



Shadow Warrior  
Book 3 in The Portal Series  
By  
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An Electronic Publication from Forbidden Publications in arrangement with author,  
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*This book is dedicated to*

*Tee, who spends so much time proofing for me, and makes sure I keep going.*

*Mary, for the new and improved look of my beloved series.*

*Deb and Bob and Karl, because you guys keep me laughing.*

*Rene, once again for enjoying the series as much as I love writing it.*

*And to Jim, for making sure I believe in myself.*

## *Underworld*

Hades sat in silence, pondering his next move. The sisters were strong, but now they had Tavoli on their side. The loss of his favored general did not please him. The man new knew things of the Underworld, its secrets and strategies. However, Hades was not through. No, not by a long shot. It wasn't so much the need to take over anymore. It was more the desire to beat his beautiful, interfering wife.

"Helix, attend me," Hades said into the empty chamber, his voice echoing off the walls.

In a matter of seconds, another of his generals appeared. There was no worry of this one turning away from him. Helix was a demon that loved the chase as much as Hades loved to conquer.

"I believe it is time to introduce the shifter, Helix," Hades said, watching the hate flare in the eyes of the other. "These sisters are more trouble than they are worth."

"I can handle them, My Lord."

"Yes, well, I have heard that song before and frankly, I am bored with the tune."

"Sir..."

"Helix, with Tavoli on their side they are even more powerful than before." The anger that rolled off the general could be felt. "Set aside your thirst for revenge. He beat you; the sisters beat you. Now it's time to throw a little surprise their way."

Helix studied his lord and fought the rage inside. He would like nothing more than to destroy the one time leader of Hades' armies, but this was about something more now.

"May I speak freely?"

"You may."

"This is no longer about the need to rule the earth realm, is it?" Helix noticed the flame in Hades' eyes, but continued. "It is about your wife. This is about beating Persephone."

Immediately, hot pain sliced up his spine and Helix dropped to his knees.

"You will do well to remember who Persephone is, General. She may be one step ahead of us, and she may even win this battle." Hades added a little more heat, and Helix gasped. "But she is still my wife and your lady. You will not address her by her name again."

"Yes, my lord Hades."

With a blink of his eyes, Hades released Helix. Why it angered him so much for his minions to speak her name he did not know. The woman had continually found a way to best him at every turn. She was a veritable pain in the ass of the gods. But damn if he didn't respect her for it. This was more of a game now, and Persephone would play as long as Hades continued.

"Now, Helix, rise and prepare yourself. The shifter is about to join us."

The General stood and hid his discomfort. He had never seen the shifter before, though he had heard of his existence.

The room began to fill with a thick fog. Though he could not see anything, Helix could feel, and he knew they were not alone. The cry of a bird rose and a wind blew. What stood before them caused Helix to fight an emotion he had not felt in more years than he could count. For the first time since his cross to the Underworld, Helix felt fear.

It wasn't his appearance that caused the shiver to race over Helix. It was the way he held himself. Just by glance, one could see that this man, or beast, held no fear or respect for Hades. The bird, a raven, rested on the shifters shoulders, watching and waiting.

"Blayde, the time has come for you to take your place in this world." Hades watched the man, noting the hate in his eyes. He could not fault him; after all, Hades had created him.

"What do you want with me, Hades?"

"You will do well to remember who you are talking to, Blayde."

"I know who you are. How could I forget?"

Helix was stunned at the lack of respect in the man. Why had Hades not dropped him to his knees? Another emotion worked its way into him. Hate, strong and true shot through Helix, and along with it the desire to teach this man his place.

Two steps were all he took toward the shifter, and Helix found himself flat on his back, a heavy pressure on his chest.

"Release him, Blayde."

"Control your man, Hades. I did not ask to be here."

Hades rolled his eyes and did his best to control his anger. Blayde was powerful, but he was no match for the god. However, Blayde surprised even Hades with his mental strength. He had learned much it seemed.

Helix made his way to his feet, hate radiating off his body.

"You two would do well to get along." Hades smiled at them both. "After all, Blayde, Helix will be your commander."

The shifter said nothing, just turned those eyes on Helix. The fear started to leave Helix. After all, Hades himself put him in charge of the shifter.

"Helix, you will take your men and the shifter, and return to earth realm. Do not fail me in this, Helix." Hades narrowed his eyes. "I want those sisters taken care of."

"Yes, my lord." He turned to Blayde. "Are you ready, shifter?"

"I will be ready when the time is right. " Blayde turned those eyes on him again. "However, will you be ready, General?"

Hades watched the two as they left the room. Helix would do his duty, but Blayde had always been defiant. The real question, however, was with the shifter's memories. Hades had spent decades working on that.

Blayde had offered his service to Hades, when he attempted to take his own life for the loss and death of his sisters. A young man's failure to protect those he loved. It would be interesting to see just what would unfold, when he was forced to battle them both.

## *Hells Gate Casino*

Trina watched the man at the slot machine closely. The waitress was doing her best to fend off the pinches and pokes, but he was relentless. When he reached around the woman's middle and pulled her into his lap, Trina made her way quickly to them.

"All right, I think you have had enough fun for one evening, big guy."

"Now, officer, me and the little lady here are just getting acquainted." He looked at her then and she rolled her eyes at the way he assessed her. "But if you wanna play, I would be willing to trade."

"Come on, let her go." Trina reached for the waitress and pulled her from his lap. "The only play allowed in here is the slots."

The drunken fool stood and pulled Trina against him. From the corner of her eye, she watched the waitress hurry away. With relief, Trina saw she ran straight to another officer. This could get ugly.

"I bet you have a slot just begging to be played with." He leaned into her face and Trina had to bite back the bile rising inside of her. "What do you say, honey? Want me to play with your slot?"

His hand reached for her breast and she decided enough was enough. There was drunk, and then there was drunk and stupid.

"I don't think so." She caught his hand and bent his thumb back. He howled and she pressed harder. He was stronger than she anticipated.



"Bitch." he snarled, and his free hand connected with her cheek. "Damn teases, all of you. Get a man going and think you can just walk away."

"Alright, that's it." Trina snapped, and brought the palm of her hand up with just enough force to not only cause him to let go, but more than likely break his nose. "You wanna play hard ball, well come on. Let's see what a night in the jail house does for you."

"You broke my nose," he cried out, taking the rag she grabbed off a passing waitress.

"I'll break more than that if you don't knock it off."

Trina applied the plastic cuffs used by the casino, but she cuffed his hands in front of him. He was in shock and someone needed to hold the rag to his face, but she wasn't about to. Thankfully, Carter, a fellow officer, had already phoned the county and a patrolman was waiting.

"Damn Trina, what the hell did you do?" Carter asked when he saw the bloody rag on the man's face.

"I helped him sober up a little."

She briefed the patrol officer, and watched as the man was loaded into the car. She really hated to get physical. The man had been drunk, but she just wouldn't abide abuse of any form.

"Ike will want a full report on this one." He noticed the swelling on her cheek. "Are you okay? He didn't hurt you did he?"

"No, I've had worse."

"Well, everything seems calm now. Take a break and fill out your report."

"Your sure?"

"I can handle things for a few minutes."

"Okay, I'll sit in the lounge and have a coke while I fill it out. I wont be long."

Carter watched her go and turned back to survey the room. Another hour and the shift would change. Ike and his wife would be in by then. He knew Trina was in the right, and Ike would understand. But damn, he wished he had been there before she got

smacked. The woman could handle herself that was for sure, but he hated seeing that mark on her cheek.

A cold chill ran up Carter's spine and he stood still, slowly scanning the crowd. Something wasn't right. An ache slowly made its way behind his eyes. The people in the room seemed to be in a trance, walking out the casino doors without looking back.

"Carter?" The voice seemed far away. He blinked to try and focus. "Carter?"

He turned quickly, and looked into the eyes of Ike. His wife, Brillasse, regarded him with a knowing expression.

"What?"

"Are you okay?"

"Fine. What are you two doing here so early?"

"Because my gut tells me we should be."

The three stood together, surveying the room. The air seemed thick and filled with a current of electricity. A bright light began to form in the center of the large gaming room, and as it grew, Brillasse pulled her blade.

"What is that?"

"Just be ready for anything, Carter."

The light flashed bright and Carter gasped as the pain in his head increased. He dropped his pistol and clasped his head in his hands, fighting the pain. His eyes watered and his teeth slammed together.

"Carter, what's wrong with you?" Ike asked, trying to watch the light and his officer.

"He is a psychic." Brillasse answered. "Whatever is coming through that portal, it's affecting him."

"Well, shit. Why the hell didn't I know he was a psychic?"

"Don't start with me, Ike Iverson. I had no idea myself until now. He is good at hiding it from the world."

"Will he be alright?"

"I guess we'll know as soon as the portal opens completely."

The light began to dim, and the silhouette of a man was taking form. Brillasse gasped and lowered her dagger.

"It can't be."

"Brillasse? What the hell?" Ike caught her as she swayed. "Baby, what's going on?"

"It can't be. He's dead."

"What? Who? Woman, talk to me."

"Blayde." She swallowed and rubbed her palm over her heart, as if trying to erase an ache. Her eyes misted, and she looked harder at the man. "My brother."

"Brother?"

"Please, Ike. Not now." She took a deep breath. "We can talk later, but for now I need to understand this."

She pulled from her husband, and slowly walked toward the man. He was so tall; he would tower over most men she knew. His raven hair matched the dark eyes that seemed to miss nothing. The closer she got to him, the greater the feeling in her chest. The raven on his shoulder watched her, and something told her to stop and go no closer.

His leather vest opened down the front, and she could clearly see the scar over his heart.

"Blayde?"

His eyes narrowed and she could see he was trying to understand what was passing between them. It mattered not that he had been gone for decades, thought long dead by his sisters. The bond was still there, but he seemed to not recognize it.

"I know you." His voice was deep, and spoke of the rage and the power rolling inside of him. His eyes narrowed on Ike, who was approaching slowly. The raven on his shoulder began to hiss, and he stroked its head gently. "Easy Gustavo, my friend. We are in no danger here."

"Is it really you?" Brillasse took another step, and jumped back when she met the tip of the sword that he seemed to pull from thin air. Out of habit, she drew her own.

Metal clashed as she took her stance. Still, his eyes seemed to look inside of her.

"Who are you, warrior woman? You have much strength and skill."

"You should know. You trained me in the art of the sword."

Slowly, he lowered his weapon. Out of respect, she did as well. His eyes looked behind her, and he narrowed his gaze.

"If your guard dog values his life, he will not take one step closer."

"Ike, please. For once just trust me and don't move. Make sure Carter is not hurt."

"The mind bender is well." Blayde returned his eyes to hers. "There will be a battle, and we will meet on that field. Why the thought of your death pains me, I can not say."

"I am your sister, Brillasse. Do you not remember me?" His eyes narrowed, and she took a slow step forward. "Roveena and I thought you long dead."

His eyes widened slightly at the mention of their sister. Then a cloud covered his dark eyes, and Brillasse knew this had to be Hades doing.

"I died a long time ago."

A movement to his right drew his attention. Brillasse wasn't quick enough to stop Trina from walking right into the middle of the situation.

"Where did everyone go? Did you show up and declare it a holiday?" She laughed, and stood in front of Brillasse. "If this is about the drunk, I am sorry, but he had it coming."

As if she just noticed the look in Brillasse's eyes, Trina slowly turned, and met the dark eyes of the shifter.

"Oh my, but you're a big one." Her head craned back to see his face.

Trina licked her lips as she sized up the leather-clad hunk before her.

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He was at least six foot four and had muscles that would make any man envious. His hair was so black, resting across his face and shoulders, that it carried a blue streak. It was his eyes that held her captive. They were black as sin. She licked her lips again,

wishing she could commit all kinds of sin with this one. Then her attention was drawn to the sword in his hand, and something inside told her she had really screwed up.

Slowly, she turned back to face Brillasse, her eyes wide and not missing the play of emotions on the other woman's face.

"Someone please tell me this is a new act for the casino, and I just walked in and screwed up the show." Her tone and expression were hopeful.

She gasped, loosing her breath when she was suddenly gripped from behind and hauled up against a chest that may as well have been bricks. She struggled, and the arm tightened, cutting off her air.

"Let me go, or I swear you will regret it."

"Cease your struggles. It will do you no good," his voice whispered in her ear, and as his hair caressed her face. The fight left her and she went limp against him. "I can read your thoughts, little warrior, and it will do you no good."

Her body stiffened again, and she glared up into his face.

"Do not fight him Trina." Brillasse said, watching her brother's face. "I don't think he will hurt you."

"You don't think? Well hell, that sure takes a load off my mind," she snapped. "Could someone please tell me just what is going on? And could you *please* ease up on your grip, and maybe set my feet on the floor? It's not like I can go very far."

Though he never took his eyes off Brillasse, his grip did lighten. The raven nuzzled her hair and she shrieked.

"Get that flea ridden creature off of me."

His eyes narrowed, and then he spoke a word softly to his bird. It began to sing, and the portal began to open.

"Blayde, release her. You can't take her into the underworld."

"I can if I so choose." He stepped back until he was engulfed in the light. "She is coming with me, and I know you will follow her. We will meet again on the fields of Hellishiam. Then we will know who the true warrior is."

Trina's cry of outrage was silenced as the portal closed, and then all was quiet. Brillasse fell to her knees. The pain in her chest lightened, though her heart ached at the knowledge that she would have to battle her brother.

"Baby, are you all right?" Ike knelt beside her. "What's happening?"

"Damn Hades! He will stop at nothing. Give me demons any day of the week, but not this. Oh, please not this."

"Brillasse, talk to me."

"He is my brother, Ike. My brother." Tears gathered in her eyes. "He was thought dead, long ago. I grieved for him."

"I had no idea you even had a brother."

"Roveena and I agreed not to ever talk about Blayde. His death, or his reported death, almost destroyed us." She took a deep breath. "I must speak with Persephone."

"Let me get Carter out of here."

At the mention of his name, Brillasse turned to the man on the floor. His eyes were open, and he lay still, breathing deeply. Blood dried on his nose, and he looked pale, but otherwise he was fine.

"Carter, are you okay?" she asked as she moved to his side. "What happened to you?"

"I'll be fine. Just give me a second."

"Why did the portal cause you such pain?"

"Okay, number one, it didn't. It was the man inside it that got to me." He took a deep breath and rolled to his feet. "Two, my problem is nothing compared to what just happened. What the hell just happened anyway?"

"An even longer story," Ike said as he handed Brillasse a cool cloth. "Okay honey, call the pretty lady and let's see what's going on."

Brillasse nodded and stood, and then closed her eyes. Her lips moved, and then her head lowered and she was silent.

Carter groaned as another light took shape, and prepared for the pain. It didn't come. He was filled with a sense of peace and had the urge to touch the light. Ike

caught his hand and silently shook his head. When the light faded, Carter caught his breath at the beauty of the woman before them. Brillasse knelt on one knee.

"Oh, for the love of the gods, Brillasse. When will you stop doing that?" The woman walked over and smiled at Ike, touching his face gently. "Get your wife off of the floor before I zap her with a bolt of energy."

"Yes, ma'am." Ike smiled and pulled his wife to her feet. "You know it drives her nuts, baby. Why you keep it up is beyond me."

"She is a goddess and deserves respect."

They both looked over to see Carter with his mouth wide open, watching the lady.

"Carter, close your mouth." Ike walked over to his side. "This, my friend, is the lady Persephone."

"Oh. My. God."

"Goddess, Carter." Persephone smiled, and traced her hand over his features. "You are something rare and special Carter. I have a feeling we will meet again, many times."

"Persephone?" Brillasse stood to her side. "It was Blayde."

"I know, dearest. I know." The lady reached out and pulled Brillasse to her. "I am sorry, my little warrior. I had my suspicions, but never truly knew for sure and did not want to give you false hope."

"How is this possible?"

"Hades. That is how." She sighed. "However, I sense Blayde is fighting within himself now. Not only for what you brought to life inside of him, but the girl as well."

"Is she safe?" Ike asked, putting his arm around his wife.

"I believe she will be well." Persephone looked to Carter. "What do you think?"

Carter stared for a moment, and let his thoughts settle. He had felt so much pain, and then the feelings rolled through him, but they were the other man's feelings he had felt.

"I don't think he will harm her, he felt attraction for her and it puzzled him." Carter said as he paced through his thoughts. "He is like me, psychic, and yet he is more."

"Oh, yes, he is a lot more." Persephone sighed. "He is a shifter."

"A what? If Hades created him, why is he not demon?" Ike was confused.

"He is anything he wants to be, and he is powerful."

"How powerful?" Ike asked and pulled Brillasse to him. "He is to fight the sisters."

"This is Hades way of getting back at me. In the process, he will strike at you." Persephone looked deep in thought for a moment. "I think you may need a little help here."

Persephone raised her hands above her head and closed her eyes. Again the portal shimmered, and gold flecks of light sparked across the room.

A leg appeared, and then another woman stepped from the light. Carter caught his breath as his knees buckled and his chest constricted.

She was tall, at least six foot, and her long blonde hair was braided down her back, its base resting behind her knees. A gold band rested across her brow, and her eyes, the color of the greenest sea, settled on him briefly before moving to her lady. Leather, the color of gold graced her body, the pants fit snug against her shapely form. Her blouse opened at the back, and held in place by only a band of gold around her neck. The woman was beautiful beyond compare. She was also strapped with weapons.

"My lady, Persephone. You called and I came." Her mellow voice soothed Carter's nerves, and he relaxed as he regained his feet.

"Andrete, my huntress. Stand, and greet your companions."

"The Huntress?" Brillasse questioned. The note of worry did not go unnoticed. "You have brought the huntress for Blayde?"

"Brillasse, my hope is that Andrete will protect you. She will not kill Blayde unless there is no other way."

Persephone glanced at the four of them, smiling her serene smile.

"You must all go through the portal. Roveena and Tony will need you in the coming battle. You must not allow Tavoli to help you, unless it is absolutely necessary. He is newly changed, and he is still healing. Carter, you must go as well." When Brillasse began to argue, Persephone raised her hand. "Andrete will die for any of you, as she would for me. Carter has his own role to play in this, and you will need him."



Andreeste, if it can be done, I ask you spare Blayde. But if he can not be reasoned with, kill him swiftly."

"It shall be done, My Lady. What of Helix?"

"Hades' general can be dealt with as any of you see fit. The demon is pure evil."

"Will Hades interfere?" Ike asked, taking in this news with a sick feeling.

"I will deal with, Hades. Now go, my warriors." The portal opened with a word from the goddess. "Be swift, be vigilant, and be safe."

Like that she was gone, and one by one they all stepped into the portal. When next they opened their eyes, they were in Hellishiam. And a battle was just beginning.

## *Hellishiam*

Trina watched the man as he stood at the entrance to a cave, looking out over the land below them. He had been easy enough with her, and he had tried to make her comfortable, but she was having a very hard time believing what had happened. One minute she was drooling over the leather-clad man, and the next she was sitting in a cave. Not counting the bright light and the way he seemed to know just what she was always thinking. She felt close to tears and hated that. Trina was afraid, and she really hated that.

Blayde? Was that his name? He was handsome; she would give him that. Sexy as hell actually described him better. His ass in those leather jeans was worth looking at, that was a plus. For some reason, she couldn't find it in her to be angry. He had issues, that was for sure, but she could feel a pain in him that he fought to ignore.

He turned to look at her, and she blushed. There was no way he could have guessed her thoughts, but he smiled and let her know he had.

"That's really not cool, you know," she said as she stood, stretching her muscles. "I don't know how you're doing it, and not sure I want to know, but my thoughts are private."

"Your thoughts are of me. So how are they private?"

"Well, because you're invading my mind and that's a private place." She looked around him at the land below. "Where is your pet anyway?"

"Gustavo is hunting."

"Hunting?"

"For his meal."

"I thought ravens were smaller, but he is a big one, much like his owner."

"You do not fear me?"

"Should I? I mean, I am here and dealing with things the best way I know how. Would you rather have a whimpering female screaming and crying, or one who will try to face her death with a little fight in her?" She was rambling, she knew. She did that when she was nervous. "I mean, that's why you brought me here, right? You intend to kill me for whatever reason, and I have no place to run or hide. God knows I can't beat you with my fists." She was pacing quickly, and was shocked when he grabbed her arm, spinning her into his body. His one arm held her to him, while his hand brushed her hair away from her face.

"My plan is not to kill you, Trina."

"It's not?" Her breath left her lungs as she looked into his eyes. She licked her lips, and noticed his eyes flared at the movement. "Then why am I here, Blayde?"

"Say it again," he demanded, pulling her even closer.

"What?"

"My name, say it again."

He was going to kiss her. She could see it in his eyes and feel it inside herself. If she said his name, it would be all over for her.

"Blayde."

His lips caught hers and he tasted his name as she whispered it a second time. His tongue swept inside her mouth, as she opened to him. Her hands wrapped around his neck and she returned his kiss. His mouth was demanding. When he lifted his head, she whimpered, not wanting to lose the contact.

"I know this feeling you have awakened in me, but I can not name it."

"Lust? Desire?"

"It feels as though I have been living in darkness, and am now walking into the light. But it's your light that draws me."

"I have no idea what you just said, but I liked it."

She pulled his lips to hers again and nipped his lower lip, drawing it into her mouth. He liked what she was doing, his hands tightening on her said as much. Her body was on fire. She had not wanted a man since her first experience in college. But now her body was coming to life and apart just from the taste of him. He was so much taller than she, that when he straightened with her in his arms, her feet left the floor. She wrapped them about his waist.

"Why did you take me?" she asked when she came up for air. Her legs tightened around him and he groaned. "Why did you bring me here?"

"I know not, other than the feeling of needing you near." He nuzzled her neck. "I will not hurt you, Trina."

"I believe you, Blayde. I don't know why, but I do."

Blayde kissed her again, and the memories of another time and place filtered through his mind. He knew what lovemaking was; he just needed to remember. His body was alive with these memories, and he wanted nothing more than to make love to Trina. He remembered the warmth of a woman's body, the feel of hands on his skin, a warm mouth on his cock. But he knew with the woman he held now, it would change him forever. He welcomed it.

Carrying her, holding her close, Blayde retreated deeper into the cave. Once he entered the larger chamber, he flicked his wrist and a fire glowed in its center. Trina gasped and watched as with another flick of his wrist, a blanket appeared beside it.

"That's a rather handy trick. What else can you do?"

He smiled, and the next thing she knew, she was naked in his arms, her clothes piled in a corner, along with her pistol. Another heat started deep in her groin when she realized he was just as naked as she.

"Impressive." She smiled and wiggled her hips until she felt his cock nudge her backside. She lowered her legs and he allowed her feet to touch the floor. Trina stepped

back and looked at him, gasping at his size. Reaching out, she wrapped her fingers around his thick shaft, or what she could of it anyway. "Very impressive."

Taking her hands, he walked her to the blanket beside the fire, and knelt before her. He nudged her belly and nipped the soft skin there, soothing it with his tongue. Her hands in his hair encouraged him, and he let instinct guide him.

Looking up into her face, he noted again on her beauty. Her red hair was braided, and he had the urge to set it free. With a thought, it unraveled and fell around her shoulders. Her green eyes spoke to him, and he admired the strength he felt in her body.

"You are beautiful, Trina."

She had no time to respond as the heat from his mouth flowed across her clit, his tongue lapping at her. Her hands fisted in his hair. The thoughts on of his magic left her mind as desire took a firm hold and would not let go. Her knees buckled, and he caught her to him as she fell. He laid her down gently on the blanket.

"No more, Blayde. Just come to me, fill me."

"You are so small. I do not want to hurt you."

"Please."

Supporting his weight on his elbows, he laid between her thighs, as his cock sought entrance to her body. Blayde leaned down and took one nipple deep into his mouth, as her body arched into his. When she took his face between her hands and brought his mouth to hers, he knew he was lost.

Trina could not believe her actions. All she knew was that she wanted him desperately. Her body was in full control and she had no intentions to fight it. She may look like a wanton, but it felt so right. Like she had been waiting for him all a long.

He pushed into her slowly, and though her body was ready for him, her muscles protested, clamping around him. He pushed again, with a little more force, and she gasped. Blayde stilled, allowing her to adjust to half of him inside of her body.

"Am I hurting you, Trina?"

"Only a little. Please don't stop."

He reached between them, and placed his thumb over her aching clit, rubbing in small circles. She was swollen and on the verge of climax. When she cried out and bucked beneath him, he surged into her with one powerful stroke. He was buried in her tight heat, and fought with himself not to take her roughly. He wanted to pound into her, and hear her scream his name.

"Do not move, Trina," he warned as her hips began to test the fullness inside of her.

"Why?"

"I am fighting for control now, and do not want to hurt you."

She looked into his eyes, and saw the truth. He was on the edge, and the thought excited her. She knew he could read her mind, so she sent him the image of her taking him into her mouth, and stroking him with her tongue until he cried out from the pleasure.

His eyes flared and he growled low in his throat. His hips jerked into her, and she again cried out at the pleasure.

He began to move slowly, and Trina thought she would die from the need flowing through her. She wanted him hard, fast and deep. She smiled and sent him another image. She wanted him to loose control. She wasn't afraid.

In her mind, she pictured him riding her roughly, pulling her hair and nipping her shoulder in his passion. She felt him pulse deep inside of her, and then he gave her what she wanted.

Blayde pulled slowly from her body, and surged forward with such force, that her body came off the ground. She wrapped her legs about his hips, clutching his forearms as he held her to him by her shoulders. With each stroke she cried out, unable to speak, though in her mind she screamed for him not to stop.

"Is this what you wanted, Trina?" he panted in her ear. "Later, we will do this slowly, but for now, I need you too much."

Her climax was building, and it felt like a searing heat in her belly. All she could do was hold on and hope he could ease her. She felt his hands in her hair, and the rough

pull on her scalp as he drew her head back, arching her neck. The fire inside of her built higher, and then his teeth closed over the spot between her neck and shoulder.

Trina came in a rush of heat, sparks and soothing relief. He felt her release cover him, coating him, and he cried out as he erupted deep inside of her. Over and over he pulsed, and the feel of his release triggered another in her. Her nails bit into his back, and they both shook from the intensity of all they shared.

Blayde collapsed onto her, and closed his eyes to the feel of her hands caressing his back, and the slight tremors coursing through her body. In this small woman's arms, all the hate and anger seemed to leave him. He did not want to give her up. If anything was for certain, he would die before he allowed harm to come to her.

He rolled from her, and lay on his side, pulling her into his body. He felt so human right now. He had forgotten what that really felt like. He frowned, as other memories started to close in on him. They were coming fast, and he sat up quickly, holding his head and shaking. Trina, surprised at the abrupt change in him, sat up, and watched him.

"Blayde? What is it?" She reached out to him, but he cringed away from her. "What is it? You're scaring me."

"I am sorry, Trina. I do not understand my mind right now."

"Tell me what it is and let me help." She pulled his hands from his face and wrapped her arms around him. He lay against her breast. "At least let me try."

"Images, so many images are running through my mind. They are memories and I can not sort them all out." He closed his eyes as she ran her hands through his hair. "I remember my sisters, Trina. I remember them, and I was sent to destroy them."

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"It really is Blayde." Roveena paced the large sitting room of her home. Tony watched her, worry marring his features. "What are we going to do? I do not think I could kill my brother."

"Maybe it will not come to that, Lady Roveena," Andreste said quietly.

"Please, just Roveena. Is there something I have not been told?"

"If your brother must be destroyed, you will not bare that burden."

Roveena stopped mid stride, and turned on Andreste. The meaning of why the huntress was among them sinking in deep.

"You are to destroy my brother?" Roveena advanced.

Brillasse moved to grab her sister, knowing she was upset.

"Roveena listen to me. Andreste is here for our protection. She can not defend herself against you." She took her sister's face in her hands, and looked into her eyes.

"She will only act against Blayde if he is intent on harming us."

"I do not care."

"Well I do, Roveena." Tony stepped in and gave her a look that caused her eyes to lower.

"He is my brother, Tony."

"And you carry our child."

As the news traveled through the room, all was quiet, and then they were talking all at once.

"Tony, that news could have waited," she snapped.

"Waited? Until you get yourself hurt or killed? I don't think so, love."

She glared, but said nothing else. Andreste walked slowly forward and knelt at Roveena's feet.

"I give you my word, Lady Roveena. I will only act if you or your child are in danger."

"Oh by the goddess, I see now why Persephone hates this. Get up, Andreste." Roveena sighed. "I am Roveena. Just Roveena."

"I am only being respectful."

"Yes, I know. But the thought of a woman bowing to me is absurd. Not to mention one who can fight like you." At her puzzled look Roveena laughed. "I know about you, and your strengths. You are a warrior. But a warrior with a heart."



Suddenly, Carter dropped to his knees, and held his head in his hands. Blood trickled from his nose, and his eyes rolled back.

"Carter?" Brillasse knelt beside him, and after hesitating, Tony allowed Roveena to go to him as well.

"He is psychic," Roveena said, watching him. "Brillasse, hold his hands."

Roveena placed her hands over Carter's eyes, and he calmed. She paid no heed to the blood rolling from his face onto her hands; she just calmly sat and gave him relief.

"He is more than a psychic. He is a bender." Roveena spoke to all in the room, though her eyes remained on Carter. "Though benders can be lethal, I am willing to bet his mind rejects evil, and that is why he reacts the way he does."

"You mean he draws on the good around him, and is able to use that for a purpose?"

"Yes, Brillasse." She kept her tone calm, soothing. "Tony, send a scout, preferably a mist rider, and have them check the area. Something evil is close, and Carter has sensed it."

Slowly Carter opened his eyes, and groaned. He hated it when that happened. It made him look weak.

"Better now?" Roveena asked, allowing him to pull from her.

"Yes. I am sorry." He looked around him. "Something is coming, and coming fast."

"Tony has already sent out a rider. We will know soon enough."

Andreste knelt on the floor beside Carter, and touched his face. Her eyes held a curiosity in them, and she smiled.

"You are a warrior."

"Hardly. I am just a freak who sees way too much sometimes."

"When the time is right, you will see."

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"What do you mean, you were sent to destroy them?" Trina asked softly, stroking his hair and holding him. "Who sent you?"

"Long ago, I gazed upon the bodies of my sisters. It was a time of war and unrest. Many had lost their loved ones. I had no way of knowing the goddess would take them into her keeping." He pulled away and gazed into the fire. "I felt as though I had failed them. I fought and killed so many men, but was unable to save those I held dear. In my grief, I threw myself upon my blade."

Trina knew it sounded crazy, but she believed him. Her heart went out to him. She sat silently, waiting for him to continue.

"As life left me, Hades himself was by my side. He offered me the chance to live and avenge those I loved. I agreed to serve him, not knowing it would lead to this. I know now that he tried to erase my memories. But I remember. I remember who I was, and I know what I am now. I am the shifter. Created not for revenge, but for Hades' game."

"Can we reverse this?"

"I would have to die once again, and be reborn." He looked into her eyes before continuing. "But what I am now would let none close enough to kill me. I am cursed to this life."

"Are you saying that there is not another in this world who could best you?"

"The half of me that is shifter would not allow it. It would have to trust, and I am not sure that half of me ever could."

She watched the play of emotions on his face, and knew that if there were a way to help him, she would do so. For now, she would ease his troubles the only way she knew how.

He jumped at the feel of her hand on his chest, pushing him onto the blanket. Her mind registered the fact that, even though he said it could not happen, he trusted her. Both the man and the shifter trusted her.

Trina kissed his lips and worked her way lower to his chest. He gasped at the feel of her teeth on his nipple, and moaned when she tongued the ache. She traveled lower,

nipping his belly and loving the way his muscles tightened at her touch. He was so strong, but seemed so gentle with her in her arms. When her warm breath caressed his cock, his hips arched, his body silently asking for what it wanted.

Her tongue tested him, tasting him. When her mouth closed over him he buried a hand in her hair, not wanting the sweet ache to end. Trina moaned at his taste, he was addictive. She swirled her tongue and took him as deep as she could, loving the sounds of pleasure coming from him.

“More. Take more of me, Trina.”

She relaxed her throat and took more of him. Blayde began to rock his hips, watching as he moved in and out of her mouth. Her hand gently clasped his cock, making sure he didn't thrust too deeply until she knew she could take all of him. Her free hand clasped his balls, learning their size and texture. She could feel him swell against her tongue, and he released her hair.

“Stop,” he panted, gently pulling from her mouth. “Come to me, Trina.”

She climbed up his body, licking and kissing all the way. When her mouth met his, he kissed her deeply and placed his cock at her heated entrance. He tongued her mouth as his hips surged up, embedding himself inside her. Trina's scream was lost in him as he drank her in.

She ground her pelvis against him, and pulled her lips from his. Watching his face, as she leaned back and took even more of him into her. He placed his hands on her hips, giving her control and letting her set the pace. Her slow movements were driving him insane. Then her pace changed as her excitement grew. He watched, in fascination as her hands caressed her breasts, pinching her nipples until they rose from her body. Her breasts were perfect. He reached up, holding one in his large hand, offering it comfort.

His hand returned to her hips, as he held her in place, making her stop her movement. Slowly, he eased one of her legs over until she turned, and when her back was to him, he eased the other leg around until she straddled him again. He thrust up

into her, her back against his chest, and he played with her breasts the way he wanted to. His teeth nipped her neck and she was panting, begging for more.

"I need more of you, Blayde."

He knew it was her rising excitement that made her want it rough. A little more and he would give it to her. Her mind was sending images that he could not ignore for long. He thrust into her in a steady pace, loving the way she cried out and tried to take more of him.

Then he held her tightly, rising until she was on her knees, and he knelt between her thighs. Looking down at their bodies connected, one being for this moment in time, he felt a little more of the ice melt from around his heart. If he died in the coming battle, he would have no regrets.

Blayde moved within her forcefully, wrapping his hand in her hair and pulling just enough to tip her head back. He knew she loved that. Her body clenched his tightly as her climax took her breath just as he shouted his own release. Still he moved, desperate to make it last, and she came again around him.

He lay over her, panting as he gathered his thoughts. Just like that, she made him forget, but like all good things, it had to end.

The cry of Gustavo echoed through the cave, and Blayde jumped to his feet, willing his clothes onto his body, then her own flashed onto her body as well.

"What is it? Your pet worried?"

"No, he is warning us of the danger."

"Danger?"

"Come Trina. There is not much time."

She rose to her feet and swayed. Her legs felt like jell-o. He grabbed her hand and rushed to the mouth of the cave.

Trina gasped at the beauty before her. Earlier, she paid no attention to her surroundings. Now, she took in the lush green hills and valleys. A sparkling river divided two areas of forest. She looked closer, and the river also separated her friends from an army of men.

"What's happening?"

"The battle will begin soon."

"Blayde, look at them. Your sisters and what help they have will not stand a chance against all those men." She turned to him. "I must go and help."

"No." He pulled her to him. "No matter what happens, you are to remain here."

"And what will you do?"

"What I must."

"You still intend to fight them? They are your family!" she shouted and fought his hold. "You are not like those men, Blayde. I know it."

"I do not want to see you hurt, Trina."

"Then I suggest you choose your side, now. Because I intend to help my friends."

"Do not do this."

"I truly hope you see what you will lose should you not fight for what you know in your heart is right." She looked back at him one more time. "But if you decide to fight them, you will be fighting me as well."

Trina fled down the side of the hill, not stopping until she reached the clearing, and had her first real look at a real life nightmare.

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"Trina, are you okay?" Brillasse rushed to her side. "He didn't harm you?"

"No, I am fine. But Brillasse, things are not as they seem."

"How so?"

"He remembers. He remembers you and Roveena."

"This is good, right?"

"I'm not sure yet. He's torn." She twisted her hands together. "He's fighting against who he is now and who he was."

"Well, we can not worry over that now. Should things get real bad, you make for the trees. Roveena will open the portal for you from there."

"Where is she?"

"She can not fight. She carries her first child. A miracle in itself."

"Well, I can fight and I will not run." She turned and faced the foe across the river.

A shadow crawled its way to the head of the army, and slowly began to take on a solid form. Trina gasped as she looked into the hard eyes of Blayde, his raven beside him. How could he turn on them, on her?

For one moment his facade slipped, and Trina saw the man she had given her body to, as well as her heart.

Gustavo shrieked and took flight. Trina hid her face, as the bird seemed to head directly for her, only to land gently on her shoulder. She looked at the bird, and in his eyes she saw Blayde. The raven was a piece of him.

Carter walked toward Trina, and Gustavo hissed, a warning to the man. Trina shrugged, and her eyes once again sought Blayde.

"Who is the man ordering Blayde about?" Carter asked, giving up on trying to figure out the bird.

"That would be Helix." Andreste said, as she stood tall and unafraid. "I feel I will have to kill him this day. He is pure evil." She said this like she was offering tea, calm and quiet.

"Something is wrong." Carter focused on the two men, and the pain started to throb in his head. He tried to focus on the good surrounding him, but the evil was leaking through. "There is much hate between the two, and I don't feel as if it is coming from Blayde."

Trina watched as Blayde turned to walk away. She screamed his name as Helix raised his sword. As if in slow motion, he smiled at her, just before he fell, Helix's sword buried in his back.

"You bastard!" Trina shouted. She rushed forward, jumping into the water, her pistol aimed and firing at the General. In a flash, Blayde vanished, only to reappear before her, hauling her back through the water and onto dry land. Gustavo again landed on her shoulder.

"Relax, little warrior, I told you. My other half will not allow it."

"But he stabbed you, and you fell."

"Yes, but my shifter half will not allow it. It does not trust the General, and therefore, shifted to mist as the blade pierced me."

Lost in thought, she ignored the conversation around her. There was one person the shifter trusted, and she guarded her thoughts well. If Blayde was correct, there was only one person who could get close enough to the shifter to break the curse.

Taking a deep breath, she concentrated on the here and the now. Blayde remained close to her, and kept the others between them.

"Blayde, do you remember me?" Brillasse asked, slowly walking toward her brother.

"I am trying. My memories are still scattered, but for now, I wish to fight with you and not against."

Andreste approached and stood before him. Her eyes were kind, though they missed nothing.

"I do not wish to fight you, shifter. Should you harm my charges in anyway, it will be a fight to the death."

"I have no desire to kill you, huntress. Should you try me, you will die. You know this."

"Yes, that is so. However, you will fall as well."

Trina stepped between them. "Alright, enough. You are both big billy bad asses, and we should all tremble in your presence." Trina almost laughed at the look on their faces. "Can we please get back to the matter at hand?"

Andreste moved away and stood beside Carter, who was trying not to laugh himself.

"Trina?" Blayde called her attention to him. "What is a big billy bad ass?"

"Oh Blayde, ask me later if we live through this."

"Where is Roveena?" Blayde looked all around him. "I remember her most."

"She is with her mate, Blayde. She can't fight this battle." Ike answered as if he had known him all along. "She carries your niece or nephew."

"Who are you?"

"I am Ike, mate to Brillasse." His eyes twinkled. "Think of it this way, Blayde. You were brought into this world on a choice; I married into it. Maybe we're both a little more crazy than is healthy."

Blayde looked at Trina and cocked his brow. She smiled, but he read the fear in her eyes. Before he could comfort her, the fight began.

Staying close to Trina, Blayde fought, watching for the General as he did so. Though he worried for his little warrior, she was a fighter. His sister surprised him. Her skill with a blade would rival any he had known. He remembered that now, as he watched her fight. He stopped, staring at her, letting the memory wash through him.

She had been so young, but determined to fight. She wanted to protect herself and her sister when he had to go away for a battle. Blayde had been hard on her, knowing it would force her to drive herself. Many times she had almost taken him.

It seemed the battle lasted hours, when in truth, only minutes. The huntress had taken many, and he admired her strength.

"Blayde, snap out of it!" Trina yelled, doing her best to push the demons back. The others were killing their foe, but no matter how hard she tried, they would keep coming. "A little help would be nice."

His eyes snapped to hers, then and rage poured through him. Shifting to mist, he circled the demons surrounding Trina, and they all dropped. Unlike Brillasse's kills, these did not go up in a blue flame. Blayde's kills simply disintegrated.

"Are you alright, Trina?"

"Yes." She glanced around her then. "Where are they?"

"The demons have fled to regroup." Brillasse panted as she glanced at her brother. "Helix will return."

Carter began to run toward Trina, blood running from his nose as he shouted for her to get down. He was the only one who saw it coming.



Trina looked surprised as she dropped to her knees, a blade buried in her middle.

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"What the hell happened?" Tony asked as Blayde carried her into the sitting room. Roveena approached, but Gustavo began to beat his wings and hiss.

"Blayde, I am a healer. I can help her. Please call off your little protector."

"Enough, Gustavo. Let her pass." He was surprised at the way his pet protected Trina. "He is not to ever be taken lightly."

"I can see that." Roveena knelt beside Trina. "What happened?"

"I have no idea." Brillasse said as she hovered near by. "Only Carter saw the danger, but then it was too late."

"What did you see, Carter?"

"I really can't say. It flashed in my mind, the pain was blinding, and then she went down."

Blayde stroked her hair, wishing she would wake up.

"I know what has happened," he whispered.

"Care to share with the rest of us?" Ike asked, his frustration evident.

"There is another shifter. Hades did not truly trust me to do his bidding, and sent another shifter. He sent him for Trina, as a way to hurt me."

"I felt the presence of a shifter, but I believed it to be you, Blayde." Andreeste said, tears forming in her eyes. "I have failed my lady."

"No, huntress, you have not failed your lady." Blayde said as he watched Roveena work on Trina. "But I have failed mine."

Roveena removed the dagger, and started to pass it to Blayde, confused when he vanished and reappeared across the room.

"What in the world?" she asked, clearly not understanding. "Did you think I would stab you?"

"No, Roveena, he did not." Andreste said as she took the dagger from her. "His shifter side did however, and took control of the man."

With one last look at her brother, Roveena returned to healing Trina. Andreste placed the dagger far from Trina, and Blayde returned to her side.

"What changed you, Blayde?" Carter asked, watching the man with his friend. "I feel it inside you, the good."

"She did," His touch was gentle as he stroked her hair. "She opened the gates to my soul, and helped me sort out the past."

"You love her," Carter whispered, feeling the emotion inside the man.

"Is that what this is?"

"I may have trouble with the bad, but I know the good, Blayde, and what you feel is love."

Roveena sat back and opened her eyes; Tony was beside her in an instant.

"Is she all right?" Brillasse asked as she joined him. "I offer my service."

"No, I will revive her. She is only tired. Besides, with the baby, it is best she only take from me. That is why I will not fight. She needs me."

Trina opened her eyes and looked around the room.

"Holy shit that hurt." She sat up, lifting her shirt and examining her middle. "What the hell?"

"It is all right, Trina. Roveena healed you." Brillasse was quick to reassure her.

"She did? How?"

"By magic."

"I'm still me, though. Right?"

"Of course you are."

"Blayde, are you okay?"

"I am well, little warrior. Forgive me for not protecting you."

Trina stood and swayed, but Blayde was there to catch her. She leaned into him, feeling tired and sore.

"Is there a place she may rest?"

"Of course. Just up the stairs there and the first room on the left." Tony said from his place before the fire, holding his wife to him.

Blayde lifted her in his arms and left without another word. He carried his burden as if she was the most important thing in his life.

"How is this possible?" Brillasse asked, but to no one in particular. "I thought he was evil."

"Many things change, Brillasse." Andreste said as she watched him leave. "If there is one thing you should know more than any other, it's that love is a greater power in itself."

Ike wrapped his arms around his wife, both agreeing silently.

Carter eyed the mysterious raven that slept soundlessly on the window seal.

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"Blayde, come and lay beside me."

He turned from the window and walked slowly to the bed. When he sat beside her, she took his hand in hers.

"I am so glad you didn't choose the wrong side."

"You could have been killed."

"But I wasn't."

Trina raised her hand to his face and pulled him to her for a kiss. It was sweet, not so like the passionate kiss they shared earlier, but each could feel it lingering under the surface.

"Lay beside me, Blayde. Just hold me, please."

He stretched out beside her, and pulled her to his chest. With a thought, their clothes vanished and a soft comforter enveloped them in its warmth.

"This is nice." She pressed her cheek to his chest. "I can hear your heart beating."

"Can you? Is it a strong beat?"

"Yes." Her voice began to fade as sleep started to claim her. "So very strong."

He held her, watching her in her sleep. In one moment, this woman changed decades in his life. Hades' power was not enough to stop the power she wielded. He wanted to keep her, but knew he could never be so selfish. How could he? She was human, a mortal. She would grow old and die, and he would only be able to watch it happen.

Careful not to disturb her, Blade misted and reformed beside the bed. His clothes again covered him. While she slept, he would try to sort out this mess with his sisters. Kissing her gently, he left her to her dreams.

As Blayde walked down the stairs, he could hear the others. The emotions he felt surprised him. The men, though careful, felt no fear from him. From his sisters, he felt a sense of happiness from. The huntress, as ever and would always be, watchful and cautious.

All eyes turned on him when he stepped into the sitting room. Gustavo made his way to Blayde's shoulder, rubbing his smooth, black, feathered head against his cheek.

"Rest easy, Gustavo. She will be well."

"Your bird seems to have connected with Trina," Carter said, still watching the bird carefully.

Blayde didn't respond, but his eyes searched out Roveena, who sat with her husband.

"You are well?"

"Yes, Blayde. I am very well, thank you." She pointed to the chair across from her. "Please, sit and join us."

He eased his way across the room, watching everyone closely. It wasn't so much him that was worried, but the shifter.

"Is the shifter another being?" Carter asked, breaking the silence. "I'm sorry, but I can't stop the feelings once they start."

"What feelings do you receive from Blayde?" Andreeste asked.

"Well, it's almost like something else takes over if he gets too comfortable." He tried to separate the emotions but failed. "My head is starting to ache. I need some air."

"I will go with you, Carter." Andreeste followed him from the room.

Again there was silence. Roveena watched and pondered. There was something beyond her understanding inside of Blayde.

"Perhaps we should speak with Persephone."

"About?" Tony gave her his attention.

"I sense in him so much good, but something is fighting for the hatred."

Blayde sat in the chair, watching those around him. He felt so out of place. Trina was his only reason for being here, and now it seemed another shifter was out there, waiting.

"I myself am having trouble understanding just what is happening," Blayde said to Roveena. He could still see the little girl he once knew.

"Well, let's hash it out. Maybe we can understand it more." Ike pulled up a chair and Brillasse sat on his knees.

"Hades must have known I would hesitate. I would have sensed the danger had he sent any other but a shifter."

"Why didn't you sense this one?"

"Because, my shifter side sees no reason not to trust another shifter."

"Perhaps you should explain?" Roveena sat forward, listening intently.

"A shifter is one who can shift and be anything at anytime. However, the shifter inside is a being to itself. It is careful and does not trust any but other shifters." Blayde took a deep breath and continued. "When you removed the dagger from Trina, the shifter in me took over and sent me to a safe distance."

"So, the shifter actually controls you only to keep you safe?"

"Yes."

"Then, how is it that you can remain so close to Trina?" Roveena put the puzzle to question.

Blayde had no answer. He had been as close to Trina as a man could get, and the shifter never once took over.

"Is there any possible way to remove the shifter from you?"

"Only if the shifter trusts completely. It would mean getting close enough to me to kill me, and then it would mean a god would have to accept me in order for me to be reborn. The shifter would never allow that to happen."

Andreste hurried into the room with Carter following behind.

"What is it?" Brillasse jumped to her feet.

"My Lady is coming," Andreste said, and knelt.

"How does she know just where and when the portal will open?" Ike looked confused. "I never know until she is right in front of me."

"She can feel her, Ike. They are connected in a way we could never understand." Roveena stood and waited.

The light shimmered and again it grew bright, until Persephone stood before them.

"How is Trina?" she asked, and the others noted her worried brow. "I had no idea that Hades had created another shifter. He is getting much too clever."

"She is well," Blayde answered and drew her eyes to him.

"Blayde, it is good to see you here." Persephone approached, and all held their breath. But even Gustavo did not protest when she reached out and touched his face. Her smile was pure and sweet, not judging him in anyway. She lightly petted Gustavo, who preened under her hand. "We have much to discuss, you and I."

"It was you," he whispered and stood before her. "You sent me, Gustavo."

"Yes. I am pleased his name did not change."

"He told me his name." Blayde felt small in her presence. "Why?"

"Do you know what his name is, Blayde? What it truly means?" At his silence, she continued. "Gustavo. The staff of the gods."

"But why send him to me?"

"I had hoped you had survived, and I suspected that you lived. I could feel your lonely soul. But there was nothing I could do then, about Hades' interference with you. So, I sent you a protector of sorts." She laughed when the bird bobbed on his shoulder. "He has been very good for you."

"You said there was nothing you could do back then for Blayde. Is there anything you can do now?" Roveena asked, her heart in her eyes.

"No, magic one. It will take much love and courage before I can step in and accept him."

"But you would accept him?"

"In a heart beat." She smiled at the human slang. "Now, we must discuss this shifter."

They all gathered around the goddess, though Blayde hung back, his mind working in so many directions. The goddess would accept him, but other than Trina, no other could get close to him. He could not ask it of her, and he knew she had not thought she could. He would have read it in her mind.

"Blayde?"

He turned to look at the group.

"Do you understand what we must do?" Brillasse asked.

"I am sorry, my mind wandered."

"Try to stick with me here." Brillasse smiled. "You must remain behind, when we face them again."

"Trina?"

"She must go with us."

"No."

"She is the only one who will draw out the shifter."

"I can not risk her. If anything happens to her, my rage would be uncontrollable."

Andreste turned to him, and though she kept her distance, she looked into his eyes.

"I will be in charge of your lady, Blayde. Without you in my presence, I will know when and how he plans to strike. I will kill him for you."

"And if you fail?"

"I will not."

Trina was all that was holding him together, grounding him. Without her, he would cease to care. He would kill every one of them and think nothing of it. But if he did not

do this, he would never have hope. Never have the hope of being with her. He looked at the others in the room, and made his decision.

"Once Andreste kills the shifter, I will need a link to one of you, other than Trina. I want to be there when he is destroyed."

"A link?" Carter asked, curious how this could be done.

"However, once I am linked, it will be forever."

"How?"

"A mind link."

"I will do it." Brillasse stepped forward, only to be dragged back by Ike.

"Oh no you won't. Its bad enough I have that weasel Tavoli knocking around in my head." He crossed his arms over his chest. "Do you have any idea how annoying that is?"

"You have become the best of friends," she countered. "Besides, he is my brother."

"No. Sorry, honey, but I can't allow it. Brother or not he is a man, and will not be climbing around in your mind."

"Save me from the male vampire species. You know, Ike, dick don't mean dominant. I got the memo, didn't you?"

"Hey, you made me, babe. Deal with it."

Persephone cleared her throat and drew their attention.

"I must say, that would have to be the most creative way I have heard a woman put a man and his parts in their place." She walked to them. "But he is right. It is the nature of the man, and you would not want a woman in his mind either. Nonetheless, Carter would be my choice."

"Me?"

"It would solve your headaches as well. You are a strong psychic, and Blayde, for all his mysterious ways, is a good man. You would only strengthen yourself in doing so."

Carter looked to Blayde and the others in the room. She said he would be needed, and now he knew why. This was his part to play.



"Alright. I'll do it, but no mind games."

"I do not play games," Blayde snorted.

"Well, lets do it then."

Blayde faced Carter from ten feet away, Gustavo hopping from foot to foot on his shoulder. The air in the room turned thick, and Carter paced his breathing. Blayde seemed to radiate strength, and his body tightened. Then, he turned his head to his pet. A light stream of smoke flowed from his mouth into Gustavo's. The bird seemed to inhale it deep into him. Then, he took flight.

The bird circled Carter, and then gently landed on his shoulder. Gustavo began to nudge him, but Carter wasn't sure what to do.

"Accept the link from him, Carter," Persephone whispered.

Carter turned and looked at the raven, then opened his mouth. Gustavo released the smoke, and Carter breathed in deeply. All at once he dropped and coughed. He felt as if he was choking. He couldn't get air.

"What the hell?" Ike started to go to him.

"No." Persephone stopped him. "Stay back. It is natural."

Eyes watering, Carter gained his breath, standing slowly.

"You could have warned me," he gasped.

"How do you feel?" Andreste asked, standing close.

"I feel..." He thought about it. "I feel great actually."

As if just remembering his new friend, Carter looked at the bird again, amazed it still sat on his shoulder. It rubbed his cheek and flew back to Blayde.

"Well, would you look at that! He about took my hand off earlier."

"Your link to me is also your link to him." Blayde petted his friend. "Do not be surprised if you find a friend of your own one day soon."

Persephone opened the portal and looked to her group of warriors. "I must go. I will return as soon as I am able. Do not turn your backs on each other. You are all you have got." She was gone as quickly as she had appeared.

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"I do not like this, Trina."

"Blayde, we know what we must do. All of us have a part to play in this game."

"If you are killed, none will survive."

"I will be fine." She walked to him and pulled him closer for a kiss. When she opened her eyes, she saw a worried man watching her. "I have you to come back to."

Like that, his passion flared and he lifted her into his arms, wrapping her legs around him. His kiss turned desperate, and he laid her back on the bed. By now, their disappearing clothes were nothing new to her.

He kissed his way down her body, pausing to play with her breasts. He pulled a nipple into his mouth and rolled it on the rough pad of his tongue. Trina's body arched, offering him more of her, but he only moved lower.

His tongue licked a path of fire across her belly, moving lower until he was a breath away from her heated center. He looked into her eyes briefly and she sucked in a sharp breath at what she saw. Then he devoured her; licking, nipping, and sucking on her until she cried out his name, begging him to fill her. Still he tormented her, bringing her to climax so he could drink in her essence, her taste filling his senses.

Only when she panted for breath and lay languid under his mouth, did he kiss his way up her body. He took her mouth gently, as he slowly worked his cock inside of her. She could taste herself on his lips, and her mind whirled at the erotic sensation.

No matter the images she sent his way, he moved within her slowly. His kiss never stopped, as his body rocked into her gently. She locked her ankles behind his back, and enjoyed the feel of the man possessing her.

"Blayde." She whispered his name, holding him closer to her.

"I will not loose you, Trina."

"No," she gasped as his hips drove him deeper into her.

"You are mine."

"Yes." Another gasp.

"You will be mine forever."

"Blayde." Her head thrashed as he increased his pace and his depth.

"You will be mine, Trina."

"Yes. I will be yours. Always be yours." Tears gathered in her eyes. "I will stay with you, Blayde. I promise."

He moved within her then, hard and deep. This was more than a mating; it was a possession. She rose to meet his thrusts, taking him into her with a promise in her heart. Over and over he brought her to completion, but he continued to move within her, drawing out her pleasure and bringing her more.

She felt his body swell within her, and in her moment of need and passion, she bit him. He gasped and held her head to his chest, her little teeth sinking into the scar above his heart. She licked the bite and tasted him, as he exploded within her. She felt every pulse, just as she felt the thundering rhythm of his heart.

"You are mine," he whispered and kissed her so tenderly, she wondered how anyone could ever think him evil.

"Always." She held his head against her breasts. "I will always be with you."

"You can not fall, Trina."

"I won't."

Still joined, she felt his cock twitch and harden once more. He lay her back, and laced his fingers with hers, holding them to the bed as he looked into her eyes.

"I wish to love you slowly."

"We never seem to be able to do this slowly." She smiled.

"But this time, I am showing you more than my passion, Trina." His hips rocked gently, a slow glide of slick flesh and hot desire. "I am showing you my love for you."

"Blayde." She whispered his name and kissed him. "Tell me that once more, after the fight is over."

"I know how you feel for me, Trina. You can not hide it from me."

"I have no wish to hide it. But when I say it to you, I don't want the fear of losing me to be inside your heart."

He said no more, and contrary to her earlier statement, he did in fact love her slowly.

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"It is time." Andreste said as she walked to the balcony doors. "I will tell Carter."

As the others gathered their weapons, Andreste found Carter looking out over the land of Hellishiam.

"Carter?"

"I know. They are here."

"Yes."

"Are you afraid?" he asked, though he knew she was not.

"Of course, I am. Like you, I know the risk, and it frightens me."

"You hide it well."

"It is what I do, Carter. I fight when I am needed."

"What will happen to you, when this is over?"

"I will go where my lady tells me too." She shrugged. "I will miss you, though."

"Will you?"

"You must know how I feel for you, Carter."

She gasped when he pulled her to him and kissed her. It was thrilling and exciting, and she returned the kiss equally.

"When this is over, I will beg Persephone for only one more day with you, Andreste. If I could, I would beg for a lifetime."

"Then let's finish this quickly."

Smiling, they hurried to join the others.

"Are you all ready?" Brillasse asked, securing her sword.

"Ready." Trina said as she stood with Blayde across the room. "I will gather my weapon when we leave."

"I will join you the minute the shifter is destroyed." Blayde said, trying not to think of her out there alone.

"I will be fine."

"Stay away from, Helix."

"Blayde, I must go."

He nodded and released her, watching her walk away the hardest thing he could ever remember doing.

Once they reached the field, they didn't have long to wait. Helix stood before his army, and smiled.

"Does the shifter hide from me?" he taunted. "I am not surprised."

"Oh, blow it out your demon ass, Helix. Are you going to bore me to death, or actually fight?" Brillasse took satisfaction in his flash of anger.

"You just had to pick on him, didn't you, baby?" Ike whispered beside her.

"Well, of course, sweetie. You didn't think I would actually be quiet did you?"

"No. I know better."

Andreste stood between Carter and Trina, her mind open and waiting for the sign.

"You may find this one a challenge, huntress." Helix spoke to her as if he knew her.

"When he is ready to die, I will grant him release."

The fight began and good versus evil clashed. Swords met and demons fell. It seemed that good would win the day. Helix called a halt, watching them all with a slow smile.

"He's up to something," Carter whispered. "It worries him that he has lost men, and we are all standing."

"Flee or fight, General," Brillasse called across the river.

Trina, not knowing why, felt the hair on her neck stand straight up. She watched as Andreste tensed. She prayed the huntress knew the shit was about to hit the fan.

A pressure was all Trina felt, and she gasped. Stepping back, she watched as the huntress seemed to snag the shifter from out of thin air. Her face serene, she held it by

the throat out to her side. The shifter dangled in front of Trina. With a single word Trina could not understand, his form became solid. She dropped him at her feet.

"I give you this one chance to be noble, shifter. You can not flee, so fight me or die swiftly." Andreste pulled her sword. It was as golden as she.

The shifter rose and looked to Helix for guidance.

"Kill her, you fool."

He pulled his own blade and squared off with the huntress.

"Do you not know me, Andreste?"

"Should I, shifter?"

"You do not recognize your own blood?"

"You are not of my blood, shifter."

"Oh, but I am. You became the huntress. I am the shifter, but I am still your brother."

He attacked then, and Andreste fought like the warrior she was. Her blade met his on every stroke, and she inflicted a wound on every pass. He was tiring, and Ike could not understand why she did not just kill him.

"Why is she drawing it out?" he asked Brillasse, who stood watching the woman fight.

"Because, like her, he was once human. She is giving him the only honor she can, the honor of a warrior's death."

Andreste gasped at the feel of the shifter's blade against her side. A lucky shot, but he was still not the better warrior. With a spin and a kick that sent him flying, she followed and stood over him. Her sword rested against his throat as she waited. "Choose, shifter. Fight or die swiftly."

"Just kill me."

He knew he couldn't win. Andreste nodded and in a swift movement, drove her blade through his heart. The ground trembled and seemed to swallow him whole. Her sword stood in his place. She retrieved it, ignoring her side.

"How did it feel, huntress? Driving your blade into your brother?" Helix looked as if he relished the thought of her pain.

"If he was truly my brother, General, then I will rest in the knowledge that I saved him by killing him."

Behind the general, at least a hundred more demons joined in for the battle. Carter sent his call to Blayde, almost shouting when the man appeared so quickly. He was linked to this guy, and it was starting to scare the hell out of him.

"There are so many," Trina said as she hurried to Andreste. "You're hurt."

"I will be fine, Trina." She held her side, panting, "It but burns some."

"Did the shifter's blade pierce you?" Blayde asked, looking at the wound.

"Yes."

"We must finish this quickly. You will fall from the poison his blade carried." He looked as if his next words pained him. "If I could get close to you, I could heal you."

"Well, we have to do something." Carter hurried to her. "Can't you use your link with me?"

"No." Then his eyes widened. "Wait, Gustavo?"

His friend landed on his shoulder, and looked into his eyes. After a moment, the bird flew to Carter and rested on his shoulder. As if he knew, Carter opened his mouth and gave the bird some of the smoke he had taken from Blayde. Gustavo flew to Andreste and sat on her shoulder. He gave her Carter's essence, and then returned to Blayde.

"How do you feel?" Trina asked, hoping the weird exchange did something for the good.

"Better. My side is already healing. We are linked?" she asked Blayde.

"No. Though I remain so to Carter, you are now to him."

"Well, now that this little kiss and exchange is over," Brillasse snapped, "Could we please get to the part of kicking some ass?"

"Absolutely," Andreste replied and giggled at the look Carter sent her way. "This slang is so much more fun."

Blayde shifted, and though he fought, he stayed close to Trina. The more demons they destroyed, the more Helix seemed to pull out of thin air.

Brillasse was fighting with all of her might and strength, but one well-aimed swipe nearly took her left arm off. Ike stood at her back, fear for his mate driving him on.

Carter fought like a man possessed, but he was human, and the blade that swiped across his middle dropped him like a stone. Andreeste stood over him, ready to die.

"Blayde," Trina shouted. "You must help them. I know you're with me, I feel it. You must help them please."

Like a ball in a game machine, the mist darted from demon to demon. They dropped and turned to dust before they knew what was happening. When the battle was over, Helix stood alone. Hades would send no more to him.

Blayde reformed before the General. The hate so thick, it was a scent in the air.

Roveena and Tony joined them all then, healing their fallen friends.

"You will be in limbo now, Blayde. You can never truly keep her." Helix felt some satisfaction in that. "You would have been better off to let her die."

"You are an evil man, Helix. Hades may be playing a game, but I will not be a pawn any longer."

"I will not let this slide, Blayde. You have betrayed your god, and he will continue until he has you back in his grip."

"You are as much a pawn as I was. You just loved the game, the thrill of the kill." Blayde took a deep breath. "You will not kill another."

"This is far from over, shifter."

"For you, Helix, it is the end."

Blayde drove his fist deep into the General's chest, gripping the black heart and turning it to dust. Though his eyes held surprise, the General laughed as his body disintegrated in Blayde's hand.

Returning to the others, he made sure Trina was safe. It was over for now. Gustavo took his place on his shoulder, and he walked with the others to the main house.

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Trina took a steady breath, needing courage for what she was about to do. The battle was over, the others healing. They had one more day in this world, and she knew the time had come.

Her hands trembled, and she hoped he could not read her mind. She hoped she was right about the outcome. She loved him, and without this chance, they could never be together.

She walked around the sitting room, smiling at them all, making small talk. They had all become so close. But still, Blayde sat away from them, his shifter side not allowing him to join the group. He looked alone, though she hoped soon he would never feel alone again.

"Trina, how do you feel?" Blayde asked, rising and standing before her. "Is there anything you need?"

"I am fine, Blayde. I could use one of those melting kisses you are so good at giving me."

He smiled and pulled her to him, gently placing his lips to hers. Gustavo sat on the back of his chair, seeming to be asleep. She took a deep breath and kissed him with all the love she had in her.

"I love you, Trina," he whispered near her ear, and she shivered.

"I love you, too. I truly do, Blayde."

She kissed him again, and slowly withdrew the dagger from her sleeve. It was the blade Persephone had given her. As she swept her tongue into his mouth, her hand slid around between them. He moaned and returned her kiss. A tear escaped, and he leaned back enough to lick it away.

"Trina?"

"I love you," she whispered, and shoved the blade into the scar over his heart, deep and true.

His eyes widened as he looked at her, dropping to his knees. She watched as the pain registered in his eyes. Both the pain from the blade, and her betrayal. Gustavo began to screech loudly, dropping to the floor, and laid beside his master.

Her wail echoed off the walls and brought the others to their feet, weapons drawn and ready to fight.

"Persephone!" Trina wailed the name, her anguish making her sound almost hysterical. "I have done it. He is going to die. Please, come and claim him."

"What have you done?" Roveena ran to her brother and pushed Trina aside. He remained solid, not able to shift. "Blayde, please do not die again."

Brillasse joined her sister, both taking the time to touch their brother. Neither noticed the light forming in the center of the room.

Roveena turned hate filled eyes on Trina. She stood and walked to the woman, knocking her across the floor. She continued to advance on her. Trina took each blow, not trying to defend herself. The next blow knocked her high into the air, her head smacking the wall before she dropped to the ground. Her eyes closed and her face bleeding.

"Stop." The voice was loud and full of authority. "Roveena, you will stop and stop now."

Tony recognized the tone of the lady's voice and grabbed his wife, holding her to him, forcing her to stop and think.

"She killed him. He was fine, he changed, and she killed him." Roveena seethed.

"No, she did not." Persephone walked to Blayde, and knelt beside him, placing his head in her lap. "She loves you, Blayde, or she would not have had the courage."

He tried to speak, but blood pooled in his mouth. He nodded his head.

"Do you swear to follow the path of good, never swaying from that path for any reason? Not even for your love?"

He nodded, gasping.

"I take you, Blayde, into my service." She placed her hand on the dagger and pulled it from his chest. Dropping it to the floor, she covered the wound with her hand. A light formed and he arched, the light flowing into his body. "You will now be known as the shifter of light. No more darkness, no more lost memories, no more shadows. You will

live through the centuries in the service of the good, protecting mankind from the darkness you know so well.”

Persephone stood, and gently placed his head back on the floor. She turned to those around her. Only Andreste had the courage to walk away and go to Trina. Persephone’s eyes narrowed at the others. “Did any of you choose to listen when Blayde himself told you of the way to erase the shifter?”

“But, he said none could get close to him.”

“Roveena, are you going to try to tell me that you think all they were doing in that room was talking?” The goddess rolled her eyes. “In your condition, you should know just how close a man and woman can get.”

“I just did not think.”

“No, you just flew off the handle. Blayde will be fine. I have accepted him.”

Persephone walked toward Trina. “Your biggest problem now, however, is will she accept you.”

Blayde moaned and stood, swaying slightly. Gustavo rose as well, and Blayde picked him up, placing him on his shoulder.

“You are well?”

He turned to his youngest sister, and stared at her through new eyes. With a smile he pulled her to him and held her close, tears gathering in his eyes that he quickly blinked away. Brillasse joined them, and for a moment they just held one another. When he pulled away, his smile was wide.

“I am very well. Better than ever.”

“This is a miracle, Blayde. So many years lost to us, and now you are here.”

“Trina is the miracle. Where is she?” His smile faded at the looks his sisters exchanged. “I need to see her, where is she?”

“Blayde.”

“What’s happened?” His heart began to drop.

“I thought she had killed you. I did not know she meant to save you.” Roveena said, her hands twisting together. “I got a little angry.”

"What's happened?" His voice rose.

He looked around the room, his eyes landing on Andreste and the lady, kneeling on the floor.

"Trina." He hurried forward, but stopped when Andreste rose and faced him. His shifter was gone. He would do well to tread lightly. "What is wrong with her?"

"The Lady will speak to you soon, Blayde."

"I want to see her." He stepped forward, stunned when the huntress placed a hand to his chest. "Let me pass."

"You can not."

He stepped back, fear mixing with the worry coursing through him. When Persephone rose, she looked as peaceful as ever. Her eyes met Roveena's.

"She is not angry with you, Roveena, so rest your mind on that. However, she is hurt."

"Hurt? What? How? Would you please tell me what has happened?"

"I happened." Roveena stepped forward. "I thought, for some reason, that she had really killed you. I had lost you once, and that fear turned to anger. I am afraid I allowed my anger and fear to take over. In my anger, I struck her, and I really do not remember much after that."

"It was your anger, Roveena. However, in your anger, Trina was hurt. Badly. Her head is damaged from hitting the wall."

"I will heal her." Roveena stepped forward.

"No, you can not." Persephone nodded to Andreste, who took a place in front of them all. "I have spoken to her. She holds no anger, but her stubborn nature will be the death of her. Unless she is willing to accept your aide, Roveena, Andreste will guard her wishes."

"Death? What are you saying?" Blayde was getting angry.

"Your sisters failed to believe in her. She came to this world, unwillingly at the time, fought beside you all, and you failed to trust her when she had trusted you."

Persephone shrugged. "She will see you, Blayde. Only to know that you do not feel she betrayed you."

"Can she be helped?" Roveena asked, her tears flowing freely.

"Yes. She could be helped. But it is up to Blayde to do so."

"Me?"

"She refuses your sister's help. If you can convince her to live, I will allow you to help her. But only if she wishes it."

"If she wishes it?"

"Then you need only give her half of yourself. Half of your light."

Blayde hurried to Trina, wincing at the swelling that was evident. Her beautiful eyes were dull, and her face bruised.

"Trina, please. Do not do this," he said, kneeling beside her. "I know you did what you did for the greater good, for us."

"I saw it in your face, Blayde. In your eyes. You didn't trust me."

"I was surprised, Trina. No other had ever gained the shifter's trust." Gustavo jumped down and nudged her cheek. "The dark is gone; the shadows are gone. Do not leave me alone now that I have found the light."

"Your sisters believed I failed you and them. How long would it be until they turn on me again?" She sighed and winced. "I understand their fear, but they knew what had to be done, yet they believed me capable of such an act."

"Then we live for each other. I will walk away, right now, as long as you are with me." His tears flowed freely. "We have come so far. If you choose to die, I will go with you."

"You would really walk away from those who love you?"

"If I have you, I have all I need." He leaned forward and kissed her. "Take the half of me that will heal you, and be with me forever, Trina."

"I do love you, shifter."

"Then take it, please."

"For you, and for me."

Blayde searched within himself, gathered the light close, and allowed it to flow into Trina. She gasped and choked, but he continued to feed her. The light surrounding them was blinding, and the others covered their eyes. When her lips met his in a kiss, he knew it had been enough.

He leaned back, looking at her face. In just a short time, she had healed. Her face was radiant and her eyes sparkled like green gems. He lifted her against his chest and held her, his tears mixing with her own.

"Thank you, Trina."

"Thank me for what?"

"Just for living."

"I won't have mist or sparks coming out of me will I? Living forever and being immortal I can handle. But I draw the line at sparks."

Blayde regarded her a moment, and then it struck him. She was teasing him. His laugh bubbled over, and it surprised everyone.

"Oh, little warrior. I guarantee there will be sparks." He kissed her to prove it.

Persephone knelt beside them, her hand stroking the raven.

"Well Trina. Welcome to the light. I trust you will allow Blayde to guide you."

"I will."

"I have something for you." Persephone clapped her hands and a beautiful white hawk flew through the open window, settling beside Trina. "She is yours, and she will be to you, as Gustavo is to Blayde. Only he must remain a black raven."

"What is her name?"

"That is for her to tell you."

Trina looked into the hawk's eyes, and smiled.

"Zoe. Her name is Zoe."

"A good name. In Greek, it means life." Persephone kissed her forehead. "Goodbye, Trina. I will see you again."

They watched as she stepped through the portal.

"Where will we live?" Trina asked as she rose to her feet.

"We will live in the shifter's house, on the other side of the mountains."

"It could be a hut, as long as I'm with you."

Blayde kissed her gently and held her close to his side. Turning, they faced the others.

"Andreeste, I thought you had to leave?" Trina said, smiling at her friend.

"The lady is giving me time with, Carter. He must learn the ways of the hunter." She smiled. "We have all found something special from this day."

"Trina?" Roveena stood before her. "I am so sorry. I hope in time we may begin to be a family."

"I would like that."

"Blayde?" Brillasse broke away from Ike. "Don't wait to long to come around, okay?"

"We will be around often." He smiled. "But for now, I need to be with Trina."

Holding one another tight, the two forms shifted into a brilliant light, and then they were gone.

"Well, I guess that's that." Ike said into the silence. "Come on, woman. Let's go upstairs. I have something for you."

Ike hauled a screaming Brillasse over his shoulder, running up the stairs. The others laughed, and the tension was broken. Once again, all was well in the portal world.

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"It is beautiful," Trina gasped as she got her first look at her new home.

Everything seemed to shimmer. The shifter's house was spacious and looked much like the homes back in her world, but the water surround the place looked as if diamonds danced upon the waves. The trees were tall and the greenest of green.

"So, we are shifters, but of the good kind?"

"Yes."

"And I have a part of you inside me?"

"We will always be together, like this, like now."

"And you love me?"

"More than anything."

"Then, come and love me, my shifter." She smiled as she wrapped her arms around him. "There is another part of you I ache to feel inside me."

Blayde smiled and carried her through the house into the room that would be theirs, together, until the end of time.

He loved her with his whole heart and body, and when his mind came into play, he paid her back with a few images of his own.

When her body came alive for him, he kissed her deeply, knowing that they would have this together every night from here to eternity.

"I love you, Trina."

"And I love you, my shadow warrior."

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"You thought you had me, did you not?" Persephone arched a brow at her husband. "I believe I have proven my point, Hades. Good will always triumph over evil."

"There will come a time when you will not best me so easily."

"Well, you lost this round. So, you have a six-month commitment to me. You lost the bet, now it is time to pay up."

"Really, woman, that is below me," Hades grumped. "It was a silly bet anyway."

"I agreed to your terms. You agreed to mine. You lost."

"I am a god. Do you really expect me to do that?"

"If you want any special time in the next six months, I suggest you drop to your knees and do me well."



Hades dropped to his knees. The site of his beautiful wife's body in her sheer gown was enough to drive him mad.

"You know, there are other things I could do in this position," he said as he pulled one dainty foot into his lap.

"Maybe later, dear, but for now, you owe me a foot massage every night for the next six months."

"Of all the things, I am reduced to rubbing your feet."

"Cheer up, love. You have a while to plot your next move."

And plot he would. But for now, he would do better to make his wife smile.