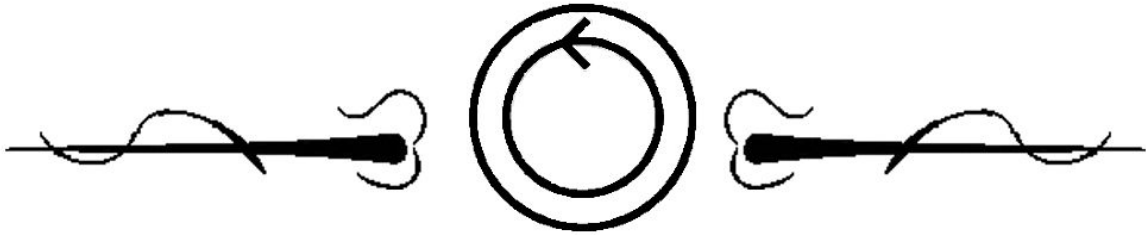


S. N. HUNT

Envy

Envy
(A Dark Demon Paranormal Romance)



Seven Princes of Sin Book Five

S. N. Hunt

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Sneak Peek of Wrath

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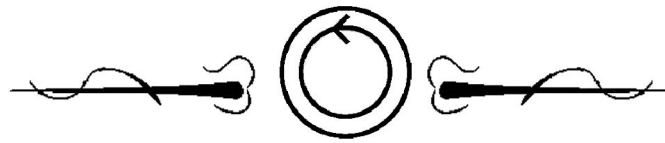
Also by S. N. Hunt

About the Author

This book is intended for mature audiences and contains dark themes. Some of the content might be troubling to some readers, including, but not limited to, attempted date rape with drugging, murder, suicide/self-harm, sexual child abuse, assault, and neglect (implied not described, I have my limits), sexual assault to MFC, anal, alcoholism, stalking, FF, torture, graphic sexual scenes, gore, and trauma. It also contains religious topics that some might find offensive. But if you've made it this far into the Seven Princes, I doubt this bugs you. Little baby Aedin is waiting....

Who's Who

This list does not include people introduced in this book. It only gives those who have been in previous books as a reference.



The Princes of Sin

Adam Lust: Second son of Lilith and Satan. Prince of Lust. Demon name: Asmodeus. Mate: Donna. Color is dark blue.

Club Lust: Brothel that caters to various kinks and a porn studio. Brothel is run by a succubus named Suga', the right hand of Adam.

Leo Gluttony: Fourth son of Lilith and Satan. Prince of Gluttony. Demon name: Belphegor. Mate: Carrie. Color is Orange.

Club Gluttony: Each floor is a different restaurant. Serves anything that you request. Basement is called the Den, where they serve drugs. Usually ran by Billy, Leo's right hand.

Linnaeus Sloth: Sixth son of Lilith and Satan. Prince of Sloth. Demon name: Abaddon. Mates: Sylvia and Gabriel. Color is light blue.

Club Sloth: Slave auction. Usually the last to open because of Linnaeus sleeping most of the time.

Corvus Greed: Third son of Lilith and Satan. Prince of Greed. Demon name: Mammon. Mate: Isabel. Color is yellow/gold.

Club Greed: Offshore banking, illegal betting, loans to help those down on their luck.

Aedin Envy: Seventh son of Lilith and Satan. Prince of Envy. Demon name: Beelzebub. Mate: unknown. Color is green.

Club Envy: Fantasy rooms to live out your greatest desires. Concerts are held weekly for those that wish to get close to the spotlight.

Stan Wrath: Fifth son of Lilith and Satan. Prince of Wrath, Demon name: Sathanas. Mate: unknown. Color is red.

Club Wrath: Rage rooms where you can deal out your frustrations.

Lucifer Pride: First son of Lilith. Father unknown. Prince of Pride. Demon name: Lucifer. Mate: unknown. Color is purple. Nickname: Luci. Has no beast.

Club Pride: Illegal surgeries and drugs to enhance your appearance. Only the most wealthy can afford membership.

The Choir

Michael: Archangel of Justice. His charge is Angelica, who is currently being held in Heaven and trained as an assassin. Color is gold. Rival is Pride. Firstborn.

Uriel: Archangel of Wisdom. Guardian angel over Carrie. Color is red. Rival is Gluttony. Was captured by Leo and is being held in the lower levels of Club Gluttony.

Camael: Archangel of Love and Charity. Color is pink. Donna Sanchez's father aka Marcus Sanchez. Left to protect her from the Choir and was kept in the Divine Needle. Freed by Satan, Lilith, and Jophiel.

Jophiel: Archangel of Patience. Guardian Angel over Rebecca. Color is yellow. Mate to Brandon Lowe. Doesn't trust Michael and has helped to free Camael.

Zadkiel: Archangel of Loyalty. Guardian angel over Luna. Color is purple. Rival is Wrath. Has lost his connection with his charge. In an incestuous relationship with Michael.

Raphael: Archangel of Temperance. Guardian angel over Isabel. Color is green. Rival is Greed. Wants to free his sister, Uriel, and will do anything he can to accomplish it.

Gabriel: Archangel of Faith. Guardian angel over Sylvia. Color is white. Was stripped of his wings and his memories wiped after God found out that he was in a relationship with Linnaeus and Rhenesea. He has regained his memories and found his place with his true family.

Mates to the Seven Princes

Donna Sanchez: Daughter of Sheila and Marcus (Camael) Sanchez. Was dating and abused by Jeremy before meeting Adam. Mated to Adam. Was one of the first mates to be killed by God. Is a Nephlim.

Carrie Wilson: Donna's best friend who betrayed her for drugs in *Lust*. Married to John Wilson, who pimped her out for money. Has gotten clean with the help of Leo, her mate. Was a powerful witch named Cassandra in a previous life.

Sylvia Tapp: Was kidnapped by John and trained as a slave at the Farm. Rescued by Linnaeus and Gabriel, and is their mate. Was a siren named Rhenesea in her previous life. Was shot and killed by Eddie Lordi. Came back to life by decree of Azazel, the Angel of Death.

Isabel Lowe: Left penniless after her husband's death. Has two boys. She was a dryad that was captured by Stan Wrath and left in the hands of Corvus. Stan tore down a third of her grove. Was kidnapped by Rapheal to get back his sister, Uriel.

The Saints

Jeremy Lordi: Second in command. Son of Eddie Lordi. Was dating Donna and abusing her. Used her to kill Adam. Kidnapped her, but the Princes rescued her. Tortured and killed by Adam.

John Wilson: Jeremy's right-hand man. Adopted son of Eddie Lordi. Ran a prostitution ring until the Jeremy incident. He was then put in charge of

the human trafficking side of the gang. Captured by Carrie and Leo. Killed by Sylvia.

Eddie Lordi: Leader and founder of the Saints. Shot Sylvia and was killed by Linnaeus.

Charles Kroff: Senator helping the Saints and Michael. Was supposed to own Sylvia before she was rescued. Killed by Eddie Lordi.

The In-Between

Malak: Brother to God and Satan. Rules over the in-between as a mediator. Judges souls and sends them to either Heaven or Hell. Granted the mates immortality for his mistakes.

Azazel: Donna and Adam's son. Was killed by God as an abomination. Given to Malak in exchange for helping God erase Satan and Lilith's memories.

Other important figures and family

Sheila: Mother of Donna. Drug addict. Jeremy used her as leverage against Donna. With the help of Adam, she is now sober and dating one of his employees, Tom.

Suga': The madam of Club Lust. Succubus. Possessive of Adam and is his right hand.

Tom: Incubus dating Sheila.

Billy: Right hand of Leo. Gluttony demon that was used by Uriel to capture Carrie.

Lucy: Mother of Sylvia. Has passed away.

Lilith: Mother of the Seven Princes. Mistress of Hell and wife of Satan. Caused the sundering of Eden.

Satan: Father of at least six of the Seven Princes. Master of Hell. Still regards Lucifer as his son. Brother to God and Malak.

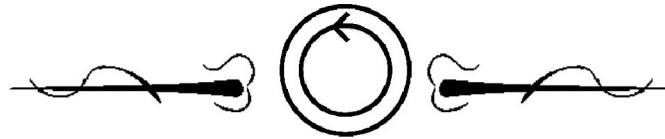
God: Hates the Seven Princes with a passion, though no one knows why. Put Michael in charge of Heaven and has since left for the Veil. Reasons unknown.

Brandon Lowe: Son of Isabel. Mate to Jophiel. Aedin's assistant.

Will Lowe: Son of Isabel. Foretold Raphael with warnings of green feathers. His soul is as ancient as the sun.

Nazareth: Has helped the mates. He gave drugs to Carrie at the Farm. Led Gabriel and Linnaeus to Sylvia. Awakened Sylvia's powers. Helped Isabel in the cemetery to get away from Rapheal. Nothing else is known about him other than he draws pictures of a beautiful woman and is an ally to the Princes.

Chapter One



A edin pushed through the crowded room, maneuvering between the bustling bodies and scanning the faces of those in attendance. The atmosphere was electric at Club Envy as its annual New Year's Eve bash got underway. The smell of alcohol and perfume hung heavy in the air. Drinks flowed like ambrosia, and money shifted between hands with a crinkle of paper. If there was anything people enjoyed more than music, it was booze. The party was one of the few times when the business was open to the public. The crowd was a diverse mix of members and nonmembers, all talking at once. Current patrons were excitedly spinning tales of the fantasy rooms on the other floors to the visitors. Clients were incentivized to spread the word about the event. In return, they were offered a large discount on membership fees for referring anyone who attended.

“Aedin, up here!”

He glanced into the loft overhead and saw Leo leaning over the rail, enthusiastically waving at him. His brother would stand out in any group with his blazing red hair and deep moss colored eyes. Moving toward the stairs, Aedin smiled when the bouncer guarding the entrance to the VIP area

pulled back a chartreuse velvet rope. He quickly jogged up the steps, a grin plastered on his face.

His family was gathered around a bar, greeting him with cheers and clapping. Corvus popped the cork from a bottle, releasing an ear-splitting pop, and sparkling foam created a tall arc in the air. A tower of glasses on the table trembled as his sibling filled the top glass, the liquid sloshing over the sides to fill those below.

“What’s the occasion? By now, this whole New Year’s Eve party should be boring and dull for you guys,” Aedin said, accepting a drink from Sylvia, her dark eyes twinkling.

“It’s not every day that our baby brother finds his mate,” Stan replied, clapping him hard on the back.

Aedin sputtered into his cup, the hit strong enough to knock the wind out of him. The Master of Wrath was always struggling to keep his strength in check. His sibling’s laughter filled the room, and his scar crinkled as his lips twitched in response. His eyes glittered with mirth, the warmth of their reddish-brown color radiating from his face. But the roaring dragon tattoos that ran down the sides of his skull only amplified his intimidating presence.

Aedin shook his head while wiping his mouth. “I haven’t got her yet. She hasn’t even met me. I let Brandon handle all the details. Besides, I never would’ve gotten this far without Jophiel’s help.”

“That’s not true. You’re destined to meet whether I led you to her or not. The mates have always gravitated toward the Princes. It’s why we watched over them and prevented it,” the woman said.

A hush fell over the group when the mention of what could’ve happened was made. Jophiel nervously gulped and her chocolate-colored eyes

scanned the room rapidly. Her head drooped, her sepia curls cascading across her furrowed brow. Her mate, Brandon, wrapped an arm about her waist and silently tried to comfort her.

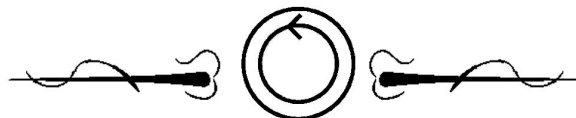
“Sorry,” she added.

“It’s okay. What’s done is done,” Adam stated, pulling Donna closer to his side and kissing her temple.

“Come on now. We’re at a party, and another mate’s about to join the fold. One that doesn’t have an angel hovering over her. This’ll be a piece of cake. Nobody can resist this baby face,” Leo said, pinching Aedin’s cheek roughly.

Aedin pulled away with a chuckle, shaking his head. He walked over to the railing, the metal cold to the touch, and stared down at the people below. Staff rushed about, the sound of their hectic footsteps filling the air while they set up for the next act. His heart fluttered in his chest, and nervousness made his stomach sour. His mate’s band, Red Riot, would soon take center stage.

Will she recognize me? Or feel the pull of our bond? He had attempted to rouse his beast from its cage, but it refused to come out. Only the sound of its grumbles and huffs rang in his mind. His brothers had told him it would surface when he saw her, but his heart was heavy with doubt.



Rebecca let out a deep breath, trying desperately to calm her nervousness. Her guitar was nestled securely in her hands, and the strings dug into her palms. Despite her many performances, the butterflies in her stomach never dissipated. *Club Envy. This is it. This could be the big moment that propels Red Riot into the limelight.*

“Are you nervous, Becca?”

She turned and stared at her best friend, Evelyn, before nodding, not trusting her voice. The woman nervously twirled the drumsticks in her hands, and the wood blurred through the air. Her large blue irises swept across the stage, her short spiky green hair glimmering in the light whenever she bobbed her head to the overhead music.

Jessica stood on the other side of Becca and her eyes were wide as she gazed out at the crowd in fear. The bassist’s face was pale, and she was breathing heavily, as if she was about to be sick. Her ebony tresses were intricately woven, giving her a formidable look, boosted by the many tribal tattoos that covered her bare arms.

“Me too. It’s hard to believe that this all started in my garage, and now we’re about to perform before hundreds of people, maybe thousands,” Evelyn said.

“Yeah,” Becca stated, the word low and breathy.

“That’s right, ladies, so don’t fuck this up. Are you sober?”

When her gaze settled on Randy Thomas, their manager, her eyelids narrowed. She was certain that he was pocketing most of their profits, despite the exclusive contract they had signed with him a year prior. His hair, streaked with salt and pepper, was slicked back. His cheap polyester suit clung to his slim figure. A sly, sinister smile lit up his handsome face. From the moment she had laid eyes on him, she had detected an unsettling

aura, but Evelyn had been adamant, claiming he could help them achieve success. The only comfort was the fact that Becca had seen his death. She wasn't positive about what did him in, but it would be a gruesome end. The image of his broken and battered body lying in a bank of snow was enough to fill her with a sense of victory.

"Fuck off, Randy," she said, bending and picked up the open bottle of whiskey.

She took a long swig of the liquor and relished the slight sting it left on her tongue. He despised the fact that she drank before every performance, but he didn't see what she saw when she stood in front of the audience. Even with the bright lights, she could still make out certain figures when they stepped out of the shadows and into her line of sight. The images of their lives were a relentless barrage that would leave her shaking and desperately trying to draw a breath. Only the booze kept it all at bay.

"Just ensure the stagehands place a few bottles by the drums. The crowd loves it anyway," she snapped, setting the bottle back down.

As their introduction echoed through the loudspeaker, she excitedly hopped up and down. Taking a pick from the sash of her guitar, her heart began to pound in anticipation of their performance. "Here we go, bitches. Let's give them hell!"

She strummed out the first chord of their opening song, and cheering filled the air. Evelyn sprinted over to her drums and started playing. Becca nudged Jessica, who stood with her eyes wide open, mesmerized by the frenzied audience. The girl shook her head and took a deep breath. Her bandmate's fingers danced across the strings of her own guitar, the notes filling the room as she marched out. The bassist found her mark and her

eyelids closed while she showcased her skills, the sound of her bass rumbling.

Becca stepped out of the shadows, tasting the dryness of her lips. She walked onto the stage and felt the warmth of the spotlight on her skin. The throng of people roared, their shouts reverberating through her body. She slowly sauntered over to the microphone, her guitar humming sweetly with each note. She stepped up to the mic, and the music paused, the room falling silent.

“We are Red Riot!” she screamed.

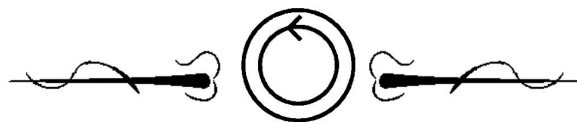
The audience was whipped into a state of feverish excitement, their cries resonating in the air. She raised her arms high, her skin tingling with exhilaration, and threw her head back, basking in the room’s rapturous applause. She quickly grabbed the microphone stand when the powerful sound of a drumbeat vibrated through the room. Closing her eyes, she was absorbed in the lyrics of the song as they floated out of her. *‘In This World’* was a hard rock anthem about living through hell and coming out the other side. She had written it in the depths of her despair, her sorrow evident in every word.

When her guitar solo came up, she stepped back and strummed the strings with a flourish. Her nimble fingers moved swiftly, bringing her instrument to life while she glanced over the expectant crowd. The blazing lights made it difficult to make out the patrons on the floor, and her gaze floated up to the balcony. When she looked into the pair of bright green irises, her breath caught in her throat. She peered into a man’s face framed by light blond hair. A spark of recognition lit up her heart, but she kept her cool.

He resembled the guy she had seen eight years ago when she had her seizure. As the memory of it resurfaced, she pondered if he had been the one to start it all. *But there's no way he's the same dude. He would be old, fifty at least, right?* She shook her head, concentrating on her performance, but her eyes kept drifting back to him.

She walked across the stage, the warmth of the lights heating her face until she was on the side closest to him. Her knees bent while she strummed out another chord, each note sultry and seductive, her gaze never leaving his. His irises contained a heat that made her cheeks flush and her body warm. After their performance was finished, she would have to find this succulent piece of meat. She jumped from the edge and scrambled to the mic, her heart racing as the next part of the song approached.

Her fingers caressed the microphone without breaking eye contact. He leaned farther over the rail, his arms resting on the metal. His lips curled into a sexy smile, and she couldn't help but grin back. *Oh, tonight might be one to stay a little sober. I think I want to remember this.*



Aedin's hand trembled when he grasped the frigid steel doorknob of Rebecca Gibbons' dressing room. His heart hammered in his chest, his blood crashing through his veins. His cock was the hardest it had ever been.

Her performance had been a masterpiece of sex and seduction. Her gaze had rarely left him, and he had felt like she was singing just for him.

Each time her fingers had strummed a note, his stomach had responded with a tight tug that traveled straight to his balls. The sound of her voice had sent a chill through his body and caused the hairs on his arms to stand on end. He had fought to not pull her right off the stage before fucking her against the side of it.

Open the damn door.

He jumped when the words ricocheted through his skull.

Beast?

He strained his ears, but all he heard was an oppressive silence. With a shake of his head, he gripped the doorknob firmly and gave it a twist. She sat at her vanity, her fingertip dragging along the smooth rim of the liquor bottle. She raised her eyes to meet his in the mirror, and their gazes locked. A soft, pleased smile graced her lips as her greenish-blue irises glowed with an inner fire. He shut the door behind him with a gentle click and took a step into the room, feeling the plush carpet beneath his feet.

She was dressed in a pair of low, hip-hugging, ripped jeans that outlined her lean legs. Her band tee shirt clung to her, looking like a second skin, with the hem cut just above her navel. Vibrant tattoos adorned her slender, toned arms, and each muscle was clearly defined. Her midnight blue hair had been styled into a voluminous mohawk, with the sides of her head shaved close and smooth. Multiple earrings sparkled in her ears and a black metal bar winked from one of her eyebrows. A tiny diamond stud glimmered in her nose, perfectly accentuating its delicate shape.

She rose to her feet slowly and turned toward him. Her hard nipples pressed against the fabric of her tee, showing she wore nothing underneath.

The outline of the bars that pierced through them made his breath hitch. She walked up to him and he felt rooted in place. His body had become unresponsive, as if it were no longer his own. He attempted to think of what to say, but his voice was stuck in his throat.

She licked her lips before falling to her knees before him. His eyes grew wide when she grappled with his belt buckle. He tried to grasp her hands, but she swiftly yanked them away. The brush of her fingers against his aching cock made him moan. *Oh, fuck.*

Before he knew what had happened, she had freed his dick and was bobbing on its length. The slide of her tongue piercing scraped along the underside and he growled. He closed his eyelids when her warm mouth devoured him. The sound of her slurping caused his knees to weaken. Her greedy lips pulled and sucked on his shaft, demanding him to fill her with his thick cum. Her hands circled and pumped his cock with rapid, rough tugs.

A growl built in his chest, and a tight knot of lust tightened in his balls. His fingers buried in her hair, pulling her flush against his pelvis. She whimpered and smacked his thigh, but he thrust into her throat a few times before releasing her. She glared up at him, wiping the spit from her mouth.

“Listen, I’m the one who controls how we do this, not—“

But he didn’t let her finish and gripped her locks tightly before shoving his cock between her lips. She struggled, her hands tearing at him. He gave a slight chuckle before delicately tilting her head back and making her gaze up at him. The greenish-blue color of her irises was almost black with rage and passion.

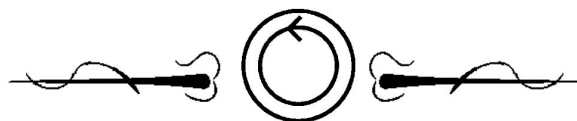
“You started this. Don’t look at me like that. You shouldn’t play with fire if you don’t wanna be burned,” he said.

Pulling her lips to his cock, he slammed in and out of her mouth, forcing his balls to her chin with every stroke. Tears dripped from her eyes, leaving trails of mascara down her cheeks. Her nails dug into the denim of his jeans, but otherwise, she didn't struggle. Instead, her tongue lashed along the underside of his shaft and her throat opened for his invasion.

Fuck. She's gonna milk me dry.

He pulled her off it with a loud pop. Spit dribbled down her chin, dampening the collar of her shirt. He brought her to her feet with a tight grip on her strands before dragging her over to the chair in front of the vanity. He released her, and she stumbled against it.

"Take off your pants and bend over," he said, his hand stroking his wet shaft.



Oh, my god. Becca trembled while she watched him pump his long length. His cock was thick with veins that stood out against the pink of his flesh. It had been ages since someone had held her down and taken control of her in the bedroom. Most groupies were so awestruck that they came with just a touch of her hand. She couldn't remember the last time she had been this fucking wet. Her tight jeans clung to her dripping pussy, and she was sure they were drenched. When she didn't obey, he let out an intimidating, low growl that rippled straight to her throbbing core. Quickly

unzipping her fly, she peeled off her pants, the fabric rustling as it slid across her skin. She spun and gripped the edge of the chair tightly, her nails digging deep into the soft material.

She jumped when he smacked a hand down on her ass cheek. The sting of it sent pulsing excitement straight into her pussy. His fingers dipped into her, and she moaned.

“Despite how you act, you’re dripping. So warm and ready to be fucked within an inch of your life.”

Her chin quivered at his words, her skin prickling as heat rushed over her. A longing built deep inside of her, and she yearned for him to fill her completely, to screw her until all her worries faded away. He wrapped an arm around her waist and thrust his fingers into her in rapid strokes. Her mouth fell open in a silent scream, her hips squirming. The liquid sound of her juices filled the room.

“Fuck yeah, you’re all hot and bothered. Your pussy’s practically begging for my cock.”

She pressed her forehead against the cushion and felt the softness of it against her skin. She shook her head from side to side. Her body was taut, her muscles tensed while he worked her into a frenzy. His other hand skimmed down her belly and strummed across her clit. She exploded with a scream, spots flickering in her sight. A gush of warmth flowed down her inner thighs when her pussy spasmed and her orgasm crashed over her.

“Oh, yeah, baby. Fucking squirt for me, coat my fingers with your juices.”

He stubbornly refused to relent, and her knees trembled as she whimpered. More liquid shot from her, coating her legs in rivulets. He bit her buttock roughly while snarling before releasing her. She collapsed onto

the ground and her eyelashes fluttered against her skin. Her breath left her lungs in hot gasps, her vision swimming. She couldn't remember ever cumming this hard before. Though the carpet beneath her squished with each movement, she didn't have the energy to rise. She laid her head on the seat of the chair and her mind raced with thoughts of him doing it again.

He effortlessly lifted her, cradling her securely in his arms. Becca let out a shrill squeal and held on to him tightly, her breath catching in her throat. He strode confidently toward the door as if she weighed nothing. She squirmed, fear choking her with each step he took. *He's not going to leave the room, is he?* She was all for a kinky fuck, but being paraded around the club with no pants on was a hard limit. When her back hit the solid, comforting wood, her irrational brain stopped its frantic spiral.

His cock slid into her with one fluid movement of his hips and elicited a loud moan from her. He was big, leaving a slight pinch deep within her core, but her passion flickered to life once more. She locked her ankles about his waist and he widened his stance. His hands curled around her shoulders, drawing her tight against his pelvic bone.

Each thrust jarred her, violent and possessive. His cock left a delicious ache in its wake. Her mind reeled in a fog of pleasure and lust, every inch of her skin tingling. Her fingers ran through his soft, silky hair, tugging gently. He grunted and hammered into her, a madman bent on breaking her. The rub of his hard stomach against her clit sent bolts of fire through her. Her breath hitched as the cusp of her climax loomed.

“Fucking cum for me, Rebecca. Cover me with the scent of your sex.”

His growled words fired a final spark of heat through her, and she screamed when every muscle tensed. Her pussy clamped down on his hard length. He shoved his shaft brutally into her with a snarl. The warmth of his

cum flooded her, overflowing out of her to mingle with her own juices. She was so enamored with the pleasure that the thought of practicing safe sex didn't even cross her mind. With a single bound, she shot up into the stars, leaving behind the ache of her miserable life.

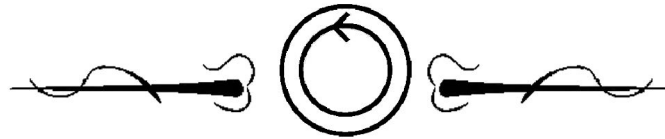
She slowly drifted back to earth, and a soft, contented smile curved her lips. She hung limp against him, her breath rattling from her lungs. His cock twitched within her, still as hard as he had been a minute ago. She had never felt the urge to ask her lovers for their names. It was just another thing that would complicate an already tangled situation, but she wanted to learn his. She needed to know who had given her the two best orgasms of her life.

“Who are you?” she asked in a slurred tone.

He chuckled and nuzzled against the side of her neck.

“Aedin Envy.”

Chapter Two



No, no, no!

Becca unlocked her legs from around Aedin and shoved his shoulders roughly. He stumbled back, his cock slipping from within her. The friction of the movement caused her to gasp and sent bolts of pleasure rippling through her. She shook her head, resting her palms on her bare knees. He was just about to take a step forward when she raised her hand and stopped him in his tracks.

She had broken most of her own set of rules over the years, but one still remained that she refused to violate. *Never screw the boss. Why did he have to be the guy that hired us?*

“Listen, this never happened. Delete it right out of your memory bank, sir,” she said.

She stomped over to her crumpled jeans, her thoughts racing. *Fuck me running. You’re an idiot, Becca.* She pulled her pants on and zipped them closed, the sound of the zipper ringing in her ears. The denim rubbed against her sensitive parts, causing her to bite back a moan. A dull,

pounding ache began to build at the base of her skull, and the bottle of whiskey seemed to call out to her.

“It did, and it’s going to happen again.” Aedin’s words sent a shiver of delight down her spine, but she shook it off.

She gripped the neck of her warm, amber colored liquor and took a deep breath before taking a long, satisfying draw from it. Heat spread through her, helping to ease the pounding in her head, but not the pang between her legs. Her pussy clenched, and she almost whimpered pathetically. Every inch of her wanted him to take her again, to fall apart in his arms until she was a mess of tears and lust.

She grabbed her heavy combat boots and sat down on the chair, forcing herself not to wiggle in an effort to relieve her need. The warmth of his cum seeped down her thighs and dampened the crotch of her jeans, a silent reminder of what had just transpired. She felt the undeniable urge to flee the room, away from the man and the temptation he exuded. With a groan, she forced her shoes on her feet, her movements jerky and stiff.

“No, it won’t. I don’t fuck my employers. It’s bad for business,” she said.

Becca reached for her bottle, and her gaze locked with Aedin’s in the reflection of the mirror. He glared at her with a fierce intensity, his green eyes blazing with rage. She returned it with one of her own, but her body was trembling with fear. This man had the power to undo Red Riot’s progress in an instant. He could easily bury them all because she refused to be his little fucktoy.

He marched toward her, the sensual bobbing of his cock drawing her attention. It jutted out of his open fly, looking painfully hard, and her mouth went dry. Her juices were slowly drying on its length, highlighting the thick veins that ran through it. She quickly took another drink, then fumbled with

her pack of smokes, averting her gaze. She bit down on a cigarette and attempted to make her lighter spark with shaky fingers.

“I don’t give a shit about whether I hired you or not,” he growled the words, his hand snatching the smoke from her. “When I want something, I get it. No buts, no protests. You’ll be mine, Rebecca Gibbons. Even if I have to lock you up in my penthouse and chain you to my fucking bed.”

When he leaned over her, her eyes narrowed, and her lips curled into a snarl. *How dare he threaten me? Fuck him. What is it with rich pricks thinking they can do and say whatever they want?*

She was about to retort when the dressing room door flung open with a loud thud, startling them both. When she twirled and saw Randy Thomas standing in the doorway, she sighed with relief. She never thought she would be grateful to see the sleazeball, but right at this moment, she wanted nothing more than to fall at his feet and thank him. Aedin cursed under his breath before turning and tucking his cock away.

“Whoa... Am I interrupting?” Randy’s lips twisted into a sneer, his eyes sparkling with amusement. His gaze darted around the room before eventually settling on the large, wet stain on the floor. His irises shone with humor and his soft chuckle filled the air. A chill ran down her spine when she imagined what he must be thinking. *Nope, I still hate his guts.*

“Yes.”

“No.”

They spoke in unison, and Becca shook her head in disbelief. She stood up from the chair, grabbing her leather jacket from the rack beside the vanity. The sound of the metal hanger hitting the floor was like a muffled bell. She pulled her coat on, feeling the warmth of the fabric on her skin, before heading toward the door. Aedin let out an angry growl, but she didn’t

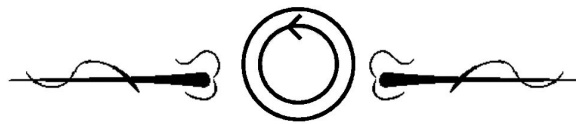
even spare him a glance as she brushed past her manager. Randy's hand gripped her upper arm roughly and tugged her against his side.

"Where are you going? You have autographs to sign and the afterparty to attend," he hissed, the fragrance of mouthwash heavy on his breath.

She clenched her jaw, tilting her chin defiantly. She glanced over her shoulder and saw the rage in Aedin's eyes before meeting Randy's gaze. "Anywhere but here."

"Find Evelyn. She knows where to go," he whispered.

He released her, and she stumbled away from her manager. Her heart hammered in her chest, her blood roaring in her ears. She hurried down the hall as if Hell nipped at her heels.



Aedin fought the temptation to grab her by her midnight blue hair and make her stay with him. His body trembled with rage, his fists tightly clenched. His usual calm demeanor had been replaced by a sense of unrest, and he had never been so angry before. Something stirred deep within him, a possessive force that had been awakened by her presence. It bared its teeth and demanded that he claim her.

"Mr. Envy, most performers will trade sexual favors for special treatment, but Becca's unique. She prefers to keep her relationships with her employers professional. But if you like, arrangements can be made for one

of her bandmates to accommodate you. Both of them are quite the spitfires. Evelyn's a bit of a cuddler, but Jessica's a pro with a whip and some handcuffs. Just let me know which you prefer?"

He glared at her manager with a sharp, calculating look. Brandon had warned him that Randy Thomas was slimy, but nothing could've prepared him for the instant revulsion he felt. Bile rose in his throat, and his stomach soured.

"Fuck off. I'm not interested in either of her friends." He pushed past the man aggressively, putting all his dislike into the movement.

Randy stumbled back with a heavy groan, yet he still managed to paste a smile on his lips. "I hope this won't affect the rest of our agreement."

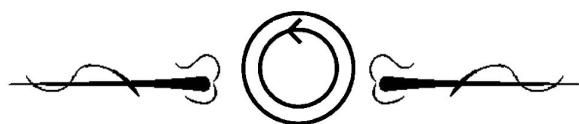
Aedin sighed, the sound of frustration reverberating through the room. *Of course, he'd be worried about the fucking money. None of this has to do with Rebecca.* He spun on his heel and cocked his head to the side, a tight grin on his face. "Our contract still stands. Red Riot will receive compensation for each show they perform at Club Envy for the month of January."

"And the Valentine's Day Bash? They'll headline with three times the usual amount?"

He inhaled a breath of air and let out a dry, raspy chuckle, his lips stretching into a wicked grin. The slime bag gulped and his eyes twitched nervously. It took every ounce of Aedin's willpower not to punch the guy right in his smug face. "Yes, Mr. Thomas. I don't go back on my word. By the time I'm done with Red Riot, they'll be topping the charts. Now then, if there isn't anything else, I have work to do."

The rapid nodding of Randy's head sent his salt and pepper hair cascading down into his fearful eyes. Aedin turned away from the man, his

fists clenched and his steps determined as he marched down the hall. He took a deep breath, trying to calm the fury churning in his stomach. His skin was hot and prickled with restrained anger. *Before this is all over, her band will be on my damn label and Rebecca Gibbons will warm my fucking bed every single night.*



Becca shivered when the crowd clamored against the security fence, their ecstatic cries ringing in her ears. She grabbed a slip of paper and her pen made a loud scratching noise as she wrote her name across it before offering it to Evelyn. The air rushed in and out of her lungs with each wheezing breath, her fingers growing cold. Her frustration rose when the throng of fans eagerly pushed closer with their hands outstretched. Her mind was clearing, and the fluorescent lights were searing her eyes.

“You okay?” her friend whispered so only she could hear.

“I need a drink.”

She had been so anxious to exit the dressing room that she had forgotten her bottle. She heard a high-pitched squeal and instinctively pressed her fingers to her brow, squeezing her eyelids tightly shut. A tiny brunette hopped in place, with eyes full of excitement. Images of the girl’s future danced through Becca’s mind, accompanied by the sound of her own heartbeat.

It wouldn't be a terrible life. The woman's husband would worship her, and she'd stay faithful. The grim picture of a hospital bed caused a deep, aching sorrow to taint the edges of the vision. Loved ones surrounded a frail elderly lady, and she died peacefully, with the warmth of their love lingering in the air. Her children and grandkids cried over her, tightly clasping her lifeless hands. Their wails echoed in Becca's mind and blended with the enthusiastic screams of the crowd.

She quickly signed the girl's chest before moving further down the line. A guy in a red shirt smiled seductively at her and she swiftly scrawled her signature across his shoulder with the permanent marker he held. When his future unfolded, her heart raced, his anger and lust seeping into her as the vision turned a deep crimson. He wrapped his hands tightly around a young woman's throat, silencing her pleas for mercy and snuffing the life from her. A rush of images passed through Becca's thoughts, and she stumbled, falling to one knee. People like him were the worst. The ones who didn't stand out, those who looked like everyone else but were far from normal. Her tears built when the flashes came quicker and soon her eyelashes were covered in moisture. *How many girls are there?*

It all ended with his mouth hanging open while a gun fired. Blood seeped down his chest, his eyes large when he stared at it. His trembling hands rose to the blotch, and crimson coated his fingertips. He fell to his knees, begging through red-stained lips. Another shot, and a hole appeared in the center of his forehead. His body slumped in slow motion to the ground, his gaze sightless and dull.

A bottle was pressed into Becca's hand, and she took a deep drink of it. The flavor of black licorice was so intense that it made her gag, the taste lingering in her mouth. She coughed and winced as she rose to her feet, the

sound of her labored breathing filling the air. Over the last few months, she had noticed that it was becoming increasingly difficult to get totally drunk. It was as if her body was burning off the liquor faster. She found herself drinking twice, sometimes even three times, as much as she normally would. Her liver had to be in agony, but she couldn't bear the tormenting images that plagued her.

Evelyn looked at her with pity. "You okay?"

Her friend was the only person who knew about her curse. Together, they had crafted songs overflowing with the sights, smells, and emotions she had experienced through her visions. Evelyn was destined for a happy life. One brimming with love and devotion from a man she would meet while playing at a packed house. She just had to wait until Red Riot made it big. The idea that someone close to Becca would find happiness filled her with a warm feeling, and she smiled. *Lord knows, I won't have one.*

She guzzled her drink, barely pausing for breath. The liquor seared through her, and she shuddered. As her vision grew hazier, the room spun, making her dizzy. She felt a reassuring hand on her arm and beamed at her bandmate.

"Yeah, I think so, but I need something else. This tastes like shit," she said, raising the bottle. She chuckled, but blue eyes searched hers, and a question burned in their depths. Sighing, she added, "The guy in red. He's a rapist and murderer, but someone will do him in. Two shots. That's all it'll take."

"I wish there was something we could do. I hate this whole helpless feeling," her friend said.

Becca shook her head. "What do you want me to do? Sorry, officer, I don't have any evidence. Just a vision that I got when I looked at him. It

doesn't work that way. They'll lock me up and throw away the key."

As a child, she had tried to explain to people what she saw, but that only resulted in her being dragged to therapy and being prescribed a plethora of medications. Hypnotherapy had helped a little. The nightmares that had once plagued her vanished overnight. Of course, the counseling and drugs hadn't done a damn thing, but the entire ordeal taught her a valuable lesson: Tell no one what she knew. She tucked the secret away and fervently hoped it would all work out. It had taken years of conversation and building a rapport before she felt safe enough to confide in Evelyn. Her friend had been the first to listen to her story and believe it.

"Come on. We better get to that afterparty before Randy comes looking for us," she said with a sigh.

They intertwined their arms and hurried down the line of loud, chaotic fans. Becca followed her bandmate through the club; the thumping beats vibrated off the walls. The pulsations of the music traveled through the soles of her feet as the band on stage sang their finale. Once they were finished, the concert hall would clear out. The staff would clean up the mess of empty bottles and discarded food wrappers, but the aroma of sweat mixed with alcohol would linger in the air.

Becca hated when the lights died down, the eerie silence almost deafening while adrenaline still pumped through her veins. Red Riot had never experienced the enthusiasm of a large crowd before. Most of their gigs had been at dingy establishments with sticky floors and stale beer. Usually, about this time of the night, she would be staggering home with a sexy little groupie tucked against her side. Man or woman, it didn't matter, as long as they were warm and willing. A few hours of fucking would

release the energy in her muscles, and make her forget any of the visions that had slipped through the haze of the alcohol.

“Rebecca Gibbons!”

They suddenly came to a halt when a guy jumped over the fence that blocked them off from the cheering crowd. His beady eyes glowed with anticipation and he clutched a notebook tightly against his lumpy chest. His round face was flushed, his feet shuffling nervously. He was short and stout, standing barely taller than Becca’s shoulder. He wore a Red Riot shirt that was straining against his rotund, protruding stomach.

“I... I’m your biggest fan. I even saw you at the Crown,” he stuttered.

She smiled warmly when she remembered the sight of the crowd cheering at their first real gig. The tavern had been full of noise and life, with a chain-link fence separating the stage from the rest of the bar. As they played their hearts out, the sound of shattering bottles had resounded in the air. The patrons’ angry shouts had rung through the room each time a fight broke out. She couldn’t imagine a guy like him in such a place with his potbelly and thin, limp brown hair.

“I... I got it all in this pad right here. Every performance and... and photos. I always take pictures.” He flipped through the pages and held it out to her.

She stared down at an image of herself, her fingers deftly navigating the strings of her guitar. The paper was covered in words, hastily scrawled in a spidery script. *‘Becca played with every ounce of her soul. She’s a superstar of rock and roll. She even smiled at me in the crowd. Each word from her lips was directed right at me.’* She looked up into his eyes and the hairs on her neck stood up.

“That’s neat....” she said.

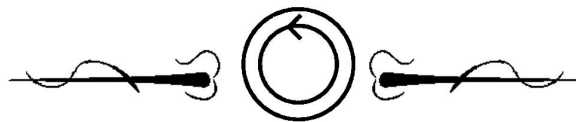
“Arnold. Arnold Haggard. I run the website Rebecca Gibbons is a goddess dot com. It’s a place for fans to come together. You should visit it. I know the members would—“

He never finished as a security guard in a neon yellow shirt grabbed him roughly by the collar, hauling him away. The little man shouted and fought against the hands restraining him. “Becca! Please, just give me a chance!”

His screams made her breath catch, her heart freezing in her chest. His eyes met hers, and she detected an almost desperate glint in them, setting off alarm bells in her head. She knew better than most how many crazies were out there.

“Come on,” Evelyn said, tugging her forward.

She lifted the bottle to her lips, gulping the booze down, ignoring her dislike for the taste. They passed into a hallway, and she let out a sigh, forgetting all about Arnold Haggard.



Aedin growled and leaned against the bar, his eyes fixed on Becca. She smiled as she interacted with the other bands, the sound of her laughter filling the air. The drummer of Primal Star smirked down at her seductively before leaning in and whispering into her ear. Her cheeks turned a rosy hue, her irises sparkling with delight at whatever the man said. With a loud

crash, Aedin's glass shattered in his hand, shards and bourbon flying everywhere.

"Things not going well?"

He looked to his right and was met by Jophiel's deep, intense stare. The archangel smiled gently, her eyes full of sympathy, while her brows were furrowed in concern. He sighed and shook fragments from his palm. "How could you tell?"

The woman laughed, her gaze glowing like melted chocolate. "Rebecca's always had a self-destructive streak. She doesn't think she belongs anywhere. Not since her powers awakened. No thanks to you."

Aedin grabbed the rag from the bartender and dried his hands, the material coarse against his skin. He scoffed, and with a heavy sigh, he attempted to scrub the stains from his clothing. "How the hell's that my fault? I've never met her before tonight."

"You've never officially been introduced, but she saw you once. Her foster parents drove across state lines to see Woeful Roses at Club Envy when she was eight years old. Seeing you strut out on stage sent her into a seizure. It was the start of it all. The downward spiral that would eventually lead to her death." Jophiel leaned closer, her voice dipping low. "Her band was supposed to make it big, but their manager would bleed them dry financially. For every dollar they made, he would take ninety cents of it. Stuck in an unbreakable contract, she would've turned to drugs when the alcohol wasn't enough to drown the visions. One bad batch of meth and, well, you know how it would've ended."

He stared at the angel, his eyes going wide. His heart ached for the woman who was destined for him. Jophiel's loyalty to the Princes was the only thing that kept Becca from dying alone and in despair. He looked

toward his mate, the lump in his throat growing even larger as he did. “I think I would’ve remembered seeing her at a show. Something would’ve happened, my beast awakening or a pull to her?”

“How many people do you estimate were here tonight? Did anyone stand out?” she inquired.

He shuffled his feet on the floor. When you were on stage, you could only just make out the outlines of the individuals in the audience. The lights were usually so strong; it was like a barrier of blinding white between the performers and the crowd, leaving only shadows in their place.

“As for your beast, that’s not my department. Who knows why he didn’t point her out? That’s something only he can answer.”

“What do you mean, visions? What was she?” he asked.

The archangel gestured to the bartender, asking for another drink with a wave of her hand. She handed Aedin a plastic cup, and he watched the amber liquid slosh around inside. He couldn’t help but smile, his lips curling up in amusement.

“Try not to break this one. I’m not sure what her past self was. Your beast would know more about that. All I can tell you is, she sees a person’s future. The good, the bad. Each image leading to their death. Unfortunately, most people don’t die peacefully or without a lot of pain. She experiences it all. The emotions, the agony.”

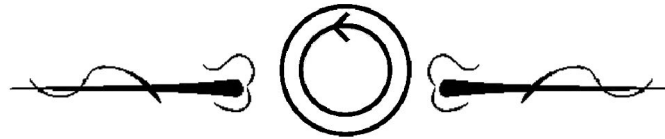
He shivered, his eyes carefully tracing the woman that filled his thoughts. She leaned heavily against the side of the drummer and the man’s arm was wrapped around her shoulders a little too affectionately.

“What about those like us? Can she see our future?” he asked through clenched teeth.

“I’ve no clue. She’s never encountered a supernatural being before. Only time will tell.” Jophiel shook her head and shrugged. She sipped from her own glass, smiling up at him. “Good luck taming her, Aedin. You’ll need it.”

He grumbled as the archangel left him to join her own mate. He heard Becca’s bubbly laughter and couldn’t help but take a second glance in her direction. She had laced her fingers with the drummer’s, the twinkle in her eyes sparkling in the dim light. An ache spread through his jaw when his teeth ground painfully. *She should only look at me like that.*

Chapter Three



The warmth of the drummer's breath fluttered over Becca's ear when he whispered, and she forced a smile. His suggestive words had no effect on her, her senses staying dull and numb. *What the fuck's wrong with me?* Before tonight, she would've been as wet as a sponge each time he ran his long fingers down her spine. But instead, her skin crawled at his touch, and her stomach turned.

She cast a glance at Aedin Envy, her thick eyelashes curtaining her eyes. He lounged against the bar and his gaze was focused on her every move. The flames that danced in his green depths caused her cheeks to flush. Her heart hammered in her chest while her pussy clenched. *Stop it! He's off-limits.*

After their escapade, her body was throbbing and made it impossible to find a moment of peace. Images of his cock, thick and proud, rose in her mind. She nervously bit her lip and a wave of heat spread through her abdomen. She let out an exasperated sigh before chugging her drink in a few seconds.

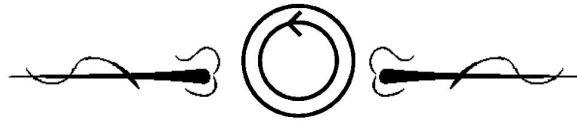
"Here, I'll get you another," the man beside her said.

She smiled widely and nodded her head in appreciation as the musician strolled away. Despite how she was feeling, she couldn't deny his striking features. His broad shoulders swept down to a slim waist, the denim of his jeans emphasizing the firmness of his ass. His wavy black hair framed his chiseled face, and his eyes had a beautiful, unique blue shade with a darker line around the edges. *What was his name again? Lyle, Lloyd, Larry...*

The party was alive with energy, laughter, and conversation. Evelyn was laying draped over the lap of the Brightdown bassist, her cheeks pink and her lips spread in a wide smile. Jessica cuddled on a nearby sofa, her limbs entwined with the lead singer of Urban Fire while they shared a passionate kiss. Becca tried to join in on the fun, but underneath her facade of joy, she was bored, and her eyes were drawn to the object of her obsession.

When she saw Aedin conversing with the drummer at the bar, her body tensed, her heart thumping in her chest. His gaze was locked on her while he spoke, and he never broke eye contact. His irises swept across her skin like a gentle brush of fire, igniting her senses. Her boy-toy's smirk widened when he glanced over his shoulder and sent her a playful wink before replying to Aedin. *What the hell are they talking about?*

The bartender handed the musician a drink, and he spun around, his grin lighting up the room. When his gaze fell on her, she returned it. The air seemed to crackle with tension. She darted a look at Aedin, his glare directed right at her. His expression was livid, and she felt a rush of excitement. *Good, let him be angry. He doesn't own me.*



Becca released a loud giggle when she stumbled into the elevator, the sound reverberating off the walls. She hit the metal barrier with a thud, cracking her knee off the surface, but no pain came. She was completely disconnected from her body, and yet her senses were heightened beyond what she had ever felt before. Her skin pimpled with goosebumps when she smoothed her palms over the cool steel. Primal Star joined her in the lift, their bodies creating a cocoon of heat around her. The world seemed to blur, and she had to blink a few times to clear her vision. She spun, leaning heavily against the wall.

“You ready for a real party, Becca?” The drummer’s voice sounded distant and hollow, as if he was standing in a long tunnel.

His face blurred before her and a laugh bubbled up in her throat. She nodded her head, her body exploding when he pressed his hips into her. The bulge of his cock made her skin prickle, and her pussy clenched hard. She was surrounded by the sound of uproarious male laughter. When the elevator dinged, she felt the comforting grip of several hands as she wobbled out.

She stared up at the looming parking deck, her head swimming. *How much did I drink?* When she tried to count on her fingers, her vision went foggy, despite her efforts to squint and see. Her giggles filled the surrounding space when she was lifted off the ground.

“We’re going to make you feel so fucking good.”

A dull thud resounded through her body when her stomach met a shoulder, knocking her breath away. A palm slammed down on her bottom, and she jolted as pleasure seared along her nerves. Her hands dug into the waistband of the man that held her. *What the fuck’s happening?*

She heard the creak of a door opening and moaned when she was gently laid on the floorboard of a large vehicle. The soft fibers of the carpet scraped across her exposed flesh like a lover’s touch. She let out a peal of laughter; the air rushed out of her lungs as she fell back. Her fingers burrowed into the deep shag, and the texture made her palms tingle. A powerful, unstoppable longing coiled inside of her.

“Fucking a’, Lawrence. You did a good job with this one. Look at that tight little body.”

She directed her eyes toward the source of the voice. Primal Star’s bandmates leered at her hungrily with their intense gazes. She bit her lip, and her nipples ached when they rubbed against the fabric of her shirt. When she pressed her palms to them, a jolt of electricity coursed through her. Her skin throbbed with heat, and her heart was pounding in her chest.

“She won’t remember any of this tomorrow, right?”

“Not a damn thing. She already gave me her address. We’ll dump her once we’re done.”

Her pussy pulsed, moisture drenching her jeans. Every slide of the denim against her flesh made her burn brighter. She gasped, and she squirmed within them, wanting, needing more. Her eyes flickered pleadingly toward the men, who bellowed with laughter, their hands clapping each other’s backs.

“I think she might be ready, boys. Let’s go,” Lawrence said, rubbing a palm over his bulge.

He stepped through the door, his hand extended out to her. She closed her eyelids with a moan, and wiggled her hips in his direction, but he never touched her. Grunts filled the air, her eyes snapping open. The men had vanished, but a cacophony of their screams rang in her ears. There was a scuttling sound as something crawled across the top of the van, the metal groaning and denting beneath its weight. The snap of a bone made her gasp. She frantically scrambled from inside of the vehicle, her feet tangled together and she fell. Despite the fear deep in her stomach, the excitement still crackled in her veins.

She hissed when her palms scraped across the pavement, but even that sensation sent a wave of bliss through her. With each movement, a surge of longing ran through her body. Every inch of her skin was so incredibly sensitive, and a shuddering sob escaped her lips as she pulsed with yearning. When she rolled onto her back, her breath came out in short, ragged gasps.

A monster stood on top of the van. Its black hide was interspersed with streaks of gold, and its yellow wings were so wide they created a canopy above it. Its head was crowned with gilded horns that curled around its skull delicately. It kicked a body off the side of the vehicle with a roar. Lawrence fell with a loud thud in front of her, his eyes dull and sightless.

Her chin trembled, and she scooted across the concrete. A bloody and mangled carcass landed a few feet away, a howl filling the air. She squeezed her eyelids shut, clamping her hands tightly over her ears. She watched in horror as a flurry of orange feathers tumbled from the sky and a monster

descended in front of her. Flames licked along the surface of its skin, matching the color of its large horns.

“Becca!” Aedin fell to his knees beside her.

Her heart racing, she raised her gaze to his green irises. His hands were soft as he tenderly cradled her cheeks, his eyes carefully studying her features. The storm inside intensified, and she flung herself against him. She grabbed fistfuls of his hair, drawing his lips closer until they were locked together.

He shook his head and pulled back. “Calm down, little rockstar. They gave you enough drugs to make an elephant go into heat.”

She moaned while she wiggled, her legs locking about his hips. The flames of her world burned around her, and the scent of him clung to her nostrils like an intoxicating perfume. His cologne was reminiscent of a summer shower with a subtle hint of cotton. The hard ridge of his cock rubbed along her crotch, but it wasn’t sufficient. Her nails scraped down his scalp, drawing blood. A gasp escaped her lips when an array of vibrant emerald feathers filled her vision, and her hand instinctively reached out to them. They shuddered under her touch, their surface smooth and as soft as a baby chick’s downy fluff.

“Fuck me. I need you to control yourself or I’m going to end up screwing you right here in front of my brothers.” He growled the words, and her back arched as each gravelly syllable rumbled through her.

“Is she okay?” a male voice asked.

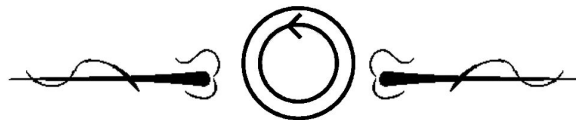
Aedin lifted her in his arms, her body clinging to each curve and dip of his physique. Every bounce and bump of his movements sent more fire flaring through her. She twisted her head to take a peek at the newcomer. He towered over them, his thick corded muscles bulging through his well-

fitted clothes. Her mouth went dry at the aura of violence around him, and the scar on his face caused more liquid heat to flow through her.

He was joined by five men, each one more handsome than the last. She couldn't decide if it was the drugs or the fact that they were a walking dream, but her body reacted instantly. She trembled in Aedin's arms and a faint moan escaped her lips.

"Fuck me. Please fill all my holes. I want all your cocks. Cover me in your fucking cum." Her voice sounded high pitched, and hoarse.

The flames that burned inside were a living thing that pushed against her skin. She fought to be free, her body wanting them all to punish her aching pussy. Aedin tightened his arms around her and grunted when she scratched at him desperately. She bared her teeth, chomping down brutally on his shoulder like a feral animal.



"What the hell did they give her?"

Aedin shook his head at Leo's question, his cock responding involuntarily to the woman who bit him hard enough to draw blood. He fought to keep a hold on her, but she broke free and slid down his body. Her fingers roughly tugged at his belt buckle. He gripped her wrists tightly with a growl. Cries of sorrow escaped her when she pulled away, her strength

surprising him. She moved along the floor on all fours toward Stan, his brother.

“Jesus Christ!” Wrath jumped aside when she reached him, her tongue licking her lips.

Her nails scraped down his thigh, and she snarled when he evaded her. Sobbing and whimpering, she dug a hand into her jeans. She threw her head back while moaning and grinding her hips. His brothers quickly spun away, the sound of their shuffling feet mixing with her agonized noises.

“You better get her home. We’ll clean up this mess,” Adam said, clearing his throat.

Aedin inched closer to her with extreme caution, as if she was a wild animal. The image of her at this very moment would be forever imprinted in his memory. Her skin was flushed red with desire, her body jerking while she fucked herself with her fingers.

“Becca? Come on, let me take you home,” he whispered.

Her eyes shot open, and a deep hunger was reflected in them. The smell of sweat filled the air as it beaded across her flesh and glistened in the overhead light. Her lips twisted into a sinister grin, full of desire. “Aedin, oh Aedin. Make this ache go away. It burns. I need... I want... Please.”

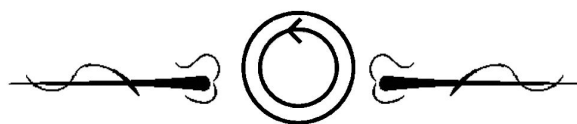
His heart ached when he heard her sobbing. He wanted her to say those words to him, but not in the slurred speech that came from being under the influence of drugs. She pulled her fingers out of her jeans and sucked them deep into her mouth, her tongue tracing along each one. His cock pressed against his zipper painfully, his restraint stretched taut.

“It’s going to be okay, little rockstar.” He leaned in to lift her off the ground, but she flung herself at him.

She lunged for his fly again, her nails scraping against the fabric of his jeans. Frustration made him growl, and he hefted her over his shoulder. He slapped a hand over her round ass. She responded by gripping his wings firmly in her fingers. He hissed in pain and folded them into his flesh to prevent any further injury. She moaned and wiggled while her fingernails scraped up his back. The scent of her arousal rose in his nostrils, sweet with a hint of musk. He yearned for her, but not in this manner.

“Put her in a cold bath. I’ll send a pill over for her to take. It’ll reverse the drugs,” Gluttony said.

He nodded and left the parking deck behind with a squirming mate tempting him.



Aedin stood still, watching Becca’s wild movements on the bathroom floor. *Should I set her in the tub with her clothes or not? Can I control myself if she’s naked?* The pill from Leo had arrived quickly, and he was sure that his brother had an employee drop it off. Brandon had slipped it into his palm with a look of worry and concern before leaving the penthouse,

It had been a hassle to give it to her. She had spit it out each time he shoved it between her lips. Finally, he had stuffed it into her mouth, and had

held her jaw closed while pinching her nose shut. She had fought with a ferocity akin to a wild animal, though she ultimately surrendered.

Aedin shook his head and effortlessly lifted Becca up. She kissed along his neck, her tiny teeth nipping. He suppressed his rush of desire and set her in the icy water. She hissed, her body tensing up. Her sorrowful moans and whimpers made his heart ache. His chest tightened when her little sobs echoed through the room.

He had watched her all night, accepting drink after drink from that fuck Lawrence. Although there were rumors swirling about Primal Star and the girls they took home, no one had ever been brave enough to speak up, so he had ignored them. He even had a talk with that damn drummer, stating that Becca was off-limits, but the guy had replied with a *'it's her choice, man.'*

When Aedin had spotted her stumbling into the elevator with the band, he had quickly gestured to his brothers. Silent as thieves, they had followed, waiting and watching. As soon as the men had stated their plans for her, he had seen red. Primal Star wouldn't prey on women anymore though. His siblings had made quick work of them, and tomorrow it would be all over the papers about how their van had wrecked on the way home. Their bodies would be unidentifiable after the fire consumed them. The police would have to use dental records to figure out who they were.

As she submerged her mohawk in the water, it broke apart and the thick hairspray turned it into a sticky, gooey mess. He sighed when he heard her teeth clacking together from the cold. Her skin was pebbled, her nipples pressing against the soaked fabric of her shirt. She looked at him with big, sorrowful eyes, reminding him of a tiny, wet kitten.

"Is that better?" he asked, his fingers working through the knots in her strands.

“I’m freezing now.” Her lips trembled, and she shivered.

He flipped on the hot tap and the hiss of steam filled the air while he added it slowly to raise the temperature. Once her teeth no longer clanged together, he shut it off. “Do you wanna wash your hair or anything?”

She shook her head and sank deeper into the massive bath. The water rippled around her chin. Her makeup was running, leaving dark streaks down her cheeks. Her gaze was clearer, but a sheen of heat still lingered.

“Why don’t I see images of your future?” Her question made him blink.

“What?” he asked, stroking a finger down her cheek.

Becca closed her eyes and exhaled slowly, her breath unsteady. “You’re a blank canvas. No lovers, no tragedies, nothing. Why is that?”

Aedin chuckled before resting his arm on the edge of the tub, feeling the cool porcelain against his skin. He smiled and rested his chin on his forearm. “Of all the things that you saw tonight, that’s what’s on your mind?”

He caught her eye, and for a moment, he was entranced by her greenish-blue eyes, so intense and inviting. “That’s all that matters. Hell, I probably won’t remember this tomorrow. I’ve never met someone that doesn’t make my head spin with visions of their future. I can’t control it. Only alcohol keeps it from becoming overwhelming, but in the last few months, it takes more and more to prevent them. I worry that someday, it won’t be enough.”

She poured out her emotions to him, and a warmth spread through his chest. *How do I explain this to her?*

“I’m not human, Becca. Neither are my brothers. We’re the Seven Princes of Hell, each representing a deadly sin. You don’t see my future cause you’re my fated mate, the one being in all of existence that completes me. The reason you gotta drink more is cause you’re immortal now. A

decree of Malak himself. The booze will eventually be ineffective. Your body cannot absorb it quick enough before your new metabolism burns it off.”

She stared at him, her lips slightly parted and her brows furrowed in concentration. A gentle smile spread across her face, her laughter ringing out like a bell. He looked at her and his expression twisted in befuddlement.

“Fated mates? Demons from Hell? Okay, Aedin, whatever. Nice touch with the whole immortal thing,” she said with a sigh. “I’m tired, so fucking tired. This life has been one fuck up after another. I can’t imagine living like this forever.”

She leaned back, running her fingers through her tangled mane. She cringed and slowly lowered herself into the water until it was submerged once more. Sitting up, she gazed at him. “I wanna wash up. Got anything I can use? Maybe something to wear when I’m done?”

He nodded in agreement and gradually rose to his feet. He walked to the robe that hung on a hook by the door, its soft fabric brushing against his skin. “Shampoo and soap are on the shelf above you.”

He spun toward her, and his breath came out in a gasp. She was slipping her shirt off while standing in the tub. The sight of her pink nipples pierced through with black bars made lust coil deep in his stomach. A lump formed in his throat as he carefully laid the bathrobe on the steps. “You can wear this once you’re done. The bedroom’s through there. Use the bed. I’ll find somewhere elsewhere to sleep.”

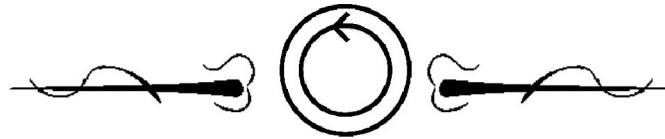
She nodded and her fingers slowly descended to the fly of her jeans, the wet fabric sticking to her skin. Squeezing his eyes shut, he gritted his teeth, determined not to fall prey to the temptation to tackle her. He strode to the vanity and pulled open a drawer with a squeal. He dug out a brush, avoiding

glancing into the mirror, afraid the sight of her naked would send him over the edge.

“Thank you, Aedin. I don’t think anyone’s ever been this nice to me before.”

He paused, his chest heavy with pain. Since she had crossed paths with him, her life had been filled with a continuous stream of misfortunes. He had used and abused her in her dressing room. Then she’d been drugged, and five men had planned on raping her. He only hoped that it would get better from here on out.

Chapter Four



S hanaera rubbed the chalk against the wall in a wide arch, the gritty texture of it sending a tingle up her arm. The tan color stood out against the dark gray stone of her room. She smiled with satisfaction when she stepped back and admired the vivid hues of her masterpiece. A canopy of trees filled a vibrant chalky sky, their branches stretching over a bright blue pond. She glanced at the illustration in the picture-book beside her and studied it. The page was splashed with watercolors of blues, greens, and browns. She had tried her best to replicate the images with her limited palette.

She couldn't remember anything before the castle, but the scent of the forest had stayed with her. King Landgrave had attempted to conquer the lands surrounding his kingdom, but his years of battle had left him with nothing to show except for her. Whenever she graced the throne room, she could feel the eyes of the court attendees on her. They whispered amongst themselves, making her aware that she was a foreigner. Hushed tones told her she had come from a land of tall trees and lush foliage. A place where heathens ruled, staining the ground with the blood of outsiders.

She loathed how the monarch showed her off to his nobles, like a prized possession. They would hold a handkerchief to their noses and sniff, as if she was the one who emitted a foul odor. Although she had no way to adorn herself with luxurious fabrics, she was provided with a bucket of water every day to stay clean. The sweet aroma of the flowers stuffed in their pockets couldn't overpower the putrid stench that rose from them. Bathing was considered unhealthy and many of them abstained from it for weeks or even months.

The king used her to uncover the secrets of the future. He rewarded her every time she shouted out a man's lies or exposed a woman's wrongdoings. Over the years, he had given her colored chalks, as well as books filled with vibrant illustrations. But he had also scolded her harshly for answers that didn't match his expectations. The multiple scars from her punishments crisscrossed her back in stark white lines that contrasted with the deep tan of her flesh.

She brushed a long strand of her pale blonde hair out of her face, tucking it behind her pointed ear. The slight brush of the lock caused the lobe to twitch and tingle. With each passing year, they became more and more sensitive, and she did her best to avoid touching them. She jumped at the sound of a key scraping in the deadbolt. She slammed the book shut; the noise reverberated through the room as she hurriedly put away the chalk in a tiny metal box. Quickly shoving the tome and container under her bed, the musty smell of dust wafted up when she perched on the edge of her mattress.

The door opened with a loud squeal. She blinked, her gaze falling upon her tightly clenched fists in her lap. She had been taught from a young age

to keep her eyes lowered. In this place, it was rude for a woman to make direct eye contact with a man.

“The king has called for you. Come on.” Frieda’s raspy voice made her sigh with relief.

The old maid was the only person in the castle to speak to her kindly. Shanaera rushed to the woman’s side and clasped her arm, providing the elderly servant with strength and comfort. As they moved through the halls, the sound of their shoes clacking against the floor rung around them.

“Girl, these bones aren’t what they used to be. I fear for you when I die. What’ll happen to you? Who else will make sure that they feed you and give you fresh water?” Frieda shook her head sadly, her aged eyes staring straight ahead. “I should’ve helped you escape a long time ago, but my selfish needs came first. You appeared right after I had lost my babe. You were so small and delicate. I couldn’t find it in me to drown you like he wanted. So I begged him to spare you. Five years and countless nights spent under his sweaty body were all I had to pay. But you lived and you’ve proven useful to him. Deep down, though, I worry he’ll look at you in a different light. You grow more beautiful each day.”

Letting out an exhausted sigh, the woman turned to her, her hands trembling slightly in Shanaera’s grasp. “He already took your wings. No matter what happens, don’t let him steal your virginity too, child.”

Shanaera tilted her head at Frieda, struggling to comprehend what the old maid was saying. *Why would the king be interested in her maidenhead?* It made little sense to her, but when the large doors of the throne room loomed close, she had to swallow her questions.

“Be careful. He’s in a bad mood today.”

She nodded and watched the woman shuffle away. Her wrinkled hand created a soft scraping noise over the rough stone wall as she disappeared into the shadows of the hall. The sound of the entrance creaking open made Shanaera's heart skip a beat, and she turned to face it. She walked into the chamber, the heavy air weighing on her shoulders. King Landgrave slouched in his throne and his eyes lazily scanned her from atop the dais. With every step, her skin crawled with fear. Over the last few weeks, his looks were becoming increasingly heated and intense. She noticed he had been calling for her more often, and she could sense there was something he was trying to hide.

She gracefully curtsied to him, the fabric of her threadbare dress slightly abrasive against her fingertips. He only provided her with clothes when the old ones became too small, and she had to move up a size. Most of the garments were worn and tattered, cast off by the servants. Frieda had painstakingly re sewn the stitches, making sure they were secure and wouldn't unravel when she wore them.

"Sit Shanaera," Landgrave said.

Her bare toes sank into the plush carpet that draped over the stairs as she took slow, deliberate steps up the dais. His eyes honed in on her every move, just like a hawk. She knelt at his feet and the coolness of the night air caused her skin to prickle. He hummed a gentle tune while his fingers glided through her hair.

He leaned toward her, his lips a whisper away from her ear. "There's a newcomer to court. A man by the name of Aedin Envy. He claims to represent Harrowhold. You know how much I've coveted it, and he states he'll serve it on a silver platter. Look upon him and tell me what you see."

She shivered and blinked rapidly, the odor of red wine overpowering her nose. The king had waged war for years, striving to take control of the neighboring kingdom. He was captivated by the sparkling gems in the nearby mountains that promised wealth and riches. He had even put forward a formal request for their princess's hand, only to be rejected because of her young age.

When the doors of the hall opened once more, a gust of cool air brushed against Shanaera's skin and her eyes rose. Her breath hitched, her pulse quickening. The man that strolled up the aisle was a vision of beauty, and the light glinted off his perfect features. His long blond hair was held back in a ponytail, the silky strands cascading over his shoulder. His olive and black doublet fit him perfectly. He moved with a powerful grace, his tights outlining the definition of his muscular legs. When she glanced up at his face, her eyelids widened in awe at the jade intensity of his irises. He had the vigor of a young squire, his good looks radiating like the sun. Her ears tingled, and she fought the urge to scratch them.

"King Landgrave." The man bowed low, a smile curving his delicious lips. "I hope you've considered my proposal."

"Hard to think about it when I've no details about how you'll accomplish it."

Aedin Envy's laughter pulsed through her, a deep, booming sound. His eyes darted from the monarch to her. She opened her third eye and gazed at him, feeling the power of her sight coursing through her body.

"You want Harrowhold, I can give it to you. What more do you need to know?"

"What do you require? A title, lands? How will you carry out the task you've presented? Those are the things I desire," Landgrave said.

Shanaera squirmed, and her brows pulled low in concentration. The harder she looked at the man, the more her mind raced with questions. No haunting images of him or his life appeared before her. No visions of his death overwhelmed her. The king's fingers tightened in her hair, as if he sensed her difficulties.

"I ask for only one thing: your little seer. In exchange for her, I'll provide an army of warriors that'll swarm Harrowhold and bring it to its knees. I'm sure you've heard of the Black Dragons. My brother commands them," Envy said.

The room filled with the sound of a collective gasp of shock. The nobles whispered, their words muffled by the rustling of their fine garments. She hissed through her teeth when her scalp was pulled taut as Landgrave's fingers formed into a fist in her tresses.

"My seer isn't for sale. What if I give you a duke's daughter? Make a noble out of you and provide my richest lands."

The man smiled, shaking his head. "No, my king, I think not. I'm a Prince where I come from. I don't need fancy titles."

She heard Landgrave's snarl and heat radiated off of him, his toe tapping impatiently beside her. "Why do you want her?"

"That's for my knowledge alone. If you don't accept my offer, I'll withdraw it, and approach Harrowhold. I'm sure they'll give her to me as spoils of war."

The king shot to his feet, and she gasped when his fingers were ripped from her. She fell to her side, tears pricking her eyes. With a low growl, Aedin Envy stepped forward and his irises blazed with rage.

"You dare to threaten me in my hall? You'll rot in the dungeons with her," Landgrave shouted.

The soldiers aimed their weapons at the man, but all he did was laugh in response. The doors flung open, and a thunderous roar of voices filled the room as a battalion of warriors marched in. Silver breastplates adorned with intricate black dragon designs glimmered in the candlelight.

“He dares and with good reason. He doesn’t stand alone,” a booming voice said.

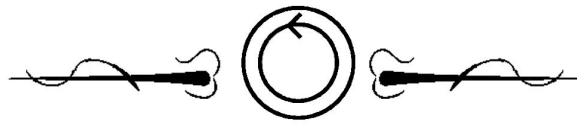
She stared in awe at the muscular man that strode confidently into the chamber. His fingers were wrapped around the hilt of his sword and his armor gleamed a vibrant crimson. When he mounted the steps, he towered over the king, his reddish-brown eyes twinkling with delight. Landgrave stumbled back, and with a thud, he landed on his hard, wooden throne. Aedin rushed to her side, gathering her into his arms, shielding her from the scene on the dais.

“You’re a foolish and weak ruler. It was too easy to break through your defenses. Your soldiers outside of these walls are dead and Harrowhold now controls these lands. Your sin has been one of envy and for that my brother lays claim on your soul, but I think I’ll enjoy dispatching you,” the warrior declared.

Landgrave sneered and heaved himself upright, but the warlord moved with a startling speed, the glint of his sword catching the light. The king’s eyelids widened in horror as he stared at the massive man, his jaw dropped in shock. The silence of the hall was deafening, but erupted into screams when the monarch’s head toppled from his neck. It thudded across the dais, bouncing until it finally stopped in front of Shanaera. She cried out when his dead eyes blinked.

She was lifted into the air, and she clung to the man holding her. All around her, nobles were struck down, their blood staining the floor. Soldiers

screamed when the warriors cut through them. She shivered as the massacre occurred. Her gaze was drawn to the crimson warlord, who sat proudly on the throne. His lips curved into a satisfied smile while he surveyed the carnage below.



Becca was suddenly jolted awake, feeling the sweat on her skin and the rapid beat of her heart. As the sunlight spilled across her face and blazed into her blurry eyes, the dreamy edges of her slumber evaporated. Her head pounded, causing her to groan. She pressed a hand to her forehead and tried to diminish the ache. She buried herself under the blankets, the rustling of the fabric providing a soothing sound.

“Sorry, they’re on a timer. Did I wake you?” When Aedin Envy’s voice filtered through the room, her eyes snapped open.

Forest green sheets covered her, soft and silky against her bare skin. She glanced down, a gasp escaping her lips when she noticed she was completely naked. *What the fuck happened?* She tried to remember her last memory, but it was like looking through a foggy window, with shapes and colors barely distinguishable. Memories of laughing with Primal Star and their charming drummer flooded her mind. *How much did I drink?* She shook her head, positive she hadn’t had enough to black out.

“Becca?”

She shivered, her stomach in knots, and she wondered if she could summon the courage to face him. She didn't feel like she had been fucked within an inch of her life. No ache resided deep in her pussy, no stiffness or throbbing in her joints and muscles. She slowly lowered the blankets and peered out at him.

He stood beside the bed, his brow furrowed with worry. When she met his green gaze, his wide smile sent a fluttering through her chest. His blond hair was swept back and the damp tips dripped with moisture. His dark denim jeans and crisp white tee shirt clung to him in all the right places, making him look tantalizing. The fragrance of soap mixed with the hint of his cologne made her stomach tingle with excitement.

"Would you like something to eat?" he asked.

Are you on the menu? But instead of voicing her thoughts aloud, she simply shook her head. What she truly wanted was a drink, anything to ease the pounding headache that seemed to surge with every movement she took. Sitting up, she tucked the sheet under her armpits and surveyed the room with her eyes.

She lay in a massive platform bed, trimmed in gray upholstery. The walls were painted an earthy, deep jungle green. The natural toned hardwood floors were covered with a large geometric rug in a stunning blend of emeralds and jades. Ebony nightstands, their surfaces adorned with tiny lamps, stood in perfect symmetry next to the mattress.

"Where am I?" she asked, rubbing a hand over her eyes.

He grabbed a remote from the stand and the sound of a soft beep rang out as he pressed a button. The black shades descended slowly, accompanied by a gentle whirring noise. Every inch of trim lit up with bright light and bathed the area in a warm glow. He dimmed them before setting the

controller back on the table. Sighing, she ran her fingertips through her tangled mess of hair.

“My home. Do you remember anything from last night?”

When he sat down, she scooted across the mattress, putting distance between them. She watched him cautiously, her fingers digging into the soft fabric of the sheets. “The party and then... It’s just a blank space. I don’t recall drinking enough to black out.”

“You didn’t,” he said, standing and walking toward a set of sliding onyx doors. “Primal Star has a reputation for taking the prettiest girls home. Rumors have circulated for months about them, and how they accomplish such a feat. I always suspected, but no women ever came forward, so I never had solid evidence.”

He stepped through the doorway and a moment later; he reappeared with her clothes draped over his arm. Her heavy combat boots dangled from his fingertips and he placed them gently on a wooden bench at the end of the bed. “I had my employees wash them for you.”

A shiver ran down her spine, and her gaze was glued to his. Her palms grew sweaty, her heart stuttering in her chest. “What happened, Aedin?”

It wouldn’t be the first time she had been drugged and raped. The memory of her last experience in a similar situation washed over her. She trembled when the sound of her foster dad and brother’s mocking laughter echoed in her head. After a full year of their attention, they had eventually grown bored with her, turning to the other girls that drifted in and out of the house. Not long after, she had been moved to a home that was even more violent than the pervious one. Her new parents had preferred to use her together with no drugs to dull the pain. She hugged herself close, the feeling of emptiness in her chest growing stronger with each passing moment.

“Nothing. My brothers and I made sure they never left the parking deck with you. Primal Star’s been dropped from the Envy label and sent home. I plan to announce that anyone who’s suffered at their hands can come forward. I’ll pay for any representation they may need to press charges. It’ll be a long shot, but I’d like them to face justice.”

She raised her eyes to his in disbelief. He had saved her from being gang-raped. A small wave of warmth washed over her heart, but she refused to acknowledge it. *He’s not for you. No one’s for you. Remember your place.* “Thank you. I don’t know how to repay you.”

His smile was warm, and his irises twinkled with a mischievous glint. “Eat breakfast with me. The bathroom’s through there. I set out toiletries on the vanity for you. Join me downstairs when you’re done.”

She nodded, watching him walk out of the room; the door closed with a quiet thud. She felt her heart in her throat, the thumping sound ringing in her ears while her thoughts swirled around her. She threw back the covers and the chill of the air caressed her skin as she quickly dressed.

When she stepped through the doorway, she was in awe of the luxurious marble bathroom. Her heavy boots clunked against the ground and the noise thudded throughout the area. The walls were wrapped in a mosaic of teals and greens, made up of subway tiles. Light shone through the glass-covered peaked ceiling and cast a warm glow in the space. A glassed-in shower dominated the right wall, a bathtub that looked carved from some kind of turquoise stone rested on steps beside it. The ebony fixtures gleamed, not a smudge or a spot of soap scum in sight.

She walked over to the massive, ornate vanity. The walls above it were lined with mirrors, giving the room a sense of infinite space. The counter was a smooth gray marble, with a shiny finish. Resting atop a towel was a

hairbrush, toothbrush, and toothpaste. Deodorant, mouthwash, and perfume were neatly arranged beside it, releasing a fresh scent into the air. She saw an empty glass with a bottle of painkillers on the other side of the sink. *He thought of everything. Well, almost everything.* Her body was craving a nicotine fix, but she knew it would have to wait until she got home. Her pack was nowhere to be seen.

She peered into the mirror, and the silence was broken only by the sound of her breathing, her image staring back at her. Her fingertip traced down the line of her jaw. She hadn't really looked at herself in a long time. On most days, she shied away from her reflection, feeling self-conscious about her body. She was so thin that she appeared more like a boy than a woman, with little to no curves visible. Her breasts were tiny, and she didn't even need a bra to hold them. She had gotten a small boost in self-esteem when she had added the piercings, but it was short-lived. There wasn't anything special about her. *So why does he insist on pursuing me?*

She grabbed the toothbrush and shook her head. The toothpaste's minty aroma became more pungent when she slathered a good amount of it onto the bristles. She brushed her teeth, then splashed cold water on her face. Her hair was limp and lifeless, falling in tangled waves about her shoulders. She ran the brush through her locks, gently tugging at the strands as she attempted to tame the unruly tresses. She sighed, the sound resonating in the quiet room as she leaned against the counter, eyes closed.

“Wake up, little seer.”

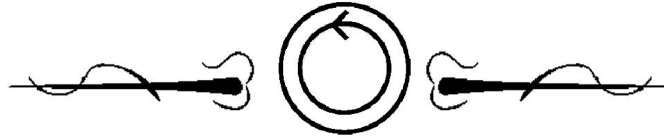
She jumped and spun around in the bathroom, the squeak of her shoes resounding off the walls. She whirled back to the mirror. When her reflection smiled at her, she was taken aback, a chill running down her

spine. The sound of her thundering heart filled her ears and her breaths came out in short, shallow bursts.

“Let me out of the cage, Becca. I can help you control it. Your third eye,” her mirrored self said.

Her mouth fell open, and she screamed.

Chapter Five



As Aedin set the table, the sound of his humming filled the dining room with joy. *She's here in my home, my mate, my love.* He attempted to poke and prod the beast that was in his mind, but all it did was grumble. His brows knit together and he shook his head.

Are you ever going to talk to me? Help me out a little? My brothers said that you'd awaken once I met her, but all you seem to do is sulk in a corner. Why?

He sighed heavily in disappointment when he received no response. *How do I make you come out? Tell me!*

It snarled, and pain lanced through his skull. ***Leave me be!***

He clenched his jaw, his knuckles turning white as he tightly gripped the edge of the table. His knees trembled, and the agony was almost too much to handle. His misery melted away at the sound of a distant, high-pitched scream. He shot a glance toward the bedroom and hurriedly scurried from the dining room. His feet pounded on the steps, his heart racing as he sprinted up the stairs. He flung open the door and his eyes quickly took in

the sight of the dimly lit interior. Becca stumbled out of the bathroom with tears streaming down her face.

“What happened?” he asked, catching her in his arms.

She shook her head, her lips quivering while she tried to find the words. Her chest heaved from her labored breathing and he could almost hear the thumping of her heart. She clung to him, her fingers digging deep into his skin, her knuckles white.

“The... the mirror. It...” She swallowed. “It talked to me.”

He looked at her with a perplexed expression, and his eyebrows drew together. He carefully maneuvered around her, making his way into the bathroom. The room appeared just as it should, with nothing out of place. He glanced at his reflection, and his face crinkled into a frown. *What the fuck?*

“There’s nobody there,” he said, walking back into the bedroom and closing the door behind him. “Maybe the drugs are still in your system. They can cause hallucinations.”

Becca was perched on the edge of the bed, her hands trembling. Her complexion was ashen, and her teeth rattled with each of her shudders. “I know what I saw. It was real.”

He knelt in front of her, tenderly enveloping her stiff fingers in his. He softly kissed each icy fingertip and felt the chill on his lips. She glared down at him with angry eyes.

Aedin smiled apologetically. “Okay, okay. What did it say?”

She nervously shifted her weight and bit her lip. He could almost hear the gears turning in her head when she looked at him with uncertainty in her irises. “Wake up, little seer. Let me out of the cage, Becca. I can help you control it. Your third eye.”

The sound of a low, menacing growl filled his mind and his beast rushed forward. His face remained expressionless, but his curiosity rose inside him. *Now you'll come out?* It grunted, but gave nothing else. “Do you know what that means?”

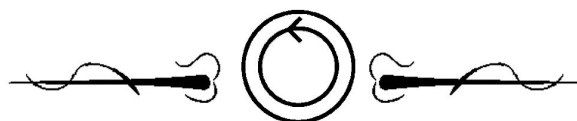
When she blinked, her eyes betrayed a fleeting moment of mistrust. She quickly looked away, her head shaking from side to side. Her hands slipped from his and she embraced herself, her arms tight around her waist.

“Maybe you’re right. Perhaps it’s the drugs,” she mumbled.

No, I’m not, you saw something. His beast shuddered, and a sense of despair unfolded in his chest. *Is this why you hide?* It snarled, slinking back to its corner. He mentally rolled his eyes. *Damn, you’re a sulky bastard. Do you know what’s going on?* But the only thing that greeted him was an eerie silence.

He sighed, the sound heavy and hollow, knowing his beast wouldn’t give him the closure he desired. “Let’s go downstairs and eat something. I made omelets.”

He stood slowly, and with a gentle tug, he brought her to her feet. He pulled her to the doorway, and she followed without another word, her eyes lingering on the bathroom door. His arm draped around her shoulders as he glanced over his shoulder. *What happened, little rockstar?*



Breakfast was a subdued affair, the aroma of eggs and coffee wafting through the air. Despite Aedin's attempts to start a conversation, she responded with only brief answers, so he eventually stopped trying. He offered her a ride, and she gave a slight nod of her head in acceptance. They retrieved her jacket from the concert hall, the smell of liquor still lingering, before taking the elevator down to the parking lot.

With a deep breath, he watched the doors open, his heart racing. *Will being here cause her to remember last night?* Images of his brothers' beasts made him lick his lips nervously. *Is she ready to deal with that?* But she was too lost in thought to look around. He led her to his lime green truck, its paint job gleaming in the light. He held her door ajar as she clambered into the oversized vehicle. When she was settled, he rushed to the driver's side and revved the engine, the odor of gasoline filling the air as he drove out of the parking deck. They merged into the sea of cars in traffic and he glanced her way.

She stared out the window, her fingers tightly interlaced in her lap. He didn't need directions to her place. Every band that played at Club Envy had to list an address, and he had memorized hers. Her apartment was in a less than desirable part of town, with walls covered in colorful graffiti and a vibrant, musical atmosphere. He pulled up in front of her building.

Becca scrunched her eyes and her forehead creased. "How do you know where I live?"

"It's on file. Same as your bandmates," he answered.

She nodded, slowly reaching for the handle. He jumped out of the driver's side and rushed to her side. The corners of his mouth twitched into a smile when he opened her door, offering his hand to help her out. She nervously nibbled her lip and let out a soft chuckle before gently placing

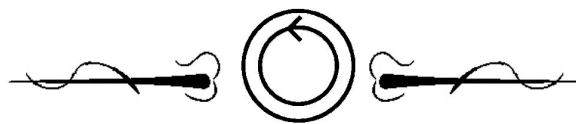
her palm into his. The snow outside her building was like a blanket of feathers, fluttering down from the sky. He was mesmerized as her long, midnight blue hair was instantly dusted with snowflakes that sparkled in the winter light.

“Thanks, I guess I’ll see you at the next gig, huh?” she said awkwardly.

Aedin’s heart ached, resisting the urge to wrap his arms around her. He wanted to beg her to get back in the truck and return home with him. He took a deep breath, trying to think of a clever response.

“Yeah, I’ll be there,” he replied before silently kicking himself.

Smiling, she walked up to her building; her steps accompanied by the crackle of the snow beneath her feet. He stood on the curb, watching her. The cold air wrapped around him when she slipped through the doorway. He got into his vehicle with a heavy, defeated sigh. His chest constricted and the sound of his heart pounded in his ears as he clenched his fist on the leather steering wheel. He stared at the door she’d gone through, the warmth of her presence dissipating. He shifted the truck into gear and, with a roar of the engine; pulled into traffic. *It’s fine, she’ll be alright.* But despite the brave face he put on, a deep, gnawing worry tugged at his gut.



Becca rested her back against the wall, the rough texture of the bricks pressing through her jacket while she listened to his vehicle driving away.

She was tempted to run out and call out to him, tell him she didn't want to be alone, but she brushed the urge aside. *Nothing good will come of this. Let him drive out of my life.* The absence of his warmth left her cold, her heart aching as if it was being torn in two.

She sighed heavily, and her breath misted the air. She made her way to the wall of glossy mailboxes. Her freezing fingers shook as they searched her jacket pocket for her keyring. She slowly inserted the key into the tiny lock, hearing a click as it slid into place. But it refused to turn, and she let out a string of curses. Resting her forehead against the metal boxes, she jangled it until it broke free, opening with a squeal. Envelopes and magazines crowded the interior, and she took them out, cradling them to her chest while she relocked it. She shuffled through the papers as she climbed the stairs, the sound of her shoes squeaking in the stairwell.

Junk mail, junk mail, bill, bill.

A bright white envelope with her name on it caught her attention. She held the paper in her hand, its size comparable to a birthday party invitation, and she pondered who would send it to her. She noticed the lack of a return address printed in the corner. When she arrived at her door, she juggled the mail in her arms while fumbling with her keys.

Wendy, her neighbor, cautiously peered out of her apartment. "Hey, is your heat on?"

Becca smiled and turned. Her breath caught in her throat when detailed visions suddenly flooded her mind. Pictures of a laughing and smiling Wendy laying on a bed before a camera engulfed her vision. A fellow actor climbed on the mattress beside the naked woman, his cock hard and ready. The scene faded with a flash, only to be replaced with another.

Wendy stood on a stage with her face covered in thick makeup, loud applause resounding around her. She grinned when a handsome man presented her with an award. More images appeared before Becca's eyes, flickering like lightning in the night sky. The last picture was of Wendy laying in an alley, a needle hanging out of her arm, her lips blue and her gaze lifeless. She had always known that the woman was in the porn business, but she hadn't realized how deep her neighbor would fall into the drugs.

"I... I haven't been home," she said, whipping away and fumbling with her lock.

"Must have been a good party. You usually bring your toys back with you. Well, let me know if your heat's working. That damn landlord needs to get his ass in gear, or I'm calling the city."

Becca nodded in agreement, and opened the door to her flat, the wood creaking softly beneath her hand. She shut it quickly, the metal latch clanking. Her breath created a fine mist in front of her, and the frigid air caused her to shiver. She tossed her mail onto the coffee table, the sound of the envelopes rustling, before she made a beeline for the thermostat. The dial was cranked up to the highest setting, and she stepped over to the radiator against the wall, touching it gingerly with her fingertips. When she found the iron as cold as the apartment, she cursed the slum lord that owned the building, her voice ringing in the stillness.

A blanket was draped over the sofa, an irresistible invitation, and she wrapped it around her shivering body as she sat down. She blinked her eyes shut before releasing a long, calming breath. She couldn't remember the last time she had been this sober. Her intoxication had become so familiar that she didn't even recognize it was gone until it was no longer there. *Moron!*

Why the hell did you look at her? She ran a hand through her hair and squinted up at the water-stained ceiling, crisscrossed with mildew.

But I stared at Aedin all morning and saw nothing. Her brows furrowed, casting a deep shadow over her eyes. *Why can't I see his future? What makes him so different?*

She nervously nibbled her lip and her mind ran through the scenarios, but none of them seemed to add up. She leaned forward, her hands rustling through the pile of mail until she spotted the small envelope. With a finger beneath the seal, she tilted her head to the side, and the wrapper gave way as she opened it slowly. Carefully, she unfolded the single piece of paper tucked away inside. She could practically feel the intensity of the typed out letters as she read them, the bright white of the page contrasting with the inky blackness of the words.

You were amazing last night, a masterpiece. Each note resonated through me. Every performance makes me cherish you more. You didn't look at me, but I realize it's because you don't want anyone to know about us. I'm your dirty little secret, your one true love. I felt it in my very soul.

Did you have a good time, slut? That's what you are. A filthy fucking whore. Did you let him fuck all your holes? The same ones that belong to me. Aedin Envy can't compare to me.

Sorry, my sweet. I just get so worked up seeing you with others. Whenever you smile or flirt, it breaks me into a million pieces. That drummer and his band last night caused me to be so upset, but I couldn't do anything when you left the party with them. You were gone by the time I arrived. I stayed in my car, hoping to God that you were okay. But then you appeared with Aedin, and rage filled my veins.

How could you betray me? I understood when Primal Star drugged you, but you were willingly following that bastard. Do I mean nothing to you? Perhaps I should show you just how much you need me. Wait for my next letter. I swear I'll prove that I love you.

The page floated from her fingertips, her body shaking with anxiety. Tears slid down her cheeks and her eyelashes stuck together. The sound of her phone ringing reverberated through her pocket. She hastily fumbled with her jacket to answer it. Her heart skipped a beat when her gaze fell on the name that appeared on the screen. She quickly swiped the green button and cautiously brought it to her ear.

“Hey, I know you never gave me your number, but I kinda stole it while you were sleeping and programmed mine into your cell. I really want to see you again, and, well, I don’t wanna wait.”

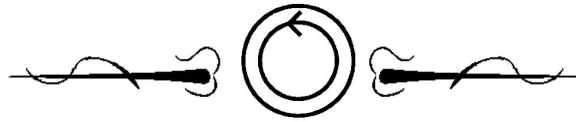
Her throat closed up, her tears and shaking lips making it impossible to speak. She forced her eyes shut, stifling another sob as she took a deep, shaky breath.

“Becca? Are you there? Is everything okay?”

“Aedin, I know you just dropped me off, but can you come back? I... I can’t stay here. There was this letter, and... and my heat won’t work... and,” she choked, wiping her fist across her runny nose. “I’m scared. So fucking scared.”

A growl flowed down the line, and she shivered. The loud, shrill sound of brakes and tires made her heart race.

“On my way, little rockstar. Pack a bag, and wait for me outside. I’ll be there in five.”



Twenty minutes later, she was snuggled up on the sage green sofa in his penthouse, a mink blanket draped around her shoulders. He read over the letter she had received, his boots scuffing on the floor while he paced back and forth. He growled, and his eyes blazed with fury when he faced her. “You have no clue who sent this?”

Her head swayed from side to side, her long eyelashes fluttering against her cheeks. The moment she heard his vehicle pull up outside her building, her fear had melted away. He had jumped out of his truck and had instantly taken her into his arms. Her attempts to keep her tears restrained were no match for the flood that had burst forth. He had gently run his fingers through her hair, the soft touch of his fingertips had sent shivers down her spine. He had carefully placed her bag in the backseat and had opened the passenger door for her. They had sped through the city, the fumes of exhaust lingering in the air when he demanded to see the letter the instant they arrived at his home.

“What about the envelope? Was it handwritten?” he asked.

“No, it was just like the message. My name was typed out on it, no stamp or address.”

He nodded. “What about the flap? Was it taped or secured shut?”

She closed her eyes and tried to remember, her thoughts coming slowly. She distinctly recalled having to rip it open. “Sealed. Why does that

matter?”

Aedin let out a deep, hearty chuckle. He pulled his phone out of his pocket. He tapped his finger on its face before lifting it to his ear.

“Because the bastard might have licked it. Hey Adam, I need your help. Becca got a note from a stalker.” He shook his head and continued. “Yeah, she’s a little upset. No, she’ll be staying with me. Okay, thanks, brother.”

He disconnected the call, his fingers flying over the keys of his cell phone. She shifted in her seat, and the reality of what was happening slowly started to set in. *It’s just a letter. Why get so worked up? You barely know this guy. Why ask for his help?* But she felt more secure than she had in years. His presence gave her an assurance of safety, and she could feel it emanating from him.

“I need your keys. I’m sending an employee to your place. He’s going to go over and grab the envelope. Also check and see if anybody suspicious is hanging around. Talk to your neighbors and shit.”

She fumbled in her pocket, and with a quivering hand, she presented her keyring to him. He took them with a weary sigh before settling down next to her. He enclosed her in his embrace, his strong arms tightening protectively about her. “It’ll be okay. This isn’t the first time I’ve had to deal with an obsessive fan. It happens. It just shows how big you’re getting.”

She smiled softly and nestled her head against his chest. His cologne mixed with the warmth of his body, slowly calming her anxious mood. She felt the heavy weight of exhaustion and attempted to stifle a yawn.

“Tired? How about you take a nap while I run this letter over to my brother?” he asked.

She stiffened, her hands digging into his shirt. He tenderly kissed the top of her head and caressed her back with the softest of touches. She shivered, goosebumps rising on her skin as she squeezed her eyelids shut.

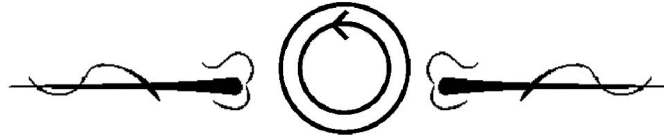
“It won’t be long, and no one can get you here. I promise.” He tilted her chin, raising her gaze to his. “Okay?”

She nodded, and allowed him to guide her from the living room to the bedroom, the faint sound of their footsteps echoing off the walls. He pulled down the blankets before motioning for her to lie down. She smiled, snuggling into the bed, and laughed when he tucked her in.

He flashed a wide grin at her before standing up tall. “The penthouse has the best security in the world. If someone breaks in, every employee in the building will come running to your rescue. You’ll be safe, I swear.”

She watched him leave; the door clicked shut behind him in the silence. She rolled onto her side, the soft fabric of the pillow against her face. His unique smell was soothing, and she closed her eyes as a wave of warmth swept over her body before she fell into a deep sleep.

Chapter Six



“Whoever left this for her had access to her mailbox. There was no sign of the lock being picked or forced entry into her apartment. None of her neighbors saw anything, though they said there’s been a weird guy taking pictures of her when she leaves the building.”

Brandon and three other employees had diligently combed through Becca’s residence, searching for any trace of a clue. The young man had become Aedin’s go-to person due to his impressive work ethic and loyalty. He worked with a relentless diligence, completing tasks faster than any other demon in the building.

“Find out what you can about the creeper. Also check anyone that attended the afterparty, his letter said he was there. And review the parking deck cameras. He stayed in his car overnight. See if they picked up anything,” Aedin suggested.

His assistant gave a brief nod before departing the luxury penthouse. He sighed and let his body relax against the sofa, the familiar creaking of the cushions beneath him. Becca was supposed to be simple, no angel to get in

his way, and no messiness. He was shocked when he learned she had a stalker; it was something he had never even thought of.

He heard the click of the bedroom door, and he looked up to see her gracefully descending the stairs. “Hey, have a good nap?”

She yawned and rubbed her eyes as her face broke into a sleepy smile. “Yeah, any news?”

He shook his head in frustration before digging into his pocket. He grinned, and the sound of a pack of cigarettes crinkling against his fingertips filled the air. She sat down beside him, her laughter echoing. “Thought you might want some of these.”

She accepted the box from him, letting her fingers trace the edges before bouncing the top of it off the heel of her hand and pulling the cellophane away from the lid. She removed a cigarette from within, lifting it to her lips. He flicked his lighter, and a warm, orange glow illuminated her face as she puffed on the end.

She let the smoke out in a cloud of gray, the swirling puffs drifting to the ceiling. “I probably should quit. Between the alcohol and these, I’ll die a premature death.”

No, you won’t. You’ll live forever by my side. But he kept his thoughts to himself. She leaned back against the sofa, the soft cushions enveloping her, and her hand rested on his thigh. He stared down at it, his muscles tensing. She absentmindedly caressed the denim with her thumb. His arm wrapped around her shoulders, and she snuggled against him. His chest became tight with emotion as his heart swelled. *This is what it’s all about, having that one person who you can sit in complete silence with and just be comfortable. No words or actions needed, enjoying sharing space with one another.*

He tilted his head back against the cushion, and the soft fabric wrapped around his neck like a hug. Her leg replaced her hand, swinging slowly while she enjoyed her cigarette. The warmth of her body was a comforting presence at his side, and his fingers softly ran across her collarbone.

“I like this. It’s calm and peaceful. Quiet and fulfilling. My life’s always so noisy,” she said.

He covertly glanced at her from the corner of his eye, and he hummed in response. She lay back against his arm, her eyes following the soft, grey tendrils of smoke that drifted above them. He leaned over and kissed her temple. “I like it too. Let’s do this more often.”

Her laughter rang through the room, and she nestled her head against his shoulder. “It’s strange. All my life, I’ve never belonged anywhere. Bounced from home to home, on my own as soon as I reached eighteen. I’ve only had myself. No one else gave a damn about what happened to me, but now I feel as if I fit here, right against your side. Like you’re just as jagged and crooked of a puzzle piece as I am.”

He rested his cheek on the crown of her hair and breathed in deeply, relishing in the gentle aroma of her fragrance. He loved the way her perfume lingered in the air, like an orchid in the rain. “Maybe I am.”

Her hand came to rest on his stomach, and his cock twitched in his pants. *It’s a tender moment, don’t ruin it!* But her fingers kept travelling lower, causing him to gasp when they brushed against his belt buckle.

“I don’t remember the last time I was this sober. Most days blur together in a drunken haze. I can’t leave my house without drinking at least a full bottle. I don’t know why I’m telling you this, but I feel as if I should. Like you might understand.”

He heard his own swallow when the leather strap loosened beneath her fingers. The button of his fly came undone, and he closed his eyes.

“I can foresee a person’s future by just looking at them. It all plays out like a movie in my mind. The only thing that’s ever helped is booze and fucking. I’ve done a lot of both, Aedin. Sometimes even when I didn’t want to, but you... I can’t see anything. It’s freeing, but also scary. Do you not have a destiny? Or is it something else?”

She exhaled shakily, and his warm hand clutched hers.

“You don’t have to do this, Becca. Sex isn’t required. Just knowing you’re safe is enough for me,” he said, ignoring her last question.

She looked up at him, and her eyes blazed with intensity. “But I wanna. For the first time in my life, I can fuck with a clear head and fully feel every bit of pleasure without the dulling effects of booze.”

He blinked, a heavy ache in his chest for her. He let go of her hand and hooked a finger under her chin. His lips ghosted over hers, not quite touching, but still tasting the sweetness of her mouth. She moaned and leaned into him. Soft and gentle, he stroked his tongue against hers. Her kiss was like a sip of the richest, most decadent wine, sending him into a state of blissful inebriation.

Her hand returned to unzipping his pants, and he groaned when her fingers slid under his boxers. She gripped him firmly, his cock growing harder by the second. She tugged him free, and her palm glided across his tight skin. He growled low into her mouth, his breath picking up speed.

She pulled away from his kiss and lowered her lips to his shaft. He threw his head back when her warm, moist tongue circled the crown of his dick. He grasped the hem of his shirt and quickly hauled it off, letting it drop to the ground. Her palm glided over the contours of his stomach and traced the

valleys between each ab. She left fire in her wake, goosebumps rising on his flesh.

Her mouth engulfed him, and he bucked his hips into her. She moaned when he skimmed his fingers up her back, dancing along her spine. Her skin was soft and inviting, like the most delicate of silks. Her head bobbed on his cock, her palm sliding through her spit while she drove him higher. His heart thumped loudly in his ears, and his lungs heaved with each sharp inhale.

She tugged at his pants while he wiggled his hips until they slid off his thighs. She bent lower, licking and sucking at his balls as her fist pumped his hard shaft. He reached for the button on her fly. With just one hand, he unzipped them. She sat up, the sound of her jeans sliding down her legs followed by the rustle of fabric as she pulled her shirt over her head. She tossed them to the side, and he held his breath when he looked her over. Lean and athletic, she was toned with muscles. She wore her tattoos like a proud badge of honor, each a unique work of art in its own right.

“Fuck, Becca. You’re amazing.”

Her cheeks flushed a deeper red when she straddled him, resting her palms on his shoulders. His cock lined up with her wet entrance and the tip slipped against her damp folds. She sank slowly down onto him while throwing her head back with a gasp. He moaned, gripping her hips tightly, and her inner walls quaked around him with each inch she took. She arched as she seated herself completely on him.

He inhaled sharply, his eyelids widening at the sight of her. Her long hair cascaded about her in gentle waves. With her eyes closed, she let out a blissful sigh, her mouth forming into an ‘o’ of pleasure. His hand glided over her stomach to a breast. His palm rolled over it, causing the bar that

bisected it to spin. She squirmed in his lap, and her chest rose with each rapid breath. He ran his tongue over his lips before he leaned in closer. He caught the taut peak in his mouth. Her fingers tangled in his strands while he lashed it with his tongue.

Her hips undulated, his cock sliding in and out of her with each movement. He growled low, bucking into her. Each cry that fell from her lips added fuel to the fire in his veins. His hands slid down her back and gripped her firm ass. His fingers dug deep into her flesh while his mouth sucked at her other breast.

He spread her, her gasps filling his ears. Her movements became more erratic, and her juices flowed down his cock. She sank her nails into his shoulders, her spine bowing while he drove her higher. He licked a path between her breasts and up her throat. He nibbled at her chin before capturing her lips. Her muffled cries made him slam her harder down onto his shaft as he drank from her.

She shattered with a scream. Her pussy clamped down on him in a tight vise. He grunted and wrapped his arms around her. Thrusting his hips, he drove into her while she rode her wave of bliss. Her limbs tightened about his neck when he ground against her, his own orgasm close to the surface. He crashed into her one more time, their bodies fitting perfectly together.

The world melted away while he painted her insides with his cum. Her body twitched and shook on top of him. He stretched out on the sofa, keeping himself buried deep within her. She attempted to rise, but he gripped her tightly to his chest.

“Don’t,” he whispered.

She let out a giggle and fell into the strong embrace of his arms. They lay there, breathing in the scent of their lovemaking, surrounded by the warmth

of each other. The sound of their racing hearts and labored breaths faded as they calmed down.

“I’m going to need to take a triple shot of Plan B,” she mumbled sleepily.

With a chuckle, he traced his fingers along her back. She involuntarily shuddered, her breath making a noise like a sob.

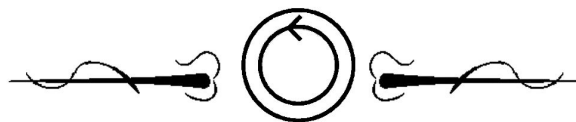
“Cold?” he asked.

She shook her head, “Quite the opposite. Keep that up and we might do a round two. Then I’ll be overdosing on birth control.”

He flipped her, flexing his hips and grinding against her. She gasped before wrapping her legs around his waist.

“Don’t worry. You won’t get pregnant, and I’m clean. That I can promise you.” He didn’t say anymore, his mouth devouring hers.

Someday, he would explain to her that the only way for her to become heavy with a child was if she desired it. Being a demon had a lot of perks, one of them being the ability to pick when he wanted to have children. Until that time came, he would only shoot blanks.



Becca stretched and rolled onto her belly. She watched Aedin’s ass as it bunched with each step he took. The persistent rumbling of her stomach had become too loud for him to ignore. Her gaze was drawn to the emblem on his calf. In shades of lime green, it was an arrow in a never-ending circle

surrounded by a larger one. It seemed like a weird thing to put on your body, but when he explained it was the symbol for envy, it made a little more sense. She shook her head. *Still, it's a strange tattoo.*

He vanished from her sight when he slipped into the kitchen. She could feel the pleasant throbbing of her muscles, a warmth radiating from within. They had spent the day fucking, and she had lost count of her orgasms long ago. He seemed to have endless amounts of stamina, his cock always ready for more. They had moved to the hardwood floor, and now she lay sprawled out on a blanket that was so soft it felt like chinchilla fur.

She got on her knees, her eyes lingering on the coffee table, and crawled toward it, her fingers quickly finding a smoke within her pack. She lit it and studied the surrounding room. It was large, and the walls were painted in shades of green, with skylights overhead, allowing natural light to filter through. A wide sliding glass door opened out onto a balcony that offered a breathtaking view of the twinkling city skyline. Curtains of sage draped delicately around them, the vibrant hue contrasting with the ordinary colors of the landscape beyond. The snow had piled up outside and covered the patio in a thick, white blanket.

She shivered, recalling the chill of her apartment. If any good came of this, it was that she had stayed warm. On her right, an enormous fireplace took up most of the wall, with a giant flat-screen TV mounted above it. She looked at the mantle, the gray rock contrasting against the streaks of chartreuse that ran through it. A bright, golden glow radiated from the framed records that decorated the room, while guitars hung from hooks between each one. An array of drums crowded the corner and their vibrant colors contrasted against the glossy black of the baby grand piano next to them. She tilted her head, wondering if he knew how to play them.

Footsteps drew her attention, and she gazed up at a very naked Aedin. His cock swayed between his thighs, her mouth growing dry. He held a bowl in his left hand, the ceramic clinking against his fingers, and a platter in his right. He smiled and the corners of his eyes crinkled when he sat down beside her, their arms brushing against one another. She crushed out her smoke, and the smell of tobacco lingered in the air.

The tray was lined up with neat rows of succulent meats and creamy cheeses, accompanied by a sleeve of crunchy crackers. In the dish, a dip was surrounded by various fruits. He carefully selected a strawberry, taking a bite and savoring the sweet taste before kissing her. She giggled, licking the juices from his lips.

“Do you play?” she asked while stacking a piece of salami and cheddar together between two crisp saltines.

He glanced at the instruments and nodded. “Yep. There isn’t an instrument I haven’t learned, but the piano has always been my favorite with the guitar, a close second. The amount of emotion that can be conveyed through them. It’s almost magical.”

Becca stared into his eyes, her heart softening. Music had the power to move people to an emotional depth that few could understand.

“Oh, I forgot the drinks. Be right back.” He rose, but she caught his hand.

He gazed down at her in confusion, and she responded with a warm smile, her lips curving softly. “Play for me?”

His eyelids widened, emitting a soft, amused laugh. “Now?”

She let go of him and stood. “Get those refreshments first.”

He beamed before dashing into the kitchen. She grabbed their food and carefully laid it on top of the glossy black piano. She had never felt comfortable naked, but here with Aedin, she didn’t mind it. There was

something about the way his eyes roamed over her, as if she was the most beautiful woman in the world, that made her not dislike her boyish frame. He returned and handed her a glass of cool, crystal clear water. She grinned and accepted it from him, sipping it slowly.

He took a deep breath before sitting down on the bench, the sound of the keys rattling as he opened the lid. "I haven't played in a while, so bear with me. The club's been busy and I've had family matters to deal with. Any requests?"

She shook her head, leaning on the piano, and resting her chin in her palm.

"Something slow and pretty. Emotional," she said.

He nodded, taking a moment to think. He placed his hands on the ivory keys, and the sound of beautiful music filled the room. The melancholic notes of the melody tugged at her heart, her breath suspended in her chest. She looked up at him with admiration. She felt the sorrow and sadness with each stroke of his fingers. His eyelids were shut tight while he skillfully played the instrument. A single tear formed in the corner of her eye, and she hastily wiped it away. When he hit the last note, it reverberated in her ears. He opened his eyes slowly, a smile spreading across his face.

"What was that?" she said breathlessly.

"Chopin Prelude in E minor."

She stepped around the piano and sank into his lap, her arms snaking about his neck. He leaned into the crook of her shoulder, his hands sending a comforting warmth through her body. "It was beautiful."

He chuckled, "Thank you."

At the sound of his phone ringing shrilly, he sighed. He held her close, squeezing her tightly. After a brief moment of silence, the noise resumed.

“Aedin?” she asked.

Growling low, he nudged her off of his lap. He trudged over to his jeans and rummaged through the pockets. He clenched the cell in his hand, his jaw tightening as he hissed, “What?”

Becca sashayed past him and laid down on the blanket. She spread her thighs, dipping her fingers deep into her pussy. He watched her with eyes that seemed to smolder with a hidden fire. Her tongue licked across her teeth while she moaned, her hips matching the movement of her digits. His cock lengthened and hardened within seconds. Her body responded with a flush of heat.

“When?” he asked, kneeling down between her legs.

She stared up at him in shock when he pulled her hands away and slipped deep inside of her. When he stretched her, she hissed through her teeth. She was sorer than she had thought, but still pleasure licked through her veins. A tiny cry fell from her lips, and he clamped a palm over her mouth. The fact that she couldn’t disturb his call made her more frantic, heightening her passion more than anything else had ever done. He pummeled into her, his hips grinding hard against her clit. Her eyelids fluttered, and her nails scratched down his arms.

“How many reporters are here?”

His words were muffled by the roaring of her blood in her ears. Her back arched off the floor, her muscles growing tauter by the minute. Her heart pounded so strongly that it hurt.

“I’ll be there in ten minutes.”

He hung up the phone and released her mouth. She screamed when he wrapped his arms around her shoulders. Each of his thrusts jarred through her while he fucked her in a frenzy. She exploded in a thousand sparks

when he pushed her over the edge before joining her with a deep roar. She blinked up at the ceiling, a smile curving her lips.

“Fuck, Becca. You’ll be the death of me,” he said against her collarbone.

He slipped from inside of her and staggered to his feet. She groaned, her pussy spasming at the loss of his thick cock. She gazed up at him before dipping her fingers into her cum filled snatch, and licking them slowly.

He hummed low in appreciation, but shook his head. “Business calls. I gotta wash up and go downstairs. You’re more than welcome to stay here or join me. Your choice.”

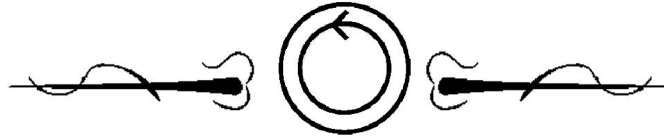
She sighed, not wanting the outside world to intrude on their private little bubble. She faintly remembered him saying something about reporters, and she raised up on her elbows. “What happened?”

He groaned while he bent to gather up his clothes, rubbing a hand over the back of his neck. “Primal Star’s van was found in a ravine about two miles from their home. It looks like they lost control in the snow and crashed. No survivors.”

An icy chill ran through her veins. While she wanted justice for the girls they had hurt, she hadn’t wished them death. She quickly stood and her hands fumbled with her jeans. “What are you going to do?”

He shrugged indifferently and slowly ascended the steps, while she followed closely at his heels. “What I always do. Avert the disaster.”

Chapter Seven



Becca sat in a back room, twiddling her thumbs while she waited for Aedin to finish up with the reporters. She had planned to stay with him, but the moment she had stepped into the concert hall, the visions had assaulted her. Her head soon pounded like a drum, and she had swayed on her feet. He had quickly ordered Brandon to take her to a private place.

The young man had smiled nicely at her, and she almost gasped at the glow that surrounded him. As if he was bathed in a halo of light, he seemed to emit warmth. Her pain had melted away, and she had followed him without a second thought. She tried to remember if he had this same glittery aura around him the first time she had met him, but all she could recall was an alcohol induced haze.

How much have I missed because of the booze? Is there more to this curse than just images of death and lost loves?

Her phone rang, and she dug it out of her pocket. She smiled, swiping across the green button. “Hey, Evelyn.”

“Oh, my god, girl! I saw the whole Primal Star thing. You were with them, and I was so worried. I can’t believe that they’re gone. It’s unreal.”

She shook her head, her chest heaving with the intensity of her simmering anger. Her temperature rose as the memory of what they had attempted flooded her mind. Taking a deep breath, her heart constricted as she pushed her emotions down. “Yeah, not to speak bad of the dead, but I never left with them. Let’s just say they wanted to party a little harder than I did.”

She stood up from the black leather couch and peeked out the door. Flashes of light momentarily blinded her, and she shut it quickly. Aedin was still occupied with the press.

“What do you mean? Did they try something? Now that you mention it, you were kinda loopy when you left.”

Becca paced back and forth, her footsteps muffled by the thick, shaggy carpet. She felt a rush of gratitude when she heard her friend’s voice on the line. The monotonous wait was driving her to distraction. One could only delve so deep into the internet before reaching their limit. “Roofies can do that to you, but I guess karma caught up with them.”

“Jesus Christ! How the hell did you get away? You seemed more than willing when you took off. By the way, where are you? I went by your place, but nobody was there.”

She sighed, taking in the sight of the tiny space. The backstage room was inviting, with soft leather couches and a minibar concealed in the corner. She had already browsed through it, but found she had no desire to take a sip. Thankfully, there had been a bottle of painkillers and some water.

“I’m at the club. Let’s just say Aedin Envy made sure I didn’t fall into the wrong hands.” She raised her phone from her ear when a scream resounded through it.

“You’re fucking Aedin goddamned Envy! Oh, my god. Girl, I’m hyperventilating. He’s a sex dream on legs. What about your rule to not screw the boss?”

She laughed and shook her head. “Let’s say that he doesn’t take no for an answer. He kinda wore me down.”

“What’s it like? Details, I want every raunchy, dirty, filthy thing he did to you.”

The door opened, and she smiled at the man himself. She gestured toward her phone, silently mouthing an apology. He shrugged and pushed the exit shut with a gentle click before easing his body against it. The loud clack of the lock made her look at him in confusion, but he only grinned mischievously.

“Becca, are you listening to me? Becca?”

“Sorry, Evelyn. I got distracted for a moment. What were you saying?” she asked.

He moved closer to her, his hands gently caressing her waist. Her throat clenched when he knelt down. He picked up her boot; the leather creaked in his grip. He rested it on his thigh and his fingers expertly unlaced it. Slipping it off, his palms caressed up her calf. She blinked in surprise when he quickly repeated the same motions on her other shoe.

“I need details. Is he hung? He looks like he would be packing. Is he kinky or is he a cuddler?”

“I’m not going to kiss and tell, but let’s say he’s got it where it matters, and he knows how to use it,” she said.

Aedin’s brows rose, and his lips formed into an even wider smile. He mouthed ‘*tell her*’ before attacking her fly. Her throat grew dry when he slid her jeans down, revealing her pussy for his eyes. He licked a wet path up

her legs and fire ignited in her bloodstream. She stepped out of her pants, feeling the cool air on her flesh. He tossed them to the side before lifting her leg over his shoulder. His fingers skipped along the soft skin of her inner thigh, making her tremble. Without thinking, her hand shot out and clutched him to keep from falling.

“Come on, Becca. Give me more to work with than that. I need to build my own fantasies from your escapades. Is he into spanking, or does he prefer to be the one spanked?”

She sucked in a breath when his lips engulfed her most sensitive place. His tongue lashed over her clit, his fingers caressing up and down her ass cheeks. She clenched her teeth and tried to stifle the moan that threatened to escape her. “Evelyn, umm, he’s big. Like really big. And... and thick. It’s hard to wrap my hand around it all the way.”

Her mind was a fog of passion that built with each lick and nip. His palm skimmed up her belly before flicking the bar that pierced through her nipple. When an intense wave of pleasure washed over her, she almost gasped aloud.

“Wow. That’s really descriptive, Becca.”

His chuckle sent a warm sensation coursing through her, the sound of it ringing around her. Her chin trembled, and she stared up at the ceiling. *Fucking hell. He’s going to break me.*

“Well, shit. What do you want... want me to say? It’s clean-shaven with... with veins running through it. He’s big enough...” she paused when he slid a finger into her, her eyes rolling into the back of her head. “To make it almost hurt. But it’s... it’s that delicious pain. You know, the kind that... that just aches.”

Her nails dug into his flesh. He worked her like an instrument, and her blood was strumming in her veins. Her heart pounded with each stroke of his digits. She fought not to moan, her hips instinctively leaning into him.

“Are you okay? You sound out of breath.”

“Oh, yeah.” She cringed and shook her head. “I’m on the treadmill.”

She blurted out the first idea that came to her mind. His deep, rumbling laughter made her eyelids flutter with delight. She tried to focus on the words being spoken, but her senses were in a frenzy, a wave of yearning consuming her thoughts.

“Does Club Envy have a gym?” Evelyn asked.

Becca bit her lip hard to keep the whimper from escaping when he added another finger to her hole. The wet squish of him pumping into her echoed around them. She silently prayed that her friend wouldn’t be able to hear it. His thumb pressed into her asshole, and she almost dropped her phone.

“No, but Aedin has one,” she blurted.

Her knees trembled, and she feared she would collapse. He slipped from inside of her before standing. Her juices glistening on his chin while a seductive smile curved his lips. He wrapped his strong arms around her, effortlessly lifting her off the ground. She squirmed against the hard ridge of his stomach. His muscles flexed with each step, sending bolts of fire through her as he walked to the couch.

“Okay, well, back on topic. Has he done anything kinky? Like blow your mind shit.”

He lowered her onto the buttery leather, and he stared down at her with a tenderness in his eyes. His gaze roamed over her while he slowly freed his cock. It bobbed before her, thick and throbbing. Her mouth went dry, her thighs falling farther open. “He hasn’t gotten out the chains and whips, if

that's what you're asking, but we spent the whole day fucking. It's as if he has endless stamina, and his cock's always hard as fuck."

He smiled and bowed before her, his lips curling in pleasure. She felt the urge to laugh, but it dissipated when he nestled between her legs, and his warmth radiated against her skin. His cock rubbed through her folds, bumping against her clit. She hissed and wiggled beneath him. Slowly, he inched into her, stretching and making her breath catch in her throat.

"Holy shit! All day. I don't think I could do that. Girl, you got a pussy of steel. Especially if he's as big as you say. I would be incredibly tender and raw."

"Oh, I... I am." He thrust into her with lazy strokes, drawing out each one until she bucked. "But it's a... a good sore. Like after you work... workout kinda ache."

She threw her head back against the cushions, her free hand tangling in her hair. The hem of her shirt rose and his mouth descended on a nipple. She bit her lip when he flicked his tongue around the hard peak. The heat in the room became unbearable, and her skin was slick with sweat.

"I don't know about that. That gym shit has always been your thing. Personally, I hate it. Why do all that stuff just to feel like crap the next day? No thanks," Evelyn said.

The only answer Becca could give was a contented hum, her mind too foggy to comprehend anything else. All her thoughts were on the cock that was slowly stoking the fires within her. Each time he bottomed out, he ground hard against her and her hips rose to meet his.

"I mean, I get it. You gotta stay in shape, but man, why..."

Her friend's voice faded when he sat back on his heels and pushed her thighs to her chest. A snarl fell from his lips as he pounded into her. Her

mouth dropped open, a squeak escaping. The phone slipped from her hand, and she clawed at him. Stars exploded in her gaze, her head thrashing from side to side.

He growled low, the sound of their flesh colliding loud in the room. No longer able to contain her scream, it was ripped from her. Her body was on fire, her heart pounding out of control. He had her pinned, and she couldn't move an inch. Every movement of his hips made her insane. A thumb pressed to her clit, and she exploded.

Her teeth chattered with the force of her orgasm, and she was pretty sure she was drooling. But she didn't care as waves of bliss rushed through her. Her nails dug deep into her hair, scraping down her scalp. She felt her muscles tensed to the point of pain.

“Becca? Becca! What’s happening?”

She shook her head, her friend's voice far away, and muffled beneath the roar of blood in her ears. She couldn't deal with Evelyn at the moment. Her world was centered on the man thrusting into her. A look of pure bliss on his face as he roared, his cock twitching in her still spasming pussy.

“Holy shit! Becca? Are you fucking?”

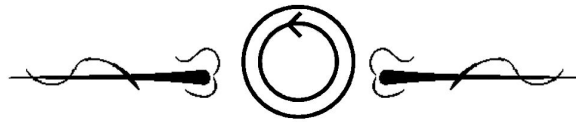
He leaned over her with a smile, his breath coming fast and hard. She was awash in a sea of ecstasy, and she closed her eyes, letting her head fall to the cushion with a sigh.

“Sorry, Evelyn. Becca will have to call you back. She just had the best orgasm of her life, and is quite incapacitated.”

When her eyelids opened, she saw him press the end button before gently placing her phone on the floor. “You’re a prick. She was probably panicking.”

He chuckled and flexed his hips, causing her to moan. A delicious twinge of pleasure coursed through her. “But you like my prick. Besides, I remember someone else playing little games when I was on the phone.”

She giggled, remembering their fuck session before meeting with the reporters. “Touche’.”



Becca tilted her chair back and listened to the creak of the wood as she watched Aedin. She found she could venture into the club if she kept her gaze fixed on him. It was hard to keep her eyes from wandering, but the fact that he was so delicious looking helped. Two entire weeks of being in his presence, and still she craved him like a fucking sweet treat.

She shook her head in disbelief when the band on stage filled the room with the sound of their instruments. They were horrible. The notes were discordant, and the lead singer’s voice grated on her ears. Each note sounded like nails on a chalkboard.

“Next!”

She smiled when Aedin dismissed them. He had a knack for talent, choosing only the most capable musicians to take the stage at Club Envy. He even could pick out the ones that required just a little help to make them sound great. Maybe they needed better tuning or newer instruments. He noticed the issues right away and acted fast to resolve them. She had never

met someone who donated so many expensive drum sets or guitars. Big named acts rarely had to audition for shows, but he insisted that all artists who wanted to perform at the club demonstrate their talents.

“Just because they’ve sold a million albums doesn’t mean they sound good live. A studio can make anybody a star.”

But music wasn’t all that he could offer to patrons. A ruckus on another floor had caught his attention the day before, and she had trailed after him, eager to find out what was going on. When they arrived outside a room, he asked for details and learned that the member had recently lost his wife.

The man had requested a special recreation of their wedding, complete with the same decorations and music they had chosen. Everything had been set up, and the customer had enjoyed every minute, but now he wouldn’t leave. Aedin directed her inside and whispered for her to stay in the shadows.

Becca stared around in awe, the beauty of the scene taking her breath away. The space looked like an elaborate chapel, the peak of the ceiling drawing her eye to the detailed moulding along the edges. Rays of sunlight cast a kaleidoscope of colors across the religious scenes in the stained glass windows. The air was filled with the scent of fresh flowers and the pews of the aisle were adorned with beautiful ribbons. At the end of the room was a large altar, with a golden crucifix hanging above it, shining brightly in the light. An old man in a tux tenderly cupped the face of a young woman in a white wedding dress while they sat on the steps.

“Mr. Smith, your session’s over,” Aedin said gently.

“She looks just like her and she’s real. So real.” The gentleman’s sorrow was evident as tears streamed down his craggy, wrinkled cheeks. His

fingers quivered when they softly ran along the contours of of his young bride's jaw. The girl beamed, her eyes crinkling with joy.

“But she isn't. This church, the flowers, and your lovely partner are all illusions. Built from pictures and descriptions that you provided us with. It's time to leave.”

The man shook his head, his hands dropping heavily into his lap. His shoulders sagged, and a shiver ran through him with each of his shaky breaths. “I can't. The house is so... so cold without her. The bed's too big, too much empty space. I tried to make her special casserole and... and I burnt it. She was all I had, my life, my purpose for living. What do I do now?”

Watery blue eyes glistened when they looked up at Aedin. He let out a deep, resigned sigh, his expression contorting with sadness. He glanced at the woman and clicked a button on his remote; the sound resonated throughout the room. Her silhouette flickered and dimmed until it was nothing more than a distant memory.

Mr. Smith's loud, mournful wail made Becca jump, the sorrow of it piercing her heart. “No, no, please. Bring her back.”

“That's not possible. There's a reason we don't normally do these types of sessions. It's too easy to become attached to the holograms. She's not real. I can't tell you what to do, but I bet your wife wouldn't want this.”

The man's tuxedo hung loosely on his skinny shoulders, his sobs shaking his entire body. Becca's heart ached for him, and she strode forward, as if an invisible force were pulling her closer to him. Each step made his outline clearer, the images of his life flashing through her mind. He glanced up at her when she knelt down beside him, the soft fabric of her jeans rustling. She cradled his hands; her figure moved with a sense of instinctive

understanding. His skin was paper thin, his palms rough and calloused from years of working.

His death played out before Becca's eyes. He was sprawled on out a bed, tightly embracing his wife's wedding dress to his chest, her scent lingering on the pillow beneath his nose. He raised his head and squinted against a bright light that suddenly illuminated him.

"Georgia? Is that you?" He slowly sat up, his jaw dropping in surprise. His eyes were shining with emotion, and a single tear sparkled on his cheek. He closed his eyelids for a moment, then opened them and gave a nod. "It's time, isn't it? I'm ready. I've missed you so much."

He laid back down, the soft fabric of the pillow cradling his head as he smiled. His final breath left him with a deep whoosh. When the light dimmed, the vision slowly disappeared. She gazed up and saw Mr. Smith, his face split in a wide grin, with his eyes shut tight.

"So that's how it'll be. Thank you for showing me. I worried I'd never see her again, that this life was it. My faith isn't what it used to be." He exhaled deeply and gently patted Becca's hand, the sound of his sniffing lingering in the air before he let go.

He stood on wobbly knees and staggered from the chapel. She squeezed her eyes shut, trying to hold back her tears. She had never experienced the sensation of sharing a vision with someone. *How did I do it? Can I repeat it?* She fixed her gaze on her hands, her fingertips trembling.

"Becca? You okay?"

She quickly wiped away a tear from her cheek before glancing at Aedin. He took her hand and pulled her up, helping her to her feet.

"I have no clue what I just did," she said.

"You made an old man happy. What happened?"

She peered at the exit. “Will you believe me or think I’m insane like everyone else?”

He tenderly rested his forehead against hers. “I would never think you’re crazy. I know there’s life after this one. Heaven and Hell exist, no matter what anyone says.”

His outward appearance didn’t hint of piety, yet his words spoke of a deep connection to something greater. She inhaled a long breath and took a leap of faith, trusting her intuition.

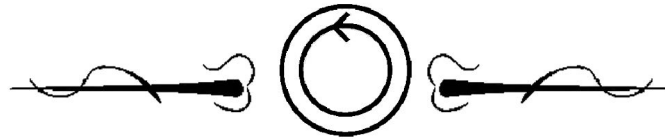
“He’ll die at home, holding his wife’s wedding dress. She’ll come for him. They’ll be together again,” she replied, wrapping her arms around Aedin’s waist.

“That’s good. She was a lovely woman from what he told us.” He pressed the button on the remote, and the chapel slowly faded away.

She blinked in surprise at the sight of charcoal panels lining the entire space. It seemed unreal that only a moment ago she had stood in a house of God. “How’s it done?”

He laced his fingers in hers, and they walked hand in hand toward the exit. “Virtual reality. We’re light years ahead of what everyone else is.”

Chapter Eight



Later that night, Becca lay in Aedin's bed, satiated and completely lethargic. He held her close, the soft light of the moon shining through the blinds of the window. His steady breathing created a gentle rhythm that made her eyelids heavy and her body relaxed. Despite her blurry vision and burning eyes, her thoughts continued to run, refusing to rest.

She was happy for the first time in years. A profound sense of contentment caused her insides to become warm and fuzzy. But a part of her set off warning bells. *Be careful. Nothing good ever lasts.*

Memories flickered through her mind. She smiled when she thought of how she had told him she didn't fuck her bosses. *Well, he threw that rule right out the window.* She closed her eyelids and pictured a life with him, her grin spreading wider.

Stop it, Becca. You barely know the man. Don't fall too quickly.

She shook her head. She had always been too trusting, too eager to give her heart away. Mark's image flickered in her mind. His sorrowful smile caused her eyes to fill with tears. She hadn't allowed herself to think about

him in years. The trauma they had both endured had created a bond between them.

He had suffered a lifetime of physical abuse in his last three homes while she was still striving to handle the psychological injury of her recent sexual assault. He was the first kid to approach her, his steps hesitant but determined. His life's story had been so sharp in her consciousness that it had made her body tremble uncontrollably, her cries resonating in the air. He had held her close and her tears had stained his shoulder. The picture of him laying on the floor in a puddle of his own blood had been seared into her mind. A single gunshot in his chest would be his death.

Despite their youth and the deep scars they both carried, they thought they knew what they were doing. Their friendship began slowly, then quickly grew into a strong and meaningful bond. A gentle kiss on the cheek led to more passionate caresses. Together, they had discovered that sex wasn't all pain and blood. It could be so much more.

But it had all ended in a flurry of loud voices and furious glares. Their foster brother had found them in the tree house and was gone in a flash, the sound of his feet pounding against the ground as he ran off to tell their dad. George Yarger had been livid, and his bellows had vibrated off the walls. His words were harsh when he called them sick and twisted. Even though they shared no biological connection, they were being raised together like siblings.

They were separated. She wasn't allowed to attend dinner if Mark was there and was forced to take her meals in her room. Before she could open her eyes in the mornings, he was up and off to school. The absence of the boy who had caused her days to be a little brighter left her feeling a deep, painful ache in her chest. She had tip-toed out of her bedroom one night,

her feet barely making a sound in the darkness, and had slowly made her way to his bed. He had opened his arms, and she gratefully stepped into the warmth of his embrace. They had tried to be quiet, yet the next day, a padlock was attached to her door.

Days melded into weeks without even a glimpse of her love. Late one night, she heard her father's footsteps in the hallway, and then his silhouette filled her doorway. All the warm and pleasant experiences she had with Mark became tainted by a sweaty, grunting body over hers. Pain and sorrow had become a persistent part of her life. George had declared that the girls in the house would be educated at home. He didn't want any of them mingling with the lads at school. Through her door, she had detected the indistinct noise of locks being added to her female neighbors' rooms. The bastard had created himself a little harem of young, underaged victims.

The boys had finally banded together and confronted the man. She shivered at the memory of the harsh voices yelling in the fight. Glass had shattered and the sound of punches being landed made her jump while she pressed her ear to the door, but it was the gunshot that caused her heart to stop. She knew what it meant, and her world had been devastated. Sobs had racked her tiny shoulders, and she crawled into the corner of her room. The cops had found her in a puddle of her own piss, her wails echoing through the house. It had taken a female officer to coax her out, and she was led from the home. George and his wife had glared at her as they were escorted away in cuffs. It was at that point that she decided never to fall in love again.

"Becca? Are you okay?" Aedin spun her in his arms and gently wiped her tears aside with his thumbs. She was so caught up in her memories that she

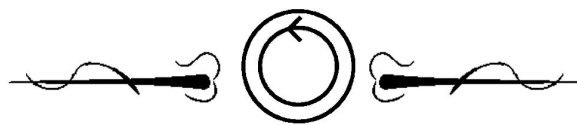
hadn't noticed her sobs. She shook her head, and he pulled her close, his lips brushing her forehead softly. "Do you wanna talk about it?"

She took a deep, trembling breath. His warmth was like a soft blanket that slowly lulled away the nightmares of her childhood. He was a strong, steadfast shield against the pain and suffering her younger self had endured.

"No... maybe... someday," she said in a tear soaked voice. "Just... just, h-h-hold me."

"Okay." He held her close and gently rocked her, humming a gentle lullaby.

All her anguish and misery poured from her, falling in wet streaks across her cheeks. She wept for all the memories of the past, for the pain and suffering, and for all the children who couldn't escape. Tears streaming down her face, she cried until she eventually drifted off to sleep next to the second man to ever care about her. She held onto the faint hope that their story would have a brighter ending than Mark's.



Shanaera whimpered as she huddled on the floor beside an enormous fourposter bed. *What will happen to me? The king's dead. Oh, god, what about Frieda?* Her heart ached when her mind replayed the bloodbath of the throne room. She had expected Aedin Envy to take her back to her cell, but instead, he had found the bedroom that had once belonged to Queen

Alicent. The chamber was lit by a thousand candles, and the flickering light created shadows that danced on the walls. Years ago, when the monarch had died in childbirth, a profound grief settled over the kingdom, leaving everyone heavy-hearted.

The sound of his deep, rumbling sigh made her heart skip a beat, and she stared fearfully across the chamber at him. With a shrug, he let the doublet slip off his frame, exposing a cream-colored tunic. He rolled his muscular shoulders and met her eyes. Her ears burned and tingled, making her want to itch at them. When the door of the room burst open, she screamed and dove behind the heavy velvet curtains that hung around the bed.

“What the fuck was that, Aedin? You were supposed to gain his support, not infuriate him by demanding a slip of a girl.” The crimson warrior entered the chamber, dragging a sobbing woman by the hand.

Her heart jumped in her chest when she saw her friend. Freida searched the shadows in every corner before landing on her. The old maid stumbled toward her with outstretched arms. “You’re safe. Thank the gods.”

Shanaera leaned into the woman’s shoulder and felt the warmth of wrinkled hands smoothing her hair. Sobs racked her body, her lips and nose growing puffy.

“God had nothing to do with it, wench. The Black Dragons liberated you. Show some fucking gratitude and help me out of this damned armor.”

“Stop being an ass, Stan. The day’s ours, and we have what we want. Harrowhold shall reward you handsomely. Maybe put a good word in with the druids. They might even cease pursuing you,” Aedin said.

Frieda shushed her before slowly standing and glancing toward the man in red. Shanaera slithered back to her hiding spot, hoping to draw no attention to herself. *What will they do with me?* For the first time in her life,

she ached to be in her cell, surrounded by the comfort of her chalks and books.

“Fuck the druids. They’ve been a thorn in my side since I fucking hacked down some of that little dryad’s trees. But that’s beside the point. Why did you do it? What’s so great about the girl?” Stan asked.

Aedin’s pale green eyes softened and seemed to glow from within when they met hers. A broad smile stretched across his face as he leisurely strolled over the soft, plush carpet toward her. She trembled in fear when he knelt and lightly brushed his fingers against her cheek.

“Don’t be afraid, little fairy. I won’t hurt you.” He glanced over his shoulder and said, “She’s my mate and under my protection.”

“Jesus! Not another damn soulmate. First Corvus, and now you. Will it never end?” The clink of Stan’s armor resounded and Freida stumbled under its weight. He tenderly lifted it from her hands, placing it carefully to the side. He took a seat, and the old maid knelt, her fingers working over the buckles of his boots.

“Perhaps someday you’ll meet your own. Do you not crave the touch of a woman and to watch the love grow in her gaze when she looks upon you?” Aedin rose to his feet, lazily walking across the bedroom to the table in the center. He watched his companion while he poured a goblet of water, the sound of liquid filling the air.

Stan’s hearty laughter rang off the walls. “What man doesn’t want the caress of a warm body? There’s nothing like a wet mouth on his piece before he spreads his seed across a pretty face. But love, no, brother, that I do not desire. Such emotions cause a person to be weak and vulnerable.”

His boot fell from his foot with a clatter, and he let out a deep sigh, wriggling his toes. Frieda paused and took a long breath before turning her

attention to his other shoe.

“You’re wrong. Love will strengthen you, and the day you meet your mate, I want you to say I told you so.” Aedin knelt before Shanaera, his hands clasped around the cool metal of the goblet.

She accepted it cautiously, taking small, measured sips. His hand swept back her hair, and the soft caress of his fingertips brushed over her ear. Fire lanced through her, causing her to jolt, almost spilling the drink in her palms. He quickly steadied her with a reassuring, comforting smile.

“Please, my lord. She doesn’t know anything about the way of men. Don’t hurt her. She’s innocent.” Frieda’s voice, rough and raspy, made her turn her head. Fear and sadness rippled across the old maid’s face.

“Don’t assume the worst about my brother. He’ll treat her like a queen. Don’t worry,” Stan said, his other boot falling to the ground with a loud clang. “Go get us something for the young woman to wear. Silk in her size. The rags she wears aren’t fit for the upcoming banquet.”

“And a bath. Have servants bring up the tub and fill it. I also want your best smelling soap.” Aedin got to his feet, then strolled up to his sibling.

Freida quickly nodded in agreement and practically sprinted out of the chamber. Shanaera watched the two men from her spot on the floor and listened to their quiet murmurs. *A new dress and an actual bath?* She took a quick sip from her drink when her tears threatened to fall, hoping it would keep them back.

The seconds slowly passed, and she felt herself become calmer until the door suddenly flew open. Male servants bustled in, carrying a large tub. They set it down with a thud before the immense hearth. They filled the bathtub to the brim with steaming hot liquid, the sound of it bubbling and gurgling. Wispy curls of steam rose off the surface and she shivered in

delight. She had never experienced the warmth of a bath before. She knew of the extravagance of the nobility, but all that had awaited her each morning was a bucket of ice-cold water.

Frieda appeared with a selection of dresses draped over her arm, the fabric crinkling. She carefully laid them on the bed and quickly glanced at Shanaera before spinning on her heel to face the men. She curtsied low, her voice unwavering and steady. “My lords, I’ll make the young lady presentable if you would pick out a gown for her.”

Aedin shook his head and his hand sliced through the air with a sharp gesture. “No need. I’ll tend to her myself. Show my brother to a room for his own personal use.”

The old woman swallowed loudly, glancing down at her. “My lord, please. The girl’s still a maid. She should be assisted by a female, not a man.”

His eyes narrowed, and Shanaera heard a slight whimper escape her lips as a shiver ran through her. Fear that he would hurt her friend made her grip the woman’s hand. Their gazes met, and her face lit up with a gentle smile.

“It’s fine. I’ll be okay,” she whispered.

“You don’t understand, Shanaera. A man’s rod can hurt and—“

“That’s enough!” Stan shouted, rising from his chair. “You assume much about my sibling. Take me to my room, and leave them to their own devices. I promise you that Aedin won’t hurt your little elf. She’s safer with him than anywhere else on this earth.”

Frieda shook her head, planting her feet. The massive man growled and rolled his eyes before scooping her up over his shoulder. The old woman shrieked like a banshee, her tiny fists pelting his back. His large palm smacked hard on her bottom and he walked out of the room, trailed by the

remaining servants. Shanaera watched, fear for her friend weighing heavy on her chest.

“He won’t hurt your maid.”

She raised her gaze to the man before her, and his presence loomed in the quiet chamber. His blond hair contrasted beautifully with his light green irises, making him look breathtakingly handsome. He held his hand out to her, and she felt the warmth of his skin when she slid hers into it. He gently led her to the bath, the warm steam of the water enveloping them.

“Have you ever bathed before?” Aedin asked.

“I’m provided with a bucket each morning. I use it for drinking throughout the day, and wash away my filth at night,” she said, peeking at him through her lashes.

“Did your jailers provide soap? It’s obvious that they neglected your clothes.” He circled around her, lifting her hair, and breathed in its scent.

She shook her head. “No, the king was kind. He provided chinks and picture-books. I received new dresses when I outgrow the last.”

“Shanaera, that’s not kindness. That’s providing the bare minimum to keep a caged pet happy. You deserve so much more.” She jumped in surprise when his hands settled on her shoulders. “Don’t fear me. I won’t hurt you, I swear.”

He slipped the sleeves of her tunic off, and it fell to the ground in a whisper. She stood in only her chemise, the heat of a blush spreading across her face. She shakily lowered her eyelashes and her inhalation paused in her throat. When he reached around her and pulled the ties free, his warm breath tickled the back of her neck. His fingertips gently caressed the worn fabric as he moved it down.

He hissed, a fingertip tracing down her scars. “He took your wings, didn’t he?”

She shivered, her shoulders hunched, and she nodded in agreement. Her heart raced, pounding against her ribcage, while her breath rushed in and out of her lungs. His touch made her flesh warm, and an unfamiliar emotion settled in the pit of her stomach.

“Get in the bath, Shanaera.”

She did as she was told, gasping when the heat hit her bare skin. The sound of clothes being removed caused her eyes to widen, and she sank lower in the water. She was startled by the sudden noise of a splash, her body rigid with shock. She didn’t dare to budge an inch, scared of how he would respond. Strong limbs wrapped around her and spun her to face him.

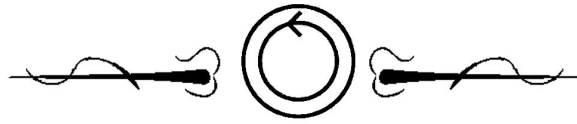
He pulled her close, his lips gently brushing her temple. “I bet your wings were beautiful, just like you are. I’m sorry for your loss.”

He dragged her arms about his neck, and she gasped. His skin was a contrast—tough as steel, yet smooth and velvety. He carefully placed her legs along his sides. She felt a steady, warm pressure on her thigh, as if something solid was pushing against it. His embrace elicited a blush from her cheeks, and when she closed her eyes, her muscles tensed.

“Look at me.”

She trembled, her heart racing with fear of the unknown. She replayed Frieda’s words in her head, her breath becoming shallow and rapid in her chest. *‘A man’s rod can hurt.’*

“I won’t take you until you’re ready. Until then, let’s just enjoy each other’s closeness.”



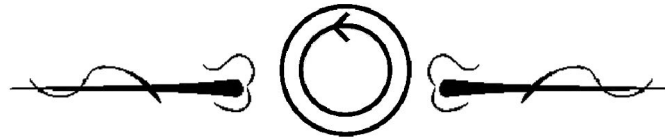
Becca felt the warm sunlight on her face, the dream dissipating like smoke in a light breeze. She sat up slowly and noticed the cold, empty spot beside her. The penthouse was so quiet, she could hear the ticking of the clock reverberating off the walls. She stood up and stretched, her muscles lengthening.

She hurriedly pulled on her clothes before stepping out of the bedroom to take in the sights of the living room. Descending the stairs, she noticed a white piece of paper on the coffee table and her brows creased in confusion. She picked it up, running her fingers along the graceful loops of Aedin's handwriting.

Sorry about breakfast, but duty calls. I didn't have the heart to wake you, but I promise to be back as quickly as I can. There's fruit and other ingredients in the fridge. If you need anything, pick up the phone on the wall in the kitchen. The employees will bring it asap. See you soon, little rockstar.

She exhaled, taking in the silent emptiness of the penthouse. She stared at the large screen television, the sleek frame and glossy surface reflecting the light. *When was the last time I just vegged out and watched a sappy tear jerking movie?* She nodded her head and made her way out of the living room, her stomach grumbling in anticipation of some snacks.

Chapter Nine



A edin's eyes moved from the text message to the building, scanning the street signs to make sure it matched what Delilah had told him. The old brick home was covered in colorful graffiti, with long brush swaying in the wind along its walls. He raised an eyebrow at the sight of the boarded-up windows and doors. "She better be right. This place looks like a fucking dump."

Corvus let out a deep, rumbling chuckle as they exited his sleek, black SUV. The crisp, cold snow crunched under their feet and the birds from a nearby tree chirped in the air. Adam had pored over the letter, yet he couldn't find any indication of who was stalking Becca. The culprit had carefully sealed the envelope with a spritz of water. Only one thing was obvious: they had typed it up on a vintage typewriter. *The son of a bitch is smart.*

After his failure, his brother had begrudgingly handed the reins over to Delilah, his employee. She scoured the internet until she finally stumbled across a website devoted to Becca. Arnold Haggard was listed as creator and owner of Rebecca Gibbons is a goddess dot com. His address was

displayed at the bottom of the site and the building before them was recorded in his name.. Aedin knew it was a long shot, but he had to follow every lead he could find.

The area was eerily quiet, the silence only broken by the occasional birdcall. Aedin leaned against the brick wall, keeping an ear out for any sound of someone approaching. He gave a slight nod to Corvus, and his brother's fingers tightened their grip on the wooden plank at the doorway. His brother grunted and bared his teeth, the creaking of the door reverberating loudly.

"Hey! What the fuck are you doing? All you had to do was ask and I would've opened it."

They turned to see a man glaring at them through a broken window. His beady eyes squinted, his gaze lingering on them both. His irises betrayed a sense of suspicion and doubt. The cold, biting air caused his round face to flush, while his thin, limp brown hair was combed over a shiny bald head.

"You wouldn't happen to be Arnold?" Aedin inquired, pushing off the wall.

"Why the fuck would the owner of Club Envy want to talk to me?"

Corvus smiled and stepped away from the door, the sound of the snow crackling beneath his shoes. He glanced around, and the noise of his hands rustling in his pockets filled the air.

"Hey, man. It's frigid out here. Mind inviting us in?" he asked, using the deep cadence of his voice to his advantage.

The guy's eyes scanned his sibling up and down, and a slow smile appeared on his face. Aedin couldn't help but chuckle at Corvus's playful grin and head tilt. *Only my brother would use his good looks to weasel a way in.*

“Corvus Greed,” Arnold said. “Sure, but only because you asked nicely.”

The man disappeared, and a squeal filled the air. The boarded up door slowly creaked open, the sound of rusty hinges grinding against each other resonated. They walked into the warehouse, and the lights hanging from the ceiling swayed gently, creating a soft glow. The concrete floor was full of cracks, with some chipping away, yet it still was solid in spots. There was nothing else in the space, and the inside was just as cold as the outside.

Arnold’s smile was beaming as he waved at them from across the room. “Come on. It’s not every day that a guy gets two big shots visiting his place. Close this behind ya. It’s colder than a hooker’s ass on the corner in the dead of winter out there.”

The man opened a thick steel door and disappeared into it. They followed cautiously, arriving on a landing at the top of a set of metal stairs. When Corvus closed the exit, they both jumped at the sound of the locks clicking into place. Aedin descended the steps, feeling the sweat trickle between his shoulder blades with every step.

“Can’t be too careful in this neighborhood. A lot of fucking weirdos out there,” Arnold said from below them.

When they entered the room, their eyes widened at the sheer number of monitors and computers that surrounded them. Shop fixtures overhead cast a harsh light from fluorescent bulbs, buzzing incessantly. The space was filled with the low buzz of electronics and fans running. Hot air drifted from open vents, accompanied by the scent of burning logs.

“I’m almost completely self-sufficient. The heat comes from a wood burner that’s hooked to a fan system that circulates it through the basement. Solar panels have been installed on the roof. They generate enough power

to deal with about half this setup. I plan to get more as soon as my latest website takes off.”

Arnold hit a button on his keyboard, and the monitor to their right switched from an image of Becca playing her guitar to a brunette stroking a massive blue dildo. She giggled while she slathered lube all over it. Aedin watched in astonishment when she sat on it, the entire thing disappearing into her ass.

“Holy shit. Look at her stomach,” Corvus said, his mouth hanging open.

“Impossible insertions dot com. Yearly or monthly subscription. I got a card if you’re interested. I’ll even throw in a discount if you refer some of your customers,” Arnold stated.

Aedin quickly pushed past his brother, and his gaze was immediately drawn to the array of screens in the room. Thousands of pictures and videos of Becca onstage flashed across every screen, her voice ringing through the speakers. One made him pause and take in the beauty of the image. She looked up at him with a beaming smile as they stood on the balcony of his luxurious penthouse. Her eyes glowed, her arms wrapped tightly around his middle. When the photo passed, he felt his eyelids close, the sensation of his lashes brushing against his skin.

“What the fuck is all this?” he asked.

Arnold settled into a worn office chair, a content smile across his lips.

“Samples. They’re on a rolling slideshow. I play them for inspiration. Running twenty different sites can become overwhelming, but she’s my muse. Rebecca Gibbons. You know her backstory, right? Of course you do. You and her are a thing now,” he said, spinning toward his computer and typing away on the keyboard. “The guys are going to lose their shit when I tell them you were here.”

“No,” Corvus growled. “We got some questions for you. Stuff that needs to stay between us. Understand?”

His brother twirled the man back to face them. Sweat ran down Arnold’s forehead and he shifted his gaze, uncertainly, between the two brothers. A glimmer of fear shimmered in his irises, his fat chin trembling. “I didn’t do anything wrong. All I showed her was my book and told her about my website. I swear.”

Aedin looked at the screens, raising one eyebrow in curiosity. He stalked toward the man and his hands gripped the armrests as he leaned over him. “So you haven’t been sending her letters? Wouldn’t have an old vintage typewriter around here somewhere?”

Arnold shook his head, his mouth falling open. His double chins quivered slightly and fear reflected in his eyes.

“Guys, if I wanted to send her a letter, I’d email her. Who the fuck still uses a typewriter?” The soft cushions enveloped him as he sank into them. “Listen, listen. I might be her biggest fan, but I ain’t in love with her. I’m a little more inclined toward... well, men like you, Corvus. Big, black and probably packing something that’ll split me in half.”

His brother growled low, his irises glowing like burning embers. Arnold whimpered and pressed a palm to his crotch. Aedin rolled his eyes when he saw the tent forming in the man’s pants. Straightening, he sighed, and ran a hand through his hair.

“Fuck!” He knew it had been a shot in the dark, but he had hoped it would be the end. He was no closer to finding out who the hell was stalking her than before. *Fucking wasted time.*

“Sorry, I’m a bit of a masochist. Is someone causing Becca problems?” Arnold asked.

Aedin let out a dry chuckle, running his tongue across his lips and staring at the ceiling. “She’s been receiving threatening letters.”

The man squinted in concentration before slowly spinning in his chair. His fingers moved with precision, a symphony of clicks and taps on the keyboard. “Did you call the cops? Oh, wait, don’t answer that. Of course you didn’t. The Seven Princes would deal with this themselves.”

His brother leaned over the desk, the wood creaking beneath his hand. Aedin matched his stance on the other side of Arnold. The guy reminded him of Delilah.

“How do you know so much about us?” Corvus asked.

“Anyone that comes into contact with Rebecca gets checked. I think of her as a big sister, so I wanna make sure she’s safe. When she shacked up with you, Aedin, I tracked down everything I could about you. Which, of course, led to your brothers. The internet’s full of secrets if you know where to look.”

They watched in awe when the monitor came to life, multiple screens flickering. The tabs momentarily shone brightly before fading away. *This guy’s the real deal.*

“We should introduce him to Delilah,” he whispered to Corvus.

“I already chatted with her. It’s how I knew you were coming. Saw that she crept onto my site and then got a ping that she had texted my address. Seems like a nice girl, a little behind on hacking, but nice. Here.”

They squinted at the mugshot of an older gentleman, his eyes staring back at them from the page. He held a plaque in his hands, and the name ‘*Yarger, George*’ was etched across it. Aedin peered, trying to make sense of what it meant.

“Who the fuck’s that?” he asked.

Arnold shook his head with a heavy sigh, his fingers clacking away on the keyboard. Aedin squinted at the faded print of an old article in the local newspaper. The headline stood out, written in bold, black ink. *'Foster home shut down due to abuse.'*

"I thought you knew her background, man. That could be the dude stalking her. The details were kept hush, hush, but when she was a teenager, she helped put him behind bars. He got out last month."

"How was she involved?" Corvus asked.

Arnold's apprehension was palpable as he squirmed in his chair. He inhaled deeply, his chest rising and falling. "It's not pretty. There's a reason Rebecca's my muse. She spent all her life in the system. Foster home after foster home. Abused and beaten, but she rose above it all like a fucking phoenix. A flaming bird of rebirth. She's a shining star, an inspiration to the world."

The guy's breath came out in a short, labored burst when he finished his speech, his face rosy with excitement. Aedin smiled at his brother. Corvus tried to contain his amusement, his mouth twitching.

"When she was a teenager, she settled into the Yarger house. She and twelve other kids. George Yarger locked up the girls, abusing them daily. They ranged from ages eight to sixteen. Well, the boys that had been placed in their custody got tired of it and confronted him. A kid died of a gunshot, but they caused enough of a ruckus that the neighbors called the cops. It was Rebecca's testimony that put him and his wife behind bars. Apparently, she was the first."

Aedin felt a sharp pain in his chest and he tried to swallow. He knew the mates had been sentenced to a life of misery, but the thought of her being abused filled him with sadness. She was pure and untouched by any

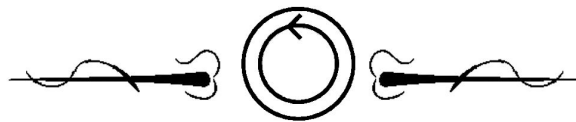
wrongdoing. He licked his lips, feeling the salty sweat on his tongue. He shook his head and his stomach boiled with rage. His legs were trembling, and he staggered. Corvus placed a comforting hand on his shoulder, giving it a gentle squeeze.

“Where is he now?” Aedin asked through clenched teeth.

The screens lit up with a bright glow, displaying a map in vivid detail. A dot blinked intermittently, its accompanying address glowing faintly beside it. He nodded and spun, his feet carrying him across the room.

“Brother, wait!”

But he paid no attention to Corvus as he thundered up the steps two at a time. With a loud clank, the steel locks disengaged, and the door swung free. He ran through the building and out into the crisp winter air, his breath fogging the space in front of his face. He threw his coat to the ground and let his wings billow out in the breeze.



Aedin touched down on the top of the halfway house, the snow crunching beneath his shoes. He almost couldn't believe his luck when he saw the man he was searching for. George Yarger sat on the edge of the roof, his feet dangling, letting the wind tousle his thinning hair.

His target raised a bottle to his lips, draining it. “Are you the Angel of Death come to collect my soul?”

Aedin shook his head and chuckled. “No. I’m the bastard that’s going to fucking kill you for hurting the woman I love.”

The man smiled, and with a flick of his wrist, the glass soared through the air. Aedin watched the object tumble through the sky, the sound of its descent filtering off the buildings. There was a loud crash when it shattered upon the ground, followed by people swearing and shouting.

“Then you got the wrong guy. I ain’t had a pussy in years. But I remember the last one as if it happened yesterday. She was a hot little thing. I wasn’t her first. No, that punk, Mark, was there before me. But that’s okay, he got his in the end, and she was still tight.” George groaned, rubbing hard against the crotch of his pants. “I dream about her now and then. She used to cry so prettily. And her ass, fuck. I thought her cunt was like a vise, but her asshole. A fucking clamp around my dick. Heard she made it big. Some kinda singer for a band.”

Aedin tightly clenched his fists, his knuckles popping. Each syllable that fell from the man’s lips caused his body to tremble with anger. He gritted his teeth and stalked toward his prey. He jumped back in shock when someone descended onto the roof, accompanied by a cascade of snowflakes. Corvus rose from a crouch, a dark silhouette against a backdrop of pristine white.

George’s mirth filled the air with its echo. “Now he looks like the Angel of Death.”

The man heaved himself up, wobbling on the edge. He laughed, the sound resounding as he maintained his balance using his arms. When he finally straightened, a devious smile spread across his thin lips. His cruel brown eyes were creased, his skin weathered and marked with age spots.

His shirt was stretched tight over his protruding stomach, his sandy hair slick with grease.

“I’m a wicked man. My soul’s black with sin. They let me out, but I still fantasize about the little girls that come into the supermarket where I work. So soft and their wails are like music to my ears. I’m a plague on this planet. So take me, Angel. I’m fucking ready.”

George took a step to his right and his foot slid on the frozen, icy ledge. His eyelids sprang open wide with surprise. His scream vibrated around them when he fell backward. Aedin roared and lunged forward, his fingers grazing the rough denim of the man’s jeans. His intended victim landed with a thud on the pavement below. His dull sightless eyes gazed up at the sky, a look of horror on his face while blood pooled beneath him.

“We gotta go.”

Aedin growled and shook off the hands that tried to pull him from the edge. The shadows shifted and twisted, forming shapes in the darkness. The Harbingers of Death materialized with an ominous rumble. Their many legs carried them toward the body, their long tongues licking along the flesh of the man that had caused Becca so much pain.

“We gotta go before the cops get here,” Corvus hissed.

Aedin spun from his brother and pushed off the roof; the snow swirling around him like a tornado from the force of his wings. He soared up into the air, the sound of the wind rushing past his ears. When Club Envy came into sight, he let out a long sigh. He needed to feel her touch, to breathe in her scent, for her to extinguish the fury that still seethed within him. He landed gently on the balcony, his wings folding into his skin as he willed them away. Rounding the corner, he was met with the cool glass of the sliding doors beneath his fingertips. Stepping through it, his heart skipped a beat

when he heard the stifled sobs coming from her. His brow furrowed, and he rushed in.

“Becca? What happened?” He sat on the sofa beside her and tenderly drew her close, wrapping his arms around her.

She squirmed against him and shoved at his chest. “You’re fucking freezing. Did you just come in off the balcony?”

She dabbed away her tears with a soft tissue before reaching for the remote on the armrest. She extended her arm toward the television and jabbed the pause button with her finger. Sniffling and with eyes still wet, she looked up at him.

“Why are you crying?” he asked, ignoring her question. He glanced down at the half-empty box on the table and the wastebasket beside it overflowing with crumpled paper. *What has made her so unhappy?*

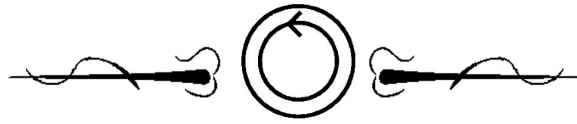
“It’s the movie. She has cancer and... and he loves her but... but their... love’s doomed,” she said between sobs. She blew her nose with a loud, nasal noise. With a deep, throaty chuckle, he shook his head in amusement. *I’ll never understand women.* “So sad and yet it’s such an excellent film. I can restart it if you like.”

“No, little rockstar. Why don’t you finish it while I freshen up? Pick a new one and I’ll order pizza. How does that sound?” he said, leaning in and kissing her swollen lips.

Her eyes sparkled with delight, and she gave a subtle nod. He stood up from the couch, the creaking of the springs filling the room. “Is your shirt ripped? What the fuck were you doing?”

He ran up the stairs two steps at a time and muttered to himself in frustration at his eagerness to see her.

“Blame my brother!” he yelled, slamming the bedroom door.



An hour later, Becca settled in close to Aedin on the sofa, enveloped in the warmth of his embrace. An empty pizza box lay on the coffee table, and a bowl of popcorn was cradled in his lap. She watched his hand gradually bring the snack to his mouth. A few fell, but he was so captivated by the images on the screen, he didn't notice.

"Please, Dominic. I can't live life without you. Oh, god. Don't be dead, don't be dead!" The actress was overly theatrical, but the emotion in the scene was palpable.

With its action-packed scenes and romantic vibes, Becca had hoped the movie would keep his attention. Mafia boss meets the girl next door, and chaos ensues. Aedin nervously bit his lip, his eyes glistening with moisture. She wrapped her arms around his shoulders, and he let out a quiet sniffle. She suppressed her own tears when a lump of emotion rose in her throat.. *There's nothing worse than a man crying.*

"Why would you wanna watch this? It's so fucking sad," he said in a thick voice.

Her laughter filled the air, and she pressed her body closer to his. He roughly wiped away the single droplet that moved down his cheek. His eyes were bright red with unshed tears, and she grabbed a kleenex to give to him.

He snatched it from her before blowing his nose. She held up the trash can, and he angrily dropped the tissue in.

“That’s part of the appeal. Makes you feel all the emotions,” she replied, a sympathetic smile on her face.

When the credits rolled, he shook his head in disbelief.

“What the fuck? What happened to Maria? Or the fucking rival gang? Bullshit,” he yelled at the screen. “If that was real life, none of those fuckers would be alive. Killing the boss would’ve set off a powder keg.”

She laughed, her eyes twinkling as she stared at him. She was taken aback by the intensity of his emotions, and a delightful tingle fluttered through her stomach. “It’s just a movie.”

He sighed heavily, pulling her close to his chest. He nuzzled into the crook of her neck.

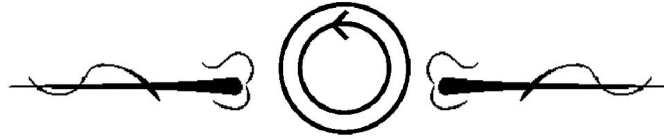
“I pick the show next time,” he said against her skin. “One where the hero gets the girl and has a happy ending.”

She let out a delighted squeal when he scooped her up in his arms. He climbed the steps to the bedroom, shaking his head. “I still don’t get it. Why the fuck would you wanna cry and be sad?”

She giggled merrily and embraced him. A feeling of peacefulness spread through her, a fuzzy warmth that filled her with happiness. “Cause women are weird, I guess.”

“That’s for fucking sure.”

Chapter Ten



Becca closed her eyes, inhaling deeply before opening them to stare down at the counter. The walls seemed to be closing in around her, and her chest tightened. Sweat beaded her brow while her fingers chilled with a cold touch. Her chin quivered as she tried to hold back a sob. *This can't be happening, not now.*

Aedin had left early in the morning to attend a business meeting with his brothers, leaving her alone in the penthouse. The sound of the elevator dinging had jolted her into action and she had fumbled for her phone, quickly opening her period tracker app. Aunty Flo should've paid her a visit three days ago, but unfortunately, it seemed her plane was delayed.

Becca had tried to think of how to get a test, but she knew if she walked out of this apartment, one of his employees would notify him. Of that, she was sure. So she did the next best thing, she called a friend. Evelyn had been the first person to come to mind, but the thought of the inevitable drama had made her cringe.

When it came to babies, her bestie was a big softy. She was always begging to hold them and sniffing their bald little heads. *I love the way*

they smell'. Nope, she's off the list. That only left Jessica. The girl had arrived promptly, her footsteps echoing in the silence. She had held out the bag while Becca shoved a wad of bills into her palm. Her bandmate had smiled sadly before wishing her good luck and departing.

Becca had spent the morning immersed in the directions, her forehead creased in concentration. She had never taken one, and didn't want to fuck this up. A false reading had been her greatest fear, but now that seemed like a minor concern. Her eyes filled with tears, the salty drops rolling down her cheeks while her unsteady hands wiped them away. By the look of things, Aunty Flo's plane had crashed. Two dark pink lines stared back at her, and her palms grew sweaty with anxiety. She swallowed the bile that rose in her throat. She set the test down beside the other five, neatly arranged on the counter. Each showed the same result: a resounding positive.

Never in her life had she thought that she would have a child, let alone with someone she hardly knew. But no matter how much she wished, the results wouldn't disappear.

I should've taken a morning-after pill! So fucking stupid. Aedin said it wouldn't happen and, like a moron, I believed him. How the fuck do I tell him? We've only been together for a little over a month.

She carefully lifted the trash bin and slid the contents into it. *How am I supposed to raise a kid? I have no clue how to be a mom. Hell, mine wasn't around.* The mere thought of her biological mother sent shivers through her body, and she quickly tried to suppress it. She deftly tied the bag shut with a tight knot. *Will I end up the same, giving up my baby for my own selfish reasons?*

She walked through the apartment and stuffed the evidence into the garbage shoot. She ran her fingertips lightly over her belly. Another option

rose in her mind, and her stomach flip-flopped. *I can't give you up, not after all I've been through. But what if he doesn't want you? Do I want you?*

She anxiously bit her lip when she thought of abortion, a sharp pang of worry coursing through her chest. Her chin quivered, and a wail caught in her throat. Shaking her head, she drew in a deep, cleansing breath. *Nothing can be done right now. I need time to think.*

She nervously wiped her damp palms on the soft fabric of Aedin's pajama pants. The waistband was cinched with a hair tie, and to avoid tripping, she had rolled the long legs up. When she imagined how they would fit in a few months, her eyes stung with tears.

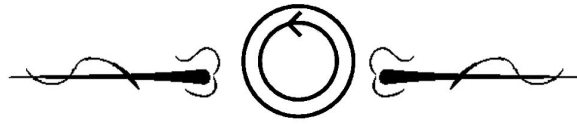
Do I inform him or just do it? The right thing to do is tell him, but what if he kicks me out? He said he wouldn't get me pregnant. Will he think I cheated?

A chill ran down her spine as a new fear crept into her heart. *No, no. The only guys I've been near are Brandon and his brothers at Sunday dinners. Well, and Randy. Oh, god, what if he accuses me of sleeping with my manager?*

She gasped for breath, her breakfast churning in her gut. She raced to the kitchen sink and vomited. With quivering fingers, she flipped on the faucet and listened to the rush of water filling the basin before she rinsed her mouth out.

Fucking hell! This isn't happening.

Her stomach grumbled loudly, hunger clawing at her insides. She turned to the cabinets and flung the doors open. Her eyes fell on a box of brownie mix, the bright red label catching her gaze. *Chocolate, that's what I need. Just stuff my face until I can't think anymore. Sweets always make everything better.*



An hour later, Becca sat on the sofa, her cheeks wet with tears and crumbs from the brownies still on her fingertips. *Why am I crying over baked goods? They were so tasty, though. Maybe there's more in the kitchen.*

The elevator dinged, and she quickly wiped away the moisture, banishing the memory of the rich, fudgy flavor. She timidly looked at the man who had brought her to this point, her nose running. Aedin grinned as he slipped off his jacket and hung it up on the coat rack.

She bit back a sob when he walked up to her, the warmth in his eyes making her chin quiver. *God, don't fucking cry in front of him. But damn, does he always stare at me like that? So gentle and kind, as if I'm the only girl in the entire world. Is this going to be my whole pregnancy? A crying, overeating wreckage of tattoos and piercings.*

"How was your day? Sorry, the meeting ran long."

He sat down beside her and he surveyed the crumbs scattered across the coffee table with an amused look. She tried not to make eye contact, nestling into him while breathing in the aroma of his cologne. *He's so fucking warm. God, I just want to wrap him around me like a blanket.*

His arm gently draped over her shoulders and pulled her close. Her mind was abuzz with a million different thoughts. *How do I tell him? I know you*

said that I wouldn't get knocked up, but yeah, I'm pregnant. No, no.

“Did you eat all this by yourself?” he asked, a hint of disbelief in his voice.

She nodded, her face growing hot with embarrassment. A deep chuckle rumbled through his chest while he shook his head. *If I keep eating like this, I'll be as big as a beach ball. But back on task. Um, you're going to be a daddy. Yay! Nope, not that one.*

“I guess dinner's out of the question, then?”

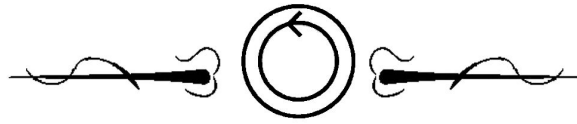
He tried to pull away, but she held on tight, her grip unrelenting, afraid to meet his gaze. *I'll fucking fall apart. Then he'll want to know what's wrong and that'll lead to shit hitting the fan.* Her stomach grumbled, and the sound reverberated in her ears. *Damn, this kid's a bottomless pit. How can I be hungry already?*

“Well, I could eat again,” she mumbled.

He guffawed and stood, offering her his hand to help her up. Guilt weighed heavily on her and she kept her eyes glued to the floor, but he didn't seem to notice as he directed her to the staircase. *Wait, wait! We gotta talk.* But the words seemed to lodge in her throat, refusing to be uttered.

“Good, cause we're going to a little cafe with my brothers. Go get dressed.”

She squealed when he smacked her on the ass, and she raced up the steps. *Oh, god, how do I deal with his siblings when I can't even tell him? Fucking hell!*



Aedin snickered at the look of shock on Becca's face as she heard Leo demand two more plates, bread, and something sweet. His brother had already devoured three platefuls and four baskets of soft, buttery loaves.

The little cafe had a pleasant ambience, with its cozy decor and muted music. A woman's melodic voice sang out gentle ballads while a man's guitar strums vibrated off the walls. All the different scents of artisan cheeses, craft beers, baked goods, and freshly brewed coffees combined to fill the air.

Intimate tables and comfortable chairs were scattered around the bistro. The dim overhead lights cast a soft, hazy glow over the room. He leaned back in his chair and let out a low chuckle, eyes twinkling with amusement. His brothers had offered to take him to a new restaurant or dive they had discovered numerous times, but he had always declined. It was awkward being the fifth wheel, surrounded by couples and feeling left out.

By the time they had arrived, Becca was so famished she was practically salivating at the sight of the menu. He couldn't remember seeing her put so much away before, but he shrugged it off. *If the girl wants to eat, let her eat.* He would still love her, even if her body became as large as a mansion.

Adam gave Donna a knowing smile and whispered into her ear. Her tanned face flushed, her twinkling brown eyes glancing at her man while she worried her bottom lip. Leo and Carrie were in a race to see who could

consume the most, and their laughter rang out in the air. Despite her small size, Gluttony's mate could match his brother in appetite.

"Do they always eat like this?" Becca whispered.

Aedin leaned in close, his voice low so only she could hear. "Pretty much."

He inhaled deeply, savoring the sweet scent of her perfume. Orchids in a rainstorm, but this time there was a citrusy smell to her that hadn't been there before. He furrowed his brows and wondered if the aroma was from a new soap she was trying. She had twisted her tresses into a thick braid down the center of her scalp, giving her a majestic aura. But he wished it was free-flowing, so he could experience the silkiness of her hair between his fingers.

"Well, sorry to eat and run, but Donna and I have a prior engagement to attend to." Adam stood and helped his woman to her feet before smiling at them all. "Good night everyone."

The two of them rushed from the restaurant as if the place was on fire.

"Don't mind them. They're trying for a baby," Carrie said between mouthfuls.

"You're going to lose tonight, kitten." Leo's smirk widened, and he shoved an enormous piece of bread into his mouth. He struggled to swallow and drank from his glass before he continued. "Donna's got Adam at her beck and call. The other day, she texted him that her temperature was just right. He rushed out of Club Gluttony as if the fires of Hell were nipping at his heels. What does body temp have to do with making a baby?"

Aedin sensed Becca tense beside him. He looked down at her and noticed how pale her face had become, her teeth tugging at her bottom lip. His lips parted to ask her what was wrong, but before he could utter a word, she was

already standing. She rushed through the cafe while weaving in and out of the tables. He clambered to his feet, tracking her every move, until the door to the bathroom creaked shut.

He slowly lowered himself into the chair, his gaze fixed firmly on the restroom. *What the hell was that about?* He could sense someone watching him, and when he turned, he was met with the silent stare of Gluttony's mate. Carrie's lips curved into a knowing smile, her blue irises twinkling with amusement.

She gave his brother a gentle shove, and he glanced up from his plate, his face a mixture of confusion and surprise. He blinked when she glared at him.

Leo awkwardly cleared his throat and smiled sheepishly at Aedin. "So, um, how's it going?"

"It's fine..." he said, the feeling that something was being left unsaid tugging at him.

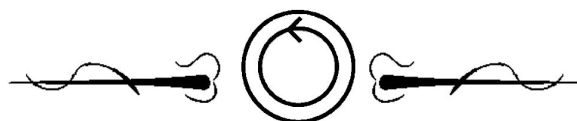
Carrie let out a delighted giggle, her grip tightening around his brother's arm, and she pulled him out of the chair. "You win. Let's go home and try for our own bundle of joy."

His brother grabbed the basket of bread on the table with a soft whimper before standing. "I'm not ready for diapers and bottles. Yet. Perhaps someday. Just not right now. Give me a few more years to get you out of my system."

"I'll never be out of your bloodstream. Come on, my bloated, overfed man. Let's work off these calories."

Aedin watched them go, a sense of confusion washing over him. He was sure that something was being hinted at, but he couldn't quite put his finger on what it meant. Their waitress strode over, her heels clicking on the floor,

to ask if they were finished. He nodded in agreement, and she placed the crisp paper check in his hands. He rolled his eyes, gritting his teeth when he saw the bill his family had left him with. *Is that what all the baby talk was about? Yay, my own bundle of joy.*



Becca stared up at the white ceiling, the warmth of Aedin's body next to her as she lay beside him. Her hand rubbed over her flat abdomen and her mind raced with thoughts. Back at the restaurant, she emerged from the restroom to find him sitting at the table alone. He asked her if she was alright, and she replied in a weak, shaky voice that she wasn't feeling well. On their way to the penthouse, each jolt and bump of the rough roads made her stomach lurch. The only sound in the car was the occasional thud of the tires.

She had thrown up her entire dinner in the bathroom stall. Part of her wanted to blame the queasiness on the baby talk, yet another part of her thought it could be morning sickness. He gently guided her to the sofa, wrapping the blankets around her body with tenderness. He then disappeared into the kitchen, and reemerged a few moments later with a bowl of steaming chicken noodle soup, the fragrance of herbs and spices wafting through the air. She accepted it with a grateful smile, nestling against him as they watched the movie.

What the fuck am I going to do? I'm not mother material. I cuss like a sailor, play my music too loud, and never wanted kids. What will happen to Red Riot?

She released a heavy sigh and allowed her eyelids to drift shut. In her mind, she could see a small, fragile girl. A chubby face was framed by cascading blonde hair, and bright greenish-blue eyes sparkled with delight. The toddler knelt on the shore, the warm sand clinging to her skin, with a shovel and bucket beside her. A grand sandcastle sat in front of her, and she carefully carved designs into the walls with her stick. The ocean waves roared, the sound resonating down the beach as the water crept closer to her creation. Aedin appeared, lifting her into his arms while spinning in a circle. The melodic noise of their laughter filled Becca with a sense of joy, and a pleasant tingling sensation traveled through her.

When she opened her eyes and sighed, a sorrowful grin spread across her face. *Another fantasy, another dream.* She was consumed with dread when she thought about how he would react when she told him. Fear of losing him made her heart clench, and she swallowed hard to keep the sob from escaping. Being with him was like nothing she had ever experienced before; it was the best time of her life. *But nothing lasts forever.*

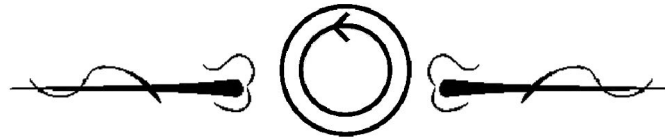
She rolled onto her side and ran her fingertip lightly down his soft, smooth cheek. *Will it be you or the baby? Do I have a choice? Why can't I have both?*

Her heart felt like it had dropped into her stomach, and she curled into him, trying to hold back the tears. His arms tightened around her even in sleep, the warmth of him chasing some of her melancholy away. She laid her ear on his chest and could hear the faint, pulsing rhythm of his

heartbeat. The image of her mother popped into her mind, and she closed her eyes.

I think I finally understand why she gave me up. It's you or the baby.

Chapter Eleven



Becca exhaled a sigh of relief as she walked offstage, the cheers of the crowd ringing in her ears. Red Riot had packed the dance floor at Club Envy over the past month and a half. Anxiety had been her constant companion, but the intense green gaze of the man on the balcony kept her grounded. Her eyes remained focused on Aiden no matter where she moved to on the stage. The memory of him beaming down at her from the VIP loft made her heart pound. A warmth of emotion flooded her chest, expanding and filling her gut with a sense of joy.

Her bandmates' laughter broke her out of her thoughts, the sound of their joyous voices resounding through the backstage area. They slapped her on the back and disappeared into the dark shadows. She nervously bit her lip while gently removing her guitar, feeling the smooth wood beneath her fingertips, before handing it to a nearby stage hand. She strolled through the halls with a buoyant stride, relishing her newfound freedom. Opening the door to her dressing room, she couldn't help but smile as she shut the panel softly.

She sat down on the chair before the vanity and let out a delighted giggle, knowing that none of this would've been possible without Aedin. Her palm drifted to her stomach, stroking and caressing the life that grew within. She hadn't told him yet, but each day her courage increased and tonight was the night.

She had never dreamed of Red Riot headlining a show, but the Valentine's Day concert was a smashing success, with the audience singing along to every song. Her cheeks were sore from grinning so much, and she shook her head in amusement. An indescribable feeling of elation rushed over her, and she realized she'd never been this happy before. Every thought and action was centered on the man who made her heart race, and a pleasant warmth radiated from her stomach.

She jumped at the sudden sound of the door opening, her gaze fixing on the entrance. Randy Thomas's eyes burned into her as he slowly closed it. Her face flushed with irritation, pushing away all other emotions. Her smile faded, and she quickly busied herself with wiping off her makeup, not wanting to confront the frown on her manager's lips.

"What do you want?" she said coldly.

He raised a brow, and an icy chill of dread crept down her spine. She could tell by his scowl that he was furious. Something told her he was going to take it out on her. She braced herself for a storm of venomous words and a heated argument.

"I think we need to establish some rules and boundaries," he said.

Her body went rigid when his fingers curled around her shoulders. Her own hands grew cold, and she suppressed a shudder. He leaned in close, his stubble scratching her skin. His cheek was warm against her, and the overpowering smell of his spicy cologne left her nostrils clogged.

“I own you. Everything you make is mine. Red Riot doesn’t exist without me. For two fucking years, I’ve sat back and allowed you to do whatever you pleased. Never pushed for you to fuck an employer. I even let it go when you got falling down drunk and slept with anything that walked. People loved it, so I ignored all your fucked up antics. The rockstar whose putting on the best show of her life.”

Becca looked into his eyes in the reflection, and their gaze connected. She sat still, her anger swelling within her body, intensifying with each passing second.

He smirked, and his lips curved up slyly as his eyelids narrowed. “But Aedin Envy’s bad for business. If you thought for one damn moment that I’d let you leave me in the dust, think again. We have an ironclad contract. Got it, bitch?”

“I don’t know what you’re talking—“

His fingers tightened, digging into her flesh. She hissed as pain lanced through her. She attempted to pull away, but he held her like a vise, the man stronger than he appeared.

“Don’t fucking give me that. His brothers are studying our contract, looking for a loophole, but they ain’t gonna find one. He may own that tight little pussy, but he can’t have the whole shebang.”

“Is that so? Well, I guess assault and threatening is all part of the package deal you gave her band then?”

Randy spun around, releasing her. She massaged the soreness in her shoulders, and her eyes met Aedin’s in the mirror. His irises were alight with a green fire that burned with anger.

“I believe that your contract states you’re entitled to thirty percent of all earnings that Red Riot makes. Seems a little high, but okay, they agreed and

signed it.” Aedin said, strolling into the room. “How much did you get for your last performance, Becca?”

She shook her head in confusion, her earrings jingling gently. Randy always paid them after every gig with cash, and by the time she left, it was usually gone. Most of it spent on drinks to drown out her visions. “Um, I think it was five hundred. Why?”

“Pretty low. If I recall, Red Riot was granted seven grand for the New Year’s Eve bash. Let’s see, after your cut, that’s about one thousand six hundred thirty-three per performer. Where did the rest of the money go?”

She stared in disbelief at her manager, her eyes wide with shock. At the core of her being, she has been aware of his thievery, yet she never thought it was so substantial. Her breath caught in her throat and the room grew increasingly warm.

“Well, um, transportation, equipment, Becca’s alcohol, outfits, and... and expenses. It takes a lot of capital to manage a band,” Randy stuttered.

She shot out of her chair, rounding on the man. Fury burned through her and her fists clasped at her sides. Her jaw tightened while her heart thudded rapidly in her chest.

“I rode the fucking bus. The gear and clothes are our own shit. You didn’t buy any of it!” she hissed.

She snarled and bared her teeth, marching toward Randy. He stumbled back in surprise, his hands instinctively lifted in front of his face. She tried to raise her fist, but a gentle hand stopped her. She looked up into Aedin’s eyes, and he shook his head.

“This is your chance, Mr. Thomas. Leave quietly and tomorrow we’ll settle this outside of a court or you can do this the hard way.” He smiled and his finger left a trail of warmth down her cheek before he spun around to

confront the man. “You’ll lose everything and probably go to jail for fraud and theft. Your choice.”

“You can’t prove anything! Red Riot’s mine.”

Aedin bared his teeth, a threatening growl reverberating through the air as he took a step forward. His presence was overwhelming, and a chill spread through her body when the lights grew dim. The bulbs flickered, casting eerie shadows around the room.

“You thought you were smart, but you left a paper trail a mile long. Think about what you do and say next.”

Randy’s eyes narrowed when he stared at her over her lover’s shoulder. He huffed and marched out into the hallway, leaving behind the sound of the door slamming so hard the trim rattled. The rage that had tightened her muscles melted away, and she sank into her seat.

“You okay?” Aedin knelt beside her, his fingers lacing with her own.

Becca’s eyes widened, and she shook her head slowly in disbelief, her ears ringing with the audacity of his theft. “He’s been our manager for two years. I always knew something was up, but I just... God, I’m so stupid.”

“You’re not stupid. It happens more than you realize. You didn’t know.”

He tenderly embraced her and brought his face close to hers. His lips were near enough that she could feel his breath on her mouth. A shiver of excitement ran down her spine, and she shifted in her seat as a warm sensation spread through her stomach. “You were brilliant tonight, little rockstar.”

His words were a caress along her flesh, and she inhaled sharply. His teeth nibbled her bottom lip, sending warmth through her. *Fucking hell, he knows just how to get me worked up.* His palm skimmed up her bare belly and slid underneath her shirt, leaving fire across her skin. His fingers

pinched and teased her nipple until it stood as hard as the bar that bisected it.

He guided her hand down to his crotch, the solid ridge pressing against the thick denim of his jeans. “Watching you perform makes my cock a fucking brick. Do you know how much I gotta fight not to pull you off that stage and fuck you right against the side of it? Give that crowd a totally different show.”

Goosebumps rose on her skin at the growl in his voice, her pussy growing damper by the minute. She licked her lips and stroked her hand along his shaft. He moaned and closed his eyes, leaning into her touch. A sudden, loud knock on the door startled them both.

“What!” Aedin shouted over his shoulder, his irritation thick in the air.

“We have an incident. I think it might require your immediate attention,” Brandon said through the wood.

“Fuck! I’ll be right back. Wait here,” he stated while standing and readjusting himself in his pants.

Her eyes followed him to the door. She smiled and nodded in farewell as he left. She spun in her chair, carefully wiping away the thick layer of makeup on her face.

“You need me, Becca. Pull down your barriers.” Her reflection sneered at her, its arms folded across its chest.

“You’re not real.”

“Of course, I am. At least in your mind. No one else can hear or see me. Just you. I’m the memories that your quack of a doctor hid away in those hypnotherapy sessions. There was a time when you remembered it all. From Aedin to the Choir.”

She shook her head, and her fingers tangled in her soft, wavy hair. *I'm fucking going insane. I've snapped.*

“You’re not crazy. Listen to me. Your third eye’s open nonstop. Before long, it’ll drive you mad. I can help you. You just have to let me out.”

A loud knock made her jump, and her reflection became normal. She squinted her eyes at it, feeling the smooth, cool surface beneath her fingertips. But nothing happened, and she sighed heavily. *Fucking hell!* She rose, her feet sinking into the plush carpet as she walked across the room. She opened the door, half expecting to see Brandon or another employee. *Perhaps Aedin’s going to take longer.* But no one stood on the other side.

She scrunched up her forehead and glanced around the hallway. Her eyes were drawn to a burst of color, and she saw a bouquet of ebony roses lying at her feet. She bent down, gathering the delicate petals into her hands. She slowly backed into her room and shut the door with a soft click.

Did he leave this for me? But why black flowers and not red?

She glided over to the vanity and placed the items down gently. A large, lumpy envelope with a white surface was nestled beneath the gold cellophane, the color contrast between the light and dark popping out. She slowly removed it from its hiding place, the icy chill of the air filling her lungs when she spotted the thick, bold ink marked her name across the paper’s face. Turning it over, she broke the seal.

She poured the contents onto the table, gasping when blackened teeth rattled over the vanity. Bile rose in her esophagus and her stomach rebelled. Gulping, she steadied herself with a hand on the mirror. A picture fell out when she shook the envelope again. She carefully picked up the photo, her fingertips trembling. Her eyes darted over it and her blood ran cold.

There was no mistaking the man in it. His image had haunted her dreams for years after leaving the Yarger house, only to be replaced by another when she moved to a new foster home. George lay in a puddle of crimson, his limbs at awkward angles on the pavement beneath him. Muscle and bone could be seen at every joint, and she took a deep inhale. A wave of warmth started in her chest, spreading throughout her body until the tips of her toes tingled.

All the memories of the pain and anger he had caused her flooded back. She clenched her jaw to keep from crying out. But it wasn't a sad, meek whimper, rather, it was a loud, triumphant yell. A sense of satisfaction filled her when she thought of one of her monsters getting their due, and her heart felt lighter than it had in a long time. It was a struggle for her to turn her eyes from the photo. She shook as she unfolded the piece of paper still in the envelope and then settled into her seat. She had to dig deep to muster the energy to read it.

I told you I would prove my love, and I've done it twice. It was so easy taking care of Primal Star. I wanted to keep their teeth as rewards, but I knew you'd treasure them more. They can never hurt another girl. Ever.

But does it matter? I thought after you received my last letter you'd realize how much I adore you, but you're still being Aedin's little fucking whore. Does he make you feel the same way I do?

She nervously bit her lip, her gaze flickering to the molars scattered across the vanity. A shiver ran down her spine, and she looked back at the piece of paper.

My second attempt at proving my devotion was even easier. George Yarger was a filthy pig that deserved to be pushed off a roof. He was already drunk when I found him, wallowing in his dirty fantasies of little

girls. Did you know he'd been released from prison? He kept a journal of his thoughts, so many of them focused on you. I can understand how he felt, but he caused you so much pain. He couldn't live. I hope you like my photo. I made it just for you.

You're my everything, Becca. My one and only. I can't imagine living life without your brilliant smile in it. Please look at me the next time you perform. I need your light to bask in.

But you won't. You'll stare at that asshole as he flaunts his authority from the loft. He can't protect you, not like I can. I was so close, just outside the door. I could've burst through it, and taken you, but I didn't. He's a failure. I bet he promised you'd be safe in the club. He lied. I'll find you anywhere, at anytime. Our hearts are connected. My soul cries out for only you. Do you hear it?

No, you probably don't. You're too busy sucking his cock to look up at the stars. Do you even know him? Who he really is? Who his brothers are? The Seven Princes aren't people you mess with. They make those who cross them disappear. Ask him about Jeremy Lordi. Ever hear of the Saints? Funny how the Princes moved in, and now the local gang's gone. Question him yourself. You'll see I'm right. Wait for my next letter.

Taking a deep breath, Beca was met with the sweet scent of the roses. For most of her life, the Saints had been a presence in the city, but then they vanished without warning. No one on the street uttered a single word about them, as if they had been forgotten. *Did Aedin have anything to do with it? Oh, God, what did I get mixed up with?*

Aedin stared down at the man, the cold snow seeping through his shoes. Randy Thomas coughed, blood staining his lips. His eyes burned with

hatred, and sparks of malice flickered in his irises. More crimson was smeared beneath his broken nose, his cheap suit wrinkled and stained.

Brandon stated the manager had burst into Jessica's room, his voice loud and angry. He had immediately started beating her, her screams bringing every employee in the club to her aid. But by the time they had gotten there, the poor girl had been thrashed within an inch of her life. The man had been restrained, but she was in need of medical attention, her breathing labored.

The moment Aedin walked in, and saw the extent of the damage done to her, he snapped. He had roared as his fist connected with Randy's stomach before pummeling the manager's face. It had taken his brothers pulling him away to make him stop. Adam quickly ordered Jessica to be transported to his infirmary while they dragged the man out of the building.

"Fuck you, Envy. What're you going to do? Kill me?" Randy's booming laughter vibrated off the walls of the dark alley behind the club. "No pussy's worth this much trouble. All I'm asking for is what I'm owed. You can have that fucking whore, Becca, but Evelyn and Jessica are mine!"

The man stumbled to his feet and spit into the snow, leaving a red stain against the stark white.

"Do you think we won't kill you?" Lucifer said, coming to stand beside Aedin. "You're nothing, Thomas. A two bit salesman that robs his customers. We collect souls blacker than yours every day."

"Okay... freak," Randy replied under his breath. He stared up at Envy once more. "Let's make a deal. I keep the other girls, and you can screw that pretty little slut until the fucking sun dies. I'll replace her. Lead singers and guitarists are a dime a dozen."

Stan's feet made a satisfying crunch as he walked through the snow. He rolled his neck, releasing a loud pop.

“He doesn’t get it,” Wrath growled.

Corvus laughed, “The dumb ones never do.”

Linnaeus’s lips split into a devious grin before wrapping an arm around Aedin’s shoulder. “I don’t think he realizes the danger he’s in. Threatening not just a mate, but also a friend of one.”

“We’ve killed for less,” Adam replied, his tongue scraping across his teeth as he joined them.

“Perhaps we should explain it to him, brothers. Prove to him exactly who we are,” Leo said with a sinister chuckle, his green eyes glowing.

His siblings unfurled their wings; the appendages tore through the fabric of their clothes with a deafening rip. But it was the mated princes who stole the show, their horns glimmering in the light and their tails whipping through the air. Randy let out a loud, terrified scream, falling backward into the snowbank. His eyes were wide with fear, and all the blood had drained from his face. His terror was met with laughter from the men, but their amusement died away when Aedin stepped forward.

“What... what the fuck are... are you?” the manager sobbed.

He smiled down at the man, his rage simmering in the intensity of his gaze. He growled deeply and his green wings spread wide.

“Your death,” he whispered before they fell on him, Randy’s screams echoing in the night.

Aedin slipped into his penthouse and quickly stripped his shirt off while he stumbled through the living room. He had to act fast before Becca’s impatience took over. Blood coated him from head to toe, and he had no desire to have her see him like this.

“Who are the Seven Princes?”

A chill ran down his spine, and he looked to his right. She sat on the sofa, studying his features with a careful eye. Her face was ashen and her lips were drawn into a tight line. He extended his hands in front of him, taking a step forward, his gaze never leaving her. She scrambled to her feet and dashed behind the couch. Fear was evident in her eyes, his heart clenching when he realized it was aimed at him.

“Becca...”

“No! Answer my question, Aedin. Who are the Seven Princes?”

His pulse raced as she spoke, her words trembling with emotion. *How do I explain this all to her?* “My brothers and I are.”

“And... and what happened to the Saints? Or... or Jeremy Lordi?”

His whole body jolted in surprise, and he stared at her, dumbfounded. “How do you know that name?”

She tossed a white envelope on the table, teeth falling from inside of it. He strode over to it and pulled the letter out. The paper grew damp and sticky from his crimson-stained fingers. He shook his head in disbelief at the glaring ink before raising his gaze to meet hers. But she was no longer behind the sofa. As he spun, he saw her standing before the elevator with a bag clutched tightly in her hands.

“Tell me you don’t kill people. It’s paint, not blood. Be honest with me, please.” Tears sparkled in her eyes, and her voice quavered.

He glanced down at the letter with a heavy sigh, his head shaking slowly from side to side. He threw it on the table and faced her.

“Okay,” Aedin said, shrugging. “You want honesty. I’m covered in Randy Thomas’s blood. My brothers and I slaughtered him for hitting Jessica. His body won’t ever be found. We made sure of that. Just like we

murdered Jeremy Lordi for beating and attempting to rape Adam's woman, Donna."

Becca's chest heaved as she muffled her sobs with a fist. She took a step back, her eyes widening in terror.

"But this letter lies. We butchered Primal Star for daring to touch you. And George?" His laughter was harsh and full of malice. "Well, he fell off a roof, but I didn't push him. He slipped while drunk, but if he hadn't, I would've torn him to fucking pieces for what he did to you."

He took a step forward, but she shook her head and raised her hand, her fingers trembling slightly. His heart plummeted when he saw the despair emanating from her eyes. He wanted nothing more than to embrace her tightly and make her sorrow vanish.

"You told me I was safe here. My stalker couldn't get to me. You lied." She pressed a button, and the chime of the elevator resonated throughout the room. She kept her gaze on him, never looking away, as if she expected him to attack her like a wild creature.

"No! I'll find out how he got in here. I swear," he pleaded.

His heart raced, but his limbs were like lead, unable to move. He had failed her. He had sworn to protect her, and her enemy had walked right into the building.

"I can't do this. You killed people. You're a murderer." Each word she spoke stabbed through him, and he gasped when pain lanced through his body. Somewhere deep inside, his beast growled with a low, throaty whine.

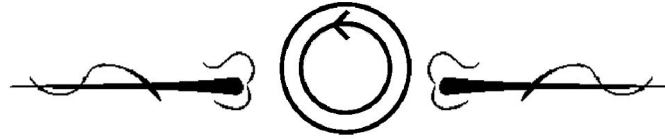
"Please, don't leave me, Becca. This is what he wants," he said, falling to his knees. "I need you."

She stepped back cautiously into the lift when the doors slid open. She shook her head, her lips shaking and her hair swishing against her face. He

fell forward on his hands as tears streamed down his cheeks. His heart clenched painfully in his chest before it shattered at her next words.

“It’s over, Aedin. You’re not the man I thought you were.”

Chapter Twelve



Becca raced down the sidewalk, the snow falling in thick, white clumps around her. Her heart ached with each step and tears streamed down her cheeks. *Don't you fucking cry, Rebecca Gibbons.* A gust of wind sent a chill through her body as it lifted the snowflakes, scattering them into her face. She felt the roughness of her jeans against her skin, like sandpaper, and hugged her coat for warmth. She shivered despite the leather, the icy chill clinging to her flesh. With a blink, the ivory specks on her eyelashes danced away in the breeze.

“This isn’t a good idea. Go back to him.”

She glanced to her right and caught a glimpse of her reflection in the glass windows of the towering office building. The person in the mirror looked at her, their expression conveying a sense of dread and a faint trace of terror. “Leave me alone.”

“Listen to me. Turn around. You’re safest with him.”

She clenched her fists and threw down her bag, her voice a snarl as she glared at the hallucination that wouldn’t let her be. “Tell me why? What’s so fucking special about him, anyway? He was covered in another person’s

blood. He killed people because of me. I can't raise a child in that environment. I refuse to live like that."

"He isn't your parents. Don't do this."

She shook her head in disbelief and spun away, trying to ignore the bitter taste that lingered in her throat. The sudden glare of headlights hit her, momentarily disorienting her and wrenching her out of her daydreams. She heard the loud rumble of the engine when it pulled up alongside the curb, causing her to take a step back. Fear caused her heart to stop beating and her already cold hands turned to stone. *Did he follow me?*

Brandon rolled down the window, giving her a warm, friendly smile. "Need a lift?"

She shuffled from foot to foot, uncertainty warring with her desire to not walk in the snow. "Did he send you?"

He scoffed and avoided her gaze. "He just wants to make sure you're alright. I won't tell him where I took you, if that's what you're worried about. He's my boss, not my dad."

She laughed as she grasped the cold metal door handle, then slid into the seat. He pulled out into traffic before turning the thermostat up. As warmth slowly seeped into her frozen fingertips and toes, she felt a stabbing sensation. She was torn between the icy chill that made her teeth chatter and the scorching heat that caused her skin to prickle.

"Where to?" he asked.

Where can I go? If she went to Evelyn's or Jessica's, Aedin would discover her instantly, the same with her own apartment. She inhaled deeply and looked out the window at the swirling flakes. *There's only one place he won't find me.* "Farley and Hanover. Drop me at the corner."

Brandon let out a low, melodic whistle. His eyebrows shot up, and he gaped at her in shock and disbelief. “Fancy part of town. Are you still afraid I’ll tell him?”

She closed her eyelids, relaxing into the warmth of the heated leather seat. “No, but if he pushes it, you can’t give him an exact address.”

He smiled and laughed. “I don’t know what happened between you two, but Aedin’s a decent guy.”

Becca shook her head, sending droplets of melting snow flying from her hair. Her teeth worried her bottom lip, the skin chapped and sore from the cold.

She sneered, “Good guys don’t kill people, and aren’t part of the mafia.”

“You have a point there, but a man has to protect his family and loved ones. Isn’t that a worthy reason?” he asked when they stopped at an intersection.

“Listen, kid. I ain’t gonna discuss this with you. You got a bright future ahead of you. Be careful who you get mixed up with.”

He laughed, a deep, hearty sound, and followed the road down the hill. As they left the downtown area, the city outside became a streak of light that flashed across her face. “I think you’ve misjudged the Princes. They aren’t the villains here. Trust me, there are worse men out there.”

She silently watched the landscape, her gaze unwavering, refusing to discuss it further. They drove in silence, the engine vibrating slightly, and twenty minutes later, she caught a glimpse of a green street sign that said ‘*Farley*’. He parked the vehicle, and she took a deep breath before hopping out of the car. The window rolled down with a creak, and Brandon extended a card to her.

“What’s this?” she asked, taking it from him.

“If you ever change your mind, call it. I’ll pick you up in this exact spot.”

She gave a slow, solemn nod before stepping back from the vehicle. She watched his taillights fade into the darkness of the night. The violent gusts of wind sent a chill through her body, and she shivered before turning down the street. On either side of her, she saw grand mansions, their large yards taking up as much space as the homes themselves. She hadn’t been here since she was sixteen, but she still remembered the luxurious aura of the opulent buildings.

She turned down a paved black drive, her gaze locked on the towering iron gate with the letters RG scrawled across its metal face. Carefully, she made her way to the intercom and touched the button. Her toe tapped out a steady rhythm, echoing her impatience while she waited for a reply.

“How may I help you?” a voice said over the static.

“Hello, can you please tell Tabitha Gibbons her daughter’s here to see her?”

Silence was her only answer, and she glanced around the neighborhood. *Will they even let me in? I’m just a cast off, anyway.* She heard the engine of a car in the distance and headlights lit up the drive. She dashed off the pavement, feeling the rough texture of the ground beneath her feet as the gate creaked open. A large white SUV screeched to a halt in front of her, and a tall man nimbly jumped out of the driver’s seat. He scurried to the back of the vehicle, opening the door for her.

Should I be doing this? She never wanted me or even loved me. But she’s also the only one that can hide me. Becca instinctively reached for her belly, her fingers tracing its shape. *I’m doing this for you. Facing a monster of my past and braving the den so you’ll have a good life.*

“Miss?” the man asked when she just stood there, staring.

She shook away the fog in her head and clambered into the vehicle. She relaxed in the warmth of the cream-colored leather seats while the driver settled into his. When they came closer to the enormous house, her palms grew sweaty, and she shivered. The sound of her heart thudding in her chest was almost deafening, her breath quivering out with each exhalation. She nervously swallowed when the car stopped in front of the steps and the man ran to open her door. She stepped out, shuddering as memories of the last time she had been here flooded her thoughts, but she pushed them aside.

A woman with a haughty expression stood in the front doorway, looking down at her with disdain. They glared at each other, their faces hard and unyielding.. “Are you going to stand out in the cold all night or come in and explain to me why you’re here?”

Becca rolled her eyes before climbing the stone steps. Tabitha Gibbons had the same timeless beauty, like she hadn’t aged a single day. She was draped in a beige robe with feathers on the collar and sleeves, a reminder of her former position as a wealthy man’s wife. Now she was just a rich widow. Her long blonde tresses were piled atop her head, her greenish-blue irises piercingly cold.

“It’s good to see you too, Mother.”

Tabitha gave her a contemptuous glance and stepped out of the doorway. “Don’t call me that. What do you want?”

“I might’ve gotten involved with the wrong kinda guy. I need a place to hide out until it blows over.”

The foyer was filled with golds and tans; the colors clashed together in a chaotic mess. A giant, glimmering crystal chandelier hung between dual staircases and filled the room with dazzling light. Becca was overwhelmed by the shimmering newness of everything, worth more than she could ever

imagine. The spotless floors, unmarred walls, and lack of cobwebs made her wonder what it would've been like to grow up here, despite her better judgment. *A pretty princess in a glamorous cage. That's what this life would've been.* She rolled her eyes and shook her head, a cynical grin forming on her lips.

"Well, you always were your father's daughter. God rest his soul. You can stay in a room upstairs. How deep are you in? Do I need to call someone to deal with it?" Tabitha asked.

Becca heard the door click shut behind her and looked down to see her boots frosted with snow. Water had pooled beneath her soles, coating the shiny marble tiles. She cringed inwardly, but forced herself to look up at her mother, who stood nearby. She didn't want to be indebted to the woman, but she was desperate for shelter. Tabitha Gibbons didn't give anything away for free.

"I just need to lie low," she answered.

"Is he going to cause me trouble? Does he belong to a gang?"

She slowly lifted her eyes to meet her mother's, and was struck by the striking similarity between them. She was scared to tell Tabitha the truth, fearing that it would make the woman refuse to provide housing. Her mom waited silently, her head cocked to the side and her brows raised in anticipation of Becca's answer.

"I don't think he'll be an issue. He's part of the Seven Princes," she said, following her mother up the staircase.

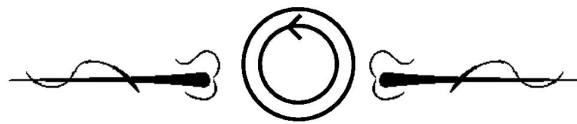
Tabitha paused and slowly spun around to face her. When she saw the fire in the woman's irises, she took a step back down the stairs, but her mother's well-manicured hand quickly grabbed the front of her shirt. A lump of fear rose in Becca's throat. Up this close, she could see the silver in

her mom's hair glinting in the light. Tabitha's skin was paper thin, as if stretched too tight, with fine blue veins running through it. A map of wrinkles crowded the woman's lips and eyes, hinting at her age.

"Which brother?" her mother hissed.

"Aedin Envy," Becca whispered.

Her mom released her with a heavy sigh, and her shoulders drooped in relief. "Thank god. I was worried it was Lucifer Pride. Come along then. You can stay as long as you need to. No one will find you here."



Becca reclined on the comfortable bed in her temporary bedroom, inhaling the scent of freshly laundered sheets while staring up at the ceiling. The last time she had been here, she hadn't ventured into the extravagant mansion. Upon discovering that her birth parents lived in the same city she was in, her childish heart had envisioned a joyous reunion with tears, hugs, and kisses.

With a jangle of coins, she had boarded a bus and used what was left of her lunch money to get as close to the address as possible. Her excitement grew with each step, and she couldn't help but gaze in wonder at the majestic homes that lined the street. When she had raised her eyes to the magnificent, shiny iron gates at the entrance of the Gibbon's estate, her

mouth had fallen open. The driveway was bordered with grand, towering trees that framed the colossal mansion at the back of the property.

A servant had driven down to the gate much like today, but she had marveled at the gleaming, luxurious SUV and its plush interior. She had just started to ascend the front steps when she was stopped short by the sound of clicking heels. Cold, greenish-blue eyes, the same color as her own, stared at her with a look of disgust.

Visions of a life without worries had passed through her mind's eye. An overwhelming sense of warmth and love had flooded Beccas's body, bringing her to tears. When she saw the woman wrapped in the dark-haired man's embrace, her breath caught in her throat. Then sadness crashed over her, the man lying dead at her feet, blood pooling from a wound in his stomach. Anguish and sorrow were replaced by rage as orders were yelled to destroy the person who had murdered him. Tabitha Gibbons' last moments were filled with loneliness, each gasp growing more and more painful, yet no one could defy death, not even her.

"Who gave you this address?" the woman asked.

When the visions faded, Becca's words had stumbled out, her voice quivering as she described how she had located her birth certificate. She had scoured the internet to find out more details about the name listed under the mother heading. Her mom had angrily spun on her heels and stormed away. Becca had hastily followed, her shoes slapping against the ground. They walked around the mansion to the back, where a lush garden was concealed. Servants had laid out an array of drinks and food, the clinking of glasses ringing in the air. The woman took a seat and waved for her to sit.

"I was told that you wouldn't have access to any of the records. I guess I was lied to. It's too late to change the fact that you're here, but the matter

will still have to be dealt with,” Tabitha said, raising a hand. A servant had rushed forward, and the woman’s whispered words were barely audible before he scurried away. “So, what do you want, Rebecca? Money? How much is it going to take to make you forget you were ever here?”

“No... that’s not what this is about. How do you know my name?” her teenage self asked.

Her mother had released a heavy sigh and slowly shook her head. She had delicately plucked a slender cigarette from a gleaming golden box on the table. A man had rushed forward, and with a swift flick of his thumb, his lighter sparked, lighting her smoke. Becca was met with a piercing coldness from the woman’s eyes.

“Listen, I gave you up because I never wanted you and I still don’t. But I also keep track of all my loose ends. I didn’t have the heart to kill you then, but life changes a person. Makes them harder. Hell, I even let you have our last name, something that I’m now regretting. I used to be so fucking soft.”

Her eyes had stung with the threat of tears, so she had quickly averted her gaze. “My father... does he...”

“He doesn’t know you exist. I would prefer it to remain that way. I don’t like to share my toys. If I had kept you, I would’ve been second fiddle and I couldn’t have that.” Tabitha took a long drag before letting it out, the smoke rising in tendrils around her.

Becca had nervously wrung her hands while her heart pounded in her chest. She had hastily wiped away the tears that had gathered behind her eyelids, her joyous daydreams shattered.

“You look like him. All hard lines and dark hair, but you got my eyes. Listen to me, if you want to continue living, you’ll leave here. I don’t deal

well with competition. Besides, your father isn't exactly an outstanding citizen. He has more hands in shady dealings than the president."

Her mother had waved a hand in a subtle, graceful gesture. A servant had carefully placed a wallet into her outstretched, waiting palm. She had opened it, and the slight rustle of paper filled the air as she pushed a pile of cash across the table to Becca.

She shook her head. "I don't want your fucking money. I didn't come here for that."

"Well, I think this visit's over, then. Do you need a ride somewhere? I can arrange for a vehicle."

She had stood, her body tense with the anger that was slowly building in her gut. Her mother had thrown her away like trash, all because the woman was a jealous bitch. "You're not what I thought you'd be."

Tabitha's laughter had cut through the air, sharp and full of malice.

"No? Being the wife of an international mob boss does that to a woman. You gotta fight for everything you have, and let no one else intrude on it. Do you know how many women I've killed for looking at my husband? For daring to think they could have a piece of this happiness?" She stood and rose to her full height, her six-inch heels making her seem more intimidating than before. "I gave my blood, sweat and tears for this life. I won't allow anyone to take that away, not even my own child."

The reverberation of her mother's words rang in Becca's mind as the memory gradually dimmed. Despite what Tabitha had said, everything had changed after that day. She was abruptly moved to a new foster home shortly after. One that didn't abuse or treat her like shit, but the damage was already done. She had no wish to join another family, having been abandoned by her own.

When she turned eighteen, an envelope was placed in her hands, the paper rustling against her skin. She opened it to discover a card with a carefully written account number beneath a lovely script. *'Find your happiness'* was all it said. She had walked out of the house with a wealth of cash, but she was determined not to use it. In her opinion, it was hush money from a mother that hated her.

Maybe this was a bad idea? But with her father gone, she no longer had to fear the woman's jealousy. She had stayed informed about the details of his life. Romero Gibbons had died of a single gunshot to the belly while boarding a plane to Columbia three years ago. The papers had reported that it was the work of a rival mob, but there was no hard proof to back up the allegation. He had been a handsome man with raven black hair framing his chiseled face. His powerful jaw and piercing dark eyes had made a shudder pass through her. Every photo of him seemed to capture the sense of power and self-assurance that poured off of him.

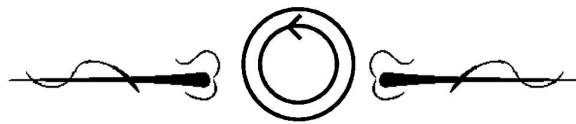
Tabitha's authoritative demeanor revealed what was widely believed - that his wife had taken over for him. For a moment, Becca contemplated the mystery of her mother's relationship with Lucifer Pride, but she quickly dismissed the thought with a shake of her head. *It isn't any of my business, and just another reason to put distance between myself and the Seven Princes.*

Aedin's image flashed in her mind, and her heart clenched with intense pain. His green eyes sparkled with delight, accompanied by a broad, beaming smile. She squeezed her eyelids shut, her breath coming in short, shallow gasps. A lump formed in her throat, and she let out a muffled sob. Her chest tightened, a heavy burden weighing her down. Despite only

knowing the man for a fleeting period of time, it felt like she had known him forever.

Every fiber of her being told her to go back to him, to accept him unconditionally. But her mind bellowed at her that she would become as cold and callous as the ice queen who had brought her into this world. That one day she would stare down at her rounded belly, heavy with child, and fear losing the man that made her the happiest to a small baby.

But damn, this hurts. Every muscle and joint ached with phantom pain. Her stomach soured, and she fought not to vomit. Her shoulders trembled as she tried to contain her sobs, her face flushing with warmth. *When did I fall so hard?* Curling into a ball, she let her sadness crash over her.



Adam breathed in the scent of sweat and leather while gazing down at the fighter's ring on the fourth floor of Club Wrath. Stan and Aedin traded blows, and the sound of fists pounding flesh rumbled in the silent air as they grappled on the blue mat. He descended the steps to where his other siblings watched from behind a rail.

Corvus glanced up at him, gesturing toward an empty seat. He unbuttoned his suit jacket, and the fabric rustled when he sat. The ground was stained a vibrant crimson, a metallic scent wafting through the air. Both of his brothers were drenched in perspiration and the rips in their workout

shorts were filled with streaks of dried blood. More scarlet covered their skin, but the wounds closed as quickly as they were made.

“How long have they been at it?” he asked, leaning back into the cushions.

Leo let out a deep laugh, and he leaned his elbows on the railing. His green eyes darted between the two men, their grunts and moans mingling as they wrestled. “Aedin arrived late last night. Went through five rage rooms before stepping into the arena.”

Linnaeus yawned and shook his head, his eyelids drooping with exhaustion. “Beat all the opponents Stan had, so he stepped into the ring, hoping he could wear our baby brother down. They’ve been going at it for three hours now.”

“Has anyone called mother?”

Adam glanced up and was met by Lucifer’s intense gaze. His older sibling’s violet eyes were narrowed and his hand was buried deep in his pocket. Corvus smiled and indicated an unoccupied chair with a tilt of his head. Luci moved with effortless elegance to it and sat. He flipped his long black ponytail over his shoulder, his resting bitch face firmly in place.

“Not yet. Stan didn’t want to involve mom and dad. Said Aedin just needed to blow off some steam, but it’s looking like we might have to,” Leo replied.

“And this is all because of a mate?” Lucifer asked, disgust lacing his tone.

Adam cast a sideways glance at his oldest brother. Luci had been a different person since Brandon and Jophiel had declared their devotion to each other. He had pestered the poor archangel until she screamed at him to leave her alone. Pride had never been one to ask for assistance, but seeing

him in turmoil over the concept of angels having mates caused Adam to feel compassion for him. But the confusion and sadness on his sibling's face had almost made him burst into laughter.

“Apparently. Stan said that Aedin won't talk about it, no matter how much he tried,” Corvus responded.

Adam stiffened when his little brother slipped on a puddle of blood and fought the urge to rush to his side. Aedin landed hard on the mat, his breath wheezing from his lungs. Wrath shook his head and his whole body trembled while his chest heaved with each inhalation.

“We're done. You're exhausted,” Stan said, his voice booming around the massive space.

Aedin leaped to his feet, his face a mask of rage. His irises blazed with green fury, and his lips curled into a menacing snarl. He ran a hand over his forehead, wiping away the salty beads of sweat that had formed and were now dripping into his eyes.

“No! Fight me,” he shouted.

Wrath walked off the mat, unwrapping the bloodstained tape from around his fingers. He grabbed a fluffy towel from a nearby chair and gently patted his brow dry. “Enough. Go home and sleep it off.”

His baby brother opened up his arms wide, turning toward them. “What about one of you?”

Adam heard Corvus's deep, throaty chuckle, and he glanced down the line of faces. They all shook their heads, accompanied by a quiet snicker.

“I said that's enough! Stop this nonsense,” Stan declared, rolling his broad shoulders before tossing the damp towel to the ground.

Aedin's lips trembled with rage as a dark growl escaped his throat. His wings unfurled with a rustle of feathers, followed by a narrowing of his

eyes. Adam felt a chill go down his spine and warning bells rang in his ears.

“You told me that when I met her, my beast would awaken, but you lied. You claimed he would help me, but all he’s done is sulk in a corner. Silent as the dead. Now she’s gone. So fuck you, Stan. You don’t know what this is like. To have your mate slip through your fucking fingers, and there’s nothing you can do about it!”

Fury created deep shadows in Wrath’s reddish-brown eyes, his face contorting in anger. With a loud roar, he spun, and they all scrambled over the railing in a hurry. They lunged for him, but he managed to elude their clutches. He gripped Aedin by the throat and slammed the man onto the mat like a rag doll. The noise of his baby brother’s bones snapping resounded loudly in the arena. Stan’s fists moved in a blur while he pummeled Aedin. More blood flew into the air, the sound of pained groans causing panic to flare into Adam’s chest.

“Stan!”

“Stop!”

“He’s your brother!”

They grappled with the big warlord, struggling and straining, until he eventually stumbled away from the motionless body on the ground. Aedin was a wreck of scarlet and torn flesh. Crimson stained his lips, his eyes swollen almost shut. A black bruise circled his neck, and he sucked in a raspy breath. He sat up slowly, coughing and spitting.

“Fuck you, Envy,” Wrath shouted, his face a mess of rage and red splatters. “You know nothing. Be glad your beast’s quiet. Mine never has been. I tried for years to control him, only to fail.”

Stan collapsed to his knees, the force of his sobs shaking his body. The brothers stepped back and exchanged a baffled expression as they released

him. None of them had ever heard or seen him cry. Even when his beloved cat had died of old age, he hadn't shed a tear. As strong as steel and with a poise that matched a funeral, the Master of Wrath was a rock that never cracked.

"No cage could hold him, no barriers, nothing. I've met my mate, soft and delicate as a rose. Blonde hair as bright as sunshine with eyes so blue that they looked like ice." His gaze grew distant, and his irises glimmered with an unspoken emotion. "And do you know what he did, my so-called beast?"

His sigh filled the air with a palpable sorrow, one that Adam could feel deep within. "He took control, pushing me into my mind. I didn't even realize it happened. It wasn't until I woke surrounded by blood and dead bodies with long yellow strands tangled around my fingertips that I knew what he had done. He mutilated her to the point of being unrecognizable, leaving only a blue eye intact. Her tiny body was torn to pieces."

His brother's face twisted into a grimace of agony, prompting Adam to reach out, but Stan pushed him away. Wrath let out a snuffle and slowly rose to his feet, and his eyes burned with rage when he stared down at Aedin. He shook his head, swallowing audibly.

"She left me with only one thing. This." He traced a bloody fingertip along the white scar that ran down his face. "A silent reminder of the crime I committed. So fuck you and your self-pity. At least your mate's still out there, waiting and alive, blessed with immortality. I've gotta wait for mine to be reincarnated. Go home. All of you, just fucking leave."

He marched out of the arena with a confident stride, his shoulders held back. Adam felt his heart aching as the sadness of his sibling's loss enveloped him. He turned toward Aedin, the soft rustle of his clothing

filling the air when he knelt down on the mat. His sibling's mangled face was slowly healing, the flesh and bone knitting together.

"I didn't know," Envy said, tears glistening in his green eyes.

"No one did."

He wrapped Aiden's arm around his shoulders and helped the man to stand. His little brother groaned when a cheekbone popped into place.

"Fuck, that hurts," his sibling whined.

"It'll probably ache for a few days, despite it being healed. You might want to call the Ezeals for some painkillers," he replied.

"So, what do we do now? If she's dead, then we can't find all the mates. How long does reincarnation take?" Leo yelled out his question, his arms stretched wide in exasperation.

Linnaeus shook his head while rubbing his bloodshot eyes. "I'll have to ask Gabriel. Maybe he knows something. If she's really lost, you would think the archangels would've told us."

Lucifer advanced with an intense, violet gaze that seemed to pierce right through them. "What's her name?"

With swollen eyelids, Envy blinked and his brow furrowed in thought. He swung his head and spit a tooth onto the mat. A deep, raspy cough escaped him as he leaning heavily against Adam. "Who? Stan's mate? How the fuck should I know?"

Luci rolled his eyes in irritation and released a long, drawn-out sigh. "Satan help me. I'm surrounded by morons. No, yours."

"Leave her alone. She made her choice. It's just something I gotta deal with." Aedin hobbled away from Adam, his limp becoming more pronounced with each step as he moved toward the exit. He walked with his

shoulders slumped, and the sound of his heavy footsteps seemed to add years to his young demon form.

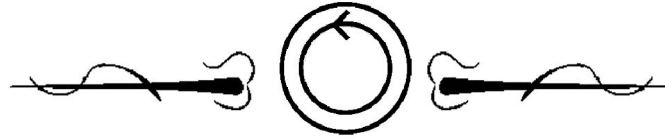
“Her name’s Rebecca Gibbons. She’s the lead singer of Red Riot,” Lust said, turning to face his sibling.

“Gibbons, you say. I wonder...” Lucifer’s grin widened, and he attempted to leave, but Adam’s hand on his arm jerked him back.

He locked eyes with his brother, their intense stares never wavering. “Don’t do anything stupid, Luci. This is Aedin’s life you’re fucking with. The last mate you encountered, you threatened with a weapon.”

Lucifer threw up his hands, the corners of his mouth twitching with an innocent smile. He pulled away slowly and shook his head in disbelief. “I wouldn’t dream of it. Trust me, Adam. I might have an ace up my sleeve with this one.”

Chapter Thirteen



Shanaera trailed behind Aedin, her footsteps resonating off the stone walls. The man had held true to his promise. He had helped her to bathe, then gently dried her off before assisting her with her dress. The gown he had chosen was a deep emerald, and the silky fabric rustled with each step she took. Golden flowers decorated the hem, the long sleeves trailing on the ground. The gilded belt around her slender waist hung low and sparkled in the light. She had voiced her reservations about wearing it, but he had been insistent.

When they approached the arched doorway of the dining hall, she shivered. Her mouth filled with the sour, metallic flavor of fear, as the warriors' hearty laughter blended with the soothing strumming of a lute. The last time she had been in this room, Landgrave had whipped her. The memory surfaced and the scars on her back itched with phantom pain.

"You're safe now, Shanaera."

She slowly raised her eyes to meet Aedin's. His gaze was gentle and sparkled with compassion. She nodded before looking down at her feet, the

bright green of her slippers contrasting against her dress. He intertwined his fingers with hers and they walked through the door together.

“Aedin! Up here,” a booming voice called.

He laughed joyously while pulling her along. She stumbled after him, a chill running through her body, and she kept her gaze downcast in fear. The stone floors were covered in a blanket of fresh rush, the air heavy with the aroma of cooking meat and spices. When they arrived at the top table, a wave of dread washed over her, sending a shudder down her spine. Stan lounged in a chair with a blushing serving wench in his lap. Aedin took the seat beside him with a smile.

Shanaera’s breathing was shallow and rapid as she nervously shifted her weight from one foot to the other. She anxiously nibbled her lip and carefully lowered herself to the floor. The cold, hard surface of the stone bit into her knees, and she bowed her head in submission.

“Shanaera, what’re you doing?” Aedin asked.

She was startled by his question, and her heart thudded loudly in her chest. She intertwined her fingers tightly together, fear coursing through her veins as she gazed down at the ground. “The... the king didn’t allow me to sit at the table. I’m only fit to kneel.”

Her breath hitched when his strong yet gentle hands pulled her into a seat. She sat rigidly, her spine stiff as a board. She nervously scanned the room, her eyes darting from person to person, waiting for someone to object to the seating arrangements.

“From now on, you sit beside me, not on the floor.” He carefully placed slices of succulent meat and juicy fruit on her plate before filling her cup with red wine.

She glanced at him nervously, her throat tightening with fear. She had never sat at a table before, much less ate from an actual dish. The sound of laughter and high-pitched squealing made her jump, her eyelids widening as she looked in the noise's direction. A warrior pulled a serving girl close, his hand disappearing beneath her shirt. Shanaera averted her eyes, and a flush spread across her cheeks.

"She's an innocent thing, isn't she? Is that what draws you to her, brother?"

She peered at Stan, taking in his features with a single glance. He had a smug smirk on his face and his fist was propped up against his jaw while he observed her. The woman on his lap carefully placed tiny pieces of meat into his mouth with her fingertips. Shanaera turned away, but before she could pick up a wedge of apple, a firm hand stopped her.

"I'll feed you." Aedin gave a gentle, sweet smile.

She shook her head. "I can do it."

He let out a chuckle, his tongue lightly grazing his bottom lip. Her gaze followed its movement. A shiver ran up the back of her neck as her ears began to tingle, and she quickly moved her eyes to his. "I know you can, but I would like to."

He picked up the fruit, and its juicy scent tantalized her nostrils before he pressed it to her mouth. She bit into the crisp flesh, and the tart flavor exploded across her taste buds.

"Have you ever had apples before?" he asked.

"No," she answered quietly.

The only sustenance she had been allowed was the cold, greasy scraps Landgrave had left on his plate after each meal. If she was in the hall, the monarch would scrape the remnants of his food into the rushes below. The

nobles had guffawed as she sifted through the putrid muck in search of something to eat. Whenever she was confined to her cell, a metal bucket was provided, full of filth and anything else that was discarded on the floor.

She shivered when Aedin leaned closer, his fingers offering more for her to consume. “What about wine?”

She shook her head so quickly that her hair flew around her face. She’d never thought of trying the beverage, not even in her wildest imaginings. Alcohol was only available to the privileged nobility and royalty. He carefully raised the goblet to her mouth, and she took a sip of the cool liquid. The flavor was so sweet and rich that it lingered on her tongue. She licked her lips, the fruity aroma of it filling her senses.

“Good?” he asked while chuckling.

She nodded while cupping the mug in her hands. The banquet flew by quickly, the warmth of the wine spreading through her body and making her cheeks flush. She delighted in the food’s flavor, declaring that it was the most scrumptious thing she had ever sampled, which earned a hearty chuckle from Aedin. With each goblet, her defenses weakened and her fears dissipated. The warriors laughed and shouted, their voices reverberating in the room as they drank.

The table shuddered, and she looked up to see Stan bending a woman over the wooden surface. His fingers clumsily tugged at her skirts while he fought with the laces of his hoses. Aedin stood abruptly, dragging Shanaera out of her seat.

“I think it’s time we retire.” He led her to the exit amid the protests of his brother.

“You’re going to miss all the fun. Stay. Let me show your little lady how it’s done.” Stan’s joyous laughter bounced off the walls, following them as

they left the room.

Aedin guided her down the hallway, their footsteps echoing in the stillness. She stumbled beside him, and he wrapped his arm around her waist. The world spun and a giddy feeling bubbled up, spilling out in a delighted giggle. Her blood thrummed in her veins with each glide of her hand over the textured fabric of her gown. He was warm against her side like a cozy blanket, and the sound of her beating heart filled her ears as she looked up at him with a smile.

“Calm down, little fairy. We’ve an eternity to learn about one another. I prefer you to be sober when we finally join.”

His words were unfamiliar, but a feeling of warmth and comfort spread through her body. Her nipples tightened against the silk chemise she wore, every movement torture. He pushed the door of their chamber open, and she rushed in. Fever licked at her flesh, her cheeks ablaze. Her hands tore at the fabric of her dress, and she sighed when it fell to her feet. She kicked off her shoes before spinning in a circle as her laughter filtered through the air.

She brought her cool fingers to her flaming face, letting out a long breath. *Is this what it’s like to drink wine? I might have to have it with every meal.* The sound of the door clicking softly made her turn in its direction. He leaned against it, his smile widening while he watched her with rapt attention.

“Have another glass with me, Aedin,” she said.

The fire in the hearth crackled and popped, sending sparks of orange into the air while a pleasant smoky fragrance lingered. A pitcher and a pair of goblets sat on the table before it. She grinned, making her way unsteadily toward it. She poured two glasses of wine before turning to face him. He gazed at her with a passionate intensity, his green eyes smoldering. An

intense heat surged through her body, and she had to struggle to keep from squirming.

“You test my restraint.” He carefully took the ornate goblet from her and placed it on the table. “I think we’ve both had enough to drink tonight.”

He stepped forward, reaching for her cup, but she leaped away. She quickly chugged it down before he could snatch it. The sweet red wine settled in her belly, and the warmth of it spread through her body. He let out a long sigh as he took the empty mug from her hands. She breathed in deeply, the scent of him filling her nostrils. His eyes lit up, and she felt magnetically pulled toward him.

“Shanaera...”

The way he growled her name made her ears burn, a shiver running up her spine. She wanted to touch him and feel the hard planes of his skin against hers. She remembered seeing a woman tightly embrace a warrior before passionately kissing him in the dining hall. *How would he react if I did that to him? Would he return it or push me aside?* The alcohol in her veins gave her a newfound courage, and she wrapped her arms around him. His muscles tensed beneath her fingers, a growl escaping him. Her mouth sought his, but he shifted so her lips brushed his cheek instead.

“Stop, little fairy. You’re tempting something you don’t understand.”

She trailed her tongue down his neck. He tasted like a dream, almost as sweet as the wine.

“Then show me, Aedin,” she whispered.

He growled low, and the sound vibrated through her body. Her insides melted, her heart skipping a beat. A tight ball of heat coiled deep within her.

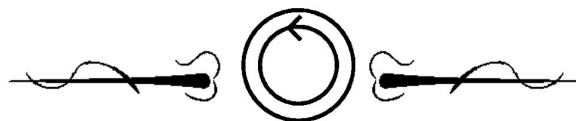
“Is that truly what you want? Or is it the alcohol talking?” He gazed down at her, a smirk on his face.

She nodded, her mouth growing dry. He took a step back, shrugging out of his heavy velvet doublet. It landed on the floor with a dull thud. Her eyelids fluttered when he pulled his tunic off, revealing a strong, toned chest. His torso glistened in the flickering firelight, the shadows giving depth to every dip and curve. Her ears burned, her overheated skin becoming warmer.

Her eyes widened in awe when majestic wings expanded behind him. She was mesmerized by the way the light glimmered across the emerald feathers, and she had to fight the temptation to run her fingers through them. A pair of tiny horns, as black as night, sprouted from his forehead, no longer than her thumb. Despite their miniscule size, their tips looked razor sharp. He took a step toward her, and she gasped when a tail slithered around her calf. Sheathed in thick snake skin, it gleamed in a spectrum of colors from vibrant oranges to deep blues.

Lime green flames danced along his flesh and cracks of emerald light flickering beneath each smooth scale that appeared sporadically across his torso. He wrapped his arms about her, and she half expected the fire to burn her. She gasped when it fluttered over her, caressing like a lover.

“My true name’s Beelzebub, Master of Envy, and Prince of Hell. And you, Shanaera, are my fated mate that I’ve waited for since the dawn of time.”



Becca jolted awake with a gasp, her heart racing. She groggily stumbled out of her bed and staggered into the bathroom, the tiles cool beneath her bare toes. Sweat beaded off her forehead, trailing down her temples. With a flick of the light switch, the black interior shone with a soft glow. She flipped on the cold tap and quickly cupped her hands under the icy water. She sipped it slowly before splashing her face with the refreshing liquid.

Nothing makes sense anymore. If I'm not dreaming of Aedin fucking me, then my mind's conjuring him up as a damn demon.

She let out a long, heavy sigh as she grabbed a nearby towel. She gently patted it over her cheeks before studying her reflection with a frown. Dark, shadowy circles were visible beneath her eyes, her usually sun-kissed skin now pale. She had been tossing and turning almost nonstop since she had left him. She was consumed by fear that he would hunt her down and find her.

“Denial will get you nowhere. Just admit you want him to burst through that fucking door and steal you away. Like he did in my life.”

For the last few days, her mirror-self had been her constant companion. She worried she had been pushed to the brink of her sanity and debated seeing a mental health specialist. Their gazes met in the glass. “Not again.”

“I'm not going anywhere. I won't stop until you set me free. That doctor didn't just erase those memories, he also left your damn third eye open. He had no clue what the hell he was doing, and he meddled where he shouldn't have. You'll never be able to control the visions without me.”

Becca sighed deeply, her fingers gripping the cold granite countertop.

“Then I'll go back to booze,” she said with a smile.

“I wouldn’t do that if I were you. You’re not exactly human anymore. It’d take days of constant drinking for you to get drunk enough to block them out. Your body will metabolize the alcohol faster than it can ever be absorbed. Besides, it’s not good for the baby.”

She gritted her teeth, snarling as her hand rubbed across her belly. She was fed up with the incessant lectures and nagging. All her reflection had done for the past week was tell her how she should just return to Aedin. She shook her head in frustration and quickly left the bathroom, the sound of the door slamming shut resounding behind her. She didn’t know what time it was, but she knew there would be no more sleep.

Snowflakes clung to the expansive windows of her temporary bedroom. She stepped over to them and drew the curtains back with a whoosh. It was still night, the shadows of the trees and landscape creating a spooky ambiance. A car inched down the long, snow-covered driveway, its headlights piercing through the falling blizzard.

When her stomach grumbled, she spun away. The room was vast and filled with French provincial furniture. Everything in the house was accented with luxe golds, creams, and whites. Each chamber was designed with high-end pieces that reminded her of the latest upscale magazines, and she suspected Tabitha had hired someone to decorate them.

When she wandered out into the hall, the sound of conversations bounced off the walls. It was rarely quiet here, with people coming and going at all hours, and the noise of cars rumbling in the background. She wondered if the woman who had given birth to her ever got a restful sleep. Descending the stairs, the clanking of silverware could be heard as she made her way to the dining room.

A girl dashed forward when she entered. “Miss, the chef’s currently preparing breakfast, but we have cold meats and cheeses, if you like.”

Becca nodded in agreement and took a seat at the heavy wooden table. Its generous size could easily accommodate twenty people, and it was always arranged perfectly, as if ready for a party to start. She absentmindedly ran her fingers along the ridges of the gilded utensils, and she waited for the servant to return from the kitchen.

The door flung open, and she stared at the woman she had barely seen since coming here. Tabitha wore a blue suit that hugged her figure, accentuating her curves. Her blonde hair was pulled into a wavy ponytail that cascaded down her back and her makeup flawlessly highlighted her features. For a moment, Becca wished she had taken after her mother, but the thought faded when she gazed into icy, lifeless eyes.

“Is there more to the story than you told me?” her mom asked.

The sound of her heels lightly clicking filled the air as she moved gracefully across the floor. She leaned over the table and rested her hand on the edge. She drummed her perfectly manicured nails over the surface. Her face gave nothing away, and Becca squirmed. “I informed you of everything.”

“Then why’s Lucifer Pride asking about you? He called me late last night wanting to know if you’re here.”

Fucking hell! A wave of fear rushed through her and she instinctively sat up straighter. Her muscles tensed, her heart racing. Although she hadn’t met Lucifer yet, his siblings had given her a vivid description of him. Telling her how he was a prime grade asshole, but willing to do anything for his family. They had mourned his absence, but said he was busy planning a

masquerade ball to be held at Club Pride in the upcoming months. *Why's he looking for me?*

"What did you tell him?" Becca asked.

Her mother plopped down in a chair, slumping her shoulders, and cradling her head in her hands. Becca was taken aback by the action, so unlike the cool, calculated woman she knew.

"I can't lie to him," Tabitha said.

"What do you mean you can't lie to him? Just say I'm not here."

Her mom sighed with her eyes closed, her fingertips pressing gently against her temples. "You don't understand. I'm an elite patron of his club. If he finds out that I lied, he would revoke my membership, and a lot of shit would hit the fan."

This was a mistake. I should've never come here. But it had been a surprise to her to learn that Tabitha held powerful alliances with the Seven Princes. "I can't stay here anymore."

She jumped from her seat, but a hand stopped her with a grip around her wrist. She stared down at it; her gaze slowly rose to greenish-blue ones.

"Don't run. He's coming later today. Face him. Make a stand. It's the only course of action that'll stop all of this." Tabitha stared at her intently with a serious expression. "Running always makes it worse. Eventually, you got nowhere else to hide. He'll find you."

Her words carried a weight that made it feel like she had been through the same thing before. Becca slid back into her seat, her gaze unwavering.

"I ran when I found out I was pregnant with you. I loved your dad with all my heart, but things had happened. Being who I am, rival gangs discover ways to make you suffer. I was young and naïve, believing that nobody could touch the great wife of Romero Gibbons. I was wrong." Tabitha

chuckled bitterly, shaking her head. “I went to a party while he was out of town on business. Someone slipped something into my drink, and the moment I left, they had me. Two days of them raping me and taking photos. They had planned to send it all to your father to hurt him, but they also intended to kill me in the end. Mario Ramirez rescued me. He was one of our guys and dealt with the situation. I made him promise not to tell my husband. His punishment would be death.”

Her mother’s body trembled, her breath coming in deep, ragged gasps. “Two months later, I was pregnant. I didn’t know who it belonged to. My rapists or my love? So I ran and hid until you were born. I put you up for adoption and hoped for the best. But I couldn’t return to Romero with it on my conscience. Not that it mattered. He found me and demanded I explain what the hell was going on. I made up some sob story about needing space. He took it line and sinker. He never gave up and neither will your man. It’s how they’re built in our world.”

Becca felt as if her heart had fallen into the pit of her stomach. *She didn’t give me up because she hated me. She was afraid of raising a child that would remind her of a horrible ordeal.*

“Is Romero my father?” she asked quietly.

Tabitha cocked her head to the side and heaved a sigh, the sound ringing in the stillness. She licked her red lips and nodded. “You look just like him. There’s no denying it.”

Hot tears burned Becca’s eyes, and she quickly blinked to keep them at bay. An aching pain in her chest caused her to clench her teeth, biting down on her bottom lip. “Why did you turn me away when I came the first time, then?”

“How was I supposed to explain that you suddenly existed? My own fears threatened to drag me down. I told him lies for years. I was so afraid he’d hate me, I couldn’t do it.”

Becca wiped her nose with the back of her hand and sniffled softly. Her chin trembled, a lump forming in her throat. “Do you know the hell I’ve been through? All because you were scared. I was raped at ten, forced to fuck other children that were housed with me. One foster parent thought it was funny to starve me and use me as a toilet. Another killed the first guy I ever loved. My life’s been horrible because of your fucking fears.”

Tabitha blinked rapidly and swallowed. Her breath rattled from her lungs while she shifted in her seat. “I’m sorry. I didn’t know that it’d be like that. The person who arranged the whole thing told me you’d be put in a suitable home. A family that would love you as their own.”

Becca thought of the couple who had lovingly shown her the meaning of family. Tammy and Ray Farrell had been wonderful and supportive parents. They had taken care of her every need, and she had never gone without. “It started out that way, but then I had a seizure. Everything changed after that. They couldn’t deal with me and put me back into the system.”

Tabitha gave a small nod, wiping away a solitary tear when a servant entered bearing a tray of summer sausage and cheese, the aroma of the delicacies filling the room. The girl silently disappeared, leaving them in the stillness, punctuated only by their sniffles.

“Together, we’ll face Lucifer. I promise.” Her mother’s fingers wrapped tightly around hers.

Becca met the woman’s gaze and saw the flames of determination in her eyes, resulting in a subtle nod. With a long, satisfied sigh, Tabitha smiled.

“Oh, you also got a letter. Someone left it on my desk. Did you tell anyone you were here?”

She dug her hand into her pocket, producing a crinkling sound, as she pulled out a crisp white envelope and slid it across the table. Becca’s breath caught in her throat when she took in the sight of the bold black ink on its face. A chill ran down her spine. She shook her head and gripped it in her trembling fingertips. *There’s no way. How could he know?*

“Mrs. Gibbons, a gentleman’s here to see you. He’s waiting in your office,” a man said from the doorway.

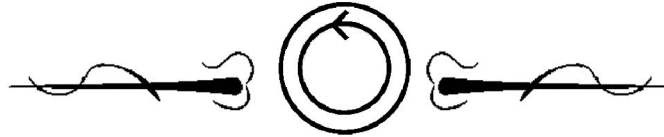
“Oh, thank you, Bill. Sorry to cut this short, Becca, but business calls. We’ll talk more later.”

She didn’t look up, and all she heard was the door closing after her mother. Her eyes were wide with shock as she stared at the paper in her hands. She leapt from her chair and sprinted through the house, her footsteps thudding on the tiled floor. With a loud slam, the panel to her bedroom shut behind her. She stumbled into the bathroom. Her stomach rebelled, and she knelt beside the toilet, dry heaving.

“I can help you deal with that. You just have to let me out. Our power isn’t all doom and gloom.”

“Leave me alone. Please, I’m begging you,” she sobbed.

Chapter Fourteen



Lucifer's lips curved into a strained smile when Tabitha entered her office. The Gibbons had been loyal customers of his clubs for decades. The woman was a regular, undergoing more and more surgeries as the years weighed down on her. She'd spent a small fortune on the pills that promised to reduce wrinkles and fine lines. She would die beautiful, but she would still perish. No mortal lived forever. Her late husband could attest to that.

"Lucifer Pride, welcome to my home. I didn't expect you this early." She sank into the plush velvet of the seat behind her King Louis XV desk. The wood's intricate carvings were highlighted by the glint of gold trim, an opulent sight to behold.

She flashed him a flirtatious smile, and he responded with a mischievous smirk. "I felt no need to wait."

She laughed, the lines around her eyes deepening. *Oh, Tabitha, your beauty's fading.* His club was renowned for their advanced medical treatments, yet even the most powerful drugs and plastic surgery couldn't

stop time from taking its toll. Before long, her outside appearance would be just as ugly as her insides.

“It’s a fucking blizzard out there. Did you drive all the way here for a girl?”

His grin widened at the playful suggestion in her voice. They’d shared many intimate moments, although that had been some time ago. They had both been changed by the years, unable to go back to who they’d been before. Now, nothing but disgust filled him as he looked her over.

“Yes, I did. She belongs to my brother, and family means everything to me. I wish for her to return to him. He hasn’t been himself since she ran away. Lovesick fool that he is.”

Tabitha froze in her chair, her hands trembling as they intertwined on the desk. Her lips pressed together tightly, her eyes flashing with disobedience. “That’s Becca’s choice to make. I won’t force her to do anything.”

He let out a hearty chuckle that echoed through the room. *So she’s finally decided to be a mom. How unfortunate. How many years have passed since she gave up that tiny bundle?* He wondered if the woman had thought about the child’s well-being at all. “You don’t give a shit about the girl. Don’t forget, I was there when you threw her away. It was only with my help that you stayed under Romero’s radar. You owe me.”

Her eyelids narrowed and her fingers tightened until her knuckles were a stark white. He watched her jaw clench as her teeth ground together. She’d begged him to assist her in hiding from her husband, and he had offered his assistance in return for her soul. Of course, he’d never imagined it was because she was pregnant.

For months, he had observed her belly expand, the sight of her pregnancy bringing a smile to his face. During that time, he had grown fond of

Tabitha, and he found a sense of warmth in her company. He'd tenderly held her hair back whenever she was overcome with morning sickness, gently dabbing and wiping her mouth with a cloth. When her cravings came, he had worked tirelessly to ensure that she never wanted for anything.

One fateful night her water broke, and he'd rushed her to the nearest hospital, her hand gripping his with every contraction. Each time her lips had contorted in pain, his stomach had flipped, and a sense of helplessness had filled his chest. When the baby let out its first cry, his heart had swelled, and he gasped in surprise. The nurse's face had lit up with a joyful smile when she presented him with a bundle of blankets. The infant's dark hair was a perfect contrast to her rosy cheeks, and her greenish-blue eyes dazzled.

Tabitha had sobbed and refused to take the baby, but he was filled with joy at the sight of the infant. When he grinned down at the miracle, a surge of warmth radiated from his heart. The little girl had wailed, and he'd shushed her, gently rocking her. Her tiny fist had wrapped around his index finger, her grip strong and secure as she brought it to her soft, rosy lips.

A bottle was handed to him, and a lump rose in his throat as he performed the simple act of feeding her. The nurse had showed him how to burp her, which ended with her spitting up on his expensive suit, but it didn't irritate him in the slightest. Instead of getting mad, he had just laughed and wiped it off with his hand. The edges of his heart melted as the warmth of the child's skin radiated against him.

For the first time in his life, he felt a sense of belonging and purpose. The tiny baby had looked up at him with eyes full of awe and admiration. *Is this what it's like to have a child?* He had assumed nothing could break the bliss

of that moment, but he had been wrong. Her mother had told him in a stern voice that she was not going to keep her. She wished for the infant to find a home where she could be loved unconditionally and implored him to make it happen.

He was overcome with shock as he stared at Tabitha, his heart thumping wildly in his ribcage. *How could she just give this blessing away?* He had tried to get her to hold the baby, but she was inconsolable, her cries resounding through the room. His pulse quickened as he gazed down at her, and something inside him changed. The deep affection he had felt for her in the last few months slowly dissipated.

After careful negotiation, he had arranged for the child to be placed in a loving home. The man and woman had been trying for years, and the sound of a baby's laughter was all they dreamed of. Their backgrounds were impeccable, and they could afford to live a life of comfort. His contact had promised him that the baby would be brought up in an environment full of love and compassion. As he watched Tammy and Ray Farrell take the infant, his heart sank and a cold emptiness filled him.

Tabitha left the hospital the next day, and he drove her back home, the hum of the engine rumbling in the background. When he had helped her settle onto the sofa, she had smiled sweetly at him, but his face remained emotionless. His mind had been a jumbled mess of rage and sadness in response to her actions. He had carefully placed a thick, heavy envelope on the table before making his way to the door.

"Lucifer? Where are you going?" she asked.

He had stopped with his hand on the handle. He had clamped down on his boiling fury, refusing to face the woman who had shattered his world. "It's over. There's enough money to sustain you for a few months. You also

have a tab at the club to fix any issues the birth caused to your body. Your husband will never know you were ever pregnant.”

He had left her behind without a second thought, the sound of his retreating footsteps fading into the distance. After a brief and passionate affair, their relationship had come to an end. He would often find himself standing at a window, watching the world go by, and musing over how the baby had grown. *Was she happy? Had she turned out better than if she had stayed with Gibbons?* The weight of his regret pressed down on his shoulders, but he shook the thoughts away. The child was not his to worry about. He was the Master of Pride, and there was no place for a young one in his life.

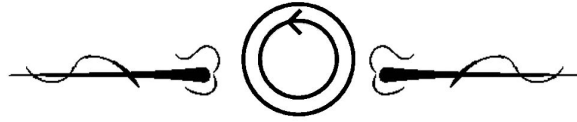
“I owe you? Do you realize what happened to her?”

He slowly raised his gaze to Tabitha’s, and the memories faded. The woman’s face was red with anger, her eyes blazing. Her lips curled up in a sneer, and she stood, palms pressing into the desk.

“You lied. She suffered at the hands of those who were supposed to take care of her. They abused and raped her. A small child.”

Lucifer shook his head, disbelief swelling in his chest. The image of the slight baby in his arms flared in his mind’s eye. He shot to his feet and towered over the woman.

“I didn’t lie. I honored my deal with you, hiding you until the infant was born. Anything that happened to her is on you. You gave her up, not me,” he growled.



Becca slumped against the wall of the bathroom, her eyes glancing up at the mirror. Her reflection stared back at her, shaking its head and crossing its arms firmly over its chest. Rage filled her, burning a path from her breast to her toes. *This has to end!* “You aren’t real! Please stop, just stop.”

“No! Not until you set me free.”

“If you won’t leave me alone, I’ll make you.” She climbed to her feet, fury boiling in the pit of her stomach. Her fingers trembled as she formed it into a fist, her knuckles white. She drew it back and approached the glass.

“Becca! Don’t do it. Think of the baby.”

She screamed, her hand connecting with the mirror. It shattered into a million fragments, and agony traveled up her arm. She shut her eyes tightly, her ears ringing with the sound of her own breath.

“Fucking hell!”

She hissed while picking tiny shards from her knuckles. Blood dripped into the sink, and she turned on the tap. The cold water ran pink as she washed her skin. *How do I explain why I broke the mirror to Tabitha?*

When the stinging sensation finally dissipated, she carefully inspected her hand for any damage. When she blinked, her heart raced and she could feel the ragged breaths slipping from her lungs. Where there should have been multiple cuts, only clean, healed flesh remained. *No, no, that’s not*

right. She slowly raised her eyes to the shattered glass, where hundreds of distorted reflections of herself were shaking their heads.

“That accomplished nothing. How are you me reincarnated? You’re an idiot. You aren’t mortal anymore. Every wound will heal.”

She snarled and grabbed a shard of the mirror that had fallen to the counter. It had broken perfectly into a sharp tipped triangle. The edge cut deep into her flesh, but she was beyond the point of feeling it. Her rage and anger were a warm companion to the thoughts of how she had finally snapped.

“Don’t do it. You’ll still experience the pain.”

It sliced through the skin of her arm, burning as it tore her open, but she ignored the agony as she continued. By the time she was finished, a thin line of red made its way up her forearm. She ran water over the cut and sobbed at the unblemished flesh. Her chin trembled, and she gripped her weapon tighter. She attacked herself with a vengeance, stabbing through muscle and meat.

“Stop it! Becca, this doesn’t achieve anything but agony. Listen to me —“

She blocked out the voice, determined to not heed its warnings. Pain caused her to squeeze her eyelids shut when she cut down to the bone. Filleting open her arm, her lungs burned with each breath, sweat beading off her nose. A tingle ran through her limb, and her fingers twitched. The tissue and jagged edges of flesh knitted before her eyes, closing until only fresh skin remained.

She dropped the glass, and it splintered into a million pieces on the tiled floor. The world around her spun, and her heart pounded in her chest. She stumbled, slipping on the puddle of blood beneath her, her palms flung out

to break her fall. Pain ricocheted through her when she landed hard on her ass, the snap of a bone filling her ears. She lifted her hand and her eyes widened in horror at the sight of her index finger bent at an unnatural angle.

“Bend it back. It won’t heal until you do.”

Her body shook uncontrollably as she gripped it, her sobs ringing through the room. Agony rattled through her when it snapped into place, and a scream was torn from her throat. She cradled her hand to her chest and rocking in an effort to dull the aching of her limb. *This can’t be happening. It’s not real. None of this is real.*

The door of the bathroom flew open with a loud bang, the sound reverberating off the walls of the empty room. She raised her gaze and met Tabitha’s panicked eyes. A man pushed past her mother, his black hair falling around his shoulders in silky waves. He stared in disbelief at the chaos surrounding her, his violet irises widening. *Lucifer fucking Pride!*

“What happened? Are you okay?” he asked in a smooth, mesmerizing tone while he knelt beside her. “Where are you hurt? There’s so much blood.”

Becca shook her head, and the tears that fell were accompanied by a soft sob. His hands roamed over her arm, and her skin prickled. A shiver coursed through her, but she pushed him away. She noticed a glimmer of light reflecting off of a piece of glass on the floor. Her reflection in the mirror stared at her with an expression of disapproval. She clenched her teeth, her anger boiling in her veins.

“This is your fault! Leave me alone,” she yelled.

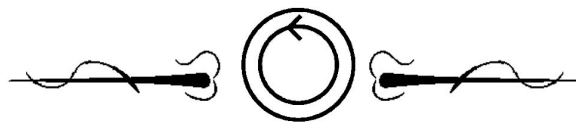
She gripped a shard in her fist. Snarling, she sunk the broken fragment into her neck and yanked it free in a spray of crimson. The blindingly sharp

pain made her cry out, the warmth of her life essence flowing down her chest. *Oh, my god. What have I done? The baby! Please, no, no.*

“Rebecca!” her mother screamed.

Lucifer clutched her hand, wrestling the weapon from her, a look of horror on his face. Her mouth filled with blood, the taste of iron strong. His palm pressed against her throat. His eyes were wide with fear, its intensity clear in the depths of his gaze. Her body began to tremble, and her breath came in short, fast gasps. *What the fuck? I’m immortal, right? Why is this happening?*

She blinked up at him, tears dripping down her face, and her jaw quivered. Bright spots of light flashed in her eyes, the edges of her vision growing darker. Yells rang around her like a distant whisper in her ears. She tried to speak, but her words were muffled, her lips moving without making a sound. A sharp, aching pain in her chest overwhelmed her as she thought about her unborn child dying with her. Her eyelids fluttered and a wave of darkness washed over her.



Lucifer quickly removed his jacket before tucking it tightly around Becca’s shoulders. Tabitha crouched beside him, her soft sobs grating on his nerves. A blood-smeared white envelope caught his attention. He stuffed it into his pocket before gathering the girl close and standing. He cradled her

against his chest. Her face was so pale, the crimson on her skin was stark in contrast. He marched out of the bathroom and the broken pieces of glass crunched beneath his feet.

“Where are you going? She needs medical treatment.” The woman latched onto his arm, her watery eyes imploring him to stay. Her nails sunk deep into his flesh, fear and worry in her irises.

He yanked his limb out of her grasp, snarling. *If she had been the mother Becca needed, this never would’ve happened.* “I’m taking her where she belongs.”

He strolled over to the windows that overlooked the property. With a swift kick of his foot, the panes swung open with ease. They clattered against the side of the house and the wind roared through.

“You can’t have her!” Tabitha flung herself at his back, clawing and screeching.

He growled low before shrugging her off with a sweep of his shoulders. His wings unfurled, and the sound of fabric tearing filled the quiet room. She stumbled backward, her hand flying to her mouth as a gasp of surprise escaped it. His lips curled in contempt as his cold eyes bore down on her. “Keep playing the mafia boss and forget about her. You’ve done so for years now, but I’ll make this right. A day doesn’t go by that I don’t regret taking the child myself.”

He stepped out the window. The wind swirled around him as he fell and whistled in his ears. His wings spread wider, a cool draft ruffling his feathers. He was pelted with snow and ice so cold that it stung his skin. The thick snowflakes blocked out all visibility, and the blizzard was in full force. Strong gusts buffeted him, and he clamped his jaw shut. He gritted

his teeth and channeled all of his energy into staying afloat. The frigid air sent a chill through him, leaving him to worry if Rebecca was doing alright.

As they flew over the city, sweat collected on his skin. The storm calmed for a moment, revealing Club Envy ahead, and the tension in his shoulders vanished. His muscles burned, each breath freezing his lungs. He landed on the balcony with a thud that resonated in the night's stillness. He kicked on the glass door, and it rattled in its frame.

Aedin lay on the sofa, the warm amber liquid in the bottle glinting in the light as it hung from his fingers. He sat up, blinking, and looked around before peering in the door's direction. His eyes were bloodshot, his hair a tangled mess, and he wore only a pair of loose fitting jeans. He stumbled to his feet, unlocking the door with a loud click before pushing it open with a creak. "What the fuck, Luci? It's a goddamn blizzard out there."

He ignored his brother and stepped into the room, where the air was thick with warmth. He carefully knelt beside the couch and arranged his bundle on its plush, inviting cushions. His throat tightened when he stared at her still and pale face. *The mates are immortal. Why hasn't she woken?* He sighed as he heard the quiet click of the lock engaging. *You're safe, little one. We'll figure this out.*

"Is that... what have you done, Luci?" The bitterness of Aedin's words lingered in the air.

Lucifer opened his eyes and cupped her cheek, her skin as cold as ice. He turned to his brother. "Blankets. We need blankets and... and warm water to wash away the blood. Rags too."

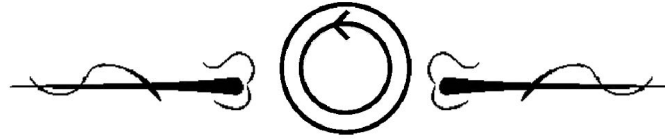
His sibling stared down at her with a wide-eyed, fearful expression. His face was drained of color, and he wept silently. Lucifer let out a menacing growl before standing and tightened his grip on his brother's arms. He

shook him violently, the man's head rocking back and forth. "Blankets. Water. Now!"

Aedin blinked, his body jolting out of his trance, and hurriedly ran from the room. Lucifer knelt beside her, his guilt like a rock in his gut. *I failed you, so, so miserably. But I swear I'll make this right.*

"Wake up, Rebecca. Then tell me who hurt you, so I can hunt them down and show them real pain."

Chapter Fifteen



S hanaera kept a firm grip on Aedin as they rode through the village, the gentle clop of the horse's hooves echoing off the buildings. She had never been on a horse, and the sensation of the powerful animal beneath her was as intimidating as she had imagined. The beast was so tall that, when she looked down from its back, it made her dizzy. She squeezed her eyes shut and buried her face in the soft fabric of Aedin's doublet.

"You okay, little fairy?" he asked.

She shook her head vigorously, not daring to look up and meet his gaze. His fingertips grazed her thigh in a gentle caress, and she shuddered under his touch. All around them, the noises of the town blended with the clatter of Stan's army. Despite the tragedy that had occurred, the townspeople continued with their daily routines as if their monarch hadn't just been murdered.

"It'll get rougher once we leave the outskirts. It's a long ride to where you were born. Are you going to be alright?"

A gasp escaped her lips, and her eyes flew open in shock. "What?"

The word squeaked out of her. She tried to swallow, but a lump rose in her throat. The sound of his loud laughter vibrated through her body. His fingers tightened on her leg. “Where else would we go? I don’t have a residence in this realm. The only home I’ve ever lived in is in Hell, and I’ve no wish to be suffocated by visits from my mother daily.”

A smile crept across her mouth, and she bit her bottom lip. She had never thought she would return to the place of her birth. Her heart swelled in her chest, and she snuggled closer to him, breathing in his scent.

Stan and his soldiers traveled alongside them for most of the day. Just as the sun began to set, they waved goodbye to the Black Dragons before going their separate ways. Aedin left the main road, and the trees grew taller, casting shadows all around them. Shanaera carefully leaned out from her spot against his back to take in the stunning scenery. The deep, rich tones of green and brown in the forest filled her with amazement as her breath caught. She had never imagined that such splendor existed outside of the gray walls of her cell.

“We’ll camp here tonight.”

He dismounted with ease before offering her a hand to help her down from the saddle. Her legs crumbled beneath her, her muscles aching, and he caught her against his chest. “Careful now.”

He thoughtfully guided her over to the rock, helping her to sit down. Her entire body screamed in agony, the lengthy ride taking its toll. A soft whimper of pain escaped her, and she had to fight to keep her tears at bay.

“It’ll get easier, I promise,” he said.

She nodded her head in agreement and watched as he efficiently set up the tent before collecting firewood. Not long after, she settled on a fur in front of him, the roar of the crackling fire filling the night’s air. He

massaged her shoulders with firm hands. She closed her eyes and her body melt into him. A delicious warmth filled her, her ears twitching with pleasure.

“Better?” he murmured.

A contented sound escaped her lips in answer. A deep, pulsing heat crept through her when he kissed down the column of her neck. His fingers drifted down her spine, kneading away the knots that gathered along it. His touch was like a gentle flame that burned through the fabric of her clothes. She squirmed and moaned as the ache spread up her inner thighs.

“You’re so sore, little fairy.” His voice was a low rumble in her ear, and her breath hitched.

Her heart raced when an unfamiliar heat began to build in her core. He laid her down on the fur, and she stared up at him, her body rigid. He smiled softly, his eyes twinkling in the flickering firelight. His hands carefully untied the ribbons of her slippers and set them aside. His fingers glided smoothly over the arch of her sole, leaving a tingle in their wake. She sighed, enjoying the deep pressure of his fingertips.

“That’s it. Relax while I tend to you.”

He switched to her other foot, and a moan escaped her. She shivered with pleasure as he kissed the tip of each toe. Her mouth grew dry, her body thrumming. His palm skimmed up her calf, and she gasped. The smooth fabric of her dress grazed her thighs. She tensed, pulling the material down to cover herself with trembling fingers.

“Shh, it’s okay. Just let me make you feel better, Shanaera.”

When Aedin spoke, his soothing tones melted away the tension, and she released her grip on her gown. The fabric fluttered around her hips, the cool night air caressing her bare skin. Her eyelids slid shut, and she savored the

pleasure he was creating. His fingers probed down her calf muscle, probing into the tight muscles until they relaxed. Everywhere he touched, flames licked at her flesh. She shifted beneath him, her senses alive with the need for something more, but she couldn't identify it.

His hands switched to her other leg, and she hissed through her teeth when he kneaded a deep knot away. But the pain was short-lived as every nerve flared to life, her skin growing damp. Her hips wiggled involuntarily, and he chuckled. Her nipples tightened at the sound, aching for him to relieve the tension that was building within her. She skimmed her fingers down her ears, and a chill ran up her spine. She gasped when he moved higher, massaging and soothing the ache in her thighs. Her body reacted by arching off the ground and into his caress.

His fingertips drew closer and closer to where she burned the hottest. His hands glanced over her hipbones, rubbing deep into her flesh. She squirmed and shifted, trying to guide him in the right direction with a soft whimper. He growled low as his palms cupped her buttocks, his digits sinking into her skin. Her muscles softened under his skillful touch. The heat melted away the soreness of riding, yet a tight ball of tension stayed in her core.

She cried out when warm, wet lips settled between her legs. His tongue lapped over her sensitive clit, and she blinked her eyelids open to see his head nestled between her thighs. He met her gaze, his eyes twinkling like two stars in the night sky. Pleasure coursed through her with each flick and suck of his mouth.

Her limbs trembled, her breath caught in her throat. The tips of her ears burned, and she tugged at them. Her mind was awash in ecstasy at the erotic sight before her as he feasted on her most intimate part. His fingers fluttered

over her ass cheeks before plunging deep into her pussy. She tossed her head to the side and cried into the night sky.

Her lips trembled as waves of intense pleasure crashed over her. She gripped the luxurious fur, feeling its coarse texture against her skin while her hips moved in a desperate, primal rhythm. She was filled with the warmth of the moment, never wanting it to end. Pressure built in her stomach, pushing and begging to be released. Every swipe of his tongue, each thrust of his hand, made it tighter.

“Fuck, little fairy, you’ll be the death of me.”

He sat on his heels, and her hands sought him, but he pushed them away. He unlaced his hoses, freeing his cock. When she saw it, her eyes widened at the impressive sight of its length and breadth. She had never seen a man’s sword before, though she had heard whispers of it. She slowly extended her finger, gasping at the velvety soft feel of his shaft. He shook and a low groan passed through his moist lips. She recoiled in shock, afraid she had inflicted injury on him.

“It’s okay. Touch it all you like, Shanaera.”

Aedin tugged his doublet and tunic off, baring his glorious chest for her eyes. She tentatively cradled his cock in her palm. It was as smooth as silk, yet as solid as iron. She ran her hand down it and was surprised when it twitched in response to her grip. It seemed to quiver with its own energy; the tip dripped with white tears.

She licked her lips, the urge to sample it in the forefront of her mind, to know if it was sweet or salty. Her tongue flicked across the head, and a savory flavor cascaded over her taste buds. He hissed when his hips leaned into her. She looked up at him, unsure if she had done something wrong.

When he grinned down at her, the firelight illuminated his tousled hair, creating a mesmerizing halo around his head.

“Perhaps another time you can explore me, but at this moment, if you continue, this’ll be over much sooner than I’d like.” He said, kneeling beside her, his hands warm against her cheeks as their lips met.

As tender and soft as a spring rain, he coaxed her to open with a sweep of his tongue along the seam of her mouth. She surrendered with a sigh, and he laid her down gently on the fur. He nestled between her knees, the heat of his cock searing into the skin of her thigh.

“I’ll be gentle, but they say the first time’s always the hardest, little fairy.”

She blinked up at him, her brow creasing as she tried to make sense of his statement. His fingers untied the laces of her gown and chemise, pulling it down to her waist. Her aching breasts pebbled beneath his gaze. His head lowered to a taut nipple, licking and sucking until it was as hard as ice. She moaned and buried her hands in his hair, her hips wiggling against his.

The heel of his palm rubbed across her clit, his fingers delving deep into her slick passage. She groaned as the ball of lust inside of her tightened. She was like a tightly wound spring, stretched to the point of snapping. Her body twitched and shuddered beneath him. His mouth captured hers and his sweetness filled her mouth with a flavor so intense it made her head spin. Her nails dug into his shoulders.

His hips moved against hers, the friction driving her insane. She gasped in delight when the pleasure built and moans of desire escaped her lips. She needed more, wanted more. Her ears had become fire incarnate, and she heard him chuckle. He nibbled a path up her throat, the tip of his cock

sliding into her. Her eyes snapped open at the invasion, a tight pinching sensation making her gasp.

Aedin bit down on the lobe of Shanaera's ear as he thrust forward. A million stars burst forth in her world and she shouted out his name. Ripples of pleasure mingled with the throbbing ache of her pussy stretching around him. He growled low, and moved slowly within her, each stroke causing the pain to subside.

She blinked her eyes, a single tear sliding down her cheek and dampening the hair at her temple. He soothed the sting of the bite with his tongue, and a soft moan escaped her lips. The pressure built, her movements becoming frantic and hurried. Her legs wrapped around his narrow waist and her hips tilted to meet his. Her nails scraped down his flesh, her teeth nipping at his neck.

He grunted, his hands gripping her ass tightly. He slammed into her and snarled. The sound rippled through her, and she answered with a growl that rumbled deep in her chest. He leaned backward, pulling her into his lap. She arched and ground her pussy down on his cock with a scream. His wings unfurled with a gentle rustling, surrounding them in a protective layer of green. She threw her head back when his satiny feathers ruffled over her flesh.

He thrust into her roughly, and switched to her other ear. The warm, wet touch of his tongue tracing its shape made her claw at him. Her teeth bit hard into his shoulder, and he shuddered, a smile curving her lips. His hand slipped between them, circling the sensitive bundle of nerves nestled in her folds. She screamed, and a wave of fiery emotion surged through her.

The heat of the stars seared her skin as she rose higher, and everything else melted away. The crackle of the fire and the sound of their labored

breathing slowly diminished to a low static. A rampage of pleasure crashed through her veins, pulsing through her like a heartbeat. Just as she reached for the moon, she shattered into a million sparks. The ringing noise of a scream filtered through the hazy fog of passion, and she realized it was her own. She fell back to earth on a fluffy, white cloud. His warmth comforted her as her limbs trembled and she collapsed against him.

He lifted her in his arms, his cock sliding out of her. She whimpered and clung to him, already missing the heat of his shaft inside her. He shook his head before flipping her around so she was on her hands and knees. She gasped when he slammed into her from behind. His hand was gentle yet insistent as he pushed down on the small of her back. She pressed her torso to the fur, the soft fibers tickling her breasts and re-sparking the flame within her.

The sound of his flesh smacking off hers sent her senses aflame. He was deeper than he had been before, filling her to the brim. A deep ache resonated through her, but she reveled in it. Each thrust added fuel to the fire that licked at her nerves. She wanted nothing more than to experience the overwhelming burst of bliss once more.

He growled low, grabbing her long blonde hair in a hand. Rough and hungry, he fucked her like an animal. Her back arched as pinpricks of pain scattered across her scalp, but it all made the pleasure sharper, more defined. She wiggled her hips, missing the friction of his hands on her clit. She reached down and circled the bundle of nerves. Euphoria coursed through her veins, and her eyes rolled into her head.

“Cum on my cock again, little fairy. I want that tight pussy to clamp down on me.”

Aedin's words caused her skin to tingle and her hand to move in a frenzy as goosebumps rose on her flesh. Her hips bucked, her whimpers growing louder. He raised the palm from her back, and the resounding noise of it crashing down on her buttocks made her gasp. The sting of his slap led to her eyes widening, but it was the deep warmth it spread through her that pushed her over the edge.

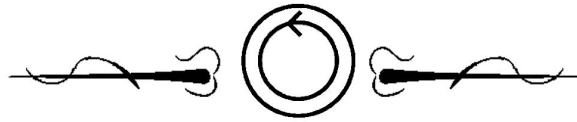
Shanaera screamed, thrashing beneath him. Her muscles grew taut, and he roared with one last thrust. Her pussy spasmed around his twitching cock, his cum filling her to overflowing. Warm liquid coated her inner thighs, and she moaned as her limbs gave out beneath her. He caught her with an arm about her waist.

The scent of sex and sweat mingled with the aroma of burning wood. She felt like she could sense the world surrounding her in a way she had never experienced before. He laid down beside her, and the warmth of his body seeped into her. She leaned close, pressing her ear to his chest, taking in the comforting sound of his heartbeat.

“Little fairy, we might take longer than two days to reach your home.”

She giggled and flashed him a mischievous smirk before straddling him. Looking down at him, she noticed the sweat dripping down his forehead and his cheeks were glowing with heat. She licked away the salty flavor, her tongue savoring the reminder of the delightful taste she was about to sample. She crawled slowly down his thighs and gripped his rapidly thickening cock in her hands.

“As long as you make me feel like that again, I'm willing to wait an eternity,” she said before wrapping her lips around his thick shaft.



The dream faded away, and Becca gasped in surprise as she sat up quickly. She groaned when pain radiated through her, her muscles aching. A tingling sensation rippled through her throat, making her cough uncontrollably. Her head was pounding so hard that it reverberated through her body, louder than any drumbeat.

“Careful. Here.”

A glass of water was placed in her hand, and she drank it with gusto. Each swallow was agony, as if her esophagus was made of sandpaper. She was so cold that her teeth chattered, and she grabbed the blankets tighter for extra warmth. She squinted through the haze that hovered on the edges of her sight, blurring and making her eyes burn.

“You have a fever. It’s your body’s natural reaction to dying and being healed. You may be immortal, but that doesn’t stop you from experiencing the pain and misery of death. If you bleed too quickly, you can’t heal fast enough and, well, you die. You just won’t stay dead.”

Becca tilted her head up to meet the gaze of an aged face, with creased skin and hazel eyes that twinkled with wisdom. The tall, thin woman’s frizzy gray hair danced in the air as she fussed with the blankets, making sure they were tucked snugly. “There now. It should break soon, but until then, you’re going to remain in bed. No talking, it’ll only impede your recovery.”

Becca glanced around and noticed the cozy green hue of Aedin's bedroom walls. Every movement was misery, and she gritted her teeth before falling back against the pillows behind her. Her body trembled as a chill ran through her bones and she gasped for breath.

"The baby..." she asked. She spoke with a croaking voice, and it was almost painful to get the words out in the faintest of whispers.

"The babe's fine. She was smart enough to protect herself."

"A girl?" The question hurt worse than the first, and she coughed violently. Every muscle ached and tensed under the force of her hacking.

The woman huffed as she dug through a large bag on the nightstand, its contents making a rustling sound. She pulled a vial from within; the cork was removed with a loud pop. She carefully poured a vibrant blue liquid into the glass and handed it to Becca. "Yes, a little girl. Now then, drink this."

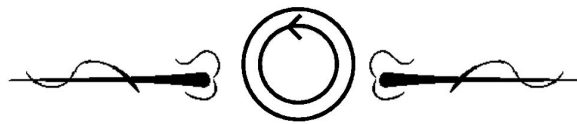
"What is it?" she rasped.

"No talking. It'll numb your throat. Prevent more coughing." The lady spoke in a firm tone that left no room for dissent, and Becca quickly gulped it down.

She gagged at the foul flavor, metallic and sour. A comforting heat spread from her mouth to her stomach as it wormed its way to its destination. "Don't tell him. Please."

She watched silently as the woman slung the heavy bag over a shoulder before marching out of the room; the door closing with a thud. Becca shuddered, her mind whirring with frenzied thoughts. *I have to get out of here. Fucking Tabitha. She probably handed me right over. Some mother. I should've known better. Whoever that lady is, she'll no doubt tell Aedin about everything. Then he'll boot me to the curb.*

She commanded her legs to move, but they lay limp. The drug thrummed through her veins, making her head heavy. *What the fuck did she give me?* Her breath was labored, her heart pounding in her chest, but sleep gradually overcame her. She let out a sob as a tear rolled down her cheek, her eyelids falling shut.



Lucifer heard the thumping of boots against the floor as his little brother paced. The man had tidied up and was now wearing a green tee shirt displaying upcoming dates for some band. Aedin's hair was artfully arranged, no longer a tangled mess of strands.

"She's going to be fine. The Ezeal are the most skilled healers to exist. Besides, she's immortal," he said, trying to reassure the Aedin.

His sibling shook his head and continued to wear a deep groove on the hardwood floor with each step. Lucifer leaned against the sofa cushions and hissed when something sharp poke into his thigh. He reached into his pocket and pulled out the envelope that had been lying on the ground in the bathroom beside Becca, the sound of the paper crinkling in his hands. The bloodstained edges of it reminded him of what she had tried to accomplish.

"I totally forgot about you," he muttered before sliding it across the table to his brother. "This was next to her."

Aedin spun around, his gaze intense and fiery as he glared down at it. He angrily unfolded the paper, his lips curling into a snarl. His eyes quickly scanned the letter before he uttered a string of curses. "I thought this was handled, but I guess I was wrong. He must've not been the one. Not unless the fucking dead can type out letters."

"What're you talking about?" Lucifer asked.

"George Yarger. He was her foster parent. She put him away for abusing her, and the other kids he was supposed to be caring for. He got out last month, but he fell off a damn roof."

He looked at his baby brother intently, his brow arching in curiosity. Leaning forward, he rested his elbows on his knees. "Did he fall or was he pushed?"

Aedin paused and ran a hand through his locks before resuming his vigorous pacing. His movements were sharp and aggressive as he clenched and unclenched his fists at his sides. His green eyes glowed brightly against the flushed red hue of his face. "I didn't fucking kill him. He was drunk and slipped. I wanted to, though. I wanted to make him suffer and experience all the pain that she felt when she was under his thumb. But like I said, I was wrong. This letter proves it."

His brother shook his head before handing Lucifer the crisp piece of paper. He studied it carefully, his fingers tightening on the page with each word. As he read each paragraph, his rage intensified, bubbling up in his gut.

You must've asked him the questions, or you wouldn't be staying with your mother. Did you think I didn't know? I know everything about you, Becca. All about how your mommy gave you up, throwing you out like a bit of trash. Who does that? I bet you were a beautiful baby. So small and

sweet. I also know all about the first eight years of your life with Ray and Tammy Farrell, even your little seizure, and how they no longer could keep you. No one's ever wanted you, not like I do.

I'm glad you left him. There isn't enough room for a third wheel. He was a wedge in our relationship, but now we can be together. The way it was meant to be: the adoring fan and the rockstar. It's like a movie. Maybe someday they'll make one about us. Wouldn't that be nice?

I'm tired of being in the shadows. I crave you, ache for you. Every fiber of my body needs to feel the softness of your skin, to hear you sigh and cry out as I bring you to the pinnacle of ecstasy. Please meet me. Thursday at Willows Park, four p.m. I'll wear a blue scarf, and be by the fountain. I promise to make all your dreams come true. Just give me a chance. I'll be waiting.

P.S. If you're thinking of standing me up, think again. I'll have to pay a little visit to Evelyn or Jessica. I wonder if they scream as prettily as you do.

Lucifer clenched the paper tightly in his fist, his fury burning through him like a raging inferno. He peered up at Aedin, his eyes narrowing into slits.

"How long has she been getting these?" he asked with a growl.

"About two months ago, she received the first letter. Adam looked it over, but found nothing. Not even a speck of DNA. This guy's a pro."

He let out a deep, throaty chuckle as he shook his head, saying, "No, a pro would've stayed in the shadows. He made a mistake when he thought he could come into the sunlight. Nobody threatens a mate."

"Well, this one's slowly recovering," a feminine voice replied.

They heard the creaking of the stairs as Ezeal descended and both turned toward her. Reaching the bottom, she let out a tired sigh before rolling her

bony shoulders. “She should be as good as new in two days. You boys really need to watch these women more closely. I feel like I’m spending more and more time in this realm. Doesn’t matter now.”

She grumbled and clomped to the elevator. “I’ll be back in a month to check on her. Keep her comfortable, and the stress down. Her body did an excellent job of protecting itself, but everyone has their limits. Even powerful beings like *her*.”

“What do you mean? Powerful beings? Why a month?” Aedin asked, but before he could get an answer, the doors shut with a whoosh. He looked up at the bedroom. His eyes were filled with longing and desire.

“Let her sleep. She’s probably not going to be the happiest when she wakes up in your room. I get the idea she didn’t want to return,” Lucifer said.

His sibling plopped down on the sofa, the cushions sinking beneath his weight. He shook his head in resignation, a heavy sigh escaping his lips. “Do you think she’ll understand any of this?”

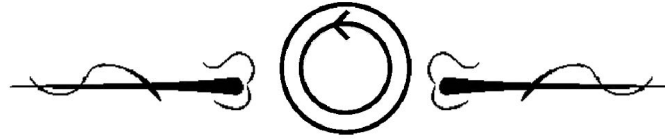
Luci shrugged. “There’s no way of telling until you have the conversation with her. If she’s like the other mates, then she’s been dreaming of your past life together. Perhaps she’ll know it all when she finally wakes.”

Aedin reclined against the cushions. The sadness and regret on his brother’s face tugged at Lucifer’s heart, but it was not his battle to fight. Their relationship was their own war, one he hoped he would never have to deal with.

“How the fuck do you plan to accomplish her meeting him when she’s bedridden?” Aedin asked.

“Don’t worry about the details. I got you covered.” He stood and walked to the elevator. “Meet me in the park at three thirty tomorrow.”

Chapter Sixteen



Aedin shivered, pulling his jacket tighter around him as the wind grew stronger. Snowflakes twirled along the sidewalks, dusting each crevice with a layer of white. He had been waiting for ten minutes, and he was growing increasingly frustrated. *I should be sitting with Becca, not standing in the fucking cold.*

“Aedin!”

He turned and was met with the familiar face of the woman he was thinking of, leaving him perplexed. She stood with her hands in her pockets, her lips curved in a mischievous smirk. He squinted his eyes and intently studied her. She had the same appearance, but something about her seemed unfamiliar. “Becca?”

“Not exactly.” He jumped in surprise when Lucifer’s voice fell from her mouth. His heart raced and a cold sweat beaded on his forehead as he stumbled back. He shook his head, his eyelids blinking rapidly. “Easy, brother. I told you not to worry about the details.”

Aedin ran a hand through his hair; the action brought a moment of clarity in the midst of the confusion muddling his thoughts. “What the fuck, Luci?

You didn't do anything weird, right? Like stand naked in front of a mirror or touch parts you shouldn't have?"

His chest tightened with jealousy, and he let out a low, menacing growl. The thought of his sibling staring at his mate's nude body caused him to clench his jaw tightly. His brother laughed, and the sound was an unfamiliar one coming from the woman he loved.

"I tried not to look too closely, but I had to get dressed. I swear I didn't do anything inappropriate. Promise," Lucifer said, her hands held out in front of her in surrender, but a mischievous glint was in her eyes.

Aedin clenched his jaw tight, the sound of his teeth grinding echoing in his ears as he realized there was nothing he could do. He sighed, allowing his body to relax, while his mind still buzzed with fury. "Let's get this over with. I want to get back to her in case she wakes."

Becca's doppelgänger gave a nod and sauntered through the park, the sound of children laughing in the background. Aedin put a careful distance between them, his steps nearly brushing against the edges of the trees that lined the sidewalk. He scanned each person passing by, their conversations filling his ears. His heart pounded as a rush of adrenaline surged through his veins, heightening his senses. He saw the fountain come into view and quickly ducked into the thicket, the noise of birds chirping in the air, and kept her in his line of sight.

She wandered over to the water feature, sitting on the edge. She impatiently tapped her foot and surveyed the area with an inquisitive gaze. Despite the throngs of people in the square, he noticed no one with a blue scarf. He glanced at his watch, his eyes lingering on the ticking hands. *Four o'clock. Where the fuck is he?*

Becca waited for five minutes before finally standing up with a resigned shrug. A man ran toward her, panting loudly and sending out hot clouds of breath. Aedin was poised to take a step forward, but when she subtly shook her head and smiled at the guy, he relaxed.

“Oh, shit. Sorry. Here,” the man said between gulps of air.

An envelope was pressed into her hand, and her gaze met Aedin’s. Confusion rippled through him, but he remained motionless.

“I was told to give this to you at four o’clock on the dot. Only five minutes late. I think that might be a record.” The guy laughed and held out his palm. “Thanks for using Fast as Fuck courier services.”

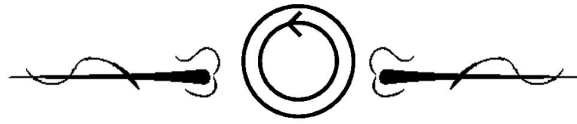
She squinted her eyes, her breath coming out in a frustrated huff. She rummaged through her pocket, withdrawing a bill to place into his open hand. He flashed a toothy grin and sprinted away. Aedin came out of his cover and his gaze darted around, taking in the sights of the area. As he walked across the square, he furrowed his brows and looked down at her with a concerned expression on his face. She shook her head and carefully ran her finger along the seam of the letter before tearing it.

“What the fuck?” she mumbled.

He craned his neck to read the paper she was holding. One word was typed out in thick, black letters that were hard to miss. *Gotcha*.

“Who’s sitting with Becca?” his brother asked.

But Aedin was already running out of the park, his lungs straining from the effort. Terror coursed through his veins as an icy hand gripped his heart and his only thought was of getting back to his mate.



It took four days for Aedin and Shanaera to reach the fairy territory. Their fiery desires lit up the night, and their passionate cries made the thicket vibrate. His presence was like a drug to her, and she was in a constant state of longing for him. Something inside of her had finally connected, and an overwhelming sense of joy filled her for the first time.

As they ventured further into the depths of the vast forest, they heard a mysterious fluttering between the silent trees. Her skin crawled, and a trickle of sweat slid down her back. Her ears perked up at the slightest sound, and she felt a prickling sensation as if she was being watched.

“Who dares to trespass into Lyllarion?”

The voice was like a chorus, resonating through the air, and her heart stuttered in response. Aedin sat straighter in the saddle, his eyes darting around the forest. She swallowed, and her fingers nervously dug into the fabric of his doublet.

“I bring one of your own back to the fold, and ask for your acceptance. She’s been treated poorly. Her wings were taken from her and we search for her clan,” he answered.

Laughter filled the air, causing a chill to run through her body, and her skin erupted in goosebumps. She pressed against Aedin, fear filling her throat like a thick fog. With each gasp, her heart raced faster and faster.

“And what do you get out of helping the fae folk, demon?” the voice asked.

“She’s my mate. I go where she goes.”

The forest fell as silent as a tomb. As the minutes slowly passed, Shanaera started to worry that they had been forgotten, but then the faint sound of footsteps reached her ears. She cautiously peered around Aedin and gasped at the sight before her.

A man and woman approached them. Their hair was so pale it looked like it was made of moonlight. The sunlight bounced off the multiple pieces of jewelry on their pointed earlobes, creating a dazzling display. Dressed in white clothing with silver accents that glinted with each step, they moved with elegance and beauty, like a blinding vision. Although the female smiled, her icy blue eyes were cold and distant.

The male stared at them with open disdain, his chin tilted high. “Bring us the child. We’ll determine if what you say is true.”

Aedin dismounted quickly before helping her down. She trembled against him, her body refusing to move from his side. He leaned in and her ear twitched as his breath, soft as a feather, caressed it. “Don’t be afraid.”

He led her to the two, his hands warm and comforting on her shoulders. The woman scrutinized Shanaera with a blank gaze, her irises giving away nothing. The man’s eyes were filled with hostility, and they glinted threateningly as he glared at Aedin.

“You hide your ears. Why?” the lady asked.

She stared at the ground as fear made her entire body tremble, sending chills down her spine. Reaching up, she tucked her hair behind a pointed ear. “The king that kept me didn’t like them. He threatened many times to cut them off. My only solution was to conceal them.”

Her fists were pulled gently, and a soothing warmth radiated through her fingers. She slowly raised her gaze and met the woman's eyes. Her world suddenly felt much smaller, her vision narrowing in on the exquisite creature before her. It was as if her soul had been stripped bare and she heard a voice inside her mind.

“Are you safe, fairy? Has the demon forced you to be by his side?”

She opened her mouth to speak, but no words came out as she shook her head.

“You’re unique. It has been some time since I have seen a seer. Your clan was wiped out. We thought all were lost, but you’ve done well. You’ve learned on your own how to control your third eye, but there’s more to your power than just visions. We’ll accept you and teach you all you need to know.”

With a loud breath, Shanaera's world expanded, the comforting smells of the forest surrounding her once more.

The woman stepped back and glanced up at the man. He let out a deep, exasperated sigh. “My wife has determined that you’re being truthful, demon. Come, let us get you settled, then we’ll discuss this further. Welcome home, my lady.”

Two hours later, Shanaera was guided through the winding, root-filled corridors of the wooden palace by a procession of women with pointed ears. The kingdom of Lyllarion was built amidst the towering trees, their branches blocking out the sky. She was surrounded by blooming flowers of every hue, the air heavy with the pungent perfume of petals. Every inch of the walls was covered with detailed carvings of animals and intricate vines. She glanced behind her, her bottom lip quivering with worry.

Aedin had been taken down a different path, her attendants explaining that men and women did not bathe together, and her fear was almost tangible. A chill ran down her spine. *This isn't right*, she thought, but brushed it aside. She was home and among her own kind. *What threats could remain?*

The girls whispered and tittered to one another, their gazes darting to her every few seconds. They had been shocked by the scars on her back as they washed her. She shivered and shrank away in fear when they touched the cold, silvery marks. They had adorned her in a floor-length gown of white and silver, which glimmered in the light. The thin fabric was like a second skin, clinging to her body and accentuating every movement she made. Her hips were decorated with a vibrant girdle of delicate flowers, completing the outfit. She felt almost naked and wrapped her arms around her waist.

They came to a large chamber, and the sight of so many people was overwhelming. As she walked by, she noticed their pointed ears twitching, each person just as beautiful as the next. The man and woman who had welcomed her sat on gleaming, bone white thrones elevated on a dais at the far end of the grand room.

Both of them peered at her with eyes as icy and blue as a frozen pond. "Welcome, Shanaera. We look forward to you joining our kingdom."

A loud chorus of cheers filled the air and sent a tingle down her spine. Her gaze frantically searched the chamber, but there was no trace of her demon. The tingle grew to encompass the back of her neck and scalp. "Where's Aedin?"

A thick silence descended, and one of her attendants scurried to her side. The girl glanced up at her with an expression of sheer terror.

“You must address them appropriately, King Aiwin and Queen Gaylia,” the woman whispered.

Shanaera gasped before falling to her knees. She trembled with fear, her heart racing as she swallowed hard. Nobody had told her she was in the presence of royalty. “I apologize, your majesties. I didn’t realize who you were.”

The room was filled with the tinkling sound of laughter, like a bell ringing out in the wind. Any other time, it would’ve been soothing, but today it sent a bolt of terror through her.

“Rise, young child. Your mistake is our own. You’re new to our realm and don’t know our customs,” the queen said from her throne. “Your *demon* must be cleansed before joining us. He’ll be here soon enough.”

She rose, and the girls who had led her here surrounded her in a flurry of rustling skirts and laughter. Thousands of conversations permeated the surrounding space, the overlapping words creating an overwhelming din that made her cringe. There seemed to be an endless stream of people approaching her, their faces filled with enthusiasm as they introduced themselves. She smiled through gritted teeth while her eyes darted to the doors. *Where are you, Aedin?*

The sun set in the sky and the darkness slowly crept in, yet still he didn’t show. Her stomach churned with dread, and the tingle in her veins seemed to grow stronger. She nervously bit her lip as she approached the thrones again, falling to her knees. “Please, my king and queen, where’s my escort? I doubt he would leave me this long.”

She heard a snicker that reverberated through the room. Her forehead creased, and she peered up through her dark lashes. Aiwin’s tall frame rose from his seat, casting a looming shadow over her.

His disdain was evident in his icy blue eyes. His lips curled into a cold sneer. “Why do you worry so much about a filthy demon? There are many here that would be your mate. Your powers should be kept pure, not tainted by mingling with lesser creatures. Don’t concern yourself with his well-being.”

Her vision blurred, and her ears rang. She stumbled to her feet, her heart pounding with rage. She suddenly felt a wave of energy course through her body, a power unlike anything she had ever experienced before. “What have you done?”

His face lit up with a smirk, and his brow rose in a graceful arc. “I did what I always do.”

Her lips curled back, fury burning through her in a rush of heat. The king went rigid, his expression contorting into one of agony. She bared her teeth, the sound of her labored breaths filling her ears as she ascended the steps slowly. The air was laden with the sounds of panicked screams and running feet as people rushed to the exit. The doors clanged shut with a resounding bang. She watched the candles flicker and then gradually go dim, the warm glow of the flames fading away. The queen snarled and charged at her, but Shanaera quickly raised a hand to ward her off. The woman sank to the ground, twitching and crying out in pain.

“Tell me what you’ve done, Aiwin. Show me where my mate is.” As she spoke, her deep voice seemed to pulse endlessly in the air, blending with the yells of the crowd.

Her confidence surged through her like a powerful wave, and she felt invincible. The king fell to his knees, gripping his skull tightly. Aedin’s image, eagle spread wide between two trees, shimmered before her eyes. His wails made her skin crawl.

A male sliced through his leg with a long jagged knife, peeling it back like butter. His limbs were bloody messes, the flesh hanging from him in sheets. His wings were a mangled cluster of feathers and crimson on the ground beneath him. Blood stained the forest floor in puddles of scarlet.

Her lover tugged and struggled to be free, but the ropes burned against his skin with an eerie, glowing light, making his efforts futile. His bones snapped when they tightened beyond his reach. She stared down at the king that had ordered this, her vision still blurry from the fading image.

“Why?” she asked.

Aiwin let out a short, angry breath and shook his head, his pale eyes alight with rage. His lips curled back, and he spit at her feet. “Because fairies are extinct, but they’re the most powerful of all the fae folk. Their power can shape worlds. Look at what you’ve done, and see that I’m right.”

She turned and felt the heavy air of the throne room wrap around her. People screamed as they clutched their skulls. Some seized on the floor, foam forming on their mouths.

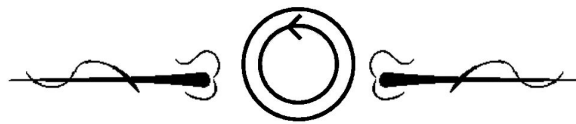
“You can make anyone, anywhere, believe what you want them to. Illusions of hope, sorrow, or pain. If I could control you, then I’d be the fae king of all. Not even Oberon or Titania could stand against me.”

Turning to face him, she knelt down and tilted her head to the side, her finger lightly caressing his cheek. “You should’ve never attempted this.”

She pressed a fingertip to his forehead, and he fell back. His screams filled her ears as she whirled toward the exit. The surrounding fae cried out in sorrow as she passed, a sound that brought some ease to her aching heart. When the doors opened, she slowly turned to take a final look at the grand hall. Her power expanded, a comforting warmth spreading throughout her body.

She couldn't help but smile as she watched the people who had been vying for her attention moments ago turn on each other. They tore at one another, their nails scratching and gouging. Blood flowed down their faces, and their screams caused her grin to widen. The queen stood, her growl vibrating through the room while the king lay moaning on the floor. The monarch launched herself at her husband, the sound of tearing flesh loud in Shanaera's ears.

It was surprisingly simple to craft the illusion. She had used her magic to make them see each other as enemies. That it was kill or be killed. She smirked to herself and the noise of the doors slamming shut rung through the hall as she began her search for her mate.



Becca woke, reluctantly, to the chill of the cold air, her dream still clinging to her mind. She opened her eyes, blinking as she took in the unfamiliar patterns of the ceiling above her. Fluorescent shop lights hung down from stark white tiles, momentarily blinding her. *Where the fuck am I?*

The drug in her system made the edges of her gaze blurry. She filled her lungs with air and tried to lift her arm, exhaustion heavy on her muscles. It came off the surface she lay on, but only a few inches before falling back

with a thud, her strength sapped. Tilting her head to the side, she surveyed her surroundings.

The steel tables beside her were covered with a sheet concealing a lumpy shape that seemed oddly familiar. She furrowed her brows, her mind foggy as she tried to discern what lay beneath. She squinted hard to make out the shimmering surface of the metal wall beyond. Heavy iron doors with thick handles lined it.

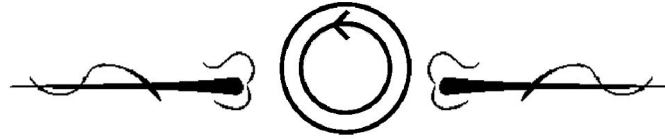
What the hell? Think, Becca. You've seen a place like this before.

The sound of a latch clicking was followed by the noise of footsteps. Her eyes drooped, her lashes fluttering against her cheeks as she fought to stay awake. Her eyeballs burned, and she let out a weary sigh.

“Oh, you’re up. Well, that won’t do. I gotta finish my shift, then we can go home. Here we go, just a little something to help you doze.”

Becca gasped when a sting radiated up her arm. *No more sleep.* Her lips trembled as she tried to form words, but all that came out was a deep silence. The sight of a recognizable face caused her to gasp in surprise, and she whimpered before falling into the abyss of darkness.

Chapter Seventeen



Becca was pulled from her dreamless sleep by the sound of distant singing. She shivered when a frigid breeze swept through the room. She blinked her eyes, taking in the surrounding view. The peeling wallpaper and water-stained ceiling of the large den she sat in filled the air with the musty aroma of age. The furniture was shrouded in layers of sheets, and a thick blanket of dust coated them.

Somewhere deep in the house, she could hear Evelyn's soft voice echoing off the walls. She fought against the ropes that bound her, sweat beading on her forehead. *All this time, it was my fucking best friend. Every letter, every goddamned threat. How did I not see it?* Blood roared in her ears, and she gulped mouthfuls of air as she hyperventilated.

“Calm down. Freaking out won’t help anyone. Think of the child.”

When she glanced up, a wave of relief washed over her. Her reflection in the mirror hanging on the far wall looked back at her with a combination of fear and confidence. *At least I’m not alone, even if she isn’t real.*

“We can get out of here. You just have to tear down the walls.”

And the nagging begins.

“I don’t know how to do that,” Becca hissed.

“Yes, you do. All you gotta do is concentrate. Clear your mind and let me guide you to me.”

Her teeth ground in irritation, and she leveled a bitchy gaze at her image. She needed to break out of here, but no, all her imaginary friend wanted was for her to meditate. She released her frustrations with a shake of her head. *I can do this. Piece of cake.* She closed her eyes, letting the air fill her lungs with each deep inhalation. A wave of serenity settled over her, and her breath fell into a peaceful rhythm.

“That’s it, slow and easy.”

“What the fuck are you doing?” The familiar voice caused her to snap her eyelids open, and she stared up at her friend. *Well, ex-best friend.* Evelyn looked down at her with a raised eyebrow and a stern expression, tightly gripping a platter. “I made you something to eat. Aedin said you haven’t eaten since you got sick, so I thought you might be hungry.”

Her kidnapper set the dish down gingerly on the floor and knelt down beside Becca with a soft sigh. A juicy cheeseburger with a side of greasy, salty fries filled the tray, and the smell of it wafted up in steamy tendrils. Her stomach let out a low, rumbling growl, and she mentally scolded her body for its betrayal.

“I’m not the best cook, but I tried to replicate our first meal together. Remember? We had just done a gig at Gebby’s. The owner was nice enough to allow us to order anything we wanted. You ordered a double burger with extra cheese and super crispy fries.” Evelyn’s lips curled in a smile, and her eyes sparkled like stars. “Fuck, I forgot the whiskey. Be right back.”

As her captor left the room, Becca’s heart raced, her throat tightening with fear. She let out a breath and struggled against the ropes, but they

refused to give, instead stiffening with each movement.

“Wow, the crazy’s strong with that one. Just wait for our opportunity. Be calm, and try not to piss her off.”

Evelyn stepped back into the room, the sound of her shoes resounding in the silence. She knelt once more, and two glasses of amber liquid clinked softly in her hands. “I’ve waited so long for this moment. I was afraid to tell you how I felt, but it was a lot easier than I thought it would be. Do you know how much I agonized about it?”

Her eyes shone with a wild gleam, and her face was split with an insane grin. She sliced the burger into quarters with a sharp knife. *If I can get hold of that blade, I’ll be able to cut myself free.*

Evelyn held a piece up to Becca’s lips, but she refused to bite into it. “I know you’re hungry. Your stomach’s about to swallow itself, silly.”

Despite the enticing fragrance of the food that filled the room, Becca shook her head and leaned away from it. *Who knows what’s in it?* Evelyn’s eyes narrowed and her nostrils flared as a red hue spread across her cheeks.

“Eat it! I fucking slaved over it just for you,” she screamed.

The woman stomped to her feet, nibbling on her thumbnail while muttering to herself while pacing back and forth. “Be nice. It’s okay.”

Becca trembled with fear, but her fingers inched closer and closer to the utensil that lay forgotten on the floor. Her palm closed around the plastic, hope sparking in her heart. But her joy was interrupted abruptly when a strong hand gripped her wrist. When she looked up, her eyes met a pair of deep, sapphire blue irises.

“I thought you weren’t hungry.” Evelyn’s lips curled up in disdain, her icy gaze drilling into her. “What were you going to do with this?”

Becca was overcome with a cold wave of fear, her lips uncontrollably trembling. Her captor let out an angry snarl and tightened her grip. The blade fell from Becca's numb fingers and she gasped when it was pointed at her.

"Were you planning on hurting me?" Evelyn's gaze glimmered with tears, and her mouth was down-turned in a sorrowful expression. "I thought we had something special. I'm your number one fan."

"Where are we?" she cautiously asked, trying to change the direction of the conversation.

"Home. I know it's not much now, but..." her kidnapper giggled, her sorrow vanishing. "It'll be marvelous once I'm done with it. I got it for a steal. The original owner's dead. Had a minor accident and fell off a roof. Very sad, but I wanted you to be somewhere familiar."

Becca jolted and her skin prickled as she looked around the room once more. Memories of the house assaulted her, a shiver running down her spine. She blinked and peered down at the red stain on the floor, its edges darkened by years of wear. The image of Mark's body laying in a puddle of his own blood flickered in her mind. *She brought me to the Yargers. Oh, my god. Fucking hell!*

"Well, since you won't eat, how about a drink?"

Her abductor tried to force the rim of the glass to her lips, but Becca refused by sealing her mouth. Fingers pinched her nostrils closed. She squeezed her eyelids shut tightly and whipped her head abruptly to the side. Evelyn's grip faltered, and the cup hit the floor with a clatter.

"You stupid bitch!"

A palm connected with her cheek, and stars exploded in her eyes. She blinked them away as pain radiated down her jaw. Heat flashed across her

skin, blood flooding her mouth.

“I’ve done everything for you! Every vision that hurt you, I took care of them. Remember that guy in the red shirt? The one that was killing and raping girls. Dead. A single shot right between the eyes. Then there was Primal Star and Yarger. I did it all for you!”

Becca snarled and bared her teeth. A potent rage churned in the pit of her stomach, fear for her unborn child giving her a courage she had never known before. “Fuck that rapist. If you hadn’t done it, someone else would’ve. You didn’t kill the other two, though. Aedin and his brothers took out that band. And George? He slipped off a fucking roof while drunk. You’ve accomplished nothing!”

Evelyn gaped at her, disbelief glittering in her irises. She licked her lips and let out a slight sigh as her hand ran through her green hair. Her expression shifted between fury and grief as her face contorted with a conflict of emotions. A final stillness settled and her mouth curved into a sinister smile, her eyes blazing with madness.

“None of that matters. You’ll love me. Even if I have to keep you locked up, one day your heart’ll be mine.”

Becca sighed heavily and looked around her small cage. The bedroom was a time capsule, unchanged since she had left it all those years ago. When she stole a glance at the twin-sized bed, a chill ran down her spine. Memories of how George had raped her many times on its soft mattress made bile rise in the back of her throat. She firmly shut her eyes, refusing to even peek at the object.

Evelyn’s irises twinkled with anticipation as she led Becca up to the room while chatting about the life they would lead together. The moment

the woman untied Becca's hands, she had lunged at her kidnapper, but to no avail. It had taken just one well timed punch to her temple to make her world spin. In her disorientation, she heard a heavy cuff snap around her ankle, followed by the sound of the door shutting with a loud click.

Chained to the headboard, the thick band pinched and rubbed her skin raw. She hobbled to the dresser and a sinking feeling washed over her as she saw each drawer was empty. She nervously nibbled her lip and looked around the dreary, dusty room, hoping to find something that could be used as a weapon. *I can't even talk to myself.*

The Yargers had provided those in their care with the minimal amount of items they needed to survive. A bed and a place for clothes were all a kid required for a comfortable home. A mirror or vanity was a luxury. She sat down on the floor; the wood creaked beneath her as she crossed her legs under herself. *Concentrate. Calm. Let go.*

She let out a sigh and breathed in through her nose. Her inhalations were slow and steady, her worries dissipating. Her thoughts became clearer and a profound sense of tranquil washed over her, radiating warmth all the way to her fingertips.

“That’s it. Just a little longer. You’re so close.”

She caught the sound of a person's breathing as the blurry outline of a woman appeared before her. Her pale blue eyes sparkled, and her platinum blonde hair was so straight it would be the envy of most girls. Her pointed ears twitched, and her lips curved into a gentle smile. Goosebumps rose on Becca's flesh when their fingertips brushed against each other.

“What the fuck's wrong with you?”

She was instantly jarred from her peace, and she met Evelyn's furious gaze. Her kidnapper glowered at her, her brows contorted in rage. A knife

was held in her hand, the wicked edge glinting in the dim light. Becca gazed down at the tip, and the faint memory of cutting herself made her shiver.

“I’m horny, come on.” Her abductor dragged her to the bed by her hair.

She kicked out at the woman, her screams filling the tiny space. Dazzling stars filled her vision when Evelyn smacked her, and her already sore cheek throbbed with heat. Her kidnapper’s fist gripped her chin tightly, bruising and causing her jaw to ache. A pill was pressed to her mouth, but she jerked her head away.

Her assailant snarled before punching her. The blow landed against her left ear and her world spun. The tablet slid through her lips as she gasped in surprise. She tried to spit it out, but her attacker had thought of that. Her nose was pinched shut and her jaw clamped firmly closed with a hand. She glared up at her kidnapper. Her lungs burned from lack of oxygen, but still she refused to ingest it.

“Swallow it, and get on the fucking bed, or I use this knife to fuck you,” Evelyn hissed.

Terror of the pointed weapon made her gulp. The pill was like a sharp, jagged rock stuck in her throat, refusing to go down. She sat on the mattress, the uncomfortable stiffness of the springs beneath her. *This isn’t the girl I’ve been friends with for years. This deranged and sick individual is a stranger.*

“I didn’t always feel this way about you, you know. It started about six months ago. Something just clicked.” Evelyn waved the knife about as she spoke, the light glinting off the fierce edge. “Lie down.”

Becca stretched out on the bed, the grainy, dusty texture beneath her skin. Her kidnapper tucked the blade between the mattress and box springs

before wrapping stiff leather straps around her limbs. Evelyn then carefully secured the strips to the head and foot boards, testing their tension with a tug.

“I was heading home after another shitty gig. When I came out the backdoor and there you were. Some girl had her face buried in your pussy as you smoked a cigarette. I remember being so shocked, but then you looked at me with those smoldering eyes.” She pulled the weapon free. “My entire body responded, getting as wet as Niagara Falls. I needed to be the one kneeling before you, making you gasp and moan.”

The knife cut through Becca’s pajama bottoms, baring her, and a tear escaped. She closed her eyelids, sucking in a deep breath. *This isn’t happening. Not here, not again. Please don’t do this.*

“I craved to taste what everyone else got to sample. You fucked anything that walked. What was wrong with me?” Evelyn sauntered over to the dresser, stashing the blade in a drawer. “You’ll forget everybody before me. You’ll love me, I’ll make you.”

Her captor strode out of the chamber, returning with a rather large pink dildo. She knelt on the bed, surrounded by the sound of her heavy breathing. Her mouth opened, and she licked along the length of the toy before sucking it deep. Becca hissed when it was shoved into her dry pussy. A single tear rolled slowly down her cheek.

“You’re going to feel so fucking good. You won’t ever want to leave me. I even got the pills to make it easier. Thanks to Primal Star.”

A soft sob escaped her as a warm mouth was pressed against her sex. She held her breath and shouted his name in her mind, as if it was a prayer. *Aedin!*

Aedin charged into the penthouse, the sound of his boots thudding, with Lucifer close behind. His gaze narrowed in on the bedroom. His heart raced as a chill of fear ran through his body. He dashed up the stairs, and when he flung the door open, it made a loud, crashing bang. The sheets were a tangled mess, and he quickly tugged them off. He roared in anguish when an empty space was revealed, and he fell to his knees in despair.

She's gone!

Lucifer stumbled into the room, his breath coming in heaving gulps. He scanned the area and staggered over to the bed. He shook his head in disbelief, his eyes wide and blinking rapidly.

“How? How could someone get her out of the club without security going off?” his brother inquired.

Aedin rocked back and forth on the floor, his sobs punctuated by the sound of his tears streaming down his cheeks. His hands curled into fists, his nails digging into his palms. *I'm so fucking stupid. I shouldn't have left her.* “Because her best friend was with her. I asked Evelyn to watch her while we went out. I couldn't think of anyone else.”

The mocking laughter of his sibling rang in his ears, his nerves frayed by the sound. “Maybe one of your brothers or a mate. That would've been the safest option.”

He sneered at Lucifer, his lips pulled back to reveal his teeth. His anguish weighed heavily on him, filling him with a deep sense of despair. He didn't need Pride to rub it in. *I'm a horrible male. Nothing I do keeps her safe.* “I wanted her to wake up to someone familiar. I was thinking of what was best for her. It never crossed my mind that Evelyn might be her fucking stalker.”

Luci rolled his eyes and pulled his phone out of his pocket with a scoff. He typed away on it, his jaw clenched tightly.

“What the fuck are you doing?” Aedin asked.

His sibling raised his violet irises and smiled, revealing a row of perfect white teeth. “I’m calling in backup.”

Twenty-four hours later, the living room was crowded with his brothers and their mates. His siblings could be heard loudly chatting on their phones or barking orders to employees. Evelyn’s apartment had been rummaged through, but no one had seen her in days. Leo sent Billy to her place of work, but they stated she had finished her shift on Thursday, and never returned.

Corvus called Arnold. The hacker and Delilah planned to meet up at Club Lust to see what they could find. Stan ordered his guys to search every dive bar the woman visited. Carrie was settled on the floor, her eyes transfixed on a scrying bowl, while Sylvia and Donna served up hot drinks and snacks. Isabel meditated in the corner, hoping nature would help them. But so far, all their efforts had been fruitless. Becca had vanished without a trace, leaving no clues as to her whereabouts or what her captor was planning.

“How the hell did she get the teeth, though? Or the picture of George? How did she know so much about us? I watched the parking deck tapes a million times. How did I not notice her?” Aedin asked Leo.

“She works at the police station, forensics. She would’ve seen it all firsthand. All investigations have to go through her lab, including anything we as a gang might have been suspected of committing. She was the lead scientist on the Saints’ warehouse explosion. While our connections keep it all hush-hush, that doesn’t mean files on us don’t exist. As for the tapes, were you looking for a woman? No, we all thought it was a man, and she

slipped right past. Plus, she knows everything about Becca. How long have they been friends?”

Aedin slowly shook his head in despair, his hands drooping in his lap. He had been blind, all the clues in front of him. A wave of panic threatened to overwhelm him and he clutched the sofa cushions tightly, determined to keep it at bay.

The sudden, sharp ding of the elevator startled them all. A man with muddy brown irises and hair the same color strode in, a devilish smirk on his lips. He wore a long tan trench coat, and he carried himself with an air of self-assurance. The brothers stared at him in disbelief, their mouths agape and eyes wide with wonder.

“Jesus Christ!” Stan said.

“I don’t go by that name anymore. Call me Nazareth.”

Carrie scrambled to her feet and threw her arms around the man. Tears coursed down her cheeks, smudging her mascara and leaving black streaks on her skin. “Thank you. I can never repay you. Without your help, I wouldn’t have been able...”

His hand stroked her back when her voice trembled. His mouth pulled into a sorrowful smile, the corners of his lips barely turning up. “I’m sorry you had to go through it, but it strengthened you in the end.”

She gave a loud snuffle before nodding and retreating. Sylvia looked at him, her eyes blinking rapidly in the silence. Her tanned face was flushed and her chin trembled.

“You... I...” she stammered.

“I apologize for the pain it caused you, but it had to be done.” He leaned forward and planted a gentle kiss on her forehead, like a father would.

She wiped her nose and peered down at her shoes. He turned to Isabel, her eyelids wide and her mouth agape, as if she had seen a ghost.

“Without your help, I wouldn’t have been able to escape Rapheal,” she said, her chest rising and falling.

“You did that all on your own. I just provided a distraction.”

Lucifer bared his teeth and advanced menacingly. They locked eyes for a long moment, the intensity of their gaze filling the space. A muscle jumped in his brother’s cheek, and rage flashed in his violet irises. “You don’t belong here, God’s son. Your father’s the cause of all of this suffering.”

Nazareth chuckled, shaking his head. He casually shrugged out of his coat and tossed it onto an armchair. He squared off with Pride, and the crackle of tension in the air was almost palpable. “I have every reason to be here. What he did to your mates was unfortunate, but he took mine first. All because I wouldn’t die on a cross.”

Lucifer’s eyes widened in surprise as he quickly stepped back, gesturing for the man to take a seat. Nazareth forced a smile before sinking into the overstuffed chair.

Leo shot his brothers an incredulous look, huffing in disbelief. “But you did? I mean the crucifix and the Resurrection, all that jazz.”

“Yeah, well. He promised if I did it, he would make Mary Magdalene immortal, just like he had done with me, but he did what he does best. He lied. She died of a ripe old age while I held her in my arms. When I confronted him about it, he stated she was barred from ever being reincarnated for loving me. I’ve lived centuries alone, waiting and hoping that someday, someone would turn on him.”

Linnaeus shook his head. “The pictures in your office. They were of her.”

Nazareth nodded, his elbows resting on his knees as he leaned forward. He clasped his fingers together, the tan knuckles turning white with the strength of his grip. “Yes, they were, but that’s not why I’m here. I’ve helped the mates whenever, and however I could, but Becca doesn’t need me to awaken or protect her. You do, Aedin. That damn beast of yours refuses to lift a finger, so wrapped up in his own depression and self-pity, but it’s time for you to become one.”

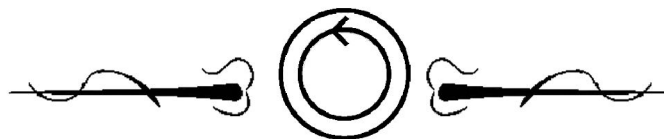
Aedin felt all eyes on him, and he shifted in his seat. The leather creaked beneath him. He heard a deep, resonating growl in the back of his mind, his inner beast stirring. Claws skimmed across his brain and he cringed. “I don’t think he likes that idea.”

Nazareth grinned from ear to ear as he stood up. He strolled toward the couch and the golden glint of his brown eyes was illuminated by the light. Aedin took a deep breath and sank further into the depths of the soft sofa when the man leaned in close. A wave of fear rippled through his chest, although it was not his own. His beast whimpered pathetically, a sound of mournful sadness.

“It’s not his choice.”

Hands gripped his skull, and he screamed as light enveloped him.

Chapter Eighteen



“**W**here are we?” Aedin asked.

Nazareth stood next to him, gazing up at the towering trees of the forest. “Your mind, where your beast goes to hide.”

They moved through the woods, the leaves under their feet making a loud, crunching sound. They were surrounded by a chorus of birdsong and the gentle rustle of a breeze. Aedin’s heart rate slowed when he breathed in the heady aroma of wet dirt and foliage. *Why would my beast be here, of all places?*

When they came into a clearing, the sun beamed down on them, casting a pleasant, yellow glow. A woman danced before them, her infectious laughter filling the air, making Aedin’s body react. His skin was suddenly warm and tingly, his breath catching in his throat. She twirled with a smile, the softness of her platinum blonde hair cascading around her.

“I didn’t know Aedin was expecting anyone. Hello, I’m Shanaera.” Her pale blue eyes sparkled as her lips curved up in a joyous grin.

A gentle rustling of a nearby bush got their attention. Jade irises glowed a brilliant shade of green, glowing in the brush’s darkness. Aedin’s jaw

dropped as his beast stepped out of the shadows, its growl reverberating through the night air. Its emerald wings fluttered gently in the wind. Its chest glimmered with scales in a prismatic hue and lime colored light flickered beneath each one. Two twin horns rose on its forehead, no bigger than a thumb. With a swish of its long tail, the creature's agitation was clear.

"They weren't invited. Run along, little fairy, I'll be there soon."

The girl rushed up to the beast and planted a soft kiss on him before running off into the trees, leaving behind a gentle floral scent. Aedin watched her, feeling an instinctive draw to follow her stirring within him. He attempted to move forward, but a firm hand pressed against his chest, halting his progress.

"She's not for you." He met the beast's gaze and heard its menacing snarl. "What do you want?"

"It's time to stop hiding in this illusion. Shanaera wouldn't have wanted this. It's not why she created it. She's alive in Becca, and she needs you," Nazareth said.

His beast shook its head and let out a deep, rumbling laugh as it spun away. Its tail sliced through the air with a whoosh, its wings quivering. "That woman isn't my little fairy. She's brazen and crass. My love never would've dropped to her knees and sucked me dry the first time we met. No, my Shanaera's innocent and naïve. Pure as the fallen snow."

Nazareth sighed. "Whether she acts the same isn't the point. She's your lover reborn, and she's in danger."

His beast whirled on them, its teeth bared, and anger flashed in its eyes. Aedin's own wings unfurled, and he growled low as he squared off against it, but it made no move toward him.

It stared menacingly at the man beside him. “You’re one to speak. He might not remember, but I do. How many years did you wallow in the illusion my mate created? Your dear Mary was alive and well in a make-believe world.”

Nazareth froze, his chest rising as he took a deep, sharp inhalation. His jaw tightened and his cheeks flushed. “I was wrong. I should’ve been making my father responsible for his actions. But I realized my mistakes, and now it’s your turn to do the same.”

His beast slumped its shoulders, its gaze focused in the direction the woman had gone. Its face was flooded with despair and its Adam’s apple moved in cadence. Aedin’s chest was filled with a deep, aching sorrow that he tried to rub away with his fingers.

“I can’t go through it again. Her death nearly shattered me. She made this illusion with her dying breath. I won’t turn my back on it,” his beast said.

He stepped forward, the warmth of its skin against his palm when he laid his hand on its shoulder. Its eyes, glistening with tears, looked up at him. Sorrow weighed heavily on his heart, and he exhaled a heavy sigh. “Then you doom me to live without the blessing of her love. I require Becca as much as I need air. Please, I’m begging you.”

The vibrant colors of the forest faded before him. He blinked and was momentarily blinded. He squinted at the bright light, and he bared his teeth in anger as hands restrained him.

“Stop, Aedin. There’s nothing any of us can do. I must obey my father, but I’m sorry for what he’s about to do.” The sudden sound of Jophiel’s voice in his ear made him jump with shock.

No, no, no. He gazed up to see Shanaera sobbing on the ground, her jade dress stained with the blood that covered the soil. Burnt pieces of wood

were scattered around her, and she ran her trembling hands over them.

“Dianthis, Rhenesea, Cassandra, and Diana... gone. This can’t... can’t be happening,” she sobbed.

Her eyes filled with tears and streamed down her face as her chest heaved with sobs. She bared her teeth while staring down at her soot coated palms. A scream was ripped from her lungs and she spun toward the light. She raised a hand, the surrounding air pulsing with magic.

“Oh, poor, sad fairy. Do you think you have any effect on me?” God’s booming laughter filled the room, and the angels chimed in with their own.

Shanaera was lifted off her feet, her cries vibrating around them as they chuckled. Blinding ropes of brilliance squeezed her tightly until she whimpered. Aedin roared while wrestling against his bonds, his brothers’ sobs and screams weighing on him.

“I wish Landgrave had left your wings intact so I could pluck them myself. But lucky me, he didn’t touch your ears.” God strode toward her, a knife poised in his hand.

The blade sliced through her flesh like butter. Crimson trickled down her neck, her wails stabbing through Aedin’s heart. He tugged at the cuffs around his wrists, and the warmth of blood flowed into his palms. The sting of his skin peeling away was nothing compared to the ache in his chest.

“Let’s see, what else can we do to this little fairy? How about a whipping?” his uncle suggested.

She was pulled through the air and lashed to the pole that had once held Cassandra. As her gown fell open, Aedin’s heart ached at the sound of her whimpers and wails. A growl rumbled inside of him, his rage building to blinding levels in his gut. His eyes burned red with fury, his muscles

twitching with anger as he tried to break free from the hands that restrained him.

Whips of light slashed across her back. Blood welled to the surface, and she struggled in vain. The wounds deepened with each strike. Her skin peeled away like paper, baring bone and muscle. Her screams slowly faded into labored breaths as she slid down the rough wood.

“We’ve only just begun. Don’t give up yet,” God said, the lashes coming faster.

Her eyelids fluttered, her lips hanging open. Cartilage snapped beneath the force of the attacks, and her spine broke. Her knees gave out, the pole the only thing keeping her upright. Aedin let out an enraged bellow, flecks of saliva flying from his mouth. His sorrow threatened to consume him, but he forced it away, letting his rage boil inside him instead.

Her eyes rose to meet his, her pain and sadness palpable in the pale blue hue. The world around him faded and was replaced by a forest. He quickly stood up, his eyelids wide as he tried to take in all the sounds, smells, and sights. *Where the hell am I?*

“Aedin!”

Shanaera emerged from the brush, her arms fiercely embracing him. She was whole and healthy, with no wounds or tattered clothes. He held her close, the gentle thumping of her heart against his chest.

“Listen to me,” she said, pulling back and cupping his cheeks. “I’m dying, but I can’t leave you. Not like this. Alone and miserable.”

She kissed him, and he savored her sweet flavor, her body pressed against his. “I used the last bit of power I have to create this place for you. I’ll always be here. Just the two of us. I love you with all my heart. My mate, my soul.”

She coughed, blood staining her lips. She raised a trembling hand to them before swiping away the thick red liquid. Pulling back, she stumbled to her feet. "I have to go. My death draws near."

An identical Shanaera materialized next to her, the odor of magic heavy in the air. The illusion knelt down beside him with a laugh, her fingers lightly skimming down his jawline. He peered up at the real one, and his breath caught in his throat. Blood stained her clothing, more pouring from between her lips.

She smiled, her teeth tinted red, her face betraying her sadness and fatigue as she collapsed onto her knees. "I leave you now, my love, but know that this place will stand forever. Deep in your mind, you'll always have me."

Her silhouette began to blur and softly fade. He pushed away the woman in his embrace, rushing to where his mate had knelt. His hands scratched and scraped at the dirt as he bellowed into the night sky. His heart shattered in his chest, his body slumping forward.

Arms wrapped around him, and he heard a gentle murmur in his ear. "What's the matter, Aedin?"

He spun and stared up at the illusion she had left him. She was an exact replica of his love; her pale blue irises sparkling, and a tender smile on her lips. He tenderly cupped her cheeks before softly pressing a kiss to her mouth. She nestled into his lap, the heat of her body pushing away the sadness.

"Nothing, little fairy, nothing at all," he said, closing his eyelids.

He shivered, and his eyes slowly opened. He knelt in a dark abyss, his vision trying to make out shapes in the darkness. His beast was bathed in a warm, flickering light. "I couldn't let her go. When God commanded that

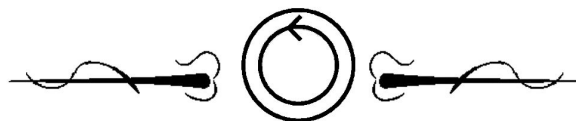
we be split, the illusion went with me. It's been my cage and dream for decades. It won't bring her back through. My fairy's dead, but yours waits for you."

Aedin stood slowly, his heart still heavy with the grief of what he had witnessed. The image of her broken body made him sob, and he wiped away a tear. "I'm sorry for what happened. I wish it hadn't been this way."

His beast stepped closer, its presence becoming ever more ethereal. It laid a hand on his shoulder as it swirled into a mist of lime green, sinking deep into his chest. He awoke with a loud roar, strength coursing through his veins. He gasped in pain when his wings caught on the hard edge of the sofa. With one swift motion, he knocked Nazareth aside and jumped to his feet. The denim of his jeans scraped against his tail as it twitched in a peculiar direction. Tearing at his pants, he sighed when it slid out of the hole he created.

A scream filled his mind, and his eyes widened. *Aedin!* His heart thumped wildly as Becca's voice resounded around him. Tears of pain and sadness streamed down the thread that held them together. The invisible bond between them pulled at him, and he knew he could trust his instincts to guide him to her. He turned to his family, his growl rumbling like thunder in the room.

"Let's go get my mate."



Becca curled into a ball on the bed. She felt like she was in an inescapable cycle of abuse, the same feeling she had as a teenager. Her body ached, and she was sure that her thighs were rubbed raw. The drug coursed through her, making every sensation burn. Her pussy spasmed out of control. She wanted more, but each contraction brought a wave of searing pain. She sobbed uncontrollably, her arms wrapped around her stomach in worry for her child. *Is she still alive?*

Evelyn discovered minor wounds inflicted would heal quickly. She laughed as she bit down on Becca's skin, drawing blood, only to watch it close up. Then the knife had been applied, cutting and tearing open flesh. It knitted back together in seconds to minutes, depending on how deep the cuts were.

"Fucking a'. You're amazing. I always wanted to be more dominant, wreaking pain and suffering, but most people can't take it. I had to settle for being a cuddler, but this changes everything," her captor said with a laugh.

She bolted from the room and came back with a box tucked under her arm. She carefully set it down on the floor beside the bed before kneeling down on the edge. The sound of her wicked laughter vibrated as she dug her hand into the carton. Becca whimpered when the thickest double sided dildo she had ever seen appeared.

"I've always wanted to try this out, but I've been scared that I might hurt something. Not with you, though."

She screamed when the woman shoved it into her. Her pussy stretched to breaking, her body shuddering at the invasion. Evelyn tried to slide onto the other end, but couldn't handle it. So instead, she fingered herself while

forcing Becca to take more and more of it. The agony was unbearable, and she had passed out only to wake to her kidnapper cutting her nipples off.

They grew back slowly, but the itch was like a fire on her skin. The drug made the process miserable, and her flesh prickled as the sensations sent her over the edge. Eventually, her torturer became tired, leaving her alone to wallow in the pain and misery. She let out a long, desperate moan and squeezed her eyes shut, begging for it to all be over. *What will she do to me next?*

“Becca, can you hear me? Come to me. Together, we’ll make it all stop.”

She whimpered when the voice in her head faded in and out of her consciousness. Her heart pounded in her chest, and her breath came in short, ragged pants. Her body was ablaze as the drug thrummed through her.

“It’ll wear off soon. Your body’s already working it out of your system. Be patient and ready.”

She counted the minutes, each one dragging out for an eternity. Each movement caused fire along her nerves, but slowly it subsided, only to be replaced with pain that made her cry out. Tears poured down her face as every part of her ached and throbbed.

“Calm down. It’s going to be okay. Breathe, Becca.”

She tried to push past the agony, but it refused to let go. “I can’t. God, please, make it stop.”

A comforting warmth spread through her body. The anguish and misery melted under a blanket of peace. She sighed, smiling as she drifted on a cloud of contentment.

“The child’s protecting you. Now, come to me. Follow my voice.”

A powerful current tugged her along an unseen river, taking her away from where she had been. She shivered from the cold that crept into her skin and opened her eyes with a start. Gray walls surrounded her like a prison, and she noticed a puddle of murky water beneath her. She rose slowly, her hands and knees creaking as she stood. She inhaled the pungent smell of mildew and mold. A single window let in a beam of sunlight, casting a dismal, grey light across the dreary, damp room. The woman from her dreams sat against a nearby wall.

“Where am I?” she asked.

“My prison. This is the place that quack constructed to hold me and the fantasies of a small child.”

Becca scrambled to her feet and raised her gaze to the ceiling. An abyss of swirling black shimmered down at her, the edges crumbling and flaking. “How do I get you out of here?”

“You will it. Then your memories will return, and your third eye closes. You’ll have access to everything I ever knew and experienced.”

She spun around, her eyelids narrowing as she faced the woman. With a gentle shake of her head, she took a small, determined step toward her. “That’s it? Why did I have to come here to do that?”

Shanaera rose to her feet, meeting her gaze, her blue eyes intense and unwavering. “Because you have to do it from within. You could’ve wished it away all you wanted on the outside, but it would’ve remained intact.”

Becca let out a deep sigh. She held her hands up, palms outward. “Okay, fine. Begone.”

She stared at the prison, its rough stone walls untouched. The woman released a throaty chuckle. “No, it doesn’t work like that. Use your power.”

She ran her tongue over her teeth. *Fucking hell!* “I don’t exactly know how to do that. The visions just come whenever I look at someone. I have no control over it.”

“You think you don’t, but you do. You’re usually too drunk to realize it. Open up, Becca. Feel it as you envision seeing someone’s future and death. Let it wash over you.”

She furrowed her brows and shook her head before squeezing her eyes shut. The old man in the chapel materialized in her mind’s eye, and she could almost hear his voice echoing in the room. An electric current surged through her when her fingers entwined with his. The sound of her pounding heart filled her ears, and a rush of heat coursed through her veins. She breathed in the cool air deeply, feeling it fill her lungs as she sighed.

“That’s it. Imagine we’re somewhere other than this place.”

She thought of the forest from her dreams, envisioning the sun dappling through the canopy. As her vision began to focus, she blinked and gasped in awe at the beauty surrounding her. She was hemmed in by tall trees, the smell of rich soil and lush foliage. A gentle, soothing breeze caressed her cheeks, rustling the leaves like a balm.

“This isn’t the place I would’ve picked.” A powerful, sorrowful scream resonated around them, and her past self visibly shook. “Oh, Aedin.”

They ventured deeper into the thicket; the air becoming more humid and dense with every step. They entered a clearing, and she sucked in a breath. A familiar figure knelt on the ground, his arm outstretched toward the sky. Shanaera furiously clawed at the rope that bound him tightly to a tree.

He was naked, his flesh in tatters, the muscle and bone glistening in the light. His blond hair was limp and plastered to his forehead, slick with sweat. His wings lay beside him in a mess of feathers and blood. When his

restraints fell away, he slumped forward with an agonized cry. His limb dropped to his side, broken.

“It’s okay. I got you. I’m so sorry, Aedin,” Shanaera said.

“Not your fault, little fairy. I didn’t know they would do this,” he mumbled.

The woman knelt, her hands trembling as she cupped his face. His eyelids were swollen closed, and his cheeks were a mess of bruises and cuts.

“Oh, my god. What have they done to you?” Shanaera sobbed, tears falling from her eyes.

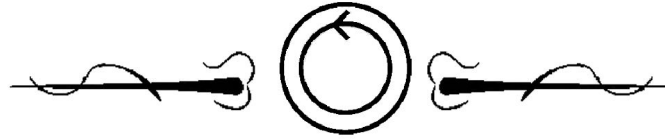
“I’ll heal,” he said, leaning against her. “I let my defenses down. Before I even knew what was happening, they had me roped. I don’t know what it’s made of, but it sapped my strength and slowed my healing.”

As they faded from view, Becca felt a lump rise in her throat, which she forced herself to swallow. The Shanaera at her side squeezed her hand. When their eyes met, a connection formed between them and the sound of her breathing rang in her ears.

“It took him two days to heal. By that time, the elves had massacred each other, but I learned my powers were more than I thought. We left this place and found a home in a distant land. One where nobody had ever heard of fairies. We were blissfully happy, but nothing lasts forever. Soon we received an invitation to Asmodeus’ son’s christening, and our happiness was shattered.” Cool hands cupped her cheeks, and she blinked at the sadness that flitted across the woman’s face. “You need to remember our death, too. This is going to hurt.”

Light exploded in her eyes, and she fell to her knees with a scream.

Chapter Nineteen



A edin descended in a cloud of snow, the flakes clinging to his wings. His brothers joined him, sending more snowflakes into the air. The home before him was a dilapidated pile of wooden planks and broken glass windows. The front porch teetered precariously, the pillars groaning with each gust of wind. It was obvious the roof was in need of repair, with bits of shingles strewn about and multiple areas that had collapsed. He shrugged and his appendages slid back into his flesh with a rustle of feathers.

He let out a deep, menacing growl as he approached the door. Becca's voice in his head had gone silent, and fear made his fingers go numb. He tested the knob before glancing over his shoulder. His brothers nodded, and he slowly turned the handle with a high-pitched squeal. He opened the wooden panel, wincing when it creaked and groaned.

The interior of the building was just as run-down as the exterior, with wallpaper that had lost its luster and paint that was flaking away. A set of stairs led up, the wood aged and decayed, with a faint musky smell in the air. Stan and Leo ventured left while Adam and Corvus turned right. They melted into the shadows of the dark doorways, their footsteps light and

soundless. Linnaeus and Gabriel brushed by Aedin, heading down the hallway beside the staircase.

A hand settled on his shoulder and he looked up to see Lucifer's violet eyes staring intently at the stairs. Together, they cautiously climbed the wobbly steps, the wood bowing beneath their weight. With each footstep, the floorboards squeaked, causing him to inhale sharply. At the top of the landing, they found a door ahead of them and two corridors stretching out in either direction. His brother pushed the wooden panel open, revealing a bathroom that was eerily silent and empty.

They shared a meaningful look before turning away from each other. They both jumped when a woman screamed, the whoosh of a baseball bat ringing in the air as she aimed at their heads. Aedin narrowly avoided a hit across the face and stumbled against the wall. In a split second, Lucifer tackled their assailant, and together, the two careened down the stairs in a flurry of limbs. With a soft thud, they landed at the bottom of the staircase, his sibling flat on his back while Evelyn straddled him, her hands on his neck. She screeched like a banshee; her knuckles were white from the strain of attempting to choke Luci. Stan rushed forward, dragging her off his brother.

Aedin shook his head and turned down the left corridor, leaving his brothers to deal with the woman. With each door he opened, his heart dropped further, the emptiness of the rooms echoing around him. *Where are you, Becca?* He spun and retraced his steps until he was in the other hallway. He snarled as he kicked each entrance, the force of his feet reverberating through the walls until only one remained. The other doors had been locked with a single padlock, but this panel was covered in them, as if someone was trying to trap something inside.

He drew a long, deep breath and then pushed forward with all his might. The wood splintered, scattering across the tiny space. The room was heavy with darkness and the sound of his mate's breathing echoed from the mattress. He stumbled to her side, and a sob escaped his lips. His hand cupped her cheek, crusted with dried blood. She was naked upon the stained and dusty sheets. Her pajamas lay in tattered pieces on the floor beside the bed. Her skin was cold to the touch, and he pressed two fingers to her neck, the faint beat of her heart making him sigh in relief.

"Becca? Wake up, little rockstar. Look at me." His voice cracked, and he tucked his head into her shoulder for comfort. "I'm sorry. I'll do better at keeping you safe. From now on, you'll never leave my sight."

"You swear?"

When he looked up, he was met with a mesmerizing pair of greenish-blue eyes, causing him to gasp. A gentle, sleepy smile spread across her face. His heart swelled with love as his lips greeted hers, the sweet taste of her filling his senses. Gently, her hand cupped his cheeks, and she drank from him like a parched traveler, savouring a cool drink of water.

"Let's go home," she whispered.

He pulled the sheet around her, cringing at the gritty dust and dirt that clung to the fabric. He had been so intent on rescuing her, the last thing on his mind had been to bring a blanket. They left the bedroom behind and arrived at the top of the staircase, pausing for a moment to take in the scene before descending them.

Lucifer bared his teeth and growled menacingly at the woman Stan was restraining. His perfect visage was marred by the streaks of drying crimson on his cheeks. Evelyn raged and hissed, her lips curled back to reveal her

own snarl. His brothers' gazes were heavy as they looked up at Aedin, their faces filled with questions.

"What do you wanna do with her?" Adam asked.

Aedin shook his head, his mind clouded by uncertainty. Becca tugged him, and the warmth of her touch made him glance down.

"Put me down," she stated.

He creased his forehead, but complied with her request, despite the aching in his heart. He fought the urge to snatch her back.

His mate approached the woman, her gaze burning with intensity. "I thought you were my friend. I bared my soul to you and you betrayed me."

Evelyn shook her head in disbelief, her mouth hanging open while salty tears trickled down her face. "I love you, Becca. How can you choose him over me? Didn't we have a good time?"

"You cut off my fucking nipples!"

His brothers winced and shuffled their feet in discomfort. His own skin crawled to hear what the woman had done. *Goddamn, what the fuck? Who does that shit to someone they supposedly loved?*

"But... but you healed. It was fine. Besides, how many times did you cum?" Her friend gazed up at Becca with a mix of hope and fear, her chest heaving as she slowly understood what was happening. Panic showed in her gaze, and she glanced around at them. Her lips trembled, her breath coming in rapid gasps.

"You drugged me. Those weren't real orgasms. They were forced on me." Becca's face filled with fury, her eyes glowing like embers. "How about you spend the rest of your life in a fucking nightmare, just like you tried to do to me?"

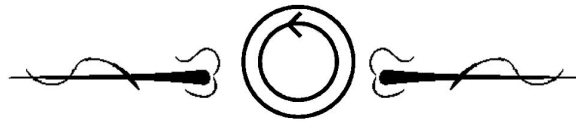
The woman's expression twisted, horror making her mouth fall open. She struggled against Stan, and her screams echoed around them. Wrath released her when she convulsed. She landed on the floor with a dull thud, her nails digging at her own flesh in thick streaks of red. Her eyes bulged wide, and a thin film of saliva formed on her lips.

"What did you do?" Lucifer asked.

Becca tilted her head back to meet his gaze. Her expression was stoic, no longer reflecting her rage. "I created an illusion. An endless cycle of abuse and terror."

She marched up to Aedin and raised her arms. He smiled warmly and gently lifted her, holding her close to his chest.

Leo whistled low and chuckled. "Damn, our women are vicious."



It took weeks for Becca's emotional wounds to heal from what Evelyn had done, but the thought of never having to experience it again was like a soothing ointment to her spirit. When they made it to the penthouse, Ezeal had been standing in the living room, expectant. The old woman had tenderly guided her up the stairs, clucking softly. The child had managed to survive the assault, in spite of the ordeal. When Becca was no longer in pain and her health was restored, she opened up to Aedin about her condition. He gaped at her in shock, as if she had sprouted an extra head.

He chuckled. "That's not possible. Demons can only procreate if they wish to. I made sure that my seed wasn't viable."

At his words, a deep sadness settled in her chest. *Here it comes. This is where he throws me away, like everyone else has done.*

"Well, maybe with a human woman, but mates are different. They're created to bear your children. All the power in the world wouldn't make your sperm ineffective in her womb." Ezeal huffed and glared at him, her lips pinched. "If that's all you have to say, then you can leave. I won't have you stressing her out. The pregnancy will become more difficult as the child grows. We don't know if the babe will have wings, horns or if she'll be a normal human. Diana was lucky with hers. The infant was born ordinary, though she labored for many hours..."

Becca's attention was completely focused on her lover, and the woman's voice slowly faded away. Aedin's face drained of color as he gazed down at her, his mouth hanging open in shock. Her heart thudded in her chest, and her breath caught in her throat. *Say something, anything.*

He blinked and crawled into the bed, his arms wrapping around her tightly. "Dad.... I'm a dad. Satan help us, but damn, I wasn't prepared for this. I never thought about having a kid," he said, while stroking his fingers down her back. "We've gotta tell my brothers and my parents. Shit, we have to get a nursery set up. I'm going to have to talk to Corvus about an addition. Wait, what's the gender?"

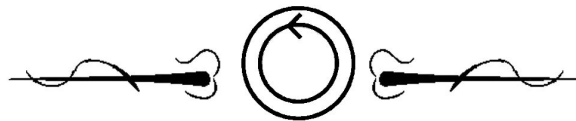
"A girl," Becca whispered.

His tears ran down his face in a continuous stream. Her heart aching, she reached up and wiped them away, her own threatening to spill over.

"A daughter with dark hair and greenish-blue eyes. Pink! We need everything in pink," Aedin said.

Becca shook her head, the overwhelming dread making her throat tight. “No pinks, peaches, or pretty pastels. She’s a spitfire just like her mamma. She needs reds, blacks, and maybe some green.”

He laughed, “Whatever you say, little rockstar.”



A Month Later

Becca sat on the sofa, her fingers skilfully plucking away at the strings of her guitar. She crooned a melody, letting the lyrics fill her mind before quickly jotting them down on the paper. She filled her time with songwriting now that Red Riot had disbanded. Without a drummer, there wasn't much of a band.

Jessica had joined Urban Fire on tour as they traveled from city to city, the sound of the roaring crowd following in their wake. At the afterparty, she was captivated by the lead singer's magnetic presence, and the connection they formed grew into something more. The last time Becca had seen her, her finger had been adorned with an engagement ring, and a contented smile was spread across her face.

Aedin offered to find new bandmates for Red Riot, but Becca politely refused. She had no desire for fame, instead finding joy in the sale of her songs. Life had settled into a mundane rhythm. She opened her eyes to the

comforting feel of the man she loved resting beside her every morning. Over breakfast, they'd talk and laugh before he left for work, leaving her to the calm and beauty of her music. On some days, she'd tag along with him to auditions, seeing the bright, hopeful gazes of the bands.

At night, they curled up on the couch watching movies and chuckling together. Weekends were spent in the club, organizing, and setting up shows or visiting with his family. She quickly learned that he was the youngest, and she noticed the extra affection from everyone toward him.

Tabitha Gibbons reached out to her, wanting to be closer after she had witnessed her only child almost die. Initially, Becca had been incensed, but then Lucifer shared the agony he felt from not knowing his father. She reluctantly visited her mother every Thursday for a midday meal. Every conversation was another step toward healing their rocky relationship.

She smiled from her spot on the sofa as the familiar ding of the elevator signaled Aedin's arrival. She moved her guitar to the side and waited for him to cradle her in his arms. He swept her up off the couch and kissed her passionately until the room seemed to swirl around them.

He growled and nuzzled into her neck. "I wish they weren't coming tonight."

She giggled, shoving at him until he set her down on her feet. She placed her hand on her belly and felt the warmth of the life inside. So far, her pregnancy had progressed without a hitch.

"You love your family. Besides, it's our turn to cook Sunday dinner," she said.

Two hours later, she watched as the brothers and their mates filled their plates. People were squeezed in at the table, with some having to eat in the living room due to the lack of seating. She let out a content sigh; her mouth

broke into a wide smile. She had never had a family to call her own, but the laughter and loving embraces felt like the missing piece of her life. This was where she belonged.

Something pulled on her shirt and when she looked down; she saw Will, Isabel's youngest, standing next to her. His face lit up with a warm grin when she knelt beside him.

He skimmed a finger over her round belly. "She's special like me."

She blinked at him, a bewildered smile on her lips. *What the hell does that mean?*

"Who?" she asked.

"Your baby, Helena. For centuries, the two of us have searched for each other, but he will come. In the past, he always made it to her before me, but not this time. We'll save her. I have the Princes on my side. My brother doesn't stand a chance."

Becca hadn't used her third eye since she had learned how to control it, not wanting to know what the future held, but she opened it slowly. A gasp fell from her lips and she stammered. "You're... You're..."

The tiny boy hushed her with a finger to her mouth. He leaned his forehead to hers, his eyes sparkling like the stars in the night sky. "Don't tell anyone. It's a secret."

She blinked, the vision fading from her mind and leaving a chill down her spine. She managed to stand upright, her hands shaking as her feet found their footing. The child let out a high-pitched giggle before dashing into the bustling crowd. He sprinted toward Corvus and clutched the big man's leg tightly. Greed smiled and wrapped his arms around Will, his face filled with the warmth of love.

"Are you okay?"

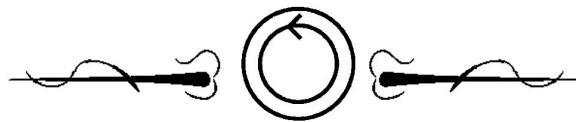
She looked up to see Lucifer staring down at her with a flicker of concern in his eyes. Her lips curved into a forced smile and she laughed softly, her gaze lingering on the small child. “He’s a lot to take in. That’s all.”

Luci’s lips curled into a smirk as he casually leaned against the doorjamb. “Did he make some kind of prediction? He’s always right, our tiny prophet. He even warned Corvus about Rapheal. What did he say to you?”

Her hand slowly moved to her stomach, feeling the gentle curve of her abdomen. *Abel will come for her. According to my vision, my child’s soul has been struck down many times by Cain’s brother. What can I do to prevent it from repeating? Should I tell Aedin?*

She stared at the little boy and he smiled, a quiet giggle escaping from his lips, his finger pressed to them. *No, let’s see where this goes. He’s just a kid now, and she isn’t even born yet. We have time.*

“He told me my daughter would be named Helena.”



Becca said her goodbyes and heaved a sigh of relief when the elevator doors closed. With a groan, she rolled her shoulders in an attempt to ease the ache before trudging to the kitchen to clean up. She couldn’t contain her laughter as Aedin’s arms wrapped around her from behind, sending a pleasant warmth through her.

“I have to do the dishes,” she protested when he dragged her to the sofa.

“Hm, well, I’m not done with dessert. So it’ll have to wait.”

He swept her up in his embrace and fell back onto the soft, plush cushions of the couch. She laughed, wiggled her hips over the hard bulge beneath her. His tiny horns appeared on his forehead and the scales on his skin glimmered in the light. He growled low and pulled her blouse over her head, his palms landing on her breasts. She gasped when he tweaked each nipple. They were more sensitive now than ever since Evelyn had cut them off. She even had to have them re-pierced, the pain worse than the first time.

As she raised his shirt, her hands lightly grazed the hard planes of his stomach. His muscles twitched under her caressing fingers and he hissed when she tugged on the hoops in his own tight peaks. She had convinced him to get them done when she did hers, along with other things. She whimpered when he bucked beneath her; the vibrations shook her body. His palms left her breasts, attacking her jeans.

“I need you, little rockstar. Fuck!”

She stood from the couch and slid her pants off while he struggled out of his. She licked her lips as she gazed down at his erection. When she touched the thick bar that bisected his cock, it was cool and smooth, making her mouth water. She swirled her tongue across the tip while he hissed.

He pulled her away, lifting her over his hard shaft, and slamming into her. She cried out, the top metal ball hitting her g-spot while the lower rubbed along her inner walls. *Convincing him to get an apadravya piercing was the best idea ever.*

She rode him with abandon, his hands gripping her thighs tightly. He growled low and met her every downstroke. Her nails dug into his stomach

as he flicked her clit. The hoop looped through it quivered and made her gasp. The slick sound of their flesh coming together drove her higher.

Becca's muscles tightened, her mouth dropping open when he hit just the right spot. Warmth gushed down her thighs, coating his hips in her cum. Aedin pressed hard against her bundle of nerves, and she screamed his name as she squirted.

"Fuck yeah, little rockstar."

Her pussy clamped down, her head falling backward. Her breath caught in her throat and her heart thudded rapidly in her chest. He flipped her over onto her stomach, a groan dropping from her lips as he slipped out of her, but she didn't remain empty. His cock made her eyes roll when he snarled and slammed back into her. He wrapped his palm around her neck and pushed her face into the cushions. His other hand held her hips tightly, raising her up with ease.

His balls slapped against her thighs, the sound loud over her whimpers. She was in a never-ending orgasm that rose and fell like waves. He pulled out of her, his warm mouth licking at her juices.

"F-f-fuck me," she gasped.

His fingers smeared her warmth up to her asshole, his tongue feasting on her. He plunged his digits into her, and her pussy contracted hard around them. He trailed a path of fire over her taint before plunging his tongue into her ass. She twitched and wiggled beneath him. He growled before biting down on her buttocks. She screamed, her mind engulfed in a haze of euphoria.

"Aedin, oh god, Aedin!"

He pushed her over the edge, her body tensing as she came once more. More liquid poured out of her, spraying the cushions and his arm.

“I love it when you fucking squirt.”

He nudged his cock into her asshole while his smooth tail drove into her wet pussy. She gasped as he filled her, stretching her wide. Her nails dug deep into the sofa, and her breath caught in her throat when he slid deeper. He smacked her buttocks roughly; the sting made her shiver. He gripped her hair, pulling her back against his chest.

“This tight ass feels amazing wrapped around my big cock,” he whispered in her ear.

He bit down hard on her lobe, and sensations coursed through her. Her ears were incredibly sensitive after meeting Selena, despite not being pointed. He could make her cum by just licking and sucking them. His hand crept down her stomach to her clit, flicking and rubbing in slow circles.

“I can’t, I can’t,” she stuttered.

“Oh, but you can, little rockstar.”

Aedin snarled the words, her mouth falling open as he strummed her like a guitar. Becca felt taut, as if he had tuned her too tightly. He pounded her ass while his tail vibrated inside of her, every inch of him making her moan. Her mind completely shut down, the only sound in her head a silent scream. Her whole body shook as she came, and he growled low before smashing into her one final time, his wings unfurling. His cock twitched, the metal balls rubbing sensually against her inner walls.

He pushed her forward and slid out of her. His cum leaked down her thighs. He spread her ass cheeks and hummed. The moist tip of his tail rubbed the fluid into her flesh while his soft touch of his feathers on her skin made her shiver.

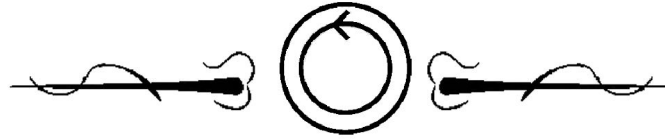
“This is how you should look all the time. Thoroughly fucked with cum dripping out of every hole.”

She smiled and bit her lip. “It’s only in one. I have two others.”

He chuckled, leaning over her. “I guess I have my work cut out for me.”

He effortlessly scooped her up and carried her up the stairs to the bedroom. She clung to him tightly. Her cheek pressed against his shoulder as her hand drifted across the gentle feathers of his wings. Her body was thrumming with the aftermath of what they had done and would do again, but her heart had never been fuller.

Chapter Twenty



As Becca walked down the dark hallways of the lower levels of the club, her hum filled the air with a gentle melody. She clutched a tray tightly, her fingers curling around the edges, and the steam from the bowl of soup tickled her cheeks. When she approached Evelyn's cell, a male envy demon bowed low, his eyes never leaving hers.

He stood tall, and his teal scales glowed with a soft light. His face was sharply angled, narrowing into a pointed snout. Jagged teeth lined his mouth, and multiple horns jutted out the back of his skull. She could sense the power radiating from the demon's true form, its claws glinting menacingly and its long tail swishing through the air. He opened the door for her, and she gracefully glided in with a smile.

Her former friend thrashed on the bed, her eyes bulging from her sockets. Evelyn's skin was an ashen hue, and her limp locks were draped around her pale, sunken face. The woman's roots had grown out, revealing her original blonde hair color. She had struggled against her bindings, and her wrists were bleeding. The blood stained the white sheets, and Becca tsked. She set

the platter on the table and sighed, the aroma of the food filling the room as she hovered her hand over her prisoner's forehead.

The illusion formed, and she found herself in a desolate desert, with the only movement coming from the gusts of wind blowing crimson sand around. She looked up at the black sky, and the only thing that could be seen was a blood-red moon, casting its eerie light on the landscape. She heard the faint sound of something moving, and she followed the noise. Climbing over a nearby dune, her face broke out into a wide smile at the scene before her.

Evelyn lay on the ground, nothing more than a naked torso. Monsters that resembled werewolves surrounded her and feasted on her limbs. Their claws dug deep into the flesh, their fur coated and matted with the gore of their kill. Becca shuddered at the noise their teeth made as they broke through bones, slurping the marrow from inside of them.

The woman stared up at the darkness of the sky, her breath coming in short, uneven pants. The flatness of her eyes indicated she was slowly dying, yet it wasn't a physical death. As if on cue, the wasteland faded, replaced by a massive jungle.

The surrounding trees seemed to go on forever, their trunks as wide as buildings and draped with vines as thick as Becca's thighs. Sweat beaded on her forehead, and moisture trickled down her back. Evelyn's screams resonated through the dense brush. The woman stumbled out of a bush with a gasp, and a large skeletal figure fell upon her. Rotted flesh hung off it in tatters, the odor making Becca hold her fist up to her nose. *God, that's enough to gag a maggot.*

It bit down on the girl's shoulder, tearing her skin in chunks while ripping her clothes off. A thick penis made of bone rose between its legs, and Becca

almost laughed out loud. *That's not very realistic.* It forced its incredibly massive cock into Evelyn's dry ass, her shrieks of pain bloodcurdling.

Becca shook her head as she let go of the illusion and lightly tapped her fingertip on the woman's warm forehead. "Wakey, wakey. Time for lunch."

Her ex-bandmate released a sound that was a mix between a sob and a sigh. Becca dramatically rolled her eyes and leaned in close to Evelyn. Her irises burned with rage as she looked down at the woman who had attempted to rob her of her happiness. "You should really be grateful for the food. I could just let you waste away down here as you live out your fantasies in your mind."

"Fuck you!"

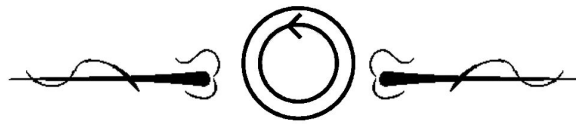
"Okay then. Guess you're not hungry." She turned toward the exit, but when she spun around, a joyful grin spread across her face. "Oh, a few of Aedin's employees noticed your piercings. They're suckers for shiny things."

She opened the door with a carefree laugh. The envy demons shuffled in, their eyes glowing with malice when they focused on their victim. Evelyn stared at them in fear, her chest heaving as she struggled to draw in breaths. The light bounced off their shimmering scales, and their tails twitched with eagerness. They shifted restlessly, their feet tapping impatiently against the floor while they waited for Becca's command.

"They'll change your sheets and dress your wounds. Afterward, they're going to rip out your studs and hoops. Then we have a surprise!" She cracked a wide smile and clapped her hands together in exaggerated joy. "Some employees from the other clubs are also requested some time with you. Isn't that nice of them? I hear the incubi are hung like horses. You should enjoy it."

When the woman gazed up at her in horror, her grin evaporated like morning dew. “I’m tired of sustaining your illusion. I need all the energy I can get to deal with this pregnancy. This baby’s going to be my death, I swear. So, I’m handing you off. Have a good life, Evelyn. Well, what’s left of it.”

She waved to the demons, the metal door handle cold against her skin as she slammed it shut. Screams echoed down the hall, rising and falling in a hypnotic rhythm. She cocked her head to the side, tapping her toe in perfect synchrony. *That beat? It would make a wonderful song.* Lyrics formed in her mind and she pushed aside all thoughts of her ex-friend.



Michael glared at the security monitor, his chin resting in his palm. Jack O’Neal had been toiling away on the database for months, with no success. Even now, the man gazed at the computer in confusion, his brow furrowed in concentration. The archangel impatiently drummed his fingers on the desk, the sound ringing in the room. The door creaked open, but he kept his gaze fixed on the screen. “What do you have to report?”

His brother, Zadkiel, shuffled his feet, and his loud gulp filled the air. He coughed and bit his lip, his eyes darting around the office as he tried to contain his nervousness. “Aedin has been reunited with his mate, despite your efforts.”

Michael glared up at the purple-haired bastard while rage boiled in his gut. He growled and rose to his feet, adjusting his jacket as he did. He walked to the large windows that overlooked Heaven. *It's all falling apart. Fuck!* He lunged toward the nearest object and hurled it with force against the glass. The chair bounced off with a dull thud, leaving no trace of its collision. He spun around to face his brother, his hands crashing down on the desk.

“What happened?” he asked through clenched teeth.

“I’m not sure. I know the girl cut her deep enough to kill her. She shouldn’t have survived what Evelyn did to her. The suggestion I planted in her friend’s mind should’ve made the woman homicidal, and blocked any visions the little seer could’ve foreseen.”

Michael’s laughter rang through the air as he spread his arms wide. “Well, something went wrong. What about your charge?”

His brother tilted his chin higher, confidence radiating from his pores. “I’ve pinpointed her location and the cult’s moving in.”

He shook his head. “No, you go. No more depending on these damn monkeys. All they do is fuck shit up.”

Zadkiel’s eyes widened in surprise, his lavender irises reflecting the shock on his face. “But that’s direct interference. It goes against what our father commanded us to do.”

Michael ran his fingers through his hair, the soft strands tugging, and laughed out loud. *Why must everyone question me? Am I not fucking God?*

“I don’t give a fuck anymore. End it now and kill her. When she’s reincarnated, your bond will be intact and we’ll smother her in her cradle. We finish this.”

Zadkiel looked at him, his mouth agape, like he had gone mad. With a smirk, Michael arose and confidently walked around the desk. His brother shrank back as he towered over the shorter man, the air between them thick with tension. His sword stood at the ready, just a burst of power away. “Do you have something to say?”

His sibling shook his head, his hand shaking when he reached for the doorknob. Fear was written across his face, and Michael’s cock harden as his brother slipped from the room. *Now’s not the time.*

He pivoted, and the force of his fists against the desk thudding. “Fuck, fuck, fuck!”

He heard the satisfying crack of the wood splintering beneath his strikes. He spun around and scanned the office for his next target. Grabbing the chair he had thrown, he pounded it against the tiled floor. Despite the sound of the metal denting and the fabric ripping, his rage still simmered.

His tantrum was interrupted by the sudden buzz of the intercom, and he responded by pressing the button with a jolt. “What!”

“Umm, Michael?”

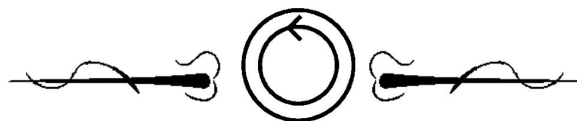
His fury evaporated like smoke in the wind when Jack O’Neal spoke. He licked his lips and smoothed his hair back. He closed his eyes, inhaling deeply, trying to steady himself before answering. “What is it?”

“I think I did it. At least, I got the permission off of Lucifer. I still have to transfer it to you, but I’ve made progress.”

He smiled and sighed, his shoulders slumping. He stared down at the rough, splintered wood of the broken desk beneath his hands. *Maybe things are looking up.* “Good job, Jack. Keep at it.”

He hung up the call, and a satisfied smile spread across his face. He slowly turned, taking in the vast sight of his kingdom laid out before him.

It'll all be mine, and Lucifer will suffer every day. I'm the best son.



Luna scooped more dirt into the hole with a huff. The bodies of the cult members that lined the bottom of the shallow grave would soon attract predators, and she needed to work fast. Tears stained her cheeks, their salty taste lingering on her lips as the sadness weighed her down. *I just want to be left alone. Why do they keep pursuing me?*

She let out a deep sigh as the last bit of soil landed with a soft, muffled thud. She slumped to the ground, and her breath wheezed from her lungs. No matter how many she killed, they kept coming. Each time they found her, she would hastily grab her belongings and flee to somewhere else, but it was never enough.

As she shifted, her concentration deepened and the tattoo of the wolf on her upper arm began to give off a faint, blue glow. Her claws dug deep into the earth while she shook, and the dirt on her fur flew up in a muddy cloud. *Fuck, I need a bath.*

Her paws moved swiftly through the trees, the scent of sap and pine needles tickling her nose. The chirping of birds and the buzzing of bugs filled the air, making her smile inwardly. The animals feared her in her human form, but now she was just another predator on the prowl.

Not that the other wolves of this forest viewed her in that light. No matter what type of creature she changed into, their eyes followed her, sensing something was amiss. They didn't attack her, but they didn't accept her. It was a lonely existence being alone, but one she refused to give up if it meant going back to the cult.

She shifted once more, this time into a turtle, and glided through the shallows of the creek. The cold water ran over her skin, washing away the grime, although she barely felt it. As she climbed out the other side, her body reformed from its animal shape to its human form. She sighed and laid down on the sandy bank, the sound of the wind rustling the leaves above her.

The dark silhouette of the pines stood out against the star-studded, cloudless sky. Her mind drifted, stopping at the image that she saw in her nightmares. Blood and screams flashed behind her eyelids, the sight of reddish-brown eyes staring down at her in shock. She involuntarily shuddered and tried to force the memory out of her thoughts. The invisible tattoo of the bear itched on her thigh, tingling and burning. She scratched at it absently. No matter how persistent the urge, she refused to give in and shift into that animal again.

A twig snapped, and she instinctively flipped onto her stomach. Her eyes slowly swept the forest, her whole body tensing as each hair stood on end. She saw a shadowy figure move between two trees, and her breath caught in her throat. She shifted, the familiar sensation of transforming filled her as she crawled to her hands and knees until she was the wolf again. Her vision sharpened, and she snarled. A man approached her with striking lavender irises and matching wings.

“I’m done with this cat-and-mouse game, Luna. I’ve been ordered to kill you.” Zadkiel gave a wicked smirk, his sharp katana materializing in his fists.

The blade shimmered under the light of the moon, and the purple leather of the hilt creaked at his touch. She let out a deep howl and sprinted through the thicket. She could hear him getting closer, his angry shouts resounding through the trees and making her heart race. *Don’t lead him back to the camper. Lose him in the water.*

She yelped when he landed in front of her, his blade nicking her ear. She spun and her paws began to carry her down the path toward the lake. *I need speed. This fucker’s fast.* She shifted, her long legs feeling like they could go on forever as she ran, the endless expanse of green passing by her. If a human saw her now, they would feel a chill of fear run down their spine, thinking a cheetah had escaped from the zoo.

Luna moved so rapidly; it was like the trees became one big blur, the breeze whistling in her ears. Her heart raced when the sparkling water came into view. *Almost there, just a little further.* Pain lanced through her hind leg, and she stumbled. Rocks and gravel bit into her fur, her body sliding down the bank. The warm gush of blood made her hiss, and she whimpered when she stared back at the tiny metal star embedded in her flank.

“Give up, druid. I can’t have you falling into Stan Wrath’s hands.”

The angel leapt out of the treeline, his words ringing in the air. He uttered a curse when he became entangled with the vines and weeds. She dragged herself closer to the water; the pebbles dug deep into her soft belly. “There’s no escape. I’m sorry, but I’m a son of God, and I must obey.”

He towered over her, his sword held in both palms, pointed down at her heart. She heard her own sharp inhalation as she shifted. He blinked down

at the ground, his knuckles creaking while his grip on the hilt loosened. She slithered in the water with every ounce of her strength. The noise of his profanities reverberated through the liquid, his fists breaking through the surface when he reached for her.

She raced through the lake, her snake form leaving ripples in its wake. A path of blood trailed behind her, and she cursed her bad luck. She needed to heal before something worse ate her. Heading toward a bank, she crawled out on her hands and knees, once more human. She collapsed on the sand as her lungs burned.

She sat up haltingly and prodded along the wound. It was deep, but would close soon enough. Thankfully, the star had fallen out when she became a water moccasin. She staggered to her feet, feeling a gentle breeze brush against her newly healed ear, and gazed out at the still waters. *First cultists, now angels. What the fuck? How are they finding me?*

She limped her way through the forest, the smell of damp foliage and earth filling her nose. She needed to move on. When she recalled the words of her attacker, her jaw tensed and her teeth ground together. *Stan Wrath's the source of all my problems, always has been.*

Luna had hid from him for two decades, never daring to go near any of the towns the Seven Princes had settled in. No matter how much she tried, she felt the pull of her soul longing for his presence when she traveled farther than a few hundred miles away from him, their connection too powerful to disregard. She had stayed on the outskirts, never wandering too close, keeping her distance. If she was threatened, she would quickly move to a safer location.

She shuddered when his beaming face came to mind, but she pushed it aside. *That was before.* Long ago, when all the mates were alive, the

demons surrounding them with love and safety, back when she had been called Shadi of the Elms. At that time, Luna's only mission was to exact revenge on the warlord that had damaged a dryad's home by ravaging part of her sacred grove.

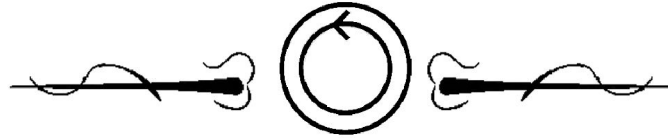
But that life had been taken away by a spiteful and vengeful God. The warmth of Stan's smile that used to light up her world was gone, never to return after what she had done. When her camper came into view, a wave of relief washed over her and she let out a deep breath, banishing any lingering thoughts of her mate. The wound on her side had healed, and she raced to the door, flinging it open. She moved quickly, her hands deftly packing and securing her things after she had dressed.

She clicked her tongue, and Fat Boy plopped into the passenger seat. His light green eyes stared up at her, and she ran a hand through his silvery gray fur, scratching under his chin. The sound of his loud purring filled the cab as he curled into a ball. *That was easy.* Normally, the feline would run and hide when it was time to leave.

Luna slid into the driver's side, cranking the key in the ignition. The motor coughed and spluttered. When she pumped the gas, the engine came to life with a thunderous growl. The headlights lit up the road like a beacon, and her RV jolted as it began to move out of the campsite. *I can't take on Zadkiel by myself. Some fucking guardian angel!* A chill ran up her spine, and she thumped a hand on the steering wheel. *There's only one solution. Fucking Stan goddamned Wrath.*

Sneak Peek of Wrath

Book Six of the Seven Princes of Sin



Luna pulled her RV into her campsite, the engine rattling to a stop, and sighed in relief. She had driven through the night, her hands gripping the wheel tightly as she tried to outrun Zadkiel. The angel was a challenge that seemed too great for her to face alone. For a shifter like her, a few cultists here and there weren't a problem, but a celestial being was an entirely different story. Only one option was available to her: Stan Wrath. She just needed to convince him to help her. The Whispering Pines campground was a short drive of only twenty miles from the outskirts of the bustling city. From here, she could set off to Club Wrath at a brisk trot without feeling any strain.

Her eyes were heavy with fatigue, her body desperate for a nap, but she managed to continue. She chocked the wheels of her home and then felt it vibrate as she leveled it. After double-checking that the RV was securely parked, she trudged into her bedroom, her feet dragging on the floor. Fat Boy meowed plaintively and rubbed his body against her legs, begging for her affection. With a tired groan, she sank down onto the mattress, not even bothering to take off her clothes or pull up the covers. The cat jumped up

next to her, his soft, silvery gray fur brushing against her cheek as he got comfortable beside her on the pillow.

She had been with Fats for years and was thankful to have him as a friend. It was a lonely existence on the run and in hiding from a mate, but he made it a little less sad. The deep rumble of his purr reverberated through her body as she ran her fingers over his soft fur. She smiled fondly at the memory of the day he had stumbled upon her.

Just when she had been about to give up, he had come into her life and filled her with hope. She sobbed as she sat beside a freshly dug grave, the sight of the cultists' lifeless bodies sprawled at the bottom, a reminder of the danger she had narrowly escaped. The remorse from her sins and crimes were a heavy burden on her soul, leaving her in a deep depression. The meow of a scruffy kitten caught her attention, and she couldn't believe it when the tiny creature ambled towards her through her tears.

Although he was covered in ticks and fleas, the soft purr he made when she picked him up filled her with joy. His lime green eyes were full of love and admiration, and her heart leapt at the sight. She clutched him to her chest, the warmth of his body against hers as she rushed back to her caravan. After a good bath and a bowl of tuna, he curled up on her pillow, the sound of his purring creating a pleasant buzz in the room. She dubbed him Smokey, but the name never quite fit. As he got bigger, she affectionately called him Fats, Fat Boy, or even Fatso Domingo, and he would beam with pride. Now he was her everything, her reason for waking up in the morning. Without her, he would have been easy prey for a larger predator.

She squeezed her eyes shut, trying to escape the dull, throbbing ache pounding behind them. As she drifted off to sleep, the sound of crickets

chirping in the night lulled her into a peaceful state. Vivid images of her days with the cult played out like a movie in her dreams. It was a great honor for Gerald Barrett, the High Priest, to bestow her name upon her, or so she was told by numerous members. He informed her she was the chosen one, meant for greater things, but he warned her it wouldn't be easy.

She was kept away from the other children and taught the secrets of powerful blood magic. If she did something wrong, she was punished severely. So many times, Gerald had plied the belt to her, a sick and twisted smile on his face. When her first monthly flow arrived, she looked up to see him standing in the doorway of her bedroom. He said his God demanded that he train her harshly so she could serve her master better. Every night, she was expected to perform physical acts to please her future husband, leaving her feeling like she was trapped in an endless nightmare.

On her fifteenth birthday, he led her into a church, the musty smell of aging wood overpowering the space. Her heart raced as each step caused the boards to creak, and she worried the planks would give way beneath her. The pews formed a route that ascended to an altar, lit up by the many candles that stood around it. Mirrors adorned the walls, each one carved with a representation of a vice. He stopped before her, his face illuminated with a bright smile. She took in the sight of the bold lettering; the shadows deepening the grooves. Her skin crawled as she read the menacing words scrawled across it: *Wrath*.

“Tonight, we’ll summon him, Luna. The only being in all this world and the next that you belong to. All your training has been for this moment.” His face lit up with a beaming grin, his eyes radiating warmth. “You don’t remember, but when you came here, you were bound to the archangel

Zadkiel. It was his duty to make sure you never met your mate, Satanas, Master of Wrath, but we will rectify this.”

Gerald pulled her away from the mirror and towards a large, white chalk circle that was drawn on the floor in front of the altar. She stared down at it, her fingers growing numb with fear as a chill ran down her spine. Women in long, red cloaks stood close by, their whispers echoing. The surrounding air grew thick with their hungry stares, making her breath come faster.

“Go with them. They’ll bathe and prepare you for your wedding night. You must look your best.” He leaned in and his lips brushed her ear, the faintest sound of his words a whisper. “Don’t disappoint me, Luna. If Wrath doesn’t like you, then you have outlived your usefulness. Remember that.”

She took one step at a time, her attendants guiding her from the room. The women bathed her before carefully rubbing fragrant oils into her skin and gently slipped the delicate white wedding dress over her head. Despite the fear that crept up her spine, an ember of hope flickered in her chest. *I might actually get out of here. Away from the High Priest, his groping hands, and his nightly visits.*

But her pain wasn’t over yet. They needed a sacrifice to power the ceremony, and she was forced to wield the knife. Tears rolled down her cheeks when Gerald gripped her hand tightly and made her slash across the throat of a young girl, crimson pooling at her feet and staining her gown. She killed five people in total to have enough blood to open the portal, her hands covered in the sticky essence of their lives. Her lips quivered as she spoke the words from the scarlet book, her vision blurred and rivulets running down her face.

The circle glowed with an intense light, and the High Priest’s hissing echoed through the room. When she glanced at him, she saw his eyes

twinkle with eagerness and his wide grin reveal a row of perfect teeth. In the center of the prison, a shadowy figure flickered and then solidified, accompanied by a low, echoing groan. She blinked, and her breath caught as a man with a shockingly human visage sat back on his heels.

She was captivated by the beauty of his face, her heart pounding in her chest. He looked around the room, his reddish-brown eyes surveying the area illuminated by the flickering candlelight, his bald head glowing in its light. His chiseled jaw was clenched so tightly that the muscles of his neck were strained and taut. His arms were adorned with tattoos, and two dragons snaked down the sides of his skull. He growled, his full lips curling back and revealing his teeth. His menacing presence filled the chapel, radiating violence and danger that pulled her forward.

Is this the man I'm promised to?

He pressed a finger to the barrier and hissed when it zapped him. She fixed her gaze on him, her jaw dropping in shock. Sitting down, he was still the tallest person she had ever seen, and the contours of his muscles were unmistakable through his shirt. The sound of Gerald talking in the distance sent a wave of annoyance through her. She didn't want to listen to his words. No, she wanted to hear this God's voice and find out if it was as deep and menacing as the Master of Wrath himself.

Something touched her shoulder, and the sensation jolted her out of her trance. She glanced at the High Priest, watching as he gestured for her to hurry, and she quickly obeyed his commands. Her future husband's piercing gaze was fixed on the book in her hands and her heart skipped a beat, her breath quickening. Fear coursed through her veins, the sound of Gerald's voice repeating in her mind.

'If Wrath doesn't like you, then you have outlived your usefulness.' No, please. I can't live like this anymore. Take me with you.

When their eyes locked, her world crashed and sparked around her. A thousand memories pierced her skull, accompanied by a sharp pain that made her cry out in agony. His voice was muffled by the sound of her own heartbeat thundering in her ears. She fell to her hands and knees, the loud shriek that had built in her chest causing her to choke.

Her bones popped, her joints snapping. Misery was a blazing fire through her nerves, and sharp fur pricked through her skin akin to tiny needles. A chorus of screams filled the room as people leapt to their feet. The deafening, echoing thuds of the barrier being pounded drew her attention. The man was gone and a demon with fiery red wings had taken his place, and an intense rage rose inside of her.

She spun on the crowd, her voice reverberating off the walls with a powerful roar. She was filled with a seething anger when she saw the people who had exploited her. In terror, Gerald stumbled back, his long robe rustling around his feet as he tripped. A wild, primitive urge suddenly surged through her mind. She slashed out with a massive paw, her claws slicing through his face in a spray of blood and tissue. The sickening crunch of his jaw breaking fed the bloodlust within her, and she turned on the others.

Everything after that was a bright-red, rage-filled haze. Without warning, the circle was broken, and Wrath spilled out with a force that shook the ground. He reached out to her, but she was lost in a sea of instinct and fury. She lashed out at him and her paw sliced down the right side of his skull. He let out a mighty roar, and the foggy mist that had captured her mind slowly dispersed. She whimpered as she ran to a corner, her eyes darting

around the chaotic scene. Bodies lay in mangled piles, blood coating the floor in large glistening pools. The walls were splattered with a thick, crimson liquid, and in the middle of it, her intended knelt, his hands trembling as they covered his face.

Luna woke with a start, the fading memory leaving a chill in the air. Fats grumbled, then opened his mouth wide in a yawn, before the warmth of his bed lulled him back to sleep. With a groan, she sat up, trying to wipe away the tears that had pooled on her cheeks. The dream lingered in her mind, refusing to be forgotten despite being awake.

Fear made her shrink into the shadows, her heart pounding at the thought of the Master of Wrath's wrathful punishment. She watched him take in the gruesome scene before him, with wide eyes and a look of confusion on his face. He stumbled to his feet and turned to a mirror. She seized her opportunity; the book grasped in her mouth as she barreled through the closed front doors of the chapel.

As she spent days in the forest, surrounded by the sounds of birds and rustling leaves, memories of a previous life echoed in her mind. Slowly, she remembered all the rituals and spells of being a druid. She gradually grew accustomed to her ability to change, and soon it felt as natural as the rhythm of her breath.

She suddenly understood the depth of Stan Wrath's importance to her. He was the one she was fated to be with, yet the reason for her death. Her heart ached for him, however, her mind begrudged him for not rescuing her from her fate. She was torn between emotions, making her hide from him, but it was his adherence to his ethical code that scared her.

'Never kill an innocent. Only those marked by sin.'

He had said it so many times before that she knew he would never forgive her for what she had done. She was haunted by the massacre of those in the church; the screams of both women and children still ringing in her ears and making her wake in a cold sweat. In addition to all that, the guilt of having struck him weighed heavily on her conscience.

Not that it matters. He doesn't even remember me.

God had wiped away all the Princes' recollections, leaving them with an empty void. The beasts were restricted, the darkness of the cages a stark contrast to the bright sun outside. The Stan Wrath who walked this Earth now was not the same person she had known in her previous life. She could probably wander right by him, and he wouldn't know her from Adam.

She forcefully shook away the thoughts, then slowly slid off her bed and ambled to her desk, the sound of her footsteps echoing in the room. Carefully, she took the fragile silver necklace from her neck, the miniature key quivering from the chain. She inserted it into the lock and heard the satisfying click as it turned before tugging the drawer open. The scarlet tome glared up at her, the light shimmering off the glossy ebony emblem. She was grateful for it, and it had been her saving grace in the darkest of times.

But the blood magic it required was so antithetical to her natural druid powers that it drained her strength. Certain incantations had left her almost completely incapacitated for days, while others only caused her pain for a few hours. She plopped down in the charcoal office chair with an audible sigh. She ran her fingertips softly down the smooth leather surface.

He has searched for centuries for you. Will he assist me if I give you to him? But how will I survive if I do that?

The spells inside could bring forth demons, but it also could create a reality where a mortal's hopes and wishes were brought to life. There were incantations meant for taking revenge, others to draw someone closer, and some even to alter a person's appearance. When she remembered the disconnecting enchantment she had tested, a chill ran down her spine. The process had taken a lot out of her and caused her to sleep for a full week, yet it was successful in the end. No matter how hard Stan tried to bridge the gap between them, their bond remained quiet and still.

Following that incident, she kept things simple and straightforward. Money had been difficult to come by, so she depended on the book as a source of income. She employed the one for food occasionally, but only when she wanted to remain undetected by keeping her location secret. There was a permanent groove in her palm where the sharp blade had cut her skin, a scar borne of her own greed. But it had been worth it when she could finally afford to buy the recreational vehicle she sat in.

To many it was inadequate, but for her it was a place of solace and security. Her queen-sized bed was tucked away in the back, the closets on either side of it like sentinels. A bathroom with a shower was a pleasant separation between the kitchen and bedroom, with a connecting hall that linked the two together. She rarely used the oven, but the stovetop saw constant use, with a pot or pan bubbling almost every day. Her tiny fridge was crammed with an abundance of meat from her hunts. The desk was a recent addition, replacing the old, unused jack-knife sofa that had been in the space formerly. She often found herself sinking into the worn leather chair and listening to the creak of its frame. Hours would fly by as she squinted at documents, hoping to uncover evidence of how the cult had kept going.

She had been the one to take Gerald's life with her own hands. It made little sense that they were still active or that they pursued her. What could they possibly want? The only thing of value she had was the book, and she wondered if that was what drew them to her. She had tried using the text to ward them off, but all her efforts seemed in vain. She looked at the tome, contemplating whether it might be of use against the angel, but quickly dismissed the idea. The thought of being confined in the house for a week filled her with a feeling of apprehension, her body involuntarily trembling. If it didn't work and Zadkiel appeared, she would be defenseless.

She glanced out the window and watched the rays of sun dance through the trees. She sighed and stood, her joints popping as her muscles stretched. *No better time than the present to go into town.* She peeled off her clothes in a hurry, and they landed in an untidy heap by the bed. Long ago, she had learned that cloth did not survive her shifts, and she now only changed while naked. She packed a crisp, clean outfit into her backpack and adjusted the straps, feeling the fabric of the bag against her shoulders. Fats meowed, and she patted his head. When he wanted to roam the woods near their campsite, she had been hesitant, but soon she saw that restraining him was torture. She snugly tucked a blanket around her and opened the door.

As she said a silent prayer that no one had spotted her, she swiftly locked the door and the sound of his contented purring faded away. She dashed into the trees, the surrounding camps thankfully quiet. A grin split her face as the image of her neighbors' shock if they saw her running through the woods naked, covered by only a thin throw, rose in her mind. Hunkering down beside a trunk, she could feel the rough bark against her fur as she shifted into a dog. She shook out her coat, and the straps of the pack dug

into her shoulders as she rolled them. Once she was confident that her bag was secure, she made her way to the city.

Luna nervously paced before Club Wrath, her fingers fidgeting with the fabric of her shirt. The sweet aroma of blooming flowers filled the air, and the sun glimmered out from behind the clouds, casting a warm glow over the windows of the massive building. Despite the warmth of the sun's rays, a chill ran down her spine.

I can do this. Piece of cake. I'm a warrior, a druid priestess. Nothing scares me. The sight of the reddish-brown eyes burning with anger was etched in her mind, and her body shook. *Okay, confronting the warlord terrifies me, but dammit, what are my other options? I just gotta convince him to help me. That's all. But what if he remembers?*

Her chin quivered as she gazed up at the cold, hard steel and glass structure. Druids became stifled and uncomfortable when kept inside for long periods of time. They longed for the forest, the noise of birdsong and rustling leaves filling their souls. In their past life, he had chosen a home nestled in the woods, a place for her to hunt and revel in nature. But here in this asphalt and iron jungle, there were no trails of undergrowth to explore, no tranquil lakes to reflect in. *If he realizes what we once were, he'll drag me back with him. Cage me, and force me to be his.*

Her skin prickled with goosebumps as her fear intensified, her thoughts turning to a more likely outcome. *No, he'll hate me. Despise me for what I've done. For killing those innocents, and keeping myself hidden from him.*

She took a deep breath, trying to steady her nerves before gripping the door handle. *Fuck it. What do I have to lose? If I don't get him to help, then I'm dead, anyway. Zadkiel will make sure of that.* Tilting her chin, she squared her shoulders and shoved it open. She marched into the lobby, her eyes immediately falling on the woman behind the desk. Cold green irises stared at her indifferently, the girl's expression settling into the perfect resting bitch face.

Her red hair was carefully braided into a shield maiden style, the sides of her scalp shaved close to the skin. Luna squinted and studied the receptionist's visage, but no memories of the person came to her. *She must be new. I know all of Stan's warriors.*

"Welcome to Club Wrath," the woman said, her tone flat and bored. "Rage rooms and the gym are members only. If you wanna join, fill this out. All payments are due up front."

Luna wrinkled her brows as the clipboard was pushed across the counter with a loud scraping sound. *Rage rooms? What the fuck?* "I'm not here for that. I would like to talk to Stan Wrath, please."

The woman released a long, exasperated sigh and rolled her eyes in frustration. "He doesn't see anyone without an appointment. Not even cute little blondes. Sorry, honey, you can whip right around and walk your skinny ass out of here."

She gritted her teeth and forced a smile while leaning awkwardly on the tall counter. *Why was I born so fucking short?* "When can I book a meeting? It's kinda urgent."

With a scoff, the receptionist stood up, her chair scraping against the floor. Luna tilted her head back to take in the towering Amazonian standing before her. Dressed in a pair of black jeans and a sleeveless tee, the woman

leaned over the desk, her presence filling the room with an air of authority. She brought her enormous hands down onto the surface; the sound echoing as her biceps bulged. “He’s booked until further notice.”

Luna took a ragged breath, her body moving a step backward without her permission, before she caught herself. *Show no fear. Wrath demons can sniff it out a mile away.* She threw her shoulders back and raised her chin. “Tell him I have information about the cult and the grimoire he searches for.”

The receptionist’s eyes widened as she slowly shook her head, her lips pursed in disapproval. She sat down, her fingers dancing across the phone’s buttons. “Have a seat.”

Luna meandered over to the leather and chrome chairs, which were the focal point of the lobby. She perched on the edge, her heart pounding in her ears. The room was minimal, a desk and waiting area, with three walls of smoky glass while a fourth was painted a bright, bold scarlet. The stark contrast of the black marble tiles and the crimson streaks was highlighted by the harsh fluorescent lights, making the space feel almost eerie. Two elevators loomed ominously behind the receptionist, and she wondered what secret destinations they could hold.

She grew more and more antsy as the minutes passed, her shoe tapping a rhythm on the floor. An itch of annoyance tingled at the nape of her neck, her jaw tightening as she moved in her seat. She glared at the woman, her gaze narrowing and her upper lip curling in contempt. *Had she even called anyone? Or was it all just a pretense to get me off her back?* She sprung to her feet in anticipation when the metal doors creaked open, expecting to see the stern look on Stan’s face. She rolled her eyes and snarled when a crusty Viking stepped off it, the sound of his heavy boots ringing through the air. *How have you survived so long?*

“Hello, Miss..?” he said in a low voice.

Her lips pursed in annoyance, and she released a loud, exasperated sigh.
“Luna.”

His blue irises sparkled with appreciation as he leaned on the edge of the desk, a seductive smile playing on his mouth. *Oh, Satan, help me.* If he knew who she was, he wouldn’t be staring at her like that. She hadn’t seen him in centuries, but he was still the same, right down to the sound of his deep voice. His hair was pulled back in two long braids, the ends of the dirty blond strands twinkling with metal trinkets. His face was a tapestry of tattoos and tanned skin, the colors standing out in stark contrast.

“Miss Luna, I apologize, but Wrath’s unavailable. I’m his second-in-command, Roth, and will gladly help you in any way possible.”

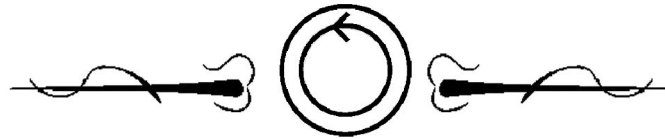
His insinuations made her raise a skeptical eyebrow. *You haven’t changed your ways at all. Still chasing pussy, I see.* “Inform Satan as that I’ll only speak with him.”

His eyes widened in surprise as he swallowed hard, his Adam’s apple moving up and down. She smirked, knowing the use of Stan’s demon name would get her noticed. The man forced a strained, tight-lipped smile and gave a curt nod of his head.

“Come with me, please.”

He led her to the elevator, and the doors shut with a thud that made her take a deep breath. Her heart raced with nervousness as her body tensed up. *Keep calm, eye on the prize. Dangle the book in his face and then get the hell out of Dodge. He’ll never even know you were once mates.*

Thank you



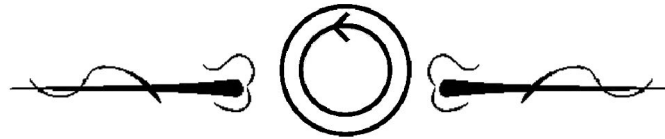
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Seven Princes of Sin

Lust

Gluttony

Sloth

Greed

Envy

Wrath-Coming Soon

Pride-Coming Soon

The Madness of Wonderland

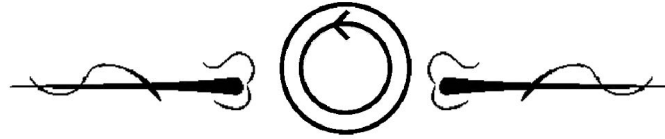
Alice and her Knave

Ally and her Mad Hatter

Nelly and her Red King-Coming Soon

Allison and her Wonderland-Coming Soon

About the Author



S. N. Hunt loves to read and write all about romance. When she is not writing or reading, she is spending time with her hubby and furbabies. She enjoys camping in the summertime and fishing til the sun goes down. She loves cooking, baking, and of course, eating. Family is very important to her, and she thanks God everyday for the support they have given her.

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Envy

