

Lena Austin

Beware the Fury

Viva Las Vegas

Changeling Press

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Detective Bach didn't like getting thrown off the case of the Feather Boa Killer just because he'd begun to suspect it was personal between him and the killer. Turns out he was right -- the killer follows him to Los Regalos and picks up his murderous spree there.

Bach likes it even less when his new partner at Los Regalos is a lady detective with a really bad temper, snakes in her hair, bat wings, and an infallible nose for murder. Oh, yeah, and Cissy's got a mushy heart for animals -- lots of animals. And she's a triplet. And a goddess -- really! His head hurts.

Cissy's real name is Tisiphone the Fury, and she's been trying to find her own individuality since she and her sisters decided to live on different continents. What's a Fury supposed to do except become a murder detective at Los Regalos? Now her contract is near an end and she's weighing her options. That is, until Detective Bastian Bach walks into her precinct and dumps the case of a serial killer on Cissy's desk. Her nose tells her more. Bach's right. It's personal.

And it's about to get really personal.

Chapter One

Bastian stared regretfully at the ravaged beauty in the picture and pinned the photograph to the chart detailing River City's latest serial killer's M.O. His imagination could almost sense all the blood dripping from the board. She was his fifth addition to the list in as many months. One a month, precise as clockwork, they'd find a new body, thanks to a new poem sent to Bastian directly. It was as if the Feather Boa Killer taunted Bastian personally. Bastian studied the details of the latest victim. "Gabriella Jones, female, Caucasian, blonde/brown, age thirty-two. Same M.O. Feather boa, used as a garrote, this time yellow. Damn." Bastian planted his fist in the center of the chart, where a blank spot waited for a picture of the killer. He wished his fist could hit that son of a bitch for his cruelty.

Chief Riley poked his head in the door of Bastian's office. "Detective Bach, can you step into my office?" His eyes flashed regretfully over the wall, and then he was gone.

Bastian grumbled at the interruption, grabbed up the cold, vile concoction the receptionist called coffee, and checked his office for anything out of place before he left. Neat and orderly, his black and gray office was a snapshot of his whole life. Even the snake plant in the corner didn't have a speck of dust on its spear-like leaves. He gave one last reverent glance to Victim #1 on the chart, and shut the door.

The chief was on the phone when Bastian knocked and barged in. Bastian bit back his protests about how he had lab reports to study and stomped over to warm his coffee from the chief's much better personal supply. It cut the taste of gasoline from the office urn and made the jet fuel drinkable.

"Yes, dammit. I said now, Richards. I mean now. I'll cover your ass." Chief Bill Riley slammed the phone back into the charger slot. "Fucking chicken shit."

Bastian frowned. Detective Richards was a good cop, and brave too. What the hell could he be scared of? None of his business. He checked his watch. He had three hours before his scheduled hour at the gym. "What's up, Bill? I need to get back to those lab reports."

"No, you don't. You're on leave as of this minute." Bill handed him some papers. "I want you on that plane and out of my city tomorrow. Orders."

The cheerful colors of a brochure and an e-ticket for an airline flashed in Bastian's hand. He blinked, nonplussed. Okay, completely flabbergasted. His brain processed the information on the brochure. Casinos? Shows? Bright lights and entertainments? Utter fucking chaos and money left to chance were not his idea of a good time. "Uh, Bill. I have a serial killer and three other cases on my desk. Bad timing for a vacation. No, thanks."

"I didn't offer, Detective Bach. I ordered. You're going." Riley plodded over and filled his own coffee mug. "Bastian, you've been on this serial killer's case since he killed Marty. I didn't want to put you on this one since Marty was your partner, but Richards was still recovering from the gunshot and the rest of the detectives were overbooked. Richards is back on his feet, and more objective. You've been letting this get personal for a while now. Time to back off."

Bastian flushed guiltily. Marty had been more than his partner for a couple of months before she'd become the killer's first victim. It hadn't been The Big L yet, but more like an extension of the partnership. They'd even considered moving in together. Then, doomsday had struck. He'd been pulled out of court and told his partner was dead in her apartment.

If Richards hadn't still been in the hospital, Bastian would have never seen what the killer did to Marty. He'd have never known how she'd been beaten, raped, strangled with a purple feather boa, and then displayed like an obscene, broken Barbie doll where the first person to walk into her bedroom would see her splayed legs and brutalized sex in all its glory. He'd have never read the poetry slashed on her mirror in

her own lipstick. He'd have never known there was no sign of forced entry into the apartment.

That was the biggest puzzle of all. Marty wouldn't let a stranger in. Neither would the other women, according to all who knew them. None were barflies or even into dating.

"Hey!" Riley snapped his fingers. "Back to this reality, Bastian. You can't even hold a conversation without going off into Never-Never-Land. That's too focused, and you know it. Your other cases are suffering."

Stung, Bastian stood erect and almost at attention. "I am extremely organized and precise..."

Riley held up his hand. "Really? You are? Then you'd know the perp of one of your other cases was apprehended in a traffic stop yesterday. Which one, Bach?"

Blank. Bastian had no clue. "No one informed me, sir."

"Can that 'sir' bullcrap, Bach. The message is on your desk, in the correct file. I put it there myself this morning at five a.m." Chief Riley shook an ink-stained finger at Bastian. "That's over eleven hours ago. You'd think in eleven hours you might have looked in your other files, right? You didn't. You lose hours sitting there staring at evidence reports, muttering over the chart you built on the wall, and snarling at the receptionist when she puts through a call. You need a break, man."

"I..." Bastian started to vehemently deny the allegations, but he knew the chief was right. He also wasn't going to give up without a fight. "Bill, the Feather Boa Killer sends his clues to me. I think he knows me."

"Bullshit. We have no evidence other than the poems sent are addressed to you. He's taunting the detective, not you personally. Richards can open your mail while you're gone." Bill's lips twitched briefly into a teasing smile. "You ain't getting anything private here, are you?"

Bastian snorted. They both knew Bastian had very little life outside the department. His fridge was emptier than a junkie's brain except for some old leftover

cheese resembling a science experiment in evolution and three beers left over from the last time his brother visited.

Riley put his hand on Bastian's left biceps and shook, hard. "You're sleep deprived, and you're obsessed. You need a break. The travel agency sent these tickets after we nabbed the perps who robbed them. You solved that case. Least you can do is use the tickets to have a week to get some rest and get your head on straight. When you come back, you come talk to me. If I see those dark circles are gone and you can focus for more than two minutes, I might let you work with Richards."

Bastian found himself outside Riley's office with the door slammed in his face. He set his jaw and stormed back to his office. His empty office. The chart and all the files were gone. Every scrap of paper related to the case. His locked file cabinet was still in place. Bastian leaned against the doorjamb and growled to himself. "Richards. You knew I'd be pissed when I found out you took my case files. That's why the chief was reassuring you he'd cover for you. I oughta..."

He turned around to go "discuss" the breach of privacy with Richards when he realized why the office seemed so silent. Everyone was gone. Bastian glanced down at his watch. After five p.m. Riley had kept him just long enough to let everyone make their escape.

The only detectives on duty, Simmons and Clark, appeared carrying a fast food bag each. They hadn't been around and didn't deserve a bitching out. Simmons waved jauntily. "Have a good weekend, Bach."

Oh, yeah. It was Friday. He shuffled back to his desk and sat down to think. The e-ticket said he'd leave from the airport and hop a connection to a special jet that flew only to this Los Regalos place somewhere in the desert. Tomorrow, early afternoon, he'd have to present himself and his baggage at security. Good thing he traveled light.

Damn, he'd miss his weekly beer and pizza with his brother. John had promised to bring a DVD of the latest flick. They got a kick out of sprawling all over the sofa, feet on the coffee table, and making fun of the movie. They hated to go out together, even to

sit in a darkened theatre. Well, he couldn't just stand John up. He'd call when he got home and cancel.

Bastian smiled wickedly. First he had a few things to put into his briefcase. He used his key and opened his file cabinet. "Efficient people keep spares for emergencies." He stuffed all of his files related to the case in his briefcase, then sent all of his scans of the labs and photos to his home computer. Still grinning, Bastian closed and locked his office. "Okay, Chief. I'm on my way to Los Regalos. See you in a week."

Maybe a week holed up in a hotel room with room service would allow him to focus. He didn't have to spend any time outside of the hotel room, did he?

When he got home, he dialed John's number while he packed. "Hey, bro. Sorry, but I have to cancel tomorrow. Chief handed me free tickets to a vacation resort, courtesy of that travel agency from my last burglary case."

"Yeah? That one on Oak Street?"

"Yeah, Hot Spot Destinations." Bastian picked up the brochure that came with the tickets. "They're sending me to Los Regalos, a resort in the desert. Lots of long-legged showgirls. Too bad you aren't coming."

"How long will you be gone?" John's voice rose a little with excitement. "Going to lounge by the pool and salivate over some fine female flesh? You need a tan, you know."

"A week. I'm planning on staying in the hotel room and working on my latest brain puzzling case. You need a tan just as badly, you night owl artist. I don't think you've seen daylight since you graduated from that fancy art school." Bastian put his feet up on the coffee table. "Flying back next Saturday. Good thing. I usually need a day or two to recover from my so-called vacations."

Bastian opened his bag of fast food and popped a French fry in his mouth. "Tell you what. When I get back, I'll spring for two movies and we'll have a marathon. Deal?"

"Deal!"

The next morning Bastian tried to juggle his travel mug of coffee, his briefcase, and his suitcase while he wrestled the front door of his apartment open. The cab would arrive in a few minutes, and he wanted to be waiting downstairs on the curb. Just as he shut the door and heard the lock click, he saw it.

An orange feather boa, tied into an intricate bow, decorated his outside doorknob.

Chapter Two

Cissy locked the door of her dungeon and took the shuttle bus to the police station to check in before going home for some much needed sleep. The bright morning sun felt good on her face, despite the early hour. If it had been at night, she might have risked the short flight, but her daylight flights tended to frighten the guests. Da Boss frowned upon such things. A naked Fury with bat wings and snakes in her hair would definitely upset someone. No one wanted Da Boss to frown about anything.

As usual, the downstairs portion of the police station was barely controlled chaos. A burly, drunken human roared and fought his captors every step of the way. There was always some form of trouble. Humans, even the wealthy, seemed to bring it with them in their expensive luggage sets.

One of the trolls who served as a beat cop waved from the door to Cissy's office. Most people might have been a little frightened by his wide, gaping mouth full of broken teeth. Cissy wasn't most people, because she recognized the expression for a smile.

Well, she was in uniform... sort of. Her last client had a cop fetish, so she had dominated him in an abbreviated version of her usual uniform. The leather mini, thigh boots and form-fitting blue shirt with badge wasn't regulation, but it would do.

The troll growled in her ear. The human behind him was a detective from River City. As a courtesy, he was checking in and letting them know he might receive occasional communications from his precinct. He also insisted on speaking with the best murder detective available.

"That would be me. Thank you, Sergeant." Cissy patted his arm reassuringly. He really was a sweetie. She'd enjoyed some fantastic meals his trollwife cooked, and they were an absolute stitch to hang around with at a midnight ballgame. "Get home via the

tunnels. Sun's up, and I don't want to lug you home as a stone garden ornament for your wife."

"Damn. Thanks." He lumbered off. "Always trouble when one detective asks for another."

"You never said a truer word." Cissy kept her glamour spell at full intensity. Whatever the detective had to tell her, she wanted the whole story, and her true appearance was designed to scare the shit out of humans. They usually stopped talking and groveled in fear. Great for criminals, lousy for co-workers.

She swung into the tiny office, noting with some minor irritation that the cop had made himself at home, lounging in her biggest guest chair as if he owned the place. He'd dumped a foot-high pile of folders on her desk, too.

"Thanks for littering my desk, bud." She noted his eyebrows escalating to his hairline at her outfit and kept her exasperation inward. She took her seat and grabbed a recorder. "You wanted to speak to me? I'm Detective Cissy Roma." She put out her hand, determined to keep it professional, despite the clear lust in his eyes.

He stood immediately, and she gave him credit for courtesy. His handshake might have been automatic, but was also warm and dry without being a "test of strength." Good. She didn't want to break his hand to prove a point.

Over six feet of brawny, handsome human man, dark wavy hair and cool gray eyes assessed her as well. Fair enough. Those cheekbones could have cut glass. Yummy. She hoped he might stop in at the Olympus Casino and visit her dungeon. Faint hope, but a fair amount of higher echelon cops were into some light D/s. Well, she could dream while she spanked the next flabby tourist. She'd love to have this one on a leash. He might even earn more than the usual puppy cookies. That was her latest term for a little off-duty sex. Zeus's balls, it had been a while since she'd indulged.

Her nose twitched, and her senses twanged an alarm. Trouble on the hoof, and this guy was more involved than a detective on the job. She sniffed again, delicately, and pretended to need a tissue. Shit. This guy was her bailiwick, in more ways than one. He was a target of some pretty heavy hate. Who had he pissed off?

He nodded at the recorder, giving her tacit permission to turn it on. He waited until the recorder's light was green, and began. "My name is Detective Sebastian Bach, River City Precinct #36." Detective Bach gestured at the pile of folders. "I've brought copies of my evidence files on a serial murderer I was working on before I was forced here. It's entirely possible the murderer may follow me to Los Regalos."

"If he or she does, you'll have another bit to add to your clues about him. If you haven't noticed, this is the playground of the rich. Takes a cool fifty-k to get a ticket here." Cissy was, to say the least, dubious. "Unless he won the same contest you did, and that's unlikely. Travel agencies hand out one of those tickets a year, to drum up business. You're probably the first cop in years to get in here." Last one she knew about had been that bobby from East London five years previous. He'd been fun. "We don't get much crime around here. Mostly guests who've had a bit too much to drink, if anything. This is the only cop shop in the entire city for a reason."

Detective Bach raked her abbreviated costume with his eyes. "I can believe you're one of the toys, too. Where's the real detective? Joke's over. The least they could have done was pick a better name than a takeoff of Tony Roma, for chrissake."

Cissy shot up from her chair and kept a rein on her notorious Fury temper. Hadn't the term furious been named after her and her sisters? Tisiphone the Fury was a bit of a mouthful. She'd been Cissy Roma for well over two hundred years now, thanks. She planted her fists on her desk and leaned forward until they were practically nose-to-nose. "Buster, I am the detective, and you have no room to talk about names. Your parents had a serious classical fetish, smart ass." Johann had been a nice guy, too.

His gaze seared downward to the swell of her breasts, which were doing their best to pop out of the blue spandex and cotton blend shirt. His sneer was unmistakable. "Forgive me, detective. Your... uniform... is a little less regulation than I'm accustomed to seeing. Most detectives I know wear a business suit and sensible heels."

Cissy ignored the heat in his eyes as well as what that lust was doing to her nipples and between her legs. She'd be a sappy mess if she didn't nip this crap in the bud right now. She vowed to change before she ever left the dungeon for the rest of her

contract. "I have a second job entertaining guests at the Olympus. As you well know, a cop's salary is zip point nothing, and I have expenses like everyone else. I stopped in here before I went home for some rest."

Well, well. His eyes lost the lust and darkened with sympathy. "My apologies, Detective." His bow was respectful enough that she resumed her seat. "I simply wanted you to know these files existed, in case the Feather Boa Killer managed to succeed in strangling me with this." He dropped a garish orange boa on her desk.

"Fuck me. I've been following the news on that one. Ugly." Her Fury senses had tingled, but not put her in hunt mode. Something had warned her to be on the alert. She was the Fury in charge of murders, particularly regicide and patricide, but extending often into other family members. Because there were so many family murders these days, her senses had long been overwhelmed. Unless she focused on a case, she could ignore the constant jangle on her nerves. "Okay, you convinced me. I assume I can keep copies?" She turned off the recorder and flagged down a witch who did secretarial work. "Mamie, would you make exact copies of the files on my desk when you get a moment?"

Cissy waited until she got a wave of acknowledgement. Mamie would have the copies as soon as she gathered up the spell components from her desk's ample supply. Mamie was a very dependable witch, even if Cissy could barely understand her Irish accent.

Detective Bach stood, apparently ready to leave things in her hands, but Cissy's senses twanged hard enough to cause her to shudder. Whoever the perp was, he hated this guy pretty bad. She'd better make sure he at least got to the hotel safely, and she'd alert the hotel security staff before she left.

Cissy sighed and kissed a long nap goodbye. "Come on, hotshot. If you're a target, I'd better escort you back to your hotel. Which is it?"

Bach's lips twitched and his smile was ironic. "The Olympus. Can I convince you to call me Bastian?"

Oh, that was just the living end. When she got back to her house, Cissy was calling the Fates to ask which one was tangling her thread. "Sure. Call me Cissy."

They hopped the shuttle and rode the short distance back the way Cissy had come a few minutes ago. Now Cissy wished she'd changed into the standard chiton worn by all employees in the main lobby and casino. As it was, she stood out like a red bird in a flock of doves.

Bastian headed straight for the elevators, flashing his keycard at the digital eye and punching the button for the thirtieth floor. "Hope you don't have a fear of heights."

Cissy snickered. She'd better not, considering she flew around a lot at night. "Nope. The view is spectacular, isn't it?" The glass elevator opened to the luxurious floor, and Cissy followed Bastian down the hall.

"I didn't get a chance to look around much. I dumped my suitcase on the spare bed, grabbed my briefcase, and went straight to you. My flight was delayed in Atlanta. I got in to your airport at three a.m. Sorry if my temper is short. I've been traveling for almost twelve hours now." His voice held the familiar rasp of a weary traveler. He put his keycard in his door lock.

Cissy nodded. The poor bastard looked like he'd been dragged through Hell face first, or been on stakeout for six months. Yeah, a serial killer would make any detective look that bad. He needed a break, and Los Regalos was just the place to get it. "We'll order you some decent food and I highly recommend the --"

Bastian's hand stopped her. His voice was grim. "Do me a favor and call your pals at the station for a homicide team."

Cissy peered around his broad chest, then winced away. She whipped her cell phone out of her boot and hit the speed dial. "This is Detective Roma. Send a full homicide team to the Olympus, room 3011. I'm already here in the hall waiting. Crime lab is gonna have a heyday with this one. It's a mess."

She and Bastian backed out of the doorway slowly, leaving as little evidence of their passage as possible.

Bastian moved them a step or two away from the door area. "I saw recognition in your eyes. Did the victim work here?"

Cissy permitted one tear to slide down her face for the soft-spoken kitsune maid. "Hell of a way to die. Yeah, Suki Kitsune had worked here almost as long as I have. The murderer must have surprised her. She was very capable of taking care of herself."

Snow Fox demons that sucked souls usually were. She had to get Bastian out of here. Suki's white tail decorated the mirror. The SOB had cut it off.

The River City detective cleared his throat. "Body mutilated, likely sexually abused before or immediately after death. We were never sure. Hair pulled into a ponytail and chopped off. The perp likes long hair for trophies, lately. Body arranged for maximum impact to anyone walking in the room. Same MO as the Feather Boa Killer."

Cissy closed her eyes and visualized the room from her one glimpse. "He takes trophies. Got it. Did he always do so?" The perp hadn't taken Suki's tail. That would have been a cooler trophy. Why hair?

Bastian's voice filled with pain, despite a valiant attempt to maintain calm. "All but the first victim. She had short hair." His eyes shot to Cissy's short spiky style. "A little like yours. Since then he's focused exclusively on female vics aged twenty to forty, all with hair past the shoulder blades."

"Then he decorates the room with the contents of their torso and their clothes. I saw. Any significance to the boa other than it's a direct copy of the one you dropped on my desk? Like, color?"

"He seems to be using the colors of the rainbow or chakras. First vic was purple, next dark blue, next blue, next green, last before this was yellow. If he were following the chakras the first color would have been red."

Cissy nodded, filing all of the information away in her head, despite her brain begging her to shut down and allow for some sleep. "Does he always warn with one boa and kill with another?"

“No, that’s new. He never gave any indication of a choice in advance. In fact, as far as we can tell, hair length had been his only criteria. Now I’m not so sure since he followed me.” Bastian’s voice slurred and rasped. He was as exhausted as she was.

Cissy leaned against a decorative urn full of feathery ferns. “Damn. Do you know how many long-haired females live and work in Los Regalos?”

“About the same number that live in River City is my guess.” He swayed with exhaustion as the Los Regalos homicide team swarmed out of the elevator and followed Cissy’s pointed finger into the room.

Cissy had a quick word with the cop in charge, properly attired in a gray business suit. Then she tugged on Bastian’s arm until she got him moving toward the elevators. “Looks like you’re staying with me, hotshot. You’re now in protective custody.”

Chapter Three

A cacophony of roars, barks, and birdcalls from outside awakened Bastian. Only his self-discipline kept him from rolling over and burying his head under the mountain of pillows. It took a few moments of studying the almost Spartan room and furnishings to remember he'd slept at Cissy's place in her sister's bed. Something about the sister living in Australia. Right. Situation assessed. Ready for the day. Next order of business was a shower and coffee, in that order.

The warm lumps around him turned out to be five cats. His feline bedmates took his open eyes for an invitation to demand petting. By the time he'd convinced them to let him leave the bed, the noise outside had diminished to the odd animal sound. Cissy had warned him she had pets, he now remembered.

Bastian took a peek out the window and beheld Cissy in cutoff jeans, ball cap, and a skimpy peasant blouse heading into the barn with a wheelbarrow and pitchfork. From his position above it all, he could see a paddock containing goats and sheep, two rows of cement buildings with kennels around the perimeter, a large aviary filled to capacity with birds, and a mountain lion with one leg in a cast lounging in a beautifully made exhibit with hills for climbing and a cave. "She doesn't have pets. She has a freaking zoo."

Returning from his shower, he found clothes lying on his now immaculately made bed and a tray of coffee and bagels waiting on the desk. The jeans were a bit loose and the shirt a bit snug, but he commended Cissy on her guesswork of his size. He had to appreciate the efficiency. If one had to be in protective custody, this was the best he'd ever heard of. Not that he actually considered himself in protective custody such as he knew, but it was nice to have another cop at his back.

Bastian took the stairs two at a time, munching on a blueberry bagel and slugging down some of the most excellent coffee he'd ever tasted. His feline troupe shot past him and led him to the sunny yellow kitchen.

Cissy was bent over, pouring cat food into a row of bowls lined against the wall, giving him a clear shot of her spectacular heart-shaped ass, the curve of her cheeks peeking out from the bottom of the cutoffs. Long, tanned legs encased in sensible desert boots completed the picture of a hard-working woman. She cooed and spoke nonsense to all five cats, making sure each got his stroking and food.

Bastian's mouth watered, and he choked on the bagel he'd been chewing. It probably didn't help his image any to always seem clumsy, but something about Cissy put her a cut above every woman he'd ever known, including Marty. Maybe it was her ability to take command and then turn around and be a marshmallow for animals. Maybe it was the hard, compact little body unintentionally shown off in the way women in hot climates did.

He swallowed the last drops of his coffee to get rid of the stuck lump. Cissy was a collection of opposites. A sexy cop, a homemaker whose dishwasher hummed, and if he wasn't mistaken she was also a Dominatrix, given her costume the first night they'd met. He liked overachievers, and Cissy definitely qualified as the most different Type-A he'd ever met.

"Hi!" Cissy straightened up and flexed her back in an unconsciously provocative yoga move. Her back crackled like a bowl of rice cereal. "Did you sleep well? Good. I figure you and I will head back to the station to check on what the lab folks found, then we'll..." She shot him a searing look filled with lust. "See what happens from there."

Amused the lust was mutual, Bastian opened his mouth to suggest they hurry. He appreciated the dedication to check on the case before taking a personal indulgence, no matter how tempting. However, the doorbell chimed melodiously, playing "Chariots of Fire."

Cissy crossed her eyes in frustration and slid past Bastian to get to the front door. The door shut, and Cissy came back with a frown on her face. She had two letters, one

of which she handed to Bastian with a solemn face. "You might want to take it by the corners, since it's likely evidence."

Bastian looked at the envelope and took it with two careful fingers as she suggested. Sure enough, just like the others that had arrived at his River City precinct, magazine and newspaper letters formed his name, but this time it was Cissy's address. "I'll wait until we can open it at the station under laboratory controls." He dropped it into the Ziploc bag Cissy produced. "What was your letter?"

Her mouth quirked upward on one side. "A threat of another kind, Bastian. A guy known only as Da Boss runs this place. We employees don't see Da Boss, and the guests see him even less." She waved her opened letter and envelope. A faint whiff of food odor wafted toward him. "Da Boss is unhappy about the murder. He wants it solved, quickly. Before the guests decide Los Regalos is not a safe place to play anymore."

"Let me get my briefcase while you change into work clothes." Bastian was halfway up the stairs before he realized the food odor had been peanut butter and bananas. He shrugged. Everyone had their own weird habits.

* * *

When the lab boys had finished performing every test known to mankind on the envelope, Bastian and Cissy were permitted to open it up in a sealed room, wearing full hazmat gear.

"Talk about bad poetry." Cissy read the verse aloud, her tone full of distaste.

Tried to escape? Don't you dare.

Your new partner has very short hair.

No trophy to claim when I'm done

But knowing you care will still make it fun

Find me the night when faces are hidden

And all those who waltz are doing my bidding

Faces are covered but hair still flows freely

*Maybe another will be more appealing
When the fat lady sings
Or the midnight bell rings.*

Bastian put down the letter before he gave in to the urge to crumple and shred the evidence. At least his hand was steady while his stomach churned. "Damn. He's going to choose his next victim tonight. But where?"

Cissy studied the letter calmly. "Let's take a copy back to my place for analysis. I can't think well with all this noise." She gestured to the chaos of a resort town cop shop full of drunks, hookers, and the occasional paranormal out of their element. In other words, the noise level was just below war zone.

Her living room resembled a paper factory explosion, but they'd managed to rig a clue board, and arranged everything that detailed each murder into piles. The usual gruesome photos decorated the board, now including a photo of Suki Kitsune. A few bloodstains on her sharp teeth said her attacker had not gotten away unscathed. Cissy personally hoped she'd hurt him badly.

Bastian rattled the copy of the poem from his place on one of the couches. The lab had sent over the contents of one suitcase that had been stowed in the hotel closet unpacked. Cissy wondered how he managed to look even sexier in a pair of faded jeans and a gray police academy T-shirt. "Let's go over this poem. See if you catch anything I missed."

Cissy grinned to herself. The slow southern drawl he used when distracted would melt butter at fifty paces. At her age, one would think she'd be immune to such things, but not when it came to a supremely serious fellow cop like Bastian. Of course, he didn't have her centuries of experience to tell him to lighten up and enjoy every day.

"I wish you'd take this seriously, Cissy. We've already figured out the FBK has you on his list of potential victims." Bastian rubbed his unshaven face.

Cissy bit her lip to avoid laughing. How cute. He was worried about her. She couldn't exactly tell him it's damn hard to kill a goddess. "Have faith in me, pal. I may be a shrimp next to a big bull like you, but I'm fairly sure he'd have trouble taking me out." In fact, she was looking forward to seeing how fast she could scare the whey out of FBK when he tried. "Give me that incredibly bad poem line by line. He sure wouldn't give Ovid or Sappho a run for their money."

Bastian didn't even bother to look up. "Of course not."

The matter of fact answer surprised her. "Most cops I know wouldn't have a clue who I was talking about."

"Most cops don't have a background in the classics. I do. Now sit down if you can find space. First line is obvious." Bastian tapped the pencil she'd loaned him on his copy of the poem. "Directed at me, intended to taunt."

"Yep. Next line is me." She secretly petted her real hair in the guise of combing her fingers through her human locks. "Victim one had short hair like mine, so we can assume hair is not his only criteria for choosing his victims." Boy, was this guy in for a real surprise if he went after her.

"Agreed. He may like his trophies, as stated in line three, but he states clearly for the first time that I'm his focus in line four." Bastian got up to pace. "It doesn't make any sense, though. I only knew Marty -- victim one. I never knew the others."

"Okay, so we don't know his whole M.O." Cissy plopped down on one of the Roman-style couches. She picked up the paper Bastian had abandoned on the table between them. "I think it's clear he has his sights on another victim or at least a location. This line, 'Find me the night when faces are hidden,' intrigues me."

"Hang on. Didn't I get a brochure for a masked ball at the admissions orientation?" Bastian dug into his briefcase. A few moments later, he brandished a colorful flyer of a masked ball. "Pre-revelry festivities take place starting at eight p.m., with the real party beginning at nine."

She glanced at the clock on the mantle. "It's just now five. We have plenty of time for a shower and to get properly dressed."

He snorted. "Sorry, left all my masks and costumes at home." The sarcasm was thick enough to cut with a dull spoon.

"Don't worry, only employees like me need to be in costume." Cissy shrugged and grinned. "Look, I'm already a chosen victim. Let's make me as sexy as possible, and I'll be the bait and distraction for him."

Bastian studied her from head to toe. "How's your self-defense?"

"Damn good." Deliberately baiting him, she turned her back on him and pretended to be lost in thought in front of the big chart. He'd have to test her, if he was any sort of good partner. The ploy worked.

Bastian grabbed her from behind and tried to get his left arm hooked around her neck. His muscles were made of granite, but she had the advantage of being lower to the ground. Before he knew it, he was on his back and blinking up at her.

Her victory wasn't total. He pulled an unconventional twisting move, and she ended up on top of his chest. Not that she was displeased. She'd wanted a similar position since she'd laid eyes on him, but she'd envisioned they'd be naked or nearly so. Cissy grinned down in triumph. "I win."

A good-humored grin spread slowly across his face. "How'd you learn to fight like that? It's no martial discipline I know."

She bit her lip and kept her laughter internal. Well no, she supposed he'd never seen real Greek wrestling. She nodded toward a picture of her sisters and herself, taken the last time they'd visited London together. "I have sisters and a large collection of rambunctious cousins."

Bastian turned to look at the picture, and his jaw slowly dropped. "Are you three identical triplets?" The emphasis was on the identical.

"Yeah." Oh, shit. Here it came. The inevitable male fantasy of having all three of them in the same bed. It pissed her off. Okay, that was an easy thing to do to a Fury. Cissy crawled off his chest and stood to stare at the picture on the mantle. In the mirror, she saw the fantasy flicker and die just as quickly on Bastian's face.

Bastian's face took on the most sincere form of sympathy she'd seen to date. "Oh, damn. I'm so sorry for you guys. That must have been hell on earth." He got up and hugged her close. "I'm glad I met you first."

She couldn't quite keep all the resentment and suspicion out of her voice. "Meg and Alex live in Europe and Australia, respectively. We don't get together much."

For the first time in centuries, she saw complete understanding in someone's eyes with no annoyance at the bitterness in her words. He nodded. "Smart move. You'd never have your individuality if you lived in the same city."

Now it was her jaw's turn to drop. His tone dripped with pity and real knowledge. She couldn't remember the last time anyone had nailed their troubles so clearly. "You do understand."

He raked a hand through his dark hair. "Hell yeah. I'm a twin myself. I can't remember the last time Johnny and I dared appear in public together. Johnny's a really introverted artist. If he didn't work only at night, we wouldn't even be in the same city, either."

Well, well. This guy surprised her at every turn, and she couldn't remember the last time a human had done so. They nodded at each other with complete understanding, his sympathy triggering a stronger attraction in her. Now she really wanted to jump his bones. She glanced at the clock. They had time for a quickie, and she saw no reason not to.

Bastian read her like a book. His slow, lazy smile of agreement and opened arms welcomed her leap seconds before she made a move.

They crashed to the floor, lips locked. She was glad the alpaca rug was thick, or she'd have bruised him long before she was ready. Boy, was she ready. The fire pools of Tartarus didn't have anything on the magma between her legs. She landed square in the middle of his chest.

Bastian broke the kiss and kept her on top. "I don't want to hurt your wings, Tisiphone."

She blinked. He knew who she was. Shit. Would he be scared of her now? It was such a bummer when they freaked. "How'd you know?"

Chapter Four

Bastian grinned up at Cissy's shocked and wary expression. Maybe she needed reassurance he was accepting of her status. "May I point out it's not professional to have an affair with a fellow cop, much less a goddess with a mortal?"

The bright brown eyes lost their look of surprise, and mischief quickly replaced it. "How'd you know what and who I am? Most people don't guess."

Bastian chuckled. "I'll hazard a guess most don't have parents who are professors of classical Greco-Roman literature, either. I grew up hearing the stories. Los Regalos is famed for being the place where the paranormal meets modern reality. Three identical sisters, your surname, and your sisters' names modernized from Alecto to Alex and Megaera to Meg -- it all fit. Cissy is much easier to pronounce than Tisiphone, so I applaud the choice."

"Oh." She blinked twice, absorbing his deductions. "Good going, Detective." Her voice changed to a teasing drawl. "Since you're in my protective custody, I feel it my duty to see to it you don't get bored. Care for a game of Parcheesi?"

Bastian couldn't resist pretending to give the offer consideration, despite the fact he could feel his raging hard-on pressing on her thigh. "Hmm. I'm not too good with that one. How about a game of nude Twister instead?"

"Works for me!" She clamped down on his mouth with her lips.

Their tongues locked and wrestled. Bastian guessed she was used to being in charge. That would be different.

Then Cissy broke the kiss. "Want to have a tour of Tartarus?"

"See the famed home of the Furies in Hell? You bet your beautiful bottom." Then Bastian thought of something. "Er, don't you have harpies for servants and don't they rip men to shreds for fun and dinner?"

“Yeah, but only on orders. You’re safe. Shut your eyes and we’ll be there in two shakes of a centaur’s tail.” Cissy’s arms wrapped around his body.

Bastian shut his eyes. Call him curious, but he couldn’t think of a more exotic locale to make love to a goddess. “Where are we going and why am I in this handbasket?”

His quip made her laugh so hard, he almost didn’t hear the sound of wings, but he damn sure felt the g-forces. Furies could break the sound barrier, it seemed. Figures. Bastian thought he’d freeze. Then it got hot. Really hot. And steamy. Was there water in Hell? Apparently so.

She stopped and landed abruptly. “Count to five, then open your eyes. That will give me enough time to return to a more human form.”

Since Bastian didn’t want to be a quivering ball of jelly, he obeyed. At least the temperature was warm, but within an acceptable range. By the time he got to four, a soft and very human hand caressed his cock back to life. The cold hadn’t done it much good.

Bastian reached forward at “five” and found Cissy’s breast with his palm. He ventured a peek. Yep, pink flesh, and a dark rosy nipple to play with. Bastian couldn’t resist a nibble. She must have lost the clothes while transforming. Nice trick. He also caught a glimpse of a Roman bath, the edge covered in cushions, directly behind her. Perfect. Time for the human to have an upper hand. His mouth never left her breasts, which Bastian tried to give equal attention to while guiding her backwards.

Cissy responded to his gentle pressure by stepping backwards until she stood with her toes hanging on the edge, his arms the only thing holding her from falling in the water. “Watersports, handsome?”

“Yeah. Mind if I indulge in a fantasy? Sit down on the edge of the water. Legend has it that goddesses taste like the ambrosia they eat.” His hand slid down to play with her clit to emphasize what part of a certain goddess Bastian intended to taste.

She moaned and stepped away from the edge. “I wouldn’t know. Why don’t you tell me?” She sat down and spread, waiting patiently for him to strip out of his clothes.

Not that Bastian needed cleaning, but who could resist the idea of making love with a goddess in a Roman bath? *Not this cop.*

Bastian dove right in and licked eagerly. Unlike other women, she did taste like a fruit and honey concoction. If that was ambrosia, it was fit for the gods. The human Bastian sure loved the taste. He could have stayed all day and not bothered to pack a lunch. He'd back up the legend any time and confirm the taste of ambrosia was indeed addicting.

Cissy moaned, shuddered, played with her own tits and generally let him know he did a good job. She lay back on her elbows, and let him have his way until she stilled and cried out, her voice echoing off the ceiling.

Bastian hadn't paid attention to the décor, but he assumed it was tiled and that was why her voice bounced everywhere. Torches, tiles, and a hot Olympic sized pool were all he needed to know.

His Fury squeaked like a mouse when Bastian grabbed her hips and pulled her into the water with him. He imagined surprising an immortal was pretty hard to do. After all, she'd been around a long time. He'd wonder later how he accepted all this so easily. Maybe Mom's idea of bedtime stories had finally done some good.

Bastian carried Cissy to the steps and sat down, impaling her on his cock right in the water. Cissy gasped and squirmed and generally let him know she was having a marvelous time. She was still orgasming, too, giving his cock a hot massage he'd never forget.

Bastian held on to the world's first hellcat and gave her the best time he knew how and hoped he'd survive the experience. Bastian wasn't sure he would, because his own impending orgasm was going to rival Mt. Vesuvius. Volcanoes didn't have anything on him when Bastian clamped down on Cissy's tit and let'er rip.

If that orgasm was close to becoming a god, Bastian didn't blame the gods for sticking around, half-forgotten by humanity. Making love with a goddess had to be close to godhood. After he returned home to River City, he was building a shrine to the Furies. Mom would approve, anyway.

Judging by the renewed squeals and the milking his cock got, Bastian knew she had come again. And again. Once he could breathe again, he had to say it. "Holy shit, loving on a goddess is definitely dangerous to a guy's health. And I'd do it again in a heartbeat. No hesitation."

Cissy giggled and snuggled in his arms. Bastian carried her to one of the Roman couches scattered around the pool and found them surprisingly comfortable. They cuddled and drank wine that had mysteriously appeared while they were too busy to notice or care.

Their idyll seemed to last for hours. He assumed, perhaps unwisely, that Tartarus time moved differently from Earth time. Mortal time. Whatever. Finally, Bastian had to ask. "Cissy, what time is it?"

Cissy got up from the couch with a sigh of regret. "Time to go get my enticement costume from work."

Obediently, Bastian rose and looked around. No elevators in sight, and he had a sinking feeling he knew the answer to his next question. The idea had his insides squirming. "I'm not even sure how we got here. How do we get back to Los Regalos?"

Her eyes bright with mischief, Cissy bit her lip for a moment. "Are you scared of heights?"

Oh, shit. Bastian winced. "We're going to fly? How will I avoid seeing your full... er, glory?" There seemed no polite way to ask how they'd get around his human vulnerability. Once a human saw a Fury, they were a puddle of terror, even if they weren't the Fury's target.

Cissy giggled. "Easy. Turn around and don't you dare peek. Shut your eyes as insurance. That way, you won't see how far or fast we go. I intend to break the sound barrier until just before we reach Los Regalos. Da Boss doesn't like sonic booms disturbing the guests."

Bastian turned his back on his goddess lover. Man, that felt weird to think. He had to wrap his mind around the concept eventually. He heard the hissing of her famed snake hair, and clamped his eyes tightly closed. He didn't want to know. The legends of

Tisiphone the Fury didn't mesh with the earthy and real Cissy he knew. "Don't even think about blindfolding me, Cissy. I am not one of your subs, got it?"

The Fury behind him snorted. Her voice seemed dangerous even while she laughed. "That stuff got old a few centuries ago, Bastian. I haven't enjoyed my job since the days of the Hellfire Club in jolly old London. Don't sweat it. Ready for takeoff?" Taloned hands grasped him around the waist.

Bastian gasped as one talon dug in painfully close. There were definite disadvantages to getting close to a Fury. "Easy, Cissy. Don't disembowel me."

The hand relaxed its grip slightly. The hissing of over a hundred tiny snakes withdrew, but not the softness of a breast in his back. "Sorry. I'm a bit scared of dropping you. Normally I don't care about my passengers like this. Dropping and catching them at the last moment is part of their punishment."

Bastian resisted turning around, his human curiosity killing him. "Two questions before we lift off, if you please?" He waited three seconds. "What color are your snakes, and -- I can't believe my prurient fantasies pop up at a time like this -- are you naked?" He shut his eyes at the sound of her wings flapping, probably warming up before takeoff.

"Black, and yes."

Bastian suppressed a shudder of fear, caused by the proximity to the Fury of Vengeance. The hissing got uncomfortably close to his ear, but it was still Cissy's voice. Weren't those snakes highly venomous, if he remembered his legends correctly? The soft kiss on his ear reassured him just enough.

"Try to relax, Bastian. I travel pretty fast when I put my mind to it. We'll be there in a literal flash, and you can have a cup of coffee with the receptionist while I change. Ready?"

"Ready." Bastian cleared his throat. "Eyes shut. Let's blow this joint."

The g-forces left his stomach behind, but the whole flight lasted only a minute. A very fucking cold minute. Cissy slowed down just as Bastian felt desert heat, and he ventured a peek. Bastian was treated to a view of Los Regalos few saw. A sunset city,

built in the shape of a star, with lights twinkling like a confection covered with sugar. He even forgot his fear of heights, which he'd always considered a decent survival fear to have. "Hanging with goddesses could be habit-forming."

Cissy snorted a laugh. "You're nuts, Bastian. Most guys I carry are screaming and wetting themselves. Nice to have a calm passenger." She landed them in a protected alleyway, out of sight of the tourists. She let go of Bastian as soon as his feet touched the pavement. "Hang on. Let me change to human."

Wisely, Bastian stared at what had to be the employees' entrance to the casino. The notices winking on a display board reinforced that guess, with statements like, "Chitons are required uniforms. If you need special accommodations for wings, tails, or other appendages, please see the Linens Manager." Bastian couldn't help smiling at that, until he remembered poor Suki Kitsune's tail decorating the bureau of his former hotel room.

Cissy, now perfectly human and wearing a Grecian dress he assumed was a "chiton," bounced up the stairs. "C'mon, handsome. I can't wait for you to meet Hilde. She's my best friend."

Bastian followed her through the doors and down a short but clean white passageway to a door labeled *Tartarus Employees Only*. "Didn't we just leave Tartarus?"

Cissy grinned and nodded. "We just left the real Tartarus. This is just the name of our dungeon here at Olympus. Don't freak on me, okay?"

Great. Bastian steeled himself. He'd never worked vice, though the stories those guys talked about when it came to the illegal BDSM dungeons was enough to curl hair. He certainly didn't expect a reception room that looked more like a Roman spa, with a beautiful blonde behind the desk. A blonde who had to be well over six feet tall and as broad-shouldered as a football player. They must have used a whole bedsheet to make her dress, er, chiton.

Introduced as Hilde, the blonde proved to have the grip of a wide receiver, and the voice of a little German girl, accent and all. She served him coffee as good as Cissy's, and pastries that melted on his tongue. "Cissy will be a minute. You play soon."

It took Bastian a moment to understand her implication. "Uh, no, Hilde. I'm not a customer. We're going to the Masquerade Ball."

Hilde's eyes lit up. "Ja? Me too, after I finish verk." Then she cocked her head to one side. "Sorry. You are *der politza* she protects?"

"Ja, er, yes."

Hilde turned solemn. "I'll speak better English. The tourists like it ven I keep Germanic. Be careful. Don't make me interrupt my time off, please."

Cissy bounced into the room, wearing an emerald green silk corset, a matching skirt no bigger than a placemat, and boot with heels so high she almost walked on her toes. "You flirting with my boyfriend, Hilde?"

The blonde laughed and went back to her desk without answering. Apparently, it was a running joke between friends. "See you at the Ball!"

Bastian felt rather conspicuous escorting a walking sex crime, but other than the male tourists who immediately paid for their interest with blows from their female companions, no one said a word.

Cissy smirked and winked at Bastian. "Oh, good. My plan is working. Everyone notices us. FBK will surely be able to follow our trail, and hopefully take the bait of you and me together."

"Look, Cissy, I know only the legends. I have to ask about your powers and vulnerabilities if I'm to be a good partner." Bastian felt the first stirrings of paranoia and jealousy. He wanted to wrap up his pocket goddess -- she'd smack the hell out of him if he voiced that aloud -- and keep her safe, as insane as that sounded. What the hell was he thinking? Wasn't she immortal and invulnerable? Good first question. Keeping his mind on business sounded like a plan. "Aren't you immortal and invulnerable?"

"Yes, and no. I am the daughter of Titans, so I'm extremely long-lived. No one knows how long, because Titans have a nasty tendency to kill off rivals, relatives, and other undesirables." She smiled wryly at her small joke. "In fact, we kill each other off on a regular basis, so we aren't invulnerable. I've had some pretty serious injuries from

knives, guns, and other weapons. The scars don't show much, but immortality is a bitch when you're laid up in bed healing from someone trying to off you."

"Some family you have." Bastian tried to absorb this. He'd seen the worst of human society, so killing off relations wasn't new to him. That a relative could kill Cissy made his protective instincts boil up. Yeah, right. A mortal protecting a goddess. Ludicrous.

"If you haven't noticed, most of the gods have the manners and temperament of a spoiled two-year-old in need of a swat on the diaper and a nap." Cissy grinned and steered Bastian toward the open doors of a large building.

"I'm glad you said that and not me. I'd hate for Zeus to fire a thunderbolt for my temerity." Bastian allowed Cissy to lead him into the interior, where the dance music blared a toe-tapping beat.

"Aw, he's a nice guy, just a little on the horny side. You're in no danger. He could care less what mortals think of him. He's more concerned with getting around Hera's watchful eyes." Cissy scanned the ballroom, looking at all the dancers. "Let's dance and mingle. You may spot a familiar face or something. FBK could be anyone, but I'll bet you know him. He sure knows you."

Chapter Five

Concentrating on Cissy and letting her be the bait took more effort than Bastian thought possible. He'd always been the bait, dammit. Maybe he was still wrapping his mind around the concept of that little shrimp with big puppy eyes being one of the original bitches with wings. He'd worked with a few female cops, and he knew looks could be very deceiving, but Cissy really did seem more like "The Kindly Ones" as later Greeks called her and her sisters. Bastian said as much to Cissy, hoping to keep a semi-normal conversation while they danced to some slow beat intended to get couples as close to sex on the dance floor as possible.

Winking, Cissy grinned like a mischievous kid. "Yeah, I'm glad Diana changed us to something a little less vicious. We were tired of being scary by then anyway, so we let her. Not that we can't get up a good rip-roaring snarlfest when needed, but unless we're directly involved or asked, we don't sniff out every criminal on the planet anymore. Can you imagine the millions of crimes we'd be chasing otherwise? Yuk! I need my beauty sleep."

"No, you don't." The words were out before he could stop them, and before Bastian realized how true they were. Cissy was fucking gorgeous, from her spiky urchin hair to her tiny pink toes, and he didn't want to know what she really looked like. Okay, maybe a little curiosity, but Bastian knew he'd be sorry he asked. Bastian bit his lip as it dawned on him she might even have a tail, and he found that sexier than hell.

Unbelievably, she blushed. "Stop. A red face clashes with my outfit."

He pretended to leer like a lecherous old man. "Baby, you threw on that costume and almost missed. There's nothing to it but two Band-Aids and a cork." Several couples dancing around them overheard his comment and guffawed. Under the cover

of their laughter Bastian bent down to whisper in her ear. "Keep your mind on business, Detective. I'll tell you how beautiful you are after the case is closed."

"Better yet, you can show me." Her voice trailed off and her nose flared. "Hang on, Bastian. I just got a whiff of FBK. His anger toward you makes even my reduced senses twitch. Man, what a heavy hate he's got for you."

"Can you do the bloodhound thing?" Bastian let go, just in case she could.

"No, not here. I'd have to shift and terrorize the guests. Da Boss wouldn't like that. I've got to let him come to me." Her eyes flicked across the room. "Let's make the bait more vulnerable. Take me to a chair and go get me some punch. We'll see who comes sniffing around."

It was a good plan. Bastian didn't like leaving her, but in a crowded room she was unlikely to be attacked. He ground his teeth in frustration about having to leave her undefended, anyway, but his little goddess could take care of herself. He led her to a chair and gave her a kiss. That should piss off FBK, if what he wanted was Bastian's "girlfriend."

Cissy leaned into his kiss and then fanned herself like she was hot when they broke it off. "Thanks for the warm up, lover boy. Now I really need a cold frosty drink. The punch will be spiked. How about a soda pop instead? Diet anything?"

"Diet anything, coming up." Bastian grinned like a besotted fool and left, knowing he'd set the bait up as best he could. The situation pissed him off, but the sooner he got the drinks and came back, the better he'd feel.

As soon as he got to the punch bar and ordered two diet sodas from the impeccably dressed caterer, a beautiful, pale woman jumped into his arms. "Hiya! I'm back! I thought we were going to meet on the terrace."

Bastian unwound her arms from his neck as politely as he could. From the alcohol on her breath, he guessed she'd been hitting the punch for several hours. "I'm sorry, Miss, but I think you've mistaken me for someone else."

Her eyes focused a bit better on him. "Dark curls cut short, big muscles, police academy gray shirt, and jeans. You're either a doppelganger or you're trying to get rid

of me. 'Miss' indeed! Hmph!" She stomped off, cursing in French. At least Bastian thought it was French.

The caterer cleared his throat and handed him two gold soda cans. "Ignore Isabella, *mon ami*. She parties with too many men, *oui*? She can no longer tell men apart, eh?"

The balm of male sympathy did much to smooth over Bastian's confused emotions. "Some are better than others, but they still mess with a guy's head." They nodded in masculine kinship, and the caterer turned to serve the next partier in need of a cool drink.

The ballroom was heating up, literally and figuratively. Bastian was bumped by dancers -- if you could call that almost sexual rubbing dancing -- several times. Whew, the place was turning into an orgy. A perfect place for FBK to choose a victim, if their baited trap failed.

Cissy smiled at two middle-aged men, obviously some of the wealthy guests from their glittering watches and rings, who bent too close and drooled much too openly at her skimpy attire. "I'll be happy to see you both, gentlemen. Here's my card." From her cleavage she extracted a business card and gave it to the slaverling, over-aged wolves.

Bastian relaxed. Okay, just guests in need of a little domination. What the hell was he thinking? That activity was illegal anywhere but here. After the men moved on Bastian walked up and handed her a can. "Going to practice a little assault and battery, darling?"

Cissy snorted into her can. "Yup, and no you can't watch."

"Damn."

* * *

"Oh, Zeus's Beard, my feet are killing me." Cissy moaned and pulled off her boots. The quiet of the coffee shop at three a.m. made her ears ring after the noise of the ballroom. Cheesy sex music always made her want to puke anyway.

"Here, have an iced coffee, grande, triple espresso, whipped, just like you asked." Bastian slid the oversized frozen concoction she admitted was a weakness toward her.

"Thanks." Cissy was so pissed off about wasting several hours at a dance-turned-orgy she didn't think. She took a healthy suck through the straw, and paid for it nearly immediately. She clutched her aching head. "Ow! Brain freeze! When will I learn?"

Bastian saluted her with his much smaller iced drink. "Since it's not polite to discuss a lady's -- or a Fury's -- age, I'll plead the fifth. But feel free to take your time."

Since she was taking another, more careful sip, she snorted the caffeine. Choking and coughing, Cissy almost missed her cell phone ringing.

The handsome human's face took on the dread they both felt. "Oh, shit. He's killed again, right?"

Cissy flipped open the phone without bothering to check the number. "Detective Roma." She listened carefully, pulling on her boots and trying not to laugh until she hung up on the sergeant. "FBK definitely isn't from around here. His victim just called. Boy, is she pissed. She's waiting for us at her villa."

Bastian took a few moments to grasp the implications. "His victim was, er, is an immortal?"

"Nope. She's already dead."

The cop cast a dubious look at his coffee drink. "Are there hallucinogens in this stuff or did I just hear you say the victim was already dead?"

"Yeah, she's been dead for a few centuries. She's a vampire. Take your drink. We'll need the caffeine by the time we're done questioning her." Cissy scooped up her drink and took a big slug. Brain freeze was the least of her problems now. "C'mon, handsome. Magic carpet ride will be here in a minute."

"Why do I have the feeling you're not kidding?" Bastian just sighed as Ali and his Magic Carpet floated down and beeped an air horn.

* * *

They could hear the curses even as they climbed the stairs of the villa at the direction of the servants. The vic was on a roll and venting her spleen. Make that having her spleen sewn back in, as well as both legs and one arm. Okay, so she had a legit bitch. From the mess, Cissy assumed FBK had a real good time. She strode toward the vic's bed. "Good evening, Isabella. I see you've met a serial killer."

Isabella focused on her immediately. "I would not call it a good evening, Cissy! The son of a flea-bitten whore! He agreed to go to my place for a bite, and look what he did! Do you think this will be covered by workman's comp?"

"What did he look like, Isabella? Can you give us a description?" Cissy sat next to her.

"Why do you need it? You caught him." Isabella looked puzzled.

"What are you talking about?" Cissy handed over Isabella's arm to the doctor, who shoved her aside to attach it with stitches.

"Idiot Fury!" Isabella pointed with her still-attached arm. "Him! My attacker is right there! Monsieur Doppelganger!"

She was pointing at Bastian.

Bastian blinked up from his examination of the red-feathered boa adorning the elegant mirrors of Isabella's boudoir. "You've called me that twice. What the hell is a doppelganger?"

Chapter Six

Bastian folded his arms and ignored the gore covering what had been an elegant and feminine room done in enough pink and frills to give a guy diabetes. Weren't vampires supposed to have spooky abodes full of spider webs and gargoyles?

The doctor sighed and answered without looking up from his work. "A doppelganger is a ghostly double of a living person that haunts its living counterpart. The legends say the doppelganger only appears to someone who is about to die."

"*Oui*. Either you are identical to my attacker, or you have a serious psychological issue, monsieur. I only talk to you now because you do not act like him. You are calm and quiet. My attacker spoke very quickly, and was... frisky with his hands before he choked me with zat boa."

Bastian barely heard her. His heart refused to accept the only logical explanation for his "doppelganger." He looked at Cissy and mouthed, "Identical?"

She was way ahead of him. She sprinted out of the room, bowling over two uniformed cops talking to evidence techs in lab coats. "I want copies of all prints and DNA! Fax them to my home office!"

Bastian was right behind her, knowing where they had to go next. Cissy's home. Cissy would think of her pets first, and the possibility that FBK would not be above harming innocent animals if he felt the situation warranted it.

They clattered recklessly down the stairs, skidding to a halt while Cissy flagged down a taxi. "If he's harmed one hair or feather on my pets' heads, I'll hunt him down. I swear I will."

Bastian shuddered at the growl of a pissed off Fury. He grabbed her arm and felt her vibrating. Her skin was rough and hot beneath his hands, and he could hear a faint

hissing sound. "Cissy! Don't change. Don't change! You don't want to piss off Da Boss, do you?"

Those sweet puppy eyes he'd come to adore had a distinct red tinge when she shot him a glare, and he could clearly see the gleam of sharp white fangs when she faced him. "Damn you! You're right." She visibly fought for control.

"Put your sisters on alert if you like, Cissy. They can be here in a literal flash of their wings, right? We might need them as bait." Bastian was thinking fast. Two could play the identical twin game. He muttered under his breath. "I'll get Johnny myself if I can. I knew he was envious of my success as a cop, but what has made him turn to this?" Bastian himself raised an arm and whistled when he saw a horse-drawn carriage pass at the crossroad.

They hopped into the cab and gave the address. Cissy folded her arms and fumed. "Who knows? But the point is that he's been using the unique properties of being an identical twin to frame you. The DNA samples will match you and Johnny both perfectly."

"Of course they'll match." Bastian sighed. "But why is Johnny doing this?"

"We'll have to ask him after we've caught him. In the meantime, we'll lock you away in some deep cold storage with a twenty-four-hour guard." Cissy tapped her foot anxiously. Things like the house itself she didn't care about. She'd had more abodes than she cared to remember, and only the one in Tartarus was really home. Too bad she could never take Bastian there again. The Goddess Hel had rules about keeping living mortals down there. A tryst, yes. Permanent, no.

"No, I don't think so, baby. The focus has shifted. You need me as bait. Johnny has been impersonating me at the cop shops, both here and in River City. He can pretend to be me at any time, so he'll know within hours that Isabella fingered me, er, him. He'll want to eliminate me now. It's easy to pin crimes on the dead because they can't defend themselves quite so easily. "

"Tell that to Isabella." Cissy couldn't keep the wry good humor from her tone, and Bastian doubted she tried very hard.

“Sorry. I keep forgetting I’m not in Kansas anymore, Toto.” Humor and smart comments were the only things that kept him from doing something un-macho like cry. Weird defense mechanism, but he’d take it. He clamped down on any negative emotion until he could talk to Johnny and ask him why. Maybe he was numb. Or confused. Yeah. Confused, that was it. He needed time to think, and was unlikely to get it.

“I’ll get you, my pretty, and your little brother, too!” Cissy’s cackle echoed in the crisp desert air. The cab stopped in front of Cissy’s house, and she flung herself out of the carriage as if she really were using her wings.

Bastian got out of the cab more sedately and tipped the driver. He could hear the reassuring sounds of Cissy’s zoo, and none of them seemed distressed. Apparently, Johnny only wanted to destroy Bastian and the things he cared about, not what the ladies cherished themselves.

Stuffing his hands in his pockets, Bastian trudged up the steps to the front door. His heart was so heavy it felt like the muscle had turned to lead and plummeted to his feet. Normally he wasn’t affected by depression, but wrapping his mind around the concept that his own twin brother wanted to not only kill him, but also destroy his life and career first was more than Bastian’s logical mind could process. What had he done to deserve this?

Cissy’s hand smacked into his breastbone with surprising force. Her face grim, she stared at something on the front door. “A rainbow boa? Now that’s really tasteless.” She dialed her cell one-handed and kept her left hand splayed in the middle of his chest.

Bastian dispiritedly glanced up. Yep, a rainbow of tiny feathers, tied in a neat bow around the front door. Dammit. “I don’t think Johnny cares about fashion, Cissy. He’s trying to make some point here, but I don’t get the significance of the colors.”

“We’ll ask him after I’ve locked his ass up for the next eight hundred years. One hundred years to life for each victim, you know.” The person answering the phone at the cop shop distracted her, and she walked away to bark orders, probably calling in a full lab team.

Bastian wearily sat down on the steps and leaned up against the balustrade. He didn't care. Pulling all-nighters wasn't anything new, but that didn't make the tiredness go away. He'd been hoping for a chance to shower, change, and take a long nap with Cissy in his arms.

Damn Johnny, now Cissy's home was a potential crime scene and target. All her pets would have to be farmed out to friends, and he could hear Cissy dialing the phone and begging for places to stash her menagerie. She'd be a while. Bastian let his mind drift, hoping for a nap. Maybe goddesses didn't need sleep, but the lovers of goddesses certainly did.

What seemed like only a few minutes later, Cissy shook him awake mercilessly. "Come on, sleeping beauty. I could carry you into the shower, but I'd have to transform and scare the shit out of you first. Wake up, Bastian!"

He wasn't hot. In fact, he was a little chilled. And naked. Bastian sat up in a hurry. Two double sized beds, a small table, mirror, and other accoutrements in the room led him to the conclusion they were in a hotel room. "How the hell did I get here, then?"

Cissy grinned at him from her position -- also naked -- beside him. "Ali was kind enough to heft you on his magic carpet taxi and wait while I got us a room and waved at him from our balcony. Lifting you that way seemed easiest, if not discreet. I assumed you wouldn't mind playing bait with me here at the Olympus."

Reassured, Bastian stroked a finger along her jaw line. "That's fine, but what will we wear for clothes? I assume your house is sealed until the lab boys are done, and my suitcase there was my last. Much as I'd love to stay naked with you forever, we do have FBK, er, Johnny to catch."

Cissy's face saddened with sympathy at his inability to equate his own brother with the serial killer. "I'm sorry, Bastian. I really am. My family has been killing one another since before my birth, but it's a bitch when it's your own sibling. I can't imagine Meg or Alex wanting to do me in, no matter how much we squabble."

"You still haven't answered my question about clothes." Bastian flung back the covers, refreshed from his nap. He optimistically assumed the clock showed three p.m., not a.m.

Bounding across the bed, Cissy bit his ass before he could take one step toward the bathroom for the promised shower. "Sorry, couldn't resist that delicious butt. Much as I'd love to keep that exposed, I ordered a few changes of clothes from the shops downstairs. No togas. Jeans and T-shirts for us both."

Bastian found a tiger striped men's "sock thong" on top of a stack of masculine clothes in the bathroom. Holding it hooked on one finger, he gave Cissy a raised eyebrow. "Not practical."

Her eyes full of lusty mischief, Cissy giggled and held up a matching lady's thong that was little more than a scrap of material and black string. "Not meant to be. Aw c'mon, Bastian. Loosen up a little. Who will know but me?"

"Me." Bastian put the thong down on top of his clothes. "I do not need butt floss distracting me when I'm on a high-stakes case."

Cissy swallowed disappointment. Eyeing Bastian's naked, well-built body, she postponed getting him to wear sexy underwear until after they caught Johnny. "Okay, Bastian. One kink at a time."

Bastian looked up at the ceiling. "Grant me patience." He sighed. "We should make this a quickie and be on the alert for Johnny to make his next -- and hopefully last -- move."

Cissy agreed, in principle, but the sad look around Bastian's eyes depressed her. He needed comfort, and fortunately men were very easy to comfort.

With the ease of long familiarity with the bathrooms of the hotel, Cissy reached in and flipped the controls for a hot, luxurious double-head spray. She couldn't wait to show Bastian the uses of the supposedly decorative lattice system and ledges in the glass brick wall.

Bastian allowed her to lead him inside. "Holy shit! Is this a cage or what?"

Cissy laughed. "It can be, but more importantly it's designed for sexual acrobatics like this." She stepped one foot on an acrylic ledge in the glass wall, and one foot on the horizontal bars of the lattice with her back facing Bastian. With one hand, she reached up and held on to the lattice in the ceiling. With her feet about one foot off the floor on either side of the enclosure, she knew she presented a tantalizing picture of a naked, wet female butt ready for plundering. "Come and get me, copper."

Silence, then Bastian chuckled. "I could get to like this. Hang on." The shower door opened and shut.

Cissy waited. Whatever he had up his proverbial sleeve was fine with her. She doubted he could surprise her. She was very wrong.

Bastian returned and closed the shower door. He leaned forward and kissed her up and down her spine until she was ready to beg for more. Then, without warning, his finger smeared something icy on her clit. In seconds, her clit "awoke" to the siren call of mint. Cissy gasped. "Toothpaste?"

"Flavored gel toothpaste, thank you." Bastian's hand gently shoved her forward.

Cissy got the message and allowed him to bend her over. "Bastian, if you don't do something about the fire on my clit, I'll..." She never got to finish that statement.

Bastian licked her clit with expertise, removing the minty smear and leaving only a tingle behind to remind her of his trick.

Cissy gasped, and writhed in the dance that had inspired the belly dancers for centuries -- that of a woman in the throes of passion.

Bastian wasn't done with his inspirational lovemaking. Olympus tricked out the bathrooms with all the finest luxuries, including the latest in soft loofah sponges the guests were welcome to take home with them. He used the sponge with expertise, rubbing the long thin sponge over every erogenous zone in reach, starting with her nipples.

Cissy could hardly believe the erotic nature of a simple sponge, and vowed to include toothpaste and loofah in her next hotel room dominance session with clients.

From there, Bastian continued his campaign of torture on her clit and her body simultaneously until her moans and gasps were louder than the sound of both shower heads pounding them from two separate walls.

Bastian lifted his face from her clit. "Oh, no, hotshot. You don't get to come yet."

"Damn you, Bastian! I was so close!"

"I know, but now I'm going to fuck a goddess until she screams my name."

Bastian stood and pressed his cock into her waiting pussy. His hands held her steady and safe.

"Make me, mortal!" Cissy thoroughly enjoyed being "made" to scream an orgasm with Bastian, but the challenge was irresistible. She bit her lip, determined to make him work for her capitulation.

Bastian had one more surprise for her. She sensed his distraction for a few seconds even as he pushed in deeper with his cock. Then, his finger found her ass with more toothpaste used as a lube.

Cissy survived and resisted all of six thrusts. Who would have thought a minty ass fuck would be her undoing? She screeched his name several times while he fucked her ass and her pussy simultaneously and ruthlessly, just the way she liked it.

The fuck seemed to last forever, with Cissy's squealing and Bastian's grunting thrusts like a chorus.

An eternity later, Bastian roared and shoved so hard, Cissy lost her balance. Were it not for his hands on her hips holding her firmly in place, a concussion would have been a real possibility.

They stood under the hot spray, panting and waiting for their systems to level. Not that Cissy wanted it to end. She'd never been fucked so well by gods or men. Her heart cried out before her head realized where the pain came from, but she managed to keep her voice silent. Why did Bastian have to be mortal? Forever just wasn't possible, her head shouted back. But oh, how she wanted it to be.

She'd never fallen in love with a mortal. No god had ever touched her heart. Until now, no one had dared love a Fury, and a Fury had never dared to love.

Cissy fell back on the litany that had kept her sane in times of trouble throughout the millennia -- one day at a time. One day, one hour, one minute if necessary. She could do anything if she measured everything in tiny bites.

Never before had she ever considered a long-term relationship with a mortal. It was just too hard to lose friends, much less lovers like that. But here she was, in love with a mortal. The Big "L." Oh, shit.

Bastian kissed her shoulder. "Like it or not, babe, we need to get dressed. I'd hate for Johnny to find us like this. Talk about being at a disadvantage. Besides, I'm starved."

"Me, too. Let's get dressed. The buffet in Muse's Lounge is -- pardon the pun -- to die for."

Bastian groaned, stepped out, and grabbed a towel from the warming rack. "Right now, if you slathered sauce on a brick, I'd eat it. I think that bagel you gave me yesterday was my last decent meal." Bastian rubbed his stomach and put on the underwear with only one uncomfortable look at Cissy. "Hey, this isn't as bad as I thought."

Cissy giggled and evaded his hands when he saw her wearing her thong. "Food first. Dessert later."

A knock sounded at the room door. "Room service!"

Cissy and Bastian both yelled, "One moment, please!" and dressed quickly.

"Either the Olympus is that efficient to hear us discussing food, or Johnny just made his move." Bastian used the peephole, nodded reassurance at Cissy, and opened the door.

A small, dark male pushed in a laden cart with a melon-sized frozen dessert swimming in chocolate, wine, a red rose, and a rainbow boa. A white envelope was propped conspicuously against the rose.

Bastian stared dubiously at the dome of ice cream. "What is that?"

The man smiled, showing sharp canines. "The chef's specialty, sir. It's a Frozen Caramelized Banana and Chocolate Bombe."

Bastian tipped the deliveryman and sent him packing.

Cissy read the note aloud. “No sense in hiding who I am now. The bitch fingered me. Next time I pack a stake, silver bullets, and holy water. Do you like the Drifters, hag? Where am I? It’s signed Johnny.”

Cissy winced. “Up on the roof, moron. Damn, I like that song, too.”

Bastian provided the rest of the threat. He pointed at the dessert. “And that’s a bombe. He’s got a bomb up on the roof.”

Chapter Seven

Cissy yanked Bastian back from racing out the door to the roof. "He'll wait. He wants us up there. He'll give us plenty of time to figure out the clue, right?" She waited a moment until she got Bastian's reluctant nod. "We have a bigger problem than just a bomb, Bastian."

He hesitated and visibly fought impatience. "What? Just let me get my hands on his throat, and he'll never live to get off on an insanity plea." His hands opened and closed spasmodically.

Her heart broke for him. He was so wrapped up in the personal side he couldn't see the bigger picture. "That's just what you can't do, Bastian. I'm a Fury. We take revenge for those who can't get justice."

Real rage contorted Bastian's face. "Don't you worry about that, baby. I'll see to justice for those women."

Cissy stamped her foot. "Dammit, this isn't some macho bullshit about precedence! I'm the Fury who takes revenge for patricide, matricide and *fratricide*." Cissy shouted the last word, praying he'd see her point. "Don't you dare become one of my victims, do you hear me? Back off!"

Bastian shook with anger, but the light of obsession died in his eyes. "I can't stand back and let you fight this battle, Cissy. He's my brother." He wiped his hands over his eyes. "Oh, God. If he gets me, he's yours. What will happen to him then?"

If Cissy transformed to her real self and gave him a taste of what Johnny could expect, he'd be a quivering mess in the corner. She also didn't want to take the time to explain about what happened to the deserving victims of a Fury's wrath. "Suffice it to say it won't be pretty, Bastian. More, he can't die until Hel says so. She rules the punishment aspect, along with a few other gods and goddesses. They have a council

down there. They're not as nice as the parole boards up here." Cissy smiled, allowing just her fangs to show. She wasn't officially a Fury on the hunt, or Bastian would see her in "all her glory." Cute phrase. She'd have to tell her sisters about that. "Just do me a favor and try not to get in the way, will you? Don't make me torture the very image of you for the next thousand years. I'll miss you enough as it is."

He looked down. "I know. I'm mortal. Sorry. But we can make the next fifty years or so pretty damn good."

Oh, Zeus! Not now. She didn't want to cry just now. Cissy blinked away tears and told her heart it could break later. Dammit, it wasn't fair to be an immortal and watch friends and loved ones die, but it was worse when you worked in Los Regalos. "We'll discuss that once we're assured you have a future, Bastian. Let's get on the roof. We have an appointment with a madman to keep."

"Right. Let's do this by the book, Detective. Badges and sidearms. Mine will just be unloaded. Fair enough?"

"Fair dinkum, as Alex would say." Cissy made a phone call to the station, warning them of the bomb threat so they could evacuate the hotel, etc. They could handle discreetly warning the hotel and getting all the guests herded out. "My biggest worry will be right below our feet, Bastian."

"Why? That would be the penthouse suites, right?"

"Normally, yes. But this hotel has an extra floor." Cissy sighed. "We can't let the bomb go off up here. The day care for the staff is on the top floor."

"Oh, fuck! We can stop on that floor and warn them. We'll take the stairs the rest of the way rather than wait for the elevator. Hopefully, that will give Johnny a surprise." Bastian sprinted for the elevator, lithe as a panther in jeans and the black hotel logo T-shirt she'd ordered.

Cissy used her employee card on the elevator to get them beyond the guest rooms and up to the top levels. How in the hell Johnny had gotten up there was a mystery. Then she remembered he'd stolen Suki's card. Son of a bitch was clever.

Warning the staff of the day care was easy enough. The Fair Folk had a wing beat alarm system inaudible to human ears. Before they could turn around, fairies were snatching up infants by the armful and flitting out the doors. It was like being in the middle of a colorful blizzard. The older children were being rounded up from the playground on that level's rooftop from what they could see through the glass doors.

Satisfied, Bastian and Cissy raced down the corridor to the stairs. They weren't winded when they reached the entrance to the highest roof, but they took their time to cautiously open the door slowly.

Mocking laughter greeted them. "Oh, hurry up so you can see the fireworks!"

"So much for stealth." Cissy stepped out first, determined to protect Bastian, who unhelpfully growled and stepped on her heels to get to his brother.

"Dammit, Johnny! Why?"

The situation was worse than Cissy thought. Johnny and Bastian were not just identical twins, they were even dressed exactly the same down to the tennis shoes and badges. If they stood side by side, she'd be in deep shit.

Johnny swept a dramatic hand over his clothes and flicked his cigarette ash over the side. "Didn't you ever get sick of dressing alike, Bas? Didn't you hate how Mom couldn't tell us apart unless she color-coded our clothes? Do you know how much I hate, hate, hate yellow and orange?" The last sentence was screeched.

"Probably as much as I hate blue and green, Johnny." Bastian spread his hands. "Mom was efficient, if not exactly inventive. But hey, we can wear whatever we want now."

Johnny drew heavily from the cigarette, and then let it dangle from his lips. "No, you stupid son of a bitch, we'll never be free as long as one of us lives. Every time I try to get a date, the bitch's eyes light up at the thought of getting us both in bed. Even if she never says a word, I can hear that fucking fantasy."

Cissy muttered under her breath. "No shit. Happens to triplets, too." Damn, was she actually feeling sympathy for what had driven Johnny over the edge?

Bastian spread his arms, palms toward Johnny to show he wasn't armed, but he stepped away from her and began the classic pincer move they were taught. "Yeah, I know that one all too well, bro. Happened a time or two to me, as well. But hey, I don't fault my dates for being human."

Cissy suppressed a snicker. "Or not," she muttered to herself. Cissy moved the opposite way, where Johnny wouldn't be able to keep his eyes on both of them.

Johnny drew once more from his cigarette and flicked the rest lazily over the edge, unconcerned about some poor person walking below who might suddenly find a lit cigarette in their hair. He picked up his pack and lit another directly from the solar collectors. The mirrors all faced the bright afternoon sun, catching the last rays and concentrating them on the collection point, which was hot enough to burn a hole in a human hand if it was placed between the mirrors and the collector.

Cissy nodded her head. Yep, he was crazy all right. Anyone who put their face that close to a collector was crazy or stupid. They'd already established Johnny was canny as a fox.

Bastian disappeared from her view behind some of the mirror panels. Stupidly concentrating on stopping Johnny, he forgot to remain constantly in her view so she could tell them apart. Maybe it never entered his mind that Cissy wouldn't be able to do so. Then, to her relief, he popped up not far from Johnny. "Johnny, did you really plant a bomb in this hotel?"

Johnny laughed maniacally. "Yeah. What do you care? This place is full of fag freaks and whore immortals. Bloodsucking vamps, bitch banshees and fucking fairies. My bomb won't cause them more than a few minutes of inconvenience. And the rich bitch humans who come to fuck them for thrills are really sick. This whole place deserves to go up in flames."

"Even kids, Johnny? Innocent babies? There's an employee day care center right below us. Kids never deserve to die." Bastian inched closer, pointing over the edge to the day care center's playground below. "Right below our feet are babies. What did they do to you?"

Johnny lazily drew on his cigarette and stared off into the sky for a moment. He seemed to contemplate the answer with calm deliberation. "They are freaks, just like their parents for one. Second, other than maybe werewolves, how many of them had a... *womb mate*?"

Bastian frowned, refusing to acknowledge the pun. "We can't help the way we were born, Johnny. If you want to consider being part of a multiple birth some sort of birth defect, that's fine. I don't. I also don't get why you killed all those women. I didn't know any of them besides Marty."

Contempt laced Johnny's voice. "That's because you had no life, shit head. Marty was the only woman you knew. So I chose random victims to frame you for their murders. I left my fingerprints and DNA all over the place so they'd eventually lead to you. I wore your clothes. I even impersonated you and pretended to lose my tickets at the travel agency so they'd give me everything I needed to follow you here. It was sooo easy."

Bastian snorted. "That's a myth, Johnny. Our fingerprints might be similar, but not identical. Not all that hard to tell apart to a trained eye."

Good, Bastian. Taunt him and keep him occupied. Cissy slipped along to the side, hoping to squeeze between two collector panels. She'd be out of sight maybe five seconds, tops. If Cissy made it, she'd be in line to transform out of Bastian's sight, but well within Johnny's range of vision. That would end this whole confrontation peacefully. He'd be so scared, he'd spill his guts about where he'd hidden the bomb. Five seconds was all Cissy needed to change.

Just as she ducked, Johnny screamed. "Don't you get it, you dumb bastard? Neither of us can be an individual as long as the other lives! If I purge my life of you, I can be me and only me! Not half a set, and half a man!"

Cissy heard a crash and a thud, followed by grunts. Flesh impacting flesh and steel. She peeked around the corner. Her worst fears were confirmed.

Not far from where she'd last seen Bastian, two identical figures grappled on the ledge above the drop to the street. Both wore badges. Both had guns. Neither had a cigarette. "Dammit!" She'd pulled out her gun.

"Shoot him! Shoot him!" One figure cried out without looking at her.

The other had shut his eyes. "Shoot us both! Shoot us both, dammit!"

Cissy sobbed, and prayed to Nike that she was right in her choice. She fired.

One of the two men stared at the wound in his torso. The other held him upright. The unwounded one nodded and smiled. "Nice work, hotshot."

Cissy lowered her weapon. "Hold the perp upright, Detective. I'll call for an ambulance." She reached for her cell.

The whole building shook with a deafening roar. Cissy hit her knees and watched Bastian and Johnny teeter on the ledge before falling to the cement rooftop right in front of her.

Johnny giggled. "You didn't stop me. Remember, no one knows I'm here. Sebastian Bach is here, not Johann Bach. If both of you are dead, then how will anyone ever know I was here?" He reached for his gun, but Bastian was quicker.

Bastian pulled the gun from Johnny's holster and tossed it several feet away under a solar collector's withering light. It immediately smoked and burst into flame. Damn toy manufacturers were getting too good at replicating the real thing.

Bastian cursed, sprang up, and ran for the stairs like the good cop he was. There were people to save and herd to safety. He was gone with a bang of the door, confident Cissy could handle Johnny all by herself. He was right, of course, but that was the essence of partnership. Trust and shared responsibility. Her job was to get Johnny to a hospital, and then to jail.

No longer concerned with protecting Bastian, Cissy transformed and stood, flapping her wings in a warm up before flight. She stretched, Johnny's fear-filled screams music to her ears.

He babbled the location of the bomb, even after it had gone off. Then he treated her to a litany of every sin he'd committed back to his first memory. Finally, the stench rose as he wet and shit himself in full-fledged terror.

Cissy yawned and picked him up. "Oh, shut up! For Zeus's sake, you aren't even a legit target. I'm just transporting you to the hospital in the fastest manner possible. By air. Stay still, shit head."

Johnny went limp in her arms. He'd fainted. Wuss. Cissy flew the stinking mess to the hospital and transformed back to a non-fearsome form in the alley beside the emergency room doors where the staff had a makeshift smoking lounge. No one was there, fortunately. Cissy had him on his way to emergency surgery just ahead of the crowd arriving from the hotel.

The ER staff shoved her into a corner. Cissy huddled in the chair, wishing she could be back at the hotel, saving as many as she could. Instead, she was stuck waiting to find out if her collar lived or died. For Bastian's sake, Cissy hoped he died on the operating table. That would be a very bad trial. Identical twins, one a cop, one a serial killer. Talk about a media heyday in River City. Bastian would be lucky to keep his badge there, poor guy.

Boy, was Da Boss going to be pissed. A bomb was bad for business. A Fury flying in daylight was bad for business. Cissy was in deep shit, and she only had three months on her contract before she could retire to the peace and quiet of the country, or Tartarus. She hadn't decided.

Or rather, Cissy hadn't yet until Bastian made the comment about "the next fifty years." She didn't have the guts to tell him she'd formulated half-assed plans about fulfilling her contract and retiring to River City. She'd just find Bastian and see if they could pick up where they left off.

All her plans were unraveling before her eyes. Da Boss had penalties for his contract employees who screwed up. Rumor had it one was increasing the length of the contract time to cover damages. Damages on a hotel could run into the millions in losses. She'd be stuck in Los Regalos until long after Bastian's death.

Sunk in misery, Cissy huddled in the corner, determined to be a good cop and finish her job. Maybe Da Boss wouldn't blame her. She had some hope left in her.

That is, until Cissy saw a filthy man wheeled into the ER with an equally filthy little girl still clutched in his arms, her face covered with a black hotel logo T-shirt. Both were coughing black smoke. The medics yelled for more oxygen and pried the little girl out of Bastian's arms, assuring him he'd saved her life.

An hour later, Bastian died in her arms of smoke inhalation.

Chapter Eight

A hand closed on Cissy's shoulder. All hope gone, Cissy looked up into her best friend Hilde's blue eyes. Then she realized what Hilde wore. Armor. Viking armor. And a sword. Cissy blinked. She'd forgotten what Hilde was.

A Valkyrie, one of the handmaidens of Odin, who took the valiant dead to Valhalla's halls to their just reward. Hilde was there to claim Bastian for the company of Valhalla.

With a ragged shriek, Cissy fled and let Hilde do her job. Howling, Cissy transformed and flew for home. Not the house still sealed for evidence, but Tartarus. Home.

Her sisters, summoned by their harpy servants, found Cissy sobbing in a corner, her wings covering her completely. Not even a letter from Da Boss, exonerating her of all the misdeeds and releasing her early from her contract, could bring her out of her depression. Finally, they left her alone and returned to their lives and duties.

Cissy forgot the march of time. In Tartarus, it hardly mattered. Souls came to their punishment, and were remitted into the general population eventually. Mindlessly and without the will to live, Cissy performed her duties like an automaton.

"Mistress?" The timid hiss of a harpy caught Cissy one "evening" after a work shift. Even the harpies were unnerved by what she'd become. It might have been amusing, another life ago. The dread, flesh-rending harpies were upset by a little honest emotion.

"What?" Cissy didn't even look up from her couch, where she slept and wept when no one was around to see.

"Mistress, I beg pardon for disturbing you, but an especially recalcitrant soul has arrived from Hel herself. He has been given to your care permanently." The harpy

bowed until her forehead almost touched the floor. "I put him in your bedroom, Mistress. He's handsome enough to amuse you for a century, at least."

"Whoop-de-do. Nosy, interfering goddesses. I don't want a toy. I'll take him back to Hel myself." Cissy pulled herself off the couch. "Maybe she'll give me some fire whiskey instead as a trade. I need a good, rip-roaring, bowl-hugging drunk. Where's Bacchus when you need him, anyway?"

"Los..."

Cissy interrupted quickly. "Never mind. I don't want to hear of that place again. Strike it from your vocabulary, and tell all your sisters."

"Yes, Mistress. Enjoy the soul slave, Mistress. Oh, and The Lady Hel suggested you appear to him in earthly form first so you might see him at his best." The harpy bowed her way out of the room, her wings dragging the floor in her hurry to leave.

Grumbling, Cissy took the time to bathe the stink of the dungeons off her flesh. Not for the sake of the slave, but because it was smart to not offend Hel's nose when returning a gift.

She strutted naked right into her bedroom, heedless of the slave who was probably chained to her bed. Whatever. Without looking at him, she sauntered to her wardrobe to decide what to wear for her audience with Hel. Maybe leather.

"Hello, hotshot."

Cissy spun around, dropping her favorite leather harness and bustier.

Bastian, cheeky grin and all, lounged naked in her bed with one hand behind his head. He winked cheerfully. "Seems Odin decided he didn't want a lovelorn cop ruining his party. Mind if I shack up here with you for the next millennia or three?"

Cissy whooped and dove for the bed.

Lena Austin

Someone cursed Lena Austin with “may you have a life so full you’ll have many tales to tell your grandchildren.” Lena’s a “fallen” society wench with a checkered past. She’s been a licensed minister, hairdresser, Realtor, radio DJ, exotic dancer, telephone service tech, live-steel medievalist swordswoman, BDSM Mistress, and investment property manager. Not necessarily in that order. She never finished that degree in marine archaeology, but did learn to scuba -- she’s got a lifetime of “research material!”

Hey, why waste these stories on kids who won’t listen anyway? Writing them down is a nice way to spend her retirement. What? You expected an ex-BDSM Mistress to take up crocheting or something? See all her books at <http://www.LenaAustin.com>. You can reach her by e-mail at voiceomt2002@yahoo.com.