



new
BLOOD
THE GODBEARER BOOK 4

JOEL ABERNATHY WRITING MPREG AS
L.C. DAVIS

New Blood

GODBEARER #4

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NEW BLOOD

The Godbearer #4

It will end the way it began: covered in blood.

Too much? Me being a demigod now and all, I figure I can get away with a pinch of melodrama.

I mean, have you seen Olympus? It's a damn soap opera up there. One I'd rather be watching on the couch with popcorn than playing a starring role in.

Not that things are much better down here. I'm still in denial over being madly in love with Cameron, the likely father of my twin babies and the far more evil twin of one of my three boyfriends. Because self-destruction is my brand, apparently.

Fortunately, so is being a vampire-taming, totally badass witch, and I'm going to do whatever it takes to keep my weird little cult-slash-family safe. And convince Cameron he belongs in the circus with the rest of us.

No biggie, right?

(Jk, send help. And nachos. I've been craving those lately.)

Prologue

The Underworld was a realm of shadows and whispers, an eternal twilight that existed on the edge of mortal comprehension. It was a place of both beauty and sorrow, a sanctuary for lost souls and forgotten gods alike. My dominion was a palace of obsidian and silver, nestled within a labyrinthine cavern adorned with glowing violet crystals. The air was cool and still, heavy with the weight of a million untold stories.

Within the heart of my realm, I stood before the three Fates, my ever-present advisors and confidantes. The crystal orb floated effortlessly above my palm, its surface swirling with a myriad of colors as it projected the visions of the three Fates bound to serve whoever ruled their realm.

I could feel the heat of their magic prickling against my skin as I held the orb captive. They were a mischievous trio, those Fates, but their visions were invaluable to me.

Like most of the other gods, I had been watching this newest godbearer.

Chase, with his long, bone-white hair and his harem of vampires, was an intriguing mortal. His fate was uncertain, but one thing was clear--he had caught the attention of my twin. Ichor was a force to be reckoned with, and

the blood goddess's obsession with Chase spelled trouble for everyone, not just him.

At first, I'd watched him because the Fates were constantly babbling about him and the vampires he surrounded himself with. They treated the whole situation like an onstage spectacle. I'd taken a look to see what the fuss was about only to learn that this spunky mortal was nothing short of pure amusement.

He was undeniably beautiful, too.

And now that my petty, vindictive twin was hellbent on murdering him, I was watching him with renewed interest. If I were being entirely honest, my amusement had become an obsession at some point. I'd never felt that way in my immortal existence. It was a strange, new feeling, one that I didn't particularly like. Chase was a mortal, a temporary distraction--nothing more. I had to keep reminding myself of that.

Zeus was keeping an eye on him, too, but he couldn't be trusted to do anything right. Why I'd entered into a celestial brotherhood with that fool was beyond me. It was certainly not one of my finest moments.

And now he was missing. Good riddance.

"Young Hades," crooned Atropos, the eldest of the Fates. She was a small, wrinkled woman, with white hair and piercing blue eyes that sparkled with a wicked sense of humor. "Still mooning over that godbearer, are you?"

I cast her a disapproving glance. "This is no time for games, Atropos. Chase is in danger, and I must do everything in my power to protect him."

Clotho, the youngest Fate, giggled as she wound her golden thread around her spindle. "Oh, but he is a pretty one, isn't he?" She glanced slyly at me, her green eyes twinkling. "I can see why you're so smitten."

My skin warmed, a rare occurrence for the Lord of the Underworld. My heart belonged to the shadows and the cold, but it seemed that the mere mention of Chase could set it ablaze. "I admire him, nothing more. He is strong and resilient."

Lachesis, the middle sister, sighed dramatically as she measured out the lengths of the threads of fate. "All this talk of admiration, and yet we all know there's more to it than that. Hades, dear, there's no shame in admitting you have feelings for the boy."

I sighed, irritation simmering beneath my ethereal exterior. "Feelings are irrelevant. My duty is to ensure his safety, not indulge in fantasies." I couldn't help but steal another glance at the orb, at the image of Chase surrounded by his vampire suitors. It was a pang in my heart, but it mattered little; his happiness was paramount.

Atropos cackled like a rusted hinge. "Oh, young one, when will you learn? The heart wants what it wants, and denying it will only cause you more pain."

I turned my gaze back to the orb, watching as Chase interacted with his companions. They seemed to genuinely care for him, but I couldn't shake the feeling they were also his greatest vulnerability--especially now that he was pregnant and more vulnerable by the day.

Ichor was relentless in her pursuit to ruin him, and I had no doubt it was jealous rage motivating her to continue on her path even if it destroyed her in the end. If he agreed to leave them, perhaps she would leave him alone.

As I continued to observe the visions, I found my gaze lingering on Chase's features. His long white hair splayed out around his head like a halo as he lay sleeping in bed, framing his beautiful face. He was presently in the

astral, and the vampires who were supposed to be watching over him had no idea.

Nor did they realize Chase was planning on returning to their little hideout with the fancier vampire's significantly less fancy twin. Was his name Cyrus? I didn't pay much attention to the vampires. They all got on my nerves for one reason or another, most of all because of what they did to Chase not nearly long enough ago for him to forgive them.

I wasn't even certain he *had* forgiven them.

Perhaps he was merely scheming over a devastating plan to exact his revenge, luring them into a false sense of security only to eventually backstab them all. It was deeply satisfying to give someone who betrayed you hope you had moved on only to crush it before their very eyes.

A god could dream.

But Chase was so... pure. It was one of the reasons I was so drawn to him. He was a bright light in the darkness, his innocence radiating from his soul like a beacon. He had been through so much in his short life, yet he had not grown bitter or jaded. Instead, he continued to care for those around him even if they didn't deserve it.

And these vampires certainly did not.

The magic in the orb swirled, displaying my reflection as I began to ruminate. The enchanted glamour I wore concealed my true form, but I knew what lurked beneath the false veneer of beauty. Then again, after being bound to the Underworld for so long, I looked more demonic than anything else.

He clearly had an affinity for monsters, at least, but if my glamour wore off—if he saw me for what I truly was—even this brave godbearer would

surely be horrified.

I didn't notice Atropos had come alongside me until she rested her withered hand on my arm.

"What are you waiting for, Hades?" she asked in a low rasp. If I didn't know better, I'd think she was concerned. "If you wish to claim the boy, you must act soon. You are running out of time."

I turned my gaze from the orb and looked at Atropos. "And what do you suggest?" I asked, wondering what cryptic, vague answer she would give me.

Atropos leaned in, her voice barely above a whisper. "You must show him your power. Let him see what you can do. Make him understand what it means to be with a god like you. You are the king of the Underworld, after all."

I considered her words as the magic in the orb swirled to show me Chase again, the light radiating from the vision filling the dark throne room.

She was right. I could give Chase a life he'd only dreamed of.

And I could protect him better than those bloodsucking idiots ever could.

Chapter
One

CYRUS

I was trying to give Chase space. I really was.

And as long as you counted being ten feet away from him outside the door to his room like the fucking stalker I was, then it was a resounding success.

I reached for the doorknob and gave it a subtle jiggle, but as I'd expected, it was locked. I could hear Chase moaning softly, but while he sounded vaguely distressed to me, he did make noises like that when he was touching himself.

He'd kill me--or at least try--if he knew I could hear him, but what was I supposed to do? Walk around the house wearing earplugs?

I wasn't sure if I should barge in or respect the fact that this was his space, and if he'd wanted us involved, he would've invited us.

I knew he'd be pissed if I forced the door open. *Really* pissed. But when I heard the distinct sound of a moan that sounded more like fear than pleasure, my instincts made my decision for me.

I slammed my shoulder against the door, snapping it off its hinges, and rushed into the room.

The acrid smoke from the cheap incense and crackling magic in the air hit me immediately, heavy and suffocating as it swirled unseen above the bed. I could hear it humming over the soft beat of Lo-Fi music coming from Chase's phone on the nightstand. Chase was lying in the middle on his back, his hands resting on his pregnant belly. He was still wearing his clothes, and I didn't see any signs of struggle, but he was breathing rapidly, nostrils flaring and half-closed eyes flitting back and forth as his white lashes fluttered.

I looked around the room, and it took me a moment to realize that I was the only one there.

But I could sense a presence. A strong one.

Something was in the room with us.

And I was pretty fucking sure the ward had shifted, too.

"Chase," I said, my voice low and gentle. "Hey, what's going on? Are you okay?"

He didn't answer, but I could tell he heard me. His body tensed even more, and he started working his jaw, clenching and unclenching it.

I cautiously moved closer to the bed and reached out my hand to touch his shoulder. He flinched at my touch, and I was about to pull away when he finally spoke in a strained tone, but I couldn't make out what he was saying.

It sounded a hell of a lot like he'd whispered Ichor's name, though.

My stomach tightened. What the fuck was happening?

"What's going on?" Sam asked from the doorway. Good to know someone else was stalking around up here.

"I don't know," I admitted, trying to lean over the bed to check Chase's pulse, but it was like there was an invisible barrier pushing me back. I'd been able to touch his shoulder before, but now, it was like trying to push my arm through a solid wall of molasses. "It feels like he cast a spell. Did he say anything to you about this?"

Sam stared at me, then Chase, in confusion. "No, but he did have me make him a weird tea."

"A weird tea?" I echoed flatly, finally managing to push through the energy field, though my entire arm was tingling with pins and needles. I took Chase's hand in mine and pressed two fingers to his wrist. His heart was pattering away, but it was steady.

"Yeah. He said he needed it for the babies," Sam said, raking his hand through his black hair. He knew he'd made a mistake, so I didn't rub his nose in it. I had to make sure Chase was okay first.

I would certainly rub his nose in it later, though.

I stepped closer to the bed, ignoring the energy humming around me, and rested the back of my hand against Chase's forehead. It was hot to the touch, almost uncomfortably so, especially in comparison to my cool skin. There was no frost on him, so it wasn't his powers doing this.

It was like he was being held captive, but by what?

"Chase," I said softly, trying to keep my voice calm and soothing. "It's okay. You can let go of the spell now. You're safe. Wake up."

He mumbled something, his eyelids fluttering open, but his eyes were unfocused and unseeing as he seemed to struggle to stay conscious. I was grateful to see that he was still alive, but I had no idea how to get him out of the trance he was in.

"Is there a grimoire around here?" I wondered out loud, leaving his side to hunt around the room. I didn't see any books, though, and the room was pretty bare in general. Then I spotted Chase's phone on the nightstand and remembered him mentioning a digital grimoire.

"What's his password?" I asked Sam, picking up the phone and punching in a few esoteric numbers I thought Chase might be familiar with. I doubted any of them would work, and I wasn't surprised when they didn't, but it was worth a shot.

"How should I know?" he shot back at me.

"Try my birthday," the last person I wanted to see chimed in from the door.

My head snapped up. "Alex? What are you doing up here? You're supposed to be watching the house. Go back downstairs," I ordered.

He scowled at me like he was a puppy I'd just kicked.

Technically, he was a horrible puppy from hell, and I'd verbally kicked him, so it wasn't far off.

"I heard a bunch of shit going on and wanted to check," he said. "Watching the house doesn't mean sitting on my ass in the kitchen, watching the wallpaper peeling off the walls."

"Chase is in a magic coma and won't wake up," Sam said to Alex before I could tell him that was exactly what I'd meant. "And no. It's not your birthday."

"You didn't even try it," Alex complained.

I rolled my eyes and entered it. "Nope."

"Our anniversary?" Alex asked hopefully.

"There's no fucking way it's your anniversary," Sam said, not bothering to hide his annoyance. Not that I could blame them. "After everything you've done, you're lucky he didn't turn you into a Popsicle the moment he could."

"You're no saint," Alex pointed out. "Next to Sarah, you were his best friend. And don't you forget it."

I pinched my temples between my thumb and forefinger and let out a long, heavy sigh. "Boys. Stop fighting and use your brains for a second. What's something that would be important to Chase?"

"Britney Spears's birthday?" Sam said, throwing his hands in the air.

"That's... Fine. Why not?" I sighed, pulling out my own phone to look it up. The signal was terrible here, though, so I didn't have high hopes. I was lucky to get a single bar, which wasn't exactly convenient considering I'd very much gotten used to technology.

"120281," said Alex.

I stared at him in bewilderment.

"Her birthday," Alex said, blinking at me. "What? All gays love Britney. It's basically a law of nature."

I sighed and entered 120281, because Alex was right--it was the exact kind of thing Chase would have chosen.

Chase's home screen popped up immediately, along with a million apps that weren't remotely organized. Food delivery, streaming apps, gossip, webcomics, ebook apps... why did he need so many options for restaurants?

I tried not to pay attention to the fact that his wallpaper was someone's abs and the base of a dick. Jealousy flared up inside me until I noticed a familiar freckle just above the guy's left hip.

My left hip.

"What's that?" Alex asked, craning his neck. I moved the phone away from him so he couldn't see. Alex's eyes directly on my cock was the last thing I needed if I ever wanted to come again.

"Me," I replied before realizing the wallpaper had changed to a much skinnier, less muscular torso and even more dick. The whole damn thing this time. "Uh. Never mind."

"Are we all on his background shuffle? That's Alex," Sam said, looking over my shoulder before I could stop him. "Was he taking pictures of us while we slept? That's kind of cute."

I wasn't sure if it was cute or terrifying.

The next slide was a full frontal shot of Sam's entire torso and everything attached to it, and I started to panic, knowing there was only one guy left after the three of us. I was running out of time before I got an eyeful of something I could never unsee.

I'd obviously seen Cameron's full body plenty of times, including during our escapades with a third, but that didn't mean I wanted to stare his massive cock down like a gun.

Especially not from Chase's point of view.

I shoved the phone into Sam's hands when I realized I had no idea where the damn grimoire was stored.

"Holy shit, Cam's huge," Sam said in horrified awe. "Why are you showing me this? Weird flex, but okay."

"Just find the grimoire," I said through my teeth.

"Fine. Chill," he replied, quickly scrolling through a few apps until he found the one with a purple eye as its logo. He opened it and a bright green-and-purple menu appeared on the screen with a plethora of options. It was unbelievably gaudy. "Found it."

I looked over his shoulder. "They have a specific app for that? I'd assumed it would be a PDF."

"They have apps for everything," said Sam, pulling up the most recent file. Fortunately for us all, the app automatically took us to the last page Chase was on, confirming the fears that had been eating away at me.

He'd astral traveled.

Of course he had. Nothing could ever be simple with Chase. Why was I even surprised he'd done something like that, even knowing how dangerous it was? He was nothing if not utterly reckless.

"Shit," Sam said warily. "Figures he'd find a way to get out of here after everything we did to keep him safe. How do we get him out of this?"

"He went after Cameron," I muttered, taking the phone from him to look over the instructions. "I have to go in after him."

"Should we get DuPonte?" Alex asked.

"No," I said firmly. "Sam, make that tea again. And do it quickly. Chase is in danger. And don't bother boiling it. I'm sure DuPonte has a microwave."

"Got it," he said, running out of the room. Alex glanced between us before following him, apparently afraid of being alone with me.

As he should've been. I was not in a good mood.

I needed to call Lash.

Chapter
Two

CHASE

I chor and I stared each other down, neither of us moving an inch, but she didn't appear remotely concerned that I'd managed to find my way there. I was kind of hoping she'd be a little worried considering I was a witch now, but she just looked amused. *Hatefully* amused.

It probably wasn't a good sign.

"Did you think Cameron could actually protect you from me?" Ichor asked with a grotesquely musical laugh. "He doesn't even have the power to get himself out of the astral."

"I don't need to be protected. I can look out for myself just fine," I retorted. "In case you weren't aware, I'm not exactly weak. I'm capable of all kinds of shit."

"You're pregnant," she said dryly, her eyes twinkling with malicious enjoyment. "And not newly pregnant, either. What exactly do you hope to accomplish?"

"Guess it's lucky I'm here to spring Cameron, then, isn't it?" I asked, standing from where I'd been sitting on the edge of the bed. Not like I could get past her. As pregnant as I was now, I was nowhere near agile, and I'd

been snacking on top of it. "What do you want, Ichor? Can't you just find some other worshipers you don't have to force to love you?"

Ichor's smile faltered for a moment before she regained her composure. "Oh, but my dear Chase, I don't want just any worshipers. I want the ones who truly know my power and my worth," she said, her sinister voice smooth as silk. "If they have to be forced, so be it. At least they'll know what I'm truly capable of."

"But what do you *want*?" I repeated, though at this point, I was just stalling her while I tried to come up with a plan that involved surviving this bullshit.

"Nothing you can give me, unless you're here to give up your life," she replied sharply, and with a flourish of her pointed crimson nails, I was wrapped in pulsating red strings. I started struggling in earnest, but the more I fought the strings, the tighter they got. They were leaving residue on my skin and clothes.

What the fuck? Were they made of blood?

This was one of my favorite sweaters, too. It was soft as fuck and one of the few that fit, considering the average maternity clothes weren't exactly made for guys.

Cameron leaped out of bed, but I could tell from the way he was looking through Ichor instead of at her that he couldn't see her. It was weird to see him vulnerable, and that was exactly what he was right now.

The strings pulled me closer to Ichor and I stumbled, unable to find my footing as I tried in vain to strain away from her. Cameron grabbed my upper arm, but she was strong enough that she just dragged him along, too.

"Let him go," Cameron snarled at the space Ichor occupied with surprising anger considering everything he'd done to screw me over, but she just

laughed.

"Oh no," she purred. "You don't get to order me around. I'm the one in control here."

I looked up at her and found her eyes to be a deep, dark red that was nearly black, and it made me feel like I was sinking into quicksand. I wanted to look away, but I couldn't. I was held there by her gaze, like a fly wrapped in a spider's web.

Or a Christmas ham wrapped in red strings.

Same difference, right?

My mind raced, trying to find a way out of this. I wasn't sure if I could use magic here, and I wasn't sure it wouldn't leave me exhausted and totally useless, either, but it was worth a shot. I didn't have much of a choice.

I closed my eyes and pulled the energy from deep inside me, feeling it surge through my veins as a white-blue light built around me. When the light was at its brightest, to the point where it was shining through my eyelids, I opened my eyes and released the burst of energy outward in all directions.

Everything stopped moving around us as the strings froze in place. They shattered and I fell into Cameron's arms. As I looked up at Cameron's face, I saw a mixture of concern and relief.

Okay. So he did care.

Ichor just stood there for a moment, stunned. At least, I thought she was stunned until I realized she was literally frozen. It didn't last long, though. The moment she snapped out of it, she lunged at us with an angry scream that made my hair stand on end.

I held up my hand and pushed all the energy I could out of my palm. It hit her like a sledgehammer and sent her flying backward into the wall. She hit the ground with a loud thud, leaving a few cracks in the plaster from where the back of her head had struck it.

"What the hell?" Cameron muttered, obviously as shocked as I was.

"That was... unexpected," I said with a shaky laugh. And it felt fucking good, too. When I saw her getting up already, her arms and legs disjointed like she was a marionette whose strings had been cut, I hit her with another blast and pushed her out into the hall.

She scrambled for purchase and managed to dig her nails into the doorframe, catching herself before I could keep pushing her back. She clawed her way to her feet even as I hit her with a few more bursts, none of which were as powerful as the first.

"You whore," she seethed bitterly, her hair falling over her enraged face in a curtain that made her look a hell of a lot like an evil ghost from a movie that had kept me awake for weeks on end as a teenager. Yikes. "Do that again and I'll haul you to Olympus myself and turn your ass over to the highest bidder."

"Do what again? Knock you on your ass?" I retorted. "Go ahead. Just try."

She let out a low growl and thrust her palm forward, sending a swirling red ball of energy right at me. It hit me in the chest hard enough that I momentarily lost all my senses, like she'd unplugged the cord to my brain. I could still think, but I couldn't see, hear, smell, or feel a damn thing.

I wasn't in the death void I'd fallen into before, but I was surrounded by crackling red energy in vivid hues I'd never seen in anything remotely natural. I couldn't see it, but I could still perceive it as if I were in a dream state.

I shouldn't have talked shit, but I was never going to admit it.

"You caught me off guard," she hissed in a corporeal voice that echoed all around me. "It won't happen again. I underestimated the power you're sapping from Cameron and Cyrus's young. Who's the real parasite here?"

I already knew the babies could have two biological fathers, but hearing it was still jarring. "I'm not sapping shit," I snapped back at her, not with my voice, but with what tendrils of my mind were still active. "If they're making me stronger, it's not because of anything I'm doing on purpose."

"Oh, so it's a coincidence," she spat with a sneer. "You think I'm an idiot? You're not fooling anyone."

She stepped closer to me, her face contorted in anger and hate. She was going to attack me, and this time, I wasn't sure if I'd be able to defend myself.

I was sure as fuck gonna try, though.

My hands filled with cold energy and I lunged forward to meet her attack head-on. She expected me to be weaker, but she was wrong. The power surged through me like a wave, and when I grabbed her by the shoulders and sent freezing shockwaves of energy through her body, she really looked like she wanted to kill me.

"*You fucking bitch!*" she snarled in rage, throwing me back like I weighed nothing.

I slammed into Cameron, or at least, I should have. Instead, when our bodies collided, mine ceased to exist and the form I'd taken in the astral realm was absorbed into Cameron's body like applying a sticker to a piece of paper. His eyes—and mine, in sync with his—widened in surprise and he looked down at me in shock.

Not me.

Us.

"Chase...? What the fuck?" he muttered, but he said it so quietly I was sure only I could hear him. Ichor certainly didn't seem to. She was hunting around the room with desperate fury, her wild hair floating around her from the energy swirling around the room. She looked like she was underwater. It would've been almost funny if it wasn't scary as fuck.

"Where is he?" she snarled, locking eyes with Cameron.

Cameron hesitated. I was sure he was about to tell her I was stuck in his body, and I was helpless to stop him, but instead, he just shrugged. "Guess you won."

She straightened up, puffing her chest out like a preening, prideful, arrogant parrot. "I guess I did," she said, tossing her hair back over her shoulder now that it was starting to settle and wasn't blowing around her anymore. "You're going to find that little bitch, and you're going to find him now, before he fucks everything up."

"On it," he muttered.

He wasn't going to tell her I was here?

I was shocked, but I wasn't complaining, especially when the goddess who would've peeled me out of Cameron without a second's hesitation was still in the room, fuming and adjusting the pearls around her neck. When had she gotten those?

They were huge. Way too huge.

So fucking tacky.

She gave him a weird little peck on the cheek that was more like the kiss you might give a pet than your lover before leaving the room in a flourish of vicious energy I could feel as strongly as if she'd struck me.

Once she was gone, Cameron sank back onto the edge of the bed and buried his head in his hands with a loud groan. "What are you doing in my body?"

"Shhh! She'll hear us," I hissed through my teeth.

Through *his* teeth.

Yeah. I hated that. I especially hated that I could taste both blood and some kind of minty charcoal flavor, because of course he had to use some weird, fancy toothpaste.

"You think I don't know if she can hear me or not? And you're a hell of a lot louder than me," he snapped. "She's gone. Trust me, she's gone. She moves fast."

"I can tell, considering she just handed my ass to me," I replied, looking down at Cameron's hands in his lap with him. I was trying not to think about how huge he was. I didn't have a small dick or anything, but being in his body and packing as much heat as he did was a wild feeling.

No wonder he was such an arrogant asshole.

He didn't say anything. He just sighed long and hard.

I wished I could see into his mind, but I couldn't read his thoughts. Not clearly, at any rate. He apparently couldn't read mine, either, or he'd definitely be griping about how much I was thinking about his dick.

"Why didn't you tell her I was inside you?" I asked when it became obvious he wasn't going to talk anytime soon.

"How about you don't word it like that?" he grumbled, standing up from the edge of the bed. "I don't know, Chase. I don't. But you have to leave before I change my mind."

"Yeah. About that," I said warily.

"Don't tell me you don't know how to reverse this," he said, raking his hand through his hair. His nails against his scalp—our scalp—felt good enough to make me shiver. "What the fuck was that, Chase?"

"Nothing," I said quickly. "But... no. I don't know how to reverse it. I don't even know what happened. One minute, she was bitch-slapping me, and the next, I was flying across the room and landing in your body. I don't know how to get back, let alone how to get out of you."

"I told you to stop saying it like that," he growled.

"Like what?" I asked innocently.

"Like you're fucking me."

I thought about it for a second before deciding being on top of Cameron wasn't something I was remotely interested in. "If it makes you feel any better, I wouldn't—"

"Nope," he said flatly. "We're not talking about this shit. We're getting you the fuck out of here before I lose my goddamned mind. I don't need a hitchhiker in here." He tapped his temple.

"How do you think I felt with Ichor in my head all that time?" I asked before I could stop myself.

I felt his annoyance pouring off him in waves. I didn't have to read his mind to feel his jaw clenching and the muscles in his neck tightening up like he wanted to put his fist through a wall.

“I’ll bring you back to the others,” he said in a surprisingly calm tone that was almost more frightening than if he were losing his temper. “After that, you’re their problem.”

Chapter

Three

CYRUS

"Are you sure about this?" Alex asked warily, staring at me from across the room like I might explode as I choked down the tea Sam had made. If it weren't for Chase being in danger, I wouldn't have been surprised if he'd put in extra pepper just to fuck with me.

It was beyond disgusting.

It was bewildering how Chase had managed to drink it all when he went out of his way to make sure he got the exact kind of boba tea he liked. Had to be tapioca pearls, too, not those little colorful popping orbs they always had at the frozen yogurt places he was obsessed with.

This tea, though? It was awful, and I didn't consider myself especially "precious," as Chase put it, about things like that.

Sam watched as I pinched my nose shut and took the last few gulps. In spite of the circumstances, he looked like he thought this was kind of funny. I sure as hell didn't.

"What did you put in it?" I muttered, grimacing as I dabbed at my mouth with the back of my thumb. Why did it have to be so gritty?

He shrugged. "I just followed the instructions. I don't remember."

"Is there dirt in it? Sand?" I asked, swirling around the last dregs at the bottom of the cup.

"A little," he admitted. "And coffee grounds."

I checked my phone since I'd sent a text to Lash a few minutes ago. The last I'd heard from his sister, they were visiting family, so while I wasn't going to wait around in hopes he could get here somehow, it would definitely be nice to have backup if my plan failed.

To my relief, a reply from him popped up on the screen.

<**Lash:** We're still in New York. Why? Your pregnant demigod acting up again?>

I started typing back to him right away. <You could say that. Chase astral traveled, and I think he's stuck. In any case, he hasn't woken up yet. I'm trying to get him out. If I sent a private jet, how soon could you be here?>

Three little dots appeared on the screen to indicate he was typing, but they stopped as soon as they appeared. Then they appeared again, then disappeared. I was starting to get frustrated when his text finally came through, and it was nowhere near as long as it should've been, considering how long he was typing.

Then again, I had asked for a huge favor.

<**Lash:** I guess that depends on how good your pilot is...>

My shoulders sagged with relief. I wasted no time replying to him. <You're a lifesaver. Literally. Send me your address and I'll have someone pick you up ASAP.>

Well, at least we had backup.

"Who was that?" Sam asked, sounding suspicious, like he thought I was somehow cheating on our little cult. To be fair, we had all made an oath to each other, as well as to the vessel.

Not that "the vessel" was all Chase was anymore. Not by a long shot. I was glad he wasn't anyway. He was so much more than Ichor could ever hope to be.

"Lash," I answered, sending a text to my pilot with Lash's info as soon as the witch's next text came through. "He's flying out here, so keep an eye on my phone. If he gets here before I wake up, make sure someone's there to greet him."

"Got it," said Sam, as if I needed his approval.

Darkness was already creeping in around the edges of my vision, so the tea had to be working, at least.

I sat on the bed beside Chase, trying to ignore the energy field pressing in around me, and stretched out so our arms were side by side before linking our hands.

"You look like sea otters," Alex remarked.

"We look like what now?" I asked, blinking.

"Sea otters," he said again, like it was the most obvious thing in the world.

"That doesn't answer my question," I said dryly.

"They hold hands when they sleep so they don't drift apart," Sam offered. "It's cute. I saw them in a documentary once." He paused before adding, "Chase made me watch it. It wasn't my idea."

I raised an eyebrow at them. "Well, don't let him hear you comparing him to a pudgy sea creature if you want to live."

Chase stirred in his sleep, and I swore I heard him growl softly.

It figured that was what would rouse him.

I stared at him, hoping he was finally coming out of it, but he just went back under, his nose twitching like it always did when he was pissed in a dream.

At least, I hoped he was just overhearing us and not getting attacked by astral beasts.

Or Ichor.

Neither was a good thing, which was why I had to join him, consequences be damned.

My vision was getting hazy as the magic tea took effect, and I felt my body sinking deeper into the mattress. A pleasant warmth spread throughout my limbs, and I could feel myself slipping away.

The last thing I remembered was Alex bitching in the distance before it all faded away into nothingness.

I could feel myself falling through an infinite void of darkness, surrounded by a million sparkling stars that glowed in shades of blues and purples. As I fell, they seemed to reach out to me like they wanted to pull me closer to them. But just as soon as I got close enough to touch one of them, I felt a tugging at my heart and was whisked away in another direction.

The sensation of flying continued for what felt like hours until I finally saw a faint light on the horizon.

As I drew closer, it grew brighter until eventually I emerged into a room with walls made of glass and a large window that overlooked what appeared

to be a garden. Everything was so vivid and alive, the colors brighter and more intense than anything I had ever seen before.

I looked around, trying to figure out where I was, but it seemed like I was the only one there. When I heard the sound of distant masculine laughter, I headed in that direction.

As I walked, the garden seemed to morph around me, the plants shifting from bright greens and blues to deep hues of red, purple, and everything in between. The garden was becoming overgrown with thorns and massive scarlet roses the size of my head, but it was still beautiful even as I delved into swirling black fog that made me question whether I was in the astral realm or a circle of hell.

"Harder, devil daddy!" a man cried in ecstasy from up ahead.

Well, there was my answer.

I froze, wondering if I'd just stumbled upon some astral sex party. The last thing I needed was to be fresh meat.

But before I could turn around and get the hell out of there, a crimson whip sliced through the mist around me and it swirled away, revealing a great iron throne built into the side of a cliff overlooking miles and miles of magma lakes, towering spires of black rock, and erupting volcanoes as far as I could see.

A gigantic crimson demon was crouched over the throne, his muscular back and quivering leathery wings facing me. His long tail—the "whip"—lashed behind him as his massive cock impaled the bouncing ass of a brown-haired human man bent forward on the iron seat.

The human's dangling legs jerked every time the demon thrust forward, his hands wrapped around the demon's curled horns for purchase. The demon

was pinning him there with a huge clawed hand on his back, but judging by the way the human was begging for more, he wasn't exactly a reluctant captive.

The only way off the side of the cliff was to take the stone stairs leading down from the throne, and there was no way in hell I was getting past them without being seen.

"*Apollyon!*" the human moaned as he came with a scream of sheer bliss as the demon snarled throatily into his hair.

His glazed eyes locked on me at the worst possible time, and for a moment, he just stared at me, blinking.

He screamed again.

"You like that?" the demon purred, grinding his pelvis against the man's ass. "You want more?"

"No!" the man cried. "There's a fucking pervert up here!"

I bolted for the stairs and flew down them three at a time as the demon roared behind me, his spreading wings casting huge shadows over me. I heard his wings beating the air as he took flight, and I knew I had to jump if I had any chance of getting away with all my limbs intact.

I leaped off the stairs and into the canyon alongside them. The sensation of dropping at terminal velocity by human standards made my head spin, but I regained my bearings quickly and turned in the air to prepare to land.

Solid ground never came, though. I just kept falling and falling until the darkness encompassed everything, even the light. I fell past strange but vivid scenes in flashes of wild color I couldn't typically comprehend, new shades of violet and red that were entirely foreign to my eyes.

Once the dizzying rush of air came to an abrupt, I found myself standing in a large, circular room with no recollection of how I had gotten there.

It was filled with a strange, deep purple light and the walls were lined with candles of every color. In the center of the room was a bed, and on it was a figure lying completely still and wearing a long white robe.

My heart began to race as I recognized the figure and I quickly stepped closer to make sure it was really him.

It was Chase.

He was wearing the robe he was sacrificed in, and the sight was jarring, but his face was peaceful, as if he wasn't in any danger at all.

I let out a sigh of relief and brushed a stray lock of white hair from his forehead. He stirred slightly, and I knew that his subconscious was aware of my presence. He may have been asleep, but he was still with me.

Out of nowhere, my face and chest were soaking wet and freezing cold, like I'd just been dunked in ice water with a distinct citrus scent. But I didn't have time to even process how that had happened because the next thing I knew, my eyes were snapping open and I was back in the room in DuPonte's cabin with Chase in the bed beside me, our fingers laced together. I was gripping his hand tight enough it had to hurt, but he wasn't responding.

Sam and Alex were looming over me with looks of grave concern on their faces, and Alex was holding an empty glass. My eyes burned as I looked down and saw ice cubes on my drenched chest and in my lap. The same citrus smell was present.

Had this fucking idiot thrown lemonade on me?

"You were yelling like you were being killed," Alex blurted out as Sam held up his palms in an appeasement gesture.

I leaped to my feet and Sam backed up so Alex would get the brunt of my rage. I grabbed the panicking man by the collar of his shirt and hauled him across the room to pin him against the wall.

"Why did you do that?" I snarled. "I'd *found* him. I was moments away from bringing him back."

"You were turning purple over the past few hours," said Sam. "And then you turned dead purple, not just the kind of purple you would be if you held your breath for too long."

"I'm a vampire. I can't suffocate," I said, letting the asshole go so I could rake my hands through my hair. "I was so close. Can you make the tea again?"

"There was only one foot," Sam said warily.

"A *foot*?" I echoed, my stomach turning.

"A rabbit's foot," Sam added quickly.

"Don't you think that's important information?" I asked as patiently as I could. How were we even still alive with these two around? Maybe I did believe in miracles after all.

"I don't know," he said, exasperated. "It was fucking disgusting, either way. There was a practically mummified one in the cabinet, and I had to soak it in the tea."

I took a deep breath and let it out through my nose. "If it was 'fucking disgusting,' don't you think Chase would have done something else?"

"Well, he didn't have me do that part," Sam admitted. "And he had me add a shitload of sugar."

"Why didn't you do it the exact way he had you do it?" I sighed, rubbing my temples. "You didn't think that might be important?"

"I thought it would be stronger if I followed the fucking instructions," he snapped.

"Stop giving him a hard time, man. You could've just made it yourself," Alex complained, surprising me with his sudden courage—even if it was stupid courage.

Did he not realize he'd just dumped ice-cold lemonade on a vampire who could fold him in half without breaking a sweat?

"I wasn't the one who made it in the first place," I hissed through my teeth before realizing I was stooping to his level. "You know what, forget it. It doesn't matter. Did Lash's plane get in yet?"

"A green message popped up on your screen, so I'm guessing he did," said Alex. "It was just a few minutes ago, though, and we were kind of distracted."

I picked up my phone and looked down at the screen. Sure enough, eight minutes ago, Lash had let me know he was close to the cabin. He was always quick about these things, so it came as no surprise when there was a knock at the front door a moment later.

I went downstairs and opened the door to find the pretty omega standing there with a bag slung over his shoulder and a stern expression. He didn't wait for me to let him in before entering.

"Thank you for coming. I'm glad you're here," I said. "Chase--"

"I read your text," he replied stiffly. "This time, I'm going to charge. The weather here is shit. Is he upstairs?"

Alex and Sam led him up to the room like loyal golden retrievers having company over as I followed them all. Lash dropped his bag on the edge of the bed and leaned in to check Chase's pulse, then wrapped a blood pressure cuff around his left upper arm.

"This isn't some fucked-up Sleeping Beauty fetish you're involving me in, is it?" Lash asked in that deadpan way that always left me wondering if he was joking or not. I wasn't going to dignify that with a response, though.

"He's astral traveling, and he won't wake up," I explained. "I tried to go in after him, but he altered the recipe in his grimoire, so it didn't work. I'm willing to do it again, though."

"How was it altered?" Lash asked with a sigh, looking down at the blood pressure machine. "Vitals seem fine, at least."

"My version had a rabbit's foot soaked in it and no sugar," I muttered.

"He added sugar?" Lash asked, raising an eyebrow as he looked from me to Sam. "How much sugar did you add, Sam? I'll need to know the exact amount."

"That matters?" he asked warily.

"Yes, because it alters the chemistry of your blood," Lash replied, taking the cuff off Chase's arm. "If you don't take the same amount, it can alter whether you end up in the same location. If he won't wake up, I can try a spell, but I can't guarantee it'll work."

Sam and Alex said nothing. They just looked worriedly at Chase.

"And what if it doesn't work?" I asked, since no one else seemed like they wanted to know.

"Then you'll have to try quite a few more teas," Lash replied curtly. "It could take a while, though, considering you'll have to get the exact right amount of sugar. At least you won't have to worry about a rabbit's foot if Chase's version didn't include that. They usually do, but something tells me the kind of guy who would add sugar to an astral brew wouldn't use that."

"So that was a useless addition," I said pointedly, looking at Sam.

"Not entirely," said Lash. "It did offer you some protection."

"Which Chase doesn't have, then," I said with a sigh. "All because it grossed him out, I'm sure."

"Fair enough," Lash replied, taking a few ingredients out of his bag. There were herbs, several crystals, and a vial of dark red flakes I thought were chili flakes until he popped it open and I smelled human blood. "Don't get all feral on me," he muttered, as if I could have possibly found that appetizing.

I ignored him. I wasn't about to get in a bickering argument with him when Chase's fate hung in the balance.

He began by lighting a few red and purple candles, sprinkling the dampened hot wax with blood flakes, and placing them around the room in clusters corresponding with a compass app on his phone. Then, he took some of the herbs in his hand, crushed them between his palms, and sprinkled them over the bed. He placed the crystals in a circle around Chase's body next and set a large quartz tower on the pillow above the sleeping omega's head. After fiddling with the arrangement of the crystals, he took the vial of blood flakes and scattered a few over Chase's forehead.

As soon as the flakes hit Chase's skin, Lash began to chant an incantation I couldn't understand. He spoke for what felt like forever until he finally finished with a flourish of his hands that jolted me out of the trance I'd subconsciously been under.

A glowing white light radiated from where Lash stood and slowly spread across Chase's body until it was completely encased in a protective cocoon. Before long, Chase's head lifted off the pillow and he let out a groggy groan.

But before I could run to his side and wake him up further, his head dropped back to the pillow and Lash was flung across the room. He crashed into Alex and they fell together in a pile of tangled limbs against the bookcase, knocking a few heavy hardcovers to the floor.

"What was that?" I asked, startled.

Lash scrambled to his feet, his usually serene eyes wild from shock. "A ward," he said, his voice low and urgent. He whipped around to face Chase, who was still unconscious. "Someone put a ward on Chase. Did he do it himself, or was it one of you? You do realize that's important to disclose before a spell, don't you?"

"It wasn't us," Alex moaned from the floor as he got to his feet, dusty books falling away from him. He sneezed. "Fuck, man, someone needs to clean this place."

"We did put a ward on him to shield him from the gods and their emissaries," I answered hesitantly. "But the magic doesn't affect anything purely terrestrial."

Lash shook his head. "That's not it. This has to be something different. You're sure he didn't place any wards before he went under?"

"Not as far as I know," I replied. "I'm sure I would've sensed that, especially when he first did it."

"Well, I'm not touching it no matter how much you pay me," Lash said hastily, dusting off his black coat. He was shaking like a leaf. I'd never seen him so freaked out before. "It's strong. Beyond strong."

"Why don't you rest in the next room?" I asked, concerned.

"Stop talking to me like I'm fragile," he grumbled, but he went out in the hall without having to be convinced.

He looked like he was about to collapse, and when I opened a door to show him the room he could take, he stumbled inside on wobbly legs like a newborn fawn and flopped to the bed without any of the majestic grace I was used to him exhibiting.

"More tea?" Sam asked from behind me.

"Yeah," I muttered. "More tea."

Chapter

Four

CAMERON

I *'m hungry*, Chase's voice said in my mind for what I was positive was the hundredth time.

I wrapped my knuckles tighter around the steering wheel of the sporty Kia we'd stolen, digging my nails into the leather.

Grand theft auto had been a crime Chase was hating every minute of, but where the fuck was I supposed to get a credit card? I'd compromised by stealing a car he thought was "nice," and I'd compromised further by being gentle with it so its owner would get it back in good condition.

I hadn't budged on getting a nondescript silver car instead of the teal one he'd been eyeing, though.

I was quickly getting sick of this shit. It was like having an angel on your shoulder, only the angel had a megaphone and a craving for pickles and Chex Mix.

Combined.

Oh, and ranch dip, but it had to be homemade from a Hidden Valley packet, and we couldn't find buttermilk.

I wasn't going to bend over backwards to get it, either, no matter how much Chase complained about it.

I'm hungry, Cameron, he said again, more pointedly this time. *We need to pull over at the next rest stop.*

"You just ate fifteen minutes ago," I said, glancing at the green sign by the side of the road that said the next one was coming up. We'd be there in just a few minutes, but if Chase let me go faster instead of bitching incessantly that it "wasn't our car," it would be much sooner.

Plenty of time for him to drive me fucking nuts.

But I'm still hungry, he said plaintively. *And pregnant. Did you forget you're a father now?*

"I'm not a father yet," I said through my teeth. Ideally, I wouldn't be at all, but for some fucking reason, I didn't feel like doing something about it anymore. "And you're in my body. I'm not pregnant. I don't get cravings."

They're astral cravings, he groaned. *The worst kind.*

"And how do you know that? Did you find a book in there?" I grumbled. "What was it called? 'A Pregnant Man's Guide to Astral Needs'?"

I'm serious, Cameron. We need to pull over. And I have to pee.

"I don't have to piss."

I do. Do you wanna find out what happens if we don't?

"Not particularly," I said.

I could see a truck stop looming up ahead by now, marked by a gigantic wooden statue of a moose that looked like some kind of tourist trap Trojan horse, so I pulled into the parking lot and stopped the car.

Easy with her! he hissed. "Her" being the car.

He was the worst backseat driver on the planet, especially since he wasn't just doing it with the car. He was doing it with my entire body.

This fucking trip was going to be the death of me.

The *real* death. Not just the vampire kind.

"The car's fine," I said, climbing out.

I was surprised he didn't yell at me again when I slammed the door in agitation, especially since a few people in the parking lot looked up at the sound and started watching me.

Maybe he just didn't notice.

Hurry, he pressed. *I don't want to have the memory of peeing myself in your pants stuck in my mind for the rest of my life. Which is gonna be long as hell, by the way.*

"Shut up," I whispered loudly, even though no one else could hear him.

The people watching could hear me, though, and judging by their wary faces, they were no doubt wondering why I was talking to myself.

I gave them a nod that was meant to be friendly, and they quickly looked away.

Chase laughed.

"What's so fucking funny?" I whispered as quietly as I could as I entered the rest stop.

You're the least smooth vampire on the planet, he replied.

"Are we supposed to be smooth?" I growled, entering the restroom only to be buffeted by the stench of dehydrated trucker urine and cheap bleach-based cleaning fluid. I was pretty damn sure the combination of the two created a deadly gas, and it was making me lightheaded as I made my way over to the wall of urinals.

I couldn't fucking believe this was happening.

I mean, theoretically, you're from a time where people were smoother, and you've had countless decades to practice, soooo... yeah, you're supposed to be smooth. Cyrus is smooth, he replied, his presence strengthening in my mind as I unzipped my pants.

I could feel him laser-focusing on my cock and froze.

"Stop thinking about my dick," I snapped.

It's hard not to, he replied. *It's huge.*

"If you want me to piss for you--and I can't believe I just said that--knock it the fuck off. I can't do it under pressure," I said under my breath.

There was an unspoken rule in the men's room that you didn't look at the person next to you, but the giant trucker type standing to my left stared at me openly enough that I could see him out of the corner of my eye. He was frowning under his silver handlebar mustache.

I didn't particularly give a shit, though. I could always snap his neck so I didn't have to think about this at three in the morning for the rest of my damned life.

You'd better not hurt that guy, Chase warned me. He looks like a hapless walrus.

"I'm sure he'd love to be compared to a fucking 'hapless walrus,'" I said, annoyed, before I could stop myself.

"Who's a 'fucking hapless walrus'?" the guy asked, angry now instead of concerned.

I sighed and turned to face him. "Fuck off. I'm not in the mood," I said flatly.

He looked like he wanted to put me through the wall, but his instincts won over and he scrambled out of the bathroom, cursing as he fumbled with his zipper. It was his lucky day.

I closed my eyes and focused on shutting Chase out so I could get this over with, but nothing worked when he breathed a sigh of relief. I grit my teeth and swore to myself I was going to kick his ass the moment he wasn't vulnerable and pregnant anymore.

You wouldn't dare. I'm an omega, he said.

"You're really getting good at that mind reading bullshit now that you've settled in, huh?" I said dryly, zipping up and going over to the sink to scrub my hands until I felt less contaminated. "I thought you didn't even like being an omega."

I've gotten used to it. It has its perks, he replied.

"Yeah, when it's convenient for you, and it seems to be convenient pretty fucking often," I said, shaking my hands off since I didn't trust the dryer not to spew filth all over me. I grabbed a wad of paper towels and used them to open the door. Why didn't this shithole have a door you could just push?

He laughed a little, but he didn't deny it.

I rolled my eyes and headed to the rest stop's snack section. For such a small store, they had a huge variety of things that looked absolutely disgusting, and I was sure Chase was going to pick the worst.

"What do you want from here?" I asked warily.

Don't be so loud. Someone's gonna notice, he said, forcing me to look around.

Not being in total control of my eyes was scrambling my brain, so I closed them and pressed my fingers to my pounding temples.

"One, it's not illegal to talk to yourself. Two, if you do that while we're driving, we're going to wrap 'that nice girl's' Kia around a tree," I remarked, grabbing a bag of Chex Mix since it was clearly a staple of his diet. I felt like I was picking out food for a weird pet.

Kit-Kats, too, he said. *Ooh! Is that a new kind? White chocolate with pretzels and Nutella?*

I grimaced in disgust. I really wasn't a fan of human food, and it didn't get much more human than that.

But I picked up a few packets anyway and glanced around to make sure no one was watching as I stuffed them into the pockets of my leather jacket. I didn't feel like compelling the cashier with Chase yammering away in the back of my mind. I was sure he'd have something to say about costing the guy his job.

Damn right, I would, he said, since he apparently couldn't stay out of my goddamned thoughts.

"Don't you have a security guard to eat?" I mumbled.

He gasped so loudly, my ears started to ring.

Guess my fine-tuned vampiric senses worked even with thoughts in my head.

Great.

You didn't have to go there, he said, his voice shaking, a telltale sign he was about to cry.

Again.

How many times was that now? Seven? Eight?

He'd spent the first hour of the trip crying on-and-off about how the owner of the Kia probably needed it to get to work, and complaining that I was being "lazy" for not just compelling someone so they at least knew they'd loaned their car to a stranger, as if that was somehow the moral thing to do.

I'm pregnant, and you're responsible, he seethed. *How about a little compassion?*

"How about not being as difficult as humanly possible?" I replied as I made my way back out to the parking lot.

I'm not really human anymore, remember? he replied, a dangerous edge to his voice. My fingertips started to get cold, and when I glanced down, there was frost on them. *Don't forget I can freeze your dick off.*

"Okay, okay," I muttered, climbing into the Kia. "You're right. I'm sorry. Happy now?"

Happier, he admitted, yawning through me. Being tired wasn't a sensation I was used to, and I didn't especially like it. *What are your thoughts on getting a hotel soon?*

Fuck, he was high maintenance.

"If you want to get to DuPonte's cabin--and your boyfriends--then we shouldn't stop," I said, pulling out onto the highway as I unwrapped one of the Kit-Kats.

When I put it in my mouth and bit down on it, it was like all his anger burned off along with my tastebuds.

It was so sweet, it hurt.

That's fucking amazing, he moaned. Now, imagine how it would taste in a nice, comfy hotel bed...

"We're not going to find a 'nice, comfy hotel bed' out here," I replied. "A flea-bitten cockroach nest, on the other hand... maybe. We're in the middle of nowhere, Chase."

I'm sure there's a Best Western. They're always nice, he said.

"If I see anything like that, okay. We'll stop," I agreed, knowing he was wrong about the hotel selection out here. I preferred showing him he was wrong as opposed to arguing with him.

Okay, he said confidently. More Kit-Kats in the meantime, please.

"You like the fact that I have abs, right?" I asked dryly.

You dashed any hope of me ever having them again, and I used to be an ice skater, sooo... He trailed off pointedly.

I sighed and unwrapped another.

Chapter

Five

CHASE

As usual, it turned out I was right.

My favorite hotel chain was indeed everywhere, even in the middle of nowhere.

The front desk clerk had been easy enough to compel considering he was playing games on his phone instead of paying attention to anything around him, so we'd secured a room for free when Cameron managed to convince him he was management.

The room was even nicer than I'd expected, with a large queen bed topped with a plush comforter and two huge white pillows that were heavenly to lay back against.

Cameron's body was tired. Too tired to kick off his shoes, even, or take off his leather jacket, which was full of crinkly candy wrappers at the moment. I knew it was bugging him, too, but he wasn't doing anything about it, so he really must have been wiped.

He closed his eyes and tried to shut off his mind for a few minutes. I could feel him pushing me out and down, stifling me. I didn't want to know what would happen if I let him.

So I started humming.

It wasn't any specific song since our tastes in music were drastically different and I didn't want to literally drive him off the deep end, but it was definitely more poppy than Black Sabbath and everything else he'd put on in the car.

Or tried to, at least, because it made him drive like a bat out of hell, and he would rather have silence than listen to me "bitching" at him.

He was ballsy for using that word with a pregnant person. A pregnant person who was only pregnant because of him, to make matters worse. But I was happy enough to have him on his way back with me--even if he planned on leaving as soon as we reached the cabin--that I was giving him more slack than I usually would.

He pinched the bridge of his nose as my humming intensified. "Don't," he pleaded.

I'm afraid to sleep, I sighed, though I did stop before I drove him fully off the deep end. *And that's what's gonna happen if you keep pushing me out like that. I'm going to sleep. Maybe forever. Who knows?*

He was silent for a minute. "We have to get you out," he finally said, forcing himself to sit up even though the world reeled around us like he was going to pass out. "I'll get the clerk's phone so we can do some research."

Good luck wrenching it from him, I said with a snort. *I don't think even vampiric compulsion is strong enough to pull off a stunt like that.*

"Yeah, well, we can try," he said, sticking the key card in his pocket alongside the wrappers before going out into the hall.

As we walked down the hall, I noticed his legs were sluggish and felt like they were made of lead. Was I hurting him somehow by being in his body?

We stopped in front of the desk. The clerk was sitting right where we'd left him, still glued to his phone. He was playing one of those colorful match games, oblivious to the world.

I couldn't blame him. I'd gotten sucked into those games myself back before my untimely death at the hands of the cult.

I was tempted to say as much, but I kept quiet, not only so I wouldn't distract Cameron but because I didn't want to stress him out.

He might have thought I hated him, but I didn't. Far from it.

Why would I be here in the first place if that were the case?

It would've been so much easier to stay in DuPonte's little prepper cabin in the woods, eating dehydrated astronaut food and venison jerky without a care in the world.

And without incurring Ichor's newfound wrath.

Cameron cleared his throat, but the clerk didn't look up. He just held up his index finger to shush him.

"I know you didn't just tell me to be quiet," Cameron said flatly. "I'm your boss, remember?"

"I don't care. This job sucks," the clerk said with a bored sigh. "I just need a minute."

He was blowing through his power ups, so it had to be a hard level.

I felt kind of bad.

Don't hurt him, I said quietly, as if the clerk might be able to hear me. *Please?*

Cameron stepped away from the desk. “One, I’m not going to hurt him, I’m going to compel him,” he whisper-growled. I was sure the clerk could hear him, but then again, he was pretty engrossed in his game. “Two, do you have any idea how exhausting it is to be a predatory monster with a cutesy little fawn—a cutesy little fawn who’s been bloodthirsty himself before, if I may remind you—whimpering in his head every time he dares to exist? Do you know how that feels?”

Wow, I muttered. *That was almost Edward levels of emo.*

And if I was being honest with myself, it was kind of hot.

I always did like a broody guy.

Alex was the exception to the rule, and he’d seemed pretty broody at first, at least until I found out it was because he was trying in vain to quit caffeine.

He rolled his eyes. “Whatever. Just be quiet. I’m going to use the other computer.”

I happily remained silent as Cameron returned to the desk and went around behind it. The clerk didn’t look up from his phone as we settled into the seat behind him. He didn’t care when Cameron logged on to the computer, either, and guessed the password on the first try.

FRONTDESK.

Not exactly secure, but hell if I was going to complain.

Cameron started Googling phrases like “how to get a guy out of your head,” which didn’t go the way he wanted, but eventually, after adding terms like “witchcraft” and “astral traveling” and, surprisingly, “hitchhiker,” we started to have better luck and landed on a promising wiki that was absolutely loaded with information.

Except when we realized the wiki we'd found was for a fandom for a series of fantasy books that definitely wasn't real.

Cameron was annoyed enough that I felt his hand twitch and flex like he was going to put the computer mouse through the screen.

We'll find something eventually, I said, trying to get his hopes up. *Maybe if we look for a grimoire? Try 'digital grimoire.' That's how I find all my stuff.*

"There's no such thing as a digital grimoire," he said under his breath, but he humored me.

Sure enough, the website that made the app I used popped up.

That first result, I said. *That's the one.*

He clicked it begrudgingly as if it physically harmed him for me to be right, but as we started to scroll the page, it quickly became obvious it was a "see, I told you there were Best Westerns in the woods" situation.

What's that about dreamwalkers? I asked, trying to get him to slow down without completely hijacking his hand. *Sounds kind of like what I did, doesn't it? And it's a PDF, too, so it would be easy to print. Wow. There really is a PDF for everything.*

Cameron snorted and clicked on the article, and we started reading, but his eyes were having trouble focusing on the page.

On second thought, it wasn't his eyes at all.

It was his mind.

He was too tired to read?

Let me read it out loud, I offered. *And you can just sit there and relax. The clerk guy won't be able to hear me.*

“Yeah, sure,” he said, much to my surprise.

Dreamwalkers have been around since man first walked the earth, I read. Their ability to move between the physical and spiritual realms has been used for countless centuries in various forms of magical practices. Dreamwalking is one of the more common methods of entering someone else’s mind. It can be used for good or ill purposes, but it is a powerful tool. With enough practice, an astral traveler can learn to accomplish anything—from changing a nightmare into a pleasant dream, to finding lost objects in another person’s mind. Famous dreamwalkers include—

“Can you skim ahead to the part where it tells us how to fix this?” he muttered. “This feels like clickbait. And I don’t want you learning how to find shit in my mind.”

Fine, I huffed. The dreamwalker can interact with people in their dreams or explore an alternate realm altogether. Some believe this could be done without leaving one’s physical body as long as they remain aware of their surroundings at all times; however, care should be taken as there is no guarantee that they will not become lost in time while doing so.

“That’s it?” Cameron grumbled. “Seriously?”

I kept scanning the page, but the article ended there. Below it was a comment section filled with spam and no useful information whatsoever.

I guess, I said, about to give up and look somewhere else when I saw a link in the comments to another article on the website for people who were “lost.”

That didn’t sound alarming at all.

Click on that, I said, and when he did, the PDF downloaded automatically to the computer. Well, shit. I hope it wasn’t loaded with porn viruses.

“I can’t think of a site less likely to have a porn virus on it,” he replied as he opened the file.

Then you haven’t been on the Internet much, I quipped as the PDF filled the screen.

It was fully illustrated with cheesy sparkly animations and angel art, which was always promising. The more basic and shitty the website, the better the information.

As I read the PDF, I realized the entire thing was all about how to stop dreamwalking. Thank God.

Or the gods, but I wasn’t a fan of theirs at the moment.

Want me to summarize this out loud? I offered.

”I guess,” he said flatly, rubbing his left temple.

I’m doing you a favor by not making you read when you’re half-asleep, you know, I mumbled. *Would it kill you to not be a dick for a few minutes?*

He didn't respond.

Guess that was a yes.

It says that if a dreamwalker is beginning to lose time while inside another body, or if they're otherwise stuck, they may need to peel themselves out. To do this, the dreamwalker should first relax and clear their mind. Visualize a safe place, such as a beach or a forest, and take deep breaths until they reach a state of clarity. Then they can focus on the image of themselves exiting the body and returning to their own, as if they're peeling off a sticker. It's important to remain in control throughout the entire process. Otherwise, it could be dangerous.

"It doesn't sound very safe," he said.

Well, the current situation is hurting us both, I explained. So we should probably give it a try.

"But you're nowhere near your body."

I guess I could just... reenter yours if I need to? But you're obviously exhausted. You need a break, at least, I replied.

He shrugged and closed the browser before standing up. "Whatever. Let's try it," he said, not sounding at all convinced, but apparently, he was desperate enough to give it a shot.

He was silent on the way back to the hotel room, but I could sense and hear some of his thoughts as he walked. They were clouded by his exhaustion.

I really needed to get the fuck out of his body.

Once we were in our room, he stretched out on the bed and closed his eyes.

He felt dangerously close to drifting off as I started visualizing the image of myself peeling away from him, starting from the top of my head.

Or what felt like the top of my head.

But I focused on the image, and slowly but surely, I felt my consciousness beginning to move away from his body, and I felt a sense of relief like sinking into a hot Jacuzzi on a cold winter day.

Every time I felt my body sticking back onto his, I peeled that part off until I could see my energy hovering outside of his physical body. The longer we were separated, the more solid I became.

"Would you hurry up?" he muttered. "This feels fucking weird."

Working on it, I said, feeling myself settling back into his body as my focus waned. Just... try to be quiet for a minute. I mean that in the least

confrontational way possible.

He grunted in acknowledgment, but fell silent again.

I closed my eyes and took a deep breath.

The next time I opened them, I found myself back in my own body and lying on the bed behind him. I didn't love the feeling of being the big spoon, especially as pregnant as I was, so I rolled onto my back and stared at my hands to make sure I was real.

My skin was glimmering with trillions of tiny points of light, but I was definitely physical. I could feel my warm skin, the fluffy cords of my beige sweater, my softened belly when I pushed my palms against it...

I couldn't feel the babies moving, but I could sense they were fine and still with me, just presently asleep.

Or maybe they were only here in the astral sense.

That came as a huge relief, considering Ichor had handed my ass to me back in wolf territory.

Cameron rolled over to face me, propping himself up on one elbow. "You figured it out," he said with a tired smirk. "I almost miss you being in my head. Feels lonely now."

I laughed a little. "I think I was killing you."

"Nah. I'm okay," he said, though the dark circles under his eyes and paler-than-usual skin told a different story.

"I can feel the bed," I said, sitting up and trying to pick up the blanket, but it was like I couldn't fully grasp the fabric. It was the same story with the pillow. "Huh."

"Can you touch me?" he asked curiously, offering me his palm.

I hesitated, but when I rested my hand in his, I could feel his skin as vividly as if I weren't in my astral body at all. I caressed down his muscular forearm, then his bicep, feeling his strong body through the thick leather of his jacket.

"Wonder if it's tantra," I said.

"Tantra?" he echoed.

"Yeah. Like sex energy. I bet it's because I'm still in my astral body," I replied. "Weird stuff happens with astral traveling."

"Huh. Maybe you could use a boost," he murmured, leaning in suddenly and pressing his lips to mine.

Just like that, my energy surged, and I felt connected to him in a way I never had before. Not even when I was literally inside his body.

When he pulled away a few moments later--and a few moments too soon--I felt strangely invigorated and energized.

"You're not slapping me even though I'm pretty damn sure you hate me, so I guess that's a yes," he mused, grinning a little as he moved in for another kiss, his hand resting on my side and his thumb caressing me through my sweater.

My cheeks were flushed by the time he pulled away again and my lips were tingling. I had a feeling this was going to be a long night.

"I don't hate you," I said after a moment. "But I've learned hate sex is pretty fucking good."

"You don't?" he asked, seeming genuinely surprised. His sharp gaze softened slightly. It was only a small change, but for him, it was a big deal.

He'd never looked at me like that.

I didn't think he looked at *anyone* like that.

I smiled a little. "No. Not even a little bit," I said, leaning in to kiss him again.

He was usually clean shaven, but he had a scrape of stubble from the trip, and I was already coming up with ways to convince him to keep it. I didn't think a full beard would look right on him, but just a little bit and he'd look like a vampire pirate.

I wouldn't complain about that.

His hair was getting longer, too, the tips brushing his shoulders. I liked that, too.

He closed his eyes as he pressed his lips harder against mine, more passionately than before. I could feel the intensity of his desire building as his hands roamed my body, pulling me closer to him. His fingers traced the edge of my jeans and then slipped underneath, sending chills of pleasure down my spine.

I moaned softly into his mouth, savoring the taste of him and the heat of his body against mine.

My heart fluttered with anticipation as he leaned in to kiss me again. His hands moved from my sides to my hips as he pulled me closer to him, finally pressing his body against mine. I felt like I was melting beneath his touch, and for the first time in what felt like a long while, I felt truly alive.

His hands roamed over my softened body with familiar ease, igniting a fire inside of me that could no longer be contained.

I wanted him now more than ever before.

And it seemed like he wanted me, too.

He pulled away slightly, just enough to look me in the eyes, and I could see the hunger there.

I knew in that moment that no matter what happened next, things between us would never be the same again.

And that was just fine with me.

He whispered something in my ear that I couldn't quite make out, but it made me melt anyway. His breath was hot on my skin and I could feel his hard cock pressing against my thigh. He nipped at my throat just enough to make me flinch in excitement without breaking the skin, his fangs gently scraping against my flesh.

His hands moved up to my chest, teasing my sensitive buds through my clothes until I was writhing against him.

I was about to start begging for him to just hurry up and fuck me when he pushed me onto my back and straddled my squirming hips, pinning me to the bed as he shrugged out of his jacket and pulled his shirt up over his head, revealing his glorious muscular body.

I almost told him to leave my sweater on, but when he started unwrapping me like a present, I kept my mouth shut and let him do whatever he wanted.

But I couldn't help but blush as he caressed my swollen belly with his fingertips, moving further down until he reached the waistband of my pants. He unbuttoned them, freeing my cock, which was hard as a rock already.

I felt pathetic and desperate as I squirmed beneath his touch, but he just seemed pleased.

Amused, which pissed me off a little, but pleased.

"Already so hard for me," he purred in a husky voice that made me squirm with renewed vigor as he palmed my cock in one hand and caressed my pregnant belly with the other.

I sank back against the pillows with a groan, covering my face, but the groan quickly became something completely different when he gave me three gentle strokes and smeared my precome over my crown with his thumb.

He hummed in approval and his lips curled up into a playful smirk as he pulled my hips towards the edge of the bed. He grabbed my legs firmly, spreading them wide open to give himself full access as he bent forward and took my throbbing cock into his mouth.

I gasped in excited fear as his fangs scratched against my sensitive shaft and his hot tongue swept over my crown.

Every stroke of his tongue sent a wave of pleasure through my body that left me quivering. I tried to yank the blanket up to cover myself, but I still couldn't fully grasp the blanket even though I felt a hell of a lot more physically present than I had a few minutes ago.

I let out a groan that was half frustrated and half enraptured.

"Shhh," he whispered, stopping his ministrations to my cock just long enough to press a sharp kiss to my stomach. "Just relax."

"Easy for you to say. You'd make a model feel inadequate," I grumbled, pressing my eyes with my fingertips to try to focus on not breaking his nose with my bucking hips as he returned his attention to my leaking crown.

He just chuckled dryly. "But you're perfect," he murmured in the most sincere tone I'd ever heard from him.

And I believed it.

He lapped at my precome like a starving animal and my hands clutched the sheets beneath me, my body going rigid as I was pushed further and further towards the edge of climax.

My eyes widened in surprise as his fangs touched me again, digging into the sensitive skin just enough to make me whimper. Before I could even process what he was doing, he sucked hard on my shaft, pulling up on it until I couldn't take anymore.

"I'm going to--" I gasped, trying to warn him, but he didn't stop.

Instead, he wrapped his strong arms around my waist, his huge hands supporting the small of my back as I arched against him.

The sensation of his hot, wet mouth combined with the sharp pricks of his fangs pushed me over the edge as I screamed out in pleasure, my body quivering as every nerve in it was electrified.

I clamped my hands down over my mouth to stifle my cry before I woke up everyone in the hotel--assuming anyone was even here and they could somehow hear me in my astral form--as my cock pulsed against his tongue and he swallowed down my pleasure.

He stayed there, humming against my still sensitive flesh as he licked me clean, his grip on me tightening as his desire seemed to grow with each passing second. I could feel his hard cock against my leg through his jeans, and the throbbing I felt only served to keep the bliss alive in my body.

Finally, after what seemed like the most incredible eternity, he pulled away and sat up, wiping his mouth with the back of his hand. I felt my muscles go limp as he dragged a gentle finger down my belly before pressing a kiss to my navel.

"Good boy," he purred, brushing his knuckles along my cheek in a surprisingly affectionate gesture that left me even more breathless.

He tugged my pants all the way off and left them in a shimmering pile on the edge of the bed before climbing over me, his huge, muscular frame arched over me like a bow.

Fuck, I liked hearing that.

His hands roved over my body, exploring every inch of me with a tenderness I hadn't expected from him. His lips consumed my neck as his fingers danced around my hardened buds, and I felt my breath catch in my throat in anticipation of what was to come.

"Excited, huh?" he asked, smirking down at me, his piercing eyes twinkling in a way that made my heart skip a beat.

He still looked tired, but like me, he seemed newly invigorated as the tantric energy flowed between us. He seemed to be feeding from it like it was energetic blood.

He supported himself with his left hand planted on the bed beside me as his right moved lower and lower until it found the cleft of my ass. He rubbed his fingertip against my hole, and another wave of nervousness washed over me as I wondered if he'd judge me for being so slick for him.

I didn't want to come off as desperate, but I needed him inside me.

I needed him like I needed to fucking breathe.

"Guess you are," he mused, nipping at my throat again as he pushed the tip of his finger into my hole.

My back arched as I gasped again, my belly pressing against his rock-hard abs, but judging by the lust that flared in his eyes, it just seemed to fire him

up even more.

"Is it true? Are you sure?" he asked.

"S-sure about what?" I panted, clawing at his arms as he worked my hole. It ached in the best possible way. "Ah!" I cried out, feeling my ass spread around his digit. I squirmed underneath him, my face heating up as my entire body burned.

"That at least one of those babies inside you is mine," he said softly.

"Ichor seemed to think so," I said, my head spinning as he pushed his finger in all the way up to the knuckle. "But I... I don't know... oh, *fuck!*" I gasped as the tip of his finger found my spot and pressed on it.

"She would know," he mused. "For the record, I think it's hot."

"H-hot?" I stammered, bewildered but not complaining as he rubbed my spot in hard but slow circles. I was going crazy beneath him, and my heart was thundering so wildly I felt dizzy. "How is it *hot?*"

"That I bred you," he said huskily.

I shuddered violently in response, both from his words and the fact that he'd just shoved a second finger into me.

"Oh gods," I moaned, arching my back as his fingers found that spot again. He pinched it, and it was like a bolt of lightning had shot through my body.

It wasn't enough, though.

I wanted him.

I *needed* him, and I needed him now.

"M-more," I breathed.

"More what?" he asked with that divine amusement that usually pissed me off. It was pissing me off now, too, because it was firing me up even more.

"I-I don't know," I moaned as he worked my asshole with both his fingers in a scissoring motion until I had no choice but to wrap my legs around his waist, even though it made my hole ache more, or I risked kicking him. "Fuck me. I don't care if I'm ready, just fuck me already."

He was still smirking as he withdrew his hand and pulled me up toward him and lined his crown up against my hole.

"Ohh, fuck," I breathed as he slowly pushed himself inside me, inch by throbbing inch.

His hard length seemed to fit perfectly within my soft walls, like it was made for me, at least until he buried himself up to the hilt and I felt like I was going to split open.

As he sank deeper into me, I felt the swell of bliss emanating from my core. His movements were slow and deliberate, but with a primal intensity that made my toes curl. I wanted to scream his name and beg for more, but I kept it in check for fear of further embarrassing myself.

It was bad enough that I was completely exposed, and the only reason I wasn't trying to grab the blanket again was because the idea of him finding my pregnancy hot was driving me fucking wild.

What the fuck was wrong with me?

His thrusts were slow and steady at first, and then gradually became more passionate as my pleasure mounted.

He kept his gaze locked on mine the entire time, never breaking eye contact as he took me higher until I was unable to take a full breath. My cock was

stuck between us, and every time he thrust into me and his abs rubbed against my length, I felt like I was going to lose my mind.

I held still as he found a steady rhythm, panting hard while he thrust into me. It felt amazing, but there was also a certain amount of discomfort due to the tightness of my hole. He must have sensed this, because after a few minutes, he pulled out slightly before pushing back in. This time, his thrusts were slower and more deliberate, almost like he was savoring every second of it.

He kissed my neck as we moved together, sending little jolts of pleasure through my entire body with each caress of his lips against my skin. My nipples were painfully erect from being dragged across his chest with each stroke, and I had to bite down on my lip to keep from screaming out in pure ecstasy as the friction of our bodies drove me to the brink.

He soon reached his own climax, snarling out my name in a guttural roar that spurred me on to my own peak moments later.

My body quaked with each wave of orgasmic bliss that crashed over me and left me shuddering against him, my nails digging into his shoulder blades.

I cried out in mingled pain and bliss as his come pulsed into me, filling me even more. I felt like a fucking cream puff. He pressed his palms against my belly as he crushed his lips to mine, and I whimpered and writhed from the pressure his hands were exerting.

"Holy shit, I feel like I'm going to explode," I moaned. "How are you still fucking coming?"

"Because you're fucking hot," he rumbled with a dry chuckle. "I can't pull out yet. Not sure I want to, anyway. I want to make sure every single drop of my come is inside you."

"Why the fuck can't you pull out?" I panted as he kneaded me. The pressure building inside me was unhinging me even more. His touch itself was electric.

"Are you forgetting I'm not a normal vampire?" he asked, and when I looked up at him in a daze, his pupils were narrowed into slits and his fangs were noticeably longer and sharper. He grinned at me. "My cock comes with some... enhancements as a result."

"Enhancements?" I breathed. "What do you mean, 'enhancements'?"

"There's a knot, for one thing," he admitted, pausing to gather me into his arms as he rolled onto his side, pulling me with him.

I winced and let out a thin whimper as I felt his swollen cock straining against my hole.

"A knot?" I echoed in disbelief as he cradled me, rubbing my shoulders to soothe me so I wouldn't keep writhing.

Not that I needed to be stopped. Moving even an inch felt like I was going to be split open.

"The base of an alpha male shifter's cock swells up and locks him inside the person he's mating with," he replied, amusement evident in his voice. "Yes, even when we're humans, depending on how long it's been since the full moon."

"So you're literally stuck inside me?" I muttered. "That's kind of hot, I guess, but why didn't it happen before?" My eyes narrowed as I craned my neck to look back at him.

Ouch.

That was a mistake.

"You weren't turned on enough or something?" I challenged, wincing as I adjusted.

"Oh, I was. I pulled out before it could swell up so you wouldn't know about it," he replied. "I didn't feel like answering a bunch of questions at the time."

"Aren't you a gentleman," I grumbled, gasping as he moved a little and it felt like he was going to fucking tear my ass.

There was something sharp inside me, too, digging into my soft walls.

Many sharp somethings, like a dozen tiny hooks.

They were digging into my spot, too, and when he moved again, it felt like he'd shoved an electric cattle prod up my ass. The muscles of my walls spasmed around him, squeezing tight as I cried out in sudden ecstasy and came again.

"Holy fuck," I gasped, my eyes rolling back into my head. The sensation was so intense that for a few moments all thought escaped me, which was the only reason why I wasn't recoiling in embarrassment for coming on his leg even though there wasn't much left in me. "What... what the hell was that?"

"I have barbs on the tip of my cock, too," he said. "Like I do as a hellcat."

"B-barbs?" I echoed incredulously, shaking like a leaf against him as more zaps shot through me from the euphoric pain in my hole. My twitching cock ached, too, after coming again.

But I didn't mind the pain. I was loving it.

"Yes. They come out when we're locked together so I can make sure you have every last ounce of my seed inside you. Like I said about the knot,

depends on when I last shifted, though," he mused.

"Fuck you," I muttered half-heartedly, burying my face in his neck as I tried in vain to catch my breath.

I felt like I was going to pass out from all the sensations assaulting my body. His barbs were driving me wild and his knot was still swollen, keeping him firmly planted inside me. It was amazing, but also terrifying.

"Why is this making me so fucking horny again?" I groaned.

"It's not every day you get fucked by a guy with a monster cock," he said like the smug asshole he was. "You got another round in you?"

"No," I snapped.

That was a lie.

Knowing entered his emerald gaze, and he rolled me over.

I whimpered as the pressure of my weight on my full stomach made me feel like I was going to explode, and I scrambled to get my knees under me to alleviate the ache only to cry out from the sharp pain when his barbs and knot moved inside me.

"It's okay, I've got you," he murmured into my hair, holding me against him as I knelt doggy style on the bed, panting and sweating.

It fucking hurt, but it felt amazing, too.

"Please don't tell me you can come again," I groaned, but my cock was certainly not complaining. It was already at half mast as it bobbed between my legs, bumping against my belly.

"Oh, I can," he assured me, his fingers tracing over my stomach and my sides as he pressed his lips to my shoulder. "I'm going to enjoy this."

I let out a strangled gasp as he started thrusting into me again. His knot kept him from pulling all the way out, and it hurt like a bitch when it strained against my hole with every thrust, but it was the best fucking pain I'd ever experienced, and it wasn't long before I was burying my face in the pillow out of instinct to keep quiet.

"P-please," I panted.

"Please what?" he insisted.

"Fill me," I breathed before I could stop myself.

He froze, his hips stilling as he processed my words, and then he began to thrust harder and deeper, pushing his knot into me with each plunge until I was screaming for mercy into the pillow. He didn't stop, though, and I didn't want him to, even when I felt like I was going to pass out from the pleasure and the pain.

I felt his teeth on my shoulder and then his tongue, kissing the spot after he'd drawn blood.

"Oh, I'm going to fill you," he said, his voice low and throaty. "You're going to be so full when I'm finished with you, you won't be able to take another drop."

I shuddered in anticipation, already feeling my cock getting ready to explode as he pounded into me, his barbs scraping against my spot and his knot stretching my hole to limits I didn't think were possible. At the same time, his hand moved up and down my cock, squeezing it, pumping it like he was milking me.

I was barely aware of him going faster, pounding into me harder, but even while I was getting fucked, I felt like I still couldn't get enough. I wanted to come so fucking bad, but my cock ached to the point I wasn't sure I could.

As soon as I was ready to explode, he would slow down and take his hand away, and I'd have to bite back a wail. When that happened, he'd start pumping me again, and the cycle would repeat until I was sure I was going to lose my damn mind.

"I'm going to come," I panted.

"Not until I say you can," he ordered, slowing down to a torturous rate.

"Fuck!" I shouted. "Please, Cameron!"

"Is this what you want?" he asked, still moving as slowly as he could.

"Yes!" I begged. "Please!"

He picked up a little more speed and started pumping me again. I was so close, I knew I wasn't going to last.

"Please... please..." I moaned, not sure what I was pleading for.

"Now," he ordered, nipping my neck and giving my cock one final tug.

I howled and my world went white as he snarled and came inside me one last time, his pulsing hot come filling me like his cock was a fucking fire hose. I arched against him as much as I could with my swollen belly, crying out again as he milked every last drop of come from my cock until I was whimpering in pain and bliss.

He collapsed next to me, pulling me against his body as he panted into my hair, and I writhed as electric shocks traveled through my body from the barbs digging into my spot.

"*Fuuuuck*," was all I could manage, barely able to make a sound above a whisper before I dissolved into pure bliss again.

He'd reduced me to being unable to think, let alone speak. I lay there, immobilized as the aftershocks of pleasure rippled through my body.

His lips pressed against the side of my throat again. His strong arms wrapped around me, keeping me close to him as I felt his chest rise and fall with each breath against my back. "That's my good boy," he purred.

I snuggled against him as I came down from the dizzying heights he'd brought me to, my ears still ringing as he caressed my side.

"I'm yours," I whispered groggily as my eyelids drooped.

I was spent. Completely and utterly spent. Every bone in my body felt like I'd just been wrung out by some kind of industrial sex machine.

He chuckled and kissed my forehead before settling down, pulling me against him and draping his arm protectively around me. We lay like that for a long time until I started to drift off, safe and happy in his embrace.

Only Cameron could make something that hurt so much feel so fucking good.

Chapter

Six

CAMERON

I woke up with Chase in my arms. As he lay there sleeping peacefully, I lay with him for a long time, listening.

Listening to the soft cadence of his breathing.

The steady patter of his heartbeat, quickening ever so slightly every time he squirmed in his sleep, his eyelids fluttering as he dreamed.

As strange as it felt to admit it, I could lay like that forever, basking in the warmth of his body against mine.

I'd never felt so content before.

No wonder the other guys' worlds revolved around him. His presence was like a goddamn drug.

What was I thinking, letting myself get attached like this? This wasn't going to end well. It *couldn't* end well. My life was one tragedy after another.

I had to keep my distance.

I tried to roll away, but Chase stirred in my arms. He yawned and stretched, his long white hair falling over his face. He looked up at me and smiled, his eyes still sleepy and hazy.

I froze, my heart stuttering in my chest.

He couldn't possibly understand what I was thinking, could he? I was suddenly paranoid he could read my mind even when we were physically separate like this.

"Good morning," he said groggily, the blue aura surrounding him shifting as he stretched like a cat.

"Morning," I said gruffly, suddenly unable to meet his gaze. I cleared my throat and tried to sit up, but he snuggled closer to me.

"Stay," he murmured. "Just a little longer."

I relented with a sigh, sinking back down against the pillows and letting him wrap himself around me.

Fuck. I was in too deep.

As he settled against me, I noticed something strange. His skin seemed almost translucent in the morning light, like it was glowing from within. He looked almost otherworldly.

I frowned and reached out to touch his arm, feeling the electric buzz of energy that ran through my body when our skin connected.

"Cameron?" Chase murmured, his voice barely above a whisper.

"Yeah?" I said, giving him a gentle squeeze.

"I don't want this to end," he said softly. "But I feel weird."

"Maybe we shouldn't be separated right now," I replied, as much as I dreaded the thought of sharing my body with him again. It was... an experience, to say the least.

"Maybe," he said, his voice barely audible.

"Come on," I muttered, patting my chest like I was calling a kitten. He snuggled closer and began to sink into my body, his aura glimmering as it spread across my skin.

This merge was much less chaotic and abrupt than when he'd landed in my body back in wolf territory. This time, I could feel his heartbeat and gentle breathing as our energies intertwined, and while I felt him accessing my mind to some extent, it didn't bother me as much as it had before.

How do you feel about hotel breakfast? he asked in my head once I felt him fully settling in. *They usually have a bar. We could get a variety of different stuff before we get on the road.*

Human food for breakfast didn't sound particularly appetizing to my vampiric sensibilities, but I wasn't about to deprive him. I'd learned my lesson about that. He could be moody as hell when he wanted to be.

And I kind of liked taking care of him for some reason.

"Sure," I said, stretching before swinging my legs over the side of the bed and standing up. "But I want to take a shower first."

No complaints there, Chase replied in a husky voice that wasn't like him at all. To be fair, it wouldn't have been husky coming from anyone else.

I turned the water on and waited for it to heat up before stepping into the shower. It was almost unbearably hot, but it felt damn good, and if I was going to be trapped in a car for the rest of the day, I wanted to get the day off to a good start.

I see we share the same scalding shower values, Chase mused as I tore open the packet of soap.

"Scalding shower values?" I echoed with a dry laugh, rubbing the soap in circles all over my body. I was uncharacteristically achy, probably from the

energy drain, but I could feel Chase's energy surging as I moved further down.

Let me take over for a second, he replied.

Before I could even respond, his energy surged around me and my right hand moved on its own accord, sliding down my stomach before stopping at the base of my cock. He teased the patch of dark hair there before wrapping my hand around my shaft, stroking the veins that were already beginning to pulse.

My body tensed as my hand moved faster, working in time with Chase's energy, and I felt my arousal mounting with each passing second as he stroked my cock. My eyes rolled back into my head and I let out a soft growl as the pleasure washed over me, hotter than the steaming water.

Chase kept up the rhythm, his energy directing my hand as he brought me closer and closer to release. I could feel the pleasure radiating from my core as each stroke got faster.

Chase was giving me the full force of his energy as my hand moved up and down my shaft, and I felt my balls begin to tighten, nearing their limit as Chase squeezed a bit harder around my shaft. The knot at the base of my cock was already swelling, and he palmed it appreciatively.

I can't believe I took that, he said with a little laugh. *It's the size of a fucking apple.*

"I can't believe you did, either," I panted as he moved my hand back to my shaft.

My breathing became ragged and I felt my orgasm building until it was just on the edge of bursting forth and I could barely stand upright. I'd jerked off in the shower before, but this was next fucking level.

You like that? he purred. *You want more?*

"You'd better not stop," I muttered as his strokes slowed and he moved my hand to my sensitive crown, teasing it. That combined with the water droplets hitting it was driving me nuts, and he knew it.

I want you to beg for it the way you made me beg last night, he said in a sultry voice I'd never heard from him before. I wasn't sure how I felt about Chase being dominant, but I was so horny now, I wasn't going to complain.

"Fine," I growled.

He hesitated, my shaft throbbing against my hand. His hand? I didn't fucking know anymore. *Fine?* he echoed. *That doesn't sound like begging to me.*

"Make me come."

Chase squeezed the hard knot at the base of my cock again. *Fuck, that feels good*, he said. He was panting now, too, in time with me.

He stroked down the length of my shaft, milking the precome out of me. I leaned against the shower wall and closed my eyes, focusing on my breathing as he resumed pumping me.

Say the word, he whispered.

"Say what word?" I asked breathlessly.

You know what word I mean, he sang, slowing down until I couldn't handle it anymore.

"Please," I said through my teeth.

His strokes increased in speed and intensity. My legs shook as the pleasure crested, radiating through my body like electricity as I came hard enough

that I almost lost my footing. My head rolled back and I let out a loud moan as the release washed over me in waves.

Chase kept up the rhythm for a few moments longer before slowing to let me come down from the high. He removed my hand, and I could sense his amusement--as well as his own pleasure--as I gasped for air.

"Holy shit," I muttered as soon as I managed to catch my breath. "What the fuck was that all about?"

Just thought it would be interesting, Chase panted along with me.

Interesting was a fucking understatement. The moment that thought crossed my mind, Chase laughed in my head somewhere. I had to get better about shutting him out of my thoughts before he saw things that would be a problem.

Like what? he asked curiously.

"Nothing," I said quickly.

I won't look at your thoughts if it bothers you, he said, sounding pretty sincere, which surprised me. I knew how nosy he was. How much he liked to snoop.

"Why wouldn't it bother me?" I scoffed, rinsing the soap--and come--off my skin. "It's fucking intrusive to have someone literally in your head."

You didn't seem to mind what just happened, he said teasingly.

"Yeah, well, I didn't say there weren't any positives on the growing list of pros and cons," I replied, lathering my hair with the small bottle of shampoo on the shelf. I was lucky it wasn't that long. Hotels really didn't give you much.

Chase just laughed again.

I was still blissed out from the handjob and in a haze as I stepped out of the shower and toweled off. I hated the feeling of wet skin against denim, and I only pulled my jeans on once I was thoroughly dry to the point where I was sure Chase was going to make a remark about it, but to my surprise, he was quiet.

You like to show off your bulge, huh? he asked, breaking the silence. I should've known it wouldn't last.

"What are you talking about?" I muttered, finger-combing my wet hair in the mirror.

Your pants are basically painted on, he said. *And I thought I was the king of tight pants.*

I rolled my eyes and chose not to dignify that with a response.

Move your bangs to the left a little.

I frowned at my reflection. "Huh?"

Just trust me, he insisted.

I sighed, but I ran my fingers through my hair to flip it over to the other side. "Happy now?" I asked.

Yep, he said. *You know, it's nice that you take your appearance seriously considering you were a straight guy before I came along.*

"What's that supposed to mean?" I growled, leaving the bathroom to make sure I had all my shit before heading out into the hall.

It was a compliment, he said. *My bar for hetero men is pretty low.*

I snorted. "Thanks a bunch."

Well, you're not actually straight, so you shouldn't be offended, he said.

I scowled even though he couldn't see my expression. "I am straight," I said under my breath as I walked into the hotel lobby, hoping no one was paying attention to me as I talked to myself.

Are you sure about that? he teased. *Haven't you screwed around with humans while you were hunting them?* Cyrus--

"Very," I grumbled, cutting him off as I followed the somewhat nauseating smell of eggs and waffles. I didn't want breakfast at all, but if we didn't get something, I wasn't going to hear the end of the complaining for the rest of the trip. And I'd rather have hotel breakfast than even shittier truck stop breakfast.

Is there cheese? he asked hopefully, sufficiently distracted from the conversation at hand.

"You tell me. We're seeing the offerings at the same time," I replied, trying not to wrinkle my nose at the smell of all the steaming hot food at the breakfast bar.

Fuck, I could go for some blood. Even from a bag.

There was that distracted clerk...

I was expecting Chase to bitch me out for thinking about that, but he didn't say anything, so maybe he wasn't digging around in my thoughts at the moment after all. I wasn't sure whether to be grateful or annoyed that was an option for him before and he chose to listen anyway.

I knew better than to even try to get a bite--a real bite--with him in my head, though.

I'm guessing you're not an omelet guy, Chase said, and I snapped out of my fog only to realize he'd been filling the plate all along. He'd gotten a pile of

bacon, at least. Meat was okay, although greasy charred meat wasn't my favorite.

"Not really," I admitted. "But if you want one, get one. I'll find a way to deal with it."

Such a gentleman, he replied.

Him talking to me like I was his pet dog would normally bug me, but I couldn't help the slight smile that tugged at the corners of my mouth.

When I dropped him off with the other guys, I was going to miss him. That much was clear.

Chapter

Seven

CHASE

I 'd never thought I would regret a cheesy omelet with bacon, but as we neared the third hour of driving, I found myself wondering if breakfast at the hotel had been a bad idea after all.

Cameron wasn't complaining, but his weakness from the sheer level of grease was clear, and it felt like we'd eaten lead. He was bloodthirsty enough that he focused briefly on a deer grazing by the side of the road as we passed it.

You okay? I asked, worried.

"Yeah," he muttered in a dismissive tone. "I'm fine."

You just looked at Bambi's mom like she was a walking Happy Meal, I said. You know those retro cartoons where a starving guy would look at another character and imagine a giant Thanksgiving turkey? Yeah. That was you just now. If you need to drink...

"I don't," he said, gripping the steering wheel tightly enough that his nails dug into the leather, nearly tearing it.

When had they gotten so sharp?

I wanted to tell him to relax before he destroyed Christine's car--I'd kind of invented a whole persona for her in my head since we stole it, most likely because I felt like shit about it and my guilty conscience was eating at me--but I was genuinely worried about him.

I'm sure there's someone deserving of meeting a vampiric doom out here, I said, breaking the silence growing between us. We could go hunting at a bar. There's always some sleazy asshole harassing a girl.

"I'm surprised you think 'sleazy assholes' deserve to be executed," he said dryly. "You seem to have a soft spot for them."

I bristled. *And you have a soft spot for bitch.*

"I do," he mused.

And there's a huge difference between a guy who thinks he has game but doesn't and a guy who's hunting for drunk prey, I added. Alex wouldn't do something like that.

He laughed, but there wasn't much energy in it. "I like how you knew I was referring to Alex right away even though you're with a whole fucking harem."

You don't seem like you'd mind being added to it, I pointed out before I could help myself.

Judging from the silence that followed, that was a mistake.

For a few minutes, all I heard was the hum of the engine, and I was pretty sure Cameron was trying to make up his mind about something. I didn't have to dig around in his thoughts without his consent to know he was ruminating over what I'd said.

The tells were all there--the way he was staring at the road as he drove on autopilot, the subtle twitch of his fingers on the steering wheel, the way he gnawed at the inside of his lower lip...

Fuck, I was really starting to get to know him better.

And the more I knew him, the more I wanted him to be with me.

With *us*.

But I could tell he was planning on dropping me off at the cabin and leaving, probably for good this time. If he didn't want to force me to terminate my pregnancy--and I truly didn't think he did anymore--it was going to be weird for him if he stuck around.

There were a lot of reasons it would be weird for him, actually.

He took an exit suddenly, yanking me out of my thoughts.

Whoa! I cried in surprise, but he was never out of control of the vehicle. I should've known better than to think Cameron, of all people, was capable of wiping out.

"Relax. Nothing will happen if we crash," he muttered. "It would take a hell of a lot more than a wreck to do anything to this body."

But it's Christine's car, I protested.

"Who?" he asked, frowning in the rearview mirror at me--us--like I was a kid in the backseat who was absolutely baffling him.

She's the one who owns this car in my headcanon, I grumbled.

"Headcanon?" he echoed incredulously.

Oh, come on, you never read fanfic?

"Uh, no?"

I sighed. *My imagination, then. I named whoever owns this car because I was bored out of my fucking mind.*

"Bored out of *my* fucking mind," he corrected me with a snort. "For what it's worth, I..." His voice trailed off like what he was saying was physically painful. "I appreciate you not digging through my brain anymore to amuse yourself."

Did you just say you appreciate me? I asked, pleasantly surprised. *Geez, you really have changed.*

"I'm getting attached to you," he said through his teeth. "Too fucking attached. And it's gonna stop when I get you back to DuPonte's safe house. So about your harem proposition--if that's what that was--no. Not a good idea."

I sighed. I'd been afraid of that, and hearing directly that he was leaving when we got to the cabin put a serious damper on my mood.

But I wasn't giving up yet.

I'm attached to you, too, I said. *Not just getting attached, either. I mean I already am. Very. I don't fuck guys I'm not really, really into.*

"I'm aware," he said, the words sounding like they were coming out of him like molasses. He sighed, too, and finally met my eyes in the rearview mirror.

Our eyes?

It was all confusing as fuck.

"But nothing can come of it," he continued. "I'm not the kind of guy you need."

And your brother is? I asked pointedly. *What about Sam? He's one of my best friends, and he literally betrayed me. Then there's Alex, who's not exactly a normal vampire anymore, either, so if you're about to launch into an emo monologue about being a monster that would make Edward uncomfortable, save it.*

He hesitated. "What do you mean, Alex isn't a 'normal' vampire anymore? He's living cardboard."

He's a hellhound now, I replied carefully, realizing I could totally turn the conversation in my favor if I played my cards right.

Cameron clearly had a protective streak where I was concerned, especially now. If he was willing to eat an omelet for me, surely he was willing to stay at the cabin if it meant I wouldn't get devoured by a monster dog.

He was a cat, after all.

Sort of.

I just had to make sure I didn't throw Alex under the bus to the point where Cameron did something about him.

"That took?" Cameron asked flatly, in a tone that suggested he didn't fully believe me. "I just assumed the demon would have gotten tired of him by now and checked out."

Be nice. He sold his soul to save me, and to keep Sam from doing it, I said, scowling. *And he can be scary when he wants. It's... kind of hot, actually. Wonder if he'll get a monster cock like yours eventually?*

Cameron was silent for long enough that I almost asked if he'd heard me. "Fucking hell," he finally muttered. "You really are in too deep."

Yep, I said proudly. *So I might as well be in too deep with you, too.*

He just shook his head, but I wasn't sure if he was saying no or if it was more that he was tired of my shit and didn't know what to say. Either way, he kept his eyes on the road and didn't say anything else until we pulled into the gravel parking lot of a bustling small-town bar.

It looked like the kind of place where there would be suitable prey, that was for sure. The anthropomorphic fiberglass cow statue on top of the bar wearing a bedazzled hot pink bra over its udders was enough of a clue.

And the fact that the bar was literally called *The Shithole*.

"You're sure you don't mind a hunt?" he asked, smirking into the rearview mirror.

It's not like I haven't done it myself, I muttered. I tried not to think about what had happened when I woke up in the morgue, but I lived with myself by reminding myself it wasn't my fault. And what was about to happen wasn't my fault, either. *We're going to choose carefully, right? I want you to hunt the scummiest scumbag in there.*

"There will be no shortage," he assured me as he got out of the car, getting a few amused looks from the bikers by the entrance since it wasn't exactly the most masculine vehicle. I felt his anger bubbling up immediately and sensed him eyeing their throats.

Scummier, I whispered.

He rolled his eyes and walked into the bar, bristling as we passed the bikers. The smell of cigarettes, body odor, and alcohol hit me like a ton of bricks as Cameron breathed.

Vampire senses were a hell of a thing.

His sharp gaze scanned the room for a potential target. The air was thick with smoke to the point where the gaudy art on the paneled walls was

difficult to make out, save for a few neon signs displaying various brands of alcohol.

Do you have to breathe? I asked, trying not to gag.

"If I don't want to sound like I'm talking underwater, yes," he replied, honing in on a red-nosed guy at the counter who looked like a jacked bald Santa.

Jacked Santa was in the middle of a conversation with a cute blonde woman who looked like she'd rather be anywhere else, but he was clearly drunk off his ass and completely oblivious.

Or willfully oblivious, judging from the way he was looking at her like a piece of meat.

Little did he know *he* was the one on the menu tonight.

Cameron walked up to the two humans and stood on the girl's other side. Jacked Santa kept yammering away about his security job in between asking the girl intrusive questions like if she'd come alone and how he was happy to give her a ride "somewhere more private" even though he was wasted because he knew all the cops in the area.

Guess Cam picked well.

"Is this guy giving you trouble?" Cameron asked, nodding to the girl. She looked up at him in surprise, then looked awkwardly at Jacked Santa like she wasn't sure what to do. "You don't owe anyone a conversation," he added.

"The hell she doesn't," Jacked Santa snapped, already at a ten on the rage meter. "I bought her a drink."

Cameron raised an eyebrow. "A drink she hasn't touched? Wonder why."

Jacked Santa's face turned beet red with unbridled anger, and he looked like he was already preparing to cave Cameron's face in. That would *not* go well. "What the fuck are you implying, boy?"

"That fruity drink isn't supposed to fizz," Cameron said flatly.

A look of horror passed over the girl's face as she put two and two together, and she pushed the drink away quickly, like she might accidentally ingest it if it were too close to her.

Jacked Santa's eyes blazed with indignant fury. "You don't know what you're talking about."

"I can smell it, dumbass," Cameron replied. "Come with me. Now."

The bearded man's eyes glazed over and his mouth fell open as energy surged from Cameron into his body. His eyes rolled back into his head and he began to sway on his feet.

Cameron caught him before he could fall. Nobody seemed to notice, though the girl looked a few shades paler. Guess it was common for people to get utterly trashed and lightheaded here.

"Must've had one too many," Cameron said to the girl. "He won't bother you anymore."

She gulped hard enough I heard it with Cameron's heightened sense of hearing. "Y-yeah," she said, backing up until she disappeared into the crowd.

Is she going to tell anyone? I asked Cameron warily.

"Does it matter?" he asked as he effortlessly hauled the asshole out through the back exit and around the corner. "Who's she gonna tell? Ghostbusters? Humans don't know how to contact hunters. It's fine."

I guess.

He unceremoniously dumped Jacked Santa's limp body next to the dumpster. I knew that was where he belonged, but it was still kind of weird to see a human being treated like a lump of meat.

A flashback to when I attacked that guy at the morgue intruded on my thoughts and I pushed the images away.

I tried to, anyway. Not easy.

"You sure you're good with this?" Cameron asked. "You're not gonna have a human rights meltdown?"

No, I said with a snort. *He deserves it if anyone does.*

"Glad we're on the same page," he said with a smirk as he bent over the guy and sank his fangs--our fangs--into his throat with no warning whatsoever.

Hot blood flowed into our mouth, but it didn't taste delicious like it should have on Cameron's tongue.

It tasted sick.

Disgusting.

"This is why I don't like to bite drunk guys," Cameron muttered, withdrawing his fangs and lapping aggressively at the blood trickling onto the collar of the guy's shirt.

Then who do you bite? I scoffed. *Innocent guys?*

"Sometimes," he admitted. "But I don't typically kill them."

I winced as he bit Jacked Santa's neck again, but the guy just lay there listlessly, staring off into space. He twitched now and then like he was coming back to his senses, but he didn't seem bothered, at least.

Then again, who the fuck knew what he was planning on doing to that girl.

Actually, I did know.

Why was I trying to tell myself he might be innocent? Why torture myself wondering if this wasn't the right thing to do? Cameron was hardly a moral person, even by vampire standards--as far as I knew, anyway--but he wasn't evil. Not really.

But would he kill unnecessarily? Did that make him evil in the first place if he wasn't even human? Was a wolf evil for eating deer?

Why was I thinking about this existential shit to begin with?

Hell, I'd done it once myself. Maybe I was just trying to justify it because I cared about him.

Cared being the understatement of the century.

"You okay?" he asked, not bothering to hide the amusement in his voice as he stood, leaving Jacked Santa pale and ashen but still breathing.

You could hear all that? My thoughts, I mean, I replied, sincerely hoping he hadn't.

"Nah. You were just silent and I figured you were having some kind of moral crisis," he said with a snort. "I'd say it's like having an angel on my shoulder, but you're more like the devil sometimes."

I can't tell if that's an insult or not, I said, hoping my relief wasn't obvious.

"Not an insult at all. I'm not my brother, in case it wasn't obvious. I like that you have a dark side," he replied, using the inside of his sleeve cuff to wipe the blood off his mouth.

A dark side? I echoed dryly. *What's that supposed to mean?*

He just shrugged. "Ready to hit the road again? Kinda looking forward to the mindfuck my brother will go through when he realizes we're sharing my body," he said, walking back toward the front parking lot. "You'd better not do anything weird."

Weird? Me? I asked innocently. *I would never.*

Chapter

Eight

SAM

Under Lash's watchful gaze, Alex and I worked like a well-oiled machine in the dimly lit kitchen, preparing various teas to aid Cyrus in his search for Chase on the astral plane. The air was heavy with the scents of crushed herbs, and my fingers were stained green from the potion-making process.

"Okay, Sam, give this one to Cyrus," Lash instructed, handing me a steaming cup filled with dark liquid that resembled mud more than tea.

"Sure. Take what, seven?" I muttered as I carried the cup upstairs while Alex got started on the next batch.

Cyrus looked about as green as my fingertips as he sat on the edge of the bed, prepared to go into the astral realm yet again after Chase, who hadn't stirred in the slightest in hours.

I handed Cyrus the cup and he took a sniff, grimacing. "Gods, this smells vile."

"Come on, you big baby. Drink up."

Cyrus choked the concoction down and within minutes, he was grimacing and turning even paler. "There's probably more tea in me than blood at this

point."

"You want some?" I asked, offering my wrist to him.

It wasn't like I enjoyed getting bitten--at least, not by him--but he was taking one for the team by doing this shit, so it felt like the least I could do. When I saw him turn an even more inhuman shade than usual and felt the blur that was him rush past me and into the bathroom before he vomited in the sink, I realized that wasn't actually a good idea.

"Sorry," I said, wincing as I listened to him continue to puke up what was probably a gallon's worth of magical tea at this point. I could hear footsteps on the stairs, and soon enough, Lash was in the doorway, frowning at the sight before him. Alex wasn't far behind.

"Damn, haven't heard someone get that sick since I ate that sushi at the gas station," Alex mumbled.

"This isn't safe for him anymore," Lash said, his brows furrowing. "Even a vampire has his limits, especially with magic. Even if he manages to go back into the astral and find Chase, he'll be in no condition to protect either of them at this point."

"I'm fine," Cyrus said, finally emerging from the bathroom, wiping down his face with a damp cloth. He looked anything but. "I can keep going. We need to find Chase."

Lash shook his head. "Not like this, you can't. You're tapped out, Cyrus. Someone else is going to have to take over."

Alex and I exchanged a look.

Fuck.

The last time I'd been a magical guinea pig had been my grandmother trying out one of her herbal remedies, and that had resulted in me coughing up blue shit for a week. I really didn't want to go through that again.

The others were looking at Alex, too, and he groaned. "Come on!" he cried, giving me a pleading look. "I sold my soul so you wouldn't have to. The least you can do is drink some tea for me!"

I rolled my eyes, knowing he had a point. Besides, the longer we waited, the more danger Chase was in. "Fine," I grumbled, sitting down on the edge of the bed where Chase was still sleeping soundly. "What's the next brew, Lash?"

"Here," he said, taking the earth-hued cup from Alex and handing it to me. "Now, remember, Sam, this is a powerful blend. It'll kick in fast, so try to focus on finding Chase as soon as you hit the astral plane.

"Easier said than done, if Cy's attempts are any indication," I muttered, staring down at the swirling liquid with an uneasy feeling in my stomach.

"Good luck," Alex said, giving me a thumbs-up.

I took a deep breath and threw the tea back, gagging at the bitter taste. It was earthy and pungent, coating my tongue like sludge. As the last drops slid down my throat, a warmth blossomed in my stomach, spreading through my limbs. The room around me started to spin and fade, replaced by a kaleidoscope of colors and shapes.

I lay down next to Chase, reaching over to brush a strand of hair from his face as the world dissolved around me.

When the chaos finally settled, I found myself floating in a vast expanse of stars. I twisted around, trying to get my bearings, but there was nothing to see in any direction.

"Chase?" I called out, my voice echoing into the abyss. "Can you hear me?"

No response. I grit my teeth in frustration, Lash's warning ringing in my head. I had to focus, had to find Chase before it was too late.

Closing my eyes, I concentrated on our bond, the threads that tied our souls together. At first, there was only darkness, but slowly a pinprick of light emerged in the distance. I latched on to it, pulling myself forward through the starry sea.

The light grew brighter and brighter until I came upon a massive, ornate gate, its metal bars twisted into ominous shapes. My heart seized at the sight of a familiar figure slumped against the gate, hair obscuring his face.

"Chase!" I shouted, relief and fear warring inside me.

I swam through the void toward him, my heart pounding in my chest. As I reached out to touch his shoulder, a sudden gust of wind sent me tumbling backward into darkness, and when the person I'd just reached for looked up, his face was anything but the beautiful, familiar constellation of features I knew so well. It was a snarling, hideous visage, eyes glowing a sickly green as a forked tongue flicked out between jagged teeth.

The creature lunged for me, claws outstretched, and I barely managed to leap back in time, flailing through the void. My heart was in my throat as I willed myself to wake, to escape the monster chasing me.

What the fuck was that thing?

I wasn't going to stick around long enough to find out as I plunged headfirst into the darkness, knowing anything had to be better than staying here. As I tumbled through the void, the scene around me shifted rapidly like a kaleidoscope of wild hallucinations. Giant mushrooms loomed over me, their caps dripping with phosphorescent liquid, casting eerie shadows on the

twisted trees surrounding them. The atmosphere was heavy, and I could taste the tang of magic in the air.

"Focus, Sam," I whispered to myself, trying to remember Lash's instructions. "Find Chase."

I knew I couldn't let fear overwhelm me. Chase needed my help, and this place wasn't real...

Was it?

"Chase!" I shouted into the dense foliage, my voice echoing strangely among the twisted branches. There was no response. I kept moving, fighting down the panic rising in my chest. The landscape continued to shift unpredictably around me, transporting me from one strange place to the next. An endless maze, a twisted fairy-tale castle, a field of poppies under a green sky.

But no Chase.

I was beginning to lose hope when a flicker of movement caught my eye. A fox with russet fur and a bushy dark tail peered at me from behind a large toadstool. Its eyes glowed an eerie green, and a strange pull drew me toward the creature. I stumbled closer, entranced by its gaze.

The creature turned and bolted through the twisted trees, and I chased after it without thinking, not even knowing why I was following it other than on some instinct I couldn't make sense of. It darted around tree trunks and leaped over fallen logs with a grace that I couldn't help but admire, even as I struggled to keep up.

Then, abruptly, it vanished.

I skidded to a stop, panting heavily as I looked around for any sign of movement. But the forest was still and silent.

Too still.

Too silent.

The hair on the back of my neck prickled as I realized I was being watched. Slowly, I turned around.

A pair of familiar glowing green eyes stared back at me from the darkness, but they didn't belong to the small russet fox. Instead, it had shifted into a massive beast, its fur a mix of shadows and moonlight. The creature's haunting beauty was undeniable, but there was something terrifying about it as well.

"Sam," it whispered in a voice that seemed to come from the very wind itself. "Help me."

"Chase?" I asked hesitantly, taking a step closer. But even as I did so, doubt gnawed at the back of my mind. The creature before me didn't feel right. It felt like an illusion, a trap waiting to be sprung.

And how the fuck did it know my name?

"Sam!" another voice called, this one distant and muffled. I hesitated for a moment, torn between the creature before me and the voice calling my name. But there was real fear and desperation in that distant shout, and it sounded like Alex.

With a snarl, the creature lunged toward me, fangs bared and claws outstretched. I dove to the side, rolling behind a large oak tree as the beast slammed into it. Wood splintered and cracked, but the tree held.

"Sam, wake up!" Alex shouted again, his voice sounding clearer. I could feel a ghostly hand on my shoulder, as if someone was touching me, but nothing was there. I continued to run, caught between this hellish, acid-trip dream world and the reality where my body still was, with the fox beast in

pursuit. I could feel it was close behind me, its hot, fetid breath washing over the back of my neck.

I turned sharply, grabbing a low-hanging branch and then swinging myself up and over the beast's head. It skidded to a stop, claws tearing furrows in the earth as it struggled to turn around.

"Sam!" Alex roared, and I felt another sharp tug at my shoulder.

The creature let out an unearthly shriek, fury etched into every line of its vulpine face.

But even as it opened its mouth again, everything started to fade. The colors bled away into grays, the sounds dampening until all I could hear was my harsh breathing. Something frigid splashed across my face, and with a gasp, I was yanked back into reality. I jolted upright, coughing and sputtering as water dripped down my face. Blinking rapidly to clear my vision, I found myself back in our makeshift headquarters in the middle of the woods. Alex stood over me, looking concerned, holding an empty bucket.

"Damn it, Alex," I growled, wiping at my face. "Why is it always water with you?"

"Be glad it wasn't lemonade," Cyrus said in a dry tone. "And your heart was hammering. It's probably a good thing he pulled you out when he did."

That, I couldn't deny, even if I wanted to. My chest ached and my breath was ragged, but I couldn't help feeling frustrated that I hadn't been able to find Chase yet. I turned to Lash, who was watching me carefully. "I couldn't find Chase, but I saw something while I was in there. Or it... saw me first."

"What did it look like?" he asked, frowning.

"It looked like a normal fox with weird, glowing green eyes at first," I answered. As vivid as the creature had been in that dream state, the longer I

was awake, the more surreal it all seemed. "But then it changed. It got huge and its fur was black and gray with a weird, shiny texture, almost like metal, and it had huge teeth. It attacked me and I'm pretty sure it would have eaten me if I hadn't woken up."

"I knew it," Alex muttered, his arms folded in indignation as he listened.

"It sounds like a demon," Lash said, growing more serious.

"It was too beautiful to be a demon," I protested. "It didn't look anything like Cameron."

"Demons come in all forms," said Lash. "Besides, some of the most beautiful creatures I've ever seen were demons. They're notorious for their shapeshifting abilities and drawing people in with their appearances," he explained, a note of caution in his voice.

"Great," I said, wringing out my wet hair. "Just what we need. Another monster on our asses."

"Do you think that thing could follow him back here," Cyrus asked, turning to Lash.

"Possible, but unlikely," Lash reassured us. "The astral realm is a tricky place, and it's not that easy for entities to cross over into our world. They'd need someone with exceptional power or a strong connection to the person they're following."

"Exceptional power, like a godbearer?" Alex asked, raising an eyebrow.

"Exactly," Lash said, nodding gravely. "Which is why we must be extra cautious moving forward. Chase is still out there somewhere, and we can't risk attracting any more unwanted attention."

"I'll go back in," I said earnestly.

"No, absolutely not," Lash said firmly. "It's too dangerous, especially now that something is clearly onto your scent. We'll have to find another way."

I opened my mouth to argue but Cyrus cut me off. "Sam, he's right. I've gone in...what, almost a dozen times? The first time you go in, a demon sniffs you out."

I wasn't sure if I should be offended, but he had a point.

"I'll do it," Alex said before I could argue any further. "Can't be any worse."

"I guess we don't have much of a choice," said Cyrus.

Lash sighed. "I'll brew some more tea."

Chapter

Nine

CHASE

I never thought I'd be so happy to see a cabin in the middle of nowhere, but after such a long trip, as we pulled up to DuPonte's hideout, it might as well have been my own personal slice of heaven.

I was so much closer to a hot shower.

My *own* hot shower.

Well, DuPonte's, but I wouldn't be in Cameron's body for it, at least.

The air was crisp and cool outside as we stepped out of the car. *Can I take over for a minute?* I asked him, enjoying the gentle breeze on our face. *I just want to stretch. I need to stretch.*

He sighed, but I could tell he was too tired to argue after hours spent listening to all the best new hits--interspersed with my favorite retro pop songs, of course--for hours. I'd learned early on that letting him put on rock just made him more aggressive, and I was intent on getting the car back to its rightful owner in one piece.

Sure, it would have to be transported a shitload of miles, but at least it was in good shape.

When he didn't tell me no, I pushed my energy through his body until I was solidly in the driver's seat. I stretched my arms to the sky, loving the feeling of the tension from the long ride dissipating from my body. I sighed in bliss when I felt a satisfying pop in Cameron's spine.

There was seriously nothing like a good stretch after a road trip from hell.

Can you stop doing yoga in DuPonte's front yard? They're coming out of the cabin and you're making me look like a dumbass, Cameron said.

"Yeah, yeah," I muttered, looking up to see Cyrus, Sam, and Alex coming out of the house. They were walking hard and fast, like they wanted to kick Cameron's ass. Cyrus looked especially pissed, his face a mask of anger and his eyes blazing with rage. He was marching towards Cameron and me with long, determined strides, his fists clenched at his sides. He looked like he wanted to reach out and throttle his brother.

I gave them a wave.

I don't wave, Cameron growled.

Cyrus stopped in his tracks and put out his arm, stopping Sam and Alex. Judging from the wary look he was giving his brother, that had clued him in that something was amiss.

"What are you doing here, Cameron?" he asked tensely.

"I'm Chase," I replied, amused when his handsome face went completely blank. It was kind of funny, actually, hearing my flamboyant intonations coming out of Cameron's mouth. He was usually so serious.

"You're what now?" Cyrus asked in an incredulous tone that made me wonder if I was actually closer to a throttling than I had been before.

I cleared my throat, trying to keep the nervousness out of my voice. "I'm Chase. Cameron let me borrow his body for a little while." I gave a small shrug, trying to look nonchalant since I knew a fight between the brothers wouldn't be bloodless. Not by a long shot. "It's a long story. I astral traveled and we ended up stuck together. Ichor basically slapped me into the next dimension."

Cyrus blinked. "You found Ichor?" he asked doubtfully.

"Yep. Call that witch friend of yours," I said, heading toward the cabin. The guys moved in front of me, but their attempt to block me was half-hearted and confused. I rolled my eyes. "Are you kidding me right now?"

"If you're telling the truth," Cyrus said slowly, "then when we get you back into your body, Cameron's going to have control again. And we don't need to have Cameron here."

"He said he's gonna leave even though I don't want him to," I said flatly.

I could tell from the way Cyrus was working his jaw that he didn't fully believe me. "You don't, huh?"

"Nope. We're cool," I replied, walking up to him. I knew how to convince him I was telling him the truth, but I was surprised Cameron wasn't stopping me from what I was about to do. When I pressed my lips to Cyrus's, nothing happened.

Cyrus stared at me for a second before holding up his index finger in a scolding motion. "Don't make this any weirder than it already is."

"I'm just proving it's me," I said, exasperated.

"How would that prove anything?" he asked, arching an eyebrow. "We've done more than that when we've had a threesome. Pretty sure I've mentioned that."

"You haven't mentioned it enough," I replied.

That was an interesting thought. A *very* interesting thought.

"We can ask Lash if he's telling the truth," Alex said from where he stood safely behind Cyrus, who was still looking at me doubtfully. "He'll be able to tell, right?"

"Yeah, if he ever wakes up," Sam said with a snort, coming up to me. "If it's really you, Chase, what's your phone password?"

At least someone was using their head. "120281," I replied before hesitating. "Wait, you're not trying to get into my phone, are you?"

Sam and Alex looked at each other. Alex laughed nervously.

"Don't," I warned them, thinking immediately about my collection of ab pics. And other shit they didn't need to see.

Oh, fuck. So much shit.

"At least we know it's him," Cyrus sighed, raking a hand through his hair and suddenly unable to look me in the eyes. I couldn't really blame him. This was definitely weird. "You're sleeping upstairs right now. Your body is, at least. Lash is here. I'm sure he can get you back where you belong."

"Wait, he's already here?" I asked, blinking.

"Yeah, but he couldn't do much to get you back," Alex replied. "Now that you're here, though... maybe?" He looked me up and down, his gaze lingering on Cameron's cock a little longer than I liked. I enjoyed the idea of the guys fucking around with each other in bed, but when I wasn't horny, thinking about it made me weirdly jealous for some reason.

"That's great," I said, relieved.

"He's drained, though," Sam pointed out. "So we might have to wait a bit. He's asleep in one of the bedrooms right now."

"I might just be able to get back in myself," I said, walking past them toward the cabin. They didn't try to stop me this time. Good choice, considering all I wanted to do was climb back into my body and then take the longest shower of my life.

No, not a shower. A bath. A hot, bubbly bath. I sincerely doubted DuPonte had anything like that, but maybe he had Epsom salts. He was the crunchy granola type, so odds were I'd be in luck.

I heard them following me as I entered the bedroom where I'd left my body. Seeing it there, looking decidedly corpse-like other than the healthy glow from my skin, was a weird experience I wasn't anxious to relive in the future.

"Any ideas, guys?" I asked, looking around the room, but they all just gave me blank looks. They were clearly freaked out that I was in Cameron's body. I had to admit, it was kind of hilarious seeing them all on edge over it. "Never mind."

I sat down on the edge of the bed beside my body and tried to concentrate, closing my eyes and focusing on my own consciousness. I felt a slight tug, but nothing promising. When I continued trying to focus, I saw tendrils of blue aural energy drifting from Cameron's hand to mine, but they weren't making full contact or sinking in the way they should have.

I wasn't enjoying the Ghost Experience. Not one bit.

And honestly, if I let myself think about it, it was giving me existential anxiety, which wasn't helping at all.

I stopped trying to reenter my body for a moment and took a deep breath, fanning my face with my hands. I knew Cameron wouldn't approve of the way he looked doing that, but that was the last thing I was worried about right now.

I can try something. It worked for Snow White, Cameron said in our head, taking over again.

I didn't have to wonder what he meant for long. He bent over my body, closed his eyes, and pressed his lips to mine.

Chapter

Ten

CHASE

My eyelids fluttered open. *My* eyelids. And I was staring up into Cameron's face as he gazed down at me with that trademark lopsided grin that always did funny shit to me, even when I couldn't stand him.

That... actually worked?

He started to pull away, but I wrapped my arms around his neck and pulled him in for another kiss, closing my eyes as our lips locked together. I could feel all the guys watching us, but I didn't care.

They could hate Cameron all they wanted, but they'd find a way to deal with it. They had to deal with all kinds of shit they didn't like.

Cameron seemed genuinely surprised, but he didn't complain. He only broke off the kiss when Cyrus cleared his throat. I looked up to find the other vampire staring wordlessly at his brother, jaw clenched.

"Things can't go back to normal, Cameron," Cyrus said stiffly. "If you think you can just waltz back here after everything you've done, you're mistaken."

"I don't think that, brother," Cameron replied, meeting his gaze.

"Apologize," Cyrus said through his teeth.

Cameron blinked in disbelief. "Excuse me? You're kidding, right?"

Judging by the way Cyrus was looking like he wanted to kill him, he wasn't joking. He was still working his jaw. I'd learned that was generally what vampires did shortly before a bloody fight, so I pushed myself into a sitting position before standing to get between them before there could be any more violence. Cyrus may have acted like the dad of the group, but sometimes, he could be just as much of a caveman as any of the others.

"Enough, boys," I said flatly. "You can all share."

Alex gave me a wary look. "You want him to stay, don't you?" he asked worriedly. "Even after everything he's done?"

"I do," I replied, and Cameron looked surprised. Shocked, even. I laced my fingers through his and gave his hand a squeeze. "I forgive him. I *need* him. Especially if I just got back into my body. Who the hell knows what'll happen if he leaves?"

It was a long shot, but it seemed to work, at least for a minute. Cameron opened his mouth to speak, but nothing came out. He shut it, his brow furrowing.

"I think we should all take a break," I suggested, giving the others a pointed look. "For one thing, I'm starving, and I'm sure DuPonte has freeze-dried astronaut ice cream somewhere in this house. I don't even care. I'll take it."

The others exchanged looks, but eventually, they all filed out of the room. For a moment, I thought they were going to leave me alone with Cameron, but Sam poked his head back into the room, and I heard Cyrus muttering something in the hall, stalking me as usual.

"Come on," Sam said to Cameron, his eyes narrowed into a fierce glare I doubted intimidated Cameron much. "If you're gonna stay here for now--

emphasis on *for now*--we're not leaving you two alone."

Cameron looked like he wanted to argue, but I just shook my head and smiled peaceably at him. I'd take what I could get.

He walked out of the bedroom, and I followed him. Sam watched us carefully as we passed him before following us down like my own personal bodyguard. I kind of liked it, if I was being honest with myself.

I wandered into the living room and took a seat on the cushy yet uncomfortably springy sofa while the other guys--except Cameron--went to the kitchen to raid DuPonte's pantries. They were making as much noise as possible, no doubt so I wouldn't be able to eavesdrop as they spoke in hushed tones. I was sure they were bitching about Cameron. Not that I could blame him.

Cyrus was right. He really had done a lot of shit to me. To all of us, really, considering he'd wanted to force me to get rid of the babies. Babies these men loved and would sacrifice their lives for.

That was probably a big reason why they were watching him from the kitchen in what appeared to be shifts, and they weren't trying to hide it, either. I was sure the only reason they weren't in the room with us was because they were talking about him amongst themselves.

He stood across the room with his hands in the pockets of his leather jacket like he didn't know what to do with himself. I was sure he'd planned on getting the hell out of here as soon as he got me back in my body, but I wasn't ready for him to go.

I didn't risk everything astral traveling for him to take off on me again, and I was pretty sure I didn't need to tell him that for him to understand. Maybe it was because I was pregnant by him, or maybe it was because we'd just

shared a body on a road trip from hell--probably both, honestly--but we understood each other quite a bit without actually needing to speak.

And I liked that.

Alex came into the living room with a bowl of tiny balls that were kind of purple in a gray way and handed it to me, shooting Cameron a filthy look. The stuff in the bowl looked like the space-themed ice cream the zoo had in little containers in a vending machine, only I wouldn't have paid out the ass for this. Not even on a hot summer day.

I couldn't help but wrinkle my nose. "I guess that's DuPonte's ice cream."

"Are you surprised?" Alex asked.

"Not really. Thank you," I said as sincerely as I could since it seemed like it had taken an eternity for them to find it. And I *had* specifically asked for it. It was kind of my fault for not settling for candied rabbit eyes or whatever the hell else DuPonte had here.

"Don't thank me," Alex said with a sigh. "It's... salty. Really salty."

"Ice cream shouldn't be salty. Or crunchy," said Sam, wandering into the room with his own bowl. His face was wrinkled in disgust. "Fuck, man, it's bad. Don't eat it. You'll never want ice cream again. It's like your brain forms an immediate association you'll never be able to get rid of."

I poked at it with my spoon, wondering how desperate I was. "What flavor is it?"

"I think it's supposed to be cotton candy," Alex said thoughtfully, trying a spoonful. He grimaced, choked it down, and went back for more.

A loud thump from upstairs made us all jump to the point Alex's spoon clattered to the floor.

Cyrus rushed into the room, glancing at me worriedly as if he thought I had something to do with it. "Sam, go check on Lash," he said, getting between me and Cameron. It didn't take much to send him into overprotective aggro mode even though I'd just spent a shitload of time with Cameron. Alone, too.

But before Sam could leave the room, Lash appeared in the doorway, his eyes wide with terror. Sweat trickled down his forehead, dampening his already tousled hair. His panicked expression made my blood run cold.

"Chase," he breathed. "Glad to see you in the waking world."

"Are you okay?" I asked warily.

"No," he said, his voice thick with fear. "I... I had a vision. I was dreaming... I..."

"Is it something we need to know?" I asked, though I was pretty damn sure it was judging by the terrified look in his eyes.

He sank onto the sofa beside me and I put my hand on his shoulder, giving it a gentle squeeze. Even his shirt was damp and hot with sweat. He wouldn't meet my gaze, his fingers digging into the fabric of his pants.

"Maybe it's nothing," he finally murmured, but I could tell from the strained look on his face that he didn't believe that.

"What happened?" Cyrus pressed, a bit less gently.

Lash's eyes met mine, and I saw defeat mixed with the fear. He took a deep, shaky breath. "Hades," he choked out, his voice barely audible. "He's coming."

Chapter

Eleven

CHASE

Everyone in the room went dead silent. You could hear a pin drop, and that was saying something considering things were rarely silent with Alex around. I could feel and hear my own pulse hammering away in my chest to the point it was making me dizzy.

I looked around the room, trying to gauge everyone's reactions. It was clear that Lash's words had shaken everyone to their core.

"Hades?" I echoed, confused. "My uncle?"

"Only by blood covenant," Lash said, swallowing hard. "So he really has no obligation to you. I'm so sorry. I don't want to scare you, but you need to be prepared."

For the first time since Lash had shared his vision, I felt a spark of determination ignite inside me. Fear still coursed through my veins, but it was now mixed with something else--defiance.

"Prepared for him to, what? Come and get me? He wouldn't be the first god to try," I said, hoping it wasn't obvious I was scared. Other than sass and snark, my number one defense mechanism was to feign bravery. It usually had the effect of *making* me brave, so...

Lash's lip curled in irritation. "Hades is ridiculously powerful. I don't think even Zeus could stop him if he put his mind to something."

Well, that didn't sound good. "Maybe he'd help, though," I said.

"I wouldn't be so sure right now," Lash said cryptically.

"What did you see, specifically?" Cyrus asked Lash before I could ask Lash what he meant.

"A monster," Lash murmured, burying his face in his shaky hands.

"Start from the beginning," Sam said a bit more gently.

Lash breathed in deep and then let it out through his nose. "Hades is a twisted, dark god," he muttered, his voice trembling. "He has been changed by centuries spent in the Underworld, and sometimes... he looks beautiful. But it's an illusion. His true self is completely different. Not just in looks, either. He's unpredictably dangerous and violent."

"It's that bad, huh?" Alex asked. "I'm a hellhound, so..." He sounded kind of offended.

"I don't even know how to describe it," said Lash. "I think seeing it broke my brain. I'm having trouble remembering it. But it made a hellhound look like an innocent puppy."

Alex's eyes narrowed into slits, but he didn't say anything even though that clearly offended him a hell of a lot more.

"Anyway, Hades is watching Chase from the Underworld," Lash said to Cyrus, Sam, and Alex, as if I wasn't there. "He's using visions from the Fates--three immortals who serve the Underworld, and in turn, Hades--to keep an eye on Chase. On you, too. All of you. All of *us*. I don't know why

he didn't come to claim Chase before, but he's... literally on his way, if my vision was at all accurate, and when they're that vivid... well..."

I swallowed the growing lump in my throat. "On his way, huh?" I asked weakly. "You mean right now? Right this second? So we can't even prepare?"

Lash finally looked at me, but he quickly averted his gaze. "Yeah. And in my vision, he was successful in taking you. And... killing everyone in this room when you guys tried to stand up to him."

My heart faltered in my chest. "Then don't," I said before anyone else could speak. "Just let him take me. I'll figure it out. If we don't fight back--if we don't fight back--that... won't happen, right?"

"No," Lash agreed. "It wouldn't."

Cameron's nails dug into his palms, his knuckles turning white. His dark eyes burned with anger.

Was he afraid to lose me?

Or was he just being possessive?

I could never really tell with him.

"What do we know about Hades?" Cyrus asked, his voice steady despite the rage in his piercing gaze. The two brothers were so much alike sometimes, it was weird.

Except I didn't have to wonder how Cyrus felt about me.

Lash sighed. "Well, he's an intelligent, cold, calculating god, and he doesn't make rash decisions, so if he's coming now, he has a reason," he said, drawing his knees up to his chest and wrapping his arms around them as he

huddled on the couch. "And he's immensely powerful—far more than all of us combined. He is the god of the Underworld, after all."

"Great," Sam muttered, running a hand through his long black hair.

"Maybe it's not the end of the world," I countered, forcing myself to think positively. "There has to be something we can do. Can't we run?"

Lash shook his head. "The Fates can see everything. They would have to have a reason to stop communicating with him for you to hide, and there's no way to contact them without going straight to his home. I can't reach them like I can some other entities. They serve the Underworld. Can't contact them unless you go there."

Cyrus mumbled something to Sam, who called Alex over, and they started talking amongst themselves in those hushed voices they'd been using in the kitchen. I hated that I couldn't make out anything they were saying. I hated that they weren't including Cameron, too, considering without him, we were definitely fucked.

Not that it mattered, did it? If fighting meant certain death for the people I loved, it didn't matter if Cameron was involved.

I considered that for a minute while the other guys worked on some kind of plan I was sure would result in nothing but destruction, and not for Hades, either. I could tell from the determination in their gazes.

I knew them so well. And now they were all in danger because of me.

Was this really how it was all going to end?

I turned to Lash. "What does he want with me?" I asked.

Lash was still having trouble meeting my gaze, but he tried this time. "He... wants to claim you as his mate," he said uncomfortably. "And I doubt it

matters if you're willing or not. Actually... no. It definitely doesn't matter. He's a god, and you're a godbearer. To the gods, they have the right to do what they wish with you. Except maybe kill you. But I'd rather die than be forced to be Hades' mate."

"Are you sure about that?" I asked.

Lash blinked at me. "What do you mean? Sure of what?"

"I mean... do you know him?" I asked. "Or anything about him other than that he's a scary monster who lives in the Underworld?"

"No," Lash said slowly, giving me a look like he thought I'd lost my mind. "What are you getting at, Chase? Because being a scary monster who lives in the Underworld is pretty much all the information I need to know I don't want to run into the guy."

I shrugged. "Maybe I can reason with him. Or the Fates. You said I can talk to them if I'm there, right?"

"No one reasons with the Fates," Lash said in a firm tone. "Not even Hades. They're completely unpredictable."

"Then maybe they'll turn on him," I replied.

Lash pressed his fingertips into his temples. "I feel like you're not understanding the gravity of this situation."

"Agreed," Cyrus said flatly, crossing his strong arms over his chest. I didn't know when they'd stopped talking, but judging by the frustrated scowls the others were giving me, they agreed with the witch, too.

Cameron, on the other hand, was completely blank and seemed to be lost in thought. Knowing him, he was just trying to figure out if he could bend a god in half.

The thought scared the shit out of me, if I was being honest with myself.

They were going to get themselves killed.

Out of nowhere, Cameron suddenly strode across the room at an alarming rate and grabbed Lash by the collar of his shirt, shoving him against the back of the sofa and pinning him there.

"Hey!" I cried, pushing Cameron's arm away. "Chill!"

Cameron let go, but he was still looming over the omega, who glared up at him defiantly. "I'll bet this little witch works for him," the vampire growled.

"He's a *god*," Lash said through his teeth, glowering at Cameron with indignant rage. "Haven't you spent the past few lifetimes kissing Ichor's ass? You should know how strong they are, and Hades is one of the strongest. He's also prideful as all hell, no pun intended. He doesn't do shit if he's not sure he'll succeed. If he's coming here, we're all fucked. Period. Oh, and for the record, I'm self-employed. I don't work for *anyone*."

Cameron looked like he wanted to knock Lash out for the Ichor comment, but he just snorted and turned away from him to pace back across the room. "I'm sure they say pride comes before a fall for a reason."

"Like you're not an arrogant asshole yourself," Lash said, rolling his eyes before sighing. "Look, it's not worth arguing with you. I don't care what you do. Just leave me out of it. I'm too fucking weak to help anyway." He rose to his feet, his legs quivering like a newborn fawn.

"You're not going anywhere," Cameron said, spinning around and moving toward Lash like he was ready to physically block him, but I put a hand out.

"Let him go," I said before turning to Lash. "Thank you for your help. Seriously. Be safe out there."

But before Lash could respond, the light overhead flickered.

We all slowly looked up at the ceiling as dust fell through the boards, shimmering in the rays of sunlight filtering in through the blinds. It wasn't much, but it was enough to quickly change the energy in the room.

Lash gulped. "Fuck. He's here."

Chapter

Twelve

CHASE

The cabin began to shake, and waves of nausea crashed over me. The ground rumbled rapidly beneath our feet, to the point where it felt like we were in a fucking snow globe that had been turned upside down.

I gripped the arm of the sofa for support and leaned on it as the vibrations intensified. Fear knotted in the pit of my stomach. Not for me, but for my guys. Fear they were going to do something that would get them all killed.

The quaking ceased as suddenly as it had begun. A chilling silence descended, and I held my breath, waiting for whatever was coming next.

The front door creaked open, barely visible from the living room, and at first, I thought someone had opened it. On second glance, it was just the wind blowing in from outside, but it carried a strange dark energy with it.

Sam walked up to the door and looked outside without a moment's hesitation, but whatever he saw made him freeze in his tracks.

"What is it?" I called, getting to my feet. "Is it Hades?"

Sam nodded, his gaze locked on something in the front yard I couldn't see from where I was sitting.

I got to my feet, but Cameron and Cyrus moved as one to stop me, placing a hand on each of my shoulders. It was a gentle but firm reminder they were the ones in charge right now.

Cameron shook his head. "You're staying right here."

I had half the mind to freeze them both.

I wanted to argue, but I could tell from the look in his eyes he wasn't going to budge. I chose to stay silent instead and watched helplessly as Alex dropped to all fours in his hellhound form, his clothes falling in tatters around him, and stalked out of the room to join Sam, the fur along his shoulders and back standing on end.

"Please don't do anything," I begged as two of the people I loved the most prepared to walk outside to face certain death. "Please. I need you." I looked pointedly at Cameron. "*All* of you."

Sam paused to look back at me with the ghost of a smile on his lips. "We're not gonna die," he said, but he didn't sound convinced.

"Lash said you would if you fight. Stay," I pleaded, but Sam and Alex walked outside anyway, the latter's bristling tail lashing behind him.

Alex was the first one to step outside, and he was immediately blown back by an unseen force. He hit the wall with a snarling yelp and collapsed to the floor, momentarily winded, but he was back on his feet in an instant. He was staggering in place and bleeding from his mouth, but he was alive. Hopefully, he'd just bitten his tongue with his sharp teeth.

"Bring the godbearer out to me and no one dies today," said a low voice from outside that rumbled like thunder.

The wallpaper peeled in response to the voice and more dust shook free of the ceiling above us.

I didn't have to ask Lash who or what it was.

I knew in my heart it was Hades.

"I'm here. Just wait a minute," I yelled back before anyone could try to stop me.

Cameron snarled at me like a beast. "What the fuck, Chase?"

"You're going to get yourselves killed!" I hissed back at him, stumbling to Alex's side as the house quaked again and taking his canine face in my hands. "Are you okay?"

He groaned in response and gave me a pleading look. He didn't have to talk to tell me what was on his mind. He was begging me not to turn myself over.

But when I saw the blood trickling down his face from the cut he'd sustained when he hit the wall, I knew what I had to do.

The howling wind battered the cabin with such force that it sounded and felt like a living thing trying to claw its way inside. With each gust, the wooden front door shook and groaned until it tore off its hinges. I barely managed to duck out of the way in time to avoid it before it took me out.

"Come outside, godbearer," Hades said in what he probably meant to be an inviting voice, but it was just frightening, especially in combination with the whirlwind engulfing the cabin.

I could see shadows moving across the waves of tall grass in the front lawn, illuminated by a dark red light, but nothing else. Not from where I stood.

Sam stepped out instead. "We're not turning him over to you," he growled.

"Then you'll die," Hades said calmly as a sharp branch impaled Sam through the chest, pinning him against the ground like a moth on a board.

"No!" I cried.

Sam grimaced and wrapped his hands around the branch, but he failed to pull it out. He collapsed, panting, and I could hear him growling in pain over the intensifying winds.

I lunged for the door. Cameron and Cyrus lunged, too, but I threw up my hands and pushed them back with a blast of blue ice magic that formed a wall between us. They wasted no time attacking the wall, but I was already outside by the time they started making any real progress.

There was an army of humanoid shadows covering the yard from edge to edge, and there were even some in the woods, all their glowing ice blue eyes locked on me. I couldn't make out their features, but they were clearly people of some kind. Damned souls, maybe. The awful negative energy pouring off them reminded me of the void that still haunted my dreams.

I shivered, not just out of fear, but because the air was freezing cold. I had a high tolerance for that, too, but this was worse than snow. There was a hollowness to it that was making me uneasy.

The army of shadows parted like the Red Sea, revealing a gaunt gray horse with gleaming white eyes set in its skeletal face. It was armored from head to hoof in dazzling ornate silver plates, but that wasn't what drew my attention first. It was the rider on its back.

The rider resembled a towering dark elf with massive leathery wings the same ashen shade as his skin. They fanned out behind him, giving him a demonic silhouette in combination with the four black horns curving over his head like a crown. Dark gray hair pooled on his broad shoulders, and his pointed ears peeked out from it, adorned with intricate metal cuffs that accentuated their shape. Shimmering, iridescent scales adorned his cheeks, giving him an almost dragonlike appearance. His pale eyes were fixed on

me, his silver irises striking against black scleras that made it look like he had the eyes of a wolf.

He was beautiful and terrifying all at once. His regal black robes, decorated with crimson designs, were even more unnerving--he clearly didn't feel the need to wear armor to this confrontation.

Guess I was right about fighting being the wrong answer.

A smirk played on the god's lips as he dismounted. "We meet at last, godbearer," he said in a voice like silk as he approached me. Nothing shook or fell apart this time. In fact, a strange silence came over everything.

Damn, he was fucking *tall*.

I stood frozen in place, watching warily as he closed the distance between us. The shadows around us seemed to retreat, shrinking away from him, with some bowing in deference to his presence.

"I've been looking forward to meeting you," he said in a low, surprisingly soft voice when he came to a stop in front of me. Soft considering he'd just stuck a branch through Sam and slammed Alex into the wall. "Do you know who I am?"

"Hades," I muttered.

He took my chin in his clawed hand and tilted my face back to meet his icy gaze. "Yes," he purred. "King of the Underworld. And with you by my side, I can reclaim what is rightfully mine--*Olympus*." He spoke that word with venom and malice that seemed to bring the temperature in the air even further down.

I held his gaze boldly. "I'll go with you if you don't hurt any of them," I said, trying not to sound as scared as I was. It was hard not to with Sam

lying in the grass, impaled by a branch, not far from where I stood. He was unconscious now, but still alive, and I intended on him *staying* alive.

Hades tilted his head. "You would sacrifice yourself for them?"

"I would do *anything* for them," I corrected him, staring him down.

"Chase!" Cyrus shouted from the doorway. "Don't do it!"

I turned to look in the direction of his voice. I never thought I'd see the day Cyrus was afraid of anything, but his face was a mask of terror. Cameron stood beside him, and unless my imagination was running wild, he, too, looked freaked out. Then there was Alex, his canine eyes wide with genuine fear.

Was this the last time I was going to see them?

Cyrus rushed at us, but before I could cry out to him to stop, Hades leaned in close enough that his breath tickled my ear.

"As you wish," the god whispered.

Without waiting for me to reply or even brace myself, he pulled me into his arms and the world shattered around us. A swirling force of shrieking, howling dark magic surrounded us like a twister as his massive wings enveloped us both.

I felt myself being sucked away from everything only for the world to fade to black.

Chapter

Thirteen

SAM

My vision was hazy, but I was vaguely aware of a cold ache in my chest and the sensation of something--or someone--tugging on the branch jutting out of it. When I tried to focus my gaze, I could make out the shape of a person leaning over me, silhouetted against the sunlight.

As my vision cleared, I realized it was Alex struggling to pull the branch out of my chest. I hissed in pain, trying to sit up, but he pushed me back down.

"Chase..." I said hoarsely.

"Just relax for a minute," Alex said warily, and I could tell from his tone that we hadn't been successful in fighting Hades off. Not to mention no one was stopping him from trying to yank out the branch.

Fuck.

Alex finally managed to dislodge the branch, and I gasped in relief. Cameron and Cyrus helped me sit up, and as I looked around I noticed that the cabin was in shambles. The windows were shattered, the door had been torn off the hinges, and the log walls were covered in smoking cracks. A few chunks had crumbled away already.

"What the fuck happened? Where's Chase?" I asked, wincing as I felt the gaping hole in my chest that was just now starting to seal up as the vampiric blood coursing through my veins worked its magic.

Unwanted flashbacks to Chase's sacrifice--the sacrifice that seemed like it was just yesterday--intruded on my mind's eye immediately. I shuddered and felt a sick, cold feeling in the pit of my stomach.

"Hades happened," Cyrus said flatly. "Chase went with him."

"Willingly?" I muttered, already knowing the answer.

Cyrus nodded soberly, and Alex looked deeply troubled. I didn't know where Cameron was, and I didn't care.

He could go fuck himself.

And if Chase wasn't here to stop me, maybe, just maybe, I'd seize the opportunity to kick his ass.

"We have to go after him," I said firmly. "We can't let Hades take him like this. We need to get him back."

"We will," Cyrus said patiently, like I was the one being unreasonable here. "We just need to form some kind of plan. We had no idea Hades was even coming for him until Lash's vision all of five minutes before he came. With a plan in place, we stand a better chance."

I shot him an angry look. "Well, while you're 'planning,' he's doing whatever he likes with Chase, so forgive me for wanting to hurry the fuck up. Where's Lash?"

"In the cabin," said Alex, looking utterly hopeless. "I don't think he's going to help. He was just getting his bag and muttering about how this is above his pay grade."

"Then we don't need him," I said with a shrug, wincing when the motion sent bolts of pain through my chest. The wound was mostly healed by now, but it was still sore. "We'll figure something else out. There are other witches. Hell, maybe there's something in that grimoire app Chase uses. We're sitting ducks here, anyway. I'm sure there are plenty of gods who'd love the chance to get rid of the competition."

"You have a point," Cyrus mused.

Alex nodded. "There are witches on Etsy." He blinked after the words came out of his mouth like he was just then fully realizing he was a complete and utter himbo, and he rubbed the back of his head. "Legitimate ones. Honestly. There are."

Cyrus arched an eyebrow at him. "And how would you know that?"

"I used one to try to get Chase back," Alex said awkwardly.

"She probably cursed you," Cameron said with a snort, walking up to us with all his usual swagger. This wasn't the time for him to be acting cool. Rage surged inside me. Yeah. I was definitely knocking him on his ass.

I just needed a minute or it was going to hurt me more than it would hurt him.

Alex glowered at him. "Where have *you* been?"

Cameron ignored his tone, and he didn't seem to give a shit about the way I was looking at him, either. "Checking the perimeter. Making sure there aren't any lingering threats. And trying to come up with a plan instead of freaking out, unlike some people."

"Can we just summon him?" Alex asked. "Over and over?"

"That wouldn't be permanent," said Cyrus. "And it would harm him."

"No," said Alex. "I mean Hades. Can't we just summon him and do some damage every time we do it? We'd whittle him away eventually, wouldn't we?"

"*Hades*?" Cameron said incredulously. "You're kidding, right? He'd flatten you all into the ground. This isn't a fucking video game, Alex."

"He'd flatten you, too," Alex shot back. "And then he'd put your pelt on his wall."

"I doubt that," said Cameron, egotistical as ever. Fucking asshole. I couldn't wait for him to get bored with us and go back to whatever shithole he'd crawled out of.

Actually, now that the patron saint of Cameron had been spirited away to the Underworld, maybe we could convince the jackass to go back to Ichor sooner rather than later. Preferably physically. He was long overdue for a good facial rearranging by fist.

"What about summoning him and trapping him in a sigil?" Alex suggested, ignoring Cameron now. "If we did it outside, would it be powerful enough to hold him? He can't destroy the earth. It's not like we would be drawing attention to our location--he already knows where we are."

"No. Cameron's right about this," Cyrus said soberly, though it seemed to pain him to admit it. "Hades is incredibly powerful. He can call down meteors, for one thing. Anywhere we trapped him would immediately become a target. He probably *could* destroy the earth if he really wanted to."

I couldn't believe what I was hearing. Was he suggesting this was a hopeless situation? "So what's your plan, then?" I asked. "Because right now, finding an eBay witch sounds like as good a plan as any."

"Etsy," Alex corrected me.

"Whatever," I mumbled.

Cyrus gave a tired sigh. "I don't have a plan yet," he said. "But we can't just rush in blindly. We need to assess our options and come up with a solid strategy. There's a chance we have the element of surprise if he's not stalking us, and considering he doesn't see us as enough of a threat to deal with us when he came for Chase, he may not be watching us."

"Would another god help?" Alex asked. "Hades isn't the only one who wants Chase. What about Zeus? Hasn't he been watching Chase, too? He's his dad."

"Zeus and Hades are an equal match, with Hades possibly having a slight advantage since he has the Fates' visions to keep an eye on things. But you have a point," said Cyrus. "We may need to get in touch with Zeus. If anyone can help, it's him."

"We should tell Chase's mom," I said. "She needs to know. And maybe she can help us contact Zeus if he's keeping an eye on her, too. We could pretend to threaten her or something to draw him out."

"It's worth a shot," Cyrus agreed.

"Let's do it, then," I said. "I'll call her right now."

I didn't care what the cost was. We were getting Chase back. There was no way in hell—or the Underworld—we weren't.

Chapter

Fourteen

CHASE

The summer sun bore down on me as I sat in my favorite beach chair, looking out over the vast sparkling ocean with my bare feet buried in the sand. I didn't normally like hot, humid days like this one, but because of the bucket of cotton candy ice cream in my lap, I was perfectly comfortable.

Even better, this was the deepest bucket of ice cream on the planet, apparently, because I'd been eating it for hours and it was still just as full. There weren't even marks from my spoon in it. Amazing.

Seagulls crowed overhead, circling me like pointy white vultures, but I wasn't sharing. They could go fuck themselves.

"What do you think about seagulls?" Alex mused from where he sat beside me. I didn't remember him being here, and he was far from the quiet type, so it was kind of weird that I hadn't noticed him before.

I looked over at him and found myself looking into my reflection in his mirrored orange aviators. His brow was furrowed and his lips were pursed in deep thought.

"Seagulls? What do you mean?" I asked, confused.

He gave a wistful sigh and turned his face to gaze back into the sky. "They're free," he breathed. "Unfettered by the constraints of life on land. They never have to worry about money or fame or any other earthly pursuits. They just fly and soar and... be."

"Yeah, majestic until they snatch a hot dog out of a little kid's hand and wolf it down while he screams and cries," I replied.

Alex smiled slightly. "Your vitriol sounds personal."

"You have no idea," I muttered, watching him as he continued gazing at the seagulls. Or sleeping. Since he was wearing sunglasses, I couldn't tell.

I let my own gaze wander over his sculpted body. Something seemed off, and it wasn't just that he had eight-pack abs when he'd definitely had six before.

He just looked kind of... fake.

He was hot, but not *unbelievably* hot like he was now. His jawline was always sharp, but it wasn't usually so diamond-shaped, and since when did he have perfectly smooth skin without a single pore or hair out of place? The guy was already a human Ken doll, but this was something else.

It was kind of weird that he was so wordy, too. He had a sexy voice, but he was kind of a goofball, and not deliberately, either. It wasn't like him to wax poetic like this unless he was trying to impress someone, and he definitely didn't care about impressing *me*.

"They're just trying to survive up there," he murmured. "And yet--"

"Am I dreaming?" I asked out loud, interrupting him.

He turned to face me with a bright smile. "Of course not," he replied, holding out a coconut with the top lopped off and a straw sticking out of it.

"Here. Have a drink."

I didn't know where the hell he'd gotten the coconut from, but I took it. "Thanks," I muttered, momentarily pacified even though my ice cream bucket was gone now. I was almost upset about it until I took a sip of coconut milk and realized it was so much better.

I didn't remember how I'd come to be on vacation, but I really needed it. Especially after everything I'd been through. It was nice to not have to worry about being hunted down for a change.

I just wondered where the other guys were. Didn't they bring me here?

And where was here?

I glanced around. There was a boardwalk in the distance and a Ferris wheel beside it, but the view wasn't anything I recognized. The sand was stark white and the water was a clear crystal blue, shining in the sunlight as if it were made of trillions of tiny diamonds. Nothing looked fully real. It wasn't just Alex. It was like reality itself was fake.

"Hey, guys," said Sam, coming up the beach with a sleek blue surfboard and absolutely no clothes whatsoever. His entire muscular body was on full display for the world to see, and I found myself staring. He oozed confidence and alpha charisma to the point where it wasn't fair to any of the other guys on the beach. His fucking hair was even blowing in the wind like a jet black curtain, as if he wasn't perfect enough already.

"Hi," Alex and I said at the same time. Alex looked him over appreciatively, like he was appraising a piece of art. He was, honestly. Sam was even more gorgeous than usual, if that was even possible.

"Cyrus and Cameron will be here soon," said Sam, plopping down on the beach chair beside me. I didn't remember there being another one, but I

wasn't complaining. Especially not if he was nude.

Was that even allowed here?

I suddenly found myself feeling paranoid we were all going to get arrested over this shit, but when I looked around to see if anyone was complaining, the entire beach was empty. I could've sworn it wasn't a minute ago.

"Where are they?" I asked.

Sam considered it for a moment. "I don't know," he finally said before leaning in and pressing his lips to the spot under my earlobe that always drove me wild. Heat surged through my body, and when he placed his huge hand on my thigh and caressed it with his thumb, I couldn't help but shiver.

Sam lowered me into the sand as the perfectly warm seawater lapped at our chairs, kissing down my throat as he unbuttoned my white shirt. I felt a surge of self-consciousness as he kissed down my chest and pregnant belly, but as Sam's strong hands explored me, he clearly didn't mind.

The opposite, in fact. He was growing hard before my eyes, his throbbing cock pressing against my inner thigh as he lowered himself on top of me.

"Gods, you're perfect," he murmured into my mouth.

Alex caressed my upper arm as he, too, kissed my neck. Having both vampiric men worshiping my throat was overwhelming, and I found myself shivering all over again as my head fell back and my eyes fluttered shut, giving in to their ministrations. Sam kissed down my softened belly and pulled down my pants, freeing my own pulsing cock, which he wasted no time taking into his mouth.

Between the two of them, I was in a state of total bliss to the point where it took me a moment to realize Cyrus and Cameron had walked up,

silhouetted by the sun like glorious angels. My breath caught, and they both smiled, their eyes burning with desire.

"You look busy," Cyrus said with a smirk.

"Yeah, it looks like we found paradise," Cameron said, his voice husky with desire.

I didn't know where we were, or why things had suddenly become so surreal, but all I knew was that I wanted this. I wanted them all.

The four of them surrounded me as if I was the center of their own personal universe as the seawater swelled around us. Sam slipped underwater, still sucking my cock as Alex supported me from behind as I floated in the ocean, teasing and flicking my sensitive nipples. Now that I was pregnant, they were even more sensitive than usual, and the sensation made me squirm.

Cyrus and Cameron both joined in. Cameron took my hand in his and ran his tongue up along the inside of my wrist, nipping and licking alternately while Cyrus nuzzled my neck before sinking his fangs into my flesh. It hurt, but in the best way, and I gasped as someone's fingertip found my hole. Judging by the girth and angle, it was Sam's, and he didn't let up on worshiping my cock as he slowly worked it into me.

I shuddered and braced myself against his strong shoulders as he pushed his finger in up to the knuckle and crooked it, rubbing the tip against my prostate. I arched my back, pushing myself further onto his hand as all four of them explored me with their hands, mouths, and teeth while the waves surged around us.

My breathing quickened and I whimpered as Sam worked another finger into me, pushing deeper and further until I felt like I was going to burst with pleasure. His fangs--sharper than they'd ever been--grazed my shaft,

sending an electric shock through my body and eliciting a trembling cry from me.

The sensation of his fingers scissoring inside my asshole, stretching me open as he continued to suck and flick his tongue along my shaft, was too much. I felt like I was on the edge of an orgasm from which I would never return, and as if sensing this, Cyrus and Cameron both increased their intensity. Cameron kissed up my neck before sinking his fangs into my shoulder where Cyrus had been a moment before, nipping and licking in a tantalizingly painful fashion while Cyrus lightly licked my nipples until I was squirming with renewed vigor.

"P-please," I begged, though I had no idea what I was begging for.

Sam's fingertips found my spot and he took my prostate between them, pinching it gently and playing with it until I was writhing against his hand, driving it further up inside me. I couldn't take it anymore. I threw my head back against Alex's chest, screaming Sam's name as I came hard into his mouth.

He lapped and sucked at my crown even though he was underwater, drinking down my come as I arched my back, pushing deeper into his mouth and climbing the hill to my next orgasm.

Cyrus moved to replace Alex behind me as Sam withdrew his fingers from my ass, and Cyrus replaced them with his cock in one smooth thrust.

I gasped, my eyes widening as he filled me to capacity. Alex rubbed my shoulders, which were already starting to heal from the vampires' bites, as Sam supported me in the water. He kept me from sinking as Cyrus began to move inside me, slowly at first, then faster as I panted in time with his aggressive thrusts. The vampire growled softly as he licked the blood still trickling from the spot where he'd bitten me.

Cameron came around in front of me and captured my lips with his, forcing his tongue into my mouth and stifling my cries. I gripped his shoulders and my eyes rolled back into my head as Cyrus drove his cock into my prostate over and over, his thrusts speeding up to the point where I felt like I was going to come completely unglued.

Right as I reached the peak, Cyrus hit my prostate from a different angle and I screamed into Cameron's mouth as I was flung over the edge. My orgasm crashed over me like a tidal wave, sending ripples of pleasure through my body. The four of them surrounded me as I rode out the aftershocks, their hands caressing my skin and their mouths exploring every inch of me.

"Next, it'll be my name you're screaming," Cameron purred, taking Cyrus's place. Only instead of fucking me in the ass like his twin just had, he pushed me forward so I was floating on the surface of the sea, my legs trailing behind me. He gripped my ass cheeks in his hands and pressed his face into my cleft.

I gasped, but my gasp was muffled as I dipped forward into the water and came face-to-face with Alex, who had completely disrobed. Somehow, even though we were in the ocean, I could see underwater. Not well, but enough to make out Alex's form as he swam below me and took my twitching cock into his mouth.

Sam lifted me out of the water by my shoulders, supporting me against his chest as Alex sucked on my sensitive crown and Cameron shoved his tongue into my aching hole. I whimpered and gripped Sam's arms, digging my nails in, but he didn't complain. Cyrus was there, too, though between his hands and Sam's, I didn't know who was doing what, only that one of them was massaging and caressing my back while another was playing with my nipples again.

Cameron's fingers joined his tongue, stretching me open as his tongue curled around my spot, pressing against it, probing and teasing me as he brought me closer and closer to the edge of bliss. I didn't know how that was even possible, but I wasn't complaining. I gasped in mingled pain and pleasure, gripping Sam's arms tighter as I felt myself spiraling out of control, driven closer to the brink by what Alex was doing to my throbbing cock. My whole body tingled, burning with arousal and ecstasy.

The sensations were overwhelming and almost too much for me to bear, and I could feel my next orgasm building deep inside me. Cameron's tongue moved faster now, pushing deeper into me with each lick until I let out a cry that Sam swallowed down. I shook violently as the tip of Cameron's tongue pushed expertly on my spot, and when I came again, the waves of bliss coursing through my body made me feel like I was going to pass out. I clung to Sam for support as the bliss engulfed me.

Cameron and Alex continued licking and teasing me until I was completely spent and limp in the water. The only reason I wasn't sinking to the seafloor was because they were all holding me up between them.

I whimpered when I felt Cameron's crown pressing against my hole. "I-I don't think I can take anymore," I said weakly.

"Are you sure?" he asked huskily, dragging his fingers--clawed fingers--down my spine, eliciting another shiver from me. "You don't want my knot filling you while Alex sucks your cock?"

Oh, I did. I wanted the fuck out of that. "I... maybe..."

He pulled my ass closer to him, letting me wrap my legs around his waist. Sam was still supporting my shoulders, and my eyelids fluttered shut as he leaned down to press his lips against my forehead.

"Are you ready?" Cameron purred.

I glanced over my shoulder at his cock, which seemed even more massive than usual, and closed my eyes again. I seriously didn't think I could take it, but I wanted to try. "Okay," I said. "But be gentle."

He murmured something that sounded reassuring, but I couldn't hear him over the sound of my own thundering heart. I winced and let out a thin moan as he pushed the barbed crown of his cock into me. He was already so hard that I could feel the sharp bumps on the tip digging into my sensitive inner walls as he slowly eased his cock in. The barbs made it impossible for him to pull out, so he wasn't thrusting as much as he was gradually applying pressure until I was forced to relax to accept his cock.

Alex resumed sucking on my cock as it dangled below me in the water, and when he palmed my balls and began rolling them between his fingers, I accidentally bucked against Cameron and cried out from the pain that shot from my ass to my toes.

"Easy," Cameron said, reaching up to massage the back of my neck. Cyrus was doing the same, rubbing my burning skin in soft, slow circles. "Let yourself get used to it."

I tried even though the sensations were exquisite and overwhelming. With every inch he pushed into me, I felt fuller, stretching wider until my walls were completely filled with him. He stayed there for a moment, letting me adjust to his size before gradually increasing his pace.

I moaned loudly and dug my nails into Sam's arms as I felt every inch of Cameron penetrating me. The sensation was intense, almost too much for me to handle, to the point where I didn't even notice Sam had positioned his crown at my lips until it bumped my nose.

I took it into my mouth obediently, whimpering as I sucked his crown and struggled to relax enough to take the rest of Cameron's enormous cock. It

wasn't possible, but it felt like it was impaling me, and when the base of his knot pressed against my hole, I had to fight the urge to panic. That would only make it hurt more.

It felt so fucking good, though, and my eyes rolled back into my head as his thick knot began to stretch me, the bliss accentuated by Alex's ministrations to my cock. I distinctly remembered it being the size of an apple before, but it was bigger now. I couldn't just be imagining that, could I?

"Good boy," Cameron murmured as my aching hole stretched around his knot. He paused for a moment, letting me adjust to the fullness as I felt his heat radiating from inside me. I was writhing in pleasure because of it when he finally started to thrust, at least as much as he could with his barbs already digging into me.

Sam began to thrust, too, burying his cock in my throat as Alex sucked my own cock with renewed vigor. Cyrus--it had to be him--was beneath me now, too, sucking and licking my nipples alternately as his strong hands massaged my quivering body.

The pressure from Cameron's huge knot finally overwhelmed my ass and it disappeared inside me. My hole spasmed before clenching down on Cameron's shaft, and he ground against my ass, his balls bumping against mine as Alex continued rolling and squeezing them. I howled in mingled bliss and pain, at least as much as I could with Sam's cock stuffed in my mouth, and thrashed instinctively. But I couldn't move with Cameron's entire cock buried in me. It felt like the crown was all the way up in my stomach.

The feeling of Cameron's knot pressing against my spot finally sent me over the brink, and I came with a muffled scream. Alex drank down my come, sucking me dry as Cameron drove into me until I blacked out.

When I came to a moment later, Sam's come was pulsing into my throat as Cameron filled me from behind until my belly ached. Cyrus massaged it in slow, firm circles as I whimpered and moaned in between shaky breaths. I could barely breathe after all that, and my body was still twitching from the aftershocks, but it seemed my guys were spent, too.

"That was amazing," I gasped, dazed and dizzy as I floated between them.

Someone nuzzled my neck and another kissed my spine, but I couldn't even keep track of who was where anymore. All I knew was that Sam was holding me and Cameron's cock was still locked inside me, and we'd probably stay that way for hours.

Fuck, I loved them so much. All of them. It was as if they had each been made just for me.

"It was," Sam said, his voice strangely gentle as he kissed my forehead. "I'm so glad we finished in time."

"Finished in time for what?" I asked breathlessly, confused.

"Wake up," Alex whispered in my ear. "You're dreaming, babe."

Chapter

Fifteen

CHASE

I began to stir, the bliss of the dream slowly fading away into reality. I opened my eyes to soft candlelight and found myself surrounded by beautiful embroidered throw pillows and plush red blankets cradling my body like a fabric nest. The scent of jasmine incense reached my nose as I breathed in deeply and blinked the sleep from my eyes.

Of course none of that was real.

Alex being a sex god should've been enough of a clue.

I woke fully to find myself in a bed fit for a queen with no recollection of how I'd come to be there. No, not a queen. A goddess.

The frame was a grand, sculpted black swan that appeared to be made of solid glass, its wings spread protectively around me. Its eyes, made from glittering rubies, stared at me as if it knew something I didn't.

The walls of the room were made of the same material, and it took me a minute to realize it was obsidian. It had the exact same look as the crystals I'd seen a thousand times in my digital grimoire. There were rubies, too, like the swan's eyes, used as accents and embellishments here and there. They glimmered beautifully in the light from the dozens of tall crimson

candles scattered around the room. The whole room looked like it was straight out of a fantasy palace.

It was incredible, really, but how the fuck had I gotten here?

"Where the hell am I?" I muttered under my breath, trying to sit up but feeling a sudden bout of dizziness. I closed my eyes for a moment, taking deep breaths, and then opened them again, hoping that maybe the strange room had just been a bizarre dream like the amazing one I'd just had. But everything was still very much the same—obsidian walls, black swan bed, and all.

As I sat up slowly, trying to make sense of my surroundings, a chill crept down my spine. My memories were starting to return, bit by bit, trickling in until they were a flood.

Hades had taken me.

This had to be the Underworld, only it was nothing like I'd expected. Hades's castle--or palace, or whatever the hell he called it--wasn't gloomy or nightmarish like it should've been.

At least, this room wasn't.

I looked down to find someone had taken all my clothes off and put me in some kind of silk kimono-style black robe with a red sash tied around my rounded waist.

I pressed my hand to my belly, feeling for the fluttering kicks from my babies even though I could sense they were fine. I held my breath until I knew for certain they were still very much alive.

"Okay, Chase," I muttered to myself, my voice shaky but determined. "You're in the realm of the dead again. No big deal. You're a godbearer, after all. You've got this."

After my pep talk, which I didn't fully believe, I climbed out of the swan bed and padded across the cold stone floor to the heavy crystal door. I was expecting it to be locked, but when I put my hand on the gleaming doorknob, the door creaked open.

The halls were eerily quiet, save for distant chatter and laughter that sounded like it was coming from a small party. I didn't hear more than two or three voices, and they were all the screechy equivalent of nails on chalkboard, but they didn't sound particularly evil. And if I was in the Underworld, it wasn't like I could hide.

As I ventured farther into the labyrinthine palace, curiosity and fear warred within me. Why had Hades brought me here? What did he want from me? I didn't think I got scared easily, but I was admittedly pretty fucking nervous right now. I was worried about the guys, too, which was new. Normally, they were the ones worried about me.

Finally, I reached a large open room that was decorated much more extravagantly than the others. The walls were lined with various tapestries and the floor was covered in thick rugs of emerald green. In the center of the room, there was a large round table surrounded by three chairs.

Sitting in those chairs was a trio of women watching a TV show on a gigantic crystal orb floating above the table between them, laughing and insulting whoever they were watching as they sipped from bubbling cocktails. I didn't recognize the show, but then again, I'd hardly had time for my usual favorite trash lately.

I did recognize the women immediately, though. I didn't have to know them to know who they were. Three ladies watching shit in the Underworld?

Yeah. These were the Fates.

The youngest Fate, a pretty blonde woman with a thick build and a corset that pushed her tits clear up to her chin, sighed wistfully at something happening in the orb. "I just need a man like Jared and I swear to the gods, I'll retire right now."

The middle sister, who was even more beautiful, pushed her curly, silver-streaked, dark locks behind her shoulders and pursed her painted lips. "You don't need *any* man," she replied. "Just look at what Chase has to deal with."

Chase?

I listened closer.

"I'm lonely," the youngest Fate said with a pout. "And phallic crystal wands can only do so much. Even Eros' newest line just doesn't hit the spot the way a good fat--"

"Chase!" the eldest Fate exclaimed, leaping up from her chair and pointing at me as her gray hair fanned out around her like it had been electrified.

I froze as the other two Fates turned their heads to stare at me, but instead of the rage I'd been expecting that I was wandering the palace on my own, all three of their faces lit up.

"Our little star!" the youngest Fate exclaimed, tripping over herself as she rushed to me.

"Wh-what—?" I stammered, my heart still pounding in my chest as she embraced me to the point where I thought she was going to break my fucking back. I wriggled out of her grasp before she could send me into labor.

"Chase, dear," said the oldest Fate, her eyes twinkling with mischief. "We've been watching you for quite some time now."

"Watching me?" I asked, my brows furrowing in confusion. "Why?"

"Your life," the middle woman chimed in, "is the best show we watch, and we're the ultimate fans."

"I'm sorry. Allow us to introduce ourselves," the youngest woman said with a light giggle. "We are the Fates—the ones who weave the tapestry of life, guiding the destinies of mortals and gods alike. I'm Clotho, and these lovely ladies are Lachesis and Atropos."

I nodded, swallowing hard. "It's nice to meet you," I said nervously, suddenly feeling very small and insignificant. "Um. How much have you seen, exactly?"

"Everything," Clotho blurted out before covering her mouth like she hadn't meant to say that.

Too late. I could feel my face warming up, and I was sure I was turning beet red. Oh, fuck. They'd seen *everything*?

"Ah, Chase," Atropos sighed, shaking her head. "You really must learn to stop asking so many questions. Just know that your story has only begun, and we're eager to see how it unfolds."

"So many questions?" I echoed before I could stop myself. "I just asked one." I hesitated when I saw the incredulous, vaguely insulted looks I was receiving from all of them, but then they laughed, and I let out a laugh of relief that they weren't turning me into a frog or doing whatever else they were capable of.

"He's so sassy. I love it," Clotho gushed to the other two.

"It's kind of my defense mechanism," I replied. "So you've really been watching me? Why?"

"You're interesting," said Lachesis. "Especially for a mortal. What started as a hate watch quickly became an obsession, especially for this one." She nodded to the youngest.

"Especially since Hades has taken such a... *keen* interest in you," Atropos added with a smirk. "He is, after all, our master."

Keen interest? That was the understatement of the year, considering he'd stolen me from my entire life and whisked me off to what was basically Hell.

"Wow," I murmured, feeling both flattered and slightly unnerved. "That's... kind of weird, but cool, I guess."

I was surprisingly okay with it, maybe because I'd been a vlogger in what felt like a previous life. Fuck, I missed Chase Space. At least I'd been able to pick and choose what I wanted to show the world.

Maybe that was something I could pick up again. Maybe. I'd have to rebrand, though, considering literally everything had changed. My priorities were different now, though.

Very different.

"So, what are your favorite moments from my life?" I asked, morbidly curious. "And when did you start watching it?"

"There aren't exactly reruns," said Clotho. "We started watching shortly after you were... you know." She dragged a clawed finger across her throat. "You shouldn't have forgiven those guys for that, by the way."

"Oh, I haven't," I replied. "I'm just going to torture them forever."

A wide grin split her face. "Good. Because they deserve it. Especially Alex, considering he was your boyfriend."

"I agree," I said, nodding. "And I will."

"And Sam," Lachesis added. "He was one of Chase's best friends. Don't forget that. Cyrus is really the only one who isn't all that bad."

"You just have a crush on him," Clotho accused.

"Not a *crush*," Lachesis said in a clipped tone. "He's just eye candy and the only one out of all of them who hasn't been a complete and utter asshole."

"He's sanctimonious," Atropos pointed out, turning to me. "Doesn't that get on your nerves?"

I shrugged. "I'm used to it."

"Our master is nothing like any of them," Atropos said with a smile that made me feel like she was trying to sell me on a pyramid scheme. "He may not be the most... *attractive* god, but he's everything you need. He has wealth beyond your wildest dreams, and he'd do anything to protect you, unlike those losers. They sacrificed you. And don't you forget it."

"They were in a cult," I replied. "Kind of different."

"Yes, well, our master isn't a cultist. He's worshiped by them, though," she said cheerfully. "Another point for our master."

I decided not to argue with her. She wasn't completely wrong there. "And why did you say he's not attractive?" I asked. "He's pretty hot, actually."

"He has another form," Clotho said with a sigh. "It's... wait, you think he's hot? Horns, fangs, claws, and all? What about his wings?" She gave me a look of pure bewilderment. "He's a monster."

"I mean, yeah," I said. "Then again, I was always disappointed when the prince turned back into a human at the end of *Beauty and the Beast*." I laughed a little.

They didn't laugh, though. They were all staring in total silence at something behind me, and I realized the energy in the room felt like it had been sucked out along with the air.

I turned slowly and my heart skipped in anxiety when I realized why they'd gone quiet. A familiar towering figure was standing in the doorway, his arms crossed over his chest and the expression on his angular face completely unreadable.

Hades.

Chapter

Sixteen

CHASE

I stared blankly at Hades, and he stared back at me. He wasn't moving at all, or even blinking. Just looking at me in a strangely detached way with those emotionless silver eyes.

I glanced back at the Fates in hopes my supposed fans would help me out by at least saying something, but they were gone, and so was the orb they'd stalked me with. It was as if they'd never been there at all.

I turned back to Hades. "I, um... hi?" I said awkwardly.

He arched an eyebrow. "'Hi'?" he echoed in a dry tone. "Is that really what you're going to say after I brought you here against your will?"

"I mean, I'm not enough of a reckless dumbass to tell you to go fuck yourself," I replied, blinking at him. Probably not the smartest thing I could say, but I was on edge, and my mouth had a mind of its own when I was this freaked out.

I was expecting him to smite me or something, but instead, the corner of his lips quirked into the slightest smirk. "You can say whatever you like," he replied in a low, gravelly voice, crossing the room to loom over me.

I had to crane my neck to look up at him. He had to be seven feet tall, not including those horns. "I can, huh?"

"Yes," he murmured, running his claws through my hair with surprisingly gentle affection. "You can be yourself here. I don't want you to feel like you have to... what do you mortals say? 'Walk on eggshells'?"

"Can you blame me?" I muttered, backing away from him. "You kidnapped me."

"I *freed* you," he corrected me, stepping closer.

I gave him an incredulous look. "From what, exactly?"

"From those fools," he replied, his lips curling around the words like they were poison. "You were nothing but a plaything to them. But with me, you'll be so much more."

"Oh, really?" I said, folding my arms. "I love them, and they love me."

I wanted to tell him they'd be coming for me, too, and he'd be wise to let me go before it came to that, but I had a bad feeling even their combined strength wasn't enough to make much of a mark on this guy. He carried himself like he could crack the planet in half and knew it. Even if they had a chance in hell at getting me back by force, telling Hades would probably just result in him going straight back to the cabin and wiping them out.

"You're mistaken," he said quietly, those silver orbs boring into me. "Creatures like us aren't capable of love. Only lust and possession."

"You're wrong," I said, holding up my palm to stop him when he looked like he was going to caress my hair again. To my surprise, he paused. "They do love me. They turned on the goddess they've been worshiping for centuries for my sake."

He tilted his head. "Was that after they drove a knife into your heart? And what about the one who wants to kill your babies?" he asked, looking pointedly at my pregnant belly.

I instinctively put a hand on it to protect them even though nothing he'd said came across as a threat. His powerful, dark energy was unnerving enough even if he seemed to be in a gentle state right now. "We're working on that," I muttered.

"Are you sure?" he asked cryptically. "That's one hell of a bet to make, isn't it?"

I hesitated. "It's not a bet. I just... I know Cameron on a different level now. If you were stalking me, you know we shared a body for a while."

"Yes," he said flatly. "For an entire road trip."

"A *long* road trip," I reminded him, but he didn't seem convinced. "Look, it's hard to explain. But I trust him now. Sort of."

"Wouldn't you rather have a safe place to give birth?" he asked. "You're a godbearer. Your nesting instincts will be kicking in soon, and a cabin in the woods far from any comforts is hardly a nest."

"At least I had my guys," I said pointedly.

"Is that the problem?" he asked with a low chuckle. "You want your pets?"

"They're not my *pets*. They're my boyfriends," I replied, though Alex was kind of a pet, I guess. Especially now that he was a shifter. I kind of wondered if a hellhound had a chance at landing a few bites on Hades.

"You deserve better than them," he pressed. He was standing directly in front of me now, but even though he towered over me, there was nothing threatening in his posture. Yet.

"And you're better?" I asked. "You just said you're incapable of love."

A soft, sad smile softened his features. "I may not be capable of love, but I am capable of giving you everything you never knew you wanted."

"Which is...?"

"Safety for your daughters and everyone else you love," he said in a gentle tone, his words going through me like a lightning bolt.

"Daughters?" I croaked, my hand going back to my belly.

My heart thundered in my ears as his words sank in. I was having daughters? I'd wondered, but it wasn't like there were magical pregnancy clinics where it would be totally fine to tell them I was a cis guy who'd been impregnated by a vampire. What would vampire babies even look like on an ultrasound?

"Yes," he said, his voice full of reverence. "You are bearing two daughters. Two beautiful, strong, resilient daughters who will need protection from those who would harm them. They are meant to play a role you are unaware of, and there are beings in your world and ours alike who would do anything to destroy them."

"A role?" I echoed warily. I wasn't sure I wanted to know, but if it meant keeping them safe... "What do you mean, exactly?"

"No one ever tells you anything, do they, Chase?" he asked. He placed his hands on my shoulders, bringing our faces close together as if he was about to tell me a dark secret. "Your daughters are the twin girls prophesied to awaken the Titans."

What?

The room seemed to spin around me as my legs went to jelly, but he supported me easily as I struggled to stay standing. Was this some kind of sick joke? But the way he looked at me, the way he spoke with such reverence, made me realize that he wasn't joking.

This was serious. Deadly serious.

"What do you mean, they're going to awaken the Titans?" I asked, my voice wavering as my mind and heart raced. "Are you saying they're going to end the fucking world?"

"What the Titans do when they're released is up to them," he said soberly. "But you need to be protected. All three of you." He reached up and caressed my cheek with a clawed finger, holding my gaze. "Let me do that for you."

Before I could answer him by telling him I had all the protection I needed and wanted, the palace melted around us into trillions of glittering black particles. I looked around in alarm as the particles reassembled into a shimmering wall of water surrounding us on all sides.

"What is this?" I asked.

"Dark matter," he replied, reaching out and tapping a claw against the strange liquid. It rippled where he'd touched it before opening up like a huge portal, revealing an expanse of stars. More stars than I'd ever seen in my life.

The liquid continued to recede until we were surrounded by stars, nebulae, and distant planets, and when I looked down, I realized we were floating countless miles above the earth. I yelped and grabbed Hades' arm in spite of myself, and he let out a low chuckle.

"You need not fear, Chase," Hades said, his voice full of amusement. "My powers allow me to control the very fabric of reality. We're perfectly safe up here."

I looked down again, feeling dizzy at the vast blue expanse below. I had never experienced anything like this before. It was both terrifying and exhilarating.

"But why have you brought me here?" I asked, unable to tear my gaze away from the sight of my world so far beneath my feet.

He smiled slightly. "I thought you might like to see it," he replied. "Most mortals will never get to experience this."

"I don't like heights," I said warily, though it wasn't bothering me as much as it should. The view of my world was so breathtaking, I couldn't bring myself to panic like I should have. I could see the curves of the land, rivers snaking through the landscape, and the city lights twinkling in the darkness.

"It's not heights you fear, Chase," Hades said in a gentle tone that was strangely reassuring. "It's the loss of control. But up here, with me, you don't have to worry about that. You can let go and experience the freedom of the unknown."

"I can let go, huh? And plummet to my death?" I asked with a snort.

"Step forward," he said. "Trust me. I won't let you get hurt."

"I don't even know you. And you kidnapped me," I pointed out.

"You forgave those fools for murdering you. Surely you can forgive a bit of mild kidnapping," he said, pressing his clawed hand to his collarbone as if clutching imaginary pearls.

I rolled my eyes, but I took a shaky step away from him, still clinging to his arm. The foot I'd put forward glowed with energy. I felt like I was stepping into water, only the water was thick and supportive.

I screwed my eyes shut tight and put the other foot forward. When I looked, I realized I was floating in the air, and I gripped Hades' arm even tighter, suddenly afraid I would float away.

"I don't like heights *at all*," I said again.

"But you do like the cosmos," he replied. "You even called your minions your 'Martians,' did you not?"

I raised my eyebrows at him. "Are you referring to Chase Space?" I couldn't help but laugh. "They weren't my *minions*."

"What were they, if not minions?" he asked.

It took me a moment to realize he was dead serious. That, or his delivery was impeccable. "Well, I'm not a villain," I said, looking back down at earth. I was starting to calm down a little. The sensation of floating was kind of nice. "I'm pretty sure you have to be a villain to have minions."

"You would make a beautiful villain," he murmured.

He was charming, I'd give him that. And he wasn't forcing himself on me. Not yet, at least. Maybe it was just the view getting to my head--it really was an incredible sight--but I felt kind of bad for him. He really didn't think he was capable of love?

I shook my head, trying to rid myself of those thoughts. Hades was a god, and not just any god, but the god of the Underworld. I couldn't let myself get caught up in his charm. *Of course* he was fucking charming.

"You can have this view--or anything else you want--whenever you like," he continued. "Ice skating, for instance. I have my own rink beneath the palace. It would be yours."

I blinked at him. "You know about that?"

"You could have made a career out of that if you wanted to," he mused. "If you didn't want to be a doctor, at least."

My heart skipped a beat as his words sank in.

It had been so long since I'd stepped onto the ice, but the memory was still fresh in my mind. The feeling of freedom, of weightlessness as I spun and twirled across the rink. Getting my old body back would be a hell of a challenge after giving birth, but maybe...

No. That was an old dream. So was being a doctor. I wasn't a vampire, but I still had those tendencies once in a while. Tendencies that were strong enough for me to murder that guard at the morgue. It felt like a long time ago, but in reality, it really wasn't.

"What troubles you, godbearer?" Hades asked gently, taking my hands in his. We were both drifting through space now, further from my world, but I felt strangely... safe.

This man--this god--knew so much about me to the point where it was honestly kind of fucking terrifying, but I didn't get any malicious vibes from him, and I was a pretty vibes-based person.

"I don't know," I mumbled. "Just thinking, I guess."

"About what?" he asked, tilting his head slightly. His dark silver hair flowed around us as if we were underwater, mingling with my white locks. We were so close, our bodies were nearly pressed together.

"My old life," I admitted. "When I... died... there was so much I left behind. So much I wanted to do."

Fuck. I even thought I might miss Sarah.

No, actually. The bitch could go fuck herself. And she probably was, considering I had her cult with me now.

The thought of them gave me a pang of grief. As intensely beautiful as this sight was, I would give it up in a heartbeat if it meant sinking into their arms again. Was I ever going to see them again? I couldn't imagine them actually defeating this strange, sad god who had the power to bend time and space.

I didn't have much time to start thinking about dark shit, though, considering the liquid had surrounded us again and reality seemed to be caving in around us. The particles were humming with new energy, glowing white and blue as they formed towering pillars of aquamarine crystal. It took me a moment to realize it wasn't crystal at all, but ice.

We were in the most incredible ice rink I'd ever seen. It wasn't just incredible--it was otherworldly.

Iridescent snowflakes cascaded from the ceiling like tiny stars, and a glowing path of silver stars glittered across the length of the rink. On one side, I could see an ancient chandelier shimmering in the light as it hung from above. A beautiful mural depicting various myths of Greek gods decorated one wall.

The music floating softly through the chilly air was faint but enchanting--a captivating mix of strings and synths that flowed through my veins like electricity.

It felt surreal to be standing here in this fantasy world, especially after all the darkness we'd just experienced. But somehow, I found myself feeling strangely at peace as my feet touched solid ground again. Ice.

Even though I wasn't wearing socks or shoes and the rink was cold--cold enough for my breath to be visible in the air--it wasn't unpleasant.

"Wow," I said quietly.

"I could give you all those things you've always wanted," he said in a low, seductive tone, coming up behind me to stroke a strand of white hair behind my ear. "All those things and more--if you'll only let me."

I turned around to face Hades. Despite my desire to resist his temptations, I found myself irrevocably drawn to him for reasons beyond my understanding. I should have been enraged, but I couldn't bring myself to feel anything but a strange sense of peace in his presence.

It was annoying as fuck, honestly, because he really deserved a slap across the face. The shimmering scales on his cheeks that made him look like some kind of dragon god were an ideal target, too.

He was probably hypnotizing me with magic. That thought should've pissed me off, too, but if he was, at least he wasn't taking advantage of it.

Yet.

"I don't want things," I said, surprising myself with the honesty of my words. "I want people. The people I care about. My friends, my lovers, my family. That's what I want. And above everything else, I want them to be safe."

His brow furrowed and he didn't reply right away.

"You know, Hades, you're going to have to return me eventually," I continued, an idea entering my mind. If he really wanted me to be happy, I was going to test that. "My daughters deserve to know their fathers."

"Only one of them is the father," he said, visibly confused. "The hellcat."

"Biologically speaking, yeah, but in spirit, it's more complicated than that," I replied, hoping he'd understand, but by the puzzlement evident on his graceful features, he definitely didn't understand at all. "Will you at least agree not to hurt them? No matter what?"

"No matter what?" He sighed. "Chase, those men... they murdered you, and they intend on coming here to steal what isn't theirs."

"You don't own me, either. No one does," I pointed out, growing bolder now that I sensed his hesitation. He wasn't flat out saying no, and I was damn good at getting what I wanted when I put my mind to it.

"No," he agreed. "I suppose that's true."

"So you'll send me back?" I asked, afraid to get my hopes up, but I saw an opening in his resolve and knew I had to go for it.

"Absolutely not," he replied without missing a beat.

I opened my mouth to argue when he took my hands in his and gave me a gentle pull, gliding backward along the rink and pulling me with him. I skated on my bare feet after him, easily keeping up, but I was sure my irritation was written all over my face.

"You said you'd give me anything," I reminded him as he gently twirled me on the ice. I landed in his arms, my back against his strong chest. "And that's all I want. So..."

"You want me to promise not to hurt your loved ones," Hades finished for me, his voice low and deep in my ear. "Is that really all, Chase?"

I shivered at the sensation of his breath on my skin, trying to ignore the way my body was responding to him. This was dangerous territory, and I needed to keep my wits about me if I was going to get what I wanted.

"Not just that," I said, pulling away from him and turning so I could meet his gaze as we glided along. He was surprisingly good at this, though I got the feeling skating came naturally to the gods. "I want you to swear that you'll protect them, too. With your life, if necessary."

He took my face in his palms and pressed his forehead to mine, startling me enough that I couldn't breathe for a moment.

I gulped. *Fuck*. He really was hot. I hadn't been lying about that. The Fates had mentioned another form, but unless he was an oozing ball of green slime, I couldn't imagine him turning into something unattractive.

I felt a familiar warmth building in my core. I wasn't just turned on. I didn't think I could go into heat when I was pregnant, but this place was full of surprises, apparently.

Heat was the last fucking thing I needed.

"I literally need the guys," I began awkwardly. "They give me this energy called tantra. I don't just need them emotionally. It's physical, too. I..." I trailed off, not sure it was a good idea to tell him I needed to fuck to gain energy.

Actually, no. That was definitely a terrible idea.

"I'm aware," he said. "That's why I didn't destroy them."

I blinked. "Huh? You're not going to...?"

"Force myself on you? Of course not," he scoffed. "I may be a monster, but I'm not that kind."

"Then you have to send me back," I said warily. "I mean it. I really do need them. I'm not making that up. And if you've been stalking me, you know how serious I am about that."

"I do," he said, nodding thoughtfully. "But I can't send you back. Not when there are other gods who want to see you dead, or worse. But I can bring your harem here if that's what you really want."

He said that like it was the simplest thing in the world, and I didn't know what to think, let alone how to respond. I definitely hadn't been expecting him to offer that. "You... will?"

"Of course I will," he replied. "You deserve better than those beasts, but if you're that attached, it can be arranged until you grow tired of them. And when you do, they will be returned to their world."

"They're not goldfish," I said flatly. "They're people. And I love them. I'm not going to 'grow tired of them.'"

"Then they shall be your servants until the end of time."

I laughed incredulously. "My servants, huh?"

"Yes. I'd say 'pets,' but something tells me you would take offense to that," he murmured. "I do ask one thing in return, though."

I raised my eyebrows at him. "And what's that?"

He slowed down, and so did I. The snow swirled around us as he leaned in closer, and for a moment, I thought he was going to kiss me, but instead, he pressed his cool lips to my forehead in a surprisingly tender gesture.

"I ask for a chance at your heart, godbearer."

Chapter

Seventeen

CYRUS

Three days had passed since Chase was taken from us--three days that felt like an eternity--and we were still no closer to getting him back.

The only thing that made me feel better at all about the situation was that while time was passing normally for us on Earth, I was well aware things were different in the Underworld. It had probably not been that long at all to Chase.

The cabin felt empty without his presence. Colder. He had left a void behind, one I was sure we all felt. Maybe even Cameron, in his own way.

Alex and Sam were certainly affected. When I had a contact bring some blood bags for sustenance, Alex barely touched his, and Sam didn't drink at all until I told him he had to get his strength up if we wanted to have a chance at reclaiming Chase.

Anxiety gnawed at me like a relentless beast. I paced more often than not, racking my brain for ways we could pull this off. With Lash across the world now and swearing up and down he would never work with us again, things didn't feel all that hopeful, but he'd been kind enough to recommend a witch he knew who enjoyed "adventure." She was on her way to the cabin

now, and she seemed enthusiastic about all this, but this wasn't as high stakes for her.

She wasn't the one missing the most important person in her life.

And that was truly what Chase had become to me--and to Sam and Alex, too. He completed us.

The two men were sitting in front of the crackling fireplace, staring into the flames in silence. They didn't need to voice their fears for me to feel the nervous energy pouring off them in waves. I couldn't blame them for not wanting to talk about it. Sometimes it felt like talking about Chase only made things worse.

It wasn't like we could do anything until the witch got here, anyway.

I checked my watch for what felt like the millionth time. Five minutes until four in the afternoon. She should've been here thirty minutes ago.

What if something had happened? What if--

A knock at the door grabbed my attention. I quickly crossed the room and threw the door open, revealing the small, slender woman with wild purple hair standing on the cabin's doorstep. She looked up at me with sharp hazel eyes accented by violet eyeliner that stood out against her warm brown skin, flashing a bright smile.

"You must be Cyrus," she said, sticking her hand out. "I'm Maya."

I shook it and held the door open for her. "I am," I replied. "Thank you for coming, especially on such short notice."

"I'm sorry I'm late. There was some snow on the road, so it took my cab a little extra time to get here," Maya said as she stepped into the cabin, wrinkling her nose as she took in DuPonte's decor. It was eclectic, to say the

least. She especially didn't seem to enjoy the badly taxidermied deer head hanging over the fireplace mantel.

"It's fine. I'm just grateful you're here," I replied.

Sam stood to greet her. "I'm Sam," he said, shaking her hand with a strained smile. "Nice to meet you."

"It's nice to meet you, too," Maya said, giving him an appreciative once-over. She looked over at Alex, who was still staring despondently into the fireplace as if the flames had hypnotized him. "And is this Alex or Cameron?"

"This is Alex," I said, clearing my throat loudly enough to make him jolt. He turned to face Maya with a stiff smile that didn't reach his eyes.

"A man of few words?" she asked dryly.

"Not exactly," I muttered. "Things have just been weird around here lately, since..."

"Since Chase's disappearance?" she finished knowingly. When I nodded, she sighed. "Well, I'll do my best to help you get him back. I understand you need to contact Zeus?"

"Yes," I replied. "Do you still think the best way is through Artemis?"

"She is his daughter, and they're pretty close," she said. "If anyone can get in touch with him right now, it's her." I must have looked confused, because she added, "No one knows where Zeus is right now. Most witches don't worship him specifically, but the ones who do have said he's... well, AWOL."

"Great timing," Sam said flatly, crossing his arms over his broad chest. "So why haven't they just asked someone else like you're going to?"

I shot him a look, but Maya didn't seem bothered by his tone. "Summoning a god isn't easy," she replied pointedly. "It takes a massive amount of energy. Fortunately, there will be plenty of that between the four of us, considering you're vampires. Which is fascinating, by the way--I've never met a vampire. I'd like to pick your brains when all this is done."

"There are five of us," I said. "My brother's just out hunting." He wasn't the blood bag type, but he'd sworn to me he wouldn't kill anyone, at least. Not unless they "deserved" it, and I didn't necessarily agree with the moral code he used to determine that. Its flexibility was directly impacted by how thirsty he was.

Maya laughed nervously as she set her leather bag on the couch and began rummaging through it. "My reading this morning suggested we shouldn't involve him," she said carefully, not meeting my gaze. "And that he isn't to be trusted. It... kind of confirms the bad vibes I've been getting from him."

"What reading?" Alex asked, listening carefully now.

"Tarot," she clarified. "When I drew a card for him, it was The Devil. That suggests his intentions aren't exactly pure, and it symbolizes the darkness inside him--specifically how he may allow that darkness to control his fears and desires."

"What was mine?" Alex asked without skipping a beat. Of course he wanted to know.

"The Fool," she said. When he looked gravely offended, she laughed a little. "It's not an insult. It means you have great potential--and that you're about to embark on an adventure."

"It applies more than you'd think," Sam said with a snort. It was the closest thing to a laugh I'd heard from him since Chase's disappearance. Actually,

since Chase had entered the astral. It was good to see he had at least a little bit of hope.

Maya smiled at him. "Yours was the Six of Cups, so I'm assuming you were friends with Chase growing up. And now you're lovers. Is that correct?"

He nodded. "That's accurate," he murmured.

She turned to me with a pointed look. "You shouldn't ask which one I drew for you."

I arched an eyebrow. "Now I'm curious."

"The Tower," she said without missing a beat. "Chaos and destruction. I'm assuming it's related to your brother considering the other cards that came up during the reading, but you should tread carefully. It could be a warning of personal danger."

"I don't care what happens as long as we get Chase back," I replied. It was true. If I died doing this, so be it. Gods knew I'd lived long enough.

The only thing that bothered me at all about the idea of dying was knowing it meant I would miss out on spending the rest of my life with Chase.

If I just got to hold him one more time...

"Desperation can lead to powerful magic," Maya mused, her eyes distant as if recalling something from her past. "But it can also lead to grave mistakes. We must be careful in our approach."

"Of course," I agreed, my voice steady despite my inner turmoil. "What do we need to do?"

She went back to rummaging through her bag. It made sense that she'd come prepared, considering she hadn't asked us for anything. "Any time mortals attempt to commune with the gods, there is always a chance of

attracting unwanted attention or angering the deities themselves," she explained. "But if you're willing to take that chance, we'll do it."

"We'll do whatever it takes," I said with no hesitation.

"I understand," she said with a soft smile. "If it means meeting my goddess, I don't care what the risks are, either. I'd do anything for that chance. And this chance... it's once in a lifetime. It's not every day you get a coven of vampires willing to lend their energy to a summoning spell."

She drew a shimmering golden cloth from her bag and spread it out on the coffee table. The cloth was printed with a five-pointed star, and she placed a large purple candle at each point before setting a handful of an herb mixture I didn't recognize--save for dried lavender--in the center. She then placed a small bone of some kind on top of the herbs before arranging several crystals on the cloth in what seemed to be a deliberate pattern.

She lit the candles with a trembling hand. I hoped it was excitement and not fear, but in reality, it was probably a mixture of both.

"Are you sure we shouldn't wait for Cameron?" I asked.

She shook her head. "We should go ahead with this while he's out," she replied, observing her arrangement. "Are you ready?"

We all gathered around the makeshift altar in a circle, our hands clasped to form a ring, and Maya began to chant an ancient prayer in Greek.

The candles flickered and grew brighter as if a breeze had blown through the room. I saw movement out of the corner of my eye, but when I glanced over, there was nothing there. Maya's chanting grew louder and more urgent, as if she knew something we didn't.

The air around us seemed to grow heavy with anticipation as we waited for an answer from the gods. I wasn't a praying man, but I closed my eyes and

focused on the task ahead of us, willing our plea to be heard. I was already exhausted from the energy exchange, and I wasn't sure if I could do it again so soon if this failed.

"Artemis, hear my call," Maya said in English, her voice strong and clear. "Guide us in our time of need, and grant us your wisdom."

A strange sensation filled the room. It felt like warmth wrapping itself around me, and I was suddenly filled with a sense of hope that something might actually happen.

When I heard the rustle of fabric, I opened my eyes.

Before us stood a towering, statuesque woman. She was draped in flowing white robes with gold accents that matched the shimmering circlet of gold leaves crowning her waves of cascading ebony hair. Her dark skin radiated an otherworldly aura of energy that made the air around her seem to vibrate to the point where it was difficult to breathe.

As her amber gaze flickered to me, I realized I was looking into the fierce eyes of a wolf. Her nose crinkled slightly on one side in a mild glare as she appraised me, as if I disgusted her. And since I was a vampire, I probably did.

I bowed my head in reverence, as did Sam, but Alex just gawked. I kicked his foot and he bent forward further than he needed to, nearly breaking the circle, but I gripped his hand hard enough to make him wince.

Artemis' eyes twinkled with amusement when I glanced up, at least, but that faded when she set her gaze on the witch gaping at her. The tall goddess stooped just enough to kiss the witch's forehead.

"I am Artemis, goddess of the hunt," she said to the witch in an entrancing melodic voice. "I have come at your request. What do you need, my child?"

"I..." Maya began breathlessly, but she was at a loss for words, and it took her a moment to regain her composure. Her legs wobbled as she knelt, still gripping my hand and Sam's, and she bowed her head until her purple hair nearly brushed the floor.

"Rise, dear one," Artemis said softly.

Maya stared up at her in surprise before getting back to her feet, still clearly dizzy. "You're so beautiful," she blurted out.

Artemis chuckled. "Thank you. But let us focus on the matter at hand. Why did you call me here? Surely you had a grave reason if you sought the energy of these... creatures."

Maya took a deep breath and let it out slowly. "We need your help to contact Zeus," she said, her voice steady now. "Hades stole someone these men love dearly and dragged him to the Underworld."

A soft frown graced Artemis' ethereal features. "The godbearer?" she asked. "We were wondering if Hades would be successful in his quest to obtain Chase."

Maya nodded. "Yeah. That's him."

Artemis sighed. "I'm afraid no one knows where Zeus is," she admitted, regret evident in her voice. "I cannot say where he has gone or why, but his absence has left the balance of power among the gods unstable."

My heart sank, my earlier determination faltering in the face of this new obstacle. Without Zeus' aid, could we really hope to stand against Hades? But we had no choice. Giving up on Chase was not an option.

"Without Zeus, the task before you will be even more perilous," Artemis continued, her golden eyes holding each of ours in turn. "But I will help you. Chase is, after all, my brother."

I knew she was a child of Zeus herself, but hearing those words out loud was still surreal. I wondered if Chase truly grasped how many divine family members he had no idea about.

"Thank you," I said quietly.

"Did Hades say what he wanted with him?" Artemis continued.

"I'm sure we can guess," said Alex. "He's a monster."

She arched a slender eyebrow. "And you're not? Are you forgetting how this all began the night you murdered this man you claim to love?"

I winced at the unwanted memory, but she was right.

We wouldn't have known Chase at all if we hadn't...

"Where is *your* brother?" she asked me, interrupting my thoughts. "Is he not a part of this?"

"He's hunting," I replied. "But... how did you know I have a brother?"

"We're all familiar with Ichor and her cult," she replied dismissively. "You will need to be united with him if you wish to reclaim Chase. You cannot afford to have petty drama between you. That can wait until later."

"He can't be trusted," I muttered.

"He can," she said sharply. "Perhaps he cannot be trusted to do the right thing, but he can be trusted to look out for his own interests, and Hades laying claim to the godbearer certainly does not line up with that."

I nodded. She had a point.

"If we find Zeus, realistically, what are our odds?" Sam asked, butting in. "I don't care if I don't make it out of this, but if we all die trying to save Chase,

is anybody else going to be motivated to actually save him? Or are the gods who are pursuing him just going to use him for themselves?"

"I, for one, would do anything for my brother," she said cryptically, her golden gaze locking on me with more judgment than ever before. "Wouldn't you?"

I hesitated. I wasn't sure. We used to be inseparable, but now, he was my enemy. I wasn't even sure I fully considered him my brother anymore, and I doubted things would ever go back to the way they were. Not after everything he'd done.

"So if we don't make it," Alex said slowly, "you'll keep fighting for him?"

She gave him a solemn nod. "As for now, I will assemble an army of beasts," she said in a thoughtful tone. "We will storm the Underworld on the full moon when Hades is forced to transform. He will surely be in hiding as usual, especially if he doesn't want to frighten Chase." She turned back to me. "Your brother will transform as well, won't he? We'll need him."

"Yes," I replied, though the idea of trying to harness the hellcat's power was unnerving. I nodded to Alex at my side. "And this one is a hellhound shifter."

Alex looked fucking proud of that.

"Good," Artemis replied, glancing between Sam and me. "While Hades is distracted by my beasts and yours, you two will go in for the kill with sacred swords of iron and silver--unless you're afraid, that is."

"Not at all," Sam and I said at the same time.

"It's settled, then," said Artemis, the ghost of a smile on her lips. "We strike the Underworld in fourteen days. If anyone wishes to back out now, this is your final chance."

"Hell, no," Sam growled. "Let's do this. Let's kill a god."

TO BE CONTINUED in the final installment of the Godbearer series, Old Blood...

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