

*blue*  
**BLOOD**

THE GODREARER BOOK 3

JOEL ABERNATHY WRITING MPREG AS

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# **BLUE BLOOD**

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**COLD BLOOD**  
*The Godbearer #3*

If three's a crowd, what does that make four?

My love life, apparently. Now I'm on the run with Cyrus, Sam, and Alex, and that's not even accounting for the fact that I'm pregnant—with twins—and my overbearing mother is along for the ride.

Oh, and did I mention I found out Zeus is my father? Yeah, that Zeus. Turns out Cameron's not the only one who's been hunting me down. And I might have to rely on my not-so-absent dad to protect me from the relentless vampire who's probably the father of my children.

Can you get a bulk discount on paternity tests? Because I'm going to need around half a dozen to sort this shit out.



CHAPTER  
**ONE**

## CHASE

This was it.

This was really happening.

I was driving down the highway with my fucking vampire cult and my mother in tow, fleeing the probable father of my unborn children, who just so happened to want us all dead, to one degree or another.

What even was my life right now?

Oh, right. A clusterfuck.

Silly me.

"Do you have a plan?" I asked, glancing over at Cyrus as he drove.

Mom had fallen asleep in the back with her head resting on Alex's shoulder, and Alex, for his part, looked like he was absolutely terrified of breathing wrong and waking her up. Considering she had been lecturing him on his life choices for the last sixty miles, I couldn't say I blamed him.

"Sure I do," Cyrus said, looking over at me. "My plan is to get as far from Winterhaven as humanly possible, and *then* figure out a plan."

"Very comforting," I said flatly.

He gave me an apologetic smile, but it didn't meet his eyes. He was even more Serious Business than usual, and that scared the hell out of me.

If Cyrus was freaked out, there was reason. Damn good reason. "Sorry. Would you prefer the sugarcoated bullshit version?"

"Infinitely," I told him.

"Right," he said, adjusting his grip on the wheel. "Let's see... We're heading southwest until we get to Pennsylvania, where we'll catch a flight to somewhere tropical. Somewhere warm and sunny, where we can lay low and relax until we figure out our next move. Oh, and demons can't travel over moving water, so there's no way he can follow us."



"Really?" I asked hopefully.

The look he gave me was answer enough. "You've been reading too many of those old grimoires if you believe that part."

I groaned, dropping my head back against the headrest as I folded my arms. "You're way too good at creating convincing sugarcoated bullshit."

Cyrus just chuckled. "How are you feeling?"

"Other than having a complete meltdown, mingled with the existential crisis of finding out Zeus is my real father, and some regret over the seriously questionable decision to down an entire packet of honey-roasted gas station peanuts?" I asked. "Pretty good."

"I told you the peanuts were a mistake," Cyrus said dryly. "You need me to pull over again?"

"No, I'm good," I mumbled. "I'll just hurl in Alex's duffel bag if I have to."

"Hey," Alex grumbled from the backseat.

"After everything you've done, I think puking in your luggage is just about the mildest thing I could do in retaliation," I informed him.

"Not that. You're going to wake her up," he said in a whisper, looking warily over at my mother, who was sleeping with her mouth half-open, snoring occasionally.

"Please, she had like three hard lemonades after that last stop, she's out like the dead," I said, scrolling through my phone.

How the hell did people even survive road trips before social media? The Oregon trail must have been hell on earth.

That and all the cholera and shit.

"You're not the one who's been negged constantly for the last three hours on all his life choices," Alex said.

"Uh, newsflash. I'm her son. She's been negging me for the past two decades," I reminded him.

He just sighed and laid his head back on the headrest. "Just wake me up when we get to New York."

"You should probably try to get some sleep, too," Cyrus said, his eyes flickering over to me.

"Someone needs to keep you awake."

He raised an eyebrow. "Vampire, remember?"

I sighed. "Right."

Cyrus picked up his jacket off the center console and draped it over my lap. I snuggled into it, unable to help breathing in the scent that was more comforting than I wanted to admit.

Before long, between his scent and the steady hum of the road beneath the car, I was out like a damn

light.



I AWOKE to the sound of voices and realized the car had stopped. When I blinked the blurriness out of my eyes and sat up, the stiffness in my body told me I'd been out for more than just a cat nap.

The driver's seat was empty, but Mom and Alex were both sound asleep in the back, the former drooling on the latter's shoulder while he snored loud enough to wake the living dead.

"We should stop here for the night."

Sam's voice was muffled, coming from outside the SUV. I turned to find him standing on the side of the road along with Cyrus, talking.

"It's not warded," Cyrus argued.

"No, but the hotel is officially within Amish lands, and that counts," Sam reasoned. "I checked with my grandma to make sure."

I got out of the SUV and walked over to where they were both talking, in the middle of the fucking woods.

"Are you fucking serious?" I demanded, folding my arms. "The Amish countryside? That's your grand plan for keeping us safe from a fucking demon?"

"Oh, good. You're awake," Cyrus said flatly.

"Look, I know how it sounds, but there are rules for this kind of thing," Sam said. "Demons can't cross sacred ground."

"And some roadway motel where they sell handmade wooden trinkets and pecan pie counts as that?" I challenged.

He shrugged. "Beggars can't be choosers."

"And you're on board with this?" I asked, turning to Cyrus.

He hesitated. "It's... not the worst idea. And we could use somewhere to regroup for the day while I plan our next move."

"While *we* plan," Sam corrected.

Cyrus just sighed. "We'll leave at dusk."

"Leave where?" Alex asked, stumbling out of the SUV.

"Get back in the car, Alex, we're going to Amish paradise," I said, walking back to the SUV.

He frowned. "What? Wait, I have to take a leak first."

"I told you to go to the bathroom when we were at the damn gas station," Cyrus muttered, offering a

hand to help me into the passenger's side.

"You're not my dad," Alex grumbled.

"Go ahead," I offered. "We probably won't leave your ass here."

Alex hesitated, looking forlornly at the woods before he squirreled into the backseat. Sam started off on his bike and Cyrus pulled back onto the road after him.

Less than thirty minutes later, we were all piled into a couple of rooms in a motel that looked like a great place to hide a body in plain sight.

For my sanity's sake, I was trying not to think too hard about the stains on the green-and-white pinstripe couch across the room.

Even if it wasn't for the fact that my mother was snoring through the paper-thin walls in the next room over, there was absolutely no way there was going to be any action happening tonight.

Not unless Alex felt like getting trained for a change.

Which, come to think of it, was kind of a hilarious thought.

I wondered briefly just how desperate he was to get back into my pants.

"Come on," Sam called, patting the spot on the bed next to him. It was huge, at least, which was important, since none of the guys was going to be willing to take a different room.

And I had to be honest, I felt better knowing they were all close.

Even Alex.

Ugh, this was a new personal low point.

I left the bathroom, having just changed into my PJs, and climbed into bed. Cyrus was at the desk across the room, poring over a map with a bunch of landmarks I was pretty sure were more about paranormal BS than tourist spots, and Alex was rummaging through a bag from the local Shell station like some kind of dumpster raccoon.

"What did you even get?" I asked, trying to peer into the bag.

Alex pulled out a bunch of candy bars between his fingers, like he was cosplaying as white trash Wolverine. "Rations."

"Snickers and PayDay. You're a real Bear Grylls," I scoffed.

He tossed me a candy bar, and I reluctantly opened the wrapper. The bastard knew junk food was my kryptonite.

"How are you feeling?" Sam asked, draping an arm around my shoulder.

"Tired," I admitted, laying my head on his shoulder. "I hope you're right about this place."

Sam grunted. "Me, too."

Alex went a little paler as he climbed into bed. "I thought you said we were safe on sacred ground."

I looked around the dingy motel room pointedly. "That's kind of a stretch, don'tcha think?"

Alex squinted. "Eye of the beholder, I guess."

"Just try to get some sleep," said Sam. "Cy and I will keep watch."

"I've been sleeping the whole drive pretty much," I said, even though I yawned. "I'm fine."

"All right. I'll put on a movie, then," he offered, grabbing the remote that was suspiciously tethered to the bed to turn on the TV. "Any requests?"

"Yeah. No vampire movies," I said dryly, snuggling in to close my eyes for a split second.

Sam chuckled and held me closer. I was listening faintly as he and Alex bickered back and forth about a bunch of different cheesy bro comedies and action movies before settling on one, but sleep claimed me before the opening music was over.

CHAPTER  
TWO

## CHASE

I woke up when someone shook me by the shoulders, and it took me a moment to realize it was Sam.

"Hey, wake up," he whispered. "We gotta go."

"Oh yeah," I mumbled, sitting up quickly. "Sorry."

My head was still foggy, and I wondered if I'd ever feel completely normal again.

I'd been working through all kinds of weird emotions and issues over the last few days, and now I was facing the reality that I had a dad I never knew about. The god of Olympus, at that.

No wonder my dreams were an unreal fucking mess.

"Did something happen?" I asked, immediately starting to panic when I realized Alex and Cyrus were already by the door, ready to go.

"No, we just need to get back on the road," Cyrus reassured me. "I'll go check out while you get ready and bring some breakfast and coffee for the road."

I yawned, nodding. "Thanks."

After a torturously lukewarm shower, I changed into one of the only outfits that fit, realizing I was about to have to confront the fact that they didn't make maternity clothes for men.

Certainly not fashionable ones.

If I ever got tired of being a witch, that was probably a niche to explore. Not like medical school was looking like it was going to pan out anytime soon.

I followed the guys out to the SUV to find my mother waiting by it, looking like she'd just had a spa day.

"There you are," she huffed. "Late night?"

I scowled, because there was no mistaking the implications. "Yeah, Mom. I'm so ragingly horny, I just couldn't help but get railed by my three boyfriends in a soggy motel room on the outskirts of a cow pasture. You got me."

She wrinkled her nose. "Do you have to be so vulgar? You really are your father's child."

"Too. Fucking. Soon," I growled, slamming the car door shut.

We couldn't get back on the road soon enough, although since Mom was bright-eyed and bushy tailed, I was starting to wish I'd taken a ride on the back of Sam's bike instead.

If it wasn't for my growing baby bump, I probably would have been tempted.

"So, where are you taking us?" she asked Cyrus.

I was relieved to finally have a change in subject, and it was a question I wanted to ask myself.

"The airport," Cyrus answered. "I have a safe house Cameron doesn't know about in Europe."

"And yet you don't have a private jet," Mom chimed in.

"I do, but he knows about it," Cyrus countered. "Just because he's restrained doesn't mean he can't reach out to anyone else to fuck us over, and I can't take that risk. But I'll figure something out."

That shut her up for a few minutes, at least.

Not that I was thrilled at the idea of taking an international flight at the moment myself, but it wasn't like we had any better options.

Hell, I didn't even care where we were going. As long as it was away from Winterhaven.

An ocean still didn't feel like enough distance to put between me and Cameron, but it was a start.



I HAD EXPECTED we were going to go buy tickets at the counter like normal people, but when Cyrus insisted on going in alone and came back half an hour later, I realized otherwise.

An hour later, we were on a chartered flight over the Atlantic, headed to Romania. Because of fucking course we were.

"You are such a cliché," I muttered into my orange juice, sitting in the plush leather seat next to Cyrus. I was in the aisle, because the babies were already big enough to wreck havoc on my bladder, apparently, despite being so tiny.

Cyrus just chuckled, glancing up from the book he was reading. He looked debonair as ever in his high-collared sweater, reading Goethe like a complete prick.

I couldn't believe I was with a sweater guy now.

Meanwhile, Alex and Sam were playing foosball at the table bolted into the floor across the cabin, and my mother was flipping through a magazine, already three sheets to the wind.

Sometimes I was kind of okay with the idea of being her when I got older.

CHAPTER  
**THREE**



## CHASE

When we finally landed in Bucharest and drove four and a half hours to a town that barely even existed on a map, I was pleasantly surprised to find that Cyrus had taken us to a large, comfortable cabin in the woods rather than the Airbnb from hell I had feared.

"What is it with you and cabins?" I asked, shrugging out of my jacket.

"Rustic charm and plenty of furniture that can be turned into stakes in a pinch," Cyrus answered without missing a beat, carrying my mother's bag past the threshold.

"Fair enough," I said, wandering into the open room. The high ceiling was adorned with a gaudy chandelier made of antlers. "I'm judging you for that, though."

Cyrus squinted up at the light and shrugged. "It was the '80s. Times were different."

"Not *that* different," Mom scoffed, picking up an equally tacky throw pillow with huge tassels.

"I dunno, I think this place is pretty awesome," Alex mused.

Cyrus grimaced. "Okay, fine, I'll hire a decorator. You don't have to rub it in, Alex."

Alex threw up his hands in dismay. "What the fuck, man?"

"I'm gonna do a perimeter check," Sam announced, heading back to the door.

"That's his code for taking a walk. He thinks it sounds impressive," I said, leaning in to Mom.

Sam lightheartedly flipped me off as he left.

"Well, I suppose there are some benefits to having three men at your beck and call," Mom mused, running a finger along the stair railing. She grimaced, rubbing her fingers together. "Clearly cleanliness is not one of them."

"I haven't been here in a decade," Cyrus argued, coming back down the steps after depositing our things upstairs. I hadn't even realized he was gone until I saw the luggage missing.

"Well, I'm exhausted, so I'm going to bed," Mom announced. "Wake me up if anything changes."

"Sure, Mom," I called. As soon as I heard the door shut outside, I whispered, "No one had better

fucking wake the bitch unless Jesus comes back on a unicorn."

"Why ruin the occasion?" Alex asked flatly, flopping down on the couch. He grabbed a remote and shook off the dust. "This thing looks like a brick. Does it even work?"

"Probably," Cyrus answered. "Aren't there better things you could be doing?"

"Like what? Sam said he'd handle the perimeter check."

Cyrus continued to stare pointedly at Alex until he slowly looked over and stopped flipping through the home shopping networks.

"Okay, sheesh, fine," Alex muttered, dragging himself off the couch. "This had better not just be you trying to get me out of the house so you two can make out."

Cyrus rolled his eyes.

As soon as the door was shut, though, he grabbed my wrist and pulled me down onto the couch with him.

"Now that he's gone," he said, pulling me in for a crushing kiss.

"Mmph!" I cried, finally melting against him.

I broke the kiss when I came to my senses, giving him a look. "Shouldn't we be, I don't know, trying to find a way to ward this place against Zeus and your homicidal brother?"

"I thought you were supposed to be the irresponsible one," he said dryly.

"I am. Which should really tell you how far you've fallen."

Cyrus chuckled, letting me up off his lap. "Guess I'll go grab the grimoire."

"Don't bother. Digitized, remember?" I said, wiggling my phone.

"Twenty-first century witch. That's kind of hot," he remarked.

I rolled my eyes, scooting further on the couch as I flipped through my digital grimoire.

"I figure we should focus on Cameron first, since my deadbeat dad has been MIA for the last two decades."

"Seems reasonable," said Cyrus. "I take it you have an idea?"

"Sort of. This place has two doors, right?"

"Yeah, why?"

"I say we start with placing another infernal bear trap on each one," I said. "Just in case Cameron shows up."

"Start with the worst-case scenario," Cyrus said, nodding.

"Then... if Alonais the one who put that ward on me, maybe she can help us do it again," I said.

"Hell, maybe she has one that'll work on Cameron and Zeus. A twofer. This place has Wi-Fi so I can call her, right?"

I hadn't had a damn signal since we'd turned off the main road.

"I pay someone to keep everything connected, so yeah, it should work," said Cyrus.

"And yet you can't pay someone to dust."

He groaned. "Does your mother ever run out of criticisms?"

"That's a joke, right?" I asked. "Because no. If we could find a way to turn her judgment into energy, we'd have an infinitely renewable resource. World saved. Climate crisis averted."

"That's what I figured," he sighed.

"Look on the bright side. If she liked you, it would be a serious turn off for me. I'm having a hard time looking Sam in the eye when she's around."

He smirked. "Guess I can live with that."



I SPENT the next hour reinventing the wheel and carving two fresh sigils on the doorways on either side of the cabin. By the time I was done, I practically had the damn thing memorized.

The door opened and Alex immediately tripped over my hard work. He didn't even have the decency to face plant somewhere more convenient. Just right in the middle of the sigil.

"Damn it, Alex!" I cried. "You're bleeding all over my sigil!"

"How the fuck am I supposed to know?" he asked in a nasally voice, holding his nose. "Couldn't you put this shit in a more out of the way place?"

Sam sidestepped us both, raising an eyebrow. "You trying to trap us again?"

"It's for Cameron, genius," Cyrus remarked, hauling Alex back to his feet. "I take it you didn't see anything out there?"

"Just a bear," Sam answered.

Alex was still whining and bleeding everywhere, so I rolled my eyes and took him by the arm, pulling him down the hall. "Come on, you giant baby, there's probably a first aid kit in the bathroom."

"My nose cartilage could've been driven into my brain," Alex complained, following me like a lost puppy. "I saw it on that TV show."

"You'd have to have a prefrontal cortex for that to be an issue, and given your complete lack of spatial visualization and moral reasoning, I doubt it," I quipped, rummaging through the medicine cabinet.

He frowned. "My what?"

"Just pinch the bridge of your nose," I said, pulling out a bandage. It wasn't really going to do anything, but it would get him to shut up at least.

He did as I said, holding his head up and glancing down at me. "Been a while since you did this."

"What, fussing over you like you're a whiny toddler?" I asked, stuffing a cotton ball up his nose.

He sneezed. "You like taking care of people. That's why you wanted to be a doctor in the first place, isn't it?"

"That and my St. Elsewhere phase happened to take place during a very formative time for me," I admitted.

"Well, you're good at it," he murmured. "You'll be a good mom."

I glared at him, pinching his nose harder since he couldn't even do that right. "Don't start with that omega bullshit."

"Sorry," he said, sounding like he had the world's worst cold. "Mom, dad, whatever."

I rolled my eyes and finished wiping up the blood. "It's not broken. You'll live."

"Thanks," Alex said, and for once, he didn't follow it up with some smartass remark.

I snorted. "Yeah. Sure."

I had only just realized how close we were standing to each other in the cramped bathroom, his body between mine and the door.

For a moment, I found myself staring at him for some fucking reason, and he was staring back. He seemed like he was about to say something else when I heard footsteps coming up the hall.

"Everything okay in there?" Cyrus asked, his knuckles rapping on the cracked door.

Alex's expression turned to disappointment as he stepped back and pushed the door open. "Guess I'll go clean up the blood," he mumbled.

I watched him go until I was aware of Cyrus watching me in turn.

"Did he say something?" he asked, a slight edge to his tone.

"No," I said quickly, shaking my head. "Nothing, I just... the sigil's done, and one's already half-bled on, so it shouldn't take long to finish up."

"Right," Cyrus said, and even though I could tell he didn't fully believe me, he continued, "I told Sam about your idea for the ward. He's calling his grandmother right now, but she says she's done so many wards, she doesn't even remember which one she used, so it could take her a while to find the right one."

"Great," I sighed. "Guess I'll start looking for a plan B, then."

"You should get some rest once the sigils are up," Cyrus said, reaching out to tuck a strand of hair behind my ear. "Cameron probably still hasn't broken the first one, and it would take him a while to

even figure out where we are. That's if he manages."

"What about Zeus?" I asked.

"Like you said, you've left Winterhaven without the ward before and he hasn't done anything," he reasoned. "Besides, we're paladins. Taking out gods and their emissaries is kind of what we're made for."

"Lucky me," I teased, leaning up to brush my lips against his. "I guess I could use some rest. And a shower."

"Feel like company?"

I paused, as if I was considering it, and slipped past him out into the hall. "I might."

"Well," Cyrus purred, following me. "Lucky me."

CHAPTER  
FOUR

## ALEX

Chase was at the kitchen table, surrounded by a bunch of herbs, rocks and shit, while Cyrus peered at the old book over his shoulder.

I was dusting the bookshelf for the fifth time that afternoon, for an excuse to be near him but not so near he told me to fuck off. That was always a risk.

We had barely been in the cabin for a full day, but it was already a fucking love nest.

"God, this is pathetic."

I looked up, frowning as Sam walked toward me from down the hall.

"I don't know what you're talking about," I muttered.

"If there was a photo in the dictionary next to pining, it would be your face," Sam said flatly.

"Would you keep your fucking voice down?" I hissed, even though a quick glance made it clear Chase wasn't paying attention. He was laughing at something Cyrus had said.

Like that corpse even had a sense of humor.

"It's not like it's a secret," he said with a shrug. "Pretty sure Chase likes the fact that you're miserable."

I grunted. He probably wasn't wrong. "He forgave you easily enough."

"I wouldn't say he's really forgiven me," Sam said hesitantly. "But for the record, it's probably not the worst thing in the world that he still hates your guts."

"How the hell do you figure that?"

"The people you love the most are the ones who hurt you the most," he answered. "Love and hate are opposites along the same spectrum. The fact that he's still so pissed at you is probably proof he still loves you."

"Really?" I asked doubtfully.

He shrugged. "Sounds like something Dr. Phil would say, so yeah, probably. Just tryin' to make you feel better," he said, patting my shoulder before he walked into the kitchen. "How's the witchcraft

coming?"

Denise looked up from her perch in the living room, and whatever she was reading on her phone, her eyes narrowing.

For someone who'd been impregnated by Zeus, she had an aversion to all things paranormal. Every time someone brought up magic, or vampirism, for that matter, she got all cagey.

"It's coming," Chase sighed. "Any word from your grandmother?"

"Actually, yeah," Sam said, leaning on the kitchen table across from him. "Unfortunately, the binding ritual she did on you before is a no go."

"What? Why?" Chase asked, his eyes widening.

I could understand why he was freaked out, considering long shots were really our only shots at this point.

Every hour that passed was another chance that Cameron or his father would find us.

I hoped Cyrus was right about this place being off Cam's radar, but really, there was no telling. And no matter what Sam thought, I wasn't even sure I trusted Cyrus's allegiances as far as Ichor was concerned.

"Because it only works on infants," Sam answered. "Something about being based on a mother's love and all that."

"Oh," Chase said, looking over at his mother in the living room. "Yeah, in that case, I guess we're doomed."

"I heard that," Denise snapped, tossing aside the magazine she was reading to stalk into the kitchen.

Chase rolled his eyes.

"Not exactly doomed," said Sam. "There's another ritual we could try."

"What is it?" Cyrus demanded.

Sam hesitated, looking between Chase and his mother. "It's, uh, kind of tantra based."

"Tantra?" Denise echoed. "What is tantra?"

When no one responded, her eyes narrowed. "It's drugs, isn't it? You're involved in drugs. I knew it was one of those crazy UFO cults. Did they make you drink anything? Did you drink the Kool-Aid yet?"

"It's not drugs, Mom," Chase groaned, burying his face in his hands. "It's too fucking early for this."

"Well, what is it?" Denise cried, her voice growing more shrill with each word. She locked her eyes on me. "Is he doing drugs?"

I sighed, torn between the "don't you dare tell her" look Chase was giving me and my legitimate fear of his mother. "Yeah, it's, um, meth? We're... injecting meth?"



Denise raised an eyebrow, both hands planted on her hips. "You have three seconds to tell me before I give you an involuntary vasectomy."

I grimaced. "Okay, shit, fine. It's not drugs, it's sex."

"Oh, God," Chase mumbled into his palms.

Denise stared at me blankly for a moment before her face crumpled in disgust. "What is *wrong* with you? I don't want to hear about that shit!"

"Me?" I cried. "You threatened me if I didn't tell you the truth!"

She ignored me, walking toward the stairs in a huff. "I'm not drunk enough for this conversation."

"That makes two of us," Cyrus said, raking a hand through his hair.

"Good job, dipshit," Sam scoffed.

"What the fuck did I do?" I protested.

"Okay, focus. What exactly is this ritual?" Cyrus asked. "How does it work?"

"Pretty much how you'd think," said Sam. "There's a sigil for drawing the energy into the person being bound, and we need to funnel as much tantra into it as possible by the usual methods. Grandma sent me the pages from the grimoire she found it in and the diagrams are, uh, colorful. FYI, I never wanted to have this conversation with my grandmother, so I'm going to be putting my therapy for the next three decades on the cult's credit card."

Cyrus rolled his eyes. "I guess it's worth a shot."

"I'll get the sigil drawing shit," said Sam, heading down the hall.

"I need a shower," said Chase, getting up from the table. "If we're doing this, I need to spend the next thirty minutes bleaching the fact that my mother and Alona were involved in this, however tangentially, from my mind."

"I'll get the room ready," Cyrus offered, helping him out of his chair.

I watched as they all went off, leaving me alone. What else was new?

Chase stopped at the top of the stairs, looking over his shoulder. "Are you coming or not?"

I blinked. "You want me to...?"

"Tantra," Chase said pointedly. "It's a numbers game. Don't read too much into it, because it's not that deep."

"Right," I said, trying not to get too bummed out that that was all it was.

It was a start, in any case, and I'd take it.

CHAPTER  
FIVE

## CHASE

I wound up drawing the sigil on a fucking bedsheet, because if there was one thing I had learned about magic, it was that sometimes, you had to be willing to adapt.

I still felt slightly awkward about the whole ritual sex thing as Sam, Alex, and Cyrus entered the room behind me, especially knowing my mother was right down the hall, but when Cyrus and Sam both took me into their arms and started tag teaming me, I forgot to care.

Fuck, they were getting good at that.

My head lolled back against Sam's shoulder as he kissed my neck, his hard torso pressed to my back, and Cyrus's tongue slipped past my lips.

I groaned as he pushed his hips into me, rubbing his cock against mine.

This position wasn't going to be tenable for much longer, if my belly kept growing, but I was going to enjoy it while I could.

They led me over to the bed, and I sat on the edge of it as they got in front of me, taking my clothes off piece by piece.

Alex lingered by the edge of the bed like he didn't know what to do with himself. For once, I probably would have preferred it if he would have just butted in like his usual self.

Cyrus kissed me again, making it impossible to focus on anything else.

I could already feel the tantra swirling around us, moving from his body into mine, and hopefully the sigil would take care of the rest of it.

"Fuck," I breathed as Sam lowered himself to take my cock into his mouth and started sucking. It felt incredible.

I leaned back against the headboard, watching him bob his head.

He licked the tip and gently swirled his tongue around the crown before sealing his mouth around it.

I reached for his hair, pulling him closer, encouraging him to take me deeper as Cyrus ran his hand down my spine and cupped my ass.

His fingers slipped into my crevice and he rubbed my hole, making me gasp. I couldn't help but squirm as his index finger traveled around the tight ring of muscle, teasing gently. He knew exactly how to get me riled up, and make me crave the sensation of him buried inside me.

I felt a weight on the other side of the bed and looked up to find Alex watching me, a familiar look in his eyes.

He leaned in and before I could say anything, he captured my lips with his.

I froze, because the new-oldness of the kiss caught me off guard, but I found myself giving in to it quickly enough.

Maybe too easily, but fuck, it had been a long time, and my body still responded to his touch whether I wanted it to or not.

He was my first. As far as I had been concerned back then, he would be my last. As much intimacy as I had developed between Alex and Cyrus—and they were undeniably more skilled lovers than the selfish prick ever had been under the best of circumstances—there was still something about his kiss that made my heart ache.

Fuck, the last thing I needed to do was get all up in my feelings right now. Somehow, being a glorified incubus still hadn't helped me to be less of a sap when it came to this stuff.

Between the three of them touching, caressing, licking, it was almost too much. Almost.

But I still wanted more. I needed it.

I broke the kiss with Alex, saliva beading between our tongues.

I wasn't even in heat, but I was getting wet in more than the one place from everything they were doing. "I don't care who, but I need one of you inside me. Now."

Cyrus exchanged a heated look with Sam, smirking. "You heard him, gentlemen."

Sam just kept worshipping my cock, taking me deeper into his mouth as he did that thing with his tongue against the underside that always made my toes curl.

"Looks like you're up," Cyrus said dryly to Alex. "Don't want to give you too much to have to follow up."

"Oh, fuck off," Alex muttered, but he sank back against the headboard and pulled me back against him.

Sam had to readjust, and it felt like torture when he withdrew my cock from his mouth, but then I felt Alex's shaft pressing between my cheeks. I hadn't even noticed him getting undressed, but I had definitely been distracted.

I squirmed, sitting up on my knees to straddle his lap from behind, and helped lower myself onto his cock.

Alex's hands settled on my hips, and I felt his lips press to the side of my neck. "You feel so good," he breathed, his voice hoarse with desire.

Sam took me back into his mouth, and I moaned, sinking back against Alex's chest. Cyrus wound up next to me, kissing me hard, and I lost myself in the physical sensations as well as the energetic shift between them. Each man's energy had its own unique flavor. Sam's was clean and refreshing, like citrus, while Cyrus's was like a fine wine, refined and potent. Alex's was earthy, like freshly turned soil.

It was a delicious cocktail of sensation.

I moaned, thrusting back against Alex as he rocked his hips, sliding in and out of me, until I could feel the pressure building inside me.

He moved faster, grinding against my prostate, and I cried out, squeezing tight around him.

He began to move harder, taking me to the edge as Sam took my shaft in his hand so he could focus on the tip, wrapping his tongue around it skillfully.

By the time Alex's thrusts grew faster, his fangs grazing my throat, I was so close to coming I couldn't breathe.

The fact that Cyrus's tongue was buried in my throat wasn't helping.

Sam sealed his lips around the head of my cock just as Alex drove into my prostate at the perfect angle.

They worked pretty well in tandem, too.

I cried out into Cyrus's kiss as I came, convulsions racking through my body, and Sam swallowed every last drop, licking my shaft clean afterward.

I collapsed in Alex's lap, panting as I broke the kiss with Cyrus.

"My turn," Cyrus purred, his voice low and husky as he grabbed me and pulled me off Alex in one fell swoop.

I gasped from the sudden shift, but when he pushed me down gently on all fours so he could take me from behind, I was ready for more.

My head was still spinning from the orgasm as Cyrus positioned himself, and I found myself eye to eye with Sam's glorious cock.

My mouth watered, eager to take him in, but I waited until Cyrus was sheathed because the risk of biting was all too real now that I was more vampirey than human.

Most days.

I moaned as Cyrus slid into me, hard and deep, filling me completely. He moved slowly, savoring the moment, and I relished it, too.

I took Sam's crown into my mouth and he slid his fingers into my hair, gripping tightly.

"Good boy," he said through his teeth.

He was sounding pretty vampirey lately, too, and it was admittedly hot as hell.

Like, really fucking hot.

Sam's cock pulsed against my tongue as I sucked on him, and Cyrus started thrusting inside me from behind, hitting just the right spot.

I was still reeling from my first orgasm, but damn, they kept them coming.

I wasn't sure if that was an omega thing or a paladin thing, but I really didn't care as long as I got to enjoy it.

I whimpered with need, rolling my hips back against Cyrus. He hit me just right, and I bucked my hips forward, pushing my ass back toward him. He sank deeper into me and I moaned.

Alex was watching from the sidelines, his eyes still glazed with pleasure. This time, he seemed to be enjoying himself.

I liked torturing him, and I wasn't going to be above doing it again in the future, but I also kind of liked him watching like this.

And if he kept playing his cards right, I might let him tag in again before the night was over.

"Still so fucking tight," Cyrus murmured.

"He is an omega," Sam reminded him. "Our perfect little fucktoy."

"Bold words to speak about someone whose teeth are on your cock," I said, coming up for air.

Because even if those words stirred a shameful amount of arousal in me, I still wasn't going to let him get off scot free.

Sam just gave me that devilish grin I couldn't resist, and pushed my head back down so I had to deepthroat his cock. "You love it."

I rolled my eyes. But he wasn't wrong.

I pulled back so I could take the base of his shaft in my palm and licked the tip, enjoying the way his eyes rolled back in his head.

I had never imagined I would have this kind of relationship with Sam, but here we were, and I couldn't deny it had been easier than I had ever imagined to transition from friendship to lovers.

The camaraderie that had always been there between us just made me even more comfortable around him, and I felt like he knew me better than anyone else.

As he came, I let the streams fall onto the back of my tongue and drank them down eagerly.

He moaned, his grip tightening in my hair. "Fuck, Chase," he whispered.

I lapped eagerly at his cock as Cyrus continued to pound me from behind, and relished the delicious tension that built each time he hit my spot.

Cyrus came, filling me with his seed, and I moaned in response to the feeling of being filled by the both of them.

I collapsed with Cyrus still inside me and Sam pulled my head into his lap, stroking my hair gently as he caught his breath.

I could still feel the tantra humming around us, only rather than lingering within me, it felt like it was forming an invisible cloak around me. A forcefield of protection that I knew was there the same way I knew their energy was.

The three of their essences had mingled, forming a powerful force that was at once overwhelming and reassuring, and when Cyrus finally pulled out to gather me into his arms, the other two on either side of us, I sighed deeply.

I hadn't felt this good—this safe—in a long damn time. I just hoped it lasted.

CHAPTER  
SIX



## CHASE

We had only been at the cabin for a few weeks, but I already felt like I was modeling a fucking beach ball.

At least so far, the ritual had been a success. Granted, the only measure of that success was the fact that there had been no sign of Zeus or Cameron's minions, but I was going to take it as a victory.

Since the ward was on me and it wasn't connected directly to a town, like the original one had been, I was able to venture out a bit with supervision.

Not that I really minded having the guys along. Gathering ingredients for rituals in the woods outside the cabin was a pain in the ass without having to be the one to haul them all back.

Actually, I was starting to think if it wasn't for the swelling, the mood swings, and the fact that I couldn't get a normal pair of pants to save my life, I could probably get used to this whole pregnancy thing.

Even though the cabin was protected and I was warded, we weren't taking any chances.

I had been studying harder than I ever had, and with little to do other than fuck, practice magic, and play the dusty old board games Cyrus kept in the closet for reasons I could only assume were him thinking that was just what humans did, I was getting pretty damn good at the whole witch thing.

No pun intended.

If I was damned, I was pretty sure the list of reasons was long enough that magic wasn't anywhere near the top.

And when I saw Cameron again, if I managed to perfect this latest destruction spell, I was going to have another one to add to the top of the list.

Hating him from a distance hadn't done much to stop the stubborn part of me that still longed for him.

And what was that even about? After all the shit Cameron had done, I shouldn't still care.

I shouldn't have ever cared about him in the first place.

But I did.

So now I was going to kill him.

It seemed like it was only fair.

"Are you done yet?" Alex groaned, kicking a rock on the path in front of him. "You've been staring at those weeds for hours."

"These 'weeds' are rare herbs that could be the difference between us getting ripped apart by an otherworldly hellbeast and surviving," I informed him. "And it's been ten minutes. The pictures in this plant identification app are shit," I muttered, putting my phone away.

I stuffed my clippings into the basket, feeling a lot like Little Red, and held out my hand. "Come help me up and stop bitching."

"Yeah, yeah," Alex said, coming over to pull me onto my feet. "Least it's not as bad as going with you to the mall was."

"You mean you falling asleep in the massage chair playing Candy Crush," I shot back.

He turned red. "It wasn't Candy Crush, it was Angry Birds."

"Does that really make it any better?" I challenged, starting back up the path.

"I wasn't complaining," he said with a shrug. "It's nice getting to spend time with you."

I rolled my eyes. "You were literally complaining."

"Still." He followed me a moment before venturing, "So, that ritual... was that a one time thing, or...?"

I glanced over my shoulder. "Really?"

"I'm just asking. You seemed to enjoy yourself enough."

"You don't think that had anything to do with the other two?"

He gave me a half-hearted scowl. "You didn't seem to mind while I was fucking you."

I grunted in reluctant acknowledgment. "You're a marginally better lover as part of a team, I guess."

"So that's a yes?" he asked, sounding way too hopeful.

I sighed. "Consider yourself on probation."

He paused as if to consider it. "I'll take it."

I shook my head, about to say something else when I heard it. A familiar whisper, laced into the sound of the wind rustling the dead trees.

I spun around in search of the source, but there was no one but me and Alex for as far as the eye could see.

"Chase?" Alex called worriedly, reaching out to steady me. "You okay? You need one of your pills?"

"No, I..." I trailed off, searching the woods once more. "You didn't hear that?"

He paused, looking around like he was listening. "Hear what?"

"Nothing," I mumbled. "Let's just keep going."

He didn't seem convinced, but he reached for the basket in my hands. "At least let me take this. You shouldn't be carrying anything."

"It's three pounds."

"Still," he insisted.

I had to admit, Alex had kept up the whole attentive boyfriend thing a bit long for it to be an act. Consistency really wasn't his thing.

We were close to the cabin when I heard another whisper, this one a lot clearer, sharper, and as if it was coming from right behind me.

*It's... mine...*

I gave a sharp cry in response to the hiss and lost my footing, collapsing on my hands and knees in the snow.

"Chase?" Alex cried, at my side the next second. I could feel him grabbing me, and I was aware of his panicked attempts to get me to respond, but it was like I was frozen. Like my body wasn't in my control, not entirely.

It was a sensation I knew well, from all the nightmares it had been the focal point of, but what had me the most unsettled wasn't that.

It wasn't even the fact that I could feel myself shutting down, or the fact that the frost creeping up my forearms wasn't just a result of the frigid weather, but coming from my own power that didn't seem in my control any more than anything else.

It was the fact that I knew that voice. I knew it well.

Ichor was back.

CHAPTER  
SEVEN

## CAMERON

It had taken me three days to get out of that damn trap, and if it hadn't been for a wayward door-to-door salesman, it might have taken even longer.

Compelling him to break the seal had been the easy part. Unfortunately, I was as drained as my phone battery by the time he came along, so he'd played the role of blood bag as well as unwitting rescuer.

Something Chase would have undoubtedly bitched about, but he could tack one more body onto his conscience as far as I was concerned, considering he was the one who'd done this.

And of course, he'd done it under my brother's guidance.

I wasn't surprised that Cyrus had betrayed me. I wasn't even surprised that he had betrayed Ichor, but I was disappointed.

Disappointed that I was finally going to have to face the reality I had been hoping so naively to put off for a long time now.

When I finally did track my brother down, I was going to have to kill him. It was a foregone conclusion.

The others, too, but that was more an inconvenience than anything.

We'd operated without Sam and Alex at various points, sometimes when Ichor had gone into a rage and taken one of them out for her own reasons. Cyrus and I usually had each other, though. To one degree or another.

That was clearly about to change.

I had a plan, but it was going to take time. And energy. Two resources I was short on at the moment, but it was better than traipsing across the globe in search of whatever safe house Cyrus had taken them to.

My brother was a lot of things, but predictable wasn't one of them.

Certainly not now.

He had always had his secrets, and I had mine. I just hadn't realized that his clandestine nature would

become this much of a problem.

That was all hindsight now, and the important thing was finding them—finding Chase—before this all got out of hand.

Before even more damage could be done and Ichor was lost to me forever.

I wanted to believe she was the only reason I had flown into a blind rage at the thought of him being taken from me.

I wanted to believe she was the only reason it felt like a part of me was gone, too, but maybe that naivete was Cyrus's folly.

Maybe thinking he was beyond betrayal was what had ultimately led him to it.



IT TOOK a while to summon the cult, and longer still to gather everything required for the ritual.

A matter of weeks felt like months, and I was beside myself thinking about him out there with only those three idiots for protection.

They thought I was the greatest threat to him, and in a sense, maybe that was true. But at least I would keep him alive.

There were other cults who would kill Ichor's vessel on sight, and others still who would bleed him dry of all her power, leaving him nothing but a husk.

"Are you sure about this?" Deanna asked, taking me aside once the evening was underway.

"I'm sure," I muttered.

She pursed her lips, as if she wanted to say more. And she had. She was here, but she had made no secret of her disapproval for my plans.

"A remote summoning spell... it's a risk. Not just to him. There's no telling what will happen if you wake Ichor up and—"

"There's no telling what will happen if I don't find them," I growled, a bit louder than I'd intended. When I saw Deanna's guardian look up, I sighed. "I'm certain."

Deanna just nodded solemnly. "Let's get on with it, then," she said, turning to enter the basement.

I walked past the binding sigil that had been my prison for the last two nights. Deanna and her partner had done me the favor of keeping watch while I shifted, and the timing of the ritual afterward was intentional.

Once I knew where Chase was, I needed as much time to hunt him down as possible without worrying about "getting my werewolf period," as he so artfully put it.

I was actually starting to miss his smartassery. I really was desperate.

I stood aside as Deanna donned a dark velvet robe and joined hands with the nearest cultist.

The inner twelve were all gathered around a circle ringing the fresh summoning sigil. Ichor's sigil was carved into my soul, and the sight of it always made my hair stand on end and a strange electricity run through me, but I tried to ignore it as I pulled the hood of my black cloak over my head.

As the cult began to chant the sacred incantation—or profane, depending on your point of view—I focused, closing my eyes and letting my thoughts drift until I was free of them.

When I opened my eyes, stirred by the slight breeze in the closed off room, I saw that the curves of the sigil were beginning to glow a soft, familiar red.

She was close. I could feel her. It was only a whisper of her essence, something I could probably only feel because of how attuned I was to her, but it was there.

I resumed focus, putting all my energy into the link between us.

It had grown so muted over the years. So thin. The more desperate I was to reach her, the further she seemed to slip from my grasp.

*Ichor*, I called within the confines of my mind. *Come to me.*

At first, nothing changed. When I heard a scream across the room, and looked up to find the light had grown intense and almost painful, I knew it was working.

The wind that had started out as a gentle breeze had become a gale, creating debris of the various items scattered across the basement.

"Keep chanting," Deanna called, and the chorus of voices rose in pitch, growing louder and louder until it was hard to hear anything else.

Then I heard her.

Her voice. Her laugh. The echoes of her laughter reverberated through my head, making me dizzy.

It took me a moment to realize the version of her I was experiencing was being drawn from my memories.

It was the same pull I felt when giving tantra, but subtler. Energy slowly bleeding from my veins.

And then, it started to fade.

"No!" I snarled, turning to Deanna. "What's happening? Why did it stop?"

She hesitated, staring down at the sigil, the glow beginning to dampen already. "It's not enough," she murmured. "The sigil needs more energy."

I looked around the circle, my attention landing on the nearest member of the cult. I didn't even have to compel him, although I was prepared to.

He dropped the hands of the people on either side of him and drew a blade from his belt, raising it to his throat.

"For Ichor!" he cried, swiping the blade across his throat. He slumped forward onto the sigil, his blood nourishing the intricately carved lines as his heart ceased.

The red light began to glow as fiercely as before, and the cult closed ranks around the fallen, continuing the chant.

The light grew until it formed a portal from floor to ceiling, and I took a step closer, reaching until my fingertips glitched, as if the contact with the sheer volume of energy was rendering my existence shaky.

"Ichor," I pleaded. "Tell me where you are. Show me."

I reached out further, and I could have sworn I saw something take shape in the crimson light. I saw her, turning to face me with that ephemeral smile and eternal beauty.

She reached out, too, her fingertips barely brushing mine.

"Cameron," she whispered, her voice like liquid flame. "My love... come to me."

"I will," I promised, barely able to see through the red and the wind. "I'm trying. Show me how."

Her hand suddenly clasped mine and all the breath rushed from my lungs.

I felt a surge of energy leave me, and for a moment, I was sure she was going to bleed me dry.

Not that I would've minded. My blood and my life force belonged to her, just like everything else.

When I saw the flickering image of a cabin in the woods, I knew.

It was like seeing through the eyes of a hawk, and suddenly, the wind itself was leading me right to that door.

I was so close, I could almost touch it, and the heat of her hand in mine was so hot it burned. It felt like it might consume me until...

"No," I rasped as I felt her touch grow cold. She looked down, frowning at our mutual grasp. "What's happening?"

She hesitated, looking up at me. "His power. It's surging again. I—"

She broke off as I felt the heat that had once been unbearable turn frigid, and despite my best attempt to cling to her, I felt her fading from my world once more.

"No!" I seethed, lunging into the red only for the light—and her—to fade entirely.

Just like that, she was gone.

The basement was plunged into darkness. Every candle that had once been lit went out. All that was left were the remaining cult members, and the dead body mere feet from me as I collapsed in the center of the sigil on my hands and knees.

"Damn it," I gritted out, lost until I felt a hand on my shoulder.



"What is it?" Deanna asked softly. "Did you see it? Did you see her?"

I looked up at her, my eyes slowly adjusting to the light. "I know where they are," I said through my teeth.

And I was going to find them.

CHAPTER  
EIGHT

## CYRUS

The moment I looked through the window and saw Alex carrying Chase, I lost it because there was definitely something wrong.

"What happened?" I demanded, flinging the door open and taking Chase from his arms.

He was unconscious, but that wasn't the only thing that drew my attention.

His skin was frigid to the touch, and a thin sheen of blue frost covered him from head to toe, making his hair brittle. They had barely been gone an hour, and Alex looked fine.

Alex shook his head. "He just collapsed and this started happening. It's his power, I think, but I don't know what's wrong."

I carried Chase upstairs to lay him on my bed and looked him over just to make sure there was nothing physically wrong with him. He didn't seem injured, but that didn't mean much.

"He was collecting herbs, wasn't he?" I asked, even though there was no sign of the basket he had left with. "Did he touch anything poisonous?"

Alex hesitated. "No, I... I don't think so. Like I said, he was fine and talking, and then he just collapsed."

"Something must have happened," I snarled, in his face the next second.

Alex jolted, but he stood his ground. "There's..." He paused, his expression shifting. "He heard something right before it happened."

"He heard something?" I echoed. "What?"

"I don't know," Alex gritted out. "But when it happened, I felt..."

"You felt what?" I demanded.

His eyes met mine. "Her," he answered. "It felt like... it felt like her. I know that sounds crazy, but—"

"It doesn't," I muttered, looking down at Chase.

"You think she has something to do with this?" he asked warily.

"I don't know," I admitted. "But there's someone I know who might."



"WHO IS THIS CHICK, ANYWAY?" Sam asked, peering out through the window blinds for the hundredth time.

We had been waiting for my contact from the local village for hours that felt like days, and while Chase's condition hadn't worsened, I was still worried.

"She's a witch I met years ago, the last time I was here," I answered.

"A witch?" Alex echoed doubtfully. "We don't have enough of those going around?"

"He's frozen solid," I answered. "This isn't something a doctor can fix. His mom's reaction should have been proof enough of that."

Alex grunted in acknowledgment. "So we wait?"

"Yeah," I muttered. "That's the plan."

Sam shifted uncomfortably, glancing upstairs. "I'm gonna go check on him. Tell me when she gets here."

It wasn't long after that I heard the sound of a car's tires crunching on the snow, and a few minutes later, the dark sedan came into view on the path leading up to the cabin.

I opened the front door and went out to greet our guest, freezing when I saw the young man step out of the driver's seat.

He was alone, and looked barely twenty-five if that. He was average height, with a lean build and dark, shaggy hair that framed a gentle face and piercing gray eyes made even more striking by a generous application of eyeliner. He was bundled in a thick black peacoat with a hood, and he had a duffel bag slung over his shoulder.

"You're not Kezia," I remarked.

"Kezia is my sister," he said in a soft, richly accented voice. "She's home with a new baby, so she sent me instead. My name is Lash."

"Nice to meet you, Lash," I said, reaching out to shake his hand. I heard the door open behind me, and I could tell it was Alex from the cheap cologne. "But I think there's been a misunderstanding. We need a witch, and you're... clearly male."

"Am I?" he asked dryly, flicking his hair out of his eye. "Shocker."

I exchanged a glance with Alex, who was already outside.

"Only women can be witches," he said pointedly, looking at me. "This is your plan for helping Chase? Some guy?"

"Maybe that's true where you are from," Lash said, brushing past us both to pause at the door. "Technically, none of us are witches anyway, but I have magic. That's what you need, isn't it?"

Sam was at the door now, watching closely. Both he and Alex were looking at me for direction, so I muttered, "Come on in," and opened the door.

Lash followed me inside along with the others and looked around the cabin, wrinkling his nose.

"Stinks of vampires," he mumbled, kicking off his shoes at the door before walking further inside. "Where is the patient?"

"He's upstairs," I said, reluctant to let a stranger near him, but it wasn't like we had many options. And if he really was Kezia's brother...

I opened the door to Chase's room and found his mother at his bedside, her face knit in a mask of worry. She looked up in confusion. "Who is this?"

"The brother of the one I told you about," I answered. "He needs to take a look at Chase."

She hesitated, and all I could do was hope she wasn't going to put up a fight.

Denise seemed to enjoy being difficult for its own sake, but she got up and stepped aside, eyeing the newcomer warily.

I watched closely as Lash walked over and dropped his bag beside the bed. He leaned in, studying Chase carefully before he took the blanket away and pulled back the sheet. He reached out, brushing his hand over Chase's, and his eyes glazed over before fluttering shut.

He remained frozen for a moment before he gasped sharply and looked up, turning back to me. "You did not mention he was an omega."

"It's not exactly the kind of thing you bring up on the phone," I replied. "How can you tell?"

Chase was definitely "fluffier" than he had been before, but pregnancy still wasn't the first thing someone would think about when looking at him. Especially not when he was bundled up in the sweats we had changed him into in an attempt to regulate his body temperature.

Lash frowned. Rather than answer, he murmured, "In my bag, there's a tea mix and a vial of holy water. Put some water on, make the tea, add three drops of the holy water and bring it here."

Everyone looked over at Alex expectantly, and when he realized it, he scowled. "What am I, the magician's assistant?"

He went over to the bag to get the ingredients out and skulked off, though.

"Chase is still Ichor's vessel," Sam said. "Isn't holy water a bad idea?"

"It would be if that were all he was," Lash answered. "Yes, holy water is poison to vampiric energy, but that is the point. Divine blood courses through his veins. It is so strong, I can almost feel it. He is no mere vessel. It will give him an edge against the intruder."

I hadn't mentioned the fact that Chase was a godbearer at all. If he was able to tell that just from his

energy, he really was the real deal.

"The intruder?" Sam echoed. "You mean Ichor? She's awake?"

"Not quite," Lash said. "Her energy is strong. It lingers, but it's frozen, encased in the same ice that covers him."

"You mean his power did this to keep her from awakening?" I asked hopefully. "Like some kind of failsafe?"

"That is one way to put it," said Lash. "It's a form of binding magic. A very powerful binding, at that."

"So he's okay?" Sam asked hopefully. "He'll come out of this?"

"Yes, but once he does, she will be there," Lash warned. "It's possible his energy is strong enough to fight her off, but if that were the case, the binding would break on its own."

I took a moment to process what he was saying, but there were still plenty of questions left unanswered. "He heard something before he collapsed. I'm assuming it was Ichor, but if she hasn't woken up in all this time, why now?"

Lash paused as if he was considering it, looking down at Chase. "It is possible that she was summoned. The magic within him is strong. For her energy to have been dormant as long as you say, and suddenly this strong, it would take a great quantity of energy. It is unnatural."

"Summoned," I muttered.

"You know someone who would do this, I take it?" asked Lash.

I nodded. "I have an idea."

"That son of a bitch," Sam muttered.

"Okay, I have the holy water tea," Alex said, carrying the cup with both hands as he took tiny shuffling steps past Sam in the doorway. "There's more downstairs, but I didn't want it to spill. Pretty sure I'm enough of a vampire that it would sting like a bitch."

"Why didn't you put it in something more portable?" Denise snapped.

"You can't put magic tea in a tumbler," Alex protested.

Lash rolled his eyes, taking the cup and saucer from his hands. "Someone lift him."

I went to Chase's side, gently lifting his head and shoulder so he was sitting up. Lash put the rim of the cup against his lips and murmured some incantation I couldn't understand to make him swallow.

Yeah, he was the real thing, all right. After centuries of being around witches, I sometimes felt like I knew even less about them than I ever had before.

Once the cup was empty, Lash set it aside. "That should help him fight her off. But I am afraid I cannot do much more. Any more than that would be dangerous for him and the little ones."

"Thank you," I murmured. "There's just one more thing. This summons... Do you think the person who

summoned her knows where we are?"

"If they were capable of this, then absolutely," Lash answered, meeting my eyes. "A connection was made, and that connection goes both ways."

"That's what I was afraid of," I sighed, reaching into my pocket for an envelope of cash I'd already prepared that morning. "If that's the case, then I'm afraid you and your family are in danger if you stay here. You should go quickly."

Lash looked down at the envelope, smirking. "We are no stranger to hostile pursuits, vampire. You're fortunate we happened to be in the area, but we won't be for long."

"At least let me pay for your time," I insisted.

He stood, picking up his bag. "I do not take money from kin."

"Kin?" I raised an eyebrow. "I've known Kezia for a while, but we're not that close. And she let me pay her last time."

"Not you. Him," he said, nodding to the sleeping man in bed.

Sam blinked. "You said you're not even a witch."

"He's an omega," I realized aloud.

The small smile on Lash's lips confirmed it.

"A human omega? Aren't you guys supposed to be rare?" Alex asked.

"Who said I was human, pretty boy?" Lash countered, looking back at me. He nodded to Chase. "Take care of that one. He is special."

"He is," I agreed. "And we will."

I walked Lash back out to the car, and once he was gone, I returned to find the others talking.

"Who just lets an omega go to some random vampire's house on his own?" Alex asked. "How do we even know he is who he says he is?"

"He has a point," Sam murmured.

"I know the family. They're good people," I said firmly.

"You didn't know he was an omega," Denise said, already back at Chase's side.

"Look, right now, we have bigger problems to worry about," I said. "Namely, the fact that Cameron knows where we are."

"What are we going to do?" Alex asked, looking a shade or two paler than usual.

"The only thing we can do," I answered. "We're going to leave."

I left the room to make preparations, stopping on the stairs when I realized Sam was following me. "What is it?"

"I'm ready," he told me.

I paused, turning to face him. "Ready for what?"

"To pay the price," he answered. "To sell my soul."

I stared at him for a moment. "You're sure about this?"

"I'm sure," he said. "Cameron isn't going to give up."

"No," I agreed. "He isn't."

"So we need all the advantages we can get on our side," he reasoned.

I watched him, noticing how different he looked and sounded compared to the last time we had spoken about this. For all intents and purposes, Sam was a vampire now, and Alex wasn't far behind.

But he was right. That wouldn't be enough.

"There's a chance that once we do this, it still won't be enough," I warned him.

"I know," he said in a somber tone. "But we have to try."

"All right," I said quietly. "We'll start the ritual once we get to the next safe house."

Hopefully we had that much time.



CHAPTER  
NINE

SAM

"Are you sure about this?" Cyrus asked me for what felt like the hundredth time.

Setting up the ritual space had taken the better part of the morning, and without a witch, we were just going off of the ritual in Cyrus's old grimoire.

It had worked for Cameron, but he admittedly knew a hell of a lot more about magic than I did.

"Would you stop asking that?" I groaned.

"Just making sure," he answered, finishing up the last bit of the sigil he was working on in the attic of the latest safe house we'd landed in. So far, there was no sign of Cameron or Zeus, but I knew that didn't mean we were out of the woods.

At the moment, we were buried in them miles deep.

I could understand Cyrus's trepidations and appreciate them, in a sense.

He was looking out for me. Selling your soul wasn't something you did lightly, but we were running out of options fast.

And the truth was, I wasn't sure I could lay much claim to having a soul at all if I let Chase be taken from me again.

Whatever happened on the other side... I didn't plan on leaving him anytime soon.

"Let's just do it."

Cyrus nodded, looking up at the attic window. I could hardly see the light of the moon through the snow and ice encrusted on the old panes, but there was definitely a hint of orange in the sky.

"Let's begin, then," said Cyrus. "It's time to create the portal."

He held out a sheathed blade and motioned for me to join him. The ritual wasn't complicated, but Cyrus had explained each step carefully over the course of the morning. As long as we were careful, we should be fine.

I took the knife from his hand and began to chant, speaking slowly and deliberately.

The incantation to summon the demon I would be sharing a body with didn't even need to be spoken

out loud, but I spoke the words anyway. It helped me focus, and Cyrus kept silent as I chanted, watching me closely.

I finished the incantation and cut my palm along the lifeline, holding it over the sigil on the floor. Blood magic was the only kind of magic a vampire could perform, and even then, it was only in the interest of summoning, not actually creating or changing anything.

At first, nothing happened. I watched as my blood slowly traveled along the lines and curves of the sigil the way it had done before with Chase's, but unlike then, there was no faint glow of magic to at least let me know it was working.

There wasn't the same crackling energy in the air, either, and I had come to realize that was probably because it came from Chase himself.

"Is it working?" I asked, looking up at Cyrus.

His face was blank, as usual, and it was hard to tell what he was thinking. "It is," he answered after a few minutes.

"Then why isn't it glowing?" I demanded.

"It takes time. Energy doesn't just appear out of thin air."

"I guess," I said doubtfully, watching the sigil closely.

I was about to tell him maybe we should start over when a plume of black light suddenly shot up from the sigil, forming what looked like a portal.

"Holy shit," I breathed.

Cyrus didn't look quite as stunned, but he rarely did, so the fact that he was reacting visibly at all was proof this was a big deal.

"Not bad without a witch," I murmured. "What do I do now?"

"Cameron said he walked through," Cyrus answered, looking back at the grimoire. "So does the diagram."

"The diagram? Seriously?"

He shrugged and held the book out to me. Sure enough, there was some little medieval bastard stepping through what looked like the black mirror that had formed before me. Like a fucking Ikea manual from hell.

"Okay," I said, taking a deep breath and squaring my shoulders. Like that was going to help.

"Take your time," said Cyrus. "But also, I don't know how long the portal is going to remain open, so... factor that in."

"Right. Comforting," I said flatly. "Not everyday you sell your soul."

I stared into the blackness, ready to take my next step when someone caught me by the arm.

"Hey, what the fuck are you doing?"

I turned around to find Alex glaring at me.

"I thought you said you drugged him," I growled, looking at Cyrus.

He frowned. "I did. I put it in the leftover Chinese food, you know he can't resist that."

"I knew it!" Alex hissed. "Joke's on you, I had acid reflux from last night."

I groaned. "This is really not the time, Alex."

"Oh, yeah? I thought there was just a portal in the fucking attic for the hell of it," he cried, gesturing at the portal. "You're doing it, aren't you? You're going to sell your fucking soul after I explicitly told you not to?"

Cyrus's eyes narrowed. "You told him?"

"He's my best friend, and I needed someone to talk to about it," I grumbled. "It was a moment of weakness."

Cyrus rolled his eyes.

"You can't go through with this, man," Alex protested.

"I don't have a choice," I snapped. "Are you forgetting Cameron already did? And he's not going to stop until we kill him or he kills Chase. That's it. This is it. This is the only way we can stop him. This is the only option."

Alex hesitated, looking from me to the portal. A look of solemn resignation crossed his face as he said, "No, it isn't."

I frowned, but before I could say anything, he pushed me aside and stepped into the portal.

"Alex, no!" I cried, lunging after him.

It was too late, though. The portal vanished as suddenly as it had appeared, and I stumbled into the empty sigil, staring up at an equally perplexed Cyrus.

"What the fuck? Where is he?" I growled.

Cyrus just shook his head, staring at the spot where Alex had been. "I don't know. I—" Before he could finish his thought, the black portal reopened, and the force of it sent me flying across the room.

I groaned, pretty sure I had blacked out for a moment.

When I came to, Cyrus was getting back on his feet, but the way he stopped and stared up ahead drew my attention.

And then I realized what he was staring at. In the center of the sigil, there was a massive black beast with a lupine head and the body of a vaguely humanoid... monster... thing.

Son of a fucking fuck, what the hell was that?

Its eyes opened, solid gold, and its lips curled back into a white snarl with fangs the size of knives. There were spiky projections of what looked like bone curving down its spine, culminating in a long, lashing tail as it rose onto its hind legs, its head brushing the ceiling.

I grabbed my knife, ready to fight when the beast's eyes locked on mine, but something in them froze me solid.

"Wait," I cried, throwing out my hand before Cyrus could lunge at it. "I think... I think that's Alex."

The way the beast's ears perked up was more confirmation.

"You've got to be kidding," Cyrus muttered, staring in disbelief.

"I fucking hope not," I said. I hesitantly reached out. "Uh. Alex? You in there, buddy?"

The beast snarled—at least, I thought it was a snarl—and lowered its head to bound forward. I felt like I was going to be sick, and I was about to regret asking Cyrus to hold back when the creature pushed its snout into my hand, its breath hot as fire.

I breathed a sigh of relief. "Yeah," I said. "It's Alex."

"God," Cyrus said in disapproval. "Leave it to him to be pathetic even as a demon."

"This... definitely wasn't ideal," I said, torn between being touched and infuriated. That happened a lot where Alex was concerned. "But it's something."

"I suppose beggars can't be choosers," Cyrus scoffed.

CHAPTER  
TEN

## CHASE

When I woke up to an empty white space, surrounded by absolute fuck all, I groaned.  
Not again.

If I was back in the fucking Other after the hell I'd gone through to get out the last time...

Okay, think, Chase. What happened? How did you get here?

I closed my eyes, trying to remember. I'd been out walking with Alex in the woods, and despite the fact that my knee jerk impulse was to blame him, I couldn't actually remember him doing anything.

The voice....

Ichor!

Shit. Of course that bitch was behind this. If I was here, did that mean she was...?

The thought of her actively piloting my body and living my life once more was infuriating and enough to send me into a spiraling blind panic, but I knew I had to keep it together. For the babies, if nothing else.

I was actually relieved to rest my hand on my rounded belly when I looked down. They were still here.

At least, I hoped that was what that meant. And I could feel their energy if I tried hard and focused enough. That was something.

Not that it was going to stay that way for long if she got her way.

"Hello?" I called, moving forward into the white. I had gotten out of this place once before, and I could do it again. "Anyone here? Ichor? You bloody bitch," I mumbled the last part under my breath.

A shadow moved, and I saw a woman standing in front of me. She was tall and slender, dressed in a flowing gown made of some dark material that shimmered in the light, and a long, white veil covered most of her face.

I froze, but she didn't seem ready to attack. Hell, she looked more like a shadow than an actual physical person. As far as I could tell, she wasn't even trying to hide herself.

"Who are you?" I asked cautiously, backing up a step.

Her eyes opened, a chromatic rainbow of colors that looked almost artificial. As if she were a mirage, or maybe a hologram.

"My name is Ampelus," she answered. "I am a nymph, sent to guide you."

"Uh. That's nice, but guide me where?" I asked warily.

My knowledge of Greek mythology was limited to Nike, Nyx and Adidas...

Wait, was Adidas even a god? Pretty sure.

But whatever the case may have been, I knew nymphs were like catnip to a slut like my father, so yeah, not too keen on following the shimmery rainbow shadow girl.

"To Olympus, of course," she answered.

Yeah, that confirmed my suspicions. And allayed at least one of my fears. "So.... I'm not in the Other?"

She hesitated, tilting her head. "This is the great corridor," she answered, stretching out her arms. "It is a bridge between realms, some of which may only be accessed with the guidance of a psychopomp."

"A psychopomp," I said, backing up. "Yeah, I know all the code words for grim reaper. First thing I looked up after dying the first time, and you're basically a white light at the end of the tunnel with a waistline and good hair. No, thanks."

She tilted her head in the other direction. "You are very strange."

"So I've heard," I said, folding my arms. "Still not going."

The nymph paused as if she was considering her next move. Before I could make a run for it, I heard a voice that seemed to be coming from everywhere and nowhere at once.

"Ampelus! What's taking so long?"

"Forgive me, Master," she said, bowing her head.

"I'm sorry, is that a loudspeaker?" I asked, looking around for any sign of it in what I assumed was a ceiling. Somewhere up in there. "How did you—?"

"Bring him to the throne room," the voice interrupted in a gruff timber.

Before I could tell loudspeaker guy I wasn't going anywhere, two giant doors opened up out of nothing and I found myself staring down a gilded street lined with people dressed in flowing robes of every hue imaginable.

"Where the fuck am I?" I asked aloud, turning around to see the nymph hovering in the air behind me.

"Olympus," she answered.

Well, that figured. "I'm not dead," I muttered. "And if I am, I don't plan on staying that way."



"Olympus is not the afterlife," she said pointedly, floating on ahead of me.

Given the fact that no one was paying us any mind, I got the feeling they were all used to the sight of gods wandering around.

"I'll take your word on that, floating spirit lady," I said dryly, following her since I really didn't have any better options.

And I didn't feel like getting stuck in limbo again, or whatever that awful white extradimensional H&M fitting room happened to be.

As we walked along, I took in my surroundings. Huge buildings with towering white columns, open atriums, and cypress trees everywhere. The road itself was carved into a mountaintop and if I looked down on any side of me, I felt like I could see forever.

We passed several people in robes and hoods, but none paid any attention to us as we approached what looked like a palace made of white stone. There was a huge fountain in the courtyard, and the water was so clear that it looked like it went straight through the building.

Even the sky above was a perfect, sapphire blue with not a single cloud.

Armed guards in ornate golden armor standing at various points around the grounds caught my eye right away.

"Holy shit, how many people live here?" I whispered, glancing around again.

"A good number," Ampelus said.

"Huh," I muttered, glancing over at her. "Are they all gods?"

"Hardly," she answered. "Many of them are demigods, but some are mortals."

"Huh," I said again, following her up a short flight of steps into a massive throne room.

At the head of the room was a man sitting on a high-backed chair, wearing a long red cloak and a crown of gold on his head. His flowing white robes definitely made him look the part of the god he clearly was.

And judging from the fact that he had familiar golden-blond hair and blue eyes, I had a very bad feeling I knew exactly which god he was.

"Son of a bitch," I muttered.

His handsome face split into a knowing smile. "It seems you finally made it home, Chase."

He stood up, and I quickly retreated back a few steps.

"Allow me to introduce myself. I am Zeus, god of Olympus and of lightning. Of course, what are such titles among kin? You, my dear boy, may call me father."

CHAPTER  
**ELEVEN**

## CHASE

"Father," I echoed with a dry laugh. "Sorry, but in order for me to call a guy Daddy, he needs to at least buy me a drink first."

Zeus chuckled. "You are Denise's child."

"That's a certain fact," I informed him. "It's the other half of my parentage that remains fuzzy."

"Well, allow me to allay the mystery," he said, raising his hand. I flinched in anticipation, but I definitely wasn't expecting to end up at the side of his throne the next instant without having taken a step.

"What the f—?"

"You should have a seat," he said, waving his hand. I was pushed back into a chair that hadn't been there five seconds earlier. "It's not good for a pregnant omega to be on his feet."

"Gee, thanks," I said through my teeth. "How does extradimensional travel factor into all that?"

"For a demigod? It's no trouble," he said with a dismissive wave, sitting back on his great throne. "I imagine you do know what you are, yes? Or did Denise keep that from you, just as she kept you from me all these years?"

I grimaced. "She took her time," I conceded.

"She did indeed," Zeus agreed. "In the time since she sent you off, I've done my best to track you down. Imagine my surprise when you show up on my doorstep."

"Sorry to break it to you, but I didn't just feel like it was time for a family reunion," I said.

"No, I imagine not," he mused. "But you are here all the same, and there is much we need to discuss."

"Is there, though?" I asked. "Because I kind of like this whole no contact thing we've had going for the last two decades, and it really seems like a shame to ruin a good thing."

Zeus was clearly not amused.

"You are my son, whether you like it or not. And you are a godbearer, at that. The role along with your birthright comes with certain privileges and responsibilities that you have been neglecting."

"Yeah, I'm well aware of the 'privilege' of being sold off to one of your cronies," I said, pushing up from the chair. "Not interested."

"Sit. Down," he ordered.

My ass plopped back into the chair. Apparently, I was no longer the commander in chief.

I gritted my teeth and dug my nails into the armrests of the throne he'd just magicked up for me. "I'm starting to see why Mom ghosted you."

"She what?" he asked, frowning.

"Nothing," I muttered. "What do you want from me?"

"I want you to take your rightful place as my heir," he answered. "And yes, that does involve being promised to someone who can appropriately care for you. Unlike the warren of murderous mosquitoes you're currently surrounded by."

So he had been keeping tabs on me at least that much. "I'm not a fucking hamster," I said. "I don't require 'care,' I can take care of myself."

"Oh, really?" he challenged. "And that parasite inside you? You call going into a comatose state taking care of it?"

"My children are not parasites," I seethed, putting a hand on my stomach. A gust of frigid wind blew into the throne room, and Zeus looked around, but seemed unfazed. "Admittedly not one of my more impressive displays, but just imagine the impact that would have had if there were doors to blow open."

"I was referring to Ichor," he said pointedly.

"Oh," I replied. "In that case, dramatic display redacted. So... you know her?"

"I know her well," he answered, a sharp edge to his tone. "Ichor, goddess of blood. Or as she's known in Olympus, the personification of the life force that grants the gods their immortality."

"What do you mean, the personification?" I asked warily.

Zeus took a dagger from his hip and I flinched, but he merely drew it along the inside of his hand instead.

"Ew, God," I said, squirming away from the sight in my chair. "What is with you people and cutting your fucking lifelines?"

When I ventured a glance back against my better judgment, my eyes widened at the sight of the sapphire-blue substance leaking from the cut in his palm.

It healed over the next instant, but Zeus raised his hand, smearing the blue substance between his fingers. "Ichor," he announced. "Pure immortals do not possess blood, but its nature is close enough."

"So you're telling me *that* stuff is Ichor," I said flatly. "Because it hasn't mouthed off so far, so I have a hard time believing that."

"As I said, she is the soul of the blue blood. An incarnation," he answered. "Much like the nymphs who take shape from stone, tree and water, she has become an entity unto herself."

"So she isn't really a god? Who created her, then?"

"That is a question the gods would like to know as well as you," he answered. "But despite the fact that her origins are mysterious and relatively recent, she has managed to carve out quite a reputation for herself. And turned an entire fleet of degenerate monsters in the process."

"The vampires?" I asked. That seemed like a pretty generous description, my personal bias aside.

"Ichor is poison to humanity," said Zeus. "It corrupts the soul and changes the physical form, as you know well."

"Yeah, I'm aware," I mumbled. "I'm somewhat vampire adjacent myself."

"You wouldn't be, if you weren't possessed," he said in a sharp tone.

"And you have a way of resolving that, I take it?" I asked.

"I do. But you need to cooperate with me before we get there."

"And if I'm not willing to pay the price of that cooperation?" I challenged.

He gave me a look that was too damn familiar. "Tell me, Chase, how has your way been working out for you so far?"

I shrugged. "I'm alive, more or less, and I've got three dicks on demand, so it's not that bad."

"Sarcastic in the face of certain annihilation," he said dryly. "You get that from your uncle."

"Which one?" I asked. "The guy who lives in Hell, or the one who hangs out with dolphins all day? I'm a little rusty on my mythos."

Zeus stood from his throne, looking admittedly menacing. "You will remain at Olympus, where you will be safe until your children are born. In the meantime, I'll have someone working on your... condition."

"I'm not staying here," I countered, pushing up from the chair, which was not really the dramatic move I wanted it to be, considering I was toting a basketball under my sweater.

"You don't have a choice," he informed me. "And if you insist on being obstinate, you can do so in your room until you've had time to reconsider."

"What—"

The next instant, I wasn't in the throne room, and there was no Zeus to rant at. I was in what looked like an Instagram-worthy hotel room in Athens instead.

On the one hand, this would make a hell of a video for my YouTube channel, but on the other, that son of a fucking bitch.

Although... technically, that was me trash talking my own grandmother.

Fuck.

CHAPTER  
TWELVE

## CYRUS

"Is he still a hell... thing?" Denise asked worriedly as she looked over at the sleeping beast on the living room rug.

Alex lifted his head, curling his lip back in a faint snarl before he laid it back down.

I'd worried he would be hard to control, but so far, he was even lazier in this form than usual.

If that were possible.

"I'm not sure he knows how to shift back," I admitted. Hell, I wasn't even sure how much of him was still left in there, but the general patheticness made me think there was still more Alex than demon.

"Well, that's terribly inconvenient, given everything that's going on right now," she huffed.

I blinked. "Yeah, he really picked an inconsiderate time to sell his soul for your son."

She just walked into the living room and set down the grocery bags in her arms, ignoring me. "Put these away. I'm going to go check on Chase. I take it he's still frozen?"

"Uh. Yeah," I said, getting up from my spot at the table to put away the groceries.

I wasn't used to taking orders from anyone other than the vessel, but it was his mother, and I had learned in the last month spent holed up with Denise that she was a lot easier to manage if she was kept happy.

Or at least, not furious. That was enough of a task.

"Sam's with him right now," I added.

She nodded, but lingered, as if there was something else she wanted to say. Knowing the woman didn't mince words, I wasn't sure what was coming.

"Whatever is happening with him... I can't help him," she said somberly. "And I'm not used to not being able to help my little boy."

"I know this is hard for you," I said, choosing my words carefully.

The flash of anger in her eyes suggested I hadn't chosen them carefully enough at all.



“No, you don’t know,” she said firmly. “You’ll never understand what it’s like to be a mother. At best, one day, you’ll know what it’s like to be a decent father, but you don’t understand how I feel and you never will. You don’t know what it’s like to have someone grow and develop inside of you, and nurture him into his own person. To give up so much of your life, and yourself, just to keep him safe, only to have his fate completely reliant on a bunch of...”

“Monsters?” I offered.

She snorted. “Close enough.”

Closer than she had any idea.

Guilt wasn’t something I had ever really felt before Chase, and I wasn’t exactly fond of Denise outside of who she was to him, but I still felt another layer of guilt knowing that she didn’t even understand what I had done to him in the past.

“No,” I conceded. “I don’t understand what you’re going through, but I do love him. He’s important to me. More than you could imagine.”

“Please,” she scoffed. “You’re a vampire. Are you even capable of love? Do you even know what that means?”

It was a fair question. One I had asked myself plenty of times before.

“I don’t know what it means for you,” I admitted, deciding to start there. “But I know it’s different from anything I’ve felt before. Even when I was human. And I know better than anyone that Chase deserves better than me. Better than all of us. So you’re preaching to the choir there, but right now, we’re what he has. And I’m going to do whatever it takes to make sure he has what he needs.”

“Even if that eventually means something better?” she challenged.

Her words were a gut punch, not because I was insulted, but because I knew she was right. One day, when all this was over, and Chase was free to live a normal life—or at least one where he wasn’t constantly having his life threatened—he wasn’t going to need me anymore.

And if and when that time came, I was going to have to decide just how much I was willing to sacrifice. I’d already given up my goddess and my calling, but those had been easy. Especially since I’d found myself in return, by finding him.

Giving up Chase, though? Was I capable of that kind of selflessness?

“I guess we’ll just have to find out,” I said finally.

She didn’t seem satisfied by my answer, but she sighed. “Points for honesty. I guess I should at least be grateful you’ve kept him alive this far. If it were up to that tool brother of yours, I’d be having to use a spirit board to talk to my own son.”

"Denise, you're brilliant," I muttered.

She blinked. "Tell me something me and the other members of the Surgical Association of America don't know. But why?"

"Cameron summoned Ichor," I reasoned. "Chase is a deity in his own right. Theoretically, we should be able to summon him, too."

She eyed me warily like I'd lost my mind, and I had to admit, I wasn't quite sure myself. But I couldn't just keep standing by, not being able to do anything. Protecting him wasn't enough, and even with Alex being a demon now, there were still no guarantees we'd be able to do that.

The truth was, Chase's power was the biggest edge we had, and the longer he was down for the count, the more vulnerable he was.

"Don't you need a sigil to do that?" she asked.

"A sigil is just a name," I said with a shrug. "Most deities predate human writing conventions, so theoretically, his name should work."

"Huh," she mused. "Well, I guess it's worth a shot."

"What is?" Sam asked, coming down the stairs. "What did I miss?"

"Denise gave me an idea," I answered. "If Cameron was able to summon Ichor through Chase, maybe we can do the same thing."

Sam blinked. "Summoning Chase?"

"He is a demigod," I said, more confident in my theory the second time I was explaining it. "Technically, you should be able to summon any inhuman spirit."

"It's an interesting theory," Sam said. "I mean, it's not like we've got any better options."

"No," I agreed. "We don't."

"Do you know how to do a ritual like that?" Denise asked.

"I don't," I said. "But something tells me Lash would."

"You heard him. His family left the last town. There's no telling where they are now," Sam protested.

I took out my phone, sending a text to his sister asking her to have him call me. "He has a phone, genius."

"Oh," Sam mumbled, rubbing the back of his head. "Right."

"You hush," Denise scolded, giving Sam baby eyes. "He was up with Chase all night. So devoted."

"He's a paladin," I said flatly. "It's literally his job. Speaking of which, someone should be with him."

Before Sam could reply, Alex sprang up from his spot on the floor and slinked up the stairs, bony tail swinging after him.

"Guess he's on it," Sam remarked.

"Is that safe?" Denise asked, squinting after Alex. "Can he really be trusted alone with Chase?"

"The ritual Alex did is the same one Cameron performed," I told her.

"So?"

"He didn't just sell his soul," I answered. "He sold his soul for Chase. That forms a bond, and he's a paladin on top of that. Trust me, there's no one Chase is safer with right now than him."

Denise still didn't seem thrilled, but she grunted. "I'll take your word for it." When my phone buzzed, she asked, "Who is that?"

"Lash," I answered. "He says he can help with the ritual."

"We're going to be teleconferencing a summoning ritual?" Sam asked doubtfully.

"Beggars can't be choosers," I reminded him. "Besides, as much of a longshot as this is, our witch being in the room is the least of our worries."

CHAPTER  
THIRTEEN

## CHASE

After trashing my room like a rock star throwing a tantrum in a hotel, I had finally given up on finding a way out. For now. That, and the morning sickness was kicking in again.

"You owe me, kids," I muttered, rubbing my stomach. "You'd better be model citizens from birth until high school graduation for all the shit you've put me through."

"Talking to yourself already after barely a day?" an unfamiliar voice came from across the room. "My, and here I've always thought Sisyphus was a whiner."

I spun around to find a handsome man with golden-blond hair cascading over his shoulders. He was wearing a tailored white suit and silver wingtips with literal fucking wings on the heels.

He was the tackiest, most glorious thing I'd ever seen.

"Who the fuck are you?" I demanded, readying an ice shiv just in case the weirdo got any ideas.

"Relax, kitten," he said, holding up his empty hands. "I mean you no harm."

"Yeah, given my experiences with you Olympus freaks so far, I'm not buying that," I informed him, gripping the ice blade tighter.

He gave a disapproving 'tsk.' "That's no way to talk to family."

I raised an eyebrow. "Considering Zeus has never met a warm hole he didn't want to stick his dick in, that doesn't really mean much, either."

He gave a musical chuckle and took a step forward. Before his foot hit the floor, he was right beside me, his hand wrapped around my wrist. "But we're closer than most, my darling. Brothers, in fact."

I flinched, turning my head to look at him. "What?"

He let go of me, and in a flash, he was standing right before me. At first, I'd assumed he was teleporting, but the gust of wind that blew the strands of hair in my face told me he was just using Cyrus's and Cameron's annoying little faster-than-the-speed-of-light trick.

And he was better at it.

"Hermes, at your service," he said with a gallant bow. "Or Mercury, depending on who's asking."

"Hermes," I echoed flatly. "The god of medicine?"

"Among other things," he mused. "I hear you've something of an interest in the subject yourself."

"I'm premed," I mumbled, feeling very much outshined. "Or was, until I got a hankering for AB-negative."

He chuckled. "Well, if it makes you feel any better, your destiny is far greater than that of a healer."

"Right. Cum dumpster of the gods," I shot back. "So prestigious."

He laughed. "A sense of humor! Must skip a generation. Well, that's good. You're going to need it, because I'm afraid you're not going anywhere, little lark."

"We'll see about that," I said.

"And what are you going to do?" he challenged. "Even if you did manage to scamper out of here and get back to your realm, you're not even in your physical body at the moment. You'd be floating around like a ghost until—and if—you were able to reconnect with your physical form."

Well, shit.

"Yeah, obviously," I said. "I knew that."

He gave me a look. "Is it really so bad here?" he asked, holding his arms out as if to gesture to everything I was turning my nose up at.

"Not really," I said, stepping back. "But I don't like being trapped."

"Oh, come now," he admonished. "This is hardly a prison. You would live a life of luxury, wanting for nothing."

"Until I'm sold off to the highest bidder," I reminded him.

"To continue living a life of luxury, wanting for nothing," he countered. "As the most treasured being in the universe. A godbearer! You would be worshiped, adored, and cared for beyond measure."

"I get enough worship from my subscribers," I informed him.

He cocked his head. "What of your harem?"

"Oh. Right. Them, too."

Hermes smirked. "My dear boy, you're meant for more than to be the plaything of vampires. The mere manifestations of what happens when humanity comes in contact with the power running through our veins..."

"Yeah, Pops gave me the spiel," I said. "I'm good. I don't suppose you know who he wants to sell me off to, by chance?"

"There are many contenders," Hermes mused, strolling across the room. "Hades and Apollo among them."

"Uh. Isn't Hades our uncle?" I asked, wrinkling my nose.

"Such mortal concerns," he said with a chuckle. "Then of course, there is yours truly."

"You?" I blanched. "Ew."

"You wound me, Chase," he said, clutching his heart melodramatically. "Rare as your kind is, such trivialities as blood relation matter not."

"No offense, but you're really not my type," I said through my teeth. "Although, if it makes you feel better, the fact that we share roughly twenty-five percent of the same alleles is pretty far down the list of reasons why."

His smirk remained in place, but there was a dangerous glint in his eyes that made it more menacing than mischievous. "We'll see, brother. But in the meantime, you aren't going anywhere. I suggest you use the time to come to terms with that reality."

"Come to terms with my ass."

He blinked. "Was that... supposed to be an insult?"

I groaned. "I'm having an off day, okay?"

Before he could say anything else, something drew his attention on the other side of the room. I followed his gaze and saw what looked like a shimmering mirror forming in the middle of the air, and judging from the look on Hermes's face, that wasn't supposed to happen.

"What is that?" I asked.

"A portal, or so it appears," he said, narrowing his eyes.

"A portal to where?"

Rather than answer, Hermes drew the blade at his side. The sheath was subtle enough hidden beneath his suit jacket that I hadn't noticed it before, but the hilt of the blade was gold and shaped like a caduceus.

Showoff.

I went to the portal to peer in, and my eyes widened when I saw the image beyond the rippling silver surface of the portal. It was hazy, but I could clearly see Cyrus, Sam, and my mother gathered around in a circle, hands clasped and eyes closed as if in prayer as they all chanted something.

Either the door-to-door preachers had upped their game in the time I'd been gone, or they were performing some kind of ritual. The strangely familiar pull in the center of my chest confirmed it.

"Get away from that," Hermes demanded, holding out his arm to push me back. He squinted into the portal, frowning. "What are you looking at?"

"You can't see them?" I asked in disbelief.

He looked back at the portal, but the look of confusion on his face made it plain enough.

Somehow, the others had opened that portal for me, and it might be my one and only shot at getting back.

Of course, I had to distract my warden and would-be brother-husband in order to take it.

I pushed a burst of energy into the ground, turning the marble beneath Hermes's fancy shoes to solid ice.

He gave a startled cry as I shoved him and he went flying, giving me just enough time to run into the portal.

"No!" he cried, and I felt him clutching my sleeve, but I managed to fall forward anyway.

Rather than stepping right into the cozy scene I'd witnessed through the portal, I found myself tumbling through a seemingly endless abyss that looked like it was made out of the same shimmery mirror-like substance as the portal itself.

Son of a bitch, not again.



CHAPTER  
FOURTEEN

## CHASE

After falling for what felt like forever, the darkness around me began to lighten, and I realized I was no longer plummeting through the endless void of space.

I felt the jolt of impact as I was thrust back into my body and sat up sharply with a gasp.

"Holy shit." My eyes darted around. "Where—?"

When I looked around, I found myself observing the scene I'd witnessed through the portal from the bed across the room. It was an unfamiliar space, but my heart warmed at the three very familiar faces staring back at me.

"Chase," Cyrus breathed, relief flooding his eyes as he rushed across the room and collapsed on the side of the bed before pulling me into his arms. "God, I can't believe it worked."

"Me either," I mumbled into his shoulder, returning the embrace. "What worked again?"

"The summoning," Sam answered, coming in on my other side. "One of Cyrus's weirder ideas, but shit, it actually worked."

"Summoning?" I echoed in confusion, looking between them.

"Never mind that now," Mom said, pushing past them both to pull me into a bear hug.

It was so crushing I could hardly breathe until she pulled away, taking my face in her hands.

"Are you all right? How do you feel? Do you remember who you are? You're not cold anymore," she said, the words tumbling out all at once as she pressed her hand to my forehead.

"I'm fine, Mom," I said, even though I was still struggling to get my bearings and remember what the fuck had happened.

At least until I saw the giant monster lying on the floor, its head resting on the corner of the bed as it watched us with strangely shimmery golden eyes.

"Holy shit, what the fucking fuck is that?" I cried, pointing at it.

The fact that none of the others seemed horrified was almost more terrifying than the thing itself.

Was I hallucinating? What if this was all a hallucination and I was still back in Olympus with my

brother-husband?

"Yeah, that's Alex," Sam said, putting his hands on his hips as he studied the monster. "Some shit happened while you were taking a nap."

"The fuck do you mean that's Alex?" I asked, scrambling as far back as the headboard would allow. The creature just blinked slowly at me. "It's a fucking hellhound."

"Probably not far off," Cyrus remarked in a dry tone.

"He acts more like a cat," Sam chimed in.

I blinked. "Okay, rewind. I don't care what he is, why the fuck is he... that?"

"Because he has to copy everything I do," Sam grumbled.

Cyrus gave him a look. "The long story short is that he sold his soul in the same ritual as Cameron did."

"He did what?" I choked out.

"Look, we can get into the details when you're feeling better," said Sam. "The important thing is you're back. And Alex isn't going to eat you."

I turned to look back at him, because I wasn't entirely sure, only to realize he had leapt up onto the bed with his front paws—claws? Hands? And a giant pointed tongue was dangling out of his mouth.

Before I could do anything, he slurped up the side of my cheek and made a sound that was somewhere between a whine and the shriek I imagined a banshee would let out.

"Probably," Sam tacked on.

All I could do was stare into those strangely familiar golden eyes, and the longer I did, the more I realized it was the truth. This was Alex.

"Is he stuck like this?" I asked.

"Seems to be," Cyrus answered.

"Honestly, I think it's an improvement," said Mom. "He can't talk."

Alex's head whipped around, and the bony spurs on his spine quivered as he let out a serpentine hiss.

Mom backed up, her eyes widening as she ducked behind Sam. "Don't you dare! Chase, you'd better control that thing."

"Oh, right, like I didn't just wake up from a coma to a pet hellhound," I grumbled.

When Alex wrapped himself around me, resting his bony head on my shoulder, I sighed and reached up to pat him. He purred in response, and the sound was so intense, I could feel it vibrating through me.

"I guess he's sort of cute in a Lovecraftian way," I said.

"That's generous," Cyrus said. "But he might actually give us a shot at stopping Cameron."

"Who, by the way, is who you have to thank for this," Mom said, gesturing to the bed.

"What happened?" I asked, still trying to comb through my memories of Olympus.

Hell, now I wasn't even fully sure they were memories and not some fucked up dream. I could hope.

"Cameron performed a summoning ritual on Ichor," Sam answered.

I felt a fresh rush of panic. "She was out?"

"No. Your power shut her down," Cyrus said, putting a hand on my shoulder. "She couldn't manifest fully. We found another witch who helped us keep her down, and he explained what happened."

"He?" I echoed.

"Long story," Sam said dryly. "But you're back with us now. That's what matters."

"I guess so," I murmured, leaning against Alex since I was feeling exhausted despite having been out for... "How long was I out, anyway?"

"Over a week," Cyrus answered. "Too long."

I looked down at myself, grimacing. "Guess ice acts as a natural deodorant, at least. But I still need to shower for about seven hours."

Cyrus chuckled. "I'll carry you."

"I don't need to be c—" I broke off when my legs gave out on me the second I put any weight on them. Cyrus scooped me up before I fell over and carried me down the hall toward the bathroom.

I just sighed, resting against him. When I looked over his shoulder, I saw that we were being followed by Alex.

He was even clingier in this form, and when he stood on his hind legs and his head brushed the ceiling, I realized he was even bigger than he'd seemed at first glance.

"That's going to take some getting used to," I remarked.

"Look at it this way," Cyrus said dryly, sitting me down on the edge of the bathtub so he could turn on the water. "He makes a better guard dog than a boyfriend."

Alex snarled, ducking his head to walk into the bathroom before he curled up in a corner.

I snorted. "Maybe so. Um. There's something we need to talk about."

"Oh?" Cyrus asked.

"Before you guys summoned me... I was in Olympus."

He turned to me. "You were in... Olympus. The home of the gods?"

"Yeah," I answered. "When I went into a coma, I ended up in the Other. Or at least, the corridor. Zeus

found me and brought me back to his weird mountaintop palace and tried to kidnap me. Oh, and apparently, Hermes is my brother and he also wants to knock me up, so that's a thing."

Cyrus just blinked slowly at me. "That was quite an eventful nap."

"It wasn't a dream, Cyrus!" I insisted. I was sure of it now that I had recounted it, even if it did seem even more far fetched than living through it had. "It's as real as anything else that's happened."

He frowned, as if he was considering it. "We should proceed with caution anyway. He didn't try to harm you?"

"No," I admitted. "He just wants to use me as a bargaining chip, but he claimed he could help me get rid of Ichor. By the way, you know she's made out of the stuff that keeps the gods alive, right?"

"I'm aware of her origins, yes."

"And you still decided that was something you wanted to stick your dick in?" I asked flatly. "Oh, sweet. The literal personification of sticky blue goo. Let me get my dick right in that."

Cyrus sighed. "I see you're back to your usual profane self. That's a relief. Now, take these off," he said, helping me get out of my clothes.

My body was so stiff it felt like I was in the process of being defrosted, and that was pretty much reality, whether I wanted to think about it or not.

As I slipped into the warm water, I hissed a breath in through my teeth. It hurt, but it felt good. I sank fully into the water until it was past my shoulders and breathed a deep sigh of relief. "So... this witch you found. He helped you restrain Ichor?"

"He helped you, more like," Cyrus answered. "We really couldn't do anything. You're the one who held her back. The tincture he gave you just helped keep her that way."

"But you arranged it," I said.

Cyrus frowned. "I called Lash, yeah. Why?"

"It's nothing," I murmured, looking down at the water. "I'm just... Thank you."

Understanding lit his eyes and he reached out, stroking a strand of frosty hair behind my ear. "You're surprised? I told you, Chase. I chose you. I'll always choose you."

"I know." I smiled. "It's just nice to have proof."

He leaned in, pressing his lips to mine. I deepened the kiss, breathless as usual when he finally pulled away. "I'll let you enjoy your bath. It's my turn to patrol."

"I don't think Zeus knows where we are, if that helps," I told him. "I was the only one who could see you guys through the portal, and I think he was only able to reach me because I entered the Other, so the ward seems to be holding."

"Well, that's good," he mused, leaning in the doorway. "We could always do it again once you're feeling better. Just for security's sake."

I laughed. "Right..." My gaze drifted over to Alex, who was sleeping or at least seemed to be. "Um. Maybe when he has fewer claws."

"Coward," Cyrus said in a deadpan tone.

I lobbed the half-empty shampoo bottle at him as he shut the door, but Alex's head popped up, tilting curiously.

"Don't even think about it," I warned him. "Fucking vampires is weird enough."

He just whined and set his head back down.

Yeah. That was definitely Alex.

CHAPTER  
FIFTEEN

## CHASE

"You know, you're kind of majestic as a wolf-demon-Skeletor thing," I remarked as Alex followed me out behind the cabin. I was tired of being cooped up, and I needed fresh air after the last few days.

He gave a half-hearted growl of protest, swinging his giant head to peer through the woods surrounding us.

"Relax. Cyrus is skulking around on patrol, and Sam's in the house. We're safe," I said, putting my hand out to send a burst of energy into the snow. It cleared until there was a ten-by-ten patch of grass that was just perfect for the blanket I'd brought out, intent on getting some work done in my new digital grimoire and getting some much needed vitamin D in the process.

Alex sniffed the ground suspiciously. He finally started scratching at the blanket and curled up to sleep. I sat down next to him, pulling out my tablet.

"You really are a cat," I said.

He just yawned, resting his head on my lap. I reached out and found myself absently stroking his head as I flipped through the pages of my e-grimoire.

Definitely the way to do it as opposed to icky parchment made out of who the hell even knew what.

At some point, I must have drifted off, because I awoke to the sound of wind rustling through the trees.

When I opened my eyes, Alex's head was lifted off my lap as he looked around, listening intently. The spiny projections on his back quivered and he let out a low growl.

"What's wrong?" I asked, glancing around.

He shook his head slightly, but his body grew even more tense as he focused on something to the right of us deep in the woods. He got up, loping slowly forward.

"Alex, wait," I hissed.

He ignored me, his fangs bared and his head lowered as he growled louder and his bony tail whipped around in agitation. I strained to get a better look at whatever it was he was seeing, but it was too dark for me to make out anything other than the vague shapes of trees.



The sound of twigs snapping made me jump. A shadowy figure emerged from the thicket and raced straight toward us.

Before I could react, Alex was charging toward the figure.

The creature had no discernible features, and as far as I could tell, it might as well have been a shadow. Except that when Alex's jaws closed around its arm, its flesh crumpled and the shriek it let out made it clear it was physical in some way.

The monster just stared at Alex, completely paralyzed, while he gnashed his teeth. When he tore its arm off and threw it aside, it went flying into the woods.

The thing continued to scream, but it didn't sound afraid. It sounded angry.

Several more appeared out of nowhere, surrounding Alex. The creatures snarled and snapped at him, but he swatted them away easily, keeping them at bay as he circled to keep all of them in front of him.

"Shit," I muttered, summoning a collection of ice shards into my palms and sending them out with a burst of energy.

They cut through the air and sliced through two of the things, but another one got a hold of one of the ice shards and turned it into a shrapnel shower that dented the trunk of a tree nearby.

Another lunged at Alex, grabbing his leg. As it did, the rest of the group attacked him, clawing and biting as they attempted to tear him apart.

He snarled and clamped his jaws down on one of them, lifting it up above his head before tearing it in half. Another took a chunk out of his side, and he growled, shaking the thing off and pouncing on it, trying to bite it in half.

I summoned more ice shards, launching them at the remaining attackers. One of them fell back from the onslaught, but the other shards struck it in the chest, knocking it back and pinning it against a tree.

The other two fled, but I kept throwing more shards their way until the last one dropped.

Out of nowhere, I saw another blur of movement and panicked, thinking it was another monster. Instead, I realized it was Sam when he had one of the things pinned against a tree, his face contorted in a vicious hiss with his newly extended fangs bared.

He broke the thing's neck and tossed it aside, then glanced at me. I nodded at him, grateful he hadn't been hurt.

Alex returned to my side, whimpering as he nudged my hand.

"I'm fine," I murmured. My heart was pounding and I felt like I was going to be sick, but I was.

"What the fuck were those things?" Sam demanded, horrified.

"No idea," I replied. "But I'm not eager to stick around and find out."

"Get him back inside," Sam said to Alex.

The beast nodded, nudging me forward. He bit my sleeve and tugged when I took too long to move.

"But I—"

"Go!" Sam growled.

Alex bumped into me and threw me off balance enough that I collapsed onto his back.

I had no choice but to wrap my arms around his neck as he ran with me back through the door that I assumed Sam had left open.

"Shit," I growled, stumbling back to my feet once we were inside. Alex was already turning back toward the door, giving me a warning snarl.

"Chase?" Mom cried, rushing toward me as he left. "What is it? What's going on?"

"We're under attack," I answered, grimacing as a fresh wave of pain assaulted me and I doubled over, barely catching myself against the wall.

Great. Perfect timing.

"Chase!" Mom grabbed me by the arm, leading me back over to the couch. "Sit down, sweetheart. Where are those pills?"

"That drawer," I gritted out, nodding toward the table next to the sofa. She rushed to grab them, laying them out on the coffee table.

"Here. Take these," she instructed, handing them to me with a glass of water. "They should help."

I swallowed them and the pain started to recede almost immediately, but the panic didn't. "I have to get out there," I said, starting to stand up only for her to push me back down.

"You do not," Mom scolded. "Think of the babies if nothing else."

I grimaced. The thought of putting my children in danger versus the fear of leaving Sam and Alex alone was torture. But...

"I can't just sit here," I said.

She sighed. "I know you want to help, Chase, but you need to stay. Whatever is going on, they'll handle it. That's their job, isn't it?"

I hesitated. "Those... things. Zeus sent them. I know he did."

Her expression immediately soured at the mention of his name. I was starting to see why she had left in the first place. Or fled.

"He's not going to stop, is he?" I asked, looking up at her. My fear was actually making it easier to grit and bear the pain. It was nothing compared to what I was going to feel if anything happened to any of them.

Even Alex.

“Who?” Mom asked, even though I could tell she knew exactly who I was talking about.

“Zeus. He won’t stop until he has me,” I clarified. “Will he?”

The look on her face spoke volumes. “You should try to relax.”

“How am I supposed to relax?” I snapped. “They’re out there because of me. Protecting me.”

“So don’t you think you should make their job easier?” she shot back. “There’s nothing you can do that they can’t, Chase.”

“That’s not true,” I said, pushing up from the table. I could tell she was going to try to stop me, so I threw up an ice wall to block her. “I’m sorry,” I said, moving toward the door. “I have to try.”

I wasn’t going to be able to live with myself otherwise. Especially not now that I knew I was a lot more valuable to Zeus alive than dead.

CHAPTER  
**SIXTEEN**

## CYRUS

I sensed something was wrong even before I had any hard evidence to think that way. It was just the strange kind of sense that had never led me astray before where Chase was concerned.

I found myself rushing toward the cabin, until I heard the sounds of snarling coming from the woods. It was followed by an otherworldly shriek, so I changed course.

*Chase!*

I could hear the shrieking continue, but there was no way it was human.

I had never heard anything quite like it, and the closest approximation I could think of was a banshee.

Granted, I had never actually run into one of those, either. But there was a damn good chance I was about to.

When I caught sight of Sam standing in the woods, some shadowy creature caught between his hands, and Alex tearing another limb from limb with his massive fangs, I felt like I had walked onto the set of a horror movie.

The hell was going on?

Before I had the chance to fully process, two more of those creatures leapt out at me, and I felt claws as sharp and long as knives digging into my shoulder.

I grabbed its arm and flung it away from me, but the other one just lunged and attacked the very same instant.

I looked down at my bleeding shoulder. Black sludge was dripping from the wounds.

What were these things?

I snarled and whirled around, thrusting my hand forward until it burst through the chest of the second monster, and I gripped what I assumed was its heart.

I ripped it out, finding it was just a black stone sitting in the center of my palm. As I dropped it, the creature became the same goo that was leaking from my wounds.

I heard another snarl of rage and anguish, but this one was familiar. When I turned around, Sam was

on the ground, still breathing, but there was something unnatural about his position.

It didn't take me long to realize there was a massive black wound in the center of his chest. Alex had leapt away from the tattered shadow creatures piled at his feet to be at his friend's side, whimpering pathetically as he tried to nudge Sam out of his state of shock.

I dropped to my knees on Sam's other side, checking over the wound. It was deep and wide, not a good sign. I couldn't tell what was blood and what was goo, but there was plenty of both.

"Sam," I said, struggling to keep him alert. "Stay with me. You're going to be okay, just stay awake."

That really didn't feel like a promise I had any right to make, though. Not in his current state.

I bit into my own wrist and started pouring blood into his open wound. So much vampire blood at once wasn't ideal, but he had been turning for a long time, so I figured that had to count for something.

Besides, if I didn't take the risk, he was going to be dead soon anyway.

Sam coughed, and the wound seemed to be starting to heal around the edges already, but it was so deep that it didn't really mean much.

He had already lost so much blood, and there was no telling what was in this black shit. Judging from the fact that my shoulder was burning like it was on fire, the shadow monsters were venomous, at least to some degree.

And I was pretty sure this thing had pierced his heart directly.

If this worked, it would complete the turn, which would come with risks of its own, and if it didn't... well, that was going to be the least of his worries.

I was still trying to get the bleeding to stop when I heard Alex snarl again, and judging from the way he was bristling, his tail whipping wildly in the air, we weren't alone anymore.

Great.

I leapt to my feet, standing between Sam and the approaching monsters. There were eight of them as far as I could tell, then more that slipped from the forest.

My attempts to get between them fell to nothing when I realized they were surrounding us on all sides. I could tell Alex was ready to lunge, but I held out a hand in hopes of stopping him. He kept growling, but he stood where he was for the time being.

It wasn't just the monsters, though.

There was someone else.

*Something* else.

I could feel it—the same electric feeling as whenever Ichor was around. Being in the presence of a full deity was an unmistakable experience.

I looked up and spotted a man with long, golden hair walking toward us. He seemed normal enough,

but I knew that meant absolutely nothing.

His energy was too powerful for him to be anything other than an ancient god, and it was making every hair on my body stand on end.

As a paladin, I had some awareness of most other deities, which was why Chase had caught me by surprise. I definitely hadn't seen him coming.

Then again, he was a demigod, and I had attributed anything about his nature that seemed unusual to Ichor's possession.

"Who the hell are you?" I asked through my teeth.

I was still keeping track of Sam's heartbeat, but it was faint and growing weaker by the second. Definitely not a good situation.

"My name is Hermes," he answered in a smooth, smug voice. The monsters moved aside as he approached, making it clear he was indeed the one controlling them. "And you must be Cyrus. My brother's faithful guardian."

I bristled.

His brother?

So Chase hadn't been dreaming, after all.

"How did you get through the ward?" I demanded.

"Let's just say it was a tip from a mutual friend," he answered cryptically.

I had a bad feeling I knew who that "friend" was.

"These freaks belong to you?" I asked, nodding to the shadow creatures.

Hermes looked around boredly.

"Servitors," he answered. "They have their uses."

"I'm sure," I said, standing my ground. "So do paladins, and you're not going to lay a hand on him."

"On Chase?" he asked, pressing a hand to his chest in feigned indignation. "I would never. I'm merely the messenger, and I have been sent to deliver."

"A message," I scoffed. "If you let Sam die, do you really think Chase is going to want anything to do with you?"

"It's not about what he wants," Hermes answered, his tone growing dark. "You have no right to possess him. The godbearer will be returned to Olympus, and if it takes killing all of you to accomplish that, so be it. You just need to figure out what it is that you're willing to sacrifice."

"I'll sacrifice whatever I have to in order to keep him safe," I answered. "But that's not going to happen."

“I wasn't talking to you,” Hermes sneered.

I followed his gaze and turned to look over my shoulder. My heart sank when I saw Chase standing there. His attention was fixed completely on Sam, and his face was frozen, his expression one of abject horror and denial.

Shit.

“Chase,” I growled, taking a step toward him. “Get out of here.”

In the interim, several of the monsters surrounded me, blocking me in.

I snarled, lunging at one of them only for the others to grab me by the arms, holding me back. They were stronger than they looked, and to my horror, I realized the ones that Sam and Alex had torn to pieces were beginning to slowly but surely piece themselves back together.

Useful, indeed.

“Don't!” Chase cried, reaching out. “I'll go with you. I'll do whatever you want, just don't hurt them. Please.”

“Isn't that touching?” Hermes taunted. “A real Hallmark moment, if ever there was one.”

“Chase, don't,” I gritted out, straining against the shadowy limbs clawing at me. “You have to run.”

Chase looked from me to Sam's nearly lifeless body, then back to Hermes.

Unfortunately, I already knew what he had chosen, and I knew my pleas would fall on deaf ears.

“Heal him,” Chase demanded. “Heal him, and I'll go with you.”

Hermes's gaze traveled down to Sam, and a slow smile spread across his lips. “As you wish, my darling,” he said, extending his hand.

A familiar burst of blue light traveled from his fingertips and spread out into the air before drifting down, swirling around Sam's body.

I watched as the energy began to congeal in the center of Sam's chest, healing the wound before me.

Alex watched, his eyes widening, but when Chase took a step toward Hermes, he seemed to put two and two together.

The hellhound let out a furious snarl and lunged at the god, but the shadow creatures disappeared, and so did Hermes and Chase at the very same moment. By the time Alex's paws hit the ground, Sam had taken a gasping breath and sat up, clutching his chest.

“No!” I cried, rushing for the spot where Chase had been. There was nothing there, of course.

It was too late.

He was gone.



CHAPTER  
SEVENTEEN

## CAMERON

Betrayal.

One way or another, that was how this thing had been destined to end from the beginning. Either I betrayed my brother, or I betrayed the woman I had sworn my life to.

My very soul.

It should have been an easy choice and it was—perhaps easier than I wanted to admit—but what caught me by surprise was how difficult it was to betray *him*.

Not Cyrus.

Chase.

When I had gone to Thanatos to present my offer—information on Chase’s whereabouts, and in fact, Chase himself—in exchange for Ichor, it was just common sense.

It was the only thing that I could do. The only reasonable, decent thing.

And yet, as I watched him being brought into the halls of Atlantis in shackles, his head down and an empty look in his gaze, I felt like a monster. A traitor.

And it was for the very same reason—the fact that at some point, some part of me had fallen in love with him—that I *was* a traitor.

I had earned the title well.

It didn't matter, though. Some things were more important than love. Some bonds ran deeper than blood, and I had to suppress the even less human side of me that blanched at the sight of him in custody and in distress, especially when he was probably carrying my children.

I told myself I didn't have a choice, but that wasn't quite true. The simple reality was that I had already made my choice a long time ago.

When Chase caught sight of me, his eyes darkened with a combination of hatred and something else I didn't want to acknowledge. Something that was far more difficult to swallow.

Hermes was with him, led by several guards. They really were taking his power seriously. Anything

else would be a mistake.

One we would all come to regret.

I had warned Thanatos ahead of time to spare no effort in the interest of keeping him contained. Chase's power was harsh and unpredictable, which was one of the many reasons this was ultimately the best decision for him, too.

He would hate me for it, of course, and considering the fact that his safety was just collateral to my true intentions, he had every right.

But he would be better off.

He'd be better off no longer being Ichor's vessel.

No longer being my brother's pet.

Cyrus couldn't be trusted, that much was clear. If he was willing to turn on Ichor after so long in her service, he couldn't possibly remain loyal to Chase, either.

That was what I wanted to believe, anyway. The alternative was far more unsettling.

I wasn't going to let that happen to me.

"He is," Hermes said, holding his arms outstretched in a dramatic fashion that eroded any doubts I might have had that he and Chase were indeed related.

Zeus was on the throne, with Thanatos not far from my side.

"Good," said Zeus. "Now that everyone is here, we can begin the negotiations."

"There's nothing left to negotiate," said Thanatos. "Cameron told you where he was, you procured him, and now, you hand him over to me."

Chase glanced my way again, and the hurt mingling with the betrayal in his eyes didn't last long before it turned to anger, but it still took an effect.

"You did honor your end of the arrangement," Zeus reasoned. "As promised, once the... *issue* is dealt with, he will be yours."

"You son of a bitch," Chase seethed. The guards restrained him.

"Careful with him," Thanatos snapped. "He will be the bearer of my young."

Those words made the beast within me bristle with rage, but I tamped it down.

"All right, settle," Zeus said, holding up a hand. "The ritual will be done posthaste. Ichor will be removed from Chase and placed into another vessel. I take it you've seen to that?" he asked, turning to me.

"I have," I said, nodding. "The preparations are made and we have a new vessel. We just need to do the ritual."

There was still part of me that was afraid it wouldn't work this time, either, but performing the ritual in Olympus was admittedly one way to get past the need for the right celestial correspondences. If the ritual didn't work while we were seated in the hall of the gods, it never would.

Not that I was any less nervous for that fact.

I watched the anger in Chase's eyes turn to bewilderment, but he would understand soon enough.

"Then bring her forward," Thanatos demanded.

The guards left the room to retrieve the new vessel.

Chase looked at me in confusion, but when the doors opened once more and Sarah walked in, I could tell from the look on his face that he understood perfectly.

This was the way things were meant to be from the beginning. Even he had to see that.

It was more of a struggle to meet his gaze than I wanted to admit. Sarah didn't seem to be having any such difficulty.

In fact, the way she looked at him was almost smug.

Thanatos was the one who had helped me find her, but I was surprised that after so long, I hadn't really felt anything when I finally saw her again in person. Quite the opposite.

My feelings for her had always been wrapped up in the fact that she was Ichor's vessel, of course, and I should have been relieved that she was going to be again, but I wasn't.

Really, I just felt like I wanted to get this over with.

That and a strange sense of dread that I knew was coming from the beast inside me.

My cat was pacing around like it did in that cage, wanting nothing more than to claim the man it had decided was its mate and to get him the hell away from these people.

Learning the truth about who Chase's father had been a shock, but I couldn't really say it was a surprise.

There was *something* going on with him, and at least it made a bit more sense as to how he had managed to keep Ichor's power contained for so long.

The fact that he was a literal demigod was all the more reason this couldn't work for anyone.

I also knew it didn't make his pregnancy any more likely to succeed.

If anything, the opposite. The divine and the profane didn't belong together.

My beast had other ideas, but of course it would be protective of those things inside him.

It, too, was a soulless monster.

And like it or not, it was a part of me.

If the ritual didn't put an end to the pregnancy, Thanatos certainly would.

I tried to ignore the howl of rage that thought stirred up within me. I just had to get through this.

I was so close to having Ichor back.

When Sarah came to stand at my side, taking my arm, I resisted the urge to cringe away from her.

Seeing this side of her had made her a whole lot less attractive, to say the least. But she wasn't going to be around for much longer. And she was raised to be a vessel, so it wasn't like she even cared.

It didn't matter to her that she would lose her free will, and very likely her consciousness.

If anything of her original self was left at all, it would be nothing but the vestiges that remained in the back of Ichor's mind, but that was what the cult did.

It hollowed people out and stripped them of their free will long before any true sacrifice was required of them, so when the time came, they would offer up no resistance.

"Let's begin," Thanatos said impatiently.

Chase struggled as the guards led him over to a stone table across the room, and memories of that night from so long ago resurfaced inside me.

I could imagine Chase was having the same sense of déjà vu, and it was probably far more unsettling on his end.

At least, that was what I needed to believe. Judging from the fact that Sarah was giving me a strange look, I wasn't doing quite as good of a job at hiding my true feelings as I wanted.

*Get it together, Cameron.*

As the ritual commenced and Chase was bound to the table, Thanatos waved a hand over him, and all the struggling ceased.

A glazed, blank look came into Chase's eyes, and while I could tell he was fighting it for a few moments—admittedly longer than anyone else should have been capable of—he eventually succumbed to the trance.

"He is strong," Thanatos remarked, his tone a mixture of irritation and admiration. "And he will bear strong young."

"Indeed," Zeus agreed.

For someone who was quite literally selling off his own son, he really didn't seem all that bothered.

It looked like Chase's biological father was a piece of shit after all, no matter who he was.

The thought shouldn't have filled me with protective rage, but denying my feelings so far wasn't doing much to keep them in line, so I decided on the simple meditative strategy of just acknowledging and dismissing.

It seemed to be working as well as anything.

“What are you going to do to him?” Sarah asked, sounding like she was torn between hoping it was something bad and being annoyed that she wasn’t the center of attention for the moment.

Before I could give her a silencing look and remind her that her role in this evening was as little more than a ritual sacrifice, Zeus answered.

“The mages will be withdrawing Ichor’s spirit from Chase’s body,” he explained. “From there, she will be free to possess her true vessel. You.”

To her credit, Sarah kept her cool appearance, but I could hear her heart picking up speed.

She just nodded and stood back as a team of seven men and women in robes, most of their faces obscured, gathered around the table the way we all had that night.

My hand flinched at my side, so I clutched it into a fist, willing myself to stand still as they all began chanting around Chase, their hands linked.

At first, nothing happened, but I could feel the magic in the air. It was summoned quickly, so much more quickly than human cultists were capable of summoning and directing energy.

When a gray light began to form, first making a halo around the circle, then slowly moving toward Chase, he gasped, but he didn’t move.

He was still thoroughly locked in the trance, but when the crackling energy grew and formed a shroud around him, he started to scream.

At first, I thought he had broken the trance, but I soon realized that wasn’t the case. He was bound with silver cords, and I assumed they had some magical significance, but no matter how hard he thrashed, they wouldn’t give a single inch.

The beast within me raged and snarled as he continued to thrash, screaming in agony.

I had never heard a sound more bloodcurdling, or one that moved me to action so deeply.

Not even Ichor’s scream had ever had such a visceral effect on me.

That realization alone was enough to keep me where I stood.

What was wrong with me?

What was happening?

The fact that Chase was carrying my children... Did that explain it?

Did that justify it?

I couldn’t blame it all on the beast, either. Not when there was a good part of me that was still thinking rationally and yet equally moved to attack. To free him from what the mages were doing.

Even if I knew Zeus wouldn’t let them cause any actual lasting harm to him, the fact that Chase was suffering from what they were doing was still reason enough.

Just when I wasn’t sure if I would be able to hold myself back much longer, a light began to emerge—

a familiar crimson glow that appeared above the center of Chase's chest and hovered a few inches above him.

The gray light of the mages began to dissipate as the red light rose away from Chase's body, now floating far above him, and all at once, his struggling and screaming ceased.

When I saw he was still breathing, I had never been more relieved.

It wasn't even just relief over the fact that Ichor was free—or at least, she soon would be.

At first, I wasn't sure what to do. She was vulnerable like this, outside the protection of any physical vessel, and at the mercy of the other gods, with whom she had always had a contentious relationship.

Just because Zeus had agreed to a ceasefire on his brother's behalf didn't mean he would honor it now that Thanatos had what he wanted.

The red orb began to move before I could do anything, and I watched as it drifted over to Sarah, as if it was conscious somehow. And it *was* Ichor's consciousness.

I reached out instinctively as Sarah faltered and grabbed her arm just in case she thought of making a run for it.

Before she had the chance, the orb shot into her chest, and she gasped, growing rigid.

Her body convulsed as she let out a startled cry and crumpled to the floor before I could catch her.

"Sarah?" I called, dropping to my knees as I gathered her into my arms.

I looked down to make sure the vessel was still breathing, but her eyes were fluttering as if she were in a fever dream. She said nothing before she went completely limp in my embrace.

I was about to ask what they had done to her when her eyes opened and I found myself staring into a familiar crimson gaze.

One I hadn't seen in so long—yet it had haunted my dreams and every waking moment for the countless years since.

"Hello, lover," Ichor said, her voice huskier and sultrier than usual. "Long time, no see."

CHAPTER  
EIGHTEEN



## CHASE

After everything I had done, and all I had fought for, I found myself back in that strange space. The nothingness.

This time, there was no nymph to guide me out of it.

At first, this strange feelings of betrayal and sadness kept me from wanting to get up at all.

Then, the familiar feeling of two small energies, coinciding with mine but unique, reminded me of why I had to fight.

Why I had to kick that bitch's ass.

I managed to haul myself out of my frozen state and trudged into the nothingness, because if this was a corridor, it had to lead to somewhere.

At least, I hoped it did.

I wouldn't even let myself think about Cameron and Sarah. When I had seen her arrive, I realized the truth.

This wasn't the hall of the gods. This was my own personal hell.

I had clawed my way out of it once before. I could do it again. And when I did, they were both going to pay.

I felt something slowly pulling me from the nothingness and heard voices echoing around me. One was familiar, even though I hadn't heard it in a long time.

Sarah?

No... It sounded like her, partly, but this was different.

*Ichor.*

When I sat up from the table with a gasp, the silver cords that had been binding me tightly suddenly released their chokehold on my torso and limbs, and I saw her across the room.

She was in Sarah's body, and I had never actually seen her outside of mine, but I knew exactly who and what she was as soon as I looked into those blood red eyes.

I wasn't even sure how I knew, but I did.

In a way, I recognized her as much as I would recognize myself.

Except I wasn't expecting the abject disgust with which she was staring back at me.

Sure, Ichor had been vying for control the whole time. But there had been a time when I thought... well, that we were friends.

One look into those frigid, fiery eyes, and I knew what a complete fool I had been.

"Ichor," I murmured.

Cameron was at her side, and his eyes met mine, filled with something like relief. Of course, I knew better than to believe that it was on my account.

My hand flew to my stomach, and I turned to Zeus. "What have you done? What about my—?"

"You're still pregnant," Zeus replied. His tone was slightly bitter, as if it was unreasonable for me to be concerned about such things, considering it wasn't the result of an arrangement he was behind.

As if *I* had taken something from *him*.

As if I owed him anything, let alone my body.

"For the time being," said the man next to him.

Thanatos.

The stillness of his energy was the most unsettling thing I had ever experienced, and completely unmistakable. His emissary had been creepy enough, but apparently, that guy was a ray of sunshine compared to the real OG.

There was no mistaking the meaning behind his words.

The son of a bitch Zeus had sold me to was going to use me as a breeder, and Cameron, the man who had sworn to protect me, the father of my children, had handed us over to him. He had betrayed us all.

No...

No, that wasn't true. Betrayal implied he had ever been more than an enemy in the first place. Of all the sins Cameron had committed, deception wasn't one of them.

He was the only one who had never lied to me—at least not about how he felt—and yet, I had believed the lies I told myself all the same.

It was for her. It was always for her. And as I saw him looking at her, I knew that had never changed.

He was never going to choose me over her.

And now that they both had what he wanted, I was nothing to him. Less than nothing. The same as I had been before.

That didn't make it hurt any less, though. Knowing the truth and accepting it were two completely

different things.

“Now that you’ve gotten what you wanted, I think it’s time you both take your leave,” Zeus said, holding up his hand.

Cameron immediately put himself between him and Ichor, like the good little paladin he was, but Zeus merely opened the same kind of portal I had gone through before.

This time, I knew I wouldn’t be making any escape.

“Come on,” Ichor said, taking Cameron’s hand when he didn’t move right away.

Why, I couldn’t imagine. I was sure he was eager to get back to everything the two lovebirds had been missing all these years.

Instead, he looked at me, but before he could figure out what the hell he wanted to do, I felt a hand on my shoulder and froze.

I felt the frigid touch of death, and I turned to look into eyes that seemed to be made of stone.

No... stone had depth. These were empty. Bottomless.

“Chase,” Thanatos purred, stroking the curve of my jaw with his thumb. “My pet.”

Before I could even register what was happening, I heard a scream of indignation and turned just in time to see that Cameron had shoved Ichor through the portal.

“What have you done?” Zeus cried.

Cameron ignored him, drawing a blade from beneath his jacket. I recognized it immediately as one of the enchanted weapons the cult had used when they were sacrificing me, and at first, I thought he was coming at me.

Finishing the job.

Because why wouldn’t he?

Instead, he rushed at Thanatos, and the element of surprise allowed him to plunge the blade directly into the god’s chest.

Thanatos froze, clutching the blade in his hand as he looked down at it in disbelief. For a moment, everyone seemed to be equally shocked, including me.

A strange blue substance began to trickle from the corner of Thanatos’s pale gray mouth, and his grip on me weakened as he collapsed to one knee when Cameron wrenched the blade out, allowing me to get back on my feet.

I was moving on autopilot more than anything, but once my feet were on the ground, that was the extent of my pre-programmed responses.

“Come on,” Cameron snarled, grabbing me by the arm.

“You’re not taking him anywhere,” Hermes said, suddenly right next to us.

I had the feeling he could've intervened and stopped Cameron from attacking Thanatos if he wanted to, considering he was probably the fastest creature in existence—or outside of it—but getting rid of the competition certainly worked in his favor.

Hermes had the caduceus blade in his hand, and I was sure he knew how to use it well.

I reacted instinctively, sending a burst of ice energy from my hand, but it was a hell of a lot stronger than I had imagined. I sent up a wall of ice that momentarily cordoned us off from the others, and froze not only Hermes, but several of the mages that were on their way to us as well.

I stared down at my hand, blinking. "Guess I can still do that, after all."

It would be nice if my powers could figure out how to work when I wasn't in mortal danger, but I wasn't going to look a gift horse in the mouth.

"It won't hold them for long," Cameron warned, grabbing me again and pulling me down the corridor.

I could hear Zeus yelling to his other guards to make sure they took me unharmed. He mentioned no such restrictions with regard to Cameron.

As we left the throne room, I realized Cameron knew his way around a hell of a lot better than I had expected.

Then again, he was just full of surprises.

"Where are we going?" I demanded, even though I didn't slow down.

I threw up another wall to block the hall behind us, but he was right. I knew it wouldn't hold for long. Not in a city full of gods, and I certainly wasn't the only elemental among them.

I was still struggling with the fact that Cameron was doing this at all, and I wasn't going to let myself jump to any positive conclusions.

I was sure he had an ulterior motive.

He always did.

Cameron glanced over his shoulder impatiently, so that hadn't changed either. "We need to find the corridor. Thanatos won't stay down for long."

"Thanatos? You killed him!"

Cameron scoffed. "There is no death on Olympus. And he's the one in charge of that kind of thing."

"Great," I mumbled. "At the moment, I'm more concerned about Zeus."

"That's because you don't know Thanatos," he countered, turning down a shadowed hall. "This way."

He didn't really even give me the chance to follow him, he just pulled me along. I struggled to keep up as we turned down yet another corridor lined with columns.

This place really needed a less cliché interior designer. Then again, I had a hard time imagining anything about Olympus had ever changed much at all.

I still didn't trust Cameron any further than I could throw him, but at the moment, going with him seemed like my best option.

My only option.

And that was how I knew I was completely fucked.

CHAPTER  
NINETEEN

## SAM

I sat up with a jerk, feeling like I had just fallen from a skyscraper.

One moment, I had been surrounded by nothing. Just a vast, gray expanse where time and substance were completely nebulous concepts.

I had barely even experienced my own thoughts in that awful, empty space. I couldn't scream, or even feel true fear.

Fear was an emotion. It was *something*. The place I'd gone to once I was plunged into the gray was pure, unadulterated nothingness, and despite knowing full well that hellfire was probably the only reward waiting for me in the afterlife after all my betrayals, I had never experienced anything more terrible.

While the concept itself had evaded me during that time, as soon as I was thrust back into the harsh, beautiful grip of reality, I had a word for what and where that place was.

The Other.

It was exactly as Chase had described it. It could hardly be anything else.

And yet, as I found myself back in my body, along with all the blissfully agonizing sensations that came along with it, all I could think about was him.

There was someone close by, and I grasped onto his arm like he was a lifesaver in the center of the ocean, and he might as well have been.

My nails dug in and I saw the pain register on his face before I fully recognized the face as Cyrus's.

They weren't nails anymore, they were fucking claws.

I looked down at the blood seeping through Cyrus's shirt sleeve, and I could smell the blood more acutely than ever. I looked back up at him, feeling like a newborn suddenly thrust into the harsh, unforgiving world.

I knew this feeling, too. I'd experienced it many times before.

All the times she'd killed me.

All the times I'd come so fucking close to losing myself from her grip...

I could remember now. Only in bits and pieces. Glimpses of past lives that didn't feel like they belonged to me, but then again, neither did this body.

It was all jumbled, out of order, out of time.

"Where is he?" My voice sounded raspy, like I'd swallowed glass.

Out of all the memories and past lives that were swirling around me, trying to find where they belonged, Chase was the one and only thing that mattered.

I finally knew who and what I was now. I understood it even if it was patchy, but it didn't change anything.

It didn't change the fact that I'd chosen him.

The look on Cyrus's face told me the answer wasn't one I was going to like. "You need to calm down. The shift still hasn't fully settled."

"Shift?" I choked out.

Someone came up on my other side and my head whipped around, a monstrous snarl unfurling from the center of my chest that sounded like a cobra's hiss.

It was an automatic reaction until I saw it was Alex. He was human again, fully clothed and holding a glass of water.

"You changed," he said in a sullen tone, holding the glass out to me. "Drink this."

I took the water, my hands shaking and clumsy, as I was still trying to remember how to work them. I drained the glass, but it still felt like there was a fire burning in the middle of my chest.

"You're human again," I remarked to Alex.

"He got hurt and blacked out," said Cyrus. "Must've been the jolt he needed to shift back."

"Chase," I repeated, shaking my head. God, everything was so fucking blurry. "Where...?"

"With Hermes," Alex said, his expression more somber than I had ever seen. I could see the anger burning in his eyes. The helplessness. I knew it well.

"Hermes?" I echoed in disbelief. "How...?"

"Chase left with him," Cyrus answered.

"Left?" I scoffed. "What the fuck do you mean, he left?"

"You were dead, Sam," Alex answered before Cyrus had the chance. I could tell from his gaze he was telling the truth. "At least, close to it. Chase... sacrificed himself to bring you back."

It took a few moments for his words to sink in, and once they started, the resistance sprang up.

"No," I seethed, shaking my head as I leapt up from the bed I had ended up in somehow.



My head was spinning and everything felt off, even though when I looked down at my body, I couldn't see any sign of anything wrong.

None of the wounds or marks that should have been there from the fight were present, come to think of it. They had all healed completely.

"We have to find him," I said, staggering a little even though I had no idea where I was going.

"They're in Olympus," Cyrus said in an unreadable tone. "Physically this time. Not just his spirit. We can't just walk in there—we need access to a portal."

"So we'll find one," I insisted. "We'll force someone to open one."

"It's not that simple," Cyrus snarled. He calmed down a second later, but it was enough to jar me back to myself.

At least, whatever the new version of myself was.

"We'll find him," he continued. "We're *going* to find him, but we need help."

"Help?" I asked. "From who?"

Before he could answer, a strange look came over his face. His eyes glazed over for a second and even Alex seemed to notice.

"Cyrus?" he called, snapping in front of the man's face.

A second later, I felt it, too. A strange, unmistakable hum of energy in the center of my chest that throbbed with a steady pulse, slightly out of sync with my own heartbeat.

It was an intense, unmistakable feeling. One I had felt so many times before. One I only now remembered.

"She's here," I murmured.

Cyrus looked up at me, snapping out of his trance. "You feel it, too?"

"Ichor," I said, my lips curving bitterly over the name.

"You remember," Cyrus said in a knowing tone.

"Enough," I said through my teeth.

I shoved him back suddenly, my body making the decision to move before I consciously had, and to my surprise, it sent him flying back into the wall hard enough that his head hitting the plaster caused a few chunks to flake off.

Cyrus recovered quickly, but I could tell from the way he was looking at me that he was coming to the same realization.

I was stronger now. A lot stronger.

I could already smell his blood in my veins. More of it than he had ever given me before.

I wasn't sure if I had that to thank for the fact that I was alive, or Hermes's magic like he said, if not both—but in any case, I knew one thing.

I was a fully fledged vampire now, and while I didn't know if I was as strong as him, I was willing to put it to the test.

"I remember she killed me," I said through my teeth. "More than once. And you watched, didn't you? You let it happen. Some 'brother.'"

"What?" Alex choked out, looking between us. His gaze lingered on Cyrus, and his expression slowly grew sullen. "Cy, is that true?"

Cyrus's expression didn't change, but he didn't try to defend himself, either. "We're paladins," he murmured. "Our duty, first and foremost, is—"

"To the vessel," I finished bitterly. "To her."

"Not anymore," said Cyrus. "Not for me. Not for you, either. You can hate me all you want, and if you want to challenge me in a fight, you have every right to."

"You're damn right I do," I snarled.

Alex looked nervous, but he also looked pissed. Usually, he'd be trying to diffuse the situation, but we were all well beyond that. Even if he didn't remember yet himself.

"Of course, if we kill each other, we're not going to be able to get Chase back," Cyrus said, holding my gaze. "So I guess the choice is yours."

I gritted my teeth. The prick was right. "We table this until he's back. Then, all bets are off."

"Agreed," said Cyrus.

I paused to think, even though my thoughts still felt like a kaleidoscope from hell. "If Ichor is here, she has to be using Chase as a vessel. We find her, we find him."

"And when we find her?" Cyrus asked.

"We get her out of him, whatever it takes," I said without hesitation. "And then we make sure she fucking stays dead."

"Are you ready for that?" Cyrus asked. "Knowing what you know now... Now that you remember who you are?"

"I'm readier than I've ever been," I answered. "The question is, are you?"

Cyrus nodded somberly. "No question." He turned to Alex. "And you?"

"I sold my soul to bring him back the last time," Alex answered. "You really think I won't put a stake in that bitch?"

I snorted. "It's settled, then."

The paladins had been created to find, protect, and fight for Ichor to the death.

And we had, many times over.

If anyone stood a chance at killing her, it was us.

CHAPTER  
TWENTY

## CAMERON

What the fuck had I done?  
What the fuck was I *doing*?

As I guided Chase through the labyrinth that was Olympus, I found myself asking those questions over and over again, but I was still no closer to an answer.

I really didn't know when I had made the decision to save him.

I wasn't even sure it was a decision I had made so much as a reflexive impulse, and considering the fact that he was no longer Ichor's vessel, I couldn't rely on any of the usual explanations that might have justified it.

She was safe, though. She was on Earth, at the very least.

Chase hadn't spoken in a long while. Not since we'd left the halls of Olympus for the tangled woods ringing its gardens.

I didn't know how to get out of the place entirely, or if it was even possible. I just knew we needed to get as deep into the woods as possible, where Thanatos had once mentioned even he feared to tread.

Of course, that was probably all the more reason we should fear it, but we didn't have many other options when death incarnate was after us.

"Can I ask you a personal question?" Chase asked, breaking his silence.

I raised an eyebrow. "Nothing's ever stopped you before, and I can't imagine anything will now."

He didn't react to that at all. He was stone cold serious as he asked, "Why do you hate me so much?"

For some reason, I wasn't expecting that.

I wasn't sure I had an answer, either.

I started to respond a few times, but none of the words on the tip of my tongue felt right. They weren't quite lies, but they weren't satisfactory, either.

"I don't know," I admitted.

But part of me was afraid I did.

Part of me was afraid I hated him because I had to. Because it was the only way to justify the other things I felt for him. Things that were as unforgivable now as they had been then.

As they always would be.

"It doesn't matter. I'm getting you back to earth," I murmured. "After that, we part ways."

"Just like that," he said quietly.

"Yeah. Just like that."

He snorted. "What about the cult?"

I paused to consider it before shrugging. "It's over, I guess. Congratulations."

He frowned in confusion. "Congratulations for what?"

"We've been together for countless years," he answered. "So far, you're the only thing that's been able to break us up."

He clearly didn't know what to make of that. Neither did I. "It's not like that was my intention."

"I know," I said. And I did. That was probably half the reason I hated him in the first place.

Before he could respond, something happened that made him double over with a sharp gasp.

I instinctively reached out to steady him before he could collapse.

"Chase?"

"I'm fine," he gritted out.

"You don't fucking look fine," I muttered. "It's happening again, isn't it? Did you bring your pills?"

"Yeah, sure, they were in the bag I packed while I was preparing to get whisked away to the underworld by Hermes and his minions," he hissed.

At least he was all right enough to be his usual smartass self.

"My turn," I said, pulling him back from the edge of the path, which dropped off stiffly beneath the tangle of briars.

I didn't know how he had kept himself alive this long without four paladins constantly up his ass.

Literally and figuratively.

"What do you mean?" he asked, frowning.

"To ask my own personal question," I answered.

Chase snorted. "Sure. Why not?"

"Why would you be willing to sacrifice yourself for them?" I asked. "After everything they've done,

including sacrificing *you*."

"Kind of hard to forget," he mumbled. "You of all people shouldn't have to ask that question, though."

I frowned. "What do you mean?"

"You've sacrificed everything for her," he said. "Your friends. Your life. Your brother. Your own children. All for someone who treats you like shit."

I immediately felt anger surge in my core in response to his words, but I couldn't really deny them.

He was right.

I *had* given up everything for Ichor. Everything but him, in this moment. And I knew she would see that as a betrayal. A failure.

And she was probably right.

Before I could respond, Chase stopped and looked up into the distance. I couldn't see anything through the thick copse of trees.

"What is it?" I asked, ready to fight Hermes's minions again, assuming he and the others had caught up to us now.

With my luck, it would be Thanatos back from a fleeting grave.

"You don't feel that?" Chase asked.

"You're a demigod and a witch," I reminded him. "There are a lot of things you're going to pick up on that I don't. Especially here."

He drew his arms to his chest, hugging himself. "It's the same feeling as the corridor."

"The corridor?"

"The Other," he clarified. "It's the same energy. Like it's... empty."

I paused to consider that for a moment, nodding. "Let's keep moving forward. Nothing good's going to come from lingering around."

Chase reluctantly followed behind me until we came within sight of a stream. He seemed to grow more nervous the closer he got to it.

"I think that's it," he said quietly.

"You mean that's what the energy is coming from?" I asked. "The water?"

He nodded, drawing closer. He peered into the water, and I realized there was something moving beneath the surface.

"What the fuck is that?" he asked.

I got close enough to see the shimmery white objects shooting beneath the water.

No... that wasn't right. They weren't beneath it, they *were* it. I realized only when I got close enough that what looked like a river was actually made up of millions if not billions of wispy clouds of energy, all teeming to form the surface of the "water."

"Holy shit," I breathed.

"What is it?" Chase asked. "You know what this is?"

"I have an idea," I admitted, meeting his gaze. "I'm pretty sure this is Styx. The river of souls. Which means we're in the fucking underworld."

"Seriously?" he croaked, looking back at the dense forest the way he had come. He grew a few shades paler. "The woods must have been a portal."

Which would explain why no one had pursued us yet. They probably thought they didn't have to.

"If this is the underworld," Chase began, "that means..."

"This is Thanatos's realm," I answered solemnly. "For all we know, we just walked into his trap."

Chase looked back at the water and I could see the wheels turning behind his eyes.

"Chase, wait," I growled, reaching for him.

He slipped from my grasp easily enough, staring into the water. The surface was such a dark blue it was reflective, and it seemed to know no depths.

I realized the crazy son of a bitch was going to jump in too little, too late, and against my better judgment—which never seemed to be particularly active where Chase was involved—I dove in after him.



CHAPTER  
TWENTY-ONE

## CYRUS

Every time Ichor took a vessel, I felt it. It was like some kind of psychic GPS went off, calling me to her side wherever she was in the world.

For the first time, I just wasn't after her for her sake.

She had gone home. Of course she had. Winterhaven was the spot Ichor had chosen to make her home because it was safe. Protected.

At least, as much as anything in this realm could be. Not that the realm she had come from was any friendlier.

I was used to being on the outs with the other deities as Ichor's paladin, but this was on a whole different level. Now, Zeus and the other big timers were involved.

Despite the fact that air travel made things a hell of a lot easier and faster than the last time I'd had to go halfway across the damn world in search of my goddess, every second that passed by felt like a second we didn't have to waste.

The longer she was possessing him, the firmer her hold would grow and the less chance he would have of fighting her off.

The thought was enough to drive me mad if I let it, so I tried to keep my focus.

The others looked to me for guidance—even though they were less trusting than before since they knew the truth about who had killed them in their past lifetimes—and I had to hold it together.

I would find her.

She clearly wanted to be found if she was back in Winterhaven. Even if she had managed to take over his body—and I could see no other possibility for how she was back on earth—I would find a way to bring him back.

There was no other option.

Coming back to Winterhaven felt strange. As long as this place had been my territory, it had only recently started to feel like home, and I knew now that was because of Chase.

As we entered again, it felt foreign and hostile. Like enemy territory.

And now, for all intents and purposes, that was exactly what it was.

We'd left Denise behind, and while I knew she probably would have put up more of a fight, even she knew what we were dealing with.

"Bring him back," she'd told me before we left, a look of pure pain and determination in her eyes. "And when you find that bitch, you tell her I said 'go fuck yourself' before you send her back to hell."

That was a promise I planned on keeping.

"Do we have a plan?" Alex asked. He was back to himself, for the most part, but I just had to hope that he was still capable of being his new monstrous self, considering it was far more useful to us.

Having a hellhound at your disposal certainly had its perks.

"The plan is to contain her without getting killed," I answered. "What else?"

Alex grunted in acknowledgment. "Easier said than done, I guess."

"You have no idea," I mumbled.

"How are we going to fight her without hurting Chase?" Sam asked, growing more agitated the closer we got to the house.

We came to a stop at the edge of the woods, since Ichor would easily be able to figure out we were here once we grew close enough.

Hell, she probably already knew, and she was waiting for us. I wasn't sure if she knew what to expect, though.

I wasn't sure I was, for that matter.

"Carefully," I answered, deciding not to tell him that wasn't likely going to be a concern.

If Ichor had managed to fully merge into her vessel, which was the only way I could sense her energy as strongly as I could now, the simple fact was, she was probably going to kick all of our asses, hellhound and full-blooded vampires or not.

"In other words, you don't have a plan," said Sam.

"I have this," I said, taking a small object out of my pocket.

Sam squinted at it. "I'm sorry, is that a fucking laser pointer?" he asked flatly. "Your plan is to what, distract her like a cat?"

"Not exactly," I said, turning on the small device. Light shot out from it, hitting a large rock not far off from us on the side of a cliff. It wasn't a perfectly flat surface, but it formed the sigil clearly enough.

"Ichor's sigil?" Alex asked, his eyes widening. "How did you—?"

"Print on demand," I answered, slipping the pointer back into my pocket. "They make everything these days. Pretty convenient."

Sam shook his head. "You've gotta be kidding me."

"I don't see you coming up with any better ideas," I said, walking past him.

"So what, you point that at the floor where she's standing and just hope for the best?" Sam challenged.

"Pretty much," I answered.

"It would be a way of containing her without hurting him," Alex mused.

"Of course you think it's a good idea," Sam said, turning back to me. "That should be a sign."

I sighed. He was probably right, but we really didn't have many better options.

Or any, for that matter, and I wasn't about to give Chase over to be Ichor's brand new vessel.

I didn't know how the possession would affect the pregnancy, but that was another thought that I couldn't dwell on for very long if I wanted to keep my sanity and remain remotely functional.

Strange how something I had never imagined possible, let alone something I wanted, could have become my dream in such a short amount of time, but it had.

It didn't even matter if I got out of this alive. All that mattered was that Chase and our babies did.

And they would. No matter what I had to do, no matter who I had to kill, I was going to keep them safe. Because for the first time in all my centuries of existence, I actually had a purpose.

A real purpose. One that came from my own free will, rather than from destiny or brainwashing or any other bullshit form of control the gods and the stars had decided to lay out for me.

Chase was mine, and that was all that mattered. That was all I needed, and whatever it took to keep him, it was worth it..

The house was full of light when we arrived, and it looked exactly how it had when we'd left, save for the dead body in the center of the floor. The guy's head was resting just over the edge of the sigil we had carved to keep Cameron restrained, and his throat had two wounds on the side of it.

Poor bastard.

I was pretty sure it was Cameron's handiwork, considering how clean the job was. Ichor had always been an artist of blood and chaos.

There was music playing as we entered the house. An old song from the fifties she had always been particularly fond of.

Truth be told, it grated on my nerves even more than Chase's angry girl pop music.

"Stay behind me," I ordered the other two under my breath. I took the lead, walking in the living room, but while I was expecting to find Ichor wearing Chase's skin, I was unprepared for the sight before me.

It was Sarah, except, it wasn't.

She had traded her usual jeans and blouse for a form fitting red dress with a slit cut to high heaven, and her normally straight hair had been curled in Ichor's usually dramatic, old-school fashion.

Even though she was wearing new skin, she looked exactly the way she had before. Those eyes and that maliciously entreating smile, I would recognize behind a thousand faces, anytime, anyplace.

I had wondered what I was going to feel when I finally saw her again after all these years of separation. After all I had done and fought for to get her back. All the people I had killed, and all the lives I had ruined in her name, including my own.

Even now, a part of me had wondered if the passion and obsession I had once thought were love would linger enough to resurge in this moment.

Part of me had been afraid it would all just pick up where it had left off, and I would find that my free will was nothing more than an illusion easily carved away by the reality of her presence.

And yet, as I stared at her—this woman I had lived for, for so many years—all I felt was blinding, unadulterated anger.

"Where is he?" I asked, my voice sounding cold and hard, almost unfamiliar.

Sarah—or rather, Ichor wearing her as proudly as she wore that tight crimson dress—gave a pout I knew was far more mocking than sincere, pushing up from the couch.

"That's how you greet me, after all this time?" she asked, a note of bitterness in her tone. "And here I was, hoping Cameron was exaggerating. Have I really been gone so long that you've lost your head over that silly little twit?"

"What can I say?" I asked with a shrug. "I guess absence doesn't make the heart grow fonder."

Ichor's red lips curved into a dangerous smirk, but the next instant, she was gone from her spot across the room and had her hand wrapped around my neck.

I was across the room, too, and through the wall as she drove into me like a freight train.

Yeah, she was at full power, all right. Or close enough.

"Cyrus!" Sam cried, rushing after us already.

Ichor immediately flung him away without effort. His head cracked against the floor and he was out cold, but I could still hear his heart beating. Fortunately, it was going to take a hell of a lot more than that to kill him now.

Not that I was sure Ichor had figured it out so far.

But she was about to figure out the fact that Alex had sold his soul. It was the first time I had actually seen him shift into his hellhound form, and the look on Ichor's face was priceless.

It registered for only a split second before Alex lunged for her, sailing over Sam's semi-conscious form. Her eyes grew wide as the hellhound sank its teeth into her shoulder.

Ichor screamed in mingled rage and pain as blue blood seeped from the wound.

If there had been any doubt she had fully merged into Sarah's vessel, it would have disappeared then.

I sprang back into action and swung at her, but she grabbed my arm and threw me off. She was a hell of a lot stronger than she looked, and I barely managed to avoid being sent careening into the fireplace.

I grabbed the brass fire poker and lunged again as she formed a dagger made from dripping blue blood in her right palm and slashed out at Alex. The hellhound yelped in pain, but sidestepped before she could deliver a fatal blow.

At least, I assumed he couldn't survive having his throat cut, but the truth was, we really didn't know what the extent of his power was now. Or his weakness.

I came up behind her while Alex had her distracted, his massive jaws clamping down on her forearm, and thrust the fire poker into the base of her spine. No sense in holding back now that she wasn't in Chase any longer.

She screeched and stumbled back, her spine arched back at an unnatural angle and her arm dangling in Alex's grasp. The beast was still snarling and thrashed his head, but her sudden stillness seemed to catch him off guard.

With a sudden burst of blue blood and energy, she sent him flying.

I watched as Ichor groped around behind her back until she caught hold of the middle of the poker and I cringed as I heard the sound of flesh and bone crunching as she started to pull it out. Once she did, a spray of cerulean splashed the walls, and what lingered on the sharpened edge of the object congealed and took the shape of an ax.

Well, fuck.

I darted back just in time to avoid the swing of the weapon as Ichor brought it around with both hands and slammed it into the wall, denting the wood.

"You're going to pay for that," she spat, her lip curled in a snarl.

"Worth a shot," I muttered, leaping out of the way at her next swing. I continued to dodge, barely able to keep up with her rapidfire movements. She was a hell of a lot stronger than she had been when she was possessing Chase, and I could only assume that was because she had full control over her current vessel.

Chase's powers were strong in their own right, and equally intense in many ways, but they were uncontrolled and prone to fluctuate with his emotions. He was still a young god, and Ichor was something else entirely.

Alex finally recovered and I watched his jaws clench down on the handle of her ax just beneath the blade. If it wasn't for him intervening, I definitely would have been caught by her next strike.

Hopefully he didn't remember that when he next shifted back. Otherwise, he was going to be insufferable.

As it was, he had to roll out of the way of her next swing, which left me with a few seconds to attack.

I dove forward and tried to kick her in the stomach.

She knocked me aside with a sweep of her leg. I rolled and came up just in time to see her lift her foot to stomp on me.

"You know, you're really putting that second-favorite status in jeopardy," she said through her teeth, blue blood dripping through them.

I grabbed her ankle, digging my nails in as hard as I could before shoving her off.

I felt something snap in my grasp and she staggered forward, her ankle crunching as it bent at an unnatural angle.

A smile curved her lips as she looked up at me and snapped it back into place. "Ah, so now we're breaking things. Marvelous."

She threw her hand out and a stream of mingled blue and red energy hit the nearby wall where I was expecting it to hit me.

Instead, a plume of dust and plaster filled the room and I heard the house creak and groan as the ceiling caved in.

I barely managed to dodge out of the way as the house shuddered and the whole thing began to crumble.

Alex lunged at her again and this time, she caught the beast by the neck, hauling him up with unnatural strength so he dangled with his back paws hovering a few inches off the ground while he struggled.

"And what is this?" she sneered. "Cowardly little Alex, a hellhound? Now that's a marvelous turn of events.

I watched as Alex gave a pained snarl and flew across the room, colliding with the large armoire and shattering it into splinters.

Yeah, that wasn't good. Even Ichor should have been slowed down by a fucking hellhound.

There was no way we were going to win this fight if it kept going at this rate, so it was time to put an end to it.

I withdrew the laser pointer from my pocket and now that I was having to use it, I found myself really regretting the fact that my plan B involved a fucking laser pointer.

"What the hell is that?" Ichor asked, her eyes narrowing judgmentally as she looked down at the object in my hand.

"Hopefully something ingenious," I answered, flicking the button on.

Before the light could even turn on, she had moved and sent a burst of energy into my chest that knocked the pointer out of my hand and sent me flying into one of the remaining walls.

This place was going to need a full scale remodel, assuming any of us survived that long.

I reached for the laser pointer, but she kicked it out of my reach.

"Looking for this?" she taunted, leaning down to pick it up. She turned it on, pointing at the wall, and gave a sharp laugh. "Ingenious might be a stretch, but you always were clever. I'll give you that. But just because you're smarter than your brother doesn't mean you're smarter than me. Do you remember what happened the last time you thought you were too clever for me, Cyrus?"

She moved closer, evidently taking note of my confusion. "Oh, that's right, you don't, do you? Of course you don't. But it doesn't matter. You fell away from me before, and I fixed it then, just like I'll fix it now."

I frowned, struggling to process what she was saying, my head still ringing from the impact.

"You killed me," I muttered. "When?"

"Just a little adolescent rebellion, sweetheart," she said with a cloying smile. "Nothing a little reincarnation can't fix. Ask your brother. He's the one who did the deed."

She knew how to twist the knife once she had it in, I would give her that. She always had.

Something caught my eye behind her, but my vision was still blurred enough that I wasn't quite sure I was seeing right.

Another figure, but Sam and Alex were both still down for the count.

Then he came into view.

The hunter.

I flinched instinctively, ready to get back on my feet and defend myself from him, too, when he raised a finger to his lips, and I saw the whip in his hand.

Talk about an unlikely fucking ally. Not that I was really in any position to be choosy as far as that was concerned.

I watched as Ichor grabbed a blade off the mantelpiece, taking slow, measured steps closer to me.

"You know, I didn't have the heart to do it myself the last time," Ichor continued. The bitch loved a good villain monologue. "You two were always my favorites, and despite the jealousy, I don't think Cameron enjoyed it, but he's always been the obedient one. Maybe next time around..."

She raised the ax, and at the same moment, DuPonte swung the whip, making the silver coil wrap around Ichor's neck.

I could tell it caught her off guard, and she staggered back before catching herself, dropping the blade from her hand as she grabbed the whip. She let out a searing hiss as her palms smoked along with her throat, and the cord dug in deeper.

Holy metal. It had to be.

Fucking hunters always thought of everything.



I watched in confusion, already back on my feet, as DuPonte shoved the butt of the whip through one of the loops behind Ichor's neck and into the post behind the fireplace, keeping her pinned down.

"That won't hold for long," he warned.

"I'm aware," I said, grabbing the pointer and locking it into the on position as I propped it up so it was shining on the floor around Ichor while she continued to thrash and struggle. "Twelve hours of battery life."

DuPonte raised an eyebrow. "Huh. Clever. Tacky, but clever."

"Seems to be the word of the hour," I mumbled, looking over at Alex, who was shaking his head as he began to rise from the rubble of what had once been the living room, staggering a little.

"I'll get him," DuPonte said, grabbing Sam's unconscious body and hauling him over his shoulder. "We need to talk, but not here."

"You're damn right we do," I said under my breath, following him outside.

I snapped my fingers and Alex looked between us in confusion before loping after me while Ichor continued to rage and thrash against her restraints.

At least he was somewhat obedient when Chase wasn't around.

CHAPTER  
TWENTY-TWO

## CHASE

So maybe diving headfirst into the river of souls with zero preparation wasn't my best idea, but it also wasn't the most questionable life decision I had made that week alone.

Besides, with Hermes and the other denizens of Olympus hot on our trail, I didn't have many top-notch options available to me.

I wasn't even sure if Cameron was behind me or not, but his momentary attack of conscience aside, I wasn't about to start trusting him now.

I had already made that mistake once before, and I was still applying cream to the burns.

I wasn't sure what I had expected, really, but somehow, I hadn't expected Styx to be a river in the literal sense of the word.

Clearly my mistake.

At first, I felt a familiar surge of panic as I realized I was underwater and couldn't breathe, but then, I had the same realization I'd had the first time I was in this situation.

I was in control.

Against my survival instincts and probably my better judgment, I took a deep breath. When I didn't start coughing and choking and spluttering on the water, I grew a little more confident, and I realized I could, in fact, breathe.

God, I hoped that was water.

Better not to think about that kind of thing. Cognitive dissonance was a hell of a drug.

I forced myself to sink down until my feet touched bottom, and then it became a lot easier not to panic.

When I looked up, I saw someone swimming toward me, and sure enough, it was Cameron.

He looked equal parts freaked out and pissed as he reached for me, but I motioned for him to calm down, and of course, he didn't seem to take heed until he saw me taking a deep breath without being affected.

I tried to speak, relieved when my voice came out clear enough. "You can breathe," I told him.

He just looked at me like I was crazy, even though I was doing the very thing I was assuring him of myself.

Whether it was because he believed me or he didn't have a choice, he finally took a breath, but he grabbed his throat like he was still going to suffocate.

"What the fuck?" he asked, looking up at me in dismay. "How did you—?"

I shrugged. "Mind over matter, I guess."

"Must be because you're a demigod," he mumbled.

I rolled my eyes. "Are you going to use that as an excuse every time I do something awesome that you're jealous of?"

"I am not jealous," Cameron scoffed.

"No?" I challenged. "Because it would be understandable if you, a mere vampire, were jealous of my awesome elemental-slash-psychic powers."

"For fuck's sake," Cameron muttered, rolling his eyes.

"That's what I thought," I said, walking in the direction of what I hoped would eventually be up. Or at least not doubling back to Olympus.

"Where are we going now?" Cameron asked.

"Oh, so now you're taking directions from me?" I asked.

"Only because you seem to have some kind of savant thing going on with liminal spaces," he countered.

I narrowed my eyes. "I'm going to let that slide, on account of your obvious jealousy."

He just shook his head.

We walked for what felt like approximately five million miles, and for all I knew, it was.

This wasn't the kind of place where time and space really held up as solid concepts. Everything was a bit... wobbly.

"There has to be a way out of here," I said.

"What, you're starting to regret jumping into the fucking river of souls without a plan?" Cameron taunted.

"I'm starting to regret telling you you can breathe," I corrected.

Cameron just snorted.

"Hey, what's that?" I asked, pointing up ahead.

Cameron squinted. "I don't—oh."

He went silent as he stared up at the giant structure in the distance, still too far to make out any details, but undeniably there.

For all I knew, it was Atlantis.

At least he saw it, too. I could never really be sure. Not in places like this where my own mind was fully capable of creating new realities.

Of course, according to my mother, that was far from a new development.

I was starting to miss her, and that was proof enough that I had been in this place far too long.

"We should get closer," I muttered.

"We don't even know what it is," Cameron hissed.

"Do you have any better ideas?" I challenged.

The sour glare on his face was answer enough. I kept walking, and he stubbornly put himself in front of me.

"I'm not Ichor's vessel anymore," I reminded him. "What's the point of protecting me?"

"Would you give it a rest?" he growled.

I scoffed. Sometimes I really didn't know what to make of Cameron. I just knew better than to get my hopes up.

As we came within view of what definitely looked like a giant wall, I started to get a little bit nervous.

Whatever there was to be found in this place, chances were good it was hostile, and I knew better than to think the fact that we had escaped meant we could stand a direct confrontation with whatever was out here.

Cameron was right. If we were in Thanatos's domain, there was a very good chance he was just leading us into a trap. And he seemed like the kind of predator who enjoyed playing with his food.

Three dark shadows came into view the closer we got and something about them immediately had me on edge. They were standing in front of a tall gate, and I realized just how massive the wall itself was now that I was close enough to see that the top of my head would only reach about halfway up the gate, if that.

Eventually, I realized it wasn't three separate creatures at all. It was one massive four-legged body with three distinctly canine heads.

What the fucking hell?

"Is that fucking Cerberus?" Cameron asked in a flat tone.

I opened my mouth to answer, but nothing wanted to come out.

And really, what was I supposed to say in response to that?

"Pretty sure it's not a poodle," I said.

Cameron gave me a look. "Did you have to think that up?"

"Me?" I cried. "How is that my fault?"

"You're clearly in control of this place to a degree," he countered. "You're telling me you can't make it go away?"

"Look, unless Alex's recent transmogrification sparked some remarkably fucked up furry fetish, I'm pretty sure I didn't summon the guardian of the gates of hell on a subconscious whim," I told him.

Cameron looked back up at the creature, frowning. "If he's the guardian to hell, then that means that's probably the only way out."

"That or Olympus," I said, looking back the way we had come.

I was pretty sure that was the way we had come, at least. Extra dimensional directions weren't really my forte.

"Great," Cameron said, raking a hand through his hair. "We're fucked."

"I mean, it might be a nice dog," I ventured. He gave me a look, so I added, "I'm just trying to think positively."

"Stay here," Cameron said, putting out his hand.

"What are you doing?" I hissed as he walked forward.

He ignored me, and kept walking until one of the beast's heads swung around to look at him. All three of them started going nuts, making the most awful, otherworldly sounds I'd ever heard.

I watched in horror, crying out for Cameron to run as the beast lunged, but it got yanked back by something in mid air and went careening into the floor of the ocean so hard it left a crater of sand.

There was nothing visible around the beast's neck, but it was clearly tethered.

The head that had cracked against the ground shook itself off as the beast got back to its feet and started snarling at Cameron again, albeit more cautiously.

"Not very smart, is it?" he scoffed.

"Don't provoke him," I scolded.

Leave it to cats and dogs to fight.

As I approached the beast, I found myself questioning all the life decisions that had led me here. And most of the afterlife ones.

One of the heads snarled, while the other sniffed the air curiously.

"What are you doing?" Cameron hissed, reaching for me as I moved past him only for that to trigger all three heads to snarl viciously, so loudly the ground shook.

Cameron staggered back and looked like he was going to piss himself, which I usually would've found endlessly amusing.

"Just trust me," I told him.

He glowered. "Right, because your judgment has never been questionable before this."

I ignored him, taking a step closer.

"Nice doggy," I said, holding out my hands in what I hoped was a nonthreatening gesture. Not that this thing seemed like it could be genuinely threatened by much of anything except maybe underworld heartworms.

The middle head cocked slightly to one side and the other two looked at it before turning back to me. I was pretty sure the middle one was the ringleader, so I decided to try getting on its good side.

"There you go," I said, smiling. "That's a nice boy."

"You've got to be kidding me," Cameron muttered.

"Shut up," I hissed at him. "So far, it's working."

I still had a hand, at any rate, so I was counting that as a success.

Cameron shook his head, but he didn't try to stop me. If anything, he seemed curious. And so was I, for that matter.

"You're not so bad. There you go. Nice and easy," I said, slowly reaching out closer toward the middle head.

Its nose twitched, and I tensed up instinctively, but I forced myself to keep going. When he didn't bite or snarl, I reached out a little further, and my hand made contact with his snout. I pet it like I would any other dog, and tried not to think about the fact that it could bite me in half.

The head grew stiff, but it didn't attack, so I kept stroking, even though I was pretty sure I had lost my damn mind.

Actually, I was a hundred percent sure.

When the canine's eyes closed, and it snorted a breath that smelled like Hades itself, I realized my crazy plan had worked.

"Guess all dogs are the same, no matter how big they are," I murmured.

Before long, the other heads were trying to get in on the action, nudging and grunting impatiently for their turns. I reached out to pet the one on the right, but that still left the one on the left vying for attention.

"Okay, boys, there's plenty where that came from, just wait your turn," I coaxed. "Being a vessel is definitely good practice for this."

"This is ridiculous," Cameron muttered. If I didn't know better, I would think he sounded impressed."

"Go on," I said, nodding my head in the direction of the gate. It was still necessary to be subtle, and when Cameron took a step, one of the heads perked up, eyeing him suspiciously with a snarl.

I immediately distracted it by scratching behind its ear, and it seemed to be working.

Cameron hesitated, so I snapped, "Go on. I'm right behind you."

He reluctantly took a step forward, and this time, none of the heads noticed.

I breathed a sigh of relief, slowly inching backward, without taking my hands off the furry creatures. Their fur was missing in large raw patches, like they had gotten into fights, and I could only imagine what could have left a mark on a beast like this.

That was assuming they didn't fight each other.

"That's a good guard dog," I cooed, continuing to back up slowly but surely toward the gate. To say I was lucky they didn't view me as an enemy was an understatement.

Cameron was right about one thing, being a demigod was sort of like a pass through this place. At least until word about my escape got around and that pass was revoked, but for the time being, I was actually beginning to let myself hope we could make a clean getaway.

Of course, that didn't mean that Zeus and the others wouldn't be pursuing us once we got back home, but I would have to cross that bridge when we got to it. Right now, I was more concerned about crossing through the threshold out of the underworld.

"Okay, boys, this has been nice, but I really have to go. I'm sure I'll see you again, just hopefully not within the next seventy years or so," I told them.

The head to my right stiffened up and gave me a suspicious look, but I felt something grab me from behind and Cameron yanked me through the gate before Cerberus could react.

I heard furious snarls as the other side of the gate slammed shut on the three-headed beast, but I barely had time to react to what was happening before Cameron grabbed me and pulled me closer to him.

There was a howling void on the other side of the wall, because of course there was, and we were falling into it.

There could never just be a nice lobby with a cappuccino machine and flowers. That would be asking way too much.



CHAPTER  
TWENTY-THREE

## ALEX

Shifting back was easier this time, but still a colossal pain in the ass. Not as much of a pain as my throbbing head, though.

Fuck, Ichor was strong. I wasn't sure what I had been expecting, but if this shit went down again and we had to face off with her and Cameron...

I shook my head, trying not to think about it. I had other shit to worry about at this very moment, namely the fact that we were holed up in a shitty motel off the Interstate with a fucking hunter.

"Someone wanna tell me why we're shacking up at a Motel 8 with Professor Douchebag?" I asked, adjusting the sleeve on the shirt he'd lent me. Judging from the looks of this place, he'd been crashing here for a while.

The hunter narrowed his eyes and I smirked. "Sorry. Guess Chase's nickname for you just kind of stuck."

He just shook his head and sighed. "Look, I'm not thrilled about working with a hive of mosquitoes, but considering what you idiots just unleashed on the planet, I'm willing to agree to a temporary ceasefire."

"A ceasefire, huh?" Sam asked, his arms folded as he leaned against the wall across the room. "Why should we believe you when you tried to burn us in a *literal* fire the last time?"

"Because I just saved your asses, for one thing," DuPonte answered.

"Still not clear on the why," said Cyrus.

"Trust me, I was iffy on it myself," DuPonte said in a dry tone. "But when the gods play on earth, humans and monsters alike tend to feel the sting."

"You want us to help you stop her," I murmured.

"It's not every day paladins turn on their deity," he remarked. "I think we could be of use together. Temporarily."

"Are you posing a truce?" Sam asked warily.

"A temporary one," DuPonte repeated.

"You already tried to kill Chase once," I said. "How do we know you're not going to try again?"

"For one thing, his power is probably the only thing capable of stopping Ichor," he answered. "For another, if he is who you claim he is, the last thing I want is to ignite a celestial turf war on earth by killing Zeus's kid."

Cyrus snorted. "No, you certainly don't want that."

"How can you even help us, anyway?" I asked. "You can't kill Ichor, and in case you haven't noticed, we don't even have Chase. Unless you happen to know of a way into the underworld."

"I do, as a matter of fact," said DuPonte. "You have to die."

I scoffed. "Yeah. Big help there."

"I did die," Sam said, still looking a little haunted. "He wasn't there."

"He's divine. He wouldn't have gone to the same place," said DuPonte. "The Other is a labyrinth. There are limitless branching corridors and it's easy to get lost. Where do you think ghosts come from?"

"I don't give it a lot of thought," I admitted, more than a little creeped out by the whole thing. "So you're saying there's no way to get to him?"

"Not unless we can find a portal," the hunter answered.

"And where would one of those be?" Cyrus asked.

DuPonte reached into his pocket and we all tensed up, but he simply pulled out a small metal object. I squinted and realized what it was.

"A compass?" Sam asked doubtfully.

"It's enchanted," DuPonte answered.

"Of course it is," I muttered.

"It tracks celestial energy," he said, ignoring me. "There's no official passage into the underworld of the gods without being a dead celestial, but there are places where the veil is weak. Every time a god comes to earth, they consume a tremendous amount of celestial energy to do so, and that creates a fissure that can be exploited."

"So we can't use the official passage, but we can go in through the back door is what you're saying," I reasoned. They all stared at me. "What?"

Cyrus just shook his head. "Even if that would work, how are we supposed to find him once we get there?"

"I never said it was a good plan," DuPonte countered.

The compass in his hand started to glow, and I had to blink a few times to make sure I was really seeing that. "Uh. I think your magical god compass is ringing."

"What does that mean?" Sam asked suspiciously.

The hunter looked down at the face of the compass as the needle jumped around erratically. "There's been a surge of celestial energy."

"A surge?" Cyrus frowned. "Where?"

"If the compass isn't able to pinpoint a direction, that means it's close," DuPonte answered, putting the device away. "Very close. Which means another god has entered this realm."

"Holy shit," Sam muttered under his breath.

"Show us," Cyrus ordered, walking over to the door to hold it open. "If one of them is here, it has to have something to do with Chase."

DuPonte didn't respond right away. The two men stared each other down, clearly having some kind of macho staring contest we did not have the time for right now, before the hunter finally walked through the door.

And I followed him, despite the fact that I had no fucking clue what I was going to do once we got there.

Hellhound or not, when it came to gods, I was sorely outmatched. Ichor had made that abundantly clear.

Not that it mattered. If there was even a chance one of those bastards could lead us to Chase, we had to try.

CHAPTER  
TWENTY-FOUR

## CHASE

Falling through an extradimensional portal out of hell—or heaven, still wasn't totally clear on which I'd just been through—was not my idea of a good time. It was like car sickness and morning sickness all rolled up in one, and by the time the portal spit us out, I was ready to kiss the ground.

I just wasn't expecting to do so literally, but the landing, while not gentle, could definitely have been worse than whatever fucking pond I landed in.

I found myself swimming toward the shore, coughing on what was probably algae infested water, until I reached the bank and grasped onto a snowy patch of grass to haul myself up.

Easier said than done now that I was toting two extra people around.

I felt someone grab me from behind and pull me up the rest of the way. When I looked up, Cameron was staring down at me, his eyes livid as they scanned me and he held my shoulders firmly in his grasp.

"Are you all right?" he demanded.

"I'm fine," I told him, still not used to him caring. Definitely not for my sake.

Hell, I wasn't sure why he cared and I doubted he knew, either, but something told me it was genuine.

What reason did he have to pretend? Of all the lies the others had told me, Cameron was the only one who had always been completely honest about how he felt, for better or worse.

And it was usually for the worse.

"Good," he grunted, looking around. "Now, where the hell are we?"

"How should I know? We just fell ass backwards into wherever it is," I said, shivering from the combination of the frigid air and my soaking robes.

Cameron shrugged out of his jacket and draped it around my shoulders. Another unexpected gesture of care I would have thought he was long past.

Fuck, I wished he would just be an asshole all the time. It would make it easier to hate him as much as survival required me to.

"We can't stay here. If you can walk, keep moving," Cameron ordered, cutting through the thick brush on all sides of the pond. The fact that the leaves had all fallen and the trees were dead just made them pokier.

I rolled my eyes, following him. The deeper we went into the forest, the more familiar the place came to be.

When I stopped walking, Cameron turned back over his shoulder with an impatient look on his face. "What is it?" he demanded.

"Is this... Winterhaven?" I asked warily.

He scoffed, as if I was being ridiculous. "Right. We don't even know if it's Earth, but that gate just happened to spit us out in..." He trailed off, and I watched the telltale look of a man who was realizing he was wrong creep across his face. "Shit. It's Winterhaven."

Before I could respond, I felt a strange pull in my chest. Like something was calling me.

There was a buzz of electricity in the air, not unlike what I had felt when Hermes appeared, but it didn't instill the same sense of dread in me.

For that matter, it didn't feel dangerous at all.

"Stay behind me," Cameron instructed, moving forward cautiously.

"You sense it, too?" I asked.

Before he could respond, I caught sight of something in the distance—the familiar shape of a ghastly hound, its fangs bared and glinting in the moonlight.

"What the fuck is that thing?" Cameron muttered, sounding horrified, which was kind of hypocritical for a guy who turned into Andrew Lloyd Webber's nightmare.

Or wet dream.

Really wasn't sure I wanted to know which.

Was I really getting defensive of Alex?

"Alex!" I cried, running toward him. I dodged out of Cameron's attempt to grab me and threw my arms around the beast's neck.

Alex growled affectionately and pushed his snout into my cheek, giving me a long lick. His breath shockingly didn't smell like anything other than dust, but I still grimaced. I was too happy to see him to scold him, though.

"Nice to see you, too," I mumbled.

I barely had my arms around his neck when I felt him vibrating with a low, rumbling snarl, and the spines on his back raised as he stared at the man behind me.

I turned and saw that Cameron had moved closer, his eyes glowing.

I could sense his energy had changed, and it hit me that he was probably about to shift himself. A cat and dog fight was the last damn thing I needed to be dealing with right now, so I put my arms out and put myself between them.

"Easy, both of you," I warned.

"That's Alex?" Cameron asked in disbelief.

"He made a deal. Sound familiar?" I asked pointedly.

Cameron narrowed his eyes, but before he could respond, something behind me seemed to draw his attention. I turned around to find Cyrus and Sam walking toward me, but before I had even taken a step toward them, I froze at the sight of the man next to Cyrus.

Hatred and fear immediately washed over me anew, and in that instant, it was like I was back at the pond, the hunter looming over me.

The hunter I had once actually kind of respected as a teacher.

Now, every boner he'd ever given me was all the more shameful in retrospect.

"You son of a bitch," I seethed, forming a blade of ice in my right palm.

Before I could lunge for him, Cyrus was right in front of me, catching me in his arms. "Chase, it's okay," he murmured, pulling me in close against him. "He's with us."

"I haven't been gone that fucking long!"

Cyrus gave me a knowing look, tucking a strand of hair behind my ear. "I know it's hard to accept, but just trust me right now. Please."

"Fine, but you have a lot of fucking explaining to do," I grumbled.

He kissed me in response, but when he pulled away to look down at me, there was a gleam of disapproval in his gaze. "That goes for you, too. Are you all right?" he asked, his hands sweeping down to rest on my stomach.

"I'm fine. We all are," I sighed, looking over at Sam as he approached. The sight of him made my heart feel lighter, and I threw my arms around him, too, squeezing as tight as I could. "I thought I'd lost you."

"You returned the favor," he said dryly, squeezing me back. He buried his face in my neck and breathed deeply. "Don't ever pull that shit again."

"You're one to talk."

"You're not the one sworn to protect me," he countered, pulling away to look down at my rounded belly. "You really think I'd want to live in this world knowing you're not in it? I've been there and done that, and I don't have any plans of doing it again."

His words caught me by surprise, and for a moment, I wasn't sure what to say. But for the moment, we had bigger issues. I realized Alex wasn't there anymore, and looked up to find that Cameron was



gone, too.

The latter really didn't surprise me.

"Shit," I muttered. "He must've gone after Cameron."

"Cameron?" Cyrus echoed, his eyes narrowing dangerously. "Cameron was here?"

So he'd run off as soon as he caught sight of them. No surprise there, either.

At least it hadn't come to a war. That was what I had been fearing for way too long, but I wasn't sure this was much better.

"We can't let him get away," Sam hissed. His eyes were redder than they had been before, and I didn't think it was just a trick of the moonlight. His fangs looked a little longer, too.

"Wait," I pleaded, grabbing his arms. "You don't understand. He helped me escape."

Sam frowned, but he didn't look convinced at all. I could still feel his muscle coiled, ready to strike like a cobra. "Bullshit."

"It's the truth," I pressed, looking pointedly between DuPonte and Cyrus. "You want me to take your word for it, then you're going to have to trust me."

"I believe you, but even if that's true, it's Cameron," said Cyrus. "He had a reason, and it wasn't altruism."

"Ichor," Sam said through his teeth, as if coming to a sudden realization.

"He's right," said DuPonte, reaching for something at his hip. I flinched, but Sam and Cyrus didn't seem on edge as he drew an old-fashioned revolver from its holster. "I'll go back to the house. See if I can cut him off."

"I'll find Alex," Cyrus muttered, looking over at Sam. "Get him to your grandmother's house."

Sam nodded, taking me by the arm and rushing us into the woods without another word.

"Wait!" I cried, putting on the brakes.

He stopped, but I knew it was only because he didn't want to hurt me. The difference in strength between us was even starker than before, if his energy was any indication.

I searched his face, torn between confusion and relief. "You're different," I said. "Your blood smells different."

"Cyrus turned me the rest of the way before Hermes brought me back," he answered in a grave tone.

"And now you're besties with a hunter," I said. "How long was I gone for again? Weeks?"

"Days," he answered, a wry smile on his lips. "But it felt like it. Now come on. Don't make me throw you over my shoulder like a caveman."

I rolled my eyes, following him. Even if I was still reluctant to want Cameron to be ripped apart by

my pet hellhound—if only because there was a damn good chance it would go the other way—I knew the guys were right.

We couldn't trust him, no matter what had happened on the other side.

He was still loyal to Ichor, and anything that stood in the way of them being reunited—myself included—was bound to be target number one.

“Wait,” I said suddenly. “Where’s my mother?”

“Cyrus sent her somewhere safe, for the time being,” Sam answered. “We knew you wouldn’t want her wrapped up in all this.”

“For a myriad of reasons,” I said with a heavy sigh, relieved she was safe. And, for the moment, out of my hair.

We certainly had enough problems to deal with, and now, the hunter was apparently one of them.

CHAPTER  
TWENTY-FIVE

## CYRUS

When I arrived back at the mansion, I found Alex, but there was no sign of Cameron or Ichor. The hunter's whip was still coiled on the floor, so I reached down to pick it up.

Alex sniffed around the room, his lip curled back in a snarl. Somehow, he was more serious as a glorified dog than he was as a human. Definitely better backup.

I spun around when I sensed someone else in the room and only partially relaxed when I saw it was DuPonte.

"You beat me here," he remarked, sauntering into the room.

I snorted. "Not Cameron, apparently."

"No," he said, glancing around. "Any idea where they'd go?"

"None of the places that come to mind," I answered. "He wouldn't be that dumb. But the fact that he's not here is probably a good thing."

"How do you figure that?"

"Because between the two of them, we'd be fucked in a fair fight," I said with a shrug. "But he has her, and he's not going to be taking any risks."

"You think that's it, then?" he asked.

I hesitated. "Cameron has what he wants, but that doesn't mean Ichor will let this go. She's pissed, and she wants blood."

"Yeah. That sounds like the MO," the hunter muttered.

"Vampires or gods?"

"Both."

He wasn't wrong. "So this truce. Exactly how far does it extend?"

"As far as it needs to until she's dead, or back on the other side," said DuPonte. "And we're still a

long way from either of those things."

"We are," I agreed. "Right now, I'm focused on keeping Chase safe."

"As you should be," he said, reaching into his pocket. I tensed instinctively, ready to defend myself, but rather than a weapon, he pulled out a small metal object and tossed it to me.

I caught it out of the air, frowning down at the object in my palm. "A key?"

"I have a safe house in the mountains," he explained. "It's warded to the teeth. You'll need a little magic to get four vampires past the threshold wards and set them back up again, but something tells me Chase can handle that."

"I'm sure he can," I said, eyeing him warily. Alex was still watching him like a hawk. "What's the catch?"

"No catch," DuPonte said with a shrug. "Like I said, Chase is our best chance at getting rid of Ichor, and if I have to tolerate one god in this realm, I'd take the one with a lesser body count. Just take him and lie low for a while."

"And what are you going to be doing in the meantime?" I asked.

"Looking for your brother," he replied.

"If *I* can't find him, what makes you think *you* stand a chance?"

"Hunters talk," he said. "And no offense, but your goddess is a bit of a glutton. Something tells me no matter how hard Cameron tries to cover the trail of bodies, that's gonna be an uphill battle."

"None taken," I said dryly. When I noticed Alex creeping toward the hunter out of the corner of my eye, I snapped my fingers. "Down, boy."

He growled half-heartedly at me.

"I don't suppose you want to take the hellhound along with you?" I offered.

Alex whined, suddenly slinking over to me with his tail and ears down.

"Thanks, but I'll pass," DuPonte said, heading toward the door. "I'm sure I don't need to tell you this, but look after Chase. Ichor isn't the only one who'll be coming after him now."

"You're right. You don't need to tell me," I said. "But I will."

He nodded, leaving the mansion. I did another sweep and grabbed a few things from the basement I was sure Chase would want, since we had been given no choice but to leave in a hurry, before heading to Alona's house.

The older woman had always been kind enough, but I knew she didn't trust me.

I was pretty sure she didn't *like* me, either, which was fair enough.

She adored Chase, though, and while I knew she was going to do whatever it took to keep him and her grandson safe, it wasn't like her magic would be strong enough to stand up to Ichor if she showed up

again.

And given the fact that Alona was on the outskirts of the cult, that was a distinct possibility.

As much as I hated the idea, I was actually entertaining the thought of making use of the hunter's safehouse.

At least for the time being.

CHAPTER  
TWENTY-SIX

## CHASE

I wasn't sure what to make of the fact that Cyrus and Alex hadn't come back yet.

Or the fact that they were, apparently, working with the hunter who had tried to kill us all.

Despite Sam's best attempts to explain it in their absence, I still wasn't comfy with the new revelation.

I was, however, keeping it together to be on good behavior in front of Alona, considering we were high-risk houseguests at the moment.

"Don't worry, dear," she said, patting my shoulder in consolation, in typical grandmother fashion. "I'm sure they're fine."

I gave her a strained smile, which was the best I could muster under the circumstances. "Yeah, I'm sure they will."

I sensed something even before I heard a noise outside. I leapt up from my chair, or at least as close to that as I was capable of these days, and rushed to the door.

When I flung it open, Cyrus was there with Alex at his side, still in his hellhound form with his long, bony tail scraping the ivy-covered gate on the walkway.

"You're back," I murmured, throwing my arms around Cyrus's his neck.

"Not successfully, I'm afraid," he said, cupping the back of my head as he looked down at me. "They were gone when we got there."

I couldn't help but breathe a sigh of relief.

For one thing, the idea of Cyrus and Alex facing off against Ichor alone scared the hell out of me.

For another, after everything that had happened with Cameron, there was still a part of me—probably an incredibly naïve part, and to my detriment—that didn't want to believe he was too far gone.

I knew if I admitted that, Cyrus and the others would never trust my judgment again, though, so I just said, "I'm glad you didn't run into them."

"I'm not," Cyrus said in a somber tone. "Ichor is bound to come after you again."

"She got what she wanted," I mumbled. "She's wearing Sarah like a new Prada bag now, and she has



Cameron."

"You know her better than that," said Cyrus. "You have us, and she's not going to let that go anytime soon."

I felt a sense of growing dread, realizing he was right. I already knew that, but there was still a part of me that could indulge in some wishful thinking. Part of me that hoped maybe she would just fucking let it go.

"Where's the hunter?" I asked, barely able to say his actual name without becoming enraged.

"He went after them," Cyrus answered. When he saw my confusion, he added, "We have a truce. For the moment."

"And you believe him?" I asked in disbelief.

"I believe he understands the threat Ichor poses to all of us," he answered. "If there's one thing you can count on a hunter for, it's self-preservation, and he knows what Ichor is capable of. He also knows we're his best shot at stopping her. You in particular."

"I wish *I* knew that," I muttered.

Cyrus reached out, stroking my cheek. "I'm not going to let them hurt you. Never."

"I don't want to lose you," I said, reaching down to pat Alex's head. He snuffled and leaned into my palm, rubbing his head against it.

"You won't," Cyrus said.

"You can't promise that," I replied. "Not if we're still wrapped up in all this, with Ichor and Zeus after us. Oh, and Cameron temporarily killed Thanatos, so there's that."

Cyrus did a double take, staring at me in disbelief. "You're kidding, right?"

"I wish. My imagination isn't that good."

"All right, don't just stand there, come in," Alona said, coming out into the hallway. She froze and took one look at Alex, before saying, "Oh, no. Absolutely not. Not that thing."

"That 'thing' is Alex," Sam said flatly, coming up behind her.

She grimaced, and judging from the way she was eyeing Alex, she was trying to figure out whether that made much of a difference at all.

"We can't stay anyway," Cyrus said. "DuPonte has a safe house that's more heavily warded. He said we can stay there, for the time being."

"DuPonte's safe house?" Sam echoed. "That's the last damn place we need to be."

"I'm going to second that opinion," I agreed.

Cyrus sighed. "Look, we're short on allies at the moment, and the fact is, a hunter is the only chance we have at staying off the radar of everyone we need to keep hidden from. The enemy of my enemy

and all that."

I grimaced. As much as I hated to admit it, he was right. And I really fucking hated to admit it.

The fact of the matter was, as long as we were here, we were a target, and that put a target on Alona's head, too.

I knew Cyrus didn't want to say that out loud, but the implication was clear enough.

"Fine," I said. "We'll go. For now."

Cyrus nodded. "You head up with Alex and Sam. I'm checking it out first, just to make sure it's clear."

"You mean to make sure the hunter didn't booby-trap it," Sam said pointedly.

Cyrus gave him a look, but he just shrugged. He was probably right. In fact, I was sure of that.

"Well, before you leave, let me give you the other batches of pills I mixed up," Alona insisted.

A few minutes later, we were all packed and ready to go, and judging from the fact that Alex was anxiously pacing in the doorway, he wasn't too thrilled about being an inside hellhound, either.

"I hate to see you go," Alona said, giving me a tight hug. "You take care of yourself and those babies, and don't let these men of yours get away with too much."

I laughed, hugging her back. "I won't," I assured her.

Sam hugged his grandmother, too, before loading us into his car.

Alex had a hard time fitting into the backseat, and he turned around a few times, growling as he tried to get comfortable before curling up on the seat Sam had to put down just to accommodate him.

"All right, let's get going," Sam said.

"You sound like a dad on a road trip," I scoffed.

He paused to consider it. "I am a dad on a road trip, technically."

I laughed. "Fair enough."

As I settled in for the ride, I found my thoughts drifting. This was definitely not the direction I thought my life would take, and as fucked up as it had all seemed in the beginning, the thing that terrified me most now was losing it.

Losing them.

Losing everything.

CHAPTER  
TWENTY-SEVEN

## CHASE

Despite the fact that I was starting to get sick of heavily wooded cabins, DuPonté's safe house ended up being a lot nicer than I had imagined.

Bigger, too.

There was a massive gated wooden fence surrounding the property, and I could feel the wards as soon as we got within eyesight of it.

"The territory is clear," Cyrus announced, coming out to meet us from the woods. "We're not going to be able to get inside without you unlocking the wards, though."

"I don't suppose DuPonté gave you an owner's manual or anything?" I asked.

"I'm afraid not," Cyrus said with a tired smile.

I took a deep breath and walked a bit closer.

Cyrus held out his hand to stop me.

"You should stay back. Just in case."

"I'm not a universal remote," I grumbled, closing my eyes to try to focus on the force field. I wasn't even sure how DuPonté had managed to set something like this up, unless he knew witches.

Apparently, that wasn't as taboo to the hunters as vampires and other adjacent creatures.

Yeah, I was going to be bitter for a good long while.

The others went quiet as I focused, trying to tap into the energetic frequency of the magic that seemed to be forming a matrix all around us.

There was usually a weak spot in any ward that could be exploited, like a key in a lock, and once I found it, I felt it tapping into my energy in turn.

It was a strange feeling, but once the ward unlocked, I felt a rush of relief.

"Okay, it should be good now," I said.

"I'll try first," Sam said, taking a step toward the door. He opened it and carefully took a step through.

I was relieved when he made it to the other side of the threshold. “Nice job.”

I smirked. "I haven't gotten entirely rusty."

"Alex, watch him," Cyrus ordered, following Sam into the house. A few minutes later, they both returned.

"Everything good?" I asked.

"Yeah," Sam said. “Aside from DuPonte’s secret sex dungeon in the basement."

I grimaced. "Ew.”

"Just kidding," Sam laughed, ushering me inside.

I shot him a half-hearted glare before walking in. Sure enough, the place was immaculate, but the hunter was so anal retentive in class that it didn't come as any surprise whatsoever.

I looked around, taking in the bookshelves in the living room filled with what looked like grimoires, and a shit ton of books about various supernatural creatures. All for the purpose of hunting them, I assumed.

"I don't know how the hell he has time to teach class," Sam muttered.

"He's not very good at it," Alex said, newly human and buck naked in someone else's living room. "His lectures are always boring as shit."

"You're not wrong," I said. "Now would you put some fucking pants on?"

“I’ll go find some,” he grumbled, going down the hall.

“You really think this place is safe?” I asked warily as I explored the lower floor.

It was surprisingly normal looking. Fewer crossbows and bottles of holy water than I would have expected.

“Safer than most places right now,” Cyrus answered. “But DuPonte said you were going to need to set up the wards again once we got in.”

“This looks like a spellbook,” Sam called from the small room adjacent to the entryway.

I looked over to where he was standing next to a massive open book sitting on a fucking pedestal.

Okay, now *that* was a little more what I had expected.

“Guess I’ll get to work, then,” I said, approaching the stand.

Cyrus gave me an apologetic look. “I’m sorry. I know you’re tired.”

I shrugged it off. “I’m fine. I’ve still got plenty of adrenaline from jumping through an extra dimensional portal. That and I’m admittedly curious about reading a hunter’s grimoire.”

“Nerd,” Cyrus snorted affectionately.

I flipped him off and started combing through the pages. The beginning of the book was more or less an instruction manual for the various magical security systems DuPonte had employed throughout the place. It was definitely more organized—and dare I say scientific—than the rest of the grimoires I had come across.

The whole process of setting everything up took a couple of hours, and by the time I was done, I was thoroughly drained and ready to sleep for about ten weeks.

And my reward was getting to hope that the wards actually worked and kept us out of sight of both Ichor and my father.

After arguing with Cyrus for ten minutes about why I didn't need to be carried up the stairs, we settled in a large room that was comfortably furnished.

At least, as comfortable as I could be in the house of a man who had tried to murder me.

Alex was already leaning against the headboard while Sam was looking out the window.

"Looking for something?" I asked, walking over to the bed.

Sam looked up, giving me a tired smile. "Just keeping an eye on things."

"The wards are up," I told him, walking over to wrap my arms around his waist. "Now we just have to hope they hold."

"Reassuring," Alex grumbled.

Cyrus gave him a look. "When you become capable of ritual magic, then you can bitch."

Alex just sighed. "Anyone else starving? You think they deliver pizza here?"

"No, dipshit," Sam scolded. "And you just ate like an hour ago."

"Yeah, and there's no telling how long that shit was in the freezer," Alex argued. "For all I know, it was poisoned."

"And yet you ate it," Cyrus said, raising an eyebrow.

"Don't judge me," Alex snapped.

"You're probably just thirsty," I reasoned. At least, I hoped he was still capable of subsisting on a diet of blood as a hellhound. That, or that whatever those things were that he'd eaten in the forest would tide him over.

"You offering?" Alex asked, suddenly perking up.

I crawled over next to him, shrugging. "I could use a top off. Maybe we can arrange a trade."

"Tantra?" His eyes darkened with lust and he moved closer, slipping his arms around me. "That wasn't just a one-time deal?"

"Don't make me change my mind," I mumbled.

“You still need it even though Ichor’s gone?” Sam asked.

I hesitated. “I mean... I guess I’ll find out. I’m still a vessel even if I’m an empty one, so I’d assume so.”

“Details,” Alex said impatiently. He leaned in, kissing my neck, and I found myself relaxing.

I had to admit, he was pretty good with his tongue.

"Move over," Sam said gruffly, and Alex gave him a glare before moving over on the bed to give room.

"Hey, now," Alex protested. "I was here first."

"And I'm here now," Sam countered.

"Could you behave yourselves for five seconds?" I muttered.

"What do you expect?" Cyrus challenged, climbing into bed as he peeled his shirt off over his head. "Until recently, they were human men in their twenties. They're idiots."

I grunted. It was a decent enough point.

As Cyrus pulled me to him for a kiss, I stopped caring about the bickering. I could feel the tantra coming to the surface of his skin already, heated energy ready and willing to merge with mine.

Yeah, that faculty was still there all right.

I moaned against his lips and opened my mouth, allowing him access to my throat as he pushed me back into Alex's embrace.

The latter stopped arguing at least and held me, slipping his hands beneath my robe and tracing the outline of my nipple with the tip of his finger.

The touch made me shiver, and I sank back onto his lap, grinding against his cock as Cyrus continued kissing me.

The taste of him, combined with his potent energy, was more than enough to make me forget about the world beyond the bedroom—for now, at least.

"You two are kind of hot together," Alex murmured, sounding dazed.

Cyrus scoffed against my lips, tearing my robes open. I would say one thing for the clothes they wore in Olympus—or at least the ones they gave omegas to wear—they were a hell of a lot more accessible. Convenience was everything when you had three horny supernaturals to keep occupied.

His hand traveled down to grip my cock and he started kissing his way down my chest while Sam watched us, already starting to stroke himself like he couldn't wait for his turn.

I wanted all three of them at once, even if that was writing a check my ass couldn't cash.

It wasn't even like it was just the tantra, considering I wanted them just as badly when I wasn't feeding. Fuck, though, that didn't hurt. It just added another layer of intensity and sensation to the

experience of being with my mates.

Part of me wasn't even sure that was the right word for what they were, but boyfriends didn't seem to cover enough ground and paladins was a boner killer if ever there was one.

Cyrus kissed down my abdomen and took my cock into his mouth, slowly sucking until he felt me tense up beneath him. He moaned against my skin and sucked gently on the tip just to tease me. As he ran his tongue up along the underside of the head, I groaned and ground my hips against his face, bucking into him.

Cyrus grabbed my hips and held them still so he could take my cock deeper into his mouth, and soon enough I felt myself hitting the back of his throat.

He had no issue breathing, but then again, I was pretty sure he didn't need to. One of the many perks of dating a vampire. That, and near unlimited endurance.

I ran my fingers through his hair and gripped the back of his head as he sucked harder and faster on my cock.

I was starting to lose myself in it when he pulled back off me, his eyes aglow with lust as they traveled over me.

It turned to mischief as his gaze drifted over to Alex, who was presently giving me a hickey no amount of full-coverage foundation was going to be able to hide, but it felt too good to care.

"Take notes, Alex," Cyrus said dryly. "I know you don't have a lot of experience in this department, but you might need to fill in for us one day."

"Oh, fuck off," Alex mumbled. "I know how to give a blowjob."

"Do you?" I asked, still breathless. "News to me."

"Hey," he complained, but he really didn't have an argument.

"That does give me an idea," I said, mulling over a thought that was more intriguing than it probably should have been.

But I had three men at my disposal and as good as it felt to be pressed between them, I was admittedly overwhelmed enough that handling one at a time was enough of a challenge. For now.

"What?" Alex asked warily.

"You should practice on Sam," I told him, glancing at him over my shoulder.

Alex stared at me blankly. "I should what?"

"Cyrus is right," I said with a smirk. "You don't exactly have a track record of being a generous lover, and if you really want to get back in my good graces on a regular basis, you're going to have to earn it. Besides, I don't want to be your pilot run with those new fangs."

"Oh, so it's fine to risk fileting my dick?" Sam protested.



I just grinned at him. "You owe me."

He rolled his eyes half-heartedly, but there was a hint of curiosity in them as he looked over at his best friend. "I guess it would shut him up."

"Fuck off, Sam," Alex snapped.

Witty comebacks had never really been his strong suit.

"It's up to you," I said with a shrug. "Do you want to blow me or not?"

Alex gave me a pathetic look, and I felt like I was withholding treats from a puppy as he looked between me and Sam like he was trying to decide. "Fine," he finally muttered. "But only because you think it's hot or whatever."

I did. But I wasn't going to admit that.

"Yeah, whatever," Sam sighed, unzipping his jeans the rest of the way. He withdrew his cock from his boxers and Alex's eyes widened as he stared down at it. I could understand his trepidation.

I wasn't small or anything, but Sam and Cyrus were definitely above average in endowment. So was Alex. It was a shame he wasted those seven and a half inches on mediocrity, but if we were going to be lovers again, that was going to change.

What was the point in having a pet hellhound if he wasn't well trained?

"Go ahead," Sam said, his lips curved into a smirk that made it clear he was enjoying this, or at least amused by it, despite his initial trepidations.

Alex lowered his head, reaching out to take Sam's cock in his hand like he'd never encountered one in his life.

For a gay guy, he was so fucking hetero sometimes.

"Um. So I just... suck it?"

"What the fuck do you think?" Sam asked, clearly annoyed.

Alex glared at him, but he lowered his head more to take Sam's crown into his mouth and started sucking on the tip.

His hesitation gradually melted as he took more of it in and pressed his tongue underneath the crown like he always liked me to do.

"That's not so bad," he murmured.

Sam swatted at the back of his head. "Would you shut up and suck it already?"

Alex rolled his eyes, but he took him back into his mouth as the other man relaxed against the headboard. He wasn't moaning like he did when I was servicing him, which was admittedly a little ego boost, but he seemed to be enjoying himself enough.

I was already more turned on by the sight than I had imagined I would be, and when Cyrus took me

back into his arms, I was all too eager to lower myself onto his waiting cock.

"Cy," I breathed as he delved into me and I sank down onto him, wrapping my arms around his neck.

The tantra surged within me as the physical and energetic sensations merged into one, and I started grinding once he was fully sheathed inside me, angling so his cock hit my spot in the perfect direction.

"Fuck," Sam murmured, his eyes hooded with desire as he watched us. He'd slipped his hand into Alex's hair and was stroking it absently the way he did mine.

I could feel the phantom sensation of his fingers running through my tresses as I watched them, enjoying the show they were putting on in turn.

"Stick the tip of your tongue into the slit," I told Alex, panting as I rode Cyrus's cock. It was getting harder to ride him this way with my notably softer stomach, but we were making do and he certainly wasn't complaining. The way he groped me like he couldn't get enough of his hands on me made it clear he didn't mind the changes my body had gone through during the pregnancy.

Then again, he was a vampire and an alpha, so he probably liked the reminder that my body was changing because I'd been bred.

"It drives him crazy," I added.

Alex's eyes met mine for a second, widening in surprise, but he let Sam's cock slide from his mouth and studied it for a second before shrugging and following my instructions. He gripped the base in his hand and ran his tongue around the crown before working the very tip into the shaft.

Sam made a sound somewhere between a hiss and a growl, the kind of vampiric response I was only used to from Cyrus and Cam, and gripped the headboard behind him so hard I heard a crack as his hips surged.

Alex gripped them and pinned them down, but not before he gagged from the force of Sam's cock hitting the back of his throat.

"Fuck, dude!"

"Sorry," Sam mumbled sheepishly. He gave me a half-hearted look of betrayal. "That's cheating."

I just grinned unapologetically and slipped my hands into Cyrus's hair before kissing him. I kept watching as Alex worked Sam's cock with his tongue. He was a fast learner, I'd hand that to him. But I might have to make him practice for a few times more.

Just for good measure.

"Babe," Cyrus panted, running his hands down my body. No matter what was going on around us, he still acted like I was the only person in the room. In all the world, for that matter. He drove his cock up into me hard enough that I saw spots, and my spine arched in response.

I could feel his energy flooding into me, re-energizing and healing what was lost. It was an intimate experience, one that I had never experienced before becoming a vessel, but one I really couldn't imagine sex without now. I wasn't sure I wanted to.

As Cyrus took me in his hand and began pumping my shaft, I closed my eyes and let myself drift on a sea of bliss as he thrust inside me over and over again, driving me closer to orgasm.

"Fuck, yes," I moaned, digging my nails into his shoulders hard enough I smelled blood.

That just seemed to turn him on even more and he thrust harder, faster, his hips slamming up against me. When I felt the flood of his come inside, I almost screamed from the intensity of it and buried my face in his neck to muffle my ecstasy.

I could tell from the sound of Sam's ragged breaths that he wasn't far behind. When I looked over, Alex was stroking himself and sucking his friend harder than he had before, his eyes drifting over to me every opportunity he had.

"Be a good boy and swallow, and I'll finish you off," I told him, still panting. I'd managed to pull myself back from the brink of orgasm, but it wouldn't take much.

Alex's eyes lit with lust, and he continued sucking Sam's shaft until the other vampire's hips surged. I watched with fascination and building heat in my core as Alex swallowed, a stream of white trickling down the corner of his full lips before he pulled away from Sam's cock.

"Damn," Sam mumbled, clearly dazed as he collapsed against the headboard. "You're not bad at that."

"Guess he just needed the right motivation," Cyrus said dryly, gently lifting me off his own cock.

Alex glowered at him, wiping the excess come from his mouth. He turned to me, his eyes still aglow with desire and an intensity I wasn't used to seeing in them. "My turn."

Before I could respond, Alex had me on my back on the mattress, pushing himself between my thighs. I felt a fresh surge of excitement as he positioned his cock at my hole, still slightly agape and lubricated from Cyrus's come. It was a new side of him, and one I really didn't mind at all.

"You did earn it," I mused, slipping my fingers into his hair and stroking until his eyes glazed over. "Good boy."

Alex chuffed, but he wasted no time pushing inside me. I grunted a little at the sudden invasion, but it felt good. The brief reprieve from being fucked so close to the verge of coming had only made me hungrier. As Alex drove into me, he hit my prostate on the first go and I couldn't stifle the moan of bliss that escaped me.

To my surprise, he reached down between us and started stroking my cock without having to be asked as he began to thrust. Maybe he really was a fast learner. Better late than ever.

He kissed me, and I ran my tongue along his bottom lip, savoring the lingering taste of Sam's come. "You two are hot together," I panted, cupping his beautiful face in my palm. "Maybe I'll have him fuck you next."

Alex froze, looking down at me with a spark of panic in his eyes. "Not funny. You... are joking, right?"

I just smirked before leaning in to kiss him, and pulled him back down onto me for more.

He forgot his concerns soon enough, and gave himself over to the pleasure, our bodies moving in

unison as he fucked me harder and better than he ever had.

I turned my head and he swept my hair behind my shoulder, leaning in instinctively. He paused, though, looking up at me with bloodlust mingled with the good old fashioned kind in his eyes.

“Can I?” he asked, his voice husky with desire.

“Well, you have been a good boy,” I teased, smiling.

He wasted no time sinking his fangs into my throat and I moaned in response, my head falling back.

Being bitten always scratched a certain itch I’d never had before I started fucking vampires, but it was definitely a taste I had acquired. Thoroughly.

I had to admit, by the time I came with his hand wrapped around my cock and his shaft fully buried inside me, I was in pure bliss.

The taste of tantra and come lingered on my tongue as I rode out the waves of my orgasm, and when Alex had finished inside me, he pulled out and bent down to lick the traces off my shaft. As sensitive as I was, his touch felt good. He’d definitely picked up a few pointers from Sam. Maybe I’d let him suck me off for real soon after all.

I was still panting as I found myself trapped between the three of them, wrapped up in warm, hard flesh, listening to the sounds of their heartbeats, strong and sure and somehow close to harmonious.

It was the first time in a long time that I had felt truly safe, even if I knew that was just an illusion.

Still, it was something. And when we were together like this, it felt like something special.

Something I had never imagined I would have, but now that I did, I wasn't sure how I would ever live without it.

I just knew I never wanted to.

CHAPTER  
TWENTY-EIGHT

## CYRUS

I spent that morning the way I did most, watching Chase sleep. He was adorable when he was dreaming. He always was, but there was something about him that was unusually vulnerable in those moments.

All his sarcasm and spunk was stripped away, and as much as I adored those features about him, I liked getting to see this side of him, too.

For long enough, I had been sure I wasn't going to get to experience it again. And while, for the first time in memory, I found myself wishing I had the vessel all to myself, I couldn't really complain too much.

Except when Alex snored. That had a way of ruining the moment.

Sam woke up with a groan. He looked up at Alex, the human woodchipper, and narrowed his eyes. "For fuck's sake," he growled, shoving a pillow over his head.

"Tell me about it," I sighed.

"How is he sleeping through this?" he asked, eyeing the man who was still sleeping as soundly as ever, his head resting on Alex's shoulder.

On the one hand, I was relieved that they were getting along better.

We were all paladins, and we needed to rely on each other to keep him safe. There being friction between them was not only an issue energetically, but practically speaking as well.

But on the other hand, I was a guy, and apparently, I was a guy who was very capable of feeling jealousy.

"Your guess is as good as mine," I said with a shrug. "Maybe he's used to it?"

Sam snorted, propping himself up on one elbow. "So, what do we do now?"

"Not much we can do at the moment," I answered. "Keeping him in one spot isn't ideal, but we can't just set up wards everywhere we go. In case you didn't notice, he needed to feed a lot more last night to replenish what he lost."

Sam frowned. "I was... kind of distracted," he admitted.

"Fair enough," I said, sitting up. I draped another blanket over Chase, covering his shoulders.

He turned away from the empty spot I had just left and snuggled closer to Alex. "I'm going to check out the territory. Do another sweep."

"Yeah, I'll take the next one," Sam offered, yawning as he laid back down.

I got dressed before heading downstairs and out of the cabin. I spent the next couple of hours exploring the woods and getting the lay of the land. It was a nice property. There wasn't another cabin in sight, and in usual Vermont fashion, everything was blanketed in a thick layer of snow.

The air hummed with energy, even though it had felt dead not too long ago. It was a testament to the fact that Chase's wards were working, and to how much his power had been growing lately.

On the one hand, I was relieved, but on the other, I feared it would make him an even bigger target.

Not that we didn't already have the gods chasing us down. And I wasn't enough of a fool to think that DuPonte's truce was going to last after Chase was no longer useful to him.

Sure, he was correct that he didn't want Zeus coming after Chase. As shady of a father as he was, he would still undoubtedly retaliate if anyone touched Chase, if only because he was Zeus's property.

The thought infuriated me more than I had expected it would. It wasn't really like I had any room to talk.

I had caused Chase plenty of pain in the past myself, but the thought of anyone using him just for his power...

He deserved better. He deserved better than me, too, for that matter, but me and the others were what he had now, and I could only hope that was enough.

I would do whatever it took for it to *be* enough.

At least I knew Zeus wasn't going to kill Chase. He'd had plenty of chances before, but it was clear he was more interested in using him for a bargaining chip.

And Thanatos just wanted him as breeding stock. Another enraging thought.

Cameron, on the other hand...

I still didn't understand why my brother had supposedly helped Chase escape from Olympus. I still wasn't ready to believe that was the truth, at least not all of it.

Cameron always had an ulterior motive for everything he did. Everything. Especially when it came to Ichor.

And yet, try as I might, I still couldn't figure out why he would've defied Ichor to help Chase. There was no way to spin it where she ended up the victor.

I was sure Ichor wasn't going to take it sitting down, either. She was likely to retaliate for that, if

nothing else.

The only reason I could see her holding back was not wanting to end up on Zeus's radar. There'd been plenty of bad blood between them before, and her very nature was a threat to the gods.

From the way Chase had told it, Zeus had come to something of an agreement between Ichor and Cameron, but that didn't mean he intended on keeping it.

Especially if the deal had gone south and Cameron was the reason Chase was no longer in his possession.

Yeah, no two ways about it, Ichor was going to be pissed. And there was no telling what she was going to do in order to get her pound of flesh.

And now that she was possessing Sarah, rather than being suppressed as a mere passenger inside her vessel, she was going to have a much easier time getting it.



CHAPTER  
TWENTY-NINE

## CAMERON

The moment Cyrus and the others appeared, I knew it was my cue to leave.

Not only because staying was almost certainly going to be a bloodbath, but because the longer I stayed, the harder it was going to be to force myself to do what I needed to do and leave.

It was the only thing I could do. The only remotely sane, reasonable thing, and yet, I felt like I was leaving a part of myself behind.

Just like I had felt as if I was turning my back on myself by handing Chase over to Zeus in the first place.

Something was clearly wrong with me, and the longer I gave myself the opportunity to linger in indecision, the greater my chance at making a mistake I couldn't take back.

If I was being honest with myself, I knew I already had.

Ichor would see it as a betrayal, and maybe she was right. Maybe I had betrayed her, and myself, for that matter.

I had certainly betrayed Thanatos, and that was bound to have dire consequences for both of us.

I still couldn't fully believe what I had done. It was instinct more than conscious thought, but I knew that would be of little consolation to Ichor.

I would be lucky if she didn't kill me, and as much as I loved her, I wasn't naïve enough to think that she held enough affection for me that it would override her thirst for vengeance.

She had already had me kill Cyrus once. It was the first thing she had ever asked of me that had given me pause.

The first sacrifice I hadn't been willing to give readily and without reservation, and yet, I had done it.

For her.

I had hated myself for it, but not her.

Never her.

And now, I had refused her after all these years—not even for Cyrus, not for my own brother, but for a

man I had only known for a blip in time.

For the person who was carrying my children.

Even if I hadn't betrayed her, I knew that Ichor would see Chase as a target because of that alone. And now that we were both on Earth, she would have the opportunity to set the scales right, in her mind.

A smart man probably would've run and never stopped, but I had never made any claim to being that. I was, as I had always been, a fool in love.

I just wasn't sure that love was as unyielding as it always had been.

But I was a paladin, and even if I was the last one with any sense of conviction, I was going to fulfill my duty and return to her.

So return I did.

Finding Ichor on my own would've been a lost cause. When she wanted to stay hidden, she succeeded. Summoning her was my only real option, so I found a safe house where I wouldn't be disturbed and performed the ritual.

Without having access to the cult, a physical summoning wasn't in the cards, since it would take way too much energy, so I settled for an astral dream instead.

It was something I had resorted to more times than I could count in the interest of seeing her. Back when she was gone, and fleeting glimpses in a dream were the only way I could reach her.

Now, I actually found myself dreading it. I told myself the reason was obvious enough.

It was guilt, if not a bit of fear for what she was going to do to me as punishment. It wasn't my own safety I feared for. I lived for Ichor, and I would happily die for her. I had been willing to make that sacrifice on more than one occasion, and it didn't matter if her will was what brought the end about.

No, there was something else I feared. That she was going to ask me to put my devotion to the test. Something that shouldn't have given me any pause, and wouldn't have even a few months ago, and yet...

Knowing what may well lie ahead, I lay down and summoned her anyway, entering into the tea-induced dream state that would bring my summoning to fruition.

Like a succubus, she appeared to me in a dream even more visceral and convincing than all the others had been.

That was some damn good tea.

"Cameron," she said, her voice deceptively warm and inviting, just like her outstretched arms as she walked over to me, embracing me. She slipped her fingers into my hair, her touch sensual and soft. "You came to me."

"You thought otherwise?" I asked, knowing better than to think the fact that she wasn't immediately laying into me meant she wasn't furious.

Far from it.

The angrier she was, the more well hidden she kept it beneath the surface. Like a quiet yet deadly storm brewing beneath the sea.

She gave me a knowing look, her lips curving into a blood red smile. I knew it well.

"You can't blame a girl for wondering," she said in her silken voice, walking a small circle around me. Her hands felt my shoulders, snaking up them entreatingly. "You haven't exactly been the most... *reliable* lately."

"Everything I've done, I've done for you," I said calmly. "At great personal cost."

"Is that so?" she purred, flicking her fingertips against my earlobe. The tender touch was enough to make me shudder.

A strange reaction to the woman I loved.

Then again, the astral had always given me the creeps. I wasn't the type of person who liked to live in fantasies unless I had no other alternative.

"Is that why you sent me here and ran off with him?" she challenged.

"I did what I had to do to get Zeus to open the portal and bring you back," I told her, struggling to keep my nerves under wraps. Not that it was likely to do much good. Ichor was an expert at reading energy.

Especially mine.

"Thanatos was never going to honor the bargain, and even if he did, Zeus wouldn't," I continued. "Without Chase, there is no bargaining chip. Nothing to keep them from going after you next."

"Oh, I see. Clever boy," she murmured. "In that case, I suppose you have him locked up somewhere? Tucked away, nice and safe, in a little dungeon where we can access him anytime we please?"

My silence must've spoken clearly enough. I didn't lie to her any further. I wasn't going to piss her off more.

And there was no point in defending myself, or arguing, considering she had already drawn her own conclusions.

This was just about learning her verdict, nothing more and nothing less.

"Like I said, I know you're angry," I began.

She was in front of me once again before I could even blink, her form slightly wispy around the edges, as if she was having trouble manifesting fully.

She must not have settled all the way into Sarah's vessel, after all. That or she wasn't quite as fit for it as the cult had always thought.

"Angry," she echoed, her voice a serpentine hiss before turning into a bitter laugh. "You don't know the meaning of the word, my love. But you will, if you don't do exactly what I say."

"Whatever you ask of me, it will be done," I said, all the while praying—to what, I had no idea, because every god but the one standing right in front of me had forsaken me a long time ago—that she wouldn't ask it of me.

The one thing I wasn't sure I had the strength to do.

The one sacrifice I wasn't sure I could give.

Not even to her.

"Bring him to me," she said, her eyes boring into mine in challenge. "Bring him, and I will forgive you."

I froze, staring at her. "You know that's a mistake. You're not thinking rationally."

It was a risk to challenge her at all, but what choice did I really have?

Ichor sneered. "Is that so? My, how bold you've grown."

Her eyes darkened, and I felt hands around my throat, invisible yet choking.

"Or perhaps merely foolish. Has that whore really gotten such a hold over you that you would defy me?"

"It's not out of defiance that I refuse you," I choked out. "He's Zeus's son."

"All the more reason to kill the little bitch," she seethed.

"And have all of Olympus hunting you to the depths of time?" I challenged. "You're not a fool, Ichor."

Anger flashed in her eyes, but I could tell she was considering what I had to say. "You test me."

"Yes," I agreed. "But I've never lied to you, and I don't intend to start now. You can't kill him. But that doesn't mean we can't still use him as leverage."

She watched me closely, and I could tell she was trying to call my bluff. I had wanted to steer her away from Chase, but talking to her for just a few moments had been reassurance enough that there was no getting out of this.

I just had to redirect her intentions. That was my only option, and ultimately, it probably was what was best for Chase.

The others couldn't protect him forever. If they couldn't even keep him from me, they couldn't keep him from her, or any of the others who would be after him.

Zeus wouldn't allow any harm to come to him. Not actual harm. Not the kind that would leave him dead forever.

Chase would be furious, and he would hate me even more than he did now, if possible, but that didn't matter as long as he survived.

I found myself unable to accept the alternative. Especially if there was anything I could do to prevent that.

"You propose we make a deal," she murmured. "Not with Thanatos, but with Zeus. And you already proved yourself a liar, so why would he believe any promise you make now?"

"He wouldn't," I answered with a shrug as the invisible hand around my throat slowly began to unwind. "Which is why you're going to be the one making the promise. It's clear I went against you back in Olympus, so he won't hold you responsible. You can tell him I went rogue like the others, and offer me up as a consolation prize, if you like, to sweeten the deal. The oath of a deity is worth far more than that of a mortal, anyway. Even a vampire."

She paused as if she was actually considering it, which was as good of a sign as any. And more than I had expected.

She finally released me altogether, moving back. "You will bring him to me," she said firmly, her eyes locked on mine, as if waiting for any sign of defiance or deception. I knew better than to show any. "And if you fail, there will not be another chance."

"Yes, my love," I said, holding her gaze. "I know."

She seemed satisfied with that response after a few moments of scrutiny. "Now, there is still the matter of your punishment," she said, gently stroking her hand down my face. "Or did you expect I'd let you get off that easily?"

"Not at all," I murmured. "But I don't know how I'm going to bring him to you if you kill me."

She gave a musical laugh that had once made my soul sing. Now, it made me feel strangely sick in depths I hadn't realized I possessed.

"Oh, my sweet Cameron," she purred. "There are many ways I can make you suffer without laying a finger on you. Until now, I've shown you and your brother an incredible amount of mercy. But that's going to change."

I grimaced. I had no doubt it was.

CHAPTER  
THIRTY

## CHASE

I awoke in a cold sweat with a gasp. When I looked up, Cyrus was staring at me from the chair next to the bed where he sat reading a book.

One of them had been there each time I had woken up from a nap, which was more often lately than usual, considering how exhausted I was.

"Another nightmare?" he asked, closing his book. "That's the fifth one this week."

"You've been keeping track," I mumbled, rubbing my eyes.

"It's my job to look out for you," he said, right next to the bed a second later, pouring me a glass of water from the pitcher on the bedside table. "You should drink. You need to stay hydrated."

"As much as I appreciate the home health aide service, it would probably be better for you to stop scaring the shit of me like that," I said, taking the glass from him.

My mouth *was* a little dry.

He gave me a faint smile. "Sorry. Old habits."

I sighed, leaning back against the headboard. "It was the same dream."

"The one about Cameron?"

I nodded somberly. It was always the same, almost like the dreams just picked up one after the other, but until now, I hadn't wanted to let him know that.

There was no use in worrying them even more, and I already knew they were worried I was going to do something stupid and self-destructive.

And considering that was kind of my brand lately, I couldn't even blame them.

"Do you want to tell me about it?" he offered, sitting on the bed next to me. "Might help to get it out of your head and talk about it."

I hesitated, because the truth was, I didn't even like to think about it, let alone say it out loud.

"I don't really know where to begin," I admitted. "It's like I can feel his pain. I don't even fully know what's happening, I just... I feel it. Like I'm alone in a dark room, almost like the Other, only instead



of emptiness, this is just... darkness. Complete, absolute darkness, and it's the worst feeling I've ever experienced. There's no depth to it, no end, and the pain..." I shuddered, hugging myself. "I know it's Cameron's pain. I don't know how I know, but I do."

"You are perceptive," Cyrus said thoughtfully, a fresh note of concern in his voice. I found it matched in his gaze when I looked up at him.

I frowned. "You don't think it's just a dream, then?"

He paused as if he was considering it. "You and Cameron are linked. He's still a paladin, and even if you're no longer Ichor's vessel, we've all exchanged energy. You're still bonded with him."

"How do you know?" I asked.

"Because *we're* bonded," he answered.

Well, that probably should've been obvious enough. "I don't know. Cameron doesn't feel the same way."

"Maybe not," Cyrus said. "But Cameron is... complicated. I'd be willing to bet even he doesn't know how he feels half the time."

"He hates me," I said flatly. "I'm pretty sure of that, and so is he."

"That's true," Cyrus snorted. "But he's not the kind of person who feels things deeply very often. Not even hate."

I paused to consider his words, not sure what to make of them or how I felt. Especially if he was right.

"All this time, I've been trying to figure it out," I murmured. "Why he helped me escape. Why he turned against her, even if it was only for a moment."

"Trying to figure out why Cameron does anything is a dangerous game, Chase," he said gently. "One I've lost many, many times."

"I know," I said, running my hands down my face. "You're right. I know you are, I just..."

Cyrus reached out, putting a hand on my shoulder. I relaxed immediately at his touch, especially as he began kneading my tense muscles. "You didn't do anything wrong, Chase. Whatever reasons he had, you don't owe him anything."

"I know that, too," I sighed. "And I'm sure he has some ulterior motive. He always has an ulterior motive, but..."

"What is it?" Cyrus asked, watching me closely.

I shook my head to clear it, because I was having trouble parsing my own thoughts.

The answer on the tip of my tongue might have been ridiculous, but I couldn't shake the instinct behind it. "I feel like she's doing this to punish Cameron. I don't know what, or how, but I just... It's a feeling, and I know how that sounds, but I can't shake it."

"Like I said, you have good intuition," said Cyrus. "In the beginning, before you knew about any of this—including the cult, or even that we were vampires—you sensed something was off about us."

"Well, yeah," I scoffed. "You guys were super sus. No offense, but I don't think it takes a psychic to know that."

He chuckled. "Maybe not, but still. You should trust your instincts."

"If I'm right, then that means she's punishing him for something," I reasoned. "And that something is probably him helping me escape."

Cyrus looked wary. "Even if that's true, you still don't owe him anything."

"Maybe not, but you said it yourself, we're bonded," I countered. "And he's your brother. What if he needs help?"

Cyrus sighed. "Chase—"

"You're the one who said that I should trust my instincts," I reminded him.

"Yes, when it comes to keeping yourself safe, and staying away from freaks like Cameron and me," he shot back. "Not when it comes to sacrificing yourself for someone who doesn't deserve it, no matter what split-second change came over him. And if you can't have self-preservation on your own behalf, then at least think about the babies."

I gave him a half-hearted glare. "Don't pull the pregnancy card on me."

"I'm going to pull whatever card I have to pull to keep you here, safe," he said, leaning in to kiss my forehead.

"That's cheating," I grumbled.

He smirked. "I can live with that. Come on, you slept for twelve hours straight. You must be hungry."

"I am," I admitted, taking his hand and letting him help me out of bed. "Did that market in town have anything decent?"

"Define decent," Cyrus said carefully.

I groaned. "I never thought I would get tired of bacon and eggs."

"Guess I need to expand my repertoire of human recipes," Cyrus mused.

"You need to rephrase that," I said flatly.

We hadn't been in the kitchen for long when the door flew open, and Alex came in, breathless.

And pantsless.

I dragged my hand down my face. "We've talked about you taking clothes with you when you shift."

"No time," Alex said, grabbing a coat off the hook by the door. "We've got company."

"Who?" Cyrus asked, immediately on edge as he walked over to the door.

“What” happened to be an equally pertinent question nowadays. I still hadn't fully recovered from those creepy shadow creatures Hermes had sent after me.

Then again, there was a lot that was creepy about my half-brother.

"The hunter," Alex answered. "Before you freak out, he's not attacking us or anything, but he's back."

"I hope he doesn't think he's coming in with Chase here," Cyrus said, raising an eyebrow.

"Trust me, I already read him the riot act," Alex said. "What he does want is to talk to you."

Cyrus hesitated, looking between me and Alex.

"I'll be fine," I told him. "But I want to talk to DuPonte, too."

"That's not happening," Cyrus said firmly.

I grit my teeth, at once annoyed and turned on by the whole macho man thing.

I really needed to figure that shit out. But that was a problem for future Chase.

Before I could argue any further, though, Cyrus had disappeared, and the door was swinging off its hinge.

"That speedy son of a bitch," I muttered, taking a step only for Alex to block the doorway.

I raised an eyebrow. "You know, it would be more intimidating if you weren't a naked guy standing there in a trench coat."

"Go ahead, threaten to turn my balls into snowglobes, whatever that even means," he said, folding his arms. "You're not going anywhere."

I gave him a half-hearted glare as I sank back in the chair. "You're lucky my feet are swollen and I have zero energy," I grumbled.

He just smirked, closing the door. He walked over to the stove and turned off the heat. "Sweet, eggs and bacon."

I rolled my eyes. "Of course you're not bored yet. You own fifty pairs of the same pants."

"Why fix what isn't broken?" he challenged, putting a plate together before setting it in front of me, and making one for himself before he sat down across from me at the table.

"What did DuPonte want?" I asked.

Alex shrugged, spearing a huge forkful of eggs. "No idea. But I don't think he found Cameron and Ichor, considering he's alive and didn't have any trophies with him."

"I guess not," I said quietly, trying not to show how worried I was.

I figured I could just pass it off as being afraid of DuPonte, even though I was more than ready to frost that guy the second I got the chance. Alex had never been the most emotionally in tune boyfriend to begin with, so that was probably a risk I didn't need to worry about.

"What's wrong?" he asked. When I looked up, he had stopped eating and was watching me closely.

Maybe that was changing, after all.

"It's nothing," I said, taking a bite of the food. Of all the times Sam had to be in town. Then again, that was probably exactly why the hunter had chosen now to show up.

I was nauseous *and* hungry, which was a combination I was used to by now. I just took small bites and held my breath in the interest of keeping down as much as possible.

It was far from nothing, but if I told myself that often enough, I hoped eventually I would start to believe it.

CHAPTER  
THIRTY-ONE

## CYRUS

The moment I saw DuPonte standing on the very edge of the territory line, marked by the invisible wards Chase had reactivated, I was immediately on edge.

He hadn't been gone that long, and I very much doubted he had actually managed to do any damage to Ichor. Or found her, for that matter.

"Well, I'm here," I said. "What is it?"

"That's no way to speak to an old friend who's letting you stay at his place," he said dryly.

I scoffed. "You knew how vampires are about protecting their omegas when you invited us," I reminded him.

"Fair enough," he conceded. "For what it's worth, I'm not back to cause trouble."

"You found her?" I asked doubtfully.

"No," he answered. "Unfortunately, I didn't, but I think I did find your brother."

I frowned. "If Cameron is alive, then he would be with her."

"That's what I thought, too," he admitted. "Imagine my surprise when I get a lead that he's shacking up with some werewolf clan."

"Oh, for fuck's sake," I muttered.

"I take it that isn't news to you?" DuPonte asked.

"Unfortunately, no," I said. "Cameron has as many contacts as you do, I'd imagine. Just different kinds."

"I guess so," he remarked. "I wouldn't be shocked if there was some overlap, though. You'd be surprised what length some hunters are willing to go to in order to make the kill, even if it means fraternizing with the enemy."

"Actually, I wouldn't," I told him.

He chuckled. "How is your omega?"

"He's doing pretty good, all things considered," I answered. "Which is to say not great."

"I'm sure," DuPonte said. "Is he having health issues?"

"No offense, but his health isn't really any of your fucking business."

"A matter of professional curiosity," he said with a shrug. "I've never encountered a godbearer before. Wasn't even sure they were anything more than a legend until him."

"And how did you find out what he was?" I asked, voicing the question I hadn't yet had the time to ask. "Professional curiosity."

He smirked. "Let's just say people talk. I'm sure the potential risks of this pregnancy aren't lost on you, though."

"What risks?" I asked, even though I was already sure I knew what he meant—and equally sure that giving him any information he didn't already have was a mistake.

We might not have had any better options but staying at his safe house, but the fact was that we were more or less trapped there. A sanctuary and a trap were pretty much the same thing when a hunter was the one who held the key.

"Cameron is the father, isn't he?" he asked.

"If you think that, you really don't understand how paladins work at all," I told him. "No matter whose they are biologically, they belong to me, Sam, and Alex just the same. And we'll do whatever it takes to keep all of them safe," I added pointedly.

"My apologies," he said. "But if Cameron is the biological father, that presents certain dangers to Chase, doesn't it?"

"And what's your point?" I asked.

"Come on now," he said in a scolding tone. "You don't really expect me to believe you're that nonchalant about it. Letting him continue the pregnancy this far, let alone actually having them, is a risk—and paladins don't take risks. Not with their vessels."

"We don't leave our sworn deities, either, as you yourself have pointed out," I reasoned.

"Which makes your devotion to him all the more impressive," he replied. "And fanatical, at that. I very much doubt you're naïve enough to think this can work out without ending in tragedy."

"Chase isn't a typical omega," I said, struggling to keep my patience, especially considering the fact that he wasn't raising any concerns I didn't constantly berate myself with. "He's strong. If he's meant to bear the offspring of a god, then I don't think carrying Cameron's baby is going to be too much for him to handle."

"Maybe not. But it would be better to know for certain, wouldn't it?"

"Last I checked, they don't make omega paternity tests."

"No," he agreed. "But there are certain methods that can be used."

"Methods?" I echoed. "And how would a hunter know about that shit, anyway?"

"Omegas are a powerful incentive," he answered. "As rare as the opportunity is, hunters have used them against your kind in the past."

"You mean as bait," I said, unable to hide my disgust.

"Among other things," he said without a trace of shame. "I'm just saying, there are options. Should you want to know what you're dealing with."

"I'll keep that in mind," I said tightly.

DuPonte nodded. "I'll be out of your hair, then. Just wanted to pass along the update."

"Feel free to call next time," I said.

He snorted, waving before he turned to leave.

I watched until he was long gone, then followed the path he'd taken to make sure of it before I headed back to the cabin.

While I didn't want the creep getting anywhere near Chase, I had to admit, there was a part of me that was curious. Not because I gave a shit who the biological father was—or fathers, as the case may well have been—but because it might help us prepare now that Chase's pregnancy was further along.

I couldn't shake something else he'd said, either. About Cameron hiding in the wolf pack.

At least now I could tell Chase that he didn't have anything to worry about, since Cameron clearly wasn't under Ichor's thumb.

Still, something about it didn't sit right with me.

Why would he be hiding out with them if she was still out there?

Either something had happened or the hunter was lying.

Either way, I was starting to think I needed to make a trip myself to find out the truth.



CHAPTER  
THIRTY-TWO

## CHASE

"Well?" I asked, leaping up from the table as soon as Cyrus came back into the house. "What's going on? What did he want?"

Cyrus closed the door and did that annoying thing where he didn't answer right away. I was pretty sure it was just thinking, but it still drove me crazy.

"He tracked Cameron down," he answered, and immediately, my heart sank in my chest. There was no way that was good for anyone. Certainly not for Cameron. Not if the hunter was alive to tell the tale.

"Where?" Alex asked before I had the chance.

"The wolf pack," Cyrus answered.

I frowned. "The ones who tipped us off about what he was planning?"

"One and the same," Cyrus said, nodding as he sat down at the table. "Of course, I doubt Cameron knows that if he's still in communication with them."

"I don't get it," said Alex. "Why would Cameron go there? Why not head straight for Ichor?"

"That's a good question," said Cyrus. "I wish I knew the answer. But I'm sure it's not ideal for him. If he's not with Ichor right now, there's a reason."

"Maybe he's trapped," I reasoned.

"Trapped?" Alex echoed. "What you mean?"

I could tell from the look on Cyrus's face that he knew exactly what I meant, and he didn't like the direction the conversation was taking.

"I keep having these dreams," I admitted. "Dreams about Cameron being trapped and in pain somewhere."

"Good," Alex muttered. "I hope the prick is having a shit time after all the problems he's caused us."

I sighed. "Look, I'm not suggesting we go on a rescue mission or anything," I began.

"Aren't you?" Cyrus challenged. "Because it seems like exactly the kind of self-destructive thing you

would do."

"He's right, it really does," Alex agreed.

I glared at them both. "Like it or not, Cameron is still a paladin. He's still one of us, and we have a lot of the same enemies. I'm not saying we can trust him, but if I'm right and Ichor is keeping him there somehow, doing something to him..."

"She's not," Cyrus said firmly. "DuPonte told me she isn't there."

"He could be lying," I said.

"Good point," Alex murmured.

"The wolves would never be okay with that," Cyrus countered. "And Ichor can't stand the smell of wet dog."

"Better point," Alex said.

"You stay out of this," I mumbled.

"I'm a paladin, too," he protested. "It's my job to keep you safe as much as it is his."

I rolled my eyes, too tired to argue. "Even if she isn't there, that doesn't mean she isn't controlling him somehow."

"It doesn't matter, Chase," Cyrus said in that annoyingly patient, firm tone he always used when he thought I was being unreasonable.

And yeah, he was right more often than not, but it was still annoying.

"How can you say that?" I asked, unable to hide my frustration. "He's your brother, and until recently, you were being controlled by her, too."

"No, I wasn't," he said. "Sure, she was my goddess, but I'm the one who made the decision to serve her. I'm the one who chose to do everything I did in her name, on her behalf. Killing Sam and Alex, killing you... I could have stopped at any point, but I didn't."

"But you did," I protested. "Eventually, you did, so what changed?"

Cyrus paused, staring at me for a few long moments. "Isn't it obvious?" he finally asked. "You. You changed me. You made me want to be something more than a mindless killer serving that sadistic bitch at the expense of his soul. Cameron might've been the one who made a deal with the devil, but I gave mine up a long time ago, little by little and piece by piece. You're the one who gave it back to me, and I'm not going to let anyone take you away from me. Not even him."

All I could do was stare at him in return.

"What he said," Alex added. "Fucking poetic asshole."

I sighed. "Even if that's true, I'm not willing to just give up on him that easily," I said. "Just because he doesn't feel that way about me doesn't mean he deserves to be bound to that bitch for the rest of

eternity. He was willing to go against her enough to save me. That has to count for something."

"It does," said Cyrus. "It means we got fucking lucky, and we're not going to take it for granted by letting you put yourself in even more danger."

"He's right," Alex said, uncharacteristically somber. "Whatever reasons Cameron had for doing what he did, you have to let him go, Chase," he told me. "He's just too far gone."

I gritted my teeth, fighting back the words on the tip of my tongue.

The most annoying part was, I knew he was right. Broken clocks and all that.

But that didn't stop me from feeling the way I felt.

I just knew better than to think arguing with two alpha vampires was going to get anywhere. Especially when one of them was under the mistaken impression that he was the one in charge of this rodeo.

"I'm tired," I muttered. "I'm gonna get some rest."

Cyrus looked immediately suspicious, and I could tell he was trying to figure out a way to argue with that. "Are you sick?"

"I'm sick of this conversation," I told him with a pleasant smile, pushing up from the table.

He sighed. "I'll take you upstairs."

"Don't bother. I can find my way," I told him.

Yeah, maybe I was being a bit of a brat, considering he was coming from a good place. The place of wanting to keep me safe.

That didn't stop it from being infuriating, though.

Once I was upstairs, I shut the door and collapsed on the bed. I flopped onto my back, staring up at the ceiling.

"What the hell are you doing, Cameron?" I mumbled.

No matter how I thought about it, it just didn't make sense.

Why would he have fought so hard to get us out of Olympus? Why would he have betrayed Ichor if he really was too far gone?

Sure, maybe I was crazy, and maybe I had a savior complex. I had always been one of those kids who'd brought home wounded animals, and of course I would end up fixating on a hellcat who could easily kill me.

And had.

I didn't know what it was that was keeping me so fixated on this except for my stubborn heart, but Cyrus's words kept echoing in my mind.

He had changed—his actions left no room to doubt that. He had already risked his life for me, and these babies, so many times.

Cameron didn't feel the same way. I knew he didn't, and he had never pretended otherwise, but he had still done what he had done for a reason.

Even if the reason wasn't me.

No matter what he or Cyrus wanted to pretend, they were still brothers, and they loved each other in their own way. I knew they did. It might've been muted and twisted after so many years of immortal life—and so many years of her—but they did. I wouldn't let myself believe otherwise.

As long as that was the truth, there was still reason to hope. Reason to hope that love could break through the brainwashing and magic and whatever the hell else Ichor was using to control Cameron.

Even his love for her.

When I'd realized I was just arguing with myself to justify a decision I had already made, planning my next move was a bit easier.

By exaggerating my anger, even if it was only by a little, I could pretty much guarantee myself some free time. And it wasn't like I was lying about what I planned on doing.

*I was* going to sleep.

It took me an hour to find the ritual I was looking for in my grimoire. Digital or not, it was still a pain in the ass.

Even thinking about trying to contact Cameron on the astral was crazy. I knew that, and I had spent enough time questioning my own sanity lately, but I had to try, and I knew the others certainly weren't going to anytime soon.

The most annoying part was, I couldn't even blame them.

I had never actually tried astral travel before. It really wasn't my kind of thing, and I was usually more interested in the forms of magic that would allow me to fight off our enemies and, generally, keep us all alive.

Convincing Sam to make me the tea the spell called for had been easy enough, once he got back. I felt bad lying to and manipulating someone who was essentially a human golden retriever, but I didn't really have many options at the moment.

I just told him it was for my morning sickness, and he seemed to buy it easily enough. He had looked disappointed when I told him I wanted to sleep alone, but I told myself I would make it up to him soon enough.

I knew the guys would try to stop me if they knew what I was doing, but there was no way even Cameron posed any danger to me on the astral. If I could hold my own in Olympus, I was clearly pretty good at the whole psychic thing.

I put on some music and lit incense to help me get in the zone before laying down. The spell instructed

me to remain lucid by asking myself questions as I started to drift off. Counting fingers, staying attuned to the noises in the room, and focusing on the sensation of my body pressing into the mattress.

My thoughts kept drifting, but I had to hope the tea would take me the rest of the way.

I was getting sleepy about an hour in, but so far, nothing of substance had actually happened.

Of course this would have to be the one spell that was a dud.

Maybe I needed more tantra. The wards had taken more out of me than I wanted to admit, but I wasn't sure if that was because hunter magic was simply more demanding, or if the pregnancy was taking its toll.

The thought was unsettling, and there really wasn't much I could do about it if that was the case, so I decided to push it out of my mind.

Zoning out somehow had the effect all my efforts to get into a meditative state hadn't, and when I realized I wasn't in my bedroom anymore, I felt both a surge of triumph and unease.

Fortunately, I wasn't stuck in a hellscape this time. That was always a plus.

Unfortunately, as I looked around the room, I had no idea where the hell I was.

I was standing in a normal enough bedroom, with big wooden furniture and a large bed. Soon, familiar sounds greeted my ears.

I looked out the window and realized everything had a strange sepia tint to it that made it look not completely real.

And considering I was dreaming, maybe it wasn't.

I heard the sounds of children's laughter and cars traveling in the distance. Outside the window, I saw the familiar layout of the courtyard of the wolf pack Cameron had taken me to when I was sick.

Holy shit, it had actually worked. He really was here. Which meant I could reach him.

Hopefully.

Not that I had reason to believe he was going to want to talk to me if I did succeed, but oh well. I really wasn't going to give him a choice. I hadn't gone through all this not to haul his ass back into the land of the living. Or waking, as the case may be.

I walked out of the room and down the hallway, realizing that I was in the house we'd stayed in before. Which meant Cameron was probably close by, too.

I was going to have to fine tune my lucid dreaming GPS.

Oh, well. At least I had a shot.

I just had to make him listen to me, which was going to be easier said than done. If there was one thing we had in common, it was our mutual stubbornness. And something told me I was the last person Cameron would ever want to come to his rescue, but he really wasn't in a position to be picky.

I had no idea where to find him, so I just kept trying doors and hoped for the best. When I finally came to one that was literally fucking padlocked at the very end of the hallway, I figured I had found the one.

I took a deep breath and put my hand out, testing the door. When my hand passed through it, I walked through the rest of the way and found Cameron laying in bed, looking like his usual obnoxiously handsome self.

He didn't seem injured, or even particularly stressed, other than frowning every now and then in his sleep.

Maybe I was wrong, and the bastard was just crashing here for the hell of it.

Well, I had come this far already.

I reached out as I sat on the edge of the bed and brushed his cheek with my fingers. They went right through. I wasn't sure what I had expected, but he had the same strange sepia tone as everything else in this place. Everything but me, which I was pretty sure meant I was the only thing that wasn't actually here.

"Cameron," I said, keeping my voice low, as if someone else was going to be able to hear me in here.

He didn't respond, but it was clear that while his physical body was here, he was somewhere else entirely.

I breathed a deep sigh of frustration. What the hell was I supposed to do now?

I was contemplating the idea of turning back when Cameron's eyes flew open, a vivid, fiery green. He snatched my wrist with a hiss, and I called magic into my fingertips, prepared to defend myself even though I really didn't know how that was supposed to work on the astral plane.

Probably should've figured that out first.

When recognition entered his eyes, his vice grip on my wrist loosened, and he frowned.

"Chase?" he asked, his gaze traveling over me in confusion, like he wasn't quite sure he believed I was here. That made two of us. "What the fuck? Why are you here? Fuck that, *how* are you here?"

"Magic," I answered, since that was the simplest answer.

His frown deepened, making it clear my answer wasn't satisfactory. "Does Cyrus know you're here?"

I rolled my eyes. "Seriously, what the fuck is with you alpha assholes? You're my cult, not my babysitters."

"It really is you," he muttered. "You're not this much of a smartass in my dreams."

"I'll take that as a compliment," I said, raising an eyebrow. "Spend a lot of time dreaming about me, huh, Cam?"

He rolled his eyes. "Look, I don't know what you think you're doing, but you can't be here. She *will* find you."

"Ichor's here?" I asked, looking around.

"Not here," he said pointedly. "But that can change."

"I thought she had you," I said, starting to feel like an idiot. "I thought she was... hurting you."

His brow furrowed more, and he gave me a strange look, saying nothing for a long time. Long enough that I wasn't sure what to think.

"How did you know?" he asked at length.

Well, I wasn't expecting that to be his response.

"I... guess I spend a decent amount of time dreaming about you, too," I admitted. "I mean, not the fun kind of dreams. The kind where you're tied up in chains in a torture chamber." I paused. "Okay, that does sound fun, but only if the one torturing you is me."

He gave me a look. "Must be the link," he mumbled, seemingly more to himself than me. He seemed a little disoriented.

"That's what Cyrus thinks," I admitted.

"I thought he didn't know you were here."

"He doesn't," I said. "And he would've tried to stop me if he did."

"He's not capable of doing his job even if he knows what it is," he said bitterly.

"Don't start," I snapped. "Seriously, I'm getting couples therapy for you guys if you can't work shit out."

"I think we're a bit far beyond working it out, don't you?" Cameron asked dryly.

"If I thought that, I wouldn't be here," I informed him. "Now come on. You're coming back with me."

"I can't do that, Chase," he told me.

"Why the hell not?" I demanded.

"For one thing, I'm here by choice," he replied.

"Yeah, and wherever Ichor is keeping your soul when you're not awake, she's torturing you," I said pointedly. "Are you seriously down that bad for a bitch who uses you like a fucking toy and then tortures you when you do something she doesn't approve of?"

"You don't know what you're talking about," he muttered.

"Bullshit," I hissed. "I'm the one who lived with her as a roommate in my fucking head for months, remember? I know exactly who Ichor is, and how she sees you and the others. How she sees me." I folded my arms. "You don't have to come back. You don't have to have anything to do with me, or even your brother if you don't want to, but for God's sake, Cameron, take a stand for yourself for once in your life."



He watched me through narrowed eyes, and I could tell he was about to say something when I felt the ground trembling beneath my feet. The strange part was, even though it shook me to the bone and made it hard to stay where I was on the bed, nothing in the room seemed to be disturbed.

"What was that?" I asked, looking around.

"It's her," Cameron said, lowering his voice to a whisper as he grabbed my arm again. "She knows I'm awake. You need to get out. Now. She knows you're here."

"Even Ichor can't get into a pack of werewolves undetected," I protested.

"Not here," he corrected. "The astral. Trust me, you do not want to go toe to toe with her where you are now. Where I can't reach you."

The implication that he would defend me even against her wasn't lost on me, as hard as it was to believe, but I didn't really have time to process that before I felt it.

A familiar presence that I could've gone the rest of my life without feeling again.

"What?" Cameron asked, searching my face. "What is it?"

I didn't answer, too frozen with dread as I turned to look over my shoulder only to find that, sure enough, Ichor was standing in the doorway. Just like me, she was in full color, rather than the same sepia hue as everything else on the astral.

"She's here, isn't she?" Cameron asked hoarsely, his entire demeanor shifting.

For someone who had spent decade after decade doing whatever he could to get her back, he really didn't seem all that excited. Maybe there was some trouble in paradise, after all.

"Yeah," I said, my voice strained. "She is."

"Hello again, Chase," Ichor said with a red smile that could freeze lava. "Long time, no see."

"Not quite long enough," I said.

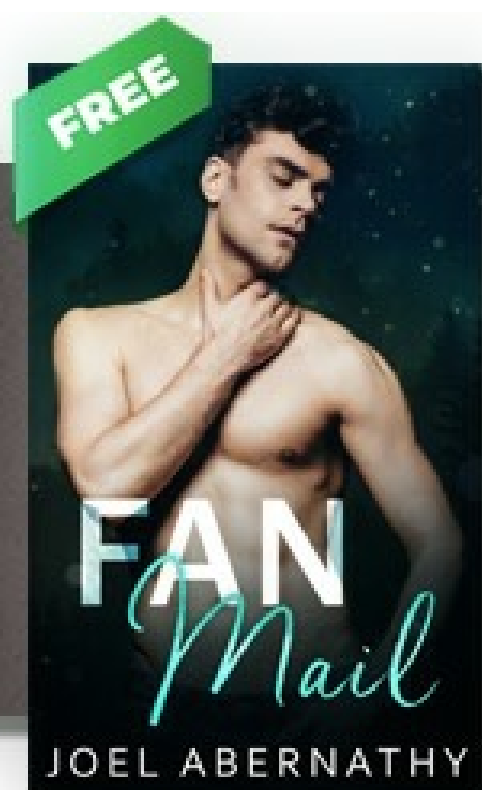
Then again, it had only been a matter of months. Not all eternity, and that would still be much too soon in my book.

*THE END. The Godbearer series continues with Book 4, New Blood.*

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