in the area, and one of the scariest motherfuckers I knew. No one knew how old he was or just when he had come to New Orleans—he just had always been here to control the things that my family couldn't. I didn't mind in the least, and the view was an added benefit, because Zachariah was hot. Like *meltingly* hot. Batshit crazy, so rumors say, but hot.

Yet *none* of those reasons were why my guys didn't like him.

"I'm watching hellhounds talk about sexual assault prevention to the same drunk Bourbon Street population they've been harassing," I explained and took a sip of my drink. One of the perks of being Queen of the Dead? The local supernatural venues didn't even attempt to stop my underage drinking. The humans did, but that didn't work out very well for them. After one minute of compulsion from my vampires, I was able to legally drink in any establishment I wanted within the French Quarter.

Zachariah just smiled in response, and I watched as he leaned forward, studying me intently. I knew he had a question, but instead of pressing him, I

just took my damn time drinking in the sexy man before me.

He was dressed in an unbuttoned white short-sleeve shirt, which gave a full-access view of his dark, solid abs. Forget a six pack. He had like an eight pack or something equally ridiculous, and his arms were massive. The rich color of his skin glowed brilliantly against the white of his shirt and made his odd silver eyes stand out so much more. As usual, he was barefoot, but his feet and hands were adorned with silver tattoos that matched the small ring holding back his shoulder-length ebony locs. Around his neck was a small, polished necklace of animal skulls that diverted a lot of attention to his built chest.

At least my attention.

There was just something so different about him. The power he radiated didn't feel mortal, but it didn't feel dead either. It felt primordial and powerful. He seemed so much more supernatural than everyone else. The way his full lips turned up into a smile that was cocky without being obnoxious let me know he was aware of it.

“What’s on your mind?” I finally asked as Raphi began to play with my hair once again. Zachariah tracked the movement and then focused back on me.

“Have dinner with me tonight,” he demanded softly. My eyes widened as my boys silently tensed.

Well, shit. That was unexpected.

I tilted my head to the side as his eyes glinted with something dark and amusing. I took another sip of bourbon. “Where would we go? It might be dangerous to have the Queen of the Dead and the only voodoo priest in America wandering around together in public.”

“My house,” he replied, his voice like a song.

Raphi let out a low growl, but Zachariah ignored him and kept his eyes on me. I was insanely curious why he wanted me to go to dinner with him, because I didn't think this was just about Zachariah being into me.

That was why they disliked him, by the way—because he was into me. *I know. Big surprise.*

No, I knew this was larger than that. If Zachariah wanted to flirt with me, he wouldn't schedule a dinner to do it.

“What time?” I asked. The table shuddered as someone attempted to loosen their grip on it. I almost snorted as Alaric nearly broke it. I supposed it could have been Dorian, but I knew my boys pretty well. I wanted badly to

gauge their individual reactions, but I kept my eyes on the priest.

“Eight,” he responded, those mercury eyes glinting with something absolutely devilish. “I’ll send a car.”

I started to nod in reply, but he was gone so quickly I didn’t have the chance. I’d barely turned before Dorian was bearing down on me, caging me in the chair and forcing me to lean against Raphi. The incubus’s eyes smoldered as he searched my face for something.

“What is your problem?” I snapped. Full disclosure, though, I had to admit I loved how close he was to me right now.

Dorian shook his head in disbelief. “You really don’t know?”

Alaric spoke next. “Why are you going to dinner with him?”

I looked at both of them. “Why are you two acting so much weirder than normal about this?” I purposely avoided his question, because frankly, I just wanted to. This dinner wasn’t as complicated as they were making it out to be, and I was curious as hell to know what he had to say. Zachariah didn’t make casual plans. Ever. So I had to assume it was important.

Abel spoke softly, the voice of reason. “She has absolutely no idea. Stop complicating shit, brother, unless you’re planning to discuss it.”

“Know what?” I demanded. Raphi grasped my hair again and began to twist it gently. *Twist. Untwist. Twist. Untwist.* I met his eyes, and he seemed to be struggling with an inner turmoil.

“Don’t go to dinner with him,” Raphi mumbled through a clenched jaw.

“Why?” I asked loudly.

All four of them stilled at my question, and a discomfiting silence ensued. *Alright then. Fuck it.* I stood up and shook my head. I wasn’t positive who pissed in their Cheerios this morning, but I didn’t have to eat it.

“Don’t leave.” Abel stood up, his eyes soft and concerned.

I turned to Alaric, who looked furious but remained silent. It was so unlike his usual cold and formal personality, it freaked me out. Almost as much as Abel looking disheartened. My gaze trailed to Dorian, his eyes filled with pain and a small, honest-to-god pout on his lips. When I looked to Raphi, I found his walls up in full force, the animal inside backing away.

What the actual fuck?

Sometimes I questioned how these men were considered so scary and badass. Right now, they were putting off more of a kicked puppy vibe.

“Alright,” I said softly, standing by the door. “Someone needs to explain what it is that I did wrong here. I’m not a mind-reader, boys.”

“Do you like him?” Abel asked.

Was I really having this conversation right now?

“I’m not sure,” I answered honestly. “I don’t know him well enough.”

“Exactly,” Alaric said in a clinical yet heated voice. Odd contrast.

“So wouldn’t I want to get to know him so I can decide if I like him...” I trailed off, very confused. I mean, I liked these boys more, but I wasn’t exactly placing all my money on believing a couple of decades-old vampire hotties, a century-old incubus, and a super powerful shifter were interested in little old me. Especially since they’d never tried to turn our relationship romantic. Plus, I couldn’t choose between them... like *could not, would not*. So, yeah.

I really did like Zachariah, but I just didn’t know him. My magic loved his power, though, so I felt comfortable around him...but I had to imagine most people felt intimidated around him. He played his own game, and no one knew the rules. Although it wouldn’t matter if you had them, because you would still lose. His experience far outmatched anyone I had ever met.

“No!” Dorian exploded up off his seat. “That is a terrible idea!”

Age made some people very dramatic.

“Why?” I asked. Raphi met my gaze, his eyes flashing to almost black.

I felt the vibration and heat in the air before I heard it. In a move that was probably going to cause them pain, but was the lesser of two evils, I let my power slip out to wrap around them. I knocked the boys to the ground as a massive burst of hellfire hit the spot where my head had just been. *Fucking hell*.

“What the fuck?” Dorian snarled and rolled to his side as we looked over the balcony. It seemed the hellhounds had grown tired of their punishment.

“Bad move, you overgrown mutts.” I stood up on the railing and jumped down. The drunk patronage screamed and ran away from what probably looked like a fucked-up magic show. Luckily, the magic that gave me the ability to hang with the dead also made me agile as a cat.

I was positive I could have found another analogy there, but I didn’t want to. I loved cats, and the only reason I didn’t have one had to do with a certain wolf and his canine predisposition toward the feline species.

“Fuck off, bitch,” the stupid hellhound growled.

It looked like he wasn’t going to cut it in my town. I had a feeling he and some of the other new hellhounds would have to die. Without pretense, I let my power curl around him as the air stilled.

I didn't fully know how to describe my power, which was frustrating because I felt like it deserved some recognition since it could literally rip the life force out of someone...or give it back. It felt like smoke against my skin, if that made sense. It felt wispy and warm running over me, and when it lashed out against others, it felt like thousands of small knives. It could also feel like fire burning your flesh or spiders crawling over every inch of you. Whatever you feared, I could make a reality. I wondered what this guy was feeling.

All the hellhounds locked down into place as I smiled widely. The ass who threw the hellfire was panting and trying to fight against me.

"It likes you struggling," I whispered as I neared him, my eyes hooded from power.

Now it might seem that death was a bit over the top. The guy was an asshole, sure. *But death? Really?* The thing to remember was that these guys wouldn't actually die. They would be sent back to the demonic realm and pop back up here again eventually. So, yes, I killed them, but the death was temporary.

Moral lines got very blurred in this field of work.

I watched as I drained the life out of him, and the hellhounds grew silent. The Alpha stood with a torn expression on his face as I reached the point where the hound would be sent back to the demonic realm. I stopped and looked at the Alpha with a cocked eyebrow.

"I'll send him back to the realm," he stated softly, his body vibrating with tension. I released my power and let some of the essence back into the guilty hound, leaving him weak and useless. The Alpha had made the right move. His decision would ensure the hound could still function in the demonic realm instead of being a useless spirit waiting for his body to heal from the injuries I'd inflicted.

"Be sure to do that. Next time, I won't hesitate to kill one of them. I understand it's hard for some individuals to accept being under my rule."

He met my eyes for a minute, neither of us backing down until he finally looked away in submission. I stepped closer to him and placed a hand against his muscular chest, in a small fist. I grinned at his frustrated, angry expression and whispered, "Good choice."

Then I walked away.

I was tired of all this nonsense today, and I needed some space.

Raphi whispered something to another one of the offending hellhounds as

he held him by the neck. The man nodded wordlessly. Abel watched with interest, as if the moment was his own personal show. Sometimes he could be a tad detached from reality. Dorian observed the unconscious man with disdain. Alaric, on the other hand, retained complete control of his expression. Any trace of whatever had been going on with him up on the balcony had disappeared.

“Now what?” Dorian asked as the five of us left behind the mess for the hellhounds to clean up.

“Well,” I sighed, looking up into the sunny sky, “I suppose we get the rest of the day off.”

“We have no one else to meet with?” Abel asked with a slight frown. He placed a hand on my lower back that warmed me.

“Nope!” I popped my ‘p.’ “We’re ahead of schedule because I’m no longer in school—thank God, right?!”

My phone—the public one—rang, and a groan sounded from everyone around me. I’d spoken too soon.

Cruel universe, why can’t I have one Saturday to myself?

I flipped it open. Yes. *Flipped*. I still used a crap cell phone for all these jerks to get in touch with me. My other cell phone remained unused and very fancy. Who was I going to text? All my friends were with me nearly round the clock.

“Hello,” my voice drifted out, tired and bored.

“Narcissa!” An Irish brogue filled my ear. “Yer feckin’ vampires are startin’ problems in me boozier.”

Oh, dear God.

I tried to not roll my eyes and attempted to adjust to his accent.

I spoke with frustration. “Declan, you are a fucking demigod. Of luck, I might add. Is there nothing you can do to break up a vampire bar fight?”

His laughter rolled softly, and I could tell he was smiling. “Yer probably roi, lass. I cud stop it. But I won’t.”

He hung up.

Leprechauns—always a problem.

“Let’s go,” I growled and turned the corner to head towards another main street, this one filled with more supernatural businesses.

Declan Flannery had made New Orleans his home sometime around the Irish potato famine. As a leprechaun in Ireland, he’d been rather run-of-the-mill. Now, in America? Well, the man had inspired your very own Lucky

Charms cereal and every other St. Patrick's Day-inspired product. All leprechauns were demigods in their own right, having been born from a union between the god of luck and a fortunate human. It just so happened that Declan was the most powerful, oldest, and oddest in America. He was also a sexy, brash, unapologetic piece of shit.

I let the twins enter ahead of me and then stepped into the dark, wood-paneled bar that smelled of cigar smoke and whiskey. It was a nice pub, actually. Served great food, but was ruined by the cheesy name. *The Pot of Gold*. I still loved it.

“What the fuck is the problem?” My power surged, making all of the patronage—all the monsters—freeze and take notice. Including the vampires.

As I mentioned, my twins weren't part of a clan, but these guys...were. Specifically, from two *opposing* clans. It was sort of like gangs. The only difference here was that one originated in Egypt and the other in Colombia. Unlike shifters, who had very strong female representation, vampires tended to only have powerful males. It always made me irrationally annoyed.

I stepped up to two very familiar men and leveled a glower at them. Both were wide-eyed and rigid, a pair of nearly black eyes and a pair of soft amber eyes staring fixedly. I could tell from the pallor of their skin they had recently fed, so what was the actual issue here? Vampires only got testy if they hadn't eaten. Unless, of course, you had powerful lineage like my twins.

As mentioned, there were two different types of vampires. Those born a vampire and those turned into a vampire. My twins were born vampires and were very much alive. They did drink blood, but it was coupled with a human diet of food and water. These men in the bar, on the other hand, had been changed. There was always a difference in their power, a cold dread that made them feel more like the dead. I mean, technically they *had* died, so I had more control over them than most.

“Your Majesty,” the Colombian clan member said. I could never remember their fucking names. “We were simply having a disagreement.”

“That resulted in him draining one of our men,” the other spat. He pointed to a man on the floor being fed blood from one of their pet humans.

Yeah. They kept humans around to feed off of.

Unfortunately, human slavery was very much a problem in the supernatural community...although there always seemed to be some kind of ‘reasoning’ behind it. My favorite was that they were willing servants. *Right*. I'm sure the orgasmic bite and compulsion had nothing to do with that...

I still made the vamps file official paperwork with me once a month that stated the humans had signed consent before any of the feedings. I probably needed to look further into that process in my downtime.

“What was the argument about?” I demanded. A deep laugh sounded, and the scent of clover filled the air. Original, right? I looked up to see a brilliant smile flash as Declan strolled towards us. He bounced on his toes as he looked between the two men. The excitement on his face was impish.

Declan loved violence at least as much as he loved flirting...although I'd never seen him with anyone. Something about that niggled at my brain. Something I didn't want to analyze at the moment.

“Tell 'er what it was about,” he goaded. He flashed a smile at me. “On St. Patrick's staff, lass, you'll love this.”

Silence.

Declan shot a dark look at one of the vampires, insisting upon the answer.

“We were talking about which of your men fuck you.”

Saints and beggorah. Bad move, dude.

Now I understood why Declan wanted us here. Before I could even step out of the way, Raphi broke both their necks.

CHAPTER 5

NARCISSA



Raphi let out a primal snarl and stepped back with a lupine grace I envied, both vampires falling to the floor.

They would live, but not without a sore neck for a few days. It probably seemed odd that I was so preoccupied with keeping people technically alive since I'm essentially Death. I just felt like it was important to underscore the point that necromancers really weren't that bad!

"Anticlimactic," Declan scolded.

I looked at the rest of the vampires' groups and offered a blank, dark expression. "Anyone else have questions about my sex life?"

I didn't add the much needed 'or lack thereof' descriptor. Kept that disappointing tidbit to myself.

Everyone shook their heads, and I smiled. "Good. Now get the fuck out of here."

The vampires scattered, human friends in tow, as I took a recently vacated seat and sighed. Declan took the one across from me and slid me a bottle of whiskey. New and very expensive.

"What's this?" I looked up at him. Declan didn't give gifts. If the glint in his clover-colored eyes told me anything, it spelled trouble.

Unlike what you would expect, our leprechaun was tall, around Dorian's

height. His hair was jet black that faded into auburn near the messy tips. It contrasted with his pearly skin and made his extensive neck and shoulder tattoos stand out. The man's body was a fully-tatted canvas, and he sported a black lip ring with a small clover charm on it. He was absolutely ridiculous.

Ridiculous and sexy.

"A gift," he smiled. "For finishin' 'igh school."

I snorted. "I'm still surprised you even know what high school is, you old man."

"I'm young where it counts." He winked and stood with a stretch, exposing his lean abs. He wore only a black tank top today and black leather. The quintessential rock star. And legend in his own mind.

"But if yer want to test me stamina, lass, I always 'ave a welcome sign on me door for yer."

I rolled my eyes as he walked away with a confident swagger that I was just a wee bit jealous of. I looked up at my boys and found a myriad of expressions on their faces. Alaric kept cool, but his fists flexed, clenching and unclenching. Raphi didn't even try to hide his anger. Dorian scowled. Abel looked at me thoughtfully.

"You four," I began as I stood, "are acting super weird."

All of them snapped their heads toward me. I waited for a response. When they didn't say anything, I rolled my eyes and began walking out of the bar. The bottle of whiskey swung in my hand as I began to hum a tune, ignoring the whispers of my men behind me. Maybe they were just having an off day? I really didn't understand them. They were usually protective, but this seemed a bit much.

I checked my watch and realized it was three. *Man, how time flies when you're yelling at people.* I should really get some more enforcers. Dominating is a lot of work.

I felt a warm hand slide around me and looked up at Raphi. Always physically affectionate, even when riled.

"What's up?" I asked as we turned onto our block. I could hear Alaric talking to Dorian, though they were being very quiet. I sensed Abel staring holes into the back of my head, which would have been a bit weird if he wasn't my sweetie pie.

Raphi looked down at me with a frown and then shook his head before looking back up. I groaned and slipped away from him, turning to walk backwards while watching all of them. When I stopped at my gate, I barred

them from entering.

“No.” I shook my head. “I can’t deal with this weirdness. You either say what’s on your mind or you let me relax in peace. All of this weird tension and thousand-yard stares are making me feel twitchy.”

When they didn’t say anything, I shook my head and walked through the gate. I was a little disappointed they didn’t follow, but they also didn’t leave the front of the house. As I stepped into the hallway, Grandma handed me a cup of freshly-squeezed lemonade and offered an amused hum.

“What’s wrong with them?” she asked, nodding towards the four men holding court outside.

I shrugged. “Zachariah asked me to dinner tonight and everything got awkward.”

Grandma snorted and looked down at me with amusement. “And you don’t know *why* they are being awkward?”

I threw up my hands in exasperation. “No fucking idea. They’re always protective, but this was different. I would say they were jealous, but they’ve never expressed interest in me romantically.”

Grandma looked down the length of her perfect nose at the men outside. “I would say your assumption is right, sweetie. I don’t know why those boys haven’t acted on their intentions, but it’s as clear as the day is bright how they feel about you.”

Well, Grandma, it’s cloudy out...

I squinted and looked over my shoulder as they continued to converse intensely. I frowned. “I don’t think so. Plus, I could never choose between them, if that was the case. I mean, how do you choose the best dessert when all four of them look delicious?”

See? I can make non-cat analogies.

Grandma laughed and tossed her head back. “Ah, yes! You are definitely my granddaughter.”

“Wasn’t aware there was any doubt,” I quipped as she continued to chuckle.

I gave her Declan’s whiskey bottle, her eyes lighting up with interest but not asking where I’d acquired it. As she went to put it away, I continued to examine my boys. Was she right? Did the boys like me like that? I frowned because I really didn’t feel like they’d ever expressed any interest to merit that assumption.

Although...I mean, I did hold hands and let Raphi carry me around half

the time because his wolf would complain otherwise. And sure, Abel and I always attended his charity events together as a couple because it relaxed him to know I was there. And I couldn't argue that Dorian and I had countless arguments that ended with us rolling around on the floor or bed shouting colorful profanities at one another because, let's face it, he was far too cocky for his own good. And Alaric offered me his soft smiles when he wasn't acting like some goddamn Viking...

Oh my fucking God. They were *totally* into me.

Naturally, my gut reaction was to get pissed.

Healthy, Narc.

I stomped onto the porch, and all four of them looked at me as I crossed my arms against the anger building up inside of me. *How dare they not tell me?!* All this time I'd been thinking my not-so-little crush had been completely unreciprocated. I had been totally in love with them for years!

If I found out they'd harbored similar feelings and had been lying all this time? Someone was going to get punched.

I was still trying to figure out if I was going to call them on it when they walked slowly up the walkway with confused expressions.

"What?" Alaric asked.

What?!

I sucked in a deep breath. "Are we ready to talk yet?"

None of them said anything. Oh my God. Alright. Either they needed to grow some balls, or I was completely wrong about my assumption. The latter would hurt my pride and urged me to not bring it up. What if they thought this was too much work? Or knew I wouldn't be able to pick?

What a mess, man.

Oh well, I would just have to push them.

"Fine. Whatever." I rolled my eyes. "If you want, you can hang out here until I head to dinner. My grandma made lemonade, and I'm sure she has gin if you want something stiffer."

All of them offered a series of upset expressions before following me inside. I hopped up the stairs and into my bedroom, opening my wardrobe to choose an outfit. I grinned, biting my lip when I saw the savage move my grandma had pulled.

It went without saying that I rarely dressed up. Hazard of the job. Besides, it made me look cute instead of badass most of the time. The dress my grandma had put in my closet? Nothing cute about it. It was one hundred

percent sexy. The cut was a halter tie with a low-dip back and tight body. I knew she'd chosen it because the metal edge would go well with my shoes.

Hmm. Maybe she didn't hate my fashion choices that much...

I pulled it out and went into the bathroom, glad to have some alone time to get ready. My grandma must have sent the boys up after they greeted her, because I could hear them lounging in my room, the television above the fireplace blaring the latest video game. *Boys*. I shook my head. I wasn't very concerned with impressing Zachariah, but it would feel good to make my boys sweat a little. If they did like me, their reactions would be more extreme. If they didn't, no foul. I smiled as I plugged in my straightener.

It took a good amount of time to straighten each layer of my thick hair, and after nearly an hour, it laid flat, silky, and long enough that the crimson ombre hit the top of my fabulous ass. I sprayed it in order to make sure it didn't turn all poofy from the humidity and began to apply makeup. As I mentioned before, I was pretty low maintenance on the makeup thing, but as with the Queen of the Dead job, I was playing a part. I was testing the waters, as they say. Seeing if the cat would...nope. I didn't have an analogy that would fit there. I washed my face gently and applied a creamy tan foundation before contouring and highlighting. Oh yeah. I knew how to do all that nonsense. I usually just didn't.

My dark brows were filled in and darkened as I put on wispy faux eyelashes that would be barely noticeable but add some drama. I added a tiny bit of blush before completing a dark gray eye that made my irises look more gold than amber. As I finished with dark red lip lipstick and slipped on my dress, a knock sounded on the door.

I began tying my dress behind my neck and yelled, "Come in!"

I was distracted but realized the silence was odd. I looked up and stumbled back slightly.

Dorian's expression was far too intense for how fucking close he was. His eyes blazed as he leaned against the counter with a tension so severe I was afraid his body would explode.

"You okay?" I queried as his nostrils flared.

I opened my mouth to speak again but he left the room, slamming the door and cursing up a storm. I smirked just slightly, because that right there—*that*—had been a funny fucking reaction. I mean, don't get me wrong, I hated to see my friends upset, but if they were going to be little boys about admitting their feelings, then fine. I'd play ball.

I slipped on a pair of designer sneakers, silver and black. They added a casual and comfortable vibe to the ensemble, and I wasn't worried about being too casual. Zachariah rarely even wore a shirt.

"What the fuck is wrong with you?" Raphi yelled from the other room as Dorian continued to curse.

I stepped into the bedroom and kept my gaze on some imaginary lint. Someone, bets on Alaric, made a strangled noise as a low growl ripped across the space.

How did I miss this?

Phenomenal cosmic power...itty bitty perceptive skills.

"What the fuck are you wearing?" Raphi snapped through a harsh snarl.

I looked up and kept my expression neutral...barely. "A dress. For my date."

That about did it.

Raphi surged into my space as his eyes flashed black. His sugary scent began to overwhelm me, which caused me to step back into the closed bathroom door. I put my hand on his chest and watched him carefully, his growling very loud.

Okay. So I maybe hadn't thought through his wolf's possible reaction.

"Raphi," Alaric warned, "you need to calm down."

Dorian moved closer, and Raphi let out a low growl in warning. Dorian's eyes flashed with actual concern, and he stopped his French swearing and tensed. Abel, silent until now, looked slightly red in the face as he pressed his lips together, hard and tight. Whatever he wanted to say wouldn't be good.

"Raphi," I snapped as he continued to growl. My power leaked out as his nostrils flared. "You need to calm your wolf down, now."

"That's only half the fucking problem," Dorian muttered as he shook his head.

I tried to push Raphi away, but his arms wrapped around me tightly in a vise grip. I kept my powers from hurting him as I met Alaric's icy eyes from across the room and spoke carefully. "If someone wants to enlighten me on what the hell has been going on with you four today, it would be much appreciated."

Alaric offered me a cool smile. He chuckled with frustration and flopped down on the bed, relaxing back with his arms behind his head. "Anyone want to tell our girl Narc here what's been on our mind today?"

Silence.

I tried to pull away from Raphi again, but he squeezed tighter. I took a deep breath. “I’m getting really tired...”

“Don’t go on your date,” Dorian demanded in his *‘I am king of the world’* voice.

“Why?” I pierced him with a look as Alaric chuckled knowingly. “Would you like to answer?” I quipped at the big vampire. He fell quiet.

Abel spoke in his signature gentle accent. “We don’t like him and don’t feel you are safe with him.”

I felt my body soften in disappointment as I nodded. Abel must have caught my expression, because he winced as the room went quiet. As I detached myself from Raphi slowly, so as to not trigger his wolf, I sighed.

“I get you’re being protective, and thank you, but honestly, I need this. It’s not like I’ve ever dated anyone before, and your main objection has been that the guy is too weak to be an aid if a situation arises. Zachariah is more than powerful enough, and I like spending time with him, so if that’s the reason you don’t want me going, then I’m going to need you to chill out. You know as well as I do that he is perfectly safe.”

“This is fucked up,” Dorian swore and left the room. Alaric looked tense and not nearly as aloof as before, his eyes swirling with something I didn’t understand completely. Raphi looked at me, but I refused to meet his eyes. Instead, I walked past a disheartened Abel toward my balcony. I didn’t leave my post until they’d all left without a word. My chest ached. My throat... thick.

Why did this hurt so much?

Maybe I’d been living in a fantasy world this entire time, never admitting to myself how much I wanted them. How ‘like’ had turned to real love and affection. Then my grandma had given me hope, only to have them crush it by acting like ridiculous ‘big brother’ stereotypes. Raphi’s wolf was interested in me, but I couldn’t exactly have a relationship with half a person, now could I? The rest of Raphi—the human Raphi—just seemed to want to keep me under lock and key.

I watched the four of them walk down the pathway, and Abel looked back at me. I met his eyes, and as usual, he saw exactly how I was feeling.

That was the dynamic. He saw everything. Alaric kept everyone’s heads on straight with his rationale. Raphi was protective of our little team. Dorian was the flame that kept us all engaged and passionate about what we did. We worked as a family and as a team. I knew we didn’t work as anything else,

though, or it would have already happened. I groaned quietly, shook my head, and went back into my bedroom.

“Holy shit!” I jumped, looking directly at Zachariah.

“Little rose.” He grinned like the lethal predator he most definitely was as he sat on my couch. I had no idea how he managed to move so silently, but I’d figured something like this would happen. He never did anything planned.

“How much did you hear?” I asked, feeling dejected.

“Everything,” he admitted unashamedly, patting the couch for me to sit down. I did and faced him, feeling rather petite in the all-encompassing shadow of this voodoo priest. He tilted my jaw up and offered me a pensive look.

“They love you,” he said softly as he smoothed over my skin with his thumb. I tried to not be distracted, because at the end of the day, this guy was one of the most dangerous men in America.

Wow. That did absolutely nothing to cure my desire to jump his bones. Good god. What was wrong with me?

“Like a sister,” I responded with frustration.

He chuckled. “No. Nothing like a sister. However, I think that they were doing their best to hold back for a time, and now they don’t know how to proceed.”

“Hold back?”

“You met your vampires and demon when you were around seventeen, correct?”

I nodded, and he smiled. “While a relationship between any of you may have been appropriate a century ago, now it would be frowned upon. I know at seventeen you had the responsibility and maturity of an adult, but romantic relationships take their own kind of time.”

“And Raphi?”

“Well, that wouldn’t be very fair since the four of them plan to pursue a relationship with you together,” he said, flashing stunning white teeth.

“What?” I tilted my head in confusion.

He grinned. “Nothing, little rose. Just trust they will admit to it eventually. I wouldn’t be afraid to show your feelings either.”

I frowned. “Not that I disagree, but didn’t you ask me on a date? Why are you encouraging this?”

His silver eyes swirled. “*Dating* is...not the right term for this, Narcissa. We are so much bigger than that little human word. As much as I would love

to attempt to keep you to myself, I know that isn't possible. With the upcoming war, you will need as many loyal soldiers as possible. Although, as I said, the concept is very enticing."

I stiffened, ignoring his possessive words that had my body flaring with heat. "War?"

His eyes darkened as he grasped my hips and lifted me onto his lap so that I was looking slightly down at him. I should have felt annoyed at his rough handling, but it honestly felt sort of nice. *He* felt nice. My dress was tight against my thighs as I straddled him, my back arching just slightly. Fuck. I was way too turned on to be sitting on his lap like this. I didn't even bother to stop my hand from resting on his bare chest for 'stability.'

He spoke softly. "It was my reasoning for dinner, originally. I had a vision."

My eyes widened, knowing the rarity of that.

"A vision of the demonic realm gates being thrown open. A vision of blood saturating the streets of New Orleans. A vision of a Prince of Hell returning."

I swallowed, knowing exactly who he was talking about. "I killed him."

"And now he is alive," he said. He ran his hands over my exposed arms, making me shiver. "So, believe me, little rose, you need many soldiers for the coming times."

"And you want to be one of these 'soldiers'?" I asked, not understanding him fully.

He grinned and cupped my chin. "It has been centuries since I have served a Queen of the Dead, the last being a personal friend of mine. Let me make myself very clear. I do not feel friendship toward you, Narcissa. I feel much more than that, and I plan on pursuing it...*enthusiastically*. However, I will also be by your side throughout this. Not only do you have the potential to be one of the strongest necromancers of the millennium, but you are a good ruler. A fair ruler."

I preened under his approval, a blush staining my cheeks. Shit. This man made me feel like a teenager with a crush. With my boys, I felt like we were on an even playing field, but Zachariah made me feel all giddy and stupid. He also made me feel really hot. My nipples tightened as a small, knowing smile grew on his beautiful face.

"How long do you think we have?" I asked quietly, trying to distract myself.

He frowned slightly and looked out the window. “Not long at all...”

My phone rang, and I shifted over to reach my purse. It didn't escape my notice Zachariah used it as an excuse to tighten his grip. I flipped open my phone and moved to answer, but my breath caught in my throat. My body had slipped forward, and Zachariah and I were nose to nose. Fuck. How did he move like that?

“Hello?” My breath was light as the voodoo priest followed the outline of my lips with his eyes. I wondered briefly what he thought of me, but the answer grew hard beneath me. Oh, God, I needed to get laid.

“Lass?” Declan's voice sounded far more tense than usual.

“What's wrong?” I snapped out of my daze.

He grunted. “You should get down 'ere, now.”

“What happened?”

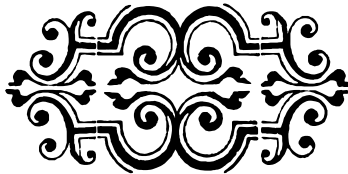
I began to gather myself as Zachariah, in a very sweet move, straightened my dress before wrapping his large arms around my waist. I looked down at him as Declan spoke words that made me feel absolutely awful.

“There are bodies linin' Bourbon Street. Norms an' supes. We need ya, darlin'. We can only keep the humans dazed for so long.”

Fuck.

CHAPTER 6

RAPHAEL



“**Y**ou need to calm down. It’s making things worse,” Abel advised as we sat on the porch of our large house.

“Fuck you,” I replied coldly. He had no right to talk. The twins had known that she was their *amour de sang* for nearly as long as I’d known she was my mate. How she hadn’t caught onto all of this, I wasn’t sure, because it wasn’t exactly normal for the four of us to have fostered a friendship. Don’t get me wrong, the guys were great, but there would be no way in hell we would’ve become friends on our own, considering our differences.

As in completely different species.

Dorian, the brooding bastard, sat on the front steps looking like someone had kicked his puppy. Demons didn’t have soulmates, exactly, but they had their *flamma vitae*, which roughly translated to ‘flame of life’ in Latin. Dorian had chosen, without a doubt, Narc as his. So after a bloody fight and a lot of bruises one night when we’d decided to have it out between us once and for all, we’d come to the conclusion that we would have to share. We’d been waiting until Narc and I had graduated, and now, only a week after the end of high school, she was getting asked out by every supernatural and human male we came across.

My wolf howled inside my chest, urging me to go find her.

MATE. MATE. MATE. MATE.

It was a constant mantra whenever I was away from her. Then, when I was around her, I had to resist the urge to bite and claim her officially. It was physically painful. I tried not to be as brooding as Dorian, but if I got pissed, I ended up just coming off as an asshole, and that was a problem on its own.

Goddamn. I almost lost it today when I saw her in that dress.

Narcissa was hands down one of the sexiest women I knew, and it wasn't just because she was my mate. No, she had this glow around her. Those soft, pouty lips always seemed to be crooked in amusement as her slightly hooded eyes encouraged you to lean just a little closer. I knew she thought she suffered from 'cute syndrome,' but if she even knew the number of supernatural and human men—and women—we had to warn off her, she would be shocked. It was why Jonathan, ever persistent, pissed me the fuck off.

Something wasn't right about that guy. I let out a small growl and shoved my hands through my hair in frustration.

Alaric tried to be rational. "We need to tell her."

"And if she likes Zachariah as well?" Dorian snapped.

Alaric shook his head. "I have no fucking idea. All I know is that Abel is right. This in-between is simply making things worse, not better."

"What if she doesn't feel the same way?" Abel asked softly. My wolf whimpered at our biggest insecurity. It was a possibility. She had never shown us romantic affection before, and while I could tell she was attracted to us, I couldn't understand why she'd never pushed for anything more.

"It's painful how similar the five of you are," a deep voice sighed from the walkway. I felt a snarl rip from my lips as Zachariah walked up as if he owned the place. Well, he probably did own the land—who knew? He was right, though, about the four of us. We were all similarly obsessed and in love with Narc. It was a bonding experience, I suppose.

"What do you want?" Dorian grumbled.

The priest smiled and looked at all of us. "A message from your Queen. She is on her way to Bourbon Street because Declan informed her of a killing."

All of us paused in reaction to his words—incredulous.

"You let her go alone?" I growled and jumped up. We began to make our way towards the street, Zachariah chuckling softly and following behind at a leisurely pace.

"She's with Declan," he stated. As if that helped.

"Why the fuck was she with you?" Dorian clipped.

Zachariah moved toward the front of our group and began walking backwards with a smile. "Now boys, I just put in such a good word for you, and you aren't even being appreciative."

“What do you mean?” Alaric asked, sounding detached and indifferent—I knew he was far from it though.

“I mean that a certain little rose felt very insecure about your feelings towards her, and I assured her that you very much did not view her as a little sister.” He grinned. “So now she knows, and I am telling you that she’s interested in the four of you as well. I’m essentially handling your romantic affairs.”

A small bit of relief washed over me. Well, no confusion now. She knew, and we just needed to man up and admit to it ourselves. The tension eased slightly.

“Why?” Abel asked.

Zachariah grinned. “Because you are not the only ones enthralled with our little Queen. I haven’t lived for centuries believing I can solely possess someone like Narcissa—I understand the dynamic here and have come to terms with it. Plus, our best option to keep her safe is creating a guard that is strong enough for the upcoming war.”

“War?” I growled. My wolf was already planning ways to toss Narc over our shoulder and leave the area. I had to fight the protective instincts—she would kill me if I acted on half of them.

“Yes. Bit of a long story.” He sighed indifferently, but his gaze was calculating. “I had a vision. We’ll plan later. The main thing, though, is that you need to do your housekeeping, gentlemen. Make your feelings known, because when the gates of Hell open, we won’t have time for this modern relationship drama.”

Then he was gone.

I had no idea if the ‘gates of Hell’ was a metaphor or if he really meant the demonic realm would open.

“What the actual fuck?” Dorian stated at Zachariah’s impromptu departure.

How the fuck did he *do* that?

“Okay.” Abel nodded with a slight frown while still moving. “Cat’s out of the bag, as they say, so we should probably tell her.” I nearly snorted at his cat analogy. Even Alaric had begun to use them. For everyone trying to avoid having felines near me and my antisocial wolf, I certainly seemed to be surrounded by them.

I was secretly planning to get Narc a kitten soon, but I wanted to find the perfect one. I would probably be putting up with the little feline for a long

time.

“And the part about him liking her? And the ‘gates of Hell’ thing?” Alaric asked, completely failing at his attempt to remain aloof in the face of Narc being in danger when faced with the truth about her feelings for us.

Abel was Alaric’s polar opposite. He was very much invested and in tune to how Narc felt at all times and didn’t hide that. Concern flooded his face at the moment.

I swallowed, feeling on edge. “I would take Narc any way I could get her. I’m not planning to live without her, and if it means playing along with that crazy bastard, I’m cool with it.”

My wolf was so *not* cool with it, but hopefully he would be appeased once we got to claim her.

“She does like us, though,” Abel stated with a small smile.

I grinned at that. Yeah, it looked like she did.

“Fuck,” Dorian swore as we entered Bourbon Street. Narc immediately caught my eye, a guilty look flashing across her face. I barked orders to the others, unable to help myself. “You two go compel as many humans as possible to get the fuck out of here. Dorian, can you try to get information out of anyone who may have seen what happened?”

They nodded and separated as I walked past the columns of bodies tied to each balcony on the deserted street.

I wasn’t sure how I’d ended up sharing leadership with Alaric, since I was the youngest. Part of it was that my wolf wouldn’t let me be submissive, I supposed. The other part was that the other three men were a hair more relaxed than myself.

We weren’t relaxed now though.

Both ends of the street were blocked off by hellhounds and shifters. Apparently, the former had decided where their allegiances lay. Nothing like a big threat to freak everyone into listening to our Queen. Narcissa vibrated with power, and I suddenly realized why she looked guilty. She was feeding off this mass murder, and she couldn’t help it.

“I feel awful,” she murmured. I wrapped her into my arms. Instead of attempting to support her own weight, she curled into me and simply tried to steady her harsh breathing. I think that was how I knew it was really bothering her.

“You can’t help this any more than I can help shifting,” I whispered against her hair.

She met my eyes, and every protective instinct inside of me rose to the surface. I could see the fear and concern in her eyes overriding the guilt.

I spoke quietly. "We're going to figure out who did this."

"It was him," she said, but my mind drew a blank.

"Who?"

Her face paled as she gently turned my chin with one finger to one of the bodies hanging over the street. A deep gash and house sigil was carved into the body, exposing the person's insides. I felt myself wrapping her closer, because there was only one person with that sigil. Only one person who would be trying to fuck with her.

Asmodeus.

CHAPTER 7

NARCISSA



I tried to only use the word ‘hate’ when I truly meant it. It was often overused and lost its potency. I could say with certainty, however, that I *hated* Asmodeus.

I hated him for everything that he had ever done to me and had attempted to do to my family. He was a cruel little bastard that should have been the inspiration for Joffrey in GOT. If he was alive, it meant that someone had raised him for a purpose, and it was something bigger than giving him another chance at being a creepy obsessive bastard.

He had once threatened to kill my entire family because they wouldn’t let him in the house to talk to me. I wouldn’t have taken the threat seriously, but he’d recently had a temper tantrum and killed a bar full of people because I’d rejected him for the millionth time. The threat to my family was the last straw, and I’d finally killed him.

When I got close enough and the prince’s defenses were down, I happily kicked his ass back to the demonic realm. It was pathetically easy. All it took was agreeing to dinner with him. With a single touch, off to the demonic realm with him! I did have to kiss him, though, which was super gross. I truly wished humans were right and that Hell did contain punishments. Sadly, though, it’s not very different from Earth.

Beyond unfortunate in my mind.

The death around us buzzed against my skin, causing me to shake. *This was pure, uncontrollable power saturation in the making.* I began to tremble under the pressure of it, filling like a balloon ready to pop.

“Laddie,” a harsh Irish brogue boomed out to Raphi. “Yer need to git ’er away from ’ere.”

“You’re the one who called me!” I exclaimed. Raphi grunted against my power.

I had never seen Declan upset, but as he stalked toward us, he looked very concerned. “How in the feck was I supposed to know ya were gonna explode wi’ power?”

I hissed and broke away from Raphi. “Seriously, Declan? How many dead bodies are here? Thirty? You didn’t think that maybe my powers would get a little funky?”

Declan’s nostrils flared as he muttered something in Gaelic before shooting Raphi a warning look. “Ya need ter keep ’er grounded.”

“What?” I snarled, butting into the conversation again.

“Grounded,” he snapped. “Ya need ter draw on ’is life force.”

“How the fuck do you know that?”

Declan chuckled. “I know a lot about ya, lass. Maybe more’n ya know ’bout yerself. Now, go an’ do yer weird ’arry Potter Death Eater shite.”

My mouth popped open as Raphael Sanchez, the bastard, started laughing so hard he coughed. In a lightning move, I punched the leprechaun in the gut. I gasped as he smiled in victory, and my power soared through him and knocked us both to the ground in spectacular fashion. Electricity cracked around us as the sky broke into a deep, thunderous roar that I hoped was because of him and not me. Several lights went out around the area, and the winds picked up.

I groaned at the impact as he chuckled, rolling on top of me while smiling roguishly, his hand behind my head to protect it from the concrete. “Now that was some shit, lass.”

Yes. It felt like a fucking lightning bolt. Also, my poor cute dress was on the nasty stones of Bourbon Street. I grimaced. “Did you know my power would do that? Also! Where the heck did your accent go?”

He smiled. “It was either you get it out with fighting or fucking, and something tells me that you and Raphi aren’t there just yet.”

“You’re a bastard,” I snarled and pushed him off me. Raphi helped me up

as Declan lounged on the ground with bright, knowing eyes, smiling as rain started to fall.

I looked around to see that several of the bodies were still tied up on display on the balcony. Raphi saw my troubled look and began to command those around us for their removal.

I reached down to offer Declan a hand, and when the Irishman took it and stood up, I found myself very close to the clover-smelling demigod. His rich green eyes sparkled down at me. “Feel better?”

“Yes, I do. Thank you,” I murmured as he grinned like an idiot.

“Anytime, lass. As for my accent, that would be due to you. I absorbed some of your power, and that means some of you. It’ll go away with time.” He winked before taking some long-legged strides towards Zachariah, who observed everything with a curious expression. I sighed as the scent of cherries surrounded me and Abel wrapped his large arms around my waist, placing his head on top of mine.

“I think I may have caused a storm,” I said, making Abel chuckle. The sound warmed me, and I fought the urge to nuzzle against him. Everything about the man was fucking edible.

“I think the leprechaun shares the blame on that,” he assured me.

I turned into him and smiled up at his deep blue gaze, finding something in his eyes that confused me. It was almost like relief, but mixed with caution and curiosity.

“What?” I asked.

He gently stroked my lower back where his hands had landed. He opened his mouth to say something, and I was tense enough that when thunder clapped in the sky, I jumped. Abel let out a laugh and lifted me up as the rain began to pour down in heavy sheets. Despite feeling somewhat worried, my smile grew as we ran toward the doorway of Zachariah’s family shop. It was a famous voodoo shop, and he rarely showed up there, letting distant relatives run it for commercial profit.

I let out a laugh as Dorian jogged up behind us and stole me from Abel. He scooped me up in a bridal hold and shook his wet hair all over me. I scowled and struggled to get down, but the playful, handsome demon just held me tighter.

Outside it poured, and all my boys gathered near the door. We followed after, knowing it wouldn’t be letting up anytime soon. We weren’t going anywhere for a bit.

The shop downstairs was a fairly standard commercial voodoo shop. The lack of magic was evident in the air. As we took the spiral staircase up and passed through a dark door, the wave of dark magic that hit me made my body spark. It felt like a massive, exotic cat rubbing against my leg while purring. I swayed slightly on impact as Zachariah offered me a knowing look.

I flipped him off and let Alaric, his eyes brighter than before, help me inside. What had changed between when the boys left my house and now? The awkward discomfort of this morning had dissipated.

I narrowed my eyes at Zachariah. Nosy, sexy priest.

The room we were in was large and had an open balcony with a wrought iron rail that overlooked the street. The french doors stood open, soft purple curtains blowing back against the rain, but no one made an effort to close them. Instead, the boys took the towels offered by Declan before the leprechaun began to turn on some lights. It was obvious he felt comfortable here, and I wondered just how much time the voodoo priest and the demigod spent hanging out.

I was soaked to the bone, so I took the massive, dark towel offered to me and slipped off my tennis shoes. I made a conscious effort to avoid the area where the power in the room was the strongest—the assortment of shelves and tables in the back. Instead, I went to sit on one of the comfortable, plush couches. A contented sigh bubbled from my mouth before I could stop it.

“Was this you or me?” I asked Declan, gesturing to the maelstrom outside. He smiled and winked.

“Both of us,” he admitted. “We made a baby storm together.”

I snorted as Alaric narrowed his eyes at Declan, causing him to grin that much more. *Instigator*. Zachariah sang something in the small work area in the back as he put on a tea kettle. Seeing him do something so simple like making tea was odd, and I wondered how much time he spent here since his estate was outside the city. Abel must have found it odd as well, because he watched him with keen interest from his position next to me. Raphi stood near the balcony doors, keeping a wary eye on everything.

“Let me dry your hair,” Dorian suggested. I didn’t mind it being wet, but I didn’t want to hurt his feelings, so I moved onto his lap. The big crush I had on him may have played a part, but I was trying to ignore it. I closed my eyes as he began to towel my hair gently. Abel played with my hand in a distracted fashion, and his thumb petted my wrist gently. He and Alaric had an odd obsession with my wrist and neck. *Imagine that*.

All my boys had weird little preferences like that. For example, it had taken me forever to get used to Raphi's obsession with how I smell. He blamed his wolf. I found it funny and disturbing that he made me wear his sweatshirt to school each day so that I would smell like him. It was just so 'woffy.' And cute.

Dorian had a thing with looking me in the eye. He hated it when I chose not to and would go out of his way to tilt my head up so that I had no choice. I think it was easier for him to gauge the truth of what I was saying. Probably why I was hesitant to meet his gaze half the time. You know, just to mess with him a bit.

Not because of the intensity of my emotions for him or anything silly like that.

"So *he* is back on Earth?" I asked.

Zachariah brought over several cups of tea on a tray and sat down, slinging off his shirt and relaxing into the sofa. His muscles were distracting enough that I had to look away, but I refocused my attention when he spoke. "I don't feel his magical signature on Earth, but if I had to assume, someone here is acting as his puppet. Either that or he's possessed someone. Did anyone see what happened?"

Declan, looking somewhat serious, spoke. "Not a soul. Which is impossible, of course, unless he used mass compulsion."

God. It was so weird hearing him with only a faint accent. No one seemed to question it. I supposed they either knew, or...well, that was really the only possibility. My boys weren't exactly the type to avoid blunt questions.

"Which would only be possible if it was actually him instead of just one of his people," I said. "My money's on the possession theory."

Zachariah nodded. "I suppose that's possible. The kid must have gotten far stronger since the last time we met."

I nearly chuckled at him calling the demonic prince a kid. "Well, he did die," I offered.

"Why did you kill him, again?" Dorian asked curiously, tilting my head back.

I thought back to the demonic prince's annoying habits and ticked off the reasons on my fingers. "One, he was killing lots of people. Two, he was creepy and obsessed with me. And three, he threatened to kill my family."

Alaric shook his head and looked out to the rain, his eyes frosty but holding a scalding, white-hot heat. Abel kissed my palm gently as Dorian

began brushing out my hair now that it was a bit more dry. Where the hell had he gotten a hairbrush?

You know what? I didn't even care. It felt good.

Trapped in thought for a long moment, I finally sighed and spoke. "We need to figure out my response to this and call a meeting tonight for everyone."

It didn't escape my notice that somehow the leprechaun and priest were part of our little conversation. The two men had wiggled their way onto our team, and I wasn't about to refuse the help of a demigod or the only voodoo priest alive.

I was prideful, sure, but I wasn't stupid.

"What's your formal response going to be?" Alaric asked.

"We need to see if anyone has information, and then we need patrols assigned for every day and night. I don't particularly trust the hellhounds, but an ally is an ally—even a tenuous one. The vampires shouldn't be an issue, nor should the wolves. Hopefully. We need to get the local witch coven on board, which sucks, because they're stuffy assholes. Am I missing anyone?"

Dorian chuckled. "What about the local chaos?"

I shot him a baleful glare. "What do you think are the chances of any demons wanting to help?"

He shrugged. "Depends on the incentive."

I huffed and dropped my head. "Fine. Whatever. Invite them."

"I can go notify the witches," Abel volunteered. I gave him a thankful smile.

"I've got vampires," Alaric stated coolly with unmasked ire at the concept of interacting with them.

"You're going to handle the chaos. Right? Please don't make me go there." I offered Dorian a wide-eyed, almost pleading look, and he smirked at my frustration. I knew he would though—I didn't really need to ask.

"I've got the wolves," Declan said with a devious grin. "Those wee little buggers don't scare me. Besides, they won't let Raphi on their land." Raphi's chest rumbled, but he stayed quiet.

"I'll let Alpha Draco know so that the hellhounds are informed," Zachariah said.

Was that his name? Fascinating.

I nodded before smirking. "Wow. Look at us. We're such a cute little team."

“And you’re just chock full of sarcasm today. Surprised you can even get anything informative out,” Dorian quipped, looking for a fight. Raphi growled at his words as I turned and narrowed my eyes at the demon. Dorian’s eyes flashed. I very much wished we had time for this right now. I loved our little fights.

“You would know what that is like,” I shot back lazily. I yawned suddenly, unable to stop it, and stretched my hands up above my head, noticing that the rain had let up. “Whatever, we just need to take some type of action. Thank you for your help, Declan and Zachariah. I will *forever* be in your debt—”

My sarcastic words were cut off as I let out a very un-badass squeak, Declan was suddenly very much in my space, his magic sparking with something absolutely lethal.

Why did I feel like I’d said something wrong?

CHAPTER 8

NARCISSA



“**W**hat are you doing?” I frowned as my back hit a table, never taking my eyes off of Declan as he worried his lip ring. He placed his hands on either side of me and studied me with an interested stare.

“Declan?” I rose a brow and forced my power to not react.

“Don’t ever say you are in someone’s debt,” he warned so softly that no one else could hear it. “You won’t always be in such friendly company, and those words can be very binding, lass.”

My temper sparked inside of me. I licked my lips and spoke into his ear. “And what if I wanted to be in your debt, Declan?”

A small, barely-there shiver went across his skin as he swallowed hard. I pulled away and lifted a questioning brow. His eyes sparkled with something I didn’t understand before he finally stepped away and disengaged.

It wasn’t that I wouldn’t heed his advice, I just didn’t like being told what to do, and honestly...now I was a bit curious about being in Declan’s debt. That didn’t sound all that bad...

Either way, it seemed that besides Raphi, the others hadn’t clued in to our odd little interaction. The wolf, however, wrapped me up in his arms and nuzzled me, a low, rumbling purr sounding from his chest.

Sometimes little things like that surprised me, but not as much anymore.

Part of it was being around people like Zachariah and Declan who were so far removed from humans that the surreal became the norm. Dorian and my twins were able to act human most of the time, but Raphi didn't even try now that we'd graduated.

My hands lightly trailed over his gold scars as he began to vibrate against my back. His lips rested against my neck, and I had the odd urge to bare my throat to him. I resisted though, because if I was going to be submitting, it would *not* be in a room full of people. I may have had little dating experience, but I knew how that shit worked, and even I probably wouldn't be able to stop his wolf. I felt my body shiver at the thought.

Then again, I wouldn't mind engaging in a few choice fantasies featuring several of my men...at the same time.

I know, I know. How the hell was I still a virgin?

I turned into him and looked up as the other boys began talking, discussing the different issues that could arise with gathering all our monsters in the same area. I was glad to have them, because I suddenly found myself very distracted. Raphael and I had always had a very physical relationship, and in high school people just always assumed we were dating. We'd never kissed, but there had been a few moments where I thought, just maybe...

Then I just chalked it up to his wolf. It was the reason he kept me close and the reason for all the touching. It was also the reason that he was unapologetically hard right now with my body pressed against his and my head tilted up to look into his pretty green eyes.

I felt oddly lost looking up into his gaze. Like I had no idea what I was doing and was in serious danger of tilting right over the edge.

Into *what*, I had no flippin' idea. I was far too excited at the prospect of it though.

Raphi's eyes darkened as he zeroed in on my lips, and I licked them in a nervous habit. His pupils seemed to expand as he gripped my hips just a tad harder. I felt his life force, a sugary taste, explode over my tongue and fill my body with warmth. I wanted him to kiss me so bad. Bad enough that I didn't care if the other guys were in the room.

Fuck.

Then my phone rang, and my eyes closed as a frustrated sigh came from my lips. I lifted the phone from my pocket as the room went quiet. "Hello?"

"Narcissa," said the cool, calm voice over the speaker. "We have a problem."

“Mayor Lourn.” I sighed, thinking briefly of his son Jonathan. “What seems to be the problem?”

“The problem is that a human reporter—several, in fact—are growing suspicious of the issue on Bourbon Street today. I need you to do whatever it is you do to make them forget,” he stated in a no-nonsense tone.

“What’s this reporter’s name?” I asked, not liking his tone but also knowing he was never this bold in person, so it didn’t matter.

“I have the list of them at my house,” he stated. “I didn’t want to print it in the office—too many eyes. You are more than welcome to stop by. I have informed housekeeping and my son that you may stop by shortly.”

I nearly groaned and stomped my foot in frustration. It was a ridiculous reaction, but I *did* not want to see Jonathan again today.

“Alright,” I agreed before deciding to remind him of just who was in charge here. “We’ll pick up the list—and Alex, I suggest the next time you talk to me, you monitor your tone. I will forgive you this transgression because you are so clearly concerned about the balance of our fine city, but only this once. Do we have an understanding?”

His voice was raspy and strained. “Yes.”

“Good.” I hung up.

“Alright team,” I said, everyone’s attention already on me. “I have to go pick up some documents from Mayor Lourn’s house.”

“I’m coming,” Raphi stated.

I smiled. *No shit, dude*. Not only did everyone else have a predetermined place to go, but Raphi wouldn’t let me go within ten feet of the guy’s door without him while he was alive. While dead, even, probably.

“Let’s all meet back at my place before we go to the meeting tonight. Does that sound good?”

Abel immediately pulled me into a soft, sweet hug. I smiled up at him. Alaric pressed from behind, dropping a kiss to my cheek, which was his equivalent to declaring his undying love.

As they walked off, Dorian stepped into my space, tilted my chin up, and whispered, “We need to talk later.”

“As in all of us, or…”

He leveled a penetrating stare at me and smiled in an attempt to appear clueless. Then his soft lips pressed to my forehead and he was gone. I looked at the demigod leprechaun and voodoo priest, wondering if they had anything to offer, but both of them were staring at me with their own brand of

amusement.

“What?” I snapped as my face turned light pink. I didn’t very often show affection around other people, drawing a hard line. But when my boys were around, the line blurred.

“She’s so cute when she’s pissed,” Declan said, shaking his head as he walked out. I growled under my breath, which made Raphi chuckle.

“Let me walk you both down,” Zachariah offered. I followed his lead and walked downstairs between the two massive men. Once my feet hit the bottom step, my waist was surrounded by warm hands as the voodoo priest lifted me to eye level. That meant my feet dangled a good foot off the ground. Luckily, no one was in the shop, because this wasn’t very badass. In fact, I should probably be kneeling him in the balls or something. Once again, though, something about Zachariah made me enjoy being manhandled. It was some ridiculous thing I needed to get out of my head.

“Be safe,” he instructed softly before brushing my lips in a faint yet searing kiss.

My feet hit the ground and he was gone, my lips heated and my body riddled with pleasurable shivers. *Holy shit...I mean, seriously, I had not expected that.*

Raphi circled around, but instead of looking pissed, he looked concerned. “Are you okay?” he asked.

I nodded.

“Good, because I’m going to kick his ass later,” he mumbled. I nearly smirked at that and accepted his hand as we strolled out the shop. I wasn’t at all eager to see Jonathan, but I did want to get out of these wet clothes, and his house was close to mine...so that made this entire thing a bit better, I suppose.

Raphi continued to smooth his large thumb over my hand as we turned corner after corner, not interrupting my busy thoughts, the humidity growing as evening brought out the many night walkers. Not vampires, mind you—that’s just what I called the humans who only partied at night. It made them seem more special, didn’t it?

I was always looking for new ways to entertain myself.

“This is going to be a test of my patience,” Raphi sighed as we came within sight of the mayor’s house.

“Shall we?” I mumbled. He nodded and strode up to the door. I looked back at my own house and saw my grandma looking amused from her spot

on the front porch. *Ridiculously unhelpful. Must be nice to be retired.* I stomped up the steps as the door opened, Raphi standing in direct view of whoever was opening it.

“What the fuck do you... Hey, Narc!” Jonathan changed his tune as I peeked around Raphi. My aggressive wolf let out a rumble as I stepped around him and faced Jonathan head-on.

“Your father told me to pick up the papers he had faxed over,” I stated, crisply efficient and business-like. Jonathan opened his door wide. With frustration, I stepped into his home, Raphi wrapping a possessive arm around my waist. The human noticed.

“The office is the third door down the hall,” he instructed Raphi. “Narc, can I have a word?”

Raphi tensed, and I rubbed his forearm. “Want to just go grab the fax so we can be on our way?”

Raphi stared at me for another moment but then grunted and broke away. I turned back to face Jonathan and found his eyes darker than usual.

“So, are you with him now?” he sneered.

My power bristled as I kept my face neutral. “I don’t see how that’s any of your concern.”

Jonathan’s jaw tightened. “What’s the difference between him and me? We both went to school with you and have known each other just as long.”

This was frustrating as fuck.

“Johnny,” I sighed. “I have a bit of a complicated life...”

“Help me understand it!” He gripped my arm in a pleading gesture. My skin tingled in warning, and I could feel movement in the layers of the house, including its life force. Something was very off here. Before I could delve into it...

“Get. Your. Hands. Off. Her.”

Raphi’s low growl made Johnny jump, snapping him out of the weird intensity the moment had over him. It was enough for the wolf to snatch me up by my waist and level Jonathan with a glare.

“Do not ever fucking touch her again,” Raphi warned.

“What if she wants me to?” Jonathan demanded.

Come on, Johnny.

Raphi chuckled low and deep, causing even my hair to stand on end and sending desire flooding through my system. Goddamn it. This was an issue, because I liked scary men. I was like the Queen of Halloween up in here.

Jonathan couldn't hold a match to the raw power that Raphi was packing, and my magic wanted to rub against him like a kitten.

But like a badass kitten. Maybe a jaguar kitten? Still was sticking with the cat analogy though. Raphi's wolf would just hate that, wouldn't he? But then he would have no choice but to love it because it's me and I'm fabulous.

"I can promise you she doesn't," he stated evenly. "So next time you think about touching her, I would consider how much you like those fingers, because I'll break each one before taking off the entire limb."

Whoa. He was pissed.

With that, we were out the door. Raphi had the papers I needed folded in the band of his pants and under his shirt to protect them against the weather. Smart man. The rain had started up again, and we jogged quickly across the street, his energy burning next to me like a beacon. We were halfway up the walkway when Raphi tugged me back.

"Raphi?" I started, but then it didn't matter. *Nothing* mattered. I let out a soft sound as those sugary lips molded to mine. I felt my toes curl as I gripped his shirt, the deep content purring in his chest making me feel at home. Everything about him made me feel safe, protected, and loved—that's how it had always been with Raphi, and I knew it would never change.

I couldn't explain what it felt like to kiss the man I'd liked since I was fifteen, but the sensation of the rain soaking us only enhanced the sensation of his lips and fingers on me. It was like tasting sugar for the first time. It made me feel vibrant and alive, yet filled me with a soft, gooey undertone. I wanted to taste him, lick him, and then have him do the same in return. I wanted to feel his teeth mark me as he pounded into me. I didn't care that we were outside in my front yard, my grandmother no doubt nearby. I didn't care that my thoughts were on the sex express right now. I just wanted him.

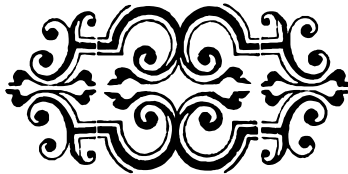
"Oh shit—"

My face went red as my gaze met Raphi's green eyes. I knew that voice. He knew that voice. We both turned to find Alaric, Abel, and Dorian staring at us in their own versions of surprise.

Crap.

CHAPTER 9

ABEL



“Narc!” I felt my heart stop as she turned and ran into her house, leaving all four of us in the cold rain. Fuck. I could still see the look of confusion and embarrassment on her face before her expression completely blanked and she made a hasty retreat. I looked at the other three men around me.

“This conversation is happening now,” I commanded and walked into her house. I kicked off my shoes and walked past her grandmother, who offered each of us a towel. I had no doubt she knew exactly what was happening.

I’d always found the dynamic between the two of them fascinating. They were so alike, less like grandmother and granddaughter and more like friends. Both women were extremely intelligent, but Narc’s grandmother had always been missing that innate sense of confidence you needed to be a leader. She also was missing the drive that Narc possessed to continue bearing the responsibility of an entire supernatural community. I think her grandma had known that and made the decision early on to hand off the job to Narcissa, knowing the community needed her.

As I strolled upstairs, I could practically hear our girl thinking. The other men behind me were silent, and I knew that they were about as clueless as me on how to handle this. It was humorous because we’d been waiting for this moment for a long time, but now that we’d reached it, none of us knew what the fuck to say.

I reached her bedroom door and stopped as pain lanced through my heart. Our girl never cried, which was a problem in its own right, but right now? This was very close to her version of crying. I’d only seen it once before, on the day we met her.

I sat in the general gathering of the Supernatural Committee. The new Queen had been announced tonight, and fuck if she hadn't just bulldozed the air from my chest. I'd never been one for hierarchy, but the young woman, only seventeen, had stood before the committee with a cocksure smile.

There had been an ease and natural confidence to her words, and she smelled of power. My brother sat next to me with a confused expression—it had been some time since anyone, man or woman, had affected us in any notable way. In fact, one of the reasons we'd returned to New Orleans was out of boredom. We'd traveled the world, and with nothing else to do, we figured we would return to our American roots.

It was a plus that our family had decided to travel, so the estate was vacant and available.

I was up and moving toward her before anyone had a chance to tell me otherwise. The previous Queen, her dynasty lasting only a decade and a half, watched us with an amused expression. Something told me that she knew exactly where we were going. No one attempted to stop us, though, and that was smart since it would merely take a twitch of my hand to kill most of them.

My nature was to be a lover. An artist. A philanthropist. But I couldn't ignore the predator that roamed around under my skin, calling for blood. It was a delicate balance that my brother had given up on. He was a gruff bastard, and the only reason we were so close was because we were family. I don't think we would've been friends had we not been twins. He could be difficult, even on his best days.

"What are you doing?" he growled under his breath, keeping pace with me.

"I am doing the same thing you are," I murmured. "You didn't have to follow."

We continued to move silently, passing several individuals that barely noticed us.

The thing about being a living vampire? We could move through the night's shadows with ease. I found her energy quickly. My darkness craved to touch her, an intense power that thrummed under my skin and demanded that I taste her. Demanded that I claim her as only mine. That would never be the case, though. I had long ago accepted that any woman I had would not just be mine.

My brother and I, despite our massive differences, were far too close to

have anyone separate us. After all, what was near-immortality really worth if you weren't with your family?

We had long ago decided that if we found someone we wanted to be with, it would have to be someone we both cared for equally and who wanted to be with the two of us.

The only thing that could stand in the way was if we found our amour de sang. The connection between a living vampire and their amour de sang was essentially unbreakable, so our separation would be impossible to stop.

I stood in the doorway with my brother for just a moment, looking at the confident woman that had been downstairs. I felt something hurt inside my chest, because in this moment, she looked very young. Her face was soft, and those lips were pressed together with thought and tension. Her head was bent with her mass of hair creating a veil, and her eyes were closed, her jaw tense. I had a feeling this was as close as this woman ever came to crying.

I could only imagine the weight on her shoulders. In that moment, I found myself irrationally upset at her grandmother for laying such a burden on a woman who, within this day and age, was considered just on the cusp of life.

I'd been alive for half a century, had met countless women, from famous movie stars to European royalty. But none of them held a candle to this woman in front of me. It had little to do with looks, although she was beautiful. Her hair was thick and dark, hanging in silky waves that surrounded her deep golden skin. I could see her tight curves pressed against her dark blue dress, and those wrap-up sandals formed to her long, lean legs like they were melted on.

Fuck. I could smell her blood as well.

Her beauty and blood had nothing to do with why I was suddenly so enamored with her, though. No, this had to do with the strength and seduction radiating off her. Natural and completely unintentional. I felt like I was in the presence of a truly powerful predator.

"Your Majesty," I greeted. Her head snapped up, pinning me with metallic gold eyes. I knew that color shouldn't have been possible, but there it was, golden orbs surrounded by beautiful dark lashes.

Her voice was smooth and husky. "Ah, the Vladern twins. I was surprised to see you tonight."

My entire body shivered under her direct attention as my brother spoke in a voice wrought with tension and confusion. "You know of us?"

We lived very quiet lives. No one had even known, supposedly, that we

were back in New Orleans until tonight.

Her smile was authentic as small infernos brightened in her eyes. “Know of you? Yes. I am very, very much in the know when it comes to your family.”

“Why?” Alaric demanded. He sounded harsh, which seemed to only make her smile, a flash of brilliant white teeth against her golden skin.

She walked towards both of us with gliding steps, standing nearly a foot shorter yet vibrating the air around her with an intensity that should have been...well, impossible. In fact, she seemed as though she herself should be rather impossible.

“Your family is one of the only original founders,” she said while surveying both of us. “I also needed to know which vampires were living without a clan.”

“It’s only us,” I responded.

She tilted her head. The action was calculating, her dark red lips curving up at the edges. “So, is it true?”

“What?” Alaric asked with a furrowed brow.

“You have a pulse?” she asked with authentic interest. The flash of curiosity gave me whiplash and made me feel as though for just that moment, she was much younger. I couldn’t get a hold on this woman, and maybe that was the point. She wasn’t someone you ever ‘got a hold of’ or kept. No, her power was wild and couldn’t be captured.

I offered my wrist, a move that shocked Alaric but didn’t seem to faze her. It became clear that while this woman was well-versed in the world, she lacked some cultural nuances. For me to offer my wrist was like a wolf offering its neck. It was an act of trust and submission.

The only thing that was more surprising than me offering my wrist was when Alaric grunted and offered his as well. It confirmed my assumption that he was feeling the same odd pull that I was. Her cool fingers wrapped around both our wrists, and euphoria filled me. A rush of cool energy floated through me as the scent of earth wrapped around me like a blanket.

The power was deceptively welcoming, but I could practically suffocate on the amount of it. Then it hit.

Oh, fuck me.

She was our amour de sang.

It hadn’t taken long for Alaric and me to realize the delicacy of the position

we were in. I was thankful, in some ways, that we shared the same *amour de sang* because it brought us closer, but dealing with his gruff bullshit for the past two years had been exhausting. I understood, though. Both of us were high-strung from not being able to claim her.

Now I stood looking at our stunning Queen, and my heart hurt. It took a lot to make her upset, and it was clear that we'd messed up. Somewhere along the way we should have told her our intentions and made it clear that her feelings were not misplaced. Mind you, we'd been oblivious to those feelings until recently, but I mean, fuck! We should have just told her.

She had been so new to life, I hadn't wanted to burden her with the knowledge that she was essentially stuck with the two of us for the rest of our extended lifespans. I mean, shit! Even if she didn't want us, I wasn't positive we could leave her alone.

It was a painful enough thought to make my chest clench.

"Narc," I said softly, not wanting to make her think I was anything but calm about all of this—I knew she would be sensitive to our moods and reactions right now. The other men moved throughout the room. Raphi looked very uncomfortable being away from her and, if I had to guess, his wolf felt defensive. He was a territorial creature by nature, but this situation had made it far worse. It had taken most of the past two years for him to even come to terms with sharing her attention.

She took a deep breath and offered us a controlled expression. "Yes?"

Despite her apparent calm, I could see how she held her arms crossed in a self-soothing manner. Fuck. *I* wanted to soothe her. How the hell did we mess this up? It was like we'd gone from zero to sixty and back again in the past day.

"Why did you run?" I asked. It was the only thing I could get out. I knew I wasn't the only one upset, because a soft, unintentional almost-whine came from Raphi's wolf.

Her lashes closed, and she seemed to grow frustrated. She tossed a glance to Dorian. "What did you need to talk to me about earlier?"

Dorian's gaze narrowed on her knowingly. "You know what, Narc."

This was bad. The two of them fought. A lot.

"No," she hissed with brightening eyes. "I *really* don't, Dorian."

He stepped forward, and I could see this heading further south. "Well, that's surprising, because here I thought you were perceptive."

Her lips peeled back in a snarl as her power, sleek and deadly, began to

swirl around her. “You’re a jerk.”

This was worse than their usual arguments—there was a far more tense and anxious edge to it.

“And you’re being evasive.”

“Me!?” she exclaimed with a dark laugh. “How fucking hard is it to admit you’re interested in someone?!”

Silence.

A pink blush tinted her cheeks, but she held her ground. I could tell she was practically jumping out of her skin wanting to yell at us. I countered, “To be fair, you haven’t expressed interest in us either.”

Alright. I’m clearly a fucking idiot.

Her mouth popped open in disbelief. “Is that a fucking joke? All I’ve been doing is crushing on the four of you for the past couple years, and now somehow this is my fault?! *You treated me like a little sister!* Well, except for Raphi, but he freakin’ friend-zoned me until about ten minutes ago!”

Alaric snorted. “You’re our *amour de sang*, Narc. Trust me, nothing little sister-ish about that.”

Ah, good. Just pile it all on, brother.

“I’m your *what?*” Her cheeks flushed, and she looked more confused and impossibly more defensive than before.

It was time to end this.

“I’m done with this evasive shit, Narc. I’m crazy about you and have been since we first met.”

CHAPTER 10

NARCISSA



O h.

“Really?” I asked, my voice very quiet. My power had turned down to a low simmer, and I unwrapped my arms from my waist. Was it wrong there was a tiny, coy part of me that was parading around my head in victory?

“Really,” Abel confirmed as my cheeks deepened in color. He looked frustrated and relieved at the same time, which was confusing on its own.

“You are the *amour de sang*,” Alaric stated softly, “for both of us.”

I scanned my head for the term and realized it was the equivalent of a shifter’s mate for born vampires.

Holy fuck...*both* of them? I felt my lips involuntarily press into a smile. I mean, was it that far-fetched to find a way to be with the other two, then?

Now I was just being greedy.

But maybe. Just maybe.

I bit my lip as Abel tilted his head with a knowing look. “Are you really going to make us say it?”

I offered a small, wide-eyed look and nodded as Alaric chuckled. Abel grunted and walked up to me, tilting my head up with his large hands before placing a kiss on my nose. “I want to be with you, Narc, and have for some time.”

“Want to be with me, like...” I urged him to continue, because, fuck me. I was insecure right now. Never, ever had I been insecure on this level, but give a girl a break! This was a big deal, and I wanted to hear them spill their hearts out before I did.

Abel smiled and narrowed his pretty eyes. “I’m in *love* with you.”

My smile broke open. “Yeah? Really?”

I totally loved my cutie pie.

“Move over,” Raphi grunted as he swept me up in a nuzzling hug. I wrapped myself around him as Abel chuckled lightly but didn’t really move. I wasn’t positive how the twins felt about Raphi holding me, but when they didn’t protest, Raphi took his chance to speak.

“Of course I love my mate, what type of stupid question is that?” he asked softly. I pulled back, surprised.

“So it’s not just your wolf?”

He shook his head, heat in his gaze. “It’s very much both of us.”

Well then! Now I just felt deceived. I should have listened to the damn wolf. Only one being honest out of the five of us. I blushed and tried to control my growing smile.

He continued, “For the record, I never friend-zoned you. I mean, come on, Narc, I had you wearing my shit to school every day so that no other shifters would look at you.”

I grinned. *Possessive shifter*. Raphi let me go just enough to move to my side and seemed to relax at the way I melted between him and Abel.

Dorian sauntered around him and narrowed his gaze. I crossed my arms and faced off with him, stepping into his space. A small lip twitch told me he loved this before he leaned down to softly kiss my lips, the mere brush lighting up every single nerve ending in my body. It was so intense for a brief kiss.

“I’m crazy about you, Narc. Your stubborn ass keeps me in check. Although I really can’t believe you haven’t figured this all out.”

“You all say it like I was just supposed to assume that you were into me!” I exclaimed, which made them chuckle. Dorian wrapped me up in a warm hug as I sighed happily, my face pressed into him.

“Yeah,” Raphi rolled his eyes, “because we weren’t obvious or anything.”

Alaric snorted. “At least we don’t have to be quiet about warning people off anymore.”

“What?!” I surged forward, grabbing his shirt. “Warning who off?”

Dorian laughed. “Oh, Alaric, you’ve done it now.”

Alaric’s eyes grew dark but sparkled as he slid a hand down my back, holding me to him possessively. “Narcissa...” I hid my grin as he continued in his rough accent, trying to figure out how to explain what he had to admit. “We may have warned off a few assholes from asking you out. We couldn’t exactly let anyone else try to take our woman out, could we?”

“How? How did you warn them off?”

For the record, I was loving this shit.

I know, *I know*—*how had I turned an admission of love into a joke instead of the serious moment it was?* Because I’m hilarious. Obviously. Also, I’m not exactly the Queen of Emotion, now am I? No. I’m the Queen of the Dead. The dead are petty, and so am I.

Also, I’d been nursing this lovesick crush for quite some time now. It wasn’t that far of a stretch for all of us to admit to being in love. I mean, shit, we’d been saying “love you” for about a year now. Now it just meant I could jump their bones.

Abel walked around us. “Raphi, what was the threat again?”

“For which species? For the vampires it was something along the lines of being trapped in the ground for a century or so.”

I growled. “And you never thought to run this by me?”

“They weren’t your type.” Dorian grinned. “We decided.”

I went to respond, but Alaric’s teeth on my ear had me shivering. He spoke in a quiet, more private tone. “You know how much you mean to me, Narcissa. You’re everything.”

Oh, be still my heart.

Well, life literally didn’t get better than this...and I was totally creating a harem. I mean, I was a badass Queen, so that just made sense in retrospect. Not that I read reverse harems on my Kindle or anything. Or even that it reminded me of the possible future and dream that I pined after when it came to these four men and me. No. I’d never even thought about this idea until this very moment.

I solemnly swear.

I snorted and rolled my eyes, replying with a smile. “So, you all love me. *Hmmm...*”

Dorian squinted, and I grinned even more. “I mean, I may need to think about this—it is a lot to process.”

I was up and over Alaric’s shoulder in a second flat, my laugh echoing

through the room as he threw me on the bed. “Raphi, help!”

“Nope.” He grinned and leaned back to watch as Alaric pinned me to the bed.

“What are you doing?” I gasped with laughter.

“You said you needed to think.” He smirked. “I’m going to keep you here until you make the right decision.”

I continued to laugh and wiggled underneath him. “Let me up!”

“Nope.”

“Just admit it.” Abel looked down at me as Dorian watched with unmasked amusement.

“Admit what?” I asked with a fake wide-eyed look.

“Narc,” Alaric warned and began to lightly tickle my ribs.

I shrieked and pushed away from him to no avail, gasping. “Damn it, you bastards! Of course I love all of you! I have for like forever now.”

Alaric stopped and surged forward, kissing me and making my stomach flutter. He pulled back, and I was about to respond when my phone rang. I groaned as my head drooped. The collective grumbling around the room made me laugh.

Well, now that the five of us were being all cute and stuff, maybe I could suggest the idea of taking that vacation overseas. I had vacation time as Queen, right? I needed a vacation. Also, sex. *Sex was totally on the table now.*

“Hello?”

“Declan and I will walk with you to the meeting. We’ll be over in five.”

Zachariah hung up then as I shook my head. I looked up at all of them with a lightness in my chest. “So, what does this mean?”

Raphi grinned. “It means we’re together, baby.”

“Oh yeah?”

Before the conversation could continue, my balcony doors flung open to reveal a very amused demigod. I crossed my arms.

“That wasn’t five minutes,” I complained.

His accent was growing thicker once more. “Sorry, lass, but patience isn’t me strong suit.”

“Nor mine,” Zachariah said, strolling in behind him.

“Well isn’t this fun?” I said, looking around. “You know, the five of us were in the middle...”

“Yes, yes.” Declan grinned. “We knew.”

“You were listening?!” I exclaimed, my cheeks flushing again—entirely too much today, for the record.

The two of them looked at me with completely unrepentant expressions that had me huffing in exasperation. Totally not worth it. Like I said, more than a bit nosy.

My boys all chuckled except for Raphi. I rolled my eyes, opened my wardrobe, and stalked toward the bathroom. “The meeting is at midnight, right? Why?”

“Everyone wants to have a separate audience with you beforehand,” Zachariah explained with an amused yet tired tone.

I groaned before looking at Raphi. “You have the list, right? Someone needs to go handle the reporters.”

“We can compel them,” Alaric offered. “Meet you on Bourbon?”

I nodded. He stalked up to me, tipped my chin back, and kissed me with his smooth, chilled lips that tasted of peppermint and something suspiciously wintery. I made a sound of complaint as he pulled away, but Abel wasted no time gathering me into a second deep kiss. I tugged my hands through his hair and felt my toes curl. The two of them were like summer and winter.

Then the twins were gone, and I was forced to collect myself with a content sigh. Zachariah was lounging in his earlier spot, his eyes dancing with amusement as Declan sorted through random shelves and cabinets. *See! Nosy!* Raphi was on my bed, spread out with his eyes closed even though I knew he was tracking my every movement. Dorian looked right at me with a wicked smile from where he was leaning against the end of the bed.

“What?” I asked him.

His smirk grew. “Nothing.”

I rolled my eyes and stalked toward the bathroom, placing my things down on the counter as a warm body pressed up against me. I met Dorian’s gray infernos in the mirror.

“Do you need something?” I asked, my voice husky. I felt like I was on a fucking rush of euphoria from relief now that my boys and I had established a base of understanding.

“Yes.” He tugged on my ear with his teeth.

“Well then, why don’t you take it?” I suggested. Dorian let out a deep sound that vibrated his chest as he spun me around and locked my hips against the counter. The man was so beautiful. I found myself licking my lips as he leaned in to kiss them, but then he moved down.

“Maybe I will.” He spoke in a soft, dangerous tone as his nose trailed my jawline. I whimpered lightly and let my head fall back as he pressed his body into me. I could feel his energy, seductive and smooth, wrapping around us in a tight cocoon.

“Kiss me,” I demanded softly as his hands clasped my jaw, and he brought his lips over mine, hovering.

“Unless you want an audience, I would suggest not, Dorian,” Zachariah called with amusement.

Well, that didn't sound like the worst thing in the world...

Dorian groaned and tugged on my lip gently before pulling back and stalking away. I scowled but began to get dressed, knowing that right now probably wasn't the best time to get distracted anyway...although it was more than warranted after all this time of waiting to express how we felt for one another.

After this meeting would be a different story, though.

A meeting that I planned on going full out for—after all, I had long established that I loved dramatics, so anything less just wouldn't work for this event.

I pulled on a black lace dress, its off-the-shoulder sleeves dipping into a sweetheart neckline before trailing down into a mid-thigh loose skirt. The dress was essentially see-through on top, so I laced up a corset and added some dark thigh-high stockings. I figured I was going for 'Addams Family meets Southern Gothic,' which I was unashamedly inspired by. I mean, come on—I'm a modern girl. I've used Pinterest.

My stiletto boots were tight with a bright red bottom that matched the dark crimson of my skull necklace. I was practically giddy as I traded my rum lipstick for a deep red. Finally, I opened up my cabinet and found my knives.

Remember, *always be crazier than them*. I put on my thigh holster and placed in two sleek black daggers, just in case I needed to prove a point. Or maybe just if I didn't like someone.

“Are we ready?” Zachariah asked from the door. I looked up and adjusted my skirt to fluff it out. It sort of looked like a Halloween costume. I liked it. A lot.

“Ready to be annoyed?” I snickered. “Why, yes. Yes I am.”

Zachariah shook his head and looked me over, a slight hesitation in his eyes.

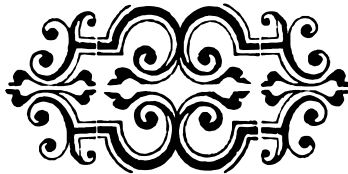
I frowned, concerned. “What?”

His lips pressed together as his silver eyes lightened once again.
“Nothing.”

Why did I have a feeling tonight would be interesting to say the least?

CHAPTER 11

ZACHARIAH



I was about to kill the man in front of me if he didn't stop looking at Narcissa that way. Maybe I would just remove his eyes. I couldn't help but accept the surge of possessiveness that overtook me when it came to her.

It wasn't something I could admit to openly, probably ever.

It had taken me fucking long enough to come to terms with Declan liking her, let alone her group of men. I could practically feel the energy inside of me, darker and older than anything alive today, whispering that I should claim her. I came from an age where ownership and conquering were normal and expected. The status quo.

I wasn't a stupid man, though. I knew damn well that someone like her could and would never be kept. Owned. Collected.

Instead, I planned to keep her safe and insulated between the six of us. I had been watching over her since she had come into power on her birthday. I had heard whispers of her before, but she had been kept mostly in the shadows until that night.

Every time I saw her, though, the same emotions coursed through me. Possessiveness. Lust. Frustration. Respect. I was torn between wanting to bend her over and screw her into the next century or kneeling on the ground and offering myself up to her for eternity.

Very torn.

Somehow, though, the two of us were subtly melding into a compromise. I kept a check on my possessive nature, and she seemed to soften just a hint, almost subconsciously, letting me exert some level of dominance over the situation.

I say ‘letting,’ because despite my age and power levels, her raw, untamable power was a formidable match for my own. I would be interested to see what would happen if the two of us ever went against one another. It would be like two powerhouses fighting for dominance, which was exactly what we were.

Yet I still felt as though I’d signed my soul over to her long ago. I wish I could say I felt in control or that she had somehow bent under my will, except that didn’t happen. Truthfully, I was glad. From the moment I first saw her, I’d been fighting the need to control her, and it was a fucking massive struggle. Her fire and will only made me want it more. I wanted that fire to myself, but I knew that trying to capture it would either kill me or extinguish her.

Plus, this wasn’t the fucking Roman Empire anymore—I couldn’t pull that shit.

Instead, I chose to bask in her energy and try to not come off as the obsessed fool I was. I had taken control of the situation, including her love life, so that I knew what was going on and could hopefully be part of it. On some level, she knew I needed it, I think, because I was really the only one in her life that even tried to get away with it.

I swallowed, thinking about how she had been when it was just the two of us in her quarters. The way that she had been curled up on my lap and melted against me, her body soft and curvy against my much harder one. She would hate to know how much I loved that. How much she reminded me of a sleepy kitten.

Fuck. Where did these thoughts even come from?

Actually, there were much worse ones. Ones that I had no business thinking since she barely knew I was interested in her—ones that included our future. Hadn’t I gone centuries without these kinds of thoughts appearing? Never in my life had I felt so strongly about someone.

I pulled away from my thoughts and focused on the low growl emanating from Raphi. The first group of monsters stood in front of us.

Hellhounds.

“I see the select individuals from before are gone,” Narcissa stated with amusement.

The Alpha’s crimson eyes focused raptly on her. The six of us didn’t seem to bother him in the least. He was a strong motherfucker, but that wasn’t the issue. The problem was the implications of what had occurred

earlier tonight.

Unbeknownst to our beautiful young Queen, when she'd displayed dominance and essentially kicked our Alpha here down a peg earlier, it had been way more of a turn-on than an insult to his pride. I could practically feel the affection and lust growing under his skin as he rested his forearms on his knees and stared at her.

All of the hellhounds seemed fixated but couldn't meet her eyes.

"As you requested," Alpha Draco said quietly.

She grinned and relaxed back into her chair. Raphi stood over her, his gaze hyper-focused on the other shifters. I could feel the twins and Dorian fume at this man's attention, but they kept quiet. Declan had an amused smirk on his face, but he was anything but relaxed when it came to her—something she would probably learn fairly quickly. The demigod was complicated, though. Maybe he would be able to hide his affection for a bit longer.

"What did you need to meet about?" she asked Draco with open curiosity, her hand casually grasping a wine glass. The Supernatural Committee met in a large, open pavilion surrounded by high walls and thick greenery. The low, simmering oil lamps accented her bright gold eyes as she waited.

"I just wanted to apologize for earlier," he replied, "and assure you that we are very much on your side when it comes to whatever happened on Bourbon Street today."

She smiled in amusement, although it had a cold edge to it. "You mean the dead bodies swinging from balconies? Yes. That was an odd twist to the afternoon. If I didn't know better, I would suspect you'd done it in retaliation."

I smirked at the Alpha's alarmed expression. His shock confirmed he most definitely was not the one responsible. But my smile disappeared as Narcissa leaned forward and captured his jaw. "But you wouldn't do that, right Draco?"

No. I knew he wouldn't—I had a feeling his allegiance was one hundred percent tied to our woman now.

The Alpha's chest made this fucking annoying purring sound as she smiled, her eyes alight with satisfaction. "Well, I appreciate the gesture. Thank you."

"I was wondering," Draco began in a low tone, "if you had a moment to speak alone with me."

Fuck no.

There was a tiny sign of her surprise in the way her brow twitched, but otherwise she looked entertained. “And what would we talk about?”

His eyes darkened. “Something regarding only the two of us.”

There it was.

Narcissa smiled as Raphi let out a low growl. “After the meeting I may be available, but I don’t go anywhere without one of them.”

I was always surprised by how diplomatic she could be. I shouldn’t have been, but the lineage of Queens before her had been on a wide scale from crazy to petty. Draco looked right at me, and I had to fake my amusement, because none of this was fucking funny. Draco nodded and stood up, Narcissa joining him.

“Your Majesty.” He grasped her hand, bowing his head in respect. Raphi vibrated with aggression as Declan stepped in, clearly unable to control himself.

“Alright, time ta move on an’ be good wee doggies,” he teased, but his eyes were dark, focused on their joined hands.

Draco chuckled softly, giving our Queen one last glance before walking out. The other hounds followed, and I sighed with frustration.

“That was odd.” Narcissa frowned.

Odd? *No, beautiful, that was one of the more relaxed propositions that the six of us had fended off over the years.* Declan’s efforts, as well as my own, had transpired anonymously. I had told myself for the longest time that it was for the security of our new Queen...and it was, partially. The other part derived from pure possessiveness.

“Who’s next?” Abel said in an attempt to distract.

Dorian heaved a long-suffering sigh. “The chaos.”

Our local chaos was rather temperamental and extremely self-centered. Only the main three were permitted to enter, because any more and things would have descended... well, into chaos. We had made that a general rule for all groups, but it was really for them. As the doors opened, my eyes rolled.

Demons.

“Your Majesty!” one of them exclaimed. “We are so honored!”

I was going to hate every moment of this.

CHAPTER 12

NARCISSA



Demons were very dramatic. Also petty. Dramatic, petty, and selfish.

Similar to the dead and everyone else under my rule. I had always wondered if that was a reflection of my reign, but then I decided I was absolutely not responsible for their actions and insanity when they had been alive for centuries—so the answer was *no*.

Astro, his dark hair floating to his waist, bowed dramatically as his red, rubied robes sparkled under the oil lamps. All flash and pizazz. If Elton John had been a demon...

His eyes were completely black and seemed fathomless in the absence of white.

“Please sit,” I said with evident ire. They liked it when I was annoyed with them. Sometimes I acted friendly just to mess with them—how freaked out would they be if I was suddenly super sweet?

“It would be our pleasure,” Samantha tinkled whimsically. I noted that her blonde ringlets had been trimmed to her shoulders in an attempt to look older. She still looked fucking twelve, like some creepy immortal child. Her wide, doll-like eyes were filled with darkness and amusement as her red and black robes billowed from her body.

Finally, their silent yet brilliant leader Marcus sat right in front of me. If I

thought Draco was fun to mess with, it was *nothing* compared to these guys.

“What can we do for you?” I asked.

“We are concerned, Your Majesty!” Astro proclaimed. “We have heard rumors of terrible things in the French Quarter, and your power levels only seem to be rising. One can’t help but make the connection.”

I almost lost it and laughed. *Subtle, Astro. Very subtle.*

“You’re wondering if it’s me,” I said, leaning forward.

Samantha shrugged noncommittally. “I mean, that’s a lot of dead, and you feed off of them. How can we be expected to trust a Queen who may be killing her own people?”

Here we go.

“First,” I began, holding both of their gazes before I locked onto Marcus’s dark eyes that watched me with a creepy, empty expression, “I don’t need you to fucking trust me.” I let my power out, all three of them grunting as it reached them. “I think you’ve forgotten how this fucking works. You are under my rule, and unless you plan on challenging me for it, you can fucking deal with it.”

Nothing but silence.

“Secondly, if you would take a moment to think rationally, please explain how it would make any sense to destroy my own kingdom when there are many other large cities within reach?”

More silence.

“Convenience?” Marcus suggested.

“Don’t be a fool,” I challenged.

Marcus’s lips twitched. “Fine, so then who is it?”

“Asmodeus.”

Astro’s eyes widened. Samantha paled. *Yeah. He was sort of scary.*

To them—scary to them, not me.

“That’s impossible,” Marcus stammered. “He is...he is still unable to hold physical form.”

I smirked at that. I *had* messed him up pretty good, and it was no secret.

“Do you have a way to track him?” I asked.

“For a price,” Marcus offered nervously.

“Name it.”

“A lock of your hair for trading with the witches,” he stated without hesitation.

“For?”

“We need more of those fun potions they mix up, and they want some of your hair for spells,” Astro explained with a grin.

“*Fun potions?*”

“Makes people do hilarious shit. One guy started dancing...” Samantha couldn’t finish her thought as she pealed out in laughter.

“Fine!” I interrupted. “We come over tomorrow and you show me the tracker. *Then* you get the hair.”

“Deal.”

With that, they were thankfully gone, and I made a mental note to check into these potions. I wasn’t very concerned, though—the witches were annoying but mostly harmless.

“We will cut it beforehand and make sure to remove any magical ties from it,” Zachariah assured me. He seemed tense tonight, and as I met his silver eyes, I saw something flash behind them. *Interesting*. I couldn’t help but be thankful I had someone with so much experience around.

“Who’s next?” I asked.

Raphi’s warning growl alerted me to the opening of the main door. I bit back a smile as the Alpha, Beta, and Enforcer of our local wolf pack entered the space.

So, they had a new Enforcer? Interesting.

“Lucas,” I greeted, grinning stupidly. The wolves were just funny, especially because they seemed so intensely different from Raphi.

Lucas was a handsome man, but a bit too hairy for me. I mean, I could see his black forearm hair from here. It spilled from the open top button of his shirt, his massive barrel chest covered in the stuff. Brown eyes warmed in friendly greeting as he offered his hand. I met his massive paw as Raphi let out another, harder to define, sound.

Lucas offered an annoyed grunt but didn’t say anything as he sat down. I turned to their Beta.

“Lionel.” I met his hand, which was only slightly bigger than mine. You might be wondering how this small dude was a Beta of the pack. *Easy*. The green-eyed wolf shifter was as deadly as he was charming. He flashed me a smile, and Raphi actually let a snarl leave his lips, the sound causing shivers to break across my skin. He was so much more ‘wolfy’ around other shifters.

Finally, I looked at their new Enforcer.

“Mila,” she introduced herself, offering a polite smile. I met the woman’s hand and realized just how powerful she was. In fact, I gave her a questioning

look, wondering why the hell she was just an Enforcer. She just shrugged. Clearly, she hadn't challenged the Beta or Alpha for a reason.

The woman in front of me could only be described as cool. She was taller than me and very lean, showing off impressive muscles in leather pants and a cropped top. Her hair was sleek, black, and cut short to the base of her neck. A pair of cool, icy eyes that matched the extensive silver piercings lining both ears greeted me.

Like I said, totally badass. She was badass goals, in fact.

"So," I said as I joined them in sitting. "How can I help you?"

Before they could answer, the door swung open, and each wolf muttered a groan. I looked up with interest and nearly cursed myself.

"I thought our rule was three?" I barked as I pulled a knife from my right holster and began playing with it. It was smooth and cool against my fingers. Soothing and dangerous, my favorite type of toy.

"It is," Lucas stated dryly. "This is my brother, Rickard, from the Atlanta pack. He's the Alpha there and...wanted to be part of this."

I didn't stand for him, instead leaning back in my chair, making Declan chuckle. Rickard approached and sat down with all the confidence in the world, his eyes dark and hair very light compared to his brother's.

"Our rule is three," I explained.

"The hellhounds had more," Rickard shot back, nonplussed. "Plus, I don't exactly trust you to be straight with my brother. I've heard rumors that you're a little girl trying to act like a Queen."

Oh, okay buddy.

Lionel smiled at him, looking disgusted and amused at the same time. "You're an ass."

The over-inflated Alpha growled a threat. I moved quickly and tossed my knife through the air. It soared and landed, tip embedded in the wood, right between Rickard's spread legs. Silence filtered through as the Alpha stared down at the precariously placed blade.

"What the hell was that for?" he snarled.

"Actin' like an arse, I'd expect," Declan clarified with a smile.

"Can't even fucking understand him," Rickard drawled.

My magic totally got defensive. I shot a warning look at Lucas, and a small lip twitch told me he wouldn't attempt to intervene. I stood up and rounded the chair Rickard sat in, pulling the knife from the wood and placing my hands on his shoulders.

“What the fuck?” he snarled, writhing and trying to turn around to see me. That wasn’t happening, though—he was stuck by my power.

“Look forward,” I demanded. He did.

“Now,” I stated softly, “I’m going to stand here and keep this knife right in my hand. If I hear one more shit thing come out of your mouth, I’m going to lodge it right between your legs. And this time, I won’t bury it in tree wood. Understand?”

He nodded very quickly.

“Please continue, Lucas,” I instructed. Mila grinned openly as she spun her own knife. Maybe she wanted to get a shot at him as well.

Can we say ‘girl bonding’?

On a side note, I had very much been looking to form my own girl group. Not that I didn’t love my boys, but if we were going to get all sweet and romantic, they would get even more protective than they were now. I could see them itching to get involved as we spoke. I needed a badass girl group to run around town with. Mila was totally getting an invitation.

“Some of the pack members,” Lucas started, “are worried that this attention will draw in other shifters from the local areas. As you know, we’ve claimed most of the territory to your west. If they move in, there would be problems.”

“Who specifically are you most worried about?”

Mila spoke then. “The pride from Northern Louisiana mentioned to a wolf passing through that they heard there was trouble here and were thinking of...expanding.”

I chuckled, and Rickard shivered under me. Good.

“I wouldn’t be very worried, really. If they attempt to claim your land, you know you have an ally. Not only that, but despite your differences, I think you would find the other communities around here don’t crave change. You know, something along the lines of ‘the devil you know’ and shit.”

Lucas nodded, and Lionel seemed satisfied with that answer as well.

“I’ll send scouts, then, and try to gauge how serious they are,” Mila said.

I nodded. “Good idea.”

Now, how did I slip in a ‘Want to go shopping and be gal pals?’

“Thank you, Your Majesty,” Lucas said and stood. Before I moved to shake his hand, I knocked the legs of Rickard’s rickety chair, a grunt escaping as his ass hit the ground. Mila let out a laugh, and Lionel smiled.

I kept my back to Rickard in a show of dismissive confidence. I felt him

move behind me, but before he could pounce, Raphi had him on his back. Zachariah chuckled. Declan took a sip of his whiskey. The twins watched with interest. Dorian wrapped an arm around my waist and kissed my cheek.

See? Sometimes he was so sweet.

Raphi rumbled a low warning in Rickard's ear. "Don't bother to challenge me. I don't have time to move to Atlanta, and I have no interest in moving your shitty pack here."

Rickard growled as Lucas rolled his eyes at his brother. The wolves began to walk out, and Raphi held Rickard for a moment longer before the Alpha glanced down, stepping back and scrambling away like a wounded puppy.

"Bring in the vampires!" I called, glad they were next. I always left the witches for last, because, frankly, they sucked.

I expected the Egyptian and Colombian clans, however, it seemed there was a new group in town as well. I bounced my right leg in anticipation as both of my living vampires moved behind me. The twins got very defensive around the undead because...well, they just did, honestly. Dorian was the only one who didn't get defensive around his own kind, but then again, he had disengaged from demonic culture almost completely.

Three vampires walked in, and I instantly spotted the outlier. The first was...god, what the fuck was his name? Oh! *Xavier*. The other was something that started with an *R*, I think.

"Hello." I offered them a polite head nod as they both sat. The new third member approached a bit slower but with a grace that told me she was probably far older than most here.

"A female clan leader," I mused. "Very interesting."

The woman in front of me seemed different from most undead vampires. Her eyes were nearly black, and she had waist-length blonde hair that starkly contrasted against her purple dress. She offered her chilled hand, and I noticed there was absolutely no scent of life on her. Not recently dead, then.

"My clan, from Paris," she explained in her thick French accent while sitting in one smooth, fluid movement, "had to seek refuge in the Americas due to trouble with a larger clan. The local clans here were nice enough to allow us to maintain our power structure."

I looked at both men, who were openly staring at the woman.

Ah. Now I knew what was going on here.

"How...sweet of them." I chuckled as she flashed me a tiny smirk that

had me wondering if she realized I knew.

“My name is Elizabeth,” she offered. “I was the one to encourage them to meet with you.”

Xavier spoke, his Spanish accent extremely thick. “Her clan arrived only last week, but because of everything going on, we hesitated to bother you with this.”

The guy whose name started with *R* spoke. “Plus, we’ve been made aware of what occurred at Declan’s bar earlier and feared we wouldn’t be welcome.”

I understood their hesitation then. “The actions of one shouldn’t reflect on everyone, now should they?”

The two of them shook their heads as Alaric mumbled something incoherent.

“So,” Elizabeth continued, “I just wanted to let you know that we are very much on your side when it comes to the issues on Bourbon Street.”

I hadn’t doubted their allegiance, but damn, they had never stated it outright like that. Her two companions nodded, and I nearly burst out laughing. I’ll just bet they agreed with her. I did appreciate that despite them not fully knowing what the threat was, the groups were willing to declare their allegiances—I think it said a lot about their desire to keep this community safe.

“I appreciate it. Will you be staying in the French Quarter?”

Her eyes flashed with humor. “I’ve been moving between the two larger clans, but my clan is housed in the Quarter.”

Called it! The three of them were totally a thing.

“Well,” I drew out, “I would love to have a longer chance to talk at some point.”

“Absolutely.” She grinned, the points of her fangs flashing with her smile, reminding me just how deadly even the most polite vampire could be. .

I dismissed the three of them and marked her as another invitee to my gal pal club. I mean, a group of three badass chicks? Let’s just make a movie, honestly. Oh! *What about matching motorcycle jackets?*

As the doors closed, I threw my head back and groaned. “Can I just skip the next part? Please?”

“If we have to suffer, then so do you,” Dorian quipped. I tossed my hand back to hit his arm, but he caught it and placed a searing kiss on the top of it. *Well, that was stupid cute.* My cheeks flushed at the sweet action.

“After this, we may be able to have a break before the larger meeting,” Abel suggested.

Alaric scoffed. “If these stuffy assholes don’t take up all of our time.”

Declan grunted. “How long was it last time?”

“Three full hours of formalities,” Raphi said.

Zachariah chuckled and leaned forward on his forearms. “Should we call them in, little rose?”

I squeezed my eyes and muttered a curse before sighing. “Fine.”

Dorian called something out in French as the doors opened. I could literally feel the stuffy asshole-ness in the air. Of course they didn’t stick to the three rule either, but it wouldn’t have been worth it to call them out on it. Trust me, they were a piece of work. Last time I tried, we ran circles around linguistic definitions of ‘three’ within this universe. Three groups of three... three groups of ten. They sucked. And I’d just been in a room full of vampires, for crying out loud!

“Your Majesty,” a snooty voice said. I looked up at the decrepit woman in front of me. She looked like the Crypt Keeper. I always tried to talk positively about women, but she was a total bitch through and through. I examined her gray pallor and that silver head of stiff curls as she sat in front of me in dusty robes.

“Gertrude,” I offered coolly, forgoing her title.

She sneered as one familiar and one unfamiliar face sat on either side of her. Other witches were milling about, but they didn’t bother me as much as the woman to Gertrude’s left. My metaphorical fur bristled as she stared at Zachariah like he was her next meal. A low sound came from my throat, causing the red-haired bombshell to look back at me.

“Who are you?” I challenged. I felt Zachariah’s hand graze my back.

“Nina,” she replied, flashing her eyes toward my voodoo priest. “I just got into town.”

I could tell.

“She doesn’t care.” A lazy drawl from the other side of Gertrude made me nearly smile. My favorite witch, Brandon, sat relaxed and nonchalant. He was cute in the same way Jonathan was—very all-American and way too sweet for my tastebuds. Still, I loved the kid to death. We were around the same age and he was absolutely the only witch I could stand to be around for any length of time.

Nina scowled. “She should.”

I laughed genuinely, making Nina frown before she returned her attention to Zachariah, looking at him with big eyes. “What’s your name?”

My head fell back at her obvious lack of understanding. Gertrude looked pained, and Brandon just amused. The other witches looked concerned, murmuring amongst themselves.

Zachariah’s eyes met mine, sparkling, before he answered her. “I don’t see how that matters.”

Declan sighed and muttered under his breath, “Lass dinnae know what she’s gettin’ ’erself into.”

No. No, she didn’t.

Now, I had no right to be possessive over Zachariah. Honestly, that was only half of it, though. The bigger part, and the aspect Declan was referring to, was the obvious disrespect being shown.

Then, if possible, she did something even dumber.

“Oh, but it does,” she breathed huskily and reached to touch his jean-covered leg.

I wasn’t about to kill her, because she wouldn’t regenerate, but I didn’t hesitate to grab her hand and twist her wrist. I heard a snap, and she cried out.

“Oops.” I gave a patronizing smile. “So sorry about that. Afraid I got a little enthusiastic about that hand shake, there.”

Nina’s pained scream turned into a furious look of rage. “You bitch! You’re just jealous because he’s obviously into me.”

I didn’t even try to stop my chuckle, and neither did my boys. Even Zachariah, looking exhausted, smiled widely and smoothed a massive, warm hand over my knee.

Gertrude shook her head. “Leave, girl. Go wait in the back.”

Nina snarled before spitting, “This is ridiculous.”

Our new friend Nina was gone. Good. And I hadn’t even killed her!

“Now.” I smiled at the rest of them, completely ready to move on. “What can I do for you?”

CHAPTER 13

NARCISSA



Someone save me.

A full two hours later, I had given up trying to rationalize the coven's current concern regarding some crap about the wolves bothering them. I had completely tuned out mentally, because the twins, along with Dorian, were answering her questions easily. The three of them were fantastic at talking in circles with people and *not* killing them from outright exasperation. Zachariah still had his hand on my knee in a possessive hold, and many of the witches kept staring at an annoyed Raphi pacing behind us.

Declan? He was seated slightly off to the side, humming a tune under his breath and drinking a glass of whiskey as he watched the spectacle in amusement. I wanted to be annoyed, but instead I found myself staring at his arm muscles.

At least until he caught me doing it. *Busted.*

Unfortunately for my boredom though, this was necessary. The witches were still our allies, despite their stuffiness. They always showed up when needed, so the least I could do was hear them out.

"Alright," I said after another thirty minutes of negotiations. "I can promise we will look into this, but we really should invite everyone in for the main meeting. Is there anything else that needs to be said before that?"

Brandon flashed me a grin that spelled trouble. “Just that you look beautiful tonight.”

I heard Raphael growl, and all my other boys, even Declan, went quiet. I wasn't even going to try to analyze when the voodoo priest and Irish demigod had become part of my little team. Dare I say...*my little harem?*

A girl can dream...and read more on her Kindle.

“Thank you.” I flashed him a sickly sweet smile as the witches filed out, narrowing my eyes to let him know that he was in trouble for riling up the men behind me. Although sometimes I liked when they got like that, so maybe I would be thanking him...

When I stood and stretched, a pair of arms wrapped around me immediately. *Raphi.*

“Yes?” I asked, but instead of answering, he placed his nose against my throat and nuzzled me. “Stop scenting me,” I said playfully and pulled away. His wolf let out a deep rumble, and I knew if I wasn't careful, he would make an appearance. I didn't mean him shifting, although that did happen often.

Alphas had three forms. They had their human form and their wolf form, of course, but there was also a special third one that wasn't as well known. It appeared like their human form, but the dominant personality present was the wolf. It had only happened twice since I'd met Raphi, and each time had been a mix between hilarious, sexy, and a bit scary.

His eyes would turn black, and his voice pitched far lower than normal. His wolf was possessive, but also extremely demanding. I mean, the guy was very pushy. Very animalistic. Sexy, but only half a person. Ever tried reasoning with a feral animal? They're not big on Dr. Phil.

But now that Raphael had admitted to loving me like I loved him? Well, I should have expected this increased level of intensity from his wolf than normal.

“Raphael,” I warned, looking up at him. “Other people are here. We can't —”

“Why not?” He spoke with a slight growl. None of my boys bothered explaining for me, and I got the feeling they were curious about my answer.

“Because it's a little difficult to be a badass when a massive shifter is holding you like a doll.” I looked pointedly at his arms around my middle.

His rumble echoed again. “So you don't want them to know that you're ours?”

My lips flitted into a smile.

This guy.

I totally wanted to knee him in the balls for saying I was *theirs*, but it was sort of fucking cute, also. If anyone was *anyone's*, they were *mine*.

“It isn’t that,” I mumbled, trying not to melt too much into his tight embrace. “It’s just that I need to seem like I can hold my own.”

“No one questions that,” Alaric stated, trying to be helpful.

“And what about the men who think you’re single?”

I shot Dorian a narrow-eyed look. He was only making it worse. Unfortunately, I opened my stupid mouth before I could stop myself, expressing my frustration. “Come on, guys! We haven’t exactly made anything official to even announce tonight!”

A savage growl ripped through the space, and my head whipped around to Raphi’s...wolf.

Yep. Definitely should’ve expected that.

“Raphi.” My eyes widened in realization that he *really* wasn’t in charge anymore. His expression was so dangerous, far different than the two other times I’d experienced this same shift overtaking him. “Pull him back.”

His dark eyes flashed, struggling and failing to revert back to green. This was going to be a difficult situation for his wolf to understand, let alone be okay with.

“No.” His voice was low and gravelly, causing my skin to flush. I didn’t understand how his voice alone could inspire that type of reaction, but it totally did.

I put a hand on his chest and frowned. “Yes. We have other stuff to handle right now. We do not have time for this.”

“Mate,” he growled and pulled me forward, pressing me against his chest. I could hear the boys warding people off and semi-shielding us from the many curious eyes. God, this was so fucking caveman-like.

Cave-wolf-ish. Ha! Now that was funny.

“Raphael Sanchez,” I warned in a stern, quiet voice. “You cut this out right now or else I’m going to have to use my power.”

His hand grasped my jaw to tilt my head back. “Narcissa, are you ashamed of us?”

I knew the ‘us’ was him and Raphi. His wolf didn’t pay the other men in our group any real mind, but he didn’t try to kill them, so that was a positive. I let out a frustrated sound, not wanting Raphi or his wolf to think that was the case at all. “No, you big brute, but these guys are going to see it as a

weakness.”

“Nothing fucking weak about how I feel about you.” His voice rasped over my skin as my toes curled in my boots.

And then he kissed me—hard, possessive, and demanding.

My mouth opened to allow his probing, hot tongue, and I suddenly realized how much he had been holding back in his earlier kiss. I mean, holy hell. The scent of melted sugar filled my senses and a slight tremble ran over my skin. I involuntarily slid my hands up his massive arms as he pulled me off the ground to be eye level with him. I think I lost my mind a little when one of his hands slipped into my hair and tugged just enough to cause a sting of pleasure, his other arm wrapped around my waist to secure me to him.

My entire body responded, and I had to resist the urge to wrap my legs around his hips. Raphael’s wolf let out a low rumble as he began to kiss down my neck, skimming his sharp canines against my skin, just enough that I could feel it.

I whimpered. I couldn’t even stop from baring my neck. That only made him more excited, and his grip turned bruising.

“Raphael,” Alaric snapped. Both of us pulled back, my breath rough and uneven as I peered into a pair of very bright green eyes.

God. I had no idea that his wolf could be triggered so easily. I was totally, absolutely going to test that out more often. Except I wanted to be alone, in my bedroom, naked.

“We have a meeting,” I mumbled, more to remind myself than anything else. I could hear everyone talking behind us, and a few catcalls rang out. *Great. That’s all I fucking needed.*

Instead of answering, he hummed in response and looked hungrily down at my mouth. He pressed one last kiss to my lips and strode forward, leaving me wrapped up in Alaric’s waiting arms as the vampire approached from behind. I heard Raphael growl something at the other shifters about lowering their gazes

“Are you okay?” Alaric asked, his hand running over my neck and pulse.

I turned into him before slowly turning my head to look at the very shocked and recently reprimanded crowd. My boys were in full-blown badass mode, creating a protective barrier between the community and myself, and something that felt a whole lot like love filtered through my chest.

I looked back at Alaric. “Yes. Although I am resisting the urge to kick all their asses for being so nosy.”

I kissed his cheek and walked past all my boys, not even bothering to act indifferent. Everyone in the crowd was well aware of what was going on with our group by now. As I walked toward the front of the murmuring crowd, stepping up onto the platform that was simply an old, defunct fountain, I stood in my stiletto boots and realized the urge to explain myself was completely absent. If they had a problem with anything, they could take it up personally with me.

“Alright,” I announced with an even expression. “As most of you know, there was an attack on Bourbon Street today that resulted in both human and supernatural casualties. I know that many of you lost someone today, and I want you to understand that we will fully investigate what occurred and find the bastard who did this.”

“I heard it was a demon,” one of the shifters shouted. The local chaos grumbled in contention.

“I’ve met with each group separately, and unless and until I find proof otherwise, I do not believe it is a local suspect. However, I would like to state that if you have any information, it is important to let us know. Until then, we stay unified. Understand?”

Everyone nodded.

“I’ll need everyone to commit to different shifts to watch Bourbon Street and the rest of the area. I need a large contingency of each community on guard, because we have no idea who or what we are dealing with here. So we need all the security we can get.”

Although I did have a very strong idea of who was behind this...but they didn’t need to know that yet.

“For how long?” Nina asked with a bitter face.

“We do have other things to do!” Astro warned. “Are we supposed to give up our lives for this?”

I chuckled, and a few people paled at the sound. “Well, if we don’t catch this person, I imagine that is exactly what you will be doing.”

Astro immediately shut up.

“Now, I am giving you five minutes to talk amongst yourselves—it shouldn’t take long. We’ve used a similar system before. Then I need to see the groups separately. Shifts will be four hours at a time.”

Everyone stared at me, seemingly waiting on further instruction—although I felt like I’d been pretty freakin’ clear.

“Now!” I emphasized, waving them off.

A cacophony of murmurs and shuffling bodies arose as everyone attempted to divide into their respective groups and talk. Abel stepped up behind me, and I leaned back into his chest as he smoothed my arm gently.

“They are a difficult bunch,” he noted.

“You think?” I grinned up at him.

“I think we will catch this fucker,” he mumbled after a long minute. “If it really is *him*, though...”

I shook my head. “It had better not be. I’ll fucking kill him again, and this time I’ll make sure he goes somewhere he can’t come back from.”

Abel kissed my cheek gently, the movement completely natural, as if we’d been doing this forever.

A shadow eclipsed my left side, and I looked up into Declan’s handsome, amused face. “Narcissa.” His accent had returned, thick and full. “Yer can go home. We can ’andle this.”

My features softened. *I wasn’t sure I could handle him being sweet.*

“That’s sweet of you,” I said as he flashed me a roguish smile, his green eyes dancing with amusement. He ran a hand through his hair before looking back over the crowd. I then did something out of pure curiosity. My finger left Abel’s chest, and I gave Declan a tiny zap.

Partly because things were getting a tad too cute around here for my liking.

“Bloody hell, lass!” he growled. His accent had completely vanished. *So it really did only take a bit of power. Fascinating.*

“Well, now.” Abel grinned. “It really is much easier to understand you like that.”

Declan rolled his eyes. “I like both, honestly.”

Alaric sandwiched me from the other side. “That’s because you can’t understand the other version at all. He gets away with a lot more.”

I held back a laugh as Declan narrowed his eyes. “Be careful there, Alaric. I wouldn’t want your luck to run out.”

With that, he walked away, and I found myself *trying* to scold my grumpy vampire. “Don’t be so mean to him.”

Alaric raised his brows, amused. “Sweetie, that wasn’t even close to being mean.”

Dorian grinned like the Cheshire Cat, looking far too intrigued by the conversation. “What’s this about being mean?”

I smiled. “Oh, nothing. Just thinking up ways to bully you.”

He scowled at me, gaze burning.

Raphi loped over and tugged me into his chest. I frowned at the wolfy bastard, and he hung his head sheepishly. "Sorry, baby. Really. I tried to control him."

Liar.

"Right. I'm onto you, Mr. Sanchez."

"I would love for you to be on me," Dorian muttered off the cuff. He shrugged unapologetically when I shot him a look.

"Little rose," Zachariah said as he stepped forward. "The groups have been separated. Should we dismiss them?"

I examined his blank expression and realized something was off with him tonight. Barely noticeable, but enough that it concerned me.

"Absolutely. The first shift should start tonight."

As all of my boys spread out, Zachariah stayed near me, and I searched his silver eyes. "Are you okay?"

His eyes met mine, his brow furrowed. "Yes?"

"You don't sound sure," I mumbled.

He sighed after a long moment. "I'm not."

"What's wrong?" I asked, and his eyes traced my lips briefly.

"I'm just thinking through everything," he said. "There's a lot we need to do."

"You don't strike me as someone that would be upset over this type of thing."

His lips tilted up in a smile. "And you would be right."

"Are you always this evasive?" I asked curiously.

He chuckled at that. "I'm not sure. No one has ever asked me this many questions."

I looked away to see everyone slowly filing out to execute our plan. "Well, I can't lie. I ask a lot of fucking questions. Is that going to bother you?"

Zachariah's hand lifted to ghost across my lower back, his gaze following the crowd as well. "Nothing you do bothers me, little rose. Ever."

My head whipped toward him at the rather intense statement, but the voodoo priest was already striding away. I frowned and looked at Declan, who flashed me a sexy knowing smile.

"What?" I growled slightly.

"Nothing, lass." He put his hands up in mock surrender.

Right.

“We’re going to head home,” Raphi said as he approached, his hand pulling on my hip.

I nodded in agreement and looked back at Declan, whose expression was a bit more serious now. “Night, lass. Sweet dreams and all that shit.”

I rolled my eyes, and it seemed to make him happier—because *of course* it did. Zachariah was gone, and a part of me was bothered by that, but I followed my other four boys from the courtyard and onto the late-night streets.

CHAPTER 14

NARCISSA



It was around one in the morning as we walked home and we made our way past the perpetual party that was Bourbon Street.

The five of us were rather quiet in comparison. I nearly brought up the declarations that had been made today, but ultimately decided not to because all of the boys looked exhausted. As we passed their house, Abel pulled me into a hug and kissed my wrist gently. Raphi lifted me up to eye level and brushed my lips before heading inside. Apparently, his wolf was feeling calmer.

Dorian sauntered over and kissed my nose. “We’ll talk tomorrow about all of this.”

“Don’t wake me up,” I warned playfully, and he winked before going inside. *He was a bit demanding, wasn’t he?*

“I’m going to walk you home,” Alaric said. I looked up into his icy eyes and let him wrap an arm around my shoulder, breathing in his wintery pine scent.

“What are you thinking about?” he asked in a soft, almost concerned voice after a few moments of walking in silence.

“That today has been fucking crazy.”

He nodded. “Yeah, it has been, Narc. I know you probably have a lot to

think about with us all admitting...”

I stood on my toes, pulling his shirt, and kissed him.

It was a light but intense kiss that had him releasing a rumble from his chest that vibrated across my fingertips. I allowed him to deepen it as my head tilted back, and he filled my senses with pine. Where Raphael kissed with passion, Alaric’s kisses were deep and slow. It so contrasted his gruff personality that I found myself pressing even further against him.

“Alaric,” I whispered, and he groaned in response. His muscular arms moved me into the shadows that lined my large house, and I felt them close around us as I stared up into his beautiful eyes.

Without saying anything, he began to pepper kisses along my jaw and neck. I could feel his lips right over my pulse, and I had an odd, burning urge to have him bite there. I wanted his energy and lips on and against my skin. I gripped his shoulders as he hesitated over the pulse point.

“I want to save the moment I claim you until we’re with my brother,” he stated without reserve. I met his gaze and found a molten heat within it that I loved.

Wait. Hold the phone...both of them at the same time? Oh, Jesus. Would that be how I lost my virginity? I wasn’t positive I could handle that.

I would try though—I would totally try.

I nibbled my bottom lip, and he chuckled at the nervous gesture. “Don’t worry, sweetheart. We have all the time in the world.”

We did, but I felt like I was burning up inside. I wanted him.

“Okay,” I whispered without any witty retort. The front door opened, and my grandma called out.

“Come on in, Narcissa,” Grandma chided. “If I can hear you, so can the neighborhood.”

I flushed red as Alaric flashed me a wicked grin. He gave me one more sweet, white-hot kiss before leaving me to face my grandma, who offered me a cheeky smile as I stomped up the steps.

See? The woman couldn’t be serious if her life depended on it. I shot her a scalding look that just made her laugh.

Once I was alone in my bedroom, the day hit me in odd waves of confusion, happiness, and relief. I groaned, kicked off my boots, and walked towards my balcony, opening the doors and leaning against them as I looked over the quiet street. Jonathan’s house was lit up, and I wondered briefly what they were doing up at this time. What did humans even do with

themselves at this time of day?

Despite my annoyance, I was thankful the mayor had offered that tip regarding the reporter. It was much needed. I turned toward my bedroom and swore.

“Mom!” I scolded. “You can’t just sneak up on me like that!”

My mother rolled her eyes from where she ‘sat’ on the edge of my bed. “I saw you with that boy.”

I shook my head at her label. “He’s older than you.”

She scoffed and leaned back on her forearms. “You really shouldn’t get involved with vampires.”

I took out some soft pajamas from my nearby wardrobe and turned to her. “I hear what you’re saying—as in I hear the words coming from your lips—but *honestly*, I don’t think you’re one to give out romantic advice.”

Her mouth twisted. “You don’t know anything about my romantic life.”

“Your previous one,” I clarified. “And what? You don’t think I noticed that I have no father, dead or alive, to speak of? Or how about all of your male friends that used to come by to ‘visit’? I’m all for a healthy sex life, but don’t come and talk to me about who I should or shouldn’t be involved with.”

My mother disappeared with a haughty huff. I shook my head, exhausted. As I got ready for bed, changing into comfortable sleep shorts and a tank, I thought back to when I first asked her about my father. Apparently it had been a rather short affair.

I was around nine when I first asked. It had been Father’s Day, and I asked her where my dad was. ‘*Hell*’ had been my mother’s curt reply. My grandma had scolded her, and she promptly left the house to get drunk. I cried for about five minutes before my grandma sat me down and spoke to me with comforting words.

“Narcissa,” she’d said, “if your father knew about you, he would want you in his life.”

I still didn’t believe it, but it was nice of her to say.

As I began washing my makeup off, my brows dipped in a frown. Now that I was older, I should have given more thought to who my father was and maybe attempt to find him. I mean, he was supposedly in Hell. If he was dead, it wouldn’t be difficult—not for me, at least. Yet I held off. I didn’t have a good reason for it...I just wasn’t invested enough to know the answer. My life was busy enough without adding long-lost relatives.

My grandma was at my door a moment later, as if sensing my thoughts...

or hearing my mother complain about my dismissal of her.

“Are you okay?”

I offered her a smile and nodded. It wasn't the full truth but it also wasn't wrong...I didn't really know where I was after a day like today. My stress level had been rising all day. From my mother's commentary to the issue of all the deaths this afternoon, I just was exhausted.

Grandma kissed my temple before closing the door behind her, leaving me to it.

As I turned off the lights, I wrapped my arms around my knees and sat in bed, looking toward the night sky and full moon. I wasn't a crier and wouldn't start now, but damn if a frustrated little tear didn't leak from my eye. I suppose it came down to the fact that I was feeling overwhelmed.

I was thrilled that the boys felt the same type of affection that I did, but what happened now? How did you move from being friends to something more? I had always known how I felt about them, and it was a goddamn shock to know they felt the same. A good shock, but a lot to process all the same.

Ugh! I just needed time to adjust. Yes, that was it. Time to adjust. Maybe a vacation with margaritas, local food, and fantastic sex with one or all of my boys. Yeah. That sounded great. I would dream about that tonight.

The second aspect of my worry was how to rationalize my weird fucking feelings for Declan. Like, I totally shouldn't find his lip ring sexy or his brash behavior and accent hot.

And how about my newfound softness toward Zachariah? I could tell he wasn't nearly as relaxed as he pretended to be. There was a vibrating tension to him, and I had no idea when it would show, but I could see his façade wouldn't last. It was confusing, because sometimes I felt like he wanted to throw out commands, but for whatever reason, he didn't. Too bad—if I were going to listen to anyone's commands, it'd be his.

The two of them were just so fucking different from my boys. At least in some ways. I mean, you've got Mr. Brash-and-Sexy with Mr. Pretending-Not-to-Be-Dominant-but-I'm-Super-Powerful. My boys were everything from protective and loving to gruff and playful. *God!* The six of them were very different, weren't they?

I laughed softly and put my head to my knees, thinking back to the very first time all of them had been in the same room with me.

“Raphi!” I grinned as we walked up to my bedroom. My grandma had handed us lemonade, and I held both of the glasses as he shouldered both backpacks. “We’re going to be screwed for ditching detention.”

Although, I’d give my left arm to hear my grandma’s response if the school called the house. That woman could talk for days. One time when the school called, she kept them on the phone for two hours talking about gardening. No idea how it came up, but I was impressed.

“I only got detention because you did,” he said as he dropped both backpacks on the couch. The start of senior year had been fairly quiet, but today I’d gotten a little pissed.

“She was a bitch!” I exclaimed. “She tried to take your sweatshirt. Who the hell does that?”

Raphi raised a dark brow. “So you knocked her ass to the ground?”

I shrugged, not wanting to admit my tiny bit of jealousy. “The two of us had some bigger long-term issues as well.” Like her wanting Raphi to be her Alpha, in every sense of the word.

Oops! Guess my magic made me tackle her! I simply couldn’t control how possessive it was, just as Raphi couldn’t control his wolf. I snuggled in tighter to the sweatshirt with a smirk.

“Like what?” he prodded.

I almost answered when a breeze ruffled my hair. I turned and scowled at a very confident-looking voodoo priest.

“Zachariah.” I offered him an amused look. “What can I do for you?”

Raphael muttered something incomprehensible, and Zachariah flashed me a dangerous smile. “Heard we got into a bit of trouble today.”

I crossed my arms. “That is what caught your attention today? Not the host of other problems my monsters have been causing in the French Quarter?”

He shrugged. “You know I don’t bother with politics.”

“Why are you here? In her bedroom?” Raphi’s voice was quiet. I looked over to see how tense he was.

“That’s a great question,” said a smooth, sexy tenor. Dorian materialized against my bedroom door, a glass of my grandma’s lemonade in hand.

“I wanted to see if she was okay,” Zachariah replied, completely unbothered by their accusatory tones.

“Is it true yer got in trouble today, lass?” a familiar demigod asked as he

swung onto my balcony. What the actual fuck?

No. Really. How did he do that? Maybe he was just...lucky.

"How is THIS the most entertaining news of the day?" I groused. "It's fucking detention!"

"That you're missing," Abel pointed out as he moved past Dorian. He smiled and pressed a kiss to my forehead in an unfortunately friendly gesture.

"Sweetheart," Alaric demanded, "why are you ditching detention?"

My jaw hit the ground as I looked at all six of them. Finally, I groaned and looked at a grumpy Raphi. Why did it feel like they were distracting me from something?

"Alright, you weirdos. What's actually going on?"

Nothing but silence as they all looked at each other, avoiding my gaze.

"There may have been a little issue today," Dorian hedged.

I whipped my head toward him. "Like?"

Zachariah chuckled. "Your twins and demon got into a fight today."

"What the hell, guys? Why?" And why hadn't I been invited? I wished I'd been there. I would have kicked some ass.

"They were being assholes," Dorian said simply.

"Tis true, lass," Declan vouched.

"You were part of it?!"

"No... I just watched," he said with a smirk.

"You do that a lot, I heard," Dorian quipped, making Raphi growl.

Declan just smiled wider and flipped Dorian off, and Zachariah shook with laughter. "Now, don't be throwing judgement, Dorian. I think all of us are guilty of being watchful of those around us."

Alaric shook his head, dismissing their conversation. "I'm still caught up on why you aren't in detention."

"And I want to know why the hell you got into a fight today," I parried.

"It's not important," Abel said while wrapping his arms around me.

"She got into a fight today, too," Raphi offered. "Maybe it's just that kind of a day."

"You traitor."

"You got into a fight?!" Alaric demanded.

I shrugged unapologetically. "If I told you I won, would that make a difference?"

"Lass," Declan said through his chuckling.

"Bitch deserved it," I muttered just as my phone rang. Crap.

At least I wouldn't be doing my job alone today...if they managed to let go of this detention thing.

“Narc?” a familiar voice asked as I retreated from my memories and found a shadow walking across my bedroom floor.

“Dorian?” I rose to my knees and looked into his burning gray eyes, a haunted face in the shadows. “What’s wrong?”

He pressed his lips together and suddenly looked unsure. “Can I sleep here tonight?”

I frowned but nodded, feeling a surge of concern. “Are you okay?”

There was a cloudy darkness to his eyes as he kicked off his shoes and crawled into bed with me. I tried to not shiver at his touch, but sleeping in the same bed together wasn’t exactly normal. For us, anyway. Raphi, sometimes, and the twins once or twice. But Dorian?

Never before.

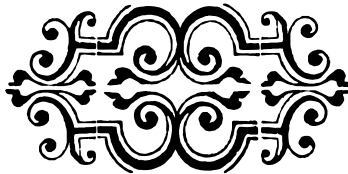
His scent enveloped me as I placed my head on his chest. “You’ll tell me in the morning?”

“Sure,” he mumbled and placed my head under his chin.

I’d never heard him sound so odd.

CHAPTER 15

DORIAN



It was nearly dawn, and Narcissa had fallen asleep almost right away. I continued to hold her and gently play with her hair, thinking about what I'd seen only an hour ago. *Was I losing my fucking mind?*

It went without saying that the four—more likely the six—of us had eyes on Narcissa at *all* times. Her wards were good, some of the strongest I'd experienced, but we'd been able to slip through them from the start, and I had loved it...at first. Now I worried that others would be able to as well. I knew it was in part because of how tired she was, and worse because her grandmother weakened them with all of her...guests.

The magic was innately connected to Narc's well-being. The power waned when she did. While I loved that it welcomed us without question, often not even alerting Narc to us being there, I was now realizing just how fucking dangerous that could be.

Her house was as safe as we could make it, but if someone was determined enough to get in? Well, I now knew it was a possibility. I usually watched from the front of her estate, underneath the massive oak tree. Tonight I'd been entering the property when I saw a shadow on her balcony, staring into her room like a looming, dark presence.

I slipped up quietly, hoping to take the intruder by surprise, but the shadow was gone seconds later.

It left a cold and cruel aura that had me terrified for her safety. Even worse? Narc had been so caught up in her thoughts that she hadn't noticed it. That was so unlike her, I figured there must have been something important on her mind...or whoever the shadow belonged to had enough magic to

conceal themselves completely from her detection. No matter how you looked at it, it wasn't fucking good. I didn't like the unknown being so damn close to my girl.

It hadn't been a normal shadow or spirit either. It felt demonic in nature, but I didn't want to assume the worst or worry her unnecessarily.

I would tell her after a good night's sleep. *Maybe*. Raphi was already out front, and the others were searching the neighborhood. Even Declan had joined in the watch tonight. Originally we'd been concerned with individuals she may have pissed off today, but once I told them about what I'd seen, it felt like an entirely new game.

A dangerous one.

"Dorian," Narc mumbled and turned onto her other side, her body curving into mine with ease. I steeled myself, praying for a small semblance of control that I normally lacked around this woman. My arm wrapped around her smooth, silky waist, and I pressed my forehead to her shoulder.

It was a fucking struggle to ignore my natural urges. The worst part? It wasn't like I could relieve this constant frustration. When a demon chooses their *flamma vitae* and their energy connects...well, why the fuck would I ever want anyone else in my bed with me? My power flared to life as she stretched in her sleep and pressed her ass back into me. I wanted to know what she was dreaming about, and that interest only grew as her desire sparked, my gaze tracking her slightly flushed expression.

"Shit," I grunted as she shifted again. My hands slipped up her stomach to wrap around her ribs and skimmed the bottom of her breasts. *This was torture.*

What I wouldn't give to be inside her head right now.

"Dorian," she murmured, her power wrapping around me and pulling mine forward.

"You've got to wake up, Narc," I managed to get out in a strangled voice.

She rolled into me and her hands crawled up my chest, which was bare since I'd taken off my t-shirt. Her fingers felt hot and seductive against my skin. I looked skyward for patience as she ran her leg against mine.

"Narc," I tried again.

Don't get me wrong, I wanted this. *A lot*. But right now she wasn't awake, and a part of my demon side didn't give a fuck. I shook her gently, not wanting to shock her awake.

Those eyes snapped open in the early dawn light. Except it wasn't

completely her. I'd only seen this happen a few times, and all of them had been scary. This time, however, it wasn't—far from it. The look she offered me was absolutely searing, and her normally gold eyes were a deep, rich green.

“You need to pull your power back,” I told her firmly as I grew harder against her silk-covered body. My cock clearly was not getting the memo on keeping our shit together.

She rubbed her face against my chest like a kitten. “Why?”

I almost laughed at her disgruntled tone but groaned instead as her pelvis pressed against mine. “Because, love, I only have so much control here.”

“I don't want you to have control.” She trailed hot kisses against my jawline.

Sweet Christ.

“You're not able to make that decision right now,” I barely managed as her nails bit into my shoulders. Her lips trailed just to the corner of my lips.

“Please?” she practically mewed, her entire aura saturated with need and desire, causing her to nearly tremble against me. Guilt surged through me. I knew this was in part a reaction to my powers and wherever her head had been while sleeping, but my magic didn't care what I wanted and it sure as hell wasn't interested in calming her down..

“What do you need, love?” I asked softly. Her eyes melted to gold, and her lips parted just slightly.

“You,” she whispered.

I kissed her gently, groaning into the kiss as her soft, feminine scent surrounded me. My hands grew tighter on her small, curvy waist.

“Please, Dorian.”

Shit.

“You aren't even fully awake,” I protested, not even believing it myself. I think I gave in with what she said next.

“You don't want me?” Her voice was so raw and vulnerable.

“Of course I fucking want you,” I hissed and deepened our kiss, not wanting her to think that for a damn second.

I couldn't fuck her. I couldn't—not yet. I kept the thought on repeat. Instead, my fingers slid against the apex of her thighs and her silky shorts, and Narc tilted her head back with a gasp. I groaned audibly. She wasn't wearing anything under her silk shorts—and she was absolutely soaked, her center needy and hot.

“Please,” she whined as she moved against me, searching for friction.

I dipped my finger into her, and she arched her back, crying out in relief. I soothed her hot, shivering skin with kisses as I let my power wrap around her, moving my finger in and out of her while rubbing her clit with gentle yet precise movements. Her breathy moans urged me on as I prayed for more patience, my cock pulsing uncomfortably from where it was trapped in my pants.

Fuck, she was tight.

I wanted to undo my dress pants and slide right into her tight heat. I pressed my lips against hers as I quickened my pace, the scent of her desire filling the air. I kissed down her throat as I slid up her shirt and kissed the underside of her breasts with a delicate, light touch.

There were so many people who rushed sex. I never could understand that, especially considering how my magic worked. It was truly the closest you could come to magic in life, if you weren't supernatural. I could have spent hours kissing and loving Narc's smooth skin. She cried out softly as I drew her wetness over her little clit.

“Dorian,” she gasped as I swirled my tongue against her tight nipple. I switched to the other.

“Come for me, baby girl,” I whispered while adding a second finger.

That did it.

Her back arched off the bed as she cried out her release, her lips forming my name. It was fucking glorious.

I wrapped my arms around her and nuzzled her soft hair, loving every moment of this intimacy. I had felt so painfully lonely these past two years, not being able to touch her. Feeling like I would die unless I fucked her. Now, even a hug seemed fucking great.

After a long moment, a pair of hazy gold eyes met mine as she tried to steady her ragged breath. I smiled slightly at her as an alert, non-sleepy Narc began to appear. I wasn't completely done, though. Not by a long shot.

I moved over her and began to kiss down her soft skin, tugging her shorts down and exposing her to the cool air in the bedroom.

She spoke in a raspy voice. “What are you...”

Pressing my thumb to her mouth, I murmured, “Just need a taste.”

I wanted to fucking devour her—a taste was a good fucking start though. I placed her legs over my shoulders and my tongue met her soft, wet heat. Her surprised moan had me feeling a sense of satisfaction as I began to

devour her perfect honey and worked on bringing her to a second climax.

“I can’t,” she groaned as her body began to tense, my tongue plunging into her tight hole.

She absolutely could.

“Now I don’t believe that, baby girl.” I shot her a smile from between her legs, and they tightened around me slightly. Rolling my tongue over her clit and sucking on it, Narc gasped and arched up, nearly moving out of my arms, causing me to throw an arm across her hips to keep her locked in place. I wasn’t going to let her run away from me, not when she was so damn close to giving me what I wanted. “If you want to get out of bed, you have to come,” I growled. I slipped up a hand to gently massage her tight breast, and a whimper escaped her throat as I decided it was time for my beautiful girl to come. I sucked on her clit before gently biting down.

“Dorian!” she cried out, and I felt a very masculine satisfaction fill me at the relief and pure pleasure in her voice. As her body sank into the bed, I began to lick up her release, wanting every ounce of what I’d worked for. She tasted so fucking sweet.

“You okay, baby girl?” I rested between her legs on my hands and knees, examining her dazed face.

“Dorian... That was one hell of a way to wake up,” she said breathlessly.

“You could get woken up like that every morning,” I offered.

She groaned at the thought, and I pulled the covers around us, wrapping her body into mine. The smell of our desire and her release satisfied the energy rippling under my skin. I kissed her forehead as she slowly trailed a pattern on my chest. While I wanted her more than my next breath, I wouldn’t trade the contentment between us for absolutely anything—I fucking loved having her in my arms.

“I’m glad you came to stay over,” she whispered. “You never have before.”

Because of this exact reason.

I could barely maintain my sanity around her. I wanted to fuck her nearly all of the time—no, *all* of the time—so I’d always been careful around her with my powers. Especially since I wanted her for so many other reasons outside of what I *knew* would be mind-blowing sex.

“I didn’t trust myself.” I tugged on her ear with my teeth, making her shudder.

Comfortable silence filtered in around us before she spoke. “You know...

I mean...how is this going to work between us? I mean, shit. I'm not exactly very experienced."

I knew that. We all knew that. It was one of the reasons I'd held off from having sex with her. As much as I would have loved to, I just didn't think she was ready for that. Until she asked me, I would try to refrain. I didn't want my powers to be the reason that I claimed her; I wanted that moment to be special between us. That was exactly what she deserved—special.

"We'll figure it out," I whispered. "I promise."

She nodded. "I believe you."



After a few minutes of relaxed quiet, the dawn light growing, I told her my secret. "When I came by, I saw a shadow on your balcony."

I grunted as her head smacked into my chin, trying to sit up to see my expression. "What?!"

My lips pressed together, trying to keep nonchalant about the situation to try and not freak her out. "I came by, and there was a shadow on your balcony. It disappeared upon my entrance, but it was there. You were fully awake, baby girl—it would've been right in your sight line on the balcony."

"Fuck," she muttered, realizing the implication. "I'm getting distracted."

"You just have a lot going on. You need to rely on us more."

Her gold eyes met mine, and she nodded. "You're right."

"Morning," a deep, grumpy voice called out from the door. Alaric rounded the bed and looked at the two of us, his gaze narrowed on me with a knowing look. I didn't feel bad at fucking all.

"Hey." She frowned, sitting up.

Alaric's fists clenched. I'm sure he could feel her desire in the air.

"There was an attempted attack last night," he stated softly.

"Really?" Her face went rigid. "Where?"

"Near Declan's bar."

Narc shot into the bathroom. I heard the shower turn on and couldn't help but groan, thinking of her perfect ass in those tiny shorts, which unfortunately had disappeared behind the door now.

“Sorry to interrupt your morning.” Alaric chuckled as I swung my legs over the edge of the bed.

“Don’t worry.” I yawned casually, stretching my arms before adding, “Already had my breakfast, so I’m ready to start the day.”

Alaric cursed at the implication, and I moved toward her balcony to go get ready. Suddenly, this day seemed a lot brighter.

CHAPTER 16

NARCISSA



“So, what did he say?” I asked Raphi.

The attack had been unsuccessful, but two werewolves were in healing centers near their packlands. Something ‘demonic’ attempted to attack them, they claimed. They didn’t mention who’d saved them, but I suspected it was Declan.

Raphi chuckled. “Nothing, of course. Dodged my question, but I’m positive it was him.”

I took a sip of my coffee and walked toward Declan, his long, lean form resting against the dark bar.

“Lass,” he greeted with a mock toast of his whiskey glass.

I pressed a finger to his chest and threw some power at him, making him grunt.

“What was that for?” He scowled, rubbing his chest as if the small surge had actually hurt him.

“I didn’t want any misunderstandings,” I explained easily. “Now, why won’t you admit to helping those women?”

“Why does it matter?” He tilted his head while playing with his lip ring. “I promise that the force was demonic and we are on the right path.”

“Dude!” I slapped my hand down in confusion while ignoring his

statement. “How is helping someone a bad thing?”

“I’m rarely helpful,” he said plainly. His dark red and black hair was messier than usual, a slight tension to his frame. “Do I really seem like the type that would’ve helped with this?”

Yes, actually. He did.

With a surprising amount of grace, I jumped over the bar and walked towards him, pressing a hand against his chest. “Is it a reputation thing?”

His ears turned pink as he offered me an amused look. “No idea what you’re talking about.”

My mouth dropped. “It totally is! Sonofabitch, Declan! You *like* people thinking you’re an asshole!”

“I am an asshole,” he posited, but there was a slight amount of hesitance.

I shook my head, yet I understood. I kept up my Queen crazy bullshit for a reason. “Why?” I asked, knowing he’d understand.

He worried his lip ring again and shrugged. “Keeps things consistent.”

And so he doesn’t let anyone close. That worried me. I had no idea what Declan thought about us, really—if he even thought there was an ‘us.’ I just knew he found me attractive, as he’d mentioned before. But the two of us? I had no idea if he viewed me even as a friend.

“Is that going to be an issue between us?” I risked. I could always say I meant friendship.

His emerald eyes flashed with heat before he looked away for a moment. “No.”

“Because...”

The bar door swung open and Zachariah walked in, scaring half of the crowd in attendance. I watched people leave, sneaking out the door behind him, as he sat down at the bar. Declan handed him a bottle off the top shelf and a solid crystal glass. I was momentarily distracted by their familiarity—I mean Zachariah had his *own* bottle at Declan’s bar.

Then it clicked. *Oh my God.*

“You guys are totally best friends!”

Zachariah smiled behind his glass as Declan scowled.

“I have no friends,” Declan grumbled. He turned on his heel and stormed towards the other end of the bar, swearing up a storm.

“Keep telling yourself that,” I murmured.

“We’re totally best friends,” Zachariah confirmed with a proud smile.

I leaned over the bar and took a sip of his glass before I remembered how

weird he'd been the night before. Instead of bringing it up, I asked him an important question. "Are you coming with us to the chaos's estate today?"

"Am I coming with you into a house full of demons?" he asked, his silver eyes amused. "What do you think, little rose?"

I pressed my lips together as Raphi sat next to him. "We need to leave fairly soon. The other guys are grabbing our bikes."

Zachariah nodded. "Ours are out front."

I tilted my head. "You ride?"

Damn. Zachariah on a motorcycle? Declan? My boys? Man, this spelled trouble for me. How cool was it that my harem and I all rode motorcycles? We needed matching jackets. Maybe on the back of theirs, I'd put 'Property of Narc.' That would change it up a bit for people, now wouldn't it?

The rumble of motors sounded from outside, and I grinned in anticipation. My boots were laced up, and I was wearing a pair of ripped jeans with a long-sleeve shirt. I felt only semi-badass today, but if I put on my leather jacket, I'd feel better. My face was free of makeup, and I looked pretty fucking young today, so I would need all the assistance I could get on at least *looking* badass.

"Baby girl," Dorian sang, and I had to hold in my groan. Forever would that name be associated with fantastic morning activities—like him between my legs, devouring me. The sexy demon walked in, handed me my helmet, and lifted me over the counter.

I was glad Zachariah had scared away almost everyone in the bar, because it really wasn't very badass to be lifted up like that.

"Thank you." I kissed his cheek before pulling my hair back into a messy braid.

Dorian turned his head and kissed me briefly, surprising me, before going back outside. I shook my head and looked at Raphi's curious expression. Zachariah didn't look surprised, though, so I wondered how much the man knew. Nosy bastard.

Good thing I thought he was sexy.

"Shall we?" I ventured.

We left the bar and walked into the humid air. My baby sat parked between the other boys', a classic piece of art.

I would like to state that the five of us were cheesy as hell and got matching bikes with different custom artwork. *I know—relationship goals.* My bike was a sleek black with two skulls on either side. Raphi's was a deep

green with a hand-painted massive claw mark ripped down one side. The twins' bikes, deep and light blue, had a Scandinavian phrase written down the body. Dorian's was a deep purple ombré that faded to black. It was just so cool—I mean, we were cool, so it made sense.

“Jesus,” I muttered, looking at Zachariah's bike, because I knew how much it must have cost. It was all silver, too. I narrowed my eyes at his bare chest while he slipped on a leather jacket. Did he ever wear a shirt?

“You're drooling,” Dorian murmured. My head snapped up as I narrowed my eyes at him, wanting to argue. But then Alaric wrapped an arm around me and Abel adjusted my helmet, making me feel all melty between them.

“Are we good to go?” he asked. I looked around at my boys. Declan walked out and got onto a bright, neon green bike that had a freakin' clover on the side. Did he create the stereotypes or just relish them? Chicken or egg?

“Yeah, let's go.”

I started up my bike, and the seven of us pulled away from the curb and began to drive slowly through the crowded city. I led, but I could feel my boys following close behind me. The supernaturals outside slinked into the shadows as we passed, making me laugh quietly to myself. I revved my engine as we left the city and traveled to the massive estate that the chaos lived in.

I absolutely loved New Orleans, but there was something beautiful about the area outside the city limits. I leaned forward and began to speed, which would no doubt make my boys pissed. Still, I could feel the wind rushing past me, and my hair fell from its braid. My tinted visor gave everything a purple hue.

As I turned, my bike leaned responsively to the side. I began to speed down the long driveway, and I noticed that all the thick trees that lined it were larger than before. The estate at the end of it made me scowl though, taking away a bit of enjoyment from the ride. This was going to be so fucking dramatic. I stopped in front of it, tires crunching to a halt in the gravel drive.

Samantha stood watching me with humor. I pulled off my helmet and gave her an annoyed glare.

“Baby,” Raphi growled, coming to a stop.

“Yes?” I asked innocently.

The overprotective wolf mumbled something under his breath and lifted me from my bike, looking over my face. “You took that turn way too fucking fast.”

“He’s right, lass,” Declan agreed, eyeing my bike in concern.

I rolled my eyes at the cranky leprechaun. “You do not get to be worried about me. You still haven’t explained yourself from earlier.” *Didn’t save anyone, my ass.*

Zachariah chuckled before releasing his locs from their tight silver binding. “Declan, you reap what you sow.”

“What he said,” Dorian quipped, relishing the darkening scowl on Declan’s face. *Oh, I could see the two of them fighting a lot.* They’d have to compromise if they wanted to be in my harem. If not, I’d kick both their asses. Then have fantastic sex with them.

I just wanted to get laid.

“Stop it,” Alaric ordered before taking me from Raphi.

“Give her back,” Raphael demanded.

“We have a meeting,” Abel reminded us.

Samantha interrupted the family drama. “Are we done with the harem soap opera?”

“I was liking it,” Astro called from the balcony.

“Inside.” I nodded toward the house, and we barged in without so much as a knock, not waiting for Samantha to show us into what could only be described as...a piece of architectural artwork.

I had to give credit where credit was due. Their house was as dramatic as they were. It was not only renovated but styled elegantly with crystal and marble everywhere. I would have wanted to spend more time here if it wasn’t for its inhabitants.

Astro appeared in the foyer, and Samantha twirled in from outside while sliding to lean against the bannister by the stairs.

“Where is everyone?” I asked, looking around.

Samantha sighed. “Marcus made us put everyone outside. You guys apparently are super important.”

I chuckled. “Where did you get that idea?” I asked as they led us upstairs. I knew Marcus would be waiting for us—this exchange seemed far too important to him to miss.

Which reminded me... I turned to look at Zachariah and he winked, pulling a plastic bag from his jacket. It had a piece of my hair in it. I didn’t even want to fucking know how that happened. I narrowed my eyes as he flashed me a smile.

Crazy bastard.

“So, are you guys all together or something?” Samantha wondered out loud. Her robes dragged up the stairs as Astro twirled a piece of his hair while watching my reaction.

“That’s none of your fucking business,” Raphi snapped.

Samantha giggled as she tossed her curls back. “So, yes.”

“Why do you ask?” It didn’t seem like something she would actually be interested in, but her expression was a bit more curious than normal.

“Well, you see, I’m trying to convince Astro and Marcus to both date me. Unfortunately, they aren’t sold on the idea. It’s weird, because they’re both fantastic in bed, but Astro over here is super possessive.”

Not the answer I’d been expecting.

Also... Astro possessive? The three of them sleeping together? I couldn’t fucking imagine that. After a moment of silence, Dorian began to laugh as Declan muttered something in Gaelic. I grinned until we entered the third floor lounge, Samantha scowling at their reactions and my gaze moving about our new environment.

Marcus stood near a center marble table that reflected the hazy mid-morning light. I could see the way he watched Samantha now, and it fascinated me. I mean, don’t get me wrong, it made a bit too much sense... but that was a whole lot of crazy I didn’t feel equipped to handle this morning.

“Do you have what we need?” he asked as Samantha wrapped her arm around his waist. Astro scowled, taking her hand. It seemed they’d already figured it out, whether she realized it or not.

Zachariah took out the plastic bag, and Astro frowned. “Why not cut it off here?”

“I didn’t trust you with my haircut.”

Astro scoffed and took the bag, and Marcus motioned to the flat marble surface. My eyes widened as I looked down onto a pentagram engraved about half an inch deep into the surface. *See why humans made these silly connections?* Marcus, in all his creepiness, closed his eyes and began to hum. My boys shifted with discomfort at the magic that surged through the room without hesitation, the unfamiliar sensation making me feel uncomfortable as well.

Suddenly, the marble surface began to glow a soft red, drawing my eyes back to it. The pentagram filled with a sleek red liquid that I realized was blood. It shined with almost a golden haze as Marcus’s voice rose in a

language that I briefly recognized as demonic.

Someone's hand pressed into my back as a hazy figure began to form in the center of the table, barely a foot tall yet full of thick, familiar power.

Fuck. He really was back.

Marcus sighed and looked at the unassuming figure, his features unclear but his presence very obviously on Earth.

"Where?"

He frowned and narrowed his eyes. "Not *where* so much as *in whom*."

"Is that a sex joke?"

Samantha chuckled as Astro smirked at my joke.

Marcus continued, "It seems he's using a vessel, but he is very much residing in your city—surprisingly close to your own place of residence."

Dorian muttered a curse, and I began to think about the shadow he'd seen on my balcony. I nodded, and Marcus let the haze fall as he closed off the spell. Once it was over, the three eccentric demons seemed oddly calm.

I offered a small thankful smile. "Thank you."

Thank you for confirming exactly what I had assumed.

"No, thank *you*," Astro said, shaking the baggie of my dark hair. I rolled my eyes, and the seven of us strode down the stairs, finding our way to the door. I had no intention of staying here any longer than necessary.

My lips pressed together, and I realized that while we had confirmed Asmodeus's presence, we still knew very little. I hated that.

I was going to punch that bastard when I saw him.

"Where to now?" Raphi asked as we approached our bikes. I paused and looked at my phone hesitantly, then opened my mouth with caution.

"I think we can go ho—"

A hand moved over my mouth. "Don't." Alaric shook his head as Abel grinned.

"He's right, sweetie. Every time you say *that*, it rings," he said, shooting a meaningful glance at my phone.

"Say what?" Zachariah asked.

"That we have the day off."

My phone buzzed in my hand.

"Damn it, Dorian!" Raphi hissed.

Declan grinned. "Not me this time."

I moved my finger to zap him before moving the phone to my ear. "Hello?"

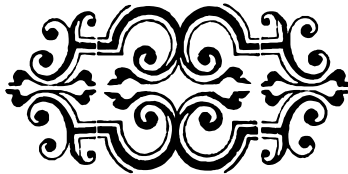
“More killings on Bourbon Street,” Draco said. “We’re holding people off, but they’re asking questions.”

I swallowed. Hard. “Alright. I’ll be there soon.”

Without saying anything, completely positive my men had overheard, I slid onto my bike and blasted towards the city. I was really getting tired of being one step behind this demonic asshole.

CHAPTER 17

ALARIC



Raphi and I stood right behind Narc as she talked with Draco. I barely restrained myself from pulling her back into my arms. Instead, I focused on the three bodies lined up in front of us on the floor. We were currently stationed in Declan's bar as the other supernaturals attempted to keep up appearances for the tourists.

"It was just as before," Draco grunted. "We were all there. One moment, the bodies weren't there...and then they were. The three of them had been maybe only ten feet away from us, talking on a terrace overlooking Bourbon."

I grunted. This had the demon prince's name all over it. Narcissa frowned and looked away from the hellhound for a moment, and I heard Raphi growl as Draco stepped closer to her. Narcissa offered the hellhound a frustrated expression.

"You said we could talk after the meeting," Draco reminded her. I couldn't get a good read on Draco. I had a feeling he was into Narcissa, but it could also be something else. She seemed to signify something important to him...I just didn't know what that was. I hoped it was his respect for her as a leader because anything else was unfucking acceptable.

"That I did, Draco."

Draco offered her a patient expression, and I practically heard Narc's groan of frustration in my head. I didn't think she needed to talk to this asshole at all, but I did sort of love it when she got all huffy and cranky about having to talk to certain people. Mostly because the pinched expression on her face was cute, and the way she told people to fuck off turned me on in a

way I wasn't ready to analyze.

"After the bodies," she determined.

The bar door slammed open, and Narcissa turned to view our new guest. *Motherfucking annoying pest.* I couldn't control the snarl that escaped my lips as Jonathan stood there, looking like he very much understood everything going on—including the bodies on the floor.

"Jonathan?" Narcissa frowned. She tilted her head and crossed her arms in a self-protective manner. My hand ran over her back gently as I resisted the urge to wrap her up possessively in my grip.

"Narc," he greeted. "I suspected I might find you here."

There was no way to hide dead bodies, nor disguise a room full of shifters. I could see Narcissa struggling with confusion. As far as we'd been aware, Jonathan's father had left him completely in the dark about all of this. About *us*. Yet here he was, acting as if this was completely normal...

"Did you?" she hedged.

He grinned and tucked his hands in his pockets. "Dad spilled the beans. Now I understand what you were saying about us not being able to be together. But now I know, so...problem solved."

I would have laughed at her expression if pure rage wasn't boiling up inside of me. Raphael tensed next to me, and I worried he would shift—only to realize that his wolf might just take care of Jonathan for us. That wouldn't be the worst solution in the world...

Draco looked at me over Narc's head. "Is this kid for real?"

I suppose he was a kid, wasn't he? Yet something about him didn't feel childish anymore, and while he wasn't built like any of us—tiny in comparison and devoid of magic—there was an odd energy I was picking up. Narc gave me a meaningful look that said she felt something similar.

"I see," she muttered in thought. "Then you're aware I'm in the middle of an investigation."

"I want to help." He nodded knowingly, and I had to close my eyes to avoid snapping his neck. I just didn't understand how this kid thought he had a chance with our beautiful Queen. I was surprised constantly that she'd been fated to be in my life, but Jonathan? Absolutely fucking not.

"I appreciate that," she said. "How about I get a handle on this and give you a call back?"

He chuckled. "No, I'm going to stay. I can't let my girl get hurt, can I?"

Motherfucker.

Draco stepped forward. “Listen. Jonathan Lourn, correct?”

Jonathan’s gaze moved from Narc to the hellhound with distaste. “Yes. What about it?”

“I don’t have to be nice to you or keep you alive. I may suffer a punishment from our Queen over here, or maybe not. The point is, I’m about two seconds away from snapping you in half for being so goddamn annoying. So I would appreciate it if you left.”

I was hard-pressed to keep the smirk from my face as Narcissa looked down to hide her own satisfaction. I had to give it to the hellhound bastard—that was pretty bold. I also knew Narcissa was about to fucking laugh. Maybe Draco would turn out to be more of an ally than we’d expected...

“Narc?” Jonathan demanded.

It was my turn to speak. “You wanted to be part of this world, Jonathan? First rule is don’t talk to the fucking Queen unless its through one of us.”

Raphael rumbled, “Or at all.”

Jonathan’s face grew red, a scowl taking over his expression. “Really?”

The question was posed for Narc’s benefit.

Her golden eyes swirled with green as she spoke, choosing each word with care. “As I said, let me give you a call when we have something to actually work with.”

His nostrils flared with annoyance before he stalked out of the bar. Narcissa waited all of two minutes before she started laughing uncontrollably. She looked at Draco. “Oh, man! That was fucking awesome, dude.”

Draco tried to not smile, and I wanted to roll my eyes at his inflated ego. I respected that he quickly changed the topic. “You probably noticed it on your own, Your Majesty, but his power levels were very odd for a human. There’s something off with him.”

Narcissa nodded. “We need to keep tabs on him. After what we learned from our visit to the chaos, I would put him on the suspect list of possible vessels. It’s very odd timing for him to suddenly learn about our community.”

“Should we talk to the mayor?” My brother asked as he strode from the back room, obviously having heard every word.

“No,” Narc said. “We don’t want him to think we’re curious. We should try to compile a list of anyone we suspect...I do not want this turning into a witch hunt, though.”

Dorian appeared next to me. “You positive, love? We hate witches, remember?”

“Not as much as we hate our current problem,” Zachariah drawled from his place near the bodies.

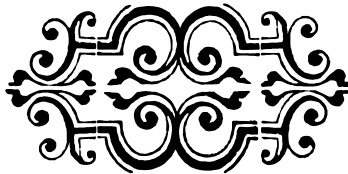
She nodded and looked up to Declan. “Alright. I need a drink.”

I murmured a curse under my breath as Declan perked up, glad of something to do. “Comin’ right up, lass.”

An inebriated Narcissa was always an experience.

CHAPTER 18

DECLAN



“**M**aybe we should take it easy for the rest of the night, lass.”

Narcissa lasted three hours of fairly impressive drinking before her body finally succumbed to the alcohol it had consumed. I always marveled at how long it took her to get drunk. I’d even had her zap me just so she could understand me better in her altered state. I figured after the first whiskey bottle she wouldn’t be able to concentrate very well.

I wasn’t positive if I was glad her powers allowed her a tolerance for alcohol, or just concerned. I think her grandmother had once mentioned that because of their magic, the alcohol only affects them one-eighth as much as it should have...or something like that. I hadn’t believed it until I saw Narcissa drink.

“Me?” She leaned over the counter while taking another sip of my drink. “Declan, I am not drunk.”

I groaned at the dip of cleavage I could see, her perfect, round breasts pressed together. Fuck. This woman was going to kill me.

I loved hearing my name drop from her lips though. I braced my forearms on the bar. “You are most definitely drunk and probably need to switch to water.”

Her eyes flashed, and she flicked my arm in frustration. “It’ll be out of my system in a few hours.”

It would be faster than that.

It was one of the reasons the other men felt comfortable leaving her here while they helped with the current shift. The people who’d died earlier had been smaller members of the shifter community, and the wolves were fairly

worked up about it. So instead of her dealing with it, we'd voted to clear out the bar for the most part so she could get drunk in peace. The hellhounds were here, but Draco was keeping everyone at a distance—including himself.

Maybe the bastard was smarter than I gave him credit for.

"How about something to eat then?" I suggested. She leaned closer until we were almost nose to nose. Those beautiful eyes were turning a bright emerald green as the air became saturated with her power. It wasn't a harmful power, it just showcased how much she actually had.

I'd known how powerful she was from the time she came of age. Unbeknownst to her, that power surge had brought me forward from the estate I kept outside of town, and it had taken all of an hour to realize that it was coming from the tiny woman strolling around Bourbon Street as if she owned it.

Which, technically, she did.

So far, I'd been able to keep just how much I obsessed over her to myself, but I knew it wouldn't last. Even this morning she'd seen right through my asshole routine with exceptionally frustrating ease. It was why I'd always avoided spending too much time with her. There wasn't a very solid line when it came to me being her friend versus something more.

I chuckled at that. I'd been alive for hundreds of years, and this small woman fucked with my head more than anything else I'd faced thus far.

"What are you laughing about?" she asked as her hair began falling out of its loose braid.

"Us," I admitted, hesitating after the word had already left my lips.

Her face softened. "What about us?"

I shrugged and tossed her a nonchalant smile. "How long we've known each other."

She nodded and pulled away a little, resting on her elbows. "But I feel like you've always kept me at arm's length. You know? Like, this is the first time we've spent a considerable amount of time together. Before now, you would just sorta appear randomly."

This was exactly what I meant.

I rubbed a piece of her hair between my fingers. "I did keep you at arm's length."

Her eyes became more golden with curiosity. "Why?"

How did I explain it to her without sounding like a fucking boy with a crush? Or an obsessed fool who clearly had too much time on his hands?

Both felt accurate.

“You were young when we first met,” I rationalized.

Her eyes sparked, and she responded instantly. “Why would that have mattered if we were *just* friends?”

I almost laughed. The lass clearly had my number, and it was only a matter of time till she called me out on it. My hand snuck out and grasped her jaw gently, and I kept her gaze right on me, running a thumb over her bottom lip. “Because, Narcissa, you know we would never just be friends.”

A bright blush filled her face while excitement sparked in her eyes. I’d never doubted the chemistry between us, but I found myself more caught up with her age than Zachariah was. While he came from a time where eighteen was nothing significant, I just felt like I was somehow taking away her options.

It was beyond shite, because she had a choice in who she was with, of course, no matter how many men or women that included. Maybe I was scared of my decision to involve myself with her and changing my own options in life—of changing my level of freedom that I’d valued for so long. A freedom that now felt like bitter loneliness even on the best days. I knew damn well that once I took that dive into Narcissa, I would never come back up for air.

“Then what would we be?” she asked, her alcohol-glazed eyes already clearing.

I hummed and moved my hand from her jaw down to smooth the column of her throat, meeting her gaze with my own. “Whatever you want us to be, lass.”

That was the fucking truth of the matter.

She licked her red lips in a small, subconscious movement, and I caught myself staring. I looked up to find her eyes on mine, and a needy look passed through her eyes. *Fuck*. I was already turned on from being around her. Now to see how much she wanted me in return? It was just fucking painful.

I inhaled, trying to find some level of control and patience as I worried my lip ring.

“You know, I hated your lip ring at first,” she teased, leaning further over so that we were nose to nose again. I caught some of the hellhounds checking out her ass out of the corner of my eye. Without preamble, I lifted her over the bar to sit on top of the counter. I didn’t care how loyal her wee doggies were, I didn’t want them looking at her like that.

“No you didn’t.” I caged her, standing between her legs, as she recovered from my quick movement. I knew she loved it though—her legs locked around me just enough to keep me there with her.

“Why did you move me?” she asked curiously.

It was a good question, and one I had to answer truthfully because I needed a distraction from how close and accessible she was to me now.

“I don’t like people looking at your arse.”

She smirked and glanced back at the group behind her before turning back to me. “And why is that?”

Because it’s mine.

Instead of answering out loud, I kissed her shoulder and turned to grab a new bottle of whiskey, because fuck if I didn’t need a drink myself. I turned back to set it down and was instantly caught by her.

Narcissa leaned forward and pressed her lips to mine, and I moved in closer to steady her from falling over. At least, that’s what I told myself. I didn’t even attempt to lighten the kiss she offered me, her lips cool, her perfumed scent floating around me. My hand caught in her hair, and a groan stuck in my throat as she tugged very lightly on my piercing. The whiskey bottle was put aside as my large hand grazed her curvy, small waist.

“Declan,” she mumbled, her voice breathy and filled with need.

“Aye, lass?” I responded, my accent growing slightly thicker with heat.

Instead of answering, she softened against me, and I wholly lost the battle of holding back my feelings. Narcissa may have been younger than me, but she was capable of leading an entire city and held her own in every single fucking situation she’d been placed in. I couldn’t hide behind the excuse of her age any longer—not when she was offering me her lips so fucking sweetly.

In a way, she’d dug her own grave. I wouldn’t be letting her go now. I couldn’t. After all, I’d been around since the times when it was completely acceptable to throw a woman over your shoulder and take her home.

I was tempted to see if I could pull that off with Narc before she killed me. I was a lucky bastard, but not that lucky...

Our kiss hardened my entire body, and my power clung onto her seductive energy. I could tell how turned on she was, and I forced myself to pull back, not wanting others to see her like this—especially the hellhounds. My hands cupped her face gently, and I looked down at her with a slightly furrowed brow, trying to control myself. Her lips curled into a satisfied smile,

and fuck if that didn't just make my heart beat faster than before.

"Lass," I murmured, "you aren't..."

"I'm not what?" she asked, her gaze sharp. "Whether I've had one drink or a full bottle, it doesn't change that I think you're sexy."

I groaned, because damn if she didn't sound extremely honest and straight-up sober. I leaned in and she met my lips eagerly, her breath minty and cool against my heated skin. I groaned as she pressed into me and wrapped her legs around my waist. I could hear a few catcalls from the back of the bar, and a surge of protectiveness and possessiveness crawled forward. I lifted her off the bar and took her toward the small office I kept in the back.

"Lass," I mumbled against her throat as her fingers ran over my back, causing my skin to break out into shivers. "You're killing me."

She laughed softly and pressed in close to nip my ear, making my cock jerk to attention. My hand sought out the skin right under her flimsy shirt, and she arched into me as my rough palm ran against her smooth, small waist. I was so lost in our kiss that I barely even recognized when someone leaned against the door frame.

"Well!" Zachariah's amused voice rang out. "Glad to see we've all admitted our feelings."

Motherfucker.

I cursed against her lips as she pulled me closer, breaking the kiss and peering at Zachariah.

"Hmm," she replied tartly. "I don't remember you admitting anything, Zachariah."

I grinned and buried my head against her neck, nibbling the skin and rubbing my nose into the soft texture. I heard him mutter something in French before he was right in our space as well.

"Would you like for me to admit something, little rose?" he dared.

She ran a delicate hand through my hair, and fuck if I wasn't nearly purring. I felt like a damn dog, but the woman had a fucking magical touch. Plus, it was the first time I had connected with anyone lately, outside my friendship with Zachariah. And that was only because Zachariah had been nothing if not persistent. Probably my only real friend.

Well, except her.

It had been a lonely existence, though. So her touch was lighting me up and satisfying a part of me that had felt so empty for so damn long. I had a feeling I was going to be a clingy bastard with her.

“I wouldn’t *like* anything,” Narc teased. “But if you have something to say...”

I groaned as he grasped her face and kissed her hard, not taking her away from me but stealing her attention. I muttered a curse and moved to the side as a small surprised sound came from the back of her throat.

Then he was gone, and her eyes went wide in shock, staring at the door he’d disappeared through.

“You know,” I mumbled, smoothing a hand over her leg, “he still didn’t admit to anything.”

Narc shot me a look and began laughing so hard I couldn’t help but chuckle too. I felt a small bit of hope grow in my chest that we could make this work, even if the situation was unique.

I wanted her like I’d never wanted anyone or anything before—I didn’t think I could give her up even if I wanted to.

CHAPTER 19

NARCISSA



I stood on my balcony terrace, the late night air running across my skin and lazily breezing past the filmy curtains that hung in the doorway. My hands clasped the railing as I breathed in the humidity. A peaceful spirit or two floated across my front yard, but I didn't have it in me to call them out. I mean, what did it really matter?

Lord. I was on a freaky *Love Boat* tonight.

I sighed dreamily like a schoolgirl, thinking about Zachariah's dominating kiss and Declan's teasing, sexy kiss. *Yeah, I'd admit it. I was totally into them.* The oddest part, despite Raphi's grumpiness, was that the boys really didn't seem very bothered by it.

Or maybe it was more that they weren't surprised by it...

The four of them had walked me home, and now I found myself oddly lonely. I'd spent all day with them, but I guess it just showed how much I liked being around them. I turned to go back into the bedroom and let out a curse of surprise.

"Dude!" I hit Zachariah's chest. "What the hell is wrong with you?"

I changed my mind. I didn't want him around. What a bastard!

The silver-eyed voodoo priest backed me up against the railing and pinned me with a stare. He leaned down, and I surrendered to his kiss and

shivered as his cool power drifted over my skin...

Except his power didn't normally feel cool to the touch. Not like this.

I pushed away and wrapped my powers around whatever the fuck had just assaulted my mouth.

"Are you fucking serious?" I mumbled as the Zachariah look-alike melted into what appeared to be a demon. It was frozen by my power and trembling, its body almost completely black and tarrish in appearance.

"*Chérie?*" Dorian's voice called, and I kept my powers focused as I resisted the urge to rip off my lips.

"Dorian," I called out, voice strained. "Get up here. Now, please!"

He was behind me instantly and let out a very non-Dorian sound from deep in the back of his throat. It was primal and territorial. *Hot*. It was fucking hot.

"Whose form did he take?" Dorian demanded.

"Zachariah," I murmured as the creature's eyes flashed to Dorian with fear. My demon approached, his hand passing through my power that encased the trespasser. The skin on Dorian's hand glowed as he grasped the demon's jaw and tilted it.

"He shouldn't have been able to get through the demonic realm portal," he whispered. "For demons like him, glamour is mandatory because of humans. He is clearly not properly glamourous."

"Which means someone snuck him in here," I concluded.

"What did he do?" Dorian asked with sudden concern.

"Kissed me," I said harshly.

Dorian's nostrils flared as he looked back at the creature. Without pretense, he closed his eyes and began to let his seductive power grasp the demon, replacing mine. I pulled back and watched as desire did what it did best. *Take or destroy*. It destroyed this demon without a hint of hesitation. It completely absorbed his energy as the air cleared of any remembrance of him.

I took a deep breath as we both stood there for a moment with frustrated and shocked expressions.

"The others are going to be livid. Raphi—especially his wolf—is going to freak out," he stated softly, almost to himself.

"Why am I going to freak?" my overprotective wolf asked, easily jumping onto my balcony because stairs were for losers.

I kept my mouth shut.

“There was a shapeshifter demon here that somehow got through without being assigned a proper glamour for society,” Dorian said. Raphi let out a growl, and Dorian finished somberly, “He took Zachariah’s form and kissed her.”

That about did it.

“Good job, Dorian,” I shouted from over Raphi’s shoulder. He jumped down off the balcony while holding me, then loped toward their house. I just rolled my eyes as Dorian followed, looking fairly entertained but still concerned.

“This is literally no different than my house, Raphi,” I huffed. “Also, this whole ‘sack of potatoes’ way of lifting that you’ve got going on here—not so badass.”

His wolf merely offered a growl in reply, and Dorian let out a laugh as he dialed a number. My eyes went wide as I tried to stop him, but I heard him begin to explain the events to Zachariah and Declan. *Jesus Christ.* The bastard looked so proud as we stomped up the stairs into the twins’ home.

I loved their house. I mean, not as much as mine, but it was beautiful. It was a bright, key-lime green with two-story Grecian columns supporting two matching balconies. I muttered uselessly as we walked into the house and through the first floor.

Of course, despite my upside-down state, I did take a moment to appreciate the interior of their home as well.

First, their original wood floors were in beautiful, almost perfect condition. All the walls had been painted their original color, and the ceilings were extremely high—dizzily high. The boys had chosen a deep blue and yellow decor style that spread throughout the bottom floor. I could tell by how dark it was that they only had the oil lamps on tonight, and the windows were all covered with long, expensive curtains. I frowned as I saw a large throw blanket on one of their sofas, the one detail that didn’t match.

I know, I know. Petty. But come on! I couldn’t help it.

Raphi ignored the staircase at the end of the hall and turned through the door opposite the elaborate dining room that they literally never used. The twins both went quiet as Raphi walked into the kitchen and set me on the counter, and I looked around the brightly lit black and white kitchen.

“Hey,” Abel said, the word sounding like a question as he walked toward me. I offered my sweetheart a look, squeezing his hand as Raphi took a napkin and ran it under a stream of water while Dorian took out a bottle of

wine and settled in for the wolf show. Alaric just seemed confused.

“What happened?” Alaric asked.

I put up a finger, not wanting to make this worse as Raphi let out a growl. His eyes were very, very dark, and I held back a surprised sound as he began to wipe off the demon’s kiss. I was thankful, because it was literally what I’d wanted to do, but this was verging on ridiculous. Alaric’s head tilted to the side in confusion as Raphi leaned in and began to nuzzle my neck and scent me.

“So...” Abel started cautiously, as if he wasn’t positive about what to say. That made two of us.

For the moment, I ignored him, grabbing Raphi’s shoulders and peering into his eyes, which were turning back to green. “Are you going to be okay?”

His wolf released a deep growl and kissed me hard before stalking out of the room. I offered Dorian a dry look and flipped him off. He just *had* to go telling Raphi about the demon...

“What the fuck was that?” Alaric asked finally.

I motioned to Dorian, and he began explaining as Abel stood in front of me, urging me to wrap my legs and arms around him. I smiled at the comfortable nature of the gesture, and his massive hand moved in a gentle pattern on my leg.

“So was that the shadow you saw before?” Alaric asked, looking furious.

“Most likely,” Dorian said. “I’m just glad we were on watch.”

“Yeah,” I drawled. “Was anyone going to clue me into this new ‘watch’ thing you’re doing outside my house?”

“New?” Abel chuckled. “Try the past two years.”

“You’ve been watching my house for *two years*?”

“We’re your guard, sweetie,” Alaric said easily, as if it was nothing. But I think we all knew that them watching my house was totally *something*.

The front door opened as Zachariah all but stormed in, his eyes lit with concern as Declan followed lazily behind. I blushed a little bit as I thought about each of their kisses.

“What the hell is going on?” Zachariah asked.

I groaned, jumped off the counter, and squeezed both of their shoulders in passing. I needed to find Raphi. I was worried about him. My feet were quiet on the stairs as I made my way up the polished wood and towards the farthest door toward the front of the house. I didn’t knock before I pushed into the room, Raphi looking at me from where he sat on the end of his bed.

Oh God.

He didn't have a shirt on. I tried to not let my eyes stray as his gaze darkened slightly. He spoke in a voice barely above a whisper. "Narc, you probably shouldn't be up here until I calm down more."

Now that was just a plain old challenge.

Plus, I could not and would not walk away from those sculpted muscles. I mean, Jesus! I nibbled my bottom lip, trying to hide a smile as I closed the door behind me and leaned against it. A low rumble came from Raphi's chest as he stood up slowly, and I nearly groaned at his built chest and ridiculous abs.

Who the fuck had abs like that?

He walked forward, his sugary scent surrounding me as his large arms landed on either side of me on the door. Those pretty green eyes were dark, now with impassioned heat instead of anger, but the possessiveness was still very much there. He looked at me like he wanted to just eat me up and devour me whole.

I wanted him to. If this was *Little Red Riding Hood*, I'd be seeking out the big bad wolf to fuck his brains out. Granny could get her own goddamned cookies. *Inappropriate childhood story analogy?* Absolutely. How proud were we that it wasn't about cats, though?

"You should go back downstairs." Raphi's voice was deep and raspy.

Tingles rushed over my body as I lifted a hand to his chest and smoothed it over his warm skin. A throaty, masculine sound escaped his lips as desire began to pool between my legs, and a tremble of need ran over me as I tried to resist the urge to climb up his impressive body.

"I don't want to go downstairs." I trailed my finger up his chest to his neck while locking the door with my other hand. The noise echoed. Goosebumps broke out on his skin as he released a low rumble. I could tell he was hanging onto his last thread of control, his hips pressing closer to mine as his steel-hard erection pressed into my stomach.

"Last chance, Narc," he breathed out as his lips trailed against my jaw.

I felt bold as I let my hand slide down his body, stopping right above his low-riding jeans. I turned my head so that our lips were only a tiny space apart, then I let my hand slide down to rub his jean-covered erection and nipped his bottom lip.

And we had liftoff.

"Raphi!" I let out a squeak as my body was tossed onto the bed. The

massive man crawled over me, his lips meeting mine in a hard kiss. I let my legs fall apart as he settled between them, his cock grinding into me as he invaded my mouth, consuming and possessing.

“Fuck, you’re so goddamned irresistible. It’s driving me crazy, woman,” he growled as he ripped my shirt down the center with a simple flick of his wrist. I couldn’t do anything but moan as he peeled down my lace bra and leaned down to tease one of my nipples between his teeth, creating an electric pulse of need that caused my clit to pulse. My body slid against his as he pinned me down with his heavy weight.

Fuck, I loved that.

“I need you,” I gasped out as he switched to the other nipple, my fingers slipping into his thick hair. A flash of heated shivers traveled across my skin as my energy escaped my control to mingle with his wolf.

Raphi let out a low sound as he nipped down my stomach and tugged off my pants and panties in one motion. *Shit*. That was hot. He looked up at me, his eyes a dark green that sparkled with a burning inferno of heat. “I want to taste you, baby. I want to see how sweet you are under your little badass exterior.”

I would have given a sassy retort, but instead a cry of pleasure left me as his tongue swept across my wetness, those small golden snake bites cool against my searing skin.

“Damn—it—you taste better than I even imagined,” he rumbled as he slipped a finger inside of my pussy, causing me to call out his name.

“So tight,” he growled darkly. “Tell me why you’re so tight, Narc.”

Raphi absolutely knew I was a virgin, and I was almost positive he was as well.

“Raphi—” I cried out again as he added another finger and began to pump in and out of my body while sucking on my clit. I was shaking with need, and I could tell that my orgasm was quickly approaching, my body shuddering with the need for release.

“Why, baby?” he demanded with another growl, the sound vibrating against my delicate skin.

I screamed out as I climaxed hard and he licked up my release, nipping at my skin for an answer.

I whispered breathlessly, “Because I’ve never done this before.”

Raphael made an appreciative sound as he unbuttoned his jeans, revealing his massive and very hard cock. I whimpered at the sight, and he smirked and

kicked off his jeans before trailing a massive, rough hand up my ribs. My legs locked around him as I squirmed against his hard length, which slid right into my wet heat.

“Good,” he said. “Then this will be a first for both of us.”

“Raphi,” I whispered against his lips. Pleasure broke across my skin as he pushed inside of me in a sharp, hard movement. Our moans matched as he sank in deeper, my legs trembling and his grip on me growing tighter.

“Baby,” he grunted, bottoming out inside of me. “You feel so fucking amazing.”

I moaned as my breathing hitched, the slight twinge of pain nothing compared to the absolute pleasure I felt. “Please move—please. I need you to.”

“Oh, I’ll move alright.” He nipped at the skin of my neck, leaving a mark, no doubt. Then he pulled back and looked down at me with heat, possessiveness, and a whole lot of love.

“You’ll keep taking all of me, won’t you, baby?” He began moving in and out of me with a slow, controlled pace. “Even if I start pounding into your tight pussy until you’re screaming down the house?”

“Yes,” I whimpered. “I want that. I *need* that..”

I moaned as he began to pound into me, continuing to go faster and then slower, a demanding pace followed by a more controlled roll of his hips. It was fucking with my body, and I was a mess of desire, needing to come after only a few minutes of his rhythm and the power he easily exerted over me.

“Do you need to come, baby? Do you want to come on my cock?” he hissed, his hips moving faster. I shuddered, pleasure infecting every part of my senses.

“Yes!” I exclaimed through a moan. Raphi brought both of my legs over one shoulder and began to use an intense and deep pounding pace. I cried out his name again as he slammed, fully-seated, inside of me so damn hard I swear I saw stars.

“Come for me, Narc,” he growled against my lips.

My pussy spasmed around him, and my vision blurred. Raphi groaned as he somehow moved faster, his speed supernatural as he roared out my name, finishing fully inside of me. Those perfect lips broke skin on my shoulder as I felt an intense bond form between us that I could only assume had to do with his wolf.

It made my body light up, and he let out a deep growl as both of us

groaned under the white-hot searing heat of it. I could feel his cum inside of me as his cock seemed to grow even bigger while releasing his seed. The feeling was so intense that a secondary smaller climax rolled over me, causing me to whimper in relief.

My breathing came in short, staccato bursts as he held himself above me, his forehead resting on mine as we both tried to calm down. My eyes met his as he let out a soft sound that was filled with affection.

“I love you,” he whispered against my bruised lips.

“I love you, too.” I kissed him gently. “That...that was perfection. How have we waited so long to do that?”

He pulled out slowly, his gaze focused on the spot between my legs where our cum mixed, and lifted me off the bed. My legs wrapped around him as I clung to his impressive frame, and his lips met mine as he smiled. “You have no idea how many times I’ve thought of this exact moment, Narc.”

I blushed as he walked us into the bathroom and turned on the shower. Raphi was a princess about his showers, so the place looked like a spa. He carried me into the steaming water and both of us groaned as I slid down his body to wrap my arms around him.

“So, you waited also?” I asked quietly, looking up at him.

I’d always wanted Raphi to be my first. Before I’d met the other boys, before I’d even started thinking about them like that. It had always been Raphi.

He clasped my jaw and tilted my head back with soft eyes. “Of course, Narc. I’ve been crazy about you since we met. I would have waited another hundred years if it meant being with you. Although those jeans you used to wear to school drove me up the fucking wall.”

I gasped. “Is that why you always gave me that oversized jacket?”

He smirked and shrugged. “It made you smell like me, and I hoped you would think about me all day then.”

I turned bright red at his sweet sentiment. “Stop being so fucking cute. I’m not feeling very badass right now.”

“Good.” He wrapped his arms around me and kissed my head. “This can be your break from all the badass shit you do all day.”

“I like that.” I nipped at his neck, then pulled back and raised my hand to the soft part of my shoulder right near the base of my neck. I jumped as an electric energy sparked through me that had Raphi’s eyes darkening with

heat.

“Oh shit,” I gasped as he leaned down and licked the seam of my lips.

“Mine,” he whispered in a dark yet playful tone. “My mate.”

Good thing we didn't have any other shifters in our little group.

“Raphi!” A knock on the door sounded as Dorian’s playful voice offered a sound of complaint. “Bring her back.”

Raphi grinned and kissed me softly before calling out, “Maybe.”

Dorian chuckled and walked away. The fucker had probably just fed off the sexual energy in this house.

I blushed in realization. *Everyone just heard us, for sure.*

“Get used to it, baby.” Raphi nipped my nose. “You’re stuck with the six of us, so being overheard fucking should be the least of your worries.”

“And the most?”

Another knock on the door sounded as Declan’s voice rang out. “Lass? We ’av a problem. Draco jus’ called. Thar’s been another attack.”

I didn’t know what Raphi had been about to say...but I would consider *that* a big worry.

CHAPTER 20

NARCISSA



“Well,” I sighed in frustration. “That’s a fucking message if I’ve ever seen one.”

In Declan’s bar, just over the entryway, was a disturbing symbol. This time there was no body, but the blood used was from a fresh source. I swallowed my anger as supernaturals gathered around us.

My fingers smoothed over the parchment that had been left on the ground as I opened it and read it again.

*Save your people or save yourself?
Every day you don’t turn yourself in, one more will die. -A*

I shook my head and looked back up at the bloody sigil. He was marking Declan’s bar, and my demigod was vibrating with more fury than I’d ever experienced from him on my other side. I squeezed his hand gently, but his energy didn’t calm down—not in the least.

“Where was Jonathan during this time?” I asked Zachariah, keeping my voice low. My other boys were keeping the crowds away as they questioned anyone nearby.

“At home. It doesn’t make any sense. I don’t know who else the vessel could be. I’ve been thinking about it nonstop, and it has to be the vessel who did this because no one else would be able to mass compel in order to leave these ‘gifts’ for us.”

It was true. Mass compulsion was special to *his* family line, and it would make it seem as though the bodies had appeared out of nowhere. So it was either him or someone from his...

Motherfucker.

“Narc?” Declan asked in his heavy brogue as I turned down the street and stalked toward the nearest graveyard. This was bigger than just Asmodeus, and the demon prince had only one relative who would play along with his silly games. Except for him it wouldn’t be about me—it would be about his constant desire to rule *my* city.

Nero. Motherfucking Nero. Asmodeus’s brother, and someone who my grandma had been forced to banish to the demonic realm after several attempts to take her throne. It didn’t surprise me that he and his brother were making a comeback together. I needed to confirm my theory, though, and there was only one spirit for the job.

As I pushed through the wrought iron fence and began to pass the ornate mausoleums, I stopped to pull off my shoes. I let my feet pulse power through the ground as I sought out his energy near the back of the place, where the oldest spirits lived.

To be fair, Wu was not a normal spirit. In fact, he was a demon that had been sent to the Other, only to be sent back. *Yeah.* That hadn’t been our family’s proudest moment. We still weren’t really sure what happened, and Wu says he doesn’t even remember a tiny bit of it.

No matter though. Wu had had a good existence and had great insight into the goings-on of both the demonic realm and Earth. As a spirit, he could openly travel between them without anyone knowing. It was pretty cool, despite it being a direct showcase at our lack of understanding about the Other.

“Queen of the Dead—to what do I owe the honor?” Wu called out from his place between two raised coffins. I jumped up on top of one and took a seat, facing him with determination.

“I need your help,” I said, confirming what he most likely already suspected.

His spirit robe was down to his feet, and he waggled his massive

eyebrows while placing his hands into the robe pockets. “How can I aid you?”

“Asmodeus is back.”

His eyes sparkled. “Yes, I’ve gathered that.”

I snorted and shook my head at his dry and annoyed tone—no one liked Asmodeus. “And Nero?”

Wu was quiet for a moment as I felt his power search out across the thick grass. I could hear the faint voices of my boys, but I knew they would keep their distance to let me have this conversation. I waited patiently, trying to not tap my fingers or swing my legs.

It’s not that I felt bad about sitting on this grave or anything—the woman laying here was stuffy and mean. She always sat on a roof overlooking Bourbon Street, judging us all for our choices in fun. Then, when you were hungover, she showed up to laugh.

Well, maybe that part was reserved especially for me. Bitch.

“Nero.” He nodded finally.

I swallowed, feeling a pang of nervousness, and tried to focus. “Do you know where they are?”

Wu snapped his eyes to me, pulling out of deep thought. “They’re at the house across from yours. They seem to have inhabited two family members.”

Jonathan and Mayor Lourn.

“Our mayor could have easily been in public without suspicion,” I muttered. “Fuck! Our mayor is possessed by a demonic prince. That is what you’re telling me, right?”

Wu chuckled. “Exactly.”

“Thanks,” I drawled and hopped off, then walked towards my boys.

“Good luck, young Queen. Let me know if you need further assistance.”

And I would. He was extremely reliable.

Declan reached me first, his emerald eyes flashing. “Lass, don’t run off like that.”

“It was a dangerous move,” Zachariah noted. I kept walking as they frowned and followed me.

“Lass?” Declan tried again.

“What’s going on with her?” Abel asked softly.

“She’s on a fucking mission,” Dorian cursed as I walked past Alaric. He tried to pull me closer, but I ducked my head, and Raphi jogged to keep up with me. He finally overtook me though, and I couldn’t help but stop when

he stood in front of me, blockading me.

“Where the hell are you going?” Alaric demanded as they surrounded me.

I swallowed and looked around at my boys. With a deep breath, I explained.

“We’re going to kill the mayor.”

GLOSSARY

1. *arse* - ass
2. *boozer* - bar
3. *cud* - could
4. *dinnae* - doesn't know
5. *feck* - fuck
6. *roi* - right
7. *shite* - shit
8. *ter* - to
9. *yer* - your, you're, you

TEA TIME WITH THE DEAD

BOOK TWO



DESCRIPTION

I hadn't been wrong about the trouble I felt brewing.

Now the problem was here to stay, unless we could figure out a plan. A plan to stop Nero from trying to take New Orleans from me. A plan to stop Asmodeus from kidnapping me and taking me to the demonic realm. *Hell*. A plan to figure out what I was going to do about these six men in my life.

So how better to spend it than having a tea party for the dead! Right? Seems logical. Trust me, there was a solid reason for holding such a morbid-sounding event. Now if only I could figure out how to follow all these ridiculous rules of etiquette.

Tea Time with the Dead is the second book in the lighthearted, fast-burn paranormal reverse harem The Dead & Not So Dead series. You can bet that our characters will be swearing up a storm in New Orleans. Expect elements of horror such as gore, violence, and an array of other topics dealing with death. Sexual themes are suitable for mature audiences. +18

A glossary for Declan's Irish accent can be found at the end of the book.

CHAPTER 1

NARCISSA



The dead preferred tea over coffee.

Picky, high-maintenance bastards. How did I know this hyper-specific taste preference of the dead? Easy. I was currently sitting with two of my very dead family members, listening to them talk about their daily tea parties. Apparently—*get this*—the dead hold tea time each and every day. *Isn't that just the cutest thing you've ever heard?*

If cute meant having a group of complaining and gossipy souls in your garden drinking tea, that is.

Of course, I couldn't explain to my boys why I was rolling my eyes. I mean, I could, but because they couldn't see my mother and aunt, it would be difficult for them to understand my level of exasperation. Besides, they were all hyper-focused on the house across the street. The house that was currently bathed in blue and red lights from the squad cars surrounding the property. I shook my head as news reporters attempted to get as close as they could to Mayor Lourn's home.

Ridiculous. I was so ridiculously annoyed by this.

I'd been so fucking ready to kill Nero and send his ass back to the demonic realm for good.

Then surprise, surprise, conveniently it seemed the mayor had gone

through a random terrible attack that required the entire New Orleans police force to show up at his damn doorstep.

I shook my head and narrowed my eyes at Alex Lourn, our mayor, who was currently possessed by Nero. Nero who was hell-bent on taking over New Orleans with his brother and my stalker, Asmodeus.

Want to take a guess on who he was possessing? That's right! Jonathan Lourn! The mayor's son. So unfortunately, we weren't getting into that house any time soon.

How the hell had they found out we'd known? That bothered me so flippin' much.

"If she keeps frowning like that she's going to get wrinkles," my aunt criticized. I let out a low growl, and Raphi turned to look at me with raised eyebrows. *Oh, as if he has a right to judge when it comes to growling!*

"Her aunt and mother are being..." Zachariah muttered, exhaling. "Rude."

"You can hear them?" I pinned him with a shocked gaze. A mild amount of excitement and hope soared through me that I would no longer have to suffer their antics alone.

"Why do you keep this terrible assortment of company?" My mother talked over our conversation. "You really shouldn't be hanging around so many dangerous men. I made that mistake once and look how that turned..."

I zoned out and refocused back on my voodoo priest.

And what a fucking sight he was. As usual, the muscular man wore an open linen shirt that matched his pants. Those large arms were spread out on either side of the bench back, and he pinned me with a look that had everything inside of my center tightening up. *Mr. I'm-Dominant-but-Pretending-Not-to-Be* tossed me a brilliantly white smile, as if he knew what I was thinking, that reflected against his rich mahogany skin. If there was anyone that I would follow orders from in this world, it was Zachariah. The man was the only living voodoo priest in America and didn't play by anyone's rules except his own...and maybe mine. *Super flattering, by the way. Just saying.*

For some odd reason though, I had the feeling that he was holding back when it came to how he treated me. I hated that. I wanted to know what it was that vibrated right under his skin, and the longer I went without knowing the more I wanted to poke at it until it made an appearance in spectacular form.

I didn't bother hiding my appraisal of his ridiculous eight-pack or the silver tattoos that wrapped around his dark skin. The man was sexy; there was no way I could deny it. I had to literally fight the urge to not climb on top of him and nuzzle against his chest like a fucking kitten. My eyes focused on the silver band holding his locs back that matched the mercury color of his eyes.

Honestly, I really, really wanted Zachariah. Naked, preferably. Was that so much to ask for?

"Yes, I can hear them clearly," he said.

Everyone suddenly snapped their heads towards where Jonathan's body sleeve, essentially, had stepped outside to talk to the media. While they were distracted, Zachariah's lips landed against my ear, and a shiver rolled over my skin. "But you better stop looking at me like that, little rose."

Did he mean the eye-fucking? Because that was not going to stop.

"Or what?" I teased naturally.

His eyes, turning into dark pools of silver, melted as his rough hand grasped my chin gently before depositing a kiss on my forehead.

Ugh! So not what I wanted. His lip twitched at my scowl. I feel like as Queen I should have some ability to order sexy moments whenever I wanted. Like a service. Not an escort service per se...but like just with my harem. I wanted my harem to be on call for sex. That was what I wanted.

"Question," Dorian said, his voice rolling across my skin, "can't we just go kill them and make the humans forget?"

I fucking wished.

"They've surrounded themselves with humans," Alaric pointed out with a frustrated snarl. "If someone didn't get hurt, then someone would see. I just don't trust that we'll get everyone before someone can escape and tell the entire world that monsters exist."

I looked up at my Scandinavian vampire. *What a freakin' hottie.*

Seriously though. His rough accent crawled across my skin as he crossed his arms, looking all gruff and broody. His icy blond hair was combed back, and his bright crystal eyes traced the house in front of us as if he could find a solution through the fortress of human bodies. I, on the other hand, was solely focused on *his* body.

The Vladern twins were massive, 6'6" tank-like men, and that was only enhanced by the dark jeans and clothing they wore, paired with their motorcycle boots. Their shirts fit tight against their cool icy skin that was

decorated in stark black Viking runes. Yet, despite his rough exterior, Alaric was a total softie.

When he met my gaze, his icy eyes melted into cool water pools and I blushed, wanting to climb *him* like a tree too. I was really, *really*, attracted to him. Like, probably an unhealthy amount.

Abel, his twin brother, was identical to him in every element except for his rich, true navy colored eyes that were filled with warmth and sweetness. *For me*. He'd still kill anyone that threatened me, *but* for me he was all cuteness. That was our secret though. To everyone else they were vicious predators, not the philanthropists and financial wizards that I knew them to be.

That wasn't even including the total Disney binge the three of us were on. Disney Plus? Yeah. That was the shit. Not that we would tell anyone, but it was a thing. It was fucking adorable, and I think they really watched them because I enjoyed it. But to make me feel a bit more badass, I assured myself that they enjoyed them as well.

"Humans can be annoying," Dorian insisted, flashing me a dangerous grin. "Come on, do we really need them? I promise you that we would be significantly adding time to Earth's life expectancy if we got rid of a few, baby girl."

Honestly, he probably wasn't wrong about that.

Dorian Westburrow. The charming, broody daydreamer had my stomach all twisted up in the best way possible. I also wanted to punch him, but that was because he had the unnerving ability to hit the perfect buttons to frustrate the hell out of me. Not just sexually either.

Although, I had to admit he *was* really sexy...and cocky...and had a massive...6'4" ego. *Thought I was going to say something else, didn't you?*

So why did I like this demon? Well, for one, not only was he built like an Olympic swimmer and nearly two centuries old, but he was a bit scary. I liked scary. He was an incubus, and while he didn't abuse his powers, he totally had the ability to level those around him with a simple surge of magic. That *alone* was sexy. Yet despite his age and powers, my living vampires who were only decades old seemed far more mature.

It aligned with a firmly held belief that *age made people petty*. I didn't bring that up to Dorian very often, though, because I was convinced that the man was going through some sort of mid-century life crisis. Instead, I teased him about being an old man. Constantly.

Tonight his auburn hair was styled back to show off his burning gray inferno eyes that were so thickly lashed they made me jealous. He was absolutely stunning, and the industrial bar in his ear and his unique style that seemed to be grunge mixed with a 1920s gangster sooo didn't lessen the attraction. Even now he wore a Nirvana shirt with suspenders and dress pants. How was a girl supposed to focus with that shit around her?

His smirk grew, and I realized I was staring, so I scowled, moving my eyes away and trying to not think about the way he said that pet name he'd given me. *Baby girl.*

I shivered, thinking about last night. That particular term of endearment would never be something I would not turn bright pink at. I squeezed my legs together slightly, thinking about his tongue on my wet heat as he devoured me. *Thank fucking Christ* I wasn't a virgin anymore. I was very eager to explore my sexuality...fully...with a select group of very intense, scarily hot men. Not that I hadn't been able to before, but I was glad I'd waited to share losing my virginity with Raphi. I blushed, thinking about how it had been his first time as well. I had no idea why, but that meant more to me than I could ever properly explain.

My hand snuck up to my neck casually where Raphi's bite marked my skin. The minute I touched it, his wolf let out a low growl from his throat, my skin breaking out into shivers as my pulse began to flutter. I met Raphi's gold-speckled forest green gaze set against his perfectly tan face. He was literally the poster child for a dark angel, and the way he had absolutely let loose earlier tonight when it was just the two of us...well, I would never forget that, and neither would my body. I was slightly sore from the hard, intense way he'd taken me, yet I was still wet, wanting to slide down on him again and ride him once more. Or several times, preferably.

But apparently we had work and important things to handle. *Lame, right?*

Raphael's dark hair was brushed back but messy from our recent shower, the deep midnight strands damp to the touch. I intertwined my fingers with his, and my eyes trailed up the scars that littered his bare arms and knew they expanded down his back from the abuse he had suffered in New Mexico before coming to New Orleans. He'd hated them for so long, but when we'd talked about it I told him the truth, *I thought they were beautiful.*

Then again, I was a tad biased, because I thought everything about him from the gold snake bites under his lip to his sugary-sweet scent was fucking perfect. He was my best friend, and I could never discount that moment we'd

had earlier. I'd loved him before it, but now? Now, I knew there was nothing that could ever pull us apart. Hell, I didn't think anything could take me away from these men.

"Meltin's an understatement, but this city thrives on tourists," Declan stated, and I tried to not get turned on by his Irish accent that snagged my attention. There was no damn reason to find it *that* sexy! Yet it didn't stop me from getting turned on. The man just sounded so fucking cute sometimes; he was like my own personal four-leaf clover.

If a clover could be over 6'3" and covered in ink that rivaled Dorian's knuckle tattoos. Declan's hair was messy in that sexy bedhead way that only men could pull off, the obsidian roots fading into dangerous blood red tips that matched his lethal appearance. His fair skin was covered in tattoos and accented by two emerald eyes and a black lip ring, which—and no, this was not a joke—had a clover on it.

I loved that shit, but I would never. *Ever*. Admit to that.

I was convinced the Irish stereotypes were developed *by* him because they seemed to come far too natural to him. For example, right now he had a whiskey glass that he swirled while watching the house across the street, his posture relaxed, as usual. As a demigod of luck, also known as a leprechaun, I was *really* hoping he could help us out here. Instead, he seemed to be perfectly content with drinking.

"I have no fucking idea what he just said," Raphi grunted.

"They're annoying, but tourists bring in money," Zachariah summarized. Declan and he were secretly best friends despite Declan acting like an asshole so that no one wanted to be his friend. *Too bad*. He was stuck with us.

"Boo," I complained. "I wanted to zap him."

Declan narrowed his eyes. "Wan av these times that's gonna git yer in trouble."

"Can't wait," I sassed back.

"It is nearly five in the morning," a clear voice said from the door, drawing all of our attention. My grandmother stood there looking well-rested and amused by our all-night vigilance.

I really didn't like calling her my grandma because she was far more of a mother than my real mom or aunt had been. The same two ghosts that were still talking shit about me, for the record. She looked only around thirty despite being one hundred and three. That was the plus side of being a necromancer, though—you lived around five hundred years and aged

extremely slowly.

It didn't seem like a plus side when your dead relatives haunted you in an annoying, critical fashion, though.

"You two," my grandma growled, looking at her daughters. "Leave the girl alone. Now."

Both women grumbled and disappeared, causing me to relax finally. Damn. I wished that for once my mom would just let up a bit. That was probably why I had such a huge issue recognizing others' emotions, because I blocked out so much when it came to her. I needed to be better than that.

Maybe that would be my New Year's resolution...if only we weren't in mid-June. That was a long time to prepare, though—what, over half a year? I could probably be ready to 'try' feeling shit by then.

Maybe I needed longer... Nah, I'd figure it out.

My grandma interrupted my train of thought. "You should really get some sleep, Narcissa."

"We aren't leaving," Raphi mumbled, his eyes staying on me. My lips tilted up in amusement because I knew he was a bit afraid of my grandma. Which was hilarious because frankly, she was like the *last* person he should be afraid of. There was a reason I was Queen of the Dead and she wasn't. Yet she was still a necromancer, and that freaked a lot of people out.

My grandma narrowed her eyes, confused at his tone since he was normally so respectful towards her. I offered her a knowing look, her eyes finally resting on the mating mark on my neck. She sighed in realization. "Well, at least go on upstairs. I don't need your scary selves crowding my porch. The Yard of the Month committee is coming around for pictures today."

I chuckled at that. *Fucking ridiculous*. But probably a really good move not trying to separate Raphi and me right now. He was a bit attached after, you know, having found his mate and all. His wolf was a bit worked up.

P.S.—That was me. I was his mate!

Do you even realize how irrationally happy that made me? After all this time, four years of high school having a massive crush on him, only to find out that the affection was shared?! Amazing.

"Come on, boys." I yawned and stretched my arms above my head. I looked around the span of our front yard and the beautifully detailed wrought iron fence that lined where my wards came down. I really needed to work on enforcing them because frankly, the fact that they were attached to my health

wasn't a very good stability plan.

The rest of the yard was covered in a damp drizzle, a field of bright green grass that was only broken by the path leading to the house. The ferns lining the walkway grew larger as it approached the bright white porch, and the old-fashioned streetlamps went off as the sun began to rise. I was, in a word, obsessed with our house. Not just our house, though—it was this entire city.

I breathed in the energy of the city, living and dead, before turning to enter our estate that was a beautiful mix of Italianate and Greek Revival architecture, trademarked by its white columns interspersed with hanging baskets blooming with brightly colored flowers. The interior of our house was covered in deep cherry-colored floors and woodwork-lined cream walls from when it had originally been built. Ornate carpets of red and gold covered the hallways and rooms and matched the gilded crown molding and fixtures that had been upgraded to function with up-to-date electrical standards, stood out as accents.

Yet somehow it still offered a soft light that didn't make it seem too different from what I imagined it looked like a hundred years ago. Probably because my grandma had overseen the project. Our family had been in the French Quarter long before it was considered that.

The seven of us trailed upstairs, and I kicked off my boots and forced myself to walk towards the bathroom—you know, instead of passing out immediately. I squinted at the light breaking against the white marble tile while pulling my dark hair streaked with crimson back to wash my face before bed. It felt unusually thick today, and I blamed the humidity.

Unlike my grandma and mother, I suffered from a horrible case of 'cute' syndrome. At 5'5" and lean with small curves but mostly athletic, I had to dress like a badass to maintain my non-cute status. Still, my face was feminine, and I had a damn button nose with freckles that were a far cry from my grandmother's regal visage. Add on a pair of massive gold eyes with thick lashes and you had the most un-badass look possible. Thank God for my wardrobe.

I leaned over the counter and scrubbed my face, feeling my body sag slightly. Damn, I was way more tired than I realized. I was clearly distracted as I patted my face dry because I let out a loud curse, realizing Abel was literally *right* behind me.

"Sorry." He chuckled at my squeak. I put down the towel and turned towards him, his massive arms caging me against the marble counter.

“Oh no, it’s fine, just scare me to death, why don’t you?” I goaded, curling my fingers against his shirt as he grasped my waist, his thumbs rubbing my spine gently. He rolled his eyes at my dramatic statement and tucked me against his chest before grazing my forehead with his lips. I sighed into him as he tilted my chin up, looking over my face with affection and heat. My magic wrapped around Abel, and his eyes darkened, looking at my lips with hunger. I went up onto my toes but in true Narc fashion, it would have been far too easy for this to be a sweet kiss.

The taste of cherries exploded on my lips as my power sharpened and wrapped around his like an electric bolt had fused and melded us together. I moaned against his lips as he lifted me from right under my thighs and pressed me against the mirror, his lips nearly as demanding as my own. I tightened my legs around him as his grip turned bruising, causing me to shiver.

Holy Christ.

“Abel,” I whimpered as the man pulled away, his breathing rough and fangs totally longer than before. His energy went from soft and sweet to dangerous, with a threat of darkness I had totally not expected. Except now I needed to push it. I needed to know more. I needed him.

“Narcissa.” He gently pulled back from our kiss, his hardness pressing against my stomach and causing my breathing to go rough. *Holy shit.* This man was making my head spin.

I went to beg him for something...anything...but I was distracted by Alaric’s winter scent that crowded the doorway. We both looked at him as he offered us an amused yet heated glance, clearly understanding exactly what was going on.

“You know, as much as I would love to do this right now—and I do, very much so—you have an entire room of men who are getting turned on by your soft little moans. May not be the best combination if you desire to sleep.”

And if I didn’t want to sleep...

I wiggled against Abel’s massive hard-on and he groaned, putting me down and letting me sashay out the door past Alaric. I drew a nail across his chest as he let out a low rumble. I was far too distracted to notice though, my bed calling to me as I crawled into it. My bed, which was cluttered with bodies. I climbed up and wedged myself between Raphael and Dorian. Both twins stretched out on the couch, and Declan, *Mr. I-Swear-I’m-an-Asshole*, crawled up and wrapped his arms around me. My eyes searched out

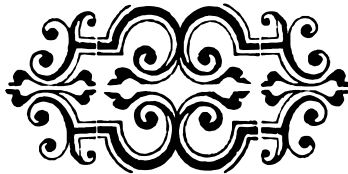
Zachariah and found him staring outside my window at Jonathan's house.

Sometimes the man looked really fucking dangerous, and other times he seemed passionate and intense. Maybe all at the same time. He turned to look at me, offering me a heated gaze before walking out onto the balcony, closing the curtains to provide shade to the room.

Now why did I feel like Zachariah wasn't saying something on his mind? I would be sure to find out first thing when I woke up.

CHAPTER 2

ZACHARIAH



I fought the urge to go inside.

Fought the urge to kidnap her and take her to my own bed.

My hands tightened against the balcony's ledge as I leaned into it and stared at the Lourns' home turning red in the unusually bright sunrise. I could see the two of them come to the window every so often to stare at Narcissa's house while still avoiding the media and heavy security. I was about seventy-five percent convinced the right move was to forget about the humans and possible issues coming from just killing both of them.

The worst part? I was far less bothered by Nero and way more by Asmodeus. At least with Nero, this was all a game. He wanted what Narc's family owned—New Orleans and the power that existed within it. That, in an odd way, made sense to me.

With Asmodeus though? He wanted Narcissa, my little rose. That fucking infuriated me. I closed my eyes, breathing in and remembering the last time I dealt with the bastard. It had been right around first meeting Narcissa.

“I 'm going to lose it,” she snarled, her dark hair hanging in loose tendrils as she slammed her balcony doors and thunder cracked outside. I sat spread out on her velvet couch as she muttered to herself and peeked through the glass doors once again.

“I can get rid of him for you,” I offered, trying to not notice how stunning she was, even at barely over seventeen. I had no right to look at her.

Although, for the fucking record, I could have easily married her if we were back in Roman times. Not that she wanted to marry me at the moment...but the point stood.

“No.” She turned and pinned me with a look. “Absolutely not. I am handling this myself.”

Right then the balcony doors flung open as Asmodeus jumped down from the railing and focused intently on Narcissa. My little rose offered him an annoyed look. “What are you doing here? What the hell do you not get about ‘no’? I. Do. Not. Want. To. Spend. Time. With. You.”

Asmodeus rolled his eyes. “I didn’t ask if you wanted to or not.”

I stood up, drawing his attention, and he froze and stayed outside on the balcony, getting drenched by the rain. I felt Narcissa’s scowl from behind me, but I didn’t care. My magic picked up and the winds grew even more intense than before. The demon swallowed nervously as I approached and grabbed both door handles.

“I would highly suggest leaving Narcissa alone if you know what’s good for you, boy,” I drawled, narrowing my eyes. “I would rather not call your father on you.”

He went on to say something, but I closed the doors and locked them. The only reason I hadn’t called the demon king yet was that I didn’t want Nero also being alerted to Asmodeus’s whereabouts. The two of them were trouble apart but worse together.

“You didn’t have to do that,” Narcissa stated, her red lips pressed together in frustration.

“He was interrupting our game.” I motioned to the chess board and sat back down. She huffed and joined me, her eyes tracing the board. Always a power struggle between the two of us. Lucky for me, she didn’t spend too much time on it and decided the game was more important.

She made sure I lost that round though.

Unfortunately, it hadn’t taken me notifying Asmodeus’s father to get Nero to notice New Orleans wealth of power. Once his brother was killed by Narcissa and kicked off Earth, he realized that only someone extremely powerful must have lived here. There had been a rumor that he was coming after New Orleans, and now we knew that was very much his plan.

If this was any other time period, I would have already killed both of

them and deposited them back into the demonic realm. I could kill them so fucking easily if I didn't care about disrupting the peaceful arrangement with the humans in the city, but I knew it was important to Narcissa. If I killed them, it would be extremely obvious, because there would be nothing quiet about it.

Even now the skies, despite having been blood red at sunrise, were slowly growing thick with rain clouds that began to cast an odd greenish hue on the city. No doubt the meteorologists would be freaking out about the sudden change in weather and what it could possibly mean. I could only blame myself because if the dead reacted to Narc, then the earth reacted to me.

I swallowed, shaking my head, and turned to walk into the room through the thick curtains I'd drawn shut. My lips pressed up in amusement at Declan's sprawled form wrapped around Narc's slim waist. I should have known that there was no way he would be able to keep his emotions from her—I wasn't sure why I had even entertained that as a possibility.

It wasn't the only thing I'd been wrong about, though—no, there had been several things. One of them being him and the other being how lonely he had truly been trying to stay away from her. I could see the relief and contentment filling my friend with every moment he spent in her presence.

Then there was the final realization of how fucking impossible it was going to be to hide any part of myself from Narcissa. Especially the part that wanted to dominate her. Not all the time of course...but a good amount of it.

It was a need that was clawing at me; it was a dangerous thing that needed to be locked up. Either that or we needed to find some type of compromise. I groaned, my cock getting harder while I thought about bending her over and showing her just what type of compromise I had in mind. There were so many things I wanted to do to her perfect fucking body.

My eyes traced over her relaxed expression, and I let out a quiet curse and threw myself into one of the armchairs, relaxing into the shadows of the room. It was already growing warm and muggy in her room because of the rain that was now pouring down outside. Still, the ceiling fan sent a soothing cool pattern rolling over my skin.

It was probably the most peaceful I'd felt in the past forty-eight hours.

Needing to distract myself, I began to sort through a number of visions I'd had recently. Some were important and others showed absolute chaos; neither gave me any direction on where to go with this entire situation with Nero unless I could follow the solution 'just kill him.' Part of me wanted to

lock Narcissa up until this all passed. It wasn't that she couldn't deal with this, because she could, with absolutely no doubt. I just didn't want her to.

My head started to pound after too long of overthinking ,and I knew I needed to clear my mind...it just wasn't that easy to do so. Things had been far simpler and far less vibrant without Narcissa in my life. I clearly hadn't fully adjusted still.

I must have sat there for a very long time, falling asleep or into some type of sleep-like state, because I was genuinely surprised when a small curvy form appeared in front of me, nudging my legs. I looked up to find a very sleepy Narc looking at me with massive sleepy gold eyes. I moved my hands from my lap, and she crawled right up onto it. I watched her curiously as she tugged a blanket from the arm of the chair and settled it over us. Then she fell right back asleep with her face tucked against my neck.

Fucking perfection.

My arms wrapped around her as I felt her entire body relax into sleep against me, practically melting into my chest, her breathing soft and her curvy form making me uncomfortably hard. That perfect ass was nestled right against my cock, and I was finding that being with Narc like this was the sweetest fucking torture. I shouldn't have been surprised, though—the woman's draw on me was insane.

What was surprising? How I was currently feeling. My nose was buried in her hair as I breathed in her natural cool scent that had my magic watching hers with interest. I sighed in frustration because my magic was...fickle?

No. I wasn't positive that was a good description. It was normally indifferent, and then when it wasn't, it was usually a bad thing. Her magic, like the lethal predator it was, watched mine with challenge. *Also bad.* All of this was fucking bad. Yet I'd never felt more at home as I did with her settled on my lap like this.

I closed my eyes momentarily to savor it.

Well, that had been the plan, at least.

When I woke, I could feel every inch of her hot body pressed against mine, and it was then I realized we had somehow ended up in bed. That didn't surprise me—weird shit happened a lot when I slept, which was why I didn't do it very often. I couldn't regret this though, her soft shorts and tank top a very small, easily removeable barrier between her skin and my hands. The afternoon's rainy light poured into her bedroom, and the now open balcony curtains breezed over the empty room, the voices of the others

echoing downstairs.

“Narcissa.” Her name rolled off my tongue like the sweetest song as her large eyes fluttered open to reveal deep green streaks tinting the solid gold color.

“Zachariah,” she mumbled, her voice filled with need as she melded her body against mine. A groan emitted from my throat as her leg wrapped around my waist and she rubbed against my extremely hard cock. I wanted to bury myself in her silken hot cunt, and I was worried my control was moments away from snapping. I tried to not think about how much I loved my name on her lips and tried to catch her attention by grasping her chin gently.

“Little rose,” I murmured.

“Yes?” she asked, stretching against me like a cat.

“I need you to wake up,” I said through a clenched jaw. “Please.”

If my hands got any tighter on her I would leave fucking bruises, something that was far too appealing to me. I could tell how fucking soaked she was, and my hand gripped her ass as she let out a soft whimpering sound. *Fucking shit.*

“I don’t want to,” she complained, her teeth nibbling my throat and causing me to curse. I rolled on top of her, trying to pull away from her perfect mouth on my skin.

“Narcissa.” I was practically begging at this point.

“What?” She offered me a coy look as her pupils dilated and skin heated. I think it was the way she was looking at me, or maybe I’d just hit a breaking point, but either way a thread of my tight control snapped.

“What?” I said in a whisper against her lips. “*What* is that if you don’t stop rubbing against me, I’m going to tear off those little shorts and bury myself deep inside of you. *What* is that if you don’t wake up, I am going to fuck you into the next day and then some.”

Her breathing hitched, and I was pretty damn sure my tactic had done the exact opposite of what I’d intended, which was to scare her a bit. Instead she tightened her grip on my shoulders and leaned up, pressing her lips to mine gently in an almost curious, testing way.

Without a moment of hesitation, I took over the kiss. If she wanted to play, I would be more than happy to. My hand wrenched into her thick hair as I deepened the kiss, her nails digging into my shoulders as I felt the small sting of her drawing blood. *Fuck.* The minty taste on my lips was completely

and utterly her, causing me to draw her hands above her head in fear of taking things too far. It was dangerous to allow her to touch me.

“Don’t start something with me, Narcissa, that you don’t plan to finish,” I growled.

“Who said I didn’t plan on finishing?” she teased while arching against me, her perky tits pressing against her tank and those small hard nipples poking through, making my mouth practically fucking water. My lips met hers again before I kissed down her golden neck to where her shirt dipped to reveal her perfect cleavage.

“Grab the headboard,” I demanded softly. Her fingers wrapped around the bars as my hands brushed over her tight breasts and tugged down the material of her thin tank top to expose her perfect, braless, perky tits. I groaned as her nipples tightened further, and I kissed down the center of her chest before taking one into my mouth eagerly, the taste of her skin like fucking sugar.

A small moan emitted from her lips as her back arched to bring my mouth to her breast further. I let out a low dangerous noise that, instead of worrying her, only seemed to excite her, her wet covered center rocking against my hard length and letting me feel just how much she needed me. I tugged one of her nipples between my teeth a bit harder than before, and a soft cry rose from her lips as she came while rubbing against me, those fingers tightening around the headboard like she was told.

Good girl.

“I really hate to interrupt...” Dorian’s voice had me freezing as I swallowed down an extremely territorial sound. Sometimes I truly believed I was worse than Raphi.

Narc grinned, adjusting her shirt before she rolled us over, my hands cupping her ass as she straddled me, looking somehow turned on and sated at the same time. Could she feel how fucking hard I was? I wasn’t sated at fucking all. I wanted her, *needed* her so much it was totally unhealthy. She looked at Dorian while intertwining our fingers above my head, her breasts once again separated from me by that damn shirt. A shirt I was close to fucking ripping down the center.

“What’s going on?” she chimed, her dark hair cascading around her like a waterfall as the scent of mint wrapped around me.

Dorian’s lips quirked at her nonchalant attitude. “Draco is downstairs, so normally I would have said take your fucking time, but considering he has

shifter hearing...”

This time the sound escaped my throat, and Dorian offered me a knowing look. Narc muttered in annoyance and exhaled, falling against me and snuggling into my neck. Dorian left with a chuckle as I gripped her chin, my other hand palming her perfect ass possessively. I squeezed it, feeling the soft golden skin in my hand as she arched slightly, causing me to let out a low rumble at her arousal.

“I want to stay in bed,” she complained and then opened her eyes. “With you.”

I smirked. “Is that so? Why, little rose?”

Looking coy, she rolled out of bed with a languid movement and looked back at me, tugging on a hoodie. “Guess you won’t find out today.”

She hurried towards the door, and in a sharp movement I had her pressed against the frame, grasping her jaw and holding the back of her neck in a claiming grip. I pressed a kiss to the corner of her mouth. “Be careful. If you tease me too much, you’re going to get exactly what you’re asking for and then some.”

She nibbled her plush lip and winked. “Maybe that’s exactly what I want.”

Shaking my head with a grin, I let her go and watched her bounce down the stairs. I was going to tie the woman up. *Fuck*. That sounded like a great fucking idea. I could imagine her tied to my bed with silk strands of dark fabric against her golden skin.

Shit, I was going to be turned on for the rest of...well, probably forever.

“Draco,” she greeted as I slowly followed after, trying to get my head on straight. The hellhound Alpha immediately snapped his head up to pin her with a searing gaze. There was a level of devotion there, and I was torn between being proud that she inspired something like that and being annoyed, wanting to rip off his head. Per usual, my feelings for Narcissa and anything regarding her made very little sense.

Instantly, Raphael had her in his arms, and Draco shook his head at the open level of possessiveness. I didn’t think that Draco wanted Narc—not sexually, at least. There was devotion there, but I didn’t think it was romantic despite the fact he probably found her dominance attractive. Or maybe I was just trying to talk myself down from fucking killing him.

“Narc.” He reached for her hand and brushed a kiss across her knuckles with a goading smile at the twins’ annoyed sounds. The expression he

exchanged with Narc was an almost private, amused one that pissed me off even more.

This was why I stayed away from emotions. They were messy as fuck.

She pulled back her hand. “What’s going on, Draco?”

“That mayor is stating that he was attacked by dogs, but he’s spreading word through the supernatural world that it was hellhounds,” he stated, looking frustrated.

Her brow arched. “Well, that’s obviously bullshit.”

Draco grunted. “That’s the fucking problem. I don’t think it is.”

CHAPTER 3

NARCISSA



“How long has this been going on?” I asked quietly, my brain breaking from the foggy sexual haze Zachariah had inspired and into sharp reasoning. It helped that the afternoon rain blowing through the large windows of our sitting room had more chill than expected. I sat facing Draco, and my boys were spread around me, protectively, which was hilarious considering this was Draco we were talking about.

He was totally becoming someone I considered to be a friend—or at least an ally.

I felt a tiny annoying flare of affection for him, but it wasn’t the same as how I felt about my boys. Not how I felt about my grandma either... somewhere between that. Where was the crazy woman, anyway? I shook my head mentally and tried to refocus because I clearly was all out of sorts today.

“The possessions?” Draco asked, arching a brow. “Well, I’d imagine they started even before the other day when one of mine attacked you. Why don’t you ask your demon, though. I’m sure he has better insight on this type of thing, more than me.”

Dorian let out a frustrated sound. “If your pups are acting out and killing people, they would have to be possessed by something fairly strong since you’re already demonic in nature.”

“So what do we think it is?” I tossed my tanned feet onto the smooth traditional coffee table. The arm around me tightened slightly, and I tipped my head up to look at Raphael, who seemed to be vibrating with tension. Dorian was looking over the sexy bastard, sitting perpendicular to our sofas with no shirt on and his suspenders hanging from his hips.

Zachariah paced behind Dorian with a contemplative look on his face. *You know what look I liked more?* The one where he looked like he wanted to fucking devour me only minutes ago. I hated that we had to deal with this shit instead.

Alaric sat on my other side, his fingers strumming my pulse gently as Abel frowned at Draco’s exhausted expression. I didn’t take that to mean that Abel cared about Draco, but it *was* odd to see him look so tired and worn down. Finally, I looked up to Declan behind me. The man was confusing and today even more so, his gaze searing hot with something I didn’t understand. What I did know? His hand twirling my hair felt comforting and stressful at the same time.

“My real belief?” Draco sighed. “I think that this behavior is very oddly close in timing to us arriving on Earth and your demon prince’s reappearance.”

I didn’t disagree with that in the least.

Draco continued, “Narc, I need to speak to you.”

“You are,” I mumbled as Alaric made a frustrated noise.

“Please, Narc? Alone?” He spoke softly, the tone of his voice odd.

There was something I wasn’t understanding here. “Fine. Front porch.”

“Baby girl,” Dorian growled, offering me a surprised expression.

“Dorian, trust me.”

Instead of waiting for a response, I trailed towards the front door with Draco following behind me. The man sat down as I leaned against one of the many columns, noticing that the rain had become heavy once again, probably drowning out our voices for everyone except Raphael.

“What’s going on?” I asked, crossing my arms.

He sighed. “It’s just a feeling, and it could be nothing, but if there was anyone that could do something with it, it would be you. I think...I think we need to look at the local wolf pack as well.” His red eyes met my confused and speculative expression. “I know, Narcissa. Just please trust me on this. It may not be the same thing, but I’ve heard rumors about some odd shit happening over there.”

I nodded and considered him for a moment. "Alright."

"Really?" He sat up straighter, gratitude and relief filling his expression.

"Yeah." I nodded, blowing out an exhale. "If you think there's a problem, we'll check it out."

He flashed a small smile. "I'm going to get out of here before your mates decide to come back out. Thank you, Narc." His shoulder squeeze barely registered as he walked past and down the steps towards his sports car.

I nodded, thinking about the shit show I could feel blowing in. I nibbled my lip as I glared at Lourn's massive home. I saw a figure shift in the window and realized that someone was watching back. Besides the obvious police officers staring at me, but I didn't pay them much attention.

"No. I'm going out there," a familiar gruff voice barked. I smirked, my eyes flashing towards the door. My massive vampire pushed through the door with a hot, determined look on his face, only to have it falter upon realizing the 'possible threat' was gone.

"Oh," he grunted, running a hand through his blond hair. "He's gone."

"That's a good observation, honey." I nibbled my lip, trying to hold back a growing smile.

His eyes darkened as he moved forward to grasp my chin in a hard hold, his body suddenly plastered against mine. I shivered as I watched his artful eyes darken with lust as he brushed his lips against my own. I whimpered as he nipped my lip, his winter scent making my hand tighten on his shirt as I attempted to deepen the kiss. My magic wrapped around him as he began to feast on my lips at a languid, relaxed pace. I felt like I wanted to crawl into his very essence, breathe him in completely.

"Mine," he murmured, pulling back before pressing his forehead to mine. Then he was stalking back inside, making me laugh softly as I licked my lips, tasting copper from where he nicked the delicate skin. *Bad vampire.*

"Damn this rain." My grandmother walked around the porch from the back yard, her hair damp and dress loose around her elegant frame. "They had to move the pictures until a different day, can you believe that? I should go yell at that voodoo priest of yours."

"I would love to see that," I noted with a grin as she shook her head and yelled at two spirits walking past our yard. I turned, my bare feet meeting the wood of the house as I left her to whatever the heck she did all day. I sauntered into the house, noticing that everyone's energy was upstairs. I made my way up the stairs and grinned, finding most of them talking in a quiet

group near the couches of my bedroom suite. The group of them had always been protective, and I had no idea how I hadn't realized their very real affection before.

Then again, I was the first to admit that I was terrible at emotions.

“Raphi,” I complained as we walked into the cafeteria and made our way towards our normal corner of the open pavilion. To say that we were anti-social was no doubt an understatement.

“Narc,” he mused while opening his calculus book once we sat down across from one another. I felt my scowl deepen because the bastard knew exactly what I was upset about. He always pulled this alpha wolf shit. Why I wasn't getting more upset about it was a far better question though.

“You can't just tell people they can't work with me.” I narrowed my eyes while leaning forward.

His full lips twitched. “Actually, I can, baby. They're shifters, and considering I could overthrow their Alpha, it would be in their best interest to listen to me.”

“Why do you hate them so much?” I asked pointedly, tilting my head. My thick hair tumbled around my shoulders as it once again fell out of that damn messy bun. I was about to give up on trying to handle my stupid hair.

His forest green eyes twinkled. “I don't hate Matthew or Marvin.” The two of them were twin wolf shifters in our grade. I truly had no idea why their parents went with the ‘M’ name thing for them—it was a bit confusing if we were being honest.

“So why not let them work with me?” I adjusted the hoodie that he'd thrown on me. Despite it being January, the weather was mild, and I was dressed in jeans and sneakers.

“Don't like them.” He shrugged, something dark flashing in his gaze. “Plus, now we can work together.”

I narrowed my eyes. “Liar.”

His eyes flickered with amusement. “That we can't work together?”

I groaned and put my head down. “You know what I mean, Raphi.”

My wolf smiled at me affectionately before his eyes flickered behind me and he let out a low, frustrated sound. I turned to find someone sitting next to me. My cheeks turned bright pink at who exactly my visitor was.

“Dorian?” I asked curiously.

His eyes stayed on Raphi's before he flashed me a smile. "Narcissa."

"What are you doing here?" Raphi growled in low demand.

I had the same question, but it wasn't all too surprising, to be honest. The man had been hanging around a lot lately. Not nearly as much as the Vladern twins, but often for sure.

"Just wanted to say hi to my favorite necromancer," he mumbled and squeezed an arm around me. Raphi let out a low sound that had the demon next to me chuckling. I shivered at his proximity. I know he didn't use his demonic incubus magic on me, but hell, he just had that crazy intensity that was sexy as hell.

"Stop growling so goddamn much," Alaric demanded.

Speaking of the twins...

"Why the hell are you guys here?" I frowned, trying to pretend I wasn't thrilled.

Abel flashed me a smile. "You aren't happy to see us, sweetheart?"

I blushed and rolled my eyes as Raphi mumbled something under his breath. A shadow fell over our table and all of us looked up, my brow furrowed in annoyance. Now this person I wasn't excited about seeing.

"Leonard," Raphi hissed at the jaguar shifter. "Get out of here."

Leonard was an asshole.

"Calm down, doggy," he chided as the power at our table jumped. Leonard was an alpha, and the next one to take over for the jaguar pride. As I mentioned though, he was an asshole.

"Leonard," I snapped feeling defensive over Raphi, "why the fuck are you over here?"

A flash of something heated his eyes as he turned his gaze on me. I really needed to tone back the dominance around shifters; it always led them to get all freaky with me. It would probably help to find out why he was here though.

"I wanted to invite you to a party tonight," he drawled quietly and winked. "Your Majesty."

I went to respond, but it seemed Alaric had other ideas. "Absolutely fucking not."

Abel placed a hand on my back that didn't seem to faze Raphi now in the presence of Leonard. Dorian said, "Leonard, don't you have a group of people you need to be sitting with? At least they'll pretend to find you interesting."

Don't smile. Don't smile. Don't freakin' smile at that.

"Narc?" He raised a brow, looking for my answer.

I blinked and sighed. "I have homework. Maybe another time."

He grunted, and after a long, awkward moment of staring, walked away.

"You have homework?" Raphi smiled, looking fucking amused now.

I shrugged with a coy smile. "I do." I didn't. "That's why I can't hang with any of you losers tonight."

"Funny," Dorian chirped.

"We already picked up four movies and dropped off snacks at your house," Abel said with a heartbreaking expression. Raphi chuckled. Despite his annoyance with Dorian, it seemed all of them had come to some weird compromise a few weeks back. All I knew was that they were hungover the next day and even my vampires came out of it with black eyes and split lips.

I didn't ask because frankly, I didn't want to know.

Okay, that was a lie—I totally wanted to know.

"Fine," I mumbled.

Alaric grinned, and it was totally worth it. The vampire never smiled.

"Don't worry boys," I chimed, drawing their attention. "He just wanted us to go check out the local wolf pack. Apparently some odd shit has been going on."

Raphi's head snapped towards me as relief filled his gaze. "Really?"

"Yes," I said, "so if we could, I would suggest now would be a fantastic time to get ready and head over there."

And they were gone. *Crazy bastards.* Raphael had seared my lips in a hot kiss and then hopped over the balcony. Both vampires had left through the door, and Dorian sauntered off with a wink. Declan relaxed on the sofa and Zachariah was on the balcony still, his back against the railing and eyes on me.

It seemed like everyone was acting a bit off this morning. Or maybe I was crazy. What the heck had they been talking about before I came in here?

I shook my head. It didn't matter for now.

The tub was steaming with warm water, as usual. The odd occurrence no longer surprised me, and a cup of coffee even sat waiting for me next to the clawfoot tub. I swear the house staff deserved a raise. They had their shit together. I would tell them that, but I literally never saw them. They'd hidden

from me ever since they started giving me weird looks for talking to dead people they couldn't see. It was some bullshit because they totally didn't do the same thing to my grandmother.

I didn't bother locking the door as I slipped my clothes off, and I watched the raindrops trail down the windows. I hissed in pleasure as I sank deep into the water and bubbles, my eyes peacefully fluttering closed. I knew I didn't have long to get ready before it became *not a good time* to visit the wolves, so I made sure to wash my hair and finish off my coffee, feeling much better after the end of my bath. I stood up and stretched, water dripping off my body, a strangled and frustrated noise making my head snap to the side. Abel stood in the doorway with a nearly feral look in his gaze.

"Hey," I purred as I slowly wrapped a towel around me.

Abel turned and walked out after looking over me with a searing gaze. Excitement and desire coursed through me, and man did I have to resist the urge to call him back in here. Instead, I slipped on a pair of black lace panties and a matching demi-cup bra. I dried my hair, trying to straighten it, and pulled it back to show off the angles of my face. I darkened my eyes and lashes before adding dark lipstick, striding out of the bathroom into my bedroom...filled with men.

"Feckin' Christ!" Declan snarled. I rolled my eyes and walked towards my wardrobe, not feeling even a tiny bit self-conscious about my state of undress. I looked good, and they were totally in my room—what else did they expect? I could feel their eyes searing into my skin.

"Baby," Raphi demanded my attention.

"What?" I asked curiously, grabbing a pair of jean shorts and drawing them up my legs slowly. "This is my fucking bedroom. It's not my fault that I have six hulking men hanging around."

"Actually," Abel pointed out, causing a smile to tug on my lips at his obvious suffering, "this is very much all your fault."

Zachariah grinned as Alaric narrowed his eyes on me. I blew him a kiss and he let out a growl, causing me to be authentically surprised until Dorian tugged me into him by my waist. I tilted my head up and smiled at the incubus. "What's up, handsome?"

"You're distracting," he growled, pulling a shirt over my head, the tight material fitting like a second skin as I fixed the little cleavage that I did have.

"Can't you wear a massive coat or something?" Raphi grumbled. "I can't work with you walking around like that. I'm going to end up killing every

wolf there.”

“I always wear clothes like this,” I pointed out, bending down to lace up my boots. “The only difference is that you’ve seen me naked now—

“Sweet Christ!”

My back hit my bedroom wall as Raphi let out a low, dangerous noise, his nose trailing my jaw as he pressed a kiss to my mating bite. His words were thick and dangerous. “See? Now I’m thinking about you naked, baby. That’s even worse.”

“I like you thinking about me naked,” I admitted, a wicked smile tugging at my lips.

“We need to go before I lose it,” Alaric grunted, running a hand through his icy hair.

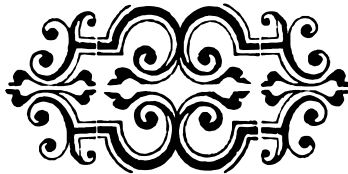
“Lose it?” I teased, wanting to know what exactly that would look like. I also wanted to know what that would feel like. I imagined amazing.

“Come on.” Raphi tugged my hand and led down the stairs. My smirk grew because I was pretty sure I was going to enjoy teasing the six of them.

I could make a bit of a habit of this.

CHAPTER 4

RAPHAEL



*M*ate.

My mate. My sexy, perfect mate who was a total tease. I had to thank God she was in a good mood because when I put her on the back of my bike, she hadn't said a word. Instead, her arms had wrapped around my waist and she relaxed against me, her smooth legs on either side of the bike. I ran my hands over them and groaned. I nearly cursed thinking about how fucking tight and warm she'd been less than twelve hours or so ago when I was buried deep inside of her.

I couldn't even explain what it was like to have finally formed the mating bond with Narcissa. It was all I'd been thinking about from the time I was nearly sixteen and first met her. Now that we'd mated, I felt like everything in my world centered around her. Although, to be honest, it had from the start. This completion felt different though. It felt as though we'd finally reached a point where we couldn't turn back.

Not that I had ever considered that as an option.

We were driving on a highway that cut through the swamps that bordered the city, on our way to the packlands. I wasn't nervous about entering them, but I was going to be annoyed if anyone challenged me. I didn't have time to deal with pups. I had more important things to focus on. Things like the way Narcissa's ass looked in those jean shorts today.

Was it impolite to fuck her during a pack meeting? I wasn't part of the pack, so I probably didn't need to consider social etiquette, right? Then again, the idea of anyone seeing her like that caused me to see fucking red--

I leaned forward and tried to focus on the road ahead, not allowing myself

to go down that road mentally. I could smell that we were growing close to the packlands. When a massive wooden gate rose before us, I was unsurprised to find a group of pack members serving as security waiting for our arrival. I came to a stop, and Narcissa stood up so that she was leaning on my shoulders, looking over me. I loved the feel of her fingers wrapped around my shoulders, and I could easily imagine her riding me and gripping my shoulders the same way.

I wanted her nails to bite into my skin. I wanted to feel her mark me.

“I’m here to see Lucas,” she announced in a bored tone. I actually almost snarled at the sound of another man’s name on her lips. I’d accepted the other five, but no one else. I would fucking lose it.

“I’m super fucking busy today, so I need to see him now,” she continued, her magic wrapping around me and sinking into the ground in the direction of the gate. I breathed in the minty scent and fought the urge to pull her down in front of me so that I could bite her neck again. My canines almost hurt from the urge to do so.

Scratch that. They did hurt.

I really hated being around these other fucking wolves.

“I’m not letting that fucking exiled bastard—”

“Open the fucking gate,” a voice snapped, and my eyes narrowed on the woman that Narcissa had deemed part of her girl gang. I didn’t understand the concept, but she explained that now that we were together and loved her, we wouldn’t want to be as violent or kill stuff as much, at least with her nearby.

I very much wanted to kill just as much as before...but maybe she was right about not wanting her to be in proximity of that type of violence. It didn’t sit well with me.

“Mila!” Narcissa grinned as I rolled forward through the gates, followed by the rest of our group of six. My little mate stayed standing perfectly balanced until we were through, and then she hopped off, offering the woman a handshake in greeting. I parked my bike and followed after them, the rumble in my chest consistent and loud.

“You okay?” Dorian asked quietly. I met his gaze and nodded. *I wasn’t okay.*

“He seems antsy,” Mila commented to Narcissa while motioning to me.

Narc met my gaze and smiled softly. “He’s okay, just tense from being here I’m sure.”

“I don’t fucking blame him,” Mila muttered. “Everyone has been acting like they have a bug up their ass recently.”

I let my magic seep out as my wolf went quiet, searching the space and letting out a low rumble at the odd tension underlying the land. *Interesting*. Not in a good way, either.

“That may actually be part of the reason we are here,” Narc muttered.

“What?” Mila arched her brow in confusion.

I zoned out a bit when I started to notice a few pack members from New Mexico staring at me as if I was some fucking oddity. I swallowed back a growl as an unfortunately familiar pair of dark eyes met mine, and I realized that somehow the bastard hadn’t died yet. Abusive piece of shit.

“What are you doing here, boy.” My uncle’s voice echoed through the space, interrupting their conversation as he stepped forward. He hadn’t been nearly as bad as my father or mother, but he’d still beaten me and left scars all over my body. I wanted to ignore him, but Narcissa stopped, and I placed a hand on her back watching him carefully as he appraised the two of us.

“Who is that, Raphi?” she asked quietly. I sighed, debating whether to tell her or not. She’d never met my uncle, but she did know what my uncle had done to me. I didn’t want her involved with him at all, though, let alone stand in the same space as him.

“This is Roy, my uncle,” I explained, my voice tinged with a bitterness that didn’t hide my anger well. Narcissa froze in realization.

“Your Majesty,” he offered with a small head bow. Narcissa narrowed her eyes at him and looked up at me to examine my expression. I offered a small head shake because I had no desire to go down that fucking road right now.

“Don’t ask why he’s here,” she stated with a dangerous edge directed at Roy. “Don’t fucking talk to him or about him at all, Roy. Understand?”

My lips pressed up as Roy’s head dropped more, and my wolf let out a small proud rumble at the dominance rolling off my mate and her protectiveness over us. It pleased my wolf in a way I could never fully explain. Mila barked out a command and everyone began to disperse, leaving us alone for the most part.

“Sorry, what were you saying?” Mila asked as we progressed further down the road, her attempt to move past the tense situation seeming to work for everyone but me.

I inhaled as small flashbacks of violence crawled out from my

consciousness. Narcissa intertwined her fingers with my own to ground me.

“We received intel that there have been some...behavioral issues here,” Narc said. “Not outside of packlands, but within them.”

Mila frowned. “Who? I mean, they aren’t wrong, but that’s none of their goddamn business.”

“Draco, the hellhound’s Alpha from the local pack,” I sighed. *Fuck*. I was very much ready to leave this place already.

Mila pulled out her phone to shoot off a message, and I instinctively knew that they were calling for someone to summon Draco here. I was interested to see if he would show up because of Mila’s summons. I knew neither of them had ever met before, so this would be interesting.

It also annoyed the shit out of me that he may show up, for several reasons. One, the possessive element. I didn’t like Draco around my mate. Secondly, because being around so many other alphas gave me a fucking headache. I still wasn’t even sure how my wolf was so okay with Narcissa’s dominance, but it seemed he had just rolled the fuck over and exposed his belly to her. Just like the day I’d met Narcissa, it had just clicked. Naturally.

I had no fucking reason to be in school. It was not only stupid, but unneeded. Only two years and I could be free of the bullshit that most wolves subscribed to. Until then I would keep my head down, literally.

That was what abuse taught you. To keep quiet and keep your head down. It didn’t matter that I had the ability to become Alpha if my mental mindset was defeated. My hoodie was pulled up over my head as I walked into the high school I’d been sentenced to.

I honestly couldn’t tell you what occurred throughout the first few periods of class. I had to continuously bite back a growl when people hit into me by accident, and the overwhelming number of supernatural creatures at this school mixed with humans was giving me a pounding headache. When we finally reached lunchtime, I had officially decided that ditching for the rest of the day was the perfect plan.

Except as I walked through the halls towards the exit, I noticed an odd shift in energy. My wolf let out a low rumble as people walked around a woman that slammed her locker shut, causing everyone to steer clear. I didn’t think they knew her; I think it was more instinctual than anything else. She was tiny, and her oversized sweatshirt hid her completely. The only

reason I could tell she was female was the intoxicating scent that radiated off her.

It tasted like mint and fresh air, my wolf perking up as if he'd had just been offered a deluxe steak. Her hood was pulled up, and she had this cool, easy confidence that surrounded her, despite her being seemingly annoyed.

I approached her before I even had the chance to think about why I was doing so.

"Hi." I leaned against the locker, my jaw tensing, because what the fuck else did you say when your wolf was howling in your ear?

She froze before continuing to slide her last book into her bag, ignoring me completely. I couldn't even be offended because it was super weird that I was randomly talking to her. Yet when she turned to walk away, I reached out for her. The moment my hand closed around her small arm, a shock of energy tethered me to her, and I nearly passed the fuck out. One, because she had knocked my ass to the ground, pressing her tiny hand to my throat as she crouched over me. Two, because a pair of actual pure gold eyes were searing my soul. Three, because that goddamn mating bond I'd heard about sparked and locked me to her like shackles.

Mate. My fucking mate. Holy shit.

"Didn't your mother ever tell you it's rude to touch strangers?" she asked dryly. A shade of something passed through her eyes as surprise and something else seemed to sink in before she hid them both easily. I breathed in her magic that was wrapping around me and realized almost immediately that she was a goddamn necromancer.

"My mom's dead," I told her.

Something that looked a lot like sadness flashed in her eyes as she nodded and released my neck, not that her hold had been doing much. Her magic may have been intense, but she was a tiny thing. When she offered me a hand, I took it even though I easily stood on my own. Her hand stayed in mine as the two of us stared at one another with odd expressions.

"Cute," someone from my pack snarled in passing.

My little mate snapped her head to the side. "I'm sorry, what the fuck did you say?"

A low rumble came from my chest as I wrapped an arm around her center, not wanting to cause any drama or more attention than was already being paid to us. She didn't move away and in fact stepped closer into me, almost protectively. Which was cute as shit for the record, but I had a feeling

she would hate it if those words came from my mouth.

“Nothing,” the wolf snarled and stalked away, looking back at me as if I disgusted her.

“Is that your girlfriend?” the girl asked with a frustrated, angry expression.

“Absolutely not,” I rumbled in assurance.

She searched my face. “What’s your name, wolf boy?”

I smirked. “Raphael.”

“Alright Raphi. I’m Narc, and you just won yourself buying me lunch. Let’s get out of here.”

We never returned to school that day, and it took all of an hour for me to realize that no matter what, my allegiance lay with Narc. I was going to live for this woman. I knew it at fifteen, and I sure as hell knew it now.

I watched the easy sway of her hips as we approached the large cabin that served as official pack headquarters. Lucas, the local Alpha, and Lionel, the local Beta, stood waiting for us as Narcissa offered them a head nod in greeting. Both seemed relieved to see us rather than upset. Maybe this trip wouldn’t be so bad after all.

Then a voice grated on my ears and had my wolf snarling. *Rickard*. “Well, well, well, if it isn’t the Queen herself. Can’t even fucking ride a motorcycle on her own, useless bitch.”

I didn’t even bother trying to stop the shift that overtook my frame. I felt my bones crack and fur break through as I let out a snarl that had even Lucas dipping his head in submission, all the other wolves nearby except for Mila, Lionel, Lucas, and unfortunately Rickard shifting because of my magic.

I let out a low rumble as I felt my body prepare to spring forward, my teeth wanting to bite into Rickard’s neck and snap it clear off. But then Narcissa’s small yet elegant fingers ran through my fur, and I turned my head. I stood nearly eye to eye with her, and I let out a low rumble as she offered me an understanding look. I backed off a bit, not wanting to ruin anything she had planned.

My wolf didn’t like it, but I compromised. If Rickard tried to say something again, though, we’d fucking kill him. The odds were not in his favor.

CHAPTER 5

NARCISSA



Rickard was asking for it. No, really. He was fucking asking for it. What type of twit made fun of someone for hitching a ride on someone else's motorcycle? Better question, why the fuck was he still in town? It was clear his brother Lucas hated him.

So I ask again—*why?*

I didn't get the answer to my question right away, though, as Mila led us through the dark wooden doors that were carved intricately with leaves and forest animals. The expansive pack house appeared rustic and cabin-like on the outside, but the inside had smooth dark marble and wood trim everywhere, leading me to believe that the local pack was flourishing if they were able to have such a nice fucking place. As Queen that made me happy, but I had to admit I was a bit jealous. This place was absolutely gorgeous.

Mila led us to a sitting room that had a full bar as well as a table set with tea. *What the heck was with everyone and this weird tea obsession?* Was it a health thing? But then how did you explain the dead? Also, talking about the dead, there was a ridiculous number of dead shifters roaming around here. This land had to be fucking ancient.

"Move." I motioned for a spirit to get out of my way so I didn't sit on them. You would think that wouldn't faze me, but trust me on this. It was

weird to sit in random people's laps, even if they were dead and not solid.

"Who is she..." Mila started.

"The dead," Abel informed her. "You probably have spirits moving about."

"You could say that," I muttered as Alaric sat on my other side, Raphael a permanent fixture in his wolf form in front of me. He was absolutely massive and sat staring at the others while I rubbed my hand through his fur, trying to assure him that everything would be fine. Zachariah and Declan were oddly quiet, but it felt reassuring that they were here with me. I trusted their opinions. Abel was his normal charming self, and Dorian was talking to Lionel and Lucas as they walked into the room and made themselves comfortable. I could always count on Dorian to be talkative and good-natured, no matter the company. After all, he had such extensive experience. *Old man.*

"Tea?" Mila offered. Her inky dark hair was gelled back today, highlighting her angular cheeks and lethal athletic form. The woman was absolutely cool-looking, and I know she didn't realize it yet, but she was totally going to be part of my girl gang. I needed some badass chicks by my side since the boys would become less 'stabby' now that they were all 'lovey.'

I know, a very poetic description of my situation.

Mila could easily be an alpha wolf, for the record. Her cool demeanor and demanding presence radiated with strength. Plus, she looked so flippin' cool. She was the badass I aspired to be.

"Sure," I said. She set out two more teacups, but I shook my head when she went to fill them. I took the kettle from her.

"What..." she asked as I used my magic to pour the tea into the cups, making it turn into a substance that spirits could actually drink. It was almost gel-like in texture, but no one would be able to see it except for them and me.

I had no idea how I'd known to do that...but now I knew exactly how the dead were holding fucking tea parties.

Goddamn it, grandma.

My magic did weird shit like this to me all the time, making my body act before I had time to mentally catch up. The two shifter spirits offered me raised glasses and then went off, two teacups bobbing in the air and making Lucas and Lionel raise their brows in surprise.

"Alright, now that we're alone—" I clapped. "I have to ask, why the fuck

is Rickard still here?”

Lucas and Lionel found their way over to the couch as I sipped on some orange blossom tea that was actually pretty damn good.

“He won’t leave,” Mila stated softly, her voice filled with frustration and anger. I wasn’t positive where the annoying bastard was right now; I hadn’t looked for him after we’d gone underneath the balcony he’d stood on and dipped into the estate. Hopefully he would stay locked up wherever the hell he was.

Raphael let out a low snarl as his midnight fur bristled, his eyes flickering between Mila and the door. I looked over and sighed. *Speak of the fucking devil.* Or his much less impressive brother.

Rickard strolled in, and Lucas rolled his eyes. Now, my normal instinct would be to get pissed, but instead I tried to feel for the odd energy that surrounded him. There was something very *off* about this particular asshole.

Not just the fact that he was a jerk, either.

“No need to be such a bitch,” Rickard drawled, looking delighted at my annoyance.

“One more thing,” Alaric snapped, causing me to smile as a shiver of pleasure at his tone rolled over me. “Say one more fucking thing, Rickard, because I have no qualms with ripping your throat out. It would make my fucking day.”

Ugh! The broody bastard was so hot when he got violent.

Dorian hummed in agreement. “Lucas, send him away or he’s going to lose a body part. He doesn’t need to be here.”

Lucas offered his hands in mock surrender. “I’ve asked him to leave several times, and he won’t.”

“We can help with extermination,” Abel determined, clearly catching on that Lucas didn’t care what happened to his own brother anymore.

Declan rubbed a hand over my shoulder. “Go on, wee doggy. Time ter run on ’ome.”

“Fuck you,” Rickard snarled as his energy started to grow darker.

I tilted my head and looked at Mila. “Has he been part of the ‘behavioral’ problem?”

“No...” Lionel sighed. “He’s just an ass.”

“Did it start once he got here though?” Zachariah asked.

Mila, Lionel, and Lucas froze, all of them offering expressions that made me know that Zachariah’s guess had been correct. I stood and walked toward

Rickard, his growl nearly feral as he stepped back, looking panicked all of a sudden. I tried to hide a smirk as the doors to the room closed and his back hit them, his eyes dark and hands twitchy. I let my magic seep out and wrap around him.

I let loose the predatory instinct that rested right under my civil facade as I moved forward, my legs making easy work of the distance. I tightened my magic and halted all his movement as my lips curled up into a smile at how silent the room went. Well, except for Declan's chuckle, but that didn't surprise me in the least. I swear, the man relished in chaos.

"Now," I purred, standing right in front of him. "Rickard. You're being awfully rude. I would ask what's wrong, but I think you're just a dick. So come on—let's have it out, shall we?"

He spat with a feral glint to his eyes. It landed over my shoulder, a plop on the tile as Raphael released a savage growl and appeared next to me, my hand diving into his thick fur. I examined the manic look in Rickard's eyes and let my magic bury itself deep inside his chest. I muttered a curse as I hit into a very familiar sigil.

Well, that would fucking explain it.

I tugged at his life force without warning, and his knees broke as he fell unconscious against the hard floor. He was a lot more interesting when he wasn't talking.

"He needs to be restrained." I turned to Lucas. "He's out for the moment, but Nero has marked the fuck out of him. Where are the others you've had issues with?"

Lucas called out a command, and the doors opened to reveal two wolf shifters that raised their eyebrows at the scene presented to them, namely Rickard's unconscious state. Mila instructed them to bring Rickard's body to the cages meant for new shifters. Made sense to me.

My mate nudged me back, away from the wolves as Raphael's furry ass sat down right in front of me, my nails combing through his fur as he let out a small, deep rumble.

"Is this the same demon killing people on Bourbon?" Mila asked.

"The very one," I admitted softly with annoyance.

Before she even had a chance to respond to my statement, the energy in the room completely shifted. Footsteps echoed through the hall, several wolves leading Draco and two of his hellhounds towards the meeting room. He offered me a head nod, and I turned back to find Mila standing in front of

Lucas and Lionel in true Enforcer fashion. Well, until Mila and Draco's gazes met head-on.

I cursed as the air sharpened into a tight metal cord of tension.

Holy crap.

Draco froze as a low rumble broke from his throat, and Mila made a concerned noise that didn't sound like her at all. I was confused by the tension for maybe a solid second before it became clear what was happening.

Lucas muttered a curse as Mila's back hit the wall across the room, and Draco let out a snarl, his massive body covering hers completely. Possessive energy wrapped around the two of them, and all at once it became very fucking clear that they were experiencing some type of weird shifter 'mate' shit.

You know, this pairing actually made a shit ton of sense to me though. They were both so badass and tough. I could totally understand how well they would be matched.

"Mila," Lionel said, his voice filled with concern for his Enforcer. Draco let out a territorial growl at Lucas, and he stopped his movement towards the two of them. Not even alphas fucked with mating bonds, and this? *This right here was mating 101.*

"I'm fine," my friend said, her voice extremely quiet.

I believed that, actually.

"I suggest," I drew out in a relatively calm tone, "that we leave these two for a moment. Yes? Lucas, is there somewhere else we can go?"

Raphi shook his head with a wolfy huff as Dorian offered me a cheeky smile, probably feeding off their insane sexual tension. I looked back at them while we all exited the room. This didn't feel like the type of moment we should be present for.

Like the adult I was though, I obnoxiously shouted before the doors closed, "I like this, you two! It's cute. As your Queen, I fully support this."

"I support it also," Alaric muttered, but I knew he supported it for a totally different reason, one that had his large arms wrapping around my waist possessively. I watched as Raphael easily shifted back, unfortunately with clothes on, seeming far more relaxed than when we'd first arrived. He shook himself as he tried to settle into his human form and offered me a grin, seemingly elated by what had just occurred.

Or maybe he needed to shift more often. *When was the last time he had?*

"Do you really think it's been Nero making them act out?" Lucas asked

as we followed him down a long hallway.

“What have they been doing, exactly?” Zachariah asked. Abel’s expression tracked Lucas’ reaction and words intensely, his ridiculously smart brain no doubt beginning to connect things I probably couldn’t see.

“They’ve been acting insane,” Lionel said simply as he led us to a dark wooden door with wrought iron handles. It was cracked open, and I could feel Rickard’s magic from here, meaning we were probably going to see just what ‘acting insane’ meant in their world.

“Violent tendencies,” Lucas admitted, looking ashamed. “Not normal aggression. It came out of nowhere. One of them attacked a pup the other day just because they wouldn’t be quiet.”

Fuck. That wasn’t good.

I offered him an understanding nod. “We’ll get this figured out. It’s not your fault, Lucas.”

He grunted, opening the door and motioning us through. Declan pressed a hand to my back, keeping me near him as we walked down the stairs, a gust of harsh magic hitting us like a fucking tsunami. A snarl came from Dorian’s lips in front of me, which was so unusual for him that I stilled in surprise. Not for long, though, because he picked up the pace, making me wonder what exactly was going on in my demon’s head.

When we finally reached the cages, it became clear that Rickard was very much awake and no longer unconscious. The other four wolves down here with him were growling and snarling in response to him, looking as if they were half shifting, vibrating with tension and a manic light in their eyes.

I looked around the dark cells and was pleased to find that there weren’t a shit ton of restless spirits down here, letting me know that the pack most likely didn’t believe in torture or mass murder.

Hopefully.

What? It says a lot about a group of people. Especially if the dead seemed tormented.

“Well,” Dorian bit out with a growl, “that’s your fucking problem, right fucking there.”

Was I the only one super confused right now?

“Shapeshifter demons,” Zachariah mumbled to answer my unspoken question.

Oh. Fuck.

Dorian, despite being a pretty and fairly *petty* bastard, was actually really

fucking powerful and intense when he chose to be. Standing near him, I could smell his warm citrus scent that wrapped around me like a comforting blanket. I shivered as he rolled up his button-down sleeves, his suspenders patterned to match his dark pants. I watched greedily as his runes, which were similar to his tattooed knuckles, became exposed to my gaze. My center tightened. *Fuck he was so hot.*

His lips twitched as he cast me a dangerous smile, clearly catching onto my thoughts, before his magic crawled around the bars and towards the shifters, including Rickard, that were now panicking and howling in pain. I watched in shock, trying to ignore the extreme lust pulsating through me in response to his magic, as all five prisoners melted into black tarry forms like the creepy bastard that had been on my balcony the other night. Lucas let out a low growl as his eyes narrowed on his brother with betrayal.

“Are you fucking telling me they’ve been these *things* this entire fucking time?” he demanded.

“No,” Dorian purred. My toes curled at the feeling of his magic rushing over me again. *Was it just me, or was I moving closer to him?* “I’m telling you that someone took them and replaced them with shapeshifter demons.”

I inhaled, trying to focus. “I need the city searched immediately. We need to get to Nero somehow and force him to tell us where they are.” Because mark my words, I knew without a doubt that he was holding the real wolves captive somewhere. I just had no idea where to even start looking.

Dorian’s fingers wrapped around my shoulders. I shivered, leaning back into him as his lips trailed my neck. Suddenly, I couldn’t hear the orders and discussion the others were partaking in because I was arching back into Dorian, his eyes darkening on my gaze. I didn’t even care about the shapeshifter demons and other shit because all I could focus on was how hard he was against my ass.

This was the danger of magic—it could be powerful and destructive but distracting as hell. *Especially Dorian’s magic.*

I inhaled sharply as his large hand wrapped around my hair and tilted my head more so that I had to keep absolute eye contact with him. I let my magic relax, and instantly Dorian’s flooded through me, wrapping like a cobra around my essence.

“*Shite,*” Declan mumbled, but white static washed in my ears, and my vision flooded with a hazy gray smoke as Dorian’s lips met mine.

Don’t ask me how, but the next thing I knew, my back was hitting against

a tree trunk and Dorian's fingers were gripping my thighs, holding me against him. I locked my legs around him and deepened the kiss before pulling away, feeling light-headed and dizzy. Dorian's eyes were nearly black, and he growled, low and dangerous, stepping further into me. He was so hard against my covered center, and I knew he wasn't meaning to, but his magic was infiltrating every single pore on my body, making every sensitive nerve come to life.

"Baby girl," he mumbled, running his nose against my neck, "you can't keep making those little noises. They are driving me crazy."

"I'm not making any noises." I locked my legs tighter around him and mumbled, trying to bring him impossibly closer.

He groaned, and I squirmed with a moan against his massive erection, feeling my center tighten as his lips trailed down my neck again. I gasped as his teeth skimmed the delicate skin of my neck, and my nipples tightened painfully. *Oh, holy shit.* I could literally feel my body coming apart underneath him, and the man had barely breathed in my space.

A crunch of leaves had him growling as my magic pulsed out and we both looked to find Draco there, his jaw tense and eyes dark. Mila stood next to him, her eyes nearly black but a small flush covering her face.

"There's has been another killing on Bourbon Street," Draco said solemnly.

"Fuck," I muttered as everything—including my lust—came to a halt.

"I don't enjoy the disruption either," Mila mumbled as they turned back towards the pack house, a small, amused smile at her disgruntled tone tugging at my lips.

Dorian placed me down, but not before he murmured a stealthy 'later' in my ear. I stared up at the man that I loved so much, kissing his cheek and making his eyebrows shoot up in surprise. What? *I could be cute if I wanted!*

Clearly my badass ways were working, though. Now I could surprise them with cute shit. They better watch out. Valentine's day? I would pull out the fucking works. *BOOM.* Cuteness activated. Just wait until their fucking birthdays...

"Alright." I clapped my hands. "Let's handle this shit."

Missing shifters. Evil demons. Murders on Bourbon.

Never a moment to rest.

CHAPTER 6

NARCISSA



You would think death wouldn't bother me all that much, considering my magic. Yet seeing this bothered me more than I would have expected.

One, because it was in front of the voodoo shop Zachariah's distant family owned, and the other because the victim was young. Really fucking young, like barely eighteen, and his shirt was ripped with a massive sigil burned into his skin. *A witch.*

I sighed and looked over the figure, feeling the eyes of the supernatural community on me. I swallowed back my panic because I knew how this looked. How I was so clearly the one to blame. The note that I'd been given only the night before—God, how long ago that seemed—had been clear.

*Save your people or save yourself?
Every day you don't turn yourself in, one more will die.*

- A

I needed room to think. I pushed into the shop, ignoring some of my men's calls, and made my way towards the upstairs apartment. My magic shivered

under the feel of the power that hit me from Zachariah's wards, yet they let me through easily.

How did I handle this? If I turned myself in, it wouldn't do any good. Nero still wanted to take over New Orleans, and Asmodeus just wanted me. Turning myself in wouldn't get the missing shifters back, and it wouldn't guarantee a stop to the murders. What the hell was I going to do? I did not freakin' sign up for my life to be this goddamn serious.

My cellphone rang suddenly as I stood by the open windows looking over Bourbon Street, the tourists oblivious to the illusions blocking them from seeing the disturbances raining down on the supernatural community. Honestly, though, I really had no idea how they hadn't caught on.

I mean, I guess they did, to an extent—it's why New Orleans has so much folklore surrounding it. That and, you know, the graveyard cities and shit.

I picked up my phone.

"How are you doing, sweetheart?" My grandmother answered, her voice was soft and understanding.

"Fucking peachy," I bit out, my voice sounding a bit strangled, even to myself. "Are you home right now?"

"In the garden," she explained. "If you want to talk, I always find it a good place to do so."

Honestly, that sounded pretty damn perfect right now. "Alright. I'll be home soon. I could use a talk." After she told me she loved me, I hung up and sagged against the window, feeling absolutely fucking done with today.

"Little rose," Zachariah called from the doorway.

"I need a moment," I muttered, running a hand over my face. "Please."

Instead of listening to me, his arms came down on either side of me and his lips dipped against my ear. I breathed in his warm scent and shook my head, trying to distance myself, except I was distracted by his large hand that wrapped gently around my throat.

"I don't think you need a moment." He pressed a kiss to my neck. "I think you need to relax though."

My eyes found his because his relaxed tone didn't match the burning fire in his gaze. I narrowed my eyes. "Don't tell me to relax."

It was probably ridiculous, but I couldn't help myself from pushing back.

His silver eyes turned molten as he examined my expression. "Narcissa, what's happening is not your responsibility alone."

"Like hell, it's not," I growled and tried to move from his arms, but he

held me steady, trapped in place. “You know as well as I do that the only person getting blamed for this is me. They aren’t wrong, Zachariah.”

“Stop trying to move,” he demanded, his jaw clicking as I wiggled again on purpose, his chest producing a low dangerous sound at my attempts.

“Make me,” I taunted, feeling like pushing him because this felt far better than thinking about the bullshit that was going on in my life right now.

“I’m sorry, I must have heard you wrong, little rose,” he said, tilting my chin up. “Because unless it’s the words ‘Yes, Zachariah,’ I don’t want to hear it until you calm down, Narc. Now.”

To be fair and in his defense, despite wanting to punch him, my magic was practically vibrating the building, shaking the walls themselves, and would probably have brought them crumbling down by this point if it wasn’t for his magic fighting against mine. I could feel his power wrapping around mine, and my breathing heightened as I grasped his chest, my nails dipping into his bare chest. Was it wrong that the dominant flare seeping from Zachariah was making me want to poke at it even more than before?

“I don’t have to listen to you,” I murmured, my body shivering with need now, the shutters hitting from the high winds breezing through the loft.

“That’s where you’re fucking wrong.” He grasped my jaw harder and tilted my head back, his eyes searching my expression for something. My entire body was practically trembling in need from the force he was exerting on me and the collision of our magic. Thunder boomed in the skies as rain began to fall in a downpour. My tongue darted out onto my bottom lip momentarily, and his eyes snapped down to the movement as I rolled up on my toes so we were nearly nose to nose.

“Narcissa,” he warned, his body so fucking tense I was worried he would snap.

“What?” I purred, loving that his magic was more in charge, pushing past his attempts to not be an overcontrolling bastard. “What the fuck are you going to do if I don’t listen to you?”

Zachariah shook his head. “You don’t know what you’re asking for, little Queen.”

“What are you so afraid of?” I asked quietly, feeling frustrated as my fingers crawled up his shoulders and slipped under his unbuttoned white linen shirt. It slipped off his shoulders, and my eyes snapped down to look over his impressive chest. How the hell did someone have muscles like that?

“I’m not afraid,” he stated in a small hiss as I rubbed against his hard

cock that was only layers away from my touch. “But you should be.”

“I don’t *do* fear.” I pressed my forehead against his before letting my lips skim his own. His magic, like a raging storm, surged through me and filled all the space that existed. As a necromancer, I was an empty vessel that could take and take and take...until there was only death. He filled me completely, and electricity surged through me, causing me to let out a strangled gasp at the exact reason he was hesitant. His power was on a one-track path. *Domination*. Complete and utter domination...of me.

Holy hell.

How the fuck did this man act so relaxed? If I had this type of power roaring through me, I’d be a mess. This was some archaic, gladiator-type shit. I could feel how ancient his magic was, and I found myself getting impossibly wetter. I didn’t think it was possible for him to get sexier.

Then he had to go all Spartacus on my ass.

“See the problem?” he whispered as his hand tightened on my throat.

“Actually,” I admitted truthfully, “I don’t.”

Zachariah seemed to absorb my words for a moment before it happened.

The snap.

“Fuck,” I whispered as my body hit the velvet couch nearby and his hand wrapped tightly in my hair, tilting back my neck to expose myself fully to his gaze. A tremble worked through me as my voodoo priest let out a feral snarl and his teeth trailed down the soft, exposed skin of my neck, sucking over the pulse point and causing me to nearly orgasm on the fucking spot.

“*Fuck* is exactly right,” he growled, his voice having a tri-layered effect to it as my head began spinning. “I warned you, little rose.”

I let out a soft, dangerous laugh before moaning into his hot, demanding kiss, my legs opening up to accommodate his body that now caged me completely. I rubbed against him, my legs hooking at his waist as his massive monster of a steel rod grew harder, pressed against my unfortunately covered center. He growled at the needy whimper that escaped my throat, and this time there was no gentleness to his actions. The windows and doors of the loft slammed shut from the wind as he stripped me bare, my clothes in shreds, looking as if they’d never been whole to start with.

My skin prickled with tension as I watched him look over me with a hungry, dark, possessive gaze, gripping my hair harder before leveling me with a serious look. I could tell how hard he was working at controlling himself.

“You’re sure you want this, Narcissa? Nothing will be the same between us if you give yourself to me,” he purred, his offer sounding like the most dangerous temptation.

“Want *what*, Zachariah?” I said in a breathy voice as he tightened his hold on me. “Want you to dominate me? Want you to fuck me?”

The man let out a low strangled sound that made me light up with fucking power, I relaxed my legs even further as I answered him seriously. “I want you, Zachariah. I want this.”

He growled and brushed my lips in a dangerous spark of a kiss. “Then you’re going to give it to me, little rose. You’re going to give me every ounce of pleasure I can wring from that mouthwatering body of yours. Do you promise to give it to me? Without reserve?”

“Yes,” I cried out as his hot mouth closed around one of my nipples and he sucked on it with a bruising pull. *Fuck.*

“Good girl.” He smirked and tugged me onto his lap so I was straddling the dangerous man, his eyes filled with heat as an easy, almost languid calm took over. *I didn’t believe it for a fucking second.* I licked my lips, a bit nervous, as a wicked glint entered his eyes.

“On your knees,” he demanded softly, my skin breaking out in shivers at the promise there. There was so much sexual tension and dangerous energy in the air it was making my skin prickle.

I scrambled down as his thumbs hooked on his pants, and he tugged down so that his...sweet Christ, how was he this big? I was a lucky bitch. No really, if you understood how large these men were, you would give me a ‘lucky bitch’ award. My eyes widened as I swallowed and flicked my eyes up at him, my nails digging into his muscular legs that were spread to fit my smaller frame. He looked down at me, and I was seriously wondering who here was the Queen—well, King in his case—and who wasn’t because he was very much in charge right now.

Honestly, it couldn’t be healthy how turned on I was.

“Open your mouth,” he whispered, his voice so rough it sounded like rocks.

I did and he groaned, pressing his rough thumb to my lips before slipping the digit into my mouth, smearing my lips with moisture from my tongue. I shivered as my nipples tightened and my thighs squeezed together. I watched, nearly fucking hungry, as he gripped his massive, hard length, and I swallowed nervously.

“Scared yet?” he asked with a dirty smirk.

Oh, I liked this side of Zachariah.

“No,” I retorted with a glint of determination. He responded with a wolfish smile before pressing his cock to my lips. My tongue darted out to swirl around the head, salty precum exploding on my lips. *Fuck, he tasted amazing.* I let out a soft needy sound in response.

“Fucking shit, woman,” he snarled, and I leaned forward. I’d never done this before, for the record, but the deeper I took him into my mouth, the more he liked it, so I was doing something right. I took him so deep I was practically choking on him, only to have him pull out and bury himself deep in my throat again. Tears welled in my eyes as I put a solid effort into fucking his cock with my throat.

Zachariah hissed as his grip on my hair turned slightly painful. Having him in charge like this gave me a nearly euphoric high. I was drenched, and I could feel the loss of *not* having him buried between my legs. Now that I’d had sex, I realized exactly what the fuck I was missing out on, and I needed that with Zachariah.

“This mouth is going to kill me,” he groaned, his movements becoming faster as I gave him the control I knew he needed. It was true, I was a badass Queen, but like I said...if I were going to listen to anyone, it would be him.

Especially in bed. *Specifically* in bed.

I pulled back and offered him a coy smirk. “Come on, Zachariah, take me. Do what you want to my mouth.”

As mentioned, I had no idea how it took me so long to lose my virginity since my mind was anything but fucking virginal.

I got exactly what I asked for though. I choked on his cock as he began to pound into my throat with fast and hard movements, the winds and storm outside growing so violent that the windows crashed open. The water splattering from the sky matched the tears crawling down my face and the wetness between my thighs. The voodoo priest’s eyes held mine, almost hypnotically, and I felt so hot and dirty that I wasn’t positive anything could top this moment.

Well, except fucking, of course.

“Shit.” He pulled out of my mouth, making me scowl at the loss of my new favorite toy. *What?* It was like a lollipop...*a man lollipop!* Ah! That was going to be how I referred to his dick from now on.

“I need to be in you.” He pulled me up from the floor as I smirked.

“Weren’t you just...oh shit!” I gasped as he tossed me on my back and impaled me with one hard push. My core tightened as I threw my head back, crying out his name as he began to drill into me, my legs shaking as his hand wrapped around my throat. The other held my hands above my head in an iron grip. I could feel how much my lack of control was turning him on, and I was literally gushing around him. The man was so fucking thick and long, but my slight soreness from the night before was long forgotten.

“Such a *good* fucking girl,” he growled and accented his words with thrusts of his hips. “Look at you taking my entire cock.”

I did look, and holy fuck that was erotic, nearly lewd with how massive he was compared to my tight center. His rigid length continued to disappear into me again and again, coated in my wetness. I cried out his name, my voice cracking as he continued to fuck me into the couch.

How the fuck hadn’t it broken yet?

“Give it to me,” he demanded as the hand around my neck came down to strum my clit. I moaned and let loose a pulse of power that had the sky outside cracking with thunder. Magic saturated the air, and I gave him exactly what he wanted.

My climax railed into me like a rocket as my grasp on reality broke. Zachariah somehow increased his pace, and I found myself shaking until a point of white-hot pleasure had me screaming out his name. The sound of glass breaking echoed around us as pleasure flooded me like a shot of heroin and everything inside of me broke to pieces.

“Fuck, Narcissa,” he hissed as he roared out a curse that had the entire room lighting up with his ancient magic. The building shook, and something dark buried inside me responded to our union. Power flooded me, and I felt the two of us feeding off one another in an endless loop of energy.

His climax came with a roar of my name as his cum filled me after a solid thrust, a blast of pleasure making my eyes roll to the back of my head.

Fuck.

For a moment everything seemed to suspend as Zachariah’s now dark eyes examined my face, his expression intense and his grip on me hard. The storm raged outside, the winds rushing through the streets like a hurricane, but that was the least of my concerns. All that mattered was us.

“You.” He chuckled softly after a moment of looking a bit dazed. “You, Narcissa, are fucking trouble.”

“Why didn’t you say something before?” I asked, my face still very

flushed.

He ran his nose against my cheek. “I wasn’t about to tell the Queen of the Dead that I wanted to hold her down and fuck her senseless.”

I tightened around him and he groaned as the rain grew stronger outside, my leg wrapped around him tightly as he tried to pull out. “Have you ever considered that I wanted that from you? If there’s anyone I want to dominate me like this, it’s you, Zachariah.”

He cursed and put his head down on my shoulder, his hips rolling so that his still very hard member began to move in and out of me again, this time much slower as the storm outside became very unimportant, and instead my focus was on his now silver eyes that were melting me. I whimpered because I was a bit sore, but nothing that I couldn’t handle, and when my voodoo priest pressed his forehead to mine I became somewhat of a lost cause at the soft gesture.

My toes curled and he groaned, his movements becoming hard, deep thrusts that had my back arching and his name like a chant on my lips. My cool power spread through my chest around his strong forearms and wrapped us in a tight cocoon, his chest producing a deep primal sound that felt like it was influenced by his magic. His power washed across my skin, and I inhaled some of it, my body filling with the dangerous magic of the man buried inside of me.

All too soon, I could feel my climax building, and I cried out while tightening around him. He growled, “Fucking shit, you are so tight, little rose.” Following me, the man snarled my name into my neck and climaxed with me again, both of us basking in the energy circulating around the room.

This. This energy filling me? I loved this. This contentment was so deep and real.

I felt my eyes prick with tears because I recognized the feeling raging through me—I’d experienced it with four other amazing men. *Yes, it took four different people for me to recognize what this emotion was. I sucked at this type of thing.*

“Zachariah,” I whispered as he pulled back and searched my expression.

Then he spoke words that made my chest break open with an intensity of emotion. “Before you say anything, little rose, I need you to know that this wasn’t a one-time thing for me, or a heat of the moment choice. You’re so much more than that to me. I’m mental over you, Narcissa. I’m so painfully in love with you. I’ve been in love with you probably far longer than you can

even imagine.”

“Really?” I inhaled, feeling very un-badass right now and not minding one damn bit. I’m sorry, but hearing that Zachariah—one of the most powerful men in the country, let alone the world—was in love with me? That he was insane about me? Well, fuck. That made me feel so good it wasn’t even funny.

“Yes really,” he whispered.

“I love you,” I admitted softly. “I love you too. So incredibly much.”

His face broke into a smile that made the entire space around us light up, and I inhaled as an ethereal swirl of silver magic twirled between us and caressed my neck. Zachariah’s eyes flashed dangerously as he tried not to smile, something a lot like victory flashing in his gaze.

“This is the most un-badass I’ve felt in some time,” I said, blushing.

“I like this version of you. You’re soft, cuddly,” he mumbled as I scowled. “But I also like how much of a badass you are. I love that about you.” His nose brushed against mine gently, and a cocoon of warmth seemed to hover around us.

“I require a bath and cuddles,” I said. “I don’t want to have to think until then.”

“I think we can make that happen.”

“Baby girl,” Dorian’s voice came out amused as we both looked over to the door...that was broken off the hinges. *Well then.* My demon looked peachy as hell, his gray eyes filled with life and his cheeks dusted with pink. He offered a cocky smile at the way I blushed.

“What?” Zachariah growled, burying his head in my neck and pulling a blanket from across the room over us. Well, his magic brought it over as his thumb caressed my neck gently.

“Not sure if you noticed,” Dorian drawled, crossing his arms, “but our friend Zachariah here summoned a bit of a storm.”

“Which I’m feckin’ pissed about,” Declan added, coming to the door. “You can’t make a storm baby with her, that’s my thing.”

I barked out a laugh and let my head fall back. Zachariah muttered a curse and groaned, rolling us to sit up. I was disappointed when he pulled on pants and walked towards the windows. I turned to find Dorian right in my space, leaning over the couch. I narrowed my eyes at the demon as Declan’s eyes tracked me momentarily before crossing the room towards Zachariah.

“Hey, baby,” I grinned, offering a sated smile.

“You okay,” he asked softly, his eyes flickering along my covered body. I knew the man was super tuned into my physical well-being because *duh*, he’s an incubus. I stretched and winced slightly, checking to see how I felt fully.

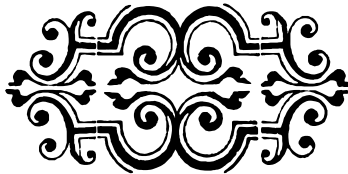
“Yes,” I sighed happily. “But a bit sore.”

“Let’s get you home.” He lifted me up, and instead of even attempting to be a badass, I curled up on his chest only to be transferred moments later to Abel’s lap. I didn’t need to open my eyes to know it was him. I sighed into him, and he murmured ‘I love you’ into my ear before I finally gave in to sleep.

I trusted my men to get us home.

CHAPTER 7

ABEL



The storm was still raging outside as Zachariah offered a cocky smile as he tried to talk Declan down from being upset about Narcissa and his ‘storm baby.’ Narc was curled against me in a throw blanket and nothing else, her minty cool scent mixing with her arousal in an intoxicating perfume. I ran a thumb over the pulse in her neck as I resisted the urge to take a nibble out of our little Queen. I shook my head at the small, elegant silver rune that I knew was from Zachariah, his eyes flashing to it every once in a while a bit obsessively.

“I want to get her home,” my brother announced, but the others were caught up in talking, Dorian looking real fucking pleased overall and Raphael unsurprisingly territorial.

“Agreed,” I murmured.

“What’s the climate downstairs?” Zachariah asked, and I knew he wasn’t talking about the weather. We’d already ordered a car because I didn’t feel comfortable taking her on a bike in this storm, especially while sleeping.

“People are getting pissed,” Alaric admitted as Raphael shook his head furiously. Of course it was beyond fucking stupid that they were upset with Narcissa but completely unsurprising for this community.

“Scared.” Dorian lost the smile on his face. “We probably should leave and keep her away from Bourbon until we figure out how to handle this.”

I smoothed over her hair, and those thick lashes fluttered as she snuggled further into me. I kissed her head and got distracted looking at her, so I was a bit surprised when the car alerted us to its arrival.

Yes, we were using one of those human car services that you could order

on your phone. I didn't like most things that humans did, but even I had to admit that this invention was particularly smart.

Tucking her further against me, I took the back staircase out of the shop and all of us easily filed into the car, Zachariah's voice low as he murmured a series of incantations and spells to fix the storm outside, most likely. Narc mumbled something in her sleep, but other than that, the ride was silent. I couldn't even tell you who drove us because the moment we reached her home, we were out of the car.

Luckily, her grandma wasn't there to greet us because I didn't know how to explain why we were bringing her granddaughter home naked and unconscious, wrapped only in a blanket, in the middle of hurricane-like weather.

I heard Raphael curse, and I realized that the media trucks across the street were taking an interest in what we were doing. That wasn't a good thing. Once we were inside, I walked up the stairs and shook my head, finding the damn bathtub already filled and steaming. The others were talking in her suite, so I easily unwrapped her from the blanket as she blinked her eyes open, looking at me through a sleepy haze. I smiled at her as I lowered her into the water, and she moaned, causing my dick to twitch.

Now was not the time to even think about how she would sound moaning while under me. *No*. I couldn't let my thoughts stray there. Not right now.

I was glad the steam covered her amazing body because I wasn't very confident in my self-control. Her lips were bruised and puffy as she grasped my jaw lightly. "I love you, Abel."

"I love you so much, Narc," I replied as a blush filled her cheeks.

"Join me." Her eyes crawled over my form as I pulled off my shirt and pushed down my jeans, leaving my boxers on before sinking into the warm water. I tucked myself behind her and wrapped an arm around her naked waist, pulling her against me so that her ass was right against my cock. It was pure, beautiful torture. My hands began to wander over her body in comforting caresses, the scent of lavender surrounding us as the soothing sound of rain added to the haze of comfort.

"You know," I began as I tucked some hair behind her ear, "this isn't the first time we've taken a bath together."

She offered me a lazy grin. "I don't think the last one counted, considering how very drunk I was and that you never actually got into the tub."

It was true, she'd been ridiculously drunk—and more than a bit adorable.

“H omecoming, bitches!” Narcissa yelled enthusiastically, stumbling into the house with a tipsy Raphael in tow. The two of them were back far earlier from that stupid dance than expected. I loved that.

“Come on.” Raphael tugged her hand gently, neither of them noticing me on the staircase. I expected to feel a surge of jealousy at their obvious closeness, yet instead I felt curiosity. I knew she was his mate, but it was different for vampires. I'd known the stunning little Queen was mine and my brother's amour de sang for over a year now. I wanted her to realize the connection so badly, but she hadn't. Or if she had, she never brought it up. Sometimes I thought I saw her looking at me with heat in those stunning gold eyes, but I honestly wondered if I was imagining it.

Narcissa scowled. “My house is right down the street though, and my bed is so comfortable.”

Raphi swept her up into his arms. “I don't want your grandma thinking I'm a bad influence because you're drunk.”

She wouldn't, but it was fucking funny seeing him try to be rational.

“You're both drunk.” I sighed as she offered me a goofy smile, both of them realizing I was there.

“Drunk as a skunk...do skunks eat pasta? I could use some pasta,” she claimed, swinging her feet in the bridal style hold Raphi had on her. I watched as Raphi let out a low rumble at the proximity of her bare neck and knew this was a good time to interfere. I narrowed my eyes at Raphael in warning, and he grunted, gently placing my bubbly drunk little queen into my arms before he stumbled off towards the kitchen.

“No,” she lamented. “You're not going to help me make pasta.”

I chuckled. “How do you know that, honey?”

She sighed dramatically, putting her head back as my eyes flickered down to her perfect smooth neck. “Because you're a vampire, silly. Duh.”

I carried her into our bedroom where my twin looked up in confusion and then chuckled, realizing that her commentary and self-inflicted giggling meant she was drunk as shit. Alaric swung his feet over the side of the bed and stood, then crossed the room towards us.

“Can you make me pasta?” she asked Alaric, fluttering her lashes. He nodded, kissing her forehead before passing us. I set her on my bed and

immediately she fell back and looked up at the ceiling with interest.

“Abel!” she sang as if somehow I’d disappeared.

“Yes, sweetie?” I caged myself over her.

She reached up, her soft fingers tracing my lips. “Can you help me?”

Literally with any-fucking-thing she wanted.

“With what?” I arched a curious brow.

“I want to take a bath,” she demanded in a queenly tone. “This is my great plan. I’m going to seduce him.” She mumbled that last part, and a snort came from me as she froze, looking alarmed. Ah. She didn’t realize she’d said it out loud.

Well, I was hoping she meant that because little did she know that her seduction was fucking natural. Honestly, all she needed to do was smile at me and I would be a goner. Maybe she would remember what she said when she sobered up.

“Come on.” I picked her up gently. “I’ll start a bath for you.”

I nearly groaned as my body hardened at the thought of her tight, perfect curves in steaming hot water. It was almost painful to consider, knowing I wouldn’t be able to touch her. Five minutes later as she sat on the counter humming, I’d filled up the tub and was looking over her flushed face. She’d worn a gold sparkly dress to the dance, and I started to unpin her hair from the tight updo she had going on. I helped her out of her dress, unzipping the back, and I tried so hard to not groan as she offered me a coy smile...and nearly face-planted.

God, I loved her so much it hurt.

“Fuck,” I mumbled. “You’re a bit clumsy drunk.”

“You’re clumsy.” She scowled in response, turning into my chest.

I swallowed and tried to not look down at the very naked woman pressed against my frame, a thin piece of lace covering her silken ass. My eyes flashed over her from the reflection behind us, and I inhaled sharply at how fucking sexy she was, no longer able to hide how hard I was. Damn. I wanted to devour this woman, and not just her blood.

“I’m going to go outside,” I mumbled.

“No.” She scowled, grabbing my shirt and looking up at me with heat in her gaze.

“Narcissa.” My hands tightened on her small waist, and she blinked up at me.

“Please stay,” she mumbled, and I couldn’t even say no because of the

insecure look in her eyes.

I needed this school year to fucking end because while she may have been eighteen, we'd promised we would wait to tell her how we felt. I ran a hand through my hair as she stepped back and slipped off the lace on her ass, exposing her delicate golden skin. I could see her tight nipples, and my mouth practically watered for them. I wanted to bite into every part of her body. She sank into the bubbly surface seconds later, and I scowled at her now hidden body.

I joined her on the tile floor, and she offered me an innocent look as if she hadn't just offered herself to me. How much I wished to take her up on that offer.

"Thanks." She offered me a smile, relaxing into the hot water completely.

"Anything for you, Narc," I offered softly.

"Anything?" Alaric goaded as he walked in and stopped. "Seriously, Abel? I get stuck making pasta and you get to watch her sit naked in a steamy pool of water?"

I handed her the bowl of pasta, and she smiled happily. "Life does not get better than this, Narc. Pasta and two vampire hotties hanging out with me while I take a steam bath."

She probably hadn't meant to say that last part out loud.

"Hey, Abel?" Narc's voice brought me out of my daydream.

"Yeah?"

"I don't want to deal with any of this."

"But you do want to fix it, I know you do." I sighed, feeling bad that this type of weight was laid on her shoulders. I would fix it for her completely if I could, but I knew this was something that Narcissa would insist on fighting on her own. Or else these demonic assholes would come back again and again.

"It's fucked up," she mumbled. "I'm tempted to just walk across the street and demand both assholes get the fuck out."

"I don't want him near you," I stated softly, my fingers gently running over her body. She shivered in response, her breath catching as my fingers smoothed down her soft stomach and over her wet, sensitive center.

"Abel," she moaned, moving against me. I continued to pet her as she whimpered against my mouth that dipped to hers in a soft, needy kiss.

“I know,” I whispered, licking a drop of water off her soft neck. “You need rest though, sweetheart.”

Fuck. She was so wet though; her silken cunt’s wet heat made me want to change my mind and pull her over my hard cock before letting her sink down on me, taking every inch I had to offer.

Before she could respond, the door opened and Zachariah strolled in, pausing to stare at the two of us momentarily, the storm having faded outside. I didn’t even mind that he was here—there was an acceptance between us that seemed to grow each day.

“Storm is done.” He crouched down at the edge of the tub, and Narcissa reached out and tugged on one of his locs.

“So New Orleans is safe another day?” she purred.

“Something like that,” he murmured.

“Narcissa.” Her grandmother’s voice rang out loudly from the other room. “Meet me in the garden in ten.”

Narc sighed, and I nodded. The small amount of peace was over. Now we just needed to get this shit done so we could resume it. Permanently.

CHAPTER 8

NARCISSA



After drying off in my unfortunately empty bathroom, I slipped into an unusual choice for myself—a light sundress that was a cherry red color. It tightened at the waist and smoothed over my hips, making me feel oddly lady-like and not badass at all. I dried my hair and slipped on sandals to go meet my grandma downstairs. I wasn't sure what had inspired my clothing choice except that I needed a change to get out of my own head, to look at this situation differently than I was currently.

Hopefully it would help.

Zachariah and Abel had decided to go with Alaric back to Bourbon Street to see what everyone was saying about what had occurred. I could hear Raphael sleeping in my room, and if I had to guess, Declan and Dorian were downstairs somewhere, most likely talking to my grandma.

“Lass?” Declan called, answering my question of where he was as I came down the steps, shutting the door to my bedroom so Raphi could rest in peace.

“Hey, you,” I chimed, offering him a smile before zapping him with a quick point of my finger.

“Goddamn it, Narc, that hurts so fucking much,” he groaned as Dorian peeked around the kitchen corner.

“Oh, you’re being a baby,” I pointed out and intertwined our fingers together. “Come on, come to the garden with me. Dorian, you coming?”

The incubus placed a kiss on my forehead. “I’ll be back, baby girl. I want to grab something from our place.”

“Oh, grab me your hoodie,” I called out. “You know the one.” It was my absolute favorite.

Declan and I entered our well-maintained, fenced backyard garden. My grandma looked up as I walked outside towards our family cemetery, the roses parting for me as a bunch of misted forms offered me frustrated looks. They were, in fact, having some afternoon tea that I was clearly disrupting. Although they were annoyed enough that it stopped them from looking at my demigod...not that I could blame them. Declan had no shirt on under his leather jacket, making him look even more irresistible than usual, which was saying something.

“Thanks, lass.” He winked.

I blushed, realizing I’d said that cheesy nonsense out loud.

“I need your help,” I said to my grandma. “We have missing shifters and another murder involving two humans on Bourbon Street.”

“What can we help you with?” My aunt sneered, as if I’d been talking to her. “You’re the necromancer.”

“Shut it, you dumb twit,” my great-great grandmother scolded. *Thanks, Grandma.*

“We wouldn’t know anything,” my Uncle Rubert agreed, his pot belly still large and his head still bald, exactly as he appeared in every photo I’d ever seen of him. “We have no reason to leave the property.”

“Don’t you have ghost friends you can ask?” I asked the seemingly empty space across from my grandma. I had to give Declan props, he didn’t think it was unusual at all and instead continued to smooth a hand over my back gently.

All of my family members looked up at me immediately, surprise and excitement filling their faces as my mother appeared in a flash in front of me. “Are you suggesting we invite people over?”

Why did I feel like this was a bad idea?

“Yeah, sure.” I waved my hand as my grandma laughed. “Twilight tea tonight. Here.”

A collectively excited hum went through the ghosts, and they disappeared, leaving my grandma to raise her manicured brow. “Do you

understand what you agreed to?”

“Not really.”

“The ghosts are very particular about their teatime,” Declan noted as he sat down across from my grandma. She poured two cups of tea, and I sat down to join them. I mean why the hell not, right? Today literally wouldn’t get any odder.

“There are rules you need to follow,” my grandma agreed and suddenly snapped her fingers, a large piece of paper floating down on the garden tabletop.

“What are the rules?” I refocused on the paper, trying to not be distracted by the chuckle Declan emitted at the scowl on my face. The parchment was a thick cream-colored piece of paper that was edged in a stunning pattern of skulls and roses. The flowers of hot pink, sapphire blue, and a cherry red that matched my dress contrasted the bone coloring vividly. I absolutely loved it.

“*Tea Time with the Dead: Etiquette and Styling Tips*,” I read, finding myself amused despite this odd situation. Declan settled in and snapped, a whiskey bottle and three glasses finding their way in front of us as magic poured them to a good sipping amount. Tea and whiskey. Interesting. My grandma toasted before returning her attention to me.

“Alright, *Rule One: Ensure that a theme has been set for the styling and dress of guests*. Well, that’s not needed because they’re ghosts, right?”

“Wrong,” Declan said. “They would very much want a theme.”

“How do you know so much about this?” I arched my brow curiously.

“I’ve been around a bit,” he reasoned. I hummed as I looked at my grandma.

“It’s true.” She waved her hand. “I would personally suggest you pick something easy, like a floral theme.”

“Okay.” I blew hair from my face as the wind picked up slightly. “Floral theme it is.”

“Here we go!” She grinned, and I almost fell out of my chair as the garden parted, pushing back to expand into a large floral edged space. Out of literally nowhere, a massive, curved table shaped like an S settled in the thick grass, and flowering vines grew up the legs as chairs joined it. The top of the table settled with a floral tablecloth and an assortment of vases.

“That...that is freaky,” I murmured.

“Rule two?” my grandmother asked.

I looked down. “*Rule Two: Make sure to have a selection of teas and*

small snacks suited for your dead guests.” I nodded and looked up. “Alright, so do I need to transform tea into that weird goopy shit for ghosts?”

“You can do that already?” My grandma tilted her head with interest.

“She’s pretty amazing,” Declan noted, smoothing a hand over my neck as I leaned into him.

My grandma offered us a smile before standing up. “I’m going to let you two figure this out. Declan, I assume you know what this is supposed to look like?”

“Of course.” He offered a lazy salute, and I kept my eyes on him until we were finally alone. He looked down at me with his emerald eyes sparkling.

“What?” he asked.

“You.” I shrugged. “You’re just cute and shit. Can’t blame a girl for looking.”

He hummed, his eyes flashing with heat. “Let’s finish these damn rules so I can show you just how cute I can really be.”

I blushed as I picked up the paper. “How do I do the tea and snacks?”

“That will have to be done the old-fashioned way, unfortunately, so you may want to call a caterer and then change them yourself.”

“Already called them!” my grandma yelled from the house.

Perfect.

“Rule Three: Be sure to have a gift table available for the hostess presents you are sure to receive.”

“Oh.” Declan whistled. “Those will be interesting.”

I frowned but realized a small table had already appeared along with teapots and trays alike. *Wow, this magic shit was really coming in handy.* I looked down and realized there was only one rule left.

“Rule Four: Make sure to dress as you would want your guests to. So, sweatpants?”

“That rule is sort of bullshit.” He sighed. “I even have a suit for tea parties. It’s almost essential for all supernatural members that hang around long enough.”

“What does your suit look like?” I arched my brow.

He flashed me a wicked grin and snapped, his entire appearance shifting into what I could only describe as a ‘Mad Hatter’ look. I wasn’t joking. The bastard was wearing a massive green top hat and a suit with teapot buttons and clovers that patterned it in a silky green shade.

“Holy shit,” I mumbled, noticing that despite the suit jacket, he still had

no shirt on. “You look hot in that. How the hell is that possible?”

Declan placed his hat down as he tugged me onto his lap, my legs falling to either side of his large body. “I’m sure you’ll look fucking perfect in your dress and hat as well. Probably enough that I won’t be able to get through this damn party without bending you over the table.”

“Declan!” I squeaked in surprise as he chuckled softly and cupped the back of my neck. Declan was sarcastic and a bit of an asshole, but when it was just the two of us alone? The man was a total charmer. Also a dirty bastard, but I liked that about him.

My lips pressed against his as the taste of whiskey exploded on my pallet. I sighed into it, his hands gripping my ass. The light of the sunset was hitting our skin, and I found my heart beating faster at how hard he was beneath me. When I pulled back from the kiss, I realized that my clothes had changed.

What the...how did something like that even happen?

“See,” he said. “Told you you’d look delicious. Like a fucking cherry.”

I squirmed off his lap and turned around, a bright tulle skirt in red fanning out to showcase a pair of white satin heels with bows on the ankles. The corset of the dress fit perfectly, and on top of my head was a small hat that felt as if it had feathers on it.

“Did you do this?” I motioned to my dress.

“No.” He shook his head. “I wish I’d undressed you, but the redressing probably wouldn’t have happened.”

I offered him a smirk and looked around the garden, suddenly feeling a bit nervous.

“Do you think this is going to work?” I asked. “Do you think this will give us any information at all?”

He stood up and pulled me into his arms, offering me a cheeky smile. “Well, lass, I would wish for it real hard—maybe you’ll get lucky.”

My eyes widened. “Is that how your magic works?!”

He shrugged. “Maybe, maybe not.”

“Declan,” I complained, offering him my best wide eyes. “You have to tell me! Boyfriends always tell their girlfriends cool shit like that.”

“I’m your boyfriend?” His eyes flashed with heat. “I’ve never had a girlfriend before, so I’m not positive how it works, Narcissa.”

“You may be right,” I hummed, taking way too much pleasure in him admitting that, “but tell me anyway.”

Instead, he winked and then the back door opened to reveal a very

handsome and half sleepy Raphael. He froze, looking at the two of us.

“So, I don’t believe in kink shaming...” He tilted his head. “But this is weird as fuck. I never thought you would be into tea parties, Declan.”

Declan barked out a laugh. “Now come on, Raphi. If I was going to have a kink, it would be far more creative than this. Like maybe making her dress up as a clover or some shit.”

I scowled at him as his smile only grew, seemingly elated at the turn of conversation.

I spun into Raphael’s arms. “Hate to tell you, but you’re going to need a suit as well.”

“Fuck no,” Raphael said. A pulse of my magic surrounded us, and I pulled back, clapping my hands happily. Raphael groaned, his body now covered in a dark gold suit. His hat had a little feather that I hit like I was a cat.

“Love the look,” Abel called as he appeared.

“You’re next,” I chimed. Really though, the minute they stepped into the garden, Alaric following him, magic shimmered around the massive men. Alaric’s suit was a deep blue, and Abel’s was a baby blue by the time the transformation was complete. I loved that their suits were the opposite of their eyes. My magic totally knew what was up.

“You look fantastic in those.” I let Alaric lift me up under my butt as he looked around the space with interest.

“What the hell are we doing dressed up for a tea party?” Abel asked.

Ah, right. They literally had no idea what was going on. Before I could respond, Dorian and Zachariah both walked into the back yard looking less confused. Most likely my grandma had filled them in. When my magic surrounded Zachariah, it left him in a silver suit that he seemed to approve of before he walked over and lifted me from my grumpy vampire. Thank Christ we were hidden from view, because this was very un-badass.

For the record, yes, I’d seen the small rune he’d left on my neck. No, I was not going to give him the pleasure of knowing I’d noticed.

“I actually like this,” Dorian said. I looked over his burnt orange suit. I did as well.

“What is all this, sweetie?” Abel asked, still confused. Zachariah was so comfortable I’d almost forgotten what I’d been meaning to explain to them.

“As you’ve gathered, we’re having a tea party tonight.”

“What? Why?” Abel arched his brow.

I waved a hand. “A tea party with the dead to see what they know, to be exact.”

I sort of understood why they were giving me such a funny look. I imagined it was much like the one I’d given to my grandma.

“I’m going to go enforce the wards with my magic for tonight. I know the rules.” Zachariah kissed my forehead, and I nibbled my lip in thought. Would that be enough? I didn’t want to invite danger into our house, and I really had no idea which spirits were on our side and which weren’t...

“We won’t be able to see the dead,” Raphael pointed out.

Declan’s head shot up. “Actually, I’ll be right back. Zachariah may be able to help with that.”

That would be so incredibly nice and honestly make me feel a little less crazy. Plus, then they could suffer with me while listening to their antics!

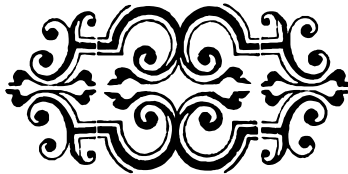
I looked around at my boys and smiled. “Ready to hear the rules of the tea party?”

Alaric grunted as Dorian sat down, looking excited. Raphael frowned. “Rules?”

“Rules.” I handed Abel the paper, and he chuckled. I couldn’t wait to see what they thought.

CHAPTER 9

DECLAN



“Lass?” My voice was rougher and a bit more panicked than I intended as I searched the property for Narcissa.

Zachariah had just walked outside to tell the others that he would be able to include all of them under his magic so they could see the dead at tonight’s party. Unbeknown to Narcissa, I was able to see them as well. Which is something I would have told her...if I’d been able to find her, but it was clear her little ass was no longer in the back yard.

A weird feeling, a lot like panic, struck me and I searched the bottom floor of the house, ignoring her grandmother’s questioning gaze before I climbed the stairs. I let my magic expand out, and I could feel that the wards were still very much in place. I entered her bedroom and opened the balcony, relieved to see a streak of red standing in the front yard.

What in the bloody hell was she doing?

I stepped onto the railing and jumped down, causing her to turn as a warm glint entered her eyes. “What are you doing out front, lass?”

I knew the wards made humans feel uncomfortable, so the media and police weren’t focused on us, but I still didn’t like her out in the open like this. Open and vulnerable. She fixed me with a look. “Before we hold this party, I want to give Nero and the other asshole a chance to give back the shifters and stop this nonsense.”

“You aren’t turning yourself in,” I growled.

“No shit.” She squeezed my hand. “I also don’t want to have tea with the dead and go to war with the two bastards without having asked them to cut it out.”

“You were going to go over there alone?” I frowned as she watched me with light amusement.

“No, I knew you would come find me. I was waiting,” she chirped. “Ready?”

“Should we tell the others?” I looked back at the house, knowing they would be concerned at her sudden disappearance.

She stepped backwards and offered me a rogue grin. “Do you feel like you need permission?”

I grunted and plastered her to my chest before opening the gate. She inhaled sharply, and I was tempted to swipe away all the fucking spirits that crowded around her. Bloody inconsiderate assholes.

Immediately the news trucks were turning their cameras towards us, and I kept a hand on her back as we approached the house, the security guards watching us cautiously. *Shifters*. Specifically hellhounds, and *not* part of Draco’s pack if my senses were right.

“We’re here to see Mayor Lourn,” she stated pleasantly as the shifters watched us, eyes narrowed in caution as if trying to gauge our intentions. They were right to be concerned. One of them pressed a button on their mic, and I briefly heard Mayor Lourn’s static voice over the tech piece.

Suddenly the door opened, and Mayor Lourn’s obnoxious smile filled the space as reporters began shouting questions at him. My grip tightened on my little cherry, and she walked forward, her magic seeping out to cover the interior of the estate.

The minute we were inside with the door shut, her magic slammed Nero against the wall, Mayor Lourn’s human body no doubt bruising despite his obnoxious laughter. I offered one of the guards who lined the hallway a warning look to not attempt to get involved. I’d sort of figured she wasn’t going to go about this nicely, so her action didn’t surprise me.

I focused my magic on the house and searched the space with a pulse of power just in case they were dumb enough to keep the missing shifters here. Unfortunately, they weren’t.

“What the fuck is wrong with you, Nero?” Narcissa snarled, stepping closer to him. “Cut the shit and get out of town.”

“Absolutely not!” he hissed and offered a cheeky smile. “If you kill this body sleeve, I’ll just jump into one of the reporters outside. You’re the only one that will look bad here.”

“Fuck you,” she bit out. “I am asking you once—leave town and tell me

where the shifters are.”

I had to admit, her being this angry in a red tulle dress was somehow ridiculously hot even though it shouldn't have been.

“It's not just shifters missing.” Jonathan's voice caused me to tense, trying to control myself from enacting violence on the pest of a boy as Narc dropped the mayor and stepped back. “It's several vampires and witches. All because you won't come home, Narcissa.”

“Home is *here*, not in your hell hole,” she bit out, and anger surged through me at the concept of her being taken from me. “I'm only offering you this one chance before this becomes a real war. Where are the missing supes?”

Both of them offered smug smiles, and I realized how smart they'd been. They'd completely fucked us over. One, Narc couldn't just keep killing the body sleeves they jumped into; it would waste more time in the long run. Two, they'd ensured their safety by taking hostages.

I smoothed her hair gently, and Jonathan caught the movement, scowling.

“Don't look so down, lad.” I smirked despite feeling anything but amused. “Sometimes you're just not meant to get the girl.”

His black eyes narrowed on my hand as Nero put a hand on his shoulder, probably to stop him from lunging forward. Demons were a very possessive bunch. Neither of them worried me, though. Maybe Nero more than him, but both were weakened by their human vessels.

“We're leaving,” Narc stated softly. “Let it be known that I offered you a fucking chance. This is war, Nero. All because your brother is a sore fucking loser about not getting laid.”

She turned, and Asmodeus lunged forward. I rolled my eyes, pulling Narcissa behind me and grasping his neck in a tight hold in one swift movement. I squeezed enough that he made a choking noise, Nero looking annoyed and pissed but not trying to interrupt.

“Declan,” Narc whispered, seemingly surprised by the violent action. Not sure why because I was a fairly violent person by nature.

“You're very lucky I haven't snapped your neck yet,” I warned with disdain as his face turned a bit blue.

“I have no idea who the fuck you are,” he snarled. *Liar*.

“I think you remember exactly who I am,” I stated. “I thought I told you to leave her alone. I thought maybe dying would knock some fucking sense into you. Clearly not. I'm not above killing as many human body bags as it

takes to get rid of you. You're like a cockroach. I'll just keep trying new methods until you finally fucking die."

"Declan," Narc mumbled as I dropped the fucker, pulling the door open and fixing them with a look.

"Consider her fucking offer."

The moment we were outside I had her tucked against me, and she stared up at me with surprise evident on her face. I tried to keep my own face neutral, but when we finally crossed the street, I looked down at her. Heat shone in her expanded pupils.

Thank God she wasn't mad or freaked out. Not that I expected her to be—this was Narc, after all...but I'd still felt a bit worried over what her reaction would be.

"Lass," I groaned, "you can't look at a man like that and expect him to remain civil."

Really, though, my cock was always uncomfortably fucking hard around her.

"Sorry," she said, not sounding sorry at all. "That was just so sexy."

I shook my head in amusement, but when I caught Zachariah's concerned and panicked expression while rounding the house, I sighed. *Here we go.* I wondered if he was going to let loose his crazy yet. If not now, I predicted soon.

"What the hell were you thinking, Narc?" he demanded.

Now it was, then.

Unsurprising since the man was mental. Once we were through the wards, Narc was instantly in his arms. She scowled, squirming away from him. "I am totally fine. It was my idea to go over there. Now let me down, you crazy bastard."

I followed them back towards the garden, and I smiled to myself, recounting the first time I'd met Narcissa after watching her from the sidelines.

"Just go say hi to her," Zachariah suggested from the loft above his family's shop. The little necromancer Queen sat with Raphael, an exiled wolf alpha, and Dorian, an incubus, and I could see them all perfectly from here. Why move? It wasn't like I could go sit next to her. I felt a bubble of jealousy that I tried to ignore because it truly had no place there.

“Oi don’t tink dat is a gran’ idea,” I pointed out. My eyes strayed to her plush lips that kept breaking into a smile in reaction to whatever her tablemates were saying, as her magic seemed to radiate off her in waves.

“You’re being ridiculous.” Zachariah chuckled. “And scared. She’s a young woman, barely fucking eighteen.”

There was no need to remind me of that. No fucking need at all.

“Ah yeah?” I turned to look at him. “Is that why yer go practically mute ’roun ’er?”

He grunted, and I ran a hand through my hair in frustration. This was stupid. She was just a woman. Why did I even care if she liked me? There had been quite a few Queens of the Dead I’d given little to no attention to, so why had she caught my eye?

Narcissa. Even her name seemed to radiate power. Her sure, almost cocky smile had me groaning as I turned and stalked down the steps of the shop to go talk to her. Fuck it. I wasn’t some schoolboy; I was a goddamned demigod that had been alive for centuries. This shit was embarrassing.

I exited the shop, and her eyes immediately flashed to mine as a small, amused look glinted there. I frowned as both guys got up and offered me frustrated expressions, leaving to walk into the bar behind them. I pulled out a chair and sat facing her as she leaned forward on her elbows, looking thrilled. I had no idea at what.

“Why ye smilin’, lass?” I crossed my arms and fixed her with a look. I think I realized this was past the point of attempting a normal introduction. Clearly she knew who I was.

“Because,” she drew out, her eyes sparkling, “I was wondering how long it would take for Zachariah to convince you to come over and say hi.”

My eyes shot up to where the man in question stood in the open window, watching Bourbon Street with interest, a scowl forming on my face. I smoothed it out and fixed her with a look. “So, you’re our new Queen?”

“I am,” she said and narrowed her eyes. “Is that going to be a problem?”

My lips tilted up. “Not as long as yer leave me boozer alone.” Or come visit it every day.

Narcissa arched her brow. “And which one is your bar, Declan Flannery?”

My name rolling over those pretty lips had me nearly fucking groaning. “The Pot of Gold.”

“Are you serious?” She barked out a laugh as I tapped my fingers on the table and a glass of whiskey landed on the table with a slight ‘bing.’

“Wow.” Narc whistled. “You are taking these stereotypes to the extreme.”

I offered her a dry look. “Lass, oi inspired de stereotypes, not de other way raun.”

Her smile grew, and I found myself annoyed when Dorian called her name from inside the shop. She stood and squeezed my shoulder. “It was nice meeting you, Declan.”

“Yer as well, lass.” I offered her a smirk, but the minute she was gone I nearly rolled my eyes at myself. I was acting like a fucking kid around her. Zachariah was waiting for me as I stepped up into the loft, and he offered a cocky smile.

“See!” he said. “Wasn’t that bad.”

“Feck yer.”

He was right, though. It hadn’t been that bad.

I’d tried to keep my distance after that, but it was difficult when you had so many instincts telling you to keep close. Her ancient magic was like a searing brand, and once it touched you, you were fucked.

As I looked over the garden and Narcissa, who now organized something on the large table set for tea, I realized that I’d been fucked long before our first conversation. When she’d come into power, her magic had pulsed out and brought me from my rural estate right to the city center, where I had stayed ever since. She’d never been to my larger property, and watching her in the twilight garden now, set with twinkling fairy lights, I wished I had taken her there before all this shite began. Although, the pixies that hung around there were assholes.

“Something on your mind?” Zachariah asked.

I nodded, tucking my hands into my pockets. “Just want all of this shite with Nero done.” I could hear my accent coming back. “You okay? I thought you were going to have a bloody meltdown a minute ago.”

He shrugged. “I wouldn’t call it a meltdown.”

“Right,” I snorted as he scowled.

Just then, a pulse on the wards had me looking towards the front yard, where a group of spirits were making their way across, talking and smiling.

Ah, good. It was time for the tea party.

CHAPTER 10

NARCISSA



I supposed I hadn't known what to expect out of a tea party with the dead. I should've known they would do their damn best to avoid answering my questions, to avoid the reason for being here completely. It had been nearly four hours, and by all considerations, it was a fucking great party. Classical music filled the garden, and the tea as well as the food was spelled so the ghosts could enjoy it.

Looking around at my guests, I realized that while most were familiar, there were some that I didn't recognize—and that was just at the main table.

Host a small tea party, they said. Not every ghost in New Orleans will show up, they said. Freakin' liars.

I had an abundance of gifted hostess presents that I had no idea what the fuck to do with. I wasn't talking about a bottle of wine or a cute coffee cup either. I really didn't have much need for someone's pinky bone that they had so graciously brought with them from their family mausoleum. *How sweet, right?* No. The only gift I wanted right now came in the form of answers.

Every time I attempted to call the group to attention, though, my aunt or another one of my mother's rowdy friends would begin a new conversation, a new story, all of them relating to when they were alive, of course. Eventually, I just leaned back into Alaric's chest as Raphael smoothed his fingers over

my hand, all of us resigned to this absolute madness and the concept that this may have been a completely pointless endeavor.

I was thrilled my men were able to see the dead along with me and impressed, if we were being honest, that Zachariah's ward allowed *everyone* within the bounds of the back yard to see them as well. I could tell my vampires, Raphael, and Dorian were a bit overwhelmed, and I nearly found that amusing.

Welcome to my fucking life, boys.

Mind you, the entire back yard was filled with spirits. The ones who weren't at our table roamed the property like it was their own personal playground, only staying out of the house where my grandma held her own little party.

Ask me why my grandma chose to have a party tonight...because I had no idea. Inside, the house was filled with members of the supernatural community, and somehow this small get-together had turned into a massive gathering of the living and the dead. New Orleans had a lot of ghosts and a lot of supes, so word had spread very quickly. I guess I shouldn't have been completely surprised.

The one thing I could compliment everyone on? Their sense of style. Sure, some of it was outdated by a few decades—or maybe a century or two—but they still looked great.

Personally, my toes were starting to kill in these stilettos, and I could not wait to change into something more comfortable, like my boots. What I wouldn't give to hop on my bike and ride away from this nonsense. My eyes trailed towards our seven bikes that sat safely in the side yard, delivered by some of Draco's hellhounds following the tropical storm that Zachariah and I had created. My eyes trailed over the sleek chrome and vibrant colors of each one.

The five of us, my original boys and I, were cheesy as hell. We'd gotten matching bikes with different custom artwork. My bike was obsidian with two skulls on either side of the front. Raphi's was a rich, deep green that had a hand-painted massive claw mark that appeared to rip down one side of the bike. Both twins had deep and light blue bikes that had Scandinavian rune phrases on the side. Dorian's was a deep purple ombre that faded to black. They were awesome, and we were awesome. Just saying.

Then you had Zachariah and Declan's bikes. Now, my bike cost a pretty fucking penny, but it was nothing compared to theirs. The first had a silver

chrome tone to it and the other neon green with clovers on it. The demigod relished in these stereotypes.

I was so distracted by admiring our bikes that when a ghostly figure appeared in front of me, cut in half by the table, I jumped slightly. My mother, followed by my aunt, appeared in front of me and stared at me with expressions I didn't fully understand. Much like my grandmother, they were stunning in that regal way that was only enhanced by their matching dresses and ornate hats.

I had never gotten along with either woman, even when my mother was alive, but it seemed to be worse now in death. I tried to restrain my sarcastic eye roll that preceded whatever nonsense they would spout. I arched a brow at the two of them because frankly, I really wasn't in the mood for their shit. I was annoyed that we'd hosted this damn party and were presumably going to gain nothing from it. There were lives at stake, and I was sitting here drinking fucking tea with dead people.

Fucking ridiculous.

"We're impressed," my aunt stated graciously, as if her compliment held weight. I held in my response to explain to her exactly where she should stick her opinion of being 'impressed.'

"One of the better things you've accomplished," my mother noted as my jaw clenched. *Yes, because being Queen of the Dead was a small feat.* Which was why she'd been so jealous of her mother and me in life.

"Because of that," my aunt drew out, "we want to help you."

Instantly, I sat up and leaned forward. *Looked like my luck had taken a fucking turn.* I didn't trust my mom and aunt, but I didn't think they would offer bad advice either. I hoped they weren't that cruel, considering the lives on the line.

"Alright," I said. "How much do you know about the murders going on?"

"Oh, how much do the dead know about other dead people? I wonder..." my mother said sarcastically. I inhaled, trying to be patient as Raphael let out a dangerous, low warning growl. Alaric chuckled as both women's eyes widened in fear. I honestly think they forgot they were dead most of the time.

"We know some of what is going on," my aunt conceded.

"More than you do," my mother added in that annoying, smug fashion she'd perfected. I honestly could not believe how immature the two of them were. It was almost painful.

"I really need a more direct answer." I felt my jaw clench. The dead were

petty and truly had an issue with the fucking truth. They weren't liars, but they weren't direct enough to be called honest. Instead, they liked to float around facts and make you question if you were fucking losing it. I had their number though, and I wasn't about to let the two of them play with me.

"Fine." My mother groaned dramatically. "There have been rumors."

"What rumors?" Raphael demanded, looking frustrated as hell. I knew he was nearly as over this night as myself.

My mother ignored him as Alaric pressed his forehead down on my shoulder, clearly about to lose his shit. She continued, "Some of the ghosts buried in lot one claim that there have been some very odd disturbances lately. Creatures living in their mausoleums and crying out in the night, trying to leave through the locked doors."

St. Louis Cemetery No. 1.

It was known as one of the most haunted and oldest cemeteries in New Orleans. I'd been there several times with my grandma when she was first teaching me how to raise the dead.

"It is completely possible they were coming up with shit to make themselves sound better than the old hags they are," my aunt noted, looking annoyed as fuck at the concept of being deceived.

"But—" My mother sighed. "If I were you, I would check there first. The assholes in that lot are exactly that—assholes—but the dead don't make a habit of outright lying."

True.

"Thank you," I said quietly to both of them.

My aunt rolled her eyes. "Don't thank us, silly girl. We just told you where to go running into *more* danger."

Before I could respond she was gone, and I was left with my mother. Her expression turned a bit more serious than normal as she searched my expression. Behind me, a teapot shattered as the dead became almost intoxicated sounding, shouting and laughing. Maybe tea was like alcohol to ghosts... That was sort of cool, actually.

"My advice?" she said quietly. "Not that you asked...but I would drop this entire fight and leave town. You're going to end up dead, or worse—trapped in the demonic realm."

I searched her face and was surprised to find true concern there. "You know I can't do that, Mom."

She looked tired and waved her hand dismissively. "Yes, well, maybe the

demonic realm isn't as bad as when I visited there. You seemed to like it a lot, kicking up a storm inside of me."

My eyes widened. "You went to the demonic realm when you were pregnant with me?"

She tensed as if realizing what she'd said. "No."

"You just said that," I demanded.

"Did I?" She floated away, and my mouth hung open in shock.

"She said that, right?" I looked at Raphael. Alaric grunted an affirmation.

"Maybe she's just fucking with you?" Raphi suggested.

Maybe.

"I'll deal with that later. Tonight we need to go check out that cemetery. I'm going to let my grandma know. Meet me upstairs?"

Both nodded as I pressed a kiss to both of them, making Alaric growl and try to pull me back onto his lap. I offered both of them a flirty smile before making my way up the back porch and into the scented house filled with vanilla and fresh baked treats. Turning a corner, I found myself in the kitchen where my grandma stood with several women who were very *not* human.

Once again, why the hell was half the supernatural community here?

The Garden Committee, to be exact.

My grandmother's friends squealed my name, and for the next three minutes, five women excluding my amused-as-fuck grandma pulled me into hugs and planted lipstick kisses on my cheek. I felt my eyes widen at all the compliments and words they were throwing at me. There were few people that weren't afraid of me, and that currently seemed to include her friends. Then again, most of them were well over three hundred.

"It's so good to see all of you," I finally got out, feeling a bit overwhelmed with the contrast I was experiencing. Going from being around the dead to the living was a heady change of power. My magic worked best in balance, which was exactly why my grandma had invited all these living creatures into our house—to balance things out. *Damn her.* Her eyes sparkled as she excused the laughing celebratory women, leading us towards the office on the main floor. The minute the doors closed, I sagged in relief and threw myself into a velvet chair.

My grandma, as always, looked timeless and elegant tonight. Her dress was cream silk, and she had diamonds on her neck and hands. She could be in one of those perfume commercials—you know, the super dramatic ones? Yep. That was a perfect analogy.

“Lot one,” I stated quietly as she raised her brows. “The destructive duo told me that there were rumors flying around about living creatures trapped there.”

She searched my face before looking outside. “Just be careful, honey.”

“You know I will be,” I said, feeling exhausted.

“I’m going to pray that my two daughters wouldn’t be dumb enough to play a nasty trick on you like this, but still. Be careful,” she reiterated.

I stood up and nodded, knowing it was a complete possibility. “I know, I will. I’m going to go upstairs to change. I *can* leave my own tea party, right?” I arched my brow, not remembering a rule about that.

“I’ll hold down the fort.” She waved her hand as I slipped out of the office and attempted to climb the stairs as elegantly as I could despite how badly my heels were killing me. I really fucking hoped we could find these missing shifters.

I could easily call for backup from the hellhounds or others from the supernatural community, but until I knew the missing shifters were there, I wanted to keep this quiet. No point in raising hope if they weren’t. Plus, letting the assholes across the street know that we’d caught onto them wouldn’t be good.

I pushed through my bedroom doors, relieved to be away from the party, and froze.

“Are you fucking joking?”

CHAPTER 11

NARCISSA



My comment was directed towards the two supes making out on my fucking bed. When the man’s head popped up from practically eating his girlfriend’s freakin’ face off, I nearly groaned. Scratch that—I *did* groan. *Leonard*. Fucking Leonard Frank. High school classmate and Alpha to the jaguar community.

Annoying little bitch is what he really was.

I’d long stopped attempting to be nice to him after he decided that my slight that one lunch period, not accepting his dining invitation, was reason to *attempt* to bully me.

I chuckled softly as I reached my locker. *Was this for fucking real? I felt my temper spike as I inhaled sharply, shaking my head. The entire metal surface was splattered with food from the lunch special, meatloaf today. In ketchup, the word ‘bitch’ was artfully scripted. I had to give the artist this—their handwriting was fucking excellent considering the tool and method used.*

“Yikes.” Leonard’s voice rang out in the silent hallway, everyone having already entered their classrooms. “What did you do to deserve that?”

I turned on the heel of my boot to pin him with a look as I tried to ignore my magic wanting to act out. "Probably nothing."

"Well clearly not." He tilted his head in a predatory fashion. "I mean, who would do that?"

"Someone with a small dick," I answered dryly.

His jaw clenched, but he tried to move on. "If you were my mate, I would handle this for you."

"But I'm not." I crossed my arms. "And I really don't need it handled considering your dumb ass was the one who did it."

"That's not my handwriting." He shrugged.

"I'm guessing it's hers, though." I nodded as a girl's surprise squeak echoed through the hallway, Raphi rolling his eyes as he threw open the door she'd been hiding behind.

"Ashley," Leonard growled, and she paled.

"I didn't tell them!" she exclaimed. "I was waiting where you told me to."

I rolled my eyes as I stepped closer to Leonard, his eyes snapping towards mine. "Leonard, go clean my fucking locker," I said in a calm, controlled tone.

"I'm not doing—"

My magic released and wrapped around him. He froze, his pulse going crazy as Raphael chuckled, ignoring the way Ashley was backing away from the scene of the crime. Leonard's voice turned rough as his eyes dilated because he was weird like that. "Fine, fine. I'll fucking do it."

"Good boy," I snarked, releasing him as I turned towards the door with Raphi. Hell, it was nearly the end of the day. This called for a good skip day, didn't it? Once we were out into the cool air, Raphi's next comment made me smile.

"He's such a little bitch," he muttered.

"I wish he would leave me the fuck alone," I growled as Raphi hummed and placed a hand on my back.

"The more dominant you are, the more he's going to be there," he pointed out.

"Why?" I scrunched my nose.

"Shifters are like that." He shrugged.

My lips twerked up. "Yeah? Do you find it attractive when I act like that?"

*Raphael's chest let out a low rumble. "My wolf fucking does."
Mentally, I let out a sad sigh. If only he did and not just his wolf.
One thing I knew for sure? Leonard's weird attraction for me wasn't
going to stop me from kicking his ass.*

“Who is that?” the girl asked, trying to look as Leonard backed up a bit from the bed. “I thought you said they wouldn’t come up here, that we could fuck on her bed...”

“You can’t,” I snarled, stalking forward as the girl’s eyes widened. “Both of you get the fuck out. That is disgusting.”

The girl scrambled from beneath him, leaving Leonard with a half-open shirt and a cocky smile on his lips. I really hated this fucker, and I hated more that he looked like this was how he’d wanted this plan to work out. I could feel his jaguar right under the surface, so I let my magic seep out, making sure to establish how the fuck this was going to go.

“I have no idea what you’re trying to pull, but you need to get the fuck out of my house,” I demanded. I didn’t have time to deal with the politics of this.

Leonard put his hands up and sauntered forward. “So sorry, Your Majesty. Just trying to impress the lady.”

“By fucking in my bed?” I cringed.

He shrugged a lazy shoulder, walking past me before turning to meet my gaze. “I also came by to see if it was true.”

“To see if what was true?” I snarled, hating where this was going.

“To see if our Queen was holding parties while members of our community continue to be kidnapped and killed.”

Motherfucker.

“You’re a bastard, Leonard,” I bit out. “You know it’s not like that.”

It was hard to keep my cool when the man was essentially threatening to spread lies about me. I didn’t care about a lot, but I didn’t want anyone to think I didn’t care about people dying. That was just some absolute bullshit.

“I don’t know anything for sure.” He chuckled, putting his hands out. “Nothing I can tell them for sure, at least.”

A low snarl had me smirking as Raphael grabbed Leonard’s suit jacket by the collar and Alaric rounded on him, looking furious. His voice was accented with cold ice shards as he grabbed his throat, causing the jaguar to

choke.

“Did I actually just find you in her goddamn bedroom?” he demanded, his eyes nearly black and his body vibrating with tension. *That was hot.*

“I was here with someone else, not with her. She interrupted us.” Leonard begged, his voice squeaking. “Tell him, Narc.”

I blinked innocently. “I don’t know anything for sure.”

I grinned at the anger that filled his gaze, and it was enough for Raphael to yank him from the room, Alaric slamming the doors shut. A small scream was muffled from outside as Alaric shook his head, looking beyond annoyed. He approached me and I offered him a small smile, my fingers crawling up his chest.

“Was he really in here with someone else?” Alaric demanded quietly.

“Yes.” I scowled. “They were going to fuck in my bed. Who the hell does that?”

His jaw clenched as a dangerous light flashed in his eyes, his hands gripping my waist tightly and plastering my smaller body against his massive frame. I inhaled sharply as he let out a low territorial rumble against my neck. I sort of wanted to know what violent thoughts were running through his head, if we were being honest.

“Alaric,” I purred as he brought his lips to my jaw, and I melted into him completely. I knew I needed to get to the cemetery to investigate this shit, but damn it, the way he was holding me right now and my libido completely negated that desire. My magic lit up our connection, convincing me to stay. I wished I could tell you I put up more of a fight.

“Yes, sweetheart?” he asked, his massive, rough hands gripping my ass over this stupid fluffy skirt. This was why I liked tighter clothes—I wanted to feel his full touch.

“We should take back my bed,” I teased, rubbing against him. “I don’t want it smelling like them when I go to bed tonight.”

His eyes darkened from icy blue to black at the thought. I let out a laughing squeak as he stepped into my space and I stumbled back slightly, his massive arms sweeping under me and tossing me on my bed in a swift movement. My pulse turned into a racing tempo as I curled my hands into the soft bedspread in anticipation.

“You know I’ll never refuse you anything, Narc,” he growled, his words soft and filled with heat. His large hand grabbed my ankle and slipped off each shoe before crawling over me. I let out a needy sound as he ran his large

hands up my calves and over my knees, my thighs parting for his massive frame. He let out a deep rumble as he flipped up the skirt of my dress to show off the black lace thong I had on.

“Fuck.” He growled out another series of curses in an unknown language.

I shivered, squirming under his intense gaze as his eyes flicked up to meet my needy expression with a cocky smile, his finger snapping the lace material easily. I was so turned on, my nipples painfully hard against the corset of the dress and my pulse beating a million miles an hour. I watched as he slid his dark suit jacket off his built shoulders and began unbuttoning his shirt at a painfully slow pace, his eyes completely holding mine. I could feel myself getting even wetter between my thighs, and it didn’t help that I could see his massive cock outlined in his suit pants.

“Alaric.” I finally let out a needy beg, “Please.”

“Patience.” He chuckled but slid his fingers over my soaked slit, causing my eyes to flutter shut. I moaned out his name as my fingers clawed at the bed, my body practically begging for some type of release.

“You smell fucking amazing,” Alaric groaned, his lips pressing to the inside of my thigh as he pressed them apart fully. My back arched as my breath caught at his tongue meeting my hot center. I whimpered as my fingers sunk into thick blond hair.

“So sweet,” he snarled as his tongue once again dipped into my heat. I was soaking wet and gushing more each moment he devoured me. My body was practically trembling, and when the bedroom door opened, Abel’s energy circled the room and had me turning my head to meet his gaze. It was filled with so much hunger that his eyes were nearly black.

“Narc, you’re a sweet fucking torture to be around. Did you know that?” he mumbled.

“Why is that?” I moaned Alaric’s name as he sucked on my clit, Abel’s chuckle making me snap my eyes up to where he now stood over me. My eyes traced his very apparent hardness, and I greedily moved a hand from Alaric’s hair to run along Abel’s suit pants and grip him. Abel groaned as his cock pulsed under my hand, and with an easy effort he leaned over to rip my dress down the center. The sides fell, and my entire body was bare to their eyes as the humid air met my flushed body.

“I want to devour you, Narc,” Abel said, crawling onto the bed and pinching one of my nipples, making me moan out at the slight sting of pain.

“No one is stopping you,” I whispered as Alaric looked up, his lips glossy

with my arousal.

Fuck that was hot.

“Are you saying we can bite you, Narc?” Alaric asked softly, his predatorial magic making my heart pause as I shivered at the intensity of them waiting for my answer.

“Yes,” I whispered, knowing this was a big deal. Abel broke out into a dangerous smile and leaned down to devour my lips. I was so distracted by his deep, intense kiss that I squeaked against his lips as Alaric’s hot and hard as fuck cock pressed against my folds. Panic raced through me a bit because *holy shit* he seemed huge.

“Relax, Narc,” Alaric said softly. “We were made to fit together, sweetheart.”

His words had me moaning in relief as he pressed into me, Abel’s lips kissing down my neck as he began to nip and lick my delicate skin, never biting down hard like I needed him to, like I craved him to. I jumped as Alaric suddenly punched home, and I cried out his name as Abel bit down on my nipple gently, tugging with his teeth and causing me to clench around his brother.

“Fuck.” Alaric gripped my hips and began to slide in and out of me at a slow yet deep pace, my back arching as Abel kissed along my breasts and nicked my skin, making me cry out. His tongue ran over the sensitive bite and licked up the blood, moaning against me.

“How does she taste?” Alaric asked, his voice thick with lust and envy. I could feel my climax growing, and my heart was beating so loud in my ears it was almost painful.

“Fucking euphoric.” Abel plucked one of my diamond-hard nipples while licking around the other, causing me to shiver. “How does she feel?”

Why was it so sexy that they were talking about me like this?

“So unbelievably tight,” Alaric growled, slamming into me hard enough that I gasped. Then he slid out of me and flipped me around on my knees. I cried out as he re-entered me from behind and Abel slid onto the bed, his masculine smirk making me reach for his impressive body. I made quick work of his pants, and he growled as I pulled out his truly impressive cock, its rigid and massive length nearly hitting me in the fucking face.

“Are you going to take my big cock in your mouth, baby?” he goaded. I took him between my lips and depthroated him for my answer. Abel groaned, and I began to push forward, swallowing him deeper into my throat

as Alaric slammed into me again and again. I cried out around Abel's cock as Alaric quickened his pace, and I felt my pussy clench, exploding at the sensation of both of them inside of me. When Alaric pulled out of me I nearly pouted...before Abel tugged me forward so I was seated on his lap.

"I need to be inside of you," Abel snarled, no longer teasing as he slammed me down onto his thick length. I cried out as Alaric's hand wrapped into my hair and his cock pressed against my ass, sliding against it as I bounced on Abel's cock, his fingers gripping my ass hard enough that it would leave bruises. *Shit, this was so overwhelming.* There were so many sensations at once, making me feel dizzy with pleasure.

"Oh shit," Abel groaned as I gripped his neck, my nails breaking skin as pleasure coursed through me. I was close to coming again, and Alaric biting my ear nearly pushed me over the edge.

"Do you want both of us, sweetheart?" he asked, his voice rough and accented.

"Yes," I whispered, not fully realizing what he meant, clearly. I whimpered as his cock, coated in my release, pressed against my ass. I shivered in anticipation and nervousness, Abel pausing but nearly shaking with the need to move inside of me as I tried to mentally prepare myself for Alaric in my ass. That sounded terrifying. Hot as fuck, but terrifying.

"You ready?" Alaric asked as Abel followed up, "Are you ready to take both of us, Narc?"

Before I could do more than nod, Alaric slid into me in a hard, solid push. *Holy fuck.*

"Oh my God," I gasped. "Do you have to be so goddamn big?!" I could feel both of them squeezing inside of me, and talk about a tight fucking fit.

Alaric barked out a pained laugh and began to slide in and out of me as I rolled my hips naturally against Abel. Alaric's hand reached up to grab my neck in a hard, firm hold instead of responding to my question. Their pace increased in tempo with one another, and I screamed as they slammed into me in unison, my skin breaking out into a flush as sweat prickled on my neck and my thick hair stuck to my skin in the humidity of the space. I was positive that everyone from the party could hear us, and I did not give a fuck.

Alaric's lips pressed to the back of my neck as everything around me faded except for the pleasure they were giving me. Alaric's lips trailed my neck, and my voice was raspy at my demand. "Bite me, Alaric. Please."

"Absolutely," he growled as Abel slammed into me. His brother bit

down, making me moan and tighten around both of them. He groaned and began to drink from me, and his movements became almost feral and frantic in response to the moment. The pleasure that filled me at his action had my eyes nearly rolling up into my head. Abel tugged my wrist towards his mouth, and he offered me a roguish grin before his sharp teeth sliced into my pulse point. I cried out, a climax slamming into me as my body flooded with pleasure and stars filled my vision. At that point I officially took off from Earth, the only thing tethering me here the two of them and their hands caressing my skin.

They were far from done with me, though.

I couldn't fucking tell you how long I was between them, being fucked so incredibly deep and hard, my encouraging moans only pushing them on. Their teeth marked my skin as I climaxed again and again until tears streamed down my face. I gasped as thunder cracked outside and lightning lit up the now dark room.

"Fuck," Alaric snarled and slammed into me as he finally climaxed, filling me with his cum and biting down right on my neck again where he had first drank from me. Abel bounced me up and down on his cock before biting down on my wrist and buried himself deep inside of me, filling me with his release which caused me to go off like a firecracker. The two of them filled me completely to the brim at once, and I felt like I was going to explode... before the darkness pulled me under, my magic collapsing over me completely.

The last thing I remembered was mumbling 'I love you' before passing out.



I woke up gasping as if I'd just had a terrible nightmare. My eyes snapped open, looking around the room and my oddly empty bed, the large moon crossing the dark wood floors to highlight the space. I frowned, realizing any possible soreness from earlier was gone and I was extremely awake, which probably should've made me realize that something was very off. I stood up from the bed, and when the floor creaked behind me, I turned around and a

feral growl nearly escaped.

Asmodeus.

“How the hell did you get in here?” I demanded with a snarl.

I was able to rationalize that this was most likely a dream because he did not look anything like Jonathan right now. Instead, his bright almost white-blond hair hung around his face, and his dark eyes watched me possessively. Unfortunately for everyone, he was actually very handsome. Which was why it was a shame that he was such a dick.

I raised my brows and waited for an answer as he rounded the bed and sat on the edge of it, looking annoyingly calm.

“Your wards don’t protect your dreams. Shame on you for not thinking of that.” He ‘tsk’-ed despite looking extremely pleased. “It was so easy for me to break through them and pull you into the dream realm.”

“Good thing that is all this is,” I purred, “because I would kill you if this was real life.”

He searched my face and sighed. “No doubt.”

“You’re annoying. You know as well as I do that you’re wasting your time here. You can’t do anything to me in my dreams.”

“I’m not wasting my time,” he pointed out. “I’m here to warn you.”

“From yourself…” I arched a brow, wrapping my arms around my waist tightly. It made me uncomfortable how calm he was.

“Nero,” he explained. “You’re playing a stupid game with him. You should give up New Orleans now. Trust me, you don’t want to test my brother.”

I nearly rolled my eyes. “You’re joking, right?”

“No,” he grunted.

“I made myself very clear earlier when I offered you one last chance,” I growled, feeling annoyed. “Now I’m going to make your life hell. Go back home, demon boy. This is stupid for both of you.”

He muttered a curse and looked away. “The demonic realm isn’t that bad, Narc.”

“Which is why you are trying to live up here?” I drew out.

“I’m not; Nero is,” he said evenly, looking suddenly infuriated. “I want you down there. With me.”

“I am really happy on Earth,” I explained. “In fact, I was fucking euphoric only moments before I fell asleep, so this is making me exceptionally angry.”

His jaw tensed. "Yes, I heard of your sad little attempt to get answers on where the shifters are. Have you had any luck?"

"I wouldn't tell you if I had," I pointed out.

"Just think about what I'm saying, Narc." He stood up, walking towards my balcony. "Nero plans on taking everything you care about. Everything."

"What the hell does that mean?" I demanded, but when he snapped his fingers, the world bent.

My back hit the solid floor as I cried out in surprise. My eyes squeezed shut as dim lighting filled my gaze. *Fuck.*

"How the hell did she fall out of bed?" Alaric demanded as his brother lifted me. I inhaled, and the scent of magic and sex filled my lungs, tinted by the sound and light drizzle of rain outside. My body was now clothed in an oversized shirt, and I could hear the familiar sound of my men's voices around me. I finally opened my eyes again and looked around, realizing how fucking late it probably was. Why was everyone so fucking awake right now?

"Shit," I muttered as a pair of mercury-colored eyes appeared in front of me. "Why the hell are all of you up?"

"The party just ended," Zachariah explained. "Are you alright?"

"Maybe it's the blood loss," Raphael snarled as Alaric muttered a curse. Dorian's scent surrounded me as he grasped my jaw and tilted it back.

"Why do you smell like a demon?" he growled. "And one that's not me, at that."

I almost smiled at the possessiveness there. I inhaled and spoke the words that would no doubt send them into a fucking panic attack and overbearing frenzy. "Asmodeus just appeared in my dreams to warn me about Nero."

An outroar sounded and had me covering my ears. I let them freak the fuck out and was surprised to see even Declan looking pissed. I closed my eyes, exhausted. Then I remembered why I had come up to my room in the first place.

A surge of guilt hit me hard, realizing I'd gotten distracted. Mind you, I would take a distraction like that any time...but I felt guilty. I murmured a curse and stood up, walking over to my wardrobe. I tugged shorts up my legs and turned to face them.

"The cemetery," I said, trying to speak loud enough to be heard over their angry conversation. "We need to go and search for the missing supes. Now."

We can come home and freak out about Asmodeus later.”

“We aren’t coming back here,” Raphael growled. “We can go to our house.”

“Not far enough,” Zachariah said, only making it worse. “I suggest either going to my estate or Declan’s outside of the city limits.”

That just pissed me off. “I am not leaving my goddamn city,” I snarled. “I might as well hand Nero the fucking keys at that point. Absolutely not.”

I threw open my bathroom door and turned on the sink. I smirked a bit at the bites on my neck and began to use a face wipe to clean my neck and face. The oversized shirt worked nicely, so I tied it at my waist and pulled my hair back into a braid. Sex hair wasn’t a thing for me, clearly, because I just looked exhausted.

“Ready?” I asked, coming back into the room to find my men locked in some odd, silent standoff as I tugged on my motorcycle boots. Declan looked like he was failing at being indifferent, and Zachariah looked heated. Alaric looked frustrated and Abel concerned. Raphael looked...well, his normal possessive self, and Dorian was unusually quiet. *Wonderful.*

Declan’s phone rang, and I kept my eyes on him as he picked it up. “Wat?”

His eyes widened as they flickered towards me, his jaw clenching. “’old it together till we git down there.”

Hold what together?

“What?” I demanded.

Ever have those moments where you’re fucking annoyed by everything? Like you know it’s not their fault, whoever is near you, but you want to punch everyone in the flippin’ face? That was how I felt. I felt exhausted, worked up, and even the fantastic sex I’d had recently did little to fix the oncoming headache I could feel pulsing at my temples.

“The supes are gettin’ eaten at one av the local bars an’ startin’ ter express...’ow frustrated they are about this situashun,” Declan stated softly.

“What the fuck are you even saying?” Raphael demanded.

I knew. “What bar?”

Declan rattled off the name and I inhaled, tugging my leather jacket from my wardrobe before turning to leave the room.

“Where the hell are you going?” Alaric asked gruffly.

“I’m going to handle this,” I chirped despite feeling like I wanted to punch someone in the face. Namely Nero.

I was out of my room and jogging down the steps, meeting my grandma's sympathetic gaze as I offered her a head shake of annoyance. *I was so over this.* Couldn't I just focus on great sex and cuddles? Was that so much to ask for? I pushed open the front door as a light, warm drizzle hit my face and Dorian, the sexy bastard, materialized next to me.

Instead of protesting like the other bastards behind me—yes, including Declan and Zachariah—Dorian squeezed my hand supportively. I offered a middle finger as we passed Asmodeus's home, and a figure watched from the window. Probably Nero, creepy bastard.

"Hey." Dorian drew my attention back as our feet sounded on the wet pavement. "You know this is going to work out, right?"

I looked up at him, feeling a serious note overtake our conversation. I sighed. "I'm not sure about that, Dorian. People are dying and missing, and I'm to blame. Don't get me wrong, Nero would still take over if I suddenly disappeared, but I could stop the deaths."

"Or they would get worse," Dorian noted, "and he would kill more."

I nibbled my lip and sighed. "Yeah, maybe you're right."

"I always am, baby girl." He winked, making me roll my eyes as a trickle of pleasure filled me at his unwavering support and comfort.

I felt like a lot of people would automatically assume that having multiple partners was about the sex. Which, don't get me wrong, rocked. Sex was awesome, but what they didn't consider was the emotional support and backing you had when you had to make a difficult decision. Or what it was like to be the Queen of the Dead and have a group of amazing men to help you. No one considered how fucking great that part was. Even now, despite the hell that was going on, I knew that these guys, even Zachariah and Declan, would support me. My lips pressed up because of how much I loved them.

Oh shit.

Did I love Declan also?

I shook myself, not ready to fully go down that pathway. I had things to focus on, and if I started thinking about how attractive the brash sarcastic asshole was...well, I may get distracted. Again.

Bourbon Street was oddly calm tonight, and as we made our way past drunk humans towards the pub, I spotted Draco waiting outside for us. I could hear yelling from inside, and the scent of different supes filled my nose. Already I found myself annoyed.

Don't get me wrong, I was a huge supporter of being able to complain to the hierarchy when you were unhappy. However, I'd prefer if people just came and talked to me instead of getting piss drunk and ranting about it with most likely completely false information.

I nodded at Draco in greeting and looked toward the door, Raphi's arm wrapping around my waist. Draco quietly explained the situation. "It's mainly jaguars, wolves, and a few vampires. No one of importance or any alphas...well, except one."

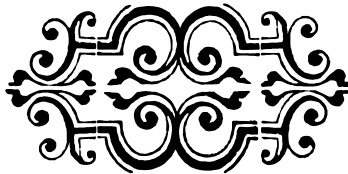
I could guess who that was. I inhaled, shaking my head and realizing that Mila wasn't here with Draco, which was odd to say the least.

I pushed through the door without another word. An angry cry broke out, a glass soaring over my head to shatter on the doorframe. The loud, sharp echo silenced the space, and my eyes narrowed on the long line of people at the bar as I found the face I was looking for.

Yeah, I should have fucking figured.

CHAPTER 12

DORIAN



I had known Narcissa for quite some time now. I'd seen her happy enough that her face seemed fixed in a permanent smile, sad enough over Disney movies that she would cry, and every in between. Right now, though? My *flamma vitae* was fucking furious. I let my magic expand out in a lethal blanket, and Raphael vibrated with so much tension I thought he would shift on the spot. Our power filled the space, not attacking but waiting for her to decide our next move as pieces of the shattered glass fell onto the floor. Drunk shifters and shady-looking vampires stared at her with concern and anger.

Completely unjustified anger, for the record.

“Who fucking threw that?” she said calmly, her eyes turning a deep shade of green as the part of her that was far from human began to make an appearance. I swallowed my concern and stepped back mentally to let her handle this, despite my need to kill whoever had shown her disrespect.

While I was relaxed most of the time it wasn't my natural state. Demons were possessive, and where shifters respected dominance in any form, demons didn't fucking care. The one that lived right underneath my skin believed that his *flamma vitae* shouldn't have to lift a finger, whether it was to get a glass of fucking water or to kill someone.

No one volunteered an answer, and half the room seemed frozen under the assault of power. She was pinpointed on one person though, and I knew her question had been rhetorical because at the center of all this bullshit was fucking Leonard. Who was very sober and had a stupid, antagonistic glint to his eyes that was going to cause major problems.

“Are you causing this?” she demanded softly, her steps the only sound in the room. I inhaled, trying to ignore the thick lust circulating through the room. It was in part because shifters were horny fuckers, but the other part was one hundred percent due to Narcissa’s magic. You wouldn’t think that death magic would attract literally everyone, but it did. I equally loved and hated it. Hell, it gave me a hard-on most of the time, but that was also just Narcissa in general. The woman turned me on like fucking crazy.

“Causing what?” He stood, putting a stool between them, acting as if Narc hadn’t seen the very obvious distancing move for what it was. “All I did was inform my shadow, as they have the right to know, that their fearless leader was hosting a party while three more shifters went missing tonight.”

I still found it odd that a group of jaguars was called a shadow. Like I guess it was weird that demons in a group were called a ‘chaos’... but still. Seemed fucking stupid, especially because it had to do with Leonard.

“Did you also tell them that you were trying to fuck a random chick on my bed at that same party?” she snarled. “If you’re so damn concerned about the situation, why don’t you fucking help out? Or are you too busy to care because the people who disappeared aren’t part of your shadow?”

The other jaguars shifted uncomfortably as he turned red in anger. Before he could respond, Mila’s voice echoed through the space, which had Draco letting out a low rumble from the doorway. “Don’t fucking lie to your Queen, Leonard. All you’ve been doing is spreading lies. Stop being a little bitch and own up to it.”

It was then that I realized most of the wolves seemed very sober, and the truth of what was going on here came out. They were trying to contain the situation that Leonard was creating.

“Shut it, bitch.” He barely got up before Mila grabbed him by the neck and knocked him to the floor. Narcissa’s magic flared up but she kept quiet, not offering her opinion on Mila’s actions either way.

The wolf Enforcer knelt down and spoke quietly. “If you ever call me or any other woman a bitch again, I’ll kill you.” Then she stood and kicked his ribs, rounding Narc to go stand by Draco. My little Queen searched the room and grabbed a chair, pulling it with a loud screech that had the shifters covering their ears. She sat down, one foot settled on Leonard’s head and the other leg stretched out in a calm, measured move. It made me proud that she didn’t worry about protecting her back because she knew we had it covered.

“Alright,” Narcissa said quietly. “Let’s hear it.”

“What?” a young woman who was distinctly a wolf asked.

“You have issues,” Narcissa explained, her voice dangerous but still honest. “You’re concerned and scared. You have a right to be. So lay it on me. What can I say or do to help this situation?”

“Fucking find them and make it stop,” a jaguar male demanded. He immediately looked down, scared of her reaction.

Narcissa nodded and nudged Leonard’s head as he groaned. “Unlike the shit this fucker claimed, the party I held had a purpose. I was attempting to gather information on where the missing shifters could be. Until I was pulled away because of this, I’d been on my way to look into that lead.”

Everyone shifted uncomfortably and exchanged looks. A woman sniffed, tears in her eyes, as she stood. “My son died yesterday because of you.”

Narc’s jaw tensed as she sat forward, her hair falling from its braid. I knew it wasn’t the time at all, but she looked fucking beautiful in an oversized shirt and messy hair. She would probably scowl at me if I told her that right now.

“I’m not going to sit here and lie to any of you. The person who’s killing your family and friends? They’re in part trying to get rid of me so they can take over New Orleans. If they’re killing indiscriminately now, what do you think they would do if they were in charge?”

“Who is it?” another woman demanded.

Narcissa inhaled. “I’m not going to disclose that publicly. I will, however, call an Alpha meeting. We’ll send out an official notice for tomorrow night informing all your Alphas to meet me in our normal place. Including you, Leonard. Especially fucking *you*.”

With that, she stood and shook her head at Leonard before turning on her combat boot heel. *God, the woman was just so perfect.* While our little Queen had a temper to say the least, I could never deny that she wasn’t a good Queen. She hadn’t needed to sit and explain shit to them, but she had, and while they didn’t want to face the truth, that was what she’d given them. Honesty.

I could see that her eyes were filled with doubt as we ducked outside, and I hated how much pressure this was putting on my baby girl. I gripped her hand, and she didn’t even make a comment about it being ‘un-badass,’ which made me worry for a lot of different fucking reasons.

“Where now?” I asked her quietly.

“Cemetery,” she mumbled.

Everyone was quieter than usual. Zachariah was watching her with concern, and Declan was humming sort of a sad fucking tune. I wanted to shake all of them, knowing we needed to keep it together for our girl, but even the twins and Raphi seemed concerned. *Christ*. I was not the person to drum up morale for the team. It was nearly three a.m., and the streets were silent except for the rain. Occasionally you would hear drunk laughter echo throughout the streets, but the journey towards our destination was actually rather short.

Instantly, the scent of death and magic crowded my senses as I breathed in the intensity of it. Humans overlooked that aspect of New Orleans often, preferring to focus on the party and celebratory nature of the city.

The location we arrived at was known in the modern day as St. Louis Cemetery No. 1. The cemetery was considered the oldest and most haunted within New Orleans. We'd been here before, but it had been under different circumstances and far less serious. I mean, it wasn't exactly odd for us to hang out in graveyards—Narc was the Queen of the Dead, after all.

Plus, if we were being honest, I may have always imagined fucking her in a graveyard. I know it was sort of fucked up, but I mean, come on. I was a demon; it wasn't that farfetched.

The wrought iron gates rose above us but we didn't risk opening them, instead swinging ourselves easily over the fence.

“What did your mother and aunt say, exactly?” Zachariah asked her.

“That the ghosts here had been talking about the living creatures in their mausoleums,” she mumbled. “The dead are literally so fucking vague it's painful.”

“Or your mother and aunt are particularly vague,” I pointed out.

“Honestly,” Abel stated, “it's weird she offered to help.”

“After meeting her officially tonight, I would agree,” Alaric said.

She let out an amused hum. “Wow. Yeah, that was a big step, guys, meeting the parents—minus the plural.”

Raphael chuckled as Declan lit a cigarette, offering her an amused look. A cool breeze brushed through the graveyard, and I grabbed her hand again to slow her down slightly. The others walked ahead to search, not wanting her to walk into this situation blindly.

“What do you want to do when we find these shifters and fix everything?” I asked to distract and amuse her. I could see her pupils expanding in the dark, and as usual, the minute that we were near one

another, we turned into magnets, moving as close as possible. My face still felt flushed as we walked slowly through the cemetery, the sexual energy from the twins and her fueling my magic enough that I would be good for fucking months. Unfortunately, my cock had been hard as fuck for way too long and *wouldn't* be good for months. I craved to be buried deep inside of her, fucking her until she screamed my name from those soft lips.

She held up a single finger. "I want to watch *Lady and the Tramp*."

A second finger went up. "Eat Brownie Fudge ice cream with chocolate syrup."

And finally, a third finger. "Make a pillow fort and fall asleep for the next twelve hours."

I grasped the hand that wasn't intertwined with mine and folded her fingers down, pressing a kiss to it lightly. "Done, done, and done."

"And if I asked for something extreme?" she goaded, wiggling her brows. Happiness surged through me because I was making her smile.

It seemed like such a simple thing, but the life of an incubus was fucking lonely. Seriously, people either wanted to fuck or use you, usually a combination of both. The fact that Narcissa actually loved me for the impulsive, arrogant bastard I was made me irrationally happy.

"What are we talking about?" I pulled her against me as her eyes sparkled with amusement.

"Well," she pondered, running a hand up my jaw and making me shiver, my hard cock pressed against her soft stomach. "Maybe I want all of you in my bed at once."

I grinned. "Yeah? I feel like that won't be very difficult to work out, Narc. I would say all of us are very willing to be in bed with you for any reason or at any time." She blushed. "You're going to need to reach for the stars here, baby girl."

Squirming against me, she tilted her head back as my hands gripped her jaw. "Alright, I want a full body massage."

"Fuck." I groaned. "That's a present for me."

"Well, let's go handle this then so I can get my massage." She winked. "Plus, I'm guessing they've searched the entire space already."

My ears heated as she barked out a laugh at my slight embarrassment. "Damn it Narc, it's going to be hell when we go to propose to you, baby girl."

Seriously, the woman always knew exactly what we were up to.

She wavered in her tracks as her eyes snapped up to me. "Huh?"

My smile grew at authentically shocking her. “Where did you think this was heading, *chérie*? Last time I checked, this was a pretty serious relationship.”

Her mouth popped open, and those cherry lips were tempting enough that I dipped down to nip the bottom one. “Come on, Narc.”

“You can’t just drop that bomb on me,” she huffed indignantly.

“Not a bomb, just the truth.” I intertwined our fingers as she flushed and muttered, looking down. I smiled to myself because she really would flip if she realized that we already had a ring for her. My eyes found the others as we made our way through the above-ground tombs and mausoleums. In the comfortable silence, I began thinking about how we’d come to have the ring in the first place.

“Afternoon!” I called out as we entered Narc’s house. The twins were arguing about something with Raphael behind me, but I didn’t pay them much mind. I was far too occupied mentally.

“Hello boys,” her grandmother called, and I frowned, confused on where our girl was. Raphael said she hadn’t been at school today, so I wasn’t positive where the hell she could be. It was making all of us uncomfortable and me a bit of a nervous wreck.

“Where is she?” Raphael frowned.

Her grandmother offered us a concerned look. “She’s in bed, sick.”

I was up the stairs and walking into her bedroom in a second flat. Narc, sick? No way. My brows went up as the breeze coming from her open balcony hit me, my eyes searching and finding a small ball of dark hair on the bed snoring softly. Oh shit. I could feel from here how under the weather she was feeling. Her eyes were closed, and Raphael made a worried noise as he entered behind me.

“Has she had medicine?” Abel asked worriedly.

“Won’t take any.” Her grandma sighed. “Everything is in the bathroom.”

The twins went to grab the medicine, and Raphael moved to the side of her bed as I kicked off my shoes and crawled forward, pressing a hand to her forehead. Her fever was high, and she moaned discontentedly as I attempted to wake her up.

“Dorian? Raphi?” she whispered, looking sleepy and confused. “What

the fuck are you guys doing here?”

“Taking care of you since you won’t do it,” Alaric muttered, handing me the medicine and Abel giving Raphi a cup of water.

“No medicine,” she growled, putting her head in the pillow. How was it possible that she could look cute while sick? It was fucking unfair.

“You need to get back to school; we have two months left,” Raphael pointed out. As she groaned and took the medicine, I got off the bed and set up the TV so that we could watch a movie. I drew the curtains, and I found myself smiling as she curled up between Raphael and Alaric. Abel sat at the end of the bed, and a few minutes after hearing her fall asleep again, I nodded towards the door. Abel followed me out.

“I think we should get her some of those human vitamin waters and stuff, maybe ask the chemist there...” I sighed.

“Pretty sure they’re called pharmacists now, bud. But I’ll go grab them. Need anything?”

I shook my head, and he walked down the steps. I followed but went into the kitchen to grab her some water. My lips pressed up because despite wanting to kill the other men sometimes, we worked together pretty damn well. I hadn’t known at first how the hell I was going to deal with sharing Narc with others, but when I stopped overthinking it, it seemed to fall into place easily.

Now we just...you know...needed to tell her we loved her.

“Dorian?” her grandmother said. I realized then that I’d been so distracted in thought, I’d been standing with the fridge open for a few minutes. I grabbed some bottles of water and placed them on the counter.

“Don’t want her to have to leave the room,” I explained.

She smiled, her eyes lighting up. “The five of you are very cute. Now when are you going to tell her how you feel?”

I grunted at the girlish smile she offered. Honestly, sometimes I thought her grandmother acted younger than Narc did. I sighed. “She should graduate first.”

“That sounds a bit like an excuse,” she chimed. “I thought you were serious about her.”

I put down the water and fixed her with a look. “How are we even having this conversation right now?”

She fixed me with a look, and I saw the age pour through her serious expression. “I want to give you something, but I need to know that it will be

used as it should.”

“We are all very serious about Narc,” I assured her quietly.

Her grandmother searched my face and then walked out of the room, putting up her finger.. When she came back, she held a small black box, my ears heating because I had a feeling what it was.

“I never married my mates,” she stated softly, “but that’s a long story, and unfortunately, a lot of them weren’t nearly as good of friends.”

I opened my mouth, and she raised a finger to halt me. “Her mother...she was madly in love with Narcissa’s father, but they ended things after a short, week-long stint. Narcissa’s existence something he is still not aware of.”

“He’s alive?”

“I won’t talk about her father, just understand that Narcissa is one of the only women in our family to have a chance at a happy, loving, healthy relationship. I can see how much you care about her, and while I would normally say she is far too young...I think my granddaughter is more than capable of making her own decisions.”

“Fair,” I mumbled, because she was. And honestly, our ages were all over the fucking place. Technically I was older than her grandmother. I know. It was fucking weird.

She slid the box across the counter. “This is a family heirloom. Use it wisely.”

As she left the room, I opened the box and my eyebrows shot up. Fuck. A massive black diamond sat at the center of a decorative pattern of smaller diamonds. It was gorgeous, and I had seen priceless jewelry from all around the world in the past two hundred years.

“What the hell is that?” Alaric asked as he appeared downstairs, probably wondering where I’d gone to get the water.

“Her grandmother gave this to us,” I mumbled.

“Oh shit.”

I inhaled. Well fucking said.

Since then we’d had the jeweler restore it to top quality, and it was now sitting in my house, waiting for the moment that would work best to propose. Honestly, I had no idea what I was doing. I’d never loved someone, and for sure never someone like Narcissa. Unsurprisingly, the twins and Raphael had been on board with the concept right away since the supernatural could be

married legally to multiple partners within our community. We hadn't decided yet who she would marry legally in the human world, if she even wanted to do that.

I think the most surprising element of all of this was when we attempted to bring it up to Zachariah and Declan because I mean *shit*. We sort of had to talk about it if they wanted to be in a relationship with her as well. Unfortunately, right as we had gotten to the good part, Narc had come back upstairs after talking to Draco. I wasn't as worried as I'd been before, though, because neither of them had seemed surprised on where the conversation had been headed.

I inhaled, shaking the thoughts for now as we approached a mausoleum. I recognized the structure because it held some of Narcissa's distant relatives, and she'd practiced her magic by raising their spirits often. Even now they seeped out from the black marble structure as the stone archangel above the door watched her carefully.

Creepy fucker.

Narcissa inhaled, and I didn't bother asking if she felt anything because I could feel her magic searching. Those stunning eyes closed as spirits brushed past and through her, a mint-cool vibration of gold and green surrounding her. That thick, dark hair blew around her face, and she crouched down to press her hand into the dirt underneath her favorite pair of worn motorcycle boots. I wasn't nearly as good at seeing the dead as Zachariah, but I could see their forms floating in silver waifish clouds. I think that the more connected we became with Narc, the easier it became to see the world as she did.

I imagined it would come the hardest to Raphael because he was the most 'alive' out of all of us, especially because he was newer to this world than any of Narc's other mates.

She opened her eyes and stood, looking disappointed. "I can feel the dead here, but no life. Fuck! This is some bullshit. The dead say they have no idea what my mother was talking about—apparently no one has talked to her."

Now that fucking pissed me off. It was one thing to be a shitty mom, but to mess with this situation was a new low. I held in a growl as I tried to convince myself to not have a word with her mother myself.

"We should go back," Abel stated quietly. "Get some sleep and start over tomorrow. You're running on no energy, Narc."

"Yeah," she mumbled. "The sooner this day is over the fucking better."

"I couldn't agree more, baby girl," I said and swung her onto my back.

Raphael started talking to her and my hands tightened on her legs, the scent of her magic wrapping around me.

The sooner we got through this, the sooner we could focus on the important shit. Like our future together.

CHAPTER 13

NARCISSA



I didn't set an alarm.

I didn't even attempt to wake up early.

I slept until my body woke up naturally because if I was going to meet with Alphas and find these shifters, I needed to be sharp and on top of my shit. I was curled up in Raphael's comforter like a burrito, my head buried in the pillowy surface, the soft carpet of their living room underneath me.

When we got home last night, I hadn't even bothered arguing about staying at their place. Instead I'd grabbed the ice cream and a comforter before wrapping myself up and watching *Lady and the Tramp*. I inhaled and groaned, rolling over on my back not giving into the urge to sulk about getting up. *Today would be a kickass day.*

Despite being sore, my mind was sharp. Come hell or high fucking water, this shit was going to get figured out.

"Mornin' sleeping beauty," Dorian drawled in a languid voice. I snapped my head to the side to find the glorious man sitting in the afternoon sunlight with a cup of coffee. Freshly showered and in a suit, he looked handsome as fuck.

"How long did I sleep?" I mumbled.

"It's about four p.m., so around twelve hours," he said, running a hand

through his damp hair. “Most of us just got up as well. Not positive where Zachariah or Declan ran off to, but the other three are upstairs showering.”

I crawled out of the sea of blankets, and he smirked as I came between his knees and grabbed his coffee cup. I rested my head on his leg, his hands running through my hair as I sipped on the amazing hazelnut flavored drink. I realized he was already sipping on another cup, and that made me smile. The bastard knew me so damn well that he’d prepared an extra cup for when I stole his.

“I love you, Dorian.”

He grasped my jaw and offered me a smile. “I love you more, Narc.”

After another moment of contentment, I groaned. “I need to go home and get ready.”

“Clothes are upstairs,” he noted. “Your grandma suggested you not stay there since some of the supes are a tad upset and you are literally right across the street from Nero.”

I groaned and stood up, shaking myself before cracking my neck. “Is your room open?”

Dorian’s smile grew cheeky. “For you? Always.”

I rolled my eyes and pointed at him. “You are not allowed to flirt with me this early. I’m not properly equipped.”

He barked out a laugh as I dragged my ass upstairs and to his bedroom. I loved Dorian’s bedroom. It was neat, dark, and smelled faintly like expensive cologne. Pushing through the bathroom doors, I grinned at his luxurious shower. I stripped off my clothes and immediately got under the hot water, hissing at how good it felt rolling over my skin.

I took my time scrubbing my hair and running through a mental checklist of how I was going to handle today. I smiled as I grabbed a razor and a few other things from the basket of shit Dorian kept in here for me. Whenever I showered, I did it in his bathroom because while Raphael had a fancier shower, Dorian’s bathroom was larger. I shook myself, turning the water freezing, holding in a yelp and inhaling sharply. I turned off the water and stepped out far more awake than before, curling my toes as I patted down my skin.

Clothes sat on the counter, and I was impressed that he’d put them in here without joining me. Also a bit sad because I would have fucking loved that. I brushed out my thick hair and dried it with an expensive blow dryer he owned—*such a princess*—before pulling it into a high ponytail. I opened a

small bag of cosmetics and applied light makeup with dark lashes and deep red lipstick. I nodded, looking myself over before dropping the towel I'd wrapped around me.

I shook my head, smiling as I pulled on the dark red lace underwear and demi-cup bra that Dorian must have...bought for me? *That was sexy as fuck.* I did a little twirl and nodded. It looked fucking good. If I wasn't so set on kicking ass, I would have shown him. Instead, I pulled on black shorts and a half top with a vintage band logo. Perfect.

"I missed the show." Dorian nearly pouted.

"Later I'll give you a full strip show when you give me that massage you promised me." I winked as he groaned, but he looked elated. I ran my hand across his hard length in passing, making him growl. I giggled and sprinted from the room, running right into my grumpy vampire. I couldn't even think about what Dorian said yesterday about engagement. I couldn't get caught up in that until I fixed the problem at hand, which is what I kept telling myself.

"Alaric." I smiled. "How are you?"

He looked behind me, amused, before running a hand over my ponytail. "Good. You look beautiful."

I smirked. "Thank you."

"Are you ready for this Alpha meeting?" Abel asked, walking out of his room.

"As ready as I can be, most likely," I mumbled.

As I walked downstairs, I frowned, realizing that Raphael wasn't here. I looked up as he came jogging down the steps, making me smile.

"Hey, baby." He grinned, tugging me into a hug.

"You seem smiley for going to see a bunch of Alphas," I noted.

"I'm shifting for it," he explained, stretching his muscular arms above his head. "Not even going to risk that shit."

"But then I can't talk to you." I frowned, pulling on my boots.

"It's that or you have to sit in my lap the entire time." He smirked as Alaric chuckled. I believed him so I didn't push it, eyeing my wolf cautiously and wondering if he wouldn't try to do something like that anyway.

As we left the house, I left my jacket behind and stepped outside, knowing it was going to be slightly hotter than normal and thrilled to see our bikes had been brought out front. My lips dipped at not seeing Zachariah's or Declan's waiting as well. Then again, I couldn't exactly expect them to be there every single minute of my day.

Right?

I sighed and shook my head, looking down the block and considering going to bitch out my mother about her misleading information. Instead, I inhaled and swung my leg over my bike, revving the engine as it purred beneath me. Despite how much it annoyed them, I took off without waiting, and the humid air felt really fucking good against my skin. Supes looked up from their houses as I passed, and as usual there were a few parents that urged their kids inside as if they could somehow catch the scary vibes that I was putting out.

Right now I wasn't finding it nearly as amusing as usual, though. In fact, I was finding the only people I really wanted to scare were the assholes.

New Orleans seemed relatively calm today. I couldn't feel any whiff of odd magic or tension, and that worried me because it felt like the eye of the storm. The calm before everything went to shit again. I made my way through the paved side streets and decided to go past Declan's bar, the sound of four motorcycles echoing behind me.

I slid off my bike and hopped down, feeling the faint aura of both his and Zachariah's magic. If I found out they were day drinking at a time like this, I was going to lose it a bit. I would love to be day drinking instead of worrying about this insane shit. Slipping through the door as two humans squeezed by me, I paused at how fucking crowded it was.

My breath caught as everything froze for me, for only a mere second mind you, and jealousy surged through me. It was not an attractive look, jealousy on me. Yet seeing Zachariah laughing and talking to Declan and a truly stunning woman did absolutely nothing for my overworked brain. The woman was standing behind the bar next to Declan, her hand resting lightly on his shoulder and her eyes on Zachariah as she said something that had them chuckling. I was really fucking glad the bar was busy, but it still hurt they hadn't felt my magic as I walked in.

I swallowed down the jealousy, and when it wouldn't stay pushed down, I slipped back out and breathed in the fresh air. As the other four pulled up, I made a decision and got onto my bike without saying a word.

It was childish. I mean, they wouldn't know I saw them, and they weren't doing anything wrong, but I could feel the eyes of my other four men staring into my back, not understanding the short stop. I would just have to tell them the two of them hadn't been there or something.

Because it was going to sound stupid that you left because of jealousy.

Along with jealousy came a defensive ‘I don’t fucking care’ mentality, which was clearly not true. I did care. A lot. I’m sure there was a rational explanation for why when I was dealing with something of a crisis they were drinking with a redheaded goddess. Yep, I was positive there was a completely rational reason.

I just kept repeating that as I drove myself towards our normal meeting place.

I was not jealous.

I wasn’t. Really.

I mean sure, Zachariah and I had only said ‘I love you’ like once, and Declan...well, I had no idea how he really felt about me. Fuck, this was a mess.

I inhaled, shaking my head and drove faster. I couldn’t afford to think about this right now.

God, she was literally everything I wasn’t though. This fucking sucked. I’d never had low self-confidence, but maybe it was because the feelings I had for Zachariah and Declan were so new. I mean, I’d always felt that way, but I’d never realized they had. So to see them with a 5’11” or something redhead, curly hair down to her waist, green-eyed goddess that was making them laugh? Yeah, you could say I was jealous.

As Queen I could have demanded to know who she was, but then I’d be in a place of total vulnerability if the two of them made it obvious they cared about her. Or she was special to them.

Fuck!

I muttered a curse and pulled up to the truly worn brick building. The outside was like a fortress with high walls and small windows, the doors heavy and worn with age. The entire property breathed magic, and for good reason since it was the official meeting place of supes under my family’s rule. Ivy crawled up the walls as the gray muggy skies threatened to sprinkle rain on my perfectly done hair. Talk about a fucking cherry on top of the bullshit.

No! I would not let them, or the weather, distract me. I had shit to do.

Wasn’t that always the case for women though? No matter the complex issues or horrible occurrences going on in our own lives, we had to be strong for others. We were expected to focus on the larger picture rather than the individual one. It pissed me the fuck off.

I eyed the building, excited to get inside the familiar open pavilion that the evening light usually lit up. The owners of the property had been around

for nearly forever, and they kept it maintained while I ensured they lived uninterrupted and peacefully. Plus, they always brought out wine while I was there, and that was a fucking plus.

The official invitations for everyone would have shown up around an hour ago; I didn't need to confirm with my boys to know that they'd sent them out. I trusted them to handle what needed to be done. Always. That was what a relationship was built on—trust and respect.

Was that the problem? Was that why I was upset, because I didn't trust Zachariah and Declan? Well, that made no damn sense since they had literally never given me a reason to *not* trust them. I gritted my teeth and made it to the massive door before Abel was spinning me in his hands to face him.

“Narc.” He frowned, his eyes pulsating with magic. “What the hell was that?”

“What was what?”

“Did they not want to come with...” Dorian tried to gauge my emotions, or lack thereof. “It was obvious they were there.”

Fuck.

“They seemed really busy, so I figured they would show up when they needed to,” I explained with a small, forced smile. Raphi made a worried noise and I avoided Alaric's gaze, turning to open the doors. Instantly, the familiarity surrounded me, and I was able to put myself into a place where I wasn't jealous and wasn't worried.

I was Queen of the fucking Dead, first and foremost.

“Alright.” I made my way across the stone pavilion where our long table and chairs were already set out. “I want to try to get this done as soon as possible. I'm not sure what exactly we can explain to them that will ease their worries. I think this is stupid since we could be spending this time searching.”

“We should have them search as well,” Raphi suggested, “even if we don't give them a lot of information. Just start mapping out places they could be. Have them search residential areas.”

“Each group could have some of each pack or pride,” Alaric added gruffly.

It was a good fucking plan, and far better than it appeared my mind could come up with.

The courtyard quieted with that thought as steps sounded down the inside stairs to reveal an older woman. Mrs. Hempshaw offered me a smile and

squeezed my hand in greeting, asking about wine or food, both of which I declined. As I said, I wanted this night over with as soon as possible. She would no doubt bring them down anyway, though—owl shifters were sweet like that. I offered her a small smile as she left to go inside, my panic catching in my throat.

It was people like her that Nero would start to target more and more each day.

Damnit, I wanted to ring his neck. I couldn't risk any more deaths though. Raphi eventually crouched down by me, leaving the others to their conversation and making me realize that I'd been off in my own world for however the fuck long.

"You okay?" he asked.

"Yes." I sighed as he pressed his forehead to mine. "Just a lot going on."

Just then the doors opened, and in strolled Zachariah. *Yep, there was the jealousy.* You know when you think you're fine and then you see the person and you're like *fuck this shit?* Well, that doubled for me because you know who did not walk in with him?

Declan Flannery.

CHAPTER 14

NARCISSA



Raphi frowned and examined my face as I shook my head. Luckily, I didn't have to deal with it because following a slightly confused looking Zachariah, his head tilting in a predatory fashion upon clocking my expression, were Mila and Draco. Thank God. I avoided the voodoo priest's eyes because frankly I wasn't used to dealing with jealousy. My boys were always fucking amazing at reassurance, even if they hadn't meant to reassure me at the time.

I stood up as Mila approached, a smile on her lips, as Zachariah rounded the table to come stand by me. I didn't say anything because I worried about what would come out of my mouth.

It would be word vomit. They literally weren't doing anything wrong. How I was acting was childish, but until I finished this fucking nonsense, I just couldn't delve into that small piece of nonsense going on in my head. So I would just do the neutral thing and say nothing.

"I'm gonna shift. Love you." Raphael kissed my forehead and backed up, shifting with ease as Mila and Draco watched. I didn't even bother asking why Mila was here despite not being an Alpha. Honestly, I felt like she was more here for my support.

Even if she didn't know it.

The New Orleans community was large, and while I normally dealt with the larger factions such as Lucas's wolf pack, the vampires, the local chaos, and the witches...there were others. I remained standing as Raphi moved to my side, my fingers sliding through his fur in a therapeutic pattern.

My lips twitched. *Did this make him my emotional support animal?* Could I bring him on a plane? The thought nearly had me smiling because he would be so fucking pissed if I said that.

Not really, but I might get thrown over his shoulder and fucked. Hopefully.

Mila, like the fantastic friend she was, stood silently to my other side. I had no idea if she realized she was blocking Zachariah and me from having a conversation, but I was thankful as fuck. I could practically feel his eyes burning into me.

My other men were spread out behind me, and I stilled only momentarily as other Alphas began to file in. I saw Lucas, Lionel tagging along behind him, and Leonard without his Beta and looking like a kicked puppy. Well, kitten, I suppose. *Damn, we had a lot of L's going on in here.* There were a few other shifters that I didn't know but who offered me respectful nods, no one approaching to shake my hand. I couldn't blame them—Raphi was scary as fuck.

As the sky grew darker, the vampires arrived, the same set of three from before. The Egyptian and Colombian clans had been oddly quiet, and I knew that I could only blame and *thank* our new addition to New Orleans. Elizabeth, a clan leader from France, had moved her family here, and the two other leaders had oddly seemed to come to an acceptance that I could only guess was due to the leggy, elegant blonde that stood between them.

She was another one I wanted in my girl gang. This shit needed to happen.

Before I could talk to her, unfortunately and to everyone's dismay, the witches arrived. Gertrude, in her full stuffy glory, was followed by two men I didn't know, and she stayed oddly quiet compared to the normal pain in the ass she was. My brow dipped slightly, thinking about the young witch that had just been killed.

"We have arrived!" The local chaos leader's second in command chimed, looking amused, as fucking usual. Did it matter that we had people dying at the hands of demonic forces? Not to these fuckers. Our local demon chaos was a piece of work.

Dorian muttered under his breath as I watched Astro, his long dark hair floating around his red robes, make his way towards me. I didn't even bother fighting Samantha because it was clear she and Astro went wherever Marcus went. The quiet leader offered me a head bow as Samantha intertwined her fingers with both of theirs. Last time we talked she'd been trying to convince them to be okay with sharing her. I couldn't tell how that had worked out, but I was guessing okay. Everyone grumbled as they pushed towards the center and the doors closed, leaving all of us in relative silence. I leaned slightly against Raphi and tried to determine what the fuck to say next.

Well, I'd never been a good storyteller or a liar, so I went with the truth.

"Nero is back, along with Asmodeus," I stated. Eyes widened, and people dropped any relaxed pretense. "The first wants New Orleans, and he's using his brother's weird fixation on me to make it seem as though I'm the reason all the killing is happening so I'll get pushed out of the way. Mind you, I *am* the reason, but I suspect he would continue the killing even if I was taken out of the equation. On top of that, we discovered that shapeshifter demons have been residing in our communities and causing chaos, replacing loved ones who either end up dead or are still missing...which is why I called you here. I need help.

"This city is fucking huge, and I've pulled at most of my resources and leads, unable to find shit. I need to find them, not only to get them back home safe, but also because I can't risk killing either of the bastards until we do. If you don't want to help or get involved, I understand, but I can't assure anyone that Nero will actually give a shit."

I let that breathe for a minute.

"Does anyone have any questions?" I asked, my body rigid and tense.

Silence reigned before Lucas cleared his throat. "How do we want to go about searching?"

Relief filled me, and as if knowing exactly what I needed the twins stepped in and started instructing them. My fingers relaxed on Raphi as he turned his head and licked my cheek, making me smile. I could feel the worry leaving my body as I looked around. No one was watching me with critical gazes anymore, and honestly, I felt better than I had since this bullshit started. Maybe, just maybe, this would work out?

Leonard's eyes narrowed on me, but it was in sort of a pitiful, spiteful way. Raphi growled and Leonard looked away immediately, making me smile. *What a little bitch.*

“Little rose.” Zachariah’s arms wrapped around me, and I jumped, tensing. I swallowed down any possible sarcastic, defensive retort and said nothing at first, a deep rumble echoing from his chest. “Narc?”

“What’s up?” I asked, glad that people were busy planning. My chest squeezed, thinking about how I wished that Declan was here. Because you know, he always had some sarcastic remark and was cute as fuck. I hated that I knew he was probably still talking to her at his stupid bar. I should have that freakin’ place condemned.

No. I would never do that to something he loved, but I was feeling petty.

“What’s wrong?” Zachariah’s voice was deep and rolling, almost in a warning tone. My jaw clenched as I turned into him, pressing a hand to his muscular chest to put some distance between us.

“Nothing.”

His silver eyes searched mine as they narrowed, and I tried to change the topic. Tilting my head I asked, “So, what were you up to all afternoon?”

“Declan and I were handling a few things down at his bar,” he explained as hurt flashed through me. I mean, sure, he wasn’t fucking lying, but he wasn’t telling the whole truth either.

I nodded and asked the question I dreaded. “Yeah, I was a bit surprised he wasn’t here. Where is he?”

That wasn’t too direct, was it? *Me? Direct?* Never.

His eyes turned a stormy gray as thunder sounded in the distance. “Something must have come up at the bar. He said he planned on being here.”

As if answering our question, the doors opened and I felt everything inside of me freeze. My eyes moved towards the doors as a growl caught in my throat. Raphael echoed it out loud as Declan walked in with the woman in question, the gathered Alphas only pausing momentarily to look at our new guests.

The closer they got, the more panic surged through me. I let out a small sound and mumbled about using the washroom, ducking under Zachariah’s arm and heading towards the inside staircase. I jogged up them quickly, not ready to hear whatever it was they had to say. I wasn’t positive whether the truth or lies would hurt more.

It could be nothing. Or it could be everything.

This was why I didn’t do fucking emotions.



I walked through the hallway that wrapped around the pavilion and found the room I'd sat in right after my first community meeting as Queen. My butt hit the velvet seat of the vanity and my eyes stung with tears as I leaned my arms on my knees, pressing the palms of my hands to my eyes. *I refused to cry.* It was only like one tear, but it was some offensive-ass shit and I refused to do that. Not over this.

I didn't cry.

I was a total badass.

Why the fuck was I crying? This was some absolute shit.

A small knock on the door had me stilling as I slowly looked up, fully aware of the magic that surrounded me with the scent of clovers. I used my sleeve to brush away some damp moisture, pretty sure my makeup was fucked to hell. I nearly cried more as I met Declan's alarmed and unsure emerald green eyes. I didn't blame him. Hell, I was confused, and I was the one feeling these emotions in the first place.

"Lass." He stepped in hesitantly. "Waaat the 'ell is goin' on? Why ye cryin'?"

Because of you, you perfect freakin' jerk.

I shrugged lamely. "Just overwhelmed. It's been a weird week and an even stranger day."

He frowned and narrowed his eyes, stepping into the room. "I think you're a bleedin' liar, but I'll go wi' that. I think I may 'ave someone who can fix yer problem, or at least 'elp..."

"Yeah," I bit in with a sharp nod. "Sure, I would love to meet them. Is that what you've been up to today?"

His eyes darkened as he crossed the floor, my eyes finding my boots so I wouldn't do something stupid like cry or tell him how much my heart hurt right now. When a warm hand tilted my chin, I met his gaze and my power surged out to zap him. He grimaced but something clicked, and a concerned, almost guilty expression filled his pretty eyes.

"You were at my bar earlier," he said softly, nodding to himself. "Shit, I thought I was going crazy."

I sniffed and looked over his shoulder. "Yes, well, I didn't want to

interrupt your date. I figured you would join us when you had time.”

Fuck. I so hadn't meant for that to sound so bitter or for those words to come from my mouth in the first place. I suppose I didn't realize how spoiled I'd been. I really had never worried about other women, and *surprise*, the first time I had to deal with a heavy emotion, I was acting like a little bitch. I inhaled as his eyebrows shot up and shoulders tensed.

“What bloody date?”

“The redhead you were hanging out with.” I cleared my voice so it didn't sound like I was choking on my own pain. “It was that clear you, Zach, and her were...”

“Were what?” he asked softly, sounding oddly not judgmental. I was judging myself. The more I spoke out loud, the stupider I felt.

I snorted softly, shaking my head. “Nothing. You were doing nothing, actually. This is stupid, I should just—”

Declan let out a soft hum and lifted me up so that I was straddling his lap. I wrapped my arms around his neck and eyed him cautiously, unable to tell how he felt but loving how close we were. His large hands on my ass were rough and warm as I tried to not get turned on because fuck, this was really not the time for this.

“I imagine that if I walked into a bar and saw you talking to a man I didn't know, I'd be pretty damn furious,” he said, his jaw tensing as if the thought infuriated him. I nibbled my lip as he examined my expression and continued. “Especially since you've been stressed out of your mind and probably needed as much support as possible before this meeting today.”

Yeah. He had my number.

“More so—” He tucked a piece of my hair behind my ear. “Because I didn't explain to you that last night I contacted my distant cousin, a druid priestess, to help us search the area. Druids are notoriously good at tracking.”

My heart sputtered to a stop.

“Cousin?” I echoed, and even I could hear the fucking hope in my voice.

“Yes.” He tilted his head. “My cousin, whose wife is probably pretty fucking pissed at me that she had to leave when they are expecting baby number three here soon.”

Oh shit.

“Fuck, I feel like an idiot,” I mumbled, shaking my head and nearly groaning.

“Not my intention,” he whispered. “I don't want you worrying though. In

fact, I never want you worrying, lass. I should have made it clear before now, but I'm crazy about you, Narcissa. I'm not going anywhere unless you want me to. I would never go on a date with some random fucking woman. No one holds a candle to you. I fucked up by not telling you where I was going, and I'm sorry you even had a moment of doubt."

Tears welled in my eyes, and I buried my head in his neck. "Thank you. I needed that."

"Anytime, beautiful. I can't have the girl I love thinking that I'm off drinking with other women."

Let's all pretend I wasn't just super insecure... Wait, what?

My head snapped up as a smile filled my face. "You love me?"

He chuckled. "Well, I would say that I'm pretty fucking in love with you, but I can find a way to prove it if need be."

I grinned and shook my head. "No, I believe you. I love you too." The end was a nervous whisper as affection exploded in my chest. It had a distinctly different tone from my boys or Zachariah, but equally as powerful.

I hadn't expected this. Hadn't expected him.

His eyes sparked as he leaned forward to sear my lips to his own, a soft sound coming from my throat. I shivered at the feel of his cold lip ring against my warm mouth, and he groaned as I rolled my hips against his hard cock. I was starting to wish we were back at home...or at his bar. That would be ridiculously hot, bent over his bar being fucked...

Alright, I needed to stop. I so had bigger things to focus on.

Although, talking about big things...

"Later," he whispered, his thumb rubbing against my lip as heat entered his gaze. "When this shite is done, I'm kidnapping you for the night and the others can fucking deal with it."

"Yeah?" I arched my brow and leaned into him. "Where are we going?"

His eyes lit up. "To my estate outside of the city. The pixies in the garden out back are assholes, but I think you'll like the rest of the place."

"I would love that." I leaned my forehead against his as he intertwined our fingers, our palms pressing together.

After a moment, he chuckled and shook his head. "I can't believe you spent this entire time mad at me, lass. I feel like shite. Didn't Zachariah explain what was going on?"

"No." I scowled, feeling a bit frustrated that he'd left me hanging like that. "That's why he fucked up also."

It wasn't like I hadn't asked, either! I literally asked...

“Yes, I’m gathering that,” a deep voice started from the door. I smiled at the voodoo priest but kept narrowed eyes.

“Why didn’t you tell her?” Declan growled, his voice lacking actual anger.

Zachariah’s jaw clenched as he put out his hands. “You fucking told me to wait.”

“But I didn’t realize she thought I was bloody cheatin’ on her!”

“Wow, you two even fight like an old married couple. If I wasn’t positive about you being best friends before...”

Declan kissed me to shut me up as Zachariah chuckled but came to crouch down near us so that I was wedged between them. “Narcissa, as much as I love that you are possessive over us—because I do. It makes me feel way better about the archaic-ass notions you inspire— but still, I need you to believe that we wouldn’t do that to you. I know it’s going to take more time to trust us because we haven’t been by your side as much as the others, but we are one hundred percent in this with you. You can rely on us.”

I nibbled my lip and offered a teasing grin. “So could I hypothetically rely on you to always be in bed with me in the morning?”

Zachariah chuckled in a soft, dangerous tone. “Only if you’re okay with being fucked the entire night before.”

Declan groaned as his cock twitched underneath me. He pressed his forehead to my collarbone. “Please don’t talk about fucking with her on my lap. I’m already on edge.”

I smirked and rolled my hips as Declan’s hands tightened on my ass.

“Lass,” he warned.

Zachariah’s hand wrapped around my ponytail, and he pulled back slightly, exposing my neck so Declan could nip it, causing me to let out a soft moan. I nearly growled when a magic signature registered in the doorway. *Goddammit. Although, I suppose now was not the time considering the supernatural hearing of our guests downstairs...*

“Sorry to interrupt,” a female voice with a slight accent offered, “but they need you downstairs to officially dismiss them or something like that.”

Immediately I was off Declan and facing the woman I was once worried about. I hoped I didn’t look like too much of a hot mess.

“Hey.” I offered a small smile as her green eyes lit up. *Okay. Cool, Narc. How the fuck did you not see the family resemblance?*

“I’m not sure if my cousin explained,” she said a bit nervously, her fingers tapping lightly, “but my name is Savannah. I’m a Priestess. He mentioned that you might need some help?”

In true Narc fashion, I nodded and pulled on her elbow out of the room, leaving the guys as I hooked arms with her comfortably despite the height difference. “My name is Narcissa, by the way.”

She offered a slight laugh. “I know—my cousin wouldn’t stop talking about you. I haven’t spent a lot of time with the old fucker, but it seems you’ve wrapped him up.”

I blushed slightly. “He’s pretty cool.”

As we stepped downstairs, everyone turned to look at us, and I immediately jumped into asking where we were in the process of organizing search parties. I could feel the other boys looking at me, but I temporarily ignored the urge to explain what had happened.

For the next hour we went over a map and their plan as well as how Savannah would work with each group. I noticed that her eyes kept straying around the room nervously. I had a feeling that she was a bit more nervous in social situations than I had originally assumed. It was also very clear to me how young she was, like my age. I wondered if she was interested in being an honorary girl gang member...

I would have to see if she made the badass cut. Not all badasses were loud and leather-wearing like me. Some were like Elizabeth, who would totally drink your blood out of a crystal champagne glass. Some were like Mila, who would run you over with her spiked heels. Honestly, it took all types of badass women to form a girl gang. The most important part? We supported each other, especially when we wanted to get all stabby. You know, the important bonding shit like killing our enemies. That was the shit that people should really scrapbook about. Then again, that wouldn’t go over very well if the police ever found it, now would it?

As people began to split off, I said goodbye to the girls. Savannah followed Mila out, and Raphael shifted back into his human form. Immediately his arms were around me as the twins rounded to face me as Dorian frowned, kissing my knuckles. I blushed because it was cute as fuck.

“Everything okay?” Abel asked, cupping my jaw. My eyes trailed up to where Zachariah and Declan were talking animatedly about something on the stairs.

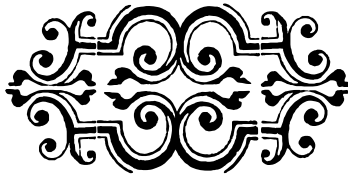
I nodded and inhaled. “Everything is perfect...well, it will be.”

“Once we kill Nero?”

I inhaled and nodded, feeling determined. “Once we kill fucking Nero.”

CHAPTER 15

ALARIC



I was a grumpy bastard, but I was Narcissa's grumpy bastard.

I would literally do anything for her, and I wasn't positive she'd realized the extent of her powers that had nothing to do with being Queen of the Dead. The woman could send me around the world, and I would go without fucking question. It was completely unhealthy and completely unavoidable.

I inhaled, looking over her as she stood with her golden legs and curvy form straddling her dangerous bike. I wanted to do terrible things to her. I wanted to bend her over and pound into her until all of New Orleans exploded from the impact of her magic and mine.

I would also settle for cuddling and watching a Disney movie with her right now.

Not that I would ever admit it, but I think my brother and I enjoyed our movie nights as much as she did. We'd grown up in a cold, unemotional family, and Narc brought so much passion and warmth to everything. Plus, the way she lit up about shit, becoming super passionate, had my cock hardening. Her happiness and smiles turned me on.

That was just fucking weird, right? My lips pressed up, thinking about last summer when we'd stayed at one of our houses on the Gulf Coast and gone swimming at night.

*“Alaric!” she screamed, running down the dock barefoot after me.
“Bring it back.”*

My lips pressed up as I held up her cell phone. The coastal breeze brushed over us, and the house, which was positioned slightly above the shore and filled with warm lights, highlighted the others milling about. Narc stood in an oversized shirt and shorts, her golden nose slightly burnt and smile wide.

“No,” I said evenly.

“Why?!” she demanded, eyeing my outstretched arm. The woman may have had magic, but she was still short as shit.

“You need to relax, and that does not include worrying about shit your grandma is sending you.”

“New Orleans could burn to the ground without me!” She stepped forward.

I arched a brow. “She can handle one week, Narcissa.”

Tilting her head back, she groaned and then looked around at the water. I watched as she walked past me towards the end of the dock. I placed her phone down and followed after her.

I didn’t trust her to not run back and grab her phone, but the relaxed sigh that slipped from her had me feeling a bit better. I wanted to take all of her burdens away, even if that wasn’t possible.

“Why have I never left the country?” she mused, looking out over the ocean while sitting on the expensive, newly stained wood. I wouldn’t admit to it yet, but my brother and I had purchased this place recently...right after she mentioned wanting to have a house near the water. I know. We were total suckers. I sat behind her, wrapping an arm around her waist as she leaned back into me. Honestly, it was painful torture being this close, but not being close to her was even worse.

“Because you’re busy being a badass,” I offered. She tossed back a cheeky smile, turning slightly so her legs were over mine and she was looking up.

“So true,” she chimed.

“Where would you want to go?” I asked after a moment.

Blowing out a breath, she hummed. “Can I pick everywhere? I have no idea where I would even start.”

“Norway,” I offered quietly.

“Yes!” She turned her head, nodding, “And then we can do Europe. We should just take a tour around the world.”

I smiled, watching her get animated about everywhere she wanted to go.

My favorite part? She was including me in her plans without a second thought. Maybe there was hope for me after all.

“We ready?” she called as I revved up my motorcycle and took off after her. She liked to pull this shit where she tried to race away from us. It was funny, but it also scared the shit out of me. Today I rode next to her, and I was happy to see that she seemed more confident than before the meeting. I knew that had to do with several factors, one of them being the demigod bastard riding along with us.

I’d gotten the gist of what happened between her and Declan. The man should be glad she forgave him. I didn’t care how lucky you were, a snapped neck was a goddamn snapped neck. Then again, I was irrational when it came to protecting Narcissa, even if it had been a miscommunication.

As we neared our house, my eyes narrowed down the street. Narc’s grandmother stood on the balcony, seemingly reading a book. But I had a feeling she was doing far more than that, and I would bet you it had to do with the assholes across the street. Parking our bikes, I smirked, sensing a presence in our house.

Maybe this was exactly what she needed.

“Today, of all days?” Raphael offered me a smile as I shrugged. When I called the other day, I’d assumed it would take a bit. Although I supposed today was better than tomorrow considering we had no idea what the hell was going on with Nero.

“Good delivery timing,” Dorian mumbled as Narc walked down the pathway, my brother following. Zachariah and Declan walked behind me, semi-oblivious to anyone but their quiet conversation regarding Narcissa. *And I thought I was obsessive.*

“Who the hell are you?” Narc demanded as I stepped into the foyer to find a vampire lounging with a satchel over his shoulder. A little heartbeat, only noticeable to the vampires in the room, sounded from inside, and I shook my head, wondering how this was going to play out.

“Good to see you, James.” I shook his hand as he nodded and offered me the bag. With that, he walked out, leaving Narcissa looking put out. In part I didn’t introduce them because frankly, I didn’t want any of my family touching her besides Abel and me. They were assholes, and the longer they stayed away doing whatever it was that they did, the better.

“Who was that?” she demanded, crossing her arms. My eyes flicked past the golden scarring on her neck where I’d placed my bite to how her cleavage pressed against her shirt. *Damn, the woman was fucking distracting.* One more reason I didn’t want any other vampires around her. She was far too irresistible.

“Come here.” I curled my finger as the others watched with interest. She let out a cute huff but still approached with interest. It went without saying that this had been a long time coming; I think it had been almost two years since I’d heard comments regarding her wanting this particular gift. It only fit that the little creature joined our little family.

Opening the leather bag, a pair of eyes blinked up at me, and with one hand I hand easily scooped up the little hellkitten curled up in the bottom of the satchel. Hellcats as a species were very adaptable, and at full maturity they could shift from the size of housecats to a jaguar in a puff of smoke. However, they always maintained the trademark sleek shadowy fur...this one just seemed to be a bit fluffier than normal. He sat in my hand and looked right at Narcissa with big blinking green eyes.

“*Oh my, who is this?*” Narcissa bent her knees slightly so her nose brushed against the little hellcat’s nose while running a hand under his chin. The freakin’ bastard started purring and rubbing up against her right away. *As if I could fucking blame him.*

“We figured we would finally get you a kitten.” Raphael cleared his voice as her eyes shot up to me and then turned towards the others.

“He’s for me?!” Her voice was filled with an almost hyper energy, and the kitten meowed for attention. Narcissa spun back around and picked him up, bringing him up to her face and talking in this cute voice to the cat. “You are so handsome! We need a vicious name for you, though. I promise we can fight this cute syndrome together.” Then, turning to us, she added, “Thank you, guys! I love you and you are amazing!”

...and then she was gone to the living room, leaving the six of us suckers staring after her like idiots. Lovesick idiots, to be exact. I narrowed my eyes at the kitten that looked back at us over her shoulder, purring and soaking up all her attention. *Bastard.*

“Now I’m fucking jealous of a kitten,” I muttered as Raphael grunted, my own brother laughing. I didn’t believe it for a minute. Just wait until the kitten started sleeping in her bed—we would never get any time with her.

Alright, it was possible I was being overdramatic.

But that cat was giving us a fucking smug look! I walked into the living room and sat down next to a very happy Narc. I suppose it didn't matter if he was a bastard, the little hellion was worth it to make her smile like that.



Later that night...

The night had an odd air to it.

I couldn't describe it exactly, but everything my many years on this fucking earth had taught me was telling me that something was up. The humid air filled our formal dining room where we were spread out, the tall narrow windows opened as the brocade curtains breezed back and forth. The entire table was covered in a map, and the house had essentially become headquarters for this entire scenario as supes called in to update us on what they'd found.

Well, had 'not found' in our case. Narcissa's brow bent as the tightness in her shoulders increased, making me worry about the burden she felt she had to bear. Her kitten, unnamed still, lay in the center of the table on its back, purring like a fucking engine. Honestly, it was pretty cute; I just wished that we could enjoy it. Had it only been hours ago that Narc's smile had been lighting up all of our afternoons?

I was even more worried because she hadn't touched the pizza we'd ordered. Narc choosing to ignore food was fucking terrifying.

Another call came in, and I watched as we painted red X after red X on different parts of the city, her eyes darkening from gold to a deep green in frustration. I worried what she would do if we came up with nothing, what she would do if we searched the entire city and there was absolutely no sign of the missing family members. Hell, even Declan's cousin wasn't coming up with much except for faint traces that could have been from before they were kidnapped. She had pieces of clothing and personal belongings that the family members offered, but nothing was happening.

I closed my eyes and tried to think of something that we'd yet to try. To think of *anything* to help out.

“Maybe they’re in the demonic realm,” she mumbled, looking distressed.

“They wouldn’t survive that,” Dorian reminded her gently.

“Exactly,” she groaned. “What if they’ve been dead this entire time? What if Nero is just making me think that they’re alive so that I can’t fucking kill him? It’s almost guaranteed because I can’t exactly go check the demonic realm because...well, that would be giving them exactly what they want. So unless anyone has seen these people, living or dead because I would even take finding their ghosts right now...we’re fucked.” Her rambling ended with her putting her forehead on the table as I rubbed her back gently, twirling a silk strand of dark hair on my finger.

A cool breeze rolled over the room and Narcissa snapped her head up, standing so quickly that the chair screeched on the polished wood floors. Her eyes narrowed at the archway, and the feeling of death surrounded the room, a faint outline of her mother appearing. This lady was really getting on my fucking nerves. It also became obvious that the tighter our bond became with Narcissa, the more dead I would be seeing. In a way, I was glad to share the burden, but it was still fucking weird.

“What the hell do you want?” Narc demanded, her voice exhausted but cold.

“I was going to offer you some help,” her mother responded in a haughty voice, “but it sounds like you don’t need it. It sounds like you’ve got everything handled.”

“Was it fucking funny to send me running to Lot 1 when our family told me that you’d never even talked to them?” she demanded. I could feel her magic right under her skin tonight, and I knew it wouldn’t take much to push her to do something rash and possibly dangerous.

Her mother frowned, any petty snark gone as she tilted her ghostly head, becoming seemingly more solid as the moments went by. “Narcissa, I have no idea who you talked to, but that was what I’d been told about Lot 1. I spoke to several spirits there over lunchtime tea only the other day.”

Narcissa sighed. “Mom, they said no one was there, and I asked several people—”

“Did you go into the actual mausoleum? The family one?” her mother demanded. “You know you can’t trust anything but the source. I don’t spend time with the clingers, as your great-great grandfather would have been happy to tell you, I’m positive.”

It was odd because I really felt like her mother was being honest, and

considering her track record, the sudden authenticity just felt...weird.

“No, we didn’t.” My *flamma vitae* shook her head as I intertwined my fingers with hers, relaxing in the chair next to where she leaned against the table. I wanted to pull her down on my lap, but I’d probably get punched.

“Try there, maybe,” her mother offered, and after one more look, she was gone.

“I don’t trust her,” Dorian said quietly after a moment, and Raphael nodded in agreement. The small kitten narrowed his eyes at him before going back to sleep, probably not liking the rumble that he’d made.

“I hate to say it, but her sudden helpfulness is odd,” Abel said as if reading my mind.

Zachariah tilted his head thoughtfully. “It may be worth going there. I don’t think anyone can get into your family mausoleum but you, correct?”

“Not without magic,” Declan answered, Narcissa nodding in affirmation.

“I need a moment to figure this out.” Narc turned towards the kitchen, and I followed her with my gaze, noting the slight defeat in her posture. The kitten let out a worried meow, and I grunted in agreement.

This was going to be a long night.

CHAPTER 16

NARCISSA



I stood on the back porch, breathing in the humid air as I tapped my nails on the smooth wood banister. From here I could see spirits floating about as I tried to dissect everything my mother had said. I felt like there was something I was missing.

Maybe I should go back to Lot 1. What would it hurt? No one had found anything in that area, and I was the only one that could enter besides my grandma. Well, at least the only one who could enter without some hefty magic. Magic that Nero could work up, no doubt. In a way, it would be the perfect place, because if anyone ever found them...

It would look like I'd done it.

Oh fuck.

Turning on my toes, I went back into the house and stopped right in the doorway, my hand on the wall. Everyone looked at me as I spoke sharply. "She's right, they're probably there. Underground. Think about it—if anyone ever found them there, they would blame me. It's the perfect place because so few people can get in—"

"Fuck," Zachariah muttered. "You're right, little rose."

His agreement seemed to pause the room as everyone thought over the situation. Thought over any possible solution besides the obvious one.

Unsurprisingly, there was none. It made sense what my mother was saying, and while I didn't trust her, it sounded like something Nero would do.

I could feel a headache pulsating across my temples, but I tried to shake it. We had a lot bigger things to worry about; I didn't have time to take some fucking Tylenol.

"Some of us need to stay here just in case the others find something, or if we need them to grab medical help, so who wants to come with me?" I asked. The guys exchanged looks, trying to have some weird silent discussion, no doubt. I never understood that. I didn't think they did it on purpose, but it seemed like it was somehow easier to decide shit with just a look rather than an actual conversation. Men were fucking weird.

"Abel and I will go," Alaric stated, standing up as Raphael tugged me towards him and kissed my forehead. Dorian offered me a searing look and bent down to press a kiss to my lips before picking up my little hellcat. I pet him for a moment, appreciating what a sweet gesture it had been. Badass moments weren't a place for kittens though.

"Bye, Shadow," I whispered as Raphael shook his head at my newly coined name.

I looked up to find Zachariah and Declan still in silent conversation before the first let out a tired exhale and nodded. "Fine. I'll stay."

Declan grinned and stood up, rounding the table as I walked toward my voodoo priest, who offered me a curious look. Something crossed his face as he kissed my hand, and I thought I saw worry there. *What was he worried about?* If he was worried, that made me fucking worried.

"Stay safe," Zachariah said as the others talked quietly. "I love you, Narcissa."

I blushed and nudged his leg as I stood in between them. "Stop being so cute," I mumbled and then spoke softer. "I love you too."

"Let's get this done with!" Declan slapped the doorway, probably not being able to handle the fucking sappy emotions like myself. I pulled away and followed them through the kitchen into the moonlit back yard. Declan intertwined his fingers with mine, and the twins walked slightly in front of us as we made our way down side streets towards Lot 1. Again.

I had a lot on my mind, so I zoned out a bit, not focusing on my surroundings as much as I should have. I was thankful to have the three of them watching my back because I clearly didn't have my shit together right now.

You know, I talked a big game, but I was realizing each and every day how much I relied on these men. Sure I was Queen, but without them, I wasn't positive how my success would have fared. I mean, no one could successfully rule a kingdom alone. I felt a surge of annoying affection in my chest, and I nearly rolled my eyes at myself. Like when did I become such a fucking sappy bitch?

Since you fell in love.

I sighed, trying to push it from my mind and promising myself that I would spend more time reflecting on the sudden surge of emotions *after* killing these two demonic assholes. I felt like that was a fair trade. If I killed an asshole, I spent some time reflecting on how much I loved my men. It just made sense.

As we approached the graveyard, I realized it had literally been less than twenty-four hours since we'd last stood here. The ground was soft underneath my feet as Declan made a slightly worried noise in the back of his throat at the odd shift of wind moving through the cemetery. Then again, it was filled with the fucking dead, so I was trying not to overthink it.

Easy right? I never overthought anything, ever...

The spirits seemed oddly absent tonight. Don't get me wrong, there were a fuck ton of them, but they were keeping their distance as we approached my family's mausoleum. The dark stone and avenging angel above seemed to grow darker and more menacing. You know everything is messed up when the necromancer starts feeling on edge. A weird sense of premonition ran over me as I seriously considered backing out of this. My instincts were telling me something was off.

Then again, it could have been an extra ward or spell they had put up around the cemetery. Just because I couldn't feel it didn't mean it didn't exist. Maybe it was the same type that surrounded our place and forced humans to turn away from the house, giving them a sense of unease upon looking at or nearing it. I just couldn't take the risk of possibly leaving the missing supes in pain because I had a 'bad' feeling.

"Does this feel off to any of you?" I asked quietly, just to confirm I wasn't crazy.

"Yeah," Abel sighed as I inhaled deeply, trying to steel myself.

"Are you planning to come in with me?" I asked as we approached.

"Of course," Alaric said sharply, offering me an incredulous look. My lip twitched at his tone.

Declan chuckled. “I don’t think even I could handle waiting out here, lass.”

Considering how chill he was, it helped me know that I wasn’t imagining all this shit.

Standing at the base of the steps, I closed my eyes, the earth’s energy stilling in response to my magic as I crouched down. My hand laid flat and firm on the marble staircase as the magic surrounding the structure vibrated with tension. It felt like a bubble or maybe a glass orb...one that I was noticing had a few cracks in it. My feelings about this scenario grew more anxious by the minute, but finally I was able to soften the barrier.

“Alright, step through so I can close it up again,” I instructed as all of them climbed the stairs. My magic easily solidified the ward again, and I stepped into the space without resistance, breathing in the scent of earth and death. My cool power worked its way up the stairs in a smoky pattern as the doors creaked open in a sound worthy of a horror movie.

Maybe if this Queen stuff didn’t work out and I was run out of New Orleans, I could become an actress. No, really—*follow me on this*. I could say that I had fantastic special effect abilities, and they could put me in some badass horror movie. Hell, at that point I would probably even take a role as the villain.

“Lass, this is creepy as fuck,” Declan muttered. I grinned at his cautious gaze and stepped into a large marble foyer. The spirits rarely spent time up here though. No, the party was downstairs.

“Help me move this.” I moved towards the stone altar where the moonlight shone through a cross-shaped window onto the surface. The twins lifted the top easily to reveal a set of stairs, my magic running down the length of the steps, lighting the torches with cool blue flames and informing me that no one was waiting to ambush us at the bottom. *Nifty, useful magic*.

Swinging my legs over the side, Alaric grunted and sped ahead of me so that I ended up wedged between the twins with Declan at the back making sure no one snuck up on us. We walked down quietly, our shoes echoing as a weird feeling took over at the lack of spirits. My family were busybodies; they would be out by now.

Maybe going back upstairs was a better idea...

“Something’s wrong,” I whispered as we reached the burial floor, which held elaborate coffins. The dampness of the air reminded me how close to sea level the land actually was. A weird chill moved up my spine.

Suddenly, everything went dark.

“Fuck.”

Alaric’s gruff words would have been funny if not for the entire space lighting up in black and red flames, surrounding us in a violent pattern. My magic hissed, backing up like a wounded animal as I tensed, looking around for the fucking problem.

Or as I liked to refer to it, *my next victim*.

“This was far too easy—you walked right into it!” A cackle sounded as I narrowed my eyes at Nero, the body sleeve of the mayor looking a bit worse for wear.

“Let’s get this over with. I don’t want her escaping,” Asmodeus grunted. I really could not wait to carve this man up like a cheese board. I had disliked him, found him annoying before, but now? Now he was making me furious. I was going to make sure when I killed him this next time that he stayed dead. I wasn’t positive how I was going to make that work, but you could bet your sweet ass I was going to give it a shot.

“I’m going to snap every bone in their bodies for fun,” Abel said. I looked up at him, slightly surprised. Declan’s hand tightened on my wrist as he let out a low, dangerous hum.

Of course, being the weirdo I was, I totally got turned on. *Because why wouldn’t I?* They were being scary, and it was like my magic was addicted to that shit.

“What about them?” Nero asked as my men stepped closer, the flames closing in. I inhaled, trying to call on my magic, but it wasn’t doing jack shit for me. We’d walked right into a trap. God, we were fucking idiots. My magic wound around us, attempting to protect but still looking injured and burnt.

“Send them down as well, I don’t care,” the other bastard responded.

I growled. “Nero, you do this and you’re going to fucking regret it.”

“The only thing I’ll regret is not being able to see your face when I take over your precious city.” He sneered, looking far too fucking happy. “Better yet, when you realize your mom was the one that led you straight to this fate.”

Realization dawned on me, and all the fight left me in a sharp exhale. My ears rang, and pain surged in my chest as the magic suffocated us in thick smoke. The twins and Declan surrounded me as we held onto one another, knowing this was going to be a bumpy ass ride. The only thing I could think

about, though?

I was going to need to find a way to bring my mother back to life so I could fucking kill her.

The dead were such assholes.

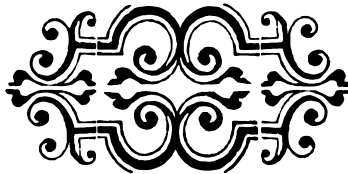
I gasped as the world went dark around us, my head snapping back at the force of the air around us compressing. After moments of suspended pain, I cried out as our backs hit a toppled pile of dark obsidian stone. My eyes snapped up to the dark red skies around us, dry winds scraping our skin.

After everything I'd done, and all this time...

I'd landed myself in Hell. Fucking wonderful.

EPILOGUE

ZACHARIAH



Something was wrong.

I stood on the porch, looking around as Raphael and Dorian spoke quietly. We'd been inside until a few moments ago, and upon walking outside, I could feel an odd spark in the air. A sudden surge of power had the city sparking as all three of us froze cautiously. *What in the bloody hell had that been?* Thunder cracked in the sky as a vacuum-like absence seemed to fill the space. I felt my chest pulsate with pain as the entire earth around us seemed to tremble and shake underneath my feet.

Dorian shot up out of his chair, eyes wide. "She's gone."

Everything froze upon his words. Then I let my magic expand out.

"What?" Raphael snarled.

"She's not on Earth anymore," I gritted out, realizing what the hell the change had been. *Narcissa was gone.* Somehow they'd fucking gotten to her.

Any control I had snapped. Lightning flashed from the sky and struck Mayor Lourn's home, sending it into flames. Nero was going to die, and I didn't give a fuck if humans knew.

"Where are you going?" Raphael asked over the wind of the approaching storm.

"To get Narcissa back."

Neither of them questioned it, following after me. I was going to kill Nero and get Narcissa back, not necessarily in that order.

No one took my little rose away from me.

Not even a demonic prince.

GLOSSARY

1. *Meltin's an understatement, but this city thrives on tourists.* - Annoying is an understatement, but this city thrives on tourists.
2. *Feckin' christ!* - Fucking christ!
3. *Which I'm feckin' pissed about...You can't make a storm baby with her, that's my thing.* - Which I'm fucking pissed about... You can't make a storm baby with her, that's my thing.
4. *Oi don't tink dat is a gran' idea.* - I don't think that is a great idea.
5. *Ah yeah? Is that why yer go practically mute 'roun 'er?* - Oh yeah? Is that why you go practically mute around her?
6. *Not as long as yer leave me boozer alone.* - Not as long as you leave my bar alone.
7. *Lass, oi inspired de stereotypes, not de other way raun.* - Lass, I inspired the stereotypes, not the other way around.
8. *Yer as well, lass.* - You as well, lass.
9. *Feck yer.* - Fuck you.
10. *'old it together till we git down there.* - Hold it together until we get down there.
11. *The supes are gettin' eated at one av the local bars an' startin' ter express... 'ow frustrated they are about this situashun.* - The supes are getting heated at one of the local bars and starting to express... how frustrated they are about this situation.
12. *Waaat the 'ell is goin' on? Why ye cryin'.* - What the hell is going on? Why are you crying?
13. *I think you're a bleedin' liar, but I'll go wi' that. I think I may 'ave someone who can fix yer problem, or at least 'elp...* - I think

you're a bloody liar but I'll go with that. I think I may have someone who can fix your problem or at least help...

DYING FOR THE DEAD

BOOK THREE



DESCRIPTION

My mission?

To save New Orleans from Nero's demonic clutches.

Should be simple, right? I mean, hell, I am literally the Queen of the Dead. I fear that we are running out of time though.

Time to save the missing supes taken by Nero and Asmodeus.

Time to get out of the demonic realm, before we can't leave.

Time to save our city and my kingdom.

The biggest snap in my plan? I've died. I mean, technically I wasn't dead... right? I was in 'Hell' though, and that was a bit of a problem. I mean, this was totally off schedule, and to make it worse? *The dead were an unthankful group of losers that didn't care if you died for them.* No, really! You should hear them complain.

Plus, I wasn't positive about what I was more mad about... that I'd been dumb enough to fall for my mom's trap or that she trapped me to begin with. I mean, talk about mommy issues, right?

I am so livid with her, but the longer that I spend in the demonic realm the more I start to believe that I may be here for a much larger purpose than I could have ever expected.

Dying for the Dead is the final book in the lighthearted, fast-burn paranormal reverse harem *The Dead & Not So Dead* series. You can bet that our characters will be swearing up a storm in New Orleans. Expect elements of horror such as gore, violence, and an array of other topics dealing with death.

Sexual themes are suitable for mature audiences. +18

A glossary for Declan's Irish accent can be found at the end of the book.

CHAPTER 1

NARCISSA



The dead were an unthankful group of losers that didn't care if you died for them.

If you think I'm being dramatic, I wasn't. In fact, right this moment, I had a group of spirits complaining very openly to me about their thoughts on Hell. As if I had some control over it. *Hate to tell you buddy, but I didn't want to be here either!*

I groaned, looking skywards, examining its crimson color as I tried to gather any residual 'I can deal with this bullshit' energy. I found absolutely none. *Weird.* It was almost like I was on fucking empty.

Do you know who I could blame for that? Without a doubt in my mind? My fucking mother. *Bitch.* She literally set me up. I inhaled sharply, shaking my head. I mean really, who sets up their own daughter? What the hell had I ever done to her? Was I that terrible of a daughter? I didn't think so. Hell, I thought I was pretty freakin' fantastic, thank you very much. I would love to have me as my daughter. If that made sense.

Dry winds carrying red colored dust whipped around us as we walked towards the massive, glinting city in the distance. The open, barren, obsidian-covered landscape, with jagged rocks and dusty red sand, was filled with endless wandering spirits. Spirits that were annoying the shit out of me

currently.

I should banish their asses to the Other.

Of course, this was only one of several layers within the demonic realm, but it was the most known. ‘Hell’ was far shorter than the term ‘demonic realm,’ so I understood why humans had chosen that label long ago. Although, how they could have such an active belief in Hell and not ghosts, witches, and shifters was beyond me. It was like they thought they knew everything about this universe. I literally held the ability to take life itself... *and I still didn’t know everything!*

I narrowed my eyes at the kingdom in the distance, trying to refocus on the very pressing goal ahead. So what was my plan to get us out of Hell, you ask? Simple. I was going to walk my ass right into those not-so-pearly gates and demand the high king of this realm send me back so I could kick my mother’s, Nero’s, and his little brother’s asses.

Heck, maybe Mr. High King of Hell would be super chill and even help me out. After all, the two asshole princes and their father, as members of a lesser kingdom, were under his rule, so he had the power to squash them fairly easily. He also had the power to tell me to fuck off. I’d heard rumors that he was a bit of an asshole, so my prospects weren’t looking very high.

“Lass,” Declan’s accented voice chimed, “we need a plan. We can’t just storm the bloody hell in there.” I was really glad right now that I had zapped him, because I would have been pissed if I’d had to listen to his adorable Irish accent. I mean, who did the bastard think he was, being so cute? I turned and narrowed my eyes at him as a wicked glint lit up his emerald gaze.

Sometimes I wondered if he could read my mind. Honestly, it wouldn’t surprise me.

For just a moment, I almost faltered in my steps because an overwhelming giddy feeling that was *sooo* not welcome right now hit me right in the chest. Holy crap. This stunning demigod of luck was in love with me. Me! I blinked, trying to clear my thoughts, and kept walking, his chuckle making me scowl. If he had been a bit less attractive, my life would be far easier. Honestly though? I don’t think I could ever find him unattractive, no matter what he looked like.

His personality—his blunt confidence yet softer nature with just me—was one of like a million reasons I was in love with him. I looked over at him again, trying to be secretive about it, only to find him watching me. The man flashed me a sexy smile, running a hand through his crimson-dipped hair that

was a near oil color near the roots. It was a stark yet stunning contrast to his handsome ivory-toned, chiseled face that was peppered with freckles.

Looking at the man was an experience, but touching him? Kissing him? Far better. I tried to ignore the urge to attack him, wanting to feel that damn lucky charm lip ring against my skin.

No.

Now was not the time, Narc. I just had to get out of Hell first. Right? That seemed reasonable. *Then again,* we were going to need a rest stop soon. I even saw the landscape changing up ahead to a more forested region with shade and comfortable places to relax.

Yep. I had now decided we would need a rest stop. That could include a sex break, right? A scowl slipped on my face as I tried to deal with the reality that I had to handle all this shit before doing something more enjoyable like spending the day in bed with one or all of my men.

At that thought, I was now in an even worse mood than before.

“Come on, lass,” Declan encouraged while wrapping a massive, hot arm around my waist, his tall muscular body not making me feel any less frustrated. My fingers twitched, wanting to find their way under his clothes so I could feel his ridiculously cut body. I could just imagine how good his large, rough hands would feel on my hips as he bounced me up and down... “I promise everything is going to work out how it’s supposed to.”

“You can’t promise that,” I mumbled, leaning into him so that I could inhale his familiar clover scent. His magic, playful with a dark twist, looped around my own, making me shiver with excitement.

“Sure I can.” He offered a sexy wink that had me melting. “I’m a demigod of luck, I know shite like this, lass.”

“Oh yeah?” I arched my brow. “Is that how your magic works?”

“My magic?” he asked, tilting his head almost thoughtfully. “You know, I’m not sure how to exactly explain how my magic works.”

Before I could say anything or inquire more about his curious response, a noise had me turning to find that we had actually been traveling rather quickly, the change in landscape meeting us head-on.

Instantly, the sounds of creatures moving around in the forest had me a bit cautious. I didn’t feel worried or scared, though, because this place felt oddly like... home? Well, not exactly, but I felt comfortable here despite how foreign it was to me.

Then again, it didn’t really matter if I felt comfortable here, did it? That

wouldn't solve my problem. Well, *problems*. I frowned as the reality of why I was down here brought me to a standstill, the fight and anger draining out of me a bit.

Had my own mother really set me up?

I was not a crier, but the sense of betrayal had me feeling a bit sick to my stomach. Maybe Nero had been lying? I didn't think he had, though—it would have been such a random lie, and I knew they were aware of my lack of a relationship with my mom as it stood.

Shit. I mean, did she really not want me to be Queen bad enough that she would sell me to my enemies? Sacrifice New Orleans and possibly entrap me in a demonic kingdom with Asmodeus, the creepy bastard? If that was true, then I guess I had underestimated just how much she disliked me. The concept shouldn't have hurt as much as it did.

The one plus side I could pull from this? New Orleans hadn't been left completely alone. I trusted Zachariah, Raphael, and Dorian. They would realize something was wrong and put it together. I also trusted my grandmother. She would be furious. I smirked slightly at that, knowing that she wouldn't go easy on my mother. Hell, this offense may be 'banish to the Other' worthy.

I slouched slightly. *Did I want that?* I had no idea. I hated her, or at least that was what it felt like right now, and if she had done this... I mean, there was no excuse... but did I want her gone forever? No. She was still my mom at the end of the day.

A reality that felt somehow very hollow.

"Narcissa?" Declan's accented voice was soft against my ear as I realized I'd come to a complete standstill. My body was shaking slightly in anger, and my eyes flickered from where they had been focused on the trees to my left, up into a pair of emerald burning yet concerned eyes.

His massive hands gripped my shoulders and turned me so that I was pressed against his chest, my arms wrapping around him in an embrace. I loved hugs. My boys could make me feel so effortlessly anchored and relaxed with such a simple action. I knew they had no idea how much that type of thing affected me.

I felt like a total sap, but this had made me realize how much more vocal I needed to be with my emotions... even if they were awkward, confusing, and made no sense to me in the least. Maybe the guys would be better at decoding them if I spoke them out loud.

“I’m fine.” I sighed slightly and tilted my head back so that I could look all the way up to where he stood at 6’3”. How was it fair for him to be this attractive? All of them. All six of them were unfairly hot. Don’t even get me started on Declan’s tattoos that I wanted to trace with my tongue... yeah, alright, I was in a weird as fuck place tonight.

A low rumble came from his chest as I pressed closer to him. I eagerly met his lips as he dipped his head to brush his lips against mine, causing me to let out a small embarrassing moan.

“God,” Alaric grumbled in frustration while tearing me away from my totally hot demigod, who offered a dirty smirk as I huffed. I went to yell at Alaric for the move but couldn’t focus when I felt how hard he was behind me, that thick cloud of lust only growing heavier instead of lightening. It didn’t help that my magic had decided now, of all times, to flare up. I could have used this energy an hour or so ago. *But no.* That would have been far too helpful.

Alaric, my grumpy vampire, muttered something behind me as I tried to not smile. I knew he could probably smell my lust and feel how much blood was rushing through me, making my skin heated and flushed. I couldn’t help wanting to tease the man a bit, especially because when his control did break, it was so damn delicious.

Plus, I didn’t feel bad about his obvious frustration. Nope, not one bit. The vampire was totally in part to blame. I mean, did I suggest having a panty-melting twin sandwich threesome that I had continued to think about every other minute since then? No I had not! Alright, actually, I may have. But the point still stands—he was in part to blame for how worked up I was. The bastard didn’t even seem apologetic either!

“It’s not *just* his fault I am frustrated.” I wiggled against the vampire as his vise-like arms locked around me.

Alaric and his twin, Abel, were both massive, tank-like, 6’6” living vampires. They were built like true warriors and had a cool exterior that could easily turn lethal. Well, that was for most people. For me? They were totally softies. The exclusivity made me feel all that more special.

Although, if they ever found out I thought they were softies, they would probably react similarly to how I would if I was called that... by going to kill something to prove my badass-ness. So, of course, for the well-being of others, I kept that shit secret. It wasn’t like anyone would ever guess on their own—hell, they might not even believe me!

The Vladern twins were scary looking, with their dark designer fitted clothing, leather motorcycle boots, and stark Viking runes that ran down their arms. They weren't exactly the type of guys that you would tease if you cared about your life in any way. Me though? I teased them enough for everyone.

I didn't spend a lot of time around vampires. Well, actually, until recently I tended to avoid interacting with a lot of supernaturals outside of my queenly duty. I thought that was the easiest way to keep order. Now though? After meeting Mila, gaining a friend in Draco, and getting to know the local wolf alpha Lucas better... I was rethinking my analysis. Having friends outside my boys was possibly a very good thing, especially when it came to demons trying to take over my shit.

Although, I was still hesitant to befriend the other vampires—the non-living ones. They had been causing a lot of problems in NOLA. Small problems, but annoying nonetheless. But—since Elizabeth had shown up, things had been relatively peaceful, so maybe they were changing for the better.

I had to assume the non-living vampires were the reason for the vampire mythos in modern culture. You know, the 'dead' and being so pale they sparkled concepts. Because my guys? They were very much alive, and Alaric's body heat radiated off him as he kissed the top of my ear gently, making me feel so completely at home.

It contrasted the way his icy arctic eyes darkened with heat on my expression. It wasn't a calm, affectionate heat either. It was burning. I mean, love was totally there... but I felt like the man wanted to ravage me.

I think Alaric's eyes were possibly the most expression-filled part of his face. They darkened and lightened according to how he felt. For example, if he was being possessive or turned on, they turned into this deep midnight blue. It was stunning.

Had it become clear enough yet how into them I was?

I smirked, thinking about the first time I had noticed it. I had hid my little secret for years until this past winter. I had kept the books hidden and never talked about it. When he and his brother discovered my tiny—I promise—*Twilight* series obsession? And then learned it was about a vampire? Well, he was a bit miffed, to say the least.

You couldn't blame me for enjoying them! They were literally a goddamn craze when they came out, and I got swept into it... sorry, not sorry.

I tried to reassure him that I wasn't Team Edward or Team Jacob, because Bella shouldn't have had to choose, but that just had him looking at me even hotter. I really have no idea how I hadn't caught on to their feelings towards me sooner. Especially when I'd been so oblivious.

Sometimes I still caught him mumbling about killing Edward whenever I brought up the series. It was hilarious. I'd yet to get him to watch the movies, but that was coming—I swear to you, I would get him to watch those or read the books, one way or another.

...Although, the threat to Robert Pattinson's life could become very real if I did that.

"Wait!" I paused my steps once again, turning to face the three of them. "Does this mean we are dead? Like officially dead?" Shit. This was so not on the schedule.

If you were wondering, yes. Yes, I totally had a schedule that I was just coming up with now to define this chaos. It included: getting out of Hell (well, killing Nero would have been my first preferable option, but circumstances had obviously changed), then killing Nero, followed by a movie night and drinks. Also, we probably needed to have a talk, the seven of us. You know, about important shit like 'what the hell are we doing' type vibe.

I mean, obviously I had an idea of where this was going, but I sort of needed to hear it from them. Can you actually blame me? There were six of them and one little old me. Why did I have to be the one to bring it up?

Dorian and I had already talked briefly about it, but somehow talking in a larger group made it all the more intimidating. I tried to not blush as I considered his words. *Marriage*. I had to admit, I expected a lot of different things in my possible future, but marriage to these hotties? I hadn't expected that.

Hoped... but never seriously considered.

"You know, I am really not positive," Abel offered while tilting his head curiously. "I don't know how this will affect traveling back to Earth, but by all technicality, the two of us should be fine. I mean, our magic isn't connected just to the land of the living. I would just guess that we shouldn't spend an extended period of time down here, though. It may affect the 'living' aspect of ourselves."

His warm, soothing voice had me momentarily zoning out as we began walking again, everyone's thoughts seemingly elsewhere as I tried to

formulate my next question. I inhaled slightly, trying to shake myself, but instead took in Alaric's pine scent and Abel's cherry scent. Honestly, I felt like I was being taken on some seasonal joy ride. Yankee candles had nothing on these boys.

Plus, Yankee candles couldn't turn me on. Just saying.

Abel's deep ocean eyes tracked my heated face as a tiny smirk flashed onto his perfect lips, causing his brother to rumble in warning. Abel ignored it and continued to meet my stare. The two of them had very different personality types, yet they looked nearly identical except for their eye color.

I loved all my men for different reasons, and the twins—from Alaric's grumpiness to Abel's sweetheart charm—were absolutely included in that. I wouldn't change them, ever. They accepted my flaws, and I sure as hell accepted theirs. I mean, these boys were sweet enough to watch Disney with me! And kill for me! That's fucking hubby material right there.

I was totally going to husband them up.

"What about you?" I looked at Declan, feeling concerned about the lively demigod.

His lips twerked up into a satisfied smile. "Worried about me, lass?"

I scowled as I looked away. "Well, not anymore."

He barked out a laugh, making me smile as the crimson sky above us cracked with thunder, which made me almost fucking jump in surprise. What the hell?

Suddenly and without warning, the familiar scent of Zachariah's wild magic wrapped around me, then disappeared as quickly as it had appeared. My eyebrows rose as I looked around. I mean, *call me crazy*, but my sexy voodoo priest was not here. Unfortunately.

Declan's smile grew, seemingly elated with what had just occurred.

"What?" I asked as the twins looked at him with confusion as well. Oh good. I would hate to be the only one.

Declan looked skyward and then at the kingdom ahead, which was less visible as the dark foliage grew thicker. "I would give it an hour, maybe two at most."

"An hour until what?" I pushed, stopping to stand in front of Declan. His eyes met mine as a dangerous light flashed through them. You know, the guy was normally pretty laid back, but I had a feeling he had a different side to him and that he was far more upset about this situation than I had realized. Which was a bit flattering, in a way.

Should it concern me that I was discovering that he may have a slightly darker side? Nah. I think I had always known the bastard was a bit crazy. Plus, I liked scary. I knew Declan would never hurt me. I mean, after all, we did make storm babies together, and that was a fucking big commitment.

“He means until the others show up,” Abel translated. I felt relief and excitement crash into me. How crazy was it that I literally already missed them? I mean, we had been down here for an hour or two, at most.

I wanted to say I was being pathetic, but the truth was I was in love with them. All six of them. I didn’t exactly ever feel complete unless the seven of us were together. So no, not pathetic—just insanely in love.

Plus, the sooner we got back to Earth, the sooner I could see my adorably vicious kitten! Shadow. What an absolutely adorable bundle of fur. I literally had the best boyfriends in the world. I mean, how long had I been wanting a kitten? Then they don’t just get me a kitten, they get me a hellcat! My brow furrowed, hoping he would be okay while we were gone.

I really needed to up my gift game for Christmas this year to compete with that. Although, to be fair, they had six brains to come up with gift ideas. I did not.

Maybe I could get the spirits that always annoyed me to help...

“Zachariah is probably freaking out.” Declan seemed amused by that.

It was true though. His secret best friend was no doubt freaking out. I knew Raphael was probably losing his shit, and Dorian was most likely trying to keep it together without doing something rash. It didn’t help that the level-headed twins and relaxed Declan were the ones down here and not above trying to figure out what to do. I loved my three men on Earth, but they weren’t exactly known for their cool temperaments.

Zachariah was always in control—like literally, all the time—and only recently had he let out his crazy. Something that I enjoyed probably far more than I should have. I was excited for what the concept could yield. I already knew what it yielded with Raphael, and it was absolutely something I would repeat again... and again. Oh, and again. Dorian I wasn’t as sure about. I mean, I could see it going either way. When we’d fooled around before, he’d been hesitant and worried about losing control. I wasn’t worried though. I trusted Dorian with my life, let alone in bed. He just needed to trust himself.

I realized I had somewhat zoned out again as they started to place bets on the timing. My eyes followed the path towards the massive glinting castle, a dark monstrosity against the red skies. My mood dipped slightly, and I was

glad they were too distracted to notice the guilt that weighed on me. I mean, I really did feel as though I'd gotten us into this mess.

I should have known that my mother's actions were unusual. I mean, when had she ever been helpful in my life? Had it been too much to ask that she would put her own daughter first instead of her own selfish bullshit? Not even just me, either. No, this was literally about most of New Orleans!

I had no idea what had happened to mommy dearest to make her this way, but I would never be like that. I had promised myself that I would never treat others poorly just because of my own past. They didn't deserve that. The past could only haunt you, if you let it.

On top of that, I should have considered the two demonic princes' abilities when it came to fucking shit up. Asmodeus and Nero weren't dumb. I hadn't expected that impressive of a trap, but I suppose I should have been more cautious. I had underestimated just how badly they had wanted to win. How much all of this meant to them.

Well, if they wanted to win, they were in for a fight. No, really—if they wanted NOLA, they would be pulling it from my very dead hands. Well, alright... since I am technically “dead” right now, that may not be the right analogy, but you get the point.

I didn't make promises lightly, and I had sworn to put the supernatural community of New Orleans first. So I planned to. Whether or not I was the right person to lead them didn't matter currently.

Not until the threat was eliminated.

Then, and only then, would we sort out the grievances the community had seemed to form. Because heaven forbid they figured out how to communicate their issues instead of finally exploding with frustration in a maelstrom of bullshit.

Sometimes I sincerely wondered how I enjoyed being Queen so much.

The supernatural community as a whole didn't have the best reputation for communication... or just normal reactions as a whole. Instead, they caused chaos and avoided talking about problems until someone aggressively forced the issue. I think it may have to do with some weird dominance factor, but I wasn't positive.

Hell, if they hadn't caught on now, I had no idea what to say to them. I mean, people were actually missing, and I had to fucking ask to find that out. I shook my head, hoping to God that the other boys figured out something before coming down here. I missed them like crazy, but I would prefer a life

saved, even if it meant waiting to see them. I knew that these victims only had a limited time until they would no longer be alive, if they weren't already dead.

We walked for about another five minutes, all of us tapering out of conversation as we traveled further into the forested region. The obsidian-like landscape fully changed to thick black greenery and plant life. Dark willow-like trees with ashy leaves grew closer and closer on all sides, and little glowing eyes stared at us as odd creatures ducked back and forth trying to stay out of sight.

My magic was vibrating happily under my skin, and I really tried to keep it tempered. She was being a fickle bitch though. You know, because of all the goddamn spirits floating around. I mean, what's the worst that could happen? Becoming oversaturated with enough power that I ended up killing everyone around me? Who was worried? Not this girl.

My eyes flickered to Declan, wondering if he would be able to remove some of my excess power like last time. *I promise* it wasn't another excuse to touch him more...

Suddenly and without warning, the space around me shifted. Everything in the air seemed to flash with a searing heat, and I frowned, feeling short of breath for a moment as the air around me seemed to sizzle as if it were burning. I felt Alaric tug me back, the trees breezing from a phantom wind as the smell of citrus exploded around me. I smiled in relief and excitement.

A very familiar demon appeared in front of me, looking as cocky and devilishly handsome as he normally did.

Dorian.

CHAPTER 2

NARCISSA



“Dorian!” Immediately, I was throwing myself into his strong, secure arms. There was no other way to describe my ridiculously soft action, and it was completely worth it when he caught me, pulling me flush against him.

I didn’t even care if my action was insane-looking, because I was far too focused on trying to express just how happy I was to see him. *Thank God he had access to this realm.* Forget what I said about being responsible—I wanted all my men here. Now.

My incubus groaned, chuckling, as he hooked my legs around his hips naturally. I mean, this was far from the first time that I’d thrown myself at him, but the flawless way he caught my chin with one hand and kissed the shit out of me still made me breathless. Instead of fighting the urge to delve my fingers into his thick auburn hair, I pulled on it slightly, only leaning back to watch the burning gray inferno-like eyes darken with heat and desire.

This attraction between us wasn’t even about his incubus powers, although his magic was wrapped very possessively around me—just the way I liked it, for the record. But no, this wasn’t just his magic, *this was us.* This was Dorian and I.

I loved him, pure and simple, and our attraction to each other was anything but. I had literally missed the cocky bastard in the few hours we’d

been apart.

Examining him, I noticed his hair was messy, and stress creased his brow in an unusually serious expression. I could tell he was attempting to appear relaxed, but he was failing miserably at it. My fingers rubbed against his oversized dark shirt, which was wrinkled and a bit loose in the collar, as if he had been pulling on it.

I frowned, wondering how worked up he had to have been to look like this. I mean, I didn't want to assume he'd been worked up about little old me... although, that would be extremely flattering. *He totally had been.* I mean, not that I could blame him—I was pretty great.

Abel asked Dorian something, but I couldn't focus on the words coming from his perfect lips. No. All I could focus on was how Dorian's lips moved to respond. His magic vibrated against me, growing in power, and my eyes nearly fluttered shut. Alright. I lied. His magic was totally taking effect now.

Tightening my grip on his shirt even further, I leaned into him fully, not caring about our audience. Instead, I pressed my lips to his and moaned slightly as he deepened it, his fingers tightening on my thighs in a bruising grip.

“Missed me?” Dorian teased, looking flushed while examining my expression. His eyes were a bit more wild than usual, and I could feel how hard he was against me.

“Yes,” I answered honestly and a bit breathlessly. What? Give me a break! He was an incubus and literally sex incarnate. You can't exactly blame me.

“How did you know where we were?” Abel asked. I was curious about that as well.

Alaric's eyes were on me, searing my skin with heat, but overall he seemed more relaxed than he'd been before. I realized with slight surprise that I often forgot how close these guys were. I had no doubt that he'd been worried about the others up above. Despite the odd start to their friendship, they were almost like brothers. It made me thrilled that they worried about one another as much as I worried about them. This really was a family, the group of us. *Our* family.

I smiled into Dorian's chest, feeling elated at the concept. Declan's fingers twisted into my hair lightly, Dorian shifting me so he had more access. I slid down my demon's hard body, his chest rumbling slightly, as he kept me pressed against him as tight as possible. Against his fantastic yummy

chest.

I was totally digging my nails into him, just slightly, but enough that he let out a low, dangerous hum. I began to imagine what exactly could happen in a very different situation where I was between Dorian and Declan.

We really needed to finish this shit so we could move on to the fun stuff.

“When you left Earth, we immediately felt it. Scared the shit out of me.” Dorian’s voice was soft, concerned, and filled with a tension I didn’t like at all.

He continued, “Almost right away, your grandma appeared outside our house, looking furious. We’d been on our way out after feeling the change, but we explained everything, and she didn’t exactly seem surprised. In fact, she immediately stormed down the block, cursing up a storm... something about your mother. That was really all I heard before we were distracted by Zachariah, who had decided it was time to go across the street to pay Nero a visit.”

“He went to Nero’s?” I asked, my chest filling with panic.

I knew my voodoo priest was a total badass, but I still didn’t like the idea of him choosing to put himself in the way of danger for me. It was totally sexy, but still, my slightly softer side had me wanting to kick Nero’s ass for even bringing it to this point.

Dorian’s lips tilted up slightly—possibly at my expression, or possibly at the pain that Zachariah would no doubt be inflicting on Nero. “Yes, but we can talk about that later. Raphi and I split up, and when I came to the cemetery lot, I could immediately smell the portal’s power signature and just hoped for the best. Seems we are a bit more connected than even I realized.”

“Really? *We* have a connection? Weird.” I teased—because, no shit—as he winked.

An angry change came over his face suddenly. “Oh fuck, is it true? Is all of this because of your fucking mother?!” *Oh good, he had connected the dots there. How the hell had my grandma? Interesting.*

I mean, at least that was what I am assuming, due to my grandmother’s angry mutterings regarding the woman in question. I nearly scowled at the thought of her. Maybe we needed family therapy. That so wasn’t my thing, *but*—what I wouldn’t give to see my mother sit through a session, extremely uncomfortable and awkward. *Did ghosts go to therapy?* I wasn’t positive that was even a thing.

“Yes. It seems she decided to double-cross me.” I attempted to keep the

pain from my voice, ignoring the sadness and fury in my demon's gaze, but it was difficult. This was the problem with emotions—you open yourself up for a few and start to get way more than you bargained for.

No. Not today. I would not deal with these today.

“Narc—”

“So my grandma knows?” I needed to confirm while also filling the painful silence that reeked of the potential for pity regarding my shitty mother. I didn't want them thinking I needed that, because I didn't. I was perfectly fine. I mean, mothers betray their daughters in demonic realm battles all the time. Right? We were actually pretty run-of-the-mill when it came to parenting issues.

I didn't think I was actually fooling anyone.

“As much as I did at the time.” He nodded as his large hand gently ran through my hair, making my skin break out into shivers. His words did make me feel a bit better, because if my grandma was somewhat aware of the situation, she would easily be able to hold down the fort until I managed to find my way back.

Dorian frowned slightly, seeming to debate something before guilt flashed in his gaze. “Well, it is possible she knows more than that.”

“What do you mean?” I pulled back as Abel chuckled under his breath.

He offered me a slightly sheepish look. “It was very brief, and I could have misheard it, but I thought she said something about your father.”

“My father?” I parroted.

He nodded. “I mean, I know she has an idea of who he is, but I'm not positive how that relates to where we are—”

“Excuse me?” I asked sharply, feeling a confusing cloud of frustration form over me. Unless I had lost my ever-loving mind, I was damn positive that this was the first time that Dorian had ever mentioned *anything* about my father.

My incubus's gaze darkened with concern. I could feel a slight tension running through the group, and I had the urge to turn to see the others' expressions. To see if they were surprised by his words or if they had already known. I was hoping for the first but betting on the second, which meant I was a bit miffed. More than miffed. I was pissed off. I kept my focus on him, not wanting to budge on our intense eye contact until he explained himself.

I didn't do secrets.

Dorian ran a hand through his hair, a bit of a nervous gesture, before an

expression took over his face that had my chest squeezing. Not because of worry or insecurity or even anger... no, this was affection. I could see the concern for my possible reaction and guilt from what I could assume was due to his secret-keeping.

My anger dissipated as I realized how much my reaction to his words mattered to him. I don't know why he had kept this from me, but I trusted Dorian with my life, so I had to assume it was for a good reason.

Was it wrong that it gave me a small thrill of happiness that he cared about my opinion so much? I'd been obsessed with my guys for so damn long. Had loved them for so damn long. It was overwhelming to realize that they truly loved me back. Wonderful, but overwhelming.

"Fuck, this is not the ideal time to explain all of this," he grumbled. "The context of the conversation isn't going to make full sense right now... but your grandma is aware of who your father is, and according to my understanding, the reason why he and your mother broke up. She didn't explain further than that, though."

Oh.

"Why did she share any of that to begin with?" I demanded softly. My heart was beating a million miles an hour as I processed his words. Holy shit.

In my peripheral, I could see the others had walked ahead just a bit, giving us space to talk. I appreciated that, but I really needed to confirm if they had known this literal life-changing fucking news and for how long.

I forced down the tiny bit of betrayal I felt, because I wanted to instead focus on his words—you know, the ones about an entire sector of my past that I'd always been curious about. More than anything though? The strongest emotion I was feeling?

I was livid with my grandma.

Okay, livid was dramatic, but I was pissed. I mean, I had expressed to her several times what a massive gap this had been in my life, and all this time she could have filled it in for me? That was a bit shitty of her. Sorry, I wasn't going to lie about that.

Dorian's ears heated. "I think that may be a conversation better held with everyone else here. Plus, as I said, I have no idea how it relates to this situation at all. I probably shouldn't have even said anything. I'm sorry Narc ___"

"Dorian," I began, tugging his hand to mine. "It's fine. I'm not mad at you." I hated that he was rambling. I hated that he was so uncharacteristically

worked up about this. I didn't want him to feel that way. I think I was just a bit shocked about all of this. I could also see that he authentically believed it would be better to wait to have this conversation, and like I said, I trusted him. Instead of saying anything, I raised up on my toes and brushed my lips against his in a heated kiss, gripping his shirt in a tight hold.

A deep, low groan broke from his throat as his hand wrapped around the back of my neck, making the kiss deep and intense. *Maybe I could kiss the answer out of him?* I had to admit, this was a much healthier way to deal with my frustration regarding all of this bullshit. I'd meant it to be a light, sweet kiss, but when my tongue darted out to trace his lips, I could feel my demon starting to break.

"Dorian!" I exclaimed, breathless and flushed, as my back hit a nearby willow, the leaves creating a night-like veil of privacy around us. I could tell we had traveled a bit into the forest, my head falling back to look up at the large man filling my entire vision.

His muscular chest and citrus scent created a shiver that ran up my spine as one of his large hands tilted my head back, his thumb running over my quickening pulse, making heat explode in my center. *Holy shit.* This man had the power to destroy me, I could just feel it. Of course, it didn't help that my magic was one hundred percent on the 'let's fuck right now' train. I briefly had a thought about the others, wondering if they would be worried...but I mean, worst-case, they came looking for us. I wouldn't complain.

"I was going to answer you anyways." Dorian's voice was soft and filled with certainty, his gray eyes tracing my slightly parted lips.

"That wasn't why I kissed you," I admitted as a sexy glint lit up his eyes, making me nearly smile. I enjoyed most looks on Dorian, but happy and amused were ones that I would be thrilled with seeing constantly... well, that, and the hungry way he was staring at me right now.

"Sometime last year, when you had stayed home from school sick, I ended up having a conversation with your grandma that even I couldn't have predicted," he began, making me realize just how serious he was. "We were in the kitchen, and she began to explain how, out of all three of you, there was only one person that had a chance at happiness long term. You. So she gave me something, something for our future."

My cheeks heated. "She gave you what?"

What had she given him? Did I want to know? Of course I fucking wanted to know. I also wanted to know who my father was, though it seemed

like I should have been more focused on getting out of Hell... something that didn't seem nearly as important anymore.

Dorian's chest rumbled, his brow dipping. "I am not positive how—"

I opened my mouth to tell him that he didn't have to answer. I swear to God. I hated that guilty look on his face, and I could feel his conflict from here. Literally.

Instead, his eyes darkened as if deciding something, and his hand tightened on my jaw. Pleasure coursed through me at his demanding action as his forehead pressed to my own. If I hadn't been floored before, his words had me practically melting into him. No, scratch that—nothing 'practically' about it.

"I love you, Narcissa. You know that, right? I love you so goddamn much and have for a really fucking long time. You are the only person in my life that has ever loved me for who I am and not what I can give them. When I met you, I hadn't expected... well, any of this. But I know this was how everything was supposed to work out. The six of us and you. Our family. Your grandma knew it also, clearly, because when we talked that day, she gave me... a ring."

My eyes widened. "A ring? Like a class ring? A friendship ring? A magic ring?"

"A wedding band and engagement ring that have been in your family for a very long time." His voice turned velvety, unintentionally, as if he was trying to soften the blow of such massive news. No need for that. *Holy hell*. I sank against him as what he said began to filter through me, immense joy and excitement shimmering in my chest.

"Oh."

What? What the fuck else was I supposed to say?!

His eyes filled with amusement. "I think that is by far the shortest response I've ever heard come from your sexy mouth."

A slight shyness invaded me as I tried to ignore the urge to joke around and instead focused on asking some type of useful fucking question. "And the others? Do they know about this ring?"

His smile grew. "Yeah, *ma chérie*, all six of us have talked about it."

Oh my God. Out of everything you could have had me bet he would say, it would absolutely never have been this. Literally never. Although, after our conversation in the graveyard... maybe it wasn't all that surprising.

"Well..." I swallowed nervously before continuing. "I don't know exactly

what to say. I mean, you aren't even asking me anything yet, so I guess there isn't anything to say. I don't want to presume that you were going to ask to start with. I mean, official titles aren't crazy important to me. You know how much I love all of you and that isn't going to change, ever—”

My rambling was cut off by a searing kiss that had my entire body turning into liquid molten heat, the lava-like feeling spreading throughout every vein, causing me to feel dizzy with pleasure. Dorian growled against my lips, his hard cock pulsing against my stomach from where he had me wedged up against the willow. Fucking hell. I knew it wasn't the time or place... but I wasn't fucking positive I cared anymore. Actually, I was positive that I didn't care anymore.

“Narcissa,” he snarled, his voice holding a slightly dangerous edge. “You have to stop rubbing up against me like that. I can fucking smell how wet you are, and if you don't stop, I'm not going to be able to control myself.”

Says the man pinning me up against a tree! How was I the sexy problem here?

“No.” I nipped his bottom lip, pulling on it slightly. “I'd much rather you didn't control yourself...” I honestly don't think I'd ever seen Dorian move so fucking fast in my entire life.

A small, needy moan slipped from my lips as my back hit the soft dark grass hidden underneath the forested shadows of the willow above us. My magic rippled against his as they circled one another and brushed each other like a pair of wild animals. Need ripped through me as I made an impatient sound, his lips trailing across my jaw and back to my mouth where he seared a kiss against my lips. Damn. He was way too good of a kisser; it was absolutely distracting.

Before I even realized what I was doing, my fingers found their way to his belt, and I pulled on it with literally zero skill or patience, needing him close to me as soon as possible. I didn't even bother with his shirt. My legs were shaking slightly, his large body wedged between them, as his hand tightened on the back of my neck in a controlling, hot kiss.

The other hand pushed up my shirt, his fingers skimming across my breast as my nipples tightened in the cool air of the demonic forest. My breathing was turning erratic as my pulse heightened, Dorian's own gaze sparking almost nuclear with need.

“You are so fucking sweet.” He pulled back from my lips, his voice taking on magic-like quality as the air around us grew nearly constrictive. I

felt like I was drowning in pleasure, and I found myself relaxing completely, placing my trust in him. Trust that he would fix this burning, desperate need that had taken root under my skin. A need that I knew only he could fix.

Breaking away from our pressed position, he tugged down my leggings and flipped me over easily. I whimpered as my hands bit into the dirt, my back arching as I looked back at him, almost surprised by the feral edge to his magic. I pressed back on all fours, wanting to be as close to him as possible, his hand automatically wrapping tightly into my hair in a firm hold. The man knew his way around my body like he'd been doing this forever. I was willing to make that the case in the future.

“Do you want me to bury myself inside of you, Narc? You want me to bury this hard cock instead of your tight soaking pussy?” His voice was rough against my ear, causing me to let my head fall back, my core tightening as I grew impossibly wetter. If I didn't get him inside of me, I was going to lose my ever-loving mind.

“Please, Dorian!” I whimpered in a needy voice as I arched even further back, hoping it would convince him to push inside of me. It did.

I cried out in relief as the man slid home, burying his insanely large length inside of my pussy, my arms almost breaking in relief. Oh holy hell. The feeling of him fully seated inside of me had my legs nearly shaking as I gripped the grass under my fingers, pulling some out. Dorian didn't give me even a minute to adjust before he began to fuck me. Hard.

I cried out his name as he pulled back and slammed into me again, the sound of my ass hitting against his firm abs so erotic that I could have come from that alone. His magic pulled on my body, sparking like shocks of lightning against my sensitive skin, bringing me to the edge of a fucking climax but refusing to let me fall over it.

My skin was dotted with sweat, and the way that he was fucking me—the angle his cock was hitting—had white-hot points of pleasure filling me. I felt my eyes roll back as I moaned out his name, something that seemed to only encourage his animalistic behavior.

Damn. Dorian fucked like a goddamn porn star. Better than that. Although I would *totally* record us so that we could watch it later.

I had no idea how much effect his magic had on me overall, but I was absolutely drenched, making it easy for him to pound in and out of me, his stamina almost machine-like in nature as he gripped my hips hard. I wanted him deeper despite him almost being so goddamn deep I could feel him in

every part of my body, emotionally and physically.

I felt dizzy with frustration and pleasure. No matter how much he gave me, I found myself wanting more. I craved all of him, and when his hand broke across my ass, I let out a whimper of pleasure, begging him for more, slight tears of pleasure breaking from my eyes.

“Dorian,” I moaned, “faster. Please.”

“Holy shit,” he grunted, brushing his lips against my neck in a contrasting gesture of softness. “You are so fucking tight, Narc. So goddamn beautiful. I love you. I love you so fucking much.”

“I love you,” I gasped out. He snarled and flipped me over, sliding back into my wet center while throwing my legs over his muscular shoulders. Despite being mostly dressed still, I felt bare to him, and his eyes ate up every single change in my expression as I clung to him, my nails biting into his shoulders in anticipation of the climax I could feel growing.

“Look at me,” Dorian snapped, his voice low and rough, and my eyes flung open in realization they’d closed in pleasure. “I need to see all of you when you come all over my cock.”

Yes freakin’ sir.

Shit. This man was so fucking beautiful. His skin was glowing from the magic I was feeding him, his eyes were almost swirling pools of onyx, and his messy hair laid sexily over his slightly sweaty forehead.

I gripped his hair and brought his lips down to me, his pace growing more erratic and demanding. I screamed out his name as the bond between us snapped into place, an explosion that caused my entire body to go up in flames.

“I’m so close, Dorian,” I whined. I could tell he was holding it back from me, and it was infuriating—but I could also feel how fucking amazing it would be upon relief. I needed that. I was chasing it like a goddamn high.

“Give in to it,” he demanded finally, with a rough, almost feral voice. “Come for me.”

My body listened to his command immediately, everything inside of me tightening as a nuclear explosion went off, my voice cracking during the scream of pleasure I let out. Sweat and a flushed heat dotted my body as flames licked my skin, Dorian’s eyes turning a silver, glowing color as he slammed home. His roar of my name shook around us, filling me up completely as my entire body sagged to the ground. My head fell back, eyes closing as the sense of satisfaction of our bond had tears stinging my eyes.

WOW. Just wow.

My world was hazy, my head spinning. My vision turned black as my breathing tried to regulate. I gripped Dorian tighter as he kissed along my collarbone, my magic and I both in shock of just how intense of a pull his incubus magic had. I'd known he was powerful, but *shit*. I felt drained in the best way possible.

Dorian pulled back and searched my face, smoothing his thumb over my drying tears as he gently peppered my face with kisses, his magic soothing my skin.

"Are you okay?" he asked, concern filling his voice as he examined me with increasing worry. "I didn't mean to pull on your magic that much—"

"I am fucking perfect," I interrupted, blinking while trying to come back to reality just a bit. "Holy shit, Dorian, that was so intense."

"I've never experienced anything like that before," he mumbled almost to himself, but something about his words made me feel all that much better. *This was special between us*. That meant something more than I could describe. It also helped that the suction of his magic had lessened my extra dosing of death magic from being down here, leaving me completely centered.

A small, sexy smile tilted his lips as he pressed his forehead against my own. I didn't care to mention that he was still deep inside of me, hard and pulsating. I was tempted to wiggle around, but he seemed so content that I didn't bother moving. I could feel the love and affection radiating off him.

Despite his cocky side that I loved, there was a much sweeter side to Dorian that wanted more than anything to be loved back. I knew, at least partly, that he hadn't been loved for most of his life. Not without conditions. But I would always love him. There was no getting rid of me—*sorry not sorry*.

"I love you, Narcissa."

"I love you more," I admitted fairly breathlessly, feeling cheesy as hell and not caring. I ran my hands through his hair when he finally pulled back, kneeling above me and leaving a nip on my neck before casting me a wicked smile. Feeling a bit dazed, I let him roll up my leggings as he tucked in his still ridiculously hard cock and adjusted himself, looking far more normal than my hot mess appearance, no doubt.

"Next time we'll be in a bed," he promised as he tugged me closer so that my head was resting against his chest. Then he picked me up, my legs

locking around him. “I want to fully fucking enjoy you. I need more. I want access to your entire body.”

“Yes sir,” I mumbled sleepily. Dorian’s answering chuckle was soft and warm as I realized that other voices were nearing us. *Oh good, they found us.*

My face turned red in realization that they had, of course, heard everything. *Everything.*

Oh well.

“Bloody hell, now I am wishing we hadn’t given you privacy.” Declan’s chuckle was dangerous and dark as I shot him a scowl from where I rested very comfortably in Dorian’s arms, my body sliding down his so that I was pressed further into him.

Abel hummed in agreement as Alaric’s eyes narrowed on me, making me offer him a smirk. *What?* What was he going to do about it? No, really, I wanted to know where teasing would lead to with him. I had a feeling it would be fucking great, and I wondered if he could justify giving me a sexy punishment for fucking my other boyfriend in a forest and getting him worked up. Seems like something he would do.

Before I could say anything, a sound came from the path we had just come from. I cursed, feeling the power exchange in the ground underneath me as I broke away from Dorian. Nearing the path, I froze in frustration.

Well, that seemed about right.

A moment of extreme pleasure followed by fucking annoying people.

“Should we do something?” Abel asked, looking unconcerned about the large group of soldiers making their way towards us at a leisurely pace.

“We wanted to get to the kingdom.” I explained reasonably. “Looks like we have a ride.” *Positive, Narc. Always looking at the goddamn positive side of things. Good for you, girl.*

The soldiers were massive. I am talking far over seven feet and covered in dark obsidian armor that was somehow silent as they moved in perfect formation. The one up front barked out an order as they came to a stop, the group of thirty-something men keeping their gaze straight ahead, over us. The man in charge removed his helmet, and my eyes widened in realization.

They were dead.

No, really—this man was just a skull with a black, almost smoky essence covering his bones like a translucent skin. He did have eyes though. They were small, red, flame-like eyes that bore into me, portraying a level of curiosity I hadn’t expected from someone that was dead. I suppose that was

fairly ignorant of me, wasn't it?

"Hi there," I offered, feeling awkward about the weird silence that had fallen between us.

"Your Majesty," the man replied, bowing deeply before slowly returning to his massive height. "We are here to escort you to the castle."

I blinked and turned back to Dorian with a small amount of hope in my chest. "You're a Prince of Hell?" *Please say yes. Please say yes.* No other answer was acceptable.

Dorian chuckled, his eyes lighting with mischief. "Sorry, *ma chérie*, I'm not. I would have remembered that, I hope."

I swallowed and turned back to Mr. Flame Eyes. "I'm sorry, I must have misheard what you just said—"

"Your Majesty, the high king requests your presence, and he isn't a very patient man. I would suggest we start back towards the castle. He has been anxious to meet you ever since sensing your magic." His voice was filled with pride in regard to the king, making me frown because there wasn't an ounce of humor in his gaze. Nothing to pad from the possibility of what he was saying.

"The high king? He sensed my magic..." What was I not understanding here?

You know, Narc. You know what he is saying.

I could almost see the frustration growing in the dead man. "Yes. Your father, the high king, recognized your magical signature because it's partly his, of course."

Oh. Of course.

Now, I would like to state for the record that I'm not a little bitch. I can handle most shit. But this? No. Not tonight. Not without coffee or more sleep. I blinked several times and ran a hand over my face, letting out a small laugh. I could feel my men shifting in concern as the space around me wavered.

It was that exact moment when several things hit me. Exhaustion. Anger at my mother. My excitement and orgasm from being with Dorian. My adrenaline from being down here.

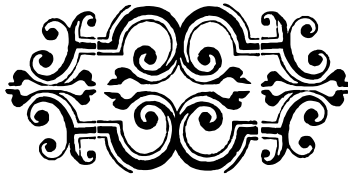
All of it hit me. All at once.

I passed out. The space around me went black, and someone caught me right before my head hit the ground.

Wonderful. Fucking wonderful.

CHAPTER 3

RAPHAEL



Motherfucker.

A dangerous growl left my throat as I stared at the space that Dorian had just disappeared from without warning. Well, I suppose his warning was something about ‘splitting up,’ but I knew he'd gone to the goddamn cemetery. It was the last confirmed place they'd been. I was tempted to follow after him, but something told me I would end up stuck, just looking around like an idiot. *She wasn't in this realm anymore.* A very real, cold fact that had me feeling absolutely furious.

What the hell was I supposed to do with myself? Seriously. If Zachariah's prediction was accurate about her being in the demonic realm, then how the fuck was I supposed to help? My wolf vibrated with angry energy in my chest as my eyes moved back towards the porch of Narc's house.

Her grandmother walked out as I stood on the sidewalk considering if I should go get Zachariah or try to figure some other shit out. I hated feeling useless, and while shifters had all the brute strength in the world, that didn't do jack shit for me at the moment.

I should probably avoid Nero's house right now. I didn't trust my wolf to not pull some shit with all the dominant magic flying around. I needed to keep focused, and if I shifted, I couldn't guarantee I wouldn't do something completely idiotic.

More so, even I could admit that the silence radiating over there was scarier than anything else. I wasn't concerned for Zachariah, because the strong magical signature coming off the house was one hundred percent voodoo. He could handle himself.

So, as I was saying—what the hell did I do with myself now?

“Fucking bastard,” I mumbled out my annoyance with Dorian, frustrated as hell at how useless I felt more than anything.

“You know you can’t go down to the demonic realm,” Narcissa’s grandmother’s voice rang out across the lawn. Only moments ago she’d been furious, but upon returning inside, she seemed to have gathered herself.

Although... her magic was far more active than normal, something that made my wolf extremely uncomfortable. I was used to Narcissa’s magic surrounding me in its familiar minty scent. Her grandmother’s had a similar texture, but it wasn’t my baby’s magic, so it instantly repulsed me. I nearly let out a growl at missing my mate.

It was nice to hear her confirm where we’d all assumed Narc had disappeared to. Although I was still confused and absolutely fucking furious on how that happened in the first place. My fists clenched as I seriously considered walking across the street, consequences be damned.

She continued when I didn’t respond. “Neither can Zachariah. He knows that. Both of your magics are far too connected to this realm. If it takes torturing some demon so he can forget about his inability to directly interact, then so be it. But don’t you worry, Raphi, she will be just fine.”

The surety in her voice annoyed me. I had no goddamn doubt that she would be “fine.” I didn’t want her fine. I wanted her fucking amazing and in my arms. She was right, though. Frustratingly right. I just had to deal with it and make myself useful. A plan formed in my head as I stood there, thunder cracking in the sky as rain began to fall.

I would focus on continuing Narc’s plan of keeping the demons from fucking shit up more than they already had.

A pained scream sounded from Nero’s house, causing me to look over. It had originated from the back yard, a large garden shed standing seemingly innocent despite being the home to Zachariah’s interrogation. Mind you, it was clear he had managed to cast some type of shield so you couldn’t hear his full cry, but thanks to my supernatural hearing I was still able to hear parts of it.

Good. They should suffer. We couldn’t kill them yet because we were still looking for the missing supes, but a little pain may help jog their memory. Narc’s grandmother laughed at the scream, turning and walking back into the house, leaving me to my thoughts.

The night sky turned angry, no doubt due to Zachariah’s hold on nature.

Running a hand through my damp hair, I immediately shifted, giving over control to my wolf for a bit, not overthinking my plan. I also didn't really care if humans saw me or not. I was past the point of giving a fuck. Once shifted, I began sprinting through yards, shifting through the darkness of the night and hoping that I would appear like a large fucking dog instead of a massive wolf. At least, that was the goal.

As I neared Bourbon Street, I considered the best way of pulling together the supernatural community—or at least those left that were still willing—to look for the missing supes. I knew I wasn't their alpha—in fact, I was no one's fucking alpha, and I took pride in that—but I was hoping my natural pull on dominance would be enough to convince them to do the right thing, the only thing that mattered right now. Well, to them at least.

Besides, I had to think like that or I would end up hyper-focused on why Narcissa wasn't here, and the small amount of control I had on my wolf would be gone. I promised him we would have the chance to tear Nero and Asmodeus apart, bit by bit, just not yet. I didn't want him to do anything rash to get to her either, like forcing our way down into the demonic realm somehow... After all, I wasn't any help to Narc if I was dead. *I just had to wait a bit longer and then everything would be fine.* It was what I kept telling myself.

There was an angry energy boiling through New Orleans, and my wolf let out a snarl in response, making my magic feel chaotic and tense. I could sense the fear vibrating through the supernatural community, and every dominant alpha instinct I had demanded that I find a way to fix it. Find a way to calm down the people that my wolf considered 'ours.'

I didn't blame them in the least for their fear. There was the fear of the future for many of them, but also the more timely fear for those that were missing. I wouldn't have normally given a fuck about their concerns, but this time I did because I knew there was a chance the supernatural community could easily become united in the fight against the demonic princes, provided the right push. After all, no one wanted to lose someone they loved.

Where the hell had they hidden them? I mean, fuck, it couldn't have been far, right? My biggest fear, though? That they were already dead. Something that Narcissa would no doubt be blamed for, if that was the case. I wasn't okay with that. I really wasn't okay with the idea of her blaming herself either, which I knew she would do anyway. She didn't deserve to live with that guilt when the assholes responsible had made the choice to act like that,

not her.

My mate had always taken the blame for shit like that though, especially when it came to her responsibilities as Queen. She shouldered it all on her own, and it drove me up the goddamn wall. I wanted her to feel like she could lean on us. Trust us.

I mean, it had been getting better for sure, but I wanted to know that I was helping her life, not stressing her out more by making her feel like she had someone extra to worry about. Despite what some assholes would claim, Narc was a good leader that was not only appreciated, but respected. Not always loved, but I didn't think that was what she was after anyway.

The people that truly drove me crazy? The assholes that tried to take advantage of her goodness. It was unavoidable, of course, but it didn't make me hate it—or them—any less.

Thunder cracked in the sky as I reached the crowded, late-night Bourbon street. I shifted easily behind Declan's bar and brushed off my damp clothes before I turned the corner and approached the somewhat busy establishment.

Immediately, heads turned towards me, most of their gazes shooting down with the exception of some other alphas and upper-hierarchy shifters. My main focus landed on a table near the door, off to the side, where Draco, Mila, and Lucas sat. The music around me seemed quieter than a moment before, but I ignored it, walking up to them and offering a frustrated look before I gave them news they would no doubt find upsetting.

"What's going on?" Mila asked sharply, her eyes narrowing on my expression. My wolf growled at her demanding words but I brushed it off, knowing that I didn't have time to waste on a dominance battle with Narc's friend. Not right now.

Plus, I begrudgingly respected the woman, in some ways more so than Lucas. The latter was a fantastic alpha, especially for the assholes within his particular pack. He managed to keep them mostly contained, which was a hard feat on its own.

With that being said, Mila had more raw power than Lucas. Yet, as far as I was aware, she'd never challenged him in any way for pack hierarchy. In a way, I respected that because I didn't buy into all that shit to begin with, which was why I tried to not find it frustrating when I felt like she was demanding answers. My wolf found it annoying, but he seemed to begrudgingly accept anyone that had Narc's best interests at heart. Even if that included fucking Draco as well. Bastard.

Although, now that he was mated, it made me feel better. No one fucked around with mating bonds—that was just asking for chaos—and I really could see how much the two of them seemed to fit together. Which was good, because I'd been close to killing him before.

“Narc said she would meet us here if she didn't find anything,” Lucas provided.

I inhaled sharply. “Yes, well, she was taken into the fucking demonic realm. Presumably by force.” I mean, I didn't know that for a fact... but I essentially did. Right? Whatever, it would have to fucking work for now.

Around me, others quieted as I mentally chastised myself for nearly letting out a threatening growl at people paying attention to information regarding Narcissa. This possessiveness I felt for her could not be healthy, right? Oh fucking well. I had bigger issues to deal with for sure.

“She was following misleading information and must have walked into a goddamn trap,” I hissed, thinking about her grandmother's words regarding Narc's mother. “She is being retrieved, but until then we need to double our efforts.”

“Who set up the trap?” Mila demanded, standing up.

I lowered my voice. “We suspect her mother.” I wasn't one hundred percent positive it had been her mother, but that was the general consensus that we had come to from her grandmother's statements. I probably should have felt bad, but the woman was an asshole, so I didn't. She had made my baby feel bad for most of her life, as it stood.

“We have searched everywhere in the city.” A feminine voice had me turning to find the woman that was supposedly Declan's cousin. What was her name again? I honestly couldn't tell you. She seemed a bit nervous, almost flighty, as she sat between Lucas and Mila. I think she may have been scared of me... but there was nothing I could do about that.

“Then we need to look outside the city. I need a list of places to search—alphas, do that now. I want everyone searching tonight. Preferably in the next hour. Pull in all your forces. Nero and Asmodeus will be...preoccupied for a bit.” *Suffering, hopefully.*

“Zachariah?” Draco asked, looking a bit amused.

I offered a sharp nod and turned towards the door as everyone began to spread out, the bar shaping from a place of relaxation into a headquarters real fucking quick. I leaned against the large entrance door, watching the street and attempting to avoid any unwanted supes or humans entering. It wasn't

usually a problem, but you never knew with the nighttime crowd around here.

The conversations behind me turned serious and quiet as I scanned the rain that was falling far heavier than before, leaving a misty, almost eerie look to the roads. I shook my head as I tried to imagine life as a human, like the ones that lined the block. So simple and easy. So terribly ignorant of everything going on around them. I guess in some ways ignorance was truly bliss, right? I mean, children experience that same level of naive wonder. Well, most do. My entire life had been pain-filled until Narcissa. Until I had seen her in that school hallway that one rainy, muggy, fall afternoon.

Narc became an angelic, heaven-sent temptation that I'd never expected.

Absently, I ran a finger over the scars along my arm, shaking my head and wondering what the hell she saw in me. Don't get me wrong, I was happy for whatever it was, but *shit*. Sometimes I felt like I'd been given the largest blessing in the world that I didn't deserve. Closing my eyes, I smoothed a hand over my face, feeling exhausted as memories of my life back in New Mexico flooded in through a splash of subconscious sadness.

“S hut up, boy,” my father growled, his hand hitting the back of my head as I winced and leaned further back against the stone bench that sat in front of our run-down trailer.

I should have expected the hit, but it still hurt. I knew he was nervous about another pack coming to visit us, but for the past few days he had been taking it out on me as well as my mother.

Now that I was fourteen, I could take more of a hit for sure, but my mother always hit me later if I tried to stand up for her in a fight. Something I would never understand. I think the two of them enjoyed hurting one another. It was sick and scary.

I wasn't positive if I would ever find someone I liked or trusted enough to be with, but if I did, I could never imagine hurting her like they hurt each other. I just didn't have it in me. Not that I didn't have violent thoughts, but it could never be towards someone that I loved. It made me sick to my stomach.

The rumble of a motorcycle sounded as our pack gathered in front of our house. I found myself sinking back into the crowd, knowing it would anger my father but not caring. I had no need to meet others like him. I had met enough men like him for a fucking lifetime.

They represented the antithesis of what I planned to grow up into.

However, as they pulled up, I realized I'd been wrong. Sure, they looked a lot like us, but these pack members were different. The men and women were exchanging conversation and talking lightly as they pulled up, a contrast to our serious pack's nature. Although I'd argue it was more fear than seriousness.

My wolf sulked a bit at our obvious mistreatment, and I didn't have much to offer besides a 'yeah this fucking sucks.' Because it did. Of course it did, but until I was seventeen there wasn't jack shit I could do about it.

I watched as my father exchanged greetings with the pack and explained where they would be staying. Luckily, it would be in the large packhouse that went mostly unused, but it was pretty shitty and I could tell from their motorcycles that it would no doubt be a downgrade for them. My eyes ran over the gleaming metal in a somewhat greedy fashion, hoping one day I could fuel the motorcycle obsession I had by getting one.

My father narrowed his eyes on me as he tugged me forward by my shirt, and I tried to keep my snarl down, shaking the hand of the alpha while meeting his gaze without flinching.

I stayed silent, though, not wanting to let out an aggressive sound towards my father and have the alpha think it was in a threatening way towards him. I would lose that battle. Horribly.

"What's your name?" the Alpha asked, his eyes shading with something as he looked at my father briefly and then back to me.

"Raphael." At that moment, I felt like something odd had passed between us, and later that evening I found out what.

Apparently, the man had been there to talk to my father about 'fixing' his pack and how he was treating his family. Some other shit as well—rumors had been moving around the supernatural community about drugs and the like in our pack. My father didn't take the suggestions very well, as one could imagine.

After our guests had gone to bed, my father and uncle had gotten absolutely fucking wasted. They began yelling at me and I took it, ignoring them while smoking a cigarette in the living room of our trailer, the news quietly talking about everything going wrong in the world. The last thing I saw was something about a hurricane hitting New Orleans before my uncle hit the back of my head with a whiskey bottle. Then my wolf had taken over.

I don't remember much after that, but the place had been destroyed, and both my father and uncle had been hospitalized. I should have been punished for it, especially since the visiting alpha was there.

Instead, he had chosen to take the pack under his guidance after I had stated firmly I wanted nothing to fucking do with it. It was mine by birth, but I wanted to get the fuck out any way possible.

Shortly after that, my father's younger brother, my only other uncle, had moved some of our pack, including me, to New Orleans. I didn't bother to say goodbye to any of them the day I left Lucas's pack lands at seventeen.

Of course, it hadn't been the alpha's fault, and I think he understood that. I think he also understood that it benefited him if I left because I was stronger than him, and my wolf wouldn't have been able to deal with being told what to do for very long.

While I didn't have my own pack now, I considered my family a makeshift pack, and it worked perfectly for my wolf and me. I think besides Zachariah, the two of us always fighting for dominance a bit, the rest of the guys had no issue with the concept.

I didn't regret what had happened regarding my family, but there were days I wished my life had been different. Days when I wished I'd had a mother that loved me. That I'd had a father that didn't take out his anger on me. I still wished that I had a loving family that my kids would get to know one day. That shit wasn't in the cards for me, and that was okay. It had made me who I was... made me the person that Narc was in love with.

I considered her my family. I considered the guys my family. It had taken some time to adjust to it, but now I couldn't imagine my life without them. Declan and Zachariah didn't even surprise me all that much, if we were being honest.

Sure, the timing when everything collided had surprised me, but they'd been around for some time. I knew how much attention Narc had paid to them. Knew how much she cared about them despite her denial.

I shook my head as my wolf reminded me that the woman at the top of our mind was still fucking missing. I didn't even bother talking him through it, because he knew we couldn't do shit right now. I didn't try to stop the angry rumble that broke through my chest.

"I see you still don't have control over your wolf," a familiar voice goaded from inside the bar. *Speak of the fucking devil.* Well, I wouldn't give him that much power, actually.

My eyes snapped over to find my uncle, the one that had moved me here, watching me through narrowed, beady eyes as he took a swig from one of the countless beer bottles in front of him. I had to admit I forgot about this bastard a lot of the time, and then when I did see him, he pissed me the fuck off. He looked and acted so much like his brothers. It didn't surprise me in the least that he was here instead of out helping. Useless, lazy piece of shit.

Was it any question why I didn't associate with these assholes anymore?

Instead of honoring him with an answer, I took out my cell phone and briefly checked the time. Did time go by differently in the demonic realm? It had been a little over two hours here, but for her had it been longer? God, I hoped not. I hoped Dorian had found her and that she hadn't managed to find trouble in that small amount of time.

Well, trouble usually found her, but both were concerning. I was glad she was with the others, though. It made me worry less about her being in Hell than I would have otherwise. I just wished we were with her. More specifically, I wished *I* was with her. I wanted to fight for her and be by her side. It was a goddamn compulsion.

I was crazy about that woman.

My lips tilted into a smile thinking about how things would be different when this was over and we tried to resume "normal" life. There were no more secrets or hidden feelings lingering. Now we just had to decide what our future looked like for our family.

Ideally? I wanted Narcissa in our house, wherever the hell we chose to live. In our bed, even if we needed a massive one. And more specifically, bonded to us in any way possible.

I knew Narc wasn't a fan of traditional institutes like marriage. In the supernatural community, though, it was possible to get married to several people, and I was sort of hoping that she would want that.

I had wanted to call her my wife from the first time I realized I loved her. Obviously, the decision would be a group one, and mostly based on her. If she decided she didn't want to get married, I was fine with that as well. Because in my heart, mind, and soul, I would always be completely devoted to her.

I chuckled to myself thinking about the conversation in September we'd had about marriage and kids.

“I ’m not saying I don’t want to get married,” she insisted, “I’m just saying the actual institution is stupid. I think if you love someone, you should always be ‘married’ emotionally and mentally, whether or not it is legal or some shit. I mean, hell, why else would you start a family, you know?”

“Do you want a family one day?” I asked cautiously, not positive exactly how I felt, considering my own past. Was it bad that my answer somewhat relied on what my mate said?

Her ears heated. “I mean, I think it would be cool. I just can’t even imagine that right now.”

“I agree,” I mumbled as we walked into our senior history class. “The concept of raising a small pup is a bit intimidating.”

My wolf didn’t agree with my analysis, considering we knew our mate, but I didn’t really give a fuck about his opinion most of the time. Well, actually, I usually just ignored it. He growled at that. Oh well.

“Right?!” She smiled, looking relieved.

God, that conversation felt like forever ago, but it had been less than a year ago. It was interesting that in some ways I still felt the same. The concept of having a family was intimidating, but I could see it with Narcissa. She made me stronger, and I knew that we would be able to figure out anything together. I wanted her by my side, no matter what that brought. Whether it meant traveling and going place to place or staying here and settling down. I was going to be by her side for whatever she wanted.

My wolf liked the idea of having a family for an entirely different fucking reason.

“So that whore mate of yours was stupid enough to fall into a fucking trap?” my drunk uncle slurred, causing a savage growl to rip through my teeth. The bastard had been trying to get my attention for a while through his asshole commentary, but until his words against Narcissa, I hadn’t given a fuck.

Before I had a chance to stop myself, I was across the room, his shirt hoisted up in my fist as he choked in surprise. I pulled back my fist sharply and knocked him out, his cry of pain making me feel somewhat better. His body lay sprawled out on the floor as I looked over him with disgust. I smirked slightly, feeling a bit better and knowing that Narcissa would

probably find it amusing and justified.

It didn't change the past, but it sure as hell made me feel better about the future.

CHAPTER 4

NARCISSA



It was becoming startlingly clear to me that I had never had a true hangover. Maybe a slight headache or a general sense of drowsiness. But hungover to the point of being so sore that my entire body felt completely drained? Bile resting in my throat as everything radiated pain and dehydration? Yeah. That was how I felt right now. This was like the worst fucking hangover in the world times ten. It was the only way to explain how I felt right now.

Everything around me felt out of touch. My fingers, gripping the soft unfamiliar sheets around me, felt almost numb. I blinked my eyes open, everything coming across as blurry. I let out a pained groan, my temple pulsating in a sharp sensation as nausea rolled over me, making me curl further into myself.

The shaking began sometime after that as a searing heat began to filter through my body, making me sweat. The ceiling above me spun as I once again attempted to open my eyes to ground myself. My eyelids were sore and hot, as if I was about to cry. Which I totally was.

I lied. This wasn't a goddamn hangover, this was like the flu.

I had no idea how long I stared up at the ceiling trying to ground myself while inspecting the red silk that hung in billows above me. The color alone had me feeling even worse, so it took longer than expected. Where were my

boys? I frowned, feeling terribly confused, my hearing popping as I finally cued into the familiar cadence of their voices nearby.

It was clear they weren't in the room with me, which made me uncomfortable, but it settled me a bit to know they weren't far. I tried to yell out to them, but only a faint raspy sound emitted from my throat. Going silent, I tried to listen to their familiar voices, holding onto them like an anchor in this new painful reality that I found myself in. I had no idea what was going on, but I was about fucking over it, that was for sure.

Where the hell was I? What the hell was going on?

With a small whimper, I rolled onto my stomach, pulling a pillow towards me to bury my pounding head against. What had happened earlier today? My brow furrowed as the memories began flooding back. The hot-as-sin sex with Dorian that drained all of my frustration from the influx of death magic around me, and my not-so-little annoyance with my mother. Well, annoyance... more like fury.

But then after that, a completely blank slate. I knew I was forgetting something. Something that would have left me in this state, but I couldn't remember for the life of me. I couldn't connect the missing pieces to where I was now. I had never felt so out of it in my life, and that was saying something.

Finally, working up the energy, I pushed back on my knees in a yoga-like pose, my back muscles stretching in relief as my nails dug into the bedding. After a deep breath, I attempted to push forward into a tabletop position and barely maintained it, my vision spotty. Inhaling and exhaling, I managed to clear my vision and finally sit back to examine where I now seemed to find myself.

The massive suite was luxurious, to say the least. The entire space was decorated in elegant, high-end dark wood furniture, luxurious vibrant silk, and crystal lighting that reflected the candlelight. Everything seemed untouchable and priceless.

I couldn't tell you if there were any windows in the room, because all of the walls were trapped with layers of dark material that had me feeling sleepy despite just waking up. Narrowing my eyes, I briefly noticed there were two distinguishable doors I could find.

One was clearly where my men were, partially open and emitting a small amount of light, and the other was closed. Placing my legs over the side of the bed, I stood and gripped the bedpost to ensure that I didn't fall over or

something stupid like that. I needed to clear the fog from my brain, and more than anything? I had to pee so, so bad.

Walking across the expensive carpeted floors, I grabbed onto the jeweled door handle and sent a prayer up to the gods that this would be a bathroom. Pulling it open slowly, candles came to life, revealing a stunning dark marble masterpiece of a bathroom. I squinted, avoiding looking directly into the light, as I walked towards the toilet. Relieving myself quickly, I went to go wash my hands and finally looked up into the mirror, my eyes no longer stinging like they had sand in them.

Holy hell.

A strangled sound came from my throat as my knees almost broke out from underneath me. *What the actual fuck?*

For the record, let it be known I had always wanted to look more badass in an attempt to defeat my horrid case of the cute syndrome. But *this*? Well, this was a fuck ton of a lot more than I had bargained for.

Momentarily, I was distracted by the thought of my fellow cute syndrome sufferer, Shadow. I really hoped he would be alright. I couldn't imagine it was fun being adopted and then fucking ditched. Yes, if you were wondering, I was attempting to distract myself from whatever *this* was...

When I had imagined a more 'badass' vibe, it had been in a 'leather jacket motorcycle' type way and not so much 'demon queen that would rip your heart out' way. You know? I mean, I had literally been served up the second one, and I wasn't positive there was a way to undo it.

My dark, thick hair was now tumbling down to my hips in lush waves that lightened to crimson-dipped tips. My normally bright gold eyes that sometimes turned green were now an obsidian color that had expanded out to the point that there were little to no whites to be seen. Those changes alone I may have been able to get over.

But the markings all over my body? Yeah, no. That was a bit goddamn freaky, even I had to admit that. The markings were very obviously demonic in nature, most of them almost skeletal. It was as if someone had drawn bones across my skin—anatomically correct, for the record—and then tattooed the bones with demonic runes.

I had no idea how to feel about the new addition, and I was just glad that it didn't go above my collarbone. I arched a brow at my long, dangerously sharp black nails that glinted menacingly under the candlelight.

I wasn't positive how long I stood there staring at myself in shock,

wondering if I was imagining it or possibly still sleeping. Eventually, my hangover-like symptoms began to disappear, and I turned to see that the massive tub, centered in the room, was slowly filling. *Convenient*. Steam came off of the surface as rose-smelling bubbles began to form, urging me forward as I decided that maybe this was exactly what I needed right now. Sure I could have gone and gotten the guys, but I had to admit, I was feeling a bit selfish right now. I needed to protect any sanity I had right now, and talking about the changes I'd gone through with them would *not* do that.

Plus, I wasn't exactly a stranger to bathtubs that seemingly appeared to be filled up by ghostly sources. Shit happened all the time at home, and honestly, it made me feel a bit more comfortable here.

Stripping off my clothes, removing the smells of fucking on the ground and waking up in a near panic attack, felt goddamn amazing. A slow moan left my mouth as I sank into the tub, my eyes closing in relief. *Oh, thank God*. But of course, because this was me, I was able to relax for about two seconds until everything hit me at once.

We. Were. In. Hell.

We were in the kingdom that ruled this circle of the demonic realm. We had been taken by the guards when I'd passed out, presumably to said kingdom. The guards who had been clearly crazy, because one of them had called the high king... *my father*. Which couldn't possibly be true, right? Of course not. That would be crazy. And I, for one, was not crazy.

I mean, I would know if I was heir to a demonic throne. Right?

Muttering a curse, I dipped myself under the water, fully sinking down as the rose-scented bubbles began to do their work. I wasn't ready for the real world yet. I wasn't ready for its overwhelming truths. I needed to be clean and possibly be holding a cup of coffee before any of that bullshit occurred.

Letting out a soft hum, I scrubbed my hair and body before using oils on a small counter nearby to soften my skin. I let out a small yawn as I stood after what felt like over an hour of washing myself, still in a haze of denial. I was really good at distracting myself when needed, and to be honest, I know I'd asked for answers about my life... a lot. But not all at once, you feel me?

Grabbing a large towel, I dried my hair and then wrapped myself in it completely, loving that I now smelled fresh and like roses. Narrowing my eye at the labelless bottle, I found myself annoyed it wasn't Dove or Suave. You know, something I could buy at Walmart. But of course it wasn't something I could come by on Earth, because god forbid anyone asks for the little things

in life, am I right?

My magic shimmered over my skin, and I walked in front of the mirror, finding my skin dried and flushed with color. My hair was now a mass of fresh, beautiful waves that were warm to the touch. Well, that's neat. Hadn't I said how much of a pain in the ass it was to blow dry my hair? A girl could get used to this. As long as it didn't come with any life-changing information, of course.

A robe was laid on the counter now, and instead of questioning its sudden appearance, I grabbed the material and slipped it over my shoulders. Turning towards the door, I rolled my shoulders back and prepared myself for what I would have to face. I opened the door and almost immediately slammed right into a very familiar, very sexy, clover-smelling chest. Damn him for smelling so good. I literally had to blink, clearing my head so that I wasn't completely distracted by his wonderfulness.

"Declan," I squeaked, grabbing his shirt. "Warn a girl." His green eyes widened while examining my new appearance in a curious, surprised, and heated way. A way that had my center tightening and my limbs starting to feel a bit like jelly. It was always flattering to have such an effect on him, but very surprising, even at this point.

"Holy hell," he mumbled, looking a bit dazed as his accent slowly crept back in along with his surprise. "*Lass, you look stoehnnin.*" Pretty sure he was telling me that I looked stunning, but just to make sure...

"Christ!" He growled as I zapped him right in the center of the chest, my smile growing at the scowl that formed on his face. Grumpy Declan was oddly adorable.

"Sorry, I wanted to hear your compliment properly," I teased as he narrowed his eyes, an amused glint filling them.

"You're gonna get it," he warned, nipping my bottom lip and making me shiver.

Before I could respond with something sassy, Alaric spoke up. "What the hell happened, Narc? We were out of the room for an hour, tops."

"You didn't notice this weirdness before now?" I motioned to myself as they all shook their heads. Alright...well, in some ways that made me feel a bit better, because I was going to get pissed if they had noticed this but had just decided it wasn't important.

"You didn't look like that before we left the room." Abel's head tilted curiously as his eyes flickered with a darkness I knew came from his magic.

“So I am assuming that the change occurred when you finally woke up. I have no idea how we didn't hear you getting up as it is.”

“You must have had a glamour on you that broke when you officially became conscious within the kingdom’s walls. When we passed through the warded gate, we assumed some effect, but hell... who would have known you were hiding all that?” Dorian noted, tossing me a charming smile and using his words as an excuse to look over me. “You look fucking gorgeous, *ma chérie*.”

My ears heated slightly, ignoring the satisfaction of even Alaric inhaling sharply while examining me with blatant need. I crossed my arms and looked around, willing myself to not get more turned on than I already was. *Now was not the time for an orgy... now was not the time for an orgy... Although...*

No! After you figure out where the hell you are. Then you can have an orgy.

“This is the kingdom? We're in the castle? What the hell even happened after I passed out?” There! See? It was good to ask these types of questions. Questions were good.

“Yeah,” Declan admitted, a slight grumpiness in his voice that had me wondering how he felt about the following statement. “Alaric caught you before you passed out and we followed the soldiers back to here.”

Oh, man. He totally did not agree with the move. I almost smirked at the frustration in his voice, but figured now was not the time to tease the demigod.

“And now we are here in your fath—in the high king’s castle,” Alaric corrected as my eyebrows shot up. He’d started to say ‘father.’ Hadn’t he? I wasn’t crazy. Oh, fuck no.

“You almost said ‘your *father*’s castle!” I accused. We were crazy, but we would not believe the insanity that man had been spouting. No way. No how. Absolutely not.

Honestly though, I didn’t think we had much of a choice here.

“Nope,” Alaric offered, looking very unbelievable as I groaned, putting my head down and rubbing a hand over my face.

“Fuck,” I mumbled. “This can’t be happening. I mean, this is crazy, guys. There is no way he was telling the truth, implying that my heritage is somehow linked to a king of Hell.”

“Is that really so hard to believe?” Abel questioned quietly. “I mean, you are insanely fucking powerful, Narcissa.”

Dorian cleared his throat and stood, disrupting my answer, which was good considering I wasn't positive I exactly had one ready for him. "We need to go see the king. He summoned us to the throne room, apparently, and we were expected to go there once you woke up. As much as I would love to put it off, I think it may be best if we went. After all, if he really is your father, I wouldn't want to make a bad..."

He trailed off at the no doubt alarmed expression I was offering him. You know, for him insinuating that I had a father whose opinion that they needed to worry about. Something that was bullshit. Obviously.

Swallowing, I spoke up. "What am I supposed to wear? Where did you get those slick-looking uniforms? I don't have one of those."

The guys exchanged a quick look before Abel hedged out, "They are guard outfits."

No shit.

No really, that was becoming increasingly obvious to me the more I looked at them. For a moment I was able to ignore why they would be in guard outfits and instead stared at their insanely sexy chests that were underneath fitted long-sleeve black shirts. It was possible I had a bit of a thing for chests, or maybe they just happened to have really fantastic muscular built ones?

My eyes moved over the rest of the outfit. The tight shirt was paired with dark military cargo pants and combat boots. Honestly, I had no idea why, but the outfit was totally turning me on. You know, I was feeling a bit stupid, because here I was, the literal Queen of the Dead, and I hadn't thought to come up with a group uniform? Maybe they should wear this forever. I was a huge fan. Although, I also loved their individual styles, so maybe not. But wearing these uniforms one time in bed wouldn't be a bad idea, though.

"And you are deciding to wear uniforms now because..." I questioned, hoping they would give me any answer other than the one I assumed.

Maybe they were wearing it because they started a bowling team? Really, Narc? A fucking bowling team? That was what my exhausted brain had come up with? I was totally off my game tonight. At least I hadn't said that out loud.

"You did." Dorian flashed a charming smile that made me scowl.

"No, we were given uniforms for the guard of the heir to the—"

Turning on my toes, I walked back towards the bathroom, hoping to find that instead of a robe appearing, I would find something useful like a closet

or some shit. I wish I could tell you I was ready to accept the reality of what they were saying, but let's be honest—it was a lot to ask a woman to accept that not only did her father literally exist somewhere in this building but that he recognized her. Like where have you been, pop? Oh, and then on top of that, I was supposed to be some goddamn heir to a demonic throne?

Right. Okay. Cool.

Such bullshit.

My eyes scanned the bathroom until I found a dark doorway that I neared curiously. I pulled it open and smiled, finding a closet. Can we say convenient? As I began to search through the dark material at the start of the room, I wondered if any of this stuff would actually fit me.

Hey, even if it didn't fit perfectly, at least it would be better than wearing a robe to meet my absent father. Right? My fingers ran across the expensive materials until I found a small black dress that appeared to be fairly comfortable. Pulling it down from the shelf, I laid it on a velvet couch while stripping off my robe.

Muttering an annoying curse at my lack of undergarments, I slipped on the dress so that it rested in a straight line against my cleavage. It was black silk that fit my body like a second skin, showing off my new tattoos while falling to the floor, making me look far taller than I actually was. A slit against my left leg crawled up my thigh, and along each side a red dragon rested, its jewelled eyes looking up at me.

It was a legitimately stunning dress, and considering I couldn't seem to find my combat boots anywhere, I slipped on a pair of strappy heels that finished off the wicked look. I would promptly be putting my boots back on when I could find them, but until then, this made me feel pretty damn badass.

“Anyone know where my boots are?”

All of them snapped their gazes towards me, making me flush a bit as a heated look seemed to pass over each of their faces.

“I don't like that dress,” Alaric growled, looking grumpy as fuck and a bit adorable. He totally *did* like the dress, by the way. I could see the outline of his very hard cock pressing against his combat pants, proving my point.

Plus, I had learned pretty damn quick that just because Alaric didn't like something didn't mean it didn't look fantastic. Abel offered him an eye roll and motioned for me to take his hand, which I did happily as Declan looked over me for a prolonged moment before humming something under his breath, making my center tighten in anticipation. Dorian pulled up on my

other side, intertwining our fingers as we made our way towards the door, ready to face whatever was out there.

I had no idea what was waiting for us, but I knew that I could handle it with my boys at my side.

CHAPTER 5

NARCISSA



Or I could end up in full freak out mode. I was worried that was where this was going.

I mean, sure, I felt stronger with my boys here. But did that stop me from freaking out because I was meeting my completely absent up until now father? No, of course it fucking didn't. I swallowed, squeezing both Abel's and Dorian's hands on either side of me. I could hear Alaric and Declan behind me talking quietly. I wasn't positive that spelled anything good, because the two of them were a bit intense right now.

It didn't help that I missed Zachariah, Raphael, and even Shadow right now. Don't get me wrong, I was goddamn thrilled that most of my men were here, but I never felt completely at home unless we were all together.

It made me hopeful about our future, that I felt such a strong connection even in the absence of one another for a few hours. Did they feel the same way? I had to believe that they did, just like I had to believe I knew where this was heading next.

If I was right, I was so fucking excited it was unreal. I mean... Dorian had a ring that all the guys knew about. For me. Holy shit.

"Hey, Dorian?" I turned to him slightly. "Are Zachariah and Raphael okay?"

His eyes heated slightly, going towards my lips before smiling with a wicked heat. “Okay? Sure. Livid? Absolutely. Raphael is particularly mad at me because I refused to take him down here with me. I had a feeling Declan would be alright since he’s not really alive to begin with, but Raphi not so much. And Zachariah was already distracted, to say the least. Although, if I had to presume, his magic wouldn’t fare well off the realm it’s attached to.”

My head snapped back towards Declan, his eyes moving up from my ass with a smirk. “Wait, is he serious? Are you not alive?”

The Irish demigod shrugged. “I mean, I was alive once, but when you are around long enough you become immortal in the truest sense of the word. I will never die due to age, and it would be fucking hard to kill me, but of course, if anyone wants to try...”

I scowled at his joke, making his eyes warm as I looked back to Dorian. “So Zachariah can’t come down here, for sure?” Yeah, I missed him. Could you tell?

“Not positive, but he also doesn’t know I’m down here yet.” Why did I find it so sexy that Zachariah was off torturing my enemies? I loved that shit.

Declan admitted, “It probably wouldn’t be a fantastic idea for him to leave Earth for super long, considering how connected he is to the damn place.”

My lips dipped at that, because my need to see Zachariah and Raphael were definitely not as important as my need to have them unharmed. The only solution, in that case, was to get out of here as soon as fucking possible. Hopefully I could make that happen.

We turned a corner that fed into a massive, long, dark hallway, lit dimly but enough that I could see the hauntingly beautiful elements of decor that filled the space. Honestly, I had absolutely no idea where we were going, so I was sort of just following my instincts at this point. My eyes followed the gothic architecture and dark stone walls that somehow managed to look luxurious instead of overwhelming and heavy.

The windows that lined the hallways, tall and narrow in framing, showcased glimpses of the now amethyst-colored sky that rested right outside. My eyes widened at the cityscape of obsidian and glass buildings that seemed to surround us, a view that seemed oddly modern for Hell. Not in a bad way, just in a very surprising way. I was so distracted by all of this that I barely listened to the quiet conversation of the boys, and our group eventually fell into a comfortable silence.

I couldn’t even tell you how long we walked for, but eventually, a quiet

hum of haunting music began to play, and my eyes drew to a dark door in the distance. Had we even turned any corners? I couldn't remember. I narrowed my gaze briefly on the guards standing in front of the heavy doors, looking rather bored as they looked beyond us, their soulless, flame-like eyes seemingly unaware of our presence. Although I would have to assume that wasn't the case.

"Hello there!" I chimed as both of them slowly looked down at me. You know, the whole 7-foot tall height requirement here seemed a bit excessive.

After a silent moment, both straightened and stepped back, pushing open the doors to reveal whatever laid beyond. I squinted at the light forcing its way past the guards through the windows as low murmurs from beyond the doors seemed to quiet. The music continued, but as I stepped forward, bringing a hand to my eyes to shield them, the room came fully into view.

It was stunning. High peaked ceilings painted in blood red contrasted the black walls but matched the two large thrones at the head of the space. Guards, large and serious-looking, lined the space, and demons dressed in dark robes paused their milling about to look at me. My eyes scanned past theirs to look directly at the man in the front of the room. The one looking right at me.

The one wearing a crown.

Ah shit. Yeah, there was no denying this, was there?

You know, I'd always thought I looked similar to my mother, but I now realized how wrong I was. Because the high king? The one I was in denial about regarding our familial relationship? Yeah. To say we looked alike was a goddamn understatement.

The man wasn't very tall but still held himself in a strong fashion, his dark hair hanging to his shoulders in waves with red ends that matched my own nearly perfectly. A pair of dark eyes lit up happily as he sat forward on his throne, the dark crown tilting just slightly as he examined me. I blinked, feeling a bit of shock because the man seemed authentically happy to see me. *Was this for real?*

"Narcissa!" he chimed, the space filling with his deep voice as my magic warmed happily, the same way it did around my grandmother. I could feel the shock radiating off my men, which made me feel a bit better, if we were being honest. I mean, could you blame any of us? Out of everything I could have expected, this was not it.

"Hi," I offered awkwardly as a small tickle of amusement hit my chest.

What the actual hell? This was so insane.

“Don't be shy!” he insisted, beckoning us forward with a hand as I crossed the space almost immediately. My eyes scanned the space, finding two men around his own age standing behind him as guards.

They both were watching me with overt surprise, and my magic warmed in response as well. God. The three of them felt so familiar, but I'd never been more confused in my entire life. I almost craved my bitchy mother right now, because at least I understood her. Not perfectly, but more than this.

The king examined me and exclaimed, “See?! I told you there was no doubt. Look at her! She's a damn near walking replica of her mother.”

I frowned, stopping once I reached the stairs of the throne. “You know my mother?” Ok, so maybe I was still a bit in denial, even with the mounting evidence of this man's relationship to me. Relaxing a bit as Alaric's warm hand pressed to my back, I prepared myself for the answer.

The king flashed a smile. “Of course we do! Don't we gentlemen?”

It was only then that I realized the guards and the number of demons in the room had greatly diminished, leaving me facing these three men that felt so familiar yet I had no recollection of.

“This must be confusing for you,” one of the other men said in an understanding voice. I nodded, feeling like a twit, as my defensive sarcasm came up my throat and I blurted out a response despite knowing it sounded a bit rude.

“Yeah, you could fucking say that.”

“That sarcasm!” The king clapped his hands. “Jeremy, she must have gotten that from you!”

The man that had just spoken rolled his eyes. “Better than your insanity.”

My brow arched because I was very much crazy, thank you. The last one, quieter than the rest, nodded towards me. “That look is all her mother.”

They chuckled, and before they could say another thing, I blurted, “Can someone explain what the hell is going on?” There! A demand! That was good. Now I would get an answer.

The king's face blanked before he smiled softly, walking forward until he was close enough to softly grab my shoulder. “I am so sorry, Narcissa. I forget there is so much you don't know.”

“Don't know?” I asked again, feeling far less bold as I stood at the edge of secrets.

He smiled before shattering everything I assumed was real.

“That we are your fathers. All three of us. Your mother is our mate.”



Twenty minutes later, and I honestly didn't think his words had sunk in yet. I mean, what he was saying just seemed... insane.

At least I was far more comfortable now. I couldn't tell you when we had moved from the throne room to this much smaller lounge room, but I did feel somewhat relaxed sitting on a velvet sofa with a glass of dark wine in my hands. I hadn't drunk from it yet, but the intoxicating berry scent had my entire body relaxing into Dorian's chest.

Alaric wasn't able to relax, despite the change of scenery, and instead was pacing around the room as Abel sat on my other side. Declan was behind me, his fingers lightly playing with my hair.

Something my fathers.... *my fathers?* Sure. My fathers. Yeah, they had already commented on it. I know. What typical dad behavior, right? There was a small blossom of hope underneath the shock because, despite the oddity of all of this, they seemed genuinely excited to meet me. I mean, maybe I had a shitty mom and aunt... but what if I had three dads who wanted to be in my life? That would be fucking awesome.

The three of them were currently bickering about something as I tried to mentally sort through everything they had said. Of course, I still had a million questions, and I was positive they would answer them if I could find my voice and the bravery to ask.

Maybe not bravery... but right now I just felt silent. I couldn't seem to get my mouth to work, and I hated that. I felt like a wimp, if we were being honest. I also felt like it was somewhat understandable.

Jeremy, 'the understanding one' as I'd deemed him, had the exact same pair of gold eyes that I normally had. He had explained to me several times now what they had announced in the throne room. I understood logically what they were saying, but I was having issues connecting that my mother had mated with these three demons and that they had created me. Could you tell I hadn't had a lot of parental support growing up? The concept seemed alien to me.

I had an even better fucking question. Why was this the first time I was learning about them? Why had my mom kept quiet? Why had my grandmother never said anything? I swallowed, feeling a bit of anger surge through me.

“I blame you,” Duke, the grumpier and far more quiet one, motioned to High King Alexander. “If we hadn’t kept this a secret, we would have been able to stop this. She is dating four of them. Four! This is ridiculous.”

God.

“Six,” I corrected. King Alexander snapped his head towards me, surprise covering his features. It was a bit odd seeing his reactions, because they really were very much like my own. It was like looking in the mirror.

He sighed and looked back at them. “Yes, that is a problem. We may need to kill them.”

A growl escaped my throat as Alaric chuckled, but I did notice that they all grew closer to me. Yeah, my men didn’t like the idea of that at all. Not them dying—no, I think they were concerned we would be forcibly separated. That shit was laughable. I didn’t care who these guys were, my men were mine so they could fucking deal with it. Possessive? A bit.

I finally spoke. “Okay, so can someone please explain how the hell this happened? Why did it take my goddamn mom trapping me in Hell to find you?”

“You shouldn’t talk about your mother in that tone,” Jeremy pointed out. I blinked but ignored him, because now was so not the time to inform them what a bitch my mother had always been towards me.

“Please explain,” I demanded softly.

“She should really be here,” Duke pointed out. I wasn’t sure I liked the idea at all. Luckily, Alexander waved them off and began talking. I had to be honest, I almost wished he hadn’t, because he confused me more than I already had been. Wonderful. Fucking wonderful.

“Around nineteen years ago, give or take, your mother and I met at a function your grandmother held,” Alexander explained, a small amount of sadness feeding into his gaze. “She was absolutely perfect... but I wasn’t the only one who thought that.” His eyes narrowed on Jeremy and Duke, who both offered him tired looks. Abel muttered under his breath an annoyance that I had to agree with. Was it just me, or did this group seem a bit more petty than normal?

“After a few months of your mother and I seeing one another, I asked her

to choose between the three of us... it was a miscalculation. She refused and left the demonic realm, went back to New Orleans.”

“We tried to go after her,” Duke grunted, “But someone had us locked up.”

Yep. Petty.

“To be fair, I think we did threaten to kill him,” Jeremy rationalized.

“So she left us, and I fell into a bit of a state. Three months later when she came to see me, I sent her away, refused to see her,” he lamented, looking mournful. “I later found out that she’d been here to tell me she was pregnant. With you. Around seven months later when you were born, we became aware of our presence on Earth because you carried all of our magical signatures. We tried to go see you, but your mother told us—and rightly so—that we had no right to be part of your life until you found us on your own and chose to include us in it. For years we were miserable. I decided that if I ever had the chance to have your mother back I wouldn't mind sharing because... well, I loved her enough that I would sacrifice my selfishness just to have any part of her.”

Alright. That’s a bit romantic.

“I see,” I sighed, feeling a bit bad for my mom and starting to understand why she had acted so bitchy for so long. I mean, the guys she loved had asked her to choose, then ignored her when she came to tell them about me, only to have them show up and demand a place in my life. I may not have agreed with her decision to keep them from me, but knowing my mom, she probably thought it was the best way to protect me.

“When she died,” Duke continued with a frown, “she came down here and the four of us were reunited.”

Looking down at my lap, I tried to consider how to deal with what they had just told me. A pang went through my heart. I couldn't imagine being told to choose between my men and then to be turned away at the door, pregnant. Yeah. This was starting to make a lot more fucking sense.

“So why now?” I figured that was the most reasonable question. Right?

“I’m not actually positive,” Alexander admitted and then scowled. “Your mom hasn’t been down here as often this past month, so I haven’t been able to ask her—”

A shift in the air caused my eyes to widen as the woman in question appeared out of thin air. I expected anger to surge through me, considering what had occurred, but instead, sadness and a bit of understanding filled my

chest as she met my gaze. This was going to get complicated, wasn't it?

Don't get me wrong, the woman sucked. There was no excuse for how she had treated me, but understanding why she was so bitter and unhappy had me feeling far more empathetic towards her.

The four lunatics totally deserved one another—they all seemed petty as hell.

"She's here because I made sure she was," my mother responded primly. "She found you herself like I said she would, but we couldn't afford to wait any longer. Our daughter is dealing with a bit of an issue on Earth and needs help."

"Needs is debatable," I muttered as Declan kissed the top of my head.

My mom took a seat on the arm of Alexander's chair, a crown appearing on her head of dark hair as she became solid instead of ghostly, her gown a deep purple that surrounded her thin, elegant frame. Alright. She was looking pretty badass. I could give her that.

"That was sneaky of you," Alexander mumbled.

"Seems punishment worthy," Duke responded blankly as my mother smirked.

Then Jeremy muttered something about spanking, and I felt bile rise in my throat. I was speaking before I could stop myself. "Oh, God no. Do not flirt around me. That is so fucked up."

Dorian laughed softly, kissing the top of my hand he was holding. Duke narrowed his eyes at the action. "Baby, why is our daughter dating?"

My mother rolled her eyes. "'Dating' implies they aren't serious. Which they are. They have been around forever and are perfectly qualified to watch out for her."

I had no idea my mom even thought about shit like that.

"So you have been keeping this from me my entire life?" I clarified.

My mom's eyes softened slightly. "By the time I decided I should have told you, we weren't exactly on good terms. Well, I would actually say you rather hated me."

"What? Why?" Jeremy demanded. Both of us ignored him.

I sighed and spoke honestly. "I don't hate you. I mean, you are a total bitch, but you know I don't hate you. You're my mom, and I have wanted to know who my father— well, plural, in this case—was for forever. I would have listened to you."

She replied softly, "That may be true. I am sorry for being so distant. I

don't have an excuse, Narcissa. I was jealous of my own mother and then of you because you were a necromancer..."

"You are High Queen of the demonic realm," I pointed out. I mean, I had to give the woman credit where it was due.

She smirked, a light filtering through her gaze that was far younger and happier than I was used to. "Yes. Now I am, but I spent many years miserable and jealous. I had no idea how to fix what had happened between us. When I heard what Nero and his brother were planning, I decided to offer them a way to trap you. They meant to portal you to their kingdom, but I managed to use the little magic I have from my position here to make sure you ended up where you needed to. I am positive they don't even realize what occurred yet, which has afforded you some time. It was all I could think of. Your grandma is furious at me, but she understands now."

Relief filled my chest that despite our rocky relationship, my mother didn't hate me enough to betray me.

"What the fuck does Nero have to do with this?!" Alexander demanded, any patience he had clearly hitting a stopping point.

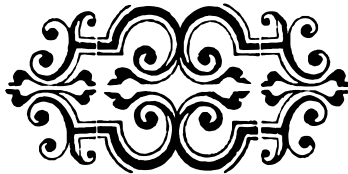
My mom's smile grew. "You should tell him, honey. He hates Nero's family."

Oh, fuck yes.

Taking a sip of my wine, I offered an authentic smile. "Well, you see, all of this started when Asmodeus decided to be a little bitch..."

CHAPTER 6

ZACHARIAH



The scream that echoed through the utility shed had me smiling just slightly. It was a smile of satisfaction, not happiness. No, I couldn't be happy without my little rose. At that thought, rage ripped through my chest as I examined the damage I'd done so far.

I had tried for so long to deny this side of me. The side of me that had been far more prominent when I'd been younger and violence had been more acceptable. I had tried to hide this from Narcissa, not wanting her to think I was out of control. But that had all snapped the moment I'd felt her get forcibly pulled from this realm.

I just hoped she wouldn't find my actions barbaric. I didn't regret them at all. Not only had these fuckers tried to hurt Narcissa, tried to take her away from me, but they were trying to hurt the city I'd called home for over two hundred years.

My gaze fell on Asmodeus, who had passed out hours ago, his human form crumpled in a pile. I could feel his spirit, restless under his skin, and I wished I felt worse about what I'd done to him, but I didn't. He and his brother had completely destroyed their vessels. Internal bleeding. Psychological damage. The works.

I hadn't realized it until my magic had begun searching through their system, but upon realizing they had really made their vessels essentially human skin sacks, killing the original spirits, I stopped holding back. I knew they felt pain just as the humans would have, so their torn flesh had me only feeling pleasure instead of concern at the long-term effects.

I knew Narcissa would be pissed. She may have hated the mayor and his

son, but to realize the demonic bastards had killed them? Destroyed their souls after taking over? Yeah. She was going to be fucking furious about that. What I didn't want? Her accidentally blaming herself.

Leaning back in my chair, I let my magic play against the wards I'd put over the fairly sizable backyard shed. I had made sure they couldn't take a new vessel, or in Nero's case, shift to his true form. Nero had not only realized that fact but was livid about it, so I felt far more justified in it because it was clear that it had been his exact plan.

Currently, he hung against the wall where he had been chained earlier in the day, blood dripping out of every surface where I had driven needles into his skin.

They had been caught off guard by my direct attack. They had grown comfortable, and I was thrilled for it, because now they were fucking trapped. Trapped and at my mercy as my voodoo magic grew more anxious the longer Narcissa was gone. Anxious wasn't good, because it almost directly correlated with a lack of control when it came to her.

I knew she was down in the demonic realm, I just knew it, and I think one of the reasons I was so pissed was that it happened to be one of the places I couldn't go very easily. If this went on any longer, though, I was going to end up down there. My biggest question? How long I wanted to keep all of this going on. I knew I was using it as a pure distraction, but it was working, and I was afraid to step away from it.

Afraid I would bring the realm to its knees in order to reach her.

I had gone to the demonic realm before, when I was far less strong, and it had managed to drain my energy for weeks. That alone wouldn't have bothered me, but I didn't want to be useless when we finally returned back here.

Plus, if I left, who would be here to stop these motherfuckers from getting away and wreaking havoc on the kingdom that Narc loved so much? No. I just needed to fucking relax. I would see her soon, and until then I would just have to take my anger out on these fuckers.

Dorian had clearly left the Earth, so I had to hope he'd found her. Raphael had presumably gone to Bourbon Street, something that was smart, because we needed to attempt to keep searching while I tried to get an answer out of Nero. I couldn't kill him or his brother until we found the missing supes. I really wanted them dead, so as you can imagine, I was really fucking motivated.

Taking a sip of my dark drink, I watched Nero come to. My voice was quiet and sounded cold, even to myself, as I asked, “Where are they, Nero?”

Outside, a storm was growing, thunder rumbling against the house as lightning flashed through the large tinted windows. I tried to steel myself, because I didn’t want Narcissa to come back to a total shit show because my power had lashed out. That wouldn’t help at all.

“Where are *who*?” Nero chuckled through a pained rasp. I sighed, my magic tightening on him as the needles embedded themselves deeper. His scream echoed through the space as tears fell down his face. Yeah, I bet he was wishing he was in his more durable demon form right now. Dumb fucker.

“Nero,” I warned.

“They are in the demonic realm! You know that!” he snarled as I shook my head, his attempt at distracting me with news of Narcissa fairly frustrating. I mean, don’t get me wrong, it was a good tactic because Narc’s name could turn my head literally during any situation, but he knew I didn’t mean that.

“Not Narc. The people you took. Where the fuck are the people you took?”

He growled, “Like I would tell you that. Then you can fucking kill me.”

Bingo.

“I’m going to kill you either way,” I responded indifferently. “I’m not as caught up on finding the missing supes, Nero. I am doing it because I love Narcissa. It’s that simple. Unfortunately for you, I am running out of patience, so you have a very short time frame until I kill you. I won’t be sending you back to the demonic realm either. No. When I kill you, you won’t be coming back, so I would sincerely consider what you want to do here.”

“If I tell you,” he panted in pain, “will you send me back to the demonic realm?”

Fuck no.

“Sure,” I smiled thinly.

His eyes darkened as he snarled, “Fucking liar!”

I tightened my magic around him as blood oozed, matching his scream that filled the room. The cracking of thunder shook the house as the rain began to pour down.

Honestly, I would much prefer making a ‘storm baby’ to this. I nearly

rolled my eyes at that. Why was I calling it that? Clearly Declan was affecting me. I smirked, knowing that Narcissa, if she were here, would make some comment about him and I being best friends, something she wasn't completely wrong about. A somewhat amusing and happy memory flashed through my consciousness, settling a tiny bit of rage rolling through me.

"I've never been ter wan av dees," Declan pointed out.

"A graduation ceremony?" I questioned. Although that didn't completely surprise me, because if we were being honest, neither had I. Well, at least not one in the modern sense. Graduations from military academies and the like? Sure. But as we stepped through the large school gateway towards the football field where a massive stage was set up, I realized this was a much different affair.

Declan was quiet next to me as I began letting my magic out, seeking out one particular head of black and red hair. Humans instinctively looked away from the two of us, and supes put their heads down. I felt a bit bad about that, but it did make it easier to find the woman in question.

Not that it would have been very difficult to begin with. For someone that was the Queen of the Dead, she literally radiated a glowing life force that vibrated the space around her. It was absolutely beautiful.

I couldn't help but smile when I saw her. Sometimes the woman was so goddamn perfect it made my chest uncomfortable. Right now was a perfect example. She didn't even realize how adorable and sexy she looked in an oversized graduation robe with her combat boots sticking out underneath.

Her golden complexion was flushed from the early evening summer humidity, and her white smile was massive as she laughed at something her grandma said. Raphael, along with Dorian and the twins, sat along the row of seats. I offered them a head nod in response to them realizing we'd arrived.

Once I had stepped within five feet of my little rose, her head snapped towards me, her eyes lighting up and flashing green in response to my magic. It was something she probably wasn't fully aware of doing.

"Zachariah!" she chimed as the others watched me cautiously. I paid them no mind as she nearly tackled me, making me let out an authentic laugh as I pulled her against me. Almost immediately, her cool, minty scent filled the space around me, and I placed a kiss right on her cheek before she pulled

back, flushed.

I nearly groaned at her dilated pupils, wishing I could act on this insane attraction to her. But I knew it wasn't time yet. I mean, fuck, I knew the other four didn't want Declan and I here, but they didn't understand what I'd seen. Not yet. Although Declan knew, and I think the possibilities scared him a bit. He was terrible with emotions.

"I had no idea you were coming." She tried to wiggle away, but I kept her close despite the vampire, Alaric, growling from nearby. Her eyes flashed to Declan, who stood next to me. "Declan! You also? This is so fucking exciting. I am so happy to be done with school. This past year felt so exhausting."

My smile grew when I realized she was nearly jittery, wondering if it was the excitement or the can of Red Bull sitting on her empty seat. Probably both.

"Happy graduashun, lass." The bastard looked awkward as fuck.

I nearly laughed as her eyes jumped with unadulterated amusement, Declan's hand thrusting forward with a large bouquet of sunflowers. Instantly she was leaning forward and kissing his cheek, his expression turning shocked and making me actually laugh this time. He scowled, but she didn't seem to notice in the least, which was good because I didn't want her thinking that I was a total asshole. Only partly one.

"Come on," she urged, steering us towards the others. While it was never spoken, there was a weird understanding in part between all of us. Did I think it would be easy when we eventually told them about how the two of us felt? Fuck no. But that was okay. We had a ton of time to figure it out this summer.

Unfortunately, despite my visions, there had been a lot I hadn't accounted for at that time, and we hadn't been able to ease into all of this as slowly as I had assumed. Which, if we were being honest, I was completely fucking fine with.

I thought about how I had approached her the day after my vision alerting me to the issues regarding the demonic realm. Thought about how I had found the five of them sitting on the balcony and how excited she was to see me. The day that had changed fucking everything.

Of course, when I had actually had the vision, it had been the middle of

the night, and I'd immediately traveled in from my estate to her grandmother's house, needing to know Narcissa was okay. It was probably my magic warning me about Asmodeus, who had been across the street, which I was unaware of at the time.

Still, it hadn't stopped me from being a creep and jumping up on the balcony to watch her sleeping, making sure her slumber stayed peaceful and her breathing even. I had no idea how long I'd sat there in the doorway—I just know I stayed until I felt better, and even then I hadn't left.

My little rose evoked a bit of an irrational reaction in terms of the choices I made. But wasn't that partly why I loved her? I mean, there were many reasons why I loved her. But she had me experiencing emotions I hadn't felt any time ever before in my life. My smirk grew slightly as I considered what was next for us.

That was when I remembered the motherfucker that was crying out in front of me, slowly being bled out by the excessive needles I had in his skin.

"Fine!" he sobbed. "They are outside of the city. In the abandoned shack near the edge of the swamplands."

Immediately I was picking up my phone, Narcissa's bright smile lighting my lock screen. I called Raphael, and after about a half a ring he was picking up, thunder rumbling in the background as my magic jumped in excitement. I was so fucking ready to be done with this.

Ready to have my little rose in my arms. Her soft, petal-like skin under my fingers as I pulled her clothes from her body, kissing and devouring every inch of her. I had the urge to tie her to my bed. More like a goddamn compulsion at this point. That way she could run her perfect sassy mouth until I had her in such a state of being turned on that she was nearly sobbing with pleasure. Only when she was completely fucking drenched would I slam into her, filling every fucking inch of her pussy until she came around me, squeezing out every drop of cum from my cock...

"Zachariah?" Raphael asked, snapping me out of my fantasy.

"He broke. They are outside of the city in an abandoned shack near the edge of the swampland to the east. I can show you where or—"

"I've got it." He hung up as I smirked, glad that this would be resolved soon and that I had an official timer for how long I had to let Nero live.

I wanted to save Asmodeus for last to kill. I had a very personal issue with the motherfucker, and it was because he thought he had a right to my little rose. What he didn't realize was that no one owned Narc. No one at

fucking all. I may own her sweet ass in bed, but I would follow that woman anywhere.

Turning back to Nero, I sent a pulse of power through him as he let out a scream.

“Why?!” he snarled. “I told you what you fucking wanted.”

“Yes you did.” I motioned towards his state of being drenched in blood. “That wasn’t a reflection of my anger. It served a far larger purpose. Now, while we wait to see if you’re lying, I can do what I have been actually wanting to fucking do to you.”

Without warning, my magic surged forward, bones snapping in his body as he cried out loud enough to wake his brother. His brother, who offered me a terrified look that had me smiling. Yeah. You know, this wasn’t a terrible way to pass the time while we were waiting on my little rose.

CHAPTER 7

NARCISSA



*T*here was nothing better than having a common enemy.

Seriously. There was a lot that could unite people. Their favorite food or sports team. The fact that pineapple did not belong on pizza, *you weirdos*. Oh, and that Carole Baskin totally killed her husband. You know, reasonable, sound facts that were essentially indisputable.

But something even more powerful than that? Having a common hatred of some motherfucker.

My father's voice was angry and dark, making me realize where I may have gotten my temper from. "That dipshit has been trying to take over my throne for years now. I wouldn't put it past him to have convinced his sons to try to take over New Orleans just to spite me."

I arched a brow. "Does he know I'm your daughter?"

It must have only been around twenty minutes, but in the time that had passed, I had already explained the premise of what Nero was doing while not-so-subtly stating what a creep Asmodeus had been along the way. Was I possibly itching for him to suffer a bit more than Nero? Why do you ask? Yes. Yes, I totally was.

Alexander nodded with a confident smile. "Everyone knows that you're our daughter. Well, down here at least. I mainly told the minor kings, but

gossip travels, of course. I didn't bother telling the hellhounds—not a very trustworthy group, if you ask me.”

My lip twitched as Alaric chuckled under his breath, making me know he was laughing at my father's distrust of Draco. Who knew they had such a bad reputation, right?

Intertwining my fingers, I looked at my mom who was talking quietly to Jeremy, both of them offering one another flirty looks that had my stomach churning. Man. I was so, absolutely not ready for that.

“So,” I said, tilting my head, “I didn't think this mattered but... if his father has been trying to take over your throne, then it may be applicable. Asmodeus, since we are around the same age, has had it in his head for a very long time that the two of us should be together. He's been trying to get me down to the demonic realm.”

Duke stood, looking furious. “His fucking son has been trying to marry you?!”

“Trying,” Dorian noted. “That's the key word.”

“A very important key word,” Declan muttered, making Abel chuckle under his breath. Yeah, my men were still a bit worked up.

“You shouldn't be getting married anytime soon,” Jeremy argued as my mother rolled her eyes. I almost appreciated that, because it was funny watching them attempt to exert some level of control on my life, but I would let it go for now. I mean, it was a bit sweet they were trying to be so fatherly right now, I couldn't deny that.

“The point is...” I drew out, “I think that they are all in with this plan. I mean, what are the chances that their father is trying to take your throne, Nero is trying to take my city, and Asmodeus is trying to marry me? That's not a goddamn coincidence, right?”

Everyone seemed to consider that for a moment, my fathers looking thoughtful as my mother went to pour herself another glass of wine. I felt antsy. I still didn't have a great grasp on time right now, and I needed to get back. Get back and take care of Nero.

I also wanted to see Raphael and Zachariah, but somehow I didn't think that was the way to introduce the two ‘unknown’ boyfriends to my fathers. Like ‘hey guys, can we go back up to Earth, I miss my two fuckable men upstairs as well.’ Yeah. I needed to just talk as little as possible right now, that was the solution.

Alexander stood. “We are going up there and handling this. Guards!

Summon King Louis to Earth. Come up with some bullshit or just force him, I don't care. Get him there."

"To Earth?" I arched a curious brow.

"Yes!" He nodded and then looked over the rest of us. "There is nothing stopping us from going up there, right? What better way to bond with your fathers than defeating your enemies?"

"I love that," I admitted honestly and then smiled. "What's our plan?"

"You have demonic hellion power now," Jeremy pointed out. "The wards have broken, so that power has been released. Your grandma put that on when you were very young, so if your power ever felt off, that would be why. Your necromancer side probably got oversaturated a lot."

My smile grew as Declan whispered, "Still going to make storm babies."

"So that means..."

"You will now have necromancer and demonic power," Duke announced. Well shit.

My smile started to turn slightly evil, even I could admit that. "Because I'm a princess of Hell I get badass demon powers? What type are we talking about?"

"Want to see?" Duke asked, his eyes lighting up with excitement. I don't want to stereotype, but Duke struck me as the one who liked being a guard the most in the group. Jeremy seemed a bit nerdier, and Alexander... I had no idea what the hell his deal was. Honestly, I was starting to think I got my weirdness from him.

"Absolutely!" I hopped up as he approached and offered me a hand. My boys tensed, but I didn't worry too much. I trusted Duke even if I didn't know him. I was a bit envious at how much of a badass he seemed to be, but that tended to be a trend with me.

Plus, let's be honest, I was fantastic at gauging other's intentions. Emotion? Nada. Intentions? Usually pretty good. Well, unless it had to do with seeing the obvious affection of the men who were by my side every single fucking day.

Fuck. Maybe I wasn't all that good at this.

"Close your eyes," he demanded as his right hand lit up with black flames. I did so instantly, and I felt heat flash over me before a heavy weight appeared on my head. My eyes snapped open as my hand flew up to find a heavy metal, warm to the touch. I turned, running towards a mirrored surface, because you better believe I wanted to look.

This. This was so badass.

“This looks absolutely spectacular!” I exclaimed, turning towards my boys. “I mean, look at this shit! It is fucking amazing.” The black metal was dark and heavy, glinting in the firelight of the room. The embedded rubies and amethysts only made it more luxurious.

“It really does look good,” my mother said softly as I offered her a tentative half-smile. I tried to push down any awkwardness. I was around this woman literally all the fucking time, so why was I feeling so weird around her? Maybe because I was feeling more sympathetic towards her? Maybe because I was finally understanding her point of view? I had no fucking idea.

I was becoming such a softie.

“Ready for the 101 on hellion powers?” Alexander asked, my grin growing at his obvious attempt at the lingo he thought I would recognize. He was sort of a dork.

“I do suggest we move this outside,” Jeremy provided as Alexander motioned towards a pair of massive doors that hadn’t been there before.

Honestly, I kept forgetting we weren’t on Earth, but as the door opened, the concept was very much solidified by the alien landscape. I could feel my men behind me as I slowly walked towards the door, the purple skies shifting with red clouds as inky grass and hedges breezed against the hot winds. My brows rose as I examined the demonic creatures lazily moving about the gardens.

Two women in particular caught my attention. They seemed around my own age, and both had massive horns that were made of a diamond-like material that matched their translucent hair. Their tanned skin contrasted their white silk dresses and the multiple diamond piercings along their skin. Honestly, they were super cool-looking, and I found myself a bit jealous of their overall aesthetic.

Looking down at myself, I smirked slightly, suddenly very happy about the physical change the breaking of the glamour brought.

The garden began to clear as Alexander spoke loudly. “Alright! First thing first, you are now able to phantomize.” Why did that term sound so familiar?

“Like this, *ma chérie.*” Dorian snapped his fingers as he seemed to flicker out of existence. My eyes widened as he formed into a smoky figure, his smile making my center tighten despite him being a damn ghost.

“Exactly,” Jeremy nodded. “You must be fairly powerful to be able to do

that as an incubus.”

Dorian’s ears flushed just slightly though his expression remained unchanging, making me smile. I could feel the awkwardness between my boys and my fathers slowly disappearing. I think it helped that my guys were so protective of me. Dorian and Abel seemed to be having the easiest time, as Alaric seemed a bit grumpy still, and Declan was quieter than normal, observing everything with fascination.

“So how do I do that?” I asked curiously.

“Try pulling on your new powers,” Duke encouraged. My eyes moved over to my mother, who sat watching with avid interest. I nearly felt nervous under her attention because she rarely gave me the time of day. Can we say ‘mommy issues’?

Closing my eyes, I inhaled and let myself sink further into my body. Resting on the surface was my familiar necromancer magic, cool and minty, with a strong pull on the life around me. I could feel something more dangerous underneath, filling the once void space, so I tried to dive past the minty stream of death magic.

Holy God.

The energy at the center of me was hot, like a searing flame. My instincts rose up, and the feeling I’d gotten from entering this realm, anxiety and excitement in heaps, came to the forefront. This energy felt darker than my normal one, but more impassioned, full of strength and energy. I tightened my grip on the licks of flames under my skin, willing myself to fade out of existence...

“Oh shit,” Alaric muttered.

My eyes snapped open as I looked around, feeling my smile widen as I realized that I was see-through! I let out a small amused laugh as I turned and floated right through Declan, making him groan, a thick heat hidden under his tone. Did that turn him on? Interesting.

“Oh my God, this is amazing!” I spun as Dorian shook his head.

“You shouldn’t have shown her this,” Alaric stated, looking amused.

“Why?” Duke demanded.

“You have no idea how much fun she will have with it,” Abel replied with a grin.

“It’s true.” I flashed a wicked smile because I was going to fuck with them so much now, they had no idea how much trouble they were in. Turning once more in the air and landing on the ground, I released the feeling and felt

my limbs harden. I sighed as my feet touched down.

“That was epic,” I mumbled and then looked at my fathers. “What else?”

Alexander tilted his head. “You will be able to portal in and out of the demonic realm without spells, bring anyone with you for a period of time in a protected ward, and send anyone here from other realms.”

“I have been able to before,” I pointed out. I had always been able to send the annoying fuckers down here, but maybe he meant something else.

“Yes, but that’s a bit different,” Alexander eased. “Now when you send them down here, you have the ability to keep them here because you aren’t just banishing them from Earth for a period of time.”

“So I can lock them up in Hell?” I arched a brow, looking amused.

“Exactly,” Jeremy confirmed, his arms wrapping around my mother.

“Sweet,” I nodded. “Anything else?”

Before any of them could respond, the sky cracked with orange lightning, making them frown in confusion and a bit of surprise.

Alexander spoke quietly, eyeing the sky with caution. “The lessons will have to wait for now, daughter. I think you are needed on Earth.”

“I have no idea who could be drawing on that much power to affect this realm,” Jeremy pointed out. I smiled at that because *I very much did*.

With an easy flick of his wrist, my father created a large, glowing red portal near us. I watched as Jeremy walked towards me, handing me a thin, dark sword, muttering, “Just in case.” Where the hell had he gotten that from? You know what? I was so not going to complain about a badass sword.

“Let’s go handle these assholes,” Alexander sighed, looking frustrated.

My mom flashed me a smile before disappearing completely and leaving me with my men and my three fathers. You know, today may have been overwhelming, but I was starting to think that this could work... I wasn’t, like, ready to have Christmas together, but it was better than nothing. Right? My mom and I would still need to talk for sure.

“You ready, lass?” Declan asked quietly, his eyes heated and focused on me.

I tossed him a smile. “Ready? Of course I’m ready. After all, one of my dads is essentially the devil and my mom is a Queen of Hell.”

Declan shook his head, his green eyes filling with amusement. “I love you, lass.”

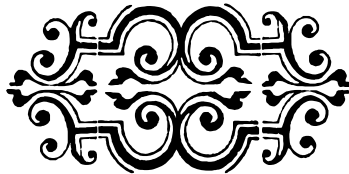
“I love you guys more.”

As I stepped towards the portal I realized - *we were finally going to end*

all of this.

CHAPTER 8

DORIAN



Official portals always made me feel disoriented as fuck, especially considering it wasn't of my own making. Inhaling sharply, I stepped through the red portal of light, my hand pressed to Narcissa's in a tight hold as everything went from a vibrant crimson to dark at once. I let out a small groan as the world began to spin, and it wasn't until I felt fresh air rush over my face that an exhale of relief left me.

My hand tightened around Narcissa's as she looked up at me, and I was relieved to see that she appeared healthy and unbothered by the portal. Unlike myself and the twins. I pulled her to the side slightly as Declan stepped through, looking completely okay as well.

That was right around when everything seemed to pop back into focus. I winced as my hearing cracked to life, the humid air tightening around us as the music of cicadas filled the space we found ourselves in.

Why the hell were we...*in the swamp*? Ahead of us, cypress trees and tall grasses, the shifting of wind allowing the scent of wild animals nearby to play across my nose. Was this really where they had decided to portal all of us? That's weird as fuck.

I heard the soft drop of Narcissa's new sword on the ground—well, the tip of it at least—and I easily took it from her, knowing she was far too distracted to be carrying a sword around. Plus, what the fuck was the woman going to do with a sword? She was much more powerful than some elementary-made weapon.

King Alexander stepped through as we watched his face turn from lighthearted to confused. It was amusing, in some ways, because his

expressions were a ghost of Narcissa's.

I honestly hadn't been terribly surprised upon realizing Narcissa's heritage. I mean, sure, it was fucking crazy, but her powers were so intense, even more so than her grandmother's, that it was obvious something had been different. It clearly hadn't been a matter of experience, either, because her grandma had years on her. It was a natural, raw, instinctual power that was honestly awe-inspiring.

Now, did that make calling the three of them her 'fathers' any less weird? Absolutely not. I also was at a complete loss on how to act towards her mother now. I didn't think Narcissa fully realized it, but in the demonic realm was really the first time we had properly interacted with her mother. Before, she'd been a concept, someone I could easily dislike because Narcissa did.

Now though? She was not only clearly very real and not as dead as we'd assumed, but I could see that their relationship was far more complicated than I could have imagined. I would just have to take Narc's lead when it came to this. It was the only possible solution, right? Nearly shaking my head, I found myself glad that we had a good relationship with Narcissa's grandmother, because for now, that was what mattered most. I hoped.

I didn't want any of this to change things. Unless, of course, it made Narcissa happier. I wasn't dumb. I had seen how her mother had affected her and the sadness radiating from her at times whenever we spoke of our families.

For so long she had been very clear about how she was perfectly happy with her setup, but if this meant having a larger family? Filling the void of a parent's love? I would happily help her figure this all out because I knew how important family could be.

Before my own mother passed away, we'd been extremely close, and having that family security was huge. So yeah, while it may be complicated, I was going to help her figure out whatever the hell she needed to.

That was what you did when you loved someone. You stuck by them and helped them figure out the hard shit, even if it didn't directly affect you.

"Where are we?" Narcissa's voice rang out over the large boom of thunder. The portal closed, leaving the eight of us standing in the relative silence of the swamp, following the echoes of the storm.

As the breeze blew, my eyes traced over the spanish moss cascading from the trees, reminding me of the willow I'd pinned Narcissa against before fucking her deep enough that I knew she would feel it tomorrow.

Trying to control my magic, I stuffed that thought down. Obviously, as an incubus, I was sexual in nature... but sex with Narc had been nothing like I'd ever experienced before. Not only had I fucking loved sinking myself into that tight, hot pussy while she screamed out my name and clawed up my back, but her magic had just continued to feed my own in a constant cycle.

I had felt goddamn high for an hour afterwards, wanting nothing more than to taste every inch of her just to make sure I had drained every ounce of pleasure from her perfect form. *Fucking hell*. Narcissa shivered against me as I tightened my jaw, shoving my magic away as she seemed to let out a small exhale of relief.

Yeah, something tells me that fucking her on the floor of a swamp with her dads nearby was not a solid plan. As in, I would probably, definitely, end up dead.

Fuck. Did we need to ask them for Narcissa's hand in marriage? My smile grew because she would fucking hate that. No. She could decide and give herself away on her own. Her grandma's opinion was the only one I cared about... *but* it was very tempting to give her shit about it. Maybe later.

"I have no idea," King Alexander stated. "Unless Bourbon Street was moved in the past seventeen or so years, this is not the correct place." He would be correct on that.

I recognized the space as the swamplands outside of New Orleans and examined the sky with interest. If I had to assume, it was still the same night but around two or three in the morning.

Declan let out an amused laugh as I arched a brow at him. The demigod was an odd one to begin with, and the more time I spent around him, the more I realized how little I knew about how his magic worked. The mystery surrounding Declan and his magic wasn't just something I had noticed, either. The others, except for Zachariah, had made note of it, but none of us had asked for an explanation. I felt like there would be some level of a 'mind fuck' associated with understanding luck magic, and I'd rather save that for a night when we are all sitting around having a beer rather than dealing with this bullshit.

My smile grew at that thought. Now that Narcissa knew we planned to marry her, I couldn't explain the level of relief and satisfaction I felt. I knew she wanted to marry us, even if she was a bit overwhelmed, and I was perfectly content with spending my life with all these bastards if it meant her being happy. Honestly, once the pressure of this situation was done, I had

absolutely no doubt that things would be much easier and more relaxed.

My brow arched in thought as I wondered how she would react when she realized that all of our families would want to come into town for the wedding. I mean, shit, I wasn't close with my father, but that was because he was so damn busy. The bastard would no doubt still want to attend, though. Most likely with his harem of demons. Alright, on second thought, maybe this wasn't the best idea...

"I sent us here," Declan said and looked around curiously, as if he didn't understand why. "Apparently."

I could see Narcissa's fathers staring at him in confusion, and I realized that they hadn't asked him what his magic was. In fact, they seemed almost hesitant around him. I figured that despite the lot of them seeming a bit petty, I could help them out.

"Declan is a demigod of luck," I filled in as Narcissa leaned her head against my shoulder.

"Ah." Jeremy nodded as the other two seemed to grow more interested and a bit freaked out by him. Don't get me wrong, I had heard horror stories about how fucking insane demigods could be, but the worst Declan would do is finally give in to the sexual tension between Narc and him. I mean, I could literally feel that shit growing as we spoke. Other than that, the guy was pretty relaxed, so I wasn't very concerned.

They just didn't know him, so their reaction was based on a stereotype, and I found myself getting annoyed by that. Damn, when had I gotten protective over the other two of them? I mean, despite the situation being odd at first, I knew Zachariah and Declan were in for the long haul, which meant that they would be brothers in my mind. I had never had real siblings, but the family I had been close to—my mother, mainly—I'd always been protective over. I had found it much the same with Narc's other guys. They were family.

"Why?" Abel asked curiously, clearly wondering why Declan had chosen this location to begin with. Shifting in the branches had me freezing as a familiar magical scent registered, making me smile.

"I'm not sure why..." Declan's words fell off as a familiar voice echoed through the space, confusion going to elation on Narcissa's stunning features. The change had my heart softening as I became distracted enough that I forgot what was actually happening, entrapped by her natural radiance. Was I a romantic? Fuck. I hadn't thought so, but who the hell knows anymore.

"Mila? Draco?" Narcissa's voice filled the space.

My brows rows as I watched the thick foliage give way to Mila and Draco, who stepped through carrying three drugged-out shifters. In Mila's arms was a young girl, and over Draco's shoulders were two older teen men.

Despite Alaric's general issue with Draco, I actually didn't mind him. And while I could tell he had been attracted to Narcissa's dominance before, that was not an issue anymore. In fact, I wasn't positive he saw anyone in a sexual light anymore besides Mila. It would probably be good to let my brother know that, but eh... I would let him figure that out.

Narcissa ran over as noises began to sound behind them, and I gathered what was occurring. Declan let out a curious hum as I realized that his luck magic must have brought us here, knowing that...well, all of this would be occurring.

As in, shifters from our community carrying out drugged-out missing supernaturals from the swampy surrounding lands. My smile grew as I stepped forward, allowing the twins to explain to her fathers what was going on. Raphael emerged from the thick foliage last, a small boy passed out on his back, his arms locked around his neck.

Narcissa spoke to others in passing, but when Raphael finally approached, her smile grew and tears filled her eyes. I took the kid from Raphael, squeezing his shoulder as the small, maybe four at most, kid latched his arms around my neck. I frowned, not liking how skinny he was or the bruises marring his skin. I had a feeling those weren't new.

"I missed you so much," Narcissa said softly as Raphael let out a low pained sound. I turned my head slightly towards her fathers, letting the two of them have a moment. I wasn't positive there was another mating relationship as close as theirs. I mean, even in a pure shifter way, it was unusual.

Her magic had all but attached itself to his, and instead of the natural pull and push ours had, he had let hers completely brand his. I wondered if he was even aware of that. Something told me his wolf knew it but wouldn't admit to it because of the dominance factor.

"I assume these are the missing members of your community?" Duke asked, drawing Raphael's attention as I saw confusion hit him. Yeah. I understood that. I bet it was probably a bit fucking odd to see three men that looked like Narcissa but not understand why. I wasn't positive I would have even made the connection with the other two had I not known. Alexander was a bit easier to see it with.

"Who are these guys, baby?" Raphael asked defensively, wrapping an

arm around her waist.

“Long story,” Narcissa said, bouncing on her toes slightly. “My three fathers. King of Hell and two of his guards, but we need to focus on the—”

“Your fathers?” Raphael questioned, his wolf letting out a low growl. Raphael had always held a grudge against Narc’s missing and absent father—well, *fathers* in this case—more so than even Narc had.

I think it was because he knew what it was like to have a shitty father, so someone just up and leaving, which was the story at the time, was a horrible offense in his mind. I didn’t disagree in the least.

“My name is High King Alexander,” Alexander offered as I arched a brow, wondering why they were now being so fucking nice.

Raphael examined the three men and grunted, walking towards them and offering a hand. I watched in amusement as they each introduced themselves, and instead of including any barbs or comments about Narcissa dating, kept quiet. You know, I was just starting to think they didn’t consider the twins or I a threat, because we seemed to be the only ones getting shit.

“We need to get them back,” Narcissa said, motioning to the group of missing supernatural members and helpers who were standing in a clearing as they waited on Raphael’s orders, no doubt. I could see how relieved Narcissa was, and I think it was distracting him just a bit, so I stepped back so he could see them fully, drawing his attention back to the matter at hand.

“I can help with that.” Alexander motioned and a portal began to glow a deep purple, signifying that it would transport us to a place within the same realm we were already in. I sighed, glad it wouldn’t be such a pain in the ass this time. Declan walked through first, clearly unconcerned. I was hoping that there wouldn’t be an issue at all here, because frankly, we needed to get to Bourbon Street. Now.

There was absolutely nothing stopping us from ending all of this and getting rid of Nero and Asmodeus. Pure excitement ran through me at that thought.

“Where is Zachariah?” Narcissa asked Raphael as I walked with the boy towards the portal. In my arms, he shifted slightly and turned his head. My eyes widened, finding a savage bite mark. Inhaling, I realized that the kid was fucking human. Well, until the next full moon, or however that worked for shifters that were bitten. Shit. I needed to ask Raphael about this. Also, where were his parents?

Wasn’t it more dangerous to be a bitten wolf rather than a born one? I

could briefly remember some literature I'd read on it several years back, but it had been at least a decade, which meant that it could easily be outdated by this point in time.

The portal went far smoother this time, and I kept tabs on the vitals of the young kid in my arms. They dipped slightly as we were walking into Declan's bar, which was currently sectioned off from other humans. Nevermind that the fucker had totally influenced our travel again. At least we were closer now. My concern grew as a fever began to spike on the kid.

"Dorian?" Narcissa asked, but I moved towards the bar, setting the kid on top of it and using my shirt to rest underneath his head. Luckily, as an incubus, it allowed me somewhat of an insight into the body, and not just in the traditional way associated with my kind. It was why I'd been—and frankly still was—a fantastic doctor. Not to brag, but it was honest.

The storm was raging outside, and I could hear the others talking, but as I walked around the bar, I found myself studying his bite further. I called for Raphael as I began to wipe the blood away.

Yeah. Never mind. It wasn't healed.

"Is this a wolf shifter bite?" I asked him quietly, turning the boy's head. I then called out, "Declan! Do you have a first aid kit?"

Moments later, the demigod returned with it as Raphael looked up from the cut. "It is, but it's extremely infected. If I am not mistaken, his body is also coming off of drugs. It's very faint but still there."

"He wasn't one of the kids taken," I pointed out.

Raphael winced. "There was a small homeless community there as well. It appeared to be a massive abandoned building. I think a few of them were killed in the panic of the supes waking up after being kidnapped, and with many of them being on drugs, they didn't stand a chance in defending themselves. He may have been one of the only ones to have survived."

Wonderful. Fucking wonderful.

"I need a knife." I prodded the wound on the side of his neck, noticing that the bite mark felt slightly bumpy. Frowning, I took the small, sharp knife he offered and doused it in Everclear, glad we were in a bar of all places. Had a lot more useful shit than you would realize. I could hear the bar growing louder, but mostly everyone was ignoring us, except for Narcissa and Declan. Both watched me as Raphael turned the boy's neck and held up the flashlight on his cell phone so I could see better.

Pressing on the wound slightly with my thumb, puss came out as the kid

let out a strained whimper. I brought the knife to one of the bumps and made a small incision, more puss squirting out with blood. I let out a small sigh of relief as I found a broken piece of tooth in his skin. I removed it and proceeded to go down the cut until all of them were removed, his neck looking like a destroyed, bloody mess. I cleaned it and then bandaged him up, all within a five-minute span, his heart rate growing far stronger than before.

“Holy shit, Dorian,” Narcissa muttered as I looked up, probably looking fucking gross considering the bodily fluids on me. I didn’t see disgust there, though. I saw surprise and a bit of heat, which I loved.

“Do we have anywhere he can heal?” I asked Declan, and the demigod nodded. Before anything could be said, though, the bar door flung open, revealing Zachariah with a panicked look on his face.

That wasn't good.

CHAPTER 9

NARCISSA



I thought I'd seen it all.

I thought I had seen every sexy side of Dorian Westburrow. To be fair, there were a lot of sexy sides, so it could be hard to keep track. But I'd been wrong about knowing all of them... because I could honestly admit I had never been so attracted to him as I was at this moment, and most of it didn't have to do with physicality.

Although him shirtless? Very distracting.

Dorian was a complicated individual. Every element of his personality was filled with depth and was intoxicating to discover. It was probably why I was so dangerously attracted to him. But at this moment? Acting legitimately as Dr. Dorian Westburrow? So incredibly sexy. I would have never expected it, but I literally felt like fucking swooning. Was there something wrong with me? Why was I having such a strong reaction to this?

I mean, the bastard was covered in blood and a bit of puss, so that part was gross, but it didn't take away from the strong pull of attraction I was feeling. It wasn't his magic either. No, I was very aware of how that felt, and this was different.

I think it was the expression on his face. The way his gray eyes were dark with worry and the concentration on his perfect features as his messy hair fell

partly in his face. He was literally saving some young kid. My ovaries were having a goddamn heart attack right now.

Honestly, I was glad the boys were so distracted right now because I had absolutely no idea how to explain why I was staring nearly open-mouthed at him. Man. He would hold that over me if he knew. Then again, could anyone blame me for being attracted to a sexy incubus being a caretaker? Um. No. No, they couldn't. Declan handed him some water as Raphael let out a small relieved sound, his rough, large hand brushing against my back.

Looking up into my mate's face, I found myself damn near elated to just be near him. I hadn't realized just how much my disappearance had affected him, even for a few hours, until he was hugging me possessively and telling me how much he loved me. He didn't have to tell me though. I knew. I knew really well because I loved him so much that sometimes it was legitimately painful.

Of course, it didn't help that the man was goddamn beautiful. I found myself reaching up to push dark hair away from his golden face as his green eyes met mine with warmth. His wolf was rumbling in his throat as I pressed myself into his massive, muscular chest, knowing it would make him feel better.

As Declan and Dorian talked quietly, I let Raphael tighten his arms around me, his warm scent surrounding me as he trailed his nose through my hair. My eyes moved down to his arms, and I used my thumb to brush over the scars he had there. The scars that made him even more beautiful in my mind. I knew he would be embarrassed if he heard me tell him that, but it was how I authentically felt. The man was beautiful, and I refused to say differently.

He was wearing the same outfit he'd been wearing before I landed myself in Hell, and I found myself burying my nose in the familiar shirt. I loved how good he smelled, and the comfortability I had around the man was almost unreal sometimes. He was my best friend. Plain and simple. I considered all of them my best friends, but Raphael had gone through high school with me and had never once budged from my side. Something about those days at that large unfriendly school had created a friendship that, even putting aside our romantic relationship, would always be there.

Now did that overpower my need to possibly climb him like a tree, right here, right now? No. I clearly was in a real turned on state today, so I somehow needed to fix this problem as soon as possible. As in *with* one of

them. Or multiple ones of them.

Celebratory orgy anyone? No. Still not the time?

"Baby," he growled as I wiggled against him, kissing me lightly, his gold snake bite piercings cool against the heated surface of my skin.

I knew that I was a bit of a hot mess right now, my heels recently abandoned and skin covered in rain and a bit of mud, my hair in a wild mess of curls. Which reminded me... looking down at my skin, I found that my tattoos were gone. Was that a side effect of coming up to Earth? Fascinating.

Honestly, I was missing them a bit right now, along with the crimson ends of my hair. No doubt it would have scared the shit out of Raphael though. I think he was still processing the whole thing with my dads. Hell. *I* still could not believe I had three freakin' dads. How insane was that?

Before I could respond to his low growl, the door of the bar banged open and magic filled the space. My heart tightened as I snapped my head towards where everyone's attention was directed, silence filling the space like a heavy blanket. A bit of fear also, but was that very surprising considering who had just arrived?

Zachariah.

Raphael let me go begrudgingly as the others stayed with Dorian, the twins watching me from where they stood in quiet conversation with my fathers. No doubt talking about what was going on, who Zachariah was, or coming up with a plan.

The rest of the bar was filled with supes that were being reunited with family members and given medical treatment, food, and a shit ton of water. Alright, some were getting a shot of whiskey also, but frankly, they deserved it after the shit they'd been through.

Thunder cracked outside as I neared the door, the scent of rain pouring down as Zachariah's magic greeted me. My eyes ran over the man as I finally met his heated and relieved gaze, a million different emotions seeming to crowd his face all at once.

It really shouldn't have surprised anyone when I ran right into his arms, thunder cracking loudly at the impact of his arms wrapping around my body. If it hadn't been for this dumb silk dress, I probably would have tackled him to the damn ground. But the minute I was in his arms, everything seemed to still, making me forget anything else but his touch.

A sigh of relief left my lips as his familiar scent constricted around me and tears filled my eyes. He was here. Raphael was here. Everything was far

better now that they were here. Now that we were back together as a family.

"Little rose," Zachariah's voice was rough as he pulled back, his silver eyes running over my face as his fingers tightened on me possessively. A thrill of desire and comfort ran over my skin as I leaned into him, needing as much of his body against mine as possible.

I was glad he and Raphael seemed okay with my neediness for touch right now, because I couldn't have ever predicted just how much our separation, even if only for such a short time, would have affected me. I never wanted to go through that again.

If it was possible, Zachariah appeared even more intense than usual. He looked absolutely wild, and it was doing things to me that were completely inappropriate considering our audience. I mean, the man was always sexy as hell, but right now he really did seem unearthly.

His muscular body was splattered in rain and blood. The blood of my enemies? That totally gave him brownie points, I couldn't lie. The linen button-down shirt he usually wore was gone, and instead he wore just a pair of dark jeans that laid low on his hips, showing off his fantastic fucking body.

The man had to have a ridiculous eight pack or something, right? I didn't know how else to describe it. I found myself memorizing the silver tattoos that ran the length of his rich mahogany abs, chest, and arms that I wanted to dig my nails into. I wanted to mark him.

"Narcissa," he called my attention again, looking strained. I tilted my head back, feeling a bit bad about not bothering to hide the blatant heat I was feeling right now. I knew he had a total dominant streak... well, not streak really, considering it was the majority of his authentic personality. The magic that vibrated under his skin was dangerous and deadly, and the strength in his fingers that smoothed around my throat, calming him slightly, had enough power to snap my neck. Easily. Why was that so sexy?

Better yet—how was this man in love with me? This dominant, sexy, *I would torture your enemies for you* voodoo priest that was absolutely singular in his power within the entire country. It seemed unreal. This man could do anything he fucking wanted and had chosen to stay by my side and love me. Can we talk about a freakin' ego boost? I mean, seriously. I didn't like taking orders as a general principle, but this man had me wanting to rub up against him like a kitten.

Even now I found my fingers playing with the silver hoop looped around his dark locs as his mercury-colored eyes ate up my expression. There was a

desperate need and authentic relief behind his expression, and I flushed realizing just how much he had missed me.

“I missed you,” I whispered softly, pressing my head against his chest and wishing that we could have more time and space alone. It was what I needed right now. Time away with my men... but not before we got the shit done that we needed to.

My words had Zachariah kissing me softly before pulling back. “I missed you so goddamn much. Are you alright? Did anyone hurt you? What the hell happ—”

Searing a kiss on his lips, I interrupted his rambling questions. He groaned and pulled back from our kiss, offering me a frustrated and hot look. I smirked as I got ready to explain what the hell was going on exactly... *but then I didn't have the chance to.*

“Well, isn't this a fun party!” a half-amused voice said from behind me. I had felt the shift in power, and I knew if I turned I would find my grandmother and... Shadow?

I found myself smiling as Shadow jumped off my grandma's shoulder and landed on my own. His purr was loud as I examined the small black hellcat with large green eyes. Maybe he would fight this cute syndrome better if he went down to the demonic realm with me as well? Something to think on.

For just a moment, everything seemed frozen. There was so damn much to explain. To say. I could see my grandma's eyes falling on my dads. I knew they would need to be introduced to Zachariah. I knew that I needed to talk to my grandma, my mom, and my aunt. I knew that there was so much shit to talk about... but then, in typical fashion, our problem fucking found us. Because of course it would.

Screams sounded outside as my body locked up.

“What happened?” I asked as murmurs broke across the bar. I found myself walking towards the door, my voodoo priest striding next to me confidently.

“They broke out of the hosts when I stepped inside to clean up, and apparently Nero decided it was time to lend some of his power to Asmodeus so he could take his true form. I had a feeling they were coming for you, but I came to you instead of trying to hunt them down. I had no idea where they were going to go,” he explained quietly.

As we stepped out onto the porch, everything slowed and I let out a small

growl. Yeah, this wasn't about to fucking happen.

I had imagined coming face-to-face with Nero and Asmodeus a million times after I sent the latter down to Hell the first time. Something about this felt different though, and I barely paid attention to the humans that screamed and ran from the demons that were making their way down the side street towards the bar.

The street lamps crackled with power, and I had a moment where I realized that this felt like a good old-fashioned western standoff. I wish I meant that in a joking way, but I was serious. A surge of pride filtered through me as my men, my fathers, and my grandma all joined me down on the street, Mila and Draco keeping everyone safe in the bar.

Fear was completely absent from me. Instead, pure resolve filtered through my chest as the cold, wet pavement under my feet kept me feeling alert and on my toes. It was actually really fucking gross that I was standing barefoot, especially knowing how dirty these streets could be, but I could deal with that later.

“Narcissa!” Nero’s voice boomed through space as I watched the bastard with a bit of amusement. *What a fucker.* Seriously, though. He and his brother strutted toward me, their pale blonde hair braided and their nearly silver eyes lit up like the white flames that seemed to bounce off their fingertips. I had no idea what they were hoping for, but I wasn’t going to give it to them.

Lies. I knew what they were looking for. They were looking for a fight, and in that moment, I realized... I didn’t want to fight them. The resolve and confidence in my magic steadied me with the knowledge that I had the ability to kill them, even though I didn’t really want to.

I frowned, wondering if my violent streak before had been an attempt to lash out because I always felt so unbalanced. I mean, did I want to see them bleed? Yes. But they were now somewhat inconsequential on my radar. I wanted them gone. They were a means to an end so that we could return back to our normal lives. Something I craved at this point far more than violence.

I wasn’t going to drag this horse and pony show out.

I would give them this—they’d been smart taking hostages, but now they were fucked.

The bolster of confidence they held barely gave me pause. They’d always been like that. Always far more confident than their powers warranted.

“Boys, I’m surprised you have the balls to show yourself here. You

should have escaped while you had the chance,” I explained softly, my fingers going through Shadow’s fur as Asmodeus stared at me with a possessive, gross gaze. I ignored him, focusing on his brother, knowing who the real threat here was. Well, ‘threat’ was becoming a somewhat loose term.

The fury in Nero’s eyes surprised me. There was true hatred there. And fear. It made me feel... honestly, it made me feel pity. I don’t think he even realized how much he hated me. I was going to take a wild guess here and assume that there were some serious ‘daddy’ issues going on.

Shadow let out a small hiss, sensing the tension. I arched a brow at the small sound, noticing that it was actually quite fierce, if I do say so myself. See? We were seriously a badass team in the making.

“I don’t want to hurt my future followers,” Nero bolstered, coming to a stop around seven feet away. “If you give up the city, I won’t kill any more of them. You can fuck off to wherever you want.”

Bargaining? Interesting tactic. My chest clenched as I remembered everyone that had been hurt and those he’d killed, my jaw tightening as I tried to keep a rein on my emotions. You know... maybe a little magic wouldn’t be bad to use. I slowly let my magic out, but this time it wasn’t its usual black smoky texture that was nearly invisible.

No, this time it was mixed with something else, and that something else had the power to bring a prince of Hell, with magic like my other half, to his knees.

“You promised her to me!” Asmodeus snarled like an unhappy child. Nero shot him a look as I examined their tense dynamic.

I stepped closer, my magic nearly reaching them as I pet Shadow gently. “I think that both of you should return to your little demonic kingdom. We both know you won’t win, Nero. I am far stronger than you.” *And that was before my new magic.*

My words seemed to infuriate him, because before I knew it, his white flames were arching towards me. I let out a sigh. Shadow jumped off my shoulder, my eyes widening as he transformed mid-air into a massive jaguar, absorbing the magic and letting out a low growl.

“Wow, you are totally rocking this badass thing,” I whispered. I was nearly positive one of the boys laughed behind me, but I would scold them for that later.

“You have a goddamn hellcat?” Nero demanded. Then a scream rang out as Asmodeus backed up while my magic attempted to crawl up his legs. Nero

batted my magic away as it circled him once again, but when it touched his hand it began to decay, the smell of decaying flesh filling the space. Both of them backed up further and I pulled my magic back, not completely done with playing with them. I knew that we had more information to find out.

“That is correct.”

“And that magic?” Nero demanded, looking... jealous? “You’ve never had that before!”

You know, as someone who had confidence issues created by a lack of parental support, I felt for the two of them. I mean, I’d yet to meet their father, but he did a number on these boys, and if they hadn’t killed so many of my people, kidnapped shifters, and tried to hurt my men... well, I would almost feel bad for them. As it stood currently, I did not.

“Do you always do what your daddy wants you to?” I goaded softly. “He wants you to take New Orleans, so you almost get yourself killed to make him happy?”

“You don’t know anything about our father,” he retorted sharply.

“But I think I do.” I crouched down next to Shadow, his massive body rubbing against me, and finally decided to answer at least one of his questions about my magic. “You see, you aren’t the only one with parents in high places, Nero.”

“What does she mean?” Asmodeus demanded.

“My daughter would be referring to me,” Alexander said, stepping forward. I nearly smiled as the raw fear on their faces became very, very obvious. Yeah... alright, I was starting to seriously love this ‘dad’ thing.

“I don’t understand,” Nero sputtered. *So clearly his father hadn’t let him in on the secret.* Which really sucked for him, because let’s be honest—if he had known, he probably would have tread far more lightly.

“This is King Alexander, who I am sure you are familiar with. One of my fathers,” I purred, enjoying both of their discomfort.

I saw the indecision on both boys’ faces, and then Asmodeus had to be stupid. He turned and tried to run. Immediately, my magic looped out and caught his legs easily, pulling him to the ground and holding him there as Nero stared on in horror. Horror as my magic began to devour his brother’s flesh.

That was right about when the truth began to come out.

“I didn’t mean to disrespect you, King Alexander,” Nero blabbered, shaking. “I was just doing what my father wanted me to. He told me I needed

to take New Orleans. You have to understand, if I had known, I would have never done anything like that—”

“Be careful to not kill him just yet,” Alexander said, nodding to Asmodeus, who was screaming in pain as I held my magic at his legs. Smirking slightly, I inched it up a bit so it hit where his dick was.

Yep, that cry of pain was different.

Alright, one of the boys totally laughed this time.

You know... honestly, this was all a bit anticlimactic. I was glad though. Before all of this, before coming into my own, I would have craved a fight. But now, feeling more balanced, *I didn't feel the need to waste my time on small men with smaller egos and obviously tiny penises. Peni? What the fuck was the plural of penis...*

“Narc!” Abel let out a laugh as I realized I had said that out loud. I flashed him a smile and shrugged, getting distracted as someone joined us. Someone I clearly needed to meet, because without this guy, none of this shit would have happened.

However, in my slight distraction, Nero stepped back and I growled. “Do you want to end up like your brother? Don't fucking move.” Nero nodded, looking down with disgust at his younger brother. I didn't feel bad. In some ways, Asmodeus' interests were not only darker, but way less excusable. He had threatened to kill my family when I'd killed him the first time. The second time he'd wanted to imprison me and force himself on me. I had absolutely no sympathy.

The entire space filled with power, blocking out my internal thoughts as a very familiar man—well, looks-wise—appeared, a near replica of his two sons. He was swearing up a storm and was accompanied by two guards that were holding him in place, looking completely unphased as the entire New Orleans supernatural community watched on.

“Let go of me you fucking idiots, do you have any idea who I am?! I will be your king one day...” His voice went meek as he looked around, realizing just where he was. I watched him pale as he began to shake and met my father's gaze.

Alexander, paying him no mind, turned towards me and smiled. “If you don't mind, I am going to escort our new favorite prisoners down to the kingdom's prison cells. I want to make sure they get there safely... before suffering.”

Tilting my head, I considered again if I wanted to kill them. But I didn't. I

wanted them to suffer with their father. But more than that, I think the person who deserved to die was Louis. He seemed to be a manipulative bastard, and since my father knew more about the politics in Hell, I'd wash my hands of this.

I offered him a curious look, not wanting to sound like a total softie. "You're going to come back?"

"Do you want us to?" Duke asked, walking forward as I nodded. Jeremy's eyes warmed on mine, and Alexander snapped suddenly, opening up a portal. The boys and their father screamed out for help as they were forcibly pushed through, followed by Duke and Jeremy. Alexander offered me a wave before he disappeared, leaving me staring at the rainy street left in their wake.

Tilting my head back as rain began to cover my face, the silence of the space around me had reality crashing in. The reality that... this was over. They were gone.

My smile grew as I turned back towards my men. "Honestly, I am only really disappointed about one thing."

"What's that?" Raphael asked, arching a brow.

"I was sort of craving a Scooby Doo ending, like 'I would've gotten away with it if it hadn't been for that meddling necromancer and her badass hellcat.' You know?"

There was silence before laughter rang out, and I smiled happily, glad to know that I was still as fucking funny as I assumed.

CHAPTER 10

NARCISSA



*T*his is what I had been fighting for. This peace and serenity. This feeling of being in Declan's spacious bar, the serious tone turning far more celebratory. Although, I suppose in retrospect, it hadn't been much of a fight at all, had it? Stretching my legs out in front of me, I found myself at peace with that. At peace with knowing that I had handled a situation with my newfound self-confidence secured.

They were gone, and I had a feeling that they wouldn't be trying to fuck with us any longer, which was good. Because while blood wasn't shed by me this time... if they ever tried anything, I wouldn't be nearly as understanding.

"Oweya feelin', lass?" Declan asked with a bright grin. I leaned further into his chest, not bothering to zap him since I knew what he was asking and was enjoying just absorbing how it fell from his lips.

"Happy," I answered honestly.

How could I not be?

The bar was clearing out as my grandmother and Dorian made sure that each family who walked out had a stable handle on the injured member's health. Then there were those who were drinking, buying drinks for their friends and oddly even me, which I am sure the guys were hating, but who was I to say no to a beer?

My fathers had yet to return, but I wasn't worried. I had a feeling that there were a lot of talks to be had, and while I would have normally shied away from that, I knew it was necessary. Plus, I was bound and determined to get better at this emotional shit.

My eyes drew up to where the news was playing, describing the insanity of what happened on Bourbon Street. It was being called a freak electrical storm, which caused a generator to spark and blow power. However, all of it was overshadowed by the death of both the mayor and his son. I did feel bad for that loss, but I also knew that once the demon assholes had decided to wreck their souls... there was nothing we could've done.

I frowned, feeling a bit like shit about that. It was one of the only things that was overshadowing this pretty peachy fucking day. Maybe... maybe, I could find their ghosts and reconnect them with some family they'd lost. After everything that happened, the least I could do was be somewhat of a tour guide.

Tomorrow. I would think about that tomorrow.

The stress of worrying about Nero kidnapping people was over, and that was really what mattered. Well, that and the fact that my old clothes had appeared washed and on top of my boots when I'd walked back into the bar. I felt much better now that I was securely in my trusty tank top, jean shorts, and combat boots. Felt far more myself.

"Zachariah," I called softly. He turned from where he was talking to Abel and Alaric to offer me a questioning and affectionate look. Man, these guys were just killing me tonight. What did I do to deserve all this sexy sweetness?

It didn't help that Raphael had gotten up to go look over the little boy that we were watching over. The concern and care on their faces about this young, nameless boy was killing me. It was so sweet from some really vicious men.

The boy's vitals were apparently stable, but he was extremely dehydrated, so Dorian had arranged for him to have an IV while he was set up comfortably sleeping on a couch nearby. We would need to figure out where to bring him, but for now I was hoping that this would help a bit. Either that or we needed to take him to a human hospital. Something everyone tried to avoid.

"Little rose." Zachariah's voice was soft, and it had me turning pink, focusing up on him with interest.

I tilted my head, trying to remember my question, and then looked at Declan. "Are you sure neither of you knew who my fathers were?"

Declan shook his head and took another sip of his beer as Zachariah offered me a slightly amused look and... was that a bit of guilt? His voice was rough as he said quietly, “I didn’t know for sure, but I’d put together the timeline a bit ago. I didn’t want to bring it up in case I was wrong or if there was a reason your mother had chosen to keep them from your life, but I had wondered.”

I nodded, having figured it would be something like that. I kissed his cheek lightly, making him let loose a small growl from his throat that had me arching a brow. Was he really that much on edge? A small, teasing smile came on my lips, making me wish I had a bit more energy so that I could put his frustration to good use.

Overall though, my men felt far less tense now. It had taken a few minutes to explain everything that had happened and the history between my mother and her mates, but once I had, both Zachariah and Raphael seemed to share the same understanding I’d had. I mean, I still think they really disliked her, but it was a bit more reasonable why she had such issues.

As I said, it didn’t excuse how she’d treated me. Or that she’d lied to me in order to get me down into the demonic realm. But she had made her choices, and now it was up to me on how I wanted to pursue our relationship. Something I was mostly undecided about.

I didn’t want to cut her from my life. I would be lying if I said I didn’t crave the possible connection between the two of us, even if it took a bit of work. I didn’t want a lack of trying on my end to be the reason I completely lost any form of a relationship with my mother.

My aunt was another story—who the fuck knew what her issue was. No, seriously—if she was staying around, it was purely because my mother wanted her to. Other than that, I didn’t want much to do with her.

Running a hand through my hair, I inhaled, feeling a weird contentment in my chest that I wasn’t used to. Though maybe ‘contentment’ wasn’t the right word. Maybe it was just an equilibrium of my magic that I had craved so long without realizing it. There had been an entire part of me that had been locked away, and its release had brought out a side of my personality that was far calmer. It would take a while to get used to, but honestly, it felt good. I felt far more sure of myself than usual.

“What are we going to do about the boy?” I asked quietly as all of the guys looked over to where Dorian and Raphael were standing near him.

“De sprog doesn’t ’av anyone,” Declan admitted.

I nibbled my lip. “I mean, what if he stayed with us until we figured out a permanent solution? I can’t justify sending him to a fucking orphanage.”

“I was going to bring him home to our house for now, until we figure something out?” my grandma asked, walking over. I could see the exhaustion filling her gaze as I nodded, knowing that was best for tonight, at least.

Our group broke into movement as Dorian walked over, offering me a kiss on my forehead and telling me that he was going to go with her. I could see the exhaustion and concern on his face, so I hoped that he would be able to get some sleep before tomorrow. I hated the idea of him not feeling well. I knew Raphael was going to stay with the boy as well, because we had no idea how fast the kid would shift, nor when he would, and he was going to be the best bet to be able to handle it. I hadn’t realized it, but apparently bitten wolves were fairly rare and pretty fucking dangerous. It was just sort of a rule of etiquette that as a shapeshifter you mated and had a pack of your own instead of turning human bloodlines.

“Try to get some sleep, okay?” I kissed both of them as Shadow meowed in agreement from the center of the table we’d been sitting at. Luckily, he had shrunk back into kitten form, purring up a storm. His head brushed against my hand, back and forth, nuzzling it affectionately as I offered him a warm look.

“Love you.” Raphael nuzzled my neck before Dorian winked, and the three of them disappeared with the boy, leaving me with the twins and my two psychos.

“Are we going home?” I asked, letting out a small yawn. My eyelids felt heavy, and I had to imagine it was fucking late.

“Yes,” Abel replied. “But apparently the outside of the house is a bit of a mess... after Zachariah realized you were gone, so Alaric and I are going to go ahead to fix that shit.”

“I can help,” I offered as Declan snagged my waist back.

“You need to relax a bit,” Zachariah demanded softly as I relaxed into my demigod, not bothering to argue. Alaric kissed me hard before disappearing through the door with a sexy Abel, leaving me smiling stupidly at both of them. I let out a happy sigh, feeling like a total softie.

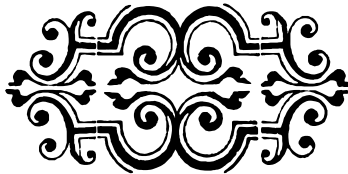
“I love you guys,” I offered quietly.

Declan whispered it against my shoulder and Zachariah kissed my hand, making me smile. For just a moment, everything was absolutely perfect. Although, any situation with them would be perfect.

And yes, I was a goddamn softie. Nothing to do but absolutely rock that shit.

CHAPTER 11

ALARIC



My eyes followed Narcissa as she stood slightly in front of me, her arms wrapped around a woman that was shaking with tears. The woman wasn't one I recognized, but I had a feeling she was part of the vampire clan because Elizabeth and Xavier were there, along with quite a few others. In fact, it appeared that almost everyone from the supernatural community had made an appearance on this somber morning, from the local wolf pack to the demon chaos. They were oddly on good behavior, and I had to assume it was out of respect for the one or two members that had been kidnapped as well.

In fact, we hadn't realized just how many members had gone missing until... We either rescued them or went back for their bodies. We had lost over seventy-five members of the community, and while we were large, spanning the city of New Orleans, it was an absurd amount that wouldn't go unpunished.

Her fathers had been informed of the loss and invited us down to participate in the punishment, but I didn't think Naricssa was interested. Other members of our family were very much so. I just wanted to be as close to my woman as possible, because everything that had happened had left me with a fear of someone taking her from us. Something that made me absolutely furious.

Narcissa stepped back from the hug, offering one to Elizabeth as I saw Narc attempt to steady herself. I could tell the moods of everyone around her were starting to affect her, so I was glad the memorial service was nearly done. I didn't like that it was causing her any level of discomfort. My eyes trailed over the tight black lace dress she was wearing, fishnets with garters,

and combat boots. I held in a groan, fighting myself to not get a goddamn hard-on at such a sad event.

To be fair, it had been several decades since death meant anything to me, and I knew it was hard for Narcissa as well. I mean, to her, no one ever really died because they always were around in spirit form. It wasn't an end as much as a transformation. Those that had lost loved ones throughout this battle, though, were suffering with the reality that they would no longer see the person they loved.

Thunder rolled in the distance, but rain refused to fall. Zachariah's eyes moved upwards to the gray skies, the muggy air making Declan shift his suit jacket off. Both of them were standing slightly to the side, looking fairly exhausted, and I didn't blame them in the least. It was rare for me to feel such strong physical human side-effects like fatigue, but fuck if I wasn't exhausted.

My smile grew thinking about this morning.

“A laric.” Narcissa’s soft whisper instantly had my body hardening as I squinted an eye open to look down at a very flushed Narc. Not in the frustrated way, either. No, she literally looked like she was about to pass out.

I arched a brow and looked to where Declan was wrapped around her waist tightly, gripping her hard enough that she couldn't move her legs, and my brother had his arms locked around her shoulders with his head buried in her neck. I could have laughed at the entire scene, but with how red her face was, I was actually fairly concerned she would pass out.

Slowly, removing each of their arms from her, I had pulled her out of their grasp and onto me, her exhale of relief making me chuckle. Quiet enough not to wake them, though. I didn't get a lot of time alone with Narc.

“We need to get up,” she whispered, rubbing her eyes.

I looked at the clock, reading seven a.m. and knowing that after portaling those bodies in and out of town all day... Well, I'd gotten maybe only two hours of sleep so far.

“Why?” I could literally feel my eyes closing.

“My grandma wants to hold a memorial service at eleven. She just messaged me,” she whispered, nodding towards her phone. Closing my eyes, I grunted and swung myself off the bed, holding her to me as I walked towards the bathroom.

“What are you doing?” she asked, her lips pulling up into a smile.

“Shower.” I nearly grunted as I turned on the water, the steam billowing out as I slowly stripped off her oversized shirt. A groan left me as I slid her panties down her legs and let my gaze eat up every inch of her perfect golden body.

“You are so perfect.” She let out a small laugh, stepping into the shower. I ran a hand over my hard length, unable to stop myself, before pushing off my boxers and following her. I nearly groaned as her eyes ran down me and widened on my cock. Not that I blamed her—it was pointing right the fuck at her.

“How did that fit inside of me?” she questioned, offering me a confused look as I barked out a laugh and stepped closer to her, caging her against the tile wall.

“Want to see?” I teased, half messing with her as my one hand grasped her hip before I dipped a finger against her tight pussy. I let out a low sound as her eyes fluttered, a flush appearing on her face as I realized just how fucking wet she was.

“Fuck, you do want to see,” I snarled as she nodded, her lips brushing against mine. I seared our lips together and lifted her under the thighs, fitting her smaller frame between the shower wall and my own. I really hoped she was fucking ready, because I needed to be inside of her yesterday.

“Please, Alaric?” she whispered as I brought my lips down to her neck, sucking hard as I lowered her down onto my length. Holy fuck. How the hell was she so tight? Her soft moan as she adjusted to my size and the way she dug her nails into my shoulders had my cock pulsing inside of her. If I wasn’t careful, this woman would have me coming in goddamn minutes.

Pulling out and slamming back in, deep and slow, I pierced the side of her neck with my fangs as Narc let out a small cry. She squeezed around me as I felt her milk out her first climax, rolling through her at a hot, languid pace as I continued to move slow and deep, wanting her to feel every fucking inch of me. I wanted her to be fucking shaped to my cock, and the feeling only intensified as I drank from her.

God. She tasted so goddamn good. I pulled back, meeting her lips, and when she bit down on my lip in a slightly feral move, I couldn't help that I began to pound into her faster.

“Faster, please,” she whimpered as I growled her name, licking the blood from her neck as I fucked her into the tile wall, the old walls of the

house creaking in protest. Oh well.

“Oh shit,” I nearly choked out, feeling her cry out her release around me, her breasts arching against me as I bit into her neck once again. All it fucking took was her coming on my cock for me to lose it as I slammed home a few more times, my release filling up her tight little cunt without my goddamn permission.

I swear, the woman had complete fucking control of my body.

“That was a fucking fantastic way to wake up,” she breathed, offering me a sleepy smile as I kissed her. Needing her to taste her blood on my lips.

I planned on starting every fucking day just like this.

“**A**laric.” Narcissa’s soft voice had me looking down at her as I immediately released her hip, realizing I had probably been holding it far too tightly. She just offered me a small knowing smile, turning back to her grandmother and the others waiting to talk to her. Fuck. I needed sleep and maybe to fuck Narc again—you know, just to really make sure I slept the entire night through. I frowned, wondering how she was doing with so little sleep. I didn’t like that at all.

Still. I knew this memorial service had been a good idea. I could see the admiration that everyone had of Narcissa, and any tension that had been there before was gone. Wasn’t that always the goddamn case though? It was easy to blame those in charge in a crisis and love them when not. Still, I could see a thread of respect that hadn’t fully been there before, one that she fully deserved.

Sometimes it took a crisis to show what type of leader someone was. Narc had handled the chaos of this situation amazingly, and I reminded myself to tell her that, because I wasn’t positive she was being told enough.

As I looked around, I found where her three fathers were sitting near the back of the space. They appeared to be talking to an empty chair facing them, but it was clear that Narcissa’s mother was in attendance.

I still honestly wasn’t sure what to think about the weird bastards that were her fathers. I didn’t dislike them, but I also didn’t trust them with our girl. I was going to follow her lead on this, but I swear if they stepped out of fucking line or caused her any pain, they would be out of her life immediately. Until then, if she was interested in mending the relationship, then I was in support of it. After all, it seemed as though their absence was

far less about them not wanting to be in her life and more about their domestic issues.

Honestly, I'd never given much thought to being a father. If that ever did happen, though? I would make sure to be the husband and father to our children that Narc deserved.

As Narcissa slowly handed out small folded notes after each conversation, I could see the surprise, emotions, and more than that—joy—on the recipients' faces. Apparently, many of those who had died were in attendance today, so Narc had come up with the adorable idea for them to tell her what to write in a note to their loved ones. A note of closure. Honestly, I knew she would hate it if I called it perfect, thoughtful, or adorable, but fuck if it wasn't the cutest shit she'd ever come up with.

I could see the healing it was allowing them as Narcissa became the bridge between their loss and their future. Considering the woman was amazing, it didn't surprise me that she so naturally filled that role.

One of the more surprising guests that had shown up today had actually been Rickard. I'd been so fucking furious at his presence at first. My instinct to rip out his goddamn throat was ridiculously strong. Raphael had actually shifted, and I wondered if we were going to have a goddamn blowout at a memorial service. Then the alpha had bent his head in submission, kneeling in front of her and apologizing profusely for his actions, despite it really not being his fault. I still hated him... although he seemed a bit more like Lucas now that he was himself.

I could tell that Lucas was embarrassed, so he had quickly ushered him away, and for the past hour, following the memorial service where Narc's grandmother had spoken, people had slowly been filing out. I knew some individuals were going to Declan's bar to drink, but I only had one goal right now, and it had absolutely nothing to do with drinking. Well, unless you counted Narcissa's blood.

No, we had a plan for tonight, and I would be damned if anything got in the way of that. Even sleep, which was extremely surprising considering how tired I could see we all were.

"Honey." Her grandmother's voice had me cueing into their conversation. "I think your mom has been waiting to talk to you."

I saw Narc tense slightly before nodding. Her voice was quiet as she examined her grandmother's expression, all of us pretending to give them privacy. As if I would ever give the woman privacy ever again in her entire

life.

“Why didn’t you say anything, ever?” Valid question.

I saw pain hit her grandmother’s face as she intertwined their fingers. “There were so many times I wanted to, honey. I was just so worried that they would cause you the same pain that they caused your mom. I kept putting it off, and at some point, I knew you would find out, but I wasn’t completely in disagreement with your mother at the time. The men over there were very different people when the lot of them got together. Nothing like your boys. Much more irresponsible. I worried about the impact they would have had on your life. Sure, not having a father was bad, but I have had a shitty father before... and that didn’t make my life any better.”

I almost nodded in agreement with her analysis, because my parents had been fairly absent at best. Of course, I don’t think any secrets should have been kept from Narcissa, but it wasn’t difficult to understand their reasoning. Sometimes people made the stupidest decisions in an effort to protect the people they love.

“I understand.” She nodded, circling her arm around her grandma before turning back towards the empty chair and her fathers. All of them seemed to be waiting for her, so as Narcissa made her way over there, I ran a hand through my hair, nervous about not following.

“I’m assuming Narcissa is going to be moving soon?” her grandmother asked. Abel nodded from where he stood next to me, shifting the boy from yesterday to his other side as he let out a small snore.

Luckily, when we had arrived here today, not only had her grandmother informed us that Benjamin was feeling better, but that he was in fact awake. Something that I easily could tell by the large green-eyed boy that had been clinging to her upon arrival. Raphael and Dorian had never returned that night, staying with him, and I wasn’t positive whether Benjamin was his real name or they had chosen it, but I could see the attachment already being made between Narcissa and the little boy. He had sat on her lap throughout the entire memorial service, and even now, while he was sleeping, his hand was clutching onto my brother’s shirt as if he was afraid of being left. My brow furrowed, hating that he felt that way.

Honestly, until Narcissa, I hadn’t considered having kids, but seeing her with Benjamin was putting ideas in my head.

“Yes,” I agreed and then looked over at her, finally asking, “Would you be upset if I sent moving trucks over there as soon as an hour or two from

now?”

Her grandmother broke into laughter and shook her head. “No. I would be completely unsurprised. I was planning on heading back now as it is.”

Well, that makes shit easier, because the trucks were already headed over there.

“It seems a bit unreal that all of this is finally over,” Abel said as she walked away, making me nod. It was over. But the start of us was just beginning.

CHAPTER 12

NARCISSA



“**W**here are we going?!” I yelled over the wind.

Declan just offered me a wicked grin while leaning forward on the bike, my arms locking around him, loving the feel of his leather jacket against me. Honestly, I think the man just knew me really fucking well, because this—this is exactly what I needed after all of the emotions associated with the memorial service. And the talking and attempting to mend things with my mother, promising we were going to try to start fresh. It was just a lot at once, and while I was very much about trying out this emotional communication thing... Rome wasn't built in a day, right?

The open, wet roads with just my sexy demigod of luck was a perfect palate cleanser from all of that. Plus, as my hands slid underneath his shirt, I found myself running my fingers over his hard abs, making him let out a low groan.

I nibbled my lip, wondering if I would be able to convince him to pull over since we were in the middle of nowhere. Not that I wouldn't mind waiting until we got back to the house, but the vibrations from sitting on the back of his motorcycle had everything inside of me heating. I couldn't lie, I'd always wanted to fuck on or near my motorcycle. And well, if it couldn't be mine, I would one hundred percent be okay with his. His sexy expensive bike

with a clover on the goddamn side of it.

God, I loved this man.

“Careful, lass,” he growled over his shoulder as my hand ran down the material of his dark jeans, my eyes widening at just how goddamn hard he was. I barely had skimmed over his jean-covered erection before he was pulling the bike to a complete stop. Oops. Guess he was a bit more on edge than I realized.

“Declan!” I let out a small surprised noise as he lifted me up from behind him and placed me on his large lap so that I was straddling the massive man on his motorcycle, my face flushed with a need that had been growing for far too long now.

“I told you to be careful,” he mused, a low rumble breaking from his throat as his one hand wrapped around the back of my neck and the other grabbed at my hip, pulling me flush against him. I let out a small needy sound as my hips rolled naturally against his hard length, absolutely loving the feral sound that broke from his throat.

“Please, Declan.” I nearly was begging. “I need you. I love you and I really fucking need you.” Honestly, I think the more I had sex, the more turned on I got. Because right now I was fucking drenched, and *god* did I need him.

“Turn around,” he demanded sharply, his eyes sparking with an almost electric energy. I turned, immediately pushing myself flush with his hardness, his teeth biting down on my neck in a move that was far more animalistic than I could have imagined.

“Lass,” his voice was dark and rough, “how wet are you? I want to pound the fuck into you, but I don’t want to hurt you.”

“Pretty fucking wet,” I whispered on a small moan as he pushed up my dress, his fingers running up my thighs to my small black thong, a low growl breaking from his throat. The rain that had been falling the past few minutes had soaked our clothes, but somehow it made all of this so much dirtier. I loved romantic fucking moments, but this was hot as hell, and my breaking point on waiting had officially been met.

“This is *all* that’s been blocking me from claiming your sweet ass all day?” he snarled, snapping the material as I squeaked, surprised at his feral edge. Declan was so chill, but as the sky thundered above us I realized all the passion he had tried to keep hidden from me.

“Declan,” I moaned as his hot, rough fingers grazed my wet pussy, my

eyes fluttering shut as he cursed, sliding one finger inside of me while rolling my clit with his thumb, my head falling back against his chest to look up at him. His lips were demanding as he kissed me again, making me feel as though this was some dream.

“I want you to come for me, lass,” he demanded sharply. “I want you to come on my hand like a good girl before I fuck you raw, until you are screaming my name so hard, they hear it back home.” Oh sweet fuck.

I cried out his name as I climaxed, tightening around him. His dirty words had my breath escaping me as he bit down gently on my shoulder, my entire body squeezing around his fingers, a shaking sensation rolling over me.

“Fuck I need you,” Declan snarled, standing up and pulling me with him so that I was leaning forward, my hands wrapped around the handlebars and my back arched so that my ass was pressed right against him. I could feel how thick and hard he was, and as he twisted my hair tightly, I let out a small moan of his name, my wet heat feeling far too empty right now. I could feel my need for him intensifying tenfold.

“Goddamn it, you are so fucking sexy,” he said nearly to himself as I looked back at him and found his jeans undone, his hard and—holy shit—large cock in his hand as his vibrant eyes met mine, coming up from my ass.

“Tell me you want me to fill this tight pussy up, Narc.” He tugged my chin forward, kissing me hard as if trying to convince me. Something he totally didn’t need to do since I was one hundred percent on board.

“Please,” I begged.

Rain began to fall on us harder as his hot, hard length pressed right against my opening before sliding home. My mouth opened as fire seemed to explode through me, a thunderous energy seeming to build between our magic and bodies.

“Holy fuck, Declan, you’re huge.”

He chuckled dangerously as he finally slammed completely home, balls deep, making my eyes roll up in my head. My back arched as his fingers tightened on my waist, my entire physical being begging for this man to fuck me like he was goddamn mating me. I wanted him hard and fast, and he delivered, his hips colliding with mine again and again. I cried out, tears of pleasure welling in my eyes as the sound of our skin hitting filled the space.

His magic tightened around me as I felt myself begin to shake, leaning forward and pushing my ass back even more. I moaned out in relief as he

gripped my ass hard, his hand then coming around to play with my clit, making my thighs begin to tremble. My entire head was in a delicious haze, and I let go of everything going on. I let go of all the previous stress and just gave myself to him fully. As if recognizing it, he went harder, pulling me further against him so that I felt like we were being melded into one.

“You. Feel. So. Fucking. Good.” Declan bit down on my ear as I felt another climax rearing up, his pace growing faster and more reckless.

“I love you,” I gasped out as I tumbled over my peak, my orgasm creating a nuclear explosion. I let out a small surprised sound as he literally flipped me over, sliding back inside of me as he fucked me on the bike, my chest arching into his as his eyes flashed between gold and green, my hands gripping his hair tight enough he groaned.

“I’m going to come, lass,” he panted as I found myself arching into him, urging him deeper as he finally let out a roar of my name, his climax hitting him as lightning and thunder cracked in the sky, making the moment feel that more unearthly.

Holy hell.

“You can say that again,” he murmured, his head tucked against my neck as I squeezed my legs around him, loving how deep he was buried inside of me. I let out a small laugh as it began storming, and Declan pulled away slightly, his toned stomach contracting as he pulled out, his hard length making me shiver.

“We made a storm baby,” he winked as I let out a laugh. Because yes, yes we did.

“We are going to be stuck in this storm if we don’t get out of here,” I teased, not in any rush, because frankly I would stay out in the rain with him any day.

His hand came up to my jaw, and his kiss was soft this time. “I love you so goddamn much, Narcissa.”

Blushing, I followed him up in our kiss, my dress falling back into place as he held me against him, my heart settling as I felt everything, all my connections, fall into place. I held tightly onto him as he just held me back for a few minutes, both of us completely absorbing one another’s affection. I had slowly caught on to the fact that Declan was a total goddamn softie cuddler, and it was possibly one of the million favorite things I loved about him.

“We really should get back,” he chuckled. “They are going to kill me.”

“Why?” I asked, alarmed.

He just offered me a quick smile as he settled me back on the bike, making sure I was wearing his jacket. Honestly, it was a struggle to not fall asleep on our way home, but the curiosity of what he meant had me staying awake despite the subtle exhaustion. Or not so subtle.

As we pulled up to the house, my eyes ran down the street to where I could see the media crowding the mayor’s home, covering the investigation going on there. More than that though, I could see my grandma playing on the porch with Benjamin. Little adorable Ben. His bright blonde hair was far more golden than it had been when he was covered in dirt, and he was looking far healthier. His small amount of speech was seemingly normal for his age, but he was obviously a fairly quiet kid. I didn’t blame him—I wouldn’t know what the fuck to do if I’d been attacked like he had. My chest warmed, knowing that wherever he ended up, he’d always be part of this family.

As I reached the foyer of the house, my eyes widened as a small, excited squeak came from my lips. Have you ever had a moment that you had only dreamed of come true? That was how I felt in this moment, my heart warming as love wrapped tightly around my chest, making me feel as though I was floating.

Raphael’s arms wrapped around me almost immediately, Declan closing the door behind us. My mate’s strong presence made me feel a bit more grounded in the room that was completely filled with candles and black roses, like some stunning gothic funeral. Which I, of course, loved. My eyes met his, having a feeling what this was about but letting myself completely absorb it. Living in the moment.

“I love you so much, baby.”

“I love you more.” I pressed my lips to his briefly as I stepped fully into the room, Alaric grabbing my hand and pressing a kiss to it. Abel’s arm wrapped around my waist from behind, both of them making me feel like I was dangerously on the edge of tearing up. I wasn’t even going to try to be tough right now. I was surrounded by candles, flowers, and the six men I loved.

“Narc,” Abel’s voice was soft as I looked up at him, “we’ve known since the day we met you that you were our soulmate.” I blushed at realizing that had been the connection between us. The connection that had grown every single day and was further enhanced by our emotions that were filled with so

much depth and love that I wasn't positive how I had gone so long without telling them.

"But more than that," Alaric's voice was gruff, trying to get his words out. "You are the woman that we want to spend the rest of our lives with."

Oh my lanta.

"You know how much I love both of you," I whispered, looking both of them in the eye before smiling slightly and adding, "Plus, it would be pretty hard to get rid of me now."

Alaric chuckled, making me smile further as Dorian, clearly impatient, grabbed my hand gently, pulling me towards him. Both twins offered him a look, but I didn't mind. I leaned into him, his words quiet and sincere.

"Narcissa," he began, his voice laden with emotion, "you are the only woman I have met in my entire existence that has made me feel this alive and this passionate about things I normally wouldn't have cared about. But more than that, you are the only woman that has loved me for me. It is a feeling that I can only hope to replicate for you, because I am goddamn obsessed with you. I love you so much, I hope you realize that."

"I love you, Dorian. I have since the first day I met your crazy ass," I teased softly, making him chuckle.

Finally, my eyes landed on Zachariah. The man looked almost nervous as Declan offered me a cheeky grin and a wink. Yeah, he totally saw the nerves also. I walked up to the man, tilting my head back as the voodoo priest kept one hand behind his back, the other cupping my jaw.

"You're ours," he said softly, his eyes lighting up with a possessiveness I loved. "Forever."

"I love you," I murmured softly as his eyes sparked. My eyes were welling with tears at the overwhelming emotions washing over me like unforgiving waves.

"I love you, little rose. So goddamn much." A meow had me laughing as finally Zachariah brought his other hand around, revealing the surprise.

"Oh my god!" I let out a small squeal of delight, tears on my face as I continued to smile so hard my cheeks were hurting. "Shadow, you look so adorable! I lied, we can't fight this cute syndrome. Look at you."

Zachariah muttered a curse as the others chuckled, my hand reaching out to gently pull the black ribbon on my kitten's neck, revealing a stunning black diamond ring that felt heavy and... holy shit, it was huge!

"Holy shit," I murmured, looking at it.

“We had some changes made.” Zachairah slowly slid the ring onto my finger, my hand shaking slightly. Or maybe his were as Shadow climbed on his shoulder. I loved that I didn’t even have to answer for them to know my answer. Of course it was a goddamn yes.

“It’s perfect,” I whispered lovingly. The massive center square-cut black diamond had three large circular diamonds on either side, making it not only flashy as hell but totally badass. I looked at all of them, fanning my eyes slightly as I tried to stop smiling, which was fucking impossible.

“I love you guys. Damn it, stop making me cry.”

“So that’s a yes?” Declan chuckled as I offered him a sassy look, pulling Shadow to my chest.

“Of course it’s a yes,” I sniffed. “You guys are totally ruining my badass reputation, but it’s worth it because I love you so much.”

They laughed as the sudden sound of a truck pulling up had me arching a brow curiously, Declan opening the door so I could see out the front. Raphael barked out a laugh as Alaric tossed me a slightly embarrassed look.

“What’s that?” I asked curiously.

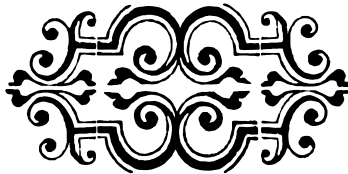
“Moving truck,” he grunted. Oh my.

I barked out a laugh, because that right there, folks, was love. There had never really been a question on whether I would say yes to my boys.

They were my everything.

CHAPTER 13

DECLAN



October 31st...

For the first time in my life, I was legitimately nervous.

Running a hand over my chest, I looked around Narc's grandmother's sizable garden and backyard. The entire place was filled with dark decor, and individuals from the supernatural community, including our families, were milling about before the ceremony. I swallowed, trying to distract myself from that thought. I really didn't want to fuck this up.

Savannah, my cousin, offered me a wave from her place in the third row on our side. She looked extremely awkward, but luckily her wife had decided to come into town with her for the celebration. Honestly, most of my family had either passed away over time or I stayed out of contact with them, but Savannah had always been somewhat of an exception. In fact, the only reason I'd met her was because when she was around ten, she tried a summoning spell for her ancestors... and I woke up, crashing onto her floor, alarmed with the entire situation. Following that, though, I'd always kept in touch, feeling like it was good to have some type of family relationship, even if it wasn't much.

Although, I very much had a family now.

Despite that thought and having lived with everyone for several months now, I found myself nervous with really no good goddamn reason except my fear of having bad luck on the one day that meant the fucking world to me. My eyes moved skyward, a low rumble making me nearly curse. Don't get me wrong, I knew it was 'lucky' for it to rain on your wedding day, but I

didn't want anything to ruin all the hard work that Narcissa had put into this event.

She had already said yes. Why was I so nervous?

The collar of my suit felt tight, and I pulled on it as I tried to get my magic to calm down. But it seemed almost damn near hyper at the idea of officially being claimed publicly by our girl. Which was already a bloody thing, so I had no idea why it was acting up. Running a hand through my hair, I looked at Zachariah, his arched brow letting me know that he could tell I was freaking out a bit.

"You need to relax," Zachariah mused as Raphael turned slightly, offering me a concerned look.

"I just need to take a walk," I muttered, strolling down the aisle towards the house. I heard my friend chuckle behind me because he knew damn well where I was going, and I didn't feel bad in the least. Fuck. It was considered bad luck to see the bride before the wedding.

"Declan!" Narcissa's grandmother opened the back door and offered me a knowing look. "She's on the third door to your right."

I wasn't even going to ask how she knew where I was headed. Instead, I made my way over there, just needing to see the woman I loved so that I could assure myself that all of this was going to be okay. Grabbing the dark glass knob, I pulled it open, revealing Narcissa in all her perfection.

"Declan?" she asked, standing up with a small smile on her lips. I could hear her bridesmaids in the other room, but I didn't even give a fuck about that. I was across the room and searing my lips to hers needily as she let out a surprised sound, clutching onto me. When I pulled back, I cupped her jaw and let out an exhale, so fucking thrilled to see her.

"I thought you weren't supposed to see me before the wedding," she teased, pressing her forehead to mine. "Isn't that bad luck?"

I smirked and then spoke quietly. "I just needed to see you before all of this. I was... fuck, I guess I was just nervous."

"About what?" she asked quietly, her large eyes painted in exquisite makeup that even I could appreciate. Currently, she was in her robe, not her dress, so maybe that made it less bad luck?

"Just messing this up," I muttered. "I love you so much, and I want this day to be fucking perfect. I never thought I would be getting married to begin with, so yeah, I'm just feeling all out of fucking sorts."

"Even if it started storming and everyone left, it would still be perfect,"

Narcissa promised, a sweet side of her seeping out. “I promise you, as long as I get to marry you, nothing can ruin today.”

“Okay,” I breathed out and pressed a soft kiss to her again before she stepped back.

“Go before they see you.” She let out a small almost-giggle as the voices from the other room grew louder. I seared another kiss to her and strolled out of the room feeling ten times fucking better than before.

And they said seeing the bride was bad fucking luck. I made my own luck, thank you very much.

“Everything good?” Zachariah asked as I came to stand next to him, adjusting my black suit and feeling far better than before. Mostly because I could taste the vanilla and mint flavor of Narcissa’s magic on my lips, making my chest settle as my nervousness disappeared.

The garden was growing more crowded as everyone began to take their seats. While Narcissa had explained the plan a million times to us, none of it compared to the masterpiece she and her grandmother had created for today. When we had proposed this previous summer, I’d wanted to get married almost right away, but when she started to look through wedding stuff, she came up with an idea that even I couldn’t deny was a good one. And in full effect? It was even better.

A Halloween-themed wedding. I loved that shite.

The large home stood tall against the gray skies as the fall foliage moved against the wind. The entire garden was filled with black decor, from the reception area near the house to this smaller section of the property that was set up for the ceremony.

The ceremony that would legally marry us in the eyes of the supernatural community.

Skulls decorated each table of the reception area, along with wax-dripping candles and velvet tablecloths. Ghosts, dressed up for the occasion and spelled to be seen, moved and found seats along with our many living guests. I think that Narc hadn’t even realized how exciting this opportunity would be for family members, being able to interact with their lost ones. It made the tone of this entire moment that much more exciting.

Honestly, the thing that shocked me the most was the amount of people that had shown up. There was in no way enough seats, but people stood around happily, seemingly thrilled just to be part of this. We had, however, reserved spots for our family members, which was really what mattered. At

least to me.

I wasn't surprised in the least to see Narcissa's fathers sitting with her mother, talking quietly as her aunt stood scowling off to the side. I honestly wasn't positive what the woman's problem was, but it didn't matter much to me. In the past few months, I had seen a lot of progress between Narc's mother and her, but things were still a bit tense. On the other hand, she got along fucking great with her fathers, who came up from the demonic realm at least every other weekend to visit her. I had to admit, they were growing on me as well, despite their overall petty bullshit between them.

My eyes moved to the house, wondering when Narc would make an appearance. If I had to assume, she was finishing getting ready with Mila and Elizabeth. Draco turned around in his seat, making me nearly smile because I very much understood being uncomfortable with not being able to see your girl. Like right now. I'd seen her seconds ago and I already needed to see her again.

"Do we think he's going to be able to do this?" Abel asked as Benjamin offered him a scowl, holding the ring box to his chest. Yes, he was the ring bearer or whatever, and for four years old, the kid totally had some steel to him. Although, if I had to guess, that had to do with a mix of the shifter blood running through his veins and all the time he'd spent with us. He'd been staying with Narc's grandmother, and we all considered the little guy to be part of the family.

"He'll be fine." I messed up Benjamin's hair as he smiled at me. He would be. I had specifically spelled him so that he wouldn't trip or anything like that.

As I looked at the other five men at my side, I realized that we really had become like family, and that familiarity was very much being showcased today with our 'real' families here. While Zachariah, Raphael, and I didn't have much of an adjustment, the twins and Dorian were obviously a bit on edge due to the amount of relatives that had shown up.

In the second row sat a man that was almost a damn near replica of Dorian, and on either side of him sat six women, twelve in total. It was very obvious that they were all together, and I had to admit, that shit was impressive. I would never want to be with anyone but Narc, but I could appreciate the fact that they all got along. Like *really* got along. As in they were flirting and almost kissing one another in public, something that was clearly embarrassing Dorian.

Then there were the twins' parents and stoic vampire family. When I said stoic, I literally meant sitting perfectly still and staring straight ahead, waiting for the ceremony to start. Honestly, it was a bit creepy, and it would probably do them some good to hang out with humans at some point in time.

The oddest part about them? During the rehearsal dinner last night, which had been family only, I had seen them interacting with Narcissa completely normally. While they were ice to her fire, they seemed to absolutely love her and dislike everyone else. Hell, I wasn't positive they even liked their own sons all that much. I mean, that's being fairly dramatic, but the point stood.

The most important part was that everyone showed up. Weddings could get messy, and it seemed this one was going to actually be pulled off. I was really hoping my magic continued to work with me here.

"Isn't it time yet?" Alaric grunted. I looked down at the watch I rarely wore, feeling very much as impatient as him. I didn't like having Narcissa out of our line of sight, but more than that, I was ready to marry the woman of my goddamn dreams.

Zachariah shifted, his eyes moving over a few people as they looked away nervously, making him roll his eyes. I didn't blame them completely. Until Narcissa brought him or I into town, we were more concepts instead of real people, so there was some healthy caution that was kept around us. Rightfully so.

Finally, after what felt like another million minutes but was in fact maybe five, the violinist began to play. I immediately looked towards the house, waiting to see Narcissa. Needing to see her.

My eyes scanned right over Mila and Elizabeth as they made their way towards the ceremony grounds. The witch that was marrying us stepped forward, and I found myself almost tapping my foot anxiously, wanting to see Narc.

Then I saw her, and any nerves I had completely vanished.

Narcissa was always, without a doubt, beautiful. But right now? Exquisite. It was the only word that came to mind as my chest squeezed and cock hardened at the sight of her in a fucking wedding gown. Not a traditional one either. No, this wedding gown was custom-made for Narc's hot little body and her badass personality.

The black bodice laced up like a corset and pressed against her golden skin, emphasizing her tiny waist. The large skirt that fell around her looked almost cloud-like in a mixture of black and greys that matched the floating

sleeves. She had said it was 'organza' material, and fuck if I knew what that meant, but it was perfect on her. She looked almost unreal. Gasps echoed through the space as she offered us a cheeky smile, the slight thud of her combat boots on the ground making me smile.

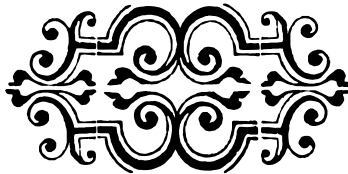
God I loved this woman.

"Still nervous?" Zachariah mused, not looking away from her for even a second. Couldn't blame him.

"No. Never been more sure about something in my life."

EPILOGUE

ABEL



2 Years Later...

I let out a small yawn, squinting an eye open as Nacrissa's soft laughter echoed across the empty beach and reached my ears. From where I was, underneath one of the large palm trees stretched out on a beach chair, I spotted Narcissa kneeling in the sand. Fucking hell. I was so glad we had gone with a private beach and property this time around.

We had made that mistake the first time around on our honeymoon, when we had nearly gotten kicked out of a Jamaican luxury resort for fucking on the beach. Something she was nearly doing with Dorian right now. Nearly, as in he kept trying to untie the laces of her tiny gold bikini as she avoided him. Alaric sat up next to me, watching her as she ran towards the water.

How much did you want to bet he was unhappy with the space between us and her?

"She should be careful," he grumbled and laid back down. Grumpy motherfucker.

Every October since getting married, we made our way somewhere warm, and this time we were in the Mediterranean. Specifically in Greece, on a small, isolated island that we were renting for the week. Other than the staff, it was just us, which allowed Narcissa to walk around half-naked most of the time without us acting like possessive idiots.

We had needed this week, and even though we'd only been here two days, I could already feel myself relaxing. Ever since we'd gotten married, it had seemed that things had really taken off in New Orleans, and the already

very popular tourism sector only grew. While none of us had the need to work, we spent most of the time helping Narcissa out when it came to handling everything that came along with being Queen.

She had made a point of even purchasing the meeting space that we usually used, turning it into an unofficial office. I usually had to drag her away from the damn property to get her to relax, because she had become more and more invested in the supernatural community the past two years. Something she should be proud of, considering all the shit she had accomplished. Sure, there were still assholes in the community, but she handled them with such ease that it sort of gave them no ammunition.

Most recently, we had been working on a large foster system for supernatural children that either were in terrible situations or homeless, giving them homes until they finished school or found a more permanent pack or community. Watching her deal with kids on a daily basis had been inspiring, if we were being honest... but it had also started the thought process of having our own kids.

A concept that as of recently had sort of possessed me. I had no idea why, and maybe it was just a very primal instinct, but I fucking wanted to see her pregnant with my kid. I wanted to fill her tight body up with so much cum that a few months from now, everyone would be well fucking aware of who she loved. Not that they weren't already. Plus, the bite marks I left on her neck were fairly fucking noticeable.

Examining Narcissa's frame, I tilted my head and smiled slightly, wondering if I could possibly be right about what I was seeing. I turned to Alaric, my twin looking up from the financial analysis of one of our holdings to momentarily raise a brow at me. Probably wondering why I had such a smug look on my face.

You would be smug too if you'd managed to knock your wife up as fast as we had.

Of course, I wasn't absolutely positive. Nor did I know if any of the other men had noticed, but I knew Narcissa's body top to bottom and usually could tell when a change had occurred. In the past two years she had complained about putting on weight—not that you could fucking tell—but I still didn't think that was what I was noticing.

I narrowed my eyes, glad to have supernatural hearing and vision as I realized her lower abdomen had a slight near-bump to it. Was that possible? I arched a brow, trying to think about when she had last had her period. I

mean, I sure as fuck remembered our conversation about kids, and that had been... almost eight weeks ago?

Walking into our large attached en suite, I stopped completely, finding my stunning wife standing at the bathroom counter putting on makeup. Her curvy body was only covered in a tiny pair of black lace panties and a bra that I had the sudden urge to destroy.

Well now I sure as fuck didn't want to go to this meeting tonight.

"Are you sure we can't push the meeting?" I asked, coming up behind her, my fingers running down her soft skin as she let out a small moan, biting down on her red lip. My lips traced her neck, and I had a sudden urge to bite down on her neck and turn her into a melted pool of satisfaction before bending her over this counter and fucking her.

I also didn't want her to miss this meeting if she was really set on it.

"It will only last a little bit. They are new to town, we need to say something," she explained softly, leaning back into me.

"Fine," I growled, nipping her shoulder as she let out a small squeak. I grumbled to myself as I walked to the bathroom door, planning to get dressed.

"Oh, Abel?" Narcissa grinned as I turned back, hopeful she'd changed her mind.

"Tonight," she winked, brushing past me. "Plus, I stopped taking the pill yesterday."

My brain stuttered as a grin broke across my face. Fuck yes. We'd been talking about it for a few weeks now and had decided we wanted to start trying. Holy shit, the others... were totally going to use this as an excuse to fuck her twenty-four seven. I wasn't any less guilty. I watched her getting ready, already planning how I was going to ravage her the minute we got home.

How I was going to knock her up tonight.

I would never know if we actually got her knocked up that night, but fuck I hoped so. Was I crazy, or had she really not had her period last month? I mean, I obsessively tracked all things Narc, and I was almost damn positive

she hadn't.

"Is she..." Alaric trailed off, looking slightly confused, probably noticing the slight change.

"Pregnant?" I mused as Narcissa ran into the water, letting out a high-pitched scream as Raphael lunged for her, Dorian waiting to catch her on the other side. I inhaled, trying to temper the urge to tell them to be careful with her—because that was totally the fastest way to get my dick cut off. Narcissa, even pregnant, would not want to be viewed as breakable.

"Is that why she's been taking prenatal vitamins? I assumed, but I also knew she had started taking them when we began trying." Zachariah appeared, obviously caught up in our conversation, holding a new bottle of sunscreen. Narcissa had gotten a sunburn last time we were in the tropics—an extremely light one, mind you—and since then he had been bound and determined to never let it happen again. Damn near obsessed with it.

"Are you serious?" Declan popped his head up, looking half asleep. I had honestly totally forgotten he'd fallen asleep on the sand in front of us. That was actually pretty fucking funny.

"I bet she knows already." I chuckled and then thought back to her not drinking any alcohol, which was odd for Narcissa, because our girl loved her beer. Then again, since we'd been trying, she had been trying to cut back on all of that.

"I'm going to spank her ass for not telling us," Alaric sang under his breath, looking pleased. Considering that we took Narcissa together half the time, I wasn't going to complain about his plan.

A small part of me craved to go home already. Not that I didn't love it here, but I liked our massive house and New Orleans' familiar weather. After moving in, Narcissa had really made it a home, and now anywhere else, even a private island, felt like a cheap replacement.

"Help!" she screamed, her laughter making me smile as she nearly tossed herself into Zachariah's arms.

"Give her to me," Dorian demanded as Narcissa wiggled down and hid behind us, tossing him a cute smile. I turned my head up and offered her a look, and she turned those large gold eyes on me, making my chest squeeze happily.

"Sweetheart?" I asked as she leaned closer curiously. "Have you taken a pregnancy test yet?"

Instantly I knew she had, her ears turning bright red and a smile breaking

out on her face. “Damn it. I can’t keep anything from you. I promise I was going to say something! I only found out yesterday.”

Joy hit me straight in the chest as the reality of what she was saying seemed to permeate the group. Holy fuck.

Narcissa was pregnant.

“Totally punishment worthy,” Dorian declared as Narcissa sprinted towards the house. My eyes tracked her long legs and ass as my cock pulsed painfully. I stood and began walking towards the house.

“Where are you going?”

Besides kissing the fuck out of my wife who was pregnant with our first child?

“If she wasn’t pregnant before, she sure as hell is about to be.”

Apparently that was funny, but I was one hundred percent serious.

T *he End...continue reading past the glossary for a bonus epilogue!*

GLOSSARY

1. *lass you look stoehnin.* - lass you look stunning.
2. *I've never been ter wan av dees* - I've never been to one of these.
3. *Happy graduashun, lass* - Happy graduation, lass.
4. *'Oweya feelin', lass?* - How are you feeling, lass?
5. *De sprog doesn't 'av anyone* - The kid doesn't have anyone.

BONUS EPILOGUE

NARCISSA

“Mom!” Cleo’s voice echoed through our house, causing me to look up from where I’d been sorting through jewelry for today. Slipping in my third piercing in each ear, I watched as my daughter stormed furiously into the room, looking very much the angsty teenager. One I loved, but she was going through a phase to say the least.

“What’s wrong honey?” I asked curiously, looking over her outfit and almost smiling. Mostly because we were dressed very similarly. Something that she would be absolutely annoyed with if I brought it up, I’m sure. Damn, had I been this cranky at eighteen? I hadn’t thought I was, but maybe I just hid it better.

“What’s wrong?” she demanded, her large, purple eyes wide with an incredulous expression as she ran an anxious hand through her emerald-colored hair. Cleo had so many qualities of her fathers in personality, but looks-wise, I liked to think she mostly resembled me.

Because I thought she was adorable. Did that mean I thought I was adorable? I mean, sure, I was pretty fucking adorable.

“Mhmm,” I nodded, amused at her expression.

“Benjamin and Coal are my issue!” she snarled, her temper flaring.

I could feel her necromancer magic swirling through the space as I moved closer, squeezing her arms and hoping she would calm down. We had always assumed there could only be two necromancers in the family at a time, but something having to do with my demonic magic had messed that up, because Cleo was very much both, and she had quite a few other strong magical qualities.

“What did they do?” I asked curiously. Their names didn’t surprise me in

the least, if we were being honest. Considering the party had started only moments ago—well, the friend part of it—this seemed about correct timing.

“They are scaring away half the guys from our class,” she explained. “Olive and I keep trying to talk to them—well mostly me, you know how Olive is. But they keep scaring them away. Coal is doing that weird thing where he growls, and Ben’s just being a cranky bastard.

Olive was no doubt finding all of this hilarious like her mother, Elizabeth, would. In fact, if I had to assume, Olive was in support of how Benjamin and Coal were acting, because everyone was well aware of why they were acting that way. I mean, except for my husbands, who refused to accept the situation at hand. Stubborn bastards.

“And did you know they are planning to come to campus with me? Why? I mean, it’s an apartment slightly off campus, but the entire reason for me going is space!”

Oh man. My smile grew as I tried to finish getting ready, wanting to watch this horse and pony show. I know, it sounded terrible, but after all this time, it was pretty funny.

Benjamin had ended up staying with my grandma until nearly eight, when he had been adopted by a family in Lucas’s pack through the foster program we had set up. He was almost like a son in some ways, but I also knew he wanted to be my son-in-law in not that far of a distant future.

From the day Cleo had been born, Benjamin had been absurdly protective over her. I remember I had come to pick her up from my grandma’s house—she had been around six months—and I’d found Benjamin curled up next to the carrier in wolf form. When I’d tried to take her, he snarled until he realized it was me. Then he’d whimpered until I put her back down, so we had made sure to always let them visit one another, because apparently he started to ‘sulk’ if not. At least, that was my grandma’s understanding of it. Benjamin came around a lot after that, and throughout most of their childhood they had been attached at the hip.

Things had very much changed though. As in, he was in love with her, and I was positive she didn’t realize it. I mean, at least he wasn’t alone in his crush. Coal, Mila and Draco’s son, was in her class in school and nearly as bad, if not ten times worse.

“What is their reasoning?” I asked curiously.

“To keep an eye on me!” she exclaimed.

“And that bothers you?” I pressed as she blushed.

“I mean, yes,” she frowned. “Shouldn’t it? They are treating me like a kid.”

I inhaled and fixed her with a look. “Cleo. I want you to really think about this.”

“I get what you are implying, but that’s impossible,” she argued, dismissively waving me off.

Suddenly, my mother appeared, standing next to my daughter as my little spawn looked up at her curiously.

“Why is it impossible?” she asked.

“I mean...” Cleo’s cheeks turned red. “For one, have you seen them? They are like seven goddamn feet tall and total hotties.” I barked out a laugh at that as she continued. “Just trust me, they see me as an annoying little sister.”

Another spirit appeared suddenly, not one I recognized, and offered all of us a shy look before addressing my daughter. She was younger, maybe in her mid-twenties.

“Your Highness, you may want to get down there. Coal is hitting a boy and saying something about ‘Cleo’ being his... so, yeah.”

My daughter’s mouth popped open as my own mother laughed, the random spirit disappearing. I shook my head as I heard Cleo yelling for Coal to stop, which was useless since he was a hellhound and she was his mate. But I would let her figure that out.

“I was going to tell her myself,” my mom whispered, casting me a glance, “but it felt more authentic coming from a random spirit that hangs around here.”

I nodded in approval as we came to the back door. My eyes fell on Raphael’s expression as he arched a brow at Coal being pulled away by Benjamin, none of the parents even bothering to get involved.

It happened at every single party.

Suddenly, music began blasting and the mood lifted, sort of fixing the moment unintentionally. I grinned at the spirits playing the music and looked around my yard, filled with family, friends, the dead, and the not so dead.

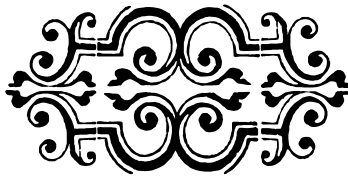
I guess the dead were pretty cool after all.

*Want more of a sneak peek of Cleo’s story? Check out the **bonus scene** on the next page.*

EXCLUSIVE BONUS

SCENE

CLEO



How did I keep getting myself into these situations?

At this point, I had to be close to winning an award or something for ‘how much trouble Cleo could land herself in this week.’ I muttered an annoyed curse, shimmying along the ledge that I had just climbed onto, the shouting from inside of the frat house growing louder as I mentally crossed my fingers, trying to summon some good luck.

I always wished I’d gotten more of my father’s luck magic, but it had yet to make any appearance in my life.

I closed the window I’d snuck out of tight enough that I hoped they wouldn’t look out here and find me. I hadn’t *wanted* to escape through a window and have to walk along a stone ledge three stories up to not get caught, but clearly tonight was just going to be one of those nights.

I was obviously off my game right now.

Finally reaching the metal fire escape, my hand closed around the stair rail as I climbed over it and onto a safer landing. I stilled as I heard the front door to the frat house bang open, sounds of anger filling the air. I knew they probably wouldn’t go looking into the alleyway...but you never knew.

They were particularly drunk and worked up tonight, which was understandable since it was the fourth time this month that we’d successfully stolen their flag and hung it in the middle of campus to showcase our victory. I mean...I didn’t feel bad at all, but they probably had more than a bit of hurt pride over the entire thing.

Oh well.

I would have to tell my mom about this one—she would see the humor in a bunch of college kids getting worked up about something so stupid. My dad's might also, but they were more than likely to worry about my safety. And considering I still wasn't at ground level or hidden from the 'threat,' I couldn't blame them for that thought process.

"What are you doing up here?"

I tensed, snapping my head to the side, only to feel a sense of relief at the spirit floating in mid-air, watching me curiously from a few feet away. She looked to be around my own age but wore a Victorian-era dress, making me think that she'd died quite some time ago.

If I had to guess, she was bored out of her mind and wondering what the future Queen of the Dead was doing, scaling buildings on the university campus. A fair question.

"Trying to avoid humans," I murmured. The silence that greeted me as the humans grew more distant convinced me it was safe to climb a floor down the fire escape before vaulting down onto the pavement. The ghost was unsurprisingly gone, probably bored after having gotten her answer.

My phone buzzed in my jeans and I slid the screen open, glad I'd dimmed it before. Olive had messaged me, a smug selfie of her drinking wine. What a freakin' bitch. You know, I never should have started this stupid truth or dare game with her, but between her and our other two friends, we'd become a sorority unto ourselves this past semester. Which meant that any time Olive and I got competitive, the other two cheered us on, hyping us up to do more and more dangerous, fun conquests.

Opening up my camera, I sent her a selfie with my middle finger up, the flag wrapped around my wrist. Then I quickly tucked it and the phone safely away.

I needed to get back to our apartment—*now*.

I wasn't as worried about the fraternity finding me, especially since they were mostly human, as I was of three *other* individuals. Ones I knew were looking for me. I had to resist the urge to give into my ability to completely disappear and phantomize to make it back to the apartment without being caught. That was cheating, according to my friends, who were no doubt waiting there for me. But it wasn't my fault that they didn't have those abilities!

Whatever, I was clearly going to need to make their next dare far more

crazy. Especially since Olive and I had each stolen the flag twice now.

Keeping my back pressed against the wall, I moved quietly towards the end of the alley. The busy street would allow me to get lost in the crowds, and I was thanking God that campus was in such a busy city like New Orleans. Sure, I may have picked it because it was close to home, but it also made it really easy to get away with shit.

Right as I neared my escape, a muscular arm caught around my waist. *Motherfucker*. I fought the urge to surge all my power into the body behind me.

“Dammit,” I groaned as the bastard literally lifted me up, turned me around, and threw me over his shoulder without a word. I grunted at the feel of his muscular shoulder against my stomach but refused to complain—that would only end up with him carrying me bridal style or something equally as ridiculous.

“I will send your ass back to the demonic realm,” I warned, trying to wiggle out of his grip. His hand tightened on the back of my thighs, my body lighting up under his touch. Unfortunately, my words were an empty threat, and he knew it.

I would never do that to Tattinger.

I wanted to though—I very much fucking wanted to.

“Ten minutes. You slipped out on me for ten minutes and you have an entire fucking fraternity searching for you. That is concerning, princess.”

“Don’t call me that,” I growled at the demon. Because my grandfather was the High King of Hell or some fancy title like that, I’d been assigned a bodyguard. Unfortunately for me, he was less interested in doing anything with my body and way more interested in making sure I had zero fun.

Did I mention I had a weird attraction towards him? Yeah, it so didn’t help with being annoyed with him most of the time.

I huffed as he suddenly put me down, and I scowled up the duplex we stood in front of, the distant echoes of partying telling me that I was once again going to have to listen to it from afar. I should be out celebrating what a badass job I’d done stealing this flag or getting drunk with the other kids my age. Or both.

I knew that wasn’t in the cards for me, though, not only because of my parents but because Tattinger wasn’t the only one who would step in to stop me—he just happened to be the one to do so now.

“I’m home!” I called out into the apartment, but rolled my eyes when I

realized that Olive and the other two were not there. Where the heck had they gone?

“Back to Olive’s parents’ house for the night. I think they were trying to avoid whatever you would dare them to do.” Tattinger threw himself onto the black velvet couch nearby, the door having been locked. The man liked to act like he was ridiculously relaxed, even putting a boot up onto the table, but I knew the truth.

Scowling, I crossed my arms and offered him a look that seemed to amuse him.

Then again, the man had one of those faces that seemed to always be in a permanent state of amusement, usually at my expense. His white hair was tugged back away from his face that featured nearly black eyes, and his lean, muscular body was dressed in all black, somehow looking absolutely lethal and effortless all at the same time.

It was ridiculous.

“I need to have some fun,” I pointed out.

“We have fun all the time,” he reasoned. “You, Coal, Benjamin, and I were just playing checkers yesterday and you said how fun it was.”

“I don’t mean that type of fun,” I complained, dropping the flag and walking into the kitchen. Pulling out leftovers, I felt a scowl twist my face at the sound of the back door opening. While Tattinger and the other two lived right next door, they may as well have moved in here since the three of them always seemed to be over here bothering me.

I hated it. Sort of.

“Don’t worry, I’m home!” I called out. I arched a brow at Benjamin, who appeared right in the doorway, filling the entire space—to the point that I wondered how he functioned on a normal day. I mean, what was it like being that big...

“You didn’t say you were planning to leave,” Ben said, a look of concentration on his face as he looked me over for injuries.

“To go to a fraternity house, at that!” Tattinger yelled, making Ben’s eyes darken in confusion.

I didn’t know how to describe Ben...well, I had a lot of words. The man was quiet, intense, and a lethal bitten wolf that turned into a thing of nightmares when shifted. It was hot, if we were being honest. He was protective and had been by my side from the start. I knew that I could count on him for absolutely anything. The only little thing I had to deal with? How

damn overprotective he was.

Where Tattinger liked to hide it the indifferent, apathetic attitude of someone who was ‘only doing his job,’ Ben was very clear about how he used my scent to track me and how he couldn’t sleep without physically seeing I was in bed first, safe for the night.

I knew there was something there, we’d just never talked about it. I wasn’t going to be the first to bring it up, especially since the attraction I had wasn’t only towards him. No, it was also towards Tattinger and one other man.

“Why would you go without us?” Ben asked in concern, moving to the microwave to remove my leftovers before I could. Heaven forbid I touch what could be a potentially hot plate.

I literally had no idea what to do with the man.

“It was part of the truth or dare game,” I explained with a dismissive wave. “Seriously nothing.”

Tattinger chuckled from where he joined us at the kitchen table. “I don’t know if everyone else is going to feel the same way, princess.”

“No.” I leveled him with a look. “We aren’t telling Coal.”

The back door swung open as the devil himself, except not really, strolled in with blood splattering his face and a feral look to his red eyes that was barely disguised by a cocky smirk. As usual, the man was dressed in all black and threw himself into a chair nearby, offering me an arched brow.

“You don’t need to tell me anything. I already know. The six fraternity boys looking for you are unconscious and will wake up with a massive headache after the blow I landed on them.”

“Coal!” I growled at the hellhound shifter.

“You have no one to blame but yourself.” He smirked, taking a small bite from my plate of dinner, ignoring Ben’s disapproving frown. “Sort of scummy pieces of shit though anyway; not the worst idea to just lay them out.”

They *were* pieces of crap. It was one of the reasons we’d targeted them.

Tattinger chuckled, and Ben shook his head but didn’t disagree. I leaned against the counter, my brow dipping. “I can’t do this for four years, guys. I have to be able to have fun.”

“Move in with us.” Coal smirked. “Make it easier.”

Rolling my eyes at his ridiculous suggestion, I left the room and stomped upstairs after kicking off my boots. It wasn’t the first time he’d said it, but I

didn't like the idea of moving in with them so they could keep track of me better...probably because I wanted it to be more than that.

I made it all the way to my room before Coal appeared, catching me up against him. I scowled as he pinned me against the wall and smirked at my expression, my eyes darting over the blood on him.

"You're covered in blood."

"Am I?" He mused. "Hardly noticed."

"You can't keep hurting humans," I murmured.

"And are you actually worried about them?" Coal tilted my head up with his knuckle.

I rolled my eyes. "No."

"I know." Coal chuckled, his slightly dark laugh making me know that he was in one of those moods right now—the one where I had no idea what he would do. The chaos of it sort of called to me, I wouldn't lie.

Before I could respond, a sudden clap of thunder sounded and the house vibrated under my feet. My head snapped to the window, seeing the glass nearly shatter. My magic filled the space, and I could feel Tattinger and Ben appear in the doorway, looking for the threat and making sure I was okay, but there was nothing—

A man—well, a spirit—appeared in the middle of the room. While it totally wasn't the time, what with him invading my personal space in such a chaotic fashion, he *was* sort of attractive...

"Where am I?" he demanded, his thick English accent surprising me. Although considering the clothes, maybe it shouldn't have.

"New Orleans. Did you recently die?"

"No." He stared at me with a dark look. "No, I've been dead for a long time."

"Where were you before this?" Coal asked, his voice filled with a protective edge as he placed a hand on my back.

The spirit looked me dead in the eye. "The Other."

That wasn't possible...was it?

T *he End...for now!*

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