



Rene
Lyons

SETHEUS

THE SERAPHIM

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Samhain Publishing, Ltd.
512 Forest Lake Drive
Warner Robins, Georgia 31093

The Seraphim: Setheus
Copyright © 2007 by Rene Lyons
Cover by Scott Carpenter
ISBN: 1-59998-537-3
www.samhainpublishing.com

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First Samhain Publishing, Ltd. electronic publication: July 2007

The Seraphim: Setheus

Rene Lyons

Dedication

Laurie, thank you for being my editor and my friend. How is it possible I was blessed with you?

Serena, my days wouldn't be complete without you in them to complain to. Thank you for putting up with me.

Mandie, as always, you are my saving grace. Congratulations and much love to you and Mark. This one is for you.

Chapter One

Bethlehem, New York, 2005

Sabrina Hart glanced discreetly down at her watch.

Seven o'clock.

He'd kept her waiting for almost two hours. Sabrina considered herself a relatively tolerant person, but even she had her limits. Waiting this long without explanation was just plain rude.

If there wasn't so much riding on her being here, Sabrina would have told the receptionist to extend a message to her boss. In no uncertain terms, she would've had the woman tell him where to go and how to get there before Sabrina marched herself right on out of the office.

Unfortunately, that wasn't an option. Instead, Sabrina had to grit her teeth, swallow her pride and try not to fidget in her chair to get circulation back into her numb ass. Actually, she wasn't in an office, per se. It was a house. Although calling this place a house was a drastic understatement. It was a mansion. A rambling, spire-tipped Gothic Revival that was just about the eeriest—and most beautiful—house she'd ever seen. Her entire two-bedroom ranch could fit in this wing of the mansion alone. Casting a discreet look around, she admired the room.

It must be nice to have money.

Having money was something she wouldn't know much about. Struggling to make ends meet seemed to be part of her genetic makeup. Her mother had struggled and that hardship had been passed down to Sabrina.

Though her house was small and a little bit on the weathered side, it was hers. She'd grown up there, and it held all the memories she'd shared with her mother. Sabrina would

love to be back there, sweatpants on, feet up on the coffee table, watching television. Not here, stuffed into borrowed clothes, and uncomfortable as hell.

Truth be known, this waiting room wasn't such a bad place to have spent the last two hours. Although it was incredibly rude to have been kept waiting so long, it beat the hell out of being at work where Bryce often assaulted her with his coffee-breath. The man gave her the creeps, but he was a necessary evil. She'd suffer him if it meant finally gaining answers to a lifetime of questions.

Holding a vastly boring architecture magazine open on her lap, Sabrina looked everywhere but at its pages. She let her gaze travel the room, taking in the plush brown rug covering the floor and the mahogany furniture that decorated the room. A painting she knew to be a Waterhouse hung on one wall and she wondered if it was a replica. Everything about this room was elegant and refined—basically everything she wasn't.

A young, attractive receptionist sat behind a painfully neat desk, studiously scribbling things down on a stack of papers. She wore her thick blonde hair pulled back in a loose ponytail. The casual look seemed to fit her. It also showed off her delicate-featured face and elegantly long neck. It would have taken Sabrina hours to copy such a look.

The low din of Skid Row whispered from a small radio hidden behind the receptionist's desk and, more than once, Sabrina was tempted to ask her to turn it up when a good song came on. Unfortunately, that would have been entirely too unprofessional. Directing her attention back to the boring magazine, she realized there were times being a grown-up was a total drag.

Stuffy and uncomfortable, squeezed into her friend's classic gray suit, Sabrina had considered it a stroke of genius to put on the lacy white camisole underneath. She hoped the age-old ploy of showing some cleavage might loosen up the man she would be interviewing.

Uncrossing and re-crossing her legs in the opposite direction helped to get the blood flowing back into her sleeping left foot. When the pins-and-needles sensation hit, it was an effort to sit still and not show her discomfort. How she longed to kick off the black

heels. Sabrina swore they weren't merely shoes, but medieval torture devices. She'd give her right arm for her sneakers and jeans.

Why hadn't anyone warned her that pantyhose rode up in the most horrible of places? Even her hair was bound up and confined. She wanted to rip the black clip from her hair and let the brown mass fly free. She had clipped it too tight and it now caused her a splitting headache.

The receptionist looked up from her work and gave her a pleasant smile. It had to be the zillionth such smile the woman had directed at her and Sabrina was about ready to lose her temper. She didn't like being patronized and she couldn't stand rudeness. Since she'd come here, she had been forced to endure both.

"It's already been two hours," Sabrina said tightly, breaking the relative quiet. The receptionist raised her perfectly plucked brows, obviously hearing the strain in her tone. "He won't be much longer, will he?"

She shook her pretty blonde head. "No, Miss Hart. He should be with you any minute now."

So you claimed two hours ago.

That seemed to be the standard answer. After all, it was the only one she'd given the other times Sabrina asked the question over the course of the past couple of hours. Enough was enough—no one was worth being treated so disrespectfully. Did he think she had nothing better to do with her time than waste it sitting here waiting?

True, there wasn't anything more important than being here, but *he* didn't know that. As much as she wanted to leave, she simply couldn't do that. Not just because Bryce had threatened her, but because she also had reasons of her own for seeking this man out. Sabrina didn't doubt Bryce would snap her neck if he knew why she worked for him and why she'd readily agreed to come here tonight.

The ringing of the receptionist's phone interrupted the tension. She picked up the receiver. "Good evening, Mr. Raleigh. Of course, sir." She replaced the receiver. "You can go in now, Miss Hart."

Standing, Sabrina had to take a second to stretch out her aching body. Her ass was still numb and pins and needles pained her foot. She adjusted the suit, now wrinkled from hours of sitting. She retrieved her pocketbook, surprised she remembered it lying on the floor next to the chair. She never carried a purse. Everything she needed usually fit in her pockets. Her philosophy was if it didn't fit in her pockets, she didn't need it.

There were three doors in the room, one of which she'd entered from. That still left two more. Sabrina pointed to one. "Here?"

The woman smiled politely. "No, Miss Hart, that one."

Sabrina walked to the other door. She hesitated for only a moment before pushing open the door. She almost expected bats to come flying out at her—or some other indication that she was walking into a monster's lair. Instead, she was met with the warm glow of candlelight, the rich scent of spice and more whisper-soft rock music. Only this music was a bit more up to date than Skid Row. As a matter of fact, "Far Behind" by Candlebox was one of her favorite songs. That she had the same musical interests as him surprised her.

A fire burned in the fireplace. Sabrina was even more surprised to see the painting hanging above it. Of all Dicksee's work, *La Belle Dame Sans Merci* was her favorite. Having common interests with Seth Raleigh amazed her.

The huge mahogany desk, complete with impressive computer, dominated the room. A long black leather sofa lined one wall. That, along with a matching chair and low table, made up an elegant sitting area.

But it was the man who stood in the center of the room, seeming to eat up all of the space, who caught—and held—Sabrina's attention.

Though they were about the same age, something about him seemed ancient. Otherworldly. It chilled her as much as it fascinated her.

He stood well over six feet tall. Glossy black hair hung free around broad shoulders. A white tailored shirt, the top four buttons of which were open, hugged his massive chest. The sleeves were rolled up to the elbows to reveal intricate tattoos decorating his right

forearm. His arms were heavily muscled and she wondered if the legs hidden beneath those black pants were just as solid.

Finely chiseled features made up an incredibly handsome face. Two eerie black eyes peeked out from beneath long sooty lashes. The weight of his intense stare was almost unbearable. He seemed to see right through her, as if he peered into the very depths of her soul.

Sabrina's heart hammered against her ribcage. She shifted in her uncomfortable shoes, suddenly hot. It felt as if the air in the room had risen ten degrees. Plain and simple—he flustered her.

“Are you all right, Miss Hart?”

All right? Oh God, no. She was far from “all right”. In fact, never had she been so turned on by anything more than the mere sight of this man.

It didn't help things that, if sex had a specific sound, it would be Seth Raleigh's deep and resonating voice. How had she thought she could waltz into his world and remain indifferent to him? How had she thought to be any match for a man who was no mere man at all?

“I'm fine.” How she managed that lie without choking on her words, Sabrina didn't know.

“Yes, you are.”

Sabrina managed to snap her jaw closed after it dropped open at his remark. “Excuse me?”

Raleigh stalked over to her. His natural grace was impressive, especially given his size. The closer he got, the paler Sabrina could see he was. In fact, he looked like he hadn't seen the sun in years. What skin showed was smooth and perfect. Her hands seemed to grow a mind of their own and she had to fight her body to keep from touching him.

“You heard me perfectly, Sabrina.” Spoken by him, her name sounded beautiful.

He leaned toward her and she detected the wonderful aroma of spice that clung to him. The raw power he exuded made her feel almost intoxicated. His grin drew her gaze

to his lips. She wondered what his mouth would feel like on hers. That thought led to others, which brought about an ache between her legs to go with the heat still flowing through her.

Sabrina heard Seth's deep inhale, followed by a growl that resonated from deep within him. The sound was sexy as hell.

Seth leaned in closer, giving Sabrina a clear peek down his shirt. She had a tantalizing view of a large tribal tattoo over his ribcage. It snaked its way up and over his shoulder. It took everything she had not to tear the shirt from him to get a better look at the artwork—and the gorgeous body it was tattooed onto.

As much as Sabrina liked having Seth this close to her, her reaction was extremely inappropriate. Besides, she couldn't think. Not one coherent thought formed in her muddled brain. As if he anticipated her actions, Seth caught her wrist just as she was about to push him away. His touch was slightly cool, like he'd just come in from the cold. She wondered how that was possible, given how hot she was, but the idea flew right out of her head when Seth's cheek brushed hers.

"We both know why you're really here, Sabrina."

She used her other hand to shove him away. "Good. Then we can cut through the bullshit and get right down to things."

Seth released her wrist and stepped back—but not too far away. A slow smile pulled at the corners of his mouth. "As you wish, Sabrina." He waved a hand toward the sofa and the chair. "Please, have a seat so we can begin this...interview."

From the way he said that, Raleigh seemed to know this was no interview, but the interrogation it was intended to be.

Sabrina walked over to the chair on legs that shook from the force of her desire for Seth. She had to adjust her skirt after she sat, painfully aware of how Seth watched her every move. She placed the pocketbook at her feet, resisting the urge to kick it. She was too much of a tomboy for a pocketbook and heels.

She admired the way Raleigh moved when he sat on the sofa. He leaned back, extending his legs and crossing them at the ankle. He clasped his hands behind his head.

It was a very relaxed pose. She wished she could be as laid-back. Instead, a riot of thoughts and emotions ran rampant through her.

“I apologize, Sabrina. It wasn’t my intention to keep you waiting for so long. Unfortunately, it was unavoidable.”

Sabrina was impressed. She hadn’t expected an apology from him. “It wasn’t a problem. Really.”

What he’d done to her just a moment ago was a problem. Or rather, her reaction to him was the problem. How was she supposed to conduct any sort of interview with him if all she could think about was dragging him back toward her and kissing him?

“So, Sabrina, what will you have of me?”

Now *that* was a loaded question if she’d ever heard one. By the mischievous glint in his eyes, he’d planned that question and executed it with perfection. Sabrina wasn’t about to play games with him. Honestly, she didn’t think she’d be able to outplay him even if she tried.

She leaned forward and rested her hands on her legs. “I’m not going to beat around the bush, Mr. Raleigh...”

“Seth.”

“Fine. Seth,” she repeated. “Since you said you know why I’m here, I’ll come right out and ask. Do you have the stone?”

“How very direct.” One black brow cocked and a grin revealed perfect white teeth. “You and I are going to get along just fine, Sabrina.”

Her head was really starting to pound. Her hand actually itched to tear the damn clip out of her hair. She wanted to get this over with and get the hell out of there before she crawled onto Seth’s lap and gave in to the need to bury her hands in his thick hair.

“I don’t want to get along with you, Mr. Raleigh—Seth—I just want to know if you have Hakion’s Stone.”

That was a lie and, from Seth’s cynical look, he knew it. She was sure he could sense her reaction to him.

For just a moment, Seth looked taken aback. But a mask of indifference descended over his features quickly, and Sabrina thought she might have imagined his fleeting look of surprise. After all, given how flustered she was, and how her thoughts were on sex and not the real reason she'd come, it was entirely possible her mind had played a trick on her.

"Do you think I have it, Sabrina?"

She pointedly ignored the way he practically purred the words. She knew he was *not* referring to his sex appeal—which he had in spades. "It doesn't matter what I think. The bottom line is Bryce Mathers does. He wants it and he's willing to pay you top dollar to have it."

He contemplated her words for a moment. "Even if I did have it, it wouldn't be for sale. Not for any price."

She hadn't thought it would be.

Hakion's Stone was a priceless artifact dating back to about five thousand B.C. Of course, as far as Sabrina was concerned, Hakion's Stone was still just a myth. There was no hard evidence it truly existed. Until she saw it for herself, it was just whispered rumors that drifted down through the ages.

As the legend went, God had picked three of his fiercest warrior-angels to guard the three stones here on Earth. The stones supposedly contained the hearts of three demons. The angels had to fall from Heaven, sacrificing themselves in order to walk the earth and keep the stones.

After her mother died and Sabrina learned of the circumstances of her birth, she set out to learn all she could about the stones. Her search had led her to Bryce Mathers and, in turn, to Seth Raleigh.

Instead of dirtying up his own hands, Mathers, who owned a small and rundown museum, enlisted his most overworked historian to interview—interrogate—Raleigh. Not that Sabrina minded. She wanted to come face-to-face with a man who might have known her father. A man who might hold the key to her finding out what part of her

mother's outrageous deathbed confession was true, and how much was from delirium caused by the pain of her cancer.

"Do you know why Mathers wants the stone?"

For some reason, Sabrina knew Raleigh was going to see right through the bullshit she was about to serve him. Nevertheless, she wasn't going to tell him the true reason for her being there. More than anything else, she wasn't ready to admit the truth about herself aloud. It was still difficult enough for her to say it in the privacy of her mind.

"I don't know and, honestly, I don't care." She looked right in Raleigh's pitch-black eyes when she gave him that lie. She cared very much why Bryce wanted the stones, and planned on doing everything she could to keep them from him. "If he wants the stone, I'll do everything I can to get it for him. My job is on the line if I don't."

Given Raleigh's expression, he didn't like Bryce. She couldn't blame him for that. She hated the man herself. "It figures a man such as Mathers would threaten a woman to get what he wants."

Mathers wasn't going to win any humanitarian awards. He was a rat-bastard who made her skin crawl just by being around him. She was also not ashamed to admit that he scared the shit out of her.

"That's neither here nor there, Mr. Raleigh."

"Seth."

Sabrina held back a frustrated huff. "Seth," she corrected. "Bryce believes you have the stone and he's not going to stop until he gets it. So, let's just put aside all the niceties..."

"Sweetheart, I haven't even begun being nice to you." His voice was warm honey, causing a wonderful thrill to shoot through her. "Like I said, even if I did have the stone, I'd never give it up. Especially not to Mathers."

Knowing what she did about Bryce, Sabrina couldn't fault Seth for that. Unfortunately, that didn't help her. "You have to know how important these stones are. If they truly exist, they could change..."

"The stones are nothing more than a myth."

Sabrina raised a brow at that announcement. “Then why are people willing to kill for them?”

Seth relaxed in his chair and steepled his fingers under his chin as he regarded her with his steady gaze. “Men, I’ve learned, are foolish creatures who rush in before they know all the facts. They like the idea of absolute power and will do absolutely anything to acquire it. Even sacrificing life on the belief of a myth.”

“Men? You sound as if you believe you aren’t among us humans.”

His silence was cryptic. The look he gave her was chilling. Although Sabrina knew what he was, she said nothing about it to him. She didn’t know what he’d do if he discovered she was well aware of the truth about him. And so, she played the game of ignorance and hoped things would fall into place as she’d planned.

There was no denying Seth was...different. The way he carried himself and the feral look in his mesmerizing eyes proclaimed he was something far more than human. That *something* seemed to reach out to Sabrina. It wrapped around her, seeped into the very core of her being. She felt robbed of breath and made her skin feel like it was on fire. Or was it his gaze that seared her? Whatever it was, she almost fanned herself to help cool the heat coursing through her.

“I believe this business about the stones has come to an end, Sabrina.” The finality in his tone told her he’d not budge on the matter.

“Well, that’s it then.” What a waste of two hours. Sabrina had hoped to leave here with a better idea of whether Seth possessed the stones or not. Or at least come away with a better understanding of the man himself.

She collected the infernal pocketbook and stood. Her skirt had ridden up—Raleigh’s eyes were locked on the expanse of exposed thigh—so she adjusted the material and stuck out her hand. “I believe our business is done. Thank you for your time, Mr. Raleigh.”

His hand wrapped around hers and, in one smooth and unexpected motion, Seth Raleigh stood and pulled her up against him. Almost every part of her was touching some part of him and that made her breathless. All of his glorious hardness made her dizzy.

The pocketbook slipped from her shoulder, landing at her feet. He kicked it away. She reached out to take hold of his shoulders to steady herself as her mind spun at the contact of their bodies.

Seth pressed his cheek to hers. “Our business is far from over, Sabrina,” he said softly in her ear. “It’s only just begun.”

Chapter Two

At the touch of Seth's mouth on hers, Sabrina's entire world spun out of control. His touch was electrifying, instantly setting her body on fire. Casting aside every inhibition, she gave herself over to the moment, wanting to get lost in Seth and have the rest of the world fade away.

Sabrina didn't think. She simply allowed herself to feel all the wonderful sensations Seth evoked in her as he used his thumb to force open her mouth and slip his tongue in. His hands moved down her back, sending a delicious shiver down her spine in its wake. He tasted of mint and something else she couldn't quite put her finger on. It was something dark and mysterious that wove through her, taking her to a place within herself where her deepest desires dwelled.

He cupped her ass and pulled her into him. Sabrina wrapped her arms around his neck and held tight as he ground his erection against her. Everything about him was hard and massive, making her feel small and feminine. Yet, instead of being overwhelmed by him, Sabrina was empowered by Seth's touch. There was something very freeing about forgoing the worry of consequence. It allowed Sabrina to take full advantage of all Seth was awakening within her.

Seth certainly knew how to kiss. Sabrina had never been particularly fond of kissing, but now she understood what the big deal was. Seth kissed her with a finesse that had her clawing at his back and whimpering for more.

Oh yeah—the man had talent.

Sabrina shuddered when Seth ran his tongue over her bottom lip. Warmth and wetness pooled at the juncture of her thighs. The force of her desire was almost frightening. She trembled with need, ached to take this as far as it could go. Sweat broke out on her brow as even more heat flooded her. She knew this was something far more than passion. This was animalistic. This was raw.

And it was incredible.

One of Seth's hands settled at the small of her back, sending a jolt of electricity through her. Sabrina brought her leg up to wrap around him, allowing him better access to where she needed him the most. He growled and hooked his arm under her knee, forcing her leg higher. His fingers slid along the nylon of her pantyhose. He growled again, just before ripping the delicate material so his hand could touch her bare flesh.

Sabrina had never had her clothes torn from her in the heat of passion until now. The urgency in which Seth tore them from her heightened her desire. He radiated power and sex, which added to the energy of the moment. She wished he'd rip the rest of their clothes off, just so she could feel his body against hers without any barriers between them.

She'd never felt a body like his, one so strong and sculpted with finely honed muscle. As she ran her hands down his back, those muscles flexed beneath her palms. Her body ached to know the feel of him, the warmth of him, and the strength of him throbbing inside of her. It was more than just curiosity, but a burning need that threatened to consume her.

He lifted her effortlessly. Sabrina wrapped her legs around his waist as he carried her to his desk. After he settled her on it, he moved his hands to her thighs and spread her legs so that he could fit himself between them.

He pulled away from her mouth. "Open your eyes and look at me, Sabrina."

Sabrina did and was shocked to see the fire burning in the depths of his eyes. It was an ancient flame, full of forbidden passions and wicked promises. Short of breath, Sabrina leaned her arms back behind her, settling her weight on her hands. Something about the way Seth stared down at her, assessing her, sent her heartbeat racing even faster. He looked like a predator ready to devour its prey.

Before Sabrina could grow unnerved by his close scrutiny, he snatched the clip from her hair and threw it aside. "Better," he remarked.

As Seth admired his handiwork, Sabrina removed her shoes. Once her shoes were off and she let out a sigh of relief to finally give her toes freedom, she stared, transfixed, as

he peeled off his shirt. She watched him expectantly as he revealed his amazing body to her. Finally getting an eyeful of his tattoo, Sabrina was mesmerized by the intricate design.

At first glance it appeared tribal, but once she got a better look she realized it wasn't. The tattoo was more like tracing—a work of art made up of delicate swirls and points that had an almost mystical quality traditional tribal lacked. The ink covered the entire left side of his torso and arm, ending at his wrist. It worked its way over his shoulder and she wanted to spin him around to see exactly where it ended. His navel was pierced as well. She studied the piercing, having never seen this particular body art on a man before. It was a shame he kept all this beauty hidden beneath clothes.

“That’s gorgeous.” Seth sucked in a sharp breath as she traced the tattoo with her finger. “Where did you have it done?”

“Consider it a gift from God.”

The mention of God was like a bucket of ice thrown over Sabrina’s head. It cleared her mind of the sexual haze and had her flattening her hands on his chest. She gave him a slight shove, but he didn’t budge.

“What’s the matter?” Seth asked with a deep frown that drew his black brows together.

Sabrina shook her head. “Nothing. Everything. I shouldn’t be doing this with you.”

“Really? Why not?”

“Because I don’t know you, that’s why. I came here for an interview, not to have quick sex with you on your desk.”

Seth leaned toward her. His lips hovered near hers. All she had to do was lean forward, just an inch, and they’d be kissing again. The temptation was almost too much to bear.

“You know me, Sabrina.” Her name was a whispered prayer. “You’ve always known me. Open yourself to me and let me love you.”

Oh God... Seth’s words drew her back into his spell. She stopped worrying about right and wrong—about respectable and licentious. Instead, she gave herself back over to

Seth and allowed him to take her down a road she'd never traveled. One paved with pleasure so intense, she wondered if she'd ever be the same once she'd reached the end.

Seth stepped into the cradle of her thighs. Sabrina liked how he fit perfectly there. He settled his hands on her thighs, his gaze never leaving hers. Sabrina's lips parted on a sigh as his fingers danced up her leg to disappear under her skirt. A wonderful frisson of excitement ignited within her when he took hold of the band of her pantyhose and tugged on it. She lifted herself long enough for him to slowly work the tattered nylons down her legs. The tips of his fingers grazed her bare flesh. With a careless flick of his wrist, Seth tossed the ruined nylons to the floor.

The sight of him dropping to his knees in front of her was something Sabrina would remember forever.

"Your skin is so soft," Seth whispered as his fingers bit into her thighs.

Seth's hold on her was firm, yet Sabrina had the distinct impression he was ready to let her go if that's what she wanted. Leaving was the last thing she was going to do. Her every instinct screamed that here was exactly where she was supposed to be.

Seth brought his head down and trailed light kisses up from her knee. Sabrina dropped her head back as pleasure poured through her. He inched up her skirt, kissing her higher. He stopped just short of the juncture of her thighs, yet his fingers pushed on to touch her through her lace underwear. She felt him smile against her leg, obviously pleased with the wetness he found there.

She nearly came off the desk when he slipped a single finger inside her. "Oh, God, that feels so good."

"Remember, Sabrina, I warned you we've only just begun."

Dear Lord, if he could light her up with just a few kisses and one finger, Sabrina was almost afraid to find out what he could do with more of himself—but not enough to make him stop.

He teased her, thrusting into her hard and fast, only to draw himself out slowly. Slow enough to bring every nerve in her body alive. The air became heavy, making every breath difficult to drag in as his mouth traveled over her thighs. Given the way Seth was

pleasuring her, Sabrina had the distinct impression he somehow knew all of her secret sexual desires.

All too soon, Seth stood and withdrew his finger from her. Sabrina resisted the urge to take hold of his hand and move it back between her legs. Needing to touch him, Sabrina glided her fingers over the delicate tattoo on his chest. She marveled at its detail, having never seen anything like it before.

Sabrina loved the way his flesh felt against her palms. "I have a tattoo as well, but nothing like the quality of yours."

"I'm sure I'll find it."

Surprisingly, his arrogance gave her a wonderful thrill. She was the assertive one, the one who had to be in control, which was why she found it exciting that Seth took the role she usually played.

Pushing her jacket down her arms, Seth cocked a brow at the lacy camisole. Sabrina was glad she'd thought to don it instead of the plain white blouse she'd originally planned to wear. He demanded she remove it. She complied without thinking, loving the way he watched her.

Sabrina closed her eyes and bit her bottom lip when his large hand cupped her right breast. His thumb flicked over her hard nipple and she held back her cry. Only after she was able to breathe again did she say, "I don't know why I care that you know this, but..." She shook her head. "This is so out of character for me. I don't do the casual-sex thing."

He brought his head close and rubbed his cheek over hers. His skin was soft and smooth and held the faint scent of aftershave. "I know, Sabrina." His breath tickled her ear.

"I don't know why I'm... I just can't explain it."

"Then don't." His hand lightly squeezed her breast. "Just feel."

Seth's mouth settled on her neck and Sabrina almost shot off the desk. He laved her with his tongue, nipped at her with his teeth, and as he did so, every rumor of him being a

vampire danced through her mind. For a moment, she almost wished he were one. Then he could help her escape to another plane of existence, allow her to leave her life behind.

Reality would have continued its invasion and broken the spell Seth wove around her, but his mouth moved over her flesh, causing her breath to catch and her fingers to dig into his shoulders with desperation.

As if sensing how she ached, Seth continued to stoke the flames of her passion. Unable to stifle a sigh of pleasure as he rubbed her clit through her panties, she pressed herself into his touch.

“That’s it, Sabrina,” Seth whispered against her flesh. His voice was velvet. It wrapped around her, heightening the sensations coursing through her. “Let it go. Just feel what I’m doing to you.”

“I’ll try.”

“I don’t want you to try. I need you to let it all go. Can you do that for me, Sabrina? Can you just feel what I’m doing?”

Sabrina nodded as he trailed his lips over her collarbone. He rolled her nipple between his fingers. She cried out as his finger slid over her clit, making her feel empty, her body throbbing to be filled by him.

The more she whimpered, the more ruthless Seth became. He played her body with an expertise that would have had her screaming with frustration if his mouth wasn’t claiming hers. He swallowed her cries as his hands roamed her body. Only once she was damn near ready to shatter did Seth pull her off the desk and turn her around. He bent her over and a sharp stab of anticipation shot through her. She’d never felt so wicked, so alive. Seth brought out a side of her she hadn’t realized existed.

He tore away her panties. She threw her long brown hair over her shoulder and tried to steal a glance at him. All she saw was Seth dropping to his knees. Though she couldn’t see what he was doing to her, she could *feel*.

He roughly pushed up her skirt and grabbed hold of her waist. Though Seth wasn’t gentle, he wasn’t hurting her either. The way he took control excited Sabrina. With a hand on the small of her back, he pressed her lower toward the desk. She flattened her

palms on the polished wood to steady herself just as she felt Seth's tongue lave at her from behind. Her nails scored the wood of his desk and she bit back a scream as waves of pleasure flowed through her.

He slowly slipped one finger into her, then another, drawing low moans from her. Sabrina felt her body ignite as he worked her with his hand and tongue.

"Please... Seth..." Her broken whisper ended on a cry.

Sabrina looked over her shoulder as he rose to his feet. She caught a glimpse of his arrogant grin before he bent over her backwards. He took a handful of her hair in his hand and brought his mouth close to her ear. "Beg me for what you want."

"You. I want you, Seth."

He gave a gentle tug on her hair. "You have me, Sabrina." His whisper tickled her ear. "Now tell me what you want me to do to you."

The feel of him against her body made her crave to have him deep within her. "I need you to fill me."

He dropped his forehead to her and she felt his smile against her neck. "Thank you, Sabrina."

Before Sabrina could wonder at what he was thanking her for, Seth straightened. He unzipped his pants and let them fall. She tried to turn to watch him, but a hand on her back kept her as she was. All she could do was steal another look over her shoulder as he kicked off his shoes and stepped out of his pants. He wore no underwear. The sight of his cock robbed her of her breath. Every part of him was magnificent. His arousal was long and thick and as perfect as the rest of him. It'd been a long time since she'd been with a man and none of them had been as large as Seth. The idea of his length buried inside of her caused her passion to grow to heights that were almost frightening.

He stepped back up to her and nestled himself between her legs. Seth's erection pressed against her. Her body opened for him as he inched into her. Hissing, she stretched to fit him. The mix of pleasure and pain had her head dropping to the desk. She arched her back and her legs shook as she took him.. From behind her, she heard Seth panting as he slid into her. The sound was music to her ears as he seated himself fully.

Seth stilled, allowing her body a moment to adjust to his size. He swept her hair to the side and it cascaded over her shoulder in a heavy mass of waves that, for once, Sabrina didn't mind the weight of.

"We're a good fit, Sabrina."

The whisper of a kiss to the nape of her neck sent a chill down her spine. That was the last of Seth's tenderness. He grabbed her hair again, holding on tightly as he drove into her with a ruthlessness that had her dancing on a razor's edge of fear and excitement.

Each pulsating thrust pushed her closer to the point she'd only heard of but had never gone to. It was this big mystery, one she'd never thought she'd know firsthand. She'd honestly thought she'd be one of those women who'd never experience an orgasm.

Seth clamped one hand on her shoulder. The other settled on her hip as he pumped into her. His touch, firm on her shoulder to hold her where he wanted her and the other hand a mere hint of pressure, helped to send her over the edge. Sabrina let go and allowed her body to soar. Every part of her felt electrified. The sensation began somewhere deep inside as Seth thrust into her, shutting shut out everything but Seth, making him her sole anchor.

Sabrina screamed as she experienced her first orgasm. The rush of sensations brought her to heights she never knew a person could go. Seth was right there with her, following her as he pumped his climax into her. As she floated back to reality, she became aware of his weight bearing down on her. She liked it—liked the feel of his hammering heartbeats. She liked the sound of his rasping breaths. She could have stayed like that with him forever.

As odd as it seemed, Sabrina was comforted by Seth's heat on her back and his breath against her skin. The sense of loss cut through her sharply as he slipped out.

She straightened and tried not to feel self-conscious as Seth retrieved his clothes from the floor and got dressed. Since most of her clothes were still on, all Sabrina had to do was yank her skirt down and fix her shirt. After running her hands through her hair to smooth it down, she spotted her torn panties and nylons lying on the floor. She quickly gathered them up and stuffed them in her pocketbook.

Sabrina looked back at Seth, who was watching her with a hint of a smile as he zipped his pants. She tried her best to retain as much dignity as she could, but now that the spell of passion was broken, she wished the floor would open and swallow her whole.

Never had she been more mortified than she was right then. Nor had she ever experienced the overwhelming sensation of what could only be called “afterburn”. Not afterglow—which was something she’d often heard about but never experienced for herself.

No. This was *afterburn*—a fiery sense of shame that burned deep within and had her wanting to run out of there as fast as she could.

“I have to go,” she announced, keenly aware of his gaze fixed on her—studying her every move.

“I’d rather you stay.”

His offer sent a flutter of butterflies throughout her stomach. Unfortunately, she couldn’t. “No, I don’t think that would be a good idea. I have to get back to the museum.” She gripped her pocketbook as if it were a shield. “I’m going to tell Bryce that you don’t have the stone, but he’s not going to stop. He believes you have it and he’s determined to get it.”

Sabrina also needed some distance between her and Seth. More than just a sharing of their bodies had happened and she needed to get the hell away from him in order to think clearly and make sense of what had passed between them.

The predatory way Seth walked toward her had Sabrina wanting to take a step back. After what they’d just done, now was a bit too late for her self-preservation to kick in. “Is that a warning, Sabrina?”

Knowing Bryce, it was. “Yes, and if you knew Bryce you’d understand why. He’s obsessed and he’ll make your life a living hell until he gets what he wants.”

He brushed his knuckles down her cheek. “Is that what he’s done to you? Has he made your life hell to get you to come here for the stone?”

She shook her head curtly. Seth’s hand fell away. “No. I’m here for my own reasons.”

Seth cocked a brow at that. “At least you’re honest.”

No, she wasn’t. If she were honest, she’d tell him the real reason she was here and they both knew it. Sabrina saw the truth of that reflected in the guarded way he stared at her.

“Now, I have a warning for you.”

“Do you?” Sabrina asked breathlessly.

He nodded, that ghost of a smile on his lips again. “I do.” He brought his head down to her ear. Gently, he moved aside her hair. His tongue tickled the upper curve of her ear and a shiver raced through her clear down to her soul. “I’ll be seeing you again. Very soon.”

And so she was warned.

Chapter Three

Seth stood at the window and watched Sabrina climb into her black Malibu. An odd sense of loss came over him as she drove off. He still felt her body pulsating around him as she climaxed. Her cries of ecstasy still rang in his ears. He still tasted her and it was driving him insane.

He'd known eventually their paths would cross. What he hadn't anticipated was his reaction to her.

Since last night, Seth had sensed Sabrina. He'd been expecting her, yet was unprepared for the sensations that had run through him as her very being moved through his. It had thrown him off center and made him take a foolish risk in giving in to the need to have her.

From Sabrina's beauty to the strength of her spirit, everything about her drew him in. He'd been compelled to touch her, to taste her. He'd had to know what it was like to be inside her. And now that he'd had her, he swore he would have her again.

His years here on Earth had been empty. Sabrina had given him the one breath of life he'd been missing—and needing—since he'd come.

Seth remembered what it had been like to feel God's love all around him. He'd never feel such a thing again. He'd made his choice to fall from grace and hadn't regretted it since. Such an emotion was beyond him. He was an angel. Angels didn't suffer regret. Yet, slowly, over the years, human emotions had begun to infect him. Sorrow crept into his heart the longer he was away from God. Loneliness tore him apart as the nights grew longer and quieter with each passing year.

Turning away from the window, Seth stalked from his office. He knew where Sabrina was going and an uneasy feeling slithered up his spine. Every instinct he possessed told him to go after her. Out in the waiting area, he noticed Mary was gone.

Her perfume lingered, as it always did. One of these days, Seth was going to ask her to wear less of it, since the strong scent played havoc on his senses.

A glance at one of the chairs told him that's where Sabrina had sat while she'd waited for him. He'd hated having to keep her waiting, but it had been unavoidable. Being trapped in the dark was one of the drawbacks of his existence. Yet, it was a small price to pay for the honor he'd volunteered for so long ago.

Quitting the wing he used for his office, Seth strode through the enormous mansion. Passing the locked door that led down to the basement, a strong sense of apprehension overcame him. That Bryce Mathers had learned he possessed at least one of the stones didn't bode well. The man was a thorn in all of the Seraphim's sides and though he hadn't made a move to take the stones, Bryce was a headache Seth could ill afford. He knew it would only be a matter of time before he was forced to put an end to Bryce. He just prayed Sabrina didn't get caught in the crossfire when that time came.

Hakion's Stone.

Seth didn't just possess it. He was its guardian.

He was one of three angels who'd willingly fallen from Heaven to protect humanity. They were the Seraphim, the guardians of the imprisoned hearts of the children of Balian, one of the angels who'd fought with Lucifer and was thrown down from Heaven.

Kael and Bath-Kol guarded the other two stones. It was Kael who'd first warned Seth that Bryce had taken up the torch of finding the stones after his father's death. He was less zealous, but just as dangerous. Knowing Sabrina worked for him had worried Seth to no end, yet he'd been powerless to intervene. No Seraphim could interfere in human affairs unless it brought about a direct attack on them or the stones. As long as Bryce made no move to take the stones, he couldn't strike the bastard down.

Like a lightning strike, Seth had the unpleasant sensation of foreboding creep over him. He realized his mistake in allowing Sabrina to leave. The urgency of getting to her before she reached Bryce had Seth grabbing the keys to his car as he hastened out of the mansion. After climbing into the driver's seat of the black Jaguar, Seth made a call to Kael to alert him about Bryce.

God help them all if the stones were ever to fall into the hands of someone like Mathers.

Speeding out into the night, Seth drove down the winding country roads that led from his house to the converted warehouse where Mathers had set up his museum. Seth used the term museum loosely, since the place was more like a hole-in-the-wall Bryce used to legitimize the relics he'd sought for the last few years.

By the time he pulled into the lot across from the museum, Seth had already spotted Sabrina's car parked next to Bryce's. Parking his car next to hers, Seth got out and stood there for a moment. He reached out with his senses and felt Sabrina's anxiety wash through him as she faced Bryce. He then heard Sabrina's voice and focused in on it, listening to her conversation with her boss.

"He doesn't have it."

There was a thud, like a fist hitting a desk. *"Did he tell you that?"*

Seth would know Bryce's annoyingly whiny voice anywhere.

"Yes, he did."

"And you believed him?" Bryce questioned incredulously.

"Why wouldn't I?" Sabrina countered. Seth was impressed with how calm she sounded, especially given how turbulent her emotions were. She was obviously terrified of Bryce. *"I told him you'd pay him whatever he wanted for it. He outright told me he didn't have it. Who in their right mind would turn down an offer like that for a stone?"*

"Someone who knows what the stone is worth!" he thundered back.

"Look, I did what you wanted. I went there and asked him about the stone. You can stop threatening me now."

"I can see you did a little bit more than just what I asked." Seth didn't like the snide implication in Bryce's tone.

"What I did or didn't do is none of your damned business, Bryce."

Seth heard heavy footsteps and assumed they belonged to Bryce.

"I see how it is with you, Sabrina. A rich pretty boy with a bad rep crooks his finger and you spread those legs of yours, huh?"

There was no mistaking the sound of flesh striking flesh. Pride shot through Seth that Sabrina had obviously slapped some part of Bryce's person.

What he heard next had Seth running toward the steel back door of the building. The second slap, followed by Sabrina's gasp, had him furious enough to kill. As he pulled open the door, snapping the lock in the process, he heard her fall. There was a shuffle of movement that had Seth bounding up to the second story he knew Bryce used for his office.

He burst in like a raging storm, taking Sabrina and Bryce by surprise. His keen gaze took in the situation in the span of one heartbeat. Sabrina lay on the floor with her hand thrown up as if to protect her face and Bryce stood over her with his hand poised ready to strike. Seth went blind with rage—something he hadn't thought possible given that he was a warrior of God. He wasn't supposed to feel such fury, yet it ran through him hot and hard, bringing him across the room in a movement almost too fast for human eyes to see.

Seth clamped a hand around Bryce's arm, nearly breaking the bone when he bent the wrist back. A perverse part of him wanted to snap his arm just to hear Bryce scream with pain. How he refrained from doing so, only God knew.

"You will *not* touch her again."

Bryce tried to wrest his arm free but Seth held fast. "Who the hell are you?"

Seth cocked a brow and twisted Bryce's wrist just a little more. When Bryce whimpered, Seth smiled coldly. "Don't you think we're beyond introductions, Bryce?"

"Raleigh." Bryce spat out his name as if it were poison on his tongue.

Movement from Sabrina had Seth glancing at her as she pushed herself from the floor. He saw a bruise the size of a man's fist already turning her left cheek purple.

It took all of Seth's self-control not to tear Bryce's arm from his body. Instead, he shoved the bastard back and let go of his arm. Bryce stumbled, cradling his wrist against his chest. "Are you going to continue to hide behind others, or are you going to be a man about this and ask me about the stones yourself?"

Bryce had the audacity to curl his lips in a sneer. “Hide? I don’t think so. She,” he stabbed a finger at Sabrina, who still seemed dazed after being hit, “has her own reasons for wanting the stones. Don’t you, Sabrina? Did you tell him why you came to work for me and how you want the stones just as much as I do?”

Sabrina paled. Seth realized that she had no idea Bryce knew more about her than she’d thought. That only went to show how vulnerable she was. If she couldn’t see through Bryce, she’d never see greater danger coming at her until it was too late.

She was breathing laboriously as she tugged down her skirt. Instead of going to him when Seth put his hand out to her, she stepped around him. With an impressive show of dignity, she walked right up to Bryce and spat on the floor at his feet.

“You fucking bastard,” she ground out before marching out of the office with all the grace of a queen. Seth’s heart damn near shattered when he heard the soft weeping she’d held in until she was halfway down the stairs.

Seth positioned himself in front of the door and glared Bryce down. All the while, the wrenching sound of Sabrina’s sobs cut through him. “If you go near Sabrina again, I swear on God, I’ll kill you with my bare hands.”

Bryce stepped back until he collided with his desk. “I know what you are. You can’t hide those stones forever.”

Seth strode up to Bryce and grabbed him around the neck with one hand, digging his thumb into the hollow of Bryce’s throat. Bryce’s eyes bugged out and he tried to gasp for a breath that wouldn’t come.

“Then you know what I’m capable of.” That threat finally seemed to get through to Bryce, though Seth knew he’d not stop until he either had what he was after—which would never happen—or Seth put an end to him. “I’ve been around thousands of years before the time of Christ. I took the stone from the hand of God Himself. What makes you think *you* can take it from me?”

Bryce answered with a choked gasp. Seth threw him aside. Bryce fell to the ground and sucked in great gulps of much-needed air.

“If you think you can take the stone, Bryce, come and get it. Don’t send a woman to do your dirty work. For once in your miserable life, be a man.”

With the arrogance of someone who knew he was invulnerable, Seth turned his back on Bryce and calmly walked out of the office. Once he was out of the museum, he saw Sabrina sitting in her car. Her hands were curled around the steering wheel. Even from a distance Seth saw she trembled. He also noticed she was still crying.

When he rapped lightly on the window, Sabrina jumped. She looked up and Seth let out a violent curse at the sight of her cheek. She turned on the car in order to lower the window.

“Thank you, Seth,” she whispered.

It killed him to see a woman like Sabrina broken by a man such as Bryce. He’d watched her over the years, had witnessed her going through hardships she’d faced with dignity and pride. To see her crying now had Seth wanting to cast off the laws of God and tear Bryce to pieces.

“There’s nothing to thank me for.” It was an effort for Seth to keep his anger and frustration out of his tone.

She wiped the tears from her cheeks, wincing when she ran her fingers over the bruise Bryce left her with. “He’s not going to stop. He’s obsessed with the stones. He’ll try to get at you when you least expect it.”

“That’s where he’s going to make his last mistake. My guard is never down.”

“I hope you’re right,” she replied solemnly. “I can tell you now, he’s not above murder.”

Seth bent down so that his face was level with hers. “I’m not that easy to kill. But if I were to die, Sabrina, would you weep for me?”

Sabrina tilted her head to the side and regarded him with a sad smile. “Yes, I would.”

“Then I’ll be careful with my life, since it’s a sin to see such a beautiful woman cry.” He reached in and ran a finger down her wet cheek.

She looked away and licked her lips. Seth remembered her taste and what it had felt like to be lost in her. If he weren't still furious, he'd give in to his raging lust and take her back to the mansion and have her again.

When she looked back at him, he saw uncertainty reflected in her eyes. In five thousand years of life, never had a woman's eyes affected Seth more. "About what Bryce said...about me having my own reasons for wanting the stones..."

Seth cut her off. "It's of no importance. Keep your secrets for tonight, Sabrina. We'll have plenty of time to discuss this. I clearly remember telling you we've only just begun. Do I need to remind you of that fact again?"

She shook her head. "I just don't want you to think I'm like Bryce."

Seth cupped her chin. "Go home, Sabrina. You'll be safe for the rest of the night." He released her chin and she let out a small sigh. "Come back to me tomorrow."

"I will. Good night, Seth."

His name rolling off her tongue reminded him of how she'd cried out his name when he was inside her. "Good night, sweet Sabrina."

He stood and moved away from the car. She turned on the radio and drove off. The pounding music of Fuel echoed on the quiet night. He looked up at the warehouse. He saw Bryce staring down from the window in his office.

It would be so easy to end the bastard right now.

But Bryce hadn't made a move to take the stone yet. He would. And Seth would be there to take him out when he did.

He'd make sure it was something very slow and extremely painful.

As he walked to his car, Seth wondered where people got the notion that all angels were sweet little cherubs. If humans had the slightest idea of what an angel truly was, they'd never look up at the sky the same again.

He'd been among the first angels. He was a true warrior of Heaven. He'd fought alongside of the archangels when Lucifer and his followers were thrown down to Hell. He was the first one God had asked to fall from grace in order to protect His children from Balian's children when the angels thought to raise their fallen father from Hell. Seth

had been there when God ripped out their hearts and imprisoned them in the stones. Their bodies had been flung down to Earth, to be buried in consecrated ground and guarded by Azazeel.

Seth, along with the other Seraphim, would bring down the wrath of Heaven itself in order to stop Balian's children. And he'd do it with a smile, since a warrior liked nothing better than a good fight.

After five millennia of boredom, Seth was more than ready to do battle.

Chapter Four

Sabrina flinched when she turned her face up to the shower nozzle and let the hot water stream over her. Her cheek was throbbing. Damn Bryce. He'd really done a number on her. He'd caught her good with a direct punch to the face. With a shiver, she knew she got away lucky. If Seth hadn't shown up, Bryce would have done a lot more damage.

Never in her life had Sabrina needed saving. She'd always faced adversity alone and head-on. With her mother in and out of hospitals, Sabrina had been forced to practically raise herself as she was tossed around foster homes whenever her mother had one of her psychotic episodes. How ironic that she'd learned her mother wasn't as insane as everyone believed. Oh, she'd been good and crazy, that was for sure. It just turned out that much of what her mother had been babbling about proved true.

Sabrina wrapped her arms around herself, unable to stop the shudder of cold dread that worked its way through her. Given what Bryce had said to Seth, it was obvious he knew there was more to her than met the eye. *Damn*. If he knew what she was, it was going to cause all kinds of problems. If being the target of Bryce's obsession wasn't bad enough, she was also out of a job. Not that working at the museum had paid much, but it had been a necessary evil.

Knowing the unpaid gas and electric bills were sitting on her desk, rent was due in two weeks and the phone would need to be paid any day now, she had every right to fear the repercussions of this one night.

The weight of loneliness suddenly bearing down on her, Sabrina felt the sting of tears in her eyes. She fought them back, knowing they were useless. Crying wouldn't get her anywhere. It wouldn't change her situation, and so she wouldn't indulge in a useless endeavor such as wallowing in self-pity.

When her thoughts went to Seth, Sabrina couldn't help but think of her father. She'd never met him. He'd died just before she was born. She'd grown up believing her father had been a cop who'd been shot in the line of duty. That had been a lie her mother had told her to keep the unbelievable truth from her. But on her deathbed, Sylvia had confessed the truth, and now that knowledge festered within Sabrina. It's what made her seek out Bryce, beg employment in his museum and put up with his shit for the past year. It's what brought her to Seth Raleigh and it's what set her apart from the world around her, yet brought her closer to him.

Letting the water run down her body, Sabrina remembered the feel of Seth's hands on her. He'd been amazing, bringing her to her first orgasm in a matter of moments when others couldn't in twice the time. She knew his ability to affect her the way he had ran deeper than mere sexual attraction. There was an undeniable connection between them. It had been almost electric when they'd touched. If she'd felt it, it stood to reason so had he.

If anyone would understand what Sabrina was going through, it would be Seth, yet she kept her secret from him. She wondered if he'd seen through her deception. Most likely he had. Why he hadn't called her on it, she didn't know. All she knew was that she was grateful he hadn't. She wasn't ready to talk about what her mother had revealed. It was just so...bizarre. She hadn't given voice to it yet, and honestly, she wasn't sure she was ready to.

How could she talk about something she herself didn't fully comprehend? Of course, she knew Seth was the one person who could make sense of her life. Still, she didn't want to talk about it. Not yet—not with anyone.

Once she'd rinsed the last of the conditioner from her hair, Sabrina shut off the water and stepped out of the shower. She dried herself and donned a long T-shirt and a pair of men's boxers. Not the most attractive of pajamas, but they were comfortable. After turning off the light, she crawled into bed, swearing that she still felt Seth's touch all over her. It was as if he'd left a remnant of himself with her.

She closed her eyes and saw him. Only instead of looking like a modern man, in her mind, he appeared a fierce warrior standing on the edge of battle. His long, straight black

hair billowed in the wind and sun gleamed off his armor. He wielded a sword that had to be as long as she was tall. But what caught and held Sabrina's attention were the glorious black wings fanned out behind him.

Flanking him were two other angelic warriors. Behind him, legions of Heaven's soldiers lined up, stretching out as far as her eyes could see.

Gasping, Sabrina opened her eyes and bolted up in bed. Had that been a dream? It had certainly felt as if she'd glimpsed something all too real—something she had no business seeing.

Pressing her fingers to her temples, Sabrina massaged her suddenly aching head. She didn't want to be a part of this. She didn't want to be caught up in a world that was as fascinating as it was frightening. Yet she knew that choice was out of her hands. She was at the mercy of God, who had plotted out her life long before she took her first breath.

Though Sabrina never believed in the expression "ignorance is bliss", in her case, it proved true. She'd believed the lie her mother had told her about her father and had been blissfully ignorant of what he was and what it meant to her. Now, her life was turned upside down and inside out and she no longer even knew who she was anymore.

Before lying back down, Sabrina had the unnerving sensation she wasn't alone. She searched through the darkness, almost expecting Seth to step from the shadows. Not that there were many places for him to hide in her sparsely furnished room. Nevertheless, she felt him all around her.

Settled back down, Sabrina closed her eyes and tried to do exactly what she believed Seth was doing—putting the events of the night far from his mind. Though, as hard as she tried, her dreams were filled with the glorious image of a black-haired, black-winged warrior of God.



All Seth could think about was Sabrina. A part of her was still with him, not that it surprised him. In fact, the lingering sensation of her managed to calm his fury. It quieted his need for Bryce's blood in a way nothing else could.

Throughout the ages he'd had to endure this existence, he'd never known a moment of peace. That is, until Sabrina came walking into his office. Buried inside her, Seth had learned what it was to find a small sense of serenity.

Though he'd never once regretted his decision to fall from grace, there were times he ached to walk out into the sun. He burned to feel God's light on him instead of being forced to dwell only in shadows. Five thousand years of moving through life alone, he wanted—no, he needed—what he'd found with Sabrina tonight.

Leaning on the hood of his car across the road from Sabrina's house, he stared up at the window. After waking briefly, he sensed she'd fallen back to sleep, though it wasn't restful. He heard her tossing and turning, felt her turmoil as troubled dreams haunted her.

It would be all too easy for him to steal into her house and join her in bed. He could take her body before she even realized it wasn't a dream. He'd feel her warmth around him again as the tightness of her body hugged him. So much had he enjoyed her, the mere thought of having her again caused him to grow painfully hard despite his fury.

He cupped his cock and shifted, his pants suddenly uncomfortably tight. The night had been long and dawn was coming soon. He had to get back to Halifax Manor before the sun peeked over the mountains. Remembering the agony the one time he'd tested the power of the sun, Seth climbed back into his car. With one last glance up at the lightening sky, Seth drove off.

First thing he had to do after he returned to the manor was call Kael and Bath-Kol. They had to be told about Bryce. If it was as Seth suspected, Bryce was going to use any means necessary to gain possession of the stone—even going so far as to use Sabrina. She had to be protected at all costs. She was Daniel's daughter, and the Seraphim were prepared to lay down their lives for one of their own.

Sabrina might not have realized he'd known who she was, but the truth was that Seth had been watching over her since the night she was born. It was the reason he'd come here to Bethlehem.

After Daniel had been killed protecting Jerrod's Stone, Kael had taken his place. Instead of Kael coming to Bethlehem, Seth took up residence at Halifax Manor. He alone

wanted the responsibility of looking after Daniel's daughter. The last time a nephilim had been born was over a thousand years ago. They were sacred beings, part human and part angel. While they possessed the heart and soul of a human, they also bore the power and wisdom of Heaven itself.

Once home, instead of going directly to his study to call Kael, Seth went down into the cavernous basement. If anyone dared come here, he was in his right to kill in order to protect the secret hidden in the dark depths of the mansion.

After disabling the state-of-the-art security system, Seth genuflected at the golden cross hanging on the far wall of the large vault. He touched a hand to his heart and whispered the Lord's Prayer.

Only after he finished the prayer did he reach for the long wooden box beneath the shelf. It had been centuries since he'd brandished the sword encased within the box. He ached to wrap his hand around the hilt. Yearned to rush into battle with the blade held high, ready to strike down Heaven's enemies. It was what he'd been bred for.

Opening the box, Seth carefully pulled the sword free. He kissed the blade, which had been blessed by God, before rising to his full height. He curled his hand around the hilt and smiled. The familiar weight of the holy weapon was welcome after the emptiness he'd felt for so long without it.

The pommel was fashioned into a cross and engraved in the crossbar was his true name. *Setheus*. Down the blade was Angelic script. The blade had shed the blood of Lucifer during the First War. It had been this weapon that had killed Hakion before God took his heart and imprisoned it in the stone nestled on a bed of black velvet, which sat nearby on the small metal shelf.

Seth well remembered that battle. Hakion, Jerrod, and Orien had thought to raise their father from Hell. The battle had sparked the Second War, which had lasted for two centuries and cost too many lives on both sides of the fight. Once the three disgraced angels were brought down and their hearts sealed in the stones, their followers were thrown down from Heaven. They now awaited the return of their three leaders to save them—and Balian—from Hell.

Leaving the vault, Seth brought his sword with him. He retreated to his study and sat heavily on the black leather sofa. He laid the sword across his lap, trailing his fingers over the engraving on the blade. With a long, drawn-out sigh, Seth set the weapon aside before pulling his cell phone from his pocket. He'd make the call to Kael that would set a series of events in motion that wouldn't stop until human blood was shed.

Chapter Five

The harsh light of morning brought an end to Sabrina's dreams. She woke to a throbbing cheek and a mind filled with the vision of warrior-angels.

As much as she wanted to stay in bed all day with the pillow thrown over her head and forget last night, she knew that was impossible. Bryce was probably constructing a devious plan to get his hands on her, Seth, and the stones. She could almost see him rubbing his hands together and letting out a shrill, scheming laugh, just like a bad guy in a silly B movie.

Only this wasn't a B movie. This was her life, and it was becoming more complicated by the day.

God, how she hated drama, yet here she was, smack in the middle of a mess with no way out.

Bryce may be obsessed with the stones, but he wasn't a stupid man. In fact, he was too smart for his own good. Since last night had been such an utter failure, it would only be a matter of time before he tried again. Only this time, he'd have the events of last night to build from.

Sabrina's stomach twisted just thinking about the very real possibility that Bryce knew exactly what she was. That was why, as much as she didn't want to have to, she'd take herself to Halifax Manor. At least there, she'd be protected from Bryce.

She climbed out of bed, praying Seth was right when he claimed he wouldn't be easy to kill. She didn't want a sleazy bastard like Bryce to get his hands on those stones, especially if the legend was true and, through them, Hell could be opened.

Moreover, given who Daniel was—or rather *what* he was—she felt a strange connection with Seth. If anyone could explain what it meant to be a nephilim, Seth could. And she needed to understand. She needed it with her whole self, because ever since her mother told her about her father, she felt fragmented and lost.

Nephilim.

After learning what Daniel was, Sabrina had started to research angels to learn all she could about what he was and what that meant in regards to what she was as well. That's when she came across the word nephilim.

A nephilim was the child of an angel and a human. Finding this information fascinated and terrified her. That there was a name for what she was, and all the information she'd gathered about the Seraphim, reinforced the fact that her mother hadn't been crazy. It had her delving even deeper into the world of the Seraphim. She followed the trail of information right to Bryce, who eventually led her to Seth. Now that she'd found him, she couldn't just walk away without learning all she could about Seth and her father.

Getting out of bed, Sabrina went to the window. The day dawned hot and humid. Forgoing a shower since she'd taken one the night before, she dressed in a black tank top and faded jeans. Being back in her well-worn sneakers instead of those horrible heels from last night was a welcome relief.

As she made her way down to the kitchen, she pulled her hair into a ponytail. Once in the small eat-in kitchen, she put on a pot of coffee and checked the messages on her cell. One was from Seth, telling her he expected her at the manor today and that she should bring enough of her belongings to get her through the next few weeks. His deep voice was hypnotic even over the phone. Bryce's number came up, but he left no message.

Sabrina slapped the cell phone down on the counter and made herself a cup of coffee. Sitting at the table, she looked around her kitchen, wondering if she'd ever come back here. She liked her little white house. Loved the white-picket fence surrounding the front yard. It was a dollhouse that she rented from old friends of her mother's, who barely charged her rent. Though she hated the charity, she knew without it she'd be homeless.

This house was the first place she'd thought of as *home*. Having been tossed around the foster-care system each time her mother had a breakdown and ended up in a hospital

for months at a time, Sabrina learned to never get too comfortable anywhere. Only once she was eighteen and no longer a ward of the state did she begin to find her place in life.

From the day after her eighteenth birthday until now, she'd worked nonstop in order to make ends meet. That relentless work schedule had also prevented her from dwelling on her life. But now, she was surrounded by everything she had tried to ignore since her mother died three years ago.

She wasn't looking forward to abandoning her home—and her independence—even for a few weeks. Nevertheless, Seth was right in having her stay at Halifax. That was probably the only place Bryce wouldn't be able to get to her.

Halifax was also the one place where her heart would be in jeopardy of being broken by a fallen angel.



There was no way Bryce was going to let Sabrina get away with siding with Seth. Not now that he'd come this far in using her to get to the stones. He'd been too arrogant and had underestimated Sabrina's hatred of him and it had backfired on him. He wouldn't make another mistake like that again. The outcome would cost him the power he believed he'd gain by being the one to set free a demon.

He was going to get all three of the stones. Of that, Bryce had no doubt. It was just a matter of time and he was really running low on patience. He'd come this far and was too determined to fail now. Seth—or whatever it was Setheus was calling himself—had Hakion's stone. Kael was guardian of Jerrod's, and that bitch Bath-Kol, Orien's.

For all Bryce had done, all he and his family had sacrificed in their search for the three stones, he deserved to walk the road of shadows and riches and reap the rewards of power and glory. Hell, he'd given up his own blood and soul for that right.

Wrapping the bandage around his right wrist, he was furious at last night's unexpected turn of events. It seemed Setheus wanted to play. Well, Bryce would play, but he'd be the one to set the rules. It would be on his field that this game would play out—

and he'd use Sabrina as a pawn to gain the upper hand. The fool had made it all too clear the bitch was a weakness, and Bryce intended to use that to his full advantage.

Testing his wrist, which was now tightly wound with the long bandage, Bryce flinched. Looking at his reflection in the bathroom mirror, he saw there were fingers marks all over his throat. The angel could have killed him if he'd wanted. Bryce had felt the raw power in his hold and a barely contained fury.

Seeing the damage done to him only reinforced the fact that he could not make the mistake of openly striking out at the angel. Such a move would be suicide. What he had to do was take down Setheus when he least expected it. Everyone let down their guard. It wasn't a matter of *if*, but rather, a matter of *when*.

The moment Setheus did, Bryce would be there.

Leaving the bathroom, Bryce went over to the top drawer of his dresser. He removed the socks and underwear. Underneath the false bottom was a wooden box. Carefully removing it from the drawer, he opened the box and slid a finger gently over the blade of the dagger it held. The weapon was alive with energy.

With this, he could spill the blood of an angel.

The weapon had been forged in the fires of Hell. The handle was solid black and fashioned into a dragon's head. The blade was long, double-edged and bore the name of Lucifer etched in angelic script. Bryce had bargained away his soul for this weapon.

With Sabrina's blood, he would crack the three stones and lay bare the withered hearts of Balian's children. Her blood would break the Earth and call forth the demon Balian. With her blood, the blood of the last female nephilim, he would unmake humanity.

Chapter Six

Sabrina didn't have much to do to prepare to leave for Halifax other than pack her bags. Keys in hand, her fear caused her to hesitate before walking out the door. She must have looked out the window a dozen times to make sure Bryce was nowhere to be found. Not that being inside was much safer. If Bryce wanted to get to her, there were dozens of ways he could break in to her house. Nevertheless, being in her home gave Sabrina a sense of security she was reluctant to give up.

Glancing down at the suitcases at her feet, she marveled that twenty-five years of life could fit in only two suitcases. It proved how empty her life was. No family and friends, she didn't even have a pet. The die of her empty life had been cast the moment her mother learned what the father of her unborn baby was. Her mind shattered from the impact of conceiving a child with a fallen angel.

As much as Sabrina wanted to learn all she could about her father, part of her had been afraid of where that knowledge would take her. Once she'd pushed aside her fear, her quest to understand who and what her father was landed her right in the center of a world where angels, demons, Heaven, and Hell were all real.

Taking a deep and calming breath, Sabrina opened the door, picked up her suitcases and walked out of her house. After throwing her bags in the backseat, she returned to the house to lock it up. She lingered a moment and stared up at her house, wondering if she'd ever know a normal day again. Not that her life had ever been normal, but it was hers and it was what she was used to. It was the unknown future that terrified her.

In the car, she turned on the radio, hoping the music would drown out her thoughts, which screamed for her to drive someplace far away—where she could start over and pretend to be someone else and put the last years of her life behind her. As much as that thought appealed to her, Sabrina wasn't the sort to run from anything, which was why instead of heading off to places unknown, she made her way toward Halifax Manor.

“Alone I Break” by Korn was playing. She loved this song. Felt the lyrics were written just for her, given the circumstances of her life. It was dark and depressing and all about life changing and a person tired of being alone. Yes. That’s exactly how she felt.

Sabrina liked to tell people she was strong, the truth was she wasn’t as tough as she pretended to be. There were days when she felt as if her heart was bleeding and her soul was slowly dying. Yet, when she’d been around Seth, that had all faded away. She was—complete with him.

Reaching the tree-lined country road that led to Hawley, she sped up, wanting to get to Halifax as quickly as possible. Though she’d grown up here and loved living here, Sabrina wondered why Seth would choose such a desolate area to make his home instead of Rome, Jerusalem, or some other city with deep religious roots. The biggest draw of Bethlehem, New York was Mathers Museum, which really wasn’t saying much. Woodstock was nearby, but that hadn’t been a popular tourist attraction for years.

Here, lost in upstate New York, the winters were brutal. Other than the myriad camps for Hasidic Jews, there wasn’t a lot to do during the summer months. But then, as Sabrina drove down the road toward Halifax Manor, it struck her that the isolation of the area would be the perfect place for Seth to hide the stone. True, in a big city he could lose himself in the crowd, but there would also be danger coming at him from every angle—equally lost in the crush of population. At least here he would have a better chance at seeing danger.

Seth’s mansion lay just outside the south end of Hawley. It sat on a huge, perfectly manicured piece of property surrounded by an impregnable electrified fence. Cameras prominently stared down at anyone approaching to let people know they were being watched. An intimidating armed guard secured the gate, which was the only way in or out of the property.

Pulling up to the guardhouse, the guard greeted her with a welcoming smile. “Hello, Miss Hart. Mr. Raleigh is expecting you. Go right on through.”

He leaned into the booth and hit the button that opened the gate.

After thanking him, Sabrina slowly pulled through the gate. Though she'd done this same thing last night, today, driving into Seth's lair had a certain sense of finality she couldn't explain.

As she drove down the long road that led to the manor, she remembered trying to get a peek at the mansion as a kid. She never knew her father had once lived here, nor that Seth had called Halifax home since the night he'd died. All anyone knew was that Halifax was shrouded in mystery, and the fact that the manor couldn't be seen from the main road only added to its enigma.

Besides the electrified fence, a tall line of trees further shielded the manor, which was set far back from any public roads. In the winter, after the leaves had fallen off the trees, the gothic mansion could barely be seen and only from just the right angle. During the summer, it was impossible to see.

Instead of going around to the side of the mansion where the entrance to his offices was located, Sabrina parked her car near the front entrance. By the time she turned off her car and stepped out, the front door was open and the tall, skinny butler came out to greet her.

"Good morning, Miss Hart. It's nice to see you back so soon. I'm David, Mr. Raleigh's butler."

Sabrina returned his greeting, finding it odd Seth hadn't been the one to meet her. A knot of dread settled in her stomach at the thought of his absence. "Is Seth here?"

"No, I'm sorry, Miss Hart, but Mr. Raleigh was called away on unexpected business." Her disappointment must have been evident because David offered her a sympathetic smile. "It was unavoidable."

She was sure it was. Given what Seth was, she was sure he had all sorts of secrets he had to keep and mysterious business he had to see to. "Do you know when he'll be back?"

"Not before tonight, I'm afraid." He peered around her, looking back toward her car. "If you've brought luggage with you, I'd be happy to carry it up to your room."

The man was rail thin and looked frail enough to be blown over by a strong breeze. The last thing she wanted was for him to go hefting her heavy bags around. “No, it’s okay. I can carry them.”

David protested until Sabrina relented. She followed him into the main entrance, stunned speechless by the opulence. She was almost afraid to walk on the pristine white marble floor. There was a huge marble statue of a towering warrior-angel, a sword gripped in his hands. It wore armor engraved in Aramaic.

The statue made her think of her father. This was what he had been—a glorious warrior of Heaven. He and Seth were beautiful and fierce warriors who had been chosen by God to fall to Earth. It was all so unbelievable, yet the truth was all around her. It flowed through her veins.

“Follow me, Miss Hart. I’ll show you to your room.”

By the time they trekked up the stairs and traveled down the endless corridor, she felt as if they’d walked a mile. The butler, obviously used to traveling through the massive house, wasn’t even winded. Having lived a hard and impoverished life, Sabrina wasn’t about to pretend the finery of Halifax didn’t intimidate her. She openly gaped at the artwork on the walls, the Persian carpets covering polished oak floors. The furniture alone looked like it belonged in a museum. It all had her feeling extremely crude and out of place.

At the end of the long corridor, David opened the door and stepped aside for her to enter. He made a grand sweeping gesture with his arm and announced this was to be her room. Sabrina inched into the sunlit room and did her best to hide her awe but knew she failed miserably.

The room was done up in rich earth tones, giving it a masculine feel. Heavy furniture lined walls decorated with priceless art and ancient weaponry. A delicate mural depicting three warrior-angels fighting three demons covered the ceiling. Because of the mural and the masculinity of the room, Sabrina assumed this was Seth’s chamber. She dismissed her assumption after inching fully into the room. Why she knew this wasn’t Seth’s room she couldn’t say. It was just something she *knew*.

Maybe it was the tiny frisson of electricity that ran up Sabrina's spine when she noticed the oil painting that hung over the fireplace. Her heart slammed painfully against her ribcage as she stared up at it. Though she'd never seen that face, she instinctively knew who it was and it sent her emotions into a tailspin.

Her feet carried her across the room as if they had a mind of their own. The closer she got the more details of the picture jumped out at her. Every nuance of his features was so like her own, it scared her. Scared her because she knew whose face she was staring at and the emotions it pulled from her rocked her to her soul.

"This is him, isn't it?"

Out of the corner of her eye, Sabrina saw David set her bags down near the bed. "I think it would be best if Mr. Raleigh..."

Sabrina swung around and pinned David with a glare. "Please, David, just tell me. This is my father, isn't it?"

From his nervous look, Sabrina thought he was going to run from the room rather than answer her. "Yes. That's Daniel."

"Oh God..."

Her father. The man in the painting was everything and nothing that she'd expected. He was beautiful and perfect and had a fierce edge to him that bespoke of his warrior's soul.

Sabrina reached out to the painting, as if touching it would be touching her father. She didn't fight the tears that gathered in her eyes. They slipped down her cheeks as she drank in the sight of her father. Behind her, she heard David leave, allowing her her privacy. How long she stood before the painting, she didn't know. By the time she turned away, her tears were spent and she was shaking uncontrollably.

Dazed, she looked around the room and spotted a closed door. Opening it, she was grateful it was a bathroom. Going to the sink, she stared into the mirror above it. Though she'd spent twenty-five years staring at her face, she only just now recognized it. She only just realized how little she looked like her mother. If the painting was accurate, she was the spitting image of her father.

She found it strange that she resembled someone she'd never known, yet who was so much a part of her. Daniel was in her blood and her soul. But most of all, he was in her heart.

After washing the tears from her face, Sabrina felt better in control of herself. She returned to the bedroom and dragged her bags up on the bed. Since she felt presumptuous unpacking her clothes, she rummaged through her bags and pulled out her toiletries. She brought them to the bathroom and did her best to fix her appearance. She didn't want to look like she'd had an emotional meltdown.

With hours to spare before Seth was supposed to return to the manor, Sabrina crept from her room and made her way back down the long corridor. She hesitated at the stairs, listening for voices coming from below. Hearing nothing, she proceeded down the stairs. Her stomach rumbled painfully since all she'd put in it all day was a cup of coffee.

Sabrina was relieved to hear David's voice coming from the kitchen. He wasn't alone. The woman with him was lanky, had her gray hair pulled back in a loose bun and was wearing a blue housedress with a white apron over it. She had a familial look about her, as if she'd spent hours baking cookies or stirring stew.

"What in God's name took that man so long to get her here?"

David shrugged and shook his head. "You know he couldn't force her."

"Who said anything about forcing the girl?" She stamped her foot. "But by God, if he had, this whole thing with Mathers might have been avoided."

"What's done is done, and all they can do is find a way to stop him before he makes a nuisance of himself."

The woman slapped her wooden spoon on the counter. "He comes from bad stock."

"Don't I know it," David agreed. "I went to school with his father. Never did like him. The mother was nice though. I always thought her death was a shame. If I remember right, the younger son didn't even attend the funeral."

The woman nodded. "It was scandalous."

David waved a hand through the air. "It was better off that way. He was a mouthy one—like his father. No doubt he would have caused trouble if he'd come."

“And now look, it’s the older being a bother. Seth has enough to worry about without adding Bryce Mathers to the mix.” Sabrina was about to sneak away but the woman spotted her in the doorway. “Ah, there she is, and so pretty too—just like Seth said.”

Sabrina, unused to compliments, blushed hotly as she inched into the kitchen. David, whose back was to her, turned and smiled. “That she is. She looks exactly like Daniel.”

“Of course she does.” The woman gave her a wide smile. “I’m Francine. I’ve been here since I was a girl. I adored your father. He was a good man.”

“I can’t believe I went my entire life without ever knowing anyone who knew my father and now I’m surrounded by people who did. It’s mind-blowing.”

Francine ushered her farther into the kitchen and sat her at the table. “I’m sure it’s all very overwhelming for you. In time you’ll settle in and things will take on a normal feel. Isn’t that right, David?”

David was nodding furiously. “Absolutely.”

Sabrina shook her head and shrugged. “I don’t think I’ll be staying here for too long.”

“Nonsense,” Francine huffed. “This was your father’s home and now it’s yours as well. Daniel wanted it that way. You belong here.”

You belong here. Never did Sabrina think to hear those words. They stabbed through her brain, nearly bringing tears to her eyes again. She’d never belonged anywhere, always living in someone else’s house or off someone else’s charity.

“My mother never told me he’d lived here.” She managed to control her emotions and swallow down her tears. “This is Seth’s home now, not mine. I can’t see him wanting me to move in like I own the place.”

Though she laughed lightheartedly, inside Sabrina was dying for Francine to be right—that this was where she belonged. Pain—sharp and intense—cut through her. She wished to God for just one moment with her father. Just one. That’s all she wanted, a single moment with him. But she’d never get that, and all the praying and wishing in the world wouldn’t make it so. Being here was the closest she’d come to him, and that had to be enough.

Unfortunately, it wasn't.

Over the next few hours, Francine and David kept her company. They showed her around the mansion and told her enough about her father for Sabrina to feel a hint of a connection to him. At the moment, it was enough.

After a huge meal—Francine certainly loved to cook—Sabrina went up to her room. Once she'd stared long and hard at the painting of her father again, she braved the process of unpacking, though she couldn't help but feel presumptuous by doing it. If Francine hadn't threatened that if Sabrina didn't unpack her clothes, *she* would, Sabrina wouldn't have done it.

With her clothes folded neatly in drawers and more hanging in the wardrobe, the room didn't seem so strange and unfamiliar.

"What took you so long to get here?"

Sabrina jumped at least a foot in the air. She spun around and saw Seth standing in the doorway. She hadn't heard the door open, yet there he was—all six feet of him filling the space and making her suddenly as hot as if she was standing on the sun.

Seriously, did the man have to be so gorgeous? He was devastating to her senses. All he had to do was walk into a room and she melted. It was sad, really, given that she was way too old to react to him this way, and yet she couldn't help herself. Hell, she'd finally had an orgasm. A mind-blowing one, in fact. She figured she could forgive herself for acting like a young girl crushing for the first time.

"So long? I got here at like ten this morning."

He took her hand, his thumb rubbing over her knuckles. "You should have been here earlier, Sabrina."

She loved the way he said her name. His accent caused him to roll the "R" in a way that sent chills through her. "I shouldn't have come. I have no right to burden you."

"Burden me?" The smile that curled his lips drew her attention and had her remembering the feel of them on her skin. The pleasure that coursed through her at the memory made her breathless. "This is where you belong."

Having gone a lifetime belonging nowhere, hearing it said twice in one day actually had her feeling as if it were true. In an effort to distract herself from the intensity of Seth's stare, Sabrina waved her hand through the air, indicating the house. "I still can't believe my mother didn't tell me that this was my father's house."

An unreadable look passed over Seth's face. "I was chosen to become a Seraphim the day he was killed."

Sabrina never knew the details of her father's death, only that he'd died before she was born. She'd always been curious about how he'd died but had no one to ask. She'd made the mistake of questioning her mother once. Her mother had ended up doing a month-long stint in the psycho ward. Sabrina never asked again.

"Come with me."

Seth put his hand out to her and everything around her seemed to fade away. Nothing else mattered but Seth as she slipped her hand in his and he curled his fingers around hers. He smiled as he tugged her out of her bedroom. He led her silently into his room, which was located directly next to hers.

After Seth pushed open the door, Sabrina followed him inside. The delicate aroma of patchouli assailed her as her eyes adjusted to the dim lighting of the room. Only the dancing flames in the fireplace broke the dark.

Once her eyes adjusted, Sabrina saw the room was as dark and mysterious as the man who occupied it. Black furniture lined walls covered with gothic art. A massive bed dominated the room, which had a few ancient-looking wooden chests scattered around. Heavy black curtains covered the windows. One set of curtains were slightly parted, revealing the window had been bricked closed.

Given his aversion to the light, his elusiveness, and the sinister look of his home, it would be easy to assume he was some sort of dark and dangerous creature. How ironic, considering what he actually was.

Like everyone else, Sabrina imagined angels were delicate, white-winged cherubs. Looking at Seth, she realized just how wrong that assumption was.

Chapter Seven

Sabrina's heart skipped a beat as she watched Seth close and lock the door. The breath left her lungs as his intense stare traveled over her. The dare in his eyes flooded her body with liquid heat. Oddly, she saw no reflection in them, only a darkness that somehow seemed to mirror his existence.

"I feel so strange around you. Is it because I'm half...?"

God, she couldn't even say the word. No matter how hard she'd tried since she found out what she was, she couldn't say the word aloud. To say it aloud sounded insane. Unbelievable. Laughable. She swallowed the word and looked away shyly.

"Angel?" Seth supplied, forcing her to look back at him by cupping her chin. Sabrina nodded, though she wanted to run as far away from Seth as she could. Here she was about to confront the reality of her life and it terrified her. "No, Sabrina. It's desire. I'm sure you've heard of it. It's what happens when a male and female are attracted to each other."

His sarcasm made her laugh. "It's more than that. I've felt desire before, Seth, just never like this."

"Like what?" His gaze bore through her, as if he already knew the answer. "Tell me how I make you feel."

Sabrina stepped toward him and pressed her hands to his chest. His heartbeat was strong and steady beneath her palms. "You make me burn as if my soul is on fire."

Her blood ran hot at the way he watched her mouth as she spoke. "Do you like that I make your body burn?"

"Yes."

"Good." His hands moved to her hips, settling just below the waistband of her jeans. "I want to kiss you."

Sabrina tilted her face up to his, loving the devilish gleam in his eyes. “Good.” She caressed the nape of his neck and brought his lips to hers. “I want you to kiss me.”

Before the words had even left her, Seth’s mouth came down on hers. His kiss was hard, leaving no doubt in her mind he wasn’t merely kissing her—he was laying claim to her.

An animalistic sound emanated from Seth. The rumbling growl sent a wicked desire rushing through her. The sound still reverberated within her as he wrapped his arms around her and crushed her against him. He pulled his mouth from hers only long enough to confirm her assumption about his claiming of her.

“You’re mine, Sabrina. You always have been and you always will be.”

That was fine by her. As long as he kept kissing her and making her feel so alive, she’d gladly be his.

Sabrina’s body screamed with want. She molded herself against him, loving the sensation of Seth’s erection pressing into her. The thought of him sliding into her had her groaning into his mouth. He recaptured her mouth and grabbed her leg, lifting it so that he was cradled against her.

The thin thread of Seth’s control nearly broke when Sabrina threw her head back and whispered his name on a breathy sigh. The scent of her arousal intoxicated him. The feel of her body against his was driving him insane. Having her last night only whetted his appetite for more of her—for all of her. His need for her had him so hard it hurt. If he didn’t have her soon he’d not be able to hold on to his control much longer.

Walking her backwards to the bed, Seth used his body to push Sabrina down onto it. He eased her back until he had her laid out just as he’d imagined her a thousand times. Her raw sensuality came at him like a punch to the chest, causing his heart to pound painfully against his ribcage. Covering her with his body, he marveled at how small she was beneath him. And yet they fit. Every part of her molded perfectly into every part of him—two separate bodies yet one and the same. Even their breathing and heartbeats were in sync.

Holding his weight off her with one arm, he ran his other hand down Sabrina's body. Each soft moan, every breathless sigh, pushed Seth closer to the edge of losing control. The more of her he had, the more he needed from her.

"My God, Sabrina, you taste so good." He nipped at her neck and she scored his back with her nails. "I can't get enough of you."

"Please, Seth..."

Seth buried his hands in her hair and brought his mouth to hers. "I know, sweetheart. I feel it, too," he said against her lips.

Sabrina wrapped her arms around his neck and met the thrust of his tongue. He felt the exact moment she surrendered herself to him. His body aching for her, Seth tore their clothes away with a savage passion that was almost beyond his control. Only after he had her back underneath him and his cock was pressed against the warm opening of her body, did he manage a small level of restraint.

He drove into her until he couldn't go any farther. The sensation of her body hugging him was almost too intense to bear. Seth dropped his head to hers and hissed out a sharp breath. Her body convulsed around him, squeezing him. A low groan came from deep within him. He shifted, needing the change of position to keep him from going mad from the pleasure of her warmth surrounding him.

With each thrust of his body, Seth lost himself a little more to the emotions Sabrina awoke in him. They were feelings he'd believed he'd never experience again. He'd known perfect love and serenity since the dawning of time, but it had left him the night he fell. He knew it now. He felt it wash through him in a warm and wonderful wave. Sabrina was his heart. She was the other half of him, as if God had created her solely for him.

As Sabrina reached her climax, raw emotion ripped through him. She cried out his name, her legs a vise around his waist. He followed her a moment later, her body still pulsating around him. The pleasure he experienced with Sabrina brought him closer to Heaven than he ever dared hope to get again.

Chapter Eight

Damn.

Standing in front of Sabrina's house, Bryce didn't bother ringing the bell a second time. After the first ring went unanswered, he knew Sabrina was gone and he had a damn good idea where she went. No doubt she ran right to Setheus, which put her out of his reach—at least for now.

Muttering a curse, he knew he'd scared the hell out of her last night. He'd also come as close to death as a human could at the hands of an angel. Bryce knew all that had saved him was the law preventing a Seraphim from attacking a human. Once he made a move for the stones, Setheus would no longer be bound by God's law. Given the rage he'd seen reflected in Setheus' eyes last night, Bryce would be as good as dead if he rushed in and tried to take the stones.

Reluctant to make the call to his brother, Bryce contemplated not involving Colin at all. His brother was young, with a ferocious temper. It made for a combustible combination.

Also, the truth of it was, Colin scared the shit out of him. Even as kids, Bryce had been intimidated by his brother. His brother was cold, ruthless. He used to beat up other kids just to make them bleed. Colin had treated him no different, often tormenting him to the point where Bryce would move his dresser in front of his door to block his brother from coming into his room.

As an adult, Colin's ruthlessness had only intensified. His obsession with the stones ran as deep as their father's had been. It was another factor that kept Bryce from calling Colin about this unfortunate turn of events.

Given how secure Halifax was, that put Sabrina out of his reach. The only thing keeping him from blind fury was that he now knew Sabrina was a weakness to Seth. That

nugget of knowledge would benefit him down the road, so for now he'd just have to accept that she was gone.

In the years since he'd begun researching the stones, Bryce had discovered Setheus was here in New York—right under his nose. He'd gone to Sabrina's mother, who'd babbled endlessly about fallen angels. He'd forced her to reveal her secrets before insanity robbed what was left of her mind. The woman died a year later. Shortly after that, Sabrina had come to the museum seeking employment.

How serendipitous that had been. Fate had done all the work for him. All Bryce had to do was sit back and let things play out, which would bring him closer to the stones. In fact, Sabrina got him closer than he would have on his own.

With Sabrina at Halifax, his plan had gone to shit and it pissed him off. He hadn't expected her to run to Setheus. She'd always seemed afraid of what he—and she—was. If Bryce had learned anything about her, it was that Sabrina wasn't the type to tuck tail and run. Yet that's exactly what she had done. And she'd gone to the one place that would be near impossible for Bryce to get to her.

After he walked back to his car, Bryce cast one last frustrated glance up at Sabrina's empty house. He banged his fist on the roof of his car and shook his head before climbing in. He grabbed his cell off the passenger seat and called the only person he'd dare trust with the knowledge of the stones.

"Why didn't you call me last night?"

Bryce cringed at the anger in Colin's tone. It made him glad his brother was in Romania. With his charm and good looks, it was best Colin be the one to take out Bath-Kol. Thus far, Colin hadn't gotten close to the enigmatic female angel.

"I lost her."

"What do you mean you lost her?"

"I lost my temper with her last night. I think she's holed up at Halifax," Bryce confessed.

"With Setheus." Colin hadn't asked that. It was statement of fact.

“Yes.” The frigidity in Colin’s tone chilled Bryce right down to the marrow of his bones.

“Sabrina was the only leverage we had to use against the Seraphim.”

“I know that, Colin.” Bryce resented Colin’s condescending tone. “Don’t worry, I’ll find a way to get to her.”

Colin sighed long and loud, as if he were dealing with a child. “You’d better. We’ve gotten this far, Bryce. I’d hate to fail now because of your stupidity.”

“I said I’ll find a way to get her away from Setheus.”

“I’m giving you a week. Bryce.” Colin’s voice was calm—too calm. “Don’t make me come there.”

Colin hung up on him. Tossing the cell back on the seat, Bryce banged his palm against the steering wheel. He didn’t want Colin here. He knew he could handle this without interference from his brother. What Colin seemed to have forgotten was, Bryce had been the one who had turned Colin’s obsession with the stones into action. He’d thought up the plan to attain the stones. He’d found the Seraphim. All Colin had done thus far was be the brawn who’d muscled information out of people Bryce couldn’t talk it out of. Without Bryce, Colin wouldn’t be privy to the power they believed they’d gain by setting free the three demons.

As he drove down Route 71, he wracked his brain, trying to think of a way to get Sabrina away from Setheus. Nothing was impossible. It was just a matter of finding the right way.



With Sabrina safely within the protective walls of Halifax, Seth could now afford to wait for Kael and Bath-Kol before bringing the fight to Bryce. Although his warrior’s nature demanded battle, he’d force himself to bide his time until the other Seraphim arrived. Though he knew he could take the human out alone, he’d learned eons ago never to underestimate an enemy.

It was men like Bryce from whom the Seraphim guarded the stones. Foolish men who believed they could harness the power of Hell. What they failed to realize is that to bring forth Balian would be to unleash a force that could never be controlled and would ultimately overtake the world and create a second Hell on Earth. Humanity would be eradicated.

Preventing such a catastrophe was what had compelled Seth to fall from grace. He'd given up Heaven to protect humanity, and in doing so, he'd discovered what it was to be human.

Standing out on the balcony, Seth felt the weight of the night upon him. He'd almost forgotten what the sun felt like shining down on him. What he hadn't forgotten, and what he still felt keenly, was the separation from the Father. Though he had chosen to fall, had gladly accepted the honor of becoming a Seraphim, there were times he wished—just for a single moment—to feel God's grace once more.

There were advantages to taking human form, which Seth indulged in often enough to keep the loneliness at bay. Women were attracted to him and it was more than just because of his looks. Given what he was, what they felt toward him was an almost animal attraction.

With Sabrina, it ran deeper than that. Their souls were connected. Seth had felt her soul move through him at the moment of her birth. From that point on, he'd bided his time, patiently waiting for her to come to him.

Going back into his room, Seth looked at Sabrina still asleep on the bed. He couldn't blame her for her exhaustion. He'd kept her up half the night and most of the day loving her body—just as he'd imagined doing for years.

Once back inside the bedroom, he left open the curtains that usually shut out the light and took a moment to admire the sight of her sleeping.

Sprawled out on her stomach, Sabrina was barely covered by the black sheet. Seth stepped lightly toward her, loving the scent of her that filled him the closer he got. Sitting on the edge of the bed, Seth placed his hand on Sabrina's back. She shifted but didn't

wake. He ran his palm over her smooth skin, the feel of her arousing him. He reached for her hair, pushing it aside to place a kiss at the nape of her neck.

She sighed deeply and slowly rolled onto her back. “Hi.”

Her smile wrapped around his heart. “Good evening.”

Sabrina laughed as she wrapped the sheet around herself. Seth found her modesty—misplaced as it was—adorable. “If you hadn’t kept me awake all night and day I might have woken up sooner.”

“Are you complaining?”

She snorted. “Hardly.”

Brushing the hair away from her face, Seth marveled at the flush of her cheeks and the swell of her lips. Her beauty astounded him. “Good, because I plan on having you beneath me all night and day again.”

Her lips parted and her heartbeat quickened. The scent of her arousal came to him, heightening his own. “That’s too bad.”

“Excuse me?”

Her sly smile stopped his frown. “I don’t plan on staying beneath you this time.”

Growling, Seth reached for her. He fully intended for her to prove her boast but she pushed him away. “Toothpaste and a shower first. Okay?”

Seth moved back with a laugh. “Make it quick.”

Sabrina bounded off the bed with amazing agility. The sheet trailed behind her as she stalked across the room. “I plan to.”

While Sabrina took her shower, Seth went down to a locked room at the end of the long corridor off of the foyer. Inside the circular room, paintings stared down at him. They depicted the fall of Lucifer and the victory of Heaven. Daniel had commissioned Michelangelo to paint them, although you’d never read about these in any history book. They were brought to life in stunning color and vivid detail. So remarkable were they that Seth often found himself lost in the paintings.

He’d been among the number to cast Lucifer and his minions out of Heaven. He’d battled the demons back down to Hell, shedding his blood for the glory of God. After

Lucifer was thrown down into the pit, Setheus had taken a place at the right side of the Throne, honored for his loyalty.

Set on a marble pedestal was a plain wooden box. He brought the box up to Sabrina's room, where he found Sabrina finished with her shower. Perched on the edge of the bed wearing nothing but a towel, she was truly a sight to behold as she brushed out her damp hair. After setting the box on the bed, Seth sat beside her. She smiled after he took the brush from her and continued to run it through her hair. He doubted she got as much pleasure from the simple task as he did.

"What's in the box?"

"You'll see."

"Should I be worried at your cryptic tone?"

"No. I promise this is something you'll like."

Seth forced her to turn, putting her back to him. No one had ever pampered her before and found the rhythmic action soothing. Her contentment seeped into him, adding to his own. Only after he finished his task and set the brush down did Sabrina point to the box and ask him about its contents. He opened it and pulled out ten scrolls.

After Seth handed the scrolls to her, Sabrina stared at them blankly for a moment.

"What are these?"

"Daniel was a record keeper. He penned these after his fall to Earth." Sabrina's jaw dropped in shock but she quickly recovered. "I can't bring him back for you, but I can share his memories with you."

"Seth...my God." She shook her head and clutched the scrolls to her chest. "Thank you."

He leaned in and kissed her. "You're welcome." Her smile was magical. "Take your time with them and come find me in the den when you're finished."

"Wait." He went to get off the bed but she grabbed his arm. "Will you stay with me?"

Her shy question was a caress upon his soul. "Of course I'll stay with you, Sabrina."

Sabrina didn't bother hiding her relief at having Seth remain with her. She needed him for this. She needed his strength as the life of her father was slowly revealed to her. Together, over the next few hours, they pored through Daniel's scrolls. Sabrina had a million questions, many of which Seth answered and some of which he admitted he simply couldn't. There were certain aspects of his world that he couldn't share with her. Not because he chose not to, but because there were some secrets of Heaven that simply weren't meant for even a nephilim to know.

Daniel's struggle to deal with the absence of God brought her to tears. His profound love for her mother made her heart ache. And his joy at knowing he and Sylvia had created life together brought her closer to her father than she dreamed possible.

Through the scrolls, Sabrina learned who her father had been in Heaven and the man he'd been on Earth. She finally knew who Daniel was and she was proud that he was her father.

By the time they got to the scroll that told of Daniel's death, Sabrina felt as if she were drowning in a sea of secrets and mystery. She barely held herself together as she read the last scroll. It had been written by Bath-Kol. Some of the ink was smeared, and if Sabrina was correct in her assumption, the smudges had been caused by tears.

After she finished reading the scroll, she looked at Seth in amazement. "He gave his life for me."

"He did."

She shook her head and looked back at him. "I never knew. My mother never talked about him. Whenever she tried, she usually broke down and cried. She'd slip into a depression that lasted for weeks. Because of that, I learned early on not to ask about him."

"I'm sorry, Sabrina."

Sabrina clutched the scroll to her breast, as if holding it near to her heart would somehow bring her closer to her father. "Don't be. Better late than never, right?"

"Very true." Seth took her hand and placed a feathery kiss on her knuckles. "He adored you even before you were born. His love for you reached Heaven itself."

“My mother told me he was a cop who’d died in the line of duty. I went my entire childhood bragging about how brave and wonderful my father was. It wasn’t until I was fifteen that it slipped out he wasn’t a cop. Still, she never told me anything more until she was on her deathbed.”

Seth’s gaze was searching as he stared deep into her eyes. Sabrina had the distinct impression he was seeing right into her soul. “How did learning what Daniel was—what you are—make you feel?”

“Truthfully?” Seth nodded in answer to her question. “It terrified me.”

“What were you afraid of?”

Sabrina swallowed hard as she remembered how she’d felt the night her mother confessed the truth and then died only moments after. “Everything, Seth, but most of all, I’m afraid of what I am.”

“How can you be afraid of something that comes from God?”

Seth looked genuinely confused. She imaged he would be. He was a creature of Heaven and she—well, Sabrina never had much use for God in her life and, more often than not, questioned His existence.

“I barely believed in God before my mother dumped this secret on me. And then she was gone—dead—and I was alone to try to figure this whole thing out alone. I gave myself a crash course in Christianity and, let me tell you, Seth, some of the shit I read that people have done in the name of God scared the hell out of me.”

His smile was sad and pulled at her heart. “It’s true people do horrific things in the name of God, but the Father is love, Sabrina. Trust me when I say it tears Him apart when His children kill one another. Especially when it’s done in His name.”

She supposed so. It still didn’t make any of this easier for her to accept. “That doesn’t change the fact that He sat back and did nothing while I was left all alone and my life spiraled out of control.”

“You were never alone. I was always there with you.”

Sabrina found Seth's admission shocking. "You watched me all these years?" At his nod, she threw her hands up and stepped back from him. "Why didn't you ever make yourself known?"

He had the good grace to look guilty. "I couldn't. You had to discover what you were on your own. I was forbidden to interfere."

"Forbidden?" Sabrina shook her head in exasperation. "Everything is a secret. Didn't it occur to God that it would have made things a lot easier for me—less frightening—if I'd had you at my side all these years?"

"Sabrina..."

"No, please. Just leave me alone. I need to be by myself for a little while."

Used to being on her own, Sabrina needed time alone to absorb all that she'd learned about her father and to make sense of things. Hell, she felt as if her head was going to explode from everything she'd read on those scrolls. Her life just kept on twisting and turning and, no matter how hard she tried, she couldn't navigate through it. It all seemed beyond her control, and for a person like her—who'd had to hold things together while her mother fell apart—it was impossible for her to simply let go and allow fate to take her where it would.

And yet, although things were now more chaotic than they'd ever been before, with Seth at her side, Sabrina knew a deep-rooted sense of peace that had always eluded her.

Chapter Nine

The other Seraphim arrived late the following night. Sabrina wished they hadn't. They scared the hell out of her.

Though Seth was mysterious and relatively on the quiet side, he seemed like an open book and downright talkative compared to the other two.

Kael, tall and lean, had long brown hair and deep-set black eyes. He was handsome in a gothic sort of way. His voice was deep and rumbling, reminding Sabrina of a distant roll of thunder. Draped in all black, he was a moving shadow and a whisper on the wind.

Bath-Kol was every bit as enigmatic as Kael. Gorgeous beyond words, she was a statuesque exotic beauty. Her sweep of black hair reached her waist, framing a face so perfect, Sabrina felt like a troll just standing in the same room with her. Her brilliant green eyes seemed to hold the secrets of the ages as she took in her surroundings with a quiet grace.

She'd barely said two words since she'd arrived. When she did talk, her voice was musical. It was painfully obvious her self-imposed seclusion in her Romanian fortress had taken a toll. Every sound put her on edge, but not in a skittish sort of way one would expect. Sabrina noticed how her hand went to the hilt of the sword at her hip with every sound she didn't recognize.

The two fallen angels descended upon Halifax and brought with them an arsenal of weaponry. From guns to swords, they had it all. Sabrina didn't have to wonder how they'd managed to get it all past airport security. They'd flown in on private jets.

Having grown up piss-poor, Sabrina couldn't fathom that level of wealth.

Her car, with an engine that had seen better days, took her everywhere. If she'd lived in an area where there was mass transportation, she probably wouldn't have even struggled to save for her car. The subway or bus would have worked just fine for her.

Unfortunately, up here in the mountains, most places had no mass transit. That meant she had to have a car she could barely afford to keep insured and filled with gas.

The upside of Bethlehem was that the cost of living was cheaper than in a big city. True the pay grade was lower as well, but Sabrina had always managed to find a way to survive. In fact, over the course of her teenage years, she'd made surviving into an art form.

Surrounded by fallen angels was unnerving as hell. Worse, Bath-Kol came right up to her and *sniffed* her and then strode away without a word, as if that was the most natural thing in the world.

Kael, however, was a tad more talkative. He at least acknowledged her with a murmured, "She's the spitting image of Daniel." He then walked away to join Bath-Kol wherever she went off to.

Sabrina had hoped Seth would stay with her, though she knew that was an unrealistic wish. With the other two Seraphim here, she figured she'd see much less of him than she had. Casting a look around the den, with its state-of-the-art entertainment system and seemingly endless collection of DVDs, at least she'd have plenty to do while the Seraphim did their thing.

The idea of them planning a way to deal with Bryce reminded Sabrina of one very important fact. "You know Bryce has a brother, right?"

Seth nodded curtly. "We know everything about that bastard."

"Who? Bryce or Colin?"

"Both."

So, Bryce wasn't the only asshole in the Mathers clan. "I take it Colin is as obsessed with the stones as Bryce is."

An unreadable expression passed across Seth's face. Sabrina had the weird feeling he was guarding something, though what it was she couldn't say. "Yes, he's as interested in the stones as Bryce is."

"That's not good, is it?"

Seth shrugged. The motion didn't seem natural for him. "We've known about Colin's desire for the stones even before Bryce came into the picture."

That eased her mind a little. "So, you have Colin covered." That wasn't a question, but in fact, an assumption.

"More or less."

Sabrina suddenly didn't feel as at ease anymore. "Which is it? More or less?"

Before Seth answered her, Bath-Kol returned to the den. "Setheus..."

Sabrina frowned at the name. It had never occurred to her that his name might be something other than just "Seth".

"Get Kael," Seth demanded of Bath, who stalked out of the room only to come back a scant minute later with Kael.

Seth turned to her and Sabrina was weighed down by the intensity of his stare. "You can't be present while we discuss this."

Sabrina nodded, knowing there were things she simply couldn't be a part of. "I've been on my own since the day I was born. I think I'll be okay for a little while longer."

He came at her in four long strides and kissed her long and hard. He walked away and Sabrina had to fight with herself not to drag him back and make him quench the thirst he'd awakened in her. It wasn't right that he should turn her on like this and leave her hanging. Or was it not fair that he had the power to make her burn with nothing more than a touch of his lips?

"What do you think needs to be done?" Seth's question was posed to both of the other Seraphim as Sabrina left the room.

Bath-Kol shrugged. "I say we just kill them both and be done with it."

The ice in the female angel's tone made Sabrina damn glad she wasn't on her bad side. She made a mental note to remember never to piss her off, lest she end up on the wrong end of the woman's sword.



Only after Sabrina was gone and her footfalls faded out of the wing did Seth address his fellow Seraphim. “You intend to use Sabrina as a lure, don’t you?”

“Is there another plan?”

Bath stepped up and shook her head. “No. This is perfect. They’ll take her as the weakness in our armor and strike.”

Seth regarded both of them curiously. “We can’t kill them for attacking Sabrina. She’s not Seraphim. You both know this.”

Bath’s grin was sinister, reminding Seth of why she’d been chosen. Of them all, Bath had a love of battle that put every other warrior to shame. “We can if they think to use her to get to the stones.”

“We’ll have to take this to another level in order for this to work.”

It was something he was loath to do. It would involve putting Sabrina in danger.

Kael seemed to understand what Seth was suggesting. “She’s Daniel’s daughter. She’ll rise to this challenge and play her part well.”

Seth sensed Kael’s pride. Kael and Daniel had grown close during their time on Earth. They had a bond that transcended being a Seraphim and entered the realm of friendship, something no other angel had ever known. They were beings who were bred for war, and thus, were supposed to know only a warrior’s sense of camaraderie. For them to have found a genuine friendship only proved Kael wasn’t as hard as he made himself out to be.

“That may well be, but I don’t want her put in danger,” Seth countered.

Bath stepped up to add, “If we fuck up and she gets hurt, you know we’ll never be forgiven for our failings.”

Kael looked out the window, staring at the night sky. “If we fuck up, we don’t deserve to be forgiven.”



Later that night, Seth, Kael, and Bath-Kol sat her down and presented their plan to her. Sabrina agreed without hesitation. Not that she was eager to play the part of bait. She

knew she'd be risking her life, yet declining to be a part of this was the last thing on her mind—especially after Kael told her how proud Daniel would be of her.

Sitting among the Seraphim, Sabrina finally felt a sense of belonging. She felt as close to her father as she figured she ever would. In fact, all the years of loneliness and longing seemed to simply fade the more she was with the Seraphim. Maybe it was how Kael and Bath-Kol talked to her about her father at length. Or maybe it was that they constantly referred to her as “Seth’s woman.”, which rang of medieval possessiveness and never failed to release a horde of butterflies in her stomach.

Seth did his own part to help her fit in by openly showing his affection. Never one for public displays of affection, Sabrina found herself giving back as good as she got. No wonder Kael and Bath-Kol thought she was Seth’s woman. Neither she nor Seth did a damn thing to make them think anything else.

Once she'd agreed to be the bait, the Seraphim basically kicked open the door to their world and shoved her in. She was sure there were things she'd never be privy to, and that was as it should be. Sabrina didn't want to know the secrets of the universe. It would take the fun out of life.

What she had learned was that once an angel fell they couldn't be touched by sunlight. It explained Seth's aversion to daylight. No wonder he'd been late on the night they'd met and why he rose at sunset and retired to his chamber at dawn.

After being at Halifax for two weeks, Sabrina grew accustomed to the reversal of schedule. Her days were spent with Seth in the privacy of his chamber, where they explored each other, body and soul. By night the Seraphim prepared her for what was to come once she left Halifax and would be beyond their protection. They taught her what it meant to be a nephilim, bringing out abilities that had lain dormant until now.

Strength and agility were something she'd always had and now she understood why. By having the Seraphim help her hone those skills, it would hopefully give her an edge over Bryce and his brother.

Once they were alone, Seth helped her exercise the one ability that didn't take strength of body, but rather of mind. Together, they sharpened her sense of perception. It

would help her determine danger before it was upon her—or so Seth assured her. Sabrina had her doubts, especially since the entire situation was dangerous for her.

By coming here, her life had taken another turn. This new path was leading her down an even more uncertain road than any she'd ever been on. And yet she wasn't scared. In fact, things seemed remarkably clear to her.

Since she was set to leave Halifax come morning, she and Seth remained hidden away in his room long after they'd awakened. Seth had made love to her, not leaving an inch of her body untouched. By the time he was finished with her, Sabrina knew what it was to be loved by an angel. Luckily, she found a reserve of strength and gave back to him everything he'd given to her.

She made damn sure Seth knew what it was to be loved by a nephilim.

Chapter Ten

Bryce threw his pen on the desk and cringed at the bang of a door slamming shut. *Damn.* Colin had made good on his threat. He'd left Romania and returned to New York already. His presence was a dark shadow over Bryce, who now felt Colin's watchful stare on him everywhere he went.

Colin's heavy footfalls sounded louder the closer he came to Bryce's office. Shuffling the papers he'd been poring over into the top drawer of his desk, Bryce stood on shaking legs and wiped the sweat from his brow. He tried to slap an indifferent expression on his face but knew he failed miserably. His stomach was in a tight knot of dread as he came around from behind the desk. Colin came sauntering into the office and Bryce thought he'd vomit right then and there.

"She's here."

Colin hadn't changed in the three years since Bryce last saw him. His brother was tall, muscular, and had a shock of brown hair that had a windblown look Colin worked to perfection. The scar that cut down his lips hadn't faded, though it had been four years since Bryce had given it to him. By the cold gleam of hatred reflected in Colin's blue eyes, it was obvious he hadn't forgiven him for the accident.

Actually, it hadn't been an accident, but that was something Bryce would never admit to outside of the safety of his own mind. If Colin knew Bryce had cut him on purpose, there was no doubt he would kill Bryce for the disfigurement.

Colin had put him in the hospital for a week for cutting his face. As far as Bryce was concerned, it had been well worth it. His brother had been knocked off his pedestal—even if it was only for a short time. Now, the scar Bryce had given him only intensified the air of danger that surrounded Colin.

"Who's here?"

Colin stalked up to him and slapped him. Furious, yet too afraid of Colin to do anything about it, Bryce swallowed a mouthful of blood. He also swallowed his pride, just as he'd done the night Seth had assaulted him. Humble pie left a bitter taste in his mouth.

"Bath-Kol," Colin ground out. "You fucked up in so many ways. Did you know Kael is here too? Tell me, Bryce, how do you expect to get past the three of them?"

If Bryce had thought he was going to vomit before, hearing the other two Seraphim were here brought the bile up. It sat in the back of his throat, forcing him to swallow hard to fight it back down. "We'll find a way."

"You fucking idiot." Colin's booming voice bounced off the walls as he stalked around the room. By the way Colin clenched and unclenched his fists, Bryce assumed he did it to keep from strangling him. "We'll find a way? How stupid are you, Bryce?"

The taste of blood provoked his temper. Bryce found his balls and met his brother's fury with his own. "And how was I going to get to the stone before? Halifax is locked up tighter than Fort Knox and, in case you didn't know, I'm not exactly on any of Setheus Raleigh's guest lists."

Colin's eyes narrowed into a threatening glare. "Whose fault is that?"

"I'm not going to do this with you, Colin. You've made no more headway with Bath-Kol than I have with Seth."

Colin ceased his pacing and came right up to him. Toe-to-toe, Bryce couldn't help but be intimidated by Colin's towering height. "At least I haven't made her my enemy."

"It was unavoidable with Setheus."

Right then, Colin reminded Bryce of their father, whose obsession with the stones had gotten him killed. "As usual, you've handled your end badly. Now I have to clean up your mess and hope you haven't fucked this up beyond repair."

Bryce backed away, positioning himself behind his desk. Though he knew it wouldn't protect him from Colin, he felt better with the massive piece of furniture between them. "You don't have to clean up anything."

“No?” Colin peered around the room. “I didn’t know you had Hakion’s Stone hidden away in here.”

Bryce did his best to ignore his brother’s sarcasm, though he couldn’t keep himself from wanting to smack Colin on the mouth—as he’d once done when they were younger. Of course, Colin, being the bigger of them even while they were kids, beat the hell out of him for it. Bryce had gone to bed bloody and aching, but it had been worth it.

“You know I don’t. But I told you, I’ll find a way.”

Colin stormed over to the desk and slammed his fist down on it. “You’d better. If they get to us before we get to those stones, I’ll kill you before the Seraphim get the chance.”

That threat finally lit the fire under Bryce’s ass. It brought his temper to the forefront. “Fuck you, Colin. Last I looked, I was the older brother. This was my plan. The only reason I let you in on it...”

“You let me in on it because you knew you couldn’t do it on your own. You’ve always lacked what I have in spades.”

“And what’s that?”

Colin’s gaze raked over him, his mouth twisting in a mockery of a smile. “Balls. I’ve never been afraid to spill blood for what I want.”

Bryce knew Colin was going to kill Sabrina. Instead of just using blood to perform the ritual to break the stones, he knew his brother intended to drain her dry. It was a shame, really, since Bryce actually had feelings for her. Not love, exactly, since his desire for power overshadowed all else. But he did care for her—in his own way. He would have liked for her to live long enough to see him reap the rewards of setting free the children of Balian. Colin promised they’d be made into living Gods and Bryce had no reason to disbelieve his brother. It was why he’d chosen to pick up where their father left off.

Robert had gotten closer to the stones than any human ever had. He’d found out Daniel’s secret and went after the human he’d impregnated. Thinking to take the baby

before it was born and use its blood to open Hell, Robert had made one fatal mistake. He'd underestimated Daniel's love for his unborn child.

The Seraphim had scarified his own life to save his child's. Having tracked down the one weapon that could kill an angel, Robert had used the dagger to slice Daniel's throat. Daniel had bled to death at his lover's feet. Kael had killed Robert moments later, setting the events into motion that led to this very moment.

How ironic that they'd come full circle. Only this time, it would be Bryce and Colin who brought an end to the Seraphim and unleashed a power that not even Heaven could stop.

Chapter Eleven

As much as Sabrina was glad to be back home, she was scared to death to be alone. Back in her own environment and away from the security at Halifax made her feel naked, vulnerable. The feeling didn't sit well with her at all.

She thought it strange that, after only two weeks, she'd gotten used to being with Seth. Sabrina had been alone more or less her entire life, so to find herself missing Seth and the others—needing them to feel complete—amazed her.

Sabrina walked around her house, inspecting every nook and cranny for signs that someone had been there. From what she could tell, no one had come into her home to snoop around. And if they had, they'd left no evidence behind.

There were eleven messages on her answering machine, which she found odd. She couldn't recall a single time she'd gotten that many calls in a month. She simply didn't have the sort of friends who called her on a regular basis, and if they did and hadn't found her at home, they didn't seem to care. Sabrina knew she was partly to blame for that. Afraid of getting close to people, she held herself at bay. How could people form a genuine relationship with her if she never allowed them in? Eventually, her friends gave up trying and treated her as nothing more than an acquaintance.

Pressing play, there was one call from her dentist's office informing her she'd missed her biyearly cleaning. Three calls were from friends. The rest, not surprisingly, were from Bryce. *Perfect*. Given the note of desperation in his tone in the last of the messages, Sabrina knew he'd play right into Seth's plan.

Or at least she hoped he would. She'd underestimated him once and had gotten slapped to the floor for it. She wouldn't make the same mistake twice. Added to the mix was Bryce's brother, who Kael had seen arriving at Bryce's house the night before. Two against one weren't odds Sabrina was comfortable with. Nevertheless, she'd do what was

needed of her. She reminded herself the blood of a Seraphim flowed through her veins. It would give her strength should she find her own faltering.

Picking up the phone, she called Bryce to get things rolling. He answered on the second ring. “Where the hell are you, Colin?”

“It’s not Colin, Bryce.”

There was silence on the other end of the line for all of a second. “Sabrina?”

“I’ve made a mistake in going to Halifax and I need your help.” Having practiced the script she needed to keep to, Sabrina was impressed by her flawless delivery of her lie.

“Mistake? I don’t understand.”

Sabrina took a breath, remembering what she had to say. “Seth isn’t what I believed him to be.”

“And just what did you believe he was?”

“A connection to my father.” She gave her answer without a hint of hesitation. “I thought Seth could help me understand what he was, but I was wrong. I’m so sorry, Bryce. I should have trusted you.”

Those words were bitter on her tongue, and yet, so far, her performance was perfect. Given the sort of man Bryce was, playing to his ego was exactly what she needed to do in order to get him where she wanted him. Now, all she had to do was work around his brother, whom she had no idea about. Though Kael had been keeping an eye on Bryce and knew his brother had arrived a couple of days ago, they hadn’t had the time to ascertain what manner of man he was and how she could play him. She had to use her instincts to get around him and pray for the best.

“I warned you, didn’t I?”

Sabrina smiled at how easily Seth’s plan was working. Even as she agreed with Bryce, what she really wanted to do was tell him to fuck off and hang up on him. “He’s a monster. They all are, and they’ll stop at nothing to protect those stones.”

Bryce snorted. “Why the change, Sabrina? Tell me why I should trust you.”

“Because I was wrong. You were only trying to protect me and I should have listened to you.” Sabrina suspected sand would be easier to swallow than that load of bullshit.

“So, what happened between you and Setheus?”

Only that I love him and I’m willing to sacrifice my life to protect him and humanity from you and your brother. Of course, that was something Sabrina kept to herself. “He caught me snooping around the estate and threw me out.”

“You’re lying. He would never throw you out.”

The accusation came over the phone like a slap. “I swear to God, Bryce, he did.”

“The way he fought for you that night, I thought...”

“Thought what?” Sabrina knew exactly what he thought and he was right. Seth had fought for her as if he loved her. He came dangerously close to damning himself just to make Bryce pay for hurting her.

“Never mind,” he muttered.

“Can we meet tonight? I have something to show you.”

His hesitation didn’t last long. “Of course. What is it?”

She swallowed down the lingering fear that nagged at her before saying the one thing that was going to set Seth’s plan into motion. “I know where the stones are. All three of them.”

After his sharp intake of breath, it sounded like Bryce fumbled around for a second, maybe even dropping the phone. “They’re all together? Impossible.”

“Kael and Bath-Kol are at Halifax. They brought the stones with them.”

“This is incredible, Sabrina.”

Yes, it was, and anyone else would have realized it was unbelievable as well. “My father was a record keeper. I took the scroll that tells of the location of the stones.”

“Come to the museum at eight.”

As much as Sabrina didn’t relish the idea of being alone with Bryce and his brother, she knew she had no choice. After she’d agreed to be a part of this plan, she knew she

had to take it all the way—even if it meant giving her life so that Seth and the others could trap the brothers into making a move on the stones.

“I’ll be there.”

Sabrina hung up the phone, took two steps, and sank to her knees. Waves of fear rolled over her at the thought of what was to come. She hoped to God she hadn’t just set in motion events that would end with her death. She wasn’t ready to die, even though she now knew for a fact that Heaven existed and God would welcome her home.

Fear a vise around her heart, Sabrina prayed. At first she had nothing to say to a God she’d spent most of her life not believing in. Slowly, words began to pour from her. Words that came from a place deep within her that needed to be said to God and her father. Before ending her prayer, she begged for guidance and for her father to watch over her tonight. Strange, but she felt he already was.



Sabrina rethought the idea of being watched over and protected after she pulled up to the museum. Never had she felt as alone as she did then, sitting in her car, staring at the museum. Two cars were there. The dark blue Camry was Bryce’s. She didn’t recognize the other and assumed it belonged to Colin.

A shadowy movement passing through the trees across the road told her she wasn’t as alone as she believed. Under the light of the full moon Sabrina caught a fleeting glimpse of Seth. He disappeared into the forest, though she knew he didn’t go far. She felt him all around her, as if a piece of him was with her.

Sabrina peered into the tress and, though she couldn’t see them, she sensed Kael and Bath were already here as well. They were her family and she knew they wouldn’t leave her to face this alone. They’d all stay as close to her as they could without Bryce or Colin realizing they were there.

As she grabbed the doctored scroll from the passenger seat, Sabrina thought of her father. She hoped he was with her, wished it with everything she was. After getting out of the car, she strode toward the museum with false confidence.

Light coming from the window of Bryce's office caught her attention just before she pushed open the heavy door. A sick knot of dread twisted inside of her as she walked in. The main part of the museum was dark. Thankfully she knew her way around or else she would have crashed into the clutter of display cases. Maneuvering around the chaos, she made her way to the stairs leading to the office.

Angry voices coming from the office nearly had Sabrina's steps faltering. She knocked once on the door before it was yanked open by a tall and good-looking man. The scar that cut down his mouth was unnerving because it gave him a permanent sneer. Though he bore only a slight resemblance to Bryce, it was obvious this was Colin.

One look at Colin told her he was a lethal son of a bitch. He had a rigid stance and a devious glint in his turbulent blue eyes. His muscular body was encased in black pants and a coal-gray shirt. His physique was as far from Bryce's as it could get. It was obvious Colin kept himself in top condition.

Sabrina slapped a smile on her face and extended her hand to the man. "You must be Colin."

He didn't shake her hand. Instead, he snatched the scroll from her and unrolled it. As much as Sabrina wanted to tear into him for his rudeness, she bit her tongue.

A frown marred his brow as he scanned the scroll. "Where does it say where the stones are?"

"Jesus Christ, Colin, at least let her walk in first." Bryce came toward her, smiling. His gaze traveled over her. "You look good, Sabrina."

He looked like shit. His hair was a mess and his clothes were sloppy. Dark circles shadowed under his eyes. It was obvious he'd gotten little sleep over the past weeks. She hoped to God nightmares haunted him and that's what was keeping him up at night.

"So do you." The lie slipped easily off her tongue.

"Are you two finished? Can we get down to business?" Colin snapped.

Sabrina noticed Bryce flinch. She'd believed him to be beyond intimidation. She was wrong. It was obvious his brother terrified him. She also noticed something else. Colin wasn't as ignorant as his older brother.

Sabrina motioned to the scroll. "Bryce never mentioned you could read Aramaic."

There was such ice in his glare Sabrina fought back the urge to shiver as a blast of cold shot up her spine. "I can read enough to know if you're lying to me."

She could read Aramaic too. It was one of those things Sabrina found came with being a nephilim. He moved away from her, as if being near her repulsed him. That was fine by Sabrina. He gave her the creeps.

"So, what does it say?" Bryce asked.

Colin ignored the question. He also ignored her, talking about her as if she wasn't standing right there. "I don't trust her."

Bryce shrugged. "You don't trust anyone."

Colin's sneer as his gaze raked over her reminded Sabrina of how Bryce looked the night she'd come here after meeting with Seth. "She's one of *them*."

Bryce came to stand beside her, and for once she didn't want to shove him away. As horrible as it was, she had every intention of using him as a human shield if Colin made good on the threat burning in his eyes as he glared at her. She felt he owed her that sacrifice, whether he did it willingly or not, for being such an asshole the entire time she worked for him. Not to mention the slap he'd given her. But that was something she knew Seth was going to settle up with him about.

Sabrina wanted to feel some small bit of remorse for Bryce, but she couldn't. She knew what he and Colin were planning to do with the stones and that had to be prevented at all costs.

Bryce curled his hand around hers. His palm was clammy and all Sabrina wanted to do was yank her hand back. Remembering the role she was playing, she gave his hand a gentle squeeze. He smiled at her and she knew he was buying into her bullshit. Colin, however, was another matter entirely. All she had to do was get him in the car and get him to the church and the Seraphim would take over.

"I've known Sabrina long enough to know she must have been confused and needed to connect with them." Sabrina nodded. At least that much was true. "But she's learned the Seraphim can't be trusted. Isn't that right?"

“No, they aren’t to be trusted at all.”

That was true as well. Only it didn’t apply to her, but to Bryce and Colin. The Seraphim would do whatever was necessary to protect mankind. Unfortunately, the Mathers brothers had pushed the Seraphim’s hand and would suffer the wrath of Heaven for believing they could unleash Hell.

“You’re going to tell us exactly what happened between you and Setheus.” By Colin’s tone, Sabrina assumed she was either going to tell him willingly or he was going to force the practiced tale out of her.

Remembering her script, Sabrina stared steadily at Colin. “There’s not much to explain. I found the scroll in Seth’s room. Since my father had written it, I didn’t think Seth would mind me reading it. I was wrong. He threatened to kill me if I went anywhere near the scroll again. Kael and Bath-Kol made no secret that they would see to the deed if Seth wouldn’t.” She forced a shiver and slipped her hand from Bryce’s. She wrapped her arms around herself and stepped away so she could put some distance between herself and Colin. “I was scared to death. As soon as I was able, I took the scroll and left.”

Colin grabbed her by the shoulders and gave her a firm shake. “Why don’t I believe the Seraphim would just *let* you leave?”

“They didn’t have a choice. They sleep during the day, and since they hadn’t expected me to leave, they didn’t think to alert the guard if I did.”

Bryce came to her defense. He pulled his brother away from her. “Back off, Colin. She’s been through enough. We finally know where the stones are, so let’s go get this done.”

Sabrina found the irony of what Bryce said hilarious. He was the reason she was going through most of this.

Colin gave her a hard glare. “Yes, let’s go get it done.”

His look told her he didn’t believe a word she said, but as long as he was going along with things, she’d worry about his distrust later. Right now, she had to get them to where the Seraphim would be waiting.

As they walked to the car, Sabrina knew she might be heading to her death. How strange that a calm acceptance had come over her. The night seemed to talk to her, sounds she'd never paid attention to suddenly too loud to ignore. The gentle summer wind blowing through the leaves of the trees, the chirp of crickets hidden in the overgrown grass, and the scurrying of animals in the thick woods surrounding the area, they all echoed in her mind like a crack of thunder.

She actually *felt* the world around her. An incredible charge of life passed through her, filling her with energy and heat. As Sabrina settled into the backseat, the sensation of strong and protective arms encircling her took away her fear of what this night would bring.

She wasn't alone. Her father was with her.

Chapter Twelve

Sabrina was grateful the ride to the abandoned church went by fast. Neither Colin nor Bryce tried to carry on a conversation with her, which suited her just fine. The last thing she wanted to do was talk to either of them.

Instead, they sat in the front seat as silent as a grave, leaving her alone in the backseat. It left her time to think about what was to come and her role in stopping the brothers from unmaking the world.

She'd picked the place for this whole thing to go down. St. Mary's church had been abandoned for nearly a century, and given what Seth said about ground becoming unconsecrated after the church abandoned it, it seemed a believable place for the Seraphim to have hidden the stones. Given how easily Bryce believed her story and how Colin didn't question the location, it had been a good choice.

The area was also desolate—something Seth had said was essential. None of the Seraphim would risk having this play out where humans might end up caught in the fray.

As they drove past her house, Sabrina barely spared it a glance. She felt no connection to the place. She was no longer part of the normal world. She was part of something more—part of the Seraphim. Daniel's blood flowed strong in her now and she felt ready to do anything to prevent Bryce and Colin from getting to the stones. She wondered if this was what Seth experienced, this burn in her body to protect humanity even at the cost of her own life.

Her confidence in Seth kept her calm as they drove to St. Mary's. She wasn't afraid, even knowing how fragile the thread of control she had on this situation was. If she were only dealing with Bryce, that would have been one thing, but Colin was another story entirely. He wasn't someone who was going to go down without a fight.

Staring out the window, Sabrina was met with near blackness. With no streetlights here up in the mountains, dark blanketed the area, making it almost claustrophobic. She

looked up at the sliver of moon hanging in the deep blue sky and wondered if her father was watching her. *Of course he was.* Closing her eyes, Sabrina concentrated on the sensation of her father all around her. Tears gathered in her eyes as his soul moved through her.

Opening her eyes, Sabrina looked at the back of Bryce and Colin's heads and wondered if they heard it, too. That they hadn't turned around or questioned the whisper told her they hadn't. That soft male voice saying her name had been solely for her.

Once they arrived at the church, Colin pulled the car into the overgrown parking lot. As soon as Sabrina climbed out of the car, she sensed the Seraphim were already here. Glancing around, she saw no trace of them, but they were there. She felt Seth watching her from the shadows, sensed Kael and Bath. Their warrior spirits burned bright, cutting through the darkness with a light only Sabrina saw.

"Are you sure this is the right place?"

Bryce's question brought Sabrina's attention to the two-hundred-year-old church. With no upkeep, the harsh winters had taken their toll on the building. The doors had long since rotted off the hinges, leaving a gaping black opening. The windows were shattered and the wooden shingles had all but rotted away.

Though the spire still rose up from the roof, the cross that once topped it was long gone. Even the headstones that marked the graves in the small cemetery beside the church were broken. The piles of stone were a sad sight. There was nothing left to indicate that this was once a house of God.

"I'm positive this is the place. This is the only abandoned church in the area."

A frisson of fear worked its way through her as Colin reached around to his back and pulled a gun from the waistband of his jeans. She hadn't known he was armed. He aimed the weapon at her and Sabrina actually felt the air thicken with Seth's fury.

"Shit, Colin, what are you doing? Put the damn gun away."

"Your girlfriend better be right." Colin's icy glare cut through her as cleanly as any bullet. "Because if you're not, you die."

She had no doubt he meant to do exactly as he threatened.

Sabrina rolled her eyes and pretended she wasn't scared out of her mind. "There's no need to be so dramatic, Colin. I want those stones as much as you do, so there's no need to threaten me."

Colin stalked over to her, getting so close she saw the flecks of gold hidden in the depths of his otherwise brown eyes. Sabrina resisted the urge to shove him away, to put some distance between them. "That's not a threat. It's a fact. Now get in there."

"Come on, Sabrina."

Bryce grabbed her hand and tugged her away from Colin. They walked toward the church with Colin following them. Sabrina dreaded having that cold-hearted bastard behind her holding a gun. Nevertheless, she sucked up her fear and went with Bryce into the church. Thankfully, Bryce had a flashlight, which allowed them to see as they made their way up the short aisle.

Many of the pews were still intact, though some of them were nothing more than a mess of splintered wood. Graffiti marred the walls. The confessional was crammed with garbage. Dead leaves, crushed beer cans, and crack vials littered the floor. Among the debris were syringes. The danger of what contaminated those bent and rusted needles scared her almost as much as Colin did.

The church was a wasteland of misery. The gloom seeped into her, spreading through her. She had to fight to stay focused and not succumb to the desolation all around her.

Bryce set the flashlight down on the altar. The meager light barely lit the church. It cast long shadows that seemed to move with a life all their own. Though she wasn't a person easily disturbed by the thought of things that went bump in the night, even she was a little chilled at the creepy feel of the old church.

If she didn't know better, Sabrina could swear she felt Hell's hot breath at the nape of her neck. It was enough to send a shudder racing through her. She was so on edge that the scurry of a rodent had her nearly jumping out of her skin.

"Scared?"

Sabrina wanted to smack the smirk off Colin's face. The arrogant prick really thought he was intimidating her. He was, but she'd be damned if she showed it. "No. Are you?"

His smile was pure ice. He walked toward her, grabbing her and pulling her up against him fast enough that she had no chance to stop him. The feel of him against her body was revolting. "Nothing scares me, Sabrina."

She shoved away from him, resisting the urge to swipe at herself in a sad attempt to remove his touch. "Good, because from what I've learned about the stones, they are the key to opening Hell."

Sabrina had to make them admit that was their plan. Once the words were said the Seraphim could step in and do their thing and she would be free to get the hell out of there. Unfortunately, Colin merely grunted and disappeared into the shadows behind the altar.

"Where did the scroll say the stones were hidden?"

Sabrina looked at Bryce, who stood in front of the first row of dilapidated pews. In order to keep this believable, Sabrina had to leave out exacts. Too many details might make it seem too set up.

She motioned to the altar. "Over there somewhere. It wasn't too specific."

Bryce walked past and followed his brother into the shadows. The weight of the darkness crashed down on Sabrina. An odd sensation crept up around her. If she didn't know better, she'd swear she sensed Hell.

As much as she wondered how she could sense Hell in a place that had once been holy, one look around her told her exactly how that could be. The church was now a place of broken dreams. It had been stripped of any statuary and other art, leaving bare walls and barren pedestals. The only decoration was graffiti, done by the local kids who used this place as a hangout.

Sabrina feared how Seth would take seeing his Father's house desecrated in such a way.

Looking over the altar, she peered into the dark but couldn't see either brother. Swallowing hard, Sabrina tried to calm her nerves. "Find anything yet?"

God, how she hated the way her voice shook.

"Not yet."

Like a disembodied voice, Bryce's words came at her. It was followed by plenty of shuffling around, the only indication of where the brothers were. Colin cursed—a lot—as he snooped around looking for nothing. Given his frustration, he must have realized that fact and strode back toward her.

Taking hold of her upper arm, he yanked her around like a rag doll. "So, where are the fucking stones, Sabrina?"

"I told you, the scroll said they were hidden near the altar." Her futile attempt to wrest her arm free only had Colin's fingers biting harder into her flesh.

He narrowed his eyes on her, his cutting gaze seeming to go right through her. Sabrina was sure this time it wasn't her imagination but Hell's breath she felt blowing across her neck. Balian obviously wanted out and his freedom lay in the hands of the Mathers brothers.

"If I don't find the stones, you're dead."

Colin gave her the perfect opening to coax him into admitting what he and Bryce planned to use the stones for. "Like you're not going to kill me anyway? I know you need my blood, Colin. You can't break the stones without it."

He roughly dragged her close enough so that his lips grazed her ear. "Now why would I want to break the stones?"

"Let her go and stop scaring her."

Colin released her arm and Sabrina stepped away from him. "We don't have all night. I'd suggest you stop trying to intimidate me and get back to looking for the stones."

"She's right," Bryce agreed. "We still have to perform the ritual."

Sabrina gasped and jumped back, watching in shock as Colin smacked Bryce in the mouth. "You idiot. I warned you to keep your fucking mouth closed."

“I’m sorry, but I thought...”

“And who the hell told you to think?”

Bryce wiped the blood from his mouth. “What harm would it do to tell her? She’s bound to figure it out once we get the stones and need her blood to break the stones.”

“Sorry, Bryce, but that’s just not going to happen,” Seth announced from the entrance of the church. Sabrina almost wept with relief at the sight of Seth. With him were Kael and Bath. “I hate to break up the party, but I think it’s about time we settled this matter once and for all.”

Chapter Thirteen

“You fucking bitch,” Colin snapped. “You set us up.”

Sabrina couldn’t help but roll her eyes. “Oh please, are you really surprised? You knew I wasn’t going to lead you to the stones.”

The smack caught her off guard. She stumbled back, but thankfully didn’t fall. Seth went to charge Bryce, but Kael held him back. Bryce pulled out a gun he had hidden beneath his coat. Her blood ran cold when he aimed it at her.

Whatever sympathy Sabrina might have had for Bryce went right out of her when she saw the hatred blazing in Bryce’s eyes. As much as she wanted to believe he wasn’t as ruthless as Colin, that simply wasn’t the case.

“I warned you she was one of them.” Colin’s words dripped with contempt.

“Shut up, Colin. Just shut the fuck up,” Bryce stammered.

Though Sabrina heard Kael hiss out a warning to Seth, it was drowned out by the sound of the cocking of a gun.

“I trusted you.” The accusation in Bryce’s tone had Sabrina swallowing the lump of terror that lodged in her throat. Sabrina went numb, believing he was going to murder her. Too much of a coward to turn to him and be forced to look down the barrel of the gun he aimed at her, she kept her gaze focused on Seth. If she had to go, it was his face she wanted to take with her into death.

“I couldn’t let you open Hell.”

“Bryce.” Seth’s voice was smooth and calm, though Sabrina felt his rage.

Finally, Sabrina looked at Bryce. Sweat beaded on her forehead and upper lip at the sight of the gun he held trained on her. The hand that gripped the gun shook. Slowly, Bryce turned his attention to Seth. Sabrina then noticed Bath had her sword free and held it directed at Colin. Colin, however, just stood there aiming the gun at them with a cold and calculated smile playing upon his scarred lips.

“You knew this had to happen, Bryce. Take the gun off Sabrina and let her leave. Don’t stain your hands with more innocent blood.”

The “more” startled Sabrina. It indicated Bryce had taken a life before. Why she was surprised, she didn’t know. He’d certainly made her believe he was desperate enough to kill for the stones. She had just been holding on to the hope he hadn’t gone that far off the deep end of things. Turns out, her assumptions had been correct. And now she was very likely going to be the last person he killed in his mad quest for power.

Bryce turned back to her. He was sweating profusely and trembling so badly Sabrina was terrified he’d pull the trigger without meaning to. “Where are the stones, Sabrina?”

“She doesn’t know where they are,” Seth ground out.

Bryce didn’t take his gaze from her. “Then you tell me or I’ll kill her.” He moved in toward her, close enough that the gun was now only inches from her face. “I swear to God, I’ll put a bullet in her head.”

Sabrina held back her whimper at Colin’s taunt for Bryce to do it.

“I said, shut up,” Bryce snapped. He licked his lips nervously, though his hand was steady. The gleam of hurt in his gaze over her betrayal and determination chilled her worse than staring down the barrel of the gun.

In her peripheral vision, Sabrina saw Colin move. He leveled the gun at her—only he didn’t hesitate to use it. The crack of gunfire deafened her to all else but her own scream. For a moment, Sabrina thought she’d been shot, but there was no pain. Bryce gasped, and for a second, moved the gun off her. Sabrina looked to the Seraphim and saw Bath on the ground, a bullet wound in her head.

Colin drew first blood. No longer fettered by God’s law, Kael attacked. His roar had Bryce jumping back. His finger tightened on the trigger and the bullet whizzed by Sabrina’s head. Gasping, she dove to the side.

In a blur of movement and an explosion of sound, Colin and Kael clashed. Though Colin was no match for an angel, he managed to draw a dagger and drag the blade across Kael’s stomach. Kael growled, faltering in his attack. Sabrina watched in horror as Colin gained the upper hand in the fight.

Seth reached Sabrina just as Colin dropped Kael to his knees. The fact that Colin felled Kael proved he wielded no ordinary blade. Seth had no time to wonder how the brothers managed to get hold of such a weapon, since a bullet caught him directly in the chest. Grunting from the impact, he shoved Sabrina away and lunged for Bryce, knocking the gun from his hand. Bryce backed up, hitting the wall. Seth smiled as satisfaction ran through him. Now that Bryce had made the same mistake as his brother, Seth was free to strike deadly.

He grabbed Bryce by the neck and lifted him off of his feet. Bryce's eyes bulged as Seth slowly squeezed, restricting his air. Kicking his feet and gasping, Bryce fought wildly in a futile attempt to break Seth's hold. With the memory of seeing Sabrina sprawled on the ground with Bryce towering over her fresh in his mind, that wasn't about to happen. Seth was going to kill him and take much pleasure in the act of sending the bastard to Hell.

All that saved Bryce was Sabrina screaming Kael's name. Turning, Seth saw Colin stab the blade into Kael's heart. Growling, he tossed Bryce aside and lunged for Colin. He hit Colin hard, the two of them crashing to the floor. Grabbing Colin's wrist, Seth snapped the bone, causing the bastard to drop the blade. As they fought, Seth lost sight of what was going on around him.

The fight took only moments to end. Seth, stronger and faster, broke Colin's neck. By the time Seth gained his feet, Kael was facedown in a pool of blood and Sabrina was once again facing down the barrel of Bryce's gun.

Seeing his brother dead, Bryce let out a yell that echoed through the church. He moved with surprising speed, grabbing Sabrina and slamming her against his chest. He jabbed the gun into her ribs, stilling Seth's attack.

Bryce's scream woke Bath, who sat up slowly, blood seeping from the bullet wound in her head. Seth hissed a warning not to strike, since neither of them were close enough to get to Bryce before he'd be able to fire a shot into Sabrina's side.

"It's over, Bryce. Let her go."

"Give me the stones," Bryce demanded.

“That’s not going to happen.”

Bryce pressed the gun deeper into Sabrina’s side, pulling a whimper from her that cut clear through Seth. Never had he felt as helpless as he did then, knowing there was no way he could barter the stones for Sabrina’s life. More importantly, Sabrina knew it as well. She’d agreed to risk her life to set this trap, believing he’d not fail her. But fail her was exactly what he’d done.

“Then she dies.” There was no remorse in Bryce’s tone.

Sabrina stiffened, her panic rolling over Seth like an icy wave. “Don’t do this. Please.”

“Because of you, my brother is dead. You brought this all on yourself, Sabrina.”

“Colin is dead because of your obsession for the stones. Let it go, Bryce, and you can still make it out of this alive.”

Seth was willing to offer Bryce the sun and the moon if it meant she’d make it through this with her life. “It’s over. Put down the gun and I’ll let you walk away.”

Bryce’s gaze shifted to Bath. Seth would have struck but Bryce moved the gun to Sabrina’s head. “Do you think I’m stupid? I put the gun down and you’ll kill me.”

Seth’s growl reverberated throughout the abandoned church. Bath stepped up, though Seth noticed how she swayed on her feet. Blood continued to trickle from the wound in her forehead. She stepped in front of him and he saw the remains of the exit wound at the back of her head.

“You have one chance to make this right. Release Sabrina and salvage some small part of your soul.” Her slurred words, spoken in her rich accent, barely made what she said discernable. Nevertheless, by the look on Bryce’s face, he understood her. Seth noticed how the hand that held the gun lowered a fraction of an inch. A light of remorse flashed in the depths of his eyes.

“My brother’s dead.”

Seth cocked a brow, remaining outwardly calm in the face of Bryce’s sudden anger. “As is Kael. Don’t add another death to the madness of this night.”

Bryce shook his head frantically, as if trying to dispel voices only he heard. “Her death will be on your hands.”

Seth roared and lunged forward at the same time Bryce fired the gun. If he had been any slower, the bullet would have hit her. Seth shoved her out of the way, causing her to trip and fall. She was knocked unconscious when her head hit the floor.

But she was alive, and that was all that mattered.

With the fires of fury fueling him, Seth choked Bryce until he dropped the gun.

“You failed just as your father did before you,” Seth sneered. “Your bloodline ends with you. Go to Lucifer, you piece of shit.”

Seth stared deep into Bryce’s eyes, snapping the bastard’s neck and tossing him aside like a sack of trash. He went to Sabrina, who was cradled across Bath’s lap. “She’s fine, Setheus.”

Seth dropped to his knees and took Sabrina from Bath. He smoothed Sabrina’s bloody hair from her ashen face. He looked away from Sabrina, his gaze going to Kael’s lifeless body.

“Can you bring him back?”

Bath shook her head. “I don’t know.”

“Try, Bath. We can’t lose him.”

She cast a forlorn look at Kael’s body. It was the first time Seth had seen Bath to show any hint of emotion. “I don’t know if I have the strength.”

“If anyone does, it’s you.”

Bath-Kol took in a deep breath before she walked to Kael. She knelt beside him and ran her hand through his hair. Tears gathered in her eyes as she took in their lifeless brother. She flattened her hands on his chest and whispered a chant in the ancient language of the angels. Kael’s eyes flew open, his back arched, and a roar ripped from deep within him as Bath performed a miracle and restored his life.

Chapter Fourteen

Sabrina was pulled out of the blackness of unconsciousness by Seth's voice. Sabrina cracked open her eyes. She quickly wished she hadn't. A glare of bright light made the pounding in her head even worse. She shielded her eyes with her hand and peered up at Seth. Lying across his lap, his face encompassed her vision, blocking her from seeing all else. Gasping, she struggled to sit up but Seth held her down.

"Easy, Sabrina. You've been out for a while."

"Am I...dead?"

Seth shook his head. "No, sweetheart, you aren't dead."

Relieved to still be of the living, she raised herself up on her elbows and realized the light wasn't that brilliant white light people often described after a near-death experience. It was coming from the flashlight. The damn thing was shining in her eyes.

Nausea caused her to sweat and her mouth to water. "I feel as though I was."

Seth helped her to sit up. A few feet away, she saw Kael and Bath staring at her. Bath looked like a train had hit her. Kael was even helping her to stand.

"If you were dead, you'd be with God and not me."

"Then I'm glad I'm not dead, because I'd rather be here with you than anywhere else."

A strange look passed over Seth's face. She knew then that something bad had happened while she'd been unconscious. Memory came back to her and she remembered Colin stabbing Kael. The dagger he'd wielded had felled the angel.

No, not merely felled him, Sabrina corrected, it had killed him.

"Bath brought Kael back, didn't she?"

He nodded solemnly. "She has the power of life."

Sabrina swallowed hard, past the lump of emotion that jumped into her throat. "Why didn't she save my father?"

“I wasn’t there,” Bath answered, drawing Sabrina’s attention. “I’d have given my life to save his. He was the first of us. Our leader. His death killed a part of Kael and I.”

Sabrina fought back her tears and nodded. “Bryce and Colin’s father killed him, didn’t he?”

“Yes,” Seth answered. “He bought the dagger from a Minion.”

Sabrina shook her head. “Do I even want to know what a Minion is?”

“A servant of Hell,” Seth explained. “The steel is forged in the fires of Hell and is the only weapon that can kill an angel.”

Sabrina looked at the dagger in Bath’s hand. She wanted to throw up at the thought that the blade had once been smeared with her father’s blood. “I want to go home, Seth.” He helped her stand but she stopped him. “Not my home...”

“Halifax is your home, Sabrina,” he interrupted.

Reaching up, Sabrina cupped Seth’s cheek. He leaned into her touch, as if it were a treasure to be relished. “I love you, Setheus.”

She wrapped her arms around his neck when he leaned down to kiss her. His lips touched hers and she felt a wonderful warmth flow through her. He pulled away, though his warmth remained.

“I’ve loved you since before you were born.”

Seth’s words wove their way through her, touching not merely her heart, but her soul as well. All her life she’d known only loneliness and sorrow. After learning what her father was and what that made her, Sabrina had believed she’d never know peace or acceptance, the two things she’d desired most. Love hadn’t even been a consideration, believing that was so far out of her reach it was unattainable.

Yet here was an angel offering her everything she’d ever dreamed—offering to return her love. She realized in that moment that Heaven was even closer than she or Seth thought. It was right in front of them. All they had to do was reach out and grab it.

Epilogue

Life as a nephilim wasn't much different than being an ordinary human. Other than her days and nights being switched around and the fact that she no longer had to struggle to make ends meet, everything was much the same as before. She went into town and shopped. She read, watched television with Seth, and worked a bit on the computer trying to write a *fictional* story about a fallen angel and a nephilim. Funny, but what had started out as a horror had quickly turned into a romance novel.

Basically, life had gone on even though her existence had taken a turn for the extraordinary. What amazed her the most was how normal her life with Seth was and how happy they were together.

Sabrina had spent so much time over the years worrying what it meant to be a nephilim, she hadn't taken the time to realize how little things would change once she found out. All that had changed was that she had new abilities. Among these changes were an acute perception of the world around her and added strength. The biggest difference was knowledge, which had more to do with the things Seth had taught her over the last year and little to do with being half angel.

He'd taught her enough about God and Lucifer that she began to feel one with the history of Heaven and Hell. Certain times, she sensed the love of God surrounding her and knew Seth didn't. That knowledge killed her, since she knew for a fact God hadn't forsaken him.

Placing a hand on her stomach, Sabrina sighed softly, his life inside of her filling her with love and purpose. She looked at the plain platinum band around her left ring finger and smiled. Though she and Seth couldn't be married in a church, Kael had performed the rite that bonded them as husband and wife. Bath, surprisingly, had offered herself up as a witness to the ceremony and had even shed a tear as they'd recited their vows.

Sabrina had bawled like a baby as Seth promised to love and honor her until the stars burned out. And there was no doubt in Sabrina's mind that he meant it. What woman could ask for more?

Certainly not her.

She had the love of an angel and there was nothing more beautiful than that.

"There you are."

Sabrina turned at the sound of Seth's voice behind her. Standing out on the balcony off her father's room, she'd watched the sun set—one of her favorite ways to start her night.

"You looked so peaceful. I didn't want to wake you."

He pressed himself against her back and put his arms around her. She stepped back into him, loving the beat of his heart against her. She felt infused with his love and strength, causing her to wonder how she'd lived without him for so long.

"You know I hate when you slip away without waking me. I need you to be the first thing I see."

Sabrina turned in his arms, relishing Seth's smile. "I wasn't feeling well and thought the fresh air would do me some good."

His smile was replaced with an expression of concern. "You're still not feeling well? It's been two weeks now."

Fresh air wasn't the only reason Sabrina came out here. She had something important to tell Seth and had wanted the privacy to practice how to say it. Unfortunately, her mind was flighty lately and her thoughts had gone into a million different directions. That left her with no other option than to simply tell him what she'd found out yesterday. She'd wanted the moment to be perfect. Standing in Seth's arms, their love charging the air, she knew there would be no time better than now.

"It's going to get worse before it gets better."

"What do you mean?"

Sabrina smiled, knowing that what she had to say was going to prove to Seth that, although he'd fallen from Grace, he still had God's love.

“I’m pregnant, Seth.”

Seth’s face went white and he stepped away from her. His expression of awe was one Sabrina knew she’d cherish always. “How can this be?”

She shrugged. “I prayed and God listened.”

Seth grabbed her and pulled her into his arms. He dropped down, hugging her stomach. Sabrina felt his body shake. “My God... I can’t believe this... When? When did you find out?”

“Yesterday, when I went to the doctor.”

Seth looked up at her and she saw his eyes were wet with tears. “You said you were fine.”

Sabrina couldn’t help it, she laughed. “I am fine. I’m better than fine. I’m having a baby.”

After kissing her stomach, Seth placed a hand on her abdomen. He closed his eyes and stayed like that for a long while. Sabrina didn’t even dare breathe. Something passed between them, she just didn’t know what it was. All she knew was she felt as if Seth passed right through her soul.

He opened his eyes and stood. The kiss he gave her was filled with emotion. “You’ll give me a strong son.”

“Or a daughter. It could be a girl, you know.”

Seth shook his head. “No. It’s a son. Our son.” She didn’t need to ask him how he knew. He had powers, which, even after a year, were far beyond her comprehension.

“When I asked to fall, it wasn’t just to guard the stones.” His arms came around her. “I fell for you.”

Stunned by that revelation, Sabrina shook her head. “Why?”

“Because the thought of an eternity in Heaven without you was unbearable.”

“You didn’t even know me. I wasn’t even born yet.”

His arms tightened around her. “I knew you, Sabrina.”

Seth stared deep into her eyes and she knew he was right. They may not have physically known each other, but their souls had crossed long before she was even a thought in her mother's mind.

"I love you so much, Seth."

Again, she felt a rush of his love through her. "You're my heaven, Sabrina. You always were."

As long as Seth remained guardian of Hakion's Stone, their future would never be an easy one to travel, but together—the three of them—they would find their way.

About the Author

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Look for these titles by Rene Lyons

Now Available:

Midnight Sun
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An immortal soldier defies the ancient Gods he serves and puts his existence and the world at risk when he saves the life of the mortal woman he swore to kill.

Immortal Protector

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Gideon Sinclair, an immortal, shape-shifting soldier, defies the ancient gods he serves, risking his existence and the future of the mortal world, when he saves the life of the woman he was sworn to kill: Dr. Megan Carter. For centuries he's fought for justice and balance in the eternal struggle between good and evil. Gideon challenges destiny and the forces aligning against her, but when Meg becomes more than a mission, will he be able to accept the healing love she offers or will their enemies and the demons of his past be their undoing?

Meg's accidental contact with an artifact sacred to the Goddess Isis thrusts her into the midst of a centuries old battle between two rival gods, and makes her the target of a crazed magician bent on unlocking the secrets of immortality. With nowhere to turn and no one to trust, she puts her life in the hands of the lethal, enigmatic Gideon, and is drawn into his dark world. She can't resist the passionate desire he stirs, but will she pay the ultimate price when she falls for a man who no longer has a heart?

Enjoy the following excerpt for Immortal Protector:

Meg was out of the car and moving, any thoughts of her own safety gone from her mind. Gideon started to come round as she ran up her walk. The demon moved slower, as if in pain. She trampled the pansies and pulled the sword from the marigolds. The creature took note of her, snorted, and kept walking towards the immortal.

Gideon got to his knees, saw the demon coming down with a vicious swing, and lurched to the side. He rolled into the spill and came up on his feet just in time to sidestep another strike. This close Meg could see the other wounds. His shirt was sliced in a few spots, and blood poured freely. His cheekbone was bruised, and he was favoring his right leg.

The blade felt incredibly light in her hands. Her heart rammed hard against her ribs. She couldn't breathe. She couldn't move. But she managed. She put one foot in front of the other, and reached him just before the demon.

"Run. Meg. Run," he ground out between clenched teeth. He grabbed the sword from her and lunged.

Meg stepped clear and started to back away as the two engaged in a series of traded strikes. The demon pivoted on the last salvo, changed gears, and made a run towards her. Before it could connect, Gideon leapt in between them, blade gripped with both hands, poised up in a defensive position. The creature's sword connected, and Gideon's sword severed the curved blade in two. A brilliant burst of light accompanied the sheering of steel, and the demon lurched back with an ungodly hiss.

Gideon pressed his advantage, taking a series of offensive strikes that connected more than they missed. He fought the creature back into the little house and disappeared around the corner of the vestibule. Meg knew she should go back to the car, every part of her sane mind told her to run away, but instead, she ran into the house, following her immortal. She didn't know the rules, didn't know the physiology of an immortal, but Gideon was a mess. She dearly hoped immortals couldn't be killed. But if they couldn't, why would he have so many weapons?

She hit her living room and froze in her tracks. Red blood and yellow gore covered her walls. Ash littered her furniture. What was left of it, at least. Her books were out of the built-in shelves and scattered in piles. Everything remotely breakable was in pieces. Even the floorboards fell victim. They were torn down to the joists in several spots. Gideon and the creature fought in her kitchen. She moved fully into the room and saw them as they traded blows. The demon had some kind of dagger now, but it was no match for Gideon's superior weapon.

Meg worried a creature like that would fight dirtier, have more tricks. And she worried about Gideon. He was hurt, bad, and showing signs of fatigue. Meg swallowed the panic threatening to consume her and walked into her kitchen. Her kitchen, her house, her immortal soldier. He needed an advantage. He needed help. He needed her.

She was a mortal, but she wasn't an idiot. However mythical the creature in her kitchen, it still had the same rise and fall of the thoracic region, demonstrating it still had to breathe. The first thing they taught in emergency responder class was to clear the airway. No airway, everything else was a wash. The exposed nasal passage presented an excellent point of entry. As calmly as she might grab a mug from the bakers rack near the south facing window and pour herself morning coffee, she pulled the fire extinguisher from the wall holder, moved into position, and opened up on the face of the demon.

The white foam shot out in a single stream and she angled it towards the wide nose holes. It was sucking wind already from the fight and couldn't stop from inhaling the chemical antidote for fire. The foam was designed to expand on contact and that's exactly what it did. The demon's features seized, it grabbed for its throat and lurched back, coughing and choking. It banged into her stove and pushed it through the dry wall. Gideon used the momentary diversion and drove his sword through its exposed flank. As he pulled back his blade, a brilliant white light flared through the kitchen, its epicenter the demon's rapidly disintegrating body. Then, a second later, everything returned to normal. All that remained was the destruction and a scattering of dark gray ash.

Gideon lowered his sword and it vanished. He staggered back hard into her refrigerator, braced his hands on his knees and slid to the floor. He looked up at her, a mixture of confusion, and something she couldn't quite identify in his eyes. Then his visage shifted. His lips formed a hard frown, and his burning coal black eyes pinned her with an incendiary glare. "I told you to...wait...in...the...car."

"Save the thanks." She found herself finally able to breathe now that he was safe. Now that they were safe. "I don't know much about immortals, but I'm willing to bet you could use a few Band-Aids right now. I'll be right back with my med kit."



Gideon wiped the sweat and blood from his forehead. His lungs burned from breathing in all the ash and from the taxing battle. He couldn't seem to get enough air. He briefly considered moving and started to push up to a standing position, but his body screamed in pain, so he decided instead to sit and wait for the doc. He was pissed at her

for risking her pretty little neck, and he was damned impressed that she'd wade into battle with demons without a second thought. She was a red-headed Valkyrie, and a genius. Spraying the Keeper in the face with the extinguisher gave Gideon the edge he'd desperately needed to turn the battle. Even without the sword, the Keeper was an ass kicker. Only one thing bothered him. The Keeper shouldn't have died. Not from a flank wound.

Gideon had skewered the thing to help immobilize it, choosing the sweet spot: the nexus points of nerves that clustered on either flank of a demon. The thing's hands blocked the neck, preventing beheading, but a shot to the sweet spot would result in momentary paralysis, giving him a chance to fell a killing blow. Except the strike finished the thing as effectively as beheading. It made no sense. And things that made no sense bothered him.

He heard Meg's approach as she muttered curses to herself. She carried a little black bag, like something a country doctor might have. She scowled at him and knelt by his side.

"Take your jacket off, and your shirt."

He smiled and shrugged out of his leathers. "What ever you say, Doc."

"Don't get too excited. This is a professional visit, not a social call."

The T-shirt was shredded and useless to him, so he pulled the tatters from his body. Meg might think this was a professional visit, but, judging by the way her pupils dilated and she licked her lips with that delicate pink tongue, he'd bet she was enjoying the view anyway. He felt a sharp stab of masculine pride. The doc liked him. He started grinning like an idiot, even though he felt like hell. "I have a small kit in the jacket pocket. I heal fast. That will help me heal faster if it's applied to the wounds."

Wordlessly, she grabbed the jacket, removed the small, hard-shelled kit and opened it up. "Which one?"

"The cobalt-blue bottle."

She opened it and sniffed, then wrinkled her nose. "It smells like raw sewage. What's it made of?"

"This and that."

“Let’s start with some cleaning. We can use this later.” She sealed it up, opened her own bag, and set up shop.

Gideon watched as she ripped the seal off a small plastic tray, dropped in several gauze pads, and filled the tray with saline. Her movements were smooth, practiced, economical. He found himself both dreading and longing for her touch.

“This may hurt.” Much to his disappointment, she donned a pair of latex gloves. “I want to clean the wound on your head first.”

She repositioned, leaning over him so she could better assess the wound. It gave him a spectacular view of her breasts and brought her body so close she ignited him with a slow, dangerous flame. She touched his forehead lightly, and her lips formed a slight, delectable pout. “The blood flow appears to have stopped. Amazing.”

If he straightened just a bit, moved an inch or so to the right, he could capture those juicy lips and kiss away any frowns. “You have no idea.”

She changed gears and moved back on her heels so she could give his chest and abdomen a better look. Her hand feathered across his bare skin and he shivered at her touch.

The corners of her lips tilted up. “You’re ticklish?”

“What can I say, Doc. You have the touch.”

She colored slightly and turned away, keeping her eyes solidly focused on his naked torso. He had to suppress the urge to grab her and roll her beneath him. He had a vivid image of how she would look, how she would feel. He felt himself start to harden and pushed away the tantalizing thoughts of her soft body, pliable and hot beneath his own. She’d taste sweet as cotton candy, melt in the mouth sweet. He knew it. He craved it.

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