

BLACK

Rayne

SILENT SCREAMS

BOOK 1-THE DRAGON QUEEN SERIES

Yvonne Nicolas

Red RoseTM Publishing

Black Rayne Silent Screams

The Dragon Queen Series

Book One

By

Yvonne Nicolas

Dedication

*To my family and loving husband
for their support.*

*Thank you for allowing me to take
my frequent trips to the dark side.*

Acknowledgement

I would also like to thank my friend, Andrea Weidner for pushing me forward when I was prepared to give up and throw my hands in the air.

Also, thank you Andrea for giving me inspiration when my muse was on vacation.

A special thanks to my soldier boys, Sgt. David Hamman and Byron Evans, two wonderful men who help protect this country every day.

Thank you for bringing the battle angel guardians to life.

Finally, I'd like to give a huge thanks to my pal and fabulous author, Renee Michaels.

Without you Black Rayne wouldn't have made it this far.



This is a work of fiction. Names, characters, places, and incidents are products of the author's imagination or are used fictitiously and are not to be construed as real. Any resemblance to actual events, locales, organizations, or persons, living or dead, is entirely coincidental.

Black Rayne Silent Screams by Yvonne Nicolas

Red Rose™ Publishing

Publishing with a touch of Class!™

The symbol of the Red Rose and Red Rose is a trademark of Red Rose™ Publishing

Red Rose™ Publishing

Copyright© 2010 Yvonne Nicolas

ISBN: 978-1-60435-774-5

Cover Artist: T.D. McKinney

Editor: Kristy Bock

Line Editor: Bernadette Smith

All rights reserved. No part of this book may be used or reproduced electronically or in print without written permission, except in the case of brief quotations embodied in reviews. Due to copyright laws you cannot trade, sell or give any ebooks away. This is a work of fiction. All references to real places, people, or events are coincidental, and if not coincidental, are used fictitiously. All trademarks, service marks, registered trademarks, and registered service marks are the property of their respective owners and are used herein for identification purposes only.

Red Rose™ Publishing

www.redrosepublishing.com

Forestport, NY 13338

Thank you for purchasing a book from Red Rose™ Publishing where publishing comes with a touch of Class!

Black Rayne Silent Screams

By

Yvonne Nicolas

Prologue

The Winged Beauty

Calroada Island

Demon Realm

From afar, the sharp bray of a blade sliced through the air and seized the night. Followed by the howls of the fallen, a brush of wind wafted the foul scent of demon blood into her senses.

They were coming.

At the place where the ocean met the sandy beach, the full moon illuminated the calm open waters, giving the night a false sense of peace.

As the scent of her wounded lover assaulted her senses, Nikena gazed back along the path she'd traveled and bristled. Nothing but the cold darkness stared back at her.

"Please, be patient, my dear Kaishan," she whispered in a mental message. "I will retrieve your soul from purgatory and we shall be as one again."

Clutching the bundle close to her breasts, she turned back to the ocean and moved forward. A spellbinding voice sifted up from the watery plain in song and warmed her bare feet as she crossed. She came upon a large coral reef. It shimmered like the bright orb watching from above.

“Princess Narri,” she softly called.

The song stopped and the water rippled. A burst of wind washed over her, lifting her hair from her shoulders. A playful giggle echoed in the distance as the mystical creature’s head popped out of the water like a curious child.

Narri’s magical presence shifted the breeze and strained the placid ambience surrounding her. The water fairy swam toward her in flashing speed, and then her head disappeared beneath the small waves.

The flutter of Nikena’s gown and flow of her hair froze in mid motion. Time paused, then resumed, bringing back the sound of the night. A pair of scaly hands reached out of the ocean and clamped onto the reef. The princess of *Arna*, the demon waters, emerged and rested her lamina coated frame on the limestone.

“Shame on you, milady, to make me wait so long to be blessed with your heavenly presence.” Extending her fin, Narri splashed her jestingly. “You should’ve told me you were coming. I would’ve prepared a meal.”

As always, Narri was a colorful dream. Magical hues of lavender and ocean blue scales stretched down her elongated aquatic tail, curves and torso. Small

droplets of water seeped into the smooth, fawn shade of her full breasts, and made her appear as if the water hadn't touched her at all. Bouncy aqua hair, which turned dark brown in the moonlight, dried instantly. Tiny iridescent sea creatures clung to her thick tresses, sparkling like gems.

“How thoughtful of you Narri, but unfortunately this visit is not for pleasure.”

“Aw,” Narri pouted, raking the tiny creature trinkets from her hair. “I was looking forward to splashing around with you again. I notice you are without your armor. Surely you can take one quick swim with me. It will ease your troubled mind, milady.”

Peering deep into Narri's bright hazel eyes, Nikena gazed upon the image of herself in a sheer silver gown, which flowed gracefully against her mahogany skin.

“Just one little swim...” Narri's words trailed off when a soft whimper came from the bundle held to her breasts. She gasped. “A child? You've brought a child with you?” Excited, she clapped her hands and flapped her fin. “Where did you get it from? Ooh, may I see?”

Nikena brushed the thin veil from the infant's face and lowered her for Narri's view.

“Oh my...” Narri scooted closer, nearly toppling off of the reef. “What a beauty.” Leaning in even closer, she inhaled the baby’s scent and stiffened. She swallowed hard and stared up at her wide-eyed. “Milady is this child the—”

“Yes,” Nikena replied.

“But, but you have—no, this is too soon,” Narri stammered, her eyes darting about nervously.

“No Narri. The time is now.”

“Oh no, that means the demons...” She tilted her head toward the dark forest. A storm of black clouded her irises. Her scales and fins turned a shade of onyx. “*They are coming. Where is Lord Kaishan? Where are the dragons?*” she asked, her mental words laced with panic.

Frowning, Nikena pressed her hand to her heart and looked away. The mention of her demon lover made her chest tighten. “*My time is limited, my friend. I must pass a great responsibility onto you for the sake of God’s children.*”

“*What does milady command?*”

The request sat on the edge of her tongue. She glanced down at her daughter’s beautiful face, so peaceful in deep slumber. There was so much at stake and to ask the lady of *Arna* to shed her scales and abandon her home, for the sacred love child nestled in her arms was too much to ask. But there was no one else she could trust.

“Milady, they are drawing near. Please tell me, what will you have me do?”

“Take my daughter from this place and protect her. These cursed demons are not to have her.”

An iridescent gleam glazed Narri’s eyes. *“You trust me with such a precious being? I am honored. Where am I to take her, heavenly one?”*

“Mayiki will open a portal for your escape. He awaits your arrival in Bahdea, the forest of enchantment.”

Swallowing back her emotions, she gazed at her lovely child once more, said a silent prayer then handed her to Narri. Sadness and grief weighed heavily on her heart as tears threatened to spill down her face. She took in a shaky breath and turned away.

Harboring howls of evil, a dark cloud moved across the bright moon, shading its radiant glow. Nikena sought her spiritual energy for emotional balance.

“What will you do? Where will you go?”

A steady calm consumed her as the sounds of the approaching demons escalated. The heat of silver absorbed her irises and lightning cracked from the heavens. “I will do what I must.” She raised her hand and called out, “Arise Geantye!”

A bolt of lightning shot from the heavens and filled her hand with her war companion, Geantye, the double edged, spirit battle axe. His energy sparked and stirred, fusing with hers. Together they gleamed in raw power.

Ready for war, she squeezed his leather wrapped handle, and glanced at the silver-eyed creature staring at her through the reflection of the razor sharp blade. “*I will distract them to give you time.*” She turned to Narri and sprouted her wings.

Tears filled her friend’s eyes. “*Milady, wait! Before you give into the call of the battle, please give me a name. Give me the name of your beautiful daughter.*”

Nikena straightened her back and glared up into the wickedness that consumed the night sky. “*Sharayna. My daughter’s name is Sharayna.*”

The zephyr teased her feathers and with a powerful flap of her wings, she ascended from the watery plain and took to the air. The stirring wind engulfed her in a hot rush, fueling her energy.

Against her better judgment, she sucked in her dreariness and searched for one last look at her child, but Narri no longer occupied the reef. A smile of relief curved her lips. “*Swim hard, my friend.*”

“Where is she, Nikena?” hissed an entity, manifesting out of the blackness which coalesced before her.

He took shape as hundreds of blood thirsty *chingi* demons separated from the dark cloud. Combined with their foul stench, the sound of their leathery wings flapping in the wind surrounded her.

“You cannot keep her from—”

With the unseen swipe of her axe, she severed the ghastly creature’s head. “You dare to speak of my daughter, demon?”

“You will pay for that, wench!” shrieked another.

She flashed before him and claimed his head before he could strike. Their angry howls over their fallen comrades charged her intent.

She raised her battle axe to the sky, blazing hot silver. “Now, who else wants a taste of my blade?”



Water creatures large and small scurried out of Narri’s path as she shot through the ocean in unyielding speed. Vile shrills from the demons above vibrated throughout Arna.

“*Destroy them all,*” Narri growled, clutching the infant against her breasts.

Suddenly, the awareness of another force spiked her senses. Someone was trailing her. She increased her speed, but the creature matched her pace. The being advanced swiftly, and before she knew it, he was swimming alongside her.

“There are demons hovering over our home, Narri!” he bellowed in fury. “I wanted to stay and fight but Nikena commanded I follow you. What is going on, sister?”

“They are after the child in my arms, Sota. We are to get her to the portal and protect her at all cost.”

He nodded and swam ahead of her. *“I will lead to clear the path.”*



Mayiki paced nervously along the shoreline, leaving a trail in the sand where his robe brushed. Off in the distance, he could see the battle between Nikena and the demons. The glow of her spirit axe and wings brightened the sky as she beheaded one dark creature after another, creating a shower of black blood.

The sudden ripple of the ocean caught his attention. Cautiously, he stepped back. Then in the midst of a blink, two blurs shot out of the water and landed in front of him. Startled, he stumbled backward and was on his way to the ground, when a pair of big hands grabbed the collar of his robe and pulled him upright.

“Oh, thank you, Sota,” Mayiki huffed, his heart beating erratically. “I can never get use to your sudden appearances.”

Sota regarded him with a warm smile. “And you most likely never will, my friend.”

Mayiki glanced at Narri, quickly nodded then averted his eyes. Heat warmed his face. The sight her beautiful naked body made his insides flutter. He forgot how fast water demons shed their fins and scales when completely out of the water.

“Well, *first things first.*” He waved his hand in a circular motion and cast magical beams of light over their nude bodies, clothing them. “*Follow me.*”

They moved through the copse of trees to make their way into the heart of the forest. Mayiki cut a side glance at Narri, careful not to stare at her stunning mortal image. “*Is the child safe?*”

Narri eyed the infant in her arms and smiled. “*The hard swim across the ocean hasn't stirred her one bit.*”

“*Good. We'll do better if she's dormant for the trip through the portal.*”

They came upon the large tree bearing blue and silver leaves—the elm of spiritual enchantment. Enlightened with magical life, the leaves gleamed bright. As they neared, the elm began to sway, beckoning them closer.

“*Stay close, and do not stare at the leaves.*” Mayiki pushed away the spiritless corpses of two shape-shifters at the base of the enormous bewitching plant.

Narri and Sota shot curious glances at the dead bodies, then at him.

“I’m aware you two have not ventured this far from the Arna before.” Mayiki kneeled and placed his fingers on one of the victim’s forehead. The gradual cooling of the flesh suggested the tree had devoured their souls only moment ago.

“So that you are informed,” he announced, looking up at Narri, then to Sota. *“This plant like creature is a soul seeker.”* Rising, he moved closer to the trunk. *“If your will is not strong enough, it will absorb your soul, leaving your body limp and lifeless for the wretched scavengers to fight over.”*

Sota nodded, a quirky smile gracing his face. *“We’ll keep that in mind, in case we come across any more spirit-sucking land creatures created by careless wizards.”*

Mayiki couldn’t help but chuckle. His friend’s sarcasm wasn’t lost to him.

“Yes Sota, I take full responsibility for my creation.” He placed a hand on the elm and the other out to his side. *“But do not forget, my mind was clouded in darkness when I crafted this unforgivable blunder.”*

He murmured a spell to conjure a portal. His staff appeared and filled his open hand. Completing the evocation, he slammed the rod into the base of the enchanting plant. A white light opened in the shape of an oval.

Mayiki waved them toward the portal. *“Do not stop running until you feel earth beneath your feet.”*

They nodded and both rushed into the entrance. As soon as they were completely through the portal, Mayiki began to cast the spell to close it.

The perception of a dark presence interrupted the wave of his spiritual energy. Before he could gather his senses and strengthen his power, a force lifted him in the air and slammed him against a nearby tree. He attempted to counter this dark power, but his concentration was broken when a monstrous serpent wrapped itself around his body to bind him to the tree.

Trapped within the scaly coils, he was crushed mercilessly against the rough bark. Through the fabric of his robe, the wood bit into his flesh. A harsh wail leaped out of his throat.

“Ohh, you really disappoint me, Mayiki,” scoffed a familiar sibilant voice from the shadows. “Reeeally disappoint me.”

“It seems I have a talent for that, big brother,” Mayiki retorted, his voice strained as he struggled to breathe.

“Hold your tongue, traitor,” the shadow scolded. “You are hardly in a position to be facetious.” Doshar emerged from the darkness, his finger leveled at him. The pale light emanating from the tree highlighted his pallid features.

“No Doshar, it is I who should be calling *you* the traitor.”

A malevolent glow shone from Doshar’s eyes. “I am no traitor! I’ve stayed true to my blood!” he boasted, slapping himself on the chest.

“Ah, true to the blood you say? Would that be the blood you were brought into existence with or the blood our gracious dark lord has bestowed upon you?”

Doshar’s hand sought his throat cruelly. “Enough of this pointless talk! Which realm did you send *her* to?”

“Sent who?” A weak smirk tugged at the corner of his lips.

His brother’s hand tightened around his neck, pinching off his air flow. “Why do you continue to go against your own kind, for the likes of *her*?” Doshar sneered.

“Because *she* will lead me to salvation and save my dark soul,” he gasped barely above a whisper as tears of anguish blurred his vision.

A sinister chuckle erupted from Doshar’s gut. “Save your dark soul, you say?” He laughed harder, stopped and growled, shoving his face close to his. “Well unfortunately for you, little brother, your savior has met her demise.”

“Is that so,” Nikena’s voice sung from the darkness.

The shriek that retched from the large serpent made Mayiki’s ears bleed. Its large body uncoiled and slithered to the ground. Heaving and gasping for air, he fell over the snake’s limp body.

Nikena melted through the tree, the huge severed snake head in one hand and her blood soaked axe in the other, evidence of her victorious battle. The black

vital substance was spattered along her sheer silver gown and wings, but failed to tarnish her radiance.

“Are you well, Mayiki?” she asked, her back to him.

Nodding as if she could see him, he pushed up from the ground and stood, taking in several deep breaths. “Yes, my lady,” he choked out on a cough.

Doshar grunted disapprovingly. “You address her as such, when she is nothing but a demon’s whore?”

Instant fury carried Mayiki’s feet in a flash step toward his brother, but before he could strike, Nikena raised her axe against his chest. He shifted from one foot to the other, glaring at Doshar, reluctantly granting Nikena’s request to stay put. His chest rose and fell with every angry breath he took. He balled his hands into tight fists until his nails bit into his palms. It was all he could do to prevent himself from sending a magical strike over her shoulder to sever Doshar’s insulting tongue.

“Calm yourself, my friend. His insults mean nothing to me,” she mused, glancing at him over her shoulder. She tossed the snake’s head to the ground and approached Doshar.

Panic dissolved Doshar’s smug grin as he backed away. “Those incompetent demons! I sent hundreds after you! Why are you standing here before me, alive and unharmed?”

“Because the light always prevails,” she whispered, suddenly behind him.

Doshar spun around. The flash of her blade sliced through his gut. Screaming, he tumbled to the ground.

Nikena stood over him. “Doshar, son of Rydus and servant of Lucifer, I bestow upon you a chance to set right your wrongs, a chance to see the light and walk into it, therefore erasing the darkness that binds you.” She offered her hand to him. Her wings fluttered and gleamed with the power to purify his soul. “The pain, the evil deeds—it can all be erased. Just take my hand.”

For a moment Mayiki thought Doshar would receive her generous offer, as he himself had done so long ago, but there was resistance in his brother’s black eyes. He felt Doshar’s struggle against her proposal, his refusal to be taken by the light.

The stubborn fool squeezed his eyes shut and frantically shook his head. “No! I will not allow you to suck me into the light like you did my brother!”

“Very well then,” she murmured dispassionately, stepping back from him. “Since this will not do...” She leveled her axe at him. “On your feet. Draw your blade.”

Mayiki heaved a heavy sigh. The fool should’ve taken her offer.

Grimacing, Doshar gripped the handle of his sword and leered his way. There was a frantic tap on his psyche, indicating Doshar’s request for mental

communication, but Mayiki would not comply. Doshar's decision to remain on the dark side had sealed his fate.

Sluggishly, Doshar rose to his feet, clutching his bleeding stomach. "You think you can best me, you winged whore?" He raised his hand, conjured a ball of flames, threw it at her, and fled toward the portal as fast as he could.

With the casual flip of her hand, she deflected the fireball and hurled it back at him. Inches from the portal, Doshar was smashed in the back with his own fire spell and pushed through the entryway. His enraged scream erupted from the abyss then faded.

Mayiki moved to Nikena's side and watched the flames vanish. "This portal has access to many realms, my lady. It will take him a while to find the one *she's* in," he answered without waiting for her to ask.

"He *will* find her, at the mortal age of twenty, when she reaches her peak and the heavenly scent flows from her body. It will not matter what realm she's in, he will sense her." The silver melted from her eyes and was replaced with gold. Sadness veiled her lovely face. "Her essence will draw *him* from the pits of hell."

"I will find her first and cast a *gychi* spell. I cannot detach her scent, but I *can* make it very difficult for him to locate her."

Sighing, she looked up into the night sky and frowned. "I must go into exile, Mayiki."

“Yes, my lady, I know.”

“I trust you’ll do what you can to protect my daughter until I can go to her.”

“I will give my very life to protect her.”

A warm smile graced her face. She turned and locked her golden gaze with his admiring dark stare. “I’m so glad I was able to bring you to the light, my dear friend.”

She grazed her fingers across his forehead, blessing him with a touch of the sweet divine. It traveled through his limbs and brought tears to his eyes.

“Me too,” he strained out on a whisper, touching the warm spot where her fingers had kissed him.

Nikena turned her attention back to the sky and displayed her wings. “*He* must not find her before her chosen consort does.” Her aura gleamed powerfully. “There will be many nights of a scarlet moon in the earthly realm.”

Mayiki tried to shake the question burning his brain, but couldn’t. “Please forgive me if this offends, but...” He paused to choose his words carefully. “Why didn’t you destroy Doshar when you had the chance? Why are you allowing him to go after her?”

She glinted at him then turned to walk away. He cursed himself for asking her such a foolish question. “My lady, please forgive—”

“Because my daughter will be the one to claim his head,” she replied over her shoulder. “And she *will* succeed.” Her form became a sphere of white light before she shot to the skies and vanished.

Chapter One

Take a Bow

Miami, Florida

Earthly Realm; 20 years later

“Thank you, Miami!”

Sharayna *Rayne* Piers bowed to the sea of cheering fans. Heat from the crowd’s excitement radiated over her like a soothing shower of rain. She kissed her fingers and spread her arms wide, sending love and gratitude to her admirers as they chanted her name.

Smiling appreciatively, she bowed once more. “I love you, Miami! Good night!”

The hydraulic platform she stood on lowered into the stage. She waved her hands rhythmically with the exit music until she dropped out of the audience’s sight.

His arms folded across his massive chest, Sota waited for her. “Another great show, baby girl,” he extolled, taking her hand.

With sweat dripping down her back, she hopped off the platform and shook her tousled hair from her shoulders. “Wheew, and one more to go. Hometown, big papi, you ready for it?”

“Are you?”

He wasted no time leading her through the path beneath the stage. She slapped high fives and gave fist pounds to her backup dancers as they moved along the corridor.

He ushered her to the exit where Troy, her lead male dancer tossed her a towel and mouthed, “In your dressing room.”

Winking, she mouthed back, “We’ll see.”

The stadium’s security detail surrounded her once Sota pushed the doors open. They tunneled through the crowd of anxious fans, reporters, and photographers. Rushing along, she waved and smiled, holding her persona for the cameras.

“Rayne, I love you!” someone shouted.

“I love you too!” Rayne shouted back, trying to keep her feet beneath her.

They made it to a set of double doors, which Sota plowed through with her wrapped in his massive embrace. The security guards closed the doors promptly after they cleared it. Heavy breathing from the uniformed men echoed through the quiet hallway that led to her dressing room.

“Wow, that was a rush,” she jested, smiling up at Sota.

“I’m so sorry, Miss Piers,” one of the security men breathed out, his face flushed in embarrassment. “That part of the hall is usually blocked off from the public. Someone must’ve let them in.”

She dismissed his apology with a casual flip of her hand. “Aw, don’t worry ‘bout it, man. Me and Sota do this all the time. Ain’t that right, big daddy?” Giggling, she patted Sota’s huge chest.

He held an austere expression, cupped her elbow and led her to the dressing room. “Thank you gentlemen,” he called down the hall before whipping the door open. “Wait here a minute.”

Leaning against the doorframe, Rayne folded her arms under her breasts and watched him search the room, like someone could actually hide in the wide open space. He stuck his hands in the center of her wardrobe and spread them to the sides. The hangers screeched across the chrome rod, making her wince.

“Seriously though? Who’s gonna hide in there, Sota?”

He sliced her a sidelong glare over his shoulder. “You just be quiet.”

After thoroughly checking the room, he all but yanked her in. “You’ve got ten minutes before the winners of that radio contest come in for autographs.” His deep voice was urgent and demanding. “So hurry up and change.”

“Yes, drill sergeant!” she shouted, doing her best Forrest Gump impersonation. When she got nothing but a bleak expression, she frowned. “Listen, I’ve been holding this happy joy front for months now, like my life is fabulous when you and I both know it’s not. The least you could do is play along.”

His brows bunched and his lips tightened. He quickly pushed the door closed. “I’m sorry. I’m not trying to...how are you feeling Rayne?”

Avoiding his hardened stare, she trudged over to her duffle bag. “Like the world is spinning in the wrong direction,” she grumbled. She fished out the small orange bottle and popped a pill in her mouth. “It’s getting worse, Sota.” She took a swig of water and sighed. “You said not to worry, but I dunno, brah...It happened again, on stage this time. I mean, damn man, my stage time is my therapy, and now that’s taken away from me. I think I’m sick, for real.”

“No, you’re not sick—”

“Then what’s wrong with me?” she whined.

“Not a damn thing.” He rubbed her back then reached around her to switch on the small stereo on the vanity.

“You’re all calm, acting like I’m going through some regular episode. There ain’t nothing normal about this shit, and you know it.”

Nina Simone cooed from the speakers. *Feeling Good*. Rayne briefly closed her eyes and tried to get into the feeling that Nina sung so soulfully about.

“Try not to think about it. Let’s just get through the night. You’ll feel better when you talk to Narri tomorrow, okay. Want me to call off the get together with your fans?”

“Naw, uh-uh, don’t do that.” She plopped down in the chair and lowered her head to the vanity. “Give me about twenty minutes to put on my *Rayne’s life is wonderful and I’m not losing my damn mind* face, a’ight.”

“Ya know, you don’t have to do—”

“Twenty minutes until this valium kicks in,” she drawled. “And I’ll be all smiles for my peeps, okay.”

When she heard him huff then exit the room, she groaned. “Try not to think about it? Seriously?” If he only knew how close she was to slitting her damn wrists...

Raking her fingers through her hair, she pushed up from the chair. She rested her hands on either side of the dresser top, stared into the mirror and wondered who the girl was staring back at her.

Silver eye shadow accented her deep chocolate brown eyes. Glittery powder glistened against her rich mahogany skin. Her tousled mane fell over her shoulders, and brushed over the peaks of her breasts. A silver skirt hugged her hips, and flared out slightly a few inches past her behind.

Way too short for her liking, but this was the image she projected.

A matching top, no more than a bra, fitted snug over her size C mounds. She straightened her back, tilted her head and brushed her fingers over her muscled abdomen then fingered the small, silver navel ring.

This flashy appearance wasn't her. It was a façade, put on to visually satisfy her fans—*the image of Rayne*.

Behind the bold reflection in the mirror was a normal girl who'd grown up in Florida with a talent for singing and dancing, but now, that girl was anything but *normal*.

About a couple of months ago on the day of her twentieth birthday, some real life-changing mysteries turned her world upside down. First it was the bright red highlights in her hair, which pretty much appeared over night, and consequently became a fashion trend.

Then days later the nightmares began; *terrifying nightmares* of young women brutally murdered by something or someone unseen. It wasn't long before the horrid dreams turned into visions that haunted her without warning, during the day and just recently she suffered one while on stage.

Thank God her backup singers were able to pick up where she fell out of sync.

At first she thought the visions were caused by her overwhelming life. It was stress, her brain's way of telling her she needed a break from her sudden

stardom. Then young women began to disappear in the real world, outside of the freak world in her mind.

Coincidence?

Even as their faces were flashed across the televisions, and their names blared out on the radio, she couldn't be sure they were the same girls from her nightmares, but deep inside the possibility was frightening.

"Ohhh Jesus, help me," she sighed.

Restraining her tears, she lowered to the seat and removed her make-up. It didn't matter what Sota said, she knew deep in her heart she was a basket case. Problem was, her façade was breaking down and pretty soon everyone else would know too.

Huffing, she pushed up out of the chair, spun around and propped her foot in the seat. As she unstrapped the three inch silver pump, the door creaked open.

"Don't move." She turned toward the husky voice to see Troy sliding into the room. He bit down on his lower lip and closed the door behind him. "Stay just like that."

She noted her position—her foot in the chair with her leg bent. She knew exactly where he was headed.

She chuckled lazily. “Hey there, sexy boy, change of plans. A few fans won a radio contest and are gonna come by to chill with me for a hot minute. I’ll catch up with you later, at the after party.”

Like she hadn’t said a word, he swaggered across the room, cradled her face and hungrily took her mouth. Playfully, she pushed back from him and scuttled out of his reach.

“Am I talking to myself?” she chortled. She kicked off her loosened shoe and attempted to unbuckle the other, but he came after her. “You know big papi is right on the other side of the door, right?” Troy grabbed her arm. She spun out of his grasp and skipped back. “Seriously, Troy, I can’t play with you right now.”

A look of frustration twisted his face. “Why you been dodging me lately, ma?”

Nibbling on her tongue ring, she looked away from him. How do you tell a man his groove wasn’t making your ass bounce anymore? There was no nice way to put it, so she didn’t say anything. It wasn’t fair to take it out on him anyway, because in all honesty it had nothing to do with him. It was her.

Her flood gates had been on lock down for months now, every since her supposedly fabulous life turned upside down, but he wouldn’t know that because she’d been faking the funk. At first, she didn’t feel so bad about it because she

wasn't the first woman in history to fake an orgasm, but damn, if she could just have one holy O, she'd be a happy camper.

Not saying she didn't get horny. Hell, the only time she didn't think about sex was when her mind was stuck in the murderous twilight zone. Other than that, her pussy was a flashing beacon waiting for the big wave.

He gently took her hand and drew her against him. "I feel neglected." He latched onto her mouth, slipped his eager tongue between her lips and sparred with hers.

It was confusing the way heat suddenly engulfed her, as if someone flipped on a switch inside her body. An *unfamiliar* hunger hid behind the craving for sexual release. Her body temperature shot up. Her sensitive nerve endings burned with desire, and damn near drew out a groan. She trembled against him as the unknown sensation steadily rose.

She dragged the kiss from his mouth to his cheek. Helpless whimpers spewed out of her the closer she got to his throat, but before she could plant her lips on the taunting spot Sota banged on the door.

"Baby girl, you good in there?"

She pushed back from Troy and hobbled a little. Her head spun and her hands shook. What the hell...?

“Uh, yeah, I’m good, yeah, I think...” Through a hooded gaze, she stared at Troy.

His neck. She couldn’t stop staring at his damn neck.

“Are you done changing?”

“No,” she snapped at the door. She blinked rapidly and tried to calm her heavy breathing. “Uh, hold on.”

She tried get to the door. Troy grabbed her and pinned her to the wall. “Troy, we can’t—you should probably go. I have to get ready.”

“I locked the door,” he mumbled, nuzzling the crook her neck. “Please baby just give me a lil’ bit.” He pressed his erection against her. “I need to feel you.”

Now, how could she say no with his rock, hard cock pressed up against her? “Damn, boy. Real quick, okay?”

“Yeah baby.”

Troy pulled her skirt up over her hips and slid her panties down her legs. He binged them up to his nose and deeply inhaled, then tossed them on the vanity. As he reached in his pocket to retrieve a condom, she unbuttoned his jeans.

“Rayne, you’ve got five minutes,” Sota huffed.

“Ten!” she shouted, freeing Troy’s hardened member.

“What do you mean by—whatever,” Sota grunted.

Breathing hard with anticipation, Troy hurriedly sheathed his shaft. She lifted her leg, wrapped it around his waist and sharply took in a gust of air when he slid all nine inches of his length deep inside of her core.

Troy lifted her other leg over his waist, adjusted his stance, slid out of her then pushed in again. She locked her ankles, hugged his neck, and clenched her teeth to fight the need to moan loudly.

“Damn Rayne, I love this tight pussy,” he groaned.

His hips moved in an unhurried rhythm. She nipped on his ear lobe. His slow strokes cruised into piston-like thrusts. Panting and moaning with one hand on her ass and the other braced against the wall, he plowed in and out of her at feverish pace. The sweet sounds of his pleasure brought forth an uncanny desire to...*bite him?*

Slightly jarred and aroused at the same time, she licked behind his ear and traced a wavy, wet path to his neck. The alluring sound of fluid rushing through his veins blocked out his moans and mingled with the frantic thump of his heartbeat. The rhythm was pure ecstasy. Her gums started to sting.

Bite him.

Something took hold of her. She reeled with passion and before she could stop herself, her mouth opened and she bit down on his jugular, hard. He went rigid. His breathing hitched then he bellowed out in pain, “Goddamn Rayne!”

Drawing back, she muffled his outcry with her hand. “Oh snap, I’m sorry, Troy, sorry.”

Hesitantly, she looked into his eyes, thinking maybe she’d gone too far with this new found craving, but there wasn’t fury or confusion in his eyes, only unrestrained lust.

His lids lowered half-mast, and his hips bucked into overdrive. Her body scooted up and down the wall with each forceful plunge. Clutching to the beat of his heart, her core accepted the violent pleasure willingly.

She tightened her arms around his neck, undulated with him, and smoothly took over the pace. He quaked in her embrace and stepped back, still embedded deep inside of her.

The head of his cock pulsed. She heaved against him harder, drawing out escalating moans, then subconsciously, bit him again. Bawling, he exploded into the latex barrier then dropped to his knees.

His weakened arms released her and then she tumbled out of his embrace onto the floor. She swiftly got to her feet and scrambled away from him. She couldn’t breathe for a second and had to fight to keep the distance between them.

“Damn baby,” he puffed, one hand planted on the floor and the other cupping his drained cock. “You know how to bring a brotha to his knees.”

She covered her throbbing mouth and tried to avert her stare, but damn, she couldn't. Biting him had been the closest thing she had to an orgasm in months. She had to do it again.

On his neck, a deep, purplish bruise came forth. Mesmerized by the passion mark, she slanted her head and moved toward him. The way the blood gathered right beneath his skin, did something unnatural to her. The spot taunted her, lured her in for another taste. She couldn't name it, didn't want to, just wanted *that spot* in her mouth.

“Ray Ray, open the door. I need to fix your hair.”

Brianna's high-pitched voice made her stop and rattle her head. She blinked and found the strength to look away.

“Raaay,” Brianna whined. “C'mon, lemme in.”

She took in a deep shaky breath, shook her head once more then hobbled to the door. Still unnerved, she pulled her skirt down over her behind and brushed her hair back from her face to look halfway decent.

Once she unlocked and opened the door, Brianna sashayed into the room, her hair styling bag in hand. The vanity light caught her chestnut tone and long burgundy tresses, highlighting her youthful beauty.

“Guurl, it's straight up *fandemonium* out there, for real. These people are about to lose their minds over you. I can't even begin to tell you what I had to go

through to..." Brow furrowed, she cocked her head and stared at Troy. "Boo, what the hell you doing on the floor?"

Luckily, Troy had already put his pipe away, but then again, that didn't matter. Her quick-witted friend would pick up on the scenario real quick.

Troy pushed up from the floor and took a deep breath. "What up, Bri."

Brianna darted her eyes between the two of them, then erupted in laughter. "Ooo, ya'll been hunchin'," she quipped.

"Shush girl, with yo' loud behind," Rayne whispered harshly, her finger over her mouth.

"It's not like Sota don't know what ya'll doing in here. He's right outside the door. Freaks." Snickering, she pulled her supplies out of the bag and set them on the vanity. "Don't mind me. Just work it out 'til you ain't got nothing left..."

Ignoring her best friend's jesting remarks, she watched Troy lumber toward her, his eyes torpid as if under a spell. He drew her into his arms and pressed his forehead to her temple. "I need to talk to you 'bout something," he whispered. "About us, ya know, making this real."

Rayne swallowed hard and bristled in his embrace. "You should go, okay? We, we'll talk later."

“I’m serious girl. I feel for you. I wanna do this.” His roaming hands moved down her torso over her curvy hips and his head tilted back, exposing his marked throat. His pulsating vein called out to her.

It’s like he wanted her to bite him again.

“After the party,” she whispered as she gently pushed out of his embrace. She tore her eyes from his throat. “Go ‘head now before Sota come in and bust you up for being in here too long.”

He stared at her a moment then quietly left the room. She eyed the closed door and sighed in relief when she couldn’t hear his heartbeat anymore.

“I am buggin’ out here, for real,” she murmured.

“Me too. C’mon over here so I can do something with all that hair, Freak. People don’t need to know you been bumpin’ uglies,” Brianna bantered, tapping the back of the chair with her comb. “And take off that other—what the hell? He fucked one of your shoes off?”

Finally able to conjure laughter at her friend’s silliness, Rayne bent down and removed her other shoe. “Shaddup, Crazy. Give me a sec. Lemme change real quick.”

Rayne stripped out of her costume then slipped on a pair of hip hugging, flare-legged blue jeans, a frilly peach toned half top, a silver trimmed belt and a

pair of white sneakers. Smoothing her hands over her jeans, she hurried over to the vanity, flopped in the chair, and flipped her hair back.

“Okay, so, what’s going on with Troy?” Brianna asked, digging her comb into Rayne’s hair. “Is it just me or is that boy getting finer every time I see him? Whoa, wait a minute, speaking of *fine*—Sota—good Gawd, Almighty. Can you say, yummy?”

Rayne snickered.

“Dang girl, whew. I love my black men, but hmm, that man out there gotta sista wanting to do all kinds of nasty things. I swear, I’m a burning minute away from telling him he can do the rain dance on me *any day*.”

Brianna stepped away from the chair, grinning like a mischievous child then started hopping around in a circle—her version of a rain dance.

“Hot damn! Big boy can *make it rain* with his sexy Indian ass.”

Laughing uncontrollably, Rayne slapped the arm of the chair. “Girl, you a damn fool!”

“And you know this! A’ight, now back to the other fine one, *Troy*.”

She pushed out a breath in amusement and shook her head. “As far as Troy goes, we’re just doing the do. That’s it. Nothing serious,” she muttered quickly to dismiss the subject.

“I don’t know ‘bout that. I heard what he said. Sounds like brah is trying to make you his woman.”

The smirk fell from her lips. Just thinking about him brought about the urge to sink her teeth into his flesh. She stiffened. What the hell was wrong with her?

“Aaand she’s silent,” Brianna announced, not bothering to meet her stare. “Moving on to the next subject. Remember the light skinned chick who was in our statistics class with us back in high school? Ya’ know, the one who hated your guts? The same chick who made it her business to sleep with any man you were interested in?”

“How could I forget her?” she grumbled with the roll of her eyes.

Brianna held her hair up and locked eyes with her. “Missing, since last month.”

Rayne’s mouth fell open. “Noo.”

Her heart lurched. Someone she once knew was now on the list of missing women, and according to her visions, probably dead. Tears quickly surfaced. She pinched the bridge of her nose and blinked feverishly to hold back the water shed.

“Yep. It’s been happening everywhere. Here, Georgia, New Orleans, Washington—*everywhere*. Girl, its real messed up. These chicks are our age, Ray. And get this, they say ‘bout three to four girls go missing every month. In every city! Tragic!” She brushed Rayne’s thick mane up to the crown of her head, drew it

tightly together then wrapped an elastic band around it to make it one long flowing ponytail. “You know what this means right? Nationwide *curfew*. I see it coming.” She shook her head, smoothing her hands from Rayne’s hairline to the ponytail. “This mess is way outta control. I think it’s like a huge cult or something. It has to be.”

“Or maybe they’re being murdered...by ghosts,” she uttered without thought.

Brianna’s hands paused in her head. “Now what would make you say some twisted shit like that, Ray?”

Rayne grimaced at the appalled expression on Brianna’s face.

“Na-uh, we’re not even gonna think like that, okay. They’re missing, not *murdered*, just *missing*.”

“But, what if they were...?”

She swallowed hard and met Brianna’s puzzled gaze through the mirror. It was ripping her heart apart to hold this horrific secret, especially after hearing about one of her old classmates. She had to confide in somebody. Why not her best friend?

“Okay, don’t freak out when I tell you this, and don’t say anything, just listen. I can trust you, right, not to repeat this to anybody...?”

“I’m pissed that you even think you have to ask me that.”

“Seriously though, this is important and I really need you to believe what I’m about to tell you.”

“Spit it out, Ray,” Brianna muttered in annoyance.

Rayne took a deep breath and ran her hands nervously over her thighs. “Okay. Those girls, who are missing...I’ve been having nightmares about—”

“Knock, knock.”

They both snapped in the direction of the familiar voice to see Carrie standing in the doorway.

“Hey!” Rayne shot up from the chair and ran over to give her a big hug. “You made it.”

“Yeah, I made it,” Carrie mumbled with a tight-lipped smile.

“I’m so glad to see you. It’s been like, forever. You look great, ma. Did you like the show?” Rayne asked, beaming at her.

“It was cool.” Carrie cut her eyes at Brianna, who leaned against the vanity, arms folded and lips pursed.

“You know damn well it was better than cool, *hater*,” Brianna hissed.

“Bri,” Rayne warned, slicing her best friend a side glance.

“Whateva.” Carrie rolled her eyes. “I just came by to tell you I’m going home.”

“What? Naw girl, hang out with us for a lil’ bit. I have a room set up for you and everything. Gotta lil’ bubbly, a lil’ Patrone...” Rayne coaxed with a playful sway of her hips. “C’mon doll, don’t leave when the party ain’t even gotten started yet.”

Brianna sucked her teeth, grumbled beneath her breath then turned her back to them.

Yeah, her words were desperate, but she couldn’t help it. She needed Carrie close, even though she obviously still held a grudge, a grudge which had hung over their almost non-existent friendship for the last five years.

Besides the need to rekindle their twelve year sisterhood, there was a feeling in her heart that haunted her. *A feeling* that made her pick up the phone in the middle of the night and beg Carrie to come down to Miami to be with her. *A feeling* that something horrible was about to go down.

“Naw, I got things to do at home, so I’m out.”

“You’re lying,” Brianna sneered from across the room. “You know you ain’t got shit to do. Ray, please let this hatin’ bitch go home before I tell her how I *really* feel.”

The door suddenly flung open and Sota rushed in. He grabbed Rayne’s overnight bag. “C’mon Rayne, we have to head out,” he exhorted.

“What. Why? What’s going on?” Puzzled, Rayne watched him dump all her contents in the bag.

“Brianna, get your stuff. C’mon girl,” he ordered.

Brianna glanced at Rayne in bewilderment, quickly gathered her things and dashed out the door.

Eyes widened with an odd urgency, Sota took hold of Rayne’s upper arm and led her out of the room. “Sota, I thought I had to meet with my fans—what are doing, man?”

“Change of plans. We’ll discuss it in the limo.”

“Well, what happened? Why are we rushing?” As aggravating as she knew it was, she couldn’t stop asking questions. Something wasn’t right.

While trying to keep up with Sota’s rapid pace, Rayne turned and glanced back at Carrie. The security men were leading her down the hall, in the opposite direction.

Sudden anxiety slammed into her. “Wait, Carrie! Carrie!” But she was too far away to hear her around the noise of the fans. “What the hell is going on, Sota?” Rayne asked, consumed with distress.

“Uh, nothing to be concerned about. Paul called, gave the orders for you to be out of the building at a certain time. That’s all.”

He was lying. The furious twitching of his jaw muscles told her so. Something had spazzed him out, probably the same *something* that had her guts about to leap out of her stomach.

They moved swiftly through the back door of the building. The cool night air kissed her face, but it wasn't enough to calm the alarm in her heart.

“Uh-uh, you're scaring me.” She jerked her arm out of his grasp.

He stopped, wiped his hand down his face and pushed out a hard breath. “Rayne...”

She folded her arms under her breasts and pursed her lips. “We're not taking another step 'til you tell me what's going on. 'Cause this all-of-sudden-running-for-our-lives crap is scaring the piss out of me. Talk.”

A forced smile crossed his face. “I didn't mean to scare you, baby girl. Everything's cool, okay. There's just a little glitch in the plans. It happens sometimes.”

“Huh? What *sometimes* you talking about Sota? You acting like this is something we do on a regular basis. Naw man...” She shook her head and leered toward the building. “This doesn't feel right. And I don't like to dip out on my fans like this. You know that.”

He patted her shoulder. “Don't worry, Paul's got it all covered. They're getting autographed pictures, shirts, hats, DVD of your videos, your new album

before it hits the stores—all of the Rayne fan accessories and whatnot,” he rambled off. “Believe me, they won’t be disappointed.”

She nibbled on the ball of her tongue ring and stared at him, trying to read what was behind his phony display of calmness. “You’re hiding some—”

Halting her in midsentence, a scent sliced through the air like a hot knife and stole her ability to speak. Her eyes stretched wide and her nostrils flared. An aroma so sweet compelled her to tilt her face to the sky and deeply inhale. The playful zephyr made it faint, but it was still there, teasing her.

“What’s that smell?” she murmured, advancing against her will. Spellbound, she walked right into Sota’s massive frame.

He took hold of her shoulders and held her back. “Wha, what does it smell like?” he asked, his tone anxious and hurried.

“It’s like, I don’t know,” she stammered without dropping her eyes from the dark clouded sky. “Ooo, it’s like...” The fragrance swirled around her like stimulating ribbons, cooing her body in an erotic play. “Wow.”

“Tell me, Rayne.”

Soon, the aroma faded and gave way to a new scent, one that made her sick to her stomach. “Eww, what the—did you fart?” Covering her nose and mouth, she scurried away from him. “That’s nasty, brah. You could’ve warned me. My mouth was open.”

“Noo,” he groaned.

She was prepared to call him a liar when he bristled. Before he glared up at the sky, she could’ve sworn she saw his bright brown eyes cloud black. He took hold of her arm and rushed her toward the limo.

“Time to go.”



Carrie slammed the door to her Honda, started the ignition and sped out of the arena’s parking lot, leaving a cloud of smoke behind her. A voice within told her to take her ass home, but she needed a drink, something strong, *something* to get her mind off of Rayne.

“She thinks she’s all that now. Shit, I knew the bitch when she was nobody.”

At the same time, they were noticed in the music industry, but the hot shot producer only wanted Rayne. Still to this day Carrie didn’t understand why. She sang better than Rayne, even looked better than her, but that cockhead chose her big ass just because she could write a few songs and do a few fancy dance moves.

What-the-fuck-eva.

Clenching her teeth, she accelerated and sped onto the highway. She turned on the radio, and just as quickly turned it off when one of Rayne’s songs came blaring from the speakers.

She shot past a semi and slid onto the exit lane, heading to a club she used to frequent when she'd visit her cousins in Miami.

Once in the club, the reggae rhythm spiraled through her body and made her hips rock on their own accord. She pushed through the crowd, parched for the drink she so desperately needed. Caught in the mass of writhing bodies, she found an empty spot to occupy at the bar.

Sean Paul's Jamaican slur took over the sound system and drew excited squeals from a group of women, who ran out to join the crowd.

Hell yeah! That was her jam too, but she wasn't about to break a sweat without having a drink first.

She licked her lips, played with her hair, and watched the cute bartender make his way down to her end. Without asking for her order, he set a Red Stripe in front of her. Confused, she looked at him with a raised brow. He simply smiled and pointed toward the other end of the bar where a guy sat in the corner, staring at her.

Smiling, she nodded to the bartender, grabbed the beer and headed down to the mysterious gentleman. This brother was gorgeous with his smooth, dark chocolate tone and long, glossy dreads. A set of sexy lips curved up to greet her and bold brown eyes scanned her frame from head to toe.

“Thanks for the beer. It’s like you read my mind,” she purred in his ear, rubbing her breasts across his muscled arm.

He stood and led her out to the dance floor. He drew her into his arms and moved his hips against hers. The sexy reggae groove made her insides pulse.

Ecstasy consumed her when he slid one of his huge hands down to her behind and squeezed. This man wasn’t playing games. He was out for a little pleasure tonight and from the way he looked at her, he’d do it right here on the dance floor if she’d let him.

Hm, she could deal with that.

Holding his unwavering eyes, Carrie grabbed onto his shoulder, leaned back and ground her crotch against him, moving to the thump of the beat. His loud groan sifted over the music. He pulled her thigh up to his waist, dipped down, and rolled his pelvis back up. His beefy length brushed across her hardened clit through her skin tight jeans. Uncontainable tremors shot through her core.

“Wanna go back to my place?” His unusually deep voice boomed in her ear and rattled every nerve in her body.

Without a second thought, she nodded.

She didn’t remember getting into his car, nor leaving the club. It seemed like no time had passed when they walked through the front door of his place.

Before she could gather her wits for what was about to go down, he slammed the door, pushed her against it and started ripping at her clothes. Her blouse was quickly discarded and her bra torn completely off.

She stiffened. His aggressiveness was scary. The lust she felt back at the club vanished. Now, all she wanted to do was get away from him, but couldn't move an inch because his hard body had her pinned.

Growling like an animal, his mouth attacked her dark nipple. He sucked hard, too hard. He sucked on her so damn hard; she thought he would suck the skin right off of her breast. She cried out, and with all of her strength shoved him back. She pressed her hand to her aching mound and scurried away from him.

“That hurt goddammit!” she exclaimed.

Carrie peered down at her breast and gasped at the sight. Spots of blood dotted the torn skin of her areola. Shocked, she looked up at him just in time to witness a devious grin twist his lips.

“What the fuck is wrong with you?”

His smile widened as blood dripping fangs lowered from his mouth. The pupils of his eyes turned bright green. A thunderous roar leaped from his chest.

In fear, she dashed toward the door.

A huge hand grabbed her arm and the other closed around her neck.
“Highness, why would you run from me?”

A foul scent seeped from his skin. Her eyes watered. She tried to scream, but her throat burned on the attempt.

Smoky, leathery wings sprouted out behind him, and then something pierced her gut. The color red melted over her eyes.

“You will give me your blood, Dragon Queen!”

Chapter Two

The Demon Slayer

Father Shannon slapped the newspaper on his desk in the church's study, rested his elbows on the arms of the chair and rubbed his temples. There was no calming his troubled nerves, no soothing balm for the sadness that strained his heart, and no hope for the women who had gone missing.

Sister Agnes eased into the study, a carafe in hand. "The numbers are rising," she informed as she filled his glass with water. "And they have no leads." Distress lined her round face.

He retrieved the glass and took a long sip to wet his dry mouth. Yes, he was very aware of the rising numbers. Deep in his gut he knew there was no chance of them being found alive. They hadn't been kidnapped by a gang of psychotic men and held prisoner against their will. No, these women were being murdered, in the most horrific way possible. The smell of the victim's blood lingering in the air told him so.

Sighing heavily, he clutched the thick silver cross around his neck and glanced at Sister Agnes, who stared at him from across the desk, as if waiting on him to reveal the terrible truth.

“I have a feeling this is going to get worse, Father.”

Indeed it would. “We must have faith,” was all he could utter to ease her worried mind.

Briefly closing his eyes, he inhaled. A familiar scent assaulted his senses. Fresh blood had been spilled. He shot up from the chair, grabbed his keys and headed for the door.

The clacking of Sister Agnes’s foot falls echoed through the corridor as she trotted behind him. “Father, where are you going at this late hour?”

Dipping his head, he stopped and turned to face her. “I’m going to go see a friend. Hopefully, he’ll have some additional information on the disappearances.” He spun on his heel and made his way through the congregation hall.

“But, but why Father? What can you do with this information? You’re not a policeman. You’re just a priest.”

Just a priest. He paused at the double doors. “You are correct sister. I can’t do much, but in my heart, I believe *he* can.” He unlocked the doors and pulled one open. “Secure the door behind me please.”

Father Shannon eyed his surroundings as he made his way to his car. Once settled behind the wheel, he took in a deep breath and said a silent prayer *he* would agree to meet with him on such short notice.

“I need to speak with you in person. This is urgent.”

His knuckles became white nubs as he gripped the steering wheel tightly and waited. After about ten minutes without a response, he pushed out a hard breath, and prepared to exit the car when he felt the light tap on his psyche.

Oh, thank you Lord!

Relief flooded him when *his* mysterious voice entered his mind. *“Meet me at the mansion. I will prepare for your arrival.”*



It was a two hour drive from the church to the mansion, a journey he hoped wouldn't be in vain. His vestment brushed along the cobblestone walkway as he approached the entrance. Right when he reached out to knock, the maid opened the door. He looked down at the short Latin woman and offered her a pleasant smile.

“Ah, Padre Shannon, it's good to see you again. Follow me. Señor Bithanos is waiting for you in the great room.”

Her small feet treaded speedily across the glossy cream and gold tiles. He had to take extra long strides to keep up with her rapid pace. As they made their

way through the impressive abode, he tried not to be distracted by the rows of large granite columns, spiraled in colors of deep red and gold, reaching toward the high vaulted ceiling. Nor was he able to resist a peek at the finely dated treasures displayed in glass cases, accenting the wide corridor.

The owner of the estate had exquisite taste.

Once they arrived at the set of Mahogany stained double doors, she pushed them open and pointed toward two large, reddish-brown Victorian arm chairs facing the fireplace.

He bowed politely and entered the extravagant room. Subconsciously, he eyed the lavish furnishings and museum quality paintings. The hum of Mozart flowed through the air accentuating the 18th century styled space with a classical flair.

He eased over to one of the chairs and took a seat. Claspings his hands together, he said a silent prayer and waited for the host to arrive. After a few moments, a fire blazed to life inside the wide hearth.

“It’s been a long time, Father Shannon.” The deep, baritone voice flowed with the melody of the symphony drifting from the unseen speakers.

“Yes it has, Demetri.” He turned his attention to the empty chair.

A pair of mysterious turquoise eyes appeared first, hovering in the air like two small light bulbs. Slowly, Demetri materialized, absorbing particles out of the air, forming from dust right before his eyes.

As usual, Demetri was dressed to suit himself; a navy blue, pin-striped three piece suit, a gold button down shirt and a pair of sparkling cufflinks. Poised like a true gentleman, his long, jet black mane fell over his shoulders.

A glass of deep crimson liquid in hand, he smiled, flashing a glimpse of fang. “Would you like a glass of wine, Father?” Without waiting for an answer, he snapped his fingers. “*Chateau Lafite Bordeaux 1787.*”

A glass appeared before him and wavered in the air. Pleased to accept, Father Shannon retrieved the glass and took a sip of the intensely bold liquid, aged to perfection. “You know why I’m here.”

“Yes, I do.” Demetri placed his glass on the small cherry wood table next to the chair. “But you are not to rush. Drink your wine. Gather your thoughts. And then, we shall talk.”

Father Shannon nodded, and fell silent for a long moment, allowing the classical music to wash over him. It was interesting how a soothing tune could calm the most troubled mind. All doubts and uncertainties drained from his thoughts, until he glanced over at Demetri.

The creature sat patiently watching him, his skin flushed and a spark of something perilous dancing in his unnatural eyes. *Blood lust.*

“Have you fed tonight?”

With a quirked brow, Demetri chuckled. “Why ask a question when you already know the answer, priest?”

Yes, that was a stupid question to ask a vampire and he felt a bit ridiculous for doing so, but he had his reasons for asking.

In all the years of knowing Demetri, he'd found this particular vampire didn't need to feed every night. Because of his age, he could go for months without indulging in human or animal blood, but then again, his hunger was unlike the rest of his kind. Evil, sinful blood sated his appetite.

Nevertheless, it didn't matter the intent. Whether the victim was evil or not, a kill was still a kill.

“You know, humans can always redeem themselves. God created them that way. They were given free will to make mistakes, learn from them, and then seek a life of righteousness.” His voice rose and fell, giving depth to the meaning of his words. “Give them the chance to choose, Demetri. You have the power to do this. Then once the choice is given to them, they can be drawn from the darkness and set on the glorious road to walk the path of God.”

A slow smile spread across Demetri's face. "And it is your job to get them on that path before I find them, is it not?"

He huffed and diverted his gaze from Demetri's laughing eyes. His words were meaningless, but he couldn't help but stress them. The sliver of good that shone from Demetri's aura gave him hope that one day he'd realize God hadn't given up on him. The almighty was simply waiting for him to seek the light.

Father Shannon watched him quietly, noting his stillness as his fingertips stroked the handle of his sword, Katsumi; the spirit blade, which sang the song of death to those who were damned.

She was beautifully crafted with a smooth ivory handle etched in gold hieroglyphs. The stunning metal capped scabbard with a leather finish had the same symbols engraved into it. She was a beauty.

"Is that why you're here, Father? To preach? To ask me to have mercy on your mortals?" Demetri asked, breaking into his thoughts.

"No Demetri. It's your destiny to bring balance to the world and rid it of evil. I have no quarrels with that. However, I do know you have the power to look deeper into the souls of your intended victims, to see some chance for redemption. I just pray you'll find it in yourself to look beyond that one layer of sin and help God's children seek the light."

“Please priest,” he pushed out on a sigh, massaging his temple. “Spare me your words of redemption. You should know by now I have no patience for topics as such.”

Father Shannon shook his head. Was there no reasoning with this vampire? “Will you not come to the church one night so we may discuss this in depth?”

“I’m not one of your fallen souls to rescue. And in case you have not noticed, I’m a vampire, a *demon* vampire to be exact.” He paused and shifted his attention to the hearth. “Besides, I have not sensed any evil within your temple, so there’s no need for me to bless you and your holy followers with my presence.”

“Don’t let evil be the only reason you step foot into God’s temple, my friend. I have altered the prayer barriers to allow one vampire to come in at will.” He offered a warm smile. “And that vampire is you.”

Demetri turned to leer at him. An impassive expression fell across his face. “Don’t be so naïve, priest,” he uttered dispassionately. “You can’t trust a vampire no matter how long you’ve known him. Restore your barriers to their original state. I will only enter your church if evil calls to me.”

Father Shannon looked away from his piercing gaze. “*You have a greater purpose in this world and I have faith in you, Demetri. Your soul is not yet lost to us.*”

“*You are a priest. It’s your job to have faith. You are to cease this useless attempt to bring me to the light. My soul is beyond saving.*” With a careless sweep of his hand, he

dismissed the subject. "I'm content with what I am and what I have to do. Leave it be."

Reluctantly, Father Shannon nodded. He would honor Demetri's request and drop the subject, for now. "What do you know of the missing women? Who is doing this?"

"Demons," Demetri answered immediately, turning back to the fire. "I'm surprised you didn't sense it."

He grimaced and cut an icy glare at him. "I sense nothing but innocent bloodshed," he grumbled.

"Ahh." Demetri retrieved his glass. A knowing smirk curved his lips. "The scent of blood can be deliciously concealing. Don't you agree, Father?"

Swallowing hard, Father Shannon lowered his eyes and repressed a growl. "The missing women, Demetri."

"Yes..." He chuckled beneath his breath. "I destroyed a few demons last week in Giza, Egypt, but unfortunately I was unable to acquire any information from them. They cleared their minds before I could lock on."

"They can do that? My word, what do you think is happening?"

"Something we cannot control." Demetri took a sip of the bold liquid and tapped the stem of the glass with his nail. "The demons I killed are not of this world."

Confusion furrowed his brow. “I don’t understand.”

“*These* demons are from a different realm.”

He coughed back a gasp. “What? A different realm? This cannot be.”

Demetri settled back in the huge chair and crossed his legs. “They are much faster and stronger. They also have the ability to take on any human form they choose to, and some of them even possess telekinetic powers. Destroying them served to be a bit of a challenge.” A look of ecstasy graced his face. “But, I’m not complaining. The demons I’m accustomed to battling are not *that* talented.”

Baffled, Father Shannon stared at him for a second then shot out of the chair. Shaking his head in disbelief, he paced in front of the fireplace. “A challenge? For you?”

He’d seen Demetri battle demons and it was astonishing how easily and swiftly he destroyed them. But now, to know a few of them were a challenge for the creature with power unparalleled made him uneasy.

“The demons conjured on earth disintegrate as soon as I take a limb, but *these* demons...their limbs grow back instantaneously.” The color red swallowed his pupils and his shiny incisors descended. “You have to take the head, and take it swiftly.”

Father Shannon stopped pacing and glanced at Demetri in his full vampiric form. “*Put the fangs away Demetri, you’re making me nervous.*”

Grinning, he retracted his extended eyeteeth. “My apologies.” His eyes faded back to their original state. “The need to destroy more of them is almost unbearable.”

“Understandable. You are, after all, a demon slayer. Tell me, why are these *things* only killing young women?” he asked, pacing again.

“I’m not sure. The gender and age are the only obvious patterns.”

“The bodies!” His pace quickened with anxiousness. “Why can’t we find traces of these girls? Where are the bodies?”

“Are you sure you want to know?”

Father Shannon slowed his pace and hesitantly looked at him. The question pinched a nerve, made his skin crawl with fear. He searched Demetri’s cool eyes, looking for the answer, hoping he would give him a glimpse of the truth, so he wouldn’t need to hear it from his mouth, but he had no such luck.

“Tell me.”

“Eaten.”

Father Shannon choked on the gasp that dried his throat. “What!”

“The demons are defiling the girls and eating their bodies. I caught them in the act before I killed them.”

Deflated by this new bit of information, Father Shannon moved over to the chair and slouched down. He threw his hands over his face and doubled over. It was worse than he'd thought.

"They're..." The thought almost made him vomit. "They're eating them?"

"I'm afraid so."

He swallowed away the tears pooled in his eyes. "So much blood...so much innocent blood being spilled. It's madness, satanic. What do you do against such evil?"

"You fight, until there's not anymore fight left in you," Demetri voiced.

Father Shannon stared at him for a long moment. "All right, let's say you're right. If these demons are from another realm, how are they crossing over?"

"I don't know. I've been trying to obtain that information for almost three months now, but these particular demons are *very* clever. As soon as they sense my presence, they immediately wipe their minds. And it's difficult to get a trace on them when they are constantly shifting into different forms."

He cast a wry grin. "So, it wasn't just in Egypt, was it? How many have you killed, Demetri?"

Demetri rocked his leg and tapped Katsumi's handle. "Many. Too many. They are everywhere and multiplying. *There is a war brewing Father and we need to prepare for it.*"

A war. He knew one day it would happen, but had no idea it would come about in his life time. God, how he wished there was more time.

“Tomorrow night, I’ll pay a visit to Lady Indigo. Perhaps she’s had a vision that may help us determine where the demons are crossing over. In the meantime, I suggest you send messages to your brethren and prepare your troops.”

Exhausted, Father Shannon nodded. The long day in addition to what was just discussed weighed heavily on his soul. “Please inform me of any new findings in the priestess’s divination.”

“Will do.” Demetri stood, righted his suit and clasped his hands behind his back. “I must take my leave now and retire for the morning. The sun will rise soon.” His image waned. “Bianca has prepared a room for you to rest before driving back to the church. I sense your weariness, so please take advantage of my hospitality. I’ll contact you tomorrow night with the information you seek.” His words sifted through the air as he vanished.

Father Shannon closed his eyes and sighed. “Tomorrow,” he whispered, wrapping his fingers around his cross. “Another day of senseless bloodshed.”



Demetri watched from the third floor railing as Bianca led Father Shannon to one of the many guest suites. The noble priest’s shoulders slumped. He could

feel his faith waning, very slowly. The tragic truth of the matter would drive the poor man mad before the end.

He sauntered down the corridor to his master chambers and willed the double doors open. The aroma of lingering sex caressed his senses. Smiling inwardly, he by-passed the exhausted blonde beauty sprawled out on the bed with a leopard patterned duvet covering her pale frame and went out on the terrace to take in the last bit of night air.

He looked to the sky and spread his arms to the fading night. The bright blue in the horizon peeked over the ocean, threatening to take away the darkness. Heat from the awaiting star simmered against his skin—Lady Sun’s manner to send him off to bed.

But he couldn’t go just yet.

He needed to hear *her*, feel the torturous sensation of her soul calling out to him.

She’d been a curse to his psyche for months now, soothing him in song when his eyes were closed, taunting him with bits and pieces of her sensuality through her voice.

Who was she?

Along with the delicious scent wafting within the breeze, the distant stimuli of her spirit was maddening.

He thought he'd found her tonight while drifting past a concert hall in search of demons, but it was not so. The perceptible hint of her was faint as always, but with so many humans around, and demons on the hunt, he failed to pinpoint her location.

She was a ghost, an incubus, teasing him with his need for her.

"Is she calling to you again?"

The sweet purr of Dominique's sultry Russian accent tickled his ears. He glanced over his shoulder to acknowledge her, but didn't answer. The priestess knew too much. It wouldn't be so bad if he'd told her of the mysterious being, but the fact she knew without him saying so unnerved him.

"Demetri?" He heard her rise from the bed. "Have you told Indigo of the siren's existence? We could help you locate her, if you'd just talk to us."

He turned from the approaching dawn and strolled across the terrace into the bedroom. He eyed the priestess standing before him wrapped in the duvet and zoned in on the small passion wounds he'd left on her throat.

"The hour is late, Dominique. I think it's time I bid you adieu." He willed the doors shut behind him and closed the thick curtains.

"Is that it, beautiful one? Exhaust me with wonderful sex then send me on my way?" she drawled, sashaying toward him. "Such a cruel lover."

A smirk tugged at his lips. "That was not your tone a few hours ago, priestess."

Chuckling, she allowed the comforter to fall from her frame. His eyes roamed over her delicate curves, protruding breasts and pale skin. It was a wonder she could even stand. He'd taken so much blood from her, but it couldn't be helped. The sweet caress of his mysterious lover damaged his will, while he'd been buried deep within Dominique's core. If Father Shannon hadn't called when he did, she'd be a member of the afterlife.

"You are glutton for punishment, dear one," he crooned, grazing his fingers over the permanent bite marks on her throat.

"What can I say? Your bite is addictive." She snuggled up against him. "You almost killed me, lover."

He planted butterfly kisses on the top of her head, enjoying the feel of her silky tresses against his lips. "And I shall finish the job next time."

She tilted her face up, her bright brownish-grey eyes glinting in lust. "Promises, promises. I would part ways with you, but you've exhausted my spiritual energy. I don't have the strength to summon my sphere." Her playful tongue darted out and flicked the tip of his chin. "Can I get a ride?"

"Of course."

"And can I get another ride tomorrow?"

“No, darling. I don’t think this is a healthy love affair for you. I shall take your life in the end.”

“There you go again, making promises you don’t plan to keep.” She stepped back and flipped her golden locks from her shoulders. “Could you at least clothe me before sending me home? You ripped my dress off, now I have nothing to wear.”

He couldn’t help but chuckle. She was amusingly adorable.

With the thought, he draped her naked frame in a black gown, placed a pair of stylish pumps on her feet and wrapped a furry white cloak over her naked shoulders.

“Nice,” she extolled, brushing her hands over the cloak. “Your sense of style is impeccable.”

“You’re welcome.” He summoned her traveling sphere and engulfed her with it. “Give Sable my best,” he uttered before transporting the priestess from his sight.

Her distant laughter echoed in her wake.

Demetri stood in place for a moment and took in the heat seeping through the thick dark curtains. Weakened by the morning star’s assault, he drifted through the floors of the large structure, beneath the ground to his hidden chambers. Emptiness consumed his being when he climbed onto the comfort of his awaiting bed.

Inhaling deeply, he spread his arms wide wishing his ghostly lover was there to fill the void. As much as he hated to admit it, he needed her. Her voice, although damaging to his control over the beast within, filled him with felicity.

Whether she was a figment of his dark imagination, or a creature with the ability to seduce the most dangerous of minds, he had to have her.

A deep growl formed in the pit of his chest as he fought the urge to release himself. “Where are you, my sweet siren?” Closing his eyes, he focused all of his wavering energy on relaying his message. “Please sing to me. You strain my black heart with the unseen passion you give, but I need to hear your voice. Sing to me.”

Suddenly, his psyche opened against his will. This was new.

Dense fog clouded his mind. A gust of foreign wind danced around him, clearing the haze. On a plain of luminous water, he stood several feet from a woman seated on top of a crystallized mound.

Her naked legs were drawn to her chest, her arms wrapped securely around them and her head rested on her knees. She wept.

A sheen of gold illuminated her dark skin. Long scarlet tresses hung over the sides of her face. Her sobs compelled him to move forward. Circular ripples spread out around him with each step.

His dead heart thumped hard against his chest, jarring him. Time slowed in his path. The wind rose up against him, halted his advance, and made his approach

empty. The more he pushed forward, the further she became. He stopped. His heart lurched at the growing distance between them.

Why couldn't he reach her? Was she keeping him at bay?

Across the space separating them, he sensed her aching heart, her need to be held. Along with that came the urge to encase her in his dark love, to caress every inch of her, healing her inner agony. Admiration for this woman took hold of him.

The clouds moved lazily about the dark sky and gave way to iridescent tears. The rain showered her gently as if making an attempt to calm her pain. He couldn't help but think her sorrow caused the night's sky to cry.

"Won't you allow me to comfort you?"

Her gasp echoed through the wind. Two bright spans of light shot out of her back, blinding him. Not even his lids could block out the searing glare. He covered his face with his forearm and took several involuntary steps back. Desperate for the warmth of her, he reached out to have his hand taken by her soft touch.

"Who are you?" she whispered.

"Demetri," he replied softly, shivering from the sudden chill that surrounded him. Or was it desire?

"Demetri?" she sobbed. "I don't—what is this? Is this for real? Where are we?" Her angelic voice was filled with confusion and sadness.

"I don't know, darling. You brought me here."

Drawn forward, he curled his fingers around her delicate hand. The softness of her skin faded in and out beneath his touch. He groaned. Her astral being was hazy, driving him mad. He attempted to open his eyes to gain a glimpse of her beauty, but the light burned his irises at the thought.

“I brought you here? What do you mean? What’s happening to me? Wha— can you help me?”

“I can try.”

“Are you real? I can’t really see you.” Her fingers caressed his face. “You— you’re covered by shadows. I can only feel you. Is this really happening?”

“For the sake of my sanity, I surely hope so.”

He drew her closer. As his hands searched blindly for her physical form, her touch moved up his chest, over his shoulders, and around to the nape of his neck. A riveting stimulus shot down his spine and weakened his knees. Heat encased him like a cocoon. Taken aback by the sudden warmth covering him, he curiously reached out to feel...feathers?

Baffled, he attempted to step back, but her delicate hands cradled his face and locked him in place. Perplexity washed away with the rain when her soft lips kissed his.

“Demetri, I don’t know who you are, and I don’t know what this is...maybe a dream. Whateva it is, I feel like I—I need you,” she whispered against him.

“And I need you,” he breathed out, taking her mouth with passion.

The anxious flutter of her feathered extensions washed a divine zephyr over him. The gates of heaven had been left open.

Her lips parted, inviting him in for a taste. He eagerly accepted, then bristled when something sharp pricked his tongue. A fang, but not his own.

Could it be?!

Just as the question entered his thoughts, the encasing separated, softness left him, and the blinding light faded.

“Oh, I think somebody’s calling me.”

He reached for her in urgency only to grab the air. “Wait, sweetheart, don’t go...!”

“If you are real, like I hope you are, please come to me, okay,” her distant whisper called out. “I feel like I’ll die without you.”

He opened his eyes to his underground dim-lit chambers, lying in the comfort of his silk sheets. Angry, he shot up and pressed his hand to his chest. The heartbeat she’d given him was no more. Dazed and confused, he fell back, unable to grasp the vision that brought him to life for a still moment in time.

Fatigue overcame him, indicating the rise of the morning star. The taste of his own blood lingered in his mouth and brought a smile to his face. This was torture indeed.

With the unseen angel stroking his mind, he surrendered to the arms of slumber.

“Heaven has no bounds,” he slurred into the darkness.

Chapter Three

The Prophecy

Miami, Florida

Indigo's Massage Spa

Demetri leaned against the doorframe, arms folded, smiling to himself as he watched Lady Indigo and her lover engage in the thralls of feverish lust. Indigo's fingers slid in and out of the petite woman's wet sex. She writhed and bucked against the hand that brought her so much pleasure.

The scent of their arousal seeped into his senses, nearly drawing out his fangs. He repressed his hunger, and roamed his eyes over the enticing red gown that clung to Indigo's beautiful curves. She knew he was coming.

Long, amber locks rested along the length of her back, almost touching the curve of her rear end. The fragrance of cocoa butter on her smooth tawny skin, and the hint of jasmine on her neck intermingled with the scent of sex, stimulated his very being.

Indigo pushed her lover's leg back to her chest, consequently bestowing an unobstructed view of the woman's wetness. Demetri slanted his head and eyed the hardened clit, standing out proudly between her open folds. Indigo bent over and teased her bud with the tip of her tongue.

The moaning beauty thrashed her head back and forth, begging Indigo to deepen the kiss. Anxious to meet her request, Indigo wrapped her lips around her protruding pearl until the girl's body shivered uncontrollably, then she lowered and slithered her tongue into her dripping well, slurping at her sweetness.

Demetri's incisors lowered and his cock grew to its full length. It took everything he had not to abandon his position by the door and join them in bed.

Her lover's body snaked and jerked against Indigo's mouth as she whimpered for release. Suddenly, she stuttered, her hips rose, she cried out then went limp. Indigo continued to lick and suck her, devouring the juices seeping out of her core.

He smiled and licked his lips. He could almost taste the essence of her sweet cream on his tongue.

Steadying his aroused disposition, he closed his eyes and retracted his incisors. Once composed, he applauded the performance. "Well ladies, that was certainly worth the trip over here. Brava."

The young woman yelped and shot up on the bed, her hair spread wildly over her shoulders.

Drawing back, Indigo wiped her mouth with the back of her hand. “Demetri,” she gasped.

“Oh, don’t act so surprised, lover,” he crooned, studying her startled face with sheer amusement. “You knew I was coming.”

Pushing off the doorframe, he straightened his suit then ambled toward her. He approached at slow pace, deliberately taking his time to torture her with his mystical allure.

“Please Demetri, let me just go and right myself—”

He flashed before her and she stumbled backwards. He reached out and grabbed the sides of her face, drawing out a frightened gasp. “No need.” Eyeing her throbbing vein, he trailed the tips of his fingers along the elegant length of her neck. “I don’t mind smelling her on your lips.” He glanced over at the girl, who was now in the corner of the room, clutching at her night gown with trembling hands. “Or tasting her,” he finished on a whisper.

The smell of fear, combined with the scent of her sex, made him ache to bite Indigo’s neck, but he had to resist. A chemical substance flowed through her blood stream tonight; something he’d be sure to address later.

He pulled Indigo's face closer to his and dragged his tongue across her quivering lips. The flavor of her lover's sweetness tapped his taste buds.

Whimpering, Indigo closed her eyes and trembled against him.

"Meet me in the parlor. We have much to discuss."



Leaving a whisper of his powerful aura lingering in the room, Demetri vanished. She placed her shivering hand over her chest and pushed out a slow calming breath.

"By the Gods, I love it when he does that."

Once she had control of her jittery limbs, Indigo turned to the mirror and righted herself by applying some lip gloss and smoothing her hands over her gown. She glanced at her frightened lover, who sat on the floor, tucked into a tight ball.

"Amaya?" Indigo held her hand out and motioned for her to come to her.

Amaya slowly stood. "Is he mad at me?" she asked, easing over to Indigo with caution, darting her eyes at the door.

Indigo rubbed her hand over Amaya's unraveled hair and raked her fingers through it, loosening it more. "No baby. If he was mad at you, you'd surely know." She placed a light kiss to her forehead. "Now go fix him a glass of wine. I'll be out momentarily."



Demetri watched the nervous woman walk into the room, holding a bottle of wine and two wine glasses.

Shaky hands set the glasses on the low oval cocktail table. As she shot coy glances his way, she poured the wine, spilling a few drops of the deep red liquid on the table.

“There is no need to fear me girl. I have no intentions of harming you.”

Openly startled by the sound of his voice in her mind, she gasped. Swallowing hard, she set the wine bottle down and turned to him.

He sat perfectly still, allowing her eyes to drink up his appearance. After a moment of silently staring at him, she thrust out her wrist. He held her gaze a second more before lowering his eyes down to her pulsating vein. The hot rush of her blood called out to him in a sweet rhythm that was nearly irresistible.

Demetri brought his eyes back up to her sweet, timorous face. Her chest rose and fell at a rapid pace, quickening the rhythm of the crimson goodness pumping through her blood vessels; just the way he liked it.

“You have the fever for my bite, do you?”

She shuddered and stepped closer to him, holding her wrist out further. Her eyes urged him to take what his black heart desired.

Curiosity drove him into her mental domain, and to his surprise, right at the forefront of her pretty little head was an overwhelming desire for him. He saw through her eyes, the numerous times he'd made love to Indigo, taking her body, ravishing her, feeding from her, and nearly claiming her life in the thralls of ecstasy.

This woman longed to feel that same pleasure, to feel his incisors puncture her delicate skin, to feel his touch, to feel his length deep inside of her, to share a bed with him and Indigo together.

"Truly?" The corner of his lips curved into a smirk. "This is but a small request I'd be more than happy to fulfill."

He reached out and wrapped his hand around her arm. There was a sharp intake of air. Her eyes widened, but she didn't try to pull away. He gave her a gentle tug and she tumbled into his arms.

Within his embrace, she trembled with utter desire. Small whimpers seeped from her lips as her mind begged him to take her, and take her hard. She tilted her head, exposing her long neck.

"Please," she whispered.

Demetri pressed his cheek to hers, inhaled the scent of her and grazed his fingers down the vein that throbbed beneath her soft skin. She slipped her shaky fingers into his hair and cupped the back of his head. He moved his lips closer and

closer to the spot. Tremors ran down her body in waves. Anticipation consumed her.

His fangs slid into her flesh and her breathing went ragged.

Indigo's quickened foot falls and rapid heartbeat raised his senses as he siphoned slowly from the petite beauty bundled in his arms.

The parlor door flew open and Indigo screamed, "Demetri nooo!"

He carefully withdrew his incisors from the girl's fragile skin and looked up at the distressed priestess. She slapped her hands over her mouth to muffle her painful cry. A fountain of tears spilled from her eyes.

Smirking, he caressed the girl's temple and her head popped up.

Frazzled, she pushed out of his arms and stumbled to her feet. "Oh sorry, Mistress—"

Indigo's open palm struck the side of her face. She tumbled to the floor and covered her reddened cheek.

"What in the hell were you thinking, Amaya!"

She sniffed back tears and slowly stood. "Mistress, please. I'm sorry," she cried.

Indigo turned away from her hurt-filled expression and shook her head. "Just go clean yourself up and go to bed."

Soft sobs filled the room as the priestess's pained lover scurried away.

Indigo direct her attention to him. “What the—?”

“Are you going to scold me now, Lady Indigo?” he asked dryly, brushing lint from his jacket.

“Scold you? You are an asshole, Demetri!” She leveled her finger at him. “I told you my girls were off limits!”

He ran the tip of his tongue over his lips to swipe traces of the girl’s essence. “Then perhaps you shouldn’t have them in my presence.”

Indigo balled her hands into fists, but kept them at her side. “Demetri, you know she couldn’t help herself! You could’ve turned her down!”

He closed his eyes and absorbed the scent of her rising ire. It amused him really. The calmer he remained, the angrier she became. “Indigo, you are aware I wasn’t going to kill the girl. This is a senseless argument. Please sit down.”

“What! You’re a fucking Xsonri all you do is kill!”

“Lower your voice and have a seat,” he ordered, motioning toward the worn leather chair across from him.

“Fuck! You!” she shouted, rage blazing from her deep brown eyes.

Demetri squinted, tilted his head and by will squeezed her windpipe. Huffing for air, she clawed at her neck, attempting to pull away the invisible force that choked her.

Poised and unmoved, he dragged her across the room until they were face to face. “I don’t know if the substance you’re injecting into your bloodstream has gone to your brain, but it’d be wise of you to remember who you are dealing with.”

“I’m sorry, baby. I’m so sorry. Please let me go.”

With the casual flip of his hand, he released her and she fell to the floor, coughing and heaving. She clasped her hands around her neck and gathered the wind back into her lungs with gasping breaths.

A tinge of guilt tapped at his wicked nature. He hated to do that to her, but she was delirious with emotion and he had to bring her down the only way he knew how, with raw force.

He offered his hand to her. She glanced at it then gazed up at him with sorrowful eyes. Flashing a half smile, he wiggled his fingers to extend his offer. She smiled wryly, placed her hand in his and allowed him to pull her up from the floor.

She settled next to him, inhaled deeply then reached over and rubbed her finger along the rim of one of the wine glasses. The wine instantly mixed with blood.

The curvy glass lifted from the table and floated to his hand. “Thank you.”

“Welcome,” she uttered bashfully, looking away.

“Look at me.”

She turned to face him with glassy eyes.

“Why are you using drugs?”

She rubbed her hand across her needle-scarred arm, sniffing back emotion. “*Their screams. I hear their screams when no one else can. Every night, their screams rip my head apart.*” Expressing her anguish, she grabbed a handful of her dreads and yanked on them. “*The visions make it hard for me to breath. I feel their pain, their agony. The demons are murdering them brutally. Killing them without mercy. Tearing their bodies apart. Feeding on their flesh.*”

Tears rolled down her cheeks. He set his glass down to cradle the sides of her face. Staring deeply into a set of eyes, which had never shown fear, he wiped the tears away with the pads of his thumbs.

“*Is there a purpose?*”

“There is always a purpose, Demetri. Power. These demons want unimaginable power.”

“I don’t understand how this power can be acquired by killing innocent girls. It doesn’t make sense, Indigo.”

“*They are looking for her, the one that holds this power in her blood. The Dragon Queen.*”

Her mental whisper sifted through his mind like a thought.

He dropped his hands from her face and stared at her inquisitively for a long moment. “*The Dragon Queen?*”

“*Yes, she is here. Her scent is everywhere.*”

“*Everywhere? I cannot sense—*” He stopped and dropped his sights to the table. If his heart could thump out of anxiousness to what flitted though his mind, it would.

“*What do you mean you can’t sense her? Even I can sense her and I’m not a damned demon vampire,*” she murmured, wiping at her eyes.

Could it be?

He took in a deep whiff of air. The slight hint of *the scent* filled his nostrils, exciting his body with promises of another sweet kiss. *Could it be?!* Yes, her scent was everywhere, and her voice was stamped in his mind—his mysterious siren, the root of his unbalanced state. The Dragon Queen.

“Why me, my love,” he whispered, running a hand through his mane.

“Demetri?” He turned to face Indigo’s curious stare. “Are you here with me? You just drifted away for a moment. Is someone calling to you?”

He groaned.

Cursed priestesses. He would have to make his will stronger to conceal his obvious connection toward the dark beauty in his mind.

He shifted in his seat, retrieved his glass and took a slow sip. “So what is her make? Is she a demon?”

“Yes,” she replied, eyeing him incredulously. “A very powerful one.”

Last he checked, demons didn't have angel wings. Either he was delusional or the priestess was clueless.

He tapped Katsumi's handle, which rested against the arm of the couch. "Will her death bring an end to this madness?" He had no intentions of killing her, but to say so would divert Indigo from his uneasy state.

She shook her head. "You can't kill her, Demetri. She is your equal. If you can find her while she's in mid-shift or before she turns, then maybe you'll have a chance of destroying her. *Maybe.*"

"Before she turns?"

"Yes. Apparently she's in human form. This is why the demons are going ballistic. It's hard to track a superior demon who's concealing their true form as a mortal."

"This I know all too well," he mumbled. "If she has not fully shifted, why is her scent so intoxicating? I was under the impression they didn't release a scent until they were completely formed."

"Oh no, not in this case." She retrieved her wine and relaxed back against the couch. "She's going through an uncontrollable level of *aphrodisia*. She's in heat. At least in human form her being in heat is not that bad, but this chick is not to be messed with once she turns. She will want, and she will get. Her hormone level will be very high, and she will be *very* dangerous."

A helpless smile tugged at his lips. "Sounds intriguing."

She pursed her lips and pinned him with a glare. "Don't get too excited, Demetri. You have to remember where there's a Queen, there's a King. And if you do find her, you're going to have to go up against him."

He almost choked on the sip of wine he'd taken. A king? *Of course.*

"Well, where is this king?" he heard himself ask, a hint of animus coating his words. "According to what you're telling me, there's a multitude of demons looking for his queen. Why is he not taking action?"

"I don't know. I only know what the prophecy foretells."

"What will it take to destroy him?"

She stared at him oddly. "Demetri, this is not like battling regular demons. These two are the supreme order. It is likely he'll kill you if you go up against him."

"Your faith in me is flattering, darling," he uttered dryly.

Her expression softened. "Baby, don't be like that. You know I think you're the baddest vamp on the planet. It's just that I'm not so sure about this one."

Sliding his eyes around the room for the sake of looking at anything but her, he wet his lips. Her concerned words were useless. He'd find this king and demolish him.

"Why are they here? I thought creatures of such power belonged in the nether realms."

“Yes. We thought this much also, but something has changed in the realms. When the prophecy of the Dragon Queen first came about, it was said that she would be born in a later era when hell surfaces, the battle angels come down from the heavens and the war begins. Armageddon.”

“Is that not what is happening now?”

“No.” She took a big gulp of wine. “Believe it or not, the death toll would be greater.”

“If this is not war, then what is it?”

She set her glass on the table, her eyes darting about in thought. “I don’t know. Maybe it’s some sort of preparation.”

He stroked Katsumi’s handle, studying her distracted face. “How are they crossing into this realm?”

“Someone with great power had to open a portal to allow them to come here.”

“Tell me how to find this portal and close it.”

She shook her head again. “Only those who are traveling through it can give us that information.”

“This is almost impossible,” he growled in frustration. “They’re masters at clearing their minds against my third eye.”

“Then we’ve got to find a way to get the information without them knowing.”

With the wave of her hand, Indigo conjured a silver plated book. The thick tome was covered with a series of symbols, which glowed beneath her touch. Clamped on the right side of the book was a huge gold lock.

Demetri stared at it in awe. The book was a magnificent piece of art. He ached to touch it, to run his fingers along each and every symbol inscribed in it, but knew better. It wasn’t the silver that kept him at bay; he was immune. It was the spells in small script at the bottom of the book.

One thing he’d learned in all of his years of dealing with powerful priestesses was you never, ever touch a book they put a spell on. The consequences could be deadly, even for a demon vampire.

Indigo tapped the lock and it clicked open. “I haven’t shown this book to anyone other than the members of my coven, so I hope you realize this is a big step for me,” she confessed, offering him a bashful smile. “And don’t you go telling all of your vamp friends about this either. That could get me in a world of mess.”

He raised a single brow. “What vamp friends?”

She snickered and flipped her locks from her shoulders. “Anyway, all of the top level priestesses of this realm possess a book such as this. It’s what gives us our guidance and foresight.”

She held her hand over the tome and willed it to open. The pages turned rapidly, stirring up a breeze that blew the hair back from his face. The turning ceased once it came to a page illuminating the symbol of a dragon.

“According to the book, she’s almost 500 years early.”

“500 years?”

“Yes,” she murmured, her eyes roaming over the page.

“What’s her purpose?”

“The same as yours. Balance,” she uttered.

He stared at her in silence for a moment. “So, she’s an ally?”

“No, not necessarily. You see, she’s a product of Heaven and Hell, so she could go either way. She has to decide which team she’s going to play for. So, until we know for sure, she is our enemy.”

“*Heaven and Hell...*” Well that explained to wings.

Demetri eyes fell away from hers. His thoughts wondered to alluring vision of his distant angel, sitting upon the iridescent mound, her skin shimmering in gold lust and the blinding spans of light that cast from her shoulder blades. One part *Heaven*. Her sensual touch, her tantalizing kiss and the sweet prick from her sharp fang. One part *Hell*. A half-breed.

He shuddered at the memory.

A product of Heaven and Hell. Such an insane, yet beautiful combination.

“What is with you tonight? You are so distant.”

He didn't even bother to look at her. He'd been caught yet again visualizing the seductive creature who had taken refuge in his mind. “Tell me about her king,” he muttered, studying the lines in the palm of his hand. He would not tell her. It was not for her to know, not yet.

“Demetri—”

“Her king,” he voiced a little louder, cutting her a side glance. “What is his make? Is he also a product of heaven and hell?”

There was a short moment of nervous silence where all she did was stare at him. “Okay,” she sighed as she began to flip through the pages again.

A faint grunt caused him to look up and lock eyes with her. Perplexity crossed her face.

“I was wrong. She hasn't chosen a mate yet. One of the many demons who are in search of her will be crowned as her King. She will choose the strongest demon in this realm. Once she has chosen him, she'll take blood from him and give blood to him at the same time, and at that moment he will be crowned.” She pushed out a heavy exhale and scratched her head. “This will happen during her mid-shift. Now once she fully shifts and gives to him again, he will be supreme. After that, the only being that'll be able to take him down is a battle angel.”

“Hmm. You’d think these demons would be a little less aggressive being that they’re searching for a creature with the strength of heaven and hell within her grasp.”

She nodded anxiously. “Exactly! This is how I know the demons who are killing these girls are amateurs. Any creature of the underworld knows a Queen of this magnitude chooses her mate, not the other way around.” She pursed her lips. “Damn *Chingi* roaches, the stupidest race of demons ever created and so fucking hard to kill. They thrive on sex and death, which totally blinds them to the fact that she’ll destroy them in the blink of an eye if they dare to demand her blood.”

Raising his wine glass to the light, he swirled the liquid around causing a light film of the scarlet life-giving elixir to tint the inside of the glass. “Interesting.” He took his eyes off the liquid to look at her. “So, she’ll choose the strongest demon? Even a demon vampire?”

He could hear the rapid increase of her heartbeat. She stared at him hard, her lower lip quivering. “Demetri, what are you not telling me—”

Her eyes grew wide. Sweat emitted from her pores. Her body began to convulse. Her beige skin turned pale.

“Indigo,” he called, studying her intently.

She shot to her feet and slapped her hands over her ears. The book fell to the floor and vanished. Her eyes stark white, she tilted her head back, and a gut

wrenching scream ripped from the base of her throat. Her piercing screech shattered the wine bottle and glasses, spilling the bold mixture onto the wood floor.

Several young women ran into the room, their hands clasped over their ears. One of them held a small bag. He could smell the chemical substance from where he sat.

The alarmed woman approached Indigo with the bag clutched tight.

“No.”

She stopped in her tracks and stared at him while trying to cover her ears.

He grabbed Indigo’s arm, yanked her back down onto the seat and grabbed the sides of her face. Blood tears leaked from the corners of her eyes.

“Focus. Focus on me and control it,” he behest.

Her eyes squeezed shut, she shook her head violently and tried to writhe out of his grip.

Demetri stared into her terror-stricken face. He attempted to mentally link with her, but she was trying so hard to extract the visions and screams from her mind that in the process, she locked him out. He didn’t want to force himself into her domain and project his being to her astral location without her consent. It could destroy her psyche.

“Indigo, I need you to focus, so I can link with you. I can’t help you if you don’t allow me...”

Abruptly jarred, his body stiffened and his nostrils flared. The familiar eye-watering scent circled them in the form of a thick black mist. It drew out his fangs and ignited uncontrollable fury.

This was no mere vision. In the depths of her mind, she was trapped in the presence of a *chingi* demon.

Chapter Four

Siren's Call

Demetri's voice sifted through the walls of her mind as she watched the huge demon mutilate a poor defenseless mortal. The woman's pain projected right into her. Indigo felt like she was the one being maimed by the vicious monster.

Her flesh was clawed to pieces, insides brutally torn apart, hair ripped from her scalp, bones crushed under his grasp and limbs yanked from her body. The agony worsened when the demon roared in pleasure.

Clenching her teeth to endure the brutality, she raised her right hand and conjured a sphere of electric force. She released it to hover in the air before her then launched it at the beast. The whole right side of its body exploded into pieces.

Before she could even blink an eye, the creature's body regenerated.

"Fucking Chingi scum!"

With its victim's bloody arm hanging from its mouth, it turned and glowered at her. In haste, she attempted to conjure another power strike, but was cut short when its dark force hurled her against the wall.



Demetri heard her bones cracked. Blood poured from her nose and ears, spilt over his hands, and down his arm as he held her head firmly in his grasp. He couldn't wait any longer to link. He moved his palms to her temples, pressed his forehead to hers and closed his eyes.



The creature squeezed its hand around her neck and slammed the back of her head into the wall. The loud crack of her skull echoed through the dense area. She felt blood gushed from the wound and absorbed into her thick locks. Bile and blood hung at the back of her throat, yet she fought to remain conscious.

Grimacing, she strained to disconnect the pain, but there was no use. She would have to suffer this.

“You're one of the slayer's minions, aren't you,” the demon hissed, his eyes glowing green with hatred. “In honor of your master, I will devour you slowly, witch.” It dragged his sharp, black nail down her arm, ripping open her flesh and muscle.

Wailing against the vicious assault, she gathered her soul's energy to resist the agony. “Fuck you,” she spat, her vision becoming blurry.

It tightened its grasp on her throat and stretched its gruesome mouth wide. Its putrid yellow teeth lengthened in preparation to take a chunk out of her head.

Then the rasp of a sword drawn from its scabbard brought him to a screeching halt. It was Katsumi's death song.

Through clouded vision, Indigo witnessed the lovely lethal blade slide through the demon's neck with brutal force. She was splashed with its blood. Before the demon had time to react, the blade turned downward and sliced all the way through its burly body. The incision healed instantly, but the creature's fear was revealed.

She fell from the demon's trembling grasp. It staggered from her fallen body and attempted to flee. In the form of a shadow, Demetri blocked its path, cutting him off with lightning speed. It turned, whipped his thick tail at him and tried to run the other way.

Demetri ducked, caught the extended limb, yanked it from the demon's body and sliced through his mid-section, simultaneously, leaving him in three pieces. In a matter of seconds, its bottom section sprouted back out. Determined to get away from the demon slayer, it shrieked in terror, shot off the floor and bolted toward the window.

Before the horrid creature could shift through the transom, Demetri stepped on its tail and with one graceful swipe of his blade he claimed the demon's head.

Indigo heard the thud of the still howling head hit the floor. Faintly, she watched it evaporate into nothing, and then the room faded to black.



“Open your eyes, Indigo.”

Groggily, she opened her eyes to Demetri’s beautiful face. He gazed down at her, emotion glowing from his bright turquoise eyes. With a weak hand, she gently pushed the hair back from the side of his face and tucked it behind his ear.

The pain in her body diminished within his embrace. His healing energy spiraled through her repairing broken bones and torn flesh.

Sobs and whimpers from her girls throughout the parlor filled her ears. It had to be a horrific sight for them to see their mistress almost viciously killed by an unseen force.

She lifted a weak hand and waved at them to calm their worried hearts. “It’s okay girls. Go back to sleep.”

“You are stronger than that, Indigo. Why didn’t you link with me?”

“If I would’ve openly linked with you, then *it* would’ve known you were near and wiped its mind. This is how it had to be done.” She brushed her fingers across his temple and smiled. “You were toying with that demon.”

The slayer she knew never took that long to kill a demon, especially not while wielding Katsumi. That’s how she knew her plan had worked. It was so

caught off guard it didn't have a chance to clear its mind before Demetri was able to gain the information he needed. At least she hoped so.

“Did you get it?”

“Yes. 28 different portals, so far.”

“By the Gods...” She'd heard of several portals to other realms open at the same time, but 28... “Did you get the locations? Did you find out how to close them?”

“Yes. I acquired the locations, but unfortunately for us, we need a higher being to close them. The Queen is the key.”

“Then we have to make damn sure she's going to play for our side.”

“Leave that to me.” Lowering his head to hers, he licked the blood from her face. A faint mewl seeped from her lips. She closed her eyes and snuggled closer to him.

“If you ever do anything like that again without informing me first, I will kill you myself. Do you understand?”

Words of affection from an emotional vampire. She smiled. “Yes lover.”

He trailed his tongue down the side of her face and across her mouth. A pleasurable moan played in her throat as she parted her lips and invited him in. His tongue entered like a curious snake, twirling around hers, leaving the coppery

taste of her blood lingering between her lips. His cock stiffened through his pants and wetness formed along her slit and seeped across the cleft of her thighs.

A welcoming softness was suddenly beneath her. He had drifted her to the closed comfort of her bedroom.

She opened her eyes and became caught in his beautiful gaze. The need to sexually release himself after a kill was ingrained in his vampire blood, and she was more than happy to feed this urgent desire, but as she stared at him, she realized his mind was not where it was supposed to be.

“You are seducing my body, yet your thoughts are on someone else,” she uttered in a breathless whisper. “Has she stolen your heart from me?”

His hard body went rigid, if only for a second, but his expression remained distracted. Their clothes melted away. The warm sensation of his naked skin brought about a grateful moan.

“*Whom do you speak of?*” he asked, slipping between her splayed legs.

“Don’t be coy, Demetri. You know whom I speak of. Your lust for *her* has made you careless.” Jealousy laced her words, but she couldn’t help it. She knew the woman wouldn’t be in his mind unless he allowed it. “You came to me with your domain locked shut, but the truth spills from your eyes. I see her...I see the faceless woman who haunts your mind—”

His cock pushed deep and hard into her moist cavern, forcefully filling her to the maximum. She sunk her nails into his shoulder and swallowed back the scream dangling in her throat. A mixture of pain and pleasure shot through her core, compelling her body to climax on his first thrust.

Consumed by embarrassment and fear, she looked up to see his eyes glazed in what looked to be amusement, but she knew better. A sliver of red rimmed his irises. She had said too much; spoken on his personal affairs without permission.

“You are to hold your tongue on topics as such, Indigo, or I will be forced to snatch it from your mouth.” His threat came out in a seductive whisper, but was not to be taken lightly.

“Forgive me for my foolishness. I can’t help but be a little jealous of your new lover.”

Once this woman had fully captured his mind, his body would follow suit. It was only a matter of time. This woman had to be a master level priestess. It was the only creature strong enough to seize a Xsonri in seduction without being destroyed, but she couldn’t rely on assumptions. She had to find out who this woman was before it was too late.

“Apology accepted.” With the thin line of red dissolving from his eyes, he slowly withdrew his length just to shove it back into her, bringing about another

earth-shattering orgasm. A cry of passion leaked out of her in the form of a spell and shot to the ceiling like an explosion, lighting the room like a funhouse.

She wrapped her limbs around him, submissively bared her throat and waited for his sweet bite. The desire to feel his incisors pierce her skin made her body shudder.

Chuckling, he rubbed his nose across her neck, inhaling her scent, teasing her with the thought.

“Stop playing, Demetri. You know what I want.”

“You’ve lost too much blood and I don’t have the power to restore it.”

“Come on baby, I can take it. Just give me a little nip. I, I need that sweet feeling so, badly right now. Please baby.”

Ignoring her plea, he juttled into her inviting core, taking her body in a slow and steady pace. She hissed and moaned with each plunge as her mind was invaded and swept with erotic images of their union. The walls of her pussy stilled, and coursed into a fit of spasms.

Just when she was about to hit another level of pleasure, he bristled. A shiver shot through him and emitted into her body.

She gasped. This was no release. Something had jarred him.

“Demetri?”

He drew up on his knees and stared ahead. Following his line of sight, she tilted her head back, but saw nothing but a blank, deep rose colored wall.

“What do you see?” she asked, searching his eyes for an answer. “Is it *her*?”

Hesitantly, she separated from him, leaving his still hard member glazed in her arousal. She moved off the bed and eyed at him. Never had she’d seen him so steady, immobile like a statue. With a shaky hand, she reached out to touch his shoulder. He was hard as granite—his slumber state.

Through his thick hair, on the back of his neck, something caught her eye. It pulsed like a strobe light and shone bright gold. Her nervous pants echoed throughout the room as she brushed his mane over his shoulder to get a better look.

A snake-like dragon symbol swirled aggressively. She scrambled back, clutching at her chest, almost tripping over her own foot. Heaving out staggering breaths, she inched closer, but not too close. She gaped at the mysterious animated imprint. The tail of the serpent extended between his shoulder blades and formed the shape of a dagger.

He was possessed.

Racked in panic, she rushed across the room and retrieved a piece of chalk. She dropped to the ground and drew a spell around the bed to release him from

the trance. She had no idea how strong this priestess was, but she'd fight to keep him grounded.

"Where are you, darling?" he whispered.

Indigo stood to see him holding his arms out to the wall. He was giving in.

The chalk dropped from her hand. She hurried over to him and cradled his face. "Demetri! Demetri! Stay with me! Don't let her take you."

Just as the words left her mouth, bright gold melted over his irises. His eyes *never* turned that color.

"Is, is she doing this to you? Please talk to me!"

Suddenly, a melody entered her mind, followed by the sweet hum of a female's voice. Wrinkling her brow, she stared into Demetri's golden eyes. This voice came from his psyche. It was *her*. Indigo slammed her lids shut and moved her palms up to his temples.

The vision of a white lined aura gracefully strummed the keys of a piano. The combination of notes was hypnotic, alluring even. Through the music, a stream of power flowed through her palms.

Panting, Indigo steadied her trembling limbs to go deeper into the vision, but this was as far as he'd allow her to go. Or was it this mysterious woman holding back her advance?

"I can still hear the distant cry from your soul. Do you feel me, sweet lover?"

The angelic coo of her voice made Indigo's heart skip a beat.

"I can still feel your hands from the darkness, binding me to you with a sweet caress. I'll give into the devil's embrace, for just a little taste?"

The overwhelming flow of spiritual force lapped at hers, straining her energy, but she couldn't let go. *Her* voice was too beautiful, her aura was too strong.

"Do you feel me, like I feel you? Tell me baby. I'm whispering your name. I'm kissing your lips."

"Please, my love. Tell me where you are," Demetri beseeched desperately.

"Can you see me? Open your eyes to me, and take in the light." She paused and hummed along with the tune before calling out in a sultry whine, *"Sweet lover, come to me."*

A pair of hands grabbed Indigo's wrists. She opened her eyes to see blood tears streaming down Demetri's face. "I must go find her."

Before she could utter a word of protest, he abandoned his spot on the bed and melted through the wall in blinding speed.

Chapter Five

Musical Pain

Miami, Florida

Southside Studio

Rayne pushed up from the bench and stepped away from the piano. Staring down at her trembling hands, she sucked in a deep breath. She felt distant, disconnected, not quite like herself.

In an attempt to get a grip on reality, she squeezed her eyes shut and rubbed her temples. Gradually, it came back to her. *The darkness*. She called to him, and he answered. Jesus, the man answered!

Either she had finally lost her mind, or he was for real.

Ignoring her producer and manager's odd stares from the other side of the studio's window; she swiped her unshed tears with the sleeve of her shirt and took steps back until her back met the wall. She slid to the floor.

Early this morning, before the sun could rise and kiss the sky, she sat on the floor of the hotel bathroom, holding a steak knife, prepared to slit her wrists. She'd

just had another murderous vision and the victim's face had been vividly clear in her mind.

Carrie.

It'd been the one vision that would send her over the edge, but before the sharp ridges of the blade could sever the vein in her wrist, there *he* was.

He stood on a beautiful plane of ocean blue—*Demetri*. He called out to her and offered his comfort when she no longer wanted to live.

The *whys* and *hows* were no longer a factor. There was only the pressing need to be with him. The silky smoothness of his voice had drawn the knife from her hand and when she closed her eyes to give into the unknown her body filled his embrace. Nothing could compare to being held by him.

She moaned at the memory of his distant touch. He made her drunk with passion when his arms enclosed her and his lips claimed hers. Even now as she thought back on the mind-numbing kiss, she could still taste him. God, he was pure ecstasy.

“Uh, Rayne...”

What she'd give to get another taste of those soft lips. She drew her lower lip between teeth and curled her fingers into her palms, fighting the urge to touch herself. Dammit, she'd never needed anyone as much as she needed to feel him at this very moment.

“Hellooo, earth to Rayne.”

Unfurled, her hands roamed over the front of her thighs as his soothing voice entered her mind, yet again. *“My eyes are open, my love. I am seeking your light. Please tell me where to find you.”*

His pleading croon ignited a raging fire deep within her core. Her clit throbbed painfully for release. Whimpering, she stuck her hands between her trembling thighs and pressed hard against the surface of her jeans.

“Miami, Southside studio,” she whispered. “Please, I need you.”

“Uhm, Rayne, you do know we can see you, right?”

She snatched her hand from her crotch and shot to her feet. Reluctantly, she looked through the window. Red-faced with bashful eyes, her manager, Paul stared at her, while the producer, Johnny struggled to hide his mannish grin.

Aww hell! Heat flushed her face.

“I mean, I can sit here all night and watch this—”

“Shaddup Johnny,” she grumbled, pushing through the door to exit the sound room. She plopped down on the couch next Sota, who was stretched out, his hands clasped behind his head and ankles crossed.

“Carrie called yet?” She knew the answer would be no, but was it wrong for her to hope?

Sota reached in his pocket, retrieved her cell phone and gave it to her. She'd gotten numerous calls, but none from Carrie. She'd filled the woman's voice mail and probably her text inbox too, but still hadn't heard from her? No. This wasn't like Carrie. Grudge or not, she'd never flat out ignore her after this many calls.

Please, God...

"Think she lost her phone?" The grief was clear in her tone.

Sadness shone from Sota's eyes as his lips curved into one of those phony smiles. "It's possible. Give her time, baby girl. She'll call."

No she wouldn't, and he knew it. Squeezing her eyes shut, she fought back tears. "You sure? 'Cause I'm not."

"Rayne..." Sighing, Paul turned from the control board and eyed her oddly. "Let's talk about this song. The lyrics are kind of dark, don't you think? Besides, this is a far cry from your usual tone. What's this about?"

"I dunno, just thought I'd do something different," she mumbled, settling back against the plush upholstery.

"Personally, I think it's a hit." Johnny spun in the chair to rest his arm on top of his mocha-toned bald head. "I gotta baby-making groove that'll jive nicely with this one."

She conjured a small smile. "Thanks John—"

“No, wait a minute.” Paul shot glances between them. “This would fly as a musical mishap if I hadn’t known you throughout your whole musical career Rayne. I know you write and sing from your soul—exactly what you’re feeling. You’re going to have to explain to me what we just heard in that booth.”

“Chill out, Paul. What you heard in the booth was musical brilliance. I promise you this’ll be a chart breaker. It shows her diversity, her ability to take it there. So what she took a trip to the dark side. Don’t act like you ain’t been there before. It’s fresh, a new flavor and it’s about time for her to step outside the box.”

“No way, John! What I just heard was damn near satanic. Hands from the darkness? The devil’s embrace? The media are going to leap on this in a negative way and you know it...”

While Paul was focused on Johnny, Rayne retrieved a valium from her pocket and slipped it in her mouth.

Paul whipped his attention her way and leveled his finger at her. “Hey, I saw that! What’d you just take?”

Johnny sucked his teeth and quirked a brow. “Maan, you trip over the dumbest shit. May I remind you that Rayne’s not a lil’ girl anymore? She’s a grown ass woman, and if she wants to change the pace, or even pop a pill or two, we should just support her and go with the flow. As long as she’s still making hits and rocking it on stage, all is good.”

Paul thrust his palm out, gesturing for silence and zoned in on her. “Sharayna, I’m not your manager right now, I’m your friend.” Confusion rested behind his soft green eyes as he rustled his brunette hair. “This song, the way you’ve been acting lately...Tell me what’s going on with you, because I’m getting worried.”

She reached back, bundled her hair up in a ponytail then stuffed it beneath her lightweight hooded Yankees shirt. Paul’s unwavering stare remained locked on her. Huffing, she pulled the hood over her head and looked away from him.

“I uh...” She paused for a moment then abruptly stood. “Know what, I think I’m gonna go for a walk. I need to get up outta here.”

Prepared to follow her out, Sota stood and grabbed his hat.

“Solo,” Rayne added, fumbling through her bag for her Yankee cap and I-pod. “I know you mean well big papi, but I really need to do some soul searching and I wanna be by myself to do it.”

“You know I can’t let you do that,” Sota grumbled.

“Darn right he can’t let you do that,” Paul added, staring at her wide eyed. “Rayne I understand you’re going through something right now, most likely something that none of us understands. Maybe the pressure of this life is getting to you...I’m not sure, but taking a walk in the streets of Miami, or anywhere for that

matter on your own is not a good idea. You'll be mobbed by your fans if you walk out that door without your bodyguard."

Paul words went in one ear and out the other. "I'll be fine." She shoved her tunes in the pocket of her baggy jeans and plugged her ears with the buds. "They won't even recognize me." She slid on her designer shades and pulled the brim of her hat low over her face. "I stroll the streets of New York like this all the time and nobody even checks for me."

"What!" Paul whirled his glare at Sota. "You let her roam the streets of New York alone?"

"Let her?" Johnny laughed. "Jesus Paul, I know she's like a daughter to you, but this is ridiculous man. What is she, like twenty? You've got some issues."

"There's nothing wrong with me wanting to keep her safe."

As they bickered back and forth, Rayne made her way toward the exit, hoping to slip out unnoticed. A large hand caught her arm before she could step out of the room.

"Baby girl, this is a dark time. You shouldn't be wandering off alone."

"Dark time?" she sneered, jerking away from him. "You're telling me? I'm living in this dark time. Have you heard anything I've told you these past couple of months? I'm sick!" Heat started at the pit of her stomach and crept up to her head. For a second she felt like she would pass out.

He stared at her like she'd suddenly grown another head then stood in front of her, blocking the view of the arguing pair. "Calm down, Rayne," he whispered. "You shouldn't get this angry around them."

"Around them? What are you talking 'bout? How about I lock you down twenty-four seven and always have somebody watching you, and let's see how pissed off you get."

"No, you don't understand. You're not yourself right now." He stepped closer to her and placed a calming hand on her shoulder. "Please try to calm down."

She skipped back closer to the door. "You calm down, dammit! I watched my childhood friend die last night, in my head." Blinking back her tears, she jabbed at her temple.

He winced.

"Yeah, now you know my visions are not about butterflies and rainbows, Mr. *Everything's-gonna-be-alright*. You know she's not going to call me! Why did you even tell me that lie?"

"Rayne..."

"I can't take this mess anymore! I'm tired of pretending everything's okay!"

"Baby girl, please..."

"All I wanna do is take a goddamn walk without you on my ass for a change! Lemme step out so I can clear my head. It's not like I'm asking for a lot."

He stared at her for a moment in silence then nodded. “Okay.” His long fingers curled securely around her upper arm, he led her out of the room and through the building. “Twenty minutes is all I can give you. If anyone or anything looks suspicious, you call me, then start making your way back to the studio. I will hang out on the side of the building so it looks like I’m walking with you. I don’t want Paul to have a damn heart attack.”

Pouting her bottom lip, she slunk her shoulders and leaned against him. His massive arms encircled her and his head rested on top of hers. Surprisingly, his embrace soothed the angry heat lapping at her sanity.

She heard his breath hitch to speak, but he let out an audible sigh instead.

“I don’t mean to take this out on you, Sota. I just feel so damn misplaced and broken inside. Sometimes I don’t know which way is up. My friend is gone and deep inside, I feel like it’s my fau—”

“Go ahead and take your walk. When you get back, I’ll get Narri on the phone. She needs to talk to you about something.”

Rayne drew back to look up into his eyes. “Bout what?”

He patted the top of her head and nodded toward the studio. “Get going, before Paul comes out looking for you.”

She pushed up on her toes, gave him a quick kiss on his cheek and slid out the door. A gust of cool wind carrying the scent of spicy food brushed her face and caressed her flesh through the thin shirt.

Thank God for the breeze and a moment of solitude.

Linkin Park was her soundtrack as her Timberlands scuffed along the concrete. As always, when she was incognito, people walked by her without giving her a second glance. This was one thing that Narri taught her before she stepped into this life of fame; how to blend in when you didn't want to be noticed.

The phone in her pocket twittered violently. She contemplated ignoring it, but something made her answer. "Yep."

"Sharayna darling, how are you doing?"

She conjured a one-sided smile at Narri's voice. "Whaddup Mama Piers, I'm doing, like always," she drawled.

"You're still taking those pills, aren't you? I wish you wouldn't do that. Those things are no good for you."

"Oh God, here we go again," she groaned. "Listen ma, I would love to stand here and have this convo with you, but I'm going through some stuff right now and, anyways, I'll drop that on you later. Sota said you have something to talk to me about?"

“Yes, but not over the phone. My brother informed me that you two will be heading to Orlando tomorrow morning. I’ll meet you at your villa after your dance drill.”

There was urgency in Narri’s voice that didn’t sit right with her. It actually made her kind of nervous.

Rayne took a deep breath and reluctantly muttered, “Uhm, I think I have a photo shoot and radio interview scheduled after drill. You think we can we meet another time—”

“No, nothing comes before this,” Narri shrieked. “Cancel them!”

She yanked the phone from her ear and gave it an awkward stare. Suddenly her attention was drawn to a commotion at a nearby bistro. People scrambled from the tables, avoiding the sizzling liquid that boiled up to shatter glasses and ceramic cups.

“What’s that about?” Rayne took a step closer to the restaurant to get a better look. “Whoa ma, you won’t believe what I just saw.”

“Oh dear.” Narri’s voice was muffled like she’d covered her mouth. “I am so sorry, Sharayna. I shouldn’t have yelled. I apologize. I just—we must have this talk. We cannot delay another day.” Her voice lowered to a sweet whisper.

“Naw, it’s cool...” she murmured, distracted by the shocked people at the bistro. “I don’t know what’s going on in this restaurant, but everybody’s drinks started to boil all of sudden.”

“Where are you?”

“Walking the strip.”

There was a brief pause before she spoke again. “With Sota?”

Rayne felt the storm coming before she even opened her mouth. “No. Big papi’s back at the studio.”

“Sharayna,” Narri said sternly. “I want you to turn around and go back to the studio, right now. You cannot be alone. When you and I have that talk tomorrow, you will understand.”

Combined with the other scents wafting through the breeze, a familiar aroma entered her senses. Her nostrils flared, her lids lowered half-mast. She stopped, took in a deep whiff of air and moaned on exhale. Yes, it was there; the same alluring scent she caught after the concert.

“God, what is that? Oooh ma, I’ll holla at you later. Something just came up.”

Before Narri could get into one of her rant sessions, Rayne disconnected.

Her heart began to thump erratically. A static charge started at her head then worked its way down to her toes. In waves, it rolled back up her body and left the center of her back pulsating.

Bewildered, she dropped her eyes to the ground and reached back to brush her fingers over the dragon tattoo she had slapped on her back years ago in Hong Kong.

Why was it throbbing?

In the thick of her confusion, time shifted in slow motion, and then everything went mute. No longer could she hear the sounds of cars whizzing by, or the chatter of the people walking along the strip. She could only hear the rapid heartbeat knocking against her chest.

A presence, she felt a presence that made her insides churn. She'd felt this presence before, in her mind. Could it be him? Demetri? Had he actually found her? Nervously, she clutched the end of her shirt and scanned the area for just a glimpse of him. No one stood out. No one even looked her way.

Was he teasing her, or was her mind truly playing tricks on her? Damn!

Along the side of the street, a cab pulled up next to her. The driver, a middle aged man with a cropped haircut and broad smile, stepped out of the car, trotted around it and opened the back door for her. Compelled, she found herself sliding into the vehicle without a question asked.

It was a quiet ten minute ride to the beach. Still smiling, the driver helped her out then waved for her to follow him. The rubber soles of her Tims dug into the sand as they trudged along the deserted beach.

Off in the horizon, the pale pink tint from the moon beamed over the small waves in the ocean and the light grains of sand. They sparkled under her appraisal like a trillion tiny diamonds in the spotlight.

The driver led her to a small gazebo with sheer red curtains covering the openings. Through the transparent fabric, a chaise lounge sat in the center of it. On the side was a tall bucket filled with ice, chilling a large bottle of wine. Long metal torches set on either side of the shelter added to the glow already cast from the orb above.

She turned to question the driver to find him nowhere in sight.

A sudden breeze blew ripples over the water and pushed the curtain back, as if to welcome her into the cozy enclosure. Swallowing hard, she moved forward.

“Do you like it?” A deep croon brushed the side of her neck.

Startled, she whirled around and tumbled back. Before she could hit the ground, a pair of hands caught her. She was drawn against a hard body. Her breath came out in shorts spurts as his arms circled her waist.

“Oh God,” was all she could whimper.

Deathly afraid to look up in his face, she clutched the lapels of his jacket and squeezed her eyes shut. Panic picked at her nerves then she realized she was holding her breath.

Breathe Rayne, breathe.

This was no dream, nor vision. It was actually happening. The alluring scent of him swirled around her. He smelled so good she almost passed the hell out.

His fingers slipped beneath her chin and tilted her face up to his. “At your request, I am here for you.”

She opened her eyes and her next breath got caught in her throat.

Jet black, wavy hair draped his broad shoulders, and framed his porcelain face. Accented by a fan of thick black lashes, bright and exotic eyes, shimmering like the ocean beneath a full moon, were fixed on her.

Never in her life had she seen a man so incredibly beautiful. Just looking at him made every muscle in her body tingle.

“Demetri?” she whispered, giving into the shudders ripping up and down her spine.

His sexy lips curved up in a smirk, enhancing his beauty as he slowly removed her shades. “Hello, Angel.”

Chapter Six

Dark Lover

“Come, my love.” Demetri nodded toward the gazebo. “Allow me to make you comfortable.”

Without taking his eyes from her, he back stepped to the enclosure in fluid movements, pulling her with him. His touch was utter bliss. Although totally taken by him, the black cloud surrounding his form was not lost to her.

A graceful wave of his hand drew the curtains back. He turned her and very gently guided her down on the plush padding of the lounge bed.

Through the breezy drapes, she watched him round the shelter. He dipped his head and smiled bashfully, as if her unwavering gaze had made him shy. Didn't he know she couldn't look away even if she wanted to?

The man carried an air of nobility. Clad in a fitted black jacket, a pair of black pants with sharp creases down the front, a lightly patterned grey vest, highlighted with a silver tie and a matching button down shirt. Diamond cufflinks and a set of spit-shined boots completed the whole ensemble.

The jacket slid from over his broad shoulders. The definition of his strong physique flexed beneath his shirt and vest. He loosened his tie and the buckles on his boots then lowered himself onto the seat next to her. The curly ends of his mane pooled behind him as he swung his legs onto the stretch of the padding.

“It’s a beautiful night, isn’t it?” He bent his leg and twisted to the side to look at her. “I think you may be the cause of that.”

Coming from him, it was the sexiest thing anyone had ever said to her. Desire engulfed her as those sterling turquoise eyes peered deeply into hers.

“I thought you’d enjoyed this better than a stroll on the noisy street. Would you like a glass of wine, or something to eat?” A platter of luscious finger foods appeared on the palm of his hand when he turned it up. “If this will not do, I can take you to a wonderful restaurant where we’ll have privacy. How about Olivia’s, in Paris? It’s 3:30 a.m. there, but I’m sure my sister-in-law would be delighted to open the restaurant just for you. I can have you there in a flash if you’d like.”

Daunted, her jaw went slack and her mouth fell open.

His expression turned somber. “Have I overwhelmed you?”

Rayne sucked her bottom lip between her teeth and nodded. Granted, she was extremely attracted to him, but at the same time, he scared the shit out of her. It’d been different when they were in some fantasy world within her mind. But now that he was sitting less than six inches from her without the darkness

shading him, she saw what her gut had told her the moment he appeared out of thin air.

He wasn't human.

"I apologize. I only want to make you as comfortable as possible."

"No, it's not—how...?" She choked on the words and shook her head. "How the hell did you do that?"

"I beg your pardon?"

"What are you?"

He jerked back and slanted his head in curiosity. "You don't know?"

Hugging herself, she inched back away from him, and nearly toppled off the edge of the bed. "I know you're not human. I don't know how, but I know."

"Oh, I see." His eyes softened. "Interesting. The dark truth has been hidden from you, yes?"

"What dark truth?"

There was a long moment when all he did was stare at her. The mystery in his eyes had her stirring uncontrollably. He took her hand and placed it on his cheek. His skin simmered beneath her touch. An involuntary sigh slipped from her lips.

"It will not be disclosed from my lips. I want you to feel it," he whispered. With the slightest tug, he pulled her closer to him. A tremor traveled through her

arm then rippled down her entire body. “Don’t be afraid. Close your eyes and feel my true nature.”

As her lids drifted close, darkness crept into her mind. A pair of soft lips pressed to her forehead then ran down the center of her face to her mouth. The tender kiss sent fierce shivers to her core.

Behind her eyelids, there was the flash of a blade and in the midst of the darkness, Demetri stood over a huge grotesque creature, wielding a long sword. His eyes were red and something shiny gleamed from beneath his lips. He was crazy beautiful and horrific at the same time—a bizarre combination.

With effortless agility, he flipped his wrist and the head of creature skittered across the ground, leaving a trail of black liquid in its path.

“You offer your throat to me so freely,” he gasped.

Her eyes popped open. His body shook violently. Widened in terror, his eyes beamed like flashlights and sharp fangs glistened between his lips. That’s when she realized her position. Her head was tilted and she tugged at the collar of her shirt to expose her vulnerable neck.

“Oh my God!” She sprang to her feet and scrambled along the small enclosure, trying to part the curtains that all of a sudden didn’t have an opening. “Let me outta here!” She dropped to her knees in an attempt to crawl under the

sheer barrier, but the hem of the ghostly fabric, which apparently had a mind of its own, embedded itself deep into the sand.

A mixture of panic and anger boiled within her. “You let me outta here right now or I’ll tear this bitch down!”

She grabbed the drapery, ripping and yanking on it. It was like fighting with the wind. During her struggle, she became tangled in the soft threads and soon found the more she fought the more trapped she became.

Frustrated, she stopped moving within web and groaned, “This is bullshit, man!”

“Please, Sharayna...”

The curtain released her and pushed her to her feet with a shove to her ass. While trying to regain balance, Rayne spun around to glare at him. His back was to her and his head was dipped. The flickers of light coming from the torches bounced off the shiny strands of his hair.

“If you want to leave, I will not hold you.” The drapes separated.

She rushed out of the creepy love nest, tripping clumsily in the sand.

“But I will beseech you to stay. The mysteries of the world which has been hidden from you all your life are now before you. Please don’t leave without a taste.”

Halted by the plea in his voice, she stopped and turned to stare at the back of his head. There was no way in hell she'd be able to walk away from this man.

She sucked in a harsh breath. "Listen, I don't...I don't wanna leave either, it's just...In this crazy twilight zone that is now my life, you're the only one who makes sense, and you make me feel so..." She struggled for the right words. "Just don't show those things in your mouth anymore, unless you want to give me a heart attack."

"I'll try not to, but I can't make any promises," he murmured without turning to face her.

Wringing her hands together, she hesitantly stepped back into his shelter. "This is crazy. You can't be possible. Vampires don't exist."

"Of course not, darling, not in the world you've been raised in." He groaned and ran a hand through his hair then shook his head. "Why the water demons kept this a secret from you is baffling to me."

"Water what?"

He shot a glance at her over shoulder. "I apologize. Whilst you were peering into my mind, I couldn't help but take a glimpse in yours, which was foolish of me to do. Your demon is calling to me, the lovely vamptruss that lives within you. When I linked with you, she latched on to me." His face projected internal pain. "To deny her is...pure torture."

“A demon? Inside of me?” Her fists planted on her hips, she squinted at him incredulously. “You’re serious?”

“Very much so.”

She clucked her tongue. “Right when I thought you were the level headed one here...”

He twisted on the bed and patted the spot she left empty. “You know what I say to be true.”

Lowering her behind onto the edge of the platform, she kept steady eyes on his softened gaze. “Sounds redonkulous, man,” she snorted.

A boyish grin flashed across his face. “In denial, are we? Tell me, gorgeous, how many throats have you kissed lately? Better yet, how many times have you envisioned your teeth sinking into your lover’s flesh?”

The episode with Troy slammed into her mind. She ripped her eyes from his and gulped back a gasp. “So you’re telling me I’m a demon?” she whispered, looking down at her shaky hands. It all made sense now. The visions, the sleepless nights, all the times she thought her mind was playing tricks on her... “This can’t be—a demon? I was going to kill him?”

“No, I don’t believe you were going to kill him. You were only seeking release, something you cannot gain without a bite, or...”

“Or?” She whipped her head in his direction. “Or what? Please tell me, because this dry streak is getting old.”

His eyes smiling seductively, he removed her hat. “*The stroke of a demon vampire.*”

His soft spoken words caressed her mind like a gentle touch. Against her will, her eyelids drifted shut. Her hair was drawn from beneath her shirt and released to flow down her back.

“So beautiful. Such an intriguing color.”

The pull of his hands gliding through her strands sent tiny orgasmic tingles flittering across her scalp. She found herself breathless, melting into his stroke. An arm curved around her waist and drew her back to his chest. His muscled thighs hugged either side of her hips. Heated wetness built between her legs and soaked into her panties. It felt like he was caressing her inner being, soothing her soul, kissing her pain, erasing her anxiety.

Deep inside, she was scared as all get out, but to pull away from the sensation this man gave her was undoable. He had her locked.

Swirling about within her heart was the feeling they were meant for one another, like he belonged to her.

“*I do belong to you, Angel. Can't you feel it?*”

His lips ran along the rim of her earlobe as his fingers kneaded her scalp. Waves of delight washed into her in soft increments. She drew in ragged breaths, holding back the need to deliver the loud moan dangling in the back of her throat. The swipe of his tongue tagged the back of her ear and trailed down to the upper part of her neck. As her back arched and legs quivered, the walls of her pussy tightened, begging for release. Her hips began to move on their own accord in a slow rolling motion.

She could feel him. She could feel his tongue flicking at her clit as if his head was between her legs. The sensation was bizarre, yet *out of this world* stimulating.

“Oh God, what are you doing to me?” she whimpered.

Biting down her lower lip, she squeezed her thighs together, straining her inner muscles to do so. The pleasure intensified. He nipped at her earlobe. Panting, she grabbed onto his thigh and braced against the oncoming storm. Her sheath clutched, her hips jerked, then her flood gates opened. She threw her head back on his shoulder and wailed out her incredible release.

“Oh yeeah, baby, that’s it!”

Ripples of the powerful orgasm sparked throughout her body relentlessly. She squirmed. Her drenched panties squelched against her still leaking slit. Suffering the pulses of a spasming aftermath, she tried to push away from him. The sensation he gave her overwhelmed to her senses. She attempted to speak, but

could only manage to murmur incoherently. It felt like she was having a damn seizure. He hugged her jittery body against him until her convulsions subsided.

“Damn boy,” she finally breathed out. “I can’t believe you just made me—I’ve never felt anything like that before.”

All this time she thought the idea of an orgasm was lost her, but he offered one up with ease, without even going beneath her clothes. He was definitely a bad muthafucka!

“It’s all right, my darling,” he whispered into her ear. “It’s all right to seek pleasure in the devil’s embrace.”

She bristled.

“My dark power has made me out to be the devil in your mind, but I assure you I am not.” He settled against the head of the bed, pulling her with him. “I remember lying in my chambers during the daylight hours listening to your angelic voice. You would sing for hours. It was pure torture to hear your pain through your words and not be able to help you. I tried to call out to you many, many times, but was never able to grasp onto your spirit long enough to link with you, but when you came to me this morning...” He paused and ran his fingers along her hairline. “I thought I was dreaming. I’ve wanted to hold you for so long.”

“Wow, that’s deep. But the truth is, I’m right there with you. I needed you to hold me like this,” she confessed, rubbing her palm over the back of his hand, which lay securely across her belly.

He twisted his wrist and intertwined his fingers within hers. It was odd how all of the fear and pain she felt fell away from her. He made everything feel all right.

“I don’t understand this, Demetri. How could I be a demon? I mean, I’m not the type of broad who’s in church every Sunday, but I make it when I can. And I know it doesn’t seem like it, but I pray, *a lot*. I’ve been baptized and everything. There’s no way I’d be able to do those things if I were a demon.”

“Sharayna, not all demons are like the creatures that have haunted your mind. They are not created equal to your being. The type of demon you are was not spawned in the fires of hell. From what I gather, your father, or mother was born a demon vampire, a *Xsonri*, as were you. That does not make you evil.”

“This is too twisted to believe. A demon vampire?” she muttered. “I feel like this screws up my changes to get into heaven.”

His lips smiled against her temple. “I wouldn’t say that.”

A shudder zipped down her and she shivered. “What about you? Were you born a...Xsonri?”

He sighed. “No. I was turned by a demon vampire, one from the demon realm.”

“If you were turned, why is your skin so warm, and, and why do you feel so alive. You have a heartbeat. I feel it against my back. This kinda goes against the laws of being a *vampire*, right?”

The sound of the waves washing ashore severed the silence that suddenly fell over them.

“Uh, I say something wrong?”

“No sweetheart, I’m just thinking of the best way to explain this to you. When regular vampires are created, at the moment of death, their souls are extracted from their human vessels and that’s when the demon enters. Without the soul, the vessel is officially dead, which is why the skin and body is cold. In my case, I didn’t die when I was turned. I was drained to the point of death, but was not delivered to the afterlife. If my sire would have killed me, he wouldn’t have been able to pass his immortality onto me.”

She turned around to look into his face. “So, you’re not really dead, just kinda sorta. Does that mean you still have your soul?” A hint of excitement laced in her words.

“You seem so hopeful for me, Angel. How touching.” Smiling, he shook his head. “Although disconnected from my vessel, my soul is still connected to my

being, per say. Confusing, yes, I know. I guess another way to explain this is, I feel my spirit, but it is lost to me. Neither heaven, nor hell has claimed it.”

“Oh okay, I get it. Your soul is a fugitive.”

A glimmer of amusement shone from his unnatural eyes. “Yes. That’s a way to put it. You see, my soul is what harbors my force. If I were a regular vampire, my inner demon would be the source of my power, but it is not so. My demon is just the source of my blood lust, and it’s the same for you. Over the decades, I have learned to control him, but lately...” He paused and grunted. “He’s been besting me.”

“Blood and lust?” she murmured, trying to make sense of what he was telling her.

“*Blood lust*. One in the same. You cannot have one without the other, especially in your case. You are shifting slowly, darling. You will need both to sustain your sanity.”

“Sanity?” She snickered. “Have you met me? Boy, you just don’t know how far gone I am, do ya?” She glanced down at his chest. “So, since you are still connected to your soul, your heart still beats?”

“No, my love, my heart stopped beating a very long time ago. It is more than an organ that pumps the blood through the body. It is the source of emotion and I

was detached from all emotion when I was turned. No love. No hate. Only death and darkness. If the heart is not used then it will stop beating.”

She placed a shaky hand over his chest. “Then why is it beating now?”

The sexy smile that curled his lips made her heart skip a beat. “Because I’m using it,” he crooned, placing his hand over hers. “You’ve given me this heartbeat. My heart was still until your presence brought it to life.”

Heat flushed her face. She curled her fingers into her palms and gnawed on her lower lip to hide her flattered smile. “Aren’t you a sweet talker?”

His brow wiggled jestingly. “I only speak the truth.”

“Wow, I can’t believe I almost walked away from you.”

“You wouldn’t have gotten very far.” He pressed his fingers to her temples. For a split second her vision went black, and mind went numb.

“No more sleepless nights. No more thoughts of suicide. The demons will never taunt your domain again. My sweet angel, your mind will no longer be subjected to torment. You are not alone, and will never be, now that I am at your side. All that I ask is that you accept me.” He stroked the ball of her chin. “Yes, I am shadowed by the darkness, and will be for eternity, but I need you, Angel. I need you to keep me whole.”

Rayne was breathless, shuddering under his hooded beam. “Damn baby, right when I think needing you is so wrong, you take me to this place where it don’t even matter.”

Intoxicated by his scent, she lunged into his arms and attacked his mouth with feverish passion. The top part of the chaise fell back. He gasped, but returned every ounce of her hunger. His hands curved around her hips and slipped beneath her shirt to the bare skin of her waist. A wave of heat rolled through her limbs. His winding oral member delved between her lips and danced with hers. The velvety lust he caressed her with had every nerve in her body twittering with desire. He squeezed her tightly and slowed the kiss, forcing her to take his pace.

It was maddening and delightful at the same time.

His hardened length throbbed hard against the base of her belly, and good Gawd, baby boy was blessed! She wriggled and writhed against him, ripping at his vest and shirt.

She kicked off her Tims, shimmied out of her jeans then straddled his hips. “God, I want you so bad,” she moaned, yanking her shirt over her head. “I’ve never wanted anybody as much as I want you right now.”

In nothing but her panties and bra, she looked down at the beautiful creature lying beneath her. The smooth chiseled chest peeking up at her made her mouth water. His eyes shone brighter than the moon above.

“You look so damn delicious.”

Chuckling, he stroked her thigh and torso, leaving ribbons of rapturous delight in the wake of his touch. “Spoken like a true vamptress.”

Oddly, his words didn’t bother her. She felt the truth of it, felt it in her very being.

He ran his hands around her waist and down her back, beneath her panties, groaning with each inch, then handled her ass cheeks with need. Sizzling heat emitted from his biting grip. He shifted her hips back and forth, dragging her engorged clit along the length of his pulsating shaft. Mewling, she undulated with his pace, rubbing her hands across his arms. She reveled in excitement at the taut muscles that resided beneath the light fabric.

“Oh my Jesus, that’s so good,” she moaned breathlessly, taking his mouth again.

She pushed her tongue deep into his hot orifice; prodding his mouth at the same torturous rhythm he drove her hips. His throaty groan became hers. He rolled his groin up into her, heightening her insane bout of pleasure.

Her pussy contracted and fluttered with his sensual assault. The sudden milky climax rushed through her like a waterfall. Her body arched. She threw her head back in rapture and he buried his face between her aching breasts, lapping at

the sensitive flesh of cleft. Grounding her hips against his bulking erection, she cupped the back of his head.

A familiar urge sat within the depths of her heady desire. As her body temperature rose the craving surfaced. She began to tremble. Her top and bottom gums throbbed with urgency, along with tattoo across her back.

Then in a flash she grabbed his hair, yanked his head back and attacked his jugular.

Yielding to her uncontainable demand, he grasped her head to urge her on. Her teeth branded his skin, filling her with so much bliss, her body erupted. She jerked in his embrace, shrieking in satisfaction without releasing him. Soon the need to taste the liquid that rushed through his arteries made it hard to breathe.

“Harder,” he groaned, bucking his trapped anaconda against her leaking slit.

As requested, she added pressure, but couldn't break his tough skin. Tears leaked from her eyes. Her teeth burned. No matter how hard she bit him, she couldn't get past his flesh.

Frustrated, she shoved away and tried to scramble off the bed. This was fucking crazy! She started hyperventilating, gasping for air that was lost to her.

Demetri grabbed her arms. “Wait. It's all right, sweetheart. Don't run. You have not shifted enough to break my skin, but I can still give you what you need.”

“Nooo....”

He tightened his grip when she attempted to twist out of his hold. Before she knew it, she was slammed on her back and his strong thighs were locked around her hips, pinning her to the bed. A knowing smirk curled his lips as he gazed down at her. His silky mane dangled down the sides of his face and tickled hers.

“I know what you need,” he reiterated with the soft kiss of a whisper, flipping his hair to one side.

He lowered his head to hers, slanted his mouth across her lips and ravished her, kissing her deeply, inhaling her breathy moans. Blended colors danced behind her eyelids. She thought she'd die from sheer rapture when his tongue slipped between her lips dripping with sweet tangy deliciousness. The taste of him enticed her palette as she rolled her eager organ around his. Her nipples tingled, her clit pulsated, and her core exploded. She muffled out a cry.

Yes! Damn right this was what she needed!

Panting, she nipped at his tongue then sucked on it with hunger, absorbing his offered nectar.

He trembled. “*Sharayna*,” he moaned, nipping at her bottom lip. His sweet kiss moved down to the underside of her chin.

The moment his lips touched the top of her neck, a fever ignited. She tilted her head back as far as it would go, fully exposing her throat. She wanted his teeth sunk into her flesh so badly it was damn near suffocating.

“Demetri...Please...”

He hovered over her offer. The brightness in his eyes dimmed as his fangs extended from beneath his flushed lips. His breath teased and caressed the sensitive flesh over her fluttering vein. The walls of her smoldering core matched the erratic pulse of her heart. Every part of her convulsed with need. The anticipation was unbearable.

Breathing hoarsely, she palmed the back of his head. “Do it.”

His body stiffened against her.

“What’s wrong?” she panted out.

Groaning, he drew back and pushed off of her. She propped up on her elbows and watched the curtain part to allow him to walk to the edge of the shore. He looked up to the moon and violently shook his head. Ripples cast down his long, raven mane.

“You cannot offer me this,” he strained out over his shoulder.

Irritation sliced through the sexual spell. She got to her feet and glared at the back of his head. “What? Why?”

“Your blood,” he faltered in a murmur. “It is sacred.”

“Listen, you got the green light, baby. So why don’t you get your sexy ass over here and finish what you started.”

He ran a hand roughly through his hair and paced. “Oh Angel, if you only knew what you were offering me—”

“I know what I’m offering you! I know *exactly* what I’m offering you!” She planted her hands on her hips. “Do you see this? You got me standing out here in my unmentionables, boy.” She pushed out a harsh breath and cleared the curtains. “I’m damn near butt naked, and you’re acting cute.”

He spun around to face her. His eyes were glazed with sorrow. “Sharayna, I...I didn’t mean to upset you.”

“Whateva. If you’re scared to bite me then just say so. Don’t go out of your way to get me all worked up just to—goddammit Demetri, what the hell is that cologne you’re wearing? It’s driving me freaking crazy!” she shouted, grabbing a handful of her hair. “I’m so horny, I could—ohmyGod.” Her words came out in quick spurts. She couldn’t shake the feeling of extreme aggravation. The desire to jump his bones and slap him at the same time overwhelmed her.

He rushed to her and cradled her face. “My darling, I wouldn’t hold anything away from you, but you must understand your true nature first.”

“Then make me understand,” she whispered harshly. “I need to know why I can’t breathe without you.”

He claimed her lips and took her aggressive tongue with a chesty groan. “Don’t force me, Sharayna,” he growled, desperation coating his words. “Please, just let things fall into place. Don’t rush what you don’t understand.” He pressed his forehead to hers. “You have awakened something so primal within me, I must go to stay true to my word.”

“No, wait boo. No you don’t,” she purred in a sultry tone, latching onto his shirt. Darting her tongue out, she flicked it across his quivering lips. “Stay with me, please. I, I feel like I’ll fall apart without you. Don’t go.”

There was uneasiness in his eyes. “If I stay...” He briefly closed his eyes and nibbled on his lower lip. She caught a glimpse of his eye teeth lengthening as he spoke. “If I stay, I will not be able to control what I’d do and I’m not prepared for you to see *that* side of me.”

She rolled her eyes and huffed. “You showed me your fangs, Demetri, which I admit is pretty damn scary. How much worse could it get?”

The pad of his finger gently traced the vein along her neck, drawing out a moan. “What I’ve shown you was my desire, my lust. You have not seen the beast that drives me to kill, and if I can help it, you will not see him.” He stepped back and took her hand. “I must gain control, so I’ll leave you now.”

“Wait baby. Don’t—c’mon...” she whined.

He caught her head between his hands. “He’s clawing at my insides, needing to be released, needing to be fed, and I refuse to feed on you.”

From the depths of his alluring eyes, she saw the death to come. It didn’t scare her someone would die by his will tonight. It scared her that the thought of him killing intrigued her.

“Ohh okay.” She licked her lips, still tasting a bit of him from their kiss. “What’s your cell number?”

The glimpse of a smile curved the corner of his lips. “I don’t carry a cellular phone, Sharayna.”

“Uh-uh, what language are you speaking? You need to get with the times, man. *Everyone* has a cell phone,” she jested to make light of the deathly situation.

He wrapped his arms around her, kissed her softly then stepped away. Now fully dressed, she stood in front of the studio as if she’d never left.

“I will find you, where ever you may be.” Right before her, he became ghostly then disappeared.

“Well that was a quick walk,” Sota said behind her. “Feel better, baby girl?”

Still staring at the blank space where her dark lover once stood, she mumbled, “I think I just had the mother of all hallucinations.”

Chapter Seven

Frantic Cries

The current of the night sky engulfed him.

Demetri sliced through the strong winds in an attempt to flee. He had to escape *her* enchantment, for the strength of his will had been shot to pieces. The need to taste and be with her had overruled all reason. Her essence traveled through his system, urging him to turn back around and claim her.

Landing on the roof of an apartment building, his chest heaved. A Xsonri breathing excitedly as a human was unheard of, yet here he was panting as if he needed to. He paced.

An image of her loveliness entered his mind. The smoothness of her umber complexion tinged with a soft sheen of gold, her enticing chocolate eyes, the fullness of her pouty lips and a smile straight from the heavens...And in addition to that, her beauty was accentuated by the brilliant red, which streamed throughout her thick mane.

A Goddess among men.

He inhaled the air around him. Her delicious fragrance was a mere whiff on the breeze, but still *everywhere*.

His need for her increased with each passing moment, and to think, he was supposed to sit back and allow her to choose her mate from a mass of wretched demons. He curled his hands into fists and growled. Never! She was for him! He felt it deep down within his being, and he'd do everything in his power to make known his claim on her.

At this time, her lust and need for comfort drove her into his arms, but that wasn't enough for him. He needed more. He needed to mark her just as she'd marked him. He needed her to love him.

Sharayna.

Before he could place his claim on the beautiful Queen, he'd have to find a way to control himself in her presence. Pushed to the point of utter madness, he carelessly dropped fang in front of her. She was already conflicted with her true identity. His revelation almost made things worse.

Leaving her had been his only option. He could only hold back the beast within for so long.

Remembering the sweet taste of her kiss and the fantastic sensation of her body against his, he stopped his frantic strides across the roof and licked his lips.

It was pure torture to taste her thick lips, caress her soft skin and smell her intoxicating arousal and not be able to take her.

He walked to the edge of the building and peered down at the passing cars. The moment she offered her throat to him played over and over in his mind. She craved his bite and it took everything within him not to give it to her. Had he been a fool for not taking it, the ultimate power?

“No,” he growled.

She was unaware of the power in her blood and until she was, he wouldn't accept one drop. He might be a monster, but he still had a few morals.

Squatting down, he placed his hands over his head and slipped into a meditative state to summon a semblance of calm. He stared up at the full moon, which blushed under his appraisal.

How could the water demons not have told her? How could they have allowed her to live her life as a human, knowing one day she'd shift to her true form and create havoc on earth?

The questions boggled his mind. He'd absorbed a great deal of her pain tonight, but he could only imagine how confused and disoriented she really was. It was a miracle she'd made it this long without completely losing it.

No matter the outcome, he wouldn't allow her to go through this alone. He'd protect and cherish her, and would have no mercy in taking the head of any creature who dared to stake a claim on *his* Queen.

Yes, she was his Queen.

Finally able to gain some self control, he stood, stretched his arms out and ascended into the night sky. The soothing rush of the wind calmed his senses and brought down his ravenous craving for the demon Queen, for the moment.

Halting his flight, the unmistakable scent of evil souls assaulted his senses. He landed on top of an abandoned building and sniffed the air around him.

The piteous sobs of a young girl gained his attention. He could sense her blood, her fear, and the lust of the men who surrounded her. A wicked smile played on his lips. This wouldn't cure his obsession for Sharayna, but would momentarily quiet the beast inside.

He dematerialized into mist and seeped into the building. Down the stairwell, he drifted, lured by the sobs that quickly turned into frantic cries. His journey ended in a large room overwhelmed with the scent of mildew, feces and decaying rat corpses. Moonlight shone through a small window, giving the space faint illumination. The girl, whose cries drew out his incisors, was bound to a rickety bed frame by her small wrists.

A man was on top of her, his form corpulent and grotesque. He ripped at her clothes while four other men watched and waited their turn to take her.

Demetri thought back on Father Shannon's plea for the souls that had been lost to God. His plea was in vain. There was no salvation for these men. The evil he saw in their minds were beyond heinous and were unforgivable. They'd raped and murdered young children for years, and he was supposed to grant them mercy?

No. No mercy would be granted. Not tonight.

"Damn man, you taking all night. Just get her clothes off," complained one man waiting near the bed, tugging at his penis.

"Just hurry up and fuck her so I can get in there," grumbled another.

Demetri materialized. Had the men not been so riveted by the sight of the naked girl laying on the blood and urine stained mattress, they would've seen him standing by the doorway.

He projected a mental message to the girl. *"Close your eyes and keep them closed. No matter what you hear, do not open them until I tell you to."*

Her fear-filled cries bounced off the molding walls as she followed his instructions.

Casually, he approached them, allowing his footsteps to resound on the floor. All heads jerked in his direction. The man on top of the little girl moved off her and turned around, kneeled at the end of the bed. Unbuttoned, his police

uniform exposed a big round gut and nub of a penis. The rotund officer drew his gun out of his holster and leveled it at him.

“Gentlemen...” Demetri kept his steps at a slow measured pace, holding back the excitement of the impending kills. “Surely you have room for one more.”

“Who the fuck are you?” exclaimed the policeman kneeling on the bed.

Demetri stopped a few feet before them and smiled. “Who the fuck am I?” he asked, exposing his fangs. “Those who know of me refer to me as Demetri, but you may call me *Death*.”

A gunshot rang out.

The bullet was halted in midair then launched back at the man’s big gut. The other four took off running. Not in the mood for a chase, he swept his hand ever so slightly and they were frozen in place.

Absorbing their rising fear, he tapped his chin in thought. Now how should he go about this? There were so many ways to destroy humans with wicked souls, but not one appealed to him at the moment. He couldn’t just drain them. No, that’d be too easy. He needed to give them a memorable death, one that would follow their wretched souls straight into hell.

Decided, he gave into his malicious nature and released his dark energy upon them. Through his will, his force pulled their penises from their bodies, *very slowly*. Horrified screams of agony filled the musty room.

He reached out and grabbed the man on the bed by his throat. While clutching his wounded stomach, the officer began to pray.

Demetri chuckled. "Officer Jack," he chimed, as if he was greeting an old friend. "There is no need to pray. God can't save you now." He dug his nails into the man's throat and drew out a strangled howl. "Evil has consumed you and attracted death to you tonight."

"Noo, please! I have a sickness!" he jabbered, blood oozing from the corners of his mouth. "I can't help myself!"

Amused, Demetri arched a brow. "Do you truly believe this confession to me will change your fate, Officer Jack? Do you believe your hell bound soul is worthy of redemption?" He grabbed the man's penis and small shriveled testicles and sunk his nails in until a blood gurgling wail filled his ears. "No? I didn't think so." He delved his nails in deeper and in one swift move snatched the man's genitals from his body.

The blood lust consumed him. He plunged his incisors deep into his man's jugular, drained him within seconds then ripped his throat out. Aggravated he hadn't put him to death slower; he threw the limp corpse against the wall, leaving a bloody smear of human tissue where it hit.

Growling, he shifted his eyes at the officer's tortured comrades. One by one, he ripped limbs, claimed throats and climaxed with every painful cry. Nothing could compare to the feeling of taking a wicked life.

The last drained, throat-less body dropped to the floor. Howling with pleasure, he dipped his head back, held his arms out and gave into the stimulus induced by the evil blood that flowed through his system. His cheeks flushed. His body ignited. The dark energy was so heady, he nearly erupted in laughter.

Rattling from the old rusted bed frame jarred him from the blood orgasm and snapped his attention to the girl, who he'd almost forgotten was in the room. He closed his eyes and repressed the monster within. Waving his hand over his body, he cleaned himself and changed his suit. He scanned the gruesome scene he'd made, nodded in satisfaction, and then summoned fire to set the dead bodies ablaze.

As the scent of burning flesh tapped his senses, he moved over to the bed and looked down at the girl's naked body. She still had her eyes shut tight. Her small frame had been beaten badly. One of her ribs had been broken, the side of her face was bruised purple and blue, and her blonde hair was soaked with blood.

Overwhelmed with sadness, he touched where her rib was shattered. She flinched and sobbed as he released a stream of healing energy to repair her broken,

curved bone and battered form. He eased the pain in her fragile body. A trembling sigh of relief seeped from her lips.

He untied her wrists and as soon as her hands were free, she scurried to the far end of the bed, shuddering in fear.

“I’m not here to harm you, child.” He offered his hand. “Come, I’ll take you to safety.”

Hesitantly, she eased toward him. With prayers to the almighty flooding her mind, she took his hand. He sent a calming spell through her small limb. Crying tears of gratitude, she wrapped her arms around his waist and buried her face in his chest. He rubbed the back of her head, comforting her as her tears soaked into the fabric of his jacket.

Demetri held out his hand, willed a thick blanket with his mind and wrapped it around her shivering body. He then scooped her up in his arms, shot out of the building and took flight. He flew through a drift stream, being cautious of his speed. If he were to shift to his normal pace, the current alone would rip the skin right from her fragile body.

He landed on the hospital’s rooftop with her cradled against him. Carefully, he kneeled and sat her down. “Open your eyes.” The one eye that wasn’t swollen shut slid open. “I am going to take the memory of this night away from you.” He grazed his fingers across her swollen eye, instantly healing it.

She whimpered, “You mean, I won’t remember?”

“No. You will not remember.”

“I...” She looked up at him, tears leaking down her bruised cheek. “I don’t want to forget you.”

Smiling wryly, he flashed a glimpse of fang. “Oh yes you do.” With her gasp echoing in the breeze, he tapped her on the forehead and transported her into the hospital.

The nurses bombarded her with questions, asking who she was and what had happened to her. Other than her name, the only answer they received was, “I don’t remember.”

Satisfied with the good deed, he stood and gazed into the night. “*Father Shannon, are you lively?*” The hour was late, but knowing the noble priest, he was probably wide awake.

“*Yes, yes Demetri? Were you able to attain any additional information from Lady Indigo?*” Father Shannon asked, anxiousness behind his voice.

Just as he thought; wide eyed and busy tailed. “*28 portals.*”

There was a long pause. A gust of wind flew over the roof, brushing his hair back from his shoulders.

“*Hell is upon us.*”

“*Not yet, Father. Unfortunately this is only the beginning.*”

“Do you have any locations of the portals?”

“I have all of the locations, well except for the ones that are being opened as we speak.”

Anger emitted through their transmission. *“Who is doing this?”*

“A very powerful and sinister warlock.” Demetri responded, absorbing every ounce of his ire through the link. *“I will find him in due time.”*

“Do you know of the Dragon Queen?”

Demetri paused and thought on how much of the truth he wanted to reveal. Just as quickly as the thought entered his mind, he'd decided not to disclose anything. If the good priest knew who she was, or of his intentions with her, he'd probably have an aneurism.

“Yes, I know of her.”

“I just received the quick run-down of her existence from Father Hamiway a few hours ago. He was trying to tell me something of great importance about her when our connection was severed. Maybe you can help.”

“Of course.”

When Father Shannon opened his mind, Demetri closed his eyes and entered. Careful not to leave any influence of his darkness in the priest's psyche, he treaded cautiously. With great concentration, he drew forth Father Shannon's link

with the priest afar and leaped into his mind. It didn't take long for the cause of the connection break to become clear.

The scent of sulfur infiltrated his senses. He opened his eyes and immediately exited the two priest's domain.

"He was attacked by demons."

"God, no! Is he still alive?"

"Yes, but he won't be for long. He's in Osaka, in a temple that happens to be sitting right on top of a demon portal."

Demetri was tempted to take flight to go and retrieve Father Shannon's close friend, but it was daylight in Japan. He'd burst into flames before he could get close to the fading priest.

"Good Lord in Heaven! How did a demon portal end up beneath a temple?"

"Evil has the habit of nesting in the most unlikely places, does it not, Father?"

Father Shannon groaned. *"What do you know about the Queen?"* he asked, ignoring his sarcasm.

"That she has the power to close the portals and her blood is to blame for the chaotic behavior of the demons. Her blood happens to be a mixture of heaven and hell and is said to hold unimaginable power."

"Then we must find her at all costs."

Demetri fought the urge to think of her beautiful face. “Yes, *we must.*”

“*Do you have any idea on where she might be?*”

“*Not a clue.*”

He never thought he’d be put in a position where he’d have to lie to the priest. Nevertheless, given the circumstances, the lie was necessary.

“*The blood of heaven and hell flowing through her veins, a half-breed... What madness provoked a creature of God to take part in the making of such a dangerous demon?*”

His sentiments exactly, but their creation would be his gain. *His Queen.*

“*Well, I know if anyone can find her, you can, Demetri.*”

“*Perhaps,*” he uttered, holding back a chuckle. “*Close your eyes and relax your mind, Father. Tomorrow is another day. Leave the Queen to me. I will contact you if anything new arises.*” With that said, he severed the connection.

Prepared to take flight, he turned his sights to the sky and was jolted. Sharayna’s exotic scent wafted by his nose.

Smiling, he shook his head. There was no escaping this beauty. He drew her lingering aroma deeply into his lungs. She was within miles of the hospital, too close for him to turn away. Whether or not he was prepared to face again her without baring his fangs, he had to go to her.

Chapter Eight

Drift Cloud

Lazily raking the wide tooth comb through her hair, Rayne sat Indian style on the bed and stared through the window at the red tinted moon, which looked to be darker than the last time she saw it.

A red moon. How extraordinary; about as extraordinary as the gorgeous man who had moved into her every thought.

Demetri.

A smile tugged at her lips. She could hardly wait to see him again.

Then just like that, despair crashed into her, melting the smile from her lips. What if he didn't show tonight? She'd be lost without him. He said he'd find her, but what if he changed his mind? What if he took some time to think about it and decided he was way out of her league, not worth his time?

What if...

The man had apparently been bred from class and wealth. And even though she was a successful entertainer, she didn't think it made any difference for what type of woman she was, or what type of woman he was accustomed to. She was

almost sure he didn't go for the type of chick who strutted around in Tims, baggy jeans and hoodies on her off days, let alone a black chick, who wasn't afraid to show her hood side.

She licked her lips, swiping a taste of her strawberry flavored gloss. His beauty, his swagger, his moves, his touch, his poise—everything about him was dynamite, and he wasn't even her type. She usually liked her men, hard core, thugged-out, and most importantly *black*, but here she sat utterly sprung on a beautiful white vampire.

She giggled under her breath then threw a glance over her shoulder and rolled her eyes. “We're not going to do this again tonight, big papi,” she sighed. “Go'on to your room.”

Sprawled in the chair across the suite, Sota had his hands clasped behind his head, his ankles crossed and his eyes closed. “Paul and Narri told me to keep both eyes on you, even when you're asleep.”

“That's stupid.” Rayne twisted around. “Don't look like you got either eye on me. Go away!”

He grinned. “My eyes don't need to be open to be aware of your whereabouts.”

Groaning, she fell back onto the softness of the bed. “I believe you secretly like to torture me.”

“I didn’t realize having me around was torture.”

“Liar,” she mumbled. “Let me ask you something, Sota.” She propped up on her elbows and cut an inquisitive eye his way. “Are vampires and demons real? Like, do you believe in them?”

His lids popped open and lips twitched. The question seemed to make him stir. “Well, there are people out in the world who drink human blood. A heinous act, if you ask me. And as you’ve seen on the news people kill people for no apparent reason all the time. That’s definitely demonic in my opinion.”

She arched a brow. “Funny how you said all of that without actually answering my question. Let’s try this again and maybe you can give me a straight answer this go’round. Do vampires and demons exist?”

Clearing his throat, he stood and looked away from her. “If you’re referring to the mythical creatures that you read about in books, and see on TV...then no.”

“Sure ‘bout that,” she asked, squinting at him.

“C’mon Rayne, yes, I’m sure,” he grumbled, heading for the door to the adjoined room. “Be ready by seven am so we can get on the road. Narri called Amy to rearrange your schedule, so the photo shoot is first thing tomorrow morning.”

Business talk. This was Sota’s manner to avoid a subject he didn’t want to talk about, which made her all the more suspicious. The big guy was straight up lying to her.

“What? You’re bailin’ out on your job already? You’re supposed to keep both eyes on me, remember?”

“Don’t stay up too late. I’ll be right next door if you need me.”

Before he could flee through the door, Rayne stopped him. “Hold up, Sota. If you knew something was happening to me, like something *unnatural*, you’d tell me right?”

His eyes down, he wavered at the entrance of his room. “I think...” He paused and took a huge heaving breath. “Some things are kept from people because the mind and heart can only handle so much. If that person is not ready to absorb the truth, then its better they don’t know.”

“What the hell is that about? Who are you to decide what I can handle or not?” she asked, restraining the tears pooled beneath her eyelids. “I’m not an airhead, and I’m not some fragile lil’ girl. If there’s something you need to tell me—”

“Sharayna.” The deep rumble of his voice was quickly dismissed when a sad smile curled his lips. “Be patient,” he faltered, tapping the edge of the door. “Get some sleep, baby girl. Tomorrow will be a better day.”

“Right,” she murmured. “Before you leave, brah...what color is the moon?”

He not once took his eyes off hers. “White. Good night.”

Once again he left her with a mess of questions jumbling around in her mind, but now at least she knew everything Demetri had told her was true. It was Sota's uneasiness that gave it away.

A demon. And Sota and Narri knew all about it. All these years...

Shaking her head, she pushed up off the bed. She trudged across the suite and turned on her portable I-pod player. The soft coo of Sade's soothing voice filled the room. *No Ordinary Love*.

Every time she'd gotten a cut and didn't have a scar to show for it, they said it was because she took vitamins. It'd been the same excuse they used when she questioned why she never got sick. Hell, she was young. She believed everything they told her.

"Vitamins keep you healthy and strong, Sharayna," Narri would say in her cheery ever reassuring tone as if life was honky dory.

Bullshit. The revelation almost made her angry. Their intentions were good, but damn, this was something they should've told before her life got turned upside down. At least she would've been prepared for this mess.

"A damn demon," she snorted, peeking out the balcony door. "As if it could get any worse."

Last time she stepped out on a balcony, the flashes of cameras ruined her attempt to enjoy the night air. Paparazzi were sneaky ass bastards. They would break all kinds of laws just to get a money-making shot.

Please Jesus, don't let these nut jobs be out here; not tonight.

Rayne shut off the lights for cover and eased out onto the platform. The concrete was cold beneath her bare feet. She gazed out at the scenery.

The ocean washed ashore and the clouds floated past the full pink moon. It was beautiful, like the scene out of a fantasy.

She traced the moon with her index finger and found herself wondering what it'd be like to make love to Demetri.

Surrounded by a mass of flickering candles, their union would be illuminated. She pictured his body sprawled out naked on top of red satin sheets creating an ambience of hot and steamy sensuality. She clutched the railing and nibbled her tongue ring, resisting the urge to bury her fingers beneath the crotch of her boy shorts and between her soft pussy lips.

The contrast of her honey kissed, chocolate tone and his flawless porcelain glow mingled together against the crimson bedding, painted a seductive portrait in her mind.

As the sexy vision faded, she chuckled and opened her eyes.

Every star in the sky seemed to wink at her as if they knew her dirty little secret. Among the stars a thick purple cloud inched across the horizon. At first, it looked like an unnaturally dense rain cloud, but then, it did something bizarre. It expanded, shifted into a spiral funnel and floated her way.

Bewildered, she started to back away. The swirling cloud reared back then darted toward her like a snake, engulfing her. Squealing like a frightened mouse, she squeezed her eyes shut and went into a fetal position. An icy gale swirled around her and lifted her into the air.

Hesitantly, she opened her eyes. A mass of fog aggressively encased her like a protective shield and carried her through the sky. Scared shitless, she watched the world fly by below her.

“Oh Jesus,” she gasped. “What is this?”

Through the purple mist, she could see six figures below her, surrounded by a brilliant white light. She felt a connection with them as her transport drifted over the area. Miles ahead was a temple. Within it, she saw another white glowing figure, but this one shimmered unlike the others. The cloud melted through the structure and took her closer to the phenomenon. Huge black forms circled the being and its light began to dim.

Compelled to touch the fading light, Rayne reached out. As she got closer, it became clear to her that the figure was a man. He looked up at her. Pain in his

bright grey eyes squeezed her heart. Unable to resist, she rested a hand on his shoulder.

Tears filled his eyes. “No child, you are not supposed to be here! Get out!”

The purple cloud suddenly retreated and released her. She stumbled backwards until her back hit a wall. The realization boggled her mind.

She hadn’t even left the balcony.

Frightened and totally disoriented, she dropped to her hands and knee then scrambled over to the stone post of the railing. She wrapped her shaky limbs around the sturdy support and warily watched the dark sky through widen eyes for another freaky body-snatching cloud.

Not a trace of it in sight. Was it all her imagination?

For the life of her she couldn’t bring her heart rate down or stop the pounding in her head. “What the hell...?” she faltered.

A hand slipped underneath her shirt and rested on the center of her back. With a sudden intake of breath, she jerked forward, pressing the cleft of her breast harder into the cold stone.

Wait, she knew this touch.

To her left, particles swirled in the air then gathered to form her beautiful dark lover. Stooped next to her, he ran his fingers up her spine to massage the base of her neck. The throbbing headache gradually dissipated.

“What has you so troubled, Angel?” he asked softly.

“You won’t believe what just happened to me,” she shrilled in rapid cadence.

He pried her arms from around the post. “Try me.”

She stiffened. “No wait! What if it comes back?”

“It won’t,” he promised. “Now, allow my touch to soothe you and tell me what happened.”

Her body went lax against her will. “A cloud, purple cloud,” she babbled in a trembling voice. “It, it came out of nowhere and snatched me up, took me on this scary sky ride, across some lights, I think were people then I was at a temple—”

“A temple? Where, what temple?”

“I dunno, I dunno. There was this guy, it was weird, I felt connected to him. Something’s wrong, Demetri.” She began to shake. Tears trickled down her cheeks. “I feel like I wanna go to him, but he told me I wasn’t supposed to be there. And then the other lights...”

He scooped her up and carried her into the bedroom where lit candles hovered mysteriously in the air. As she buried her face in the crook of his neck, she took deep whiffs of his incredible scent. The softness of the bed and the soulful voice of Sade welcomed her.

“Every time I think my life is totally screwed, you come around and make me feel like I’m in heaven,” she said snuggling against him.

God, why couldn't it be like this all the time?

Demetri drew back to look into her eyes and cupped her cheek with the palm of his hand. "It could be like this all the time," he whispered.

With the artificial light shining around him, something slightly different about his appearance was revealed. His skin, which had been a smooth porcelain tone before now held a tinge of color to it. It almost looked like his cheeks were flushed.

"Demetri, was I imagining things?"

"I'm afraid not. It was a drift cloud that took you, Sharayna."

"Drift cloud?" she faltered.

"A teleportation portal. A stream or layer in a dimensional zone left by Andausians with teleporting abilities, also known as *Drifters*. It's a supernatural fingerprint, a way to track where they've been and where they're going. I assume from what you've told me, you unconsciously summoned the cloud in your need to connect with the priest."

"What? He's a priest?" she gasped in shock.

"Yes, an Andausian priest, a true follower of God. You were in Osaka, Japan and the priest pushed you back out for good reason. You were not prepared to face the demons surrounding him, not like this."

"Japan? So you're telling me, I rode all the way to Japan from here?"

“No, but your mind did. You were forced out before you were able to physically teleport, which I am grateful for,” he finished on a sigh. “It’s a form of mental teleportation. The cloud allows you to see where you’re going before you get there.”

She shook her head. “Damn, this is all so freaking confusing. Drifters? Andausians? Anything else I should know?”

“All of your questions will be answered in time.” He placed his hand on her forehead.

A warm, tingly sensation emitted from his touch and spooled throughout her limbs. She sharply inhaled.

“I have no idea what the outcome will be, but I must draw out your spiritual energy.”

“Whoa, hold up now. I’m not ready...” Her voice trailed off.

Avoiding eye contact with him, she dragged her hands down her face. No matter his ability to pull her into this sea of serenity, where everything was fantastic, she knew the priest was in trouble and so were the other lights she saw in her mind.

But what could she do?

“This is too much to take in, in one night. I feel like I’m in a non-stop whirlwind of some twisted world.” She groaned in frustration. “Listen, you are

wonderful, beyond my wildest dreams, but—you told me there’s a demon inside of me and I feel like what you’re about to do is gonna make it worse.”

“I know you’re afraid and confused, but I’m here to help you get through this, Sharayna. I want to show you something that will help you understand my place in this world, part of the reason I’m determined to release what’s trapped within you. Read my mind.”

“No, uh-uh.” She stood up on her knees and inched back away from him. “Believe me, I already know your place in the world and last time I read your mind...uh-uh, boy, you’re not gonna do that to me again.”

A wolfish smile curled his lips. “It must be done.” He took her hand and pressed her palm to his cheek. “I want you to feel it?”

Bound by his sweetly spoken command, Rayne closed her eyes. Pure rapture flowed beneath his skin. Her nipples hardened and stung, her clit ached to be touched. Her breathing hitched as he drew her closer to him. She slipped her palm around his neck. His hands circled her waist then slid over the curve of her ass.

The temperature between their bodies rose to a blazing inferno. His veins began to pulsate beneath her touch.

She felt the blood, sensed it—the new *evil* blood that coursed through his being. This blood aroused her, called to her. It evoked a yearning within her, which kindled a ravenous fire. She wanted it. Her lips quivered with the need for a taste.

Digging his fingers within her hair, he inhaled deeply, pressing his lips against her temple. “Feel it,” he whispered.

Suddenly, gut wrenching screams entered her mind followed by images of unfamiliar faces, tortured faces, bloodless faces. Gasping, she withdrew her hands and attempted to pull away, but he locked his arms around her waist and held her against him.

“Embrace it,” he demanded hauntingly.

Her mind was swamped with panic, but she couldn't erase the need to have him inside of her. She felt so damn twisted. “You killed them.”

“I did,” he responded softly, teasing the few strands of hair hanging along the side of her face. “You knew I would before I left you tonight.” The flames from the floating candles flickered violently with his words. “You knew I needed to, didn't you?”

Not able to form words, she shook her head. Would it always be this complex while with him, torn between being scared shitless and horny out of her mind?

“You scare the piss out of me, Demetri,” she managed to breathe out.

“But I intrigue you, yes?”

He cupped her ass cheeks and pulled her against his rising erection. She whimpered, grabbed onto the lapels of his jacket and wrapped her legs around his waist.

“Did you feel it? Their dark souls and their evil deeds? Their fate was to die in my grasp, beneath the sting of my bite,” he growled, clutching her tightly.

She felt it alright, every bit of it; even his caring touch to the young girl he saved. She began to tremble. Not in fear, but in mind-numbing lust.

“You want me inside of you, deep inside, filling you, loving you,” he crooned, his lips gently teasing hers.

“Yeah...please.” Her head fell back in uncontrolled rapture. “Make love to me, Demetri.”



Demetri placed a soft kiss on the underside of her chin, fighting the urge to release his incisors. “Oh, my love, your seductiveness is to be marveled at,” he whispered, pressing her back into the plushness of the bed. “Let me draw it out, your soul’s force, and in the process allow me to unite my demon with yours.”

Her compliance was given to him through a desperate sob.

His methods were a bit mischievous, but he had to do it. He knew once he revealed his previous kills, the demon vampire inside of her would come forth, and she was indeed a magnificent creature.

She yanked at his jacket. “Get naked,” she commanded in a sultry tone. “I wanna see all of you.”

At her request, he shed his clothes with snap of his fingers.

Hooded chocolate eyes ran down his physique and stopped at his engorged cock. Her mouth parted then closed. Small whimpers meant as words seeped out incoherently. She licked her lips and brushed the tips of her fingers over the pulsating head of his shaft. He restrained a groaned when sparks of delight from her touch streamed through the length of him.

“Oh baby,” she moaned. Her glazed eyes met with his. “Was your daddy a blacksmith, because goddamn boy, that piece of steel you got there...”

A silent moment passed before he erupted in ridiculous laughter.

“That is the biggest, beautifulest dick I have ever seen in my life. Wow. Seriously though, that’s a third leg, man. How much do you lift with that thing? Damn, I’ve never been scared of a shaft before, but, whoa boy...” she said beneath a giggle. “Know what? I’m gonna work with it. You rock it and drill it however you want to, baby. I’ll hang with you ‘til I go comatose, but just let me stretch real good first, okay.”

Demetri found himself laughing so hard, his gut hurt. The woman overwhelmed him with joy. He slumped into her embrace and planted his lips over

hers until their chuckles and giggles turned into moans of pleasure. Once again, he released drops of his blood into her hot mouth to infuse her desire.

She rolled her hips beneath him in slow easy movements, massaging the stem of his restless staff with her burning core as their tongues fondled one another.

Nipping at his lower lip with sharp fangs forming in her mouth, she palmed his rear end and pulled him deeper into the warm haven between her thighs.

“Sharayna, this will not be the moment we make love.”

“Why,” she whined, squeezing her legs around him. “You want to. I know you do.”

“Yes, my love, more than anything right now, but this bed won’t hold the force I’d spill into you, neither would the floor beneath us...” With his tongue, he made a wet trail from her lips to her tip of her chin. “And most importantly our union would wake the neighbors. I would take you to a place where we could be alone, but the water demon next door would track us, then I’d have to do away with him.”

Her eyes stretched wide. “OhmyGod, did you just say you’d fuck me through the floor. A’ight, big sexy, I wanna see you do it. I dare you to,” she challenged with an impish grin.

Smiling, Demetri scraped a sharp nail down the center of her fitted tank top. The fabric separated to expose her dark golden brown skin. Round succulent breast boldly bounced out to greet him. Amazed, he stared at her round areolas and hardened nipples. He brushed the pad of his thumb over a pebble and she shuddered.

This would undoubtedly be a test of strength and will.

“We may not be able to truly fulfill our desires, but our demons will unite before the night is over.”

Eagerly, he grasped one of the plump mounds and took the tiny dark morsels between his lips while gently strumming and kneading the other. Through gasping breaths, she released husky moans and grabbed his hair to lock him in place. He rolled and flicked his tongue around the delicious bundle of flesh then hungrily sucked on it.

The thin cotton shorts did little to suppress the heady scent of her rising arousal. It made his head spin. He bit back a growl and pressed his body into her. He curled his fingers around the hip of her shorts and yanked them off her. She jerked and released a startled squeal. The tinge of fear in her eyes diminished when he rocked his cock against her in slow back and forth movements.

She dug her fingers into his shoulders. “Oh God, please don’t make wait, baby.”

He wanted so badly to give into her pleas, but couldn't allow his desire to make love to her hinder what was more important—releasing her spiritual force. He had to work fast before she shattered his resistance.

Battling his own need to be inside of her, he moved onto the other beautiful globe and indulged her until she shivered uncontrollably beneath him. He slid down her body, lapping at her simmering flesh. Her sounds of her tantalizing ecstasy rose.

He felt the submerged wave of her power trying to break free of a spell, but where was it.

Running his hands over every muscle in her powerful legs and silky smooth skin, he desperately searched for the marking he knew resided somewhere on her gorgeous body. Every natural born demon had a symbol on their body to indicate their base form. If he could find it, he'd be able to link with her force.

“What are you doing?” she asked, staring down at him with her brows arched.

“I'm searching for your birth marking.”

“Oh,” she chirped. “On my back.” She swung one of those stunning limbs over his head, rolled onto her stomach then swept her hair to the side. “I think the tail of my tattoo kinda covers it up, but if you look real close, you'll see it.”

He grabbed his stirring member and gulped back a moan. *Down boy.* The bountiful curves of her body were phenomenal and torturous to resist. For a moment he couldn't speak, nor move.

"Do you see it?" she murmured, looking back at him. The dark cocoa gleam in her eyes was slowly engulfed by deep gold. "What does it mean?"

The beauty was shifting. Excitement spooled up within him.

"No darling, I'm thoroughly distracted by your glorious *derrière* right now."

Leaning in, he planted soft wet kisses along her succulent backside. He slipped his hand between her thighs and brushed his fingers across her smooth slit. She was incredibly wet and ready for the taking. The ripe scent of a blossomed demon in heat diminished his mental control.

Arching her back, she wiggled her behind. "Is that right, D'breezy?"

Unable to resist the craving to feel her from the inside, he delved two fingers between moist folds and into her snug cavern. Her heated core clenched onto him possessively. Her breaths came out in quick spurts. Anxious to heighten her pleasure, he dragged his tongue along the cleft of her *derrière*.

"Ooo, you're a nasty boy," she purred, splaying her thighs and bowing her back. "I like nasty."

Endless trickles of unparalleled energy traveled through his arm and cascaded through him, a force stronger than his. He let go of the chesty moan

dangling in the back of his throat. She had no idea what she was doing to him, or what she was capable of.

Power. The woman was raw power from the inside and out.

“My God, Sharayna!”

He had never called the Almighty’s name out in vain, not even when he was human, but now he found the need to call out to him for the overwhelming flow of energy that streamed through him. At the nape of his neck, the searing mark that now resided there slithered down his spine like a snake.

In the smoothest movements he could conjure, he eased his fingers out of her then plunged them back in. She moaned with each stroke, gratifying him with thrusts of her own. The sound of her wet sex sucking greedily on his digits serenaded his senses.

“Ohh Demetri, you know how to work this pussy, don’t you?”

He added another digit to expand her soft fluttering tissue then reached beneath her hip with his other hand to glide between her folds and caress her slick pearl. “You tell me, sweetheart.”

“Yeeah, ooo damn boy, that feels so good.”

As she balled the sheets up in her tight grasp, she cupped his massaging hand and dug her head into the bed to muffle her kitten like moans. The more he pleased her, the closer he came to replacing his fingers with his cock.

Oh, sweet torture...

Once she began to release sharp cries on every exhale, begging him not to stop, he crooked his fingers, went in a little deeper and gently flicked her internal love bud. As her nectar showered his hand, her channel clenched him violently and her body convulsed.

“Ohh shiiit, baby! That’s my spot,” she sung with a drawn out release. “Boy, you the boss.”

The things he could do to her...This was not even a taste. The mischievous part of him was dying to turn her body inside out, to show her how *nasty* he could really get and how loud he could make her scream. But there was something so erotic about taking it slow and loving her as a human man would. The real treat would be taking her over the edge when she completely shifts.

He extracted his fingers from her dewy sheath, brought his cream coated fingers to his mouth then licked them clean. The delicious, unique taste tantalized his pallet and tripped through his system mercilessly, expanding his force. His eyes rolled back and his mind went numb.

They were almost there. He eyed her glistening slit and shook his head. Now, if he could only just hold back the need to bury his face between her luscious cheeks to lap at her sweetness...

Swiftly, he moved behind her and smacked her backside. Startled, she let out a sharp shrill and heaved forward. His hands mounted on her hips, he drew her back toward him. Cradling him, her soft folds and slick clit glided across the length of his cock. Her warm essence lubricated him.

Smiling, he slapped the other cheek and instead of a shriek, he received a low growl and a sultry dare. "Hit me again."

Gladly, he met her request then rubbed it after his stinging strike. She threw her head back and ground against him. Her demon was right at the surface of her needed passion. Perfect.

"Seriously Demetri, if you don't fuck me right now, I might have to fight you."

He chuckled. "Patience. I must release your force before your body can handle me, so let me get you there, beautiful."

Drawn to the glowing tattoo on her back, his eyes fell upon her birth marking and the spell, which repressed her full transformation and soul's energy.

Of course her spirit's base form would be a dragon.

The art of the mystical creature, its angel-like wings splayed and its eyes blazing silver gold, held him in a trance for a second. The bright luminous colors, which meshed with the finely drawn details of its scales stood out brilliantly against her dark skin. The creature's long tail coiled into a symbol at the small of

her back. It traced her birth marking. This rune was the old language of the demon dragon. *Curro*.

Starting at the neck, the spell etched in six dragon hieroglyphics ran down the center of the beast to the main symbol, which was the tail. He brushed his fingers over the symbol and the tattoo became animated. The creature's eyes melted over in gold as it bawled softly to him.

It would take a time to decipher the message that the symbols created, and time was something he didn't have. This would not be effortless. Whoever the wizard was who applied the chakra binding magic set it in stages, like a combination lock. He would only be able to release part of her tonight.

"Damnation."

"Wha—what's wrong," she slurred, twisting around to look at him with her pearlescent fangs gleaming from beneath her lips.

"Not a thing, darling." He smoothed his hands over her ample backside. "I want you to relax and concentrate on what I'm doing to you." He undulated into her, stroking her quivering bundle of nerves with his rigid masculinity.

Concentrating past her sweet whimpers of pleasure, he gathered his sinew, held his hand over the dragon and began to unlock the symbols. Two of them unlocked easily and gleamed with his *Curro* spoken words. He attempted to undo

the third, but she apparently had no interest in his goal. She started to rotate her hips into him.

Her enticement drew a strained growl out of him. “Sharayna, you are shattering my spirit channeling—”

She reached down and caressed the head of his cock, while riding the length of him at a slow agonizing pace. He grabbed her hips and tried to restrain her, but her demon pushed her past his force. She stood up on her knees, threw her head back on his shoulder, circled an arm around his head and dug her fingers into his hair.

Helplessly, he surrendered to her seduction.

Demetri wrapped his arms around her, palmed a breast and rocked his hips to her sultry rhythm. As her rapid heartbeat set pace with his, her body stuttered against his joined sensual assault. His aching shaft pulsated intensely between her thighs. Harsh growls rumbled within his chest as her skillful fingers and fiery sex massaged him toward eruption.

The need to bite her grew unbearable.

Mentally stroking her desire, he raked a fang across her jugular then caressed her mind with the images of him sinking his incisors deep into her throat while prodding her wet core with his stiff rod.

She fisted his hair and her body suddenly stilled. “OohGod! OhmyGod, Demetri!!”

Shuddering against him, she released an unrestrained howl and let loose her milky goodness to flow along the stem of him.

The muscles in his rear end clenched and his thighs trembled. A wondrous sensation spooled within his groin. His hips lunged forward then a wave of spiritual rapture weaved through his lance and exploded at the tip. He roared in overpowering delight.

Moaning his name, she caught the spurts of his essence in the palm of her hand, then rubbed it up her torso and over her breasts—her manner to bind her demon to him.

Enraptured, he took her down into the bed and held her against his chest. She sung softly to him until her words slurred to hums, then she went limp and fell unconscious.

Even as she lay motionless in his arms, her angelic coo sifted through his mind.

“When the raven night falls and crimson melts over the distant moon, you will be mine, my lover, my king, my man, forever.”

This type of affection which had not been known to him for many decades was now fighting to spill out of him. He sniffed back the blood pooling in his eyes and kissed her temple.

One more step to completion then the Dragon Queen would be his mate.

Chapter Nine

Strike Force

Osaka, Japan

Shanoki Buddhist Temple

“Yo’, did you feel that massive energy pressure over us when we were passing through town?” Quest asked, climbing up the steps to the temple doors, his eyes to the sky.

Steel nodded then glanced over his shoulder along the dusty road they’d traveled. Something was amiss. He felt it in his gut.

“Yeah, it was brief, but I damn sure felt it.” He adjusted the strap attached to his jumbo automatics, Venus and Serena, then banged on the sturdy wooden door.

It’d been a three mile hike to the temple, and none of them seemed even the least bit tired. Their spiritual energy had been sparked by the unknown presence that zipped over them about a half hour ago. They were fueled with awareness, ready for the upcoming battle, which was supposed to be a simple transport

mission, but he knew better. Nevertheless, they had to get in and get out like ninjas, without a trace.

Steel turned back to Quest just in time to see him stiffen and cock his automatic. The team's sensor confirmed it. A battle would definitely go down today. With that realization, his hope for ninja tactics went straight out the window.

He looked to the sky and saw the burning star heading west. Not good. A gray cloud formed in the distance, darkening as it headed their way. Definitely not good.

“What we dealing with, playboy?”

“Sulfur,” Quest murmured without turning from the doors. “*Demonios malditos.*”

“In the temple, dawg?” Steel glanced at his best friend in confusion. “Demons can't cross holy barriers, right?”

“They're in there, *buey*. The sulfur is burning up my fucking senses.”

“Hey, his nose has never steered us wrong before.” Jade unclipped her silver whip and chambered a round in her automatic. “And I'm not about to get caught with my pants down.”

Steel smirked and leaned in close to Quest. “Ay man, you and I both know you had your nose buried in Japanese bush all week. You sure that hasn’t thrown off your bloodhound snout just a tiny bit?”

Quest didn’t even crack a smile. “Not this time, Steel. Something’s fucked up about this whole scene. The usual demons don’t jar me like this, and that miasma cloud heading our way ain’t making things any better.”

The team nodded as an unusual silence descended around them.

“Totally diabolical, dude,” Spade agreed, fingering his M-79 grenade launcher. “Time for us to bring the pain.”

Copper adjusted her fingerless leather gloves. “Bloody right,” she murmured, her British accent coating her raspy voice. She squatted and retrieved the compact sized night vision goggles from her duffle bag then handed them to everyone. “Let’s kill these wankas so I can get that bottle of Sake and ciggy I’m dying for.”

“Right there with you, kitty.” Spade gave her fist pound then slid the goggles over his head.

Her brows furrowed, Blaze unlatched her crossbow from her back holster. “Whoa guys. Before we bust in, guns blazing and everything, let me ask you something, Captain. Exactly what did Father Hamiway say to you?”

Steel shook his head. “He didn’t give a whole lot of details for this mission. He just sent me an urgent message telling me to gather my team and meet him here

in Japan at *this* temple. He wants us to deliver *something of vital importance*, his words exactly, to Father Shannon in Florida.” Warily, he darted his eyes to the sky. The faint sound of flapping wings hovered above them. “You sense the need for UV or silver, playboy?” Steel asked Quest. “Because I think we’re low and only packin’ holy rounds.” He glanced back at Copper, who confirmed with a head nod.

“We got the right ammo. We just gotta come at these *demonios* with some magnum-sized spiritual energy ‘cause these fuckers are strong, *outer-worldly* strong.”

Steel nodded as he popped the goggles over his eyes. “No time to fuse energies, just in case?”

Quest answered with the slight shake of his head.

“Alright.” Steel rolled his shoulders in preparation. “Everybody needs to stay linked ‘cause we’re forced to do this without fusing.” He took in a deep breath and kissed his twin cannons. “Looks like we are gonna bring the noise to Osaka.”

“Bout bloody time.” Copper sat her blazer sniper rifle on the ground and tied her waist-long, coppery hair back in a pony tail. “I can get some better shots off from that vantage point.” She nodded toward a shrine on the other side of a small copse of trees. “I’ll let ya know when I’m in position. Just give me a minute.” She grabbed her gear and jogged toward the shrine.

“A minute?” Spade asked, a humorous smirk curving his lips. “More like a millisecond.”

Just as the words left his mouth, two shots resounded through in the air. A large winged harpy dropped to the ground with a loud thud.

“Posted!” Copper confirmed. “Let’s get this shite done!”

Struggling to gather itself, it shrieked angrily at them then lunged at Spade. Unmoved, Spade retrieved his semi-auto and shattered its head.

“Anybody notice this demon didn’t ash after the first shot,” Spade murmured, staring awkwardly at the creature as it disintegrated.

“Like I said, *outer-worldly* strong,” Quest grumbled.

“Doesn’t matter where they’re from, we don’t back down until we’ve completed the mission. Blaze and Spade, ya’ll keep eyes on the entrance and smoke any of them creepas trying to leave the party early. Quest and Jade, ya’ll rollin’ with me.” Steel eyed his crew. “Let’s move.”

Quest kicked in the large wooden doors to the courtyard. Crouched low at the opening, he scanned the area, then motioned to Steel with the wave of two fingers. Stealthily, they moved through the eerie silence of the open space toward the large temple.

Death was in the air. The grass in the area was burnt black and the Sakura trees had withered. Life had been literally sucked out of every living thing surrounding the temple.

Weapons ready, they went through the open doors of the seemingly deserted building. Wind from the approaching smog storm blew out the lanterns, leaving them in the dense unnatural darkness. The starlight to their goggles activated as they moved deeper into the building.

“Let’s try to get this done before the storm hits, people.”

A sudden jarring presence caused them to swing their weapons in its direction. Standing before them was a little bald boy draped in the robe of a novice monk. Right away, Steel noticed the young monk staring at Jade like she was a slab of prime rib. He shot a shifty glance at Quest, who returned the gesture.

“Are you tourists? Would you like a tour?”

“Aye cono, a kid? These fuckas have no morals.” Sighing, Quest drew his pistol, aimed and shot the boy’s directly in his heart.

The monk yelped and fell to the ground. In battle stance, they stared down at him. He appeared to be dead, but this was no doubt a deception. After a short moment, the boy’s head popped up, his demonic eyes glowing malevolent green.

“That wasn’t very nice.” The demon shed the monk’s form and attacked.



Blaze smiled at the sound of shots popping in a rapid series. *“Sounds like the party just jumped off,”* she informed through their mental link.

“Sweet! I am so stoked!” Grinning, Spade gave Blaze fist pound. *“I was hoping we’d get a little action on this trip.”* He anxiously tapped his launcher. *“I was thinking the other day this team should probably seek some psychological help when we get back to the States.”*

She poked her head through the open doors of the courtyard and eyed the dying Sakura trees, before glancing over her shoulder at him. *“What on earth for?”*

“Because we like killing demons and vamps waaay too much—shifters, eh, not so much...but the rest of them are a joy to kill. Feel me? Or maybe I shouldn’t speak for everyone on the team, but I know I love killing them mafuckas.” Chuckling, he removed his hat and ruffled his dusty, blonde curly hair. *“I have erotic dreams about this kinda shit, don’t you?”*

Blaze giggled. *“That’s what we were born to do. Rid the earth of the devil’s spawn. They spread evil, sin, disease and death.”* She whipped her shiny, black ponytail from her shoulder. *“They corrupt those who are trying to find their way to God. Destroying them should be enjoyable for us.”*

He threw his head back and guffawed. *“Say my name when you put it like that, kitty! I just got an instant hard-on from your little destroying evil spiel.”*

They both chuckled then fell silent as the sounds of gunfire within the temple continued to ring through the air.

Spade began to hop around and punch at his unseen opponent. Then he abruptly stopped. Blaze cut her eyes at him. He tilted his head and stared suspiciously across the emptiness of the adjacent field. The dark cloud drew closer, carrying a massive demonic aura.

“Something’s coming.”

Blaze nodded and stood. *“I know. I feel it too.”*

A fast approaching presence snapped their attention. As soon as they cocked the weapons to fire, Blaze was hauled into the air, thrown across the plane and slammed to the ground.

“Blaze!” Spade attempted to get to her, but was ascended by the ghostly air and hurled into the courtyard.

Blaze hopped to her feet to go assist her brother, only to be shoved back down by the unseen force. It jumped on top of her, its putrid stench overwhelming.

Groaning, she fought to free herself from beneath the beast’s weight. It dragged its nails down her torso, shredding her fatigues, trying to claw through the tightly woven steel suit that protected her skin. She winced at the pressure and gagged at the foul stink.

Suddenly, she couldn't breathe. Her lungs were compressed. The weight had gotten heavier. She swung fiercely at the invisible creature in an attempt to get it off her while taking desperate sips of air.

Her limbs were seized and forced to the ground. It wasn't able to hold her immobile, but it made it impossible for her to escape its grasp, *almost*. It would take more than a bout of dark magic to hold her down.

Battling the pressure, she struggled to reach for the dagger tucked in her boot.

"Blaze, I can't get a visual! Light that wanka up so I can blast his arse!" Copper shouted.

Blaze gathered her spiritual energy, bent her leg past the binding force, and grabbed the handle of her weapon. Igniting the blade with blue flames, she slashed at the creature on top of her.

"Get the hell off!"

Two deep squeals rung out as the pressure was immediately lifted. She flipped onto her feet and sucked the stagnant air into her starved lungs. To her surprise, *two* large demons stood before her, drooling with lust.

"Now, now boys. One at a time," she taunted, waving her finger.

She eyed her automatic crossbow not far from her. She sprung the short distance to her fallen weapon, slid her foot beneath it and kicked it up into her

hands. Not allowing the ghastly entities to make another strike, she launched two flaming arrows into their guts.

From her post, Copper released a series of shots. She severed their arms, filled them with gaping holes, and spilled their black blood onto the withered grass. But in a matter of seconds their arms grew back and their wounds healed. Only when Copper's bullets pierced their throats was there some damage done.

Infuriated, the creatures charged Blaze with their heads dipped and their arms covering them.

Their heads!

"I think I've just figured something out."

Back peddling, Blaze eyed their swift movements, making sure to keep her feet beneath her. As she went for her knife, they disappeared. Already aware of their position, she swirled on her toes, her blue flamed blade extended and sliced through the demons' throats. She watched their bodies disintegrate into nothing before her.

"I thought so. We have to take their heads."

"Bloody good call, my fire wielding friend," Copper extolled.

She readied her crossbow and ran back toward the temple. *"Thanks, just doing my—"*

Something slammed her in the back. She dropped her to her knees. Her crossbow left her grasp. Before she could recover, her assailant grabbed her hair, yanked her head back and clamped down hard on her shoulder. Huge teeth tore into her muscles and cracked her clavicle, ripping a piercing scream from her throat. She tightened her grip on the ignited dagger and slashed backwards, nearly dislocating her arm in the process.

The creature leaped off of her.

Once it shed its cloaked form, its head was blown off. Blaze flipped backwards, ignored the excruciating pain in her shoulder and stooped down to prepare herself for the unseen.

Geez, something had to give. She couldn't keep waiting to be attacked to make the demons uncloak themselves.

A huge explosion in the courtyard drew her attention.

"Spade," she whispered. She felt a moment of relief that he was all right. It was known throughout the family if there were explosions coming from his area then Spade was rocking and rolling.

"Blaze, we have to make them show themselves," Copper said, stating the obvious.

"I have an idea." Blaze placed both hands on the ground. "*Spade get off the ground now!*"

Without waiting for a response, she sent a sheet of blue flames along the perimeter of the temple, setting ablaze the soil and dead grass. A blanket of rain showered from the dark cloud above, doused the dancing flames, and engulfed the area with a thick mist of blue vapor. An echo of loud wails drifted through the horizon as every demon was forced to reveal themselves.

“*Oh my God!*” Blaze gasped in horror.



“*Holy shite! They’re fuckin’ everywhere!*”

Droplets of rain mingled with sweat beads formed on Copper’s brow as she unremittingly unloaded rounds at the sea of angry shadows surrounding her sister.

“*Blaze get out of there, now! Head for the temple! I’ll clear the way!*”

“*I’m on it, Copper!*” Spade shouted.

A smile arched on her lips. Through the blue haze, her war brother took on the demons like they were nothing.

Swinging his demon-slicing machete with skill and agility in the right hand, he claimed heads of the howling creatures. With the left hand, he wielded the automatic grenade launcher and pumped them full of explosive rounds.

A sudden thrust to her side, then a hard strike to her back threw her off balance. Winded, she tumbled down the slippery tile roof. She tried to get a grip, but the sheets of rain plowing down on her made it impossible.

The ground was coming fast.

Finally, she was able to grab hold onto the eave of the roof as her body tumbled over the side.

“You...dirty...bastard,” she murmured breathlessly, dangling off the side of the roof. To gather air back into her heaving lungs seemed difficult, that was until she heard the snarl from the demon waiting up top for her. Fury consumed her.

“Don’t worry, I’m coming for you, bitch.”

She tightened her grip on the sturdy eave, took several deep breaths then began to swing her legs. She rolled the swaying motion up into her body, flexing the muscles in her arms to hold on. The long overhang gave her plenty of room to swing her body back and forth until she was able to pivot herself high enough to gracefully flip back onto the roof.

Once on top, she crouched down like a tiger and glared at the burly blood-red creature, who had the nerve to growl at her. She reached down and drew her fighting knife from her boot.

Challenge accepted!

The beast rushed her. Tracking its rapid demonic approach, she squeezed the handle of her knife, and allowed it to draw closer. Once within arm’s reach, she shifted to the side, keeping her balance on the slope, and with lightning speed,

slashed through the demon's neck. Black blood showered her then was quickly washed away by the rain.

A piercing squeal attacked her ears. It turned and glared at her, its head hanging halfway off its shoulders. Only leathery slivers of flesh, muscles and arteries kept it connected. Before it had a chance to regenerate, she attacked and sliced through the remaining part of its neck. The head hit the roof with a thud.

She turned away from the disintegrating body and bolted toward her rifle. A massive hand sought her neck, lifted her in the air then hurled her down onto the roof.

Shite!

Wincing, she quickly gathered herself, rolled onto her stomach and scurried to her feet. Seven demons glared at her with green glowing eyes and human blood dripping from their mouths. They blocked her path to her rifle.

"I got seven on me!"

Copper zipped to the far end of the roof, beheaded a demon with ease and then went after another. Halted in her attack, she was grabbed by her ponytail and forced, face down, over the ridge. The abrupt pressure on her stomach caused the food she consumed earlier to violently erupt from her gut.

Lightheadedness blurred her vision.

Her arms were pinned down and legs forced apart. The sound of their snarls combined with the rank smell of sulfur and blood, induced her to heave again. The demons clawed at her backside, attempting to shred the shark suit which protected her skin. Becoming increasingly irritated at their failed efforts, they pressed their weight down on her, and smashed her harder onto the ledge, drawing out tears and gargled screams.

Near to passing out, Copper closed her eyes and prepared for the darkness to take her.

There was a rapid sequence of whooshes above her. She opened her eyes, tightened her muscles and gathered her soul's force. With the high-pitched squeals echoing through the night, the weight lifted off of her.

"Its boom time, kitty!" Spade shouted.

"Copper, get off the roof!"

She strained to push her bruised body off the ridge and glanced over her shoulder at the demons. Blue flamed arrows with dynamite attached were lodged in their throats.

Boom time indeed.

With as much speed as she could muster from her battered frame, she stumbled groggily to her feet, disconnected the pain in her stomach from her mind, grabbed her rifle then somersaulted off the roof.

Chapter Ten

Fusing Spirits

Rayne opened her eyes and jerked upright in the bed. Her heart knocked heavily against her chest at the disturbing dream she'd just suffered.

The room was pitch-black. She blinked a few times to adjust to the darkness, but every time she closed her eyes, the faces of the six people who'd invaded her mind during sleep flashed behind her lids.

Feeling misplaced, she reached across the bed for her dark lover for comfort and realized it was empty, but she could feel his spiked energy all around her.

"Demetri?" she called out.

Across the room two red orbs appeared. Eerily the darkness separated then there he stood. Wearing nothing but his pants, he glared into the mirror with a long shimmering sword grasped in his hand. An identical ghostly reflection stared back at him.

"Wow, you have a reflection," she muttered in disbelief. She eased from beneath comforter and wrapped the sheet around her naked frame to block out the breeze that mysteriously whirled throughout the closed suite. "You're just

shattering that old vampire myth, huh? Why are your eyes red? That can't be good." When he said nothing, she stepped closer. "You okay?"

"No, she is not fully aware," Demetri's addressed the mirror. "We haven't the time to inform her. She must feel the truth and take action."

"Uhh...who you talking to, babe?"

He cast her a side glance. She shuddered and took a step back. There was death in his scarlet eyes and it made every muscle in her body seize.

"Are, are you here," she faltered, fear lacing her every word. "Or did you just switch out on me?"

Chuckling, he blended into the shadows and melted from her sight. "I am here. The sun is approaching." The impressive steel along with his eyes flashed through the darkness.

"Which means you gotta leave?"

For a moment he said nothing. The silence along with his unseen presence heightened her unwavering anxiety.

"Goddammit Demetri, say something," she snapped. "And stop going all shadowy on me."

"There is something you must do before I am forced to leave you," he uttered in a haunting tone.

“No, uh-uh. This is bullshit. You can’t do this to me!” she said, jabbing her finger in the air. “Not after we just—c’mon, D! Don’t do this, this creepy weird crap. I’m not in the mind set right now. Don’t you think I’ve seen enough?”

“You think I do this to upset you? No, sweet angel,” he finished on a whisper. “*This* cannot be helped. The darkness follows me when I am riled, when my blade is drawn. I smell Chingi demons, Sharayna. The same demons you witnessed attack those Andausians in your mind.”

She bristled and stared until the shadows shading him were no more. The dark haze hovered over his body then spiraled around him like a tornado.

“You know what I say to be true. You feel them, yes? What did you feel when you saw them fighting those shadows, fighting for their lives? What lies deep in your heart for those six souls your spirit is reaching out to?”

His aura began to beam like a black light. She was at a loss for words, too damn freaked out to answer him. Panic clouded her mind for the strangers she shared some sort of connection with. She smelled the scent he referred to, the scent that made her want to puke her damn guts out.

Gagging, she covered her nose. “What is that?”

“Sulfur and demonic miasma, the scent that surrounds the soldiers, who are about to be drawn into the darkness,” he murmured with a frown. “I’m sorry, lover but if you don’t find it within yourself to take action, they will all die.”

She stumbled back at the sudden pain that slammed into her heart. Why did it feel like he'd just told her, her family was about to die?

"I don't understand," she breathed out with her hand plastered over her chest.

"There is no time for you to understand." He held his hand out to her. "If you have the resolve to save these Andausians, then come to me."

Without hesitation, Rayne eased over to his outstretched hand and placed hers in it. "What can I do? I don't feel like I can help them. They're in Japan, Demetri."

"It doesn't matter the distance. Your connection to them is the key."

He positioned her in front of him to face the mirror where the scent was stronger. He placed his palm at the base of her belly, and pointed the tip of his sword at mirror, which now rippled like water.

"I want you to close your eyes and think of this team. Concentrate on the connection. Katsumi and I will do the rest."

"Who's Katsumi?" she asked, staring at her distorted reflection.

"The long shiny blade I hold before you. Now, close your eyes and concentrate," he behest.

Not sure she could concentrate on anything with the horrible smell assaulting her senses, she held her breath and met his request. Immediately, the

image of the lighted figures came forth. Wrinkling her brow, she concentrated on them and drew out faces in her mind. Just as they came into focus, she opened her eyes.

Dressed in fatigues, they fought repulsive looking creatures that were only shadows in her mind, until now. It played out in the mirror like a horror movie. Green eyes, long yellow teeth, putrid leathery skin—the ghouls were nightmares to look at.

“OhmyGod!” she gasped.

The scent of blood and sulfur mingled together brought bile up in her throat. Fighting to keep it down, she tried to push back and get away from the source, but Demetri’s hard body kept her planted.

“Uh-uh, no, Demetri! I don’t wanna see this anymore! Make it stop!” she squealed in between gags.

“I’m sorry, Angel, you must see this. Endure it, because this will not be your last encounter with the Chingi. Don’t sever the connection. Hold onto it.”

“Hell no, I don’t think I can do this! Make it stop, please!”

“You will do this,” he stated sternly. “Now, take my sword.”

“Now?”

“Yes, now.”

“Dammit, D. Fine!”

Allowing the sheet to fall from her body, she reached behind her and took hold of his *sword*. In a split second, it stirred to its full, thick girth within her grasp.

Chuckling beneath a lusty groan, he rested his forehead on the crown of her head. “Not that one, you impish little girl.”

“Oh.” She snatched her hand back.

“It’s astonishing how in a state of hysteria you are still able find it in yourself to grab my cock.”

“My bad, okay. I’m freaking out,” she huffed. “It’s a reflex move. You need to be more specific next time.”

He guffawed. “Sharayna, take the handle of the sword I’m holding in front of you, please.”

“Fine.”

She slipped her hand over the ivory hilt and a stream of energy shot up her arm and through her body, weakening her knees. Demetri held her up steady against him then let the handle go, allowing her to consume the weight of the glowing instrument. She began to pant at the relentless waves of vigorous force pouring into her. Her limbs trembled.

Suddenly a soft feminine voice caressed the walls of her mind. “*Steady your nerves, young Queen. Lord Demetri and I will channel your sinew to the sensor of the group.*”

“What the hell? Who is that?” She almost dropped the sword, but in a flash Demetri’s hand was wrapped around hers, keeping the handle of the sword in her grasp.

“Priestess Katsumi, the soul of the blade. Don’t let her go. She is fusing with you. Calm your heart rate and zone in on the sensor of the team.”

As soon as the request left his mouth, the face of the young man appeared in the mirror. Dark rustled hair and deep grey eyes. Everything about this guy swarmed about in her head—his past, his weaknesses, his strength, his secrets. She even knew the name he went by during war.

“Quest,” she whispered.

“Good girl,” Demetri extolled softly.

In the midst of the battle, the Andausian sensor looked around searchingly. His brows furrowed, his eyes shifted to silver. With on-point shots to the neck, he decapitated three demons as he continued to peer around for the unknown presence.

“He feels you, as you feel him. Once you send the surge to him, it will filter throughout the rest of the group. But be gentle, my love. If you send too much, it could kill them all.”

She bristled. “Aw shit. I, I don’t think I’m ready for this, Demetri. I’m serious. This is too much.”

“You must. They are greatly outnumbered and their spiritual energy is waning by the moment. They will not be able to win this battle without your help.”

The pressure was killing her. Demetri and the spirit of the sword had this strong faith in her, and the so called force she had within, but she couldn't see it, nor feel it. All she could feel was anxiety.

“Dammit, this is so messed up,” she sobbed.

“No, it is not. It is your evolution. As I've said before, you won't go at this alone. We are one, remember? Your pain is mine. My force is yours. Just trust me, darling.”

“I am channeling your force, my lady. Hold fast to Lord Demetri and strike the mirror with my blade,” Katsumi commanded.

“Brace yourself. This will be a bit jolting,” Demetri warned.

He dropped his hand from the handle of the sword then placed both over her belly. Searing heat spewed out from his touch and her muscles tightened. Spirals of forbidden ecstasy rose within and lapped at her sensitive nerves. Gasping in the foul air, she kept the heavy blade leveled with all her might.

In preparation for the incoming power surge, the Andausian sensor stretched his arms out.

A jolt of power zipped through her, drawing out a startled yelp. White flames erupted from the ceiling. She tilted her head back and watched fire circle aggressively. It expanded then formed the shape of a dragon. A violent wind rushed through the suite, knocking furniture over, but she and Demetri were glued to the floor like statues.

Roaring, the creature opened its wings and dove into her body. Her back arched and her eyes crossed. Deep within the will to take action was there in full force.

“Yes, yes, that’s it, my lady. Strike now!”

At the command of the mysterious sword, she rear back and swiped the blade across the mirror. The reflective glass sliced in two then shattered into a thousand shards at her feet.

Chapter Eleven

Battle Angels

“Quest! What are you doing man?!”

Steel smashed a demon in the face with the butt of his automatic and slammed another’s head through the wall, casting puzzled glances at his friend.

Frozen where he stood, Quest stared into nothingness with his arms spread. Jade did her best to ward off the demons trying to attack him in his motionless state, but she could only do so much, especially when their real objective was to get her.

“Lo siento. Qué es este?” Quest murmured through a mental message.

“Dude, what’s up with Quest? No hablo español,” Spade jested.

Steel frowned. If the other half of his team were dealing with more demons outside than they were battling inside the temple, they were in trouble. Time to regroup.

“Spade, Blaze, Copper, move in! Our boy is stunned. Something’s ‘bout to go down.” Steel commanded.

“Roger that!”

Demolishing demons in his path, Steel advanced toward Quest. “Snap out of it, playboy!”

Suddenly, a stream of light opened in the wall. Demons nearest the beam went up in flames. The bright specter coiled into a symbol of a dragon. It expanded a line of light along the perimeter of the wall then released a strike like lightning directly into Quest’s chest. His body was launched across the corridor into the wall.

“No!”

Steel started to run toward him then an unknown flood of energy steamed rapidly through his being, dropping him to his knee.

From his peripheral, he saw Jade fall to her knees. Unable to rise to assist his sister, he ground his teeth and withstood the intense sensation that engulfed him.

It momentarily strained his strength, but filled him with such overwhelming force he thought he’d have an orgasm right there on the spot. What was only seconds felt like hours. The spiritual wave of power seemed like it would pour into him forever, but before he could drop the other knee, it stopped.

Steel scurried to his feet and rushed over to Jade. Wide-eyed and mouth agape, she stared up at him when he yanked her up right.

Delirious chuckling snapped their attention to Quest. Grinning, he pushed up from the ground then rattled his head. “*Don’t even ask.*”

“You’re kidding, right?” Spade exclaimed from outside the temple. “Damn that dude! I’m asking! What the eff was that?”

Quest tilted his head toward the howling darkness of the corridor. “No time to explain, bucy. Break is over. They’re coming back for us.”

“Not good. Captain, we’re running low on ammo,” Blaze informed. “I know if we’re almost out, you guys have to be running low in there. Looks like we’re going to have to start blowing things up.”

“Oh kitty! You are so talking my language!” The excitement in Spade’s voice had them all tucking away grins. “When all else fails, blow shit up!”

“Okay, we’re moving in. They are blocking the bloody entrance so it might be a while,” Copper explained.

“Push through.” Steel ordered. “We have to be together if we’re gonna get out here alive.”

Ghoulish snarls echoed from the darkness. Shaking off the hazed feeling that hung over him, Steel cocked his guns toward the black hall, as did Quest and Jade. “And here we go again.”

“To the main hall!” Quest pointed down the opposite end of the corridor, yanking Jade from the path of two anxious demons. “Clear a path!”

Nodding, Steel kneeled, one hand and knee on the ground, a running start position; something he'd done many times on the football field. *"Stay with me! Don't let 'em hold you back!"*

Steel bolted down the passageway. Dark creatures were knocked all about by his fast-moving, massive frame as he plowed through the infested temple with Jade and Quest swift on his heels. Finally, they cleared the barricade of demons and made it to the main room of the temple. And it brought them to a screeching halt.

"Jesus H Christ!"



In her hast, Jade shot past Steel, and instantly regretted it when her eyes fell upon the gruesome sight before them.

Carnage.

The main hall's floor was covered in bloody body parts, ghouls and harpies feasting on them. She looked away and gagged. On the verge of vomiting, she put a hand on her belly and the other on the wall, trying her hardest to will back the liquefied bile working its way up her stomach.

"C'mon baby, keep it together. We've seen worse than this," Quest urged, standing on the other side of Steel.

In the middle of the carnage, a group of huge demons were huddled around something. Her eyes grew wide. The devilish creatures they battled were big and burly in size, but these demons were twice their size.

Gargantuan.

The heat from Quest's stare made her look his way. As soon as their eyes met, he released a series of shots toward the crowd. Deep squeals and snarls erupted from the huddle before they turned and narrowed their green glowing eyes at Quest.

"Hoodey hoo muthafuckas! What ya'll hiding over there?" he shouted.

She couldn't help but stare at him like he'd gone crazy. Why in the world would he fire into a group of huge, angry demons when he knew they didn't have enough ammo to defeat them? She glanced up at Steel, expecting him to intervene, but shockingly he didn't.

One of the creatures broke out of the group and barreled at Quest in full demonic speed. It took all three of them releasing furious rounds to bring the massive beast down. Once it evaporated, Quest shot at the group again, and this time Steel joined in.

"Are ya'll mental?" she exclaimed.

Ignoring her, they continued to fire, causing the annoyed demons to shriek and shift around, slightly loosening the huddle.

That's when she saw *him*.

Trapped in the center, Father Hamiway swung a long scythe like the true holy warrior he was. His robe, stained with a mixture of red and black blood was shredded badly. His grey hair, soaked in blood and sweat stuck to his head.

“Father!” Jade screamed.

Every demon in the room turned in their direction. Fearful for her Father's life, she started moving toward him. A hand grabbed her upper arm.

She snapped around to glare at Steel. “Let me go,” she ordered through clenched teeth.

“Jade we can't go running in there without the rest of the team. As much as I want to go in and wipe out those demons and save Father Hamiway, I can't. You saw how hard it was for us to take out one of them. We could only try to give him a little leeway to get out of the huddle.”

Ignoring reason, Jade made a futile attempt to yank away from his strong grasp. “*But they'll kill him if we don't move now! I will not just stand here and do nothing!*”

“Niomi, stay where you are.”

The determined look on Father Hamiway's face, the way he swung his weapon—it took her back to the day they met. She was eight years old when a band of rogue vampires came through her village in Africa, pillaging and slaughtering. They'd raped and killed her family right before they drained her to near death. The vampires would've surely finished her off if he and his Holy Squad

hadn't shown up. Back then, he'd been just the nice white man who saved her life, but now, he was and would always be her father.

"Father this is crazy. Those things are going to kill you."

"Yes, but not before they obtain the amulet."

A round of gunfire rang out behind them. *"Back up is here and packing a bitchin' new trick! Boom baby!"*

Knowing Spade's new trick involved something explosive, Jade shouted, "Incoming!"

A golden orb flew over their heads, followed by string of grenades. Before Jade could freak out, the sphere flattened and fell over Father Hamiway like a protective sheet of armor.

Everybody dropped to the ground. A series of explosions rattled the huge temple's walls and floors. Jade squinted to see through the debris. Father Hamiway was crouched inside of Spade's dome-shaped force field. A pile of black bloody mess surrounded him. But she knew better than to assume the battle was over.

"Now Father! Move now, while they're down!"

Father Hamiway nodded then ran.

"Spade, hold that shield!"

Some surviving harpies tried to swipe at Father Hamiway. Their hands and limbs were burnt off from the divine energy surrounding Spade's barrier.

She cut a glance at Spade. To the side of the opening to the main room, he held his hand out, glowing gold. Apparently, the jarring energy surge they'd experienced had increased his spiritual ability and brought out the true strength of his power.

Out the corner of her eye, she saw Quest spin around and cock his automatic toward the darkness. "*Three big ones in the rear!*"

Her team members opened fire on the three sets of glowing green eyes moving rapidly toward them. Copper and Blaze were flung into the air.

The screams of her female comrades, compelled Jade to take action. "Noo!!"

Her arms raised on their own accord. An unfamiliar surge of power zipped through her body and emitted through her hands, sending the demons crashing through the wall.

Stunned, she stared ahead, unable to move. She felt the force building within her, fusing with her spirit. She glanced down at her trembling hands then looked up at her teammates, who gaped at her, wide-eyed, in awe.

All her life, she'd been able to move objects with her mind, but never living beings, let alone three massive demons. "My God," she whispered.

A hand dropped on her shoulder. She whipped around. Father Hamiway stood before her, a weak, yet proud smile on his face. His bright grey eyes were glassy and his usually peachy complexion was now pale.

“*She* has fused with you,” he strained out. “Everything is happening as it should.”

“Father...” Worried, she looked into his colorless face. “Are you—” Her attention was suddenly drawn to the ground. They were standing in a puddle of blood. *His blood.* “Oh God, no!”

His eyes rolled back and he fell into her arms. The weight pushed her back against the wall. “No, please God, no!” She held onto him, allowing the bulk of his body to drag her to the floor. The team formed a semi circle around them to ward off the demons. “Father, please don’t die!”

“I was dead...before you arrived...my precious, Niomi.” With his heavy breaths, his chest rose and fell as he fought to hang on to the last strands of life.

“No, don’t say that! Don’t say that!” She ripped through the tattered shreds of his robe, searching for the source of his blood loss. “You will not die! I won’t let you!” She got to his torso, tore the robe completely open and found the fatal injury—a big, gaping hole right in the center of his stomach.

Jade ripped the goggles from her head, slid from beneath him and placed her hands over the wound. His blood pumped rapidly through her fingers.

Tears rolled down her cheeks and pain stabbed her heart. Even if they were somehow able to get him to a hospital, they wouldn't be able to save him. He would die.

"They, they came up...from hell...and ambushed us." He coughed, splattering her with blood. She pulled him closer and pressed his head against her breasts, her tears spilling onto his bloody face. "They somehow...they knew that...the amulet...was here. How? How did they know that?"

"Stop trying to talk, Father. Save your energy." She ripped her sleeve from her arm, balled it up along with the tattered strips of his robe, and pressed it into his furiously bleeding wound.

"There is no need for you to try to stop the bleeding, Niomi. This is the end for me. I have done my part." He pulled her hands from his wound and then slipped something into them. *"I don't have much time."* Blood oozed from the corners of his mouth. *"So you must listen very carefully."*

Her vision blurred. Her chest became tight, so tight she could hardly breathe. The gunfire from her team and angry demon snarls blended into nothingness. *Again*, her father was being taken away from her.

Father Hamiway squeezed her hand. *"I need you to be strong for me, my beautiful daughter. You must stay focused."*

She shook her head violently. *“No! I can’t, I can’t do this without you. Please, don’t leave me father. I will die without you.”*

A sad smile crossed his face, tears pooled in his weakened eyes. *“My soul will never leave you, Niomi.”* He pressed her clutched hands to his heart. *“Never. I will always be with you.”* With his bloodied hand, he wiped the tears from her face. *“There’s something very important I need you to do for me. The jewel you hold in your hand is a sacred amulet. Secure it and guard it with your life.”*

Sobbing, she nodded and slipped it in her side pocket.

“You must not let them obtain it. Her identity must stay hidden until she has fully shifted. That amulet will lead them straight to her.”

“To who?”

“The Dragon Queen. She came to me, like a blessing from heaven. It is through her touch I was able to last this long.” His grip loosened on her hand. *“I don’t have time to explain the details of her existence, but I will tell you this... through her demon blood lays the ultimate power. The amulet was made for her by her heavenly mother. Its purpose is to suppress the beast within that her demon blood brings about.”* His eyes slid close. *“This amulet must be given to Demetri Bithanos.”*

Jade’s eyes grew wide. *“Demetri Bithanos? The Xsonri?”*

“Yes. Get the amulet away from here and find Demetri. Trust to give it to no one but him.”

Her mind became clouded by a maelstrom of emotions as she tried to grasp his words. She was to seek out the deadliest vampire in the world, the very creature known for slaying Andausians without cause.

“Calm your fears. He may be an unpredictable creature, but I have faith he will not harm you or your teammates. Now, listen carefully. Beneath this temple is a passageway to an underground room. In that room, you will find the humanoid, Fabian. I hid him there when I arrived at the temple. He has in his possession the queen’s spiritual tools. Activate him and he will help get you and the team out of this place.”

“Yes, Father,” she wept.

“Oh, you will get through this. Remember, you and the team have the strength of battle angels. Use it to defeat the chingi.”

She dipped her head, trying to search for the strength he spoke of, but found nothing but pain. “I love you so much, Father, so very much.”

“I love you too, my warrior princess.” Faintly, he lifted his hand and pressed his palm to her forehead. *“And with my last bit of strength, I will pass a gift onto you. The transfer will be painful, but the outcome will be rewarding.”*

Behind the caress of his words, a searing sensation coursed through her body like a shock wave. The aching need to cry out wrenched her gut, but she squeezed her eyes shut and held it in.

For a brief moment, the agony subsided, and then within seconds, there was an eruption inside of her. It knocked her on her back. Sharp needles of pain slammed into the core of her being. Every muscle in her body spasm and jerked. She rolled onto her side, curled up into the fetal position and prayed the transition would end soon.

Finally, to her relief, it did.

Once the agony abated, she sat up and opened her eyes. She almost screamed at the sight before her. A pile of ashes lay where her father's body had been. Unable to breath, she eyed the silver cross sticking out of the ashes, then through a hooded glare, she brought her eyes up to meet with Blaze's.

Her war sister was crouched next to the pile, her hands out, ignited in blue flames and tears rolling down her face. She had released a new level of her ability at the *wrong time*.

"Why?" Jade asked in growl, curling her fingers into fists. "Why'd you do that?"

Blaze looked at her, grief burning in her silver-rimmed gaze. "Because, he asked me to," she murmured in a soft, shaky voice as the flames faded from her hands. "He didn't want us to have to carry his body out of here."

Jade looked down at the ashes, and nodded.

What could she say? She couldn't be mad at Blaze for granting her father's wish.

Blaze nodded back then handed her a large, empty water bottle.

Jade retrieved the silver cross from the ashes, placed it in her pocket, then sat the plastic container down. While silently praying, she willed his ashes into the bottle.

Moments later, Jade stood, twisted the top on then handed it to Spade, who slipped it in his bag. She glanced around. No gunfire. No demons. Everything was sound.

"What happened?" she asked, glancing at Steel.

"I don't know, but something's up," he answered quickly, his eyes shifting about. *"Demons don't just give up like that. We're in trouble if we get hit with another attack like that last one. I don't even have to ask to know ya'll are all out of holy rounds."*

They all confirmed with a nod.

"I know this is a bad time to say this but, we have another package to get before we can leave," Jade informed.

"Fabian," Quest mumbled. *"I can sense his artificial blood. He's underground."*

"Well let's find a way down there, and fast," Steel ordered.

Quest pointed his gun down the black corridor. *"They've got this way shot. There are three other ways out."* He turned the barrel toward the main room. *"Through there."*

“Then we have no choice. Let’s move.”

They ran through the bloody mass of body parts, making their way through the hall. Near to the end of the room, a deep powerful growl rolled a tremor beneath the hard wood floor. They lost their footing and toppled into the carnage. Before they could get back on their feet, the men were hauled up and slammed into the wall.

Jade and her sisters stood fast, prepared to take the brunt of the attack.

Another thunderous growl made the foundation quake, once again, sending them to the ground. Before she could gather with Copper and Blaze, the huge head of a demon erupted through the wood floor and clamped down onto her leg.

A scream got caught in her throat. She anchored onto a piece of the shattered flooring to keep from being dragged under.

Copper and Blaze jumped onto the beast’s head. Agonizing shrills rattled the walls as Blaze seared its eyes and Copper sawed at its neck, her battle knife flashing with unnatural speed.

It tugged on her with urgency, gradually pulling her down. The weight was too much. Clenching her teeth, she tightened her grip. The splintered wood bit into her palms and fingers, drawing blood. With the pain darting up from her leg through her body, she wasn’t able to hang on.

The howling beast retracted his head through the floor, taking the three women with it.



Released from the dark hold, the men jumped up and ran to join their sisters, but the opening in the floor sealed swiftly, shutting them out.

“Fuck!” Quest launched his pistol across the room and kicked a bloody arm out of his path. “They got our chicas, *buey!*”

Steel kneeled and punched the ground. It dented, but remained intact. “Some dark force is holding this floor together.” He rammmed at the floor repeatedly, but wasn’t able to break though. “*Ladies, talk to me!*”

No answer.

“*They’re injured, Steel. They won’t tell us, but I feel it.*” Quest squeezed his eyes shut, trying sense their energy. “*They’re running solely off their spiritual energy. The only reason they’re still in this battle is ‘cause of that charge we got earlier, but I don’t know how long it’ll last. We have to get them out of there.*”

Steel groaned and punched the ground again. “*Shoot, I knew we should’ve fused!*”

Quest gritted his teeth and was about to release another angry rant when something caught his attention. He dropped his sight back to the spot where the demon dragged the women under then he was drawn back to where they entered

the room. Squinting, he retraced their steps. His brisk walk turned into an eager jog. Steel and Spade were on his heels.

“Talk to us, dude.” Spade groaned. *“Please tell us our kitties are still alive.”*

“Alive and kicking demon ass.” Quest reached back and Spade handed him a belt of M67 fragmentation grenades. *“I smell demon bloodshed. The girls are on the move.”*



Rapid explosions shook the ground. Dirt and wood rained down from the ceiling in the dim subterranean corridor.

“The boys are close.” Copper slammed a dark creature back with power kick to its chest. *“I see a door!”*

“That has to be it!” A strike of Jade’s bladed whip severed the demon’s head. *“That’s the room father was talking about!”*

Picking up speed, they raced to the large steel door.

Jade winced at the pain throbbing in her injured leg. She had taken on a slight limp, but she wouldn’t allow it to slow her down.

She willed the door open. They hurried into the dark room and slammed the barrier shut behind them. A still darkened figure was in the center of the room.

Copper flipped on the surefire flashlight attached to her automatic. “Bingo,” she called out with a smirk.

Fabian, the humanoid sat in a chair, his elbow propped on his knee and his chin resting on his fist, like the statue of the thinking man. Professor Poljolt, a scientist for the ministry created the dark-haired, brown-eyed android in the exact image of his late son, who'd died in a plane crash about three years ago. The deranged, yet brilliant scientist created Fabian with hopes of healing some part of his aching heart. His hope had been in vain. A year after Fabian's creation, Poljolt aimed a pistol to his head and committed suicide. Soon after, the Holy warriors got a hold of Poljolt's creation and turned him into a weapon for the light.

"You can't even tell he's a machine. He looks exactly like a human," Blaze murmured, circling the chair. "Hey! I found more ammo." Crates of ammunition and extra automatics were stacked behind Fabian's chair. "Thank you, Father."

As they loaded their guns and strapped on extras for their brothers, Jade glared at an oversized silver firearm propped against the corner of the wall.

"That's a right nifty piece there," Copper commented.

"Most likely Fabian's." Jade focused on chambering rounds to resist the urge to touch it.

"Speaking of Fabian, let's go ahead and get that bad boy fired up already."

Jade looked at the doe-eyed French boy and called out, "Code 61085 Parana."

Fabian lifted his head and stood, oddly not with the stilted motions of a robot, but with fluid movements of a human being. Standing perfectly still, they

allowed him to scan each one of them from head to toe for identity confirmation. Once complete, he properly saluted them as soldiers.

“Lieutenant Niomi Hamiway of Sector twelve, you activated my system under attack code 61085 Parana.” Fabian crossed the room and hoisted the huge automatic like it weighed nothing. “I am detecting strong demon activity beyond this room. We must move.” He wrapped the strap of the gun around his shoulder and stood at the door, prepared for battle.

Jade positioned herself behind him. Attached to his back holster were two sheathed, arc-shaped swords. An iridescent glow shone from exquisite weapons and highlighted the small room—the spiritual tools for the Dragon Queen.

Copper and Blaze flanked her. She could feel the heat of their power rising along with anticipation of what waited on the other side of the steel barrier.

Without another moment wasted, Fabian kicked the door down. As soon as it hit the ground, snarling creatures attacked. Fabian released fire. Four inch, silver coated holy rounds made dust out of the demons in seconds.

Swiftly making their way through the shadowy subterranean tunnel, they trailed the battle android, guarding the rear.

They approached an illuminated oval opening. The perimeter of the oval was charged with what looked like static electricity, but it felt like raw energy.

Fabian stopped short of it and stared, his head tilted.

Standing a few feet behind him, Jade peered at distorted reflections of her and her female comrades in the mirror-like substance, which waved like water within the voltaic border.

An incredible energy stream flowed through her body, stunning her momentarily, and then it dissipated. Subconsciously, she moved closer to Copper and Blaze. Glancing at them, she noticed they stared at the phenomenon wide eyed, slightly baffled. A confirmation they felt it too.

Oblivious to the shift in their demeanor, Fabian turned from the spectacle and continued his jog down the wide, dim lit corridor. Jade shook off the odd sensation, as did Copper and Blaze then ran to catch up with him.

“Okay, that was weird.” Blaze admitted.

“Fabian, what was that?” Jade asked, picking up speed to stay in pace with him.

“An outer realm portal,” he casually replied.

“An outer what!” she exclaimed, slowing down.

Zippering past her, Copper grabbed her hand and pulled her along. *“Yeah, you heard him right. It’s a portal to another realm.”*

Blaze came up aside them. *“Which means our situation just got a lot worse.”*

“You’ve got to be freakin’ kidding me!”

“Negative Lieutenant. That is how the demons are entering this world.”
Fabian cocked his gun and shot another demon in their path.

“Whoa! Brakes!” She jerked away from Copper and looked in direction of the portal. “We have to close that thing! We can’t just run out of here and leave it open!” She shouted in a rush, her African accent becoming more pronounced. “I don’t know how we’re going to do it but we have to!”

Fabian turned and looked at her, a robotic gleam in his eyes. “Negative—”

“Hundreds of demons are crossing over into our world with ease and *killing* humans by the thousands! We have to find a way to close it, Fabian!”

“Negative. We do not have the resources to close the portal. Please keep up, Lieutenant, you must not fall behind.”

“Come on, Jade. We’ll find a way to put an end to this shite later. Right now we have to keep our energy going and leg it out of here fast.”

In the blink of an eye, four demons appear through the portal. The large creatures looked around in confusion, caught sight of them, and charged. She put her hands out in an attempt to push them back, but they somehow dodged her stream of force. Still advancing, they scaled the walls then faded out of sight.

“Fabian!” she shouted, blindly swinging her whip at the invisible demons.

Fabian whirled around and pointed the massive gun at them. “Get down.”

When they hit the ground, Fabian opened fire, launching the elongated bullets at the creatures, uncloaking them a second before they dissipated.

“Let’s move.” Fabian turned and commenced his trot toward the end of the corridor. “We are near the exit.”

They were swift to get to their feet and follow him.

“*Am I the only one who thinks the android looks yummy right about now?*” Blaze quipped, darting her eyes at Jade with a quirky smile.

Leave it to Blaze to break the tension. With the uncertainty of the passage out and the safety of their brothers, a little banter was needed.

Jade’s released a breathless giggle. “*Mm hm, especially while he’s handling that big gun. Definitely a turn on.*”

“*Hey, does anybody know if he has a tool? And if so, does it get stiff?*”

Girlish giggles erupted from them as they struggled to keep up with Fabian’s long rapid strides. He shot a glance over his shoulder. The humorous smiles fell from their faces and were replaced with tight-lipped grins.

A wall came into view at the end of the corridor. Attached to it was a rickety ladder. Their way out. Relief fell over Jade, that was, until she saw the numerous glowing green eyes waiting for them at the exit.

Fabian cocked his gun to fire...then paused.

“Fabian, why—”

He spread his arms out and pushed all three of them against the wall. A loud explosion followed by shrieks rung in her ears. Once the clamor ceased, Fabian stepped back.

“Ay, ya’ll alright?” Spade shouted, appearing through the cloud of smoke and debris. “Hey Fabe, nice piece.”

Once at the ladder, Fabian climbed up first. After a few anxious moments of constant gunfire and squealing demons, Fabian poked his head through the exit and confirmed, “Coast is clear.”

“Ladies first,” Steel offered, holding the weak ladder steady for them.

Finally above ground, they sprinted behind Fabian until the huge temple was only a small sight in the distance. They paused to catch their breaths and unload their gear.

“Thank God,” Jade murmured, winded.

Due to the fact she’d literally pushed her spirit energy to the limit, she wasn’t sure how much further she could’ve gone without collapsing. Adding to her weakness, the pain in her leg had gotten worse. While trying to control her erratic breathing, she sat on the ground and turned from Quest’s concerned stare.

“Mission complete.” Fabian announced, staring toward the temple.

“Not yet, Fabe.” Spade reached into his back pocket and pulled out a small detonator.

Jade peered at him over her shoulder. “Oh no, Spade you can’t—”

“Don’t say it, Jade,” he grumbled, shaking his head. “You know I’m not about to walk away and leave a demon infested building standing.” He put his thumb on the button. “Even if it’s a temple, it’s gotta go.”

At the push of the button, the ground quaked and a cacophony of ghoulish wails echoed through the area. A dark mushroom shaped cloud expanded and hovered where the temple once stood.

“Yo Cop, you a’ight, chica?”

Everyone’s attention was abruptly drawn to Copper.

“Negatory,” she slurred before she swayed lazily then collapsed.

Quest ran and caught her before she hit the ground. “Man down!”

The team rushed over, Fabian in the lead. He squatted down and examined her body, shining a bright blue ray from his eyes over her torso.

“Sergeant Delany has severe muscle and tissue damage to her abdomen area. I detect internal bleeding.”

“Sonofabitch!” Spade threw his hat to the ground.

“Let’s get some transpo and get her to the hospital asap,” Steel ordered.



“Do you want us to go after them, master?” snarled the demon, glaring at the humans who had just killed hundreds his of his comrades.

Doshar glanced at the temple ruins. The unexpected explosion and the loss of numerous demons irritated him greatly. The blast hadn't been strong enough to close his portal however, it did weaken it. The human with the power of the spirit shield filled the explosives with holy water, which was guaranteed to damage his portal.

He hissed in aggravation.

Evidently, he'd underestimated this group of Andausians, but it was unlikely he'd make that mistake again.

He narrowed his eyes. These humans were no regular Andausians. They'd been touched by the light, blessed by the heavens as mortal warrior angels. This explained why his demons hadn't been able to kill them. Fortunately, a gap in their defenses had been revealed. They were connected to one another's energy forces, as well as another force he didn't recognize. The drift in their connection came forth once they came near the portal. This spiritual link could work to his advantage.

An atrocious plot played in his mind and brought on a wicked smile. Separating them would truly weaken their defenses no matter how great their power.

"No, just follow them," he ordered, staring at the dark skinned woman who now possessed the half-breed's amulet. "I will deal with these wretched mortals myself."

Chapter Twelve

The Coven

Faint streams of light shone through the stained glass windows, brightening the polished wood trusses of the vaulted ceiling, the huge cherry wood crucifix at the alter, which was draped in a red cloth, and the divine portrait of the Virgin Mary. Another day had begun.

In distress, Father Shannon paced through the congregation hall, his hands clasped behind his back. The dreadful feeling in his heart became heavier with each step. Evil was winning this unseen war and there was nothing he could do about it.

Demetri had told him to close his eyes and find sleep as if it was an easy task for him. Since the disappearances began, his nights had been restless, but now that the truth had been revealed to him, any attempt to sleep was useless.

The smell of the victim's blood overwhelmed his senses and worse of all, his faith faltered. "God help us all."

He stopped pacing and gazed upon the crucifix. Another servant of God had been slain. Even before the vampire confirmed it, he knew in his heart Father

Hamiway would die. The truth of Demetri's words had come to him after he could no longer sense his brother's spiritual force. He was gone from this world.

Sighing, he recalled his conversation with Demetri. *Twenty-eight portals.*

A demon portal beneath a temple? On holy ground? He wouldn't have thought it possible, but he had to remember over time evil had cloaked itself and hidden in God's places of worship.

"Of course," he mumbled inwardly.

What better way to defeat your enemy than to conceal yourself within their sanctuaries until it was time to attack? It was a suicidal, yet an effective strategy. Humans used this scheme all the time to defeat one another.

That still left the question, *why*, floating about in his mind.

Why was this so called warlock doing this? What would he gain by allowing a demon to find the Queen then obtain her blood and receive the ultimate power? This demon wouldn't share her blood with him. He had to know that. So, what was his purpose?

His thoughts were halted when he saw something stir out of the corner of his eye. He walked to the far end of the hall to see a woman sitting in center of the pew, a snow white cloak covering her form. He didn't have to look at the time to know the church's doors weren't opened yet.

“Excuse me, young lady, I’m sure you have much to discuss with God, but you must be aware the hour is far too early for you to be here. The doors of the church are closed at this time. Perhaps, you can come back at nine, when we are open?”

A cheery chuckle echoed around him. “I think not.” She looked up, revealing her familiar face. “Besides, I stopped talking to God a long time ago.” Her deep Russian accent laced every word. “Oh Father, you’re just as sexy as you were twenty years ago.”

Squinting, he shuffled back. “What are you doing here, Dominique?”

A soft smile graced her face. “Are you that angry about me being here, tiger?” Casually, she crossed her legs. The thick fabric of her cloak fell open, giving a healthy view of her milky white limbs. “Want to touch? I promise it’s as soft as it looks,” she purred, drawing the fabric further up her thighs.

“I want you to leave right now,” he said in a controlled tone. “Those who practice dark magic are not welcome here.”

“Oh, but I thought all were welcome in the house of God.”

“All those who are prepared to accept him in their hearts,” he retorted sharply.

She pushed the hood back from her head and exposed her golden hair. “For your information, I don’t practice *dark magic*, priest. Do not class me as a *witch*,” she

uttered on a sneer. “And I do accept him in my heart.” A wicked smile curled her lips as she slowly parted her legs. “Ask me where my heart is.”

“That’s it,” he growled. “Your blasphemy and disrespect will not be tolerated in this place of worship! Get out now or I will throw you out!”

His anger increased when she rolled her eyes in annoyance. “Relax, priest. It wasn’t my choice to come here. Frankly, I could think of many places I’d rather be—”

“Then why are you here!”

“A confession, perhaps.”

“Don’t toy with me, Dominique. I am not in the mood.”

She tilted her head and gazed at him with curiosity in her eyes. “I thought priests were supposed to be calm and graceful. Right now, you are none of the above.” She stood and floated to the end of the pew. “I was summoned here for a secret meeting.”

“By who?”

“By *me*.” The double doors to the hall unlocked and swung open. A hooded figure appeared in the entrance. “It’s the only place I could think to meet where the coven couldn’t tap in.”

The hood slid back from her head, giving way to her identity. *Lady Indigo*.

Fluidly, she moved past the rows of pews, smiling all the way. “Neither Dominique nor I possess the strength to conjure a barrier powerful enough to block out the coven’s third eye. You and Demetri are the only ones capable of doing so.” She paused and removed her cloak, revealing a sheer floor-length gown. “And since this meeting is about Demetri, I had to use you.”

His cheeks flushed. The thin, lacy material left nothing to the imagination, and it didn’t help matters she wasn’t wearing any undergarments.

He diverted his eyes and growled, “Lady Indigo, please clothe yourself.”

“I shall do no such thing,” she muttered, dramatically fanning herself. “It’s like the inside of an oven in here.”

“God’s way of weeding out evil. I’m surprised you didn’t burst into flames at the entrance,” he grumbled, moving past them. “Follow me.” He led them quickly through the large room, down the corridor to his office. He settled behind his desk and rested his forehead against the palm of his hand. “Carry on with your meeting.”

Smiling, they sat in the chairs opposite his desk. “Do you have any wine or something you could offer us?” Dominique removed her cloak and gave view to a short, silky garment, which was even more revealing than Indigo’s gown. “I’m parched.”

“Lord God, have you women no modesty? Please have your meeting so that you may depart from my presence sooner rather than later.”

Dominique giggled. “Feeling a little hot under the collar, tiger?”

“Don’t tease him, Dominique.” Indigo crossed her legs and tilted her hips to the side. “He may be a priest, but he’s still all male,” she averred with a wink.

Irritated by their cattish taunts, he pushed out of his chair and attempted to leave.

“Aren’t you the least bit interested in why I called a secret meeting about your friend?”

He stopped at the door, turned and glared at her. “What has he done? Bedded both of you in the same night? Refused to cuddle? What?”

“Fun-ny,” Dominique chortled. “I knew there was a comedic side to you.”

“Hilarious,” Indigo murmured dryly, casting a curt glare at Dominique. “No priest, that’s not the reason.” She paused and leered at him. “I have reason to believe the Dragon Queen has a direct mental connection with Demetri.”

Dominique sat up, her back stiffly erect and stared at her. “The Dragon Queen? Are you sure?”

“No, I’m not.” Indigo stood, circled the chair then leaned against the back of it. “I’ve been trying to link with him ever since he left my bed, but he’s been blocking me out, ignoring my calls.” She dragged her hands down her face. “Last

night he did something very strange. I tapped into his psyche while *she* was calling to him. She serenaded him, enchanted him into a state of slumber,” she explained, her words rushed, her gaze wandering about. “He was zombified, caught in her web, and so was I, for a moment. Her aura was incredible, and if you could’ve heard her voice...”

“Indigo, honey, I truly believe your speculations are false. There is no way you would’ve been able to link with him while *she* had a hold on him. She wouldn’t have allowed it. As a matter of fact, you would’ve paid for that with your life.”

“I know it sounds impossible, but what if...” Indigo glanced his way. “What if she doesn’t know who or what she is?”

“You’re absolutely right. That does sound impossible,” Dominique sighed. “Look, a demon queen shifts at an unimaginable rate, one we couldn’t comprehend. Now if we go by the prophecy, she is ripe by now, ready to take, ready to kill and damn sure ready to crown her king.”

“Dominique, I’ve been over this a million times in my mind—his reaction to her call, the emotions I felt through the link...”

“Maybe she’s another priestess, or another Xsonri—”

“Noo...”

“I know why you’ve made this assumption. I’ve seen him gazing up into the night skies with his arms open, seeking a connection with her. I saw it with my

own eyes, several times and he would nearly suffer the sun for this link. But, if it were the queen calling out to him, he would've already found her or visa versa."

"I agree." Father Shannon strolled from the door to the desk.

"Well glory be, halleluiah." Dominique grinned. "Welcome to the conversation."

He sliced her a narrowed eye, before he lowered into his chair. Clearing his throat, he brushed his fingers over the cross hanging from his neck. "I don't know everything there is to know about this Dragon Queen, but I'm sure if Demetri had contact with her, he would've told me so. I spoke with him last night and he—"

"Do you honestly believe everything he tells you Father?" Indigo asked, a certain amount of disdain behind her tone. "You think because he's your *friend* he confides everything in you, that he'd tell you he's linked to the bitch with the power to wipe out mankind as we know it?"

"Watch your language," he demanded on a growl, his finger leveled at her. "You may not have respect for yourself, but you *will* respect the house of God." He looked away and briefly closed his eyes. "Demetri has no reason to lie to me. In fact, he enjoys telling me the truth, particularly if the truth will spike my nerves."

"Oh yes. He does enjoy getting a rise out of those unmoved," Dominique added with a twisted smile.

Indigo tugged on her dreads as she took her spot back in the chair. “I think he would lie to you, to protect you. Think about it. If he confessed to you he knew who she was, and that he was connected to her, wouldn’t that put you and your nuns in harm’s way? That bit of information can’t be bandied about. There is too much at stake.”

“Well, if you’re right honey, that means Mr. Bithanos has been crowned.”

Indigo shook her head, her dreads swinging about. “No, we all would’ve felt it. The moment his body joined with hers, the transfer of blood...”

“That is exactly why there is no way he’s connected with her.” Dominique brushed her fingers through the ends of the mane that rested on her collarbone. “Indigo, we’re talking about Demetri here. Do you really believe he’d find the Queen and *not* take her to bed? Or better yet, do you believe she’d summon him and *not* give up the pussy?”

Father Shannon dropped his fist on the desk hard, causing the bible to hop. “Language!”

Dominique rolled her eyes. “Seriously honey, our boy is a go getter. If he found the queen and her forbidden blood, he’d mark her as his.”

“Mark her?” Indigo gasped. “Yes, but she would have marked him first.”

“What ever do you mean, sister?” Dominique huffed, apparently frustrated with her lack of success to convince the priestess she was delirious.

“A glowing serpent dragon symbol appeared on the nape of his neck and formed a dagger down the center of his back, which I bet any amount of money is still there. Don’t you see Dominique? She marked him! She has chosen him!”

“Preposterous.” Dominique stood and retrieved her cloak. “End of meeting. We must go. We’ve been summoned by the coven.”

For a moment, Indigo didn’t budge. “You believe me don’t you, Father?”

He shrugged his shoulders and settled back against the sturdy leather of the chair. “Nothing is implausible these days,” he uttered softly. “Especially if it has anything to do with Demetri.”

A small smile curved her lips as she rose from the chair. “Not a word of this to anyone.”

Dominique laughed and sashayed over to her. “Then that would defeat the purpose of it being a *secret* meeting.” She brushed Indigo’s locks from the side of her face and placed a soft kiss on the corner of her mouth. “Don’t worry darling, we’ll find out what’s going on,” she whispered, smoothing her hands around Indigo’s hips.

Father Shannon cleared his throat, loudly. “Your coven awaits,” he all but growled.

While Dominique giggled hysterically, Indigo peered at him with dismay in her eyes. “Father please, not a word to Demetri. I’m not sure what he’d do if he knew...”

He pushed out a soft puff of air. “Yes, yes. Understood.”

As soon as the two priestesses vanished from his sight, he dropped his forehead on the desk and groaned. Demetri with the Dragon Queen? If this situation could’ve gotten any worse, it just did.



Refusing to look down, Indigo tugged nervously on the lapels of her cloak.

There were many ways to travel as a priestess, none of which involves a broom as many humans may think, but either way, Indigo preferred to stay planted on the ground.

Dominique, on the other hand, had always been one to soar through the skies, and since she was the chauffeur tonight, Indigo would have to suffer her means of transportation.

“I hate traveling like this,” Indigo murmured, hearing her voice echo within the transparent sphere.

In spite of her fear of heights, she glanced down at the city lights whizzing by beneath them. Hardly any sense of movement could be felt as they traveled at an unnatural speed through uncharted drift zones.

The sight brought a small smile to her face, but her smile diminished when she caught a glimpse of the two small puncture marks on Dominique's neck.

"I should've known you were fucking him."

A quirky smirk tilted the corner of Dominique's mouth. "You've become too attached to the Xsonri."

Indigo raised her hand for silence. "Don't you dare judge me," she retorted, diverting her eyes toward the jet, which quickly shrunk out of view.

"He marked your bed mate in the same place and you have the nerve to be snippy with me?"

"Don't go there, Dominique."

She didn't need to be reminded Demetri marked Amaya. The nymph's desire for the bite would've probably gotten her killed by one of her other fanged clients if he hadn't scored her. For some reason vamps found it distasteful to bite a human already marked, particularly those marked by Demetri. So yes, he basically saved Amaya's life, but Dominique, on the other hand went after him for more than just a bite.

"He had his reasons for marking Amaya."

"Were his reasons not the same for me?"

"You fucked him out of spite, Dominique!" Indigo shouted, rocking the flying sphere.

“Oh please, get over it.” Dominique sat down at Indigo’s feet and tucked her legs beneath her. “If you didn’t want me sampling your pet vamp then you shouldn’t have been bragging about how great his bite was.” She looked up to the passing stars and chuckled. “You know how curious I am.”

Indigo opened her mouth to rail at her again, but thought better of it. She was already feeling woozy from the last roll of the traveling globe. Balling her hands into fists, she glared down at Dominique. Those beautiful ashen touched eyes that stared back at her softened her stance.

Dominique reached up, took her hand and pulled her down next to her.

Indigo looked away wishing there was room to put distance between them, but their mode transportation wouldn’t allow it. Anywhere she moved she would slide right back to her.

“Calm your emotions. You cannot appear before the council this way. Your agitation will make Sable suspicious.”

A snide remark sat on the edge of Indigo’s tongue, but she restrained herself because in all honesty, Dominique was right. Sable would drop her to her knees in a heartbeat and choke the spirit energy out of her if she came before the council huffing and puffing over her love affair with Demetri.

“Your sentiments for him are jeopardizing the mission.”

She cut a glare at her. “Not helping to ease my emotions, Dominique,” she retorted in a warning tone. “If you want me calm, then I suggest you think of something else to talk about.”

Dominique fingered the back of her hand. “Tell me, has the creature taken your heart?”

“No,” she replied, slowly taking Dominique’s hand in hers. “Only my body... and sanity.”

“Now *that*, I can understand. If there ever was a being other than you who could take my body to heights unknown...” She closed her eyes and moaned.

Sneering, Indigo snatched her hand away. “Are we there yet?”

“Indigo, you have to understand there was no emotion in what Demetri and I shared. It was only sex. Through my mind, he saw my curiosity and fed it. That was it. It’s his nature.”

“Whatever.”

“Vampires are sexual creatures. Sex is their way of connecting with what once was and will never be again. It’s their outlet. Just because he’s a Xsonri doesn’t exempt him from that ingrained need.”

“Demetri is different,” she blew out on a hard breath, already irritated by the topic of choice. “The only time that part of him takes over is after a kill. Any other time he has sex for the mere satisfaction. It has nothing to do with what he is.”

“Ahh, but it does. How many innocent people do you think would die if he didn’t fuck on a regular basis?” Dominique jested with laughing eyes. “Go ahead, throw a number out there. I guarantee whatever number you come up with wouldn’t nearly be enough.”

“Oh, so you’re saying you’re a modern day hero? You saved hundreds of human lives by laying with a demon vampire. Good for you.”

“Don’t be so melodramatic.” Leaning back, Dominique curved her body with the shape of the sphere. “I used to wonder why he’d spend hours on end staring at the stars, not speaking, nor moving as if he were a mannequin.”

Indigo looked at her hard. “Yes, and he probably became irritable when you mentioned it, right?”

She nodded. “When I first saw him in that state, I assumed he was communicating with someone at a distance or listening for the sounds of demons to destroy.”

“If you know this, why is it so hard for you to believe what I’m telling you?”

“It’s not that I didn’t believe you. Demetri is the strongest creature in this realm, of course I believe you. I just didn’t want Father Shannon to believe you.”

Indigo perked up and stared questioningly.

Dominique chuckled. “Demetri didn’t want him to know and I don’t think the priest’s safety is the only reason why. I truly believe there’s a missing piece to

the prophecy and I suspect Demetri is right at the center of it. But the problem is, I don't think he's aware of this." Glancing down, Dominique took her hand then stood, pulling her to her feet. "We've determined there's a warlock behind the release of the demons, but who is he working for?"

White clouds surrounded them as they hovered over a serene plain. "Yes, because a warlock can't absorb her blood," Indigo added.

Within the ground a hollow passageway formed.

"Neither can the *Chingi*."

"What?" Indigo gasped just as the sphere was sucked into the hole. Through tunnels they went, left, right, down then right again, shifting in nauseating speeds. Close to erupting, her stomach rumbled. She closed her eyes and squeezed Dominique's hands.

"You are to clear this discussion from your mind before we arrive," Dominique pushed out in a rush.

As if she needed to be told that.

They landed in the center of the icy fortress, the convocation spot for the coven. The globe dissipated around them and freezing temperatures attacked her exposed skin. Quickly, they conjured gloves and scarves then drew the wooly hoods over their heads.

"Remember what I told you," Dominique warned, nodding toward a wall of ice.

Swallowing hard, Indigo advanced with Dominique at her side and melted through the ice wall to enter the huge crystallized hall. They ambled past a few of their coven sisters scattered about, exchanging smiles and nods.

“Come forth ladies and take your seat at the council table.”

Sable’s tone was stern and demanding. She was pissed about something, and Indigo could bet her soul’s force Sable’s displeasure had everything to do with her.

The vastness of the round table carved out of ice glowed in recognition as she neared it. High Priestesses from across the world sat at the table, their hands clamped together, staring at her with judgmental eyes.

“Priestesses of the forces beyond, we come to you at your request.”

They all nodded and she took her seat, as did Dominique. Indigo’s spiritual symbol lit up on the table before her, indicating the connection with her sisters. She closed her eyes and opened her mind to those before her. It was custom to do so.

In the past, those who dared to come before the council with their mental domain locked were immediately disciplined. They didn’t take the time to break through a mind barrier. No. They’d just simply strip the offender of their powers.

Even though there were things in her mind she knew she’d be reprimanded for, she wasn’t foolish enough to confine her cerebrum in their presence. However, she’d been given the ability to hide her thoughts and memories deep within her

psyche. One can see only what she wanted them to—a useful skill acquired through Demetri.

“Sister Priestess, you were given specific orders to keep the vampire Demetri *occupied* —away from the humans and most importantly, blinded from the knowledge of the Dragon Goddess.”

It wasn't a surprise Kaverti, the Indian priestess was the first to speak on the topic of Demetri. She'd never been the type to beat around the bush.

“With all due respect, my sister, Demetri is very much so *occupied*,” Indigo retorted, trying to keep her tone subtle. “With the number of demons passing to this realm, he hasn't the time to—”

“Apparently, the demons are secondary to him now.”

“What do you mean?” She looked to Sable, whose face was expressionless then back to Kaverti, who wore a smug grin. “Destroying demons are never secondary to him.”

They glanced at one another then brought their cynical glares back to her. They knew something pertaining to Demetri and the longer they withheld it, the more anxiety formed in the pit of her stomach.

Sable crooked her finger beneath her chin. “Perhaps you can explain to us why the *creature* is so interested in Sharayna Piers.”

She swallowed a sigh of relief. “The singer? No. You’re mistaken,” she disagreed distastefully. “He would never go for someone like, like *her*. She’s below him—a hood rat.” Demetri wouldn’t be interested in some self-absorbed, hip hop *diva* from the gutter, would he? And when did he have the time to play with some human when all of this was going on? “He has class and she’s just too—”

“Careful sister Indigo. Your emotions for the creature are screaming from your words,” Cypress, the Greek priestess warned. “Jealousy is a distasteful emotion for a woman of your stature.”

“Well said, sister Cypress,” Sable acceded coolly, her glare unwavering. “For your information, *sister Indigo*, he openly confronted that *hood rat* last night and then visited her at the hotel where she stayed.” Her expression softened. “He’s courting her.”

Last night? Impossible! He left her in a rush last night to go find the...Oh by the Gods, then that meant...She quickly erased what began to play on her mind. “No,” she disagreed with the shake of her head. “That’s nonsense—”

“He’s courting her!” Sable’s voice boomed throughout the icy hall. “Yes, we are very aware he was with you last night, but not the whole night, correct?” She snorted in disgust. “If you were paying attention to him like you were ordered to do then you wouldn’t be sitting here stupefied by his actions.” She yanked her

hood from her head, revealing her thick mass of golden-brown hair. “He must be diverted from this obsession before he turns her.”

Indigo glanced at Dominique to get a glint shot right back at her.

The coven had no idea.

“You must get to him before he connects with her. The last thing we need is another demon vampire walking around with power such as his. It would prove to be even more difficult to destroy him if he makes another.”

“What! Destroy him?” Indigo shot to her feet. “I won’t have it!”

Dominique grabbed her hand, squeezed it and yanked her back down.

Indigo winced then glared at her.

“*Watch your tone in front of the council. Contain your emotions,*” Dominique warned with the squint of her eye.

Rubbing her hand and mumbling beneath her breath, Indigo rolled her eyes back across the table to be met several angry scowls.

“Your outburst is insulting sister,” Cypress sneered, pulling her hood back, shaking her brunette locks. “Have you forgotten what the creature has done to this very coven? Have you forgotten what he did to our sister Sable’s brother in blood? You are lost!”

She dipped her head. No she hadn’t forgotten. She hadn’t forgotten the death of Desa, her sister priestess. The young woman wanted retribution for the

death of Sable's brother, her lover. Tears of anguish had wrenched the poor soul's heart for many nights before she gathered up the strength to confront Demetri.

A huge mistake, which cost Desa her life.

"Is what's between *his* legs more important than your love for this coven, your family?" Indigo brought her head up and held Sable's glassy gaze. "Yes, I know, my brother was no saint and had flirted with the forces of hell, but he is a mere speck on a windshield compared to what Demetri could do if he chose to. His unpredictable nature, his lust for blood, his dark power which is ignited with a thought—there are so many reasons why he must be terminated."

"But how can you see this as the sole solution? He only destroys those who are evil," Indigo reasoned. "He doesn't go after the innocent. If you talk to him, you'll see he's—"

"Yet he fed from your bed mate. You are blind child." Cypress's words were coated with disappointment. "All it takes is a whisper from the dark lord to turn him into a plague walking the earth. Don't you understand? He is closer to hell than any of the creatures he demolishes."

"And on top of that, he's unmanageable. He won't abide by our rules set for the supernatural," Kaverti added. "And now, to find he's obsessed with a human who has no idea of his true nature. A celebrity, might I add, which is forbidden. If

he turns her, the world will become aware of what we've worked so hard to keep hidden. He's gone too far this time and must be stopped."

Silence fell between them as Indigo eyed every member of the council. "You question my loyalty to the coven, yet you use me as a pawn," she stated softly, dropping her eyes to her animated symbol shining through the table.

"No Indigo. I had faith that you wouldn't fall for his charm when I charged you to bewitch him."

"But you didn't tell me you had planned to kill him."

A tsking sound came from Kaverti. "We assumed you'd know, considering what he has done."

"You assumed wrong," she whispered, casting a quick glare at Kaverti.

Sable exhaled deeply. "You have every right to be upset with this new turn of events." Stunned by her words, Indigo perked up. "I knew he wouldn't pass your beauty," she admitted. "But it was foolish of me not to consider the physical side of the situation, and how it would affect you. I was eager for his passing after Desa's death. I needed him to have trust in you. And then, as soon as the trust was confirmed, I would've ordered you to kill him. Since the creature thrives on physical attention—what better way to take him out?" An almost sadistic expression fell over her face then it quickly vanished. "That was the plan. My back

was against the wall when I found he'd seduced you with his bite. And in doing so, he's weakened your connection with us when you are with him."

Little did Sable know, she allowed him to do so. When she first met him, she surrendered her mind and body to him, which allowed him to sever the connection with the council while he made love to her.

"The wretched creature holds you in his thrall with lust," Sable sneered through clenched teeth. "I should've known he would do something like that, being you're one of my sister priestesses." Her expression softened. "That's why I sent Dominique in."

Indigo turned to Dominique and met her sorrowful expression. So, she didn't go to him at her own free will. She was only following orders.

"The creature has a weakness for beautiful women born in magic. Dominique was sent to him to right your emotions and set you back on track." To Indigo's surprise, Sable chuckled. "But even Dominique fell prey to his charms."

Shifting her eyes to Dominique, Sable blew a spell across the table. Dominique's hood fell back and her hair brushed from her shoulders, exposing the small puncture marks. Staring wide-eyed at the high priestess, Dominique's chest rose and fell heavily.

Surprisingly, the gleam in Sable's eyes was not of anger and animosity, but of understanding and acceptance. "Two of my strongest young priestesses," she

sighed as if defeated. “It seems I will have to think of another way to rid the world of Satan’s creation.”

“So where are your love marks, my dear sister Indigo? If he marked Dominique, then I’m sure he marked you.” Sheer mockery dripped from Kaverti’s tone.

Indigo knew she wouldn’t get through the night without being gibed by the insolent witch. The woman enjoyed trying her patience.

She rolled her eyes toward her and smiled daringly. “On my pussy.”

“Sister Indigo,” Cypress exclaimed, failing to tuck away a grin.

Snickers and mumbles echoed throughout the space.

Indigo kept her glare glued on her taunting sister. “Would you like to see? Since you’re so interested in what goes on between my legs...”

“Sister Indigo, I understand you are extremely annoyed with this discussion, but you must remember to conduct yourself as a lady in the presence of the council.”

Moli’s voice summoned silence. The stunning Vietnamese priestess pulled back her hood and shifted her eyes to every woman in the room. Indigo looked down when Moli’s gaze came to her. She had royally fucked up if the woman who never spoke during a council meeting had to shut her down.

“If you all are going to behave like children, I’ll go home and be with my own. I don’t have time for this nonsense. If you don’t have anything useful to add to the table pertaining to the demon-vampire or the goddess of the dragons, then you are to remain silent. If you do not know how to do this, then I will do it for you.” Her soft accented warning jarred everyone in the room.

“I’m sorry, sister Moli,” Indigo said softly, hoping her apology was enough to rectify her actions and her distasteful words.

Moli nodded, a signal of acceptance then looked at Kaverti, who sat with her arms crossed and her nose in the air.

“Since you feel there is no need for you to apologize, sister Kaverti, you will have nothing else to say through the remainder of this meeting.”

Kaverti’s eye stretched wide. Her mouth opened to intervene only to realize Moli had pinched her vocal chords. Indigo glanced at Dominique and smirked. Kaverti may be a strong priestess, but there was no way she’d be able to break a spell set by Moli, one of the oldest priestesses in their coven.

“Since neither of you have anything useful to say, I will propose a notion. We should not be concerned with the demon vampire or his minor obsession with the human woman. If he turns her, then so be it. That will be an obstacle to overcome if the problem arises. Right now, our main concern is the Dragon Queen

and the demons crossing into this realm. Is that not why we are gathered here tonight?”

“Sister Moli, if I may,” Sable intervened anxiously. “The Xsonri could make the situation worse if we don’t—”

“Sister Sable, I’m not the least bit interested in your personal vendetta against the creature. My concerns are about the here and now. Besides, seeking out the creature for retribution is suicidal. Have you forgotten he carries the spirit of priestess Katsumi with him at all times? She will surely absorb your soul if you attempt to harm her master. Thank the Gods our sisters did not follow through with your foolish plan, or two additional members of this council would have been lost to us. ”

Sable open her mouth then quickly snapped it shut. A series of emotions crossed her face before she asked in a bitter tone, “What do you propose we do about the Queen? We have no way of tracking her. She’s still in human form. Even the demons can’t find her.”

Moli smiled. “This is where the creature’s existence proves to be useful.”

“What are you saying?”

“Let him find her.”

Quiet murmurs trickled around the room amongst the priestesses.

Indigo glanced nervously at Dominique. “But he can’t sense her,” she lied, breaking into the hums following Moli’s statement. “Her scent is only trailing the demons and pure evil.”

Moli waved her finger. “He can’t sense her *yet*. The Queen is shifting in levels. As you know, the demons are first to sense her, then the shifters, and last but not least, the vampires. For all you know, your lover is sensing her at this very moment. This could be the reason he’s pursuing a human. You know the creature better than anyone in this room. Am I wrong to say this is unusual behavior?”

“No,” she murmured, concentrating on keeping her disposition steady. “What you are saying makes perfect sense, but I just don’t think it’s wise to use him as bait to lure the Queen in. I mean, she’s out there on the hunt for the strongest demon to mate with. I wouldn’t necessarily count Demetri out of the category since he’s part demon.” She wanted to shoot another glance at Dominique but feared it would look suspicious to the council.

They fell silent. Had she said too much? Had she tipped them off on the possible truth? She opened her mouth to retract her previous words when Sable broke the silence.

“And what will happen if he does find her?” She rustled her puffy mane. “We all know he can’t kill her. His aura and strength will compel the Queen to give her

blood to him. What do you think the devil's advocate will do with power that raw?"

Cypress shook her head. "The creature is too smart for that. Since sister Indigo filled him in on the Queen's true nature..."

Indigo tried not to appear shocked, but failed, miserably.

Cypress narrowed her eyes at her. "The next time you decide to take an action against the council's rules and call forth the prophecy guide in the presence of a being other than a priestess, be sure to raise a barrier to conceal your indiscretions." A wry smile curved her lips. "But you are not to be punished for this. You informing him of the prophecy proves sister Moli's edict just." She glanced at Moli and Sable. "As I was saying, since he is aware that the Queen holds both hell *and heaven* in her blood, I'm sure he won't be so anxious to take what's offered to him."

Indigo erupted in laughter and every eye at the table turned to her. "I apologize," she whimpered, trying to tuck away her grin. "It's just that, he's not in the habit of turning down anything offered to him from the female gender."

At her side, Dominique giggled beneath her breath. "If the Queen offers, he's going to take."

The whole conversation became quite amusing to her. It was almost like a toss up, like gambling with the truth.

Moli's eyes squinted jestingly. "Then we'll just have to wait and see what happens."

"Wait and see what happens?" Sable asked, slowly turning toward Moli. "If he feeds from her and her consort finds out, then we'll have a war on our hands."

"There's going to be a war regardless, sister."

"What! A consort?" Indigo exclaimed. She looked to Dominique for answers, but she was just as confused.

"No. Her consort will only come to her during her final shift. By then, she would've killed the Xsonri to make way for her created lover, her king."

"Not if Lucius gets to her first."

"Who the hell is Lucius?" Indigo was on her feet, her hands out in confusion.

Moli shook her head as she continued. "This is why I say let the creature find her. If he finds her, then we find her. As soon as we have her, then we make haste, steer her from the path of hell and prepare her for the coming of the battle angels."

"Well sisters, we must act swiftly," Cypress blurted in a rush. "I don't know if you've all noticed but the full moon holds a scarlet haze tonight..."

"Which means the Queen has tasted blood..."

"And that we're running out of time."

“Hold on a second,” Indigo shouted, her hands pressed to her temples. “This is not making sense. A consort? A scarlet moon? Lucius? The prophecy said nothing of the sorts. What are you talking about sisters?”

Moli stood, held her hand out, palm up, and her colorful element stones appeared. She tossed them to the center of the table and a divination spooled up from the icy circle. “My apologies, sister. We should’ve told you this before springing into our heated discussion.” A yellow flame erupted within the circle then faded to a clouded vision. “You must see this in order grasp the truth.”

“The truth? What truth?”

Sable sighed. “That the prophecy was a ruse.”

Chapter Thirteen

Blood Memories

Blood and tears stained his ivory suit. A woman's body lay limp in his trembling arms, her hair dripping with blood, her flesh torn and mangled, from face to torso. He cradled her against his chest, covering her battered frame in his red cape. His eyes burned in pain as he wailed out to the heavens for her fading soul.

"Mother, please stay with me!"

Howls and screams spilled through the night accompanied with the smell of seared flesh. Ash flurries from the disintegrated ghouls sifted with the breeze and littered the fallen bodies surrounding him. Everyone he ever loved and knew had been stripped from him by a mass of soul thirsty demons.

Placing his hand over her heart, he squeezed his eyes shut and tried to summon his gift to save his dying mother, but his spirit had been injured. Blood and energy was falling away from him. Anger and sorrow rose within and engulfed his being. He no longer wanted to live.

"Demetri." A weak hand dropped on his shoulder.

He looked back. His brother, barely clinging to life, struggled to stay on his feet. His wife, Olivia, held him up, refusing to let him fall.

“Brother please, she is lost to us now. We must go.”

“No Maurisio! I will not leave her, not like this,” he sobbed. “I will stay and perish with her.”

“*Frère, écoutent moi...*” Olivia’s soft voice momentarily eased his pain. The French beauty brushed his bloody hair from his forehead. “They will not stop until the Bithanos family is demolished. We are all that’s left.” Her deep amber eyes held a wolfish glow. “Come with us *frère*. Live...live to fight another day.”

In the midst of his grief, a shadow fell over them. Sluggishly, he turned to look up into a pair of familiar sterling eyes. “Lord Kaishan.”

“My friend, we have run out of time.” Kaishan offered his hand. “Your new life awaits.”



To awaken with an unbearable pain in your heart was like dying.

Rayne couldn’t breathe. The grief and anguish tore her apart. Sweat coated her skin. An uncontainable waterfall of tears ran down her face. No matter how hard she tried, she couldn’t stop crying. She slapped her hands over her face and wailed.

God, was this the pain Demetri carried with him?

“Jesus, please...” she sobbed.

After she stared into nothing for what seemed like hours, she slid out of bed and approached the mirror, which was now in one piece. Her naked skin had a golden sheen to it and more strands of red threaded through her disheveled mane.

She swiped the tears from her face and pushed out an exhausted sigh.

Remembering the events from the night before, she stepped closer to the mirror and pressed her hand to the cool surface. A spark of energy zapped her palm. She snatched her hand back and stared as the reflective glass cast the image of a house surrounded by a golden shield.

“Shrine keepers,” she said without thought.

Reluctantly she placed her hand over the image. The team was there. Their life force streamed from the mirror. Thank God they’re safe, but judging from the familiar scent heading their way, they wouldn’t be for long.

She dropped her hand and shook her head in disbelief. There was no questioning how she knew things out of the blue now. Nothing seemed real anymore. Her life was literally one huge never-ending nightmare.

If she didn’t feel Demetri’s energy pulsing within her own heart, she’d think he wasn’t real either.

“God, Demetri,” she breathed out.

How did he keep going with all he'd been through? How did he find the strength to sooth her anxiety after his mother and his family had been ripped from his life?

If it wasn't for the sun, he'd still be there holding her, rocking her to sleep, telling her how well she'd done and how beautiful she was. He was her dark blessing, yet he'd been damned to suffer so much pain.

"Baby girl, you up?" Sota's voice boomed through the door followed by an annoying series of knocks. "C'mon, let's get moving. Twenty minutes and we're on the road."

Right. Time to slip on the façade and pretend her world was not going to shit.



"Brah, you see this part of my hand right here," Rayne grumbled, glaring at Sota from the passenger seat as they cruised the highway toward Orlando. "It's gonna come in swift contact with your throat if you don't stop that off-key singing. I'm serious. I'll straight Jet Lee your ass. Keep it up."

Sota bellowed out in laughter and sung louder.

During the miles of torture, she surfed the net from her phone, searching for anything she could find on the Bithanos family or Demetri. She found nothing.

Right when she thought her search was useless, six different addresses and phone numbers popped up under the name Maurisio Bithanos. *Gotcha!*

Apparently, Demetri's brother was still alive, or the walking dead, whatever. Either way, he owned six different night clubs—two in Florida, two in Georgia, one in Vegas and one in Louisiana. The closest one to the photo shoot location was Club Night Stalkers, downtown Orlando, about thirty minutes away.

She had to find a way to get out from under Sota's watchful eye, so she could get in touch with him. Maurisio was probably the only one who could tell her where Demetri slept during the day. Sure it was a drastic a move, but hell she was at a crossroads. She needed Demetri like she needed air.

As Roberto, a world renowned photographer, rambled on about his vision of her as a sixteenth century queen, she tried to devise a plan to make her escape. Going out the window was out of the question. The house they'd rented for the shoot had large windows aligned on top of one another on each floor. Even if she was somehow able to climb out the window from the second floor, someone was bound to see her legs dangling through the glass below. There had to be another way.

"You will be an African Queen, an Egyptian Queen, even the Queen of England! Your face, your form—you will make these shots magnificent!" Roberto

shouted, his excited Italian accent drawing all attention to him. “You are the face of Silver Line Beauty, Queens Collection!”

Smiling warmly, she kissed his cheek. “I’m honored. Thanks, Roberto.”

Twenty minutes after stepping into the dressing room, she found herself standing in front of the mirror, dressed in a stiff bustier covered in pearls and lace. It fitted tight over her torso and pushed her breasts up prominently. A matching cone-shaped skirt, trimmed in gold and lace, accented with a combination of pearls and jewels rested on her hips. In addition, a heavy head piece emphasized Brianna’s handy work, definitely giving her the feel of a sixteenth century queen.

Glancing at a photograph then at her hair, Brianna adjusted the headpiece and stuck a pin in her updo to hold the difficult style in place. “Sorry to do this to you, Ray but I couldn’t find a wig with this primed up hair style in such short notice. And don’t think I didn’t notice you dyed more of your hair, girl. What I told you about doing that?”

“I didn’t...” Rayne rolled her eyes and sighed. If she could only tell her...

Brianna inserted another pin then stepped back and eyed her with pride. “A’ight ladies. I think we’ve created the first, black Queen of England.”

Roslyn, the fashion designer giggled and slipped a red, silk finishing garment, accentuated with a wide lacy ruff as a collar over her arms and shoulders to complete the ensemble.

“Uh huh, yes we did. This is my finest work.”

Fay, Roslyn’s assistant clasped a jeweled chocker around her neck. “The *Virgin Queen*, ain’t got nothing on you, girl.”

Rayne would’ve shared their laughter, but her mind was nowhere in the vicinity of the four walls she was trapped in. She had to get the hell out of here. The need to make a run for the car and break away from everybody caused anxiety.

Man, why couldn’t this be easier? Other stars called their own shots, moved about as they pleased with or without a bodyguard, but here she was on lock down, like a criminal.

She eyed Brianna with an idea spooling in her brain. “Hey, uh Bri...”

Brianna grabbed her hand and led her out of the room. “C’mon boo, we’ll chat later. Sota said ya’ll on a tight schedule today and I’m not trying to be the one blamed for setting you back this time.”

Sucking her teeth, Rayne marched onto the set and assumed a pose on the lavish chaise lounge. With her mind distracted, she delivered poses by rote, which had Roberto singing her praises.

History had never been a subject she paid close attention to in school, but she’d seen enough photos and paintings to know how to pull off a convincing shot.

During the fifteenth frame, Rayne locked eyes with Roberto. “Bathroom break?”

“Of course, your majesty,” he conceded with a formal bow.

Gathering the layers of her wide skirt, she rushed off the set and grabbed Brianna’s arm. “I need you to hold all of these layers up so I can pee.” She was careful not to look Sota’s way. Even the slightest glance toward him would shatter her plan.

“What would you do without me?” Brianna laughed as they darted into the bathroom.

“Probably piss all over this dress.” Rayne pushed the door close then spun around to face her. “Bri, I need you to do something really important for me.”

“Yeah, help you pee. Got it.” Brianna reached for the billowy skirt. “C’mon let’s get this—”

“No ma. I just said that...” She looked back at the door then pushed Brianna further into the bathroom. “I just said that to get you out of the room,” she whispered.

Brianna cocked her head and narrowed her hazel eyes. “Okaay. So what’s up? What’s going on?”

She wanted to rake her fingers through her hair as a force of habit, but almost forgot her hair was propped up on her head in some out of date style. “I need to go do something, but I can’t have Sota on my ass when I go do this.”

“And you want me to do *what* about that?”

“I want you to distract him.”

“Distract him? By doing what, Ray?”

She leaned against the counter and rolled her eyes. “I don’t know. Think of something, okay. I just need him out of my hair ‘til I get where I need to be.”

Brianna cut her a side glance. “Okay, a light bulb just when on in my head. You’re actually serious about this?”

“Yees,” she retorted, wide eyed.

“I don’t know, Ray.” Shaking her head, Brianna pushed out a slow breath as if she was asking for the impossible. “Sota’s not stupid. He can pick up a scheme a mile away and on top of that, he hardly says anything to me. The man only talks to me when he’s bossing me around. Know what, you should’ve asked Roslyn to distract him since he’s been throwing eyes at her all day,” she finished on a sneer. “I mean, she’s not even that cute, but I guess with all that ass she got, it doesn’t matter.”

“Bri... C’mon girl. You’re the only one I can trust. It’s not like I ask you to do stuff like this every day.”

“Whateva, Trick. You’re always asking me to do some crazy mess for you.” Snickering, Brianna flipped her burgundy tresses from her shoulder. “So fill me in. Does this so called *something* you have to run off and do have anything to do with a guy?”

Rayne fell silent for a moment then hesitantly nodded.

“Is he hot?”

“Oh, heeell to the yeah,” she drawled.

“Sho’ yo’ right,” Brianna giggled. “Baby boy must got that fire, huh?”

A helpless smile curved her lips. “You have no idea. Ooh Bri, girl, it’s like...”

“A’ight, you’re gonna fess up like right now if I’m supposed to help you escape. I need to hear the juicy stuff.”

Rayne grinned then shook her head. “I can’t tell you ‘bout—okay, I’m just gonna say it ‘cause I have to tell somebody.” She took a deep breath and released it on a giggle. “I had a dream about this guy—I mean, it wasn’t really a dream, but like a surreal vision, I dunno, anyways, I met him yesterday, and I swear to God I’m gonna lose my mind if I don’t get him inside of me soon. Boom, there it is, the truth,” she rambled off without pause.

“Say what now?” Brianna doubled over in laughter.

“I’m serious, Bri. We did like some spiritual awareness stuff last night, and OhmyGod...”

“Spiritual awareness? Girl, he took you to church? Had you shouting for Jesus?”

“I need to feel him again... gurrll. It’s like—I haven’t had an orgasm in months—remember I told you ‘bout that? But, anyways, then he shows up and pops ‘em out like, like a magician...”

“He abracadabraed your ass? Holla.”

“Ahh, I can’t totally explain everything to you ‘cause you’ll think I’m crazy...”

“No doubt about that. I think you’re crazy anyway.”

Rayne squeezed her thighs together and hopped around like a kid on speed. “I’m delirious, I know, but just talking about him gets me so—Bri, I’m so freaking horny right now...” she sputtered. “And, and you know I can’t scratch my itch with Sota around. He’s like the king of cock blocking, for real.”

“Dayum Ray. It’s that bad, huh? He got you ‘bout to break down and flood this bathroom just by talking about him. This is some seriousness. I have to meet this brotha.”

“I’m telling you girl, when I find myself—I mean, when I *really* find myself—I’m gonna sit down and tell you *everything*, but that’s another day. Right now, I need you to flow with this.”

Brianna nibbled on the side of her lower lip then smiled. “Of course I’m flowing, babe. You need your *vitamin D*. Let’s see what we can do about that.”

She stifled back a squeal of excitement, grabbed the sides of Brianna’s face and kissed her hard on her lips, leaving traces of rouge on her mouth. “Thanks boo.

Okay, this is the plan; Roberto's going to shoot the African Queen scene last. As soon as he gets to the twentieth frame, or somewhere around that, get Sota out of the room. I don't care how, just do it."

"A'ight," she murmured slowly. "How long you need?"

"'Bout twenty, thirty minutes."

"Twenty, thirty minutes? What, girl! I can talk shit for five, ten minutes maybe, but anything over that is a stretch. Na-uh, Ray, this is a raggedy plan. Matter of fact, this is 'bout the raggediest plan you done come up with."

"Listen, if you don't keep him occupied long enough, he's going to call the driver and make him bring me back, then our whole plan'll be ruined."

"*Your plan*, not mine," Brianna stated with sassy wave of her fingers. "For real though, how am I supposed to keep him distracted that long?"

Winking, Rayne back stepped to the door. "You're smart ma. I know you'll think of something."



The snaps of the camera clicked like a countdown in Brianna's mind as she stared at the back of Sota's head. His arm bent and his chin resting on his fist, he sat lazily in the director's chair. She glanced around the room. All eyes were on Rayne, who was working the camera with finesse and literally giving the overzealous photographer an eye orgasm.

Periodically, Rayne would lock eyes with her. She didn't need to be told that was a signal for her to make her move. Mr. Italiano was on the sixteenth frame on the African set. She only had four more to get Sota out of the chair, and out of the room.

Smoothing her hands over her denim mini skirt, she eased toward him. She was nervous as hell and unprepared. She had no plan and certainly no clue on how she was going to get him to leave the room, yet here she was approaching him like she had a strategy in place. The things she did for her best friend.

After taking in the deepest breath of her life, she tapped his shoulder. The muscles in his back and shoulders flinched beneath the tight black shirt. She curled her twitching her fingers in to resist the urge to sneak a feel of his physique.

“What Bri?” he mumbled without giving her the slightest glance.

“Uh, I need to talk to you.”

“Later.”

She swallowed hard. “No, it can't wait. I need to talk to you now.”

“I said, later.” The deep rumble of his voice made her to take a step back.

As her heart drummed hard against her chest, she glanced at Rayne who shot her narrowed eye. “Sota please, it's important. It's about Rayne.”

Slowly, he turned and peered at her over his shoulder. “What about Rayne?”

“Come here—I mean, come with me,” she murmured, backing toward the stairway. “We can’t talk here.”

With a suspicious gleam in his eyes, he stood and came toward her. Clumsily, she spun around and led him up the stairs. Controlled excitement bubbled up inside of her.

Once they were on the third level, she hurried into a vacant room and held the door for him to enter. A wide oak dresser and wicker love seat furnished the sizeable, and obviously neglected space.

Sota closed the door behind him, rested his back against it then folded his arms over his hardened pecks. “So talk. What’s going on with Rayne?”

She opened her mouth to speak, but couldn’t say anything. His sexy ass demeanor had her tongue locked.

Finally, she was alone with Sota Piers and all of his striking manliness. This was the day she thought would never come. Ever since she started working for Rayne, she’d had a crush on him. Well, more like a deep down desire to fuck him senseless, but nevertheless a crush. On the down side of things, the man hardly noticed her, never once looked her way for more than a second. But that wasn’t the case now.

His wavy sepia hair draped over his bulky shoulders as he eyed her with a hooded gaze. Sure she wasn't bootylicious and curvy like Rayne, and the women she was used to seeing him with, but she was without a doubt easy on the eyes.

"Well she's, she's been acting weird." Which was the God's honest truth. "I'm worried about her." Also true, but it was hard as hell to sound convincing when her pussy was purring like alley cat. "She won't tell me, but I know something's wrong."

Nodding, he rubbed his hand down his face. "Yeah, she's been a little distant. It's probably the stress of the tour and working on the next album. I think she'll be all right. Just give her a little room. She'll come to you when she's ready."

"You make it sound like it's nothing."

A small smile highlighted his masculine face. "It's nothing for you to worry your pretty head about." He pushed off the door, grabbed the handle and opened it. "Let's get back down stairs. Rayne should be finishing up."

"Wait!" Panicked, she rushed out, wrapped her arms around his waist to stop him, but her hand *accidentally* palmed his dick. Gasping, she shuffled backwards, her hand throbbing from what she'd felt. Dizzam!

"Uhm, I, I didn't mean—damn Sota."

With his back to her, he sighed hard and pushed the door shut. Glancing at her over his shoulder, he locked it. What she saw in that quick glimpse had her clutching at her heart.

“I’m sorry. I wasn’t trying to grab you like that.”

He turned from the door and drifted toward her. Breathing like she’d just ran marathon, she backed up until her ass hit the edge of dresser. He rested his hands on either of her and lowered his face to hers. She couldn’t tell what turned her on the most—the closeness, his delicious cologne or the enchanting spark in his eyes.

“Are you the diversion, Brianna?”

Busted! “Uhh, what, noo.”

“I think you’re lying to me.”

“Huh? I, no, uh-uh... why, why would I lie?” she stuttered.

He snickered and shook his head. “Damn crazy girl...all she had to do was ask.”

He fingers crept up the side of her hips, then he locked his hands around her waist. She jerked at the sudden act.

His voice became stern. “Where is she going?”

“She, uh—I don’t know. She didn’t tell me.”

“Hm. So, how are you going to keep me distracted, Bri?” His hands tightened around her and he lifted her onto the dresser.

“I, I don’t know.”

This was a different side of him, a very different side. He wasn’t reserved and boorish like he’d been all of the years she had known him. Instead, he was suave and turning her on something fierce.

Smiling wolfishly, he leaned in and softly kissed her lips. “I think you do.” Her lips quivered beneath his. Her shaky fingers grazed over his muscled arms. “I’ve been waiting a long time to be *distracted* by you. What took you so long?” He eased his big hands along her thighs and licked her lower lip.

“Dang Sota,” she breathed out.

Closing her eyes, she licked his sweet taste from her lip then threw her head back. The moment his lips touched her skin, she thought she’d melt into a puddle and spill right off the dresser. She grabbed onto his bulging biceps and arched against him. With brute force, he palmed her ass then yanked her hips to the edge.

After he pushed her skirt up to expose her backside, he curled his fingers around the thin strips of her thong then ripped them from her groin.

Along with her shocked squeal, there was an instant gush from her slit.

“Oh God!” Her trembling arms rounded his neck. “Fuck me, please!”

Her hips heaved of their own accord, her core aching to be filled. He pulled her arms from his neck and placed her hands on his thick erection, which wavered for freedom beneath the barrier of his jeans.

“Are you sure, Bri. I won’t be gentle,” he whispered huskily.

“Fuck gentle!”

Teetering like a dick junkie, she quickly unfastened his belt and jeans to release his thick, pulsating python. She gasped. Goodness gracious!

Muscled, just like the rest of his body, his manhood stood proud and true, gleaming in its tan beauty from its curly brown patch to its engorged mushroomed crown.

This man was about tear her ass up, but she’d never been the type of chick to back down from a challenge.

As Brianna handled his heavy meat, he slipped his hand beneath her tank top, palmed her small breasts and took her lips hungrily. Their tongues danced in erotic play, he feeding her, she feeding him. He grabbed her leg, looped it over his shoulder and plunged the blunt head of his shaft just beneath the surface of her opening, spreading her soft tissue. The realization he wasn’t wearing a condom hit her late, but hell, at the moment she didn’t really care.

This was it, the fantasy that’d played in the back of her mind for years. It was surreal. She kept thinking she’d wakeup any minute now.

He slowly withdrew the throbbing head just inside of her, then he pushed back in a little deeper. Her legs shuddered around him, her body screamed and her eyelids fluttered.

“Give it all to me,” she drawled on a moan. “I can take it.”

As soon as the words left her mouth, she knew she’d said the wrong thing. Her walls were already heaving erratically around a quarter of his dick, attempting to adjust to him, and here she was being a gluttonous whore, begging for more than her body could take at the time.

“Don’t be greedy, Bri,” he crooned, plunging in a little deeper into her. “I don’t wanna hurt you.”

Shit, he did hurt her, but the combination of the pleasure and pain was so sweet, she couldn’t tell which sensation dominated her body. It was confusing and delicious at the same time. She wanted more.

Sliding her to the side of the dresser, he laid her back. He wrapped his arm around her leg then bent her other leg around his waist. He flexed his hips back and pulled out of her. Her dewy opening made a gushy, popping sound.

Objection!

An uncontainable groan of protest seeped from her lips as the pulsating walls of her core clutched for him.

Eyes fixed on hers, he caressed her protruding clit with the pad of his thumb, easing the pain circling her channel. While his tantalizing touch worked magic between her thighs, his unwavering gaze changed colors right before her eyes.

Or was she seeing things?

Beaming at her through purple irises, he turned his head and kissed the side of her calf. "Touch yourself," he ordered on a husky huff.

Without hesitation, she pulled her tank top over her head and grazed her hands over her collarbone down to her breasts where she cupped them. His lips parted and his Adam's apple bobbed. To heighten his arousal, she ran her fingers along her areola in a circular motion then pinched and plucked her nipples.

From purple to orange, he watched her through hooded lids, pushing out breaths in heavy spurts.

Brianna licked her lips and rolled her hips to increase his enticing touch. His muscles started to contract. A thick tear of luminous pre cum dropped from his stiff cock. Groaning, he jettied the crown of his shaft into her, still massaging her clit.

She sucked air sharply through her teeth and pushed her hips up to take in more of him. "Ooo shit, Sota!"

To hold her still, he pressed his hand on the base of her belly and buried the full length of his shaft deep inside of her, then just as quickly, he pulled out.

A wail of pleasure got caught in her throat. Her body convulsed with the need to cum as he continued to fondle her sensitive pearl. Again, he pushed deep into her just to withdraw her fulfillment.

Every time he entered her, he knocked her stimulus up another notch, leaving her dangling on the edge of an orgasm. She wanted him to stop teasing her, but couldn't get enough.

"You like that?" he asked, his voice dripping with raw lust.

"Oh yeah! Don't stop!" she shouted, thrashing her head back and forth.

Once more, he penetrated her with graceful force then commenced to pound her rapidly. Clamping his hand over her mouth, he pushed her leg back and grunted with each long stroke he delivered. A violent tsunami of head-spinning delight crashed into her. Her sheath clenched and her juices released to spew all over him. He removed his hand and muffled her cries with his mouth.

The sound of her wet pussy milking his piston-like thrusts sifted throughout the room. He held her tighter and she dug her fingers into his hair. His cock pulsed to the same rhythm of her contracting walls. She swallowed his growls. He picked up speed, plunging her body, battering her core, causing the side of the dresser to slam into the wall repeatedly.

Their session of unadulterated passion was now no secret. His fingers marked her hips, then he juttled into her one last time and unleashed his hot seed deep into her body.

As their heart rates steadied, they absorbed each other's exhausted breaths of release.

"How much time does she need?" he asked, breathlessly kissing her face.

"Bout twenty, thirty minutes, I think," she slurred, wiping at the sweat on his forehead.

He grinned against her lips. "Want to go at it again?"

"Oh hells yeah."

Chapter Fourteen

Eyes of A Wolf

“Pull over, right over there at that restaurant.”

Rayne pulled the royal African gown over her head, folded it and placed it at the end of the leather seat. She removed the decorative wrap from her hair and big bouncy curls fell over her shoulders. Ignoring the pair of eyes staring at her from the rear view mirror, she slipped on a pair of deep purple boots over her fitted blue jeans.

She turned off her cell phone, shoved it in her pocket, and scooted closer to the door. Locking eyes with the driver, she adjusted the sleeves to the printed, silk baby doll blouse that hung tastefully off her shoulders. He scrambled out of the car and rushed around to open the door for her. She took his extended hand and slid on her Prada shades.

“Would you like me to wait for you, Miss Piers?” the driver asked.

Oh damn. Dumbfounded, she stared at him for a moment. She couldn't tell him to leave because he'd pick up the phone and call Sota, but it'd be inconsiderate

of her to tell him to stay when she had no intentions of stepping foot back into his car any time soon.

“Uhm, I’m meeting a friend here, and I’m not sure how long we’ll be. So I’ll call you when I’m ready. Sounds good?” She didn’t really answer his question, but then again, she didn’t intend to.

His brow crinkled in uncertainty, he nodded.

Before he could say anything else, she spun on her heel and strutted into the restaurant.

Yeah, Brianna was right. This was a half-ass plan, but since she didn’t have time to think of anything else, this *half-ass* plan had to work.

The petite hostess grabbed a clip board and smiled as Rayne approached her. The welcoming expression vanished from her face, giving way to a look of shock, then the pad slid from her hands. “No freakin’ way...”

Rayne rushed forward and caught it before it hit the floor then placed her finger to her lips. “I need to be taken through the restaurant, *without a scene* and then out the back door. Could you do that for me?” she whispered, handing the wide-eyed hostess the clip board.

“Yes, yes, of course, Miss Piers,” the hostess answered quickly. “This way.”

Rayne followed the girl through the restaurant and made sure to keep her eyes straight ahead. There were quiet murmurs and gasps from those who

recognized her, but thankfully no one shouted out her name or made an attempt to approach her. The clamor of dishes and the aroma of herbs and spices assaulted her senses as they made their way through the kitchen.

“Here we go,” the hostess said once they arrived at the rear door.

“What’s your name?”

The girl’s whole face lit up with excitement. “Rita.”

Rayne pulled her into a tight hug. “Thanks, Rita. I won’t forget this.” She opened the steel door leading to a narrow alleyway.

“Wait, maybe I can help you. Where are you trying to go?”

“I think I’ll keep that lil’ tid bit of info to myself,” she said over her shoulder.

“Thanks again for your help.”

“If you’re trying to ditch your driver, this is not the smartest way to go.”

Rayne turned and pinned her with a baffled stare.

“Sorry,” Rita giggled with shrug of her shoulders. “Had to state the obvious. The shades are not a good cover up and you’ll have to walk on the outskirts of the building to get the other side. People are gonna notice you no matter how fast you walk. If you tell me exactly where you need to go, I’ll take you there and no one will see you, promise.”

Rayne raked the young woman, who could easily pass for a model, with an appraising gaze. Stylishly, her short blonde hair framed her round face. Her thin

lips twisted into sly smirk and her perfectly plucked brows arched at her scrutiny. That was when Rayne noticed it—the luminous aura surrounding her petite frame.

Could this woman be like the soldiers from last night?

She pushed her shades on top of her head and planted a hand on her hip.

“A’ight, I’m trying to get to club Night Stalkers.”

Rita’s brows raised in surprise. “Wow. Never saw you as the type to hang out at that kind of club.”

“What kinda club are you talking about?”

Smiling, Rita took her hands. “You’ll see. This is gonna feel a little strange.”

Suddenly, the alley blurred. Strips of newspapers and debris wafted up off the ground, swirled around them then disappeared. Rayne blinked then they were standing in an elevator.

“What the—whooaa!” Rayne stumbled back against the wall of the enclosure.

“Yeah, it’s kinda trippy on the first go ‘round, but that’s the worst of it. Next time, you won’t even feel it.”

Amazed and slightly disoriented, she stared at Rita with her mouth gaped open. “What the hell...?”

“Oh, I’m a drifter, or transporter, which ever you prefer,” Rita confessed with a soft grin.

“A drifter?”

She remembered Demetri had mentioned drifters when he’d explained the cloud, but she never thought she’d actually run into one. That was, without a doubt, the coolest ability to have. Jump from one place to the other with the thought... This girl would be handy after a concert.

“You are gonna so love this place. It’s awesome and everybody who comes to this club is soo hot. O.M.G., I swear, if you’re ugly you can’t get in.” Her face flushed with excitement. “I go broke every week partying in this place, but it is totally worth it. The dance floor is on the sixth level.” She pressed the sixth button and the elevator began to move. “VIP on the seventh, casino on the eighth, swingers club and strip joint on the ninth and the private club on the tenth.”

“Wow. Is there anything this place doesn’t cater to?” Rayne murmured, watching the LCD above the elevator doors change to the number four.

Rita laughed. “No, I think all bases are covered. There’s a parking garage on the first floor, but I have no idea what’s on the floors in between one and six. Considering all of the sexy people that come here, I can only imagine what that space is used for.” She grinned sheepishly. “He surely knew what he was doing when he hooked this place up.”

“He?”

“Maurisio Bithanos. He owns this whole building. In fact, he owns all of the buildings on this street. Word is he came out of nowhere years ago with cases of cash and bought up all of this property,” she explained, throwing her hands around.

“Seriously?” Sounded like Demetri’s brother was money-making gangster. “So uhm, do you know how I can get in touch with him, or do you know if he’ll be in the club today?”

Rita tilted her head and gave her a puzzled look.

“It’s just that I called and nobody can tell me when he’s gonna be there. They won’t tell me if he’s in town and they won’t give up a contact number either.”

“Not sure if I can help you with that. I don’t know what time he shows up or even if he shows up every day, but I do know if he finds out *you’re* here, you’ll most likely see him. He has a drifter working for him, so even if he’s in Vegas, he’ll be here in blink of an eye. And girl let me tell you, Maurisio is soo freaking hot, ohhh—like, he is Adonis in living form.” Her lids briefly closed and she shuddered in ecstasy. “God, I hope he does come in today so you can see what I’m talking about.”

Rita smoothed her hands over her sleek hairdo. “I wish I could join you, but I have to get back to work, so I can blow my whole paycheck in here on Friday.

Get my groove on, ya know. Don't let me slip out of your memory, Miss Sharayna Piers *aka Rayne*. Come back and visit me, have dinner even. I'm sure my manager would be thrilled to have you. Oh, and before I leave, can I just say, you are *extra* hot in person, and your hair so rocks. See ya."

Just as the elevator arrived on the sixth floor, Rita vanished.

Blasting hip-hop music invaded the small space when the doors slid open. Two bulky men waited on either side of the opening when she stepped off. Staring at her wide-eyed, they stayed glued to their positions, but acknowledged her with nods.

Unlike Rita, a deep blue glow shimmered around their massive frames. Returning their gesture, she quickly moved past them.

From the sixth floor, she looked up and could see the seventh and eighth level. Blocked off by glass railings and black marble columns, the two floors rotated at a snail's pace. The retro design of the huge dance club was invigorating and classy, but beneath the beauty it held an eerie appeal.

It was the people that gave it that appeal.

They danced and conversed along the lounge areas that circled the perimeter of the dance floor, dressed beautifully in the latest fashions. Rita was right. Everyone she looked at was definitely eye candy.

It was crazy the place was packed like it was Friday or Saturday midnight when it was Wednesday afternoon. Obviously, none of these people had day jobs.

Ignoring the numerous stares, Rayne kept her head down and headed straight for the bar. The bass backbeat of the music pulsed through her as the dancing bodies parted like the red sea to allow her to walk through. Glowing eyes flashed in unison with the multicolored lights that lit up the dance floor. The surreal and scary realization that the glowing eyes belonged to those who were probably not human didn't slow her advance.

Freaked out or not, she wasn't about to leave until she talked to Maurisio.

The bartender, whose nametag read Casey, slid a silver-rimmed martini glass before her. Winking at her, he retrieved a flask from beneath the bar. Along with the vodka martini mix, he poured some scarlet liquid into the glass.

What the hell kind of martini was that?

"Enjoy, Mrs. Bithanos."

Before she could open her mouth, he trotted down the bar.

"Mrs. Bithanos?" She looked past the glowing eyes that stared at her to the bartender. "Yo, I didn't order this!"

Grinning, bartender Casey straight ignored her.

She brought her gaze to the drink. The crimson additive swirled about in alcohol then blended with it. Hesitant to partake of the unfamiliar, she swallowed

hard and tried to look away, but couldn't. It held her in a trance. She couldn't outright drink blood in public, but damn, she wanted just a little sip.

"No one would blame you for tasting it." A soft feminine voice intruded into her private struggle. "It is in your nature."

With a raised brow, Rayne peered to her right. A woman daintily perched on the bar stool next to her sipped on a deep blue martini. Her unnaturally pale skin, accented by the snug fit of her black dress was uncanny. Long, dark blue hair curled past her waist, matching her piercing blue eyes.

"It won't kill you to take a swig," the woman coaxed.

Rayne glanced past the woman then to her left. Everyone watched her and seemed a bit too anxious for her to take her first sip. This was too much damn pressure.

"Naw, I'm good." She pushed the drink forward. "I didn't even order this."

"You didn't have to. The blood hunger is screaming from your eyes."

Rayne cocked her head. "I'm sorry, who are you?"

"Oh, I'm nobody special in here," she laughed gleefully. "My name is Imrie. I heard Casey call you Mrs. Bithanos. Are you related to the owner?"

"No. I mean, not really. It's complicated. I'm still trying to figure out how the bartender knew, or assumed he could call me *Mrs. Bithanos*." It's not like Demetri put a ring on her finger or anything.

A quirky smile twisted her lips. “Oh child, you act clueless, but the evidence is there. Your lover’s scent is all over you and from the smell of things, you’re his for the taking. The title is justified.”

“His for the taking? What the hell...You can smell my personal business?”

“Darling, you are in a club full of shifters. They all can smell your *personal business*.” Imrie gestured toward the dance floor with the flip of her wrist. “And you being in heat doesn’t make matters any better.”

Bewildered, Rayne looked out to the crowd of *shifters* and gasped. Along with the blue auras, she sensed the base animal of every person who glanced her way. There were so many. Wolves, panthers, tigers, hell there were even a few bears in the mix.

Right when she thought things could get any more bizarre...First it was demons, then vampires and Andausians, now shape shifters!

“This can’t be happening,” Rayne groaned.

She spun on the bar stool, grabbed the martini, toasted her new blue haired friend and took down the bittersweet liquid without pause. The metallic tang combined with sugary alcohol rolled down her tongue and exploded with deliciousness at the back her throat. Her head dipped back and her lips parted. The taste was pure ecstasy.

She placed the empty glass on the marble bar, snatched up Imrie's drink, which the woman nursed with elegant restraint, and took that one down too. Her performance drew applause from the onlookers.

"My bad. That was kinda rude...aaand embarrassing. I promise Mama Piers didn't raise me like this," she huffed. "I'll order you another."

Staring with her mouth agape, Imrie chuckled. "Oh my word. You are going to tip right off of that stool if you keep drinking like that."

"Good, then maybe I'll finally wake up from this twisted ass dream I'm having. And for the record, mine taste better than yours," she informed, pointing at the empty glasses. "I should ask him to serve you up the same drink he gave me."

She smiled warmly. "It wouldn't suit me. However, if I were a vampire, I would thoroughly enjoy it, but I am not."

"So what are you? If you don't mind me asking. Can't be a shifter, 'cause I'm not getting that animal vibe from you," she quipped, snickering tipsily. "This is without a doubt crazy." The smile fell away from her as she studied the mysterious woman. "Know what, I don't sense anything from you at all. You don't even have an aura like everybody else. What's that about?"

A wicked smile curved her pout lips. "Of course you wouldn't sense anything from me. I've concealed my spiritual pressure." She paused and raked a hand through her bouncy hair. "For personal purposes."

“Ohh okay. You got it like that? Gotta say that impressive.” Rayne eyed her inquisitively. “So, you must be pretty powerful, huh?”

She shrugged. “Some may say so. I’m a *Hargist*, a demon priestess.”

“Demon priestess,” Rayne drawled. “Hm, sorry to say, those two words just don’t sound right together.”

“Say it a couple of times. Perhaps it’ll grow on you,” she jested with a twinkle in her eye.

“I don’t mean to be nosey, but since you’re all in my *biznez*...I think it’s only fair you tell me a little something personal about you. Like, who are hiding from, ma? I mean, that’s the only reason I can think of that you would *conceal your spiritual pressure*, as you say.”

“My, aren’t you bright. I’m staying clear of an old abusive boyfriend,” she murmured dryly with the casual flip of her hand.

“Ah, I feel ya. Your secret’s safe with me.” Rayne motioned to the bartender for two refills.

His muscles bulging beneath the tight red T, he swaggered over to her all sultry like and filled their drinks.

“Casey, right? That was messed up how you ignored me earlier. You know you heard me, playa.”

Smiling, he tapped the stem of the glass with his nail. “But you enjoyed it, right?”

Under the surface of his gaze, the fierce lion within him came through. Fascinating cattish eyes locked with hers. She was held speechless for a moment then her sights lingered down to the length of his neck. Warmth seeped into the pit of her stomach.

Rayne cocked her head and leaned into the bar. Casey met her halfway. She took a deep whiff of him. Beneath the fragrance of cologne, his blood tantalized her senses. Slow and easy, her fangs extended, both top and bottom.

“Oh, you have two sets of fangs. I’ve never seen that before,” he stated in a dazed slur. “How astounding and so dangerously sexy.”

“You smell so good,” she heard herself coo. “Mind if I have a taste?”

He shuddered, moved in closer and brushed his lips across her ear. “Feeding is not allowed on the main floor, but if you’d like to go up to VIP...” He slipped his fingers into her hair and pulled it to his nose where he deeply inhaled. “You can feed on me as much as you’d like.”

“Yeah?” she whispered, her mouth moving in closer to his neck.

“I’m sure Sir Demetri won’t mind. My blood is pure and I’m not afraid of a Xsonri’s bite, not at all,” he exhaled on a throaty groan.

Suddenly in her right mind, she jerked back and covered her mouth. “Ooo, what just—I didn’t mean to say all that,” she mumbled.

Grinning sheepishly, he shifted his eyes back to normal. “Of course, you did. You can only hold out for so long. Let me know when you’re ready and I’ll clock out.” He back stepped from her, winked then turned to fill another order.

“You may want to take his offer,” Imrie suggested. “Your hunger affects the potency of your scent, and the longer you wait, the hotter the shifters become.”

Rayne quaffed her refilled martini. “I can’t believe I almost... You know, I was halfway alright ‘til you dropped that bomb on me, and the cat eyed boy—I could’ve went at least another week without knowing about shape shifters. It would’ve given me time to digest the other shit that’s been thrown at me in the last fifteen hours. I’m so freaking overwhelmed?”

Curiously, Imrie tilted her head to the side. Her blue hair fell lazily over her eye. “I don’t understand. You are a Xsonri. The existence of shifters should not be a surprise to you.”

Forcing a cordial smile, Rayne tossed the last of the bloody ‘tini down her throat. “Right. That’s why I’m sitting here all discombobulated,” she slurred. The effects of the alcohol started to weigh on her.

“I see...”

“Uh, listen, as you can tell I’m new to all of this and I’m still trying to find my way through a world that didn’t exist for me ‘til, like, yesterday. Honestly, I came here for one thing, to find my man and then get gone. None of this has to make sense to me—I just need him.”

“Child, you have bound your demon to this creature. As a Xsonri, you have the power to find your mate’s exact location and go to him with a thought.”

“You serious?” she asked, her eyes widened in anxiousness. “Well fill me in. How do I do that?”

Her lips curved into a small smile, Imrie eyed her up and down then giggled at her expense. She shook her head and her blue mane bounced over her full breasts. She stood, grabbed her handbag, tossed a twenty on the bar then stepped in close to her.

“I can’t tell you how to do it, I can only show you,” she said softly in her ear. “There is so much more you are capable of, so much that lies within you. Part of your spirit is concealed by the light and it baffles me.”

Imrie reached in her bag, pulled out a pen and paper then scribbled a phone number on it. “I’ll be at the Hilton for another two weeks, then I’ll have to move on. Call me. We’ll get together, have some drinks and *talk*. I’ll tell you all about this supernatural world you live in and also about the world which exists outside of

this one. You have a lot to learn, more so about yourself than anything.” Imrie patted her thigh.

A flash of heat zipped through Rayne nearly knocking her off the stool. Gasping, Imrie jerked her hand back. From Rayne’s thigh, a bright blue surge was attached to Imrie’s palm.

Imrie started to tremble, her blue eyes stretched wide. She clamped her hand into a fist and the connection broke. She stumbled back, bumping into people on the dance floor. Sweat beaded her face. Harsh breaths escaped her in pants.

“Oh my,” she breathed out in an exhausted state. “You must call me. We have *much* to discuss.”

Still dazed, Rayne watched her scurry through the crowd until she was no longer in sight.

Whatever they shared just a moment ago tripped through her system non-stop. It was invigorating, yet incredibly jarring. She turned to the bar and tried to concentrate on the feeling. It was similar to the sensation she’d gotten with Demetri last night, minus the kissing, touching and orgasms of course.

“Just keeps getting weirder and weirder,” Rayne murmured under her breath.

“*Que pasa*, baby?”

She snapped her head in the direction of the unfamiliar voice, then immediately drew back. This brother was in her face like he was her man.

“Whaddup?” Shifting on the bar stool, she turned her body to the side. The angle of her legs forced him to move back a few steps.

“Oh, my bad, ma. The music’s real loud in here. I wanted you to hear me without yelling.”

“You can respect the space, brah. I can hear you just fine over the music.” Hell, he could be whispering and she’d still hear him over the music.

Chuckling, he took a step back. “I just have to say, damn shawty, you are killing a brotha with your sexiness. I mean, when I saw you come in—damn girl.”

He flashed a suave half smile, which was probably supposed to soften her mood, but she couldn’t relax to save her life. She couldn’t even be halfway flattered by his lame ass pick up line. This man gave her the heebie jeebies to the second power. His jittery mannerisms, the strange twitch of his lips, the way his eyes hungrily roamed over her; everything about him made her want to scream, *get the fuck away from me!* Showing out in Maurisio’s club tonight wouldn’t make a very good first impression. Not to mention, she had a reputation to uphold.

“You don’t remember me, ma?” he asked, making steps to move to the side of her.

She turned her legs further to block his advance. If he didn't get the picture she didn't want him near her, he was an idiot. "Sorry, I don't."

"What? Let me refresh your memory, boo. My name is Armando. I did the lighting for your shows in Atlanta and Miami and I'm scheduled to do the one for this weekend."

"That was you, *Armando?*" she jested, forcing a pleasant smile. "Good job. I'll be sure to look for you this weekend."

"Why look for me this weekend, when I'm standing right in front of you, baby?" He posed with his palms out like he was the hottest man in the club. "So how 'bout you run it with me on the dance floor for a song or two?"

She was shaking her head no before he even finished asking the question. "I'm waiting on someone."

"Yeah, I know who you you're waiting on, ma. He's not gonna be around for a while, probably not 'til tonight. So, in the meantime, why not let me entertain you?"

She grinned at his persistent attempt to woo her. "Listen, I'm doing just fine. Don't get me wrong, I appreciate the offer, but I don't need to be entertained." *Especially by a self-absorbed ass like you.* "I see plenty of sexy ladies lined up along the skirts of this place waiting for man like you to sweep them off their feet."

His jaw clenched and his wolfish nature shone through his eyes. “C’mon, shawty! Why you being stuck up?”

Stuck up? She gave him a tight-lipped smile. “If you were trying to get on my good side, you just screwed that up, brah.”

Annoyance flitted across his face, then was swiftly replaced with a grin. “Okay, yeah—maybe I’m coming on pretty strong, but I can’t help it, ma. You’re out of this world gorgeous and I’m just trying to get a dance. *Uno danza*,” he offered, inching closer to her.

She had to admit though, the bumping groove from *Rihanna, Hard* made every limb in her body want to move. She enviously eyed the people on the dance floor grooving to the beat without a care in the world. The dancer within urged her to join the carefree crowd. Maybe she *was* being a little stuck up and over paranoid. The man asked for a dance, not her spleen.

She hopped off the stool and adjusted her blouse. “A’ight, just this one dance. But you’re liable to get a knee to the nuts if you don’t keep your hands to yourself, okay,” she warned with a squint of her eyes.

He put his hands up, gazing at her body as she moved past him toward the dance floor. “No problem shawty. Hands to myself.”

She eased into mass of waving bodies with the anxious guy trailing behind her. She ignored the awed stares of the people surrounding her. As if she wasn’t

allowed to dance and have fun. The music vibrated through her body, making her sway with the rhythm. She closed her eyes and allowed the sound to take her away.

He mumbled something about how good she smelled and how sexy she was, but she was in the zone, too far gone to even give him the slightest attention. The music moved her and everything else around her phased out.

This was where it was at. No choreographed moves where you had to sync with everybody else. Not to complain, but there was nothing like flowing with the music, dancing like no one was watching. It was a natural high.

Armando's hard hands moved around her waist and the DJ flipped the groove to *Ciara and Justin's, Love Sex Magic*. She could dig it. The music bumped through her and the moment was right. If he wanted to cop a feel around her waist right quick, then that was cool, as long as he didn't linger.

Rayne spun around, her hips bouncing to the beat, and gave him her back to look at. He didn't hesitate to wrap his arms around her and ease his hands down a little *too* far. That was when she felt his hard on.

Forget this foolishness!

She grabbed his hands and tried to pull them from around her. His grip tightened. "C'mon *mami, por favor,*" he breathed heavily in her ear. "Don't fight. Let

me feel you.” His hand swiftly moved down her torso, then under her blouse. The other hand slipped between her thighs.

Spooling outrage drove her to lift her elbow and smash him in the jaw. The unexpected strike knocked him back. She whirled around to glare at him. He violently shook his head, like a dog that had just got kicked in the nose.

“You grimy ass muthafucka!” she yelled, her hands balled into tight fists.

Intense rage drummed through her with the beat of the music. Her shoulder blades began to ache and her incisors came forth.

She took off her earrings and handed them to someone behind her. She didn’t even look to see who it was, didn’t really care. Her status and reputation was inconsequential at this moment. She was about to get rowdy and straight up fight this violating bastard in front of everybody.

“Yeah baby, get mad! Oh yeah, that’s how I like it!” He pressed the hand that was between her thighs only seconds ago to his nose.

He inspired deeply, taking in her scent with satisfaction. His eyes rolled back, then he dropped to his knees. With his arms out, he threw his head back. A deafening howl ripped from his throat, then the record scratched.

At that moment, all of the club’s attention was on them. Massive growls shot through the airwaves.

She back stepped away from him.

Then with a movement like lightening, Armando reached out and snatched her back to him to bury his nose in her crotch. She grabbed hold of his hair, yanked his head back and jabbed him hard right in the nose. There was a loud crunch then blood splattered across his face.

Growling, he released her. She scuttled back.

The growls and roars around her did something primal to her being. Deep within, she felt herself changing. The feeling frightened and exhilarated her.

She had to get out of there, fast. She turned to head out of the crowd, when his irritating voice bellowed out.

“Where you going baby? I ain’t finished with you yet!”

She spun around to see him bulked up twice the size, glaring down at her with the eyes of a wolf, a bloody snout and canines protruding out of his mouth. He was huge.

Her stomach clenched and her mouth dried, but she wasn’t about to run. She couldn’t even if she wanted to.

“Oh, you ain’t finished,” she heard herself ask in a low sensual yet, deadly tone.

She stared hard at the scarlet liquid dripping from his snout. *Blood*. She wanted the wolf boy’s blood rolling down her throat. Adrenalin pumped rapidly

through her. A deep growl rumbled within her chest as infuriation and blood lust became her.

A look of confusion flashed across his distorted face. “Yo baby, what you turning into? You’re not just a vamp, are you?”

She winced and damn near snarled. Every time he called her baby, she wanted to rip his fucking insides out.

“Yo dude, what’s wrong with you?” shouted one of the onlookers moving in on him. “You know you ain’t supposed to be messing with Demetri’s broad.”

“You better get your crazy ass up outta here, *hombre!*”

He growled. “What! You think I’m scared of him! I don’t give a fuck about that bitch ass vampire! Demetri ain’t got nothing on me!” He smacked his chest with pride. “You think that white boy knows how to lay you out? Bitch, I’ll have your ass howling at the moon!”

Bitch? Enough said!

The floor cracked beneath her feet. She launched at him. Her right fist connected with his jaw and sent his massive frame crashing to the floor. Everybody scattered. He recouped quickly, shook his head and glared at her, his face lengthening to his true form.

Unfazed, she went at him again.

She felt like a maniac. Determination coursed through her veins. The scent of his blood fueled her intent. She wouldn't stop until he was dead.

Halting her just as she was about to lock her mouth over his jugular, a powerful arm circled her waist from behind. A fist flew over her shoulder and struck her opponent in the face. The sound of bones cracking and shattering zipped through the air. Armando's body flew clear across the club into the cinder block wall, leaving a dent where he landed.

Whimpering, the creature gathered himself on wobbly limbs, shot her a narrowed glare then bolted across the dance floor toward the stairwell.

“Bring me his fucking head!” roared a deep voice behind her.

She watched in astonishment as five men dropped to their hands and knees. Clothes were ripped apart, fur sprouted and bones dislocated, giving way to their massive lupine forms. The big beautiful creatures howled in unison then rushed after the fugitive wolf.

Breathing heavily, she spun around to face the deep voiced stranger.

Profound turquoise irises blazed through the gray lens of the silver metal framed Gucci sunglasses.

“Maurisio,” she breathed out.

Chapter Fifteen

Even In Death

Towering well over six feet, Maurisio was bulkier in stature than Demetri. Wavy dirty blonde hair fell over his shoulders. He rocked an all white suit with a black button down shirt, matching tie and a pair of white loafers. The man looked like he had just stepped out of a GQ magazine.

“You alright?” he asked, tossing a peace sign up in the air without taking his eyes from her.

At his signal, one of her songs came blasting through the speakers. *Get Rowdy in the Club*. How ironic.

Cheering, people scattered about and resumed moving with the rhythm, as if nothing happened.

She briefly closed her eyes and took a slow, unsteady breath. Her heart rate regulated, but then gave way to vertigo. With her palm pressed to her forehead, she attempted to move past him to seek a bar stool, but he grabbed her waist and drew her against him.

“Need me to carry you?”

“No, no. Don’t do that.” She fought to steady her wobbly legs and remain on her feet. “I, I’m good.”

All of a sudden the floor looked like a great place to rest. Before she could get cozy with the smooth marble finish, Maurisio scooped her up in his arms.

“Yeah, I can see you’re good.”

Within his embrace, she felt the sudden rush of air and music surge against her then in split second, all was still. He had carted her into a private elevator. As the lightheadedness eased, she looked up at him.

There was no doubt he was related to Demetri. His mouth, his nose, his eyes and the bone structure of his face were damn near identical to Demetri’s. The only difference was his hair color and the addition of a perfectly trimmed goatee and mustache, which intensified his brutish sexiness.

His jaw was set hard, and his eyes were glued the rising numbers above the elevator doors. It stopped on eleven.

“You’re a wolf,” she whispered, sensing the powerful lupine spirit inside of him.

A quirky smile graced his face. “It would be hard to get any more obvious than that, sweetheart.”

The doors separated and Rayne's discomfort momentarily subsided. Mentally, she blocked out the ear-splitting beat of the hard rock music to access the nostalgic design of his penthouse office.

Black and white tiles checkered the floor. A wide glass desk, tinted blue, dominated the room, and beyond it, an amazing view of downtown Orlando spread out below them through a plated glass wall.

A white, leather couch across from Maurizio's desk welcomed her body as he gently set her down on it. No longer protected by his embrace, the dizziness returned. She drew her knees to her chest.

"Aww man," she groaned. "Way too many martinis."

"Nah, it's not the drinks."

He strolled across the office and drew a sheer red curtain aside, exposing a room, which appeared to be a gaming area. Mounted on the wall was a sixty-inch flat panel television, jazzed up with surround-sound speakers on either side. There were a few guys lounging on an over sized sectional, holding video game controllers while two others were shooting darts.

They all paused to stare at Maurizio, then they turned their gazes her way. An animalistic glow melted over their eyes.

"Get out," Maurizio commanded.

Without a word, they hopped up from the couch and headed for the elevator, casting hungry glances her way.

Once the doors closed, Maurisio unbuttoned his jacket, slipped it from over his broad shoulders and arms then placed it over the back of the dark blue leather chair. Pushing out a hard breath, he took off his shades and tossed them on the desk. For a moment, he just stood there, silently staring at her.

Wincing, she looked away. That seductive turquoise gaze was so similar to Demetri's, it was downright scary.

"Don't look at me like that," she murmured, resting her forehead on her knees.

When he said nothing, she lifted her head to peek at him. She met his unwavering leer and sexy grin. If she didn't know better, she'd think he was finding her uneasiness amusing.

"What are you grinning at?"

"You just don't get it, do you?" He retrieved a remote from the desk and lifted it in the air. The rock music lowered then switched to reggae, *Bob Marley*. He closed his eyes and turned to face the downtown scenery, giving her his back to stare at. "This man is the only person who can sing me out of killing for no reason. And lately, I find myself needing to listen to him, a lot." He dipped his head and swayed with the music. "Can you feel it?"

“Feel what?”

Turning to face her, he leaned against the glass wall and folded his arms over his chest. “The need to kill falling away from you.”

The only thing she felt was the need to get rid of the migraine currently knocking her upside the head. “I’m in tragic shape if Marley can’t get me right.”

“Give it a minute.” He pushed off the glass and pulled a thick blunt from the desk drawer.

She could smell the weed before he lit it and drew in his first deep lungful.

“You’re not seriously gonna sit here and smoke weed in front of me, are you?”

His shoulder shook in laughter. “Hell yeah. This here is gonna keep me on this side of the room...” he pushed out an exhaled a stream of heady smoke. “Away from you.”

She swallowed hard. “Listen, I didn’t mean to start no mess in your club, okay. I came in with the intentions of waiting around so I could talk to you. Next thing I know, I’m on the dance floor with that asshole’s hand down my—”

“I know what he did. But what’s more important is *why* he did it. Understand, I’m not making excuses for his actions, and you should know he will pay for his blatant disrespect to you and my brother with his life.” Closing his eyes,

he took in another deep puff and stroked his goatee. “But I understand why he did it.”

“I’m sorry—come again? You understand why he did it?”

Nodding, he dragged his tongue across his top lip. “Armando’s a loose cannon and has always had more balls than brains. That’s why it’s not hard for me to believe he lost his cool when he was close to you.” He dipped his head back and blew out a cloud of smoke. “For the past few months there’s been a delicious scent in air, swirling about, stirring up demons. I picked up the scent long before the rest of my pack did and I was kinda hoping they’d never get a whiff of it, but then, you walked your sexy ass in the club tonight.”

She cut him a side glance. “I’m not following.”

He lowered into the chair and kicked his feet up on the desk. “The source of the scent that’s been drifting through the air is sitting right here in the room with me, and to be perfectly honest with you sweetheart, it’s blowing my fucking mind. The only thing that’s keeping me level headed right now is my love for my brother, and this island ganja.” He raised his blunt like he was making a toast. “But what’s messing me up even more is the fact you could even possess a scent that affects us like this.”

“Okay.” She unfurled her legs and shot up from the couch. “That’s about all of the foolishness I can handle in one day. It’s obvious I made a mistake coming here. I’m out.”

“You think it’s that easy? You think you can just waltz in here and waltz out, especially after stirring up my pack? I think not.”

“Listen, could you just give Demetri’s address so I can go?”

“No. You’re not going anywhere. Sit your ass down.”

She planted her hands on her hips and cocked her head. “The hell you say...”

Eyes narrowed in a wolfish glare, he shot out of the chair. “Don’t you dare catch an attitude with me! Girl, I swear to God I’ll leap over this desk and pin your ass to the wall! Do not test me! Now squash that attitude, and plant your sweet ass back on that couch!”

Staring bug eyed, she shrunk back down onto the couch. She wasn’t a tamed broad, but she did know when to shut her mouth and do what she was told. His over-whelming energy, which strained the area around them, was not lost to her, nor was the storm that lived within him. It was enough to shut anybody down.

She pressed her hand to her aching head and murmured, “I’m sorry.”

He growled and fisted his hair. “Goddammit Rayne! You already got me fucked up here. You have to understand we’re feral animals—anger and rage from a female is foreplay to our senses, nothing but an aphrodisiac. Shit!” He inhaled

and exhaled rapidly, then turned to the window. “Damn girl, you about to bring out my ‘nines.”

“I’m sorry.”

“Stop apologizing,” he bellowed over his shoulder. “I’m just trying to keep my head, ‘kay. Help me keep my head.”

“Okay,” she said quickly.

The differences between Demetri and Maurisio were now very clear. Maurisio was high-strung, hot-headed and crazy without a doubt, but Demetri on the other hand, was composed, debonair, and suave; in other words, the total opposite of his brother. Maurisio even had a different dialect than Demetri. If she’d never seen his face, she’d think he was a black man.

Apparently, Maurisio changed with the times, and Demetri didn’t.

“Like night and day,” she muttered under her breath.

“As long as you remember I’m *the day* and he’s *the night*.”

She wanted to laugh, but the tension that hung between them prevented her from even cracking a smile.

“I know the repercussions of stepping between a vampress and her kill, especially a Xsonri in heat, but I couldn’t let you take Armando out in my establishment,” he said in a much calmer voice as he reclaimed his seat. “As the alpha and the owner, I have to keep the order, and if I’d allowed you to make a kill

in front of a pack of *very horny* shifters, I would've had a much bigger problem on my hands." He paused to drag deeply from his blunt. "What's your other make, Rayne?"

"My make?"

Leaning back in the chair, he pushed a puff of smoke from his nose. "Your demon is a hybrid, and I can't figure out what your other make is."

"I, I don't know, Maurisio. I just found out 'bout the Xsonri part, demon vampire, or whateva, and I still can't grasp that. Now what are you telling me? I'm a hybrid." Groaning, she dropped her face in her hands. "I can't believe this mess."

"Wait now. Don't get all worked up. We'll figure this out." He stood and tapped a series of buttons on his remote. Steel shutters lowered over the glass panels, blocking out the natural light of the day. "Your aura is twisted and painted in a multitude of colors." Once the shutters were closed, the decorative wall sconces snapped on, casting a soft glow throughout the penthouse. "They fade in and out, some taking over others depending on your emotions." He dragged a hand through his mane as he approached the gaming area. "When you got pissed at me a moment ago, your aura went red, all vamp. Even your scent changed, but on the outer rim of your aura was black and white energy."

"And that means, what?"

He leaned against the white marble pool table. “You gain your strength from both the darkness and the light,” he explained before gently knocking on the pool table. “Let’s take care of that hunger before we continue.”

When he stepped away, the table, which was attached to a wide platform, slid to the side. A large egg-shaped glass sphere rose from the passage opening in the floor. Rayne’s mouth dropped open when she saw a sleeping woman within the transparent orb. The egg opened like a clam shell and the woman’s eyes crept open.

“Rayne, I’d like to introduce you to my colleague, my partner in crime, Mia. She’s the one who keeps shit together when I’m away.” Mia swung her long, milky legs out of the egg then eased to her feet with a sensual grace. “In addition to that, she happens to be a damn good bartender. She can sate that hunger for you. I would give you a live feed, but I’m not exactly sure how affective your bite is, so this will have to do.”

“*Oy Dios mío,*” Mia sung, taking long fluid strides toward her. “You are even more beautiful in person.” The curve of her hips were accentuated by a pair of fitted boy shorts and a white half top. “*Tienes hambre, mami?* Is it my blood you hunger for?”

Captivated, Rayne pushed up from the couch and met her in the center of the room. This woman’s beauty was striking, and oddly familiar.

She brushed Mia's curly hair from over her shoulders and traced her fingers along her jaw line then down the length of her neck. Moaning softly, Mia's lids lowered half-mast.

Unlike Demetri, Mia's skin was cool to the touch.

There was a pearl rosary looped around her neck. The end of it was buried between the cleft of her luscious breasts. Rayne tugged on it, curious to see if a cross dangled at the end, but her attention was diverted to a pair of shiny fangs peeking at her from beneath Mia's plush lips. Eager to taste her, Rayne licked her lips.

From across the office, Maurisio muttered something, but his words were blurred in her mind. She could hear nothing but the soft words coming from the pale-skinned beauty standing before her.

"Por favor, Rayne." She pulled at the top of her fitted tank top, teasing her with the slightest view of her succulent mounds. "Poison me with your sweet kiss."

Rayne stared at the enticing veins beneath her flesh and her mouth watered.

"Mia, I didn't wake you to make my life harder. Come fix her the damn drink so we can talk," Maurisio grumbled.

The sensation of Mia's hands treading gently through her hair made her whimper. "Don't listen to him." Her accented coo flowed over Rayne's body like

caressing hands. “He is a shifter and will never understand the magnetism between two vampires. Your hunger goes deeper than the need for a natural feed. I feel it and it compels me to give you the very essence of my being.”

Rayne looped her finger beneath the sheer material and pulled on it to expose one of her full round breasts. So plump and juicy. She palmed the soft flesh and brushed the pad of her thumb over the taupe erect nipple. Mia sharply sucked air through her teeth and hugged Rayne closer to her body.

“Oh, so ya’ll gonna just ignore me, huh?” Maurisio growled. “Mia, if she bites you, I swear to God...!”

“I have never willingly offered my blood to anyone,” Mia whispered, grazing her fingers along Rayne’s hairline. “And I’ve only desired to be bitten by Demetri, but now, I offer to you my all. My body and blood. *Tome de mí*. Show me what it’s like to be kissed with passion.” A gentle prick of her fang caused a small scarlet bubble to rise up from the center of her tongue.

With a faint cry, Rayne attacked her mouth. Bitter, sweet nectar coated her tongue and heightened her taste buds. Immediately, the lightheadedness fell away from her. She deepened the kiss to absorb more of the taste, then just like that, the sweetness was snatched away.

Through the hazy fog of lust, she watched Maurisio zip Mia across the room, out of her reach.

He turned to face her with his forearm over Mia's throat. Mia struggled and writhed in his grasp. His eyes were slits, irises lined in gold and his canines out in full force.

"I'm trying to keep Katsumi's blade from slicing through my goddamn throat, and ya'll are not helping," he gnarled. "Now, I will say this one more time for the sake of my life and sanity. Make the drink and stop playing with my fucking emotions!" He released Mia and shoved her toward the bar.

Hissing, Mia whipped around and glared at him. "You are so over dramatic! *Dios mío!* I'll be glad when your wife returns from Paris." She cut a glare at him as she headed to the bar. "You are out of control when she's away."

"I'm out of control? I'm not the one serving up titty for dinner!"

"Oh hush. Why did you wake me if you were going to chastise me for something I have no control over? You just wait...when Olivia gets back—"

"Just make the drink, goddammit!"

Olivia.

While they quarreled like an old married couple, the French woman's face came to her mind. "Olivia..." Rayne whispered, blinking rapidly. "Dark brown hair, golden eyes... She's your wife, right? And your maker. The female alpha of the Chalvaiz clan," she rambled off under her breath. "Sorry I'm blabbing. Ever since me and Demetri—I dunno, I pull info from people without trying."

“No. You didn’t get that knowledge from my mind. I’m on lock, darling.” Tapping his temple, he strolled over to his desk. “I would’ve known if you’d slipped past my barrier to read my thoughts.” He flopped into the chair. “That’s the blood memories.”

“Blood memories?”

“You picked up Demetri’s memories through his blood.” Mia sauntered across the office like a floating goddess and slammed a glass of scotch on the desk. The deep amber liquid splattered onto his shirt.

“Thank you,” he grunted, snatching the glass from the desk. “Bitch.”

“Don’t be surprised if you pick up on my memories also. I’m sure they’re not as exciting as Demetri’s. My past is somewhat dull. Here, this should sate your hunger until nightfall. One part Navan and two parts of yours truly,” she stated, handing Rayne a glass full of a deep crimson liquid. “Even the smallest drop could give you visions of a person’s whole life. The blood also keeps you connected to him, and now me. No matter where we are, you will feel us.”

When Mia daintily lowered into the seat next to her, Rayne reached over, looped her finger around the rosary beads and pulled it from her bosom. There, hanging at the end of the beautiful pearls, was a small diamond cross.

“A cross? Well, that’s another vampire myth shattered.”

Like a movie playing in fast forward, Mia's life flitted across her mind. Spellbound by the dark figure, Mia left the safe sanctuary of the church and found herself wrapped in the dark lust of a master vampire. In a matter of minutes, she'd been abducted and turned into a night walker; never see the light of day again.

"Oh, now I see. You were a nun," Rayne whispered, twirling her fingers around the pearls. "God is still with you, even though you're a vampire?"

The sadness in Mia's eyes wrenched her heart. "Si, he never leaves you. You can only leave him."

"But how? I thought all vampires are...damned, per say."

"Yes, but when you hold God dear to your heart, live your life under his glory, your relationship with him never dies. Even now, I feel him all around me, within my dead heart. Some think of me as delusional." Mia paused and offered a pleasant smile. "Night demon or not, I know he still loves me."

"You haven't lost a bit of your faith. Even after some nasty vampire stole your life from you." Shaking her head, Rayne stared at her in disbelief. "I'm gonna need for you to pass some that faith this way, 'cause I'm...I'm drowning here," she finished on a sad chuckle.

"I have plenty faith to give." Mia took her hand and kissed it. "My human life had not been without pain and my life in death has not been without blessings. Here with Maurisio, I hang onto my morality and humanity. It's not the same as

living life under the Divine, but I don't complain because this is the life he has granted me. I give all of my thanks to God for giving Demetri the power to rescue me and bring me here. He was supposed to take my head, after slaying my maker, but he didn't. He saw the light in my heart."

Mia flipped her hair back from her face and dabbed at a blood tear that threaten to drip out of the corner of her eye. "Rayne, I'm not sure what your purpose is, but you have been given the ability to walk in daylight for a reason. Don't you dare think because vampirism flows through your veins you are created to serve Satan. He does not own you," she uttered with a voice of passion. "Remember that when he comes to you, eager to claim your soul."

"I don't think you have to worry 'bout that," Maurisio interjected on a heavy exhale, followed by a cloud of smoke. "Last time I checked, the devil doesn't meddle with the white light, but then again..." He quaffed the scotch in one big gulp before offering her a devilish grin. "You've gotten mighty cozy with my brother and he's the devil's running mate, so to speak. But don't take my word for it. That's just what I've heard."

"What you've heard? He's your brother," Rayne settled back, crossed her legs and took a healthy sip of her blood laced vanilla cognac while Mia played in her hair. "I mean, you should know more about him than anyone else."

“I do, but I can’t say I know *everything* about him. Before he was turned, yeah...now, I’m not so sure. You see a Xsonri is the most unpredictable creature ever created. What you get one night might not necessarily be the same thing you get the next night, which is why I want you to be careful.”

Mia nodded in agreement.

“He’s smooth and convincing without a doubt, but once he flips the script...”

“Flip the script, huh? You’re one to talk, *wolf man*.”

“Touché,” he chuckled, wagging his blunt at her. “Yeah, we may be a little psychotic, but you’re far more frightening than both of us put together, girl.”

Rayne rolled her eyes and murmured, “I don’t think so.”

“Ha! You cracked my fucking dance floor leaping at Armando like a wild ass cat and that’s only a sample of how dangerous you are. I feel what my brother poured into you, and frankly, it’s got me a little concerned. He practically tried to give you his whole damn life force and probably would have if he could’ve. Understand, Demetri’s on top of the food chain. *No one* charms him, and the last person *before you* who got a taste of his blood was his maker.”

“Naw, there was no charming going on,” she argued. “We just have...a super strong connection with each another.”

“Strong connection. I bet.” Grinning impishly, he rocked back and forth in his chair. “This is very interesting to me. My brother hasn’t courted a woman in

over three hundred years, and yet you come along with your sexy chocolate ass, and receive what some female vamps have killed to get, his blood and his heart. That must be some sweet ass you got on you,” he teased with laughing eyes. “It damn sure smells sweet. Did you pop it and roll it for him like you do in your videos?” He jerked in his chair, mimicking her dance moves. “C’mon do it for me real quick.”

“Maurisio!” Mia exclaimed. “Stop it!”

“Oh girl, you have me about to bust all over myself when I watch you. Especially that one video—what’s it called? *Body Language*? That joint right there, whaat—I don’t care where I am, if I even hear that song, I’m putting my dick in somebody.”

Nibbling on her tongue ring, Rayne held back the need to burst into laughter. As mannish as he was, she couldn’t get mad at him. Aside from his roguish charm, he was a straight shooter and wasn’t afraid to speak his mind. The type of man you either loved or hated.

She took a gulp of her drink without taking her laughing eyes from his. “I can’t believe you’re Demetri’s brother. You are crazy, for real. Off the damn chain, literally.”

“And you don’t think he is too? He’s worse than me! The only difference between us is, he hides his crazy and I don’t.”

She giggled then fell silent. As she briefly closed her eyes, images of the dream she had come forth. “You said I have his memories...”

His eyes glazed over in sorrow, like he knew what she was about to say.

“I had a dream about...” She tried to blink away the tears that surfaced with the memorable pain. “Your mother—God, I don’t even know how to ask this.” She couldn’t hold it back. Tears fell unrestrained. Mia leaned over and wrapped her arms around her. “What happened that night, Maurisio?”

Slowly, he took the blunt from his mouth, placed it in the ashtray and stroked his goatee. “Rayne, I can’t...” Wetting his lips, he raked his fingers through his hair then glanced up. “Damn girl, you know how to blow my high. That’s one day I’m still not strong enough to discuss. You’d think after all this time—naw, you can’t get it from me. And don’t even mention it to Demetri. He gets—just don’t say anything about it, ‘kay.” The pain in his voice scarred her heart. “If you have to know, ask my wife when you meet her. She’s the only one who can talk about it without having a nervous fucking breakdown.”

He paused and dipped his head. For the longest time no one said a word. Only the sound of Bob Marley’s voice filtered through the air.

“That day is the reason why Demetri is the way he is, and that’s all I’m gonna tell you ‘bout that.” Sighing, he flipped his hair from his shoulders. “So, I

suppose you want me to tell you where Demetri sleeps during the day, where he lives.”

She wiped at her eyes, glanced at Mia then looked at him. “Yeah, I mean, I would’ve asked him this morning, but the sun—do you think I’m being too—”

“Hasty? Yes, but I wouldn’t give it to you if I didn’t think he wanted you to have it.” Leaning forward, he quickly jotted something down on a piece of paper. “For this, I want you to do me a favor.”

Rayne folded her arms and pursed her lips. “If it requires me doing any of the nasty images you’re sending my way, then that’s a negative, *playa*.”

Mia giggled and Maurisio erupted in laughter. “Had to try.”

He casually lifted his hand and a small gust of wind shuffled the papers on his desk then blew the piece of paper across the office right into her hand.

“Wow,” she muttered, staring at him wide eyed. “You got it like that?”

Chuckling, he leaned back and placed his feet up on the desk. “You don’t know the half of it, sweetheart. Maybe I’ll show you one day.”

She finished the last of her drink, gently set it on the glass cocktail table and stood. “Looking forward to it. Thanks for the drink.” She glanced at the address, folded it then stuck it in her pocket. “And uh, again, I’m sorry about that, uh, lil’ thing that went down in the club. Could you not tell Demetri ‘bout that?”

He stood. “My lips are sealed. But about Demetri and *my favor*...”

“Why do I get the feeling like this is gonna be something I don’t wanna hear?”

“Because it’s not,” he sighed. “I gave you the address ‘cause I know my brother would kick my ass if I didn’t give it to you, but I have to ask you not to go see him after you leave here.”

“You serious? I went through all this mess to get here, got violated by some deranged wolf boy and you’re asking me not to go to him?”

She could feel Demetri all around her, his presence, and could sense he was several miles from where she stood, but she couldn’t pinpoint his exact location like Imrie said she could, and that alone irritated the hell out of her. Knowing he was close, but out of her reach increased her need for him.

Rayne shook her head. “I’m sorry, but...I can’t do that. I need to see him, Maurisio.”

“Let me get this, papi,” Mia interjected. “Because you’re new to this, you should give it time to settle in. Demetri’s blood gives this dark life meaning. *Créame*, I know. But when you leave this place, a dose of *human reality* is going to hit you hard and you might lose it a little bit.”

Rayne huffed. “Listen Mia, I appreciate you trying to explain things to me, but I’m not in the mind set to get lectured right now. I just need him. Easy fix to my problem.”

“Mami, I understand what you’re going through, and it’s hard, but you have to listen to us. He’s in a state of slumber and he needs to stay until nightfall. He expended a lot of energy when he shared his life force with you. If you go to him now, you will awaken his hunger for blood and I know you don’t understand the difference yet—”

“I understand the difference just fine,” she snapped in aggravation. “D explained it to me.”

“He didn’t explain *this* to you. A Xsonri’s blood lust is like thirty new vampires out on the hunt. It’s intense and unstoppable. And I hate to say it, but he will most likely start with you, and kill you in a fit of passion.”

Rayne slapped her hand over her chest and leered at her in disbelief. “OhmyGod! What?”

“Ask yourself this, why didn’t he take you with him this morning, after everything you two shared?” Maurisio pointed out. “Cause he didn’t want to wake up with that urge, and feed on you, that’s why.”

“This is true,” Mia conceded. “You will feel this same lust when you take your full shift as a Xsonri and only then will you understand.”

“Naw, I don’t think I wanna understand that part.”

“Just to clear this up, we’re not saying he would *want* to kill you, Rayne,”
Maurisio added in a calming voice. “He just wouldn’t have a choice. He has to feed that demon inside.”

“When he’s asleep, he can control it. Go home and wait for him. *Créame*, he *will* come to you at nightfall. If you need to connect with him before then, close your eyes and call his name. Talk to him. He’ll hear you, but keep it brief because he may suffer the sun to come to your side.”

The doors to the elevator separated. In walked a woman with long sandy blonde hair and the eyes of a fox. She was decked out in a fitted chuffer’s uniform. Her cleavage protruded from the low neckline. Maurisio swaggered over to her and slapped her ass. The woman yelped like a frightened dog then giggled playfully.

“This is Candy. She’ll take you anywhere you wanna go...”

Candy reached into her pocket and handed him something.

“Except to my brother’s house, of course.” He sauntered over to Rayne with his arm extended. “I think these are yours.”

A pair of platinum earrings dropped in her hand, *her earrings*. The ones she took off before she tried to plant her foot in Armando’s ass.

“Now go home, take a bubble bath or something, whatever you females do when you’re all emotional like this, relax and wait for him. And please, before you

go crazy, try not to think about blood, or the memories my brother passed on to you.”

Not in the mood to debate his command, she nodded and followed the woman onto the elevator.

“Oh and uh, Rayne...” Halting the sliding doors with his hand, he paused and stared at her with a secretive smile plastered across his gorgeous face.

“What, Crazy?” she shouted, trying not to laugh.

He stepped into the elevator, drew her into a tight hug, kissed her temple and whispered, “Welcome to the family.”



When the doors closed, Maurisio turned to Mia and laughed hysterically. “Ohh goddamn, goddamn, goddamn! Leave it up to Demetri to get into some crazy uncontainable shit!”

“Oy vey,” Mia sighed, planting her hand on her forehead. “What is her full make, Maurisio?” she asked in confusion.

“The hell if I know,” he said over his shoulder, heading to his desk. “I tell you what I do know though, she’s a monster. A monster in plain sight! Did you see her aura, Mia?” he asked, pointing at the closed elevator doors. “What the fuck!”

Mia nodded, smiling wryly.

“Goddamn, my brother! The man gets off on dangling on the edge of situations that will explode. And this is definitely about to explode, ‘cause if you know like I know, that girl is packing some serious spiritual force, and she doesn’t even know.” Leaning against desk, he pushed the button to connect to the swingers club. “Drop the shutters. I’m sending Mia down.”

He ran his hand roughly down his face and groaned. “Go find me a few tainted souls ready for the taking. I have to go visit my brother.”

Chapter Sixteen

Spirit Dragon

Imrie shot through the open window of her hotel, room then quickly willed it shut. She drew the curtains close and stared at them as if they would somehow come alive. She blinked rapidly, her senses vibrating to the unseen peril. She spun around, frantically searching her surroundings, deathly frightened about what might be hidden in the shadows. *Chingi*.

The presence of the humans who'd been in her room hours ago lingered. She glanced over her shoulder at the made up bed. Housekeeping.

She looked down at the black filth that covered her favorite dress. "*Sheeki*," she cursed softly. The disgusting remains of her master's henchmen stained her beautiful skin and filled the air with their foulness. "Cursed *chingi*!" She crossed the small room to make sure the door was locked then paced in an anxious circle.

She'd never thought her master would find her in such a human infested realm. She figured she'd be safe here, and assumed his distaste and hatred for mortals would prevent him from traveling to the earthly realms. But his goons had

found her, which meant she was no longer safe here. She would have to make her move sooner rather than later.

Ending her agitated pacing, she stared aimlessly across the room. Even if he did venture into the earthly realm, it would take him centuries to find her in this massive space.

At least she hoped so.

Sighing, she unzipped the back of her dress and slid it from her shoulders, enjoying the silky feel of the human-made fabric gliding over her skin. Once it pooled at her feet, she stepped away from it then murmured a spell. "*Goti ochale.*" And the garment, once known as her favorite dress disintegrated. Now to clean the stench from her skin.

She moved into the bathroom and gazed at her reflection in the mirror. Spots of the chingi blood smudged her face and hair. Growling in disgust, she reached into the shower, turned on the water and watched it spray onto the tile then swirl down the drain. It brought her to mind of the sparkling waterfall on Calroada Island in the demon realm.

Oh, how she missed home.

She stepped under the showerhead, drew the curtain and moaned as the warm water sprayed on her hair and face.

Drawing her attention, a stinging sensation on her hand jarred her. A luminous symbol emerged on her palm. The tail of a serpent-like symbol circled her wrist then a searing heat in her core emitted throughout her whole body and strained her energy. She shrieked in pain and tried to clamp her hand shut to eliminate the agony, but it couldn't be stopped. It was too strong.

She dropped to her knees and uttered every spell she could think of to break the hold of this unknown force, but to no avail. Against her will, her arms were yanked out before her, then suddenly, peace overcame her. She looked down. Her eyes widened in shock. A small glowing spirit dragon whirled around her arms. The creature was fusing with her spirit energy, absorbing the elements of her power.

“Who is your master, little one?” she whispered, no longer attempting to prevent the inevitable.

It gazed up at her, bawled softly then melted away with the water. Baffled, she got to her feet and stared at the hand where the pain had started. An imprint of the mysterious symbol was imbedded deep into her flesh.

She had been marked, spirit and body, but by whom?

“Enjoying your stay in the human realm, Imrie?”

She gasped, yanked the curtain back and came face to face with her master. He glared at her, his eyes black with fury.

His thin, black hair was pulled back into a ponytail. Ashen veins protruded out through his pale, paper-thin skin in a tracery of pulsing anger. His darkened lips, which were horrifically chapped, arched up in a snarl, flashing a mouthful of thin pointy teeth. He was once a beautiful sorcerer but, now he stood before her a ghastly warlock.

“Master Doshar, I—”

A swift, hard blow to her face cut her words short. He grabbed her neck, jabbed her in the face again then shoved her. She tumbled back and her head slammed against the tiles. The deep burgundy of her blood clouded the water as it ran down the drain.

He grabbed her by the hair. She screamed and clawed at his hand, begging him to release her. Ignoring her pleas, he snatched her out of the shower then hurled her through the bathroom wall.

In a fetal position, she lay twitching on the floor, watching him smirk triumphantly at her through the huge hole in the wall. Her wounds healed instantaneously, though her body ached from head to toe.

“My feelings are crushed, Imrie,” he sneered, casually dusting debris from his shirt. “*Extremely* crushed. I went back home expecting to find you waiting for my return. I was eager to bring you in on this quest. Imagine my surprise when I got

there to find my servants dead and my wife missing.” He clasped his hands behind his back and pinned her with a glare. “Why did you flee, my darling?”

Doshar approached her slowly. Determined to keep distance between them, she scooted away until her back pressed against the wood frame of the bed. “I didn’t flee. I...I only came here looking for you, master,” she choked out.

He grimaced as if her words had poisoned him. “You’d dare lie to me,” he hissed through clenched teeth.

With the crook of his finger, he cast a spell that sent a jolt of intense pain throughout her body. Shrieking, she squeezed her eyes shut and suffered the torment that sliced her to the bone. She dug her fingers into the carpet, channeled the pain to the pit of her gut, and then hurled the force of his spell back at him. He doubled over and she struck him once more with a spell of her own, sending him crashing into the shower wall.

The pain ceased. She swiftly regained her strength, shot to her feet and ran toward the window. Prepared to barrel right through it, she willed the curtains open. Before she could make her escape, he grabbed a fistful of her hair, jerked her back and threw her onto the bed.

Giving her no time to recover, he pounced on her, pinned her face down, yanked her arm behind her back, and twisted it until it broke. A bone chilling scream singed her throat.

“Yes! That’s right, my love! Screeeam!” He dragged his nails down her back, raking her flesh open. “Scream all you want!” His weight pressed down on her and his lips touched her ear. “No one can hear you!” he shouted, rattling her eardrums.

Her struggle was futile. Besides the fact there was no more fight left in her, she didn’t have the power to defeat him, so what was the use? She closed her eyes and allowed the pain to consume her. She stopped struggling, even stopped moving and just laid beneath him with her hot tears soaking into the comforter.

“Ah, very wise of you to cease your defiance, you ungrateful demon bitch. Where’s Gye and Qin?”

It took a few seconds to realize he was talking about the two demons he sent after her. She winced. It wouldn’t matter to him she wasn’t the one to kill them. Being the messenger of their demise was enough reason for him to punish her some more.

While trying to figure out a way to tell him to make her punishment less severe, his patience grew thin. A swift punch to the side of her head caused her to shriek.

“Where are they!”

“Dead!” she retorted. “Slain by a pack of shifters! The *chingi* are not welcomed in those parts.”

“In what parts,” he snarled.

“In all parts!” she growled. “They are not welcome *here*. Your foolish demons are slaying senselessly and the creatures of this realm are striking back. Andausians and shifters alike are demolishing your demons and in addition to that, there is a demon slayer about.”

“A demon slayer?” he asked with a hint of skepticism. “So you say.”

He moved off her and released her broken arm. Flinching from the sharp jolt, she held her twisted arm out to the side and allowed it to repair itself. Blood traveled through her limb and back into her fingertips. She sighed with relief.

“Tell me of this demon slayer,” he ordered incredulously, sliding off the bed. “What does he look like?”

Glaring at him, she rubbed her arm and sat up. “I know nothing but what I’ve heard,” she confessed, turning away from his cold stare. “A boorish incubus warned me about him when I first came here.” She glanced down at her hand, taking in the image of the marking once again. “He told me the demons of this realm usually stay out of his path, for his need to destroy our kind is unyielding.” With great concentration, she willed a fleshy shield over the symbol, so she wouldn’t be forced to explain to Doshar what still was a mystery to her.

“So, I am to believe you don’t have an image of this so called demon slayer in your beautiful mind?” He teased her chin with his fingertips.

She jerked her face away and snatched the tightly tucked comforter up from the bed to cover her naked body. “I didn’t read the creature’s mind, so I don’t know what he looks like. However, he did inform me those with human blood on their hands are most likely to taste the end of his blade. So, all I had to do was keep my hands clean.”

“Ah! He kills for mankind. That’s interesting.” He clamped his hands behind his back, and moseyed around the room. “What kind of creature is he? Is he a mortal Andausian?”

“No. I was told he’s a Xsonri, stronger than any other vampire in this realm.”

Doshar stopped to leer at her. “A Xsonri? Xsonris don’t exist in this realm.”

“Says who?”

With a distorted smirk on his lips, he tilted his head. “A demon vampire killing demons, his own kind? How rich!” His words were coated with a tint of beguilement. “I find that utterly amusing! Being damned himself, he has chosen to destroy demons for likes of mortals?”

“I don’t believe he kills for the likes of anyone. If he’s damned, as you say, he’d kill for the mere pleasure of killing. Isn’t that what they do?” she murmured in sarcasm. “Perhaps he’s gotten bored with killing humans. Perhaps he gets more satisfaction in destroying *demons*.”

His eyes narrowed to slits. “Why have I not heard of him, until now?”

“Maybe because he’s not in the habit of leaving any of our kind alive to tell of his existence.” Sensing the heat of his glare on her partly exposed breasts, she gripped the comforter and pulled it higher over her chest.

“Hm. His story intrigues me. I’d very much like to meet him.”

“And you don’t think he’d claim your head,” she questioned, rolling her eyes. “You have the stench of Chingi all over you. You’d be dead before you utter a word.”

He stared at her hard for a long moment. Probably thinking of what else he could do to punish her. It showed on his face.

“I presume this is a wish of yours, for my head to be taken?”

The thought of his headless body twitching at her feet sent shudders down her spine. She was torn between the desire for his death and the longing for the redemption of his soul. She wanted her beautiful sorcerer back.

“There is one more thing about him I should tell you.” Anxiousness clouded his face as she continued. “They say he’s beautiful. You know, the kind of beautiful you *used* to be, before the dark Lord shared his blood with you.”

His fist to the side of her face caused her head to bash into the headboard. “You are never to speak *foul* of our Lord! Never!” he spat, hitting her again, knocking her to the other side of the bed.

She lay trembling, face down. Defeated, she turned her head to the side and gazed at him through blood blurred vision. “I, I only speak the truth, Master Doshar,” she stammered softly. “The sorcerer I loved used to be so beautiful. Look at what *he* has done to you and what you had to sacrifice to be his servant.”

Doshar threw his head back in laughter. “You enjoy being punished...” He reached across the bed, grabbed her by her hair and pulled her closer to him. “Don’t you, my dear Imrie?”

He climbed on top of her, pressed his hand down on the side of her face and smashed her head into the mattress. “The dark Lord has sent me here to retrieve his bride.” He dragged his sharp nails over her rear end. She winced in pain. “And you’re going to help me find her.” He eased his fingers between her rear cheeks and jammed one into her tight hole. “Whether you want to or not.”

Whimpering, she tried to block out the pleasure she felt from his sensual assault. “Please, Doshar...don’t,” she moaned. But it was no use. She hadn’t found anyone to satisfy her since she arrived in this realm and her body desperately needed what he was about to give her.

“Oh, are we now reduced to begging?” His finger delved further inside of her triggering her sweet spot. “It will do you no good, my love. I’ve been craving this ass for far too long.”

And she’d been helplessly craving him.

He drew his finger out and hungrily sucked on it, then sharply sucked air through his teeth. “You may be a disobedient, untamable wench, but you do have the best tasting ass around.” After sucking his finger clean, he shoved two fingers back inside of her tight passage. “Which is why you’re still alive.”

Her body betrayed her. She arched her back, hissing, half repulsed and half aroused as she propped up on all fours to push her rear end back on his hand.

He chuckled. “Say what you want about my appearance, but you know no one will ever be able to sex you like I do.”

He added a finger and began plunging her hard and steady, in and out, spreading her quivering walls. Growling with pleasure, she widened her stance, slipped her hand between her thighs and feverishly rubbed her clit. He gripped her hip and slowed his pace, drawing a howling protest from her.

“Master, please!”

“That’s right. Beg my darling.”

Doshar pushed in hard, fingered her internal pleasure nub, and then withdrew his fingers to thrust them back into her. Mewling, she slurred words in the demon tongue and shuddered with the need to erupt. The distant release swirled at her core, threatening to break free.

Grinding her teeth, she bucked against him to speed his agonizing pace, and right when she was about to come, he retracted his hand.

Anger drove her actions when she spun around and swung at him. He dodged her strike, grabbed her hand and pushed her back on the bed. She spat and kicked at his chest. Guffawing, he pinned her legs to the bed and waved his hand across his jeans. His belt buckle unfastened, his button loosened and his pants zipped down, giving way to his pale, erect length.

Smiling with malice down at her, he grabbed her ankles, pushed her legs back to her shoulders and entered her back end with angry force. Her walls squeezed tightly around him. She released a wailing moan and he howled with her.

“Mm...yes, my love! I love it when you moan like the demon whore you are!” He drew out then rammed back in again. “You *will* help me find my Lord’s Queen.” Deeper, he juttled into her. He moaned loudly when her body gave way and her cream shot from her core. “You *will*...help me find...this so called...demon slayer.” His nails sunk into her thigh, ripping a gurgling scream from her as she spewed yet again. “You will...”

His body began to convulse. He increased his pace, going faster and faster, probing deeper inside of her with each surge. Snarling and slobbering, he tried to will back the orgasm causing his cock to throb frantically within the portal of her body.

She reached out, grabbed his shirt, ripped it off him then dragged her sharp nails down his torso, searing his flesh. His eyes rolled back. A deep cry expelled from his gut and his burning seed erupted deep inside of her.



Level Seven.

Lucius could hear the screams and smell the burning flesh of the tormented souls on the stratum above him. He dragged his eyes open to fowl darkness. Adjusted, his demonic sight raked over the layer of hell, known as the belly of the beast. The walls around him seeped blood and clots of flesh. The scent stirred him from his weakened state and awakened his hunger.

Harpies scattered about, devoured entrails and remains, which showered from the levels above.

This was his prison, a prison he'd soon be free from.

Glowing eyes along with ghouls and growls from the shadows approached him.

Rhanzas, demons with flesh and limbs absorbed from the torn souls of the underworld, a ghastly sight, even for his eyes. They were the scavengers of hell, hungry for his blood and his meal ticket out of here.

Groaning, he attempted to spread his wings, but the stone barrier surrounding his body, prevented him from doing so.

“Soon mother,” he promised beneath his breath.

He knew not how long he'd been incarcerated within his prison, but he did know his Queen was evolving. She waited for him, and needed him. Briefly, he closed his eyes. He could feel her soul and her core begging to be filled.

A rumbling growl shook his chest. “We will be united soon, my love.”

“You are awake, Luciusss?” hissed a serpentine creature, slithering toward him, its body composed of human limbs. “Aahh, I have waited a millennium for thissss.”

“*Master* commanded us to devour you upon your awakening.” Using the mangled human arms as legs, another creature eased toward him, its belly made of bloody entrails. “This will be enjoyable for us.”

“Then what are you waiting for? Come and get me,” Lucius dared with a smile.

Fangs out, they charged him.

Digging his talons into the fleshy floor, Lucius expanded the small amount of his energy until the stone barrier cracked around him. The creatures drew closer.

Roaring, he strained his last bit of force to free his arms. He caught two howling demons in mid lung and smashed their heads together. A mixture of human and demon blood splattered his face.

Blood hunger wrenched his gut and lengthened his fangs. Without pause, he stretched his jaws wide and took chunks out of both the bodies, then bellowed out in blood-curdling laughter as the remaining stone crumbled to his feet.

Shock stamped on their faces, the demons halted.

His sinew and libido heightened with each bite. It wasn't his greatest meal, but it would do. He looked up at the blood soaked ceiling.

"I'm coming, my love."

With flesh and blood dangling from his fangs, he unfurled his leathery wings and glared upon the mass of *Rhanzas* appointed to destroy him. Their shrieks and howls expelled their fear, feeding his dark energy, a delicacy he'd been deprived of for far too long.

Snarling, he took another bite of the limp form clasped in his hand. "What's wrong? Isn't anyone hungry anymore?"

Chapter Seventeen

Shrine Keepers

A light tap sounded at the door.

Father Shannon lifted his head from where it rested on the bible. “Not now.”

He’d been locked in his office for hours contemplating whether or not to take the long journey to Demetri’s mansion. His *friend* had been disingenuous, had not confided his connection with the half-breed. Why in the world would he keep such an important fact from him?

“Father Shannon—”

“I said not now, Sister Agnes. Please.”

He’d given his word he wouldn’t impart his newly acquired knowledge to Demetri, but the more he thought about it...

“But Father, it’s a very important phone call,” she demurred with urgency.

Leaning back in the chair, he sighed heavily. “Sister...” He made an effort to hide the vexation in his tone, but failed. “They’re always important.”

Everyone who called him had a life-altering emergency that needed his immediate attention, but his mind was too distracted to focus on someone in need of a simple prayer.

“Could you please just take down their information and I will call them back.”

“But Father, they’re calling from Japan.”

Nearly knocking everything from his desk, he shot out of his chair and ran to the door. He swung it open a lot harder than he meant to. The door handle punched a small dent into the wall.

Ignoring Sister Agnes’s startled reaction, he stepped through the entrance. “Japan? Are you sure?”

She nodded. “Yes, quite certain Father. It’s Captain Andre Dawson from a Sector Twelve.” It sounded more like she was asking a question than passing on information.

He rushed past her and headed down the hall toward the phone. “Why didn’t you transfer the call?” he grumbled, glancing at her over his shoulder.

She followed quickly behind him. “He didn’t call the church line. He called your cell phone, and you know how bad the service is on the west end of the church.”

First order of business when the contract was up, change his cell phone provider. It was increasingly irritating to be forced to run to the other side of the building just to take a call on his cell phone.

He hurried into the room and retrieved the small device. "Hello, hello."

"Father Shannon?" responded a deep voice from the other end.

"Yes, yes this is Father Shannon."

"Sir, this is Captain Andre Dawson of Sector Twelve. I was told by Father Hamiway to contact you after retrieving Lady Bird."

Lady Bird? He wasn't knowledgeable in the codes used by the special sectors of the arms forces, but he was pretty sure Lady Bird was a code for something of great importance. Perhaps this was what Father Hamiway tried to tell him before their connection was severed.

"Where are you now?"

"In Tokyo. My team and I are staying on the out skirts of the city with a family of shrine keepers until transportation is secured."

Several urgent questions whirled about in his brain, but there was no time. And beyond that, the important information Captain Dawson had shouldn't be discussed over the phone lines.

"Can you link with me?"

“Negative sir. I’m only able to link with those around me. I don’t have the ability to link with anyone from afar.”

Father Shannon couldn’t help but smile. He sensed the young man’s remarkable strength through the phone as he spoke. Captain Dawson had no idea what he was capable of and had not fully explored the true strength of his gift.

“You are stronger than you give yourself credit for, *Andausian*. Do not doubt the gift God has bestowed upon you.” He paused and readied his mind for the long distance mental link. “I know this is a lot to ask of you, but we cannot continue this conversation over the phone. I need you to open your psyche so I may find and link with you.”

After a moment’s pause, the young soldier replied, “Yes sir.”



Steel hung up the phone then turned and looked at Spade, who gave him a quizzical stare.

“What’s the word, Cap?” Spade asked, lazily shuffling a deck of cards.

“Uh, he wants to link with me.”

“You can’t do that...” Spade darted his eyes to Quest then back to Steel. “Can you?”

Shrugging his shoulders, Steel brushed his fingers over his cornrows. “I guess we’ll find out. He told me to open my lines so he can find me.”

“Wait, hold the phone, *buey*. We don’t know this guy like that. *And* we’re right smack dab in the middle of a *demonios* war zone. We can’t afford to just trust anybody.”

“True that,” Spade mumbled, giving Quest a fist pound.

“And you’re talking about opening your mind to this guy? Don’t you know how dangerous that is?” Quest planted his butt to the floor and rustled his hair. “You know what they say, an open mind is *el diablo’s* playground.”

“That’s absurd,” Jade interjected without looking from the window she’d been staring blindly out of for hours. “He’s a priest for God’s sake. Father Hamiway wouldn’t have told you to contact him if he wasn’t trustworthy. We shouldn’t even be discussing this. Just open your lines, Steel.”

Jade hadn’t said a word since she’d woken up, and that was well over six hours ago. So to hear her finally speak up about anything was a big deal. Father Hamiway’s death had taken a heavy toll on her emotions, so they all treaded very lightly around her.

“Alright, I’ll open up, but only if you link in with me, Jade.”

She agreed with the slight nod of her head, but kept her eyes fixed out the window. If someone or something from the outside tried to slip into his open lines, she’d be able to detect it. That gave him a sense of security.

Taking in a deep breath, Steel closed his eyes and a second later, Father Shannon said his name. *“Yes Father,”* he replied in excitement, astounded he’d actually linked with someone clear across the Pacific Ocean.

“Like I said, do not doubt the gift God has bestowed upon you. There is so much more to your power than you know. I pray you’ll become aware of that before the end. Now tell me Captain, what happened at the temple in Osaka?”

“We were attacked by a countless number of demons. They seem to be a different breed from the ones we’re used to battling. We found the method of killing them, but they just kept coming.”

“Did your whole team come out unharmed?”

“Negative sir. We all came out, but I wouldn’t say unharmed. These demons gave us a pretty bad beating, especially the women. We’re not sure what their goal is, but whatever it is, they’re extremely determined.”

“Well thank God you all came out alive.”

There was a brief pause. *“I understand that the absence of my brother’s spiritual pressure means he’s no longer with us.”*

“Affirmative sir,” Steel sighed.

“Is Niomi with you?”

“Yes sir.”

“Is, is she holding up —”

“I’m fine, Father,” Jade assured him softly, breaking into the conversation.

Steel rolled his eyes in her direction. *Fine? She was anything but that.*

“In order to heal the pain, you must acknowledge it first, my child. We will pray together once you arrive.”

“Yes Father,” Jade whispered, lowering her head and slumping against the window pane.

“Tell me about Lady Bird. What is it?”

“Sacred Packages. An amulet, which is in Jade’s possession and the others are two spiritual swords for the Dragon Queen. And before you ask, we have no idea who she is.”

“So that’s what he was trying to tell me before the demons attacked. I assume the demons know you have those items in your possession.”

Steel swallowed hard. *“Yes sir, they know.”*

“When are the military going to send for you and the team?”

“We were told forty-eight hours at the most.”

“No! That’s too long!” His groan of frustration radiated through the connection.

“Within that time the demons would have found you and your team.”

“Uh, they’ve already found us, sir. They’re currently regrouping beyond the prayer barrier set by the shrine keepers.”

“And they’re saying forty-eight hours! You’re sitting ducks!”

Steel snorted in amusement. *“Yes sir. I believe that’s the phrase to best define our current situation.”*

Another groan filled Steel’s mind. *“I don’t understand! There is a government base right there in Japan! Why forty-eight hours?”*

“Oh sir, I thought you knew. This mission is not sanctioned by the government. They don’t even know we’re here. Well, perhaps they do now since we made a pretty noisy exit in Osaka. Our connections back at base are trying to get here as soon as possible, but to swipe a bird under the radar is a bit difficult. That’s why we are at a standstill until they arrive.”

“That won’t do! I’m going to make a call to the ministry’s armed forces. I have got to get you and your soldiers here sooner. You said the women in your team are pretty badly injured. Are they in good enough condition to travel within four to six hours?”

“We’re always in good enough condition, Father,” Jade attested. “No worries about us. This is what we do.”

Steel glinted at Jade’s back with a smile, feeling a dose of pride engulf his heart. *“If you can make it happen, Father, we’ll be ready.”*

“Good. Give me about fifteen minutes and I will contact you with your new travel arrangements.”



Copper slid her eyes open and was instantly overcome with dizziness. Wincing, she pressed her palm to her forehead. She withstood the whirling sensation and shifted her eyes around to check out the unfamiliar surroundings.

The modern Asian furniture in the small space indicated she was still in Japan.

Dim light shone through the small window and faintly illuminated the room. How long had she been out of it?

In the midst of her disorientation, an odd feeling consumed her; a massive pressure from someone's spiritual energy. It couldn't be anyone on the team, because she didn't recognize the force and it didn't fuse with her own. Who was emanating such powerful energy?

The painful tingling sensation, radiating from her abdomen, reminded her of what had happened and who caused the pain. Fucking demons!

She attempted to push up to a sitting position, only to find her body was strapped to the bed. "Bloody hell?"

The *fusuma* door slid open and Blaze appeared. "Hey sleepy head."

Right away she noticed Blaze's right shoulder and arm was wrapped up with an elastic bandage. "You all right?"

“Am I all right?” Smiling, she brushed her long, inky hair from her shoulder. “I should be asking you that.”

Copper attempted to take in a deep breath, but it only caused her more pain. She grimaced when her stomach muscles contracted.

“Can’t even breathe,” she grumbled, clenching her teeth.

“Yeah, it’s going to be like that for a little while.” Blaze slid down into the chair next to the bed. “Me, you and Jade are at the mercy of the shrine keeper’s husband. He’s a healer. The man expended his own soul’s energy just to save our lives.”

“What?”

“Yeah. The demons did us in pretty bad. Internal bleeding, I think. Still kinda foggy on the details.” Sighing, Blaze grazed her fingers across her wrapped shoulder. “We all exhausted our energy to keep fighting.”

They had to. It was the only way they could’ve gotten out alive.

She took in a slow breath to fill her lungs then push out a tad of her pain on the exhale. “How’s Jade?”

Blaze shook her head. “Physically, she’s fine, well except for the leg, but...” She nibbled on her bottom lip and rested her hand on her injured shoulder. “Once she woke up and realized what happened at the temple wasn’t just a bad dream...”

Blinking back the rise of tears, Copper nodded in understanding.

Blaze looked away as she continued. “She’s hard as a rock right now. She’s holding in her emotions. If she doesn’t release the pain, she’s going to self destruct.”

“Give her time. You know we all have our own way of dealing with the inner pain. She’ll break sooner or later. We’ll just have to be there to give her support when she does, to help her press on.” Copper fell silent and smiled at the sound of Spade’s laughter coming from the other room. “What happened after I dropped?” she asked, vaguely remembering the moment when everything went black.

Blaze snickered, but not in humor. “I dropped...then, from what the guys tell me, Jade dropped soon after.” She leaned back in the chair and stretched her legs out. “They carried us to the nearest town where somebody was nice enough to give us a ride to the hospital.” Blaze started to unhook the straps that bound her to the bed. “Before the nurses even had a chance to prep us for the emergency surgery we were supposed to have, the doctors started asking questions...” Blaze pushed out of the chair and held onto her arm to help her sit up. “Questions about the *black substance* we were covered in when we arrived at the hospital.”

Ignoring the throbbing pain in her abdomen, Copper let Blaze ease her up into an upright position. “And they told the doctors, what exactly?”

“They didn’t tell them anything.” Blaze lowered back into the chair. “They went into ninja formation and snuck us out of the hospital.”

Copper chuckled helplessly then cringed at the tinge of pain.

“I’m still trying to figure out how they got all three of us out of the hospital without getting caught.”

“C’mon Blaze, you know we run with the sneakiest blokes around.”

“Seriously,” she murmured in agreement. “But anyway, when I woke up, we were in Tokyo.”

“Tokyo? You’d think they were running on my speed. So when are we going back to the States?”

“Steel is getting the info from Father Shannon right now. I think we’re going to be out of here before nightfall.”

“Good, because I got a feeling those damn demons are going to come after us.”

“Oh yeah, about that,” Blaze sighed. “They’re gathering as we speak. Quest sensed them before they even hit this area code.”

“No lie? Then why aren’t they attacking?”

Blaze tilted her head back and closed her eyes. “Do you feel the spiritual pressure all around us?”

“Chicky, I could be dead and would still feel *that* pressure.”

An amused smirk crept across Blazes’s lips as she opened her eyes. “That’s the spiritual barrier set by the shrine keepers who were nice enough to take us in.”

Blaze shifted her gaze from the ceiling to her. “Locked up tight. The devil himself couldn’t cross this barrier.”

“Bloody fuckin’ right! But then that leaves the question, how are we going to get out of here?”

Blaze nodded in acquiescence, staring at the taupe colored wall. “Good question.”

Fabian entered the room carrying an arm full of medical supplies with the lady of the house behind him. While Fabian organized the supplies on the table next to the bed, the short, rotund woman came to her side and dabbed her brow and temple with a cold cloth.

“This is Mrs. Kahuro, the shrine keeper,” Blaze informed.

Copper closed her eyes and accepted the soothing relief of the woman’s tender care. “Thank you Mrs. Kahuro. Tell her I said thanks, Blaze.”

Fluent in Japanese, Chinese and of course Korean, Blaze uttered a series of words in Japanese, which brought an appreciative smile to the woman’s face. She turned to Blaze and murmured merrily in response to her thanks.

“She said she’s honored to be called upon to help God’s chosen battle angels and would die doing so if that is what’s requested of her.” The woman cradled Copper’s face, kissed her forehead and whispered sweetly to her. “She said the...”

Blaze's brow arched in confusion. "That the half-breed will need us to keep her on the path of righteousness and we are to stay by her side no matter what."

Blaze rested a hand on the woman's shoulder and questioned her in her native tongue. Gently, she patted Blaze's cheek. A warm smile lingered on her face as she left the room.

"I have no idea what that was about." Crossing the room, Blaze scratched her head. "Who is the half breed?"

"Dragon Queen," Quest answered from the other side of the thin door. "I figure that's why we were picked to retrieve her weapons and amulet. We're connected to her somehow, and I think maybe she knows that now. That's why she hit us with that surge, but she didn't do it alone—ay Blaze, hold Cop down so Fabe can pull out the tiny, silicone dick. We need to get this meeting on the way."

"Tiny silicone dick? What the shite is he going on about, Blaze?" Her eyes shifted from the door to Fabian just in time to see him slip his hands into a pair of purple rubber gloves. "Blaze, tell me something before I drop this android."

"Oh. Uh, Fabian's been taking care of our, uh, medical needs," Blaze stammered quickly.

Fabian pulled on the bottom of the gloves to make sure they were securely on his hands then he drew the sheet from over Copper's legs. She stared at Blaze in question.

He placed one hand on her thigh and the other on her chest. “Please lay back, Copper.”

Copper peered down at his hand then cut a curt glare at Blaze.

“Oh yeah, and Quest programmed our war names into his system. So he’s not always saying Lieutenant this and Sergeant that,” Blaze expressed with a playful grin. “Isn’t that cool?”

“I don’t give a shite about that.” Copper eyed his purple gloved hands on her thigh. “What is he doing?”

Blaze rolled her slanted eyes. “Just lay back and I’ll explain it to you.”

Copper slowly did as requested, staring into Fabian’s impassive face. Once her head touched the pillow, he slid his hand higher up her thigh. “Please part your legs.”

“What!” she exclaimed, lifting her head. She ignored the jolt of pain singeing her from the sudden movement.

“Just open your legs,” Blaze ordered, looking like she was trying to hold back laughter. “Stop being difficult.”

“Why—why does he need my legs open? Is he trying to feel me up or something? What kind of android is he?”

Blaze couldn’t hold in the laughter anymore. “He has...to remove...the catheter,” she confessed in between giggles.

“Catheter!”

The word hadn't even left her mouth completely before Fabian forced her thighs apart and carefully, but swiftly removed the *tiny silicone dick*. She gasped as he held up the long tube which had been lodged inside of her urethra a second ago.

“You let him put a tube in my vajayjay?” she asked, glaring at Blaze. “In my vajayjay!”

“He had to! You know you sleep wild. This is nothing new. You battle demons in your sleep. Come on Cop, you see he had to strap you to the bed,” she explained, pulling on the straps. “Your injuries were worse than any of ours, so you had to be locked down while the healer's force worked through you, to keep you alive. And besides that, we didn't want you urinating all over yourself, so in went the catheter.”

“Blimey...” Copper eyes grew big when Fabian pulled a large clear bag of yellowish liquid from under the bed. “Is that my pee?”

Nodding, Blaze snickered.

“Bloody hell,” she uttered, watching him leave the room with bag. “You didn't let the guys see my goods, did you?”

A wicked smirk crossed Blaze's face.

“Did you?” Copper shouted, narrowing her eyes to slits.

“Of course not, silly.”

There was a deep chuckle from the other room. "I always wondered if the carpet matched the drapes," Quest jested smoothly.

"You fuckin' twat!" she screeched at the closed door.

Blaze shot out of the chair. "Shut up, Quest! Don't listen to him. He's just joking, Copper. No one but Fabe saw your goodies."

Like that made her feel better. Some hot android guy getting up close and personal with her snatch. Fabulous!

"So can we come in yet?"

"Not if you don't want my foot up your tight Latino arse!" she shouted, drawing the sheets over her legs.

Leaning against the door frame, Quest slid the door open. "Chill out, mami. Ya know I love you whether the drapes match or not. And besides, I think a fire crotch is sexy," he crooned, a mischievous glint in his steel grey eyes.

Offering him her middle finger, she slowly sat up. "Cheeky bastard."

Mrs. Kahuro entered the room with a large shapely bottle surrounded by five small ceramic cups set on a circular tray. "Sake," she chimed with a smile.

Spade rushed into the room with Steel on his heels. "Sake? You're so talking my language, Mrs. Kahuro." Spade embraced the blushing woman, grabbed a cup and took it down in on gulp. He grimaced and shook his head wildly, causing his

golden curls to bounce about, then he clapped his hands. “Okay dude! Now I’m ready to talk about the ass whipping we got back at the temple.”

“No lie, *buey*. That was embarrassing. But look at it this way...” Quest reached over and retrieved a cup, winking at Mrs. Kahuro. “We could be dead.”

With her cheeks burning red, the woman bowed, then quickly shuffled out of the room.

Copper snorted and pursed her lips. “Oh, for fuck sake, would you wankas stop flirting with our hostess.”

Huffing heavily, Steel sat on the floor, bent his leg and rubbed his forehead. “Let’s get serious people. The block is hot outside and Father Shannon just told me the ministry’s jet will arrive in six hours.”

“Six hours? That’s too close to night fall, Captain. There’ll be more demons.” Blaze drew the curtains and peered out the window. “I can’t see them, but I know they’re there.”

“Oh, they’re definitely there,” Quest attested, wrinkling his nose. “Bet on that.”

“Well six hours is a lot better than forty-eight, so that’s what we’re gonna work with.” Groaning, Steel pushed the back of his head against the wall. “Super demons huh? With powers nonetheless?”

“They don’t usually roll like that, big boy. Somebody was feeding them power to take us out.” Quest leaned against the wall and crossed his ankles. “A warlock is behind this shit. I felt his presence when we went underground to get the girls.”

“That’s probably who conjured the portal,” Blaze added.

“No doubt.” Steel ran his fingers over his cornrows. “We have to hit the first weaponry cache when we get back to the States. And we have to get with base to let ‘em know ‘bout the new breed, see if they can come up with something to take out those big creepas a lot quicker. But I don’t know how we’re going to deal with this warlock. I just wish I would’ve known what we were up against before I pulled ya’ll out on this mission.”

“Ay, we ain’t complaining Cap,” Spade offered, partaking in another cup of Sake.

“No we’re not,” Copper averred. “We’re always up for a challenge. You know that. And at least now we know what’s happening to all those missing girls.”

They all nodded.

“It’s bad enough to know. Let’s not even talk about it,” Spade groaned, retrieving a pack of cigarettes from his pocket.

“Agreed.” Steel reached up and snatched the pack from him. “No smoking in here.”

“Aw c’mon, dude! I haven’t had a smoke since we left the temple! I’m on edge, can’t you see?”

“Bloody right,” Copper expressed. “I think I’m going to go stark raving mad if I don’t get a ciggy soon.”

“Neither one of you is smoking ‘til we get back to the states, especially *you* Copper. Now back to business. Let’s talk about that surge. Quest, you say it was the Dragon Queen...”

“Wait, where’s Jade?” Blaze asked, glinting toward the door. “She needs to be here to hear this.”

“She needed some time alone,” Quest mumbled, reaching for another cup of Sake. He tossed the warm liquid down his throat and sucked in a sharp gust of air. “A’ight the Dragon Queen...From what I perceive, her power is immature ‘cause she hasn’t gotten a hold on it yet, but it was still mind blowing, to say the least.”

“Dude, mind blowing ain’t even scratching the surface. I’m still buzzing from that blow,” Spade confessed, adjusting the crotch of his pants.

“Quest, if her power has not fully evolved, tell me, how was she able project energy into not one, but six Andausians with so much strength. Could you please hand me a drink, Blaze.” Steel gestured toward the tray of Sake. “I swear I almost had an orgasm,” he uttered, gently taking the cup from Blaze.

“*Almost?* Dude, there was no *almost* for me. She pulled a hardcore nut out of me on impact.” Spade’s icy blue eyes glazed in awe. “Just point me in the direction of the Lady Dragon ‘cause I’m dying to get an encore. Rock on!”

“God, you’re a dizzy bugga,” Copper murmured, casting a humorous glance at Blaze.

“Not cool, kitty. You’re not gonna make me think I’m the only one who got sexual satisfaction from that charge. Show of hands, who busted a big fat juicy nut besides me?”

“Naw Spade,” Quest interjected, scratching his head. “We all felt the sexual elements of it. It’s the help she had, her lover, I think. That’s how she knew to project the energy into me. She knew my spirit would pass it to the rest of the team.” He wiggled his fingers in the air, a habitual tendency when he was in thought. “She was confused, scared. There was a lotta shit running through her mind at the time. I think—and I’m just spit balling it here—I don’t think she knew who she was until that moment.”

“That seems a little impossible after what she did to us,” Blaze muttered, picking at the wrapping on her shoulder.

“*Nada es imposible.*” Quest pushed off the wall and rubbed his chin. “What scares me about the whole thing is that the charge she hit us with was laced with a ton of dark energy. At first, I thought she was an angel, but now, I don’t know.”

“If that’s the case then why did Mrs. Kahuro, *a shrine keeper and a follower of the light*, tell us we had to stay close to her?” Blaze questioned with an arched brow. “I don’t mean to question your skills, brother, but I don’t think she’d tell us to stay close to someone laced with evil. Or better yet, I don’t think we’d be connected with someone casting dark energy. The logic is twisted.”

“Twisted?” Quest cut his eyes at her. “Not *all* creatures who possess dark energy are evil.”

The whole team stared at him liked he’d just dropped out of the sky. He dipped his head and rustled his hair.

“Blimey!” Copper gasped, shattering the awkward silence. “What planet are you living on?”

“Seriously dude. We’ve been battling the supernatural for years and I haven’t run into one that’s good hearted yet.”

“Just ‘cause you ain’t run by one doesn’t mean they don’t exist. You can’t just judge all of them like that. If we’re going to do it that way, then we might as well take a closer look at the Andausians we come across,” Quest argued. “Let’s put it out on the table, since we’re on the topic. We’re all supposed to be descendants of angels, but the majority of the Andausians use their powers for personal gain and some of them even kill people. Isn’t that evil?”

“We don’t hunt Andausians, Quest,” Copper scoffed.

“Maybe we should,” he retorted, rolling his eyes in her direction.

“I’m sorry, are you...?” Blaze shifted in her chair like she was suddenly uncomfortable. “Are you seriously arguing with us about this?”

“All of ya’ll need to slow your roll. This has no bearing to our current situation. And we don’t divide over pettiness,” Steel grumbled, his head dipped and his hand clasped at the nape of his neck. “Focus on what lies ahead.”

Quest’s expression was bleak, and then it softened. “Naw, I’m just saying...” With the faint shake of his head, he dragged his hands down his face. “Forget about it. I’mma go check on Jade.”

Chapter Eighteen

Troubled Mind

Jade sat on the floor, silently gazing through the window and listened to the conversation between her team members take a sharp turn to the south—super demons, a warlock, and the Dragon Queen. It had the whole team flustered.

They weren't used to getting beat down by any hell-raised creatures. They'd always been the victors. Now they faced something that sowed uncertainty throughout the group. Would they get out alive or be destroyed by the very creatures they'd battled all their lives?

The odds didn't tip in their favor.

As she blocked out the ongoing discussion, she rested her head against the window frame and tightened her fingers around the sacred piece entrusted to her. Sluggishly, she opened her hand and looked down at the gold wing-shaped amulet. Attached to a gold choker spiraled with silver streams, it gleamed radiantly. It'd been a part of her ever since she regained consciousness.

The promise she'd made to Father Hamiway moved into her thoughts.

For the past couple hours, she'd been trying to think of a way to tell her team she had to find the most feared creature in the world and deliver the amulet to him. *Demetri Bithanos*. She'd been calling to him through the airways ever since she opened her eyes. He hadn't responded, but she had a feeling he heard her.

Cursing under her breath, she lost her fingers in her thick fro. Somehow she had to get him to respond. It wasn't guaranteed they'd make it out of Tokyo alive, and she'd be damned if she was taken away before fulfilling her promise.

She gazed at the heavenly crafted jewel and a question dangled on the edge of her mind. *Why* was she supposed to give this scared item to Demetri? What was the vampire's connection in all of this?

The amulet hung off the side of her hand. The flickering light from the small candle in the corner of the room teased the intertwined strands of silver. The design became animated, casting flashes of brilliant colored patterns along the wall.

"Wow," she breathed out.

Taken by the sight, she moved it closer to the dancing flame. The wings of the fetish expanded then absorbed the light from the wick until the flame died down to nothing.

Her attention snapped to the fusuma door when it slid open. She closed her fingers around the amulet.

Quest appeared in the doorway like a sultry dream. He ambled in with a tray of food balanced on one hand. Those dangerous orbs boldly caressed her. She squeezed her thighs together and swallowed back a whimper.

“I brought you some sashimi, miso soup and Sake.” He set the tray on the low bed and squatted next to her. “Mrs. Kahuro got a lot more where that came from. I swear, that woman cooks almost as much as my mom used to. She’s slick like my mom too.” He tapped the bottle of Sake. “She strained medicinal herbs into the Sake. Guess she thought she had to be sneaky about it.”

Jade eyed the food calling to her stomach then dragged her eyes up to meet his smoky grey gaze. Huffing, she turned to face the window. He sensed her attraction to him and that alone irritated her.

God, why did he have to be here, taunting her with his masculine beauty?

In an effort to put some distance between them, she scooted closer to the wall and drew her knees to her chest.

“You have to eat something, *mami*,” he coaxed softly.

She squeezed her eyes shut and tried to block his voice out, but her lust for him was relentless. “Go away. I want to be alone.”

“*Jade...*”

“Don’t,” she whispered harshly. “God, Quest, there are times when I need to hear your voice in my head.” She pinned him with a pleading glance, before looking back out the window. “This is not one of those times.”

“Jade, I just wanna help.”

“Then please...leave me alone,” she begged, resting her temple against the edge of the window frame.



Ardently, Quest watched her, willing back his rising desire. Her rich swarthy skin tone was a beautiful contrast to the loose, flower printed shorts and the abbreviated kimono. She had unraveled her cornrows. A wavy afro rested along her shoulders.

He peered down at her injured leg where the demon had latched onto her. The gauze Fabian used as a bandage wrapped all the way up to her sexy, muscled thigh. Biting down on his bottom lip, he fought the urge to graze the frazzled material with the tips of his fingers.

“Go away, please.”

His brain, the surprisingly stable part of him, told him to get up and leave her alone, but his body ran solo. She’d been though a lot and he should respect her wishes, but he had a deep down feeling that leaving her alone wasn’t the best thing for her.

He slid the tray of food from the bed and set it in front of her. She shifted her eyes from the window down to his hand. He picked up a piece of sashimi with the chop sticks, dipped it in the soy sauce and brought it up to her lips.

“Quest, what are you—”

“Eat,” he ordered in a seductive whisper.

Those big, beautiful emerald eyes sliced toward him and he thought his heart would stop. She plucked the fish from the chopsticks and tossed it in her mouth. “I don’t need any help feeding myself.” Without taking her eyes from his, she snatched the chop sticks from his fingers. “And I don’t need *you* here, right now.”

She placed slice after slice of sashimi in her mouth, hardly taking a breath, focusing on everything but him. “Jade—”

“Every night!”

He jerked at her sudden outburst.

“Every damned night, up until our mission you had some skanky ass Japanese girl all up on you!” Her alluring African accent deepened with every word.

“*Que?*”

“Just, just get out of here and leave me the hell alone!”

“No.” He pushed the tray of food out of the way and inched closer to her. “I thought we agreed not do this, Jade. I thought we agreed not to let that kiss break us.”

Months ago, on a night after a vicious battle, he gave into his desire to kiss those thick, luscious lips. A kiss he’d always wanted to give her, but feared it would ruin their friendship, which it did. It started out heavy, blood pumping, adrenaline rushed. They were literally ripping at each other’s clothes. He’d been ready to make love to her until they both lacked the energy to go on, but then she confessed he would be her first.

That night, he slammed on the brakes hard and walked away from her sad emerald gaze.

He wasn’t worthy. Such a gift should be given to someone who would be true to her. Not someone like him, a man with a physical weakness for beautiful, exotic women.

She glared at him in disbelief. “You are unbelievable,” she sneered though clenched teeth.

Pushing at his chest, she tried to stand up, but he grabbed her arm and held her in place.

“I know you’re a hoe. The whole team knows you’re a hoe. But that’s not good enough. Every chance you get, you flaunt your playthings in my face!”

“What girl, I’m not flaunting anything in your face.”

“Let me go, Quest!” she demanded, writhing in his grasp.

“Don’t do this Jade. Don’t push me away.”

She landed a blow to his jaw and knocked him on his back. Immediately, she shot to her feet. “I told you, I don’t want to hear your voice in my head right now!”

She stepped over him and headed for the door, faster than he’d expected her to move. Determined to keep her in the room, he pushed up from the floor, ran after her and grabbed her from behind.

In a quick spin maneuver, she broke out of his grasp, then swung her fist to punch him again, but this time he caught her hand. Gripping her arm and mid-section, he tossed her onto the bed. Before he could pin her down, she rolled off, stood and got into a battle stance.

“You picked the wrong day to mess with me, Quest.” She struck him with a hard glare. “Wrong! Day!”

“A’ight.” He yanked his shirt over his head and tossed it on the floor. “You want to kick my ass? Fine. Let’s do it.” He matched her stance. “But you can forget it if you think I’m ‘bout to walk out the door and leave you alone.”

Her eyes grazed down to his bare chest. The tip of her pink tongue darted out to wet her luscious lips. Her hardened nipples pushed out against the silky

fabric of the kimono. A hint of her arousal lit up his senses, flared his nose and increased his blood flow.

Aye cono, she was doing it to him again.

Jade brought her gaze up to his and for a second, he saw pure lust gleaming from those hypnotizing green eyes. A violent shake of her head cleared the spark of desire instantly and gave way to daggers.

She advance and propelled her leg toward his head. He reared back to dodge the strike. The heel of her foot missed his head by inches. As soon as her foot touched the ground, she struck his jaw with her fist. The taste of his own blood swirled about in his mouth.

Rattled, he stepped back to avoid her next attack. She came toward him again with a flying fist, her eyes burning silver. He spun out of her path and grabbed her arm. Her shin dug into his ribs, and dropped him to one knee. Just as she was about to bring her leg down on his head, he crossed his arms up high, blocked it then swept her other leg from under her, bringing her down.

Once she hit the floor, her foot struck him in the side of the head. She scurried away then was back on her feet in no time.

Turned on without a doubt, he rose laggardly and palmed his head with a smirk. Bothered by his enjoyment of the battle, she delivered a kick to the center of his chest, pushing him back against the wall, which he accepted willingly.

Not even an injured leg could prevent her from kicking ass. There was no way she could've gotten any sexier than she was right now. His hardening cock strained against the woven material of his pants.

“Want some more?” He beckoned her with a crook of his finger.

Fury swept across her face. Her lips tightened and eyes twitched. She clenched her teeth as if she was about to snarl, then proceeded toward him again, her fists clutched tight. He shifted to the side on the first strike, caught her arm on the second, spun her around, and then twisted it behind her back.

Grunting, she threw her head back, knocking him in the chin, but that wasn't enough to grant her release. With her free hand, she reached between their bodies, grabbed his semi hard length and squeezed.

Aw shit!

Biting back a groan, he wrapped his forearm around her neck. “Let me go,” he demanded in a hoarse whisper.

She squeezed harder and his body jolted. “No, *you* let *me* go.”

He tightened his hold on her neck and pressed his lips against her ear. “I'll never let you go.”

She stomped down hard on his foot.

“*Aye cono*, Jade,” he grumbled before releasing her.

Stumbling away, she turned and glowered at him. “Why do you keep doing this? Why can’t you just leave me alone?” she shouted.

Words were suddenly lost to him.

Jade’s eyes shifted from emerald, to silver, then to a horrifying shade of white. The lights flashed and dimmed. The furniture in the room elevated.

Maybe he should’ve left her alone. “Baby—”

“No, Quest!” Fat tears formed in her colorless eyes. “It was stupid of me to believe that night meant anything to you! I’m just another piece of ass! You’re just waiting for somebody else to break me in, so you can have a stab at it, right?” She put her hands out. “What Quest! You like ‘em seasoned? You don’t want my virgin blood smeared all over your fine Latino dick?”

“What da—*chica* you talking *loco* shit now! You know damn well that’s not how I feel about you!”

“Quest, everything alright in there?” Steel asked cautiously from the other side of the door.

“I’m handling it.”

“Okay dude, I want to believe you. I really do,” Spade chimed dubiously. “But uhm, it’s kind of hard to do when everything out here’s...floating in midair!”

“I’m handling it,” Quest repeated in much calmer voice. “Stay clear of the door, a’ight.” Carefully, he crept toward her, his arms out, praying his invitation

would calm her. “Baby, lemme hold you for a lil’ bit. Lemme ease the pain that’s burning your heart.”

Shaking her head violently, she stepped back. “No.”

He reached out to take hold of her against her will, and then realized his feet were no longer on the floor. Her white eyes narrowed at him.

Uh oh.

Pushing through her force, he lunged forward, palmed the sides of her face and pressed his lips to hers.

Everything that was airborne dropped to the floor, including him. He landed on his feet, and quickly embraced her. She melted against him and wept like a baby. With a sigh of relief, he scooped her up and carried her to the bed.

“*Uh, she okay now?*” Steel asked.

“*She’s releasing,*” Quest replied.

“*Good. Hopefully she gets it all out before we have to face those demons again,*” Spade added.

“*I’ll make sure she does,*” he promised, spooning against her.

Hands covered her face and she cried uncontrollably. He brushed her course hair back from her temple and noticed something sparkly looped around her fingers. It was the amulet Father Hamiway had given her—the sacred jewel she refused to part with. Keeping it in her possession had to rub salt in her internal

wounds, but asking her to put it down for the sake of her emotions would guarantee another punch to the face.

As time passed, her pain-filled cries died down to soft whimpers and sniffles. Quest held onto her the entire time, hoping the warmth of his body gave her some sort of comfort.

“Why are you still here,” she whispered between sobs.

“*Sabes por qué,*” he replied softly, rubbing his nose along the rim of her ear.

“You know why I’m still here.”

“Don’t do that.” Her body shuddered in his embrace. “You know I hate it when you talk Spanish to me.”

“*Mentirosa.*” Sensing the gradual rise of her body temperature, he tightened his grip around her waist. “You know you love it.”

A sweet moan seeped from her lips as he pushed his hardened cock against her ass. Yeah, a brave move, but he couldn’t help himself.

“Quest...” She wiggled her ass along his length, drawing out a strained groan. “Don’t do this to me again.”

“I won’t do anything you don’t want me to.”

She pulled away. “You can’t be this close to me. It’s messing me up. Please stop.”

He drew her back against him. “It’s calming you.”

“It’s making me horny.”

“Yeah?” He brushed his hand across her injured leg.

She rolled onto her back to look up at him with puffy eyes. “I appreciate you staying with me, but I think you should probably leave now.”

“Not a chance.”

He drew up on his knees and tugged on the bandage. Looking for a sign of pain, he watched her eyes. When he saw none, he grabbed her ankle, rested it on his shoulder and grazed her inner thigh. Her hips jerked and her leg trembled.

“Quest, please don’t do this now. We’re in somebody’s house.”

Like that would stop him.

He started at her ankle, carefully unraveling the cloth to expose more of her skin. Emerald eyes intently observed his every movement. She nibbled on her lower lip, her chest heaving the higher he got. Once the wrapping was removed, he examined her leg.

There was not a single scar where the demon had latched onto her, *not one*. Matter of fact, none of them had any battle wounds, and he’d probably find the same results if he removed Copper and Blaze’s wrappings. He caressed the spot, drawing out a faint groan.

“How’s that feel? Does it hurt?”

“A little, but...” There was a hint of surprise in her voice. “Now that you mention it, it was hurting like hell about a minute ago, but now...”

“A’ight.” He pressed his fingers around the area, gradually working his way up her leg, keeping his eyes focused on her face. “How ‘bout there,” he whispered.

Her brow wrinkled. “This is weird, Quest. Now there’s no pain at all.”

“Uh-huh.”

As he eyed her unmarred flesh, he came across a small symbol on her inner calf. An elongated dragon with two heads and wings, coiled into a ring. *A tattoo?* Now he’d seen Jade’s bare legs plenty times and never saw this tattoo before. *Extraño.*

He rubbed the pad of his thumb over it. It throbbed beneath his touch and surprisingly brought about a soft moan from her full lips. He closed his eyes and sensed a burst of energy emitting from the mystical symbol. Red flashed behind his lids. Deep red hair. Then a tune came alive in his mind followed by the hum of a woman’s voice. This voice was very familiar.

“What?” He opened his eyes to find Jade looking up at him, a tinge of worry in her eyes. “What is it?”

He blinked a few times then forced a smile. “*Nada,*” he whispered, grazing his fingers up her leg before pressing his lips to the symbol.

Arching her back, she moaned again. “Mm, that feels so good, Quest. What’s that feeling?”

“Me, wanting you.”

Watching her lids fall, he lowered on top her and gently kissed her. Her hands cradled his face, her lips quivered against his. Nimble fingers dug into his hair and caressed his scalp. A pair of muscled thighs hugged his waist as the scent of her sex thickened. Soft lips parted, accepting his eager tongue. He caressed her oral member, sucked on it and nipped at it.

He’d suffocate if he didn’t bury himself in her soon. *Paciencia.*

“Quest...”

He ground his hips against her, allowing her to feel just his how badly he wanted her. A guttural moan erupted from her throat and traveled through him, stroking the fires of his desire. He found himself pulling at the silk kimono, deepening the kiss, wanting to swallow her whole. Full breasts pressed into his bare chest. Along with the sensation of her naked skin against his, the sounds of her blood running rapidly through her veins and her body contracting beneath him drove him wild. *Paciencia!*

Sliding down her body, he lapped and kissed the tense muscles in her abdomen. As he drew closer to her mound, he eyed her pleasure stricken face. Eyes closed, mouth agape—a picture of pure lust. A smirk tugged at his lips as he blew

lightly on the wanting sex peeking at him from beneath the baggy shorts. Her hips lurched and shuddered. He held her down and nipped at the soft flesh at the base of her inner thigh. Feverish pants flowed throughout the small room.

She whispered his name in urgency.

He could feel the increase of her heartbeat, sense the shift in her emotions. Part of her wanted him to stop and the other part wanted his teasing kisses to never end. He would help remedy her disarray right about now.

“Jade...”

Her lids lifted lazily. The eroticism beaming from her sparkling irises took him over the edge. Drawing the crotch of the shorts to the side, he pressed his lips to her soft, juicy folds. He smiled against the sensitive flesh when her thighs opened wider for him. He inhaled deeply, taking in the scent of her sex, which temporarily blocked out the foul stench coming from the demons gathered beyond the shrine’s barrier. She smelled so damn sweet. His mouth watered to taste her.

“Oh, Quest please, ohh...”

“Oh Quest please, what?” He darted his tongue between her pussy lips and stole a taste of her sweetness. “Mmm, tell me what you want me to do.”

“Oh, ohh God. Pleeaasee lick me!”

Wiggling his tongue over her clit, he wrapped his arms around her thighs. Soft pubic hair laced with her juices tickled his nose and lips, compelling him to

bury his face deeper into her warm patch. She rolled her hips up to grind her pussy against his starved mouth. He groaned against his will, squeezed her tighter and fought the urge to jam his tongue inside of her tight haven. Goddamn patience!

She tensed at the sound of Copper and Spade arguing with one another in the adjacent room. “Oh God! No, no. Wait, Quest. Not here. We shouldn’t...”

He looked up and locked eyes with her. “Aww, *mami*. Don’t try to stop me now. Baby, I’m there. I got to have you.” He lapped at her folds, making her to stir. “You have to let me do this, baby, please.”

She nodded hesitantly and raked her fingers through his hair. That was all the answer he needed.

Releasing her, he sat up on his knees and grabbed the sides of her shorts. Those seductive eyes bored into his as her hips rose, so he could pull the fabric free from her backside and down her legs. Aimlessly tossing the shorts aside, he stared down at her solid, toned frame.

She was so damn beautiful.

She looked up at him, her thighs shaking. This time not from lust, but from fear. Not fear from the ghastly creatures waiting outside the barrier. No. She was frightened by what he was about to do to her.

He ran his hands up her thighs and panic washed over her face. She wasn't ready. Even though her body ached to have him, her mind and emotions were twisted. This wasn't the right time.

"I'm sorry, Jade. I won't do this if you're not ready." He crawled on top of her and studied the anxiety in her eyes. "You know I won't hurt you, right?"

"I know," she sobbed, covering her face bashfully.

He lay next to her and pulled her in his arms. "I'm no good at this, Jade. I wanna love you right, but I want you so bad, I can't..."

"Quest, I'm just as anxious as you are and I know it's a little different for you to be with somebody not...*experienced*." She sucked in a shaky breath and wiped at her puffy, strained eyes. "You're so sexy—my God," she breathed out. "I'm just so scared."

He wet his lips and looked at her with an arched brow. Why was that flattering? Probably because the Jade he knew wasn't afraid of shit, and if she was, she'd *never* admit it. The woman took vamp heads like nothing and destroyed demons without thought, but she was afraid to be with him?

"Of course I'm afraid," she murmured, returning his quirked brow. "I don't know what to do with myself when you're around—the way you look at me sometimes... This is not like battling demons and vamps, Quest. This is a lot deeper

than that. I want you to be the one to take my virginity, but I'm scared I'll turn out like those other girls you've been with—"

"Jade..." he drawled, staring at her, too shocked to let her go on. "Please tell me you didn't just read my mind."

Her eyes widened. "No."

Quest nodded slowly. "Si, you just did it."

"But, I can't do that. I, I can't read minds," she stammered. "No..."

"Unless, that's one of the gifts Father Hamiway left you with."

She covered her mouth. "Oh my God," she mumbled beneath her hand. "I can't believe this."

Erection gone.

Swallowing hard, Quest inched away from her. Uneasiness took a hold of him as waves of emotions flittered over her face. *Aye cono*, she was reading his mind and it was evident she couldn't help it.

In all honesty, the devilish side of him wouldn't mind her catching a glimpse of some of the nasty sexual shit sifting through his head on a regular basis, but allowing her to see those things left his mind open for her to see *other* things. Things that had to stay locked away from her, and the team. He had to get his ass out of the room before she picked up on something that could ruin his relationship with his comrades.

He shot up and headed for the door. A loud gasp caused him to spin around. Her hands stuck to her temples, she shook her head like she was trying to stop the images from flooding her mind.

Too late, she'd already picked up on his deep, dark secret.

He met her gaze then turned away from her.

"*Quest*," she called softly when he slid the door open. He stopped in the doorway, but refused to turn to face her. "*I won't tell them.*"

Closing his eyes briefly, he nodded. "*Neither will I. Get a hold of it first before you break out your new ability in front of the team,*" he muttered, before walking out of the room.

After he closed the door behind him, he took a deep breath, rustled his hair, then moved over to where Copper lounged and dropped to his knees in front of her. She stared at him like he was crazy, clamped her knees together and cocked her fist.

"Try it, and I'll knock your pretty boy arse into another dimension," she warned.

He rolled his eyes and reached for her wrapping. "Don't flatter yourself, Cop. I just wanna see something."

Surprisingly, she let down her guard and allowed him to remove the cloth. Once her *un-bruised* skin was exposed, his assumptions were proven correct. An

identical symbol to the one on Jade's leg was now imprinted just above Copper's belly button. And just like Jade, she had been completely healed without any knowledge of it.

The whole team crowded around her and stared at her new tattoo.

"What's that?" Blaze murmured, reaching for it.

Quest caught her hand. "Don't touch it. It gives off sexual stimulus."

"What?" Copper gasped.

Spade's eyes lit up like a Christmas tree. "Really? Stellar!"

Laughing, he reached over Blaze to brush a finger across the forbidden spot. Jolted, Copper's bright hazel eyes grew wide, and then she threw a flash strike right across Spade's jaw.

The blow slammed him to the ground and pushed him across the floor into the wall. Struggling to right himself, he handled his jaw and smiled. "Righteous. No more pain, huh kitty?"

"None at all, you cheeky fucker," she replied, squinting at him.

Quest turned to Blaze and she'd already un-wrapped her shoulder. "Hey I have one too. Do you guys have one?"

Quest stood and began to pace. "I don't think any of us men have the symbol, but it doesn't mean one's not coming." He stopped and stood at the

window. “It had to come from the surge but, I’ve never heard of an energy surge marking anyone before.”

Closing his eyes, he pressed his hand to the glass. Through the mass of angry demons, the Queen’s emotions stirred with his. She was wrapped in turmoil and distress and it heightened by the moment.

He dipped his head and huffed. “*Buey*, there is no way this is going to get better any time soon. The shit is about to hit the fan.”

Everyone fell silent. Blaze, the positive thinker of the team, didn’t even have anything uplifting to say. The future that lay ahead of them hung on a deathly thin tread, and even though they were trained for such difficulties, none of them were truly ready to accept the destiny handed to them.

“So uh, what does a double headed dragon mean?” Blaze asked, severing the silence.

Just then, the shrine keeper’s husband came into the room, a cane guiding his steps. With solemn features, the grey haired man muttered a series of words in his native tongue then pointed to the ceiling. A trail of light followed the movement of his fingers as he traced the symbol of the two headed dragon in the air, then graciously bowed and left the room.

“He said it signifies the battle of light and darkness, good and evil that will rage within the half-breed’s soul. He also said those who are marked with the

double headed dragon were chosen by the field commander of the Army of God to protect the half-breed demon, who was created through Heaven and Hell.” Blaze stood and tapped the glowing emblem to have it melt into fog and scatter around the room. “Once the Queen crowns her King, the men will be marked also.”

“Ahh, Heaven and Hell,” Quest muttered beneath his breath. “Now it all makes sense. I told you that surge was laced with dark energy.”

“So we have to protect her? Dude, how come I don’t feel all warm and fuzzy inside about that?”

“Because we’re going to go to war, brother,” Copper drawled with a grin. “It explains why the archangel Michael chose us to protect the queen. *He is* the field commander of God’s army.”

Quest erupted in laughter. “I love how you said that all calm-like. Like it’s not a big deal.”

“Man, I had a feeling this mission would take us for a long haul.” Steel stood and heaved out a hard sigh. “If any of ya’ll want to opt out when we get back on US soil, I completely understand. We have one hell of a battle coming our way and nine times out of ten not everyone is—”

“Sector twelve never separates,” Blaze intervened, her eyes flashing silver. “We do or we die, that is our pact. Remember? I don’t know about you all, but I

made a promise to God to follow the path he leads me, and since the *general* of his Army has called us out, I mean to answer that call.”

“Bloody right!”

“Opt out? And miss out on a lifetime of killing demons? Whatever dude...” Spade slapped Steel on his shoulder. “You owe me a smoke for even offering that bullshit, man.”

Rustling his hair, Quest turned from the window and strolled over to Steel to give a fist pound. “You know me, *buey*. I’m in it to win it. Let’s get rested up so we can kill these demons and find the one we’re supposed to protect.”

Chapter Nineteen

Blood Buffet

Sex.

The scent and the sound of it flooded his chambers, rousing him from a deep slumber. A hot, wet mouth sucked greedily on the head of his cock. Moans accompanied every slurp. Another mouth latched onto his scrotum, purring, suckling and tugging him gently toward climax. The strange women drew a deep growl from the pit of his chest.

Demetri reached down, grabbed a fistful of silky hair and pulled the gasping woman's face close to his. He opened his eyes to a startled, lust-filled stare.

"Who are you darling?"

Without thought, the question slurred from his mind, but before she could answer, he sought out her throat. She squealed, but embraced his head to freely offer the life-giving elixir he so desired. Hot blood filled his mouth. Taking in every bit of her, he groaned, wishing her essence was coated with evil. It would make the extraction so much sweeter.

As he gradually took from her, a warm cunt slid down the length of his stiff shaft followed by a sultry howl. Dazed from the awakening, he took hold of the woman on top of him and bucked up into her, bringing about a scream of release.

Sharayna. How he wished it was Sharayna.

He withdrew his incisors from the neck of the woman whose heartbeat had become faint in his grasp. He'd unthinkingly taken too much from her. With the simple tap to her forehead, he drifted her from his chamber to the hospital. Then he reached up for the woman shuddering on top of him, who spilled her warm nectar down his lance, and pierced her breast. She showered him, yet again.

Life eased away from her as he drank deeply and ravenously. He ripped his mouth from the quivering flesh and studied her ashen face. He wouldn't let her die. There was no reason to. To the hospital she went.

Unable to focus on anything but the scent of the aroused bodies in his bed, he rolled onto his stomach and pushed up on all fours. *More blood.* His vision was blurry, but his other senses were keen.

He could hear them calling to him, moaning his name, seductively taunting him.

Desperately, he ran hands along the silk sheets, until his fingers brushed a foot. He grabbed the woman's ankle and dragged her beneath him. A playful shriek

invigorated him. On her stomach, the woman bowed her back, drew up onto her knees, then spread her thighs to offer her warm pussy to him.

Oh my...

If he were in a calmer state of mind, he'd take the time to enjoy the lovely image of eroticism she presented. This was the same position Sharayna displayed to him in her moment of lust.

"Oh, my love," he whispered.

Growling with the need for his angel's essence, he grabbed the woman's backside and pushed the length of his cock to the hilt of her core. Her wail held such sweet ecstasy.

At the moment he entered her, something became very clear to him. Their blood was tainted with an alien substance. He'd been drugged. The realization hit him a little too late and was useless now. The monster had taken a hold of him and it needed to be fed.

Clutching a handful of the woman's hair, he plunged his engorged member in and out of her with no tenderness, no emotion, and no mercy. Cries of pain and pleasure bounced off the walls, and rippled the water surrounding his bed.

Bellowing for a release that was lost to him, he pulled the woman up against him, fondled her voluptuous globes then sunk his fangs into her jugular. Her blood

was a little sweeter than the others, pussy a little tighter. She was corrupt and utterly delicious.

He drew from her slowly, savoring the vital fluid, bucking feverishly into her throbbing sheath. Her screams drowned out the pounding in his head. Her life was fading, but he couldn't stop heaving into her. The sliver of sin in her soul had him locked in. It was madness!

Another woman embraced him from behind and pressed her full breasts into his back. It gave him the incentive to release the woman in his clutches and teleport her before he could claim her life.

When his arms where empty, he squeezed his eyes shut, dipped his head back and roared.

Goddamned this inner demon!

For mental balance, he pushed out a harsh breath and attempted to steady his mind and gain control of his being, but it was futile. He reached back, grabbed the woman behind him and pushed her on her back. More blood. He shook away the cloudiness in his brain and stared deeply into a pair of enticing, chocolate colored eyes. This one was a shifter, and was not the least bit afraid of what he was about to do to her.

No fear? He'd change that.

As his eyes roamed over her soft honey toned flesh, he dug his fingers into her dreads. The course tresses massaged his hand and made him chuckle. It felt nice. With her hair fisted in his grip, he plunged deep inside of her. She grabbed onto his shoulders and braced against him, clenching her teeth, growling, refusing to scream.

“Oh you will scream for me.”

He juttred into her, intently watching her face, listening to the flow of her blood. Her plump, round breasts bounced to the pace his unrelenting thrusts. The moment her body bowed and her mouth opened wide to scream his name, he struck, claiming her throat in animalistic passion.

Fear revealed itself.

Her guttural shriek rattled his eardrum. Forcefully, he drove into her one last time to send her over the edge of spurting bliss. Unlike the others, he didn't drain her to near death. He just took enough to make her to lose consciousness.

Groggily, he moved off her motionless body and rolled onto his back. He slapped his palm to his forehead and stared at the ceiling, painted as a replica of a blue, clouded strewn sky on a hot summer day.

The effects of the drug weighed heavily on him. He had the urge to laugh for no apparent reason, touch his own body just to examine the softness of it. What on earth...

“Maurisio!” he growled.

The large golden doors to his chamber crept open.

Chuckling, Maurisio appeared in the doorway, carrying a tray of raw, bloody steak. “Insurance, baby bro,” he announced, sauntering across the wide walkway that hovered above the plain of water. “I had to make sure your ass was nice and calm before I came in.”

“This is outrageous,” Demetri grumbled, dragging his hands down his face. “I’ve never attacked you, let alone given you a reason to suppress me with drugs.”

Maurisio cut an incredulous eye at him. “True. But you and I both know the situation is a bit different now, isn’t it little brother?” He sat on the edge of the bed and rested the tray next to him. “I don’t smell death.” He sniffed at the air. “Hospital?”

“Morgue.” Demetri willed a pair of silk pajama pants over his naked legs.

His brother erupted in laughter. “You’re full of shit, man. Nice to know the demon doesn’t have full control of you though. If you would’ve killed those girls, I would’ve felt like an ass for bringing them over here.”

“As you should. Speaking of which, why did you bring them over here and what did you give me?”

Maurisio reached in his pocket and extracted a thin cigar and lighter. “Ain’t nothing like waking up to four sexy bitches and the smell of pussy in your bed,

right? Did you even check out the spread before you started eating, with your greedy ass?" he finished on a snicker. "Oh these bitches were fine, bro! All exotic cuisine. Thai, Brazilian, and some Mexican and Jamaican to add a little spice to your pallet."

Demetri closed his eyes and tried to move past the resulting mellow sensation that rippled through his body. Another useless attempt. Neither his brain, nor his body wanted cast away the assuasive feeling.

"What did you give me?" He laced his repeated question with a low threat.

Unmoved by his forced anger, Maurisio placed the marijuana riddled cigarette in his mouth and lit it. "I figured a man in your position would've appreciated it." Drawing deeply, he gleamed at him. "A lil' liquor, a lil' dank, a lil' X, etcetera, etcetera..." he muttered nonchalantly. "It'll be out of your system in the next thirty minutes. By the time it wears off, the beast will be dormant again."

A well thought out plan to ensure his safety, but dicey still the same. "And if it would've had the opposite effect?"

"I would've got my ass the hell out of dodge," he replied on a chuckle. "And I would've taken Bianca with me too. Lord knows the woman don't need to see her boss all vamped up."

Demetri groaned. "You're a mad man."

“You’re one to talk. I had to get you high just come for a visit. What kinda shit is that?”

“Maurisio, don’t ever do that again, because next time it may cost you your life.” Ignoring Maurisio’s quirked brow, he turned on his side and gazed at the fair skinned island native, her legs spread, still sated from his violent lust. “You should feed her before she goes into shock.” He could feel her beast awakening with rage.

Shifters were quick healers, but if their blood supply was low, they’d shift to replenish what had been lost. In that time, the nature of their form relinquishes any connection to humanity. The result, they’d attempt to destroy any and everyone in sight.

Maurisio reached over and dragged his fingers down her abdomen. “I always knew you fancied Jamaican cuisine. Saving a little for later, huh,” he jested with a sly grin. “Thanks for not transporting her.”

“I may be intoxicated, but I’m no fool. Sending her to the hospital to shift uncontrollably in front of unsuspecting mortals would be asinine, not to mention reckless.”

“Indeed.” Maurisio eased his hand between her thighs to cup her swollen slit. She stirred beneath his touch and drawled out a purr on a deep exhale. “You know she’s like Mia’s best friend. I had reservations about bringing her, but she *wanted* to come. Get it? *She wanted to cum.*” He snickered deliriously. “Oh shit bro,

Mia would've kicked both our asses if you would've flat lined this one." He tugged on her pussy. "C'mon over here and eat this meat girl, before I do."

With a low growl, she sluggishly rolled onto her stomach. Black circular spots appeared on her curvy frame followed by a coat of short, tan colored fur. Her body stretched into feline proportions. Her nose widened and lengthened to a snout. Bones cracked and dislocated as her sleek form came forth.

"She's sexy, isn't she? Can you believe she had quadruplet cubs just three months ago and looks this damn good?" Fully formed as a large cheetah, she dawdled over to Maurisio, curved her body around him and inhaled a slab of steak from the platter.

As the grin fell from his face, Maurisio scratched her head and pushed out a cloud of smoke on an exhale. "Another Xsonri. Hybrid no doubt," he uttered beneath his breath. "Please enlighten me."

Demetri sat up, bent his leg and raked his hair. A current of images absorbed from his brother's mind flashed behind his closed eyelids. Sharayna.

"She came for me," he whispered.

"And left every shifter in the building horny as hell after she pounded one of my level three boys, *and then after that*, she made out with Mia, tongue and everything. You can't imagine how fucking hard that was for me!" Shuddering, Maurisio ran a shaky hand through his hair. Drawing from the spike in his arousal,

the cat curled her tail around his waist and purred. “Damn bro, how did you manage to keep your cool when you got close to her? She is a walking aphrodisiac.”

He swallowed back a growl. “What ever chaos she may have caused in your pack, or damages that were inflicted to your establishment due to her visit, I’ll set right the situation anyway you see fit.”

Maurisio’s nose flared and eyes widened. “You think I came all the way over here to complain about some damages?”

“Then tell me brother, why did you wake me?”

“Maan, shake off the beans and pay attention to what I’m saying to you. You gave her a hit of your life force and a taste of your blood. Not smart. The girl picked up on your memories.”

His chest tightened at the sorrow and pain that glazed over his brother’s wolfish glare. Sharayna had seen the unforgettable through his blood.

“Yeah, she saw all of that,” Maurisio scoffed. “Foolish move, baby bro.”

In his eagerness to share himself with her, he hadn’t thought about how his past would affect her. That night in time nearly killed him and his brother’s grasp on humanity, but unlike him, Maurisio was able to hang onto the sliver of sanity. He, on the other hand was the walking dead, immortal, stripped of emotions and mercy for those that reside in this hell-stricken universe.

But then he met her; a light of hope, a light of love, a light of eternity with happiness. Could his brother not see that? Why could he not see what she'd done for him, what she'd done for those who would've perished beneath the sting of his bite? He needed her to give him life and a reason to spare life. His savior.

"I could not help myself. I was compelled to give her a piece of my being," Demetri muttered quietly.

"Well you gave her too much," he chided on a low growl. "And, ya know what, since we're on the subject, what the hell is she, Demetri? Her aura is all crazy and the worst part of it, I don't think she's even realizes how deep this is, and she's damn sure not accepting it. And why should she? She's a fucking monster." He ran his hand down the large cat's back and stood. "You should've seen her face when we were trying to explain things to her. She's faded, not taking it in 'cause the only thing she's concerned with is being with *you*." Taking short drags from his drug of choice, he circled the bed. "And I can't help but feel like whatever she is, is bigger than all of us. And ya know my gut feeling is *never* wrong."

Silently, Demetri stared across the oversized room to the wall littered with paintings of his overextended lifetime. Propped on a stand was a canvas with brilliant colors of oil based paints still drying on the surface.

Sharayna.

Holding a sheet over her naked frame, she stood on the balcony, her hand out to him, begging to be taken to his bed. Because of what hid in the depths of his lost soul, he had refused her, which had been the hardest thing he'd ever done. To capture her beauty, her *true* beauty, on canvas momentarily alleviated his mad need for her.

“Don't get me wrong, baby bro, I understand why you're infatuated with her. She has the kind of beauty you can't turn away from and when you add that scent she's trailing...shit man.” Maurisio pushed out a heavy sigh. “I just don't get why you did what you did. Are her charming powers that intense? That would mean she's stronger than you. I don't know, bro. I find it hard to believe you'd fuse with her without truly knowing what she is.”

Spellbound by his own work, Demetri moved off the bed and flashed across the plane of still water to the canvas. “I haven't created a portrait in over two hundred years, yet when I left her this morning, I couldn't close my eyes until I'd duplicated her beauty.” He caressed the sides of the canvas, remembering the softness of her skin beneath his touch. “This is who she is.”

He heard Maurisio's lengthy strides along the marble platform until he appeared next to him. “This is how you see her, with wings?”

Smiling, Demetri lightly traced the arm of one of her large feathered extensions, smudging a line of white paint across the pad of his fingers. “This is who she is, Maurisio,” he reiterated softly.

Demetri watched a plethora of emotions wash across his brother’s face as he gaped at the painting. For the longest, he said nothing.

“Ohh. Alright, so you uh...” Maurisio wiped the palm of his hand across his mouth then drew deeply from the cigar. “You do know that uh—an angel? You’re courting an angel, Demetri? Are you out of your damn mind? How did she...?” He coughed on exhale and patted his chest. “Oh shit, bro. This is way too deep for me, waay too deep. You, you do know there’s like a million years bad juju for fucking an angel, right? Oh man, a Xsonri—angel hybrid! Fuck it all to hell, Demetri!”

Demetri chuckled. “A stunning creation.”

“Can I say something?”

“Why ask? You’re going to anyway.”

“Ohh bro, this is by far the deepest shit you’ve ever stepped in,” Maurisio mumbled, rubbing the nape of his neck. “I mean, it’s real deep, it’s bubbling up, slapping you in the chin and everything...”

“Are you finished?”

“I’m just baffled, bro. You have to give me a second to take this in. How did this happen?”

Staring at the white paint on his fingers, Demetri puffed out a slow breath. “Perhaps we should move this discussion to the study, where I can pour you a heavy drink.” He petted Maurisio’s shoulder. “Believe me brother, once I reveal to you what I know about Sharayna Piers, you’re going to need one.”



Father Shannon moved around the congregation hall cleaning everything in sight with jittery hands and a prayer for those not before him repeatedly whispering from his lips. Afraid to approach him, the sisters of the temple watched intently. It wasn’t his intention to frighten them, but his mind was frazzled, and his disposition unsteady.

He was troubled about what laid ahead and the safety of the team of Andausians stuck in Japan.

“Father.” He spun around to meet Sister Agnes’s alarmed stare. Gasping, she shuffled backwards. “Father, are you okay?”

“No sister, I am not okay,” he grumbled, turning back to his chores. “Did you get the groceries for the team as I requested?” He tried to control his distraught state to sound at least slightly composed, but failed at his attempt.

“Yes, Father,” she replied in a shaky whisper.

Murmuring a prayer under his breath, he grabbed the bag of trash. “I apologize for my manner, sister. There are things taking place that are out of my

control, constantly getting worse and I am finding it rather difficult to digest,” he declared over his shoulder. “Please forgive me, and for the love of God, pray for me.” He rushed through the hall with the bag clutched in hand. “Lord God, keep my faith true,” he whispered, pushing through the back door.

Sobs along with a divine scent greeted him as soon as he stepped outside the church. “Good Lord, what is that?”

Strongly inhaling the scent, he followed the soft cries. He rounded the building to the dumpster. The trash bag dropped from his hand.

“Sharayna?”

She was crouched into a ball, her hands clamped at the back of her head. Her eyes filled with pain and tears, she looked up at him. “I don’t wanna go to hell, Father Shannon,” she sobbed. “But I know I’m destined to go. I feel it.”

“Good heavens child, why—what has made you ill?” He rushed to her, kneeled down and cradled her in his arms. “Why are you hiding behind the building, next to the dumpster of all places?”

“I, I don’t want nobody to see me like this.” She dragged her hands across her eyes to wipe away tears and smeared her eyeliner. “They told me not to go to him ‘cause his demon might be awake. I’m scared to call him ‘cause the sun is out. He’ll die.” The starburst in her deep, coffee colored eyes brightened and expanded with each word. “I need him so badly right now. This is so wrong, to need him like

this.” Whimpering, she clutched the front of her blouse. “I’m lost in the devil’s embrace,” she murmured beneath her breath, looking away from him.

Devil’s embrace? The words made him stiffen. “Sharayna, let’s go inside—”

“Father, I can’t go home. I don’t want to be alone, but I should. I might hurt somebody, right? I’m hungry, so hungry. Do I sound messed up right now? I know I do.”

“Sharayna...”

“I didn’t know where else to go. I can’t hurt people if I’m near the church, right?” She wrapped her arms around her belly. “My stomach hurts so bad. I think God is punishing me for needing him, for being what I am. How can he love me, how can God love a demon?” Excitement suddenly came to her face. “Ooo, you know what I want? A cheeseburger, a raw bloody cheeseburger, with mustard and onions. Yeah, that’s what I want. You got one of those.”

He was speechless for a moment. She was delirious and from what he could tell, extremely intoxicated.

Standing, he pulled her to her feet. “Come, come now,” he coaxed, urging her over to the door.

She scrambled away from him. Sweat formed on her forehead. Her eyes stretched as wide as saucers. “Uh-uh. No, no, no. I can’t, not like this. I should probably stay out here. Yeah, yeah, I should stay out here.”

He tilted his head and stepped closer to her. “Sharayna, why on earth would you stay out here? You’re not making any sense.”

“Riiight,” she whispered hoarsely, resembling someone who’d lost a few important brain cells on the way to the church. “None of it makes any sense. And ya know what, I don’t think it’s supposed to.”

Baffled, he gaped at her. Perhaps what he thought was intoxication was really something else. A deep prayer session was in order, maybe even a sanctification just to be on the safe side.

“All right, that’s settles it. You’re coming in.” He rushed over, wrapped his arm around her and forced her to the door. “I’ll have Sister Agnes brew you a cup of mint tea. That should remedy your stomachache. And then we shall talk about what has you so disoriented.”

Silently, he sent an urgent message to Sister Agnes to meet him in his office with hot tea and biscuits. As they headed through the corridor, Rayne snuggled against his chest.

Once in his office, he tightened his arm around her and found himself helplessly sneaking whiffs of her hair. The aroma of her was incredible, stimulating even. It was impossible for him to breathe without consuming a bit of her on every inhale.

Whatever it was that expelled from her was awakening the dormant part of him. A part that hadn't been stirred in years. He forgot what it felt like, even forgot it was there. His heart knocked hard against his chest, quickening with each breath. There couldn't be a worse moment to be reminded of what he really was.

So many years of walking the path of righteousness and now he was on the brink of straying from that path. *God forgive me.* He closed his eyes, lost his hands and nose in her hair then inhaled intensely.

His eyes crossed. "Oh my Lord!"

Her arms circled his waist. A voice in his mind told him to move away, but he couldn't. He couldn't stop absorbing her essence and the warmth from her body. So exhilarating. It punched him drunk, made him purr and roused his groin profoundly. She pressed her body flush against his and held onto him tightly.

"My word, what is this fragrance, Sharayna," he mumbled into her hair. "You smell absolutely amazing."

"Mmm, I like the way you smell too, Father." Her voice was a tune of pure lust. She pushed up on her toes and nuzzled his neck. "So sweet. Can I taste?"

What he felt next teased every nerve ending in his body. The tip of her tongue traced the vein running along his jugular.

On the verge of falling to his knees, he shuddered against her and tilted his head to the side to bare his throat. "Yes."

“Father, she is charming you! Push away from her now if you want to live,” said an urgent, familiar voice.

“I need you, Demetri,” Sharayna whispered in his embrace.

Demetri? Father Shannon popped his eyes open.

From over Rayne’s head, his gaze fell upon Sister Agnes, who stared at him, her eyes wide and mouth gaped open. The clanking of the teacup on the saucer in her trembling hands made him wince.

“Sister...”

A low possessive growl came from the woman in his arms. Like the strike of a snake, her lips claimed his throat. Swiftly, he pushed out of her embrace and scurried across the room, far away. Breathing heavily, he stared at her unable to speak. Her eyes beamed solid gold, her skin glisten the same and two small pairs of pearlescent fangs peered from her quivering parted lips. Tears poured from her eyes in a gold stream down her cheeks.

Momentarily, time went still, but sound resumed. He heard the clash of the glass before the teacup and saucer left Sister Agnes’s hands. Sister Agnes backed away, made the symbol of the cross from her forehead to her chest and ran out of the room.

Sharayna covered her face with her hands, dropped to her knees and cried out, “See! I told you I was hungry!”

Chapter Twenty

Damage Control

“And right when I thought I’d heard it all…” With a glass of Glenlivet on the rocks clutched in his hand, Maurisio eyes roamed over the array of books on the shelves that reached to the ceiling. “How ‘bout, you go into hibernation for a couple hundred years ‘til this shit blows over, baby bro.”

Demetri cut his eyes at Maurisio’s back. “Why? So *you* could pursue her?”

“Oh, I’m not the one you have to worry about.” Maurisio turned from the wall of books, his eyes gleaming. “You do know that, right?”

Demetri sat on the edge of the deep mahogany escritoire and rubbed his chin. “She’s bound to me, and I to her. I doubt it I have to worry about anyone.”

“Are you still high?” Maurisio asked with the twist of his lips. “Look bro, I know she’s got you whipped and everything, but you have to look past your attraction to her and think realistically. You have a bad-ass female hybrid with a world ending ability in the palm of her hand, with blood that heightens powers and you don’t think someone more powerful than *you*…” Stretching his eyes wide, he pointed to the ground as he continued. “Has gotten the news she exists.”

“But the prophecy—”

“Fuck the prophecy! C’mon Demetri, use your head a moment. That girl has somebody coming for her and it ain’t the fucking *Chingi*.”

He dipped his head and thought long and hard on Indigo’s words of the prophecy. “You think—”

“No. I don’t *think* anything. Call it a presentiment, a gut feeling or whatever.” He took a gulp of the scotch and shook his hair back from his shoulders. “And we’ve already discussed my gut’s failure to be wrong. I’m telling you, with her existence comes a war.”

Saddened, Demetri nodded. “Armageddon.”

Maurisio leveled his finger at him. “You better fucking believe it.”

Looking to the ceiling, he pressed his fingers against his throbbing temples to steady his troubled thoughts. Would the devil come for her? For her blood? Would he be so bold as to claim an angel half-breed as his mate?

He’d be foolish not to at least consider the possibilities.

Blocking out the annoying ring of Maurisio’s cell phone, Demetri closed his eyes and focused on the females singing his name through the drift currents. One of the voices obtruded intensely in his mind. It was the Andausian, and she was vexingly tenacious in her efforts to reach him.

She'd been buzzing the airwaves, seeking his attention for hours. The girl was heavily distraught. The loss of the priest at the temple had pained her heart and damaged her psyche. Her tainted emotions added to his unbalanced state. This would not do. He opened his eyes and shut her out. He'd deal with her later. At the moment, there was another matter which needed his urgent attention.

“Can’t you bitches do anything right! How the hell—and you call yourselves wolves!” Maurisio’s eyes blazed in wolfish fury. “Look, I’m not gonna say this shit again! Hunt him down and eliminate him! If that fucker’s head is not on my desk by morning, I’m taking throats and castrating motherfuckers!” He squeezed the glass until it shattered within his grasp then threw the phone across the room. The small device hit the wall and shattered into pieces. Simultaneously, a crack of lightening sounded outside. “Shiit!”

His brother’s anger frazzled his nerves and lowered his incisors. He tried to approach Maurisio, but he put his hand out and turned his back to him.

“What’s wrong, brother?”

Maurisio huffed then rattled his head like a dog. “I gotta roll.” Growling, he picked shards of glass from his hand. “I got damage control.”

“Is it because of Sharayna?”

Maurisio glanced over his shoulder. “What do you think?” he mumbled, lapping the blood from his hand. “Nothing for you to be concerned about though. I’ll handle it. My pack. My problem.”

Demetri suddenly became anxious. He was running out of time. “Before you leave, you don’t suppose you could bring forth the night a little quicker, like now, perhaps?”

His head tilted curiously, Maurisio turned to him. “The best I can do is conjure a few dark cloud for a couple of hours, but you know Mother Nature will fight me just to fry your ass if you leave this house. What’s up?”

“No. I need the night. I cannot teleport without the night,” he explained urgently.

“Look if this is about the situation. I don’t need you to intervene. I said I’ll handle it—”

“*She’s* at the church, with Father Shannon, and she’s fluxing!”

“Which means she needs to feed,” Maurisio finished, his eyes growing big. “She’s going to kill him, or fuck him, or both. Hardheaded girl, I told her to go home!” He roughly raked his hair. “Drift him out of there man, or drift her out, one of them, shit!”

“I can’t!” Demetri shouted, moving into a frantic pace. “I can’t extract him from consecrated grounds. The light won’t allow it, and I can’t teleport her during

a shift because her spiritual energy is drawing from the sun. I can't even link with her right now.”

“Then what are we going to do?”

In the moment of alarm, a thought came to him. With great concentration, he closed his eyes and steadied his mind. Tiny pricks of energy spooled up through his body as he summoned the one person who could assist him.

“Indigo.”

When he opened his lids, Indigo stood before him, her hands planted on her hips and her eyes narrowed into mere slits. “I’ve been calling and calling you since last night, and you sir have been ignoring me! Now you think you can just summon me out of the blue after not answering my calls! And what are you doing up so early?”

“Damn girl, you think that dress is tight enough?” Maurisio mumbled, leering at her backside like a hungry wolf. “I can see the dimples on your tight ass.”

“Indigo, there is something important I need you to do,” Demetri rushed out.

“And there is something important I need to tell you,” she countered, shooting a glance over her shoulder at his brother.

“No time for discussions. Summon Father Shannon,” he demanded.

“But Demetri, this is about the prophecy and *your* direct contact with the Dragon Queen. By the way, I’m royally pissed at you for not telling me about—”

His hand sought out her neck and brought her face to his. “The priest, now Indigo!”

Jerking out of his grasp, she stumbled back. “Okay, okay, okay. Dammit!” She pinned him with a sidelong glance. “I wish for the day you learn how to talk to me with a little respect, or at the very least with a little show of appreciation.”

She looked away from his narrowing glare, pushed out a heavy breath, and shook her arms and head in preparation. Her eyes drifted shut. When she opened them, the color of liquid metal clouded her irises.

“Elements of the earth, bring forth the priest which you perceive in my mind.”

Father Shannon materialized at the mantel with his back to them. In confusion, he glanced to his left, and to his right then spun around. “What...” He shifted his eyes at everyone in the room then zoned in on Demetri.

“Yooou!” he growled, offering him a cold glare. “You, you cad!”

Demetri stared at him awkwardly. “I beg your pardon.”

“Don’t you beg my pardon!” Father Shannon shuffled across the floor, his finger leveled at him. “What have you done to her? She was a sweet girl and you—you’ve poisoned her with dark lust. How could you do that to her, you heartless *vampire*?”

“Whoa, harsh words coming from a priest,” Maurisio quipped, leaning against the doorframe. “A hit of scotch will bring that heated fury right on down.”

Father Shannon cut an icy glare at Maurisio. “You, you be quiet, Maurisio. I expected more from you. You’re the oldest for Pete’s sake. You’re supposed to watch him and prevent things like this from happening. How could you condone something like this?”

Maurisio’s head fell back in laughter. “What? Am I my brother’s keeper?”

Father Shannon’s jaw tensed and his brows furrowed. “Blasphemer!”

“Father,” Demetri called faintly. “Your words of ire are not to be directed toward my brother, but to me. I don’t seek my brother’s consent for anything I choose to do. You are aware of this.”

Father Shannon rocked back and forth, shifting from one leg to the other, clutching his cross. “Demetri, your very existence is corrupting the child’s mind. Are you just going to allow her to suffer, drag her further into your blood filled world? This is unconscionable. You are to release this dark hold on her right this moment.”

“I have no hold on her, Father. It is she who has the hold on me, and please, stop referring to her as a child. You’ve held her in your arms. You’ve smelled her scent. Is that not the traces of a peaking *woman*?”

Demetri dropped his eyes from the priest’s reddened, uptight face to his neck. A small, barely discernable mark marred the skin over his carotid artery.

She'd grazed him; not deep enough to sever the vein, but enough to cause damage. A poisoned kiss.

If a score from her fangs was as addictive as his was to others, then he had a bigger problem on his hands. He'd have to take the priest's life if he sought her out for another taste of her fangs.

"Demetri, the child, er, woman came to me with an indescribable fear and confusion in her eyes." He paused and uttered words beneath his breath. When he spoke again his voice was calmer. "My goodness, I've known her since she was a baby. I remember the first time her guardians brought her to me to be blessed, sanctified. I remember it as if was yesterday and now you've—her heart is pure and she has an honest soul. The things she did to me—I'm her priest for Pete's sake."

"That is why I told you to step away from her. It was all I could do since I could not be there physically."

"You feel no remorse about this, do you? In your twisted, dark mind this is your way of loving her." He folded his arms and stomped his foot. "If you care for her, you'd set her free and allow the light to fix what you've broken!"

His Queen was out there terrified and hungry and he couldn't even go to her, to feed her, to hold her. No, he was stuck here to be battered by her scattered emotions, when his own were in disarray. And the priest's scolding only added fuel

to the fire. All of this mental chaos and he had to maintain composure in the presence of an audience, when all he wanted to do was silence the priest, in a very violent manner.

Demetri found his seat behind the *escritoire*, brushed his hand along the smooth surface and closed his eyes. There was so much anger and cluttered confusion bubbling within the priest, he found it difficult to settle his own chaotic emotions.

“Please calm yourself and steady your thoughts, Father. You’re making it very difficult to control what’s raging within me.”

“Well good! That makes two of us,” the priest barked.

“Father, I’d do what he says. He’s apparently disoriented, and suffering from lack of rest. Not to mention, distressed by his need for Sharayna,” he heard Indigo declare. “Or should I say the Dragon Queen? That is who this discussion is about, correct?”

Demetri opened his eyes to meet her knowing glare. He wasn’t surprised in the least she discovered the truth. He knew she would sooner or later.

“Yes, this is about Sharayna,” Father Shannon conceded beneath a grumble. “Right when I thought he couldn’t stoop any lower, he goes after an innocent...” His head snapped in Indigo’s direction. “I’m sorry, what did you just say?”

Her lips tightened. “The coven has spies watching you Demetri, and as cunning as you are, I *know* you knew they were there. They saw you approach her last night, and since you left my house the way you did, I put two and two together. Frankly, I’m disappointed in myself for not figuring this out sooner, but not as disappointed as I am in you. How could you not tell me?”

“It was not for you to know,” he replied dryly.

Sorrow and hurt clouded her face. “I would be flattered if I thought you held this information from me for my safety, but it is not so. After all this time, you still don’t trust me.”

“Don’t feel bad, sweetheart. Baby bro doesn’t trust anyone. How could he? God’s world is filled with lies and deceit,” Maurisio explained with a tinge of humor.

She clucked her tongue and rolled her eyes. “Well for your information, your secret happens to be safe with me. Neither I nor Dominique relayed this information to the coven, but you need to use more caution Demetri, because if we can figure it out, so can they.” She sighed as if the confession of her knowledge was a weight off her shoulder. “When will you learn to confide in me,” she muttered, her pained emotion gleaming from her eyes.

He swiveled the chair to the side, crossed his legs and studied her for a moment. What could he say? His trust was not easily gained.

“I honestly don’t know what to say to remedy the pain I’ve caused you.”

“Whatever,” she snapped. “I’ll save my sentiments for another time.”

Smoothing her hands down her hips, she shook away her saddened disposition.

“Right now we must discuss the prophecy.”

“No. I want to hear nothing more of the prophecy. The words of your coven’s bible are tainted with falsity,” he grumbled, trailing Sharayna essence in his mind. She was on the move.

“Correct. We were all deceived. The words of the great book have been altered.”

“Haaa!” Maurisio sung with the clap of his hands. “I told you! Gut feeling! Never wrong, baby bro!”

“Excuse me! Did I just hear her correctly?” Father Shannon blurted.

Indigo rolled her eyes. “Yes Father. Your *sweet, innocent* Sharayna is the Dragon Queen, and obviously has her eye fixed on the demon vampire before you. God, you’re slow.”

“C’mon Shannon, how could you not know that? The scent, the aura, the stiff ass hard-on she gave you. I betcha could’ve knocked a hole in the wall with your dick.”

“Maurisio,” Demetri mumbled, shaking his head.

“How on earth did—oh my Lord,” Father Shannon gasped, staggering back in shock. “How, how did...?” He dropped his hand to his side. His shoulders slumped. “I need a drink.”

By the bar, Maurisio laughed and held up a glass of dark scotch. “Got one for you right here, Shannon.”

An urgent howl ripped through the mansion from the outside. Cocking his head, Maurisio answered the call with a deep husky howl of his own.

“Damn, I really wanted to hear about this prophecy, but I gotta run. See you, sexy red.” He smacked Indigo’s ass, drawing out a jolting squeal. “Catcha later, Shannon. Corrine, c’mon baby, let’s roll!”

The large cheetah hopped up from the spot next to the mantel, startling Indigo. Purring, she circled Father Shannon’s legs, and then darted out of the study after Maurisio.

“Holy shit! I thought she was a statue,” Indigo gasped with her hand plastered across her chest. “Crap, did the cat hear everything we just discussed?”

“No, I blocked out her senses. She couldn’t hear nor see until Maurisio called her name,” Demetri informed to ease her alarmed state.

“Look, this has all been a bit overwhelming for me. I’d like to be sent back to the church please. I have to make sure Sharayna hasn’t—”

“You are not to worry. She hasn’t bothered the sisters and will not from what I’m sensing. She’s roused and is only seeking the attention of the male species right now.” The fact unnerved him as it spilled out of his mouth. “Luckily, she’s on her way home. Even with that being the case, I cannot allow you leave. Your blood is still running hot from the nip she gave you.” Demetri willed a chair before him. “Have a seat.”

With a huff of resentment, Father Shannon plopped down into the chair.

Shock lining her face, Indigo whipped her attention to the priest. “Wait, she nipped you? Oh, that’s not good, at all.”

“*Indigo, he’s already confounded. Please,*” Demetri warned with the faint shake of his head. “No worries, Father. May I offer you another scotch?”

With the light tap on the desk, another glass of the dark liquid appeared before him. Frazzled and disturbed, Father Shannon retrieved the glass with both hands and quaffed it without pause.

Listening to the priest’s heart rate steadily decrease, Demetri turned his undivided attention to Indigo. “If the prophecy is false, then what should I believe? And please explain quickly.”

Two and a half hours and the sun would begin its descent. He’d have to make a few kills before going to Sharayna.

“Well believe this, the element stones relayed to us she has *two* consorts.”

“What?” he strained out.

“Oh Jesus in heaven, it just keeps getting worse!” Father Shannon dropped his head warily onto the desk.

Demetri shot out of the chair and rounded the escritoire. He sat on the edge and offered her an intense stare. She shuddered under his fixed gaze.

“Two...consorts? How can that be, Indigo?”

She swallowed hard and took a few steps back. “Uh, okay. The balance has been tilted in hell’s favor with the creation of the Dragon Queen, but someone stuck their hands in the cookie jar and tampered with what was supposed to be. You see, *she* belongs to Lucifer’s third son by right of her father.”

Lucifer’s third son!

He closed his eyes and willed back the need to roar. So it turned out, once again, his brother’s gut feeling had been correct. It may not be Satan himself, but the fact it’s his son didn’t make the situation any more tolerable.

“The arrangement was made before her conception. It was a pact for power and command over the demon dragons. With the Dragon Queen at his side, he will be able to overthrow his father and rule over all stratum of hell. This will mean total destruction of earth and all God’s children. Hell will expand to incorporate all other realms.”

“So, *he*’s one of her consorts? This devil’s spawn?”

“Yes, and we’ve seen what lengths this consort will go through to claim the Queen. The demons coming through the portals, the *chingi*, are all his minions.” She fingered her locks as she began to pace. “But listen to this, because it gets twisted. As I’ve said, someone tampered with the juncture and in doing so, they altered the Queen’s need to instinctively seek him out.”

She snapped her fingers and a glass of wine appeared in her hand. Thirstily, she drank from the crystal goblet before continuing. “As soon as she turned eighteen in demon years, which is eight in human years, she was supposed to go to him, Lucius is his name, but of course she didn’t. There is a big plot brewing, and every priestess’s third eye was blinded to this fact, until now. Someone in the heavens is behind this illusion, not sure who exactly, but we hope to reveal their identity in our next divination.”

She finished the wine and sat the empty crystal next to Father Shannon, who was listening to her every word.

“Now stay with me on this because this is where it gets *really* interesting. The prophecy states that she was born five hundred years early. Well, according to the stones, she’s right on time.”

“Right on time for what?” Demetri asked, following her with his eyes.

“Right on time to start a war between heaven and hell,” she replied softly.

He groaned. Mauricio's gut instincts had proved correct, yet again. "I knew there'd be a war, but wasn't aware she'd start it. How is this so?"

"Not sure yet. We have to look deeper into the stones, which takes a lot of spiritual energy, but let me finish telling you what we found." She clamped her hands together and smiled at him anxiously. "Two consorts. One created by hell aaand..."

Indigo stared at him, her hands out expecting him to fill in the blank. He dismissed her with a casual wave. He wasn't in the mood for games.

She pursed her lips. "And the other consort was chosen by the heavens."

He wrinkled his brow. "A consort created by the heavens?"

"Noo. I said he was *chosen* by the heavens. Keep up. Okay now, of course you know, once this happened it changed everything. Now, the twisted part of it all was she was dropped here on earth, in human form, which makes it extremely difficult for Lucius to find her. In the demon realm he could've easily snatched her up, but once she left, it squashed his plan completely, because his father controls the dark side of the earthly realms." She stopped and tapped her fingers on her lips. "Now if I got this right, daddy dragon wanted to renege on the bargain and needed someone to keep his daughter out of Lucius's clutches, so he sent someone through a dimensional portal. The timing was very important in this matter, essential,

almost as important as the deed itself. Creating a time portal takes a tremendous amount of sinew and even more to target a specific period in time—”

“You’re rambling. Get to the point,” Demetri interrupted.

She huffed through her nose and rolled her eyes. “Fine. He sent a wizard or priestess through the time portal to create the Queen’s consort, who was most likely an Andausian with two abilities. They’re the only one’s strong enough to absorb the blood of a powerful demon—”

“Wait, stop right there.” He thrust his hand out for silence and shifted his eyes around the room as a thought, *the thought*, smashed into his mind making him digest the truth. He briefly closed his eyes and shook his head. How could he have not known?

Lord Kaishan.

“No. Her Father didn’t send anyone. He stepped through the portal himself to choose her consort,” he stated softly. “He couldn’t send anyone else, because he had to be the one to pass on immortality, to make his creation strong enough...”

“To defeat Lucius,” she finished, her chest heaving with harsh breaths. She rushed over to him and palmed the side of his face. “Oh my God, Demetri! You’re the other consort!”

“No. I am *the consort*,” he corrected, his eyes half-mast. “I care nothing of the agreement before her conception. She is bound to me, she is *mine*.”

Indigo stepped back. Her eyes gleamed indifference. “Yes, she is yours and she’s made it known by calling to you, but you cannot fully unite with her until she crowns you and Lucius is destroyed. It’s the only way. As long as he’s still alive, he has power over her and if he finds her, you’ll see just how powerful he is.”

Wringing her hands, she darted her eyes about. “When Rayne was born, Lucius’s mother got wind of his plan and imprisoned him in stone in the lowest level of hell. Before you summoned me, we received word Lucius had escaped from level seven and has surfaced in search of his promised bride.” She sighed. “This is about to get really bad, Demetri. He has you at a disadvantage, because he doesn’t need to wait until the sun goes down to link with her.”

“But she has to want to link with him, correct?”

“Which she most likely will. You, yourself admitted she’s seeking male attention. The only thing we can do is hope she is so in need of *you* that she rejects him, but even if she does, we’ll still be in hot water. Understand, the closer it gets to night fall, the more she’s going to need to feed and even after that she’s going to need more. So guess what? She’s going out hunting.”

“Why is this a problem? It’s natural for a Xsonri to hunt. I will help her. I’ll guide her to the evil souls; show her how sweet it is to take life from those tainted by wickedness.” He shuddered. The thought of hunting with her roused his cock.

“No! That’s the thing! She can’t go hunting. Chances are he hasn’t found her and even if he links with her or projects to communicate, he still won’t know where she is physically, unless she tells him. But if she drops a body, she won’t need to tell him. He will know her location. He must not find her, Demetri, therefore she must not kill. He’s desperate for her, so he’s going to try to lure her out.”

Demetri closed his eyes and inspired the air around him. “Would the death of a few hundred mortals lure her out?”

He could feel her questionable stare. “Yeah, how did you—”

“Thirty minutes ago at a hotel, three hundred and sixty-one miles from here, he killed everybody in the building.”

Indigo’s gasped echoed through the hall.

“The scent of his victim’s blood lingers in the air.” He slid his eyes open. “His devious attempt to lure her out.”

“Oh no! Dammit Demetri! Don’t you see? This is going to drive her mad! She might even drop a body just to bring him to her so she could kill him for what he’s done!”

Instant rage consumed him. His incisors lengthened and Katsumi filled his hand. “No.” The spark of her energy bit into his palm and electrified him on the spot. “He will not take her from me,” he growled.

“I pray the night falls soon, because I’m not sure how much more of this I can take.”

They snapped their attention to Father Shannon who they’d forgotten was in the room. One shaky hand clutched his cross and the other an empty glass as he stared aimlessly across the room.

“I think I’m going to need another drink.”

Chapter Twenty-One

Dark Lord's Wrath

The coppery scent of human blood hung thick in the air, jarring Doshar from a deep slumber. Spent by hours of vicious sexing, he opened his eyes and immediately recoiled in fear.

Caressing Imrie's leg, Lord Lucius lounged nonchalantly at the end of bed.

"My lord, you are here." His master's state, although seemingly poised, was clearly unstable.

"Is that a hint of surprise I detect in your voice, Doshar?"

Fresh blood seeped from the corners of Lord Lucius' mouth. The rancid scent of bloodied sex lingered with him. A great number of lives had been taken, and he sensed many more were to die.

"I see you've found your wife, Doshar," Lucius declared coolly, pinning him with a flashing red stare. "How fortunate for you."

Swallowing hard, Doshar glanced down at Imrie who slept peacefully next to him. Naked, she was sprawled on her stomach, her legs splayed and her

beautiful face turned toward him. Her leg moved slightly beneath Lucius's touch as a serene smile graced her face.

"I sense my bride's force." Pulling his long, silvery blonde hair over his shoulder, Lucius looked to the ceiling and sharply sucked in air. "But unlike you, I'm not laying beside her, satisfied and covered in her essence. Why is that?"

Doshar struggled to answer. The words would not come to him. Even if he were able to answer, nothing he could say would suppress Lucius' growing rage. The order to find the Queen before his Lord's escape from level seven had been his only mission, and he'd failed. Distracted by his wife's outlandish behavior, he'd been thrown off course. Whether his excuse was justifiable or not, he would be punished for his failure.

Casting a mask of composure, Lucius stood and sauntered to the window. The curtains drew apart. The glare of the setting sun infiltrated the room. Doshar grimaced.

"I was told there was a full moon last night. That it shone with an unusual vibrancy over this realm. Did you notice that?"

Doshar shook his head, trying desperately to find the hidden meaning in the dark lord's words. "No, my Lord."

Lucius turned to him, his emerald eyes smiling and engorged veins protruding out from his neck. "Her blood calls to me. Where is she, Doshar?"

“I, my Lord, she has a *gychi* spell hindering my ability to find her...”

“I gave you life with power beyond imaginations and you give me useless excuses? Your brother may have been easily taken by the winged whore, but at least he followed through when given direct orders. How I wished I could say the same for you.”

How dare he? Was he not aware the brother he praised so was the very one who placed *gychi* spell on the child?

“Forgive me, my lord. I have simply been set back on my mission—”

“Looks to me like you’ve deviated quite a bit from your task, my obsequious servant.” There was malevolence in his tone that was terrifying. “Be mindful of your thoughts.” He tapped his temple. “I’m well aware Mayiki placed the spell on my Queen, and you have not broken it, which makes him the better sorcerer.”

Holding his baleful smile, Lucius strolled over to the side of the bed and sat next to Imrie. He stroked her deep blue hair back from her face, ever so gently, as if there were a gentle bone in his hell spawned body.

“The triumph of my escape from my bitch of a mother’s stone prison would’ve been complete if only I could’ve been greeted by my wife’s hot, simmering pussy. It would’ve been perfect, Doshar, if I was welcomed from the fires of hell by her heated skin, her beautiful face...” His eyes drifted close. “If I could’ve smelled her arousal, tasted her essence...” His lids crept open. A scarlet

ring circled his irises. “Much like you’ve done with your wife tonight. Did you smell her? Did you taste her? Did you feel her skin against yours?”

Slow fury built within Doshar as he watched Lord Lucius’s hand roam up his wife’s thigh. Clenching his jaw hard, he tried to conceal his wrathful disposition.

“Oh, dear sweet Imrie. I don’t know a creature alive who wouldn’t want to fuck this beautiful demon witch. It is said the taste of her ass alone could have you heady for days.”

“Does my lord wish for me to find someone to tend to his needs?” he asked quickly.

Lucius bellowed out in laughter, rattling the glass within the windowpane. “Why? I have someone right here to tend to my needs.” He raised his hand and dropped it Imrie’s backside, hard, drawing an ear-ringing shriek from her.

She jerked up on her knees. “My lord,” she gasped, rubbing the tender spot on her bottom.

“Yes, *your lord.*” Lucius reached out to take her nipple between his fingers and pinched it. She hissed in acceptance and arched her body to him. “Yes, I smell your arousal, witch.” His fangs descended. “Not the least bit as delicious as the scent of my Queen, but still tantalizing.” He grabbed her chin and gazed deep into her eyes. Without another word spoken, Imrie bent over, unzipped his pants and

freed his erect cock. “She’s always ready, isn’t she Doshar?” he asked adjusting his position to give her better access.

Doshar clenched his teeth. “My Lord, she is hardly fit to pleasure you—”

His words were clipped short when Lucius’s hand found his throat. “You have the nerve to deny me?” He laughed, but there was no humor in it. “You’ve grown bold and immensely foolish, given your failure.” He drew Doshar closer to him, mere inches from his face. “Your attitude is quite irritating. Have you forgotten who you serve?”

A loud slurp followed by a husky moan cut through the thickness of the blood tainted air. Doshar bristled within his master’s clutches. He dared not look down. Hearing his wife enjoy the pleasure she gave his Lord was enough to boil his blood.

Lucius’s eyes narrowed then briefly closed. “Now I see why you’re so outraged,” he breathed out on a chuckle. “I almost forgot why I was furious.”

He squeezed Doshar’s neck then flung him across the room. Head first, he barreled through the television.

“But she’s not that good.”

Shards of glass lodged into his gut and face. Disgusted, he shrieked like a demon. Excruciating pain sailed through his limbs as he tried to adjust his energy.

Propped up against the wall, he watched Lord Lucius dig his hands in Imrie's hair and force her swallow every inch of his lengthy cock. She gagged and choked.

“There is a barrier around my Queen's aura. I sense it, a darkened force from another clouding her vitality.”

Wincing, Doshar began to pick the shards from his flesh. “No, my lord,” he whispered harshly. “This cannot be so. Your blood has not entered her body.”

“That's right, so why hasn't the need for my blood led her to me? Once I cleared the darkness of hell, she should have sought me out. Do you know why she hasn't, Doshar?” Red fury swallowed his pupils. “Because there is someone else!” His fangs lengthened with each word.

Doshar stiffened. There couldn't be anyone else. He commanded his demons to take care of that *problem* hundreds of years ago. He smelled the blood of the victims taken during that period in time. He sensed their demise and his demons victorious slaughter.

“That cannot be so.”

“Ah, but it is so! And the rumor of the red tinted moon tells me whoever this creature is has bled for her and released his essence to surround her, therefore blocking me out!”

This was baffling. If the barrier was created out of darkness, Lord Lucius shouldn't have a problem surging through the shield. Unless, his full power had

not been restored. Could the effects of the stone prison still be an issue, even during his release?

A spell. Yes. The dark priestess intended to make his search for the Queen even more difficult once he escaped. Such a torturous form of penance.

“Your thoughts of my misfortune are insulting, Doshar! She *has* to come to me! Without her blood I can’t—” Chocking on his words, he squeezed his eyes shut, bucked his hips up against Imrie’s mouth then released a satisfying groan. A gargling whine erupted from Imrie as his blackened secretions leaked from beneath her lips.

Breathing hard, Lord Lucius blinked rapidly. “Maybe she *is* that good.” He squinted at Doshar. “Bring my wife to me before she mates with this creature or I will take yours,” he sneered.

He fisted her hair and yanked her mouth off of his cum glazed length. Pushing her down on all fours, he positioned behind her and entered her seasoned slit with maddening force. Doshar cringed at the sound of her flesh tearing and the screams of agony that literally melted the paint from the walls.

Lucius drew Imrie up on her knees and bit into her shoulder. She faced Doshar, her horror filled eyes begging for the punishment to end. Lucius’s engorged cock pushed deep within her and extended. Like a restless snake

trapped under a sheet, it twisted and squirmed inside of her stomach, assaulting her insides, visually dancing beneath her flesh.

The sight was too much to handle, but what could he do? If he attempted save her, Lucius would kill the both of them. However, he could not sit and do nothing.

“My lord, please...”

“Tell me Doshar, do you have enough to replenish her?”

Just as the meaning of his words came to light, Lucius dragged his nail across Imrie’s throat. Her neck opened wide, spewing blackened red blood down her collarbone and breasts. Gloating, Lucius yanked her head back to prevent the gushing wound from healing.

Frantically, Doshar shot to his feet, ignoring the pain that seized every nerve in his body. “Lord Lucius, I can—I can provide you temporary passage, so that you may zone in on our Queen’s energy. She will need to feed very soon. I can help you,” he informed quickly. “You can talk to her, convince her to drop the barrier and come to you, my Lord.”

A malicious smile flitted across his face as he pulled Imrie’s head further back, widening the smile across her neck. “Are you sure?”

Imrie’s hands fell lazily to her side. Clinched to her skeleton, her skin aged rapidly and turned a horrific papery gray.

“Lord Lucius, please release my wife,” he faltered, his hands clasped in desperation. “It is important I have her to assist in destroying the angel guardians sent to keep the Queen from you. I need her.”

“Really? Well, that’s all you had to say.” Laughing, Lucius jerked her head up right and her slashed throat healed, very slowly.

Releasing her, Lucius withdrew his snake-like cock from her body. Limply, Imrie fell forward, off the bed into Doshar’s arms. Her bones shattered within her desiccated shell and her eyes were deathly white. He held her carefully, releasing bits of his energy into her fragile form. Now he’d be forced to take down a few unsuspecting demons to supply her lost blood and replenish her sinew.

“Yes, but before you seek out dark beings to feed your bitch, you will do as you’ve said and connect me to my Queen.”

Lucius flashed from the bed and was suddenly behind him. Grabbing the nape of his neck, Lucius shoved him forward.

Doshar dropped Imrie and stumbled over her still body. The side of his face met the hard blood soaked mattress.

“As you are aware, I cannot appear before my Queen unsteady. It will not do, and since your wife is no longer useful to me...” Lucius handled the base of his elongated cock, which dripped in his wife’s deep colored blood. “Your turn.”

Chapter Twenty-Two

Devil's Embrace

From the serene haven of her private studio, Rayne listened to the unrelenting rain pound on the roof of her house. The sound of Mother Nature's tears had always soothed and comforted her, but now, even the rain couldn't drown out the chaos in her head.

Resting on the tear stained keys of the piano, her fingers twitched. Clutched in her other hand, the cell phone vibrated and sent tremors up her arm. It'd been twittering in her grasp every since she'd turned it on.

Unable to even glance at it, she kept her eyes zoned in on the award cluttered wall through the interior window of the studio. She dragged her fingers across the keys. Each note cried out joyously.

That was it. If the rain couldn't give her peace, the music would.

She placed the phone on the bench next to her, cracked her anxious fingers then dropped them on the keys. A classical piece entered her mind and traveled through her arms. Her lids lowered and the slow, moody melody of Beethoven's

Moonlight Sonata filled the room. Through the music, she released the pain and confusion from her mind, along with her salted tears.

Blood was in the air. The scent was strong and overbearing. It made every muscle in her body twitch and her gums throb painfully, but she played on and prayed the musical balm would be enough to drown out that part of her too.

Block it out.

Piercing screams entered her mind, increasing the aroma, which spelled death. It was sickening, yet strangely delicious.

Demetri, where the hell are you? I need you!

Grinding her teeth, she strummed harder.

Again, the phone vibrated. Her fingers fell from the keys. The screams stopped, but the scent did not fade. She snatched the phone from the bench and glared at it. The voice mail was full. Of course.

Sliding her trembling finger across the touch screen, she bypassed all messages, then stopped at Brianna's. Smiling sadly, she tapped the message to play.

"The bird has flown the coup. I repeat, the bird has flown the coup. Now I'm going home and ice my coochie. I don't know if you know, but your big brother is *big every-damn-where*. Lawd have mercy...You can't say I never did anything for you. Matter of fact, you can put this here right at the top of the list, 'cause ba-by, I swear that boy rearranged my damn ovaries. Anyways, you need to call me. Paul's

been blowing up my phone looking for you. You do know you had dance drill today, right? Dismount the dick for a hot second and holla atcha bitch.”

Rayne stared at the phone, her mouth wide open in shock. It took a second for best friend’s words to sink in.

Brianna slept with Sota!

With tears streaming down her face, she burst into a fit of tittering laughter, delirious from the sudden and welcomed image her crazy friend’s words planted in her mind.

For a moment, she forgot all about the scent of blood and death surrounding her, but as soon as she took a breath to laugh again, she was zapped right back into the reality of her life. Along with the laughter, her grin fell away.

She pushed up from the bench, headed out of the studio and dragged her feet down the long hallway. Then without thought, she brought the phone to her ear. It didn’t ring nor vibrate, but somehow she knew someone was on the other end.

“Narri.”

“Sharayna, Sota’s here at the airport picking me up. We’re a little over an hour out, but we’ll be there as soon as possible.” Narri’s words came out in a rush on hard breaths, like she was running. “Sota said you disappeared after the photo shoot. Are you with Demetri?”

Whoa, info she didn't provide. "What—"

"No questions. We don't have time for that. Is Demetri with you?"

"How come you can ask questions and I can't?"

"Is he with you, Sharayna?"

"Think I'd be talking to you if he was with me?"

"Goodness gracious, child! Just answer the question."

"Noo Narri, he's not here," she whined. "I went to go see his brother to get his address, he told me to come home and wait."

"Good. All right honey listen, this is important. You are not to leave the house under *any circumstances*, none what so ever. No one gets in, but Demetri. I don't care if it's Brianna, Paul or one of your other friends, *do not* open the door."

Narri's anxiousness came through the phone and stirred with her disoriented disposition. Rayne found herself pacing rapidly up and down the hallway, her heart beating furiously, her head about to explode.

"Wait Narri, there's something I gotta tell you," she pushed out quickly, grabbing at her hair. "Uh, when I, uh, okay, this is messed up, so brace yourself. I felt I needed Jesus, 'cause, ya know, everything's been so—I dunno, diabolical, so I went to the church to see Father Shannon—"

“Oh heavens no! Don’t tell me! I don’t want to know! Damn you Sota, all you had to do was keep an eye on her and you couldn’t even do that! One simple job! Instead of concentrating on what you’re supposed to do, you’re chasing tail!”

She heard Sota rumbled grunts through the phone.

“Stop hitting me, Narri! I’m driving, damn! You’re not gonna blame this on me. If she wanted to leave, there was nothing I could do or say to stop her and you know it. She’s in mid-shift for Christ sake! Give me the phone!”

“Oh you just shut up. I’m so angry with you right now.”

“Seriously? Are you guys for real? If you’d just stop arguing for a second—I’m really messed up here and ya’ll are not helping,” she shouted, bringing an end to their bickering. She stopped her frantic pacing, leaned against wall then slid down to the floor. “I smell blood all around me. I hear people screaming. I’m not even gonna tell you what I feel like doing right now.”

“Baby girl, can you hear me?” Sota asked. She answered with groan. “Look, I put something in the kitchen. I want you to go check it out right now. Hurry.”

Huffing, she got to her feet and stalked to the kitchen. “Know what Sota, I don’t even wanna talk to you. You spend more time with me than anybody. You had all the chances in the world to drop this bomb on me *Mr. Some-things-are-kept-from-people- ‘cause-the-mind-and-heart*, blah, blah, blah—whateva, I don’t wanna hear nothing you gotta say. Put Narri back on the phone.”

“I, I understand your anger—”

“No you don’t! I’m going through this, not you! I mean, c’mon man,” she shouted, slapping the souvenir magnets from the fridge. “This is some mess ya’ll should have told me when I was like five! Damn Sota, a simple, hey Rayne, you’re not like everyone else would’ve sufficed!”

“Okay, okay, baby girl, I know you’re upset, but you have to calm down and listen to me for a second. I need you to do me a solid. Go over by the island and push in the bottom socket.”

Aggravated, she snorted and jabbed the bottom socket of the outlet located just below the countertop. A section of her Brazilian wood cabinet slid to the side, revealing a secret weaponry rack. Two rows, equipped with an array of different automatic pistols.

She almost dropped the phone. “What the...?”

“Listen carefully, you have six semi-automatic pistols which all hold a total of fifteen rounds, and are equipped with lasers to point out your target...”

“God man, what do I need guns for?”

“Just listen, Rayne. There are three nine millimeters and three twenty-twos. The top row is loaded with UV rounds and the bottom row silver nitrate. Get one of each, and keep them close. Below the cabinet in a hidden compartment is more ammo. Grab a case and stick it in your pocket—”

“Hold up.” She tried to steady her heavy breathing and blink back her tears. “What’re you saying? Somebody’s gonna try to kill me?” Her words came out in a strained whisper.

His nervous gulp slammed into her eardrum.

“Oh God! You serious,” she cried.

“Oh baby girl, it’s gonna be all right, okay. This is nothing you can’t handle. Believe what I’m telling you. Now, I need you to think back on all the times we went to the shooting range. Think of the target. If they get past the barrier, aim for the head—”

“Wait.” Rayne closed her eyes, turned her face upward and involuntarily sniffed the air. The familiar aroma hit her senses before *he* even stepped foot out of the car. “What the hell is *he* doing here? Uh, hold that thought, brah. Someone’s at the door. I’ll call you back.”

“No Rayne! Don’t—”

She ended the call, tossed the phone on the couch and eased to the door. She reluctantly reached for the doorknob.

“No, my lady! You must not open the door!”

Jolted, she jumped and almost tripped over the foyer table. “Dammit.” She righted herself and warily looked around for the unseen person she knew wouldn’t be there. “Uh, hello?”

“Hello Sharayna.”

She knew this soft spoken voice. Demetri’s sword. “Uh hey, you can’t just pop in my head like that. You have to give me some sorta warning or something. You know my nerves ain’t right,” she whispered, taking slow steps back from the door.

“My apologies, but your demon has been awakened and will surely rule your actions if you open that door. I am trying to restrain the dark energy you possess, but you are besting my greatest efforts. You are so strong. You must be still and await Lord Demetri’s arrival. With him, all will be well.”

The doorbell chimed erratically. She fell back against the wall and pressed her hand to frantic thump beneath her chest. Part of her wanted to sprint from the door, but the other part wanted to open it. Her mind was torn.

Demetri.

She glanced at her watch. Forty minutes. Forty long minutes until nightfall. Could she last that long without doing something she’d regret?

“Rayne,” Troy called out. “Baby c’mon, open the door, I need to see you.”

“My lady, please listen to me. You must not give into the temptation until you are in control of your being! Be still,” the woman pleaded.

Rayne squeezed her eyes shut and suffered through a sudden surge of pain in her gut. She even held her breath, hoping he’d just go away, but that crazy ass

man stayed on her porch, calling her name, like he knew she was on the other side of the door. After several minutes that ran like hours, she couldn't take it anymore.

"Troy, you need to leave, okay. Just call me and we'll talk."

"I tried that! You're not answering your fucking phone!" he shouted with a hard rap on the door.

"What are you even doing here? I never told you where I lived."

"I don't know, boo. Just open the door," he pleaded.

What happened to the security at the gate? Troy shouldn't have even gotten this far without her consent.

"Noo. Leave Troy. We'll chop it up another time, okay."

The door groaned at the weight of his body slamming into it. "Baby, please. I, I need to be inside you. I just wanna taste a lil' bit of you." His harsh pants sifted through the door. "Don't say no to me again. I can't take it."

"You don't understand. I'm...I'm sick, not myself right now, okay. Please. Just leave!"

"Rayne, I'm not leaving."

Persistent asshole. "Get away from my damn door, Troy, before I call the cops. I'm serious. You need to bounce."

“Look baby, I don’t care about all of that. I gotta have you. C’mon, open up. We can do whatever you want. Hey, you can even bite me again. I liked that shit, girl. It felt good.”

She went rigid. Now why would he say that? *“He knows not what he asks, for the pleasure of your kiss has clouded his mind. Please be still, my young Queen and leave him be,”* the voice begged as it faded out of her mind. *“Don’t cast me away, dear child. You need guidance for this transition.”*

Sending him on his way suddenly sounded like a terrible idea. “I’m sorry, but I hafta do this, ma.”

Rayne staggered back to the door, her lids lowering, and her hands roaming over her body. She dragged her tongue across her pulsating teeth and nicked herself on her sharp incisors. The taste of her blood lingered on her tongue. She shuddered. Her core and nipples throbbed with urgency.

With a thought, the handle turned and the door swung open. Never had Troy seemed as sexually appealing as he did at that moment. Hands resting on either side of the doorframe, his deep eyes gazed at her from hooded lids. His shoulder and arm muscles flexed beneath a rain soaked shirt as his blood pumped hard and fast through his veins.

He looked good enough to eat. Pun intended.

She reached out, grabbed his shirt and yanked him in the house. Kicking the door shut with the heel of his foot, he latched onto her mouth. She didn't hold back. She returned his ravenous kiss, drawing a guttural groan from the pit of his chest. Hungrily, she nipped at his probing tongue and sucked the deliciousness bubbling from it.

He jerked in her grasp, but seemed to not mind. Palming her ass, he lifted her. She wrapped her legs around his waist, locked her ankles and rolled her crotch against his rigid cock.

“Down the hall, last room on the right,” she moaned.

Nearly tripping over the rug, he rushed past the living room, and down the hallway to her bedroom, with her attached to him.

Aggressively, she sucked on his tongue as he fell on the bed, smashing her against the plush comforter. She wiggled beneath him, fighting their closeness to unbuckle his belt.

Their hands clashed when he reached down to try to help unbuckle his pants.

Frustrated, she flipped him onto his back and yanked the belt effortlessly from around his waist. He curved his hands over her ass and bucked beneath her, undulating his hardened member along the cleft of her heated sex. As a shudder

ran through her, she ripped his shirt open and bent to twirl her tongue around his nipple, tasting the salt on his skin.

In urgency, he grabbed the sides of her face and whispered, “I want you to bite me, Rayne.”

Wincing at her churning gut, she pulled back and looked into his leaden eyes. “Do you know what you’re asking me to do?” Her fangs sprang boldly out—not that she could help it—and it seemed like he didn’t care. No, something wasn’t right. He should be freaking out right about now. “Troy, you on something?”

“I’m on you. Or better yet, you’re on me,” he quipped, flashing a boyish grin. “C’mon babe, do it to me. It feels so good.”

“Seriously boo. This doesn’t seem right,” she faltered. “Your eyes are...You kinda look like a drug head, like you’re feenin’ for that next hit.”

He laughed heartily. “If I’m a drug head then it’s your fault.”

Damn, he sounded coherent, but his eyes...

Through those deep brown orbs, the evidence of his indiscretions washed into her. His appetite for sex was insatiable. He’d screwed half of the women on her dance squad and even a few guys too. Aside for being surprisingly aroused, she felt like a fool for not knowing.

I want to make this real with you. He'd used this line on many of his partners, including her. It did not matter her status. She was just another piece of sweet ass to him.

A smile played on her lips. Her need to feed from him grew stronger. "Wow, you're a very naughty boy, Troy. I had no idea you swung both ways. Ohh and you do it so well," she whispered in a voice that didn't sound like her own. She dragged her nails lightly over his flexing peck and tweaked his nipple.

He sucked air sharply through his teeth and wound his hips up against her slit. "Rayne..."

Hissing in pleasure, she licked his parted lips. "Do you know what'll happen if I bite you?"

His pupils enlarged until his irises no longer held color. "I'll belong to you." And with that said, he bared his throat.

"Oh yes you will," she moaned.

She clamped her mouth over the rapidly pulsating vein in his neck. Unlike when she tried to pierce Demetri's jugular, her sharp incisors easily penetrated his flesh.

His body stiffened beneath her as he howled her name. An overflow of hot tangy liquid filled her mouth, delighted her tongue and showered down her throat.

Sweet, sensual moans spilled out of her in a symphony of pure rapture. The taste was amazing, so delicious, nearly suffocating.

As she swallowed his elixir bit by bit, immense pleasure ripped down his body and shot through her core. The scent of his seed spilling from his shaft to seep into his boxers and jeans, mingled with the aroma of her womanhood spewing her milky essence drove her to quicken her draw.

He wrapped his arms around her waist and hugged her tightly. “Ohh baby, oh God, yes Rayne, please don’t stop,” he slurred.

The pace of his pulse slowed. His embrace weakened.

Pushing back, she forced herself to release him. From the dresser’s mirror, she caught a glimpse of her shimmering reflection. Crimson liquid trickled from the corners of her mouth, down the side of her chin and made small red botches on her t-shirt.

Exhilarated, she moaned wildly and licked her lips like a crazed animal. She closed her eyes, dipped her head back and laughed. The blood tripped through her system, aggressively tickling her insides. It was insanity and ecstasy all wrapped up in a tight package. A feeling she wouldn’t trade in for the world.

She was high, higher than she’d ever been.

A melody came to her mind. She'd name this one after Troy, since he was her first real feed. She hummed the sweet tune to herself, winding her body like an enchanted snake.

“Heady, isn't it?”

Startled, she fell back and tumbled off the bed. Half high and half spazzed, she clumsily got to her feet and darted her eyes around the spacious room. “Hello? Who's there?”

In the corner of her room, a white blur hovered. The obscure object took shape. It blended and morphed, fusing with the atmosphere, until blackness appeared and just as quickly dissipated.

A tall frame of a man appeared, dressed in all white. A platinum-blonde mane poured down his back like a waterfall and kissed his calves. Strands of hair covered the sides of his face while he looked down, casually removing a set of white gloves from his hands.

“Nothing can compare to sucking the life from a deserving soul.” He turned toward her and shoved the gloves in his pocket. “Nothing at all.”

A pair of unusual green eyes peered out from feminine Asian features, which seemed to look right through her. A fair, golden complexion shaded his skin, and contrasted nicely with the white suit.

There was something familiar about this man. Even his voice was recognizable in her mind. “Who are you?”

Chuckling, he rounded the bed and ambled toward her. “You will know soon enough.”

The closer he got, the more his uncanny beauty shone. A strange attraction to this man evolved within her.

“Tell me, what are you wearing? Give me a detailed description of your beauty.”

She glanced down at her over-sized, bright purple tinker bell t-shirt, then looked back up at him, her brow arched. “You can’t see me?”

Just as the words left her mouth, he flashed directly in front of her. “No, I can only feel the caress of your soul’s energy, which is how I found you. It spikes when you shift to feed. It’s like leaving a blood trail that leads me straight to you.”

Oddly, she wasn’t startled or the least bit tempted to move away. She actually yearned to get closer to him. His villainous lips curved into a smirk as if he knew exactly how she felt.

Nibbling on her tongue ring, she studied his face. Small narrow nose, high cheek bones, thin eyes brows and shiny, full hair some women would die for. Specks of gold dotted his eerie, bright green irises.

His smile grew wider under her appraisal. A glint from a set of long, silver fangs added to his beauty. Helplessly, she stepped forward.

“Soo, why are you here?”

“Because you summoned me.”

Rayne pursed her lips. “I don’t think so,” she snipped. “First of all, if I had a choice to summon *anybody*, it wouldn’t be you.”

“Ouch. So brutal,” he crooned, covering his heart like he’d been shot. “Dear Queen, if you took some time to get to know me, you’d see I’m the better choice. Wouldn’t you rather be graced with my presence than the unseen defiling and torturing defenseless women?”

Now *that* startled her.

She back stepped, eyeing him suspiciously. “You—how do you know ‘bout that?”

“Oh, I know everything about you, my love.”

She folded her arms under her breasts and cocked her head. “But you can’t see me? You don’t even know what I look like and you probably don’t know my name.”

“No, I don’t. But you’re going to tell me.”

“No, I’m not,” she said, mocking his tone. “Not ‘til you tell me who you are.”

He nodded. “All right then. Since you haven’t figured it out yet; I’m your husband, your king.”

Rayne released a breathless giggle, amused and slightly disturbed at the same time. “I don’t know about all of that, brah.”

There was a strong connection with this man, one she could hardly resist. Could he really be her husband? Nah.

“I don’t recall tying the knot with anybody, especially with a blonde-haired Asian guy. That would kinda stick out in the memory bank, don’t cha think?”

He closed the gap between them. “You and I were joined once you were born. You feel me, yes? My essence runs through your blood stream.” He slipped his hands over her hips and to her surprise; she didn’t try to stop him. “You feel me running through you when the night calls, when the moon is full, when the need to be loved hard and slow surges through your core.” She glanced down, wanting to feel him, but only felt brush of wind in the wake of his touch. “You feel me running through you when the slightest glance of a neck sets your body on fire.”

A lump formed in her throat as his hands moved around her hips to her backside.

Groaning, he licked his lips. “Wonder why you can’t stop touching yourself or that sex with your lover doesn’t appease your appetites anymore?” Sinking to his knees, he trailed his hands down the back of her thighs to grip her calves.

“Wonder why your horrific visions terrify you, *yet* intrigue you at the same time? You ignore the calling of your true nature to remain under the guise of a human form, but I can help you grasp your identity.”

It suddenly became difficult to listen and watch his hands at the same time. This man was working her over something fierce, trailing his hands over every peak and cranny, exploring her without pause. The feeling of disbelief hung in the back of her mind with a spiraling ribbon of pleasure. It baffled her that she'd allow this strange man to run his hands all over her body, and even more shocking, she thoroughly enjoyed it.

The breezy touch of his hands climbed up her legs then to front of her thighs. “You are an exquisite creation. Voluptuous and curvy. Such a powerful frame. Even sexier than I imagined.”

“You imagined?” she strained out on a whisper, shivering when he lifted her shirt to brush his lips across her stomach. “Uhm, may-maybe you should slow it down there boy,” she pushed out on a breath, anticipating him to deepen his kiss on her exposed skin. “We, uh, we just met.”

Then something happened, that couldn't have been real. An abnormally long tongue shot out of his mouth and wrapped around her waist like a possessive snake. She stared wide eyed as he withdrew his lengthy, slithery tongue back into his mouth with a grin.

“Okay, that wasn’t weird at all,” she jested nervously, pushing away from him. “You we’re on a roll until you wrapped the freaky, long tongue around me.”

Smiling, he stood. “That’s not the only thing *freaky long* on me.”

“Ooo yeah, I bet.” Tickled, she shot a shifty glance down at his crotch.

He chuckled and eased toward her, staring blindly into her eyes. “Tell me you loved my hands on your body, my dear Queen. Your arousal oozed through your energy field. Think of how much pleasure I could give you if we weren’t so far away from one another.”

“Sounds nice, but I think...” She swallowed the lump in her throat. “I think if we we’re supposed to be together, you wouldn’t be so far away.”

“Your doubt in our union is holding me at bay,” he whispered, suddenly behind her. His long blonde hair fell over her shoulder as he wrapped his arm around her waist and brushed his lips across her cheek.

She restrained a moan. Damn, she wanted this man with a passion.

“You are a supreme being, a divine force. Anything you want is right in the palm of your hand, including me. Call me to your side, and I will give you what you need for all eternity.”

Flustered by the rapture of his touch, she turned her head and allowed his lips to inch closer to her mouth. Shaken, she caught herself and shoved away from him.

“Eternity?” She spun and glared at him. “Right. Since you know so much about me, and wanna give me *what I need*, why don’t you tell me exactly what I am. Am I a Xsonri, or something more?”

“Of course.” He bowed earnestly. “I will tell you whatever you want to know, but first, you must finish your meal, my love.”

“Wha...”

He grabbed her shoulders and spun her around to face Troy. This time the touch, which was almost nonexistent before held a compelling force behind it. She felt his grip heating her skin.

“Finish him.”

Troy was motionless. His legs hung off the bed, his breaths labored and faint, his color gradually fading. He was dying.

“He needs to die in your embrace. You’ve already delivered him to the void of death from where there is no return. If you finish what you’ve started, he will suffer no more.”

Tears filled her eyes. What had she been thinking? How could she do that to him?

“No, hell no.” She writhed out of his grasp. “This is beyond fucked up. This is—I can’t believe I did this to him. I’m sorry, Troy. I have to get him to the

hospital,” she muttered quickly, wringing her hands together. “Maybe they can give him a blood transfusion or something.”

The blonde hair gent bellowed out in laughter.

She grimaced and suddenly hated him for that. “Oh, so you think this shit is funny?”

“Your faith in humans is wonderfully mirthful. Foolish girl, they can’t save him, and even if they could, he is poisoned by your bite. He will continue to come back for more until you’ve drained him dry.”

His words squeezed her heart. “I don’t care what you say. I’m gonna try anyway.”

She ran toward the door to go retrieve her phone, but was grabbed from behind and slammed into the wall.

With the wind knocked out of her, she started to sink to the floor. He grabbed her by the throat and yanked her up right.

“Why are you resisting me? You are not supposed to resist me,” he growled, his eyes solid red and his eyeteeth lengthening. “You refuse to remove your barrier, blinding me from your identity! Who is he?”

“Who is who? What the hell are you talking ‘bout?” she choked out, trying to gather her wits.

“Who is the creature you think you belong to?”

“It ain’t you.”

Tilting his head, he reluctantly released her neck, then laughed. “You live to try my patience, my little defiant angel. I’ll enjoy fucking you into submission.” The pads of his long fingers left a heated trail along her collarbone.

“What.” She giggled and slapped his hand away. “Fuck me into submission, huh? Good luck with that.”

He leaned in and placed his lips to her ear. “You’ll regret this disrespect.”

A bizarre sensation came over her. She found herself wanting to lock her thighs around him, but at the same time, she wanted to rip his head off. It was outside of insane. He invigorated her, vexed her and made her horny as hell. She couldn’t think straight long enough to figure out what she wanted to feel.

“Yeah? What are you gonna do to make me regret it?”

She glanced over his shoulder at her ex-lover stirring sluggishly on the bed. He was fighting to live. *Hang in there Troy.*

“You play a very dangerous game, my Queen. Finish the boy, so that I may taste your body.”

“And if I don’t?”

Growling like an agitated lion, he slid down the length of her to his knees and smashed his face into her crotch. His touch was once again like the brush of a feather. His form became ghostly. A deep rumble traveled from his mouth through

her insides as *the breeze* sifted between her thighs and parted her folds. She held back a whimper, dug her head into the wall and grabbed a hand full of his hair, which was nothing more than weightless cotton to her touch. Her hips rolled against the soft zephyr of his tongue. It caressed her hardened pearl, back and forth until her body was on the brink of climax.

Demetri.

She quickened and yanked his head back. Those sexy turquoise eyes burned in her mind as if *he* was watching her at that very moment. She looked down into the stranger's lust filled face. Her attraction to him was strong, but not strong enough to eliminate the feeling that something was terribly wrong with this picture.

"My beautiful Dragon Goddess, drop your barrier against me," he pleaded, spreading his arms out to her. "I can't smell you. I can't taste you. I can't even fucking see you!" He shot off the ground and grabbed her neck. "You subject me to only feel your spiritual presence! I need to feel your skin against mine. Free me of this torture. Finish the boy!"

Through his scarlet glare, screaming faces came forth, covered in blood, slashed beyond recognition. Then she saw him, wielding a blade, slicing, feeding, raping. The image of the beautiful creature before her was the damned devil.

"You killed all of those people!"

“Yes! Their souls belong to me.”

Heat crept up behind her eyes. “Oh my God!”

A piercing shriek erupted from him, stinging her ears. Something sideswiped her ankles. She tumbled to the floor. Before she could right herself, he was on top of her.

“You are never to speak *his* name in my presence,” he hissed between clenched fangs, his face inches from hers. “Or many more will die in your honor.”

She struggled beneath him. “Get your Satan ass off of me, bitch!”

Chuckling, he brushed the back of his hand down her cheek. “You are wrong, my Queen. I am not Satan. However, you would not be wrong to class me as such, since his blood runs through my veins, and it also runs through yours,” he finished on a chilling whisper.

“I don’t give a damn who you are. Get off of me,” she sneered, trying to push his body away only to have her hands go right through him.

He grabbed her wrists and pinned them above her head. “You were born to love me, to stand by my side as my Queen, and you shall,” he growled. “We will rule the underworld and the earthly realm, together, destroying *anyone* who stands in our path. Through your blood...” He leaned in closer and brushed his nose across hers. “We will overthrow my father and the seven levels of hell will be brought forth.” A serene expression came over his face as his voice lowered to a soft croon.

“Then once all is ours, you will bear me a child, one with power immeasurable. This is your duty as my Queen.” He traced his fingers along her neckline. “Until we are joined the image of my face will carve your mind, and stain your dreams. Your body will ache for me, your core will yearn for me, and every thought you’ll have from this night forth will be of our union.”

A devious smile tugged at the corner of her lips. “You’re too late, potna. My thoughts are on somebody else. My core *yearns* for somebody else,” she mocked.

His fangs stretched so long, he looked like a saber tooth tiger. Amazingly, she wasn’t the least bit moved by his anger.

“But I promise to take a second to think about you every now and then so you won’t feel left out.”

“Foolish half-blood bitch!”

The walls shattered around them. Chunks of the house floated by in slow motion.

He reared back, his fist cocked, prepared to strike. Eyeing the gradual movement of his intent, Rayne slammed her hand into his chest. Words unknown seeped from her lips. A zip of static energy spiraled up her arm and shot out of her palm, sending him flying across the room like a ragdoll.

Once released, she scrambled to her feet, just in time to witness a long grotesque tail spool out from behind him. His feet transform into massive claws and his platinum-blonde hair stood straight up on his head.

His true form.

His body bulked up to twice the size, his talons and tail struck the floor. Leather wings shot out of his back and unfurled into a span of blackness.

He released an earth-shattering growl, giving way to deathly cries and mountains of flames. “You will regret this defiance!”

Undaunted, she stood her ground on the small section of floor beneath her. Her shoulder blades throbbed fiercely. Fear no longer had meaning to her. She narrowed her heated glare at him.

“Stop running your mouth and bring it then, devil boy!”

“Oh I will, very soon, my Queen.” He ascended with a bow then vanished within the flames. “*Very soon.*”

Chapter Twenty-Three

Full Moon

The flames dissipated and vaporized into a white mist. Rayne blinked rapidly and steadied her breathing as the structure of her house collected itself. Broken pieces of glass and shattered dry wall mended together to form her room again.

She peered around, looking for any signs of Mr. Green-eyed, devil boy.

Thank God, he was gone.

She rushed over to Troy and placed a shaky hand on his chest. His sluggish heartbeat faintly knocked against her palm. *God, please don't let him die.*

“Troy! Troy, please, open your eyes!” Panicked, she shook his chest. “Baby, c'mon, wake up!”

His lids fluttered. “It's cool,” he slurred. “You know you my baby.”

“Hey.” She slapped his face. “Hey, get up, okay. I'm gonna take you to the hospital.” Pained emotion cracked her voice. Tears blurred her eyes. “God, Troy I'm so sorry. I couldn't control myself.” She darted over to her dresser, yanked out a pair of sweat pants and all but jumped into them.

After tying her hair back in a ponytail, she ran over to the bed, slipped her arm under his shoulders and tried to help him sit up.

A stabbing pain attacked her gut. “Oh God!” Wincing and groaning, she stumbled back and doubled over.

“Contain your blood hunger, my lady. I know it is painful, but you must not take this mortal’s life.”

The woman’s voice was drowned out by the weak pulsing blood in Troy’s veins. It called out to her. She backed away, inching closer to the door. She wouldn’t be able to take him anywhere without feeding on him again. Her only other option was to call the ambulance and get the hell out of the house.

Troy’s lids dragged open. “Naw girl, doan go.” He groggily reached for her. “Bite me again.”

The words formed a chant in her mind, causing her incisors to lengthen. With tears sliding down her cheeks, she tried desperately to will back what roared inside of her. She wanted to bite him so bad it hurt.

“God, please, I can’t,” she sobbed. “Please don’t ask me to.”

“It’s good, girl. Do it.”

“Shut up, Troy!” she cried out, palming her stomach. “You don’t know what you’re asking me to do!”

She ran out of the room and down the hall in search of her phone, then suddenly stopped.

The patter of the rain was louder than usual. She crept into the living room. The scent of blood and wet dog assaulted her senses. As she drew closer, she noticed the curtains whipping about violently in the wind. The large window behind them had been shattered.

Fresh blood dripped down the jagged glass shards protruding from the window pane. Like a trail of bread crumbs, drops of the crimson fluid dotted her tan carpet and led to the den. Praying under her breath, she followed the trail, then peeked around the partition wall and froze when her eyes fell upon the gruesome sight.

She watched in horror as the huge wolf beast fed upon the carcass of what used to be her neighbor's beloved dog. Sounds of bones cracking and flesh ripping under the beast's powerful jaws sickened her to the core. Feeling the invasion of light headedness, she took a step back, prepared to flee.

Her sudden movement caught the creature's eye.

Its head popped up and turned in her direction. A deadly snarl ceased her panic-stricken retreat. The hairy creature began to slowly approach her, its sharp nails scraping the wooden floor. Thick clumps of bloody flesh and entrails hung from its large fangs. Baleful, narrowed eyes glared at her, glowing with anger.

Her heart thumped erratically, her breath pushed out in short spurts. She slid her eyes toward the kitchen. If she could only get to the guns...

She made a go for it.

A huge paw connected with the side of her face and smashed her head into the mantle of the fireplace. She went down. The creature shadowed over her and pressed its paw into her abdomen, digging its nails into her flesh. Crying out, she clawed at its paw like a maddened animal. It slapped her hand away and pinned her arm to the floor.

It leaned in closely to brush the entrails across her face. She whipped her head to the side and willed back the tears of anguish. This creature taunted her with the stench of death on its breath and with the innocent lives he'd taken.

The lupine creature released a deep husky chuckle then began to change shape. The long snout and jaws shrunk, giving way to a human nose and mouth. Long pointy ears compressed into the small shells of human earlobes. Thick fur vanished, revealing smooth beige skin.

She stared up in astonishment at what was now, a naked man on top of her. The same man from the club.

Armando.

He turned and spat the entrails out of his mouth. Lustfully, he gleamed down at her, a wicked grin on his face. “Hey baby, miss me?” he asked in a deep throaty groan.

Now, ain’t this some shit?

In a snap, her hand was around his neck. Her fangs jutted out, sending a jolt of pain through her mouth. “You muthafucka, you killed my neighbor’s dog!”

He snatched her hand from his neck and pinned it to the ground. “And I’ll kill that meat bag too, if you don’t act right.”

She gulped back the angry words that sat on the edge of her tongue.

“Yeah, the one you left in your room, half dead,” he whispered, brushing his cheek against hers.

A new wave of panic fell over her. She’d left Troy totally defenseless against an attack. The boy couldn’t even climb out of the window if she’d told him to. She had to think fast. Think of something to throw wolf boy off track, so she could make her strike and put him down for good.

She stopped struggling and forced herself to relax beneath him. “What do you want? Tell me.” she asked seductively, lowering her lids. “I’ll give you anything, *papito*.”

He grabbed her neck and released a rumbling growl. “Don’t fuck with me, Rayne or I swear I’ll rip your throat out, right here, right now!” he boomed, his eyes turning wolfish.

She blinked up a storm and tried to calm her twitching nerves. This was the second asshole who’d pinned her to the ground and threatened her life today. She was at the end of her patience and if it wasn’t for Troy, she’d be rolling and tussling with this mutt right now! It wasn’t even about getting away from him anymore. It was about dropping his ass in the most ruthless manner possible.

“But baby,” she whispered in a sweet song, arching her back to brush her breasts against his naked chest. “I’m not fooling with you.” She tilted her head back in submission, baring her neck then lightly dragged her nail down his arm. “I’m so horny right now, I don’t know what to do with myself,” she finished with slight roll of her hips.

His glare softened and his body relaxed. Got him! *And the Oscar goes to...*

“Baby, I know, I sense it,” he groaned, grinding his groin against hers. “That’s why I was trying to do my thing at the club, but you was all about getting mad and cursing me out and shit.”

He nuzzled her neck.

It took everything out of her not to take his throat right then and there. But she couldn’t be too hasty. If she went for a strike now, with him being bigger,

stronger and faster than her, he'd probably be able to pull out of the hold and kill her on the spot.

This had to be played just right.

She scraped her nails softly up the side of his torso. He whimpered and flinched. "It's just this thing I'm going through—I dunno. It's got me buggin'."

He drew up and stared down at her with desire in his eyes. "Yeah, that's some fucked up shit ya' boy pulled. He should've prepared you for your shift before turning you, but that's the kind of muthafucka he is. He thinks he *so smooth* and can do whatever he wants." With the rise of his voice, his canines came out. "That's why I can't stand his ass."

Briefly, she closed her eyes and placed her hand to the floor. She took in a deep breath and on exhale released a bit of her energy through the palm of her hand. Doing this seemed second nature to her now. A warm, tickling sensation spread across the floor beneath her.

There would be no interruptions tonight and he wouldn't leave her house alive. She would take him out or die trying.

She palmed his bloody cheek. "Well if you hate him so much, let's do the damn thing," she coaxed, bucking her hips against his erect cock, drawing out sensual growl. "What better way to piss him off than to get it on his woman?"

“You’re not his woman! You’re my woman!” he snarled. “You’ve always been *my woman!*”

His obsession leaked from his mind and flooded hers. Each and every time he’d set up the lightning for her shows and watched her perform, it fed his desire to be with her, and to fuck her in the form of a lust driven wolf. She grimaced, helplessly siphoning the visions of the many lives he’d stolen just to feed his craving for the depraved, insane passion he had for her.

Oh yeah, wolf boy had to die.

“Well if I’m your woman, feed me. Give me a taste of what you got.” She trailed her fingertips along his jugular.

He sharply inhaled then licked his lips. “Naw girl, I can’t do that. Not while you’re shifting. So you can have me like homeboy in the room, all messed up, missing a few pints of blood? I’m not trying to be like that brotha.” Chuckling, he nodded toward the hallway. “You vamp bitches ain’t nothing to fuck with when ya’ll shifting.”

She gazed at him through narrowed lids, locked her legs around his waist and heaved her pussy against his hardened length. His eyes grew wide as he plastered his palms against the floor. Shuddering, he drew up on all fours to level himself. She hugged his neck and pulled her top half off the floor, flush against his chest.

Now she had him in a hold he couldn't get out of even if he wanted to. She tilted her pelvis and rolled her center back and forth along his shaft in an easy rhythmic motion.

Panting like a dog, he dug his nails into the wood floor. "Oh damn, chica!"

She shifted into overdrive, causing his whole body to convulse. His arms became wobbly and his knees started to give out. Small whimpers slipped out of him, then a wall shaking howl ripped from his throat as the eruption of his lust spilled onto her sweatpants.

His limbs collapsed and she was smashed into the floor.

This man was spent by *one nut, without penetration*. That was a downright bitch ass move in its fullest. She almost cracked up in laughter.

Using her thigh muscles, she easily flipped him onto his back. "I don't like to work this hard for what I want, Armando," she hissed, pushing his head to the side to expose his neck.

"My bad, *mami*," he drawled, giving her no resistance.

She leaned in, ready to go in for the strike when suddenly...

"Whachu doing, girl?"

Her eyes snapped in the direction of his voice. Troy held himself up on doorframe, and stared at her from down the hall.

She felt Armando shifting beneath her.

“Run!” she screamed at the top of her lungs, shattering every glass in the house.

A swift blow to the head knocked her on her side. By time she got to her feet, Troy’s screams were clawing at her soul. She couldn’t save him, it was too late. She just prayed the shock killed him long before the wolf did.

She rushed to the kitchen. The gun rack was still open.

Shifting anxiously from one foot to the other, she ran and antsy glance over all the guns. Which one could take out a big ass wolf? What did Sota say? Something about UV and liquid silver, and secret compartment with extra ammo? Fuck it! She snatched one from the top and one from the bottom. Already loaded.

She disengaged the safeties and cautiously headed down the hall with the semi-autos cocked. No wonder Sota forced her to go to the shooting range twice a month. Big bro had to know this day was coming.

Broken glass from the African artwork, which moments ago decorated her walls dug into the soles of her feet as she closed in on her bedroom. Blood and silver tinted sweat soaked into her t-shirt and sweatpants. She closed her eyes and backed up against the wall. The horrific sounds of the wolf feeding on Troy’s flesh filled her ears.

I’m so sorry, Troy.



Demetri stormed back and forth in front of Sharayna's house, growling in rage and squeezing Katsumi's handle. She had blocked him out. The golden barrier surrounding her house was so strong he couldn't penetrate it. Not even the powerful blade of Katsumi could breach it. Golden sparks flashed at his assault, as he slashed at it again and again in feverish strikes, yelling out in a fit of outrage.

"Sharayna!"

It wouldn't anger him so much if his woman wasn't on the other side, trapped in her house with a psychotic, third-level shifter. Huffing, he closed his eyes and sensed her aura. Adrenaline pumped hard through her veins. Silver emitted from her pores. Determination and fury ruled her every movement. She was dead set on killing the beast and deep inside he knew she needed to for her own peace of mind.

Every Xsonri needed to kill justifiably, to tap into the true meaning of their existence, and with the battle angel side of her urging her forward, she wouldn't let down. This would define who she was to herself. But the only problem with that was, he couldn't handle it.

"Please Sharayna, let me in!"

He couldn't handle the fact there was a fair chance the creature trapped in there with her could kill her. Her strength was waning. While in mid-shift, she needed to be fed a considerable amount of blood to lock into her true spirit energy.

This, she didn't have, so she was vulnerable, but her opponent on the other hand, had the ability to heal and regenerate within seconds.

It was not an equal battle match.

Demetri felt the eyes of the neighbors peering at him from their windows. He expected this. He was, after all, standing outside of Sharayna's house screaming out her name for all to hear. Yes, it was truly foolish of him to do so without placing a sound barrier around him, but he could not spare a moment to gather his wits when his emotions were out of control. To even attempt to make a level-headed decision at this moment was useless.

Someone stirred in the distance, moving toward him. Demetri shook his head. This was unfortunate. With him being disoriented, he was liable to kill *anyone* without warning.

Before the man could open his mouth, Demetri turned around, his eyes burning fury and his fangs out in full mass. He leveled Katsumi at the human.

Frightened, the man scuttled back.

"Kind sir, I appreciate your concern for your neighbor, but approaching me on this affair is not very wise. I am extremely irrational and unstable at the moment," he warned sternly. "If you value your life and want to keep it, I suggest you return to your home and leave me be."



Rayne pushed off the wall, spun into the doorway and opened fire. The wolf leaped back from the carcass and jumped on the wall. Flying bullets made a glowing silver and blue trail behind him as he sprinted across the wall toward her. He pounced on her, knocking her down. Her head smashed against the hard wood floor.

The creature snarled and snapped at her. Using one gun to smash him in the head, she squeezed the trigger on the next. Three bullets caught him in the chest. He yowled, leapt off, then bolted down the hallway.

Sluggishly, she pushed up from the floor and shook her head. She tried to will away the vertigo and severe cramping in her stomach. She touched the back of her head and brought back silver tinted blood. A renewed sense of rage bubbled up within her at the sight.

“Oh hell to the naw.”

Forcing herself not to glance at what used to be Troy, she swiped up her semi-autos and rushed down the hall, following the fresh droplets of the wolf's blood. Near the kitchen entrance, she paused. A huge paw lashed out, only inches from her face. She skipped back. He sprung out of the kitchen into the living room in a furry brown blur.

Fleety, she rounded the corner and started spraying gun-fire in a wide spread. Six shots and the clips were empty. *Shit!*

He released a furious growl, rose up on his hind legs and rushed her. She threw a gun at him. It smashed him in the snout, and then she threw the next one and struck him in the eye. Yelping loudly, he rattled his head then covered his nose and eye with his paws.

She scurried backward into the kitchen. Ignoring the sting of glass biting into the soles of her feet, she went for two more firearms. Before she could lock her hands around the handle of the weapons, she was slammed hard on the side her head. She tumbled back onto the island, knocking her knife set down as she hit the floor.

A whirling sensation consumed her. She stared blurry-eyed up at the beast growling at her, preparing to attack again. He lunged forward. She swung her leg up and the heel of her foot cocked him right in the nose. Whimpering in agony, he crashed to the floor.

She rolled over, got on all fours. Just out of her reach, she eyed one of the knives. She willed her weak limbs to move toward the shiny, silver kitchen blade. Inches from it, his huge paw came down on her back. Her intended weapon skittered across the tiles as she was pinned to the floor. She struggled under his hold, reaching desperately for the knife, which was now several feet from her. Swallowing back the scream threatening to rip from her throat, she withstood the pain of the wolf's claws digging in her flesh.

Her strength was fading fast. Her vision became blurrier by the moment, but giving up and allowing this beast to kill her wasn't an option.

Realizing her struggles were doing more harm than good, she stopped fighting and just laid there, staring at the knife. A sense of desperation spiraled up through her chest, shot through her arm and with the thought, the knife filled her hand.

Yes!

Rayne gripped the handle and aimed it up over her head to stab him in the eye. The creature reared back. She slid from beneath him and scrambled to her feet. Yowling wildly, he pawed at the knife, clumsily trying to remove it from his eye. Then he lost his footing in a puddle of blood, fell back onto the stove and to the floor.

Three small gaping holes in his chest oozed silver, but he was still alive.

Aim for the head, was Sota's instruction. She remembered that much. Hopefully, it'd be easier now that he was distracted by the knife in his eye.

She hurried to retrieve the gun when the stabbing cramps returned full blast. Breathing heavily, she backed into the wall and clutched at her heaving stomach. The distressed beast squirmed on the ground like a fish out of water and gradually drew the knife from his eye.

Damn, why wouldn't this thing die?

Another wave of pain crashed into her. She dropped to one knee. The increasing thrust of the gut-wrenching ache traveled through her limbs, making it hard to breathe. Her shoulder blades burned painfully, drawing out a throaty cry. This was excruciating pain. She squeezed her eyes shut, and willed away the suffering for only seconds at a time just to have it attack her again.

“God, please!” she screamed out.

A distant voice calling her name entered her mind. She tilted her head and concentrated hard on drawing the voice forward. It became louder and clearer. Her hands trembled.

“Please,” she whimpered.

Then the familiar voice shot through her mind like a bullet. Her head jerk back.

“*Sharayna!*”

Gasping, she shot to her feet. “Demetri!”

A hand grabbed her throat and slammed her back into the wall. She opened her eyes and glared at the creature who was now in human form.

“You dare say that muthafucka’s name in front of me, *puta!*” he spat, squeezing her neck.

Before she could think about what to do, her hands made a swift, reflexive move.

He released her, weaved backwards like a drunken fool and stared at her, eyes stretched in shock. A waterfall of blood spilled from his sides. A crimson puddle pooled at his feet. She looked down dazed and giggled headily. In her bloody hands, she held two of his ribs.

Silver from the bullet holes trailed through his body. His veins protruded, he staggered deliriously, but remained on his feet.

Through the two gaping holes in his torso, his ribs started to repair themselves. He snarled and released a challenging growl.

“Seriously though...?” she asked wearily. “Brah, I just snatched two ribs out of your ass and you still wanna come at me?”

Canines bared, he rushed her. As soon as he was within arm’s reach, she reared back then surged forward, lodging the ribs deep into his gut. Before he had a chance to fall to the ground, she smashed her palm into the center of his chest and sent him flying back through the kitchen wall, all the way to the front door.

Once again, she fell to her knees, her arms hanging loosely at her sides. That was it. She’d used the last bit of energy she had to push him back. If he came at her again, she was done.

“That’s all I got,” she whispered. “I’m spent, baby. I need you.”

“And I am here for you.” Demetri’s smooth voice was like a soft kiss on her lips.

“Allow me to take away your pain.”

Her head swirled in delight. A weakened smile curved her lips as she sought the floor for rest. The cool tile instantly warmed beneath her. She drew her knees to her chest and stared at the creature through the huge hole in her kitchen wall.

“Baby, I’m sorry I didn’t call to you earlier,” she whispered, watching Armando gather himself. “I had to do this...”

He yanked the ribs out of his stomach. His regenerative powers healed his flesh in an instant. As if he could get any angrier, he roared and shifted back into wolf form.

“Oh my God, this bastard just won’t die—”

“Shhh. Quiet yourself, Angel.”

In mid charge, the lupine beast was seized by a dark mist and yanked back against the door.

A woman’s beautiful soprano entered her mind as a blade shot through the creature’s head and out his mouth. The alluring song became louder, soothing her mind, compelling her to close her eyes, but she fought it. She needed to see him, lay her eyes upon his beautiful face once more before the darkness took her mind.

A hand came through the door and snatched the wolf's thick throat completely from his body. The headless form turned human and slowly dropped to its knees before falling limply to the floor.

She stared at Armando's head pinned to her door with the glowing blade protruding out of his mouth.

It was done. Blood for blood.

The blade retracted and the head fell with a loud thud. Like a balloon, the front door inflated, popped and broke into numerous small pieces that scattered about, giving way to Demetri. Eyes blazed in scarlet fury and fangs bared, he stood in the doorway, his sword gripped tightly in hand.

Splintered wood hovered in the air as if the force of gravity had been suspended. He stepped over the threshold and decapitated body. Once inside, the shards of mahogany regrouped back into her stylish six paneled door.

The woman's song echoed through the walls of her mind as he approached with long graceful strides. His hair lifted off his shoulders like he was moving through wind.

Lawd have mercy on me, if this man got any sexier...

She wanted to reach out to him, but didn't have the energy to move. She could only lay there and watch his gorgeous ass saunter toward her. He stepped

through the hole in the wall and flashed across the kitchen. He sheathed his sword and brought the beautiful song of death to an end.

Kneeling by her side, he looped his arms beneath her shoulders and knees, then cradled her close to his chest. A whimper seeped out on a deep sigh.

“We got his bitch ass,” she chortled on a slur.

A quirky smile graced his face and his eyes glazed with tears. “Don’t you ever block me out like that again,” he whispered, brushing his lips over her brow. His silky hair fell over the side of her face, tickling her sensitive skin.

Struggling to keep her eyes open, she gazed into his turquoise paradise. Lust for him heated her to the core. Moisture built between her thighs. As if the night hadn’t been weird enough with all of the traumatic happenings and pain, she couldn’t think to do nothing else but make love to this beautiful man of hers. Even in her enervated state, she wanted to spread her legs right there on her bloody kitchen floor and take all of him until she passed the hell out.

“Demetri...”

He covered her mouth with his and thrust his tongue between her parted lips. Delightfulness tapped at her taste buds. She released a husky, muffled moan. The lurching in her gut ceased then the sheer exoticness of his essence set her insides on fire. Hungrily, she swirled her tongue around his, absorbing every bit of what he had to give.

Places unknown flashed behind her eyelids. Cityscapes, oceans, deserts, pyramids, caves, temples—they all washed into her mind as if she'd seen them with her very own eyes. Times of old, languages, and historical events filled her brain all at once, bringing about a nerve shattering orgasm. She grabbed his collar, quickened in his arms and wailed sweet glory into his mouth.

Desperately wanting to feel him inside of her, she tried to push away from the delicious kiss, if only to rip his clothes off and attack him with unbridled passion, but he wouldn't allow her to move. He held her tight against his chest, feeding her more and more, nearly choking her with his essence.

“Please, be still, Sharayna,” he cajoled softly. “Absorb my love in this kiss for I have much to give.”

Surrendering herself over to his plea, she fell under his spell and became still.

“Open your mind and allow me to sooth you to sleep. When you awake, I will be at your side. And then when you have an understanding of your existence...I will love you. I will love you easy, I will love you slow and I will love you hard, for all eternity.”

Chapter Twenty-Four

Graceful Geisha

“Open your eyes, my lady.”

Rayne’s eyelids fluttered open. A black lit lavender sky greeted her. Colors of coral and soft blues danced across a reddish orange orb, which looked like a distant planet. Flashes of white and blue light darted around it like the pulse of a heartbeat. She blinked a few times, thinking maybe she’d wake up from what had to be a dream, only to find the more she blinked, the lovelier the sky became.

Where in the world was she?

She sat upright and swept her gaze over the area. A lush hilly terrain of bright green grass tinged with a glimmer of iridescent blue spread out before her.

The caress of Demetri’s presence was all around her, but the only thing in sight was the dreamy landscape. Where was he?

“Demetri,” she whispered.

Something squeaked behind her. Startled, she twisted around.

A squirrel-like creature stared curiously at her. Covered in a coat of spiky tan fur, it had enormous black eyes, a long bushy tail and a pair of large brown

gossamer wings, speckled with small red spots sticking out from its shoulder blades.

It leaned in closely and sniffed her inquisitively, its tiny nose twitching on each inhale. It drew back on its hind legs and turned its head from side to side as if trying to figure her out. It reminded her of a Pokémon.

Rayne got to her feet and noticed she wasn't wearing the bloody, sweat-soaked Tinker Bell t-shirt and sweat pants she had on when she fell asleep in Demetri's arms. Instead, she was draped in a sleeveless, white, silver-spangled gown. The breezy material fitted closely around her neck, left her back bare, and clung gently to the top of her buttocks, where a long elegant train trailed behind her.

A flirtatious gust of wind brushed by. The free-flowing fabric swept against her skin and the silver bracelets around her wrist chimed gleefully, gaining her attention. She raised her arms and appraised matching bands rounding her biceps. Nice.

She reached up and patted a tightly drawn do. Her hair was twisted and wound up into a style, which was probably just as glamorous as the gown.

Lost and confused in some surreal world, but at least she looked good.

Smiling inwardly, she glanced down at the curious Pokémon then lifted the front of the gown to peek at her silver painted toenails. She wiggled her toes in the grass. Squeaking, the little creature leaped on her feet like a playful puppy.

“Aren’t you adorable?”

The sound of delighted giggles behind her snapped her attention. She spun around with a start.

Two young girls stood before her with bluish white auras gleaming from their forms. They were identical, but set apart by the color of their hair and eyes. Long violet tresses accented with silver highlights hung down to the ankles of one of girls, while the other girl’s hair was a brilliant fuchsia. Eyes exotically slanted, matched their hair colors and complemented soft features set out against snow white complexions.

The creature scurried up the dress of the fuchsia haired girl and perched on her shoulder.

Sheer excitement brightened their uncanny beauty. They kept opening their mouths to speak, but would only offer girlish grins as if they didn’t know what to say.

“Hi,” Rayne chimed, breaking the nervous silence.

A look of pure astonishment fell across their faces then they erupted into a fit of giggles. She felt a little awkward, but tickled at the same time, so she tittered along with them.

Once the laughter abated, they pressed their hands together and bowed to her. Since that was their manner of greeting, she put her hands together and returned the respectful gesture.

Shocked, they tottered back then gaped at her. Turning to each other, they began to speak in an unfamiliar language.

She tilted her head and listened carefully, trying to make out what language it was. It sounded a bit like French, but it definitely wasn't.

"Ahum, I hate to break up the pow wow, 'cause the language is beautiful, so melodious, but uhm, where are we? Do you understand me? What is this place we're in?" she asked, articulating each word.

They glanced at one another then looked puzzlingly at her.

"Great. Ya'll don't understand a word I'm saying."

Suddenly, an enthralling voice came over the hills in song. It was the same melody that'd captured her mind earlier when she watched Demetri take the head of a wolf shifter. The mystical voice rose and fell, singing in the notes of an aria, pulling her forward, stimulating her very soul. It spun in beautiful, amazing octaves that brought tears to her eyes.

The girls rushed ahead, waving their hands for her to follow. She lifted the foot of her gown and ran behind them.

Up ahead, a woman robed in a long white kimono, stood on top of a small mountain, arms out, face tilted to the sky, serenading the whole terrain.

Her long salt and pepper hair danced in the wind as her smooth porcelain face soaked in the lavender atmosphere. Once she cooed out the last note, the woman floated down the mound and stood before her, beauty unparalleled.

Gazing fondly at her, the two girls stood on either side.

The woman had presence of royalty. The way she held her shoulders back and her head up...Rayne had the urge to bow out of respect, but was stuck in place staring into her extraordinary eyes. Darkened grey almost like liquid metal flowed beneath her lids.

Freakish, although insanely attractive.

“Young beautiful Queen, you have come to me.”

Her voice... “I feel like I know you.”

“Yes, you do. I am Katsumi, your high priestess.” Elegantly, she bent her legs and bowed her head.

“Katsumi? Demetri’s sword,” she whispered.

Was it coincidence or was she really bugging out? No. It was *her* voice who told her to strike the mirror when the team was in trouble. It was *her* voice who

begged her not to open the door when Troy rolled by. This woman was definitely the sword, but how?

Katsumi put both her hands over her heart and bowed once more. “My spirit is bound to my master’s sword by choice.”

“Ohh,” Rayne murmured. “Okay, so if you’re a spirit, does that mean I’m...I’m dead?”

Had she just dreamt the wolf’s demise? Had he actually killed her?

Katsumi smiled. “No, my lady, you are not dead and I am not a spirit. I’m simply a priestess who sought refuge in the spirit realm.” With the graceful movements of a geisha, she spread her arms out in a wide gesture. “Here, in this place of beauty and serenity, I will never perish and I will continue to seize the souls of those who are damned through the hand of my master.”

“So, how did I get here?”

“I summoned your soul when Lord Demetri laid you to sleep. Please forgive me for my haste, but I could no longer wait for Princess Narri to impart the truth of your existence. Time is of essence.”

“Princess? Narri’s a Princess?”

“Yes, Princess of Arna, soon to be Queen. She will be summoned by her tribe soon and will no longer be at your side. Her world is in chaos and her guidance is

required.” She turned and floated across the field. “The world you live in is also in chaos, and as Queen of the Dragons, you are to set balance between good and evil.”

“Whoa.” Unable to move, Rayne watched her drift away. “Queen of the Dragons? You serious?”

The priestess’s words smacked her brain repeatedly. Now that it was said out loud, some things started to make sense to her, but still...

“So, what does that make me? I get the Xsonri part but, am I like a—I can’t even believe I have to ask this, but am I a dragon too, or something?” she asked, looking to the sky, oddly searching for dragons.

Katsumi spun around to face her, a pleasant smile brightening her striking features. “No, my lady, the base form of your demon is a dragon, but that is not your full make. You are the first and only of your kind.” Her voice rose with authority. Her face became stern. “You were born in the demon realm, a parallel universe much like the one you call home. You are a Xsonri, a creature spawned from Satan’s loins and cursed with the dark force. You are also a battle angel, a creature created in the heavens and blessed with the divine power to purify and eliminate darkness. The Dragon Queen; stronger than a battle angel and demon vampire alike. This is who you are. Soon you will learn to embrace your true nature and use it for its purpose, but the journey to completion will be long and difficult.”

Turning back to her path, she brushed her long flowing hair over her shoulder. “Now, come with me, your highness, so I may prepare you for what lies ahead.”

The girls took her hands and pulled her along to follow the priestess.

Rayne was slammed with mixed feeling about everything that had been revealed to her. She dipped her head and stared at the grass as the girls led her across the meadow. This overwhelming night wasn't letting up and it all boiled down to this point.

Demon vampire? Battle angel? *Dragon Queen*? What?

“My lady...”

The sweet whisper of Katsumi's voice snapped her head up.

She had a commanding presence about her, determined and solemn. “There is no time. No time for shattered emotions or disorientation. No time for thoughts of the past and life as a human. Where you stand is the crossroads. Here and now. You must shed your human thoughts and become what you were born to be. Now look out into the horizon and call upon your fortress.”

Rayne shot glances between the girls and Katsumi. “Uhh, call a fortress? I have no idea how to do that. I just got here, remember?”

The priestess's austere expression hardened. “Call upon your fortress.”

“I can't. I don't know how. Can you at least show me? I'm clueless here.”

Sighing, as if totally frustrated, she folded her arms over her breasts. “If you don’t at least try then perhaps I was wrong. You are not the Queen I thought you to be. You are not the Queen who locked herself in the house to battle a powerful shifter without the knowledge of her powers. You are not the Queen who was prepared to fight one of the strongest demons raised from the bowels of hell for the life of a mere mortal, who you refused to finish when your blood hunger nearly dropped you to your knees! Are you not that Queen?”

“Damn, why you had to go there?” she murmured with a grimace as restrain the shed of tears. Rayne felt that hurt all over again about Troy losing his life over this mess.

Maybe she wasn’t *that Queen*. Maybe she was better off believing she was human, the way she did before that beautiful demon vampire came into her life.

“Your resolve is not weak! Your consort is passing along the will for you to succeed as we speak. Do not allow his efforts to be in vain. Do it!” she commanded, pointing out into the vast nothingness.

Irritated, Rayne huffed and glared at the priestess who had become a drill sergeant. It was better when she was just singing. Releasing the girl’s hands, she marched past Katsumi and closed her eyes. She searched her mind for the secret of *calling upon the fortress*, but got nothing.

How was she supposed to know how to do this?

“It’s like taking your first sip of blood. It’s natural, instinctive. Feel it course through your veins, that knowledge which lives within you, and make it appear.”

She took a deep breath. With the priestess’s gentle persuasion caressing her mind, a set of words seeped from her lips in a language, she now understood. “Guardians of the spirit realm, bring forth the fortress of dragons.”

The ground quaked causing her to stumble backward. Then from the greenish blue plain, a large structure of ivory and gold soared up to the clouds. Along the wide expanse of land, buildings alike sprouted from the ground like flowers to join the massive edifice.

Columns spiraled with imprints of serpentine dragons towered as far as the eye could see. Statues of dragons with their wings spread wide sat on either side of the iridescent stairway leading up to the entrance.

She’d traveled the world, saw many amazing sights, but nothing could compare to this.

“Now see, my lady...” Katsumi moved to her side, her voice once again as soft as the wind. “That wasn’t so difficult, was it?”

Rayne rolled her eyes toward her. “Oh, so you got jokes now?”

Two small hands took hers once again and led her forward.

“By the way, the small creature who greeted you at your arrival is Daz. He is the gatekeeper to the spirit realm, cute and cuddly, but deadly when crossed. The

two nymphs holding your hands are Tahi and Goma. Tahi on the left, and Goma on the right. Remember their names, because you will be urged to call upon them soon.”

Rayne looked down at their grinning faces. Tahi had the pink hair and Goma had the purple hair. She'd have to remember that, as not to mix them up.

“This fortress belonged to Lord Kaishan, your father, and was left to you in his absence. Do you see the white and sterling aura circling above the clouds and the structure? Well that energy was once black as night, and the walls of the city were cluttered with blood thirsty *Bashi* dragons, the rulers of the skies.”

Katsumi's words painted an eerie picture in her mind. “My dad was evil, wasn't he?”

“With every fiber of his being,” she replied, casting a half smile over her shoulder.

“Alright, so, if he was so evil, how did he hook up a battle angel?”

“True love,” was her simple answer. “It was a forbidden love, one that had been foretold from my very lips, but who'd believe a Xsonri and battle angel would unite. Your father was granted command over the dragons by the very creature who seeks you as his mate. So much power can turn even the Godliest person to the dark side, but of course your father was never a seeker of light. Neither was I,” she added with a wicked grin. “Lord Kaishan killed and feasted on all. The demon

realm was his and the race of dragons his loyal minions. Word of his pillaging reached the heavens. Although the demon realm was an area the angels did not breach, the heavenly warriors could not stand by and allow Lord Kaishan to continue his reign of death, so they sent down your mother, Nikena, to destroy him. And in so many ways, she succeeded.”

Katsumi paused at the steps to turn and face her. “Two hundred days and two hundred nights your parents fought a vicious battle. My blade had tasted Nikena’s flesh many times, but she was not to be taken down.” Looking away, she smiled. “There is no mystery to why they sent Nikena. She’s the best, and truly a force to be reckoned with. Once she shattered my blade into a thousand pieces, and bested your father, she cleansed his dark soul and purified me, therefore restructuring my blade with the powers of heaven, even though she was supposed to kill us both. After that, love united them and you were conceived, a sacred love child, a cardinal sin.”

“Sharayna, you are the Dragon Queen because upon his death, Lord Kaishan passed his rule over the dragons onto you. Even without the force of the dragons on your side, you would still be powerful, and your blood sacred, but the addition makes you a supreme being. Your father had much faith in you, child, even before you were brought into this world.”

Rayne's heart tightened. "What happened to them, my parents?" she choked out on a whisper.

"Nikena was forced into exile, and Kaishan was put to death by the battle angels. His soul was dragged into *Okidi*, a purgatory set aside for powerful demons. His dragons were captured. Where they have them, I don't know."

Blinking back tears, Rayne clutched her gown. "So they killed him? But my mother had healed him. He was purified, saved, right? Why did they still have to kill him? I don't understand." She glanced down at the girls and saw them shedding tears. They felt her pain. "Do the angels live by some rule to kill without a second chance when the person's soul has been cleansed? That's not fair."

"No, it is not. There are many things about this world you will never understand. But I can guarantee you will be faced with the same choice one day and before you lay down your judgment, I hope you will remember how your father was taken." With a soft rueful smile, Katsumi caressed the side of her face. "Now dry your tears, my beautiful young Queen. Hold this emotion for those destined to taste the edge of your blade." She took her hand. "Come, you must be ordained."

They climbed the long path of steps. As they drew closer to the entrance, Rayne saw statues of men and women lined along the first few steps, but once she

was close enough to get a better look, she realized they weren't statues at all. These were real people.

The women were glazed in gold and the men in silver. Portions of animal hides covered their goody parts. Masks, crested in colorful jewels covered their faces. In the place where there should be holes for the eyes, were large diamonds shaded with the color of the sky.

"Why are they wearing masks?" Rayne mumbled, easing closer to one of the men. "And how come their eyes are covered?" She noticed right away the man trembling as she eased closer to him. "Why you shaking, brah? I'm not gonna hurt you."

"No, my lady, you are not to speak to them, not yet. And if you don't want me to kill him, then please don't touch him." Squeezing her hand, Katsumi pulled her away and walked ahead of her.

"Well damn Katsumi, violent much?"

"*Larkons* are dragons able to take mortal form. They are servants of the royal fortress and are not allowed to look upon the Queen nor be graced with her touch while she is fluxing. Your touch is an aphrodisiac to dragons at this moment. I'm sure I don't need to explain to you what that means. Once you have evolved, mated with your lover and come into your true form, then the masks will be removed.

After that, you may touch them if you please,” she finished with the careless wave of her hand.

“Okay, Larkons are dragons. No touching. Got that part, but the masks seems kinda cruel. How do they get around if they can’t see?”

“My dear Queen,” she sighed. “You don’t need eyes to see. You only need your spiritual force. You will learn that in due time.”

“Uhm, ya know, you don’t have to keep—it’s, it’s just Sharayna,” she stammered. “I mean, the Queen and majesty and all, is a little too formal for me, and a lil’ weird, honestly. I’m a simple kinda girl. You can just call me Sharayna, or just plain ole’ Rayne.”

“Rayne!” the girl’s shouted in unison. “We like Rayne!”

Chuckling, Katsumi looked over her shoulder. “Then Rayne it is.”

“Oh, so they understand me now?”

“They’ve always understood you. It is you who now understand them. Your words have been spoken in *Curro*, the dragon tongue since you raised the fortress. Have you not noticed?”

She put her hands over her mouth and glanced at the girls who beamed at her. “Uh, no.”

“Well, you have. And it’s pleasing to me, because now I won’t have to work as hard to bring about what is already within you.”

A large set of doors opened once they got to the landing. They advanced through a hall with glossy, marble flooring accentuated in deep earth tones. More servants were bordered along the dark orange walls, holding torches, but there was nothing else to this space. No chairs, couches, portraits or decorative accessories. Just a big open space with a whole lot of nothing.

They came to a dark room where Katsumi waved them in. After retrieving a torch from one of the servants, she willed the doors shut behind her. Quickly, she pulled Rayne over to a square hole in the floor filled with a silver liquid.

“Kneel here,” Katsumi ordered, pointing to a familiar coiled symbol highlighted on the marble floor.

Once Rayne lowered to her knees, the familiarity hit her. It was the same symbol the dragon’s tail was curved into at the small of her back. Her birth symbol. With the thought, the tattoo heated.

“Yes, yes, it is coming to you now.”

Another set of symbols came alive on either side of her. The girls position themselves on top of them and kneeled next to her. Katsumi walked around to the other side of the small body of liquid and gracefully lowered to her knees.

“It is here where you will discover your true self. It is here where you will unite with the demon within.”

She dropped the torch in the liquid and it sank out of sight. The perimeter ignited in red flames and the puddle expanded. An image of Demetri took form on the surface of the pool. Her whole body shuddered at the sight.

“My master. Your lover, your protector and your chosen consort. The union between you two must be greater than the physical. It must be solid and unbreakable, because the darkness will test you both and do what it takes to shatter what has been created. He gives you power, just as you give him power, but don’t let his darkness deceive you. After existing for hundreds of years without emotion or the need for love, he finds himself in a very unfamiliar place. If you don’t love him, then he will become something very frightening and uncontrollable.”

“I think I do love him. Hell, I can’t even breathe without him,” Rayne confided, not once taking her eyes from his image.

“No, young one. You don’t truly love him, not yet. At this moment in time, you are in a lust-filled state. You desire what he has shown you, the pleasure he can give you and his beauty. But, you have not seen the true Lord Demetri, and until he is comfortable enough to show you that side of him, you two cannot move forward as King and Queen.”

“Wait. I think I did see the true side, through his mind when he forced me to look in.”

Katsumi laughed at her expense. “What he allowed you to see is nothing, child. A simple riddance of evil souls. I assure you that. You will one day see that his darkness goes a lot deeper than what is on the surface.” The liquid rippled with her words. “Your existence will bring that out of him. You must understand, your blood holds power immeasurable to vampires and demons. Power which can make a vampire a day walker and a demon unstoppable.”

“Wait, if my blood is so powerful, how come Demetri won’t take from me. I offered, I did, and he started acting all crazy about it.”

“Because you were not aware of your true nature, and even if I send you back at this moment with the knowledge you have now, he most likely will continue to reject your offer.”

“I don’t get it. Why?”

A small smile curved her lips. “That is something you and your consort will have to discuss.”

“Lemme ask you something, off the subject, well kinda. His brother told me I have a scent that’s making people crazy. That sounds stupid to me. But is it true?”

“How do you think Lord Demetri found you?” She chuckled. “A demon Queen is just like any female animal. Your body releases a scent to attract your mate and at the same time, your mate releases a scent also. Before your twentieth birthday, a spell was cast on you to scatter your scent, which is why it is

everywhere. The imprint on your back, which you received from a young man in Hong Kong years ago...That is a *gychi spell*.”

She reached back and brushed her fingers across the heated tattoo, her eyes widening. The guy’s face was so vivid in her mind; his unusual dark eyes, and his mystical allure...

“So the tattoo artist was a—”

“A wizard, yes, sent by your mother. The spell was used to keep you hidden from a certain someone, but as we feared, the demons got wind of it.”

“Demons? Hold up, wait a minute, you just said the spell makes the scent go everywhere, so does that mean...” Clutching the front of the gown, she tried to will back the sudden sickness in her stomach. Goma and Tahi scooted closer to her and rested their heads on her shoulders. “All those girls are dead ‘cause of me?”

“You are not to place blame on yourself,” she stated sternly. “You did not release the chingi into the earthly realm, the dark consort did. They were released to lure you out of hiding during your mid-shift. So there were casualties and there will be more, but this is nothing compared to the atrocity that would have befallen your world if you were cradled in the wrong arms right now.”

Tears welled in her eyes. She opened and closed her mouth, wanting to spill her pain, but couldn’t. God, how could this happen? Because her blood, people were dying all around the world.

“Sentiments are good, but as I’ve said before, you are to hold onto them. Bottle them up and release them onto those who are deserving of it. Use it as your force to achieve retribution for the souls that have been taken.”

Sucking back the tears, she nodded and dropped her attention back to the pool of silver.

Once her sniffles died down, Katsumi dipped her finger into the puddle, sending endless circles rippling through the liquid to erase Demetri’s image. The pool separated into six small sections. The familiar faces of the men and women who bravely fought with demons in her mind came forth.

“Six battle angels were chosen by the commander of God’s army and sent down to be born again as humans. Andausians. They are your spirit guardians, and soon they will find you as you have found them. I know it may seem meaningless to have guardians, especially with Lord Demetri by your side, but once the anarchy begins, you’ll see they are very much needed. Keep in mind, although they will protect you and give their very lives to do so, you are to stay close to them and protect them also. As powerful as they are, they are still mortal.”

Rayne nodded, taking in every word with intent.

Katsumi waved her hand over the puddles, drawing them together to form one again. Then *his* face appeared—eerie green eyes, long fangs and platinum

blonde hair. Her eyes burned, her limbs twitched. All the faces of the people he killed shuffled through her mind.

There were infuriated growls echoing throughout the dim room. It took a second for her to realize the growls were coming from her. She almost shot to her feet, but the girls at her sides kept her grounded.

“Lucius,” she heard Katsumi hiss. “Third spawn of Satan. When the time comes, you will claim his head.”

“What do you mean when the time comes?” Fangs jutted from her gums and her nerves jolted. Hot tears rolled down her face and sizzled against her skin. Tremors shot through her in explosive bursts, heightening her rage. “He has to die now!”

An almost baleful smile graced the priestess’s face. “You must destroy his minion first, Doshar.” The horrific features of another man appeared. “Do not forget this face. Your blades, which are in the Andausian’s possession, will be strengthened with his death. The spirits of your swords will draw strength from his power and make you stronger. Once he is demolished, close the portals and destroy the chingi who wreak havoc in your home domain. With every demon head you claim, the stronger you will become,” she informed, eagerness rushing her tone.

She heard every word Katsumi said, but she couldn't get the name *Lucius* out of her mind. Her hands curled into fist and her nails bit into her palms. The need to kill him made her core walls clutched and her nipples ached. It was a delirious, sick mixture of lust and fury and she couldn't shake it to save her life.

"Your spiritual battle weapons prosper with you, destroy with you, and grow with you!" Katsumi raised her hands and the flames shot to the ceiling. "Tahi, Goma, show your highness your true forms!"

Both girls spread their arms then brought their hands together, fists to palms. Swiftly, they shed their forms and morphed into two large dragons.

Shocked out of her mind, Rayne stumbled to her feet and jumped back.

Lovely from their enormous heads to their razor sharp talons, they towered at least twenty feet tall. The gorgeous creatures had elongated scaly necks, pointed horns, and long snouts with two thick whiskers hanging out. Curved spikes dotted the length of their backs down to the stretch of their huge tails. Even in the dragon form, they still held onto the colors which differentiated them.

"Oh my God, I can't believe this. You didn't tell me they were dragons!"

Rayne whipped her head back and forth from one to the other. The mythological creature she'd dreamed about as a little girl was actually real and two stood at her sides!

“This is straight up like, wow,” she murmured, unable to take her eyes off of one long enough to look at the other. “Tahi and Goma.” They kneeled and nuzzled her with the call of their names.

The flames lowered to flickers and Katsumi stood on the other side of the boiling puddle with a sheathed sword at her side. “Separated, they are your weapons. Together, they are your force. All you have to do is utter their names and they will come to you. My job is done for now, but before I release you to rest in your lover’s arms, you must answer a question for me.” She flipped her wrist and brought the sword up parallel with her nose. With an unseen movement, she removed the cover from the blade then leveled the sword at her. “Now that you know who you are, Queen of the Dragons, what are you set out to do?”

Tears blurred Rayne’s vision. It was not of sorrow and fear, but of determination and will. A deep pride filled her heart.

“Bring balance to God’s earth,” Rayne answered in the mystical tongue.

Katsumi rounded the pool and stood before her. She kneeled elegantly and raised her sword with both hands. “Then take my handle, your majesty.”

With emotion enfolding her heart, Rayne curled her hand around the handle. Raw power spooled through her arm and ignited within her core. The weapon pulsated in her grasp, matching the thump of her rapid heartbeat.

She squeezed her eyes shut and cried out. Tahi and Goma roared with her, shattering the walls around them.

It wasn't pain. It wasn't torture. It was enlightenment, meaning to her life, what she was born to do.

"This is who I am!"

Standing, Katsumi grazed her fingers along the blade. "Evil now has a face."

The body of liquid splashed violently then rose to form a man. *Lucius*.

Katsumi walked around behind her and hugged her waist. "If evil should approach you..."

As Katsumi's sweet whisper brushed her ear, the liquid version of Lucius flashed a sinister smile. Then without thought, Rayne stepped forward and sliced the blade through his neck with a movement so swift, she had to catch herself. His head toppled off his shoulders and splashed to the ground with the rest of the silvery liquid.

"If evil should approach me, I'll take his fucking head."

Epilogue

Awakening

Demetri jerked back to look into Sharayna's face. Low growls escaped from her crimson lips. Her body trembled in his embrace, her heart rate increased. Her intent to kill oozed from her skin in pure silver. She now knew.

He held her tightly, trying to control his own need to drain the life out of...*anybody*. She aroused him and taunted his beast.

“Calm down, my love. Please.”

A familiar face came to his mind, an image plucked from her psyche. Bright green eyes, so similar to those of the chingi demons—*Lucius*. Her target, her focus, the face of evil.

Before he could wipe the image from her thoughts, her lids flew open. Metallic grey melted over her eyes.

“My Lord, your Queen will need rest,” she urged in a voice not her own. “Do not allow her to go after him. Not yet. She is not ready.”

“Well thank you for riling her up, Katsumi. Send her to me.”

Rich chocolate pools bled through the argent gleam in her eyes, but was quickly replaced with red rimmed in silver. Burning anger.

She bristled. Her pearlescent incisors peeked from beneath her lips. He clasped her waist. She shot up and her hand sought out Katsumi's handle.

In an attempt to stop her, he grabbed her hand, but she broke out of his grasp. So strong, so swift, yet her energy steadily waned. The sharp rasp of the blade leaving its sheath sliced through the silence.

With finesse, she spun out of his reach, and leveled the sword at him. Her breasts heaved and her body wavered on unstable legs. The sight of her wielding Katsumi with her fangs out almost sent him right over the edge. He had to have her now...but no, she needed more strength.

He pushed up from his kneeling position. "The trip to the spirit realm has added to your weakened state, Angel. Come rest in my arms."

Her lids fluttered as she stepped back. "You stay right there," she growled. "Don't try to stop me."

Loosening his tie, he walked toward her. "Now why would I want to do that?"

She shook her head and staggered backward until her backside met the edge of the sink. "Demetri, I, I have to do this. He has to die," she stammered. "Do you feel the people, all of the people he's killed?"

“Yes, I do.”

“I’m gonna lop off that big head of his. I’m gonna do it.”

He unbuttoned his jacket, then his vest and pushed them both from over his shoulders to fall to the bloody floor. “Indeed.” The last of the fabric covering his torso left him and he positioned his chest right at Katsumi’s edge. The sharp blade pierced his skin.

Her widened eyes ran over his form, then slowly but surely, the rage left her beautiful face. “Demetri, stop it,” she slurred. “I can’t stay mad when you’re—God, boy—why do you do this to me? Why are you so ridiculously sexy?”

“Have me, my love. Cast the anger aside if only for tonight and have me.”

“But...”

“He *will* perish beneath the sting of your blade, but not while you’re like this.”

“Oh baby...” Katsumi fell from her hand and clanked loudly against the tiles. “I wanna kill him so bad, it hurts, but damn, D...you know how to break a chick down.”

She began to slide to the floor. He caught her and hoisted her up on the edge of the sink. Shivering limply against him, her weak hands touched his chest where the blade pricked him.

“I hurt you,” she murmured.

“You can never hurt me.” With the wave of his hand, he discarded her sweatpants, if only to feel the smoldering heat from her core.

“Bite me,” she purred with need, cupping his backside to pull him deeper between her thighs. “Why won’t you bite me?”

He nuzzled her neck and lapped at her quivering vein. She writhed against him, palmed the back of his head and mewled. He fought the urge to meet her request. The scent of her blood taunted him as she enticed him with her cooing plea.

“Demetri, I know you want my blood. I can feel your desire for it.”

No. He couldn’t. He wouldn’t. Not while she’s in this condition. “You’re not ready for my bite.”

“But I’m ready to give to you.”

She cradled his face and claimed his lips with hunger. Her powerful legs hugged him. Even enervated, she dominated his mouth. Thrusting, tasting, and caressing, the power of her velvety desire jarred his beast. Something was happening. The sudden burn in his throat made him stiffen.

A drop.

She fed him a drop of her forbidden essence. Just a drop exhilarated and battered his insides at the same time. His mind raced, his knees weakened, but her

warm thighs kept him bound in place. Blinding light sparked behind his closed lids.

Caught in a moment of rapture and crazed insanity, he growled and tried to push away, but she held him firm. His fingers dug into the steel sink and cracked the granite surrounding it. He tried his damndest to hold back the beast, but it steadily clawed its way to the surface, needing to take her just as badly as he did.

Bite her!

“No!” he growled.

“If you don’t let me see him, then how can we move forward, baby?”

“Don’t, Sharayna...”

“Please, show him to me. I’ll show you mine, if you show me yours.” The raspy coo of her inner demon tantalized his with promise of a mind shattering blood sex.

She reached down ripped his pants open and took hold of his stiff cock. Seduced under her spell, she rubbed the engorged head of his length along her dewy love nest. Her opening kissed and caressed his tip. They both sighed with pleasure.

This was not right. Their first time making love was supposed to be on a bed of rose petals, candles highlighting their coupling; the breath-taking image he’d

perceived in her mind. He had to get her away from here, but her powerful lure hindered his ability to transport. She wanted to be taken right here, right now.

“I can’t control it, sweetheart. Don’t do this. That part of me is not tamable.”

The crown of his cock slid beneath her snug passage. “Who said I wanted him to be?” she moaned.

His body no longer belonged to him.

He snatched her hand away, palmed her perfectly round behind and shoved his rod to the hilt of her core, hard and fast.

She shrieked as her nails bit into his shoulders.

His eyes crossed at the searing sweetness clutching his pride. Prickles of delight rapidly cascaded through his body, leaving a trail of fire in its wake. His blood boiled with desire.

The sensation was mind blowing.

Shuddering, he branded her thighs with his grip. He surged back, his member saturated in her liquid lust, then he thrust into her again, snuggling deeply into her channel. Her head fell back and a husky wail ripped from her throat to blow a hole through the roof. The sweet wine of her release melted over him as tears leaked from the corners of her eyes.

“Ohh yeeessss, oh my God, Demetri,” she whimpered. “Feels so good.”

Savoring her desire, he clenched his teeth then speared in and out of her as steadily as he could manage. His harsh breaths and growls danced with her vociferous cries of ecstasy. Her snug cavern clutched him repeatedly, milking him toward climax. The delicious wet symphony of her core engulfing his lance added to the incredible sensation spooling within him. Then before he could ready himself, a powerful nerve-jolting storm slammed into him.

As a monstrous wail jumped out of him, his hips heaved forward in jerking movements and he poured every bit of his passion into her.

The red glare of the moon streamed through the opening in the roof, accompanied with the howls of the demons afar. Their coupling was a call to the darkness.

“You may have her now, vampire, but she will come to me,” a malevolent voice threatened through the airwaves. *“And there’s not a fucking thing you can do about it!”*

A half smile curved his lips. *“We’ll just see about that.”*

Hair was brushed from his shoulders. Soft lips kissed his neck and then the tip of her tongue traced his throbbing blood vessel to heighten the pulse. Up above, he watched the black cloud swallow the scarlet orb as her heated fangs sunk into his jugular.

Willingly pulled into the unrestrained passion of her bite, he inhaled the rancid scent of the wickedness that swiftly infused the air.

The Chingi were coming.

The End

Look Out For Book 2 Of The Dragon Queen Series: Black Rayne Scarlet Moon

<http://www.myspace.com/yvonnenicolas>

An avid reader Yvonne decided to try her hand at writing and what a talent and love she found for writing. Keep tuned to see what she has in store for you next.

Red Rose Publishing

Designing Love

The Dragon Queen Series: Black Rayne: Silent Scream Book One

The Dragon Queen Series: Black Rayne Scarlet Moon Book Two-coming soon