



# Stephani Hecht

Archangels Series

Book 7

## Angel's Quest

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**Angel's Quest**  
**Archangel Series Book 7**

**By**

**Stephani Hecht**

## **Dedication**

*Patti Shenberger, fellow black sheep and  
partner in crime.*

## Chapter One

“**I** never thought I would see the day that Michael, leader of the angel warriors and archangels, would be such a coward.” Lehor never even bothered to look up from her scrying pool as she delivered the scathing comment. A seraphim, by name only, she had chosen to show off her royal status by wearing a Dopey sweatshirt and faded jeans. Her long, blonde hair was styled in a ponytail and she had yellow duckie slippers on.

Michael for his part, stood rooted in place, just inside the doorway, his mouth open in dumb shock. Not because of what she was wearing, he’d long grown accustomed to his sister’s informal wear. Heck, he didn’t blame her for not wearing the white, standardized attire of Heaven. What had stunned him was how easy she’d read his intentions. Fully intending to come in with the total take-charge-kickass attitude as Chief, the last thing he expected was Lehor to snatch all the wind from his sails and stomp on them.

Lehor finally tore herself away from her visions

to point a finger at him, her light blue eyes nearly sparking fire. "You will go on that mission tomorrow and you will go with her."

Michael gave his meanest look, usually it made angel warriors quake in fear. With Lehor, it appeared to merely bore her. That in turn pissed him off. True, Lehor was his sister, but that didn't mean she had the right to fucking dismiss his authority. "No, I won't. As Chief, I've made an executive decision. I'm switching the teams up. Joe goes with me and Cliona goes with Rachael."

"Oh really?" She crossed her arms and gave him a sarcastic smile. "And just why is that?"

He smiled back, refusing to be baited. "Because if I let Joe go anywhere alone with Cliona, he will claim the fairy as his mate. That's the last thing we need if we want to form an alliance with her people."

"That's only part of the problem and we both know it."

Yes, they both did know it, but damn if he was going to give her the satisfaction of admitting that gem aloud. He let out a menacing growl instead and realized how wasted it was when she turned her back on him and looked into her stupid pool. He decided to leave her accusation untouched for now. Better to continue with Joe-Cliona angle. "I still don't see why we can't assign our own teams."

"Because Nix, the oracle, consulted her runes and they told her it had to be specific pairs or else the mission will be a failure. It's imperative we find the missing fairy child or else we will lose this war."

"I think that you are putting way too much faith in one kid," Michael grumbled. He tried to peek into the pool to see who Lehor had been watching, but she put her body deliberately in his way.

"By finding her and proving she is still alive, the fairies will owe us a great debt. Then they will have no choice but to ally themselves with us in our war against the justice council, demons and Powers. Without them, we will lose. As is, we are too vastly outnumbered." She finally spun back around to face him, but still blocked his view.

He frowned, putting a child in the middle of a war didn't sit good with him. He knew things were getting desperate for the angel warriors. Even since they had gone to war with the justice council, things had gone from crappy to crappier. First, they had to leave Heaven and hide out on Earth, then the council had aligned themselves with some demons and, even worse, the Powers. He barely suppressed a shudder as he thought about the Powers, neither demon nor angel, they were a species all their own. Demented and evil, they loved to kill and had no compassion, mercy

or scruples.

Even though the angel warriors still had the elves and a few demons of their own on their side, they were quickly losing the war. Michael had already lost too many of his warriors and didn't want to have to bury any more. So he was desperate to find a way to convince the fairies to help them.

Still, to use a *child*.

Lehor came up and fixed him with her familiar unyielding glare. "We can protect the child here. With your angel warriors guarding her, nothing will be able to get to her. How safe do you think she is now, out in there alone with only humans to watch over her?"

As always, she read him better than anyone ever could and knew just the right words to sway him. Before their rift, Lehor had been the closest sibling he had. His undying devotion for her had been his greatest strength. It had also been his greatest weakness.

He ran his hands through his hair in frustration. "Do you honestly think the fairies are going to let one of their children live with a bunch of angels? Especially one of royal birth? It won't matter to them that her family was ousted centuries ago. They will still want to lay claim on her. Worse yet, what happens if the justice council or demons find her first? They'll kidnap her just to keep the fairies



away from our conflict."

Lehor averted her gaze to the side and he could sense the guilt coming off her. "Which is why we have to find her faster. The other teams have already been out for months and they are no closer to finding her."

"Lehor—"

She cut him off with a distressed cry. "She's the only one who can heal Barakiel."

Raising her eyes, he could see they were wet with unshed tears and his chest grew tight. Despite all their differences, he would never be able to stand the sight of her distressed.

Barakiel, or Bear as everyone called him, was Lehor's youngest son. Several months ago, he'd become possessed by an evil entity. The best healers they had couldn't get rid of it because it was so ancient that it predated any angel, Michael included. They had to send Bear away for the sake of all the other angels at the compound. It had been one of the hardest decisions Michael had ever made as the Chief. He loved all of his nephews and it had felt as if he'd abandoned Bear in his time of need. Even though the leader part of him knew it was the right decision, the uncle part of him stayed awake most nights, aching for the loss of Bear.

He looked over at the scrying pool, suddenly very aware of who Lehor had been watching. The

pool made it possible for her to briefly glimpse her loved ones, no matter where they may be. He didn't need the strong mental link he'd always shared with Lehor to know her heart was breaking over her son. The sadness in her face told him that. Crap, he was half-tempted to join her and snoop on Bear himself. But thanks to the prophetic dreams Michael had every night, he knew everything he already needed to know about his nephew's status.

Bear was on borrowed time.

Too bad those damn dreams wouldn't tell him exactly where the fairy was. It would save everyone a lot of searching and save a whole hell of a lot of time. But his visions always weren't cooperative and, if it concerned family, they were even more sporadic. So they hadn't give him shit about this situation, which meant, like it or not, they were going to have to use Nix's plan. "How do we even know for sure that the child can heal Bear?" he asked, all bluster gone from his argument.

She sighed, suddenly looking very tired and defeated. "Because Nix promised me so."

"Are we sure Nix is right this time?" In the past, that question wouldn't have even come up. Nix may be a tramp who couldn't keep her legs together whenever there was a male warrior anywhere near her, but she'd always been a damn

good oracle. Until, for some reason that she still refused to divulge, the fates had cut her off.

Lehor nodded, her gaze drifting back to the pool. "Nix consulted her runes and she says they've never led her wrong."

"Runes," he scoffed with disgust. He was supposed to place the fate of his nephew and the angel warriors on a bunch of rocks? "I'm surprised at both of you. Nix with her ancient runes and you with your scrying pool, it's so...witchy."

Lehor rolled her eyes. "Shut up."

"Double, double, toil in trouble..." he chanted from Shakespeare's *Macbeth*.

She threw a pillow at his head.

He caught it with a chuckle he really didn't feel, before getting serious again. "I'll get the child for you and Bear. I swear it to you, not just as his Chief, but as your brother."

With a sob, she crossed the room and threw her arms around him.

Shocked by her unexpected show of affection, he stiffened. It wasn't that he was offended by his sister's touch, it was just he wasn't used to anyone showing him warmth. He'd never gotten it from his guardians while he was a child and, as an adult, he'd always been alone.

As if sensing his thoughts, and as a psychic perhaps she did, Lehor pulled back and gave him a trembling frown. "I'm so sorry."

"You just threw a pillow at me. You didn't hurt me." Maybe if he pretended not to understand, she would let the issue drop.

The sadness still lingered on her face. "Not that, stupid. After I cut you out of my life and forbade you from knowing my children, you had no one and it's all my fault."

"It was no big deal." Time to change the topic and fast. He felt uncomfortable with the way this was going. He'd always been the last one to lay his feelings out in the open since past experience had always taught him that was the best way to get them stomped on. Not only that, Lehor might actually find out the main reason he had stayed away for so long. If the truth were to ever come out, it would not only destroy his status as Chief, thus throwing the angel warriors in even further disarray, but it would drag Lehor and her children down with him.

"It is a big deal," she relented. "It must have been so hard to watch Ana and the boys while they were growing up, knowing they were your family and not being able to be a part of their lives."

It had been hard, so hard it had nearly destroyed him, but he wasn't about to admit that to Lehor. She felt guilty about enough things already, the last thing she needed was to add him to the list. So he pushed past his awkwardness

and pulled her back into another hug. She held him tight and he found, to his surprise, that he was able to relax and take comfort in her arms. It had been so long since he'd let someone else take care of him and damned if it didn't feel good.

"I'm fine, really," he assured, after they had pulled away from each other. "I have them and you in my life now and that's all that matters. I don't want you to waste anymore time having regrets about me." *Because I'm not worth it. It would be better if you and the kids didn't have my blood running through your veins.*

Lehor gave him a gentle smile and cupped his cheek in the palm of her hand.

To his own shock, he allowed himself to lean a little into her touch. The moment of weakness would have gotten him beat by his guardians when he was a child and he was amazed that part of his soul was still alive to allow it. He couldn't begin to count the times he'd seen Ana give her own brothers the same gentle gesture. Michael hadn't even known until now, how much he yearned to have the same loving relationship with his own sister.

"I missed you so much." The damning words slipped past his lips before he had time to censor them. Shamed at his lapse in control, he waited for Lehor to spit in his face like she had so many times in the past when they had been fighting. Instead,

she smiled at him and there was so much love in her blue eyes, he felt a burning lump develop in his throat.

"I missed you, too, brother."

God, how long had he waited to hear those words? Self-conscious and more than embarrassed by his sudden desire to go all wussy and cry, he pulled away and went to the other side of the room. Not that the distance would do any good. As an empath, she would be able to read his emotions. While he could block most others from getting into his feelings, there was no guarantee with Lehor. Taking a steadying breath, he shoved his hands in his pockets and tried to rein in his emotions. "I'm sorry I was such a whiner earlier. I'll be a good and follow Nix's rules, even if they do suck."

"The only reason you think they suck is because Rachael is your partner and you're going to have to be alone with her in a car for days, possibly weeks." There was bleak understanding in her eye and a slight frown on her face. "Why don't you just give it up and admit that you want her?"

He let out a frustrated sigh. Damned, he should have known she wouldn't let it drop. Lehor was part of a very small handful of angels who thought they had the right to stick their noses in his business. So much for moving onto topics that didn't make him feel uncomfortable. "Let it go."

"Why are you so afraid of loving her?" Lehor tilted her head to the side as she seemed to gaze into his soul.

"I'm not afraid of anything." The lie tasted bitter to his tongue, but the first thing he'd learned as a leader was sometimes untruths were necessary. "It just couldn't work between Rachael and me is all."

Lehor's brow creased thoughtfully as she gave a slow nod. "You're probably right. She's way too impulsive."

He felt offended on Rachael's account. "She's just not predictable like every other female."

"Oh, and the way she dresses, way too provocative."

"She's not afraid to be different."

Lehor tapped her chin with an index finger thoughtfully. "She always talks without censoring herself, it's like she has no inner monologue."

"She's not afraid to stand up for her beliefs."

"She's a disaster."

"She's not boring," he almost snarled out the last argument.

"So in your eyes, she's perfect?"

"Yes." Michael closed his eyes and let out a silent curse, well aware that he'd just stumbled into her little trap. It was so simple only a cartoon character would have fallen for it and yet his lame ass had marched right in. "You didn't need to do

that. You know how I feel about, Ray."

"Ray?" Lehor echoed. "I've heard the boys and her friends call her by that nickname, but I didn't know you did."

"Save it, Lehor," he drawled. "You know everything. Nothing gets by your radar."

"You need to claim her before some other male does," Lehor said softly. "Would it be so bad to have some happiness? Why do you think all you deserve in life is to serve us and not take anything for yourself?"

Before Michael could give her the thousand or so reasons that were churning around in his head, a hard knock on the door interrupted them. One of Lehor's twins poked his head in and smiled. As usual, his blue eyes were nearly obscured by his blond hair. While always cut collar length in the back, both the twins always insisted on letting it grow longer in the front. To the females, it made the two look rakish and attractive. To Michael it made them look like male models more than archangels. The twin wasn't on duty since he was leaving on tomorrow, too, so he was dressed in a pair of jeans and a white tee shirt.

"You wanted to see me?" he asked Lehor as he nodded respectively toward Michael.

"Yes, Joe," she replied briskly, the tilt of her chin showing she was all business. "I know what you twins have planned and you better not even



think about it."

"How did you know about that?" Joe eyed the scrying pool suspiciously. "Have you been snooping on us again?"

Lehor didn't look one bit guilty at being caught. "You twins better not pull a switch-a-roo. You're going with your assigned partners and that's final."

Joe held his hands up innocently. "It wasn't even my idea, it was Case's. I'm perfectly fine with my partner."

"I bet you are," Michael drawled, not fooled for one instant. "You're with Cliona and you've been after that fairy since the day she came to live at the compound."

"Hey, I didn't ask Nix to pair us up. I'm just being a good warrior and following orders." A wicked gleam came to his eyes that wasn't lost on the Chief.

Lehor smiled. "See, Michael, Joe isn't complaining about this. You could learn a thing or two from him."

Michael crossed his arms over his chest. So Joe wanted to play the cooperative son, did he? This could be fun. "If that really is Joe. How do you know they haven't already made the switch and this is Case?"

Lehor's eyes narrowed as she looked over her son speculatively. "You have a point there. I never

could tell them apart and I'm their mother. The only way to know for sure is to see if he has a mole on his tush. Joe has one, but Case doesn't."

Joe's mouth dropped open, his face incredulous. He shot Michael a murderous look before he seemed to catch himself. A tick developed in the twin's jaw as he averted his gaze respectively. "I'm not showing you my butt, Mom."

With a wave of her hands, she made an impatient noise. "Quit being a baby and drop your pants."

Now it was Joe who crossed his arms over his chest. "I'm not a kid anymore so you can't tell me what to do."

Five minutes later, Michael and Joe were leaving Lehor's quarters. Joe was zipping up his pants and bitching under his breath. Michael was trying his hardest not to let on that he was laughing at the whole situation. Well, maybe he wasn't trying too hard to hide it.

"Remember," Lehor called to Michael before she shut her door, "now that we know for sure that he's Joe, you can't let him out of your sight until tomorrow."

Joe's grumbles got louder and Michael finally gave it up and laughed right in his face. "Come on, I feel like sparring. Let's go to the gym."

"Of course you do. Seeing my bare ass wasn't enough, now you have to kick it, too?"

"It'll be fun." Michael flashed his best impression of the shit-eating grin his nephew, Cam, always did.

They made their way to the large gym in the center of the compound. Since it now served as the main training facility for both the angel warriors and the students, Michael didn't spare any expense. So large, it could have easily fit several basketball courts, it had everything a warrior's battle-scarred heart could desire. Cabinets lined the wall, all of them filled with weapons and other sparring equipment. Mats covered some of the wood floors and there was stadium seating for observation. One side was taken up with an archery area for the healers, since that was commonly their weapon of choice. The leader of the healers, Raphael was training some teens and he gave Michael a curt nod.

Michael grabbed two practice swords and handed one to Joe. The archangel wearily took it before following his uncle to the center of the gym. Several of the warriors stopped what they were doing long enough to salute or bow to the Chief before resuming his or her training.

Once in position, he squared off and waited for Joe to do the same thing. Joe looked at him, his eyes narrowed suspiciously before he dropped his

arm to let his sword hang by his side and took a relaxed position. Great, so he wanted to talk, not fight. Michael barely suppressed the groan. Why was everyone so damn chatty today?

"Why do I have the feeling you are going to take out your aggressions on me?" Joe asked. "I know you and Mom were arguing before I came in."

"Did you hear us yelling?" Michael swung his sword around and attacked.

Joe parried at the last second. "No, but I could sense it."

"Really?" Michael deflected Joe's returning thrust. "Are you going empath on me?"

"No." Joe scowled as he spun to avoid a strike. "Just because I don't show all those wicked skills Bear and Cam have doesn't mean I'm not telepathic like everyone else in our family."

"So does that mean you're finally going to start doing those exercises I taught you to expand your gifts?" Michael quizzed as their swords met with a loud clang.

"No, thanks," Joe responded dryly. "I'll leave all that hooky-dooky stuff to Bear and Cam. I prefer to fight with my fists and blades."

No sooner had that last word came out of his pie hole than Michael saw his opening. He used the blunt edge of the weapon to catch his nephew behind the knees and knock his feet out from

under him.

Joe landed with a heavy thud as his body hit the mat. It was followed by a groan of anger or frustration. Michael was proud when he quickly scrambled to his feet instead of lying there and licking his wounds.

As Joe was shaking it off, his gaze shifted to the door and a look of longing came over his eyes. "Cliona and Ray are here," Joe announced softly.

Michael watched Rachael as she made her way across the room and sat down on the mats. She didn't seem to notice that him. Even though he knew it was wrong, he stared at her like a lovesick teenage boy. *She's just another female, remember that.*

But it wasn't just any female, it was her—Rachael. Member of the Order, sister of Abdiel, one of his closest friends and most skilled warriors he'd ever seen in battle. She was one of his archangels so he should be more professional toward her.

He damn well shouldn't be noticing how beautiful she looked when she smiled and twirled a piece of her dark curly hair around her finger. Nor should he be admiring how nice her small breasts looked in that tight red top she was wearing. When she tucked her legs to the side, the movement made the tiny black scrap of fabric that she called shorts ride up and he could see all the way up her thighs. His gaze trailed over the milky

white flesh and a hunger grew in his gut. He yearned to go over to her, take off those ridiculously small shorts and lick every inch of those legs, not stopping until his face was buried between them. His mouth watered as he imagined how sweet her juices would taste. How it would feel to have her soft body yield to him. How it would be so good to look at her eyes as they glazed over in pleasure.

Rachael was passionate in everything. She fought hard, loved hard and played hard. Did all that passion carry over into the bedroom? His cock got so hard, his zipper bit into it. Yeah, if he were a betting angel, he would go with her being fiery between the sheets.

"Uncle Mike, I need to talk to you," Joe said.

Michael jumped a mile, startled by the unexpected intrusion, nearly dropping his sword like he was some first-year-in-angel-school kid. "If you're asking my permission to make a move on Cliona, you can save it." Finally tearing his gaze away from Rachael, he pinned a hard look at Joe.

"It's more than some infatuation though, Chief. I really like her a lot."

"She's not one of us, Joe. We have ancient laws that forbid such a mating." Michael kept his tone hard and clipped. While he hated to see any of his nephews hurt, this was one rule that couldn't be bent.

But of course, Joe wasn't going to let the topic drop that easy. "I know humans are off limits to us, but it's not Cliona's fault her mother is human."

"They are off limits, but that's not why you can't be with her. She doesn't have any human characteristics, in fact, she's immortal. She may as well be a full fairy despite her parentage, but fairies are just as forbidden as humans." And thank all that was holy for that rule. Gawh, fairies. He barely suppressed a scowl as he thought about the species. While Cliona was sane and almost normal, she was the exception. Every other fairy Michael had ever met was well...odd to say the least. Joe got such a sad look in his eyes that he reminded Michael of a stray puppy dog.

"So there's no way that it can happen, huh?"

"Believe me, I wish there was," Michael muttered bitterly. "At least one of us should get what we want."

"But—"

"No *buts*," Michael cut in and, even though it was a bitch to have to break his nephew's heart, there was no choice. The fate of the angel warriors hinged on a peace treaty with the fairies and he couldn't have Joe's dick mucking things up. "That's a direct order. Understood?"

"Understood," Joe replied glumly as he cast one last sideways look of longing over at Cliona.

\* \* \* \*

"Joe's looking at you again," Rachael informed Cliona in a stage whisper.

"Like I care that some stupid angel is looking at me," Cliona replied huffily, before a sly smile crept onto her face. "Is he really? What's his expression?"

"He's got that same dopey look on his face he gets whenever he looks at you. Like he wants you so bad he can barely keep his hands to himself." Rachael could see why Joe had it so bad for the fairy. A pure beauty that was both sweet and erotic, she had more than a few male angel heads turning. Her dark hair was streaked with red highlights, they didn't come from a bottle either, it was her unique DNA that made it that way. She was curvy and small, smaller than even Rachael who was considered a short fry in the angel world. With the fairy-like facial structure of rounded cheeks, she was made even more attractive by her huge brown eyes that stood out sharply in her pixie-like face. She even had a cute dusting of freckles on her cheeks.

"Oh, but Joe has to be good. He could get into a lot of trouble if he were to be with me." She wrinkled her nose in worry.

Rachael didn't even bother to hide that she was



rolling her eyes. "Please, who's going to punish him, the justice council? We're at war with them, in fact we don't even live on the same realm as them. They're in Heaven and we're here on Earth. So they wouldn't even know about it."

Cliona shook her head. "The fairies would be angry if he took one of their females. They hate angels."

"Your sister was married to a human before she died and they didn't do anything."

"My sister was different than me," Cliona confessed with a nervous twist of her fingers.

"How so? You both still had a human for a mother and a fairy daddy, right?"

"True," Cliona conceded. "But for some strange reason, my sister had more human characteristics and I was more, well...fairy. The fairy elders didn't even talk to her when they came to our home for visits."

"How rude!" Rachael exclaimed. She knew that slight must have hurt her sister. Even before Appolion and she had been dragged down to Hell by their father, he still hadn't bothered to give them the time of day. It had always been all about his two pets, Douma and Forcas.

Just thinking about her two demon brothers made a pit grow in her stomach. She had to remind herself that they were destroyed. In fact, she was one of the ones who had done the deed.

But it was still hard, even after all these years. The things that her bothers had done to her... She shook her head and forced herself to focus on Cliona's problem. "The fairies are refusing to even acknowledge us," she pointed out. "So who cares what they think?"

Cliona narrowed her eyes. "You're the last one that should be giving love advice."

Rachael put on what she hoped was her best who-me face. "I don't know what you're talking about."

Cliona started chanting, "*Liar, Liar, Pants on Fire.*" She even wiggled around, doing some form of dance.

Rachael had to stop herself from jumping up and wrapping her hands around her friend's neck. She did know one thing for sure, Cliona was so not getting back the pair of boots that she had borrowed from her. "You're just trying to turn the tables on me so I'll let you off the hook," she accused.

Cliona gave her a saucy grin. "Oh, a little touchy are we? Just think how pissed you'll be when I say his name."

"Don't you dare."

"Mi—" Cliona put her hand over her mouth, pretending like she was trying to hold the damning word in. She moved it and blurted, "Michael."

Rachael looked frantically around at the other warriors, terrified someone had overheard. She wished she had a way to shut Cliona's trap. Duct tape would do just fine. Didn't they say that you could fix almost anything with that crap? "It's not like that," Rachael insisted. "I just happen to admire him. I'm sure there are at least a thousand other females who feel the same way I do."

"You're the only one he looks at."

Rachael's heart skipped at Cliona's words even though she didn't dare allow herself to believe them. There was no way on earth he would look at anyone like her with something other than disgust. It would be better if she just rid herself of this stupid infatuation she had for him. Despite that thought, she couldn't help but glance over at the Chief. She just made sure to do it real covertly, barely turning her head to the side.

Sparring with Joe, Michael was the prime specimen of archangel in battle. Even though he moved with a smooth grace that was unequal, there was no mistaking the hard muscles that tensed, bunched and rippled as he fought. He was dressed in his usual faded blue jeans and combat boots. Never one to conform to standards, he always wore a flannel shirt that was unbuttoned and rolled up at the sleeves, with a black tee shirt underneath. Even though all of his warriors wore black leather into battle, Michael never did.

Everyday was *Casual Friday* for him.

He had blond hair like his nephews, but his was darker and even though it was a just below his collar, it was always longer in the front and sides so it looked slightly messed. He didn't have the Lehor blue eyes either. His were a warm brown, the kind of eyes that could melt your heart, just by looking into them.

At that moment, he lifted his gaze to meet hers. Unable to look away, she found herself trapped as those brown eyes turned darker with emotion. If she didn't know better, she would have sworn it was desire, but it couldn't be. He licked his lips and she found herself unconsciously mimicking the motion as she wondered what his kiss would taste like.

A slow electric burn went through her and had nothing to do with her powers. As he continued to devour her with his gaze, it was all she could not to moan out loud. There had been many other male archangels who had looked at her like that, but not one had made her ache like he did. And that was what made what she felt for him so dangerous. "Leave it, Cliona. It could never work between us."

But the fairy had her teeth into the subject and she was not letting go. "Why not? He's single, so are you, he's a hunk, you're a hottie, he can blow things up just by lifting a hand, so can you."

"You know what my childhood was like. I'm a freak."

"No, you're not," Cliona vehemently defended her. "It's not your fault your parents and two oldest brothers turned demon and dragged you and Appolion to hell. You guys were only nine years old at the time for cripes sake."

"After what happened to me there, I'm no longer pure." Her face burned with shame. "The Chief of Archangels deserves better than that."

"That wasn't your doing." Now Cliona's eyes grew dark with anger although Rachael knew it was directed at her demon brothers and not her. "You were just a child, nobody blames you for that."

"Then how about this? I'm a coward. I left Appolion alone to face our father's wrath."

"Are you talking about all those years you were in that coma?"

"Yes." Although it hadn't really been a coma, but rather a deep magical trance, she had been for all intended purposes *out of it* for centuries while her twin continued to grow up and be abused in Hell.

"But I thought it was Appolion who put you to sleep in the first place to protect you."

"It was," Rachael admitted, her throat tight. While she had slept and was safe, Appolion had taken twice as many beatings. He'd done it

willingly just so she would be safe. "But I've never been able to forgive myself for having it so much easier than him. At times, I hated him for putting me in that position. Doesn't that make me an awful sister? Resenting him just because he wanted to protect me?"

"Stop it." Cliona slapped one hand on the mat. "You are one of the bravest most caring females I know. The Chief would be proud to have you by his side."

Rachael gestured to herself. "Look at me, I'm the last likely candidate to be the mate of the Chief of the Archangels. Could you really see me standing by his side at one of those formal angel ceremonies? I would probably do something horrible to embarrass him, like belch during a moment of silence or worse."

Michael and Joe finished fighting, put the practice swords away and made their way out of the gym, passing the females on the way out. Michael's eyes locked on hers again and her treacherous heart started fluttering.

"Hello, Cliona, Rachael," he said as they passed.

Rachael closed her eyes and breathed in Michael's unique sent. It was spicy and earthy at the same time. All too soon, once he was gone, it dissipated.

"You're sniffing him!" Cliona accused.

Rachael snapped her eyes open. "I am not."

"Are, too."

Rachael ground her teeth together, pissed she'd been caught up in the oldest schoolyard game. "You're so immature."

"Which is why I'm your best friend." Cliona flipped her hair over her shoulder.

Rachael smiled in spite of herself. "I'm going out patrolling tonight, do you want to tag along?"

"I can't, I promised Mom I would hang with her since I'm leaving tomorrow."

"Okay, I'll see you later," Rachael said as she got up and went to get ready for some good old-fashioned demon hunting. After the conversation with Cliona, it would be nice to find something to take her aggressions out on.

\* \* \* \*

No sooner had Michael and Joe left the gym then the Chief's cell phone rang. Scowling, he pulled it out and quickly flipped it open when he saw it was Nathaniel. "What's going on?" he asked. The second oldest of Lehor's boys, Nathaniel was by far the most distant with the Chief. There was no way he'd ever make a call to catch up on the latest gossip so this must be about warrior business.

"Ramiel and I got ambushed on our way back to the compound," Nathaniel said in a strained

voice. A couple of gunshots echoed across the connection before he continued, "We knew the demons had set up a parameter around our home, but we had no clue it was this thick and well organized."

"How far away are you?" He signaled with one hand for Joe to follow him as he changed directions to the garage.

"We're only like a half hour drive away. They got us in that really small town that's north of the compound. You should have seen it, Chief. They were just waiting for one of us to go through. As soon as we drove by, they shot out all the tires and attacked."

"Are either one of you hurt?" He and Joe had made it to his car and he popped the trunk and pulled out a pair of Glocks, giving one to the other male.

"Ramiel's trying to hide it from me, but I think he's shot. We got separated in the cluster fuck, so I can't see for sure. I can hear him though and he's got a mouth that could put Cam to shame. You should hear some of the crap he yelling at them."

Another shot rang off and it sounded way too close for his comfort. "Hold tight," Michael ordered as he climbed in behind the wheel. "We're on our way."

They found Ramiel hunkered down behind a



dumpster, hiding from gunfire. Sure enough, his right jean leg was saturated with blood. Although he looked a bit green in the gills, he was still displaying his usual archangel cockiness. Michael and Joe joined him. They all winced when a bullet hit just overhead, bright sparks flashing in the dark. Michael gave a tilt of his head toward where the attack was originating and Joe nodded before he peeled off. The Chief ran to where Ramiel was, dodging bullets, until he was next to his oldest nephew. Ramiel peeked around the corner, squeezed off a few shots of his own, before taking cover again.

"Hey, Uncle Mike." He beamed at the Chief. "Did you come to play with us?"

"What are you two morons even doing out tonight?" Michael looked around and saw no sign of Nathaniel. "Shouldn't you be at the compound, getting ready to leave tomorrow?"

"Oh, Mom and Ana are packing our bags for us. Mom even promised to send my favorite blankie and stuffed doggie."

"How are you doing?" Michael gestured to the injury.

"Just a flesh wound." Ramiel shrugged like it was nothing. "I can't run though so I couldn't go help Nathaniel."

"You've lost a lot of blood."

"I've had much worse. As soon as we get back

to the compound, I'll have a healer take a look at it."

"Yeah, you have had worse," Michael grumbled as he wondered just how many more times blood was going to be spilled before this war was over.

A shot rang out and shattered the windshield of a nearby vehicle. Ramiel cursed loudly before yelling, "Hey, assholes, that was my car you know."

Michael didn't even have time to chastise his nephew for his stupidity before a volley of shots rang out. It seemed to go on forever, the reports echoing through the streets. When it was finally over, the car looked more like Swiss cheese than SUV.

Michael shook his head to clear his ears. "Word of advice, dumbass, you never, never, never tell them it's your car."

Ramiel shot off a shit-eating grin. "But it's not my car. It's Nathaniel's."

Nathaniel's voice came from the darkness. "Ramiel, you asshat, I'm going to kick your teeth in when we get out of this."

"You should be counting yourself damn lucky that I just didn't leave your sorry self behind," Ramiel called back with a good bit of humor in his voice. "I'm not the one who was dumb enough to get stuck on the wrong side of the building. I have

a clear path to the car, I could just walk over there and take off."

"You mean the car that you just got shot up?" Nathaniel's outraged response brought some gunfire his way. Once it cleared up, he shouted back, "I don't see how you're helping me anyhow. It looks to me like you're just sitting around with your thumb up your ass."

Three shots rang out, each one clear and precise. They all flinched, but this time no bullets came flying their way because they hadn't been the target.

"You can come out of your rabbit hole now," Joe's voice came from where the justice angels had been. "I took care of the bad guys for you."

"Thanks, Twin." Nathaniel was already up and making his way to the rest of the group. Whenever they didn't know if they were talking to Joe or Case, they just said, *Twin* as it made things less confusing for everyone.

When Joe rejoined the group, Michael looked them over and thought about how they had changed over the past years and not for the better. Nathaniel had a dark edge to him since the death of his mate. A mate that he found out had betrayed him in the worst way. The twins still smiled, but it wasn't with the same carefree way it used to be. Now there was a sadness that always lingered in their blue eyes. There was also a hard

edge to them that Michael knew would never be softened up.

Ramiel had changed the most. As the oldest brother, he took every blow the family suffered to heart. When Cam had been captured and transformed into part-demon, Ramiel's heart had changed a bit, too. When Derel had been forced into slavery, Ramiel had blamed himself. Even after they had got him back, Ramiel still shouldered the guilt like a heavy weight. The crap with Bear had been the hardest on the archangel. Yes, he still joked with his brothers, but Michael could see it was all an act. It was as if someone had ripped all the warmth out of the archangel and replaced it with a need for cold hard vengeance.

*I've failed them,* Michael thought. *At every turn, I let them down. No wonder Lehor kept them away from me all these years.* Michael's head jerked to the side as he sensed another angel's presence, drawing him out of his depressing musing. It was a distant scent, not too close, but close enough to make his body instantly come to attention. He fished his car keys out of the front pocket of his jeans, trying hard to ignore how tight they had suddenly become and tossed them to Ramiel. "Take my car and get back to the compound," he ordered. "Make sure you see a healer first. Lehor would kick my ass if I let you get gangrene."

"Angels don't get gangrene. You know that whole immortal thing?" Nathaniel replied with dark sarcasm.

"Don't be an ass," Ramiel snapped at his brother before frowning at Michael. "How are you going to get back?"

"Don't worry about, me," he muttered, too distracted by the wandering angel's call to worry about something as trivial as a way home. "Don't let Joe out of your sight until tomorrow, that's your mother's orders. If you do, then I'm not checking his ass again." He didn't bother to look back at them even when he heard them all say quietly one word together.

"Ray."

He left their ungrateful asses behind and made his way down the dark streets. He didn't need a damn map or GPS to tell him where he would find her because he always knew where she was. It was almost as if the fates had relegated a part of his brain that's sole purpose was to focus on Rachael. Michael had never bought into the whole soul mate or love at first sight crap, but if he did, then that was what he would think was going on between him and the female archangel.

*I'm just checking on one of my warriors, he told himself. That's all it is. I would do the same thing for any archangel who had gone off by themselves without backup. I would be remiss in my duties if I didn't follow*

*her and find out what she was up to.*

He finally caught up with her in an alley. Instead of alerting her to his presence, he hung back and followed her, sticking to the shadows. The hide and seek thing wouldn't have worked for most other angels. Rachael was a member of the Order and, because of that, she possessed some pretty strong skills. She had a psychic sense that almost could put him to shame. *Almost*. He still had a few extra tricks and he used them to his advantage to mask his scent from her.

She strolled down the center of the street, her high-heeled boots clicking on the pavement. She had a small dagger out and was tapping it against her right thigh as she searched in front of her. A small sword was strapped to her back and the scabbard swung over her finely curved ass. His gut tightened as he thought about how soft and sweet her flesh would be under his lips.

She suddenly stopped short and her body stiffened. "Who's out there?"

He smiled to himself. It looked like her gifts were a match for his after all. That should have annoyed him, not make him even more rock hard. She spun around and fixed him with an annoyed glare. She had pulled her hair back in preparation for patrolling, but a lock had escaped and was cupping her face.

"Why are you following me around like some

sicko stalker?" she demanded.

*Because I am a sicko stalker.* "I was just making sure your back's covered. It's stupid for any warrior to go by themselves, especially now that we're at war."

She rolled her eyes and marched over to him.

That's what he'd always admired best about her. All other females backed away from him, but not her, she had always stepped forward and went toe-to-toe with him. She wasn't afraid to hand him his own ass on a platter, in fact she'd done just that a couple of times in the past.

"We've been at war for years now, Chief." Those intense blue eyes sparkled with anger. "Are you sure you're not checking up on me because you don't trust me? You wouldn't be alone, there are still a lot of angels who hate my brothers and me because of the rest of my family."

"You know that's not true. I'd trust you with my life. I've never given you, Abdiel or Appolion any reason to believe otherwise." He found himself unable to pull away from her gaze. He could very easily get lost in those eyes if he let himself. "You should know that by now."

She studied him for a few more seconds before her face softened. "I'm sorry, Michael." The way his name rolled off her lips reminded him of butter on a hot roll. "I guess I'm feeling little bitchy because I don't want to leave on the

mission tomorrow."

"Am I really that bad to be around?" He tried hard to make his voice sound light and kidding.

She gave a half smile, showing off her right dimple. "No, I'm just going to miss everyone we leave back at home."

"We'll be back before you know it." His hand somehow found its way to that tendril of hair that was caressing her face. He was pretty sure that he only meant to brush it out of her way, but his hand lingered, cupping her cheek. He was both pleased and stunned when she didn't pull away. Instead, she closed her eyes and turned her face more toward his touch.

Her skin was as soft as he'd always dreamed it would be. He yearned to lean down and taste her mouth, to see if that tasted as good as he'd always imagined it would be. He didn't dare though, that would be crossing some unspoken line. He was her Chief and he should treat her like any other one of his warriors.

She pressed her face into his touch, much like he had done with Lehor earlier. That probably was because Rachael saw him as a mentor or brother figure. If she knew that he was getting off on this, she would probably be disgusted. She turned her cheek even more into his hand and that was when he felt it.

The soft feathering of her lips against his flesh.



Oh, this was so different than the sisterly touch that Lehor had given him earlier. He held his breath, not wanting to allow himself to believe that she'd just done that. Then he felt a sweep of velvet against his palm as her tongue darted out and caressed him. She looked up at him from under her dark sooty lashes and he saw two things that he'd never seen before in Rachael's eyes, fear and desire.

Somehow he knew that the fear wasn't of what they were doing and where it could lead. She was terrified that he would reject her. If she only knew that he could never do that.

His hand was still on her cheek so he only had to move it mere inches to cup the back of her head and bring her even closer to him. Her soft curves melted perfectly into him. Her eyes widened briefly in surprise, but she didn't protest or fight his hold. If anything, she swayed even more into him, like she wanted the bodily contact as much as he did.

"All I need is one taste," he growled. "Then I can get you out of my system."

"I didn't know that I was in your system," she breathed.

He slowly lowered his lips to hers, waiting for her to come to her senses and protest. She did the opposite, she stood on tiptoe and wrapped her arms around his neck. One kiss, that's all he

needed, then his curiosity would be sated. Then he could finally focus on his job and things could go back to the way they used to be when he was in control.

As soon as he captured that sweet little mouth in a kiss, he knew that he'd been lying to himself. Her lips parted as she let out a sigh and he used that opportunity to slip his tongue in. He took his time to slowly explore her mouth in gentle sweeps.

Her fingers started to make lazy circles at the nape of his neck as she played with his hair. Michael almost moaned out loud because it felt so good. He knew that he should pull away and end it, but he'd waited for so many damn years for this that he didn't have the strength. Lehor had been right, he had been a fool for letting her walk around without his mark.

She tore her mouth away and they both panted for several seconds as they got their breath back. So many conflicting emotions were raging through him that his mind was a jumbled mess. As his nephews liked to say, shit, damn, fuck. That one kiss hadn't satisfied his curiosity, it had made him want her even more.

For the first time in nearly forever, he could see himself actually taking a mate. He yearned to wake up everyday with her in his arms, to have her by his side as he led the angel warriors, to be

his...everything.

"So did that get you out of my system?" Rachael asked in a husky whisper.

*Huh? What was she saying?* He was so floored by the thoughts hammering through his skull that he didn't register what she'd said. He just dumbly nodded his head. Her eyes flared with anger and hurt and a flash of lighting danced through the sky.

"You pompous jerk," she spat before spinning on her heels and walking away from him.

*Oh fuck! Nice going there, Slick.* All of the sudden he realized what his dumb ass had just done. "Wait, Rachael. I didn't mean it like that. It was really nice."

She stopped suddenly in her tracks like someone had bitch slapped her. "*Nice?*" She turned and he flinched when he saw her expression. "Nice is how you describe a sweater or a new book. You don't use nice to describe a knock-you-out-of-your-boots kind of kiss that we just shared."

"So you liked it then?"

She let out a little growl before she began to walk away again.

"Rachael! Wait!" He started to follow her before she turned, raised her hand and shot off a bolt of lightning. It grazed the tip of his boot before rebounding into the dark night. It was a warning shot, Rachael never missed a target.

He held his palms up in surrender and let her go. As he watched her walk away from him, he felt like a total failure. In the span of five seconds, he'd managed to blow any headway he'd made with her.

He groaned when another thought occurred to him. He'd been counting on her to give him a ride back to the compound. Now he was stuck in the city with no way back. This time he didn't even try to hold back the curses. "Shit, damn, fuck!"

## Chapter Two

**M**ichael waited impatiently for his partner to drag her butt to the garage so they could leave on the mission. Leaning against his vehicle, he resisted the urge to go find her and drag her back, kicking and screaming if necessary, so they could finally get on the road. He been left hanging for over an hour as the other teams had left, one by one, until he'd been the only one left.

Now that he was alone, the silence that was bouncing off the walls and gray concrete floors was overwhelming. Which surprised the hell out of him. Up until recently, he'd always lived alone, but at the insistence of Lehor, he'd moved into the quarters she'd shared with her children and all their mates and all their children and all their friends and all their cats, and just about every other being or thing they'd decided to drag in. It didn't hurt matters that Rachael lived there, too, although even before last night, they had done everything in their power to avoid one another.

Finding himself surrounded by the peace and quiet of the garage was dissertating because it reminded him of those centuries he'd been alone and well...lonely. He kicked the tire of the car, hating that he'd become so needy.

He studied a burn mark in the toe of his boot that had been left by Rachael's lightning and frowned. He'd really ticked her off last night. Hopefully she wasn't still mad at him. That would make the long hours in the car awkward to say the least. If he knew Rachael, she still was angry and that was probably why she was making him wait for her now.

The distant clicking of heels on the garage floor announced her arrival and he waited with baited breath for her to come into view. Once she rounded the corner and he got a full gander at her stiff posture and closed face, he knew a scuffed boot was the least of his problems.

She walked right past him, without giving him a glance, and started to put her bags in the back of the SUV. She was wearing a short red skirt that had ruffles going along the bottom, it barely covered her ass and showed almost every inch of her tight legs. Her top wasn't much better, while the black shirt did have long sleeves, it was cropped so short her taunt belly was open for all to see.

Michael noticed she'd pierced her bellybutton.

It was a recent addition because he hadn't noticed it the last time he'd looked and he was finally ready to admit he looked every single chance he got. "You're late," he grumbled.

She gave him an insolent shrug. "I had to say my goodbyes and I wanted them to be private."

In other words, *I wanted some time with my loved ones and that didn't include you, Michael*. He ran his hand through his hair again. It was something he did whenever he was pissed, nervous or upset. "Look, about last night."

She spun on him and pointed a finger in his face. "If you were smart, you wouldn't bring that up."

"I just wanted to explain things."

Her eyes grew stormy. "See, there you go, bringing it up. I knew you weren't smart, now I have proof."

He started to get a little pissed himself. "You really need to remember I'm your Chief and just not another male panting after you."

It was true, there were countless males who lusted after the little fireball of sex. She'd always seemed oblivious to their admiration while he'd always noticed and hated them for it. More than once, he'd just barely managed to stop himself from clobbering one of the doting fools.

Her finger went back into his face. "And you need to remember I'm not another one of your

simpering females who moon over the Great Michael, just waiting for a glance or a smile."

"Look," Michael fired off between clenched teeth. "We don't know how long this mission might last, so we may be around each other for a while. I think it would be smart to set down a few ground rules."

Her lips curled in a sarcastic smile. "I couldn't agree more. So here they are," she held up her hand and started to tick off with her fingers, "you will not talk to me more than necessary, you won't touch me and you will not order me around." She turned her back on him and started toward the passenger side of the car.

Michael was so shocked, he just stood there like some idiot and watched her. *She turned her back and dismissed me!* In the span of five seconds, she had spanked him and put him in his place. He didn't know whether to laugh or call her out for her insubordination. He did know one thing, it was the turn on of his immortal life.

He gathered up his pride and muddled senses and got into driver's side of the SUV. He'd purposely chosen to take his red Hummer because it had extra legroom and plenty of room for their equipment.

He buckled his seat belt and turned to address her and remind her of her place. But, she had her back to him and her iPod buds in her ears. It was a



very obvious, *Shut up, not interested in talking.* He sighed and started the car. This small archangel was going to be the death of him. She had him twisting in the wind already. What was she going to do if she ever found out he was head over tails in love with her?

\* \* \* \*

Bear ran down the dark street, Dina by his side. At first the only sounds were their harsh breaths and the pounding of their tennis shoes against the wet pavement. Soon the footsteps of the demon pursuers got closer and closer until Bear could practically feel them breathing down his neck.

He resisted the urge to turn around and see how close the demons were, not wanting to slow himself down. With each step he took, he could feel more strength weep from his body. A few months ago, he would have been able to outrun these bastards without a hitch, but that had been before he'd become host to the parasite from Hades. "Get away," he gasped to Dina. "I know you're holding back for me."

Dina grabbed Bear by his arm and pulled him along. "No way, you wouldn't leave me behind and I'm not bailing on you."

They rounded the corner and Bear could finally see the car. If they could just get to it, then they

could get to the guns they'd left behind in there. They were loaded with bullets infused with holy water and that was a demon's greatest weakness.

The site of their black Escalade bolstered his small reserve of energy and he pushed himself forward. Each step ate up more of the pavement and gave him hope he'd actually make it. Just when he thought they were going to actually do it, a heavy weight tackled him from behind and took him down.

He saw stars when his chin slammed down into the ground. Shaking them off, he twisted around to face his attacker. Before he had a chance to fully recover, the demon was on him again. Bear choked as the strong scent of decay invaded his senses. Out of the corner of his eye, he could see Dina engaged in his own battle, although his buddy had managed to stay on his feet.

The demon started to punch Bear repeatedly in the stomach and chest. He tried to buck him off, but the angel was too weak to do much of anything. Something warm and sticky was soaking his clothes and he realized the demon hadn't been punching him, he'd been stabbing him. Even as this sickening revelation came to him, the demon plunged the dagger in a few more times.

"Why?" Bear moaned. Crap, if he'd been human he'd be dead already from the number of

times the demon had stuck him.

"We know you angels are seeking the child," the male all but hissed.

*Child? What child?* "I don't know what the fuck you're talking about. Have you been smoking something?"

That comment earned him another vicious hard plunge of the demon's blade. Bear tried to hold it back, but a loud yell of pain escaped his lips. What he wouldn't give to be back in his former fighting condition. A few months ago and he would have been using the demon's ass to mop up the street.

He struggled to grab his own dagger, which he'd dropped when he'd been tackled. It was just out of his reach. He focused his energy on it and tried to use his telekinesis to call it to him. Since he was one of a handful of angels that had that ability, the demon wouldn't be expecting it. But he was so drained from blood loss that all the dagger did was twitch a bit.

He felt the thing that was inside of him start to stir. Out of habit, Bear started to fight it. *Back off, motherfucker.* He commanded the parasite that feasted on his soul. Legion's voice came into his head, it was so familiar to Bear that the piece of shit was almost like family now.

*Let me out. I'm strong enough to fight for both of us.*

Bear shook his head even as the demon stabbed him again. *You know the rules, you aren't allowed out*

to play.

Fool! Legion's voice sounded like snakes, all tongue and hiss. *If you won't do it to save yourself, then at least do it to save your little friend.*

Bear looked over at Dina and saw even though the empath was kicking some ass, the odds were against him and he wasn't going to last much longer. But what if Legion hurt Dina, too?

*I would never hurt Dina, he is a Deathwalker and my brethren worshiped his kind at one time.*

Bear still hesitated, mainly out of instinct. The demon plunged the blade in once more, this time adding a vicious twist. At the same time, he heard Dina let out his own grunt of pain and he smelled his friend's blood being spilled. *What the hell? Since when can I smell blood?* He realized for once letting Legion out of his cage might be a good thing. Bear relaxed his mind and let the thing slither out from the depths.

When Bear regained his mind and body, he was still in the same dark street. His ass was wet and cold from sitting on the pavement and his entire body screamed in pain. Looking around, the carnage he saw made him start to shake from head to boot.

The demons had been torn apart. Their broken and bloodied bodies were tossed around like some kind of broken dolls from Hell. Dina was

crouched over by the side of a building, watching him warily. He directed a flashlight at Bear and relaxed as a look of relief went over his face. Bear knew this friend was looking to see what color his eyes were. Whenever Legion took over, Bear's eyes turned black instead of his normal blue.

Dina hobbled over, his gray eyes searching Bear for injuries. The angel winced and Bear looked down at his body to see what had caused that reaction. Crap, he was bleeding pretty bad. Dina ran a hand through his black hair, the streetlamps picked up his blue highlights and accentuated the messed up way the fight had left it.

Neither Bear nor Dina dressed the way all other angel warriors did. They both preferred to dress in all black and style their hair in unusual ways. Bear's latest was to tip his blond hair with black. "Oh shit, Dina." Bear was so freaked he almost whimpered. "What the fuck did I just do?"

Dina gave a slight shake of his head. "It wasn't you. It was Legion."

Bear tried to get up and fell right back down when his legs immediately gave out. "Let's cut through the bull shit, I let him out, Dina. Look around us, it wasn't a battle, it was a slaughter. So it was my fault that this happened."

"I don't care that you let him out, I'm glad. Those bastards were going to kill us."

Bear felt more hot blood rushing from his

wounds. "The one attacking me kept talking about how the angels were looking for some child. Do you have any clue what he was talking about?"

Dina took off his hoodie and pressed it to Bear's stomach, trying to stop the bleeding. "No, but that's why we left, so we wouldn't know what Michael and the angel warriors were doing."

Because if Bear knew, then Legion knew and Legion had a physic link to Lucifer. Bear shivered as he thought about how close his mind was to the devil's. The familiar feeling of violation washed over him. God, he felt so tainted and dirty.

"Bear," Dina said gently. "I can't stop the bleeding. We need to find you a healer. That means we have to find an angel warrior team stationed nearby."

Bear wanted to argue no angel was safe near him. The only reason he let Dina stay with him is because his friend refused to leave his side. He tried to talk, but a soothing darkness came over him and he lost all consciousness.

\* \* \* \*

As Michael drove down the highway, he tried hard to keep his eyes on the road, but he wasn't having much luck. In all fairness, the beautiful female archangel sleeping in the passenger seat wasn't exactly making it easy for him.

The car was silent, but that wasn't just because she was asleep. The entire day she had left her ear buds in and looked out the window, refusing to even meet his eye, let alone talk to him. At first, he'd been relived because he'd half expected her to give him another tongue-lashing. Then he'd been disappointed because he'd found that he loved to talk with her. It wasn't just the fun sexual byplay that he missed, it was the every day casual conversations.

He glanced over at her again and noticed she'd curled up on her side and tucked her legs up. Her red skirt had ridden up and it was to the top of her thigh. His mouth went dry when he realized how close he was to seeing her ass. Just a few more inches and he'd be able to view it all.

He jerked his head away and gripped the steering wheel so tight his knuckles turned white. What kind of pervert was he? Appolion and Abdiel would have his head if they knew he was ogling their sister. He was supposed to be Rachael's leader, not her stalker. She'd made it perfectly clear she wanted nothing to do with him.

Even as he mentally ticked off all the reasons why he should keep his eyes forward, he still couldn't resist the pull and looked back. Her creamy thigh just begged to be touched and his hand was halfway there before he caught himself. He pulled it back and ran it through his hair in

frustration.

She shifted a little more and the skirt rode up even further. *That's it, baby. Just give me a couple more inches. Then I can see what color those panties are that you're wearing. Better yet, I can see if you are a panties girl or if you prefer thongs.*

The wheel jerked as he drifted toward the curve. He cursed and jerked the car back on the road, but not before the loud pops of gravel hitting the side of the Hummer gave him away. Rachael jerked awake, her dark hair tumbling in her face.

She pushed it aside and sat up, her brow creasing in a questioning way. "Is everything okay?" Her voice was heavy with sleep.

He gave her what he hoped was a convincing smile. "Sure, everything's just peachy."

Her brow went even higher. "*Peachy?* I don't think that I've ever heard you say that word. If you're tired, then all you have to do is tell me and I'll take over. You don't need to fall asleep at the wheel and kill us both."

"I wasn't falling asleep," he growled. "I was distracted."

"By what?"

Although he knew the last thing he should do was admit to her that she had been the distraction, he let his gaze linger on her legs. Even though she'd sat up, the red skirt was still hiked high up



on her legs.

\* \* \* \*

Rachael let out a mortified gasp when she realized her goods were almost hanging out in front of her Chief. Her face burned as she pulled the skirt down. Dear Lord, he must be disgusted by her behavior. First, she'd practically thrown herself at him last night and now she was flashing him. No wonder he hadn't been impressed by their kiss. He probably thought she was some tramp. "I'm sorry," she said stiffly. She cringed when she heard how angry her words sounded. The mortifying embarrassment she was feeling was putting a harsh edge to her words. "I didn't mean to disgust you."

He broke his gaze away from the road and gave her an incredulous look. "You have never disgusted me, Ray."

She shivered when he used her nickname. Hearing it come from his lips made it seem like they shared an almost intimate relationship. She shook it off, she wasn't going to fool herself into thinking Michael really had special feelings for her. Every time she'd done so in the past had led to her being disappointed and hurt. Besides, Michael was way out of her league. He was the leader of the archangels and here she was the

daughter of demons. Michael raked his eyes over her legs and Rachael was stunned to see the desire that was in those baby browns. He sure didn't look disgusted, if anything he acted like he enjoyed what he saw.

"I'm the one who should be sorry." He continued to look her over. "I need to be acting proper and averting my gaze. I sure as hell shouldn't be wondering what color your panties are."

She didn't know who was more surprised by his admission, him or her.

His jaw dropped before he recovered. "I probably shouldn't have said that. It's just the sight of your legs have rendered me stupid."

"They're black," she blurted.

"Huh?"

"My panties, they're black." She felt her face flush again and ducked her head down. She'd never been a blusher before. Then again, she'd never told a male what color her skivvies were either. But there had never been a male who had the guts to admit he'd been looking at her. She'd seen other angel warriors sneaking glances before and every time she'd tried to meet their eyes or start up a conversation, they'd always found a reason to immediately leave her vicinity. She didn't know if it was because all the Lehor brothers were overprotective of her or because of

her own two archangel brothers, maybe it was even her and her powers that scared them away. Whatever the reason, no male but Michael had ever dared to look and then admit he'd been looking.

He gave her a look so hot she was glad she was sitting or else her legs might have given out from under her. "I've always liked black."

*Then I'll have to make sure that I never wear any other color.* A little voice chanted in her head. She told that voice to behave herself while she tried not to let on how much Michael's words were making her feel like putty inside. The last thing she was going to do was give him the upper hand again. That might earn her another *nice*.

She pointed to a set of yellow arches glowing like a beacon into the dark night. "Pull in there, I'm hungry and I need to stretch my legs." He obeyed her and once he parked, she got out and went inside, leaving him behind because his cell phone was going off. She used the restroom and then went to the counter and ordered a good old artery-clogging dinner. Okay, maybe if really wouldn't clog her arteries because she was immortal, but all that grease probably wasn't good for her complexion either.

While she waited for the food, she walked in tight circles across the deserted foray and tried to work out the knots in her muscles. It had been a

rough day. Most of the time she'd only been pretending to sleep when she'd really been in a tight tense ball. Even though she'd been mad at Michael, she couldn't help but be aware of his every movement, sigh, breath.

"Get a grip on yourself, Rachael," she whispered. "Michael's made it perfectly clear he's not really interested in you. You're nothing but someone to flirt with. He'd never settle for little old you." She let out a disgusted sigh, fluffed her hair and then it hit her. A wave of despair so thick and strong it made her stagger a bit. Someone was hurting nearby, hurting bad. Not a physical pain, but an emotional one and she knew better than anyone that those hurt the worst. The most shocking thing of all was that someone hurting was Michael.

She turned toward the window and looked at him. He was leaning against the car, still talking on his phone. He hung it up and immediately called another number. Even from a distance, she could see the tense lines on his face.

Not very many things could surprise her, she'd seen pretty much everything there was to see in her immortal lifetime, but damned if she wasn't surprised at this moment. Until now, she'd never been able to pick up on any of Michael's thoughts or feelings. The Chief was a master at masking his emotions even from a strong psychic like herself.

So why was she tuning into him now?

"Hey, lady, your order's ready."

Rachael barely gave the human female clerk a glance as she grabbed the bags. Her need to be with Michael was so strong she had to resist the urge to run to him. Each step closer to him brought more of his emotions. He was in pain and only one thing could affect him this bad. One of his nephews must be injured or worse. Once she got to his side, she placed the bags on the roof of the car and unashamedly listened in on his conversation. She loved all of the Lehor boys and they meant as much to her as they did to him.

"Yes, he's in an alley about three blocks from your safe house," Michael said into the phone. "He'll be with another empath named Dina."

Rachael sucked in her breath. It meant that little Bear was hurt then. It must be pretty bad if Michael was taking the risk of exposing other angels to him, too. She placed a comforting hand on Michael's arm even though he didn't even seem to notice she was there.

"In case you hadn't heard," Michael continued. "Bear isn't exactly himself lately. Your healer is going to have to use extreme caution. Have her call Raphael, he'll be able to direct her." He was silent as he listened for a few minutes before he croaked out, "Thank you, I'll never be able to repay you for this."

As soon as he shut his phone, she asked gently, "What happened?"

"Bear and Dina were attacked and Bear was cut up pretty bad."

Rachael's breath hitched. "Will he be okay?"

Michael gave a slow shake of his head, his jaw clenched and unclenched like he was battling for control of his emotions. "They'll be able to heal his external wounds, but Bear's not going to be okay."

Her stomach dropped as fear coursed through her body. "What do you mean?"

Michael turned his face away, hiding his pain. "I can feel his life force dwindling more every day. The longer he's fighting Legion for control, the more it takes out of him. He's slowly dying and there's nothing I can do to help him." *I can't lose him again.*

Michael hadn't spoke the last sentence out loud, but she still could hear it plainly as if he had. She wanted to dissolve into tears and give into her own grief. But she knew she had to remain strong. Michael needed that more than anything now.

She didn't know if Michael would take any comfort from her. Every time she had seen him face a crisis before, he had always insisted on doing it alone. Never had she seen him turn to anyone, even his sister. Still, if she didn't try, then she could never live with herself. Timidly, she wrapped her arms around his waist and put her

head in his chest. *Please, don't turn away from me. Let me make some of hurt go away. It won't make you look weak.* Even as she chanted those words over and over in her head, she put up a mental shield so he wouldn't be able to pick them up.

For one horror filled minute, she thought that he was going to shove her away. He stiffened up and she held her breath, afraid to move even an inch. Then she felt the warmth of his hands on her back right before he rested his cheek on the top of her head. Her victory was complete when his body relaxed into hers and he let out a breath. If it had been any other male, she would have called it a sigh.

"Rachael," he whispered.

"Hmm..." She never pulled back.

"You'll never be out of my system."

She looked up and their lips were only inches apart. There were so many things she wanted to say. Stuff that been heavy on her heart for years. Was now really the time? Just as she opened her mouth to say something, a group of demons flashed into the parking lot, mere feet from them. "How did they know that we're here?" she gasped.

Still keeping her in his embrace, he answered her, "The same way they knew where Bear was. They must be looking for the child, too."

\* \* \* \*

They were trying to drown him. Now why in the fucking hell were they trying to do that? Bear coughed up a mouthful of water, the tangy taste of blood was mixed in with it. That brought back the memories, he and Dina had been attacked and he was messed up bad.

Bear tried to open his eyes, but they refused to obey him. He dimly became aware he was standing and several pairs of hands were holding him up. The water was still pouring down on him, but it was warm and someone had been kind enough to move his face from under the spray so he was able to breath. Distant rumbles slowly organized themselves and he was able to make out the conversation going on around him. He didn't recognize any of the voices and they all sounded far away.

"Just heal him and get him the hell away from here."

"We can't, he's covered in demon's blood and in case you forgot, that's a deadly poison to us," a firm, yet sensual sounding female voice countered.

"Just weak empaths like you. It'll just make archangels and healers sick."

A third voice chimed in, another female. "No one asked you to stay and help. There's nothing



you can do to help."

"If you think I'm going to let my angel warrior team be around this...thing for one minute without my protection, then your doing Benadryl shots. I think we should just dump his ass on the street and forget we ever saw him."

"Just try it, jackass," Dina snarled.

Ah, finally a voice Bear recognized, thank God for small favors.

"You'll get a real quick lesson on just how vicious an empath can be. You won't be the first archangel who learned that the hard way."

Bear finally managed to get his lids to open, just a bit, but enough to see he was in a bright white shower stall and surrounded by a group of angels. The one holding his chest was a female, her build was more toward empaths, small and scrawny, but he instinctively knew she was a healer.

The kid noticed Bear was awake and a smile lit up her brown eyes, she brushed a piece of wet hair out of her face. It was a mousy brown, but she had several different colored highlights in it, reminding him of a rainbow.

"Don't worry, we've got your back. As soon as we get you clean, I'll heal you and you'll be good as new."

The archangel's voice cut in from behind Bear. "No, you won't be healing him. I forbid it. It's too dangerous for you to mix with that thing that is in

him.”

The kid shot a vicious look over in the direction of the voice. “Michael himself called Jayleen and told her that we were to do it. Last time I checked, he was still our leader.”

“Michael’s not thinking right. Bear is his nephew and he’d do anything to protect him, even put us in danger.”

Bear opened his mouth to agree with the archangel. Even though the jerk was a complete and utter asshole, he was right. Michael should have never put this angel warrior team in this position. It wasn’t fair to ask them to risk their lives for his, even if he was the Chief’s nephew. No words would come from his damaged body though. Much to Bear’s dismay, Dina came to his defense.

“Do you have any idea at all what Bear has done for the angel warriors? He and his family have devoted their entire lives to us.”

“It’s true,” the other female voice agreed.

Whoever owned it was behind him and he couldn’t see her. She seemed older than the healer though.

“Bear has always looked out for us empaths.”

“Besides,” the younger female added. Her tone was cool and clipped, like she wasn’t going to stand for anyone’s bullshit. “Michael wasn’t the only one who called. My leader, Raphael called.

He ordered me to help Bear and I will."

Bear finally got a word out and it was a very eloquent, "Fuck."

The unseen female chided, "Language, language. Those Lehor boys always did have such potty mouths."

He tried again and this time got a, "Shit."

The healer's mouth twisted into a wry smile. "That's better, I think."

Bear collapsed and the healer grunted as she fought to hold him up. He whispered into her ear, "Just let me die. It'll be easier that way."

"Sorry, but I can't let that happen. I just didn't promise Raphael. I promised Tiffany."

"Tiffany," her name came out like a prayer. She was his mate, his life, his everything. The only reason he'd been able to fight Legion this long was by calling on his love for her.

"That's right, think about her. You can fight this."

Bear was stunned that such strong words could come from someone so young as this empath. "Okay," he conceded. "A little bit longer."

She gave him a hint of a smile as she placed her hand on his forehead. Her touch was cool and comforting. "Now rest and let us take care of you."

Bear closed his eyes and let himself fall into a healing sleep. His lips formed soundless words

right before he went under, *Tiffany, I love you.*

## Chapter Three

**R**achael darted a glance at the car, all the while keeping her other senses tuned into the demons waiting for their attack. Unarmed, she felt naked and vulnerable. Because there had been no way that she could have paraded through the fast food joint with a sword strapped to her back and remained inconspicuous, she had been forced to leave it in the car.

Even though she had seen for herself earlier that Michael wasn't armed either, she still ran her hand up his back. It was in a foolish hope that his weapon had magically appeared because they needed it so bad. Kind of like a human would pat their pockets looking desperately for their car keys, even when they could see them hanging from the ignition of their locked car. She started to pull away so she could attack, but his arms tightened around her and held her firmly in place.

"When I tell you to, go for our weapons. I'll hold them back."

Each word he spoke made a warm rush of air feather past her ear. A shiver went down her spine as she tilted her head to the side so more of her skin was exposed. She ran her hands up the expanse of his back again and this time it wasn't to see if he had a weapon, it was to cop a feel.

"You need to focus here, sweetie," he admonished.

She could feel his lips curve into a smile. His hands drifted down to her ass and she was shocked when he grabbed two handfuls and jerked her closer.

As her body slammed into his, the air came out of her lungs in a whoosh. His erection was pressing into her belly and she was shocked at how big it felt. An ache built up between her legs and it was all she could do not to moan out loud from it. One of the demons let out a growl as it came closer and she never wanted anything more dead at the moment. She didn't want to have to fight, she wanted to have just ten more minutes of privacy with Michael. She flexed her fingers as she felt lightning start to build inside her.

Michael gave her a slight slap on her bottom. "No, special tricks," he ordered. "Even though I'm pretty sure they already know who we are, there's no sense in announcing ourselves."

Before she could register the fact the Chief had actually spanked her, he threw her toward the car

with such force she went down and had to roll. At the same time, she noticed him wave his hand in the air so they were invisible to any humans who might be nearby.

She scrambled to the car, ignoring how pebbles dug into her hands and knees. She heard a grunt from Michael and she couldn't resist looking back. What she saw made her breath catch in her throat and to her horror, she got wet in between the thighs. It was something that was inconvenient, given the danger they were presently in, but it was something she couldn't help. Watching him fight was her form of Viagra. Michael in battle was like watching a wild lion stalk its prey. He moved with a fluid grace that was beautiful yet deadly looking at the same time.

He was single handedly taking on a handful of demon assassins, but he didn't show one ounce of fear. The demons on the other hand, showed a lot of terror. Their red eyes were wide on their hideous faces and their clawed hands trembled as they clutched their weapon.

Weapon. Oops. Right, she was supposed to be fetching those, not salivating over Michael. He had a way of distracting her. She fumbled with the door handle for several precious seconds before she was able to tear the door open. Just as her fingers curled around the hilt of Michael's sword, a clawed hand grabbed her by the ankle.

"No, no, no," she protested as she was dragged out. "Could this day get any worse?" She twisted her body around so she could face the demon. It was a male, or at least she thought it was. The features of its green face were so distorted it was hard to tell. She did know one thing for certain, it was damn ugly even for a demon.

She used her free foot to kick it in its ugly mug four times, using the tip of her heel for maximum injury. It didn't even faze the demon. Its black claws dug even deeper into her flesh and she bit back a scream as she felt blood starting to run freely from her wounds.

She stretched her body as far as she could, trying to get a grip on the weapon, but thanks to her small size, it was just barely out of reach. She heard Michael grunt and then the thud as he got knocked to the ground. That settled it, she was just going to have to disobey him. It's not like she did it that often. Just three or four times a week.

She put her hand on the demons misshapen head and let loose a bolt of energy. It jerked once, before it crumpled to the ground, smoke coming from its pointed ears. She sprang to her feet and fired off four more bolts, taking out the demons hitting Michael. The sight of him being attacked must have pissed her off more than she realized because all that was left behind of the demons were some smoldering ashes.



In a flash, Michael scooped her up and threw her over his shoulder.

She let out a surprised yelp right before the air was knocked out of her lungs as her stomach slammed into his rock hard shoulder. "What in the hell do you think you're doing?" she demanded as she struggled to get free. She used the palms of her hands to push herself upright some.

"You just couldn't obey me, could you?" he slapped her ass.

She let out a shriek of outrage even as she felt her panties grow even damper. No other male but him would dare treat her this way. "Why do you keep spanking my butt?"

"Because it's the only way I can seem to get your attention." He plopped her into the open backseat. "Would it kill you to just once do what I order?"

She impatiently pushed her wild mane of hair out of the way so he could see how angry she was. "I was saving you, jackass. In case you've forgotten, you are my leader and it's my duty to protect you."

Unzipping her boot, he frowned at the five puncture wounds encircling her ankle. Blood was slowly oozing from them and the flesh was already beginning to turn purple. He reached under the seat, grabbed the first aide kit and got out some four by four gauze pads. "Does it hurt?"

he asked as he gently wiped away the blood.

"It didn't until I looked at it." She hissed as he touched a particularly tender spot. "I'll be fine, you don't have to baby me."

"Every since I've known you, Rachael, you've always taken care of everyone. I've often wondered, who takes care of you?" He looked up.

She found herself locked in his knowing gaze. She fidgeted, hating the fact he was hitting so close to home. "I take care of myself."

She would be damned if she was going to admit the truth to him. That she went out of her way to watch out for everyone around her because she'd failed to protect Appolion while they were in Hell. She'd always felt guilty because while she'd been in her frozen state, her twin had been taking the abuse that had been meant for both of them.

Michael dressed her wound, his fingers leaving a heated path whenever they brushed against her flesh. When he finished, he kept his hand on her leg, lingering almost as if he enjoyed touching her as much as she did. He averted his gaze, but she could still feel the sadness plaguing him. She used her fingers to nudge his chin up, forcing him to look at her. "Who takes care of you, Michael?" she asked softly, trying hard to ignore the butterflies doing a disco in her stomach. She half expected him to bat her hands away and tell her to mind her own damn business.

He didn't get angry, instead, a crooked smile pulled at one half of his lips, giving him an almost boyish appearance. "I've never had anyone to take care of me."

Her heart broke at the matter of fact way he said those words. Even though she had been separated from Appolion and Abdiel most of her life, she's always known they loved her.

A lump built up in the back of her throat when she realized that she wanted to be the one who took care of him. Somehow, somewhere along the way, her infatuation for him had grown into love and that was the last thing either of them needed. She needed to pull away from him and put as much distance between the two of them that she could. So why wasn't she moving away?

"Why haven't you found a mate?" As soon as she asked the question, she wanted it back. She had no business asking the Chief something so personal. He would probably tell her off.

But he didn't take offense. "I did have a mate, centuries ago."

That was the last thing she expected to hear. "What happened to her?"

"Beelzebub hunted her down and killed her because she belonged to me."

How many times was her heart going to break today? "I'm so sorry. It must have devastated you."

He looked down at the ground, acting as if he were embarrassed by his sadness. "It did devastate me. I vowed then that I would never take another mate. I didn't ever want to go through that again."

A wave of disappointment went through her, which was ridiculous, it wasn't like they had anything going on between them. "Oh."

"I never regretted that decision."

At his words, her stomach dropped. Then he raised his head and the look on his face took her breath away. His eyes were dark with desire and the gaze so intense chills ran up her spine.

"I never regretted it," he repeated. "Until now."

There was so much she wanted to say, but all that came out was another, "Oh."

"You're about to get real mad at me." He inched forward so their faces were inches apart.

"Why?" she squeaked.

"Because I'm about to break your no-touching rule." One of his hands moved up so he could cup the back of her head, his fingers tangling into her hair.

"That's okay, I think I can make an exception just this once." She closed her eyes, just as his lips touched hers. As soon as they made contact, she knew she was lost. It was just like they described it in all those romance books, she saw stars, she

felt goose bumps prickle her flesh and her breath was taken away.

As she wrapped her legs around his hips and started to kiss him back in earnest, she was glad the humans couldn't see them. A thousand reasons why she should stop this screamed in her head, but none of them seemed to matter as his tongue slipped into her mouth and began to stroke.

He groaned into her mouth, like he enjoyed the taste of her. She knew that she was enjoying him. A slight shiver went through her when he put his hand on her waist. Thanks to her top, his hot touch was in direct contact with her eager flesh. His fingers splayed out until they were mere inches away from her aching breasts. Her nipples grew hard as she thought of him caressing her there.

"We shouldn't be doing this," he murmured against her lips before he went in for another taste.

"You're right," she agreed when he let her up for air. She grabbed him by the back of the head and brought him back so she could kiss him again. When his tongue darted out to taste hers, her eyes rolled back in her head. A foreign voice screamed in her head.

*Ray, we're under attack by a group of demon assassins.*

She pulled away from Michael with a gasp.

*Appolion, is that you?*

*No, it's the fucking Easter Bunny. Just how many voices do you have popping in your head for you to ask that question?*

A low growl choked her up. Leave it to her twin to tick her off even while being attacked. *Don't get snippy with me, just because you and Abdiel are in trouble.*

Abdiel answered, *She's right, Appolion.*

Rachael smiled to herself, her older brother always took her side.

*Ray, you need to tell the Chief the demons are on to us. Appolion and I are going to be able to finish off this group, but they knew about our mission and they want to make sure we aren't successful. Lucifer does not want us to find that child.*

She looked up at Michael, who had pulled back, too, but was still positioned between her legs. His eyes were distant, which showed he was having his own mental conversation. When she shot him a questioning look, he whispered, "Ramiel and Case, they were just ambushed."

"So were Appolion and Abdiel. They said the demons know about our mission and are trying to stop us."

"Ramiel told me the same thing." His jaw clenched. "They attacked all of our groups, Ramiel heard from Cam, Derel and Mael."

"Are they okay?" She gripped his arms as fear made her heart hammer in her chest.

"Our only real injury was Bear. The rest of us just have bumps and bruises."

"But Bear isn't part of our mission, he had no idea what we're doing."

"Lucifer must not want to take any chances. Legion must be thrilled to know his biggest ally just tried to kill his host body. Since Bear is no longer living with the angel warriors and not able to spy for him, Satan must have decided that he and Legion are no longer any use for them."

"That means Bear will be open game for any demon that wants to take a shot at him." Rachael pressed a hand to her stomach, the thought of the empath being harmed making her insides roll. "He's weak now and Dina can't continue to protect both of them. We need to get an archangel to him."

"I agree." Michael stepped back and ran a hand through his hair, showing how upset he was.

"How about one of our teams?"

"Not an option." He shook his head and started to pace. "I think I know of someone though. I can give him a call on our way."

"On our way to where?" She cocked her head to the side.

Michael stopped pacing and fixed her with a grim stare. "Now that Lucifer knows our plans, I don't see any reason to lay low anymore. There is someone living nearby that can help guide us in

the right direction for our mission.”

“Who?”

He let out a resigned sigh. “The biggest asshole of a drunken fairy you’ll ever have the misfortune of meeting.”

\* \* \* \*

Bear dreamed of Tiffany. He always dreamed of her, it was the only thing that kept him going, those brief moments in slumber where he could be with her again. This time though, the dream seemed so true.

They were having sex and it felt so real. Her skin was as warm and silky as he’d remembered as he slid his body up hers. Her breasts were as full and inviting as he took one of her pink nipples in his mouth and sucked it. The scent of cherries was so strong he swore it would still linger on him after he woke. When she grabbed two handfuls of his hair and tugged as she arched her back in pleasure, he even felt a bit of pain.

Her hand wrapped around his cock and she gave him a gentle squeeze. Bear let out a hiss of pleasure. How long had it been since she had touched him like that? So long ago. So long ago, he had forgotten how nice it was. He started to slide his hand down her body to return the favor. When he reached her belly, he stilled and looked up at



her in confusion. Normally taunt, her belly now had a slight bump.

He looked into her eyes for confirmation. "Are you pregnant, Tiff?"

She shyly nibbled on her bottom lip. "Would you be mad if I told you yes?"

"No, I wouldn't be angry, I would be happy."

With a slight nod of her head, she confirmed his suspicion. "I found out right after you left. I wanted to tell you, but I didn't want to distract you while you are still fighting Legion."

"So why are you telling me now?" He continued to caress her body, trying to burn every curve and dip into his memory so he would have something to cling to when he woke.

"I can feel you losing hope." A slight tremor had come to her voice and a tear trickled down her cheek. "I want to give you more of a reason to live."

Bear kissed away the tear, tasting the saltiness of it. This was so different from the other dreams, every touch, caress, whisper was so real, so alive. "Am I dreaming or is this real?"

"Both," Tif replied. "Your mother is helping me come to you."

He stilled. "Please, tell me that my mother isn't watching us right now." A soft giggle came from her. God, he had forgotten how sweet that sounded.

"You're such a dork, Bear," she chided as her fingers trailed down his spine. "Nobody is here but us. We're all alone. Now make love to me, we don't have much time."

"Turn over," he commanded in a harsh voice. "I need see that pretty ass of yours one more time."

She complied, wiggling out from under him, before tucking her knees under her belly, making her delicious backside tilted just right. Running a hand along the soft flesh, before trailing a finger up the crack, he sucked in raspy breath as his cock twitched in excitement.

"One of these days..." he trailed off deliberately as he let a finger circle her tight rosebud. It was one of the few taboo areas they hadn't delved into sexually, but he always teased her by saying how much he wanted it.

"I think that day has come." Reaching under the pillow, she grabbed something and handed it to him.

Bear looked down at it confused at first, then when he realized what it was and gave a wicked grin. "You brought lube with you? Someone is being a very naughty angel."

"Not yet." She wiggled her ass at him suggestively. "But soon I hope."

"Tif," he growled. "You keep twitching that thing at me and I really am going to fuck it."

"That's the plan," she purred as she looked

over her shoulder at him. Her hair was messy, wild and her eyes were heavy with desire.

"You better not be teasing me. Once I start there's no going back," he warned as he circled her anus with the pad of his thumb.

"Now would I do that? I've wanted this as long as you have."

"Ah, hell," he moaned as he leaned over to run his tongue along one ass cheek. With a happy sigh, she jerked at his touch. Reaching between her legs, he caressed her wet folds before slipping a finger into her hot pussy.

"Bear?"

"Ssh..." he whispered against her silky flesh. "You have to be ready for me or else I'll hurt you. Now spread your knees apart for me a bit more so I can really get at you." The instant she moved to obey him, he speared his tongue inside her ass, pulling back to rim the opening. All the while, he continued to pump his fingers inside her core. Using one hand to awkwardly flip open the bottle of lube, he squeezed some down the crack of her ass. A chuckle came from him when he smelled the sugary fruity scent. "You got strawberry flavored?"

"Yes," she panted as she rocked herself against his hand. "I know how you like sweet tasting stuff."

"That is so true." He leaned forward and laved

up some of the thick liquid. "Why do you think I like going down on you so much?"

"Oh God, Bear." Tif arched her back. "I'm going to come before you even start. Please, please, please."

"Soon." He slid one lubed finger into the tight opening of her ass.

"Do it now," she sobbed she rocked back.

He used his free hand to slap her rump. "Patience," he ordered as he brought his palm down again, making her shriek in pleasure. "You keep it up and I'll stop. You don't want that, do you? Now don't move one inch unless I give you permission."

"I'll be good. Just don't stop, please."

Teeth worked her bottom lip as she stilled her movements. To reward her, he slid in another finger, stretching her tight muscles even more. "Am I hurting you?"

"Yes, but in a good way. I've never felt anything this good before."

"You may use one hand to rub your clit," he told her as he thrust a third finger in her. He wanted so bad to bury his cock in her that the muscles bunched in his back as a sweat broke out over his body. In order to keep some control, he used his free hand to stroke himself a few times. Her slender fingers circled her clit, her arousal glistening on her hand.

"It's so much, but I want more. I need more," she cried as she continued to pleasure herself.

"I know you do, but I'm trying to go slow" his voice was strained with need.

"Screw slow," she snarled. "I want you to fuck me now."

Her dirty talk shattered his last bit of control. Replacing his fingers with the tip of his cock, he eased past the tight ring of muscle. Once in, he stilled to give her time to adjust to him. When she wiggled under him, he sucked in a hard breath. "Easy babe." He used one hand to grip her hip to still her. "You need to get used to this. You're as tight as a fist."

"No." She frantically shook her head. "I need it all now."

With a growl, he obeyed, thrusting forward, inch by excruciating inch, until he was all the way inside her tight ass. Throwing back his head, he hissed in pleasure as her muscles gripped his cock. "Why in the hell did we wait so long to try this?" he asked between gritted teeth.

"I was just about to ask you the same thing."

"I will always love you," he vowed before he stated to move in her. "No matter what happens, that will never change." She looked over her shoulder again, her cheeks flush with passion.

"I love you, too, and I'll wait for as long as it takes you to get better," each word was

punctuated with a gasp that was in perfect sync with his thrusts.

It was sheer heaven being inside her. He half expected Legion to come creeping into his mind to ruin the moment, but the creature continued to stay hidden and for that Bear was grateful. A small part of him knew this was going to be the last time that Tif and him were together and he didn't want anything to ruin it.

Tif arched her back and her breasts pressed harder into the mattress as he went even deeper inside her. Reaching under her, he pinched and teased her clit, her juices flowing over his hand. Their bodies became slick from the exertion, but that didn't slow him down. If anything, he pounded into her faster and faster. The way her breath caught and her body stiffened up told him she was right on the edge and he wanted to come with her. He would die if he didn't. Grabbing her thighs for leverage, he increased the pace even more.

Pressing her cheek against the bed, she urged him on with her moans and gasps. Then she started to scream his name again and again. She had always been loud during sex and it always turned him on. This time was no different. It took only a few more strokes for her to orgasm and he joined her, throwing back his head and moaning as her ass milked his cock.

Rolling on his side, he drew her to his chest so he could be closer to her, but not put his weight on her stomach. He reached over and kissed her sweaty cheek. A slight tremor in the air told him that the connection allowing them to be together was wavering so he reluctantly pulled back and looked into her large brown eyes.

"Fight for me, Bear," she pleaded, before taking his hand and placing it on her stomach. "Fight for us."

He opened his mouth to promise her, but blackness had already surrounded him. He felt himself ripped from her arms as he was sent back to his natural body. Even though he fought it, he found himself back in a strange bed, alone and clothed. Opening his eyes, he discovered he was in a dark bedroom he'd never seen before. For a second, he worried that it may have all really been a dream. Then he tasted her kiss still on his lips and smelled her sweet scent clinging to him and he knew it he had been true. Every kiss, every caress, every thrust had happened. "Tif," he groaned. He darted his hand around the bed, desperate to feel her warm body.

"No, but I can call her for you," a soft voice said.

A female came from the shadows to stand closer to the bed. When he spotted her multi-colored hair and black clothing, he remembered

she had been one of the angels holding him up in the shower.

She darted forward and handed him a cell phone before taking a nervous step back and awkwardly clearing her throat. "I already called your brother, the Empath King."

Great, Cam knew and he was probably pissing kittens right now. Ever since Cam had become the leader of the empaths, he had become very overprotective of Bear. The fact Bear had almost been killed and that he hadn't been there to watch over him was probably destroying Cam.

"Thank you," he said, making no move to dial. What he really wanted was some privacy to talk to Tif, but he didn't want to be rude and order the healer out of the room. Lucky for him, she took the hint and started to inch toward the door, all the while keeping a wary eye on him. Someone must have told her about Legion and the female was watching her back around him. Smart move on her part.

"I'll be right outside the room. This house is small so if you yell for me, I'll hear you," as she made her statement she continued to do that inching thing toward the exit.

Just as she was about to leave, he called, "You're name is Laurel, right?"

She pulled back, her blue eyes wide with shock. "How did you know that?"



*Because I heard you say it in your head.* Not wanting to freak her out with that tidbit, he said, "I heard it somewhere."

She had one foot outside the door and one inside as she hesitated a second, like she didn't know which one was in the correct direction. "All of us angel warriors love and respect our Chief and the same goes for his nephews. Everyone knows how much you sacrificed for us. The tales of Barakiel and his brave deeds are already being told to our youth."

She darted out of the room, leaving him in stunned silence. First, because it wasn't everyday that someone called him by his full name. Second, because he had never expected such a mature statement to come from her lips. Laurel seemed so young. Younger than even Tif and him and they were considered green in angel warrior terms.

With a tired sigh, he flipped the phone open and punched in Tif's number.

She picked up on the first ring. "Bear," she exclaimed, showing she was expecting him to call.

"Tell me it wasn't just another dream," he responded as he closed his eyes and let the sound of her voice sooth him.

"It wasn't a dream," she reassured. "I was there with you and it was fantastic."

For the first time in weeks, he laughed. "So we really are going to have a baby then?"

"Yes, we are and it carries your family's gifts. I can already tell because it is letting me know what you are feeling."

"I'm sorry," he croaked. The last thing she needed was to feel his pain.

"I'm not," she retorted in a firm voice. "That was how I knew you needed me today."

Bear could feel exhaustion claim him once again, but he didn't want to end the call. "Will you talk to me until I fall asleep?"

"Of course I will," her soft voice broke a bit. "I just wish I was there so I could hold you."

"Me, too, Tif. I miss you so much it's a physical pain."

"Just a bit longer and you will be home where you belong."

Bear wanted to believe her, but something told him that she was wrong and that they would never be together again. He didn't voice these doubts out loud, instead he closed his eyes and let the sound of her voice sooth away his fears.

## Chapter Four

**M**ichael got out of the car and stared up at the monstrosity of a house in front of him. Depleted and just plain bizarre, it was just what he expected from the foul-mouthed bastard who lived inside. The mere fact that Michael was willing to even breathe the same space as the prick showed just how desperate he was.

*Do it for Bear and Lehor.* He sighed and passed a sideways glance at Rachael who had come around to stand by him. The afternoon sunlight was shining on her hair, the soft scent from the earlier rain shower coming in distant second to her fresh scent. Rachael always smelled like a spring day. He could have spent the rest of his life waking up to the smell filling his senses, but after today he doubted that was going to happen.

What was she going to say when she heard his deepest and darkest secrets?

There was no doubt in his mind she was going to get an earful once they went inside either.

Finally someone would know the secret he worked so hard at hiding all these centuries. It just wasn't anybody learning it either. It was the female who he loved beyond all comprehension. *Do it for Bear and Lehor. Do it for all your warriors. Remember, your needs always come second to your followers.*

"Michael?" Rachael stood her ground next to his side.

Her deep eyes were soft with concern and it took him aback to realize it was for him. Twice today, she had sensed his discomfort. How was that possible? He always made sure to keep a steel wall between his emotions and others. Up until today, no other angel, not even Lehor, had been able to break through it. Shit, he was letting down his guard around her and that only showed how exposed he was with her.

A cold hard voice from his past came back to mock him. *Never show friend or foe your weaknesses. It is the sign of a pathetic warrior.* Usually those words were followed by brutal punishments. So harsh that his vulnerable teen body had almost been unable to withstand them. A cold sweat broke out over his body as he remembered the gut churning fear that had been his constant companion while he was growing up. Rachael's soft touch brought him back to the presence.

"You're afraid, why?" she asked, her hand

stroking his arm.

"That fairy in there knows everything about me. The good, the bad and the ugly." He took a deep steadying breath as he balled his hands into fists. "He's going to make sure to throw them in my face today, too."

"So what?" She tilted her chin up in a stubborn way. "There is nothing that idiot can say that will make me think any less of you."

God, if only that were true. "I wouldn't be too sure of that." Michael averted his eyes so she wouldn't see the pain and self-loathing that was no doubt there. With an aggravated sigh, she stood on tiptoe so she could cup his chin and force him to look back at her. The fierce devotion on her face almost brought him to his knees.

"There is nothing that can change the way I feel about you, Michael. I thought you already knew that." A soft breeze blew through the yard and caught up some of her hair, making it whip around both of them. Her hand was still on his face, but now she was softly caressing his jaw with the pad of her thumb.

"I'm sure you think that now, but if after you hear everything, you still want to run the other way, I won't blame you." Her touch felt so good it was all he could do not to close his eyes and savor it.

"And what if I want to stay?" she whispered.

The question sent a jolt of primal desire through his body. "Then there will be no going back for either of us," he promised darkly. "I'm done playing around and worrying about what might happen. You're mine and I will claim you."

He waited for her to push him away like everyone else had done in his past, but she didn't. Instead, she stared at him with those beguiling eyes of hers. They were rounded with surprise and her mouth was slightly open. "Let's get this over with," he said lightly, faking a blasé attitude he wasn't even coming close to feeling.

With a nod, she followed.

Michael tripped up the rickety wood steps and knocked on the battered screen door. A cat darted out from the bushes and brushed against his legs with a loud hiss. Spooked, Michael jerked out his sword and pointed it at the black furball. It arched its back and bared its teeth at him in retaliation. Rachael cocked a finely arched brow at his uncharacteristic jumpiness, but wisely held her tongue.

Sheathing his sword with a muttered curse, he pounded on the door before he did something stupid like lose his courage, throw Rachael over his shoulder and retreat to the car. They waited several minutes in tense silence for someone to answer, but it remained silent save for a few yowls from the cat. With a frown, Michael knocked

again, this time louder. Still no answer.

"That's odd." She cocked her head to the side in the cute manner she always did whenever something perplexed her. "I can sense someone is inside."

"Great, just what I wanted to be, Brolan's rescuer." Michael waved his hand over the lock and the door popped open lightly.

"Nice little skill you have there," she quipped with a small smile.

He noticed how one dimple flirted on her right cheek. "It comes in handy when you have to save humans from a burning furnace," he deadpanned. "Why are you acting all impressed? I happen to know you have the same gift with locks."

"It comes in handy when you *are* the one in the burning furnace," she countered with the quick wit he'd grown to love.

Michael pulled out his Glock and primed it. Ever the warrior, Rachael had hers out and ready before he even had to order her to. The sight of her in that short skirt, tight top and weapon out made his mouth go dry. It wasn't until she gave him an impatient roll of her eyes he remembered he was supposed to be on high alert.

"Right," he said, recovering. "Be ready for anything. While I don't think the demons know about this ass, I could be wrong. At any rate if you want to use your energy bolts, go for it. If you hit

Brolan by mistake, we'll just call that a bonus."

The corners of her mouth twitched and he was rewarded by both dimples this time. Before he could control himself, he found he was grinning back at her like he was some smitten schoolboy. Before he got caught ogling again, he gently pushed open the door and whipped his weapon in front of him.

He took the lead, searching every nook and cranny of the ramshackle house. Each room they went in was dirtier and smellier than the last. The scent of unwashed clothes, stale food and God knows what else, assaulted his nostrils so strongly that his eyes watered. Junk and trash was piled everywhere, making it so cluttered it was difficult to navigate in their search. Stacks of old newspapers and books lined the wall along with broken appliances, dirty dishes, garbage bags, piles of rank clothing and weapons. Hell, there was so much crap piled up there could be an entire battalion of justice angels getting ready to pounce and Michael wouldn't see them until too late.

"And I thought Hell was bad," Rachael muttered behind him. "This place makes my childhood home look like the Ritz."

Michael started to answer her, but another cat jumped out from what used to be a couch in a bright blur of yellow fur and claws. It landed on



the Chief's back and held on for dear life. With a hiss of pain, he tried in vain to reach behind him to yank the devil off him, but was unsuccessful thanks to the angle.

Rachael ran over to help, she was gentle with the feline as she pried its claws free from his stinging flesh. Once she had it loose, she put it on the ground with some murmured words of comfort.

"I've decided I really hate cats." He rolled his shoulders against the burning pain its claws had left behind.

"Stop it," Rachael chastised as she pressed her fingers to his back. Even though his shirt separated them, he still jumped at her touch. "The cat was more afraid of you than you of it."

"And yet I'm the one left bleeding." He winced when she found a particularly deep gash. "We should finish our search. We don't know if the area is secure yet."

"It's just your fairy friend who is here and he's in the next room and drunk as a skunk. Now that we're closer, I can sense his thoughts and they are quite graphic." She looked up at him from under her heavy lashes, an appealing shade of pink dusting her cheeks. "Do all males think of nothing but sex?"

"It depends on who we're with." He wasn't surprised to find his voice was thick with need.

When those beguiling eyes widened in understanding, his cock responded instantly, coming to full attention under his jeans.

The squalid conditions and his wounds were all forgotten as he focused his gaze on her full, red lips. He would give anything to taste them again. Almost as if sensing his thoughts, and knowing Rachael that was exactly what she was doing, her pink tongue darted out to moisten her mouth. He had a vision of her doing the same thing to the head of his cock and he barely suppressed the groan of desire building up in his throat. *Get a grip on yourself. You're in the middle of a situation here and all you can think about is Ray giving you a blow job? Focus! Focus! Focus!*

"I like it when you look at me that," she confessed in a husky whisper.

"Like what?" He turned his body so they were fully facing one another.

"Like you're hungry and I'm on the menu."

Need shot through him like a rocket as he reached one arm around her slender waist and pulled her flush against him. Her firm stomach came into contact with his rock hard cock and he was pleased when she didn't pull away. No, if anything she rocked forward into it.

\* \* \* \*

Rachael couldn't believe the wanton words that were spilling from her mouth anymore than she could believe the way she was rubbing against him like a cat in heat. Michael was still gazing down at her, his brown eyes smoldering with need. There was a raw vulnerability in his face and she instinctively knew she was the only one he'd ever let see him that way.

She loved him. There was no way she could continue to deny that truth to herself. Any more than she could deny herself his touch. Always on alert, she sent her senses out one more time and found the fairy was still in a drunken slumber and no threat to them. So she allowed herself to relax even more into Michael's embrace.

His cock pressed against her belly and she could feel how large and hard it was. Deliberately, she rolled a bit on the balls of her feet so her body rubbed against it. A smug feeling of satisfaction washed over her when she heard his harsh intake of breath.

Michael trailed his hand down her back, in the bare area between her shirt and skirt. Goose bumps broke over her skin as the soft heat of his touch inflamed her. Her nipples pressed against her top, begging to be touched in the same way. Lower and lower, his hand went until he was cupping her rear. With one hard jerk, he pulled her hips to him. She bit her bottom lip to keep

from crying out as she creamed into her black thong.

"What are you doing to me?" he asked as he inched his lips closer to her.

"I'm just being me." Their mouths were so close she could smell the spearmint on his breath.

"Abdiel is going to have my head when he finds out what I've been doing with his baby sister." Michael reached out and lightly nipped her bottom lip.

"I'm not a child." Somehow her hands had found their way to his biceps. Muscles rippled under her touch and she savored the feeling of her warrior.

"No, you're definitely not a child."

His fingers curled around the curve of her ass, his touch coming dangerously close to her aching core. Rachael had to resist the urge to thrust back into his hand. "We should find Brolan and talk to him. That is why we came here." Even as she reminded him of this, she leaned forward and kissed his jaw. His whiskers caused a thrilling scrapping sensation against her lips.

"Yes, it's always important to focus on the mission."

His hand slipped under her skirt. She jumped when his fingers caressed the sensitive flesh of her inner thigh. Things were moving fast. Really fast. She should put a stop to them since the last thing

either one of them needed was to go down this road. But she was sick of denying herself. Would it be so wrong to put her wants first just this once? "Michael, there's someone in the next room." This time there was no holding back the moan when he caressed her skin.

"You said he was drunk. He won't hear a thing." Slowly, he nipped, licked and laved a path down her jaw line and neck. Both of their breathing was harsh and labored as their bodies strained against each other.

She inhaled deep, taking in the dark, woodsy male scent of him. It was beyond good, she could drown in the smell it was so intoxicating. "True, but this place is still a pit." Something scuttled in a far corner as if agreeing with her.

With a reluctant sigh, Michael tore his lips away from her throat, but still held her in an iron grip. He moved his hand from under her skirt and rested it against the small of her back. Rachael was shocked to find he was clinging to her like he was almost afraid of letting her go. Like she was his lifeline. But that had to be impossible. Michael always acted like he owned the world and everything on it. To actually think he needed her was ludicrous.

Another cat darted out with a loud meow and Michael jumped away from her with a curse. Rachael turned to ask him why he hated the things

so much, but the look of fear in his eyes locked her into place. All of the sudden she was thrust into his mind as surly as someone had grabbed her by the chest and pulled her forward.

*Michael was small, just a child in his teen years. Dressed only in a loincloth, he was in some wooden shack that had rough floors. The splinters dug into his bottom and legs as he pushed himself against the corner of the one room dwelling.*

*Fear pounded through his body in time to his heart. He wanted to get up and run, but the terror paralyzed him. His long hair hung in damp lanks around his sweaty face. He was dirty since he was denied even the simpler pleasures like bathing.*

*The smells of the forest were strong, grass, trees, foliage, dirt and various plant life. There was another smell, a musky animal scent that grew stronger and stronger. Out of the shadows stepped a feline. Bigger than a housecat, it looked about the size of bobcat. It was exotic and of no other species that lived on Earth. Black fur covered a stout muscular body that padded across the floor to Michael. Long, curved, wicked looking fangs protruded from its upper jaw at least six inches. It had a set of black horns jutting from the top of its bony head and there was a strange intelligence emitting from its glowing red eyes.*

*"Please," Michael whimpered. "I'm sorry I failed you. I won't do it again."*

*"Apologies won't bring your followers back if they die because you let them down," a cold voice said.*

Michael couldn't see the speaker obscured in shadows.

*"You are a future leader and if the pathetic angels want any chance of survival they will have to have a strong hand in control. Failure can never be an option for you. It is better you learn now with fangs and claws as your punishment rather than the deaths of others on your conscience."*

*"It hurts."* Michael tucked his head to his chest to hide the shame in his eyes.

*"It always hurts when you fail to keep your enemy at bay," the speaker said cruelly. "Let this animal be a reminder of that."*

Michael curled up in an even tighter ball as the feline crouched with a growl right before it launched itself at the cowering teen.

"No," Rachael protested the attack even as she felt herself reenter her physical body. She blinked to clear her vision and found Michael standing several feet away from her, a guarded look on his face.

"What just happened?" he asked. Although his voice seemed calm enough, his face was pale and there were beads of sweat dotting his brow. His hands were at his sides in tight fists.

"He let that animal attack you." She shook her head vehemently. "No, he *encouraged* it to attack you. Why? You were just a child. You couldn't have been much older than Dominic." In all the years she'd known the Chief, he'd always kept a

brick wall in front of his emotions. To have him so exposed and vulnerable made her want to weep.

"How did you know that?" the question almost came out angry.

She didn't take offense. Rachael knew Michael was working hard to put those blocks back up. "I just saw it. As sure as if I had been there." She brought her hand to her stomach, queasy at the thought of all the pain he must have suffered through. "I could even smell the forest." There was a long pause and she wondered if he believed her. Then he muttered a curse that would have made her brothers blush.

"You shouldn't have had to see that."

"Who was that talking to you from the shadows?" She wanted the name so she could hunt the bastard down and make him pay for harming Michael. It wasn't because she was an archangel protecting her Chief either. It was because she wanted to avenge a male she'd grown to care about more than life itself.

"It was Treven, my guardian during my years with the elves." He spat the name out like it was a vile poison.

She could see there was no love lost for his foster parent. "How long were you with the elves?" She wasn't surprised by that bit of news. She's heard the Chief had been raised by them.

"From about five until I finally reached adult



hood."

Rachael blanched at those words. Angels aged much slower than human children did. The teen years could last decades or longer. Michael had suffered under the ministrations of his guardians for a long time. "Please tell me that one incident I saw was isolated. That they didn't abuse you like that all the time," she pleaded in a thick voice. It was getting hard to talk around the lump forming in the back of her throat.

"It was isolated. They didn't abuse me like that all the time," he parroted in a dead voice.

"Don't lie to me," she ordered harshly.

"You told me to say that." He threw his hands up in confusion.

She marched over and slugged him in the shoulder. "You know what I meant. Don't try to cheer me up by acting like an idiot."

"I'm sorry." He ran his hand through his shaggy hair. "Seeing all these damn cats just brought the memory back and our bond is so strong I must have accidentally brought you along for the ride. I won't let it happen again."

"Don't be sorry." Rachael wrapped her arms around his waist and buried her face in his strong chest. "I'm glad I can be here for you. I don't want you to ever face those memories alone again."

"It's the way things have always been. I'm used to facing them alone." The tired way he said that

made her heart break all over again. "The only time I ever trusted anyone with the truth of my past was my deceased mate and she grew to hate me for it."

"Not ever again." She tipped her head up so she could meet his gaze. "From now on, you have me. You will never be alone again so long as I breathe." Michael's eyes grew dark with desire and his face stormy with need. It was primal and alpha and it made her want him all the more.

"You do realize what you are proposing?" he asked in a hard voice.

Nervous, she licked her lips and paused before answering, "Yes, I do."

"I've waited years to hear that."

"I've been waiting for years to say them."

"We do have one problem though," Michael said as he gently ran the pad of his thumb over her bottom lip.

"What's that?" She tenderly nipped at him.

"The fairy has a gun pointed at my back right now."

## Chapter Five

“**O**ne wrong move and I’ll shoot your angel backside with so many holes you’ll have to piss sitting down for the rest of your immortal life,” Brolan slurred in a sloppy drunk voice.

“Brolan, fu...” Michael trailed off before he shot him a confused look. “Wait a minute, that doesn’t make any sense.” When he got a good gander at the fairy, Michael was hard pressed to hide his shock. The other male looked as disheveled and unkempt as his house. His light brown hair was done up in tight, knotty dreadlocks that were full of dirt and debris. Adding to his slovenly look, he wore a pair of black sweats that had so many holes in it, it was a wonder a vital body part wasn’t slipping out and dangling in the wind. The stretched out tee shirt was almost as sad as the pants. He couldn’t be for sure, but Michael thought it may have been red at one time. Now it was just a disgusting shade of orange that reminded him of a dried out carrot left too long in

the crisper.

"What in the hell has happened to you?" he asked, not even trying to hide the shock in his voice. The last time he'd seen Brolan the fairy had been a bit weird, but nowhere near this odd. Now he was an eccentric pack rat who hoarded cats. Michael barely suppressed a shudder of disgust when another one of the filthy animals streaked by.

"You should be more worried about yourself and that pretty female you're trying to hide with your body." Brolan shook the gun.

Michael threw his hands up in surrender. "Actually, I wasn't trying to protect her from you." He smiled down at her with a lazy wink. "I was protecting *you* from *her*."

Before that comment even had a chance to register through the male's alcohol-addled mind, Rachael splayed out her fingers and shot off an energy bolt. It arched blue through the room and hit Brolan square in the chest, sending him flying several feet into a wall, his weapon dropping to the ground. Hitting the filthy floor with an almost cartoon splat quality, he struggled to find the gun, he'd dropped. Rachael flicked her wrist and used telekinesis to make the gun come to her waiting hand. Once she had it in her grip, she cocked it and pointed it at the dumbfounded fairy. Gone was her usual carefree manner, in its place was a

cold-hearted warrior who was more than willing to kick ass and take names.

"Nice job." Michael couldn't decide what side of her he liked better. He always loved to watch her in a fight. "He moves one inch, don't hesitate to zap his ass."

"I see the rumors of you forming a new Order of Four are true," Brolan mused with a small frown. Now it was the fairy who raised his hands in surrender.

Michael's stomach rolled when he saw the long dirty fingernails at the tips.

"And I smell that you haven't taken a bath in years," Rachael countered with a delicate wrinkling of her button nose. "You smell like ass, BO and cheap whiskey."

Michael found himself nodding in agreement.

"What do you want from me archangel?" Brolan whined. Now that his gun was gone so was all his bluster.

Michael didn't even bother to hide his distaste. "I need some answers and unfortunately, you're the only one in this realm who can answer them." He took a step closer and almost gagged on the cloying smell wafting from the male. It made the stink coming from the house seem like paradise in comparison.

"So sorry, angel." Brolan let out an undignified belch. He was still sitting in a puddle on the floor

and he seemed content to stay there. "My mind is too fuzzy to think."

"That's because you're drunk." Michael turned back to see what Rachael thought about all this. She was giving the fairy a look someone might give to a squashed bug on the windshield. Although she had been kind enough to lower the gun, she still kept it at ready by her side.

"Yes, I am drunk," the fairy declared much too proudly.

"I have a feeling that's nothing new with you. When was the last time you were sober?"

"The Regan administration."

"What a mess," Rachael declared. "There is no way he can be any help to us. You should have done us all a favor and let me shoot him."

"Oh, he'll help us." Michael reached down and hauled the fairy up by the collar of his filthy shirt. "We just need to sober him up first." He nearly gagged when Brolan let out a rancid smelling exhalation. Shit, that stink could peel paint. "And get him some serious breath mints."

"Agreed." She pinched her nose together. This was a gal who was raised amongst the stench of demons, for Brolan to offend her sense of smell that much spoke volumes for his potency.

"Go out and get some really strong coffee. Lots of it."

"What are you going to do?"

"Give this disgusting thing a shower."

\* \* \* \*

Not wanting to leave her Chief alone with the strange fairy, Rachael drove to the closest gas station and bought several cups of coffee. Grabbing an energy drink for herself, she quickly got back to the rundown house.

The entire time she continued to relive Michael's memory in her head over and over. It had left her shaken and stirred. While her troubled childhood was common knowledge, she'd never really stopped long to think about him as a child, let alone consider what his life must have been like with the elves.

As she put the car in park and looked up at the dirty windows, she berated herself for her stupidity. The angels had been intermingling with the elves for months now and the first thing she'd learned about them was they were nothing like the movies, books or fairy tales had made them out to be. Their society was brutal and war minded without one hint of compassion. She took a sip of the energy drink, the sweet thick liquid curdling in her upset stomach. The thought of the elves raising any child, let alone an angel one, made her shiver. It was no secret the elves thought angels beneath them.

So why had Michael been sent to live with them? She knew he was one of the oldest angels living, but that was only because the first generation had all ascended to the upper realms long ago. Even though he had never talked about them, Michael had to have had parents around at least long enough to have him, Amiteil and Lehor. So why would they let their only son be raised by a completely different species?

“Even as a child, your needs were second,” she whispered as her heart ached for him. She longed to take him in her arms and sooth away centuries of hurt. Taking a steadying breath, she opened the car door and got out. A light mist had started and the moisture felt cold against her exposed flesh. Usually being out in the weather cheered her, but not today. It was almost as if the skies were mourning with her. A frigid breeze blew across the yard, bringing up crisp fallen leaves and making them dance in lazy circles. Balancing the tray of drinks in her hands, she quickened her steps and hurried inside.

All the windows and doors had been thrown open, so while the smell was still bad, at least it was now more tolerable. She silently thanked Michael as she followed the sounds of voices to the kitchen. Michael was leaning against a counter that was stacked with dirty dishes while Brolan sat at an old Formica table with yellow peeling



chairs. It was difficult to find an empty space to set down the tray, but after some searching, she was successful.

Now that Michael had cleaned the fairy up some, she could see that he was actually pretty good looking. His bright blue eyes were now more in focus and his hair was still in those dreads, but at least it was free from dirt. How Michael was able to find clean clothes in all this mess, she would never know, but somehow Brolan was now in a pair of jeans and a fresh tee shirt

Rachael had never met a male fairy before Brolan and she noticed he shared the same rounded cheekbones and large eyes that his female counterparts did. Amongst the dreads, she spotted his pointed ears. Cliona had confided to her once that male fairies had wings, too, although theirs were usually brown or black as opposed to the rainbow hue of the females. Unless a fairy chose to expose their wings, they remained hidden from view.

"My head is killing me," Brolan moaned as he buried his face in his hands.

"Drink some coffee, maybe it will help," Michael advised with no trace of sympathy. He smiled his thanks when she handed him a cup. Their hands grazed and her stomach did a little flip.

"You ruined my buzz, you uncaring bastard,"

Brolan snarled.

"Listen up, fairy." Michael leaned forward and placed his palms on the table so he could glare down at Brolan. "You've already wasted time I don't have to give. I need you sober long enough to give me some clear answers."

"Give me one good reason why I should help you." Brolan took a swig of coffee and shuddered in disgust.

"Because if you don't, I have no trouble torching this place with you and your stupid cats still inside it," Michael replied in a voice cold enough to frost the air.

Brolan paused, cup midair, as he gave a look of hurt. "Unprovoked violence from you? I never thought you would be capable of that, archangel. You may be many things, but cruel was never one of them. It's downright catty of you."

"I need you to tell me everything you know about a demon going by the name of Legion."

"Legion," Brolan echoed thoughtfully. "Now that's a name I haven't heard in centuries. He's old. Older than any angel made and older than most of us fairies."

"How is that possible?" Rachael asked. "Demons are former angels who have turned their backs on their vows."

"Your kind of demons, maybe, but not all demons. There are other kinds, some thought to be

extinct like Legion, others in deep hiding." Brolan thoughtfully tapped a finger on the tabletop, his eyes narrowed with concern. "Legion is from a breed of demon that used to be fairies much like your demons used to be angels. They were powerful in both dark and white magic and were near impossible to kill."

"But the fairies did manage to kill them," Michael prompted.

"Yes, but not without great loss of life on our side, too. The only way to kill them was with our own magic. Not just any magic either, the kind only our royal family was born with. Wild and unpredictable, the magic would often kill the one whom wielded it. Many royalty died as a result."

"How was it Legion survived?"

"Legion was the most powerful of the demons. He was a leader, much like Lucifer leads your demons. You could almost say he had nine lives. When he was defeated, he managed to retain his essence and, last I heard, he was lingering in the Death Realm." Brolan shrugged and went to take another drink. He stopped and a look of horror slowly spread over his face. "Unless he was able to find a way to come back. That's why you're here. Legion has possessed one of your angel warriors, hasn't he?"

"Let's just say for arguments sake he has," Michael replied tightly.

"It must be someone very important to you for you to come to me for help." A sly smile appeared on the fairy's face. "Which one of your nephews is it? The oldest, Ramiel? Or is it your favorite, Camael? Come on, let the cat out of the bag."

Rachael was shocked at how much the fairy knew about the inner workings of Michael's family. Even more stunning was the way the bastard seemed to take sadistic pleasure in the angel's suffering. It was more than just the Legion incident, too. All the little cat jabs were directed to mock Michael's skittishness around the creatures. Somehow this bastard knew about what had happened to the archangel and he was taking great pleasure in goading him. White-hot anger surged through her body and before she could think better of it, she had a dagger out and pressed to Brolan's throat.

"You will mind your tone when you address my Chief," she warned in a low voice. A thrill of pleasure went through her when she felt the fear coursing through Brolan's body. She'd never been one to relish in another's suffering, but after the way he'd treated Michael, she was glad to see him quaking in his boots.

"Now, now Rachael," Michael chided softly. "If you cut Brolan into little pieces, then I won't get the answers I came here for. I'm not enduring this stinky smell for kicks and giggles."

"Brolan needs to learn how to treat you with more respect." Rachael didn't move the blade.

*It's okay, I'm used to it.* Michael's voice soothed in her head.

*No it's not,* she argued back. *I'm not going to let him be so hurtful to you.*

*Don't make this personal.* He came up behind her and gently pulled her arm back. *I can endure his comments if that's what it takes to save Bear.*

Rachael backed off, but not before she curled her lip in a warning growl at the fairy. He rubbed his neck and gave her a wary look. She retreated to a corner of the kitchen and crossed her arms over her chest.

"It's my youngest nephew," Michael informed in clipped tones.

"Ah, Barakiel, or Bear as you all like to call him." Brolan nodded, his hand still protectively on his throat. "That would make the most sense for Legion. Bear has many gifts of his own and Legion would covet them."

"How is it you know all this about us?" Rachael snapped petulantly.

"I am a seer much like your oracle, Nix."

"Then why are you living with humans instead of your own kind?" She eyed the fairy speculatively. "Unless you were exiled." The embarrassed flush that spread over Brolan's face confirmed her suspicions.

"The new ruling family didn't like having me around since I knew all of their darkest secrets," he admitted. "They were going to execute me, but luckily being a seer I knew their plans and was able to escape before they could make good on them. I stupidly came to Raphael for help and of course he had to tattle to Michael."

"Raphael?" She pulled back, surprised. "Why would you go to him for help?"

"Don't you tell your followers anything?" Brolan asked Michael. The fairy shook his head in disgust. "Raphael was a foster brother of sorts to me. My father was his guardian."

"But Gabi said Raphael was raised by nannies. Angel nannies," she argued stupidly.

"That's just what Raphael told his sister so she wouldn't learn that he had been sent to live with the fairies like Michael was sent to live with the elves. You didn't think we would let the elves have the only hand in molding the future rulers of the angels, did you?"

"Why would he hide that?" she asked Michael.

"Probably the same reason Michael hid his past. Neither of them were ever up to snuff to our standards. Weak and spineless, either one of them would give up their lives eagerly to save their human brothers."

"How does standing up for innocents make them weak?" Rachael snapped.

"Humans are a plague on this world," Brolan spat, anger making his face hard. "They are like locust moving over the Earth, destroying our forests, polluting the water and making it so the fairies have no where to live. It would have been better for us all if Michael had been more like his older brother and realized humans had no place here."

"Brother?" Maybe the fairy was still drunk. Michael didn't have a brother. Or did he? The way he quickly turned around and faced one of the kitchen's cracked windows made her rethink that. "It's just Michael and his two sisters." She waited for Michael to turn around and agree with her, but he continued to stare through that grimy window, his hands in tight fists at his side. In the end, it was Brolan who answered her, his tone gleeful.

"Think about it, Rachael. For Michael to hide who his brother was it must be someone horrible. Someone that could make him lose everything your precious Chief has. Now who could that be?" He cocked his head to the side as a malicious gleam came to his eyes

"Lucifer," she whispered as she pressed her hand to her stomach. No wonder Michael had dreaded coming here. He must have been terrified of this coming out. She looked over at him, but he was still facing the window, his body stiff with shame. God, how many times was her heart going

to break for him today?

"Michael's relation to Lucifer means nothing to me," Rachael snapped, fighting the urge to run over to the archangel and throw her arms protectively around him. "If you are such a gifted seer than you should know I would never judge anyone because of who they are related to."

"Besides," Michael growled as he turned away from the window, his face an emotionless mask. "We didn't come here to go over my genealogy. I need some answers about Legion and how to defeat him."

"I don't see how you think I could help your nephew." Brolan nervously spun his cup. "I may be a seer, but I don't command the magic you would need to free him from Legion."

"No you don't," Michael conceded. Again he leaned forward on the table and fixed a steely gaze on the other male. "But you can help direct me to the fairy child who can. The one remaining survivor of the original royal family."

Brolan shot to his feet and returned Michael's glare. "Why would I do that? We both know she probably wouldn't survive the confrontation with Legion. If you think I would willingly hand her over to you to use for your own gains, then you are crazy."

"We're not the only ones looking for her. Lucifer is sending out his demons to hunt her



down and when they find her they will show no mercy," Michael bit out between clenched teeth. "There are demon assassins on her tail and they are getting closer and closer with every passing hour. They have orders to execute on sight, too. So while you may not relish the thought of her being in angel custody, we are her only hope right now."

There were several seconds where Brolan seemed to shift the options around in his head. Finally he nodded. "Fine, I'll help, but only one condition."

"What?" Michael's voice was laced with suspicion.

"I'm not promising she will heal your little whelp. If I sense there is any danger to her life should she try to exorcise Legion, I will take her and leave."

"You know I can't promise that," Michael growled.

"It's all I'm willing to give at this moment. Take it or leave it."

"You're not leaving me with much choice here. I'll take it."

"Oh, there is one other condition, you have to get someone to feed my cats while we're gone."

## Chapter Six

**B**ear bent over the sink and splashed some cold water on his face to try to wake himself up before he finally dared himself to look in the mirror. What he saw made a cold sweat break out over his body as his stomach clenched. To say he looked like hell would have been an understatement.

Pale, sallow skin was stretched tight over the sharp lines of his face and bloodshot eyes were surrounded by dark circles. His cheekbones stood out starkly, showing how much weight he'd lost. Bear pressed a hand against his protruding rib bones, trying to ignore the fact that he was trembling. Now he knew what a human junkie felt like.

*You're killing us.* Legion's voice hissed in his head. *By fighting me, you are going to destroy both of us.*

"Great, look whose back," Bear said under his breath. "You're like herpes. You just never quite

go away."

*Herpes?*

Bear could almost see the demon cocking its head to the side in confusion.

*I thought angels didn't get human diseases.*

"I was being sarcastic, moron." The empath cinched his belt tighter, noticing that if he got any thinner, he would have to punch a new hole in it. "You should try developing a sense of humor."

*Humor and sarcasm are human qualities so why would I want to have them?*

"Oh I don't know? Maybe because you have the personality of a cockroach?"

*You're awful grumpy today.*

Bear was disquieted and surprised at the hurt lacing Legion's telepathic voice.

*After the way I saved you and Dina, I would think you should be more grateful.*

"Like you didn't enjoy coming out so you could go Dahmer on a bunch of demons," Bear snorted derisively.

*I don't think I'm going to talk to you anymore,* Legion declared like some petulant child.

"Oh, that's a huge threat." Bear sat on the edge of the bed and pulled on his shoes. There was blessed silence as Legion made good of his promise. Bear did up his laces and tried hard to resist the urge to lie back on the bed and burrow under the warm blankets. It was hard. Lately it seemed as if he was always cold and tired.

*You are so ungracious, Legion snapped.*

"I thought you weren't talking to me anymore."  
Bear scrubbed his face with his hands and forced himself to stand.

*I could very easily possess another body and then kill you. In your weakened state, it wouldn't be that hard to defeat you.*

"So why don't you go ahead and do it then?"  
Bear challenged. There was another pause, so long this time that he thought the demon had gone back to resting.

*Because I like you.*

Bear stumbled in surprise. The frankness in Legion's confession left him without doubt the demon truly believed his admission. He gripped the edge of the dresser for support as his body swayed a bit. "If you like me so much, why don't you let me go free? You have to know I'm not going to last much longer at this rate."

*I don't want to leave you. I enjoy being a part of you and I like your life.*

"Great, I have some ancient demon stalker, just what I need. I don't suppose a restraining order would make you go away."

*Is that the sarcasm you were talking about? You were right, it is kind of funny.*

Bear shuddered when Legion began to chortle in delight. His maniacal laughter filling the empath's head. Tossing a few last items into his bag, Bear threw it over his shoulder and left the

room. As soon as he stepped into the hallway, he could hear an argument taking place in the kitchen.

"I appreciate your concern, but we have to leave," Dina said, anger making his tone hard.

"Until Cam tells me otherwise, I'm still Bear's empath and he is nowhere near ready to go back out into the field," A female snapped back.

Bear recognized her voice from the night before.

"Bear is as good as he's going to get and we've spent way too much time here as it is. Short of tying him to the bed, you are not going to convince him to stay."

"I thought you were his friend. How can you possibly even entertain the idea of letting him out of bed, let alone going back out to fight?" Her outrage echoed through the house.

"I am his friend," Dina growled. "But I am also under his orders and that of his brother, our Lord, Cam. So whatever personal feelings I may have come second."

"He's dying."

"Don't you think I don't know that?" Dina was almost yelling now. "I've had to watch, helpless, for the past three months as my best friend slowly dwindled away in front of my eyes."

"Then why don't let me help him?"

"Female, you've done all you can for him. The

only way he is ever going to get truly better is for Michael to find the cure for him."

"The Chief is looking for a cure?"

"Yes, just this morning I talked to him. Several teams of angel warriors are searching even as we speak for something they think will rid Bear of that thing inside of him."

*He won't find her in time*, Legion hissed to Bear.

"What's he looking for?" Bear asked out loud as he walked into the kitchen. Dina and a willowy female both jumped. Bear smiled as he saw the female who had helped him for the first time. "Hey, I didn't know Halle Berry empathed me."

In truth, the empath did resemble the famous human actress. She had the same large luminous eyes and softly rounded facial structure. Her hair was even cut short and spiked in the back. The only difference was the angel was much taller and carried herself like the warrior she was. She turned to Bear and her anger softened to concern.

"My name is Jayleen but if you insist on calling me Halle I guess I can answer to that. What are you doing up? You should still be sleeping."

"Dina's right, it's time for us to go." Bear hitched his bag higher up on his shoulder. For some reason the damn thing felt like it weighed a thousand pounds lately.

"Are both of you crazy? Bear, you aren't fit to go anywhere."

"Hey, that's nothing new. Just ask my brothers, they'll tell you I was never ready for public," he teased lightly in hopes of lightening the mood.

"This isn't funny." Fire flashed in her brown eyes.

"I'm sorry if I insulted you." Bear quickly switched to diplomat mode. "You have honored me by helping us in our time of need and I am very grateful."

"Then why don't you show it by getting your ass back into bed?" she asked with an arrogant tilt of her head.

Ooooookay...obviously the diplomacy was one-sided today. Jayleen was clearly bossy and used to getting her own way. She reminded him of his sister, Ana, which made him like her. It also made it even more imperative he get the hell away from her before Legion hurt her. That little booger just loved to use that threat as leverage against Bear.

*Oh, I would just love to go back to bed if she were there,* Legion crowed.

*Forget about it, I'm mated. Remember?* Bear thought back.

*But, I'm not.*

Bear had a visual of the demon rubbing his hands together in anticipation. *True, but since it's my body that's driving, you're SOL.* The entire time he was having this internal conversation with Legion, Bear worked hard to keep his face neutral.

"I think it's really nice of you to be worried about him, Jayleen, but I've been taking care of him this long." Dina may have been trying to smooth things over, but judging by the grimace on his face, it wasn't an easy task.

"And you've been doing a piss poor job of it," she replied in a cold voice. "When you two showed up here, he was close to death."

"Again, thank you, Jayleen," Bear used the even tones he'd heard Uncle Mike use whenever he was trying to navigate sticky situations. "But we must be on our way." He nodded to Dina and they started to walk toward the door.

"If you take one step out, then I will call Raphael and he will demand you stay," she threatened. "I may not be one of his healers, but I'm sure he'll agree with me on that one."

Bear halted in his steps before he slowly turned to face her. "With all due respect to Raphael, he has no authority over me."

*He's also a boring tool,* Legion added in a nasty tone.

"He's an elder so you have to listen to him." Jayleen gave him a smug look that showed she thought she'd one-upped him.

"No, I don't," Bear replied simply. "Not on this matter."

*We don't have to listen to him on any matter because he's a stuffy bore.*



*Shut up!* Bear sighed heavily and Dina sent him a warning glare.

*I'm serious and you said I was the one with the personality of a cockroach. That angel puts even me to sleep and I just got done taking a centuries long nap.*

"I said shut up!" Bear yelled as he clutched the sides of his head with his hands. The entire room grew tense with shock as Dina and Jayleen stared at him, her with horror, him with pity. Bear wasn't sure which was worse. Understanding slowly shifted over her face and Bear had to look away.

"Oh my God, that thing is talking to you, isn't it?" she asked, her voice hollow with dread.

*Oops, she knows our secret. Should I kill her?* Legion started to do that cackle crap again.

"No, you are not to kill her." Bear dug his nails so deep into his scalp that he could feel warm blood tinge his fingers. "Get me out of here," he pleaded to Dina. The empath moved forward immediately, grabbed him by the shoulder and started to lead him out.

"Where are your healer and archangel?" Bear rasped as a heaving cough raked through his body.

"They are training in the backyard. But they could be in here in seconds," she hastily added on the end.

The empath in Bear could sense the lie, he could also sense the terror rocketing from her. "Please

extend my appreciation to them. You all really helped us out." Bear smiled and tried hard to make it seem carefree and easy. As if he hadn't just nearly threatened her life.

They had finally reached the door and Dina opened it. When it swung wide, it revealed a large archangel standing there, hand poised to knock. Shock registered in his eyes as his gaze locked in on Bear.

"You look like shit," he declared by way of greeting.

"Raziel?" Bear didn't even try to hide the shock in his voice. What in the hell was Tif's brother doing here? But there was no mistaking that was who was standing in front of him. Even though Bear had only met the archangel once before, his honey brown hair and warm chocolate eyes were too much like Tif's for him not to be related to her.

"Michael called me and asked me to baby sit you. That was about a half hour before Tif called me and asked for the same damn thing," Raziel said as leaned across the doorjamb and blocked the empaths' way. "She's worried about you."

"Yeah, so what's new?" Bear grunted. "She's been worried about me for months."

"She wants me to come watch out for you." The way the archangel said these words made it perfectly clear he wasn't happy about it.

That was okay with Bear because he sure as hell

wasn't thrilled with the prospect either. "Not going to happen. Just call her and say you couldn't find us or something." Bear went to brush past him, but Raziel planted a firm hand into the empath's chest and halted him.

"Oh it's going to happen all right. I promised my sister and, unlike you, I keep my promises." His jaw was set in a hard line and he all but growled the words.

Any other empath may have been intimidated by the act, but Bear had been raised with seven older brothers, five of which had been archangels. "What's that supposed to mean?" Bear challenged with a growl of his own.

"It means that until this matter is cleared up, I'm going to be on your ass like white on rice." Raziel had shifted his hand so it was now fisted in the empath's black tee shirt.

"It's not good for your health to be around me, maybe you didn't get that memo." Bear went to shrug off his hold, but thanks to his weakened state, all he managed was to look pathetic. He waited for Legion to spout off a comment, but the demon was strangely silent.

"Yeah, you look real dangerous to me." Raziel gave the empath's thin body a dismissive once over. "The only thing you're a threat to is yourself."

"We don't need you," Bear protested.

"Yeah, we do," Dina interjected.

Bear turned to gape at him, hurt over his friend's betrayal.

"Oh come on, Bear, don't look at me like that. When I talked to the Chief, he said that he doesn't think the demon attack was an isolated incident. Somehow Lucifer figured out Michael's plan and he's sending out all of his demons to make sure we don't succeed."

"What good is Raziel going to be to us when Legion uses me to attack him mentally?" Bear snapped as he remembered the way he'd been able to drop his brother Cam to his knees with just such an attack. If he'd been able to do that to the most powerful psychic, then what chance would someone like Raziel stand?

"You'll just have to talk to Legion," Dina urged. "Reason with him and tell him that he needs Raziel's protection as much as we do. He has to know that your body can't stand much more."

Anger flared through Bear, it was directed at Dina for siding with Raziel, at the archangel for butting in and at his newfound frailness. Before all this crap, he never needed the protection of an archangel or anyone else for that matter. His Lehor Brother pride and stubbornness reared up and took center stage, making all sensible thinking impossible. "Fuck both of you," he snarled as he shoved Raziel's hands away. "Fine, if we're going,

then let's get a move on. I don't have all day."

Flashing a rude gesture at of them, he stepped off the porch. He'd taken only a few steps when another fit of coughing seized his body. Bear clutched at his chest as a deep burning pain ripped through it. Desperately, he tried to suck in a breath, but each time he tried it just brought on another hacking cough. Dark spots swam in his vision as his knees buckled. Strong hands shot out and grabbed him just as he was about to fall face first into the pavement.

"Listen up, because I'm only going to say this once." Raziel said, his mouth inches from Bear's ear. "When Tif called, she was crying. If there is one thing that will rip me up inside, it's the sound of her sobbing. She made me vow that I would find you and make sure you came back home to her. I'm not like you, I just can't turn my back on her suffering."

"I never...wanted..." Bear tried unsuccessfully to get the words out between coughs.

"Bullshit," Raziel cut in cruelly. "True mates don't leave just because things get rough."

"I didn't want her to see me like this," Bear managed to get out once the fit had passed.

"Why not? Do you think it's better for her to be back there alone, pregnant and mourning over your sorry hide?" Raziel shoved him away in disgust.

Bear stumbled clumsily a few steps before he was able to regain his balance. "Even if I had wanted to stay it wasn't an option." Months of pent up hurt clawed at Bear's chest. "Michael sent me away. My own uncle couldn't stand the sight of me anymore because I let this...this thing get inside me."

"That's not true," Dina consoled in a soft voice. "I told you he just called me this morning and he's looking for a cure, all of your family is."

"No." He shook his head vehemently. "He's just saying that to keep me away. They all don't want me to come home. Uncle Mike's ashamed of me because I fucked up. I fucked up and now I'm tainted. They're going to take Tif and the baby from me because I don't deserve them."

Dina came over, grabbed Bear by the sides of his head and forced him to look at him. Bear was dimly aware he was still babbling like an idiot, but he couldn't stop himself. With a loud curse, Dina gave him a none-to-gentle shake to get his attention.

"That's Legion making you doubt yourself," Dina bit out between clenched teeth. "Don't let him mess with your mind like that. He's trying to weaken you so you'll let him win."

Dina locked gazes with him, letting him see the undying devotion. Slowly the fog of doubt and despair lifted and Bear was left with the same

longing that had been lodged in his heart since he had to leave his mate behind. "I miss her so much," he whispered. "I'm never going to see her again."

"Yes, you are," Dina said with so much conviction Bear was half tempted to believe him. "Pretty soon this is going to be all over and we're both going to go home to our mates and we're never going to have to leave again."

"I'm so sorry, you must miss Megan so much," Bear rasped.

"Don't think twice about it. We both are willing to be apart for a bit to help out you and Tif. You're our friends and we know you guys would do the same for us."

"Shit, are we ever going to get going or are you ladies going to paint each other's toenails next?" Raziel bitched.

"Tif always did say you were an asshole." Dina fished into his pockets and pulled out the keys, Raziel immediately snagged them.

"Then that means her opinion of me improved." The archangel flashed a cocky smile that never reached his eyes. "By the way, I'm driving."

Bear and Dina shrugged and let the archangel think he was in the lead. In truth, it was nice to have someone else to take a shift. Bear was in no condition and, even after their break, Dina really

wasn't either. Even without being told, Bear knew his friend hadn't slept the entire time because he would have been too worried about Legion taking over and leaving. When they got to the car, Bear gave Dina a slight shove to the rear door. "Climb in the backseat and get some sleep," he urged.

Dina shot an uncertain look over at Raziel. "I'm not really that tired."

"Bullshit, you look about ready to drop. Sleep. You don't have anything to worry about. We'll be on the road and I'll have my very own archangel babysitter looking over me."

Even after they had all got in the car, Dina still seemed hesitant. He scratched his head and shifted nervously. "Are you sure you can guard him?" Dina asked Raziel.

"I think I can handle one itty, bitty empath." Raziel shot a bored look to the backseat.

"If his eyes turn black that means Legion is in control."

"You guys named it?" The archangel screwed his face up in disgust.

"No, jackass, it came with one." Dina seemed to be having second thoughts about arguing for their new bodyguard. "While it's...out, anything Bear says or does is because of the demon. Don't take it out on him."

Raziel flicked a look of sheer hatred over at Bear. "Don't worry, I won't take beat him for



anything he does while in a monster mood." The tension ebbed until he continued, "It's all the stuff this little shit did before that I'm going to kick his ass for."

"What are you waiting for?" Bear shoved the car door open. "Let's go fucking settle this now."

With a heavy sigh, Raziel reached over and pulled him in by the back of his shirt.

Bear allowed it, but he did let out a snarl, which would have made a demon proud. For all the affect it had on the archangel, Bear may well have yawned.

"When I do beat you, you're going to be healthy and in top fighting form." The archangel turned the ignition and indicated with an arrogant tilt of his head for Bear to close the door.

"Why wait?" Bear kept the door open, deliberately defying the archangel. Hell, the empath was willing to go down I-75 with the damn thing open if only to prove his point. "I'm not too sick to take out a prick when I come across one."

"As much fun it would be to wipe that smug look off your face, I can't right now." The muscles in Raziel's arms tensed as he grabbed the steering wheel so tight there was an audible pop from his knuckles. "I promised my sister I would bring you back in one piece." He fired off a vicious glare. "After this is all over though, I'm going to enjoy

teaching you what happens to whelps who take advantage of females."

"I'm not the only one who left her." Bear slammed the door shut. "You turned your back on her long before I was even around."

"Don't think I don't regret that." Raziel curled his upper lip into a sneer. "Because as soon as my back was turned, one of Michael's castoffs managed to slither in and claim my sister."

"Most angels would consider it to be an honor to be mated into one of the most powerful families," Dina defended.

Bear held up a hand of warning because it looked like the other empath was one step from jumping over the seat and going for Raziel's throat.

"You see I'm not like all those other angels who fawn all over Michael and his precious nephews. I have no use for the Chief, his methods or his ways. Or didn't Tif tell that you about me?"

## Chapter Seven

**B**y the time they had made arrangements for a nearby angel warrior team to come over and take care of Brolan's cats, gathered up some of his belonging and found a hotel, it was late. As Michael led Rachael and the fairy up to their rooms, he couldn't help but notice how tired she looked. Her usual spark was gone from her eyes, she had dark circles and every few minutes she'd yawn. "You look beat," he commented as he noticed how she struggled a bit with the large overnight bag she was hefting. He would have offered to take it for her, but knowing his little fireball, she'd zap him for coddling her.

"Not too tired to have gone on for a couple more hours if you wanted." Even as she said this, she stifled a yawn behind her hand.

"I know you would have, but we have to take time out to recharge and go to bed." He internally winced at his wording as he hastily added, "I mean, get some sleep." Michael chose to ignore

Brolan's mocking snicker.

"Smooth, Michael," the fairy drawled.

Michael glared at him as they approached a door. "This room is ours." He pushed the card key in the male's hand and gave him an ungentle shove.

"Ours?" Brolan echoed with a wicked grin. "After all the looks you've been shooting, I thought you would be in her room, making your own sparks."

"Tell me again why we need him?" Rachael teased as she gave the archangel a wry smile.

His heart thudded in response. They left Brolan behind and walked a few more steps to another door. "This one is yours." He handed her the key, but couldn't bring himself to turn away.

"So it is." She didn't make a move to go in.

Michael could hear the muffled click that told him Brolan had taken the hint and gone inside. He looked up and down the hallway and saw nobody else. They were completely and blessedly alone. After everything she'd heard and seen about him today, would she even want to be around him anymore? Shock coursed through his body when she reached out and wrapped her arms around his waist.

"Are you kidding? When I'm not with you, all I can think about is when I get to see you again." Rachael tilted her head back so she could look up

at him.

"Have you been reading my mind?" he asked lightly as he returned her embrace. Given that she had just crashed through his mental shield when no other angel had even been able to, should have angered him, but it didn't. Strangely it made him feel closer to her. It was as if they shared a bond that nobody else did. *That's because we were made for each other*, he mused, no longer even bothering to deny the truth to himself.

A primal urge overcame him, he wanted to pick her up, carry her into the room, throw her on the bed and finally claim her as his. When a male found his mate, they made love and he left his mark on her, forever letting all know she was his. To the casual eye, the mark resembled a beautiful tattoo when in reality it was the male's family symbol.

To take a female and do that was no small matter. Angels mated for life, there were no annulments, divorces or separations in their world. Not only that, the couple were so closely connected it was sheer torture to be apart. One just had to look at Tif and Bear for proof of that.

"I'm serious."

Her eyes were intense with conviction, but there was a slight undertone of fear in them, too. Michael reached out and touched her mind just enough to find out the fear wasn't of him, it was

that he would shun her because of her parents and where she came from.

"I'm serious, too, babe." Thanks to his heightened senses, he could hear her heart pick up in pace. "I can't think of any other female who is more brave, honorable and worthy."

"You make me sound like I'm a dog."

"I apologize." Michael could feel a flush rush to his face as his old feelings of inadequacy rose. "Crap, I'm blowing this again. In case you haven't noticed, I'm not very good at this kind of thing."

"No, it's me who should be sorry. I was just teasing you to lighten up the mood. You're doing perfectly."

"How can you even stand to look at me after what Brolan told you?" He hated that his voice was harsh with emotion. It was so much easier to pretend that nothing got to him.

"That doesn't mean anything to me. I see you the same as I have always seen you. If there is any fallout from this, I will gladly stand by your side through it all."

"As one of my angel warriors or as one of my mates?" As soon as he asked the question, her eyes flared in surprise or maybe it was fear.

"Are you sure?" She pulled back and gestured down to her tight clothes. "I'm not exactly mate of the Chief of Archangels material. I can't change who I am. I'll never be able to be prim and proper

like Iofiel."

"Rachael, I would never have you change who you are." Michael pulled her back into his arms, savoring the way her tiny form perfectly molded to him. "In fact, I wouldn't want to. This is what I fell in love with and I couldn't stand to see you any other way." Moving slowly, giving her plenty of time to change her mind, he gently touched his lips to hers. The fresh scent of rain washed over him as he breathed in and he knew there was no way he could ever let her go.

With a sigh, she surrendered to him, her lips parting to let him in as she swayed against him. Not needing to be asked twice, he swept his tongue inside so he could sample her sweetness. Heaven. This was Heaven, not the place they'd once called home.

A small whimper came from her as she grabbed his shirt with both hands and pulled him closer. She started to return his kiss with an urgency that made his cock twitch in appreciation. Letting out a groan of approval, he buried his fingers in her wild mane of hair and tilted her head back so he could get at her more.

So long, he'd waited, so long for this moment and now that it had started nothing short of the apocalypse could stop him. The urge to take her was so strong his hand started to tingle in anticipation of marking her. He pulled back and

was pleased to see a look of disappointment pass over her face. "Inside." He bent forward to give her pouting bottom lip a love bite. "Unless you want to find yourself naked in this hallway."

"You wouldn't dare." A saucy smile played on her kiss-swollen lips.

"I would. I'm two seconds from stripping away your clothes so I can kiss every inch of you."

"Poor Brolan is going to lose his roommate."

"I'm sure he'll get over his disappointment," Michael drawled as he ran the back of his knuckles along her jaw. When she shivered in response, it was all he could do to hold back a moan. If she responded like this to his mere touch, how was she going to react to actually making love?

She held up the card key and he wordlessly took it and slid it into the lock. Opening the door, he turned and held out his hand to her. Michael thanked the fates when she didn't even hesitate one second in placing her fingers into his palm.

Pulling her inside, he shut the door behind them and led her to the edge of the single king bed in the center of the room. Once there he paused with the intention of asking her if she was sure. Rachael apparently had other ideas in mind. She stood on tiptoe and pressed her lips to his.

She attacked him with the same passion he'd grown to admire in her over the years. Nothing



was held back as she slipped her tongue inside his mouth and stroked in and out. Her hands gripped the waist of his jeans and he tensed in anticipation before she finally had mercy on him and popped open his button. When she unzipped him and reached in to explore, he almost dropped to his knees.

"Commando?" she purred as she wrapped her hand around his cock and gave a slight squeeze. "Now why doesn't that surprise me?"

Michael tried to formulate a witty response to that, but her fingers danced along the tip of his erection and that robbed him of all ability to speak. Instead he growled and leaned in to kiss her again. She pulled back from him and slowly peeled her shirt off, revealing her creamy skin for him. The sight of her tight breasts pressing against the black lace bra she was wearing was the most beautiful thing he'd seen.

"I knew you would be perfect," he crooned before slowly running his tongue over the tops of them. Rachael let out a gasp as she shifted both hands to his head, urging him on.

"I'm not perfect?" she argued as she tugged on his hair almost painfully. "I'm too small. Everyone says I'm scrawny."

He palmed one of her breasts. "You don't feel small at all. I would say you're just right." With his front teeth, he caught the edge of the lace and

playfully pulled back before letting the bra snap back into place. Her nipples were pressed against the fabric and he pinched them with his thumb and finger.

“Michael!” Rachael’s whole body went rigid.

Scared shitless he’d pushed too much too soon, he looked up in alarm. “If you don’t want this, all you have to do is tell me and I’ll go back to my room.”

“Are you kidding?” She urged his head back down. “If you take one step toward that door, I’ll zap you again and I’ll hit a lot worse than your boot this time. I just wasn’t expecting it to feel so good.”

“Well I wouldn’t want to get zapped so I better stay.” He chuckled. Sliding one hand behind her, he slowly trailed it down until it was on the zipper of her skirt. Hardly believing that this moment was truly happening, he hesitated, overcome with emotion. Rachael cupped his cheek with one hand and made him look into her gaze. The love, the understanding he saw in those cobalt blue eyes made him feel cherished. This female cared for him when no one else could. Still a part of him was terrified to give himself completely to her. *If I love her too much, it will destroy me when she leaves me.*

“I won’t leave you, ever.” She ran the pad of her thumb along his jaw.

His body hummed in response. *Everyone leaves eventually. Once they realize I'm not worthy enough.*

"You are worthy." She placed her hand over his fingers, which were still hovering over her zipper, and helped him pull it down.

The entire time she never took her gaze off him and he couldn't tear himself away.

"You're mine, Mike. Don't you ever forget it."

"Isn't it usually the male who says *mine*?" He couldn't help but smile. Leave it up to his little fireball of fury to shake things up.

"You know I've never been good at playing by the rules." The zipper was all the way down and she lost the skirt with a little shimmy of her hips. She wasn't wearing any stockings so the only thing she had on was her underwear. At the sight of that black thong against her white skin, he sucked in a breath. The thin piece of satin barely covered her.

Her body was a work of perfection. Small and muscular, but with curves in all the right places. The silver stud in her navel twinkled at him and he brushed his fingers against it, enjoying how her stomach quivered at his touch.

"You're so beautiful." He trailed his touch up to the clasp at the front of her bra. "Worth every second of the wait."

With a flick of his wrist, Michael popped open the snap, freeing her full breasts. Thanks to his

earlier petting, her pink nipples were already puckered to attention and he licked his lips in anticipation. Dipping his head down, he took one of them in his mouth and sucked, using his fingers to tease the other one. "Definitely worth the wait," he murmured against her satin flesh. She tasted like salt, sweetness and rain mixed together.

"Well quit waiting already and get on with it." She emphasized her command by arching into his mouth.

"Greedy wench," he teased as he grabbed her with both hands on her ass and rocked her into his cock. He was still hanging out of his jeans and the tip brushed against her stomach.

Rachael stated to tug at his shirt. "Please," her voice a frantic whisper. "I need to see all of you."

Reluctant to let go of her soft body, but eager to please her, he pulled back and slipped the flannel shirt off his shoulders. She was the one who grabbed the hem of his tee shirt and pulled it over his head. With a purr of approval, she scrapped her nails over his chest before she leaned forward to give his nipple a love bite. As her tongue flicked over him to take away the sting, he let out a hiss of pleasure.

With a little hop, she jumped up and wrapped her legs around his waist. He grabbed her ass to hold her in place. The heat of her pussy pressed into his cock and he could feel the moisture

soaking the crotch of her thong.

"Make me yours." She captured his mouth in a scotching kiss.

Not wanting to break contact, even to look up to see where he was going, Michael stumbled blindly in the direction of the bed. After a few clumsy steps, he bumped it with the side of his knee, turned and tumbled back, her landing on top of him. Straddling him, she continued to whisper words of love between kisses as she rocked her pelvis against him.

They broke apart only long enough for him to pull off his jeans and for her to lose her panties. Purposely, he kept her on top, wanting her to feel like she had complete control of the situation. His Rachael liked to be in charge and he was willing to give her that, this being their first time. Later though, he planned on pinning her down, wrapping those legs around his hips and burying himself deep inside her.

That didn't mean he wasn't going to make sure she was well taken care of this time. Sliding a hand between them, he found the sensitive nub of her pussy and caressed it. Rachael acted as if she had been hit with one of her own energy bolts. Arching her back, she let out a shriek of pleasure.

"What are you doing to me?" she gasped as she clawed at his shoulders.

"Do you like it?" he slipped one finger inside

her and closed his eyes when he found out how tight she was.

"I like it a lot." With jerky movements, she undulated her hips against his hand.

"Easy, babe." He pulled out his finger and replaced it with two, trying to stretch her and get her ready to take him. "Slow and easy."

"I don't want slow." Rachael's fingers dug hard into his flesh so hard, there were sure to be bruises left behind.

"You're so tight, I don't want to hurt you." Now he had three fingers inside her and she was finding a steady rhythm, her juices making his hand slick. "That's it, ride it just like that." Michael knew she was getting close to the edge because a flush came over her cheeks as soft mewls passed through her parted lips. After a few more thrusts of his fingers, she threw back her head, her curls making an exotic flash of raven as she screamed his name. Knowing her body was primed for him and ready, he grabbed her by the hips and eased her onto his cock.

Rachael's eyes grew wide as her warm heat enveloped him like a tight fist. It took every bit of self-control Michael had not to hold on and slam into her again and again. Teeth clenched together, he fought his primal instincts as sweat broke out over his body. Sparks nearly danced over his skin when she moved slowly back and forth. He

shifted his hands to her waist to halt her movements and she let out a frustrated growl.

"Michael, let me go. I promise I won't break."

That shattered the last of his will power. Although he didn't move his hands from her waist, he did lighten his grip and let her have his way with him. At first, her movements were unsure and clumsy, like when she'd rode his hand, but like before, she soon found an easy steady rhythm.

Michael could feel his hand growing warm against her flesh and he knew he was marking her as his mate. All doubts and fears evaporated as the need to claim her became almost a primal animalistic need. After tonight she would be his and every male angel who came into contact her would instinctively know it. Now that he'd started to make her his, nothing could have stopped him, not even death.

"Mine," he growled as he thrust up into her. Even though his hand had started to cool down, he didn't move it or slow the pace of his lovemaking. She ran her fingernails down his chest again, her eyes glazed with passion and her hair messed just perfectly.

"Yes, yours and you're mine." Her hands left him as she cupped her breasts and squeezed.

The sight of her pleasuring herself shattered the last bit of control he had. Letting out a hoarse cry,

his seed shot into her hot pussy. After a few short strokes, she joined him, her body taking every drop he had to offer.

After it was over, she collapsed on his chest, his cock still inside her. Michael idly stroked her spine as they both caught their breath. She shivered as goose pimples rose on her skin and he threw an arm around her to keep her warm.

“Before you even ask, I have no regrets.” Her sweet breath fanned his ear as she spoke.



## Chapter Eight

**R**achael tensed as she waited to hear Michael's response, her heart painfully thudding in her chest. Fear washed over her like a cold wave as he continued with the silence. While she'd been rejected countless times in the past, she didn't think she would be able to survive the hurt if he did.

"I don't have any regrets either, Ray."

There was no reluctance in his admission or the edge to his voice that would tell her he was lying, but she still lifted her head so she could look down at him. "Then why did it take you so long to respond to me just now?" God she hated that her words cracked with that sentence.

"Because you'd just fucked me senseless. I couldn't breathe let alone form a complete sentence." He gave her a lopsided grin.

Her chest grew tight. Just then, he looked so young and carefree, as if the whole fate of the world didn't weigh on his shoulders. When had

been the last time she'd seen him like that? Never, not even in the few precious years she'd lived in Heaven before Lucifer's rebellion. "I guess I can forgive you this one time then." Rachael traced his smile with one finger. "Although the first time you present me publicly to your warriors, you are going to have plenty of regrets. I'm sure I will constantly be embarrassing you one way or another."

"I'll just have you sit next to Cam. With all the crap he's always pulling, nobody will even notice if you make a mistake." With a grin, he playfully nibbled on her finger.

"I'm serious, Michael." A frown tugged both at her lips and heart. "Since I was raised in Hell, I don't know all of the angel customs and I'm sure I'm going to mess up somehow and embarrass you."

Before she had a chance to continue her self-recrimination, Michael growled and flipped her over on her back. His hips were wedged between her thighs and he placed a hand on either side of her head. Leaning forward so their faces were only inches apart, he gave her a look so intense she shivered. Those brown eyes seemed to look straight into her soul and she didn't need her psychic skills to read the love and protectiveness that rolled off him.

"You will never embarrass me." He gave her a

brief, scorching kiss.

She could feel his cock twitch back to life as it brushed against her leg.

Once he pulled back, he continued, "The only reason I didn't claim you sooner was I was so damn afraid of what would happen to you in the fallout should it be discovered that Satan is my bother. I know I can't hide my relationship with Lucifer any longer now that both the fairies and the elves are in our lives and all I can think about is whether or not this will somehow end up hurting you."

A demon curse slipped out before she could stop it. "I can protect myself. Last time I checked, I wasn't made out of glass. In fact, I can kick most of your archangels' asses in training."

"Yes, I know that. If you recall, the first time I saw you as an adult, you were doing fine job of handing Cam's his." Michael shifted so the tip of his cock was poised at her entrance. "I just can't help feeling protective of you. Take now for instance. All I want to do is take you again, but I'm holding back because I'm worried that you're sore from our first time."

Rachael sucked in a breath as he rubbed his hardness against her clit before teasing her opening again. Even though she was already slick from before, she still felt more cream build in anticipation. Once, twice, three times he repeated

the movement until she thought she would scream from the burning building within her. It was a beautiful ache, but she was going to explode if he didn't relieve it soon. "I'm not too sore." The declaration came out with a shuddering breath.

"Are you sure?" He stilled, grabbed one of her thighs, but didn't go any further.

Frustrated, she cursed again and wrapped her legs around his waist, her heels settling in the small of his back. "Very sure." Even as she bit his arm to teach him not to underestimate her, she tightened her legs and forced him inside her.

They both moaned in unison as her body stretched to accommodate his thick cock. While there was a twinge of pain, it only added to the pleasure as he pushed completely inside her. His eyes were closed in ecstasy, the normally hard planes on his face relaxed. There was a residual tingle on her waist where he'd left his mark and she felt a satisfied smile spread over her lips, knowing that because of tonight she was forever his.

"You're so fucking tight." He groaned. "You grab my cock like a fist."

She got a sick thrill out of hearing the normally composed Chief talk so dirty. She dug her heels into his back and jerked him against her again. "Don't hold back. Make love to me hard."

"You're killing me, Ray." He pulled back and

thrust into her once. "I'm trying to be good, but you're not making it easy."

"One thing I learned from Hell is sometimes it's more fun to be bad."

This time when she bit him on the arm, his control seemed to shatter as he cursed in a low rumble of demon speak. Rachael shouldn't have been surprised that he knew the language even though he'd never stepped into Hell. It did turn her on like nothing ever had before. Then he switched to other languages, using French, Spanish and even some Elvish in between thrusts. All of them declared his love to her.

Rachael ran her hands up and down his warm back, reveling at the way his muscles rippled every time he moved in her body. Sweat made their bodies slick and their flesh slapped together as he started to move hard and fast. Waves of desire rocked through her body as he used one hand to tilt her hips up so he rubbed against her clit. A sharp cry came from her before he swallowed it with a kiss.

Growling into her mouth, he mimicked his thrusts with his tongue. Rachael gripped his arms so hard it must have hurt as she lifted her hips even more to meet his thrusts. Somewhere along the way, she started to scream, but it was muffled as he continued to kiss her.

She gave a stifled shriek as on last thrust sent

her over the edge and a blinding orgasm shot threw her like a drug. Dimly she heard glass shatter as her powers surged enough to break something, most likely a mirror, but that worry dimmed in comparison to the pleasure she was feeling right now.

Michael tore his lips from her with a hoarse cry as he came, too. Hot jets filling her in long surges as he pumped his seed into her. His body trembled, but that was okay since hers was too. After a few moments, he lowered his forehead to hers while they both caught their breath.

"I'm an idiot for waiting so long for this," he finally said.

She giggled as she gently stroked his sweat soaked hair. "We were both idiots," she agreed. He rolled off her and she took the opportunity to go on one side so she could finally look at the mark he left. "A dragon," she marveled as she lightly traced it.

"Do you like it?"

Even though he asked this casually, Rachael could tell by the way he shifted his gaze to the side how much her approval meant. It was all she could do to keep the smile off her face. God save them all from a mated male's pride. "I love it." She did, too. All black with a faint gold outline, it was a dragon in flight. Because of the way he was holding her when he left it, it wrapped around the

right side of her waist, the snout almost reaching her navel and the tail nearly to her spine. It had a long sword clutched in its talons and its mouth was open in a quiet roar. "You know what I like best about it?" Unable to resist touching him, she trailed her finger down his arm.

"That it's black and black goes with everything?"

"No." She lightly slapped his arm. "I like that with the type of shirts I wear, it's always going to be out in the open. I want everyone to know that you're mine."

"Well, I was going to go with a tee shirt that read *Ray's Boy Toy*, but we can do it your way." His body shook with suppressed laughter.

"I wonder if all the warriors know their Chief is such a dork." She rolled her eyes, but couldn't hold back the smile.

"I think I can recall Ramiel accusing me of that a time or two."

Rachael silently agreed because she had heard the archangel do just that. She didn't add it was usually under his breath. Even though Ramiel was one of his nephews, he was still one of his generals and he had never quite gotten over the formality in their relationship the way Bear and Cam had. Rachael smiled before she broached the subject they had both been dancing around yet never really touched. "How was it no one knew that

Lucifer was your brother?"

"Are you sure you want to hear this?" He sighed and scrubbed his face. "It's a long story."

"We have the rest of the night and I want to know everything about you." She scrambled under the covers and settled on her stomach. Rachael did want to learn everything about him, too. After all these years of slowly peeling away the layers of his past, she felt like she was finally getting to the gooey center of who he really was.

"Well, Brolan already told you that the original angels were the result of fairies and elves mating." He ran a finger up her spine and goose bumps broke out over her flesh.

"Yes, and just for the record, I think it's totally unfair we didn't get pointed ears." A warm feeling quickly replaced the goose bumps as he continued to trace the line down her back. It was as if he couldn't keep her hands off her and she was just vain enough to like that.

"I'll make sure to put a complaint in with the fates should they ever deign to talk to me."

"Please do." She snuggled deeper into the bed. "Now continue with the history lesson."

"The first batch of angels weren't to His liking. They were cold and indifferent like their sires. Fairies and elves have never been known for being warm and fuzzy, not even back then. But He wasn't ready to give up and he had ordered the



first generation of angels to mate with each other."

"Was the first generation really that cold?"

"Raphael's mother, Iofiel was one of them. Does that answer your question?"

"Yes, it does." She frowned as she thought about the cool, stuffy female.

"When the original generation mated, He added a dash of humanity to the offspring and that's where the angels we know came from. The problem was the first child born was a failure."

"How so?"

"The male child was small and weak."

"It was Lucifer wasn't it?" Her stomach clenched at the thought of Satan as a young, rejected kid. It was hard to equate anything as evil as him with something as innocent as a child.

"Yes, his father was so ashamed at making something less than perfect that he blamed Lucifer's mother. He cast her aside and took a different mate instead." One side of Michael's mouth curled in a sneer.

"How is that possible? Angels mate for life. There is no way he should have been able to take up with another."

"The whole one-mate-for-an-immortal-lifetime thing wasn't in effect then. So my sire was able to have as many females as he wanted. Luckily once he found my mother, he was happy enough when Lehor, Amiteil and I were born."

"What was his name?" As far as Rachael could remember, nobody had ever mentioned who Michael's parents were.

"I don't know." He gave a half shrug. "I only lived with them until I was five and they sent me to live with the elves."

"About the elves. How did you end up being raised with them?"

"The elves and the fairies had decided that since they had a part in us being in existence in the first place, they should have say in how the angel's future leaders were molded. I was given to the elves since I was archangel and elves are a warrior breed and Raphael was given to the fairies since he was a healer. They have always been strong with the healing arts."

"What was going on with Lucifer all this time?"

"He and his mother were forgotten. Not only had my father cast them aside, but he'd disowned them."

"All that time he was festering his hatred, too." Rachael couldn't help but feel a twinge of pity for the fallen angel. She knew first hand what it felt like to be rejected by a father.

"I wouldn't feel too bad for him," Michael said bitterly. "Raphael and I didn't exactly have it easy with our guardians. I would have rather I'd been ignored than broken so they could rebuild me to their liking."

"Who raised Lehor? Didn't they realize she was an empath?"

"Yeah, they realized." A dark, bleak look passed over his eyes as a tick developed in his jaw. "Neither the elves or the fairies wanted anything to do with her. They saw her empath skills as a fault because to care is to be weak. Not only that, she was hard to be around."

"Why?" Rachael was hard pressed to think of anyone not liking the warm, caring female.

"Because she cried all the time. As the first empath, she didn't have anyone to teach her how to shield herself from all the emotions. She was constantly bombarded day and night and nearly went crazy from it. It wasn't until she was a teen that she learned some control."

"What about Amiteil, was she the same way because she was empath?"

"Even then Amiteil was too busy concerned about herself than to worry about other's emotions. Neither the fairies or the elves had any use for her. Eventually the elves realized Lehor had potential and they tried to gain possession of her, too. I bargained for her freedom."

"With what?"

"I had to walk the gauntlet through the village and let the male elves have a go at me. It was worth it though because she never had to be touched by their cruelty."

Rachael wanted to weep for Michael, Raphael and Lehor. Most of all she wanted to hunt down everyone who had ever hurt her mate and beat them for their sins. With a cry, she threw herself on his body and wrapped her arms around his strong chest. "You've always been alone." It was true, too. Even in Hell Rachael had always known that Appolion was close by. Michael hadn't had even that small comfort. "You will never be alone again," she vowed and she meant every word with her heart. "So long as I breathe, you will never face this damn world alone anymore."

Michael wrapped one strong arm around her and held her so close her back creaked. "I love you so much, Ray."

"I love you, too, Michael. I always will, too, no matter what."

He hugged her again and said nothing, but Rachael could still feel the doubt lingering in him.

## Chapter Nine

**“H**ey, Dina,” Bear said in a loud stage whisper. “What kind of sandwich do you got?”

Raziel threw an arm over his face to cover his eyes as he held back a groan, knowing where this question was going.

“I have bologna,” Dina replied in a tired voice. Obviously, he knew where this conversation was headed, too.

“Cool!” Bear let out a cackle that grated like broken glass down Raziel’s spine. “I have bologna. Want to trade?”

“Of course he has the same fucking sandwich, you idiot,” Raziel snapped as he sat up on the lumpy mattress. “It’s not like jail serves a damn smorgasbord.”

“Oh.” Bear cocked his head to the side, his black eyes mocking. “Somebody is grumpy.”

“Well, let’s see what made me cranky.” Raziel held his hand up and ticked things off on his fingers. “One, you took over control of Bear’s

body and refused to give it back. Two, you decided to smash in the front window of a store. Which, three, got us arrested by human police offers. Police officers, which could see us, because of reason number four, you made it so we couldn't shield our presence. You're right, what was I thinking? Everything's frigging peachy cream. A rainbow of cotton candy and ponies."

"I didn't hurt any of the humans though." Bear or rather Legion was quick to point out with a malicious grin.

Raziel let out a tired sigh and rubbed the temples of his aching head. Could this day get any fucking worse? "Fine, you get a gold star for that. How in the hell did Dina put up with you this long?"

"Dina loves Bear. Although I almost think he likes him better when I'm in control. Bear can be such a bore, always doing the right thing." Legion let out an exaggerated yawn before holding one hand out in Dina's direction. "Come on, my Goth empath, don't think I forgot our little trade."

Raziel gaped at the possessed angel, feeling like he'd been taking crazy pills. How in the hell did Michael let things go this far? Dina, on the other hand, seemed used to it. He just rolled his eyes and handed over his sandwich. The demon snatched it like a feral dog might a bone, scurried off to the corner of the jail cell, sat on his haunches

and began to tear into it, spitting out bits of the plastic wrap between bites. Raziel noted he never actually traded with Dina since the other sandwich was sitting in front of Bear's battered tennis shoes. His bony knees protruded from the rips in his faded blue jeans and his Ramones tee seemed to hang on his thin body.

"Thank God we're the only ones in the cell." Raziel repressed a shudder of disgust when Bear-Legion let out a loud burp.

The demon glared up at the archangel and the dim light from the jail glinted off his marble black eyes as he let out a low hiss that sounded so primitive it was almost animal like. "When I broke the human's window I was trying to make a funny."

Now that it was Legion talking, Bear's voice had taken on a raspy affect that reminded Raziel of a snake.

"Bear said I need to get a sense of humor."

"Since when do you care what Bear thinks?" Dina rummaged around in the sack that had once held his sandwich and came out with a tired looking apple.

"I want Bear to like me. Maybe then he won't fight me so much and let me stay."

Dina stopped, apple halfway to his mouth, his jaw slack and eyes wide. "You are even crazier than I thought if you think Bear will ever accept

you.”

“Tell me, empath,” Legion’s lips spread out in a grin so wicked, Raziel half expected to see fangs, “do you like your little friend maybe a tad too much?”

“Shut up, Legion,” Dina responded in such a resigned way Raziel suspected this hadn’t been the first time the pair had this conversation.

“Oh yes, I forget. You two just like to watch each other fuck, but there is no touchy-touchy allowed.” Those dark eyes looked over at Raziel again. “How does that make you feel, archangel? Knowing your baby sister likes to get it on in front of an audience.”

Raziel clenched his hands into fists so tight his knuckles popped. Even though part of him knew Legion was telling him all this to get a rise out of him, the way Dina blushed and ducked his head said there was some truth in the words. Yeah, he was definitely going to need therapy after this mission. He was going to send the bill to Michael, too. “Tif is an adult. What she does behind closed doors is no business of mine.” Even though he tried to hide it, that statement still came out with a hard edge of anger.

“Are you sure?” Legion stood and slyly licked his lips, his gaze glinting with malicious glee. “I can give you very descriptive details. I’ll even tell you how she likes it when Bear bends her over a



table and —”

“Enough!” With a roar, Dina threw the apple at Legion.

The demon barely avoided being clocked by ducking at the last second. The fruit hit the wall with a loud smack and bits of flesh and juice sprayed out. Legion let out another cackle as he straightened and turned to watch the chunks of apple slowly slide down the gray concrete wall. “Guess Dina doesn’t like me in that special tingly way after all. But then other males have never been Dina’s way.” Legion pinned Raziel with an all-too-knowing gaze. “Unlike some other angels I know.”

Raziel kept his fists at his side as he fought to not show the panic on his face. Tying hard to keep cool even though he was freaking out on the inside. His heart pounded painfully and a sweat broke out over his body. It was no secret Bear was a mind reader. Was it possible the demon was harnessing those gifts for his own twisted use? As if hearing his thoughts, Legion nodded his head and started to slowly approach him.

Dina began to say something, but Raziel cut him off with a curt move of his hand. It was better if he faced the demon and his taunts head on. To show fear would be to show weakness. “So what I prefer males,” Raziel bit out. “What’s the big deal? There are plenty of other archangels like me.”

"True," Legion conceded as he stepped way too close. "But how many of them lust after their sister's mate? Tell me about the first time you ever saw Bear. Was that when the longing first started?"

Yes, it was, but Raziel would die before admitting it. The moment he'd laid eyes on his sister's new empath, the archangel had been done for. With blond hair that just begged to be tugged on and those sweet innocent blue eyes, Raziel had wanted him from minute one. But then he'd caught the sideways glances of longing Tif was shooting Bear and Raziel had held off.

"Admit it, deep down the reason you're angry at Bear is because he never noticed you back." Legion reached out and lightly traced the angel's jaw with his finger.

"No," he rasped. The warmth from Bear's body seemed to call to him as the empath's earthy scent made him hard. *Fight this, you ass. This is your sister's mate.*

"How many nights have you stroked yourself as you thought about Bear's tight body?"

"I don't," he lied. *Every night. Even though I hate myself for it, I think about Tif's love as I jack off. What kind of archangel does that make me?*

"I can smell your deceit." Legion leaned in and made a big production of sniffing the air around him. "I can smell your arousal, too. They are like

my own personal brand of heroin."

Raziel didn't say anything, knowing that to deny it would only make matters worse because Legion was sure to call him out on it. Instead the archangel stood there, jaw clenched, gaze directed at the far wall as he fought hard to keep the panic off his face. Legion leaned in so Bear's body was pressed against the archangel. He had the build of an empath so he was smaller than Raziel, but that still didn't stop the hard plans and angles from fitting perfectly against him.

"Why don't you kiss me," Legion moaned as he tilted his head back slightly. "I'll even close my eyes for you so you can pretend it's really Bear."

"Back off!" Raziel growled as he shoved Bear away from him. *No, not Bear, Legion. Remember that.*

With another one of those freaky cackles, Legion fell on his ass and started to roll around on the urine stained ground. The archangel retreated to the far corner, needing to put as much distance as possible between himself and the possessed empath. Taking in a couple of deep breaths, he tried to calm himself down, but it didn't help much. What he needed was to hit something. His head against the wall oughta do it. Since he didn't want to make a further ass out of himself, he settled for resting his forehead against the cool concrete.

"Sorry, I warned you how Legion can get sometimes. I just didn't realize he would go after you so hard," Dina said in gentle tones as he came up behind him.

"I deserved it."

"Don't let him jack you up like that. Legion thrives on bad emotions."

"It's true though." Raziel couldn't believe he was admitting everything out loud, but it wasn't like Legion hadn't open that can already. "Every single fucking word."

"Oh." Dina audibly swallowed. "Wow. So I take it Tif doesn't know?"

"Doesn't know that her big brother has a crush on her mate?" Raziel shot back sarcastically. "No, for some reason I thought I should keep that bombshell to myself."

"Is that why you were such a dick to Bear earlier?"

"No. Yes. Maybe." Raziel sighed and ran a hand through his hair. "Not all of it was because of that. I was really pissed at him for walking out on Tif. Now I see why. Shit, I should pin a medal on him for leaving. There is no way I want *that* around my sister." He gestured toward Legion who was too busy ignoring them because he'd started in on the second sandwich.

"Don't worry, Bear won't hold it against you." Dina reached out to touch his arm and Raziel

shrugged away.

"Don't empath me. I don't deserve it." One of the skills empaths had was the ability to sooth ill feelings in others. Right now though, Ramiel wanted to feel like shit, thank you very much.

"Sorry." Dina gave a wry grin. "It's in our genetic makeup. You know how warm and cuddly empaths are."

Raziel gave the angel a deliberate once over. He was dressed in black jeans that had huge holes in the knees and there was a black tattoo on his arm that was some sort of strange writing, maybe Elvish. The dark rock tee he was wearing looked like it could have come straight from a horror movie. His dark hair had blue highlights in it and there were large black plugs in both his ears in addition to several body piercings. "Yeah," Raziel drawled. "You look just like a teddy bear."

"Call me crazy, but since I looked so much like my dad I decided a makeover was in order." The empath's upper lip curled into a sneer. Dina's father was Jehel or more specifically, the leader of the justice angels.

"Is it true Jehel tried to kill you?"

"Not tried, did." The look that came across the empath's face was as dark as his clothes.

Since he couldn't think of anything wise to say, Raziel went with, "That sucks."

"Yeah, it did at the time, but I'm over it."

The bitterness that was laced in Dina's statement said otherwise, but Raziel wasn't going to argue with him.

"As I live and breathe. I never thought I would witness the day where I saw angel warriors in a human jail," a soft voice huffed.

Raziel jerked up and turned to see who it was. A beautiful female was looking into the cell, her disgusted gaze mostly focused on Legion who was still working on the sandwich. To say she was blonde would have been an understatement. Her hair was every shade of blonde, dark streaks mixing in with lighter ones, making for a beautiful blend. Even though she had it pulled back in a ponytail, he could tell it went all the way past her hips. It reminded Raziel of Bear's sister Ana, but this strange female wasn't her. She did share the same baby blue eyes as the Ana and her brothers though.

"Lehor!" Dina exclaimed as he went down on one knee and formally bowed to her.

Now Raziel was really surprised. The last one he expected to come spring them from jail was a seraphim and that was what Lehor was. The fact she was wearing a bright red sweatshirt and faded blue jeans didn't exactly go with the title either. The way she looked at Bear spoke to who she really was though. Only a mother would look that torn up at seeing one of her offspring so bad off.

Tears pooled in her eyes before she rapidly blinked them away.

"Dina, get up. You don't need to bow down to me," her order was given in a shaky voice.

"I failed you, Lady. I didn't watch over Bear close enough and Legion was able to control him."

"Dina, you are the only reason Bear still lives." Lehor gifted him with a watery smile. "Our family will never be able to repay our debt to you. If anyone should be bowing, it should be me to you."

"I should have guarded him better and stopped him before he destroyed that window."

"Legion," Lehor said in clipped tones. "Why did you break the window in the first place? Surely you had to know it would have attracted too much attention for the humans."

"I wanted the blanket with the sleeves on display behind it." Legion shrugged like it was a stupid question. "Maybe then Bear wouldn't be cold all the time."

"Then you should have told Dina," Lehor spoke like she was addressing a dense child. "He would have bought it for you."

"It's more fun to steal it."

"My God." Lehor closed her eyes. "Not only is my son possessed by a demon, but it's a retarded demon to boot."

"You're not being very nice, Lehor," Legion

emphasized the last syllable of her name so it sounded like a slur. "I expect more from you."

"You don't know me well enough to expect anything from me, demon." She waved her hand and the jail cell slid open with a loud series of clacks.

"No offense, Lady." Dina still was in the bow position. "But if we just disappear from the cell won't that alarm the humans?"

Raziel agreed with the empath. The last thing the angel warriors needed on this shit sundae was for them to add the cherry by becoming fugitives from the human law enforcement for a jailbreak.

"I wiped the police officer's minds. They won't remember anything about this encounter."

"What about the storeowner?"

"I already went there and took care of his memories and I arranged for his window to be fixed."

She acted so casual about being able to clean minds that Raziel was tempted to forget how great her gifts really were.

"That's what took me so long to get here. Now get your ass up, Dina, before I kick it."

"Yes, Lady." Dina chuckled as he got to his feet.

"Leeeee-hoooooor...Leeee-hoooooor..." Legion mocked in a cruel chant. "Come and give your baby boy a hug."

"Bite me, demon."



"Gladly." Legion barred his teeth and snapped them together.

"I guess I walked right into that one." Lehor motioned Dina over with one hand. As soon as the empath got close, she started to fuss over him, straightening his collar and patting his hair to tame the worst cowlicks. "You're way too thin, Dina, and you look exhausted. When was last time you got any sleep?"

"Don't worry about me, Lady. I'll catch up on my rest once Bear's better. I don't suppose you can give us any word on how Michael's doing with that?"

"I guess it won't hurt to tell you now. We just discovered Lucifer knows about our plans. All of our teams were attacked yesterday and we were lucky nobody was seriously hurt." She shot a dirty look at Legion before returning her gaze back to Dina. "Michael is close to finding a fairy child who can defeat that thing in my son. I expect him to be calling you soon to arrange for a rendezvous point once he has her."

"Bullshit!" Legion snarled as he leaped to his feet. With a predator's gait, he walked across the cell until he was inches from Lehor.

"What's bullshit?" Raziel asked as he moved to put his body between Legion and Lehor. While the archangel knew Bear would die before harming his mother, he wasn't about to take bets on Legion

having any such qualms.

"That some wee little fairy could defeat someone as great as me." Legion ran his hands over Bear's body much like a stripper would hers.

"Really?" Raziel cocked his head and made a big show of inhaling. "Now it's me who smells something and it's fear."

"Fuck you!" Legion snarled. His dark eyes grew even more feral as his nostrils flared.

"We've already touched on this subject. Not happening," Raziel said blandly, putting a hand on the possessed angel's chest. It was so thin, the archangel nearly winced. *Damn, Dina wasn't the only one losing weight. At this rate, they would both be runway model material in a week.*

The only warning Raziel got was when Legion whipped his head to the side. An unseen force slammed the archangel in the center of the chest and pinned him to a wall. At first, he tried to fight the hold, but after a few embarrassing lame attempts, he realized it was a lost cause.

"Let him down, now!" Lehor ordered. Her cheeks were bright red and her eyes flashed hostility.

"Make me, Leee-hoor." Legion raised one hand and slowly formed a fist.

Raziel swallowed a gasp. As Legion's fist grew tighter and tighter so did the pressure in the archangel's chest. A deep burning pain started at

his heart and spread out. Finally the pain became so great Raziel wanted to scream. Not wanting to give the demon the satisfaction, the angel bit down on his bottom lip so hard, blood trickled down his chin.

"Stop it." Lehor raised her hand and waved it like she was trying to deflect Legion's hold, but she may have well been doing the Macarena for all of her efforts.

"I don't need him, Leee-hoor," Legion sang. "In fact, if I kill the brother of Bear's mate, it may make your son finally give up the fight. Then he will be me and I will be him. How does that make you feel? Knowing the little baby you once held in your arms is going to be demon? The first thing I'm going to do is kill off all of your pathetic family. I'll start with the children and work my way up. But you, Leee-hoor, I'll save for last. I have something really special planned for you."

With a strangled cry, Lehor brought back her fist and swung. In the flash of a second before she came into contact with his jaw, Raziel saw Bear's eyes turn from black back into blue. The archangel wasn't for sure, but he could have sworn he heard the empath say, "Mom."

Lehor sure packed a punch for such a slender female. Bear dropped to the ground, landing with a thud onto his side. Immediately the hold on Raziel was gone and he joined Bear on the filthy

floor. He scrambled to his feet and went to help the empath.

"Oh God, Bear," Lehor sobbed. Raising a hand to her mouth, she shook her head in denial. "I'm so sorry. I didn't mean to hit you."

"It's okay, Mom." He let Raziel help him to his feet.

Even though Raziel had known Bear was in bad shape, he didn't realize until now how bad. Now that Legion had retreated, the angel was back to a pasty complexion, with red-rimmed eyes and a gaunt look. He almost looked like he had one boot firmly planted in the grave. A line of blood was dribbling from the corner of Bear's mouth and he quickly wiped it away as if he was trying to rub away his mother's guilt.

"No, it's not okay." She reached over and rubbed his injured jaw with loving hands. Already there was a nice purple bruise forming. "Damn it! I was such a fool. I should have known Legion would do something like this."

"Stop it, Mom. It's not your fault." Bear wrapped one arm around her and brought her in for a hug before placing a chaste kiss on her head.

She drew back and looked him over. A single tear slipped down her cheek as her gaze slowly traveled up his emaciated body to his worn face. Her hands trembled as she reached out and caressed his cheek. Raziel wasn't one for emotions,

but even he got gut sick at the pain on the female's face.

"Why didn't you tell me?" she asked.

"Didn't you see it in your scrying pool?" Bear teased with a weak smile.

"No, lately when I've looked through it, things are hazy and difficult to read. How long have you been this bad?"

"I don't know." He shrugged. "Does it matter?"

Raziel stood to the side, awkward and feeling like he was intruding on a private moment. He looked over at Dina to see if they should find a way to gracefully make an exit, but the empath gave a slight shake of his head. Understanding the driving need he must have to protect the former Lady of the Empaths, the archangel stayed put to help if needed.

"We need to get you to a healer," Lehor said.

"Mom, it's too late for that. I'm so far gone I don't think I can ever come back."

"No." Lehor frantically shook her head. "Once Michael finds the child, we'll get you better and back home where you belong."

"Don't you get it, Mom?" Bear closed his eyes and took in one shuddering breath before opening them again. "I don't belong there anymore."

"How can you say that? You have Tif and the baby. They need you. We need you."

"I'm tainted and I don't think any amount of

fairy magic is going to clean my soul." He ran a hand through his hair, making the spikes stand even more on end.

"You're just saying that because you're sick." Lehor reached out to touch him, but he pulled back.

"You don't get it," he argued. "That thing is no longer just here." He pointed to his head. "It's now here." He thumped himself in the chest.

"What is that supposed to mean?"

"It's becoming part of my soul." Bear shot a guilty look around. "The scary part is it doesn't even feel weird anymore. It's almost as if it's meant to be."

"So I was right." Raziel finally had enough. The thought of Tif's anguish when her mate didn't return gave the archangel the courage to face the empath's gaze despite Legion's earlier revelations. "You are a coward."

"Don't start on me." Bear curled his lip at the archangel. "You have no idea what I'm going through."

"You're right, I don't." Raziel conceded. "What I do know is you have angels literally scouring this country to save your sorry ass and you're just willing to throw in the towel."

"How can I face any of them after everything I've done in the past few months?" The angel wrapped his arms around himself like he was

cold.

"Was it you or Legion?"

"Legion," Bear admitted in a harsh whisper.

"Then they won't hold it against you. One thing I do know about you Lehor brothers is how loyal you guys are to one another. The same thing goes for my sister. You could drown a basket of kittens and she would still look at you with sappy eyes."

"Tif is great." The corners of the empath's lips twitched in a threat of a smile. "I'm sorry about Legion telling you the ins and outs of our sex life."

"Please." Raziel lifted a hand to stop his apology. "We don't need to ever talk about it again. In fact, I would consider it a huge favor if we didn't."

"Deal. We better get going before more humans come around. Mom can only control their minds so long."

Bear gave Lehor a kiss on the cheek as he left the cell, Dina at his heels. Raziel started to follow, but Lehor put a hand on his chest and stopped him. Weary, he waited to see what she wanted. Was she going to call him out for letting Bear get arrested? Worse, did she suspect his true feeling toward him? The silence between them grew long and heavy and the entire time he searched her face for some clue about how she was feeling. Her expression remained closed and guarded, revealing nothing.

"We need you, archangel," she finally said, her gaze turned imploring. "Dina has done wonderful, but I can sense his weariness. He can't do it alone anymore and my sons are all searching for the child. I know you don't like Michael or the angel warriors."

"True." Raziel had never made his views on the Chief private. "I have no love for either one."

"I'm not going to ask you why because it no longer matters. All I do ask if you would be willing to put those feelings aside long enough to help us."

"No, I can't put them aside." Raziel gave a curt shake of his head. "But that doesn't mean I won't protect Bear. I'm doing it for Tif." He was doing it for Bear, too. Even though he knew he could never have the empath as his own, Raziel still cared deeply about him and would kill anything that tried to harm him. Including an ancient demon with a blankie fetish.

Strangely, Raziel had the urge to do it for Lehor, too. Seeing the heartache in her eyes after she'd struck Bear had made the archangel in him go all protective. Crap, he was two seconds from going down on one knee and making a formal vow to her that he would protect her son. Which was crazy because he was the last angel to play that game. "I won't rest until he is safe and back with his family and Tif," Raziel said gruffly as he



left the cell.

## Chapter Ten

“How about we figure out a way to ditch Brolan?” Rachael called from the bathroom in a teasing voice. “When we take a pee break we can *accidentally* forget him at the rest stop.”

“We could try.” Michael chuckled as he sat on the edge of the bed and laced up his boots. “I have a feeling Brolan would still be able to find his way back to us though. Much like one of his damn cats.” As Rachael’s answering giggle washed over him, Michael stared through the window at the morning sun with regret. Now that the new day was upon them, it was time to get back to the assignment and he didn’t want to leave this little piece of paradise he and his mate had made in this room.

*His mate.*

A satisfied smile landed on his face at that thought. Even though they had spent most of the night making love, he’d still had to check out her mark this morning to make sure it had really

happened. Of course, looking led to touching and touching led to kissing, which led to them missing breakfast. It was worth it though.

Lehor suddenly popped into the center of the room and with a yell, she threw something at Michael's head.

He barely had time to duck as it sailed by and hit the wall. Looking over his shoulder, he saw it was a cell phone. "What did I do now?" he asked as he eyed her hands warily for more weapons.

"You stinking, son of a bitch. Do you know what a slimy, gutless jerk you are?"

"If I said yes, would you tell me why you threw a phone at me?" he demanded. Rachael came running out of the bathroom, dagger in hand and Michael raised a hand to stop her attack.

"I was trying to prove a point."

"What, that your calling plan sucked and you wanted me to get you a new one?" By the way her eyes flashed anger at his question, Michael realized maybe sarcasm wasn't the best way to handle this situation. Especially when she called up a fireball into her hand and launched it at him.

Michael flipped his wrist and stopped it mid-flight. Instead of extinguishing it, he let it hover, the smell of sulfur rich in the air as the flames crackled. Even though it was hard, he mentally took off his brother hat and put on his Chief one. "Wow, you can flash around now. I'm

impressed," Michael said casually, totally ignoring the fact his sister was still seething.

"Yes, Iofiel took off my angel harness so I could get Bear out of jail." She glared at the fireball like it had betrayed her. "You should have told me, Michael."

"That Legion landed them all in the clinker? Cam wanted to be the one to call you with that gem."

"You know what I'm talking about, you ass of a slug demon."

"I would advise you don't call him any more names." Rachael took a threatening step closer.

"It's okay." He tore his glare away from Lehor long enough to give his mate a weak smile.

"No, it's not," Rachael spat between clenched teeth. "Nobody treats my mate like that and gets away with it. Not anymore."

"Don't worry," Michael told her. "There isn't going to be anymore name calling because Lehor is going to tell me what she's so upset about. Aren't you, Lehor?" While Michael was warmed from the inside out that someone was actually standing up for him, part of him was too worried to dwell on those happy thoughts. Was it possible that Lehor had finally figured out about Lucifer after all these years?

"I saw Bear." Her jaw gapped slightly as she gave him an incredulous look. "What in the hell

do you think it's about? Do you have a passel load of secrets you're keeping from me?"

"No, just one or two," he admitted flippantly.

"You are such a jackass."

"So I've been told a time or two." He scrubbed his face with a hand. "Look, I thought it would be better if you had no clue about Bear's status."

"You it would be better?" she nearly shrieked. "I had every right to know."

"To know what? That your youngest son was slowly dying so you could go all half-cocked and do something stupid?" He gave the fireball a pointed look. "I don't know why I ever worried about that."

"Sarcasm doesn't suit you," she sneered.

"Lehor, who is the Chief of the angel warriors?"

"I'm not in the moods for games."

"Who is the Chief?" he repeated in a hard voice, staring her down.

After a few tense moments, she averted her gaze and held her hands up in surrender. "You are the Chief. But now that I am seraphim that means I don't answer to you."

"True." He nodded his head once. "But Bear is and he is under my rule. As his leader, I thought the last thing he needed was his mommy coming in to mess up the mission to save him. When Nix consulted the runes, they never said anything about a certain blonde menace butting her nose

in."

"He's my son, damn it!"

The declaration came out raw and harsh and it about ripped Michael's heart out of his chest. "And he's my nephew. Don't you think knowing he's that way kills me?" He scooped up the broken pieces of the cell and tried to put it back together only to realize after a couple minutes it was a lost cause. He tossed it aside. "Do you want to hear the main reason I didn't tell you the minute I knew?"

"Probably not," she sniffed as she crossed her arms over her stomach. "But tell me anyway."

"Bear asked me not to. He didn't want to load more crap on you guys so he begged me to keep it secret."

"So you just caved in to him?" She threw her hands up.

"I had to turn him away from the angel compound, leave him with almost no support and tear him apart from his mate, excuse me if I wanted to give him at least this one request."

"You should have let me know. I had a right as his mother."

Even though she spat the words out between clenched teeth, he could sense the anger ease up in her a little. "You're probably right," he conceded. "I let my personal feelings of guilt cloud my judgment and I'm sorry. Would it make you feel better if I let you help us out with something

before you went back?"

"What?" she asked, her eyes narrowed suspiciously.

Michael turned to look at Rachael. She had been watching the whole scene in silence even though he knew it must have been killing her. "Will you go get our buddy for us?"

"Of course." She nodded before she came over and gave him a kiss on the cheek. Passing a glare in Lehor's direction, she left the room.

"So you finally claimed her after all," Lehor observed as she waved a hand and called in her fireball. Given the fact the black long sleeved tee Rachael was wearing bared her midriff, the dragon was out in the open. She had opted for a pair of leather pants instead of the usual skirt, no doubt because of the attack yesterday. Even Rachael preferred to fight in battle leathers.

"Save it." He smiled at her. "You knew this was going to happen as soon as you found out I was partnered with her."

"Please, I knew it was going to happen the first time I saw you two in a room together. I'm happy for you, Michael. It's about time you found your mate. She's good for you. Most other females would let you walk all over them and she doesn't. You need a challenge."

"She does like to put me in my place."

"So who is this mystery buddy she's fetching?"

Lehor took a seat and ran her hands up and down the legs of her jeans.

"I'll let you see for yourself. Just remember if you fry him, then he won't be able to help us."

"I'll be a good little seraphim."

Somehow Michael doubted that, but he let the comment slide since it looked as if Lehor had finally calmed down. The only one scarier than an angry Rachael was a pissed Lehor.

Rachael came in, Brolan in tow. The fairy was dressed in a bulky sweatshirt with bright stripes of various color so bright it hurt Michael's eyes. The male had paired the fashion monstrosity with holey, gray sweats and red high-top Converse shoes. His hair was in dreads and he'd added some beads that the archangel recognized as fairy make.

"Good God, do I have to dress you everyday?" Michael grimaced in disgust. "You look like a demented hippie."

"Brolan?" Lehor stood, her eyes so wide they looked about ready to pop out of her head. "Where in the hell did you dig him up?"

"Out from under about a hundred pounds of cat shit and newspapers." Michael had forgotten Lehor had known Brolan from the good old days and, judging by the venomous look she was shooting his way, they weren't fond memories.

"You can't possibly be thinking of taking him



back to the angel compound."

"If necessary, I will."

"You can't do that to Raphael." Lehor protested. "One look at his former foster brother and he'll be shitting bricks."

"Lehor, look at you all grown up." Brolan rudely gawked at Lehor. "You did fill out so nicely."

"Down boy." Rachael shot him a warning glare. "You try anything on her and she'll fry your ass and not in a way you'd like."

"How are you doing this morning, Brolan?" Michael asked as he crossed his arms over his chest and leaned against a table.

"Do you really care?" the fairy drawled.

"Not really, but I'm trying to use my manners. So are you going to promise to help Bear?"

"I already told you I won't do that until I know whether or not it will hurt the child, Chief of Archangels."

"And we both know that's bullshit. You're a seer and you have known her destiny before we even got to your hovel." For a second, Michael thought Brolan was going to deny it. Then a sly smile spread over his face and a wicked glint came to his eyes.

"Come on, angel. You just can't expect me to give it up easy. What fun would that be?"

The archangel closed his eyes and counted to

ten very, very slowly. While he wanted to strangle the idiot for playing games when his nephew's life was on the line, he reminded himself that fairies were eccentric and set in their ways. No amount of beating was going to make him cooperate either. Which is why the angel was going to pull out a secret weapon. "Lehor, why don't you tell Brolan who Bear's mother is?"

"I know who she is." Brolan waggled his fingers in front of his face. "Remember? Seer? I know everything."

"Then you should know how much getting her son back means to her."

"Like I give a damn if some female angel gets teary with me." Brolan gave them all a disgusted look.

"Oh, she won't get teary on you." Michael looked over at Lehor and gave a nod. "Just the opposite."

Lehor splayed the fingers out on both hands and the sound of crackling flames filled the room. Brolan yelped and took a step back, hitting Rachael in his haste to retreat. She shoved him none-to-gentle back into the center of the room.

"You wouldn't dare." Brolan's voice trembled. "You took a vow never to harm me and that vow extends to your followers."

As if Michael could ever forget that stupid vow. Taken in exchange for the fairies letting Raphael

leave their care, Michael knew it was going to come back and bite him in the ass someday. "True." Michael grinned. "But, as Lehor was so kind to point out to me a few moments ago, she's no longer one of my followers. So if she wants to fry you until you agree to help, then that's no skin off my hide."

"Oh, this is going to be fun." Rachael stepped to the side. "Here, I'm going to get out the line of fire."

"Oh." Michael gave an exaggerated wince. "Very bad pun there, darling."

"Sorry, snookims." Rachael grinned. "You'll have to remember Appolion is my twin and he is the king of dorky comments. He must be rubbing off on me."

"Okay, destroy me." Brolan stretched his arms to the side and thrust his chest out. "I can't stand anymore of their sickenly sweet byplay. Next they're going to be breaking out into song and dance."

"I'll personally tie you down myself and make you listen to them all damn day if that's what it takes for you to help us out," Lehor snarled as a fireball formed in one hand.

"Ouch, you could teach Donald Rumsfeld a lesson or two."

"Tell us what we need to know then."

"Do I get a some whiskey if I do?" He arched a

brow.

"No, you get to still breathe."

"Not even a little sip?" he held his thumb and one finger of couple of inches apart.

"Maybe." Lehor balanced the fireball on her palm and lifted it shoulder level, the flames casing an eerie glow on one-half of her face.

There was a very long pause in which Michael held his breath. He hated that he was having to depend on some asshole for anything let alone the survival of one of his nephews. But he was willing to do anything to save Bear. Even this.

"Fine." Brolan let out a long sigh as he fiddled with one of the beads in his hair. "Just for the record though, I'd already decided to help you out. There wasn't any need for all this."

"Let's start off by you telling us where the fairy is," Rachael demanded.

"Myrtle Beach, North Carolina. I'm not for sure of the exact address yet, but once we get closer I should be able to pick it up."

"Thank you." Lehor dissipated the fireball by closing her hand into a fist. She turned to Michael, her eyes alight with hope for the first time in weeks. "What now?"

"I know the original plan was to get Bear and meet back up at the compound, but I don't think he has that long. I'm calling all the teams and having them meet up at the fairies location. Since

Ramiel and Case just got to Charlotte, they're the closest. I'll have them start searching right away."

"I'll go back and tell Iofiel and Nix," Lehor said. "I need to check on Tiffany, too."

"How is she doing?" Rachael asked as she came over and stood by Michael's side.

It came so natural to him when he threw an arm around her shoulder and pulled her closer.

"The pregnancy has been hard on her." Lehor's brow wrinkled as she gave a slow shake of her head. "I worry about her and the baby. Should Bear die because we're unable to save him in time, I don't think she'll have the will to go on."

They all turned to Brolan in silent question.

He gave a sheepish shrug. "Sorry, I can't see whether or not Bear will survive. The future has always been the hardest for me to read and his is even more hazy."

"Why would Bear's be even harder?" Rachael frowned.

"Probably because we are at a crossroad right now. His fate, good or bad, will be decided by the actions we take within the next couple of days," Michael answered.

"Well then we better get everyone moving." Rachael stood straight as she tilted her chin up in a defiant gesture. "I think it's high time we got Bear well and back to Tif where he belongs. I can't wait to kick Legion's ass for daring to touch one of my

loved ones.”

“You think you can beat one of the oldest creations around?” Brolan scoffed.

“Oh yeah.” Rachael gave a wicked grin. “I’m going to do the double dutch with that demon’s insides. Nobody messes with one of mine and lives to talk about it.”

As the fairy blanched and took a step away, Michael pulled her into a deeper embrace. His mate was a bloodthirsty little thing and damned if that didn’t make his heart swell with pride. Fate had given him the perfect female to lead by his side. He just hoped that she would come to realize that. When she had first looked down at his mark last night, there was no mistaking the fear that lingered in her eyes. But her support did give him the courage to do something he should have done centuries ago.

“Before you leave, Lehor, there’s one more thing I have to tell you.” Michael sighed heavily. “I’m not the only brother you have.”

\* \* \* \*

Nissa pressed her forehead against the cool smooth glass of her third story hotel and opened her senses. Below, the ocean waves hit the sandy beach in a slow rhythm and the muted conversations of the many tourists drifted up to

her highly tuned fairy sense of hearing. She drowned them out as they were no danger to her or her young charge and sent her feelers out deeper for those beings that were a threat.

She sucked in a sharp breath as her mind touched a hunter. There was no mistaking that dark, fetid stench made even viler now they were allied with demons. Even though she had expected to be found, she'd just hoped it hadn't been this soon.

A small cry of protest ripped from her throat as she pushed herself from the window and started toward her bag. There were precious few belongings in it and it was always packed, making escapes quick and easy. Pulling a clip from it, she wound her long brown hair up into a twist. Next, she grabbed her gun holster and slipped it on. "Ella, wake up, sweetie."

The young fairy sat up, instantly awake. While she may be as lazy as any other teenager, the past year of being on the run had taught her to always be prepared for the worst. Her short, white blonde hair with black streaks, stood on end, making her look like a dandelion poof and her large brown eyes scanned the room for danger.

"We need to move," Nissa said as she checked her Glocks over.

"Already?" Ella didn't whine, but there was the slightest tremble in her bottom lip.

"Already," Nissa confirmed as she slipped the guns into her holster. "Sorry."

"God, this sucks." The teen got out of bed. Used to life on the run, she was already dressed in a pair of holey blue jeans and a Hard-Rock tee shirt. "I was hoping to go to the beach tomorrow."

"I know, I was hoping for that, too." A wave of sadness slammed into Nissa. Ella shouldn't have to be living like this. Always on the run and forever looking over their shoulders, there was never a day of fun to be had.

"No big deal." Ella tucked her hands in her front pockets and gave an indifferent shrug. "The sun always burns my ears anyway."

"Sorry, kiddo." Nissa shrugged on a brown suede jacket. Even though it was hotter than hell out, she needed it to hide the guns.

"Did you even get any sleep?" Ella asked shrewdly, her violet eyes narrowing.

"Enough," Nissa lied.

"You've been having those dreams again."

Nissa opened her mouth to deny it, but clamped it shut and nodded instead. It was no use hiding it from her young charge. Since they had been constantly together the past year, there was no space to breathe, let alone keep secrets.

"Wow," Ella said eagerly. "Was that guy in it? The blond one with the blue eyes?"

"Yes, the archangel was there." Despite the



uncomfortable topic, a warm heat spread through the fairy's body as she thought about the mysterious male. Even wide-awake, she could still see him in her mind, right down to his hard body and military haircut. There was no doubt he was a warrior from the way he carried himself although every once in a while she would catch a teasing glint in his eyes that told her he could be kind, too.

"What did he say his name was again?"

"He said it was Ramiel." That wasn't all he said either. He had promised to find her and Ella and to protect them. An ache built up in her chest. Goddess, it would be so good if her dream guy was actually real. She was strong, but she didn't know how much longer she would be able to protect Ella. But he was just a dream, that was it.

"I wish I had cute angels dancing around in my dreams," Ella said wishfully.

"Trust me, you don't," Nissa snorted. "He's bossy and at times annoying. Now let's stop talking about a make-believe guy and get out of here." Nissa cautiously opened the door, searching up and down the hallway before she motioned the teen to follow.

"What if he's not a dream?" Ella asked.

Nissa tossed an annoyed look over her shoulder at the question. "Of course he's a dream."

"Did you know that some fairies have the ability to enter other's dreams?"

"No, I don't know anything about fairies. Remember?" Nissa was glad the hallways were empty of humans. The last thing she needed was to end up in one of their loony bins because they thought she was crackers for talking about fairies and angels.

"Maybe you have that gift and you really are talking to an angel. One who is coming to help us."

The hopeful tone in Ella's voice made Nissa wince in pain. To have a true archangel coming to help them would be nice, but it was never going to happen. It was just the two of them against the world and the sooner they both got used to that, the better. They rode the elevator in silence and made their way to the parking garage. Like the hallway, it was deserted. Just as they were approaching the car, several figures slinked out from the shadows. "Stay behind me," Nissa ordered as she pulled out her guns.

The things approached on four legs and once the fairy got a good look at them, she had to swallow the scream of terror building in her throat. The beasts looked like huge, hairless black dogs. Their red eyes glowed in the dim light of the garage as deep growls echoed off the concrete walls. As one, they began to snarl, showing off long sharp canines. Instinctively, Nissa knew there was no way they could outrun the monsters even

though there was no other choice or escape since the dogs blocked the car.

The air became thick and cloying as Nissa breathed in hard, her chest tight with fear. The harsh scent of decay became stronger as the monsters came closer, their cloven feet making clacking sounds on the hard ground. Behind her, Ella let out a little whimper as she pressed her body tight to her back. Spinning, Nissa shoved the teen into motion. "Run."

The two fairies took off, the snarls of the dogs following them as they began pursuit.

## Chapter Eleven

“**H**ow are we supposed to find one fairy in all this mess?” Case waved a disgusted hand at the sidewalks.

Ramiel grunted in agreement as they slowly drove down streets of the tourist town. Every side of the road was lined with hotels, motels and condos. Finding anyone in this mess would be a miracle, let alone someone that was in hiding. “Maybe we’ll get lucky and she’ll just come running to us,” Ramiel shot back, knowing how cranky he sounded, but not caring. After spending the past two days solid with Case and his constant chatter, he was half-tempted to throw him out the door, even though the twin was the one behind the wheel.

Almost all the Lehor brothers were talkers, but since Case had been without his twin, he’d been downright twitchy, which in turn had made Ramiel’s life hell. To add to it all, Ramiel hadn’t been sleeping good and exhaustion was making

his usual short temper, even shorter. Needing some fresh air, he opened the passenger side window and let the night wind hit his face. Case started to babble again and Ramiel wondered if it would be possible to jump out of the moving vehicle and make his escape. Giving a silent shake of his head, he dismissed the idea. Case may be annoying, but he was a damn fast runner. He would just catch him and bring him back. "I have a theory," he blurted, cutting Case off midstream. His brother clamped his mouth shut long enough to give him a quizzical look.

"About where the fairy might be?"

"No, about you. I think that you've always been this much of a Chatty Cathy, but we've never noticed because we thought it was Joe talking half the time. He's probably a mute and we never even realized it until now."

Case looked forward and gripped the steering wheel as his face grew impassive.

Ramiel waited for his reaction. All the Lehor brothers were famous for their tempers and fists so he was willing to bet he would get a rise from the twin. In fact, he was hoping it was. After spending so much time cooped up in a car, it would be a nice way to blow off some steam.

"Have I really been that bad?" Case asked after several tense seconds.

"Ah, yeah."

"You're just not saying that to piss me off?"

"Ah, no." Well, not completely. While he was telling the truth, it was fun to tick off any of his brothers.

"You're just trying to get me to fight you."

"Ah, maybe." Ramiel let himself grin before he added, "That still doesn't mean you haven't been talking more than Tif, Megan and Jules combined. What in the hell is up your ass?"

"Cliona."

"Kinky. Does Joe know that? Call me crazy, but I think he may have an issue with it."

"I'm trying to be serious, here." Now it was Case who sounded exasperated. "I thought I could at least count on you to not make a smartass comment. I swear sometimes I don't think this family can be serious for more than two seconds."

"Sorry, now tell me what the little fairy did to scare the big, bad archangel."

"Thanks," Case said with heavy sarcasm. "That was so much better."

"I aim to please."

"Right before we left, Cliona came up to me and asked me a question."

Case stopped and after a few long heavy seconds of silence, Ramiel growled, "Will you just spit it out already?"

"She wanted to know if a male angel would leave the mating mark on a fairy if they had sex."

When I told her I had no frigging clue, she commented that if not, then nobody would ever know if she and Joe had hot monkey love."

"She actually said *hot monkey love*?"

"Yes," Case deadpanned. "I've been trying to scrub my mind of the memory ever since I heard it."

"Oh," was all Ramiel said as he mulled over the nugget Case had just shared. While not unexpected, it was damn inconvenient. "What did you tell her?"

"I begged her to hold off until after this mission. That we could figure out a way for monkey sex then. It was the same thing I told Joe when he asked me the exact question a day earlier."

"Please, tell me you didn't say something that stupid," Ramiel groaned.

"Why not?" Case glared, showing off his famous Lehor temper. "You've seen the two of them together. They belong with each other."

"She's just another female. The sooner he forgets her, the better. If he's so desperate for a mate, then he can just find an angel to satisfy that itch."

"But he doesn't want an angel." Case looked at him like he'd grown demon horns. "He wants Cliona."

"He'll get over it. One chick is like another."

"You don't honestly believe that?"

"Yes, I do."

"How can you? After seeing the way Cam is with Amadeaha? Appolion with Ana? Shit, the way Bear and Tif are suffering without each other?"

"Bear and Tif are a perfect example for why you shouldn't give your heart over to a female." Ramiel leaned back against the headrest and closed his eyes.

"When did you become so hard?"

"I'm just being practical." Ramiel opened his eyes so he could glare. "If Bear hadn't been trying to help Tif's friend, then he never would have fallen into the demon's trap in the first place. Instead, he went off half-cocked because he was too busy worrying about making his mate happy to think about his own back."

"Idiot," Case muttered.

"Yes, he was. I'm glad you're finally seeing things my way."

"Not him, you."

"If we weren't so busy looking for this fairy, I would have you pull this car over so I could kick your ass."

Before Case could fire off the comeback that his open mouth said he was working up to, a long, wailing howl broke through the night. Higher pitched than any canine found in the human



world, only one creature was capable of it.

Hounds from Hell.

The sharp echoes of gunshots followed along with a shrilling, feminine scream. Ramiel let out a foul curse that Case echoed. Hounds were some of the most vicious demons out there, but they had no choice to go toward the howls instead of away from them. Left alone, the demon dogs would attack humans. While other demons tried to hide their existence from mankind, Hounds weren't always so discrete because they were driven by their animalistic side.

Case made a sharp u-turn and burned rubber toward the howls. "How close are the other teams?"

While they should be able to handle a pack of Hounds, there were no guarantees. "The closest behind us is Bear and Dina. Michael did say Raziel was with them though." Ramiel got his Glock out. It had special ammo in it infused with holy water. "They should be here any time now. You're better at doing a telepathic link. Get in touch with Bear and let him know what's going on." Case turned a corner so sharp that Ramiel kissed the door.

"Okay, I usually only connect with Joe, but I can try." He screwed his face up in a way that might have been comical in another situation. "Got him!" he shouted.

He made another hard turn and this time

Ramiel almost tumbled into his lap. Teach him not to buckle up for safety.

After a few seconds, Case lost the dorky look and said, "They're coming. Bear didn't sound too good though."

"Well, as soon as we get rid of the puppies, then we'll find the fairy. With luck, Bear will be back to normal soon."

Case made another turn into a large mall parking lot. Thanks to the late hour, there were almost no cars in it. A Hound was standing a couple of aisles away and Case gunned the gas.

Ramiel barely had time to brace, before they hit it at full speed. A large yelp ripped through the air, followed by a thump in the roof of the car.

They both jumped out of the car, weapons at the ready. So far the one Hound was the only one they saw, but the sounds of other howls coming closer told them there were more and they were coming.

A couple more shots rang out, telling Ramiel that they weren't the only ones demon hunting. "You sure that isn't Bear's team?" he asked, Case.

Case went over to the wounded Hound and shot it in the head. "I'm sure. When you talked to the Chief, did he mention if there were any other warriors in town?"

"A couple since the town is so big. It must be them."

A small female came into view, the pack on her heels. Case and Ramiel ran in her direction to help. As they got closer to her, Ramiel's confusion only grew. She didn't look like any warrior he knew. The girl and yes, it did appear to be a teen girl, was thin, almost waif like. No, she wasn't angel, her psychic signal was too different. She certainly wasn't human either. The speed at which she moved was that of an immortal. Her gaze locked on them and a ragged cry came from her as she changed direction in their way.

"Goddess help me!" she screamed as one of the Hounds lunged at her back.

Ramiel risked a shot and it hit the dog in the chest, saving her at the last possible second.

As soon as she got close enough, she threw herself at Case. The archangel wrapped an arm around her, her spiky, white, blonde hair buried in his chest. Case looked down before a triumphant smile spread over his face.

Ramiel shot off three rounds, wounding the pack, but more barks said even more were coming.

"She's got pointed ears," Case exclaimed. "Do you think she's the one? She's not a girl, girl, but she's young."

"We'll never know for sure if the Hounds chew her up." As soon as those words came out, Ramiel winced because the poor kid whimpered. She was

still clinging to Case like he was a life raft.

"I'll get her in the car." Case tried to pull her in the direction, but she pulled back.

"No, I can't leave Nissa."

Another car pulled into the lot, its tires screeching as it came to a stop. Bear, Dina and Raziel jumped out, guns drawn.

"Is that who I think it is?" Raziel asked as he nodded toward the girl.

"We think so," Ramiel responded as he shifted his gaze back to the direction the other Hounds had come from.

"Get her out of here." Raziel motioned for Bear and Dina. "We'll take care of the demons." When Ramiel hesitated, the other archangel made an impatient noise. "It won't do us a damn bit of good to get her killed as soon as we find her. We can handle the demons, you just protect the little one."

"I'm not going without Nissa!" she wailed.

"Who's Nissa?" Ramiel asked. He felt guilty when she jumped at the angry tone in his voice.

"I think that's a Nissa," Bear supplied as he pointed.

Ramiel looked and saw another female running to them. His breath caught in his throat and his heart pounded in his chest. This one was female, too, but she was all adult. Long, curvy legs ate up the ground as she ran with fluid grace he'd never

seen before. At the distance, he couldn't tell whether or not she had pointed ears hidden under her chestnut hair, but he was willing to bet she was a fairy, too. Even running for her life, she seemed to emanate the same whimsical aura Cliona always did.

Until this female raised one arm and shot one of the Hounds clipping her heels. She hit the beast right between the eyes and it dropped with a loud thud.

Ramiel grinned, gotta love a gal who could fight like that, she hadn't even broke stride. "Get the little one in the car," he yelled at Case. "I'll get the big one."

Not waiting to see if Case was doing as he asked, Ramiel continued to run toward to the female. For some strange reason, and it wasn't the whole fairy quest thing, it was imperative that she be safe. More so it was important that *he* be the one who rescued her. It almost felt as if he would be letting her down otherwise. Which was crazy because he'd never met her before. Or had he? There was something vaguely familiar about her. Ramiel reached her and snagged her hand. Deep, luminous brown eyes looked up at him and he could read variety of emotions flash through them, surprise, fear and then relief.

"You did come for me," she gasped, her voice a husky whisper.

The second her warm flesh contacted his, Ramiel felt something come alive inside him. Despite looming demon dogs, Ramiel found his feet unable to move. Never once had he faltered in battle, yet one touch from this female did it. Her gaze, her familiar essence, continued to nag him, as if he had met her several times before. Dimly, he could hear bullets flying and the voices of the other angels, but he didn't care. It wasn't until Dina came up and jerked him on the back of the shirt that Ramiel came out of it.

"Are you trying to become a chew toy?" Dina yelled. "Move it already."

"Nissa!" the younger fairy cried as Case shoved her in the backseat of the car.

"Where's he taking her?" Nissa asked as Ramiel dragged her into motion.

"We're getting both of you out of here," Ramiel replied, flinching as a Hound lunged at them. Dina jumped in its way, blades drawn. While Ramiel normally would have stayed behind to help the empath, he had to trust the kid had it handled since he and Case had to get the fairies away from there pronto. It wasn't lost on him the two females were the demons' main target.

One Hound separated itself and started after Ramiel and Nissa. Case was already in the driver's seat of the car and he had the passenger door open. They ran as fast as they could, but for each

step they took, the demon took two gallops. Ramiel could feel the beast's hot, fetid breath fanning his neck and knew they were within a heartbeat from its massive jaws. He deliberately let the female get ahead of him so he was protecting her back.

Just when he thought they were goners for sure, they were within diving distance of the car. Ramiel wrapped his arms around her thin body and threw them inside the door. At the same time, Case shot the Hound. He didn't get a good shot, but at least he slowed it down. Ramiel twisted his body so he didn't crush the fairy. Once they were inside, there was some awkward maneuvering, which ended with him sitting in the passenger seat and her on his lap, facing him, her knees on either side of his hips. Ramiel slammed the door shut as the wounded Hound leaped at the car. The window was still open and it thrust its head in.

"What kind of dog is that?" the teen screamed from the backseat, her full cheeks stained with tears.

"A very naughty one," Case shot back, "Why don't you smack it on the nose with a newspaper, Ramiel? Tell it *bad dog!*"

"You're bullshitting at a time like this?" Nissa jerked back from the Hound's snapping jaws before looking back at the younger fairy. "Ella, we've been rescued by a pair of idiots. I guess I'll

have to take care of this myself." She whipped her Glock around, crammed it in the dog's mouth and fired.

Ramiel flinched as demon gore splattered him in the face. "Damn it." He fought not to gag.

"Baby," she murmured so only he heard.

"Easy for you to say. Their blood is poisonous to us."

Case hit the gas and the car screeched out of the parking lot. Unfortunately, every Hound followed. The demons were fast enough to keep up with a vehicle, too. A fact Nissa was just realizing, judging by the saucer size of her eyes. Up close, Ramiel could see that her hair wasn't just brown, it had streaks of light pink through it. Somehow he knew it was natural, too, and not a dye job. Half of it had come down from the clip she had in the back and it was whipping around them, the soft tresses teasing him as they fanned his face.

Her teeth flashed in a little growl before she twisted and started to shoot through the open window. "Whatever those things are, they're worse than lice. You can't get rid of them."

"Just stay down and let us take care of it," Ramiel snapped as he tried to bring her back to his chest.

"Not happening, angel," she shot back. "I'm planning on taking a few of these things out and,



unlike your friend over there, I'm a damn good shot."

"Hey!" Case sounded wounded even though he cracked a smile.

"Just keep your head down." Ramiel jerked her close to him, trying hard not to enjoy the way her soft curves fit into him perfectly. Even with the window open, he caught the enticing scent of wildflowers.

"I'm not some weak thing who needs protecting." She struggled against him.

Ramiel sucked in a breath when she rubbed against his cock. "I know you're not, but my brother and his team are coming up in the car behind us and I don't want you to hit them by mistake." He ground his teeth as she shifted against his groin again. Of course, it snapped to attention. Ramiel prayed to every deity and every sub-deity that she didn't notice.

"They just took out two," Ella announced as she peeked over the back window. "That little one who looks like you two guys is a way better shot than you."

"I was trying to not to shoot Ramiel and your friend," Case defended himself as he swerved hard to avoid something in the road. "I can outshoot Bear any day of the week. He always pulls to the left."

"He just got another one," Ella crowed, with a

sly smile. "So did I hear them call you Ramiel back there?"

He felt Nissa stiffen up as he answered, "Yes."

"That's a very nice name, Ramiel," she drew it out in a singsong way.

He went to exchange confused glances with Case only to see the twin giving him a shrewd look.

"You should never hold a fairy in your lap."

Had everybody in the car lost their ever loving flipping minds? "Why not?" he let his irritation show.

"That's how it started with Cliona and Joe."

"Here, I can get into the back with Ella." Nissa blushed and started to move.

Ramiel grabbed her by the hips to hold her in place. "No you won't. I don't want you bopping around. It's not safe." Even Ramiel knew it was a lame excuse, but for some reason, he didn't want to give her up yet.

Case snorted in disbelief and Ella giggled.

"And riding on your lap is so much safer?" Nissa quipped.

"One left." Ella had gone back to keeping tabs on the fight behind them.

They were now on outside the crowded part of town and were in a more depressed rundown area. It was darker and Ramiel missed being able to see every angle, curve and dip of the fairy. She

tried to turn around and he kept his hands on her to hold her place. "I have some questions for you," he said.

"And why do you think I should tell you anything?"

"Because you're in over your heads and you know we're the only hope you have." Ramiel didn't add yet how much the angels would be needing the fairies in the near future. Better to let Michael handle the diplomacy of that situation.

"How about this? You ask what you want and I will decide what questions I will answer and which ones I'll ignore."

Ramiel couldn't help but smile at her gumption. "Okay, let's start with this one. Is it just you and Ella?"

She thought for a long moment before giving him a slow nod. "Yes, it's just been us for over a year now."

"And before that?"

"That's something I'm not ready to answer yet."

Ramiel thought about pushing her, but decided to let it go for now. "Okay, how long have the demons been coming after you?"

"They have always been interested in us, but it's only been the past couple of weeks that they joined up with the hunters."

"Hunters?" That was a term he'd never come

across before. "Who are they?"

"I don't know for sure who they are or why they want us dead. I just know they are fairy like me."

"They got the last one." Ella did a little bouncy thing in the backseat.

"Pull into here and we can decide what our next move is." Ramiel pointed to an empty church parking lot.

Case did as he asked, Bear's team following suit. It was even darker in the lot, the church nothing more than an ominous shadow. Ramiel knew as soon as they parked, he would no longer have an excuse to hold Nissa and he was shocked to find himself actually regretting it. Maybe Joe had been right all along and female fairies did have something special about them.

Case turned off the ignition and a Hound suddenly leaped on the hood of the car with a loud thwack. Thinking all the demons had been taken care of, Ramiel jumped a mile. Nissa let out a loud yelp and then something hit Ramiel in the face with such force it drove her deeper into his chest. All the air went out of his lungs as his vision became all pink and purple. Bracing himself for shattering glass and metal, all that followed was the softest touch of something velvet like to his face and arms.

"Holy shit!" Case yelled. "She just winged

you."

Ramiel heard something that had him laughing. The sweet little fairy sitting in his lap, smelling of flowers and sweetness, muttered, "Oh, fuck!"

Just as quickly, the pastel cloud was gone and Ramiel was able to see the others. Case was laughing so hard, he was gasping for breath. Ella was sitting there, mouth open, eyes wide. Nissa's face was bright red and she was nibbling on her bottom lip as she avoided his eyes.

"Your wings just popped out and hit the angel," Ella whispered.

"Sorry, that sometimes happens when I get startled," Nissa confessed softly.

"Oh, no." Ella's eyes twinkled like she was holding back her own giggles. "They ruined the back of your coat when they came out."

"What in the hell was that?" Bear came running up to the window and looked in.

All the amusement fled Ramiel as he felt his stomach drop when he saw the condition his baby brother was in. When Michael had called to tell them all to rendezvous he'd warned them, but seeing it for real hit hard.

"Sorry about that other Hound." Bear smiled at the females. At least that stayed the same about him, all cocky, but with a hint of caring, too. "Raziel is taking care of it now. He was itching for some sword practice and now he has his chance."

"That was some awesome shooting you did." Ella leaned forward and gave Bear her own grin.

Ramiel tried not to groan. Females always seemed drawn to the youngest Lehor brother and it seemed like the fairy was no different. A surge of jealousy went through him as he wondered if Nissa would have the same reaction. What he saw was the complete opposite though. She had huddled even deeper into Ramiel's chest and looked at Bear with a look of disgust and horror she hadn't even gifted the Hounds with. "You know what's in him, don't you?" he asked. When she didn't respond, he cupped her chin and made her look at him. "Answer me."

"Yes, it's old, very old. And evil." She shuddered.

Ramiel had the sudden urge to wrap his arms around her and protect her. "Did Nix ever say how old the fairy prophesy was?" he asked his brothers.

"No, but it must be a little old." Case jerked a thumb to the backseat. "Obviously she's a teen and not a little girl anymore."

"That's just it." Ramiel continued to gaze down into Nissa's terror-filled eyes. "I don't think Ella's the one we've been looking for."

"Great." Case threw his hands up in disgust. "So we didn't find her after all."

Ramiel feathered the pad of his thumb over

Nissa's cheek as his heart filled with dread. "Oh, we found her alright."

## Chapter Twelve

“**W**hat’s our status?” Michael asked Case as he walked into the condo the angel warriors had rented to regroup and prepare for taking out Legion.

“The usual, between screwed and no fucking hope.”

All around were the various team members, each and every one a them a blessing to see. They were his nephews, friends and fellow archangels. Even though it was as crowded as hell, he didn’t mind one bit. Some were resting on couches and the floor, others were eating and the remainder sitting at the table in the middle of what looked like a heated debate.

“We should just make her do it,” Nathaniel growled at Ramiel. “I don’t know why you’re getting so soft all of the sudden. Over some stupid female, too.”

“I’m going to forget you said that.” Rachael came into the room, her hand on her hip.



"Sorry, Ray." Nathaniel glanced briefly in her direction before he looked back. Then his eyes grew wide as he whipped his head back at her, his gaze locked in on the dragon on her side.

Michael inwardly groaned when all the males at the table followed suit, all of them staring at the mark like it was the most fascinating thing ever.

"Wow," Ramiel said slowly. "We all knew it was a matter of time, but it's still a shock."

"So this makes her our aunt now?" Case scratched his head.

"I guess it does. Any of you all have a problem with that?" Michael challenged. He knew how protective his nephews were over Rachael.

"No, but Appolion and Abdiel may have an issue with it," Nathaniel drawled lazily.

"Fine, I might as well get this out of the way now." Michael ran a hand through his hair. "Where are they?"

"Standing right behind you with their arms over their chests." Ramiel smiled. "They don't look too happy either."

Michael turned and saw that Appolion and Abdiel were indeed there and to say they didn't look happy was an understatement. Both of them had the tendency to be dark and brooding and they were showing off that skill in spades. They both shared the same dark hair as Rachael, although Abdiel's eyes were dark and not blue

like the twins. They were both glowering at him and, even though Abdiel was one of his best friends, Michael prepared for a fight.

"Don't you two go off and be idiots," Rachael snapped at her brothers.

"I just have one question for you," Abdiel replied, his eyes turning kind once he looked at her. "Are you happy, Ray?"

"Yes, I couldn't have a better mate."

"You sure?" Appolion asked. Nicknamed the Destroyer for his unmatched gifts his expression was fitting.

"Of course I'm sure," Rachael nearly snarled back. "Now stop being an ass."

"But I'm so good at it." Appolion slowly broke out into a shit-eating grin. "Now come over here and give your brother a hug. I missed you."

Rachael rolled her eyes, but she ran over to his open embrace. Abdiel came over and shook Michael's hand. "We're proud to have you part of our family, Chief."

"Thank you." Michael was both relieved and touched by the archangel's words. Stuff like that still didn't come easy to Abdiel. "What teams aren't here yet?"

"Cam and Amadeaha are coming in from California and Derel and Heather were in Colorado. We're expecting them within hours."

"Sounds good." Michael gestured to the door.

"We have a male fairy traveling with us. Will you do me a favor and make sure none of my nephews kill him. We still may need him."

"Not another damn fairy," Nathaniel grouched. "We get much more and we can make our own frigging princess movie."

"Speaking of fairies." Michael sat down at the table. "Where is our little lost poppet?"

"She's upstairs sleeping and the teenager is with her. They don't seem to be too comfortable around us. Cliona's going to talk to them when they wake up. Hopefully she can make them feel better about this whole situation," Ramiel said, casting a worried look up to where the bedrooms were. "Did you ask Nix about being so wrong on the whole age thing?"

"Yeah, I called her and she said to tell you all, *my bad*."

"That sounds like something Nix would say." Rachael came up and Michael scooted his chair back enough so he could pull her onto his lap. A couple of brows were raised at the action, but everyone was smart enough to keep the comments to themselves.

"She said she has no clue on how to get Legion out." Ramiel was still staring at the stairs.

"Why should we believe her?" Nathaniel growled.

"Because she told me and I could tell she wasn't

lying.”

“Because your dick told you so?” Nathaniel shot to his feet. “I thought you of all of us would know better than to let a nice ass get in the way of a mission.”

“I know what my duties are to the family.” Ramiel got up and leaned over the table so he was only inches away from his brother.

“Then go up there, get your fairy and make her help.”

“She’s not *my* fairy.” Ramiel balled his hands into fists and Michael knew it was only a matter of seconds before he used them.

“Then you won’t mind if I go do it,” Nathaniel challenged.

“Touch her and die.” Ramiel curled his lip with a snarl.

“Okay, enough both of you,” Michael commanded. He was relieved that both of them immediately backed off, although they continued to glare at one another. “How’s Bear?”

“He looks like shit.” Nathaniel sat back down. “Appolion tired everything he could healer wise, but it’s just a band aide. The internal battle Bear is having is slowly killing him and he’s only got days to live. Which is why we shouldn’t be wasting time coddling Ramiel’s latest flavor of the month.”

“What do you suggest we do?” Ramiel sat back

down, too, but he continued to shoot aggression over the table. "She says she doesn't know how to help. Do you want me to drag her down here and pluck her wings so she'll change her mind?"

"If it means saving Bear, then yes."

"Last time I checked we were still the good guys."

"And where has that got us?" Nathaniel sneered. "It got Bear killed, Cam fucked up, my mate destroyed and all of us exiled from Heaven. I'm sick of playing by the rules, all it's done is got us screwed sideways."

"Are you saying you want to leave the warriors?" Michael asked calmly, even though his heart was thumping in dread. He'd known Nathaniel was hit hard by all the events of the past few years, but he'd never thought his nephew would actually go rogue. Until now. The bitterness and hate that was rolling off the archangel was almost choking.

"Of course he would never leave," Rachael exclaimed. "He knows how it would destroy Ana and the boys. Nathaniel may be stubborn, arrogant and at times a pig, but he'd never be selfish."

Nathaniel tried to glare back at her, too, but soon he ducked his head and started to pick at his fingernails. Even though the anger was still emanating from the archangel, it was more under

control now. Michael hid a smile as relief washed over him. The one thing that could make any of the Lehor brothers instantly back down was the thought of hurting their sister, Ana. Rachael had used that unabashedly, too. His mate was one sly fox.

"Of course I would never break my vows to you, Chief," Nathaniel said in a more sedate voice. "I'm proud to serve under you."

"Good." Michael gave Rachael a slight hug. "Just so you know though, it's just not me that you serve under now. Rachael is my mate and she is my partner in all things."

There was a long moment of stunned silence before Case asked, "Does that mean we have to call her Auntie Ray-Ray now?"

They all laughed and the tension broke.

"Nathaniel was right about one thing," Appolion said, once everyone had sobered. "Bear doesn't have much time left and if Nissa doesn't know how to help him, I don't know what our next step should be."

"She doesn't know what to do because nobody ever taught her," Brolan announced as he entered the room.

"Hey, whose the hippy?" Case asked.

"He's the male fairy I told you all about."

"Nice legwarmers," Ramiel smirked.

"Be nice to me or else I won't teach Nissa the

chants," Brolan bit out.

"What chants?" Ramiel shook his head in confusion.

"The ones that will dispel the parasite living in the angel."

"So you really do know them?" Michael felt real hope for the first time in days.

"Of course I do," Brolan preened. "I know everything."

"Except what a shower is," Rachael muttered under her breath.

"Then why don't we just have him go heal Bear?" Ramiel asked.

"Because, you idiot, it has to someone with royal blood who sings them over the possessed or it won't work. I may be many things, but I'm not royal."

"Wow, he's a real asshole," Nathaniel observed. "He's a fairy alright."

Michael didn't argue with that one since fairies were notorious for having eccentric personalities.

"So that means we are going to have to use Nissa then." Ramiel didn't seem happy with the prospect.

"Are you even sure she's the right one?" Michael asked. "She could be trying to protect the younger female."

"I'm positive," Ramiel said glumly.

"How so?" Rachael cocked her head to the side.

"I've seen her in my dreams." He cast a wary glance around the table. "When I first saw her, they were just vague recollections, but they are becoming clearer to me by the hour."

Michael repressed a growl of frustration. Great, by the way Ramiel was acting, there was no mistaking he already had strong feelings for Nissa. As if Case wasn't bad enough. Did all of his nephews have to have a fairy fetish? "You can't get attached to her," he warned his nephew.

"I'm not."

"Sure, she's just another female," Case smirked.

"I don't recall asking for comments from the peanut gallery." Ramiel shot his brother a dark look.

"Just watch yourself." Michael pinned the archangel with a commanding look. "The last thing I need is another one of you pining away for a fairy. What is it with you guys? Can't you find a nice angel to settle down with?"

"Don't worry about me." Ramiel shoved away from the table. "I know my place and it's on the battlefield, not in some female's arms." He walked away, leaving an awkward silence behind him.

"Do you want me to go talk to him?" Rachael offered.

Michael shook his head. "Let him stew for a while. Since he's the oldest male, all this has hit him hard."



"Why don't you two go get some rest," Appolion offered. "Bear's stable for now so we have time."

Michael wanted to argue, but the way Rachael's body drooped against him spoke of how tired she was. "Okay," he relented. "But if anything changes I want you to come wake me up right away."

"You guys want anything to eat first?" Abdiel asked, his normally hard gaze soft as he looked at his sister.

"No," Rachael mumbled. "I just want to take a shower and sleep."

She got off Michael's lap and they stood, him taking her hand. It seemed so natural to be taking her to their shared bedroom. Even though it should have felt awkward given the fact they were surrounded by nosey angels, it didn't. Following Appolion's directions, Michael led her to the first bedroom on the right and shut the door behind them.

Rachael slowly trailed her fingers down his chest before giving the waist of his pants a playful tug.

He closed his eyes and savored the now familiar warmth of her touch. "I thought you said you need to sleep." His breath hitched when she popped open the button of his fly and pulled down the zipper.

"If I recall correctly, I specifically said I needed a shower first." She reached in and wrapped her fingers around his cock. "If you're a good boy, I may even let you wash my back."

Michael dipped his head down so he could capture her sweet lips with his. The hunger in him was too strong to put into words so he let his kiss do the talking. Sweeping his tongue inside her, he stroked inside before pulling back to gently nip in her full bottom lip.

Rachael gave his cock another squeeze and he moaned in response as his hips jacked forward. She used that opportunity to slip her tongue inside his mouth. A whimper tore through her when he sucked on it as his hands started to tug at the hem of her shirt. God, she tasted so sweet he hated to break away, but he needed to feel her naked flesh against him, too. Reluctantly, he broke the kiss and stilled her hand.

"Get naked, now," he ordered in his best Chief voice.

Her kiss swollen lips parted in surprise as a wicked gleam came to her eyes. "You first."

He gave a short bark of laughter. If he lived a million years, he would never grow tired of her spark. "I exist to please my mate." He stepped back, pulled off his tee shirt and tossed it to the side. Since it was so hot outside, he wasn't wearing his usual flannel button up.

He quickly got rid of the rest of his clothing, sitting on the bed only long enough to unlace his boots and toe them off. Once he was naked, he stood in front of her as she looked him up and down, sizing him up like he was a stud on the market. Her frank appraisal made the hunger in him grow to near unbearable levels. "You're lucky I'm not shy," he moaned as she slowly circled him. "A lesser male would be blushing now."

"There is nothing *lesser* about you." She gave his cock a pointed gaze as she came around to face him again. Ever the imp, she gave him a mischievous grin that was both sexy and cute at the same time.

"Now, it's your turn, mate." He reached out to toy with a lock of her dark hair. "I want to see you. No, I *need* to see you."

With slow, seductive care, she peeled off her top.

A groan slipped past his lips when he saw how her soft breasts were threatening to spill out of the top of her lacy red bra. The hardened points of her nipples were pushing against the fabric and his mouth watered with need to taste them, savoring them like the red berries they looked so much like. When she went for the clasp in front, he reached out to stop her. "Let me," he rasped. "Please."

Dropping her hands, she nodded permission.

It only took a flick of his wrist and the clasp

was undone. Her breasts fell free of the confines and he sucked in a breath. "Do you have any idea how beautiful you are?" he asked with reverence. When she shook her head, he continued, "Nobody, nothing can even begin to compare to you. I used to lay awake at night and wonder what it would be like to touch you, taste you." He bent forward and flicked his tongue over her nipple.

"You're not half bad either." She thrust her shoulders back and let her arms fall so her bra fell to the ground. The movement made her body press closer to him, the leather of her pants rubbing against him.

"We better get into that shower or else I'm going to forget myself and take you right now." He swirled his tongue over a velvety peak and she let out what sounded damn near a purr of pleasure.

"Go get the water running and I'll be in there in a second," she promised.

Michael nodded and went into the adjoining bathroom. He was pleased to find the stall was more than big enough for two and it had several showerheads at different levels. The floor was black marble and two of the walls were glass. He turned on the water and adjusted the temperature.

"Looks perfect," Rachael said as she came in wearing nothing but a smile.

"Yes it does," Michael agreed as he looked her up and down slowly so she knew he didn't mean the shower. He held a hand out to her. "Come on, you look tense. I can massage some of those kinks out for you."

They got into the stall and she stepped under the spray of water, closing her eyes with a satisfied moan. He enjoyed the almost childlike way she took pleasure from something as simple as a hot shower. With a small smile, she turned and presented her back to him.

"Grab that washcloth over there and wash me," she ordered.

Michael lathered up the cloth and ran it in slow circles over her back. He couldn't help but marvel at the way her soft feminine curves blended perfectly with her warrior muscles. The soap and water made her flesh slick and he tossed the cloth aside, wanting a more intimate touch.

"That feels so good," she moaned as his hands trailed up her belly to cup her breasts.

"You feel so good." He strummed her nipples. "I could spend all night just touching you."

"Let's hope you do more than just that." She thrust her hips back so his cock rode the crack of her ass.

"You better keep still or I'll be finishing this right here and now." He rubbed his erection over the supple flesh of her backside.

"What makes you think I don't want you to? I've always wondered what it would be like to be pinned against the wall and screwed senseless."

His knees almost buckled at her dirty talk. Even though he knew better than to ever underestimate Rachael, it was still a turn on to hear her use that kind of language. But if she wanted to play hard, then he was more than happy to accommodate her wishes. Still teasing her nipple with one hand, he let the other trail down to her pussy. She was hot and wet for him. Her sweet honey slicking his fingers as he circled her clit.

"Please," she groaned as she rolled her hips against his cock. "Take me now."

"Turn around and put your arms around my neck," he commanded in a voice harsh with need. If he didn't get inside her soon, he was going to come all over her back.

For once she obeyed him the first time he told her do something. She spun around and wrapped her slender arms around him. Gazing up at him with passion-filled eyes, she waited. Grabbing her ass with both hands, he lifted her. After that, she knew what to do, her legs going around his waist as he pinned her to the marble wall and entered her in one thrust.

"You are so hot." He pulled back and thrust into her again. Her pussy closed around him and seemed to suck his cock in.

"I need more." Rachael shifted her hands to his shoulder, her nails biting into his flesh. "I want all of you."

Michael pulled back and slammed hard into her soft body, burying himself balls deep inside her. A shriek of pleasure ripped from her throat as her body yielded to him. He stilled to give her time to adjust, but she urged him to move again by jerking her hips up and down.

"Easy, I don't want to hurt you." He yelped in surprise when she bit him on the shoulder.

"You're not hurting me." She strained against him. "I want it hard."

So he gave it to her hard, slamming into her again and again as the water cascaded over them. She urged him on and when she switched into demon talk, that sexy voice rasping in his ear, he lost what little bit of control he had left. His fingers gripped her thighs so tight, he was sure there would be bruises after, but neither one of them cared.

When she came, she latched onto his shoulder again, her blunt teeth breaking skin. That bit of pain mixed with pleasure threw him over the edge. He groaned as his seed shot inside her trembling body. Closing his eyes, he tilted his head back into the spray as the tremors of pleasure rocked through him.

"I love you, Michael," she whispered.

"I love you, too, Ray. I always have and I always will."



## Chapter Thirteen

A soft knock on the bedroom roused Michael from his deep slumber. Careful not to wake Rachael, he reluctantly left her warmth, quickly dressed and went to answer it. Even though he was still tired and a cranky, he couldn't help but smile when he saw who it was. "Cam, when did you get in?" He shook the younger angel's hand.

"We just got here a few minutes ago." Cam gave a ghost of a smile that, while it did show a glimpse of fang, never seemed to reach the rest of his face. As usual, he was wearing dark glasses to hide his blue cat-like eyes so Michael couldn't see his true expression. Cam did look like a wreck though. His blond spiky hair was even more messy than usual and his jeans and dark tee shirt were wrinkled. "I sent Amadeaha to bed while I took care of some empath matters. Man, I thought being away would give me a break with all the leadership duties, but they just seem to call me even more."

"They miss you." Michael stepped out into the hall and quietly shut the door behind him.

"They miss being a pain in my ass is more like it," Cam clarified. "Derel got here right before I did. He went into the healers trance and scanned Bear. He said it's not looking so good."

"We have the fairy now and pretty soon Legion will be nothing but a distant memory."

Cam pressed his hand against one of the closed doors lining the hallway. "They told me Bear was in here," his voice sounded so hallow, so void of hope. "I used to be able to sense wherever he was, even if we were miles apart. I can't anymore. Whenever I reach my mind out to touch his, all I find is a black, oily hole."

Michael wanted to reach out and comfort Cam, but he knew the archangel would just rebuff him. "It's going to be okay."

"God, I miss him so much," Cam continued. "We've always been able to connect mentally. Even before we came into our gifts and realized what we were doing." His hand continued to caress the door.

"Why don't you go get some sleep?" Michael suggested. His gut clenched in worry. He hadn't seen Cam this raw and unstable since right after they'd got him back from his month long captivity in Hell.

"I can't sleep. The nightmares won't let me."

"I thought those went away after you got together with Amadeaha."

Cam shook his head, his lips set in a grim line. "They came back right after we left on our mission. I never really believed Nix when she said Bear was the stabilizing force for the Order of Four, but damned if she wasn't right. Without him there to calm the shit inside me it's boiling out of control. If it wasn't for Amadeaha, I think I would have already done something dumb."

All the air seemed to go out of Michael's lungs. When Cam had come back from Hell transformed and tortured, it had felt as if Michael had lost a part of his soul. To see his nephew having to suffer again was killing him. Deep dismal failure threatened to suffocate him. Why was he always failing to protect the ones he loved? "How about Appolion and Abdiel? Since they are part of the Order, are they having issues?" Even though his mind wanted to center on the fourth member of the Order, Rachael, he left her out of the conversation for now.

"Appolion's powers have become froggy again. He's losing his temper real easy, too. Abdiel, it's hard to tell since he's so quiet to begin with, but I think it's beginning to get to him, too." Cam leaned his forehead against the door.

Michael wondered if he was keeping the sunglasses on to hide more than just the demon

quality of his eyes. "Let's go grab some food," Michael suggested softly.

"Huh?" Cam jerked his head up and it seemed as if he was suddenly a million miles away.

"You know, food? Subsistence, nourishment."

"Yeah, that would be great." Even though his voice still seemed distant, Cam pushed himself away from the door and started toward the kitchen.

With a heavy sigh, he followed the younger angel. The place was mostly deserted, but several empty and half-empty pizza boxes testified to how many angels really were there. They snagged slices and ate them cold, both of them too used to having to grab food when they could to complain.

Cam sat on the opposite side of the table and took off his dark glasses.

When he started to tug at his hair, Michael knew something was bugging Cam. That gesture had always been his nephews *tell*. "Why do I think Bear isn't the only thing on your mind?"

"I never could hide anything from you, Chief." Cam gave a hint of a smile. "There is something that I came across in California."

"Do I even want to know?"

"See that's the thing. I don't know if this is good or bad news. I do know it shocked the shit out of me and that takes a lot considering our family."

"Well don't keep me in suspense." He set down his slice of pizza, suddenly not hungry any more.

"I was at a natural bar trying get some leads when I came across a male who was of mixed angel and elf blood."

"You mean like Raphael's young cousin, Jordy?"

"Exactly, like Jordy. And I mean right down to the same dark hair and green eyes. The only difference is this strange male was older." Cam gave a slight shake of his head as if he still was having trouble believing it himself. "I'm telling you, Uncle Mike, this guy was a dead-on ringer for Raphael. There is no way he isn't related."

"Was he older than Raphael?" Michael could only imagine how the head healer was going to take this news.

"No, he seemed to be just out of his teen years. The way he carried himself was like awkward, like he still wasn't used to his adult body. Do you think he could be Jordy's brother?"

"Jordy said it was only he and his father before they were captured and separated by the slavers." Michael remembered how evasive the kid could be when he thought it suited his survival.

"Then maybe they got separated from this male and the others before that."

"Others?" Michael echoed. "As in more than one?"

"I sensed another male and female nearby, but I didn't see them. There was no mistaking they were mixed, too, I've been around Jordy enough to know that psychic mark."

Michael went silent as he wondered how this was going to go over with Raphael. Although his friend wasn't one for emotions, this bombshell, on top of Brolan coming back into his life, were sure to hit him hard. Even though the rest of the world saw the healer as a cold wall of indifference, Michael knew that behind it was a world of hurt and once it came out, Raphael might never be able to bring it back in.

"It seems like all of us are having relatives coming out of the woodwork," Cam said in low tones as his eyes narrowed knowingly.

He stilled as the implication of the empath's words hit him. The moment he'd always dreaded yet knew would eventually come was here and that terrified him. He'd rather go out and face a pack of Hounds from Hell than have this conversation. Not very many angels' opinions mattered to him, but Cam's sure did. "So you know?" he asked, striving to keep his voice calm despite the gut churning panic slamming into him.

"That Lucifer is my uncle?" Cam gave a bitter smile. "Yeah, Mom dropped that bombshell on us as soon as you told her. You know you could have told us a long time ago."

"I know I should have. I was just afraid of the fall out hurting you guys somehow."

"So is that the real reason why you resisted claiming Ray for so long? That you might taint her somehow?"

"Yes, I didn't want any of this to drag anybody down. It's my burden." He shifted his gaze, trying to hide the shame he knew was there.

"You're an idiot, Uncle Mike," Cam snapped, his anger almost palpable. "When you found out all the bad things I did when I was in Hell, did you blame me?"

"Of course not."

"Then why in the hell do you think I would turn my back on you when you always stood by my side and shouldered my weight through my hard times?"

"You don't understand," Michael tried to reason. "Not very many angels are going to be so understanding when it gets out that their leader is related to Satan."

"Bullshit!" Cam shot back. "You have no idea how much your warriors admire and respect you. You may not realize it, but we know all you sacrificed for us and if anyone does decide to have a problem with it, then they will answer to me for it."

"It doesn't work that way."

"Yes it does." Cam flashed a grin that was all

fangs and menace. "We're family and family stands by each other no matter what. You will learn that fast enough. If you think I'm just speaking for myself, you're wrong. I've talked to Ana and my brothers and we're all behind you."

Michael looked down at his hands, too overcome with emotion to trust himself to speak. For so long he had nobody who was willing to speak for him and now he had not just Rachael, but the rest of his family. "If I ever had a son, I would want him to be just like you," he told Cam. The empath jerked back as if the statement surprised him.

"You don't have to say that just so I will let you have the last piece of pizza." As usual, Cam turned on the smartass comments whenever something unbalanced him.

"I'm serious. I know I've been hard on you, at times, too hard, but I think that was because I always knew deep down what you would grow up to become."

"A demon hybrid who can't even keep his younger brother protected?" Cam's question was laced with bitterness.

"No, the finest leader the empaths have ever had and one of the most honorable archangels I know." Cam cocked his head to the side and Michael was sure the dork was about to fire off another smart comment.



"Thanks, Uncle Mike. That means a lot coming from you."

"I will be taking that last piece of pizza, however," Michael said lazily. They both laughed and thank God the touchy feely moment was broken.

A loud, blood-chilling scream ripped through the air, making both the males stand in alarm.

"Ray!" Michael exclaimed, recognizing his mate's voice. He tore up the stairs, Cam on his heels. Once he got to the bedroom, he burst through the door and was by the bed in two strides. Gathering his mate in his arms, he made sure to wrap the sheet around her to cover her nudity before he started to shake her.

Rachael continued to scream and thrash around, still caught up in her nightmare.

"Wake up, sweetie. Come on," he urged as he brushed her sweaty hair out of her tear-stained face.

She opened her eyes, but they were gazed and unfocused. "They have Appolion again," she wailed.

"Nobody has him, he's standing right here behind me." Michael nodded over to her two brothers who were standing in the doorway, looks of horror on their faces.

"No! No! No!" She shook her head so violently her dark hair tumbled back into her face. "Father

has him and he's taking him back to the dark room. They're going to hurt him again and I can't help."

"Why can't you help?" Michael was confused since Rachael's father had been destroyed years ago.

"I'm sleeping, but I still know what they are doing to him," her voice had taken on a plaintive wail. "I want to get up and run to help him, but I can't move. I'm trapped, frozen into place."

Horror filled Michael as he realized Rachael was reliving her childhood days in Hell. All this time he'd thought she'd been unaware of her surroundings, but now she was basically telling them she'd been very aware of what was going around and all the suffering her twin had endured.

"No," Appolion rasped. His eyes were huge and all the color was gone from his face. "I cut off our mental link so she wouldn't know what they were doing to me."

"It looks like she was able to break through it somehow," Abdiel said, anger simmering in his eyes.

Michael knew it was directed at their demon father and his own feeling of inadequacy for not being able to protect the twins.

"That's impossible," Appolion had a desperate edge to his voice. He gave Michael a pleading

look. "Right?"

Before he had a chance to answer, Rachael continued babbling, "They are going to hurt my Appolion again, touch him and make him cry. Why won't they leave him alone? Stop! Stop!"

"Ray!" Michael tried giving her a gentle shake again. "It's just a dream. You're not there anymore." Thank God, it worked this time. She sucked in a huge breath and the life slowly seeped back into her gaze. He looked into her eyes as horror was replaced by confusion, then embarrassment.

"What's going on?" she asked as she looked around at her audience.

"You just had a bad dream is all." He wrapped his arms around her tight, wanting more than anything to protect her, but how do you protect someone from the past?

\* \* \* \*

Rachael peeked over Michael's shoulder at the assembled group of angels who had just witnessed her ultimate humiliation. Then she realized she was still naked under the sheet and her horror grew ten times over. That was until she got a gander at Appolion. Her twin brother was shaking from head to toe and he looked like he'd just been punched in the gut.

"I'm okay, Appolion." If she could have, she would have got up and gave him a hug, but her nudity and Michael's iron clad grip held her back. When Appolion didn't answer her, she struggled to get a better look at him. "Appolion? What's the matter?"

"I never wanted you to know." His jaw ticked as he glared at his shoes. "I wanted to protect you from at least that and I couldn't even fucking manage that little task."

"Calm down there, big guy," Cam soothed as he reached out to touch Appolion's arm. The archangel ducked his hand.

"You weren't supposed to know!" Appolion snarled. "Damn it, Ray. You just couldn't leave well enough alone and let me have some dignity. No, you had to be there when they...when they... Fuck!" He punched the wall so hard the plaster cracked before he stormed away.

There was a long silence following his outburst before the entire house shook from a surge of his power.

"Shit," Cam cursed as he looked everywhere but at her. "It seems his powers are getting out of control. You want to lend a hand, Abdiel?"

"You got her, Chief?" Abdiel asked, his concerned gaze almost heartbreaking.

"Yes, go help Appolion." Michael surprised her when he kissed her on top of the head. PDA

was never part of who he was.

"More likely I'll go kick his ass," Abdiel grunted.

"Don't be angry at him," Rachael whispered because it was too hard to talk past the lump burning in the back of her throat. She had never wanted to make Appolion relive what had happened to him during those dark days in Hell. She knew more than anyone how he'd suffered.

Her cheeks felt wet and she was dismayed to find she was crying. She had never been a crier. That trait had been beat out of her by her father. Then she let out a loud hiccupping sob and she knew there was no way she was going to be able to hold it in. "What is wrong with me?" she sniffed. "I feel like an emotional mess and I haven't had a nightmare like that in forever."

"It's Bear," Michael said in soothing tones. "He has always been the cement that held the Order together. He made it so you could all handle the horrible things that have been done to all of you. Now that he's out of commission, things are going all to hell."

"I should go to them," she struggled against him. "They'll need me."

"They can take care of themselves." Michael held her tight to his chest with a ferocity that stunned her. He acted almost...scared. Which was crazy. Nothing ever shook him.

She reached up and cupped his cheek and he looked down at her, his eyes full of such tender caring she felt her stomach flip. "I'm okay. It was just a bad dream."

"No, it wasn't just a bad dream. You suffered and I hate that I wasn't able to save you all those years ago. Maybe if I hadn't underestimated Lucifer's hatred, then he never would have revolted and your parents would have never left Heaven."

There was a slight catch in his voice and Rachael felt the tears building up in her eyes again. "None of that matters anymore because I have you now."

"I vow nothing will ever hurt you again." He leaned down so their foreheads were touching.

His touch brought her comfort and eased away the last visages of her nightmare. "You can't promise that unless you plan on wrapping me up in bubble wrap and tucking me away somewhere," she teased, a happy sigh slipping from her lips. It felt so good to be held in his arms. Yes, she knew Appolion was mad at her and Abdiel was upset, too. She would deal with them, just later. Right now though it just seemed so right to indulge her whims just this once.

"I don't suppose you would consider letting me hide you away?" he asked lightly, although they both knew that could never be a possibility. She

was not only archangel, but as one of the Order, she had a sacred duty to someday face the most powerful demon ever created and defeat him. If the Order failed, then all of Earth would pay the consequences.

"I would love for us to be able to sneak away for a cruise." She snuggled deeper into him.

"Where should we go?" Michael took up the fantasy. "Aruba? Alaska?"

"I don't care as long as it's with you."

If only they really could just leave on a vacation. But that wasn't the life of an angel. They were always and would always be in the battle to protect mankind. Never had she resented it until now. For as much as she knew Michael feared for her, she worried about him, too. If anything were to ever happen to him, her soul would die. "I love you so much," she whispered.

"I don't think I'll ever get tired of hearing you say that." When he grinned, he looked so much more carefree and younger.

This was the Michael that only she got to see. "Aren't you going to tell me you love me back?" she leaned forward and lightly nipped his chin.

"I love you so much I sometimes forget to breathe." He gave her a tender kiss. "Before you came into my life, everything bleak and dull. You brought a spark in more ways than one." To emphasize his point, he caressed the palm of her

hand. The one she usually used to shoot off energy bolts.

"I suppose I should go and get dressed," she said even though she made no move to get up. It was way too comfy and warm in her mate's arms.

"I suppose you should." He didn't sound any more convinced than she did. "I like you so much better when you're naked though."

"Typical male." She giggled and he smiled down at her.

"Seriously though, are you okay?" Concern darkened his eyes.

"Yes, I've had these nightmares before and they shake me up, but I always managed to get over it. I must admit it was nice to have you help me through this one."

"Then I will have to make sure you never sleep alone again then." He took her hand and brushed his lips over her knuckles.

"I can live with that condition."

Distant shouts and then pounding footsteps interrupted their tender moment. They sat up in alarm, Rachael holding the sheet tight to her chest. Cam ran into the room, his eyes wild and the scent of fear coming off him.

"Bear's gone," he cried.

"What do you mean?" Rachael asked, her heart pounding hard in her chest.

"I just went to check up on him and he's not



there. I found Derel unconscious on the floor. It was his turn to watch over Bear. "

"What do you mean he's unconscious?" Michael demanded.

"I mean he's out for the count. Appolion's trying to rouse him out of it right now."

"Is he hurt?" Rachael put her hand to her throat.

"There's no wounds or anything." Cam shook his head. "It would have been better if there had been. Then I would have smelled the blood and we would have known something was wrong sooner."

"Why would Bear take off like this?" Rachael asked, even though the horror crawling up her spine testified she knew the true reason.

"Legion took over." Cam let out a demon-sounding roar and there was the unmistakable sound of flames crackling as his powers surged out of control.

Michael got up and put his hands on his nephew's shoulders. "Cam, calm down."

"I can't," Cam sobbed. "Don't you get it? Bear's gone and since I don't have my mental link with him anymore I don't know how we're going to be able to find him. Just when we got the cure for him, we've lost all hope again."

## Chapter Fourteen

**L**egion ran down the center of the nearly deserted road. At this ungodly hour, pun intended, most of the stupid humans were tucked into their comfy beds. The few cars that did pass by would blare a horn at him as the headlights flashed in his face before they veered to the side to avoid hitting him. He let out a satisfied smirk when one of the assholes hit a tree.

He knew he should be a good little demon and shield Bear's body from the humans, but damned if he had the energy anymore. Where they used to be stronger when Legion in control, they were now piss weak regardless of who was in the driver's seat.

Another horn blared, yet Legion only gave it the barest of snarls. His breathing harsh and wheezy, his lungs burning from exertion. In the back of his brain, he could feel Bear nagging, prodding, then full out fighting to get back in control. Legion threw a mental net on him and

tampered him down.

*How could you hurt Derel? He's my brother, you fuckhead.*

"Sorry, but our master calls. It's time to finish this," Legion gasped. He could feel the warm trickle of blood coming from his nose and where Bear would have wiped it away, the demon licked it. Angel's blood had always tasted so sweet, even if Bear's had a twinge of darkness in it.

*Master?*

"Lucifer is here and he is calling us home." A cramp clawed at his right side, but Legion ran through it, his hand clutched to the area of pain.

*No, don't do it. He'll destroy me for sure.*

"No, you are his favorite." Legion rounded the corner and the alluring call of Satan grew stronger, letting him know he was close to his master. With a triumphant laugh, he found another burst of energy.

*What the fuck are you talking about? Bear's voice screamed.*

"Lucifer has always known you would make his perfect successor. With your powers, you could take on Michael and the Empath King. Think about it. With the angel warriors, you will always just be Cam's second in command. If you go with Lucifer, you will be a ruler in your own right. He even promised me you could take Tiffany and the baby with you." Legion ran into

the parking lot in front of the same church they had been in when they had finished the battle with the Hounds from Hell.

*I'll die again before I ever join up with him.*

"The can be arranged," Lucifer said in clipped tones as he flashed directly in front of Legion.

Even though the demon was smaller than most angels and looked harmless enough with his bushy brown hair and bland looks, Legion knew it was all a façade. The evil coming from the dark lord was so strong it filled the air with a foul, stagnant scent. The smell of death, despair and suffering. "Master," Legion simpered as he dropped to his knees and bowed.

*Kiss ass. Don't you dare use my body to bow down to that traitor.*

"Now, now, Bear," Satan tisked, obviously hearing the empath's thoughts. "Is that anyway to talk to your uncle?"

"Pay him no heed, master," Legion crooned. "He has been brainwashed by Michael and the Empath King. He doesn't know what's good for him. Give me more time and I will be able to convince him."

"My dearest Legion. Is it possible that you have become attached to the angel?"

The dark lord caressed Legion's cheek in the most loving of gestures before he flicked his wrist and made five deep slashes. The sweet smell of

angel blood filled the air. Legion flinched in pain, but bit his tongue to keep from crying out. To show even one bit of weakness to Lucifer could be signing not only his death warrant, but possibly that of Bear's, too. Even though Satan claimed to want the angel as a captive, Legion wouldn't put it past him to murder Bear just for kicks and giggles. Sadly, Legion didn't want the angel killed, he really did like Bear. "The angel means nothing to me," he lied smoothly. "He's just another body to me."

"Your deceit displeases me," Lucifer snarled, his eyes turning coal black. "Now let Bear out so I can really talk to him."

"But master—"

"Let him out or else I'll bring him out myself and we both know how painful that will be."

With a resigned sigh, Legion closed his eyes and let Bear come forth.

\* \* \* \*

Bear felt as if someone had tied a rope around his waist and yanked as he was forced back into the front part of his mind. As he gained control of his body, sensations slowly came back to him. The hard cement digging into his knees, the warm summer air dancing on his skin, the taste of his own blood and the overpowering stench of Satan.

He began to gag and retch, overcome both by the stink and the way the evil overwhelmed his empath feelers. He tried to get up and run, but his body remained locked into place. It was as if someone had injected him with a paralyzing drug and he was helpless to move.

"Don't try to run, empath." Lucifer reached over and ran his hand through the angel's hair.

Bear gave an internal shudder at the touch.

"I have frozen you in place since I can't have you leaving when the fun is just beginning."

"If you're going to kill me, then just get it over with." Bear was pleased when he was at least able to curl his lip in disgust. "I'm really not in the mood for a bad guy monologue."

Lucifer jerked him hard by that hair, eliciting a hiss of pain.

While his mind was screaming at him to run away, his body still refused to obey. A cold sweat broke out over his body as his mouth watered from gut-churning nausea. Whenever an empath got too many evil vibes, their systems couldn't handle it and they overloaded. Nothing got more evil than Lucifer either. So he figured this pretty much voided any hopes he had of ever surviving this. If he was lucky, he might just be reduced to a comatose shell, instead of being killed.

"It doesn't have to end this way." Lucifer switched to soothing tones. "That blood that is

running down your face is the same blood that flows through my veins. We are kin."

"No." Bear shook his head violently.

"Yes, do you want to know why I picked you, nephew?"

"My mad skills with the Wii?" Maybe lame jokes weren't the best way to diffuse this situation, but it was all he had at the moment.

"I saw your potential," Lucifer went on as if he hadn't heard the smartass comment. "With the proper training you can be more powerful than even Michael."

"This may come as a surprise to you, but I don't want more power. I'm happy with where I'm at." As soon as those words came out of his trap, Bear knew this was one time it would have been better to shut the hell up.

Lucifer yanked his hair again, this time so hard the angel's neck cracked. "Don't be an idiot. If you go with me, I'll get rid of that thing in you. Don't you want to see your mate again, to live long so you can hold your child?"

"Better to be destroyed than to have to stand before them in dishonor," he spat around the pain. His cheek felt like it was on fire from the scratches and his head hurt from being jerked around.

"You angels and your pathetic honor. It has always been your downfall." Lucifer raised a hand as if to strike him. "Perhaps after a bit of

persuasion you will see things my way.”

Just as his fist was starting to come down, a flash of lightning shot through the air, leaving a trail of white-blue light in the dark night. It hit Lucifer in the arm and knocked him back a couple of steps. The hold on Bear’s body was broke and he quickly crawled away. While he would have loved to run, his legs wouldn’t even hold him let alone allow for transportation.

He looked over to see Michael, Rachael and his brothers had somehow managed to find him. Shit even Nissa and some strange male fairy were there. Rachael was lowering her palm, showing she’d been the one to zap Lucifer. Cam, Appolion and Abdiel came to stand by her side. The Order front and ready to fight.

\* \* \* \*

Thank God for Brolan’s skills as a seer. Without them, they may not have found Bear until too late. Michael’s stomach lurched as he watched Bear weakly try to scramble to them. His face was covered in blood and, even from across the parking lot, the hard wheezing sound of his breathing carried over. It was a relief to see the empath’s eyes were blue and not Legion black. He started to run to help the young angel, but Lucifer shot off an energy bolt of his own. It hit the



ground right before Michael's feet.

"Back off!" Lucifer snarled. "He's mine."

"No, he's not," Michael replied in a calm tone he didn't feel. "Let him go."

"Why are you being so stingy? I'll let you have the other eight of Lehor's brood. I just want this one."

Michael looked pointedly at Bear who was still trying to drag himself to the group of angels. "It doesn't look like he wants you. You know how it works with empath's. If he doesn't go to Hell of his own free will, the negative vibes from there will destroy him."

"By the time I get done *convincing* him. He will beg to come with me." Lucifer smiled wolfishly, his eyes sinister despite the fact he still looked like an angel.

"It's over," Michael snapped as he took a few baby steps toward Bear. "You're outnumbered. Just admit you've lost and go home."

"Now, brother, there you go again. Underestimating me. What makes you think I'm here alone?" Lucifer snapped his fingers and a dozen demons appeared behind him.

Normally a dozen demons would have been a piece of cake for his angel warriors, but these weren't just your ordinary demons. Right next to Lucifer was Mammon, the one who had been mostly responsible for Cam's torture in Hell. On

the other side of him was Beelzebub who stared at Rachael with hatred seething from his gaze. Then there was Persephone, still a beauty despite the fact she now had red skin, black ratty hair and horns. Before the fall of Lucifer, she had been Abdiel's planned mate.

Michael sucked in a breath as he could feel the emotions rocketing from the Order. Fear, hate, anger and sadness. Lucifer had managed to bring the perfect demons to throw them off balance. Then Michael realized who another of the demons were and cursed under his breath. Moloch.

Even though he'd never personally met the super demon from the prophesy, he instinctively knew it was the small kid standing to the right of Lucifer. His beauty was in direct contrast to the evil rolling off him. He had chestnut brown hair that was swept back in a stylish way and he had an almost elfish quality to his features with almond shaped eyes and high cheekbones. The only thing that spoke of his true nature were his red glowing eyes.

"Destroy all of them except for my little empath," Lucifer ordered his followers. "Don't forget the female fairy they have with them, too." He pointed to Nissa who was slightly behind Ramiel.

Michael wanted desperately to give the order for his warriors to attack, but Bear was between

the two opposing sides. So he did something that was completely against his nature. He waited for them to come to him. All the while he worried about how the Order was going to react to the past literally coming up to bitch slap them. He wanted to pull Rachael in his arms and protect her from the memories and pain from seeing Beelzebub. He didn't dare though because that would let the demons know she was the most important to him and that would put an even bigger target on her back.

"Make sure you take down the little lightning angel, too," Lucifer commanded with a sly grin. "She carries my brother's mark."

Okay, so there went all plans on them not knowing what Rachael was to him. "Why don't you fight your own battles, Lucifer?" Michael goaded. "Are you too afraid to take me on?"

"I have never been afraid of you!" Lucifer roared, spittle spraying from his mouth. "I was the first. Me! Not you! I should have had the glory, the power. Instead your mother managed to woo father away from us."

"Wow," Cam drawled in his trademark snarky way. "Sounds like someone has daddy issues."

"I'm going to destroy you slowly." Lucifer looked at Cam like he was a splat on a park statue. "I will pluck the flesh from your bones and grind them into a fine powder."

"Cool, sounds like you've given my demise way too much thought. I don't know whether to be honored or a bit freaked out." He whipped his hand up and shot off a fireball at Lucifer. The demon raised his palm and rebounded the flame so it hit Cam in the chest.

"Cam!" Rachael screamed as the empath went flying several feet and landed hard on the ground.

Michael shot him a worried glance. The archangel was way too still. Amadeaha ran to his side and knelt beside him.

"I never did like the Empath King," Lucifer mused. "He always reminded me too much of you, brother."

"You're going to pay for that, fucker," Nathaniel snarled, his face red with rage. "It will be you that is destroyed and then I'm going to piss on your ashes."

"Oh, Michael, you let your pure angelic warriors talk that way? I'm shocked." The demons around Lucifer snickered.

"Warriors, why don't you come out to play? Warriors, why don't you come out to play? the super demon chanted.

"You'll have excuse my young friend here." Lucifer gave a humorless chuckle. "He gets so excited when there is a slaughter to look forward to."

"After we defeat the angels, can I take Rachael

with me?" The young demon raked a hungry look over her. "I want her as mine."

Michael could feel Rachael stiffen as she let out a stifled whimper. Seeing Beelzebub coupled with her nightmare was probably ripping open the old wounds left behind by her childhood abuse. Michael wanted to send her a mental message to know that he would die to protect her, but nothing got through. He couldn't connect with any of the angels in his group. Lucifer was somehow blocking them. "Touch her and die," Michael roared.

Bear had managed to crawl close enough for Ramiel to reach out and snag him.

Once he had him, Michael signaled for his warriors to attack. He made for Lucifer first. After all this time it would feel good to finally rid the world of his evil. But before he'd taken two steps, the demon flashed out. Michael let out a grunt of disappointment, but he wasn't too surprised. Lucifer had always let others fight his battles.

Instead, he focused his attention on the next biggest threat, Moloch. Because for all the super demon's innocent looks, he knew that it was just a thin veil that covered some of the most vile evil ever created. With a battle cry, he brought his long sword around in an arch, aiming for the demon's head.

At the last second, Moloch flashed out of the

way. Michael staggered off balance when he met nothing but thin air. Frantic, he spun around, waiting for him to attack, but nothing happened. Then just as suddenly as he had disappeared, Moloch reappeared behind Rachael. As Michael watched in horror, the small demon brought out a short sword and held it at her throat.

Rachael stood stock still, not moving at all to fight back. In the countless battle he's fought along side with her, she had never once froze up or even hesitated in the slightest. Why was she doing it now? Then he saw the terror in her wide eyes and he had his answer. Somehow Moloch had her frozen in place, just like the trick Lucifer used earlier on Bear. The tendons on her neck bulged out and her jaw clenched, like she was trying to scream, but she couldn't even do that. He took a step forward, but the demon pressed the blade into her throat.

"Not so fast," the demon said. "She may be immortal, but not even she could recover if I sliced her pretty head off her shoulders."

"You hurt her and you will live only long enough to regret it." He gripped the hilt of his sword so tight his hands cried out in pain. Even though he was still unable break the telepathic barrier, he cried out to her in his mind, *Fight this, baby. I can't lose you just when I finally found you.*

"It seems like you aren't in the position to make

threats." Moloch leaned forward and sniffed Rachael's hair, a look of pure rapture coating his face. "I'm going to enjoy breaking this one in. We do have that unfortunate mark of yours blemishing her skin, but I'm sure we can find some way to remove that. It shouldn't hurt—much."

"Get your filthy hands off her," Appolion yelled as he fought his way over to Rachael. Surprised, Moloch turned to look at his new opponent. Just as the archangel got close enough, he fired off one of his energy bolt. It hit the demon in the center of his stomach, but instead of knocking him off his feet, it seemed to have no effect at all. Hell, the bastard didn't even sway.

He worked his shoulders in a little shimmy as a look of delight went over his face. "Oh that feels good." He laughed right before he let off his own bolt.

It slammed into Appolion's chest, knocking the archangel back several feet. He landed in a heap and quickly recovered, shooting to his feet. Moloch shot off another bolt, then another and another. Appolion didn't get back up after the second one hit him. Instead, he lay still, the only movement being when his unconscious body jerked from the magical blows.

Damn, that meant two members of the Order were down. Cam was still out for the count. The

only thing protecting him was Nathaniel who stood over his brother's prone body. The angel was locked into a life and death battle with Mammon, but Michael could feel his energy weakening. Abdiel was trying to get over to help Appolion and Rachael, but Persephone and her guards had him backed against a wall and they were hacking at him with their swords.

They were losing. Michael's stomach dropped as he realized that none of them may survive to see another day.



## Chapter Fifteen

Nissa held her Glock chest level, trying her best to help the angels out by taking out as many demons as she could. It was a near impossible task since she didn't have the special holy water bullets the angels had. In all the confusion before they came out, neither her or her protectors thought about it. So her bullets were just pissing off the demons and not much else.

"We should run," Brolan cried as he cowered behind her.

Nissa snorted, not even bothering to hide her disgust. If all fairies were like him, then she hadn't missed anything living with humans most of her life. She looked over at the one particular angel who held her interest the most. Ramiel. He was fighting with a tall dark demon. Every time the archangel swung his sword, muscles rippled under the tight black tee shirt he wore. Now she wouldn't mind living with him. "Stay put and fight like a male of worth," Nissa snapped at the

cowering fairy.

"Well, he's leaving, so why can't we?"

Nissa followed where Brolan was pointing and saw the possessed angel, Bear weakly crawl away from the fray and toward the church. In truth, what he was doing wasn't even crawling, it was more dragging himself on his belly. Nissa cursed under her breath as she went over to help him.

"For Goddess sake what are you doing?" Brolan wailed. "Has hanging out with the angels made you lose your sense? Our kind doesn't play hero."

"Stop sniveling and follow me."

"No, you can't mean to really help him."

"Just shut up and come on." She didn't even turn around to see if Brolan followed her orders.

Meanwhile, the angel continued his crawl drag thing.

Nissa could sense his life from growing weaker and weaker with each breath he took. She could also sense the vile evil abomination dwelling inside him. The black, unclean entity made her want to turn in the other direction, run and never look back. A larger part of herself was compelled forward to help the poor angel. A long piece of paper fluttered out of his pocket, but he didn't seem to notice, too intent on moving forward.

Once he got to the front of the church, he dragged himself up to his knees. His movements

slow and laborious. "Why did you forsake me?" he screamed up to the church.

Nissa's stomach clenched at the tortured hopelessness in his voice. It felt as if his heart had been ripped out and nothing was left but suffering.

"I did everything ever asked from me," he continued to yell up at the dark, empty building. "I was a good warrior so why did you forsake me?"

"Damn, poor angel," Brolan whispered behind her.

She looked down at what Bear dropped and tears stung her eyes. It was a strip of photos like humans got in those booths. Black and white it showed the angel with some dark-haired female. They were hugging in some, kissing in others. The love for each other was evident in the way they gazed at each other. He looked so happy, so healthy, so – vibrant.

"You're going to do that spell, aren't you?" Brolan asked.

There was no fear in his voice, just the same determination she felt.

"Even after the risks I told you? You know you can die from this."

"Yes, I know," she replied thickly.

"Why?" the angel continued to scream at his unseen creator. "Why have you forsaken me?"

What did I do to displease you?"

"Bear?" a tortured voice said.

Nissa looked over her shoulder and saw it was Ramiel. His gaze was locked on his brother, the pain and torture in his eyes making the situation even more heartbreaking. Clenching his fists open and closed at his sides, the archangel drew in a shuddering breath as he watched his brother scream.

"I need two vows from you, archangel," Nissa demanded.

"Anything, just help him, please," his voice cracked a bit before he swallowed hard.

"The first one is I want you to swear that no matter what happens you will take Ella in and protect her."

"I vow to you on my honor as an archangel. She will be cared for as one of our own."

The sincerity in his voice was so genuine she was compelled to believe him.

"What's the second one?"

"That one I'll tell you at a later time." She hated to put him in that position and felt rotten she was using his injured brother as a pawn, but she was desperate enough to do anything at this point. Maybe it made her as wicked as the creature she was about to battle, but so be it.

"Granted." He bowed his head to her. "I swear it to you."

"You better go with us, angel," Brolan directed. "Legion is going to fight this and I don't mind admitting I don't have your strength. Start off by distracting him so we can get close enough to begin the spell."

Ramiel pressed his lips together in a hard line as he gave a curt nod of his head.

Nissa took a deep breath, then gathered up her wits, courage and magic energy before she gave a nod to indicate she was ready.

"Hey, Bear," Ramiel called out gently. "What you doing, buddy?"

"I'm dying," Bear whimpered as he fell back on his ass. "I'm being destroyed and He doesn't care."

"Of course He cares." Ramiel slowly made his way over to the younger angel. "Why do you think He sent Nix the message? He wants you to live and serve."

"No, it's over." Fresh blood started to trickle from Bear's nose, mouth and ears.

Nissa hadn't thought it was possible, but he got even more pasty and sickly looking. Moving even slower than Ramiel, so as to not alert Legion of her approach, Nissa edged her way forward. Brolan followed closely behind. Ramiel had already reached his brother's side and knelt down by him. Just as she was getting closer, Bear's head whipped in her direction and she watched in

horror as his blue eyes shifted to black.

"I don't think so, you fairy bitch," he rasped in a completely different voice.

The hairs on the back of her neck stood on end at its grating quality.

"Oh, I think so," Ramiel declared as he grabbed Legion from behind and held him in place. The demon snarled and spit as he tried to wrestle away from the archangel, but Ramiel held on tight.

"This is going to kill your brother!" Legion screamed. "Is that what you want?"

"I want my brother back to the way he was before you tore him away from us." Ramiel shifted so his grip was even more secure. "Do it now, Nissa."

Nissa ran the last few steps so she could go down on her to her knees in front of the pair. Brolan came and sat by her side, lending both his knowledge and his magical energy.

"Don't you even think about it!" Legion roared.

She could detect the edge of panic in his voice too. "It's time you went bye-bye, you freak." She placed the palms of her hands on either side of his face and started to chant the incantation Brolan had forced her to memorize.

"I will rip you to pieces for this. Then I will kill that little female fairy you are protecting. I'll make you watch as I kill all the angels, then laugh as

you cry." This time there was no mistaking the fear lacing Legion's declaration.

Nissa continued with her chant, unable to stop now even if she had wanted to. It was as if the magic had slammed into her and was carrying her forward, the power of it thrumming through her body and branching out of her fingertips. The energy seeped into the angel's body and she could feel it searching for the demon possessing his body. When it found Legion, it latched onto his essence and wrapped around him like and octopi wraps it tentacles around its prey. The phantom Legion thrashed and flailed against her hold and she almost lost him. Then Brolan put his hands on her shoulders and lent even more of his power to her.

Fresh magic thrust through her and that was the last little bit she needed to pull Legion out of the angel's body. A great burst of fire and black ash erupted from her and Bear and shot several feet into the sky. The force sucked the last bit of energy from her. Distantly, she could hear the angel screaming in agony. Nissa swayed and saw dark spots before she collapsed onto the hard ground, the angel's anguished cries still echoing in her ears.

\* \* \* \*

Michael tried to fight his way to Moloch, but every time he got near enough to take a swing at the demon, he would flash out and reappear somewhere else. Rachael was still locked in place and Appolion and Cam continued to be out for the count. He prayed that they were only injured and not worse.

Out of the corner of his eye, he saw Nathaniel was still locked into battle with Mammon. Then the archangel managed to bring his sword around and neatly decapitate the high-ranking demon. Despite the grim situation, Michael took great satisfaction in seeing the demise of one of Lucifer's generals. The fact that it was the same exact demon who had tortured Cam brutally for a month made the kill all that sweeter. His nephew had been avenged.

A great roar ripped through the air, making both demon and angel stop and look around in alarm. The ground shook like there was a great earthquake before the air filled with fire, wind and ash. It hit the group with such force they were all knocked off their feet.

Michael fought his way over to Rachael and was relieved to see she was free of Moloch's mind lock and moving around. She screamed something, but he couldn't hear her due to the roar of air rushing over them. The demons all flashed out, retreating from the unknown. Michael



threw his body over Rachael's and tried to protect her as much as possible. He braced and waited for the worst.

Then as suddenly as it had started, the wind and fire blew over. The ensuing silence was in such direct contrast to the chaos of seconds before, it was unsettling at first. Michael cautiously raised his head and waited for a few minutes until he felt it was safe enough to get off Rachael and stand.

"What in the hell was that?" Case asked as got on his feet unsteadily. He was bleeding from a huge gash on his shoulder and he held his arm gingerly to his chest.

"It was Legion." Rachael raised her hand as if she was testing the air. "I could feel his evil all around us and now he is gone."

Cam moaned as he started to move and Amadeaha let out a relived cry as she threw herself on his chest, her deep red hair covering him. "You're okay," she exclaimed. "I thought you had left me."

"Never," he breathed softly as he weakly raised a hand to her cheek. "I couldn't be without you."

"You scared me," she accused.

"I know, I'm sorry. Guess what though? I can feel Bear again. And it's just him this time. I can't sense that thing in him any longer."

Michael sent out his own mental feelers and almost cried in relief. Cam was right. It was just

Bear's old and familiar pure essence. It no longer carried the stench of Legion's darkness. "Thank you," Michael whimpered to the fates.

"What the fuck hit me," Appolion grumbled as he opened his eyes and sat up, his hand to his head."

"Moloch," Abdiel said grimly as he went over and helped his brother to his feet.

"Well he and his buddies just thoroughly kicked our asses," Appolion bitched.

"Not all of them did." Nathaniel gave a wicked grin before he spit on Mammon's body. Blood streaked the angel's face, none of it his own.

"Dude, we seriously have to work on your anger issues." Appolion winced and briefly closed his eyes.

"Two words," Nathaniel countered. "Fuck and you."

"You are so lucky my powers are sapped or else I would zap your ass for that," Appolion groaned.

Michael left them to their grumbles and went to look for Bear. Rachael came up and took his hand and he was grateful for her presence. It was easy to follow his nephew's psychic scent and he tracked him to the front of the church. He found him with Ramiel, Nissa and Brolan.

Ramiel had Bear in his arms and he was gently slapping his cheeks to rouse him.

Bear came to long enough to bat his brother's

hands away. "Back off and let me sleep," he slurred. "Go help the fairy."

"I'm okay," Nissa said weakly as she sat up. All the color was gone from her face and her hands trembled as she brushed her hair out of her face.

Michael went to Bear and laid his hands on his body, having to see for himself that Legion was really gone. He sent a mental surge through him, searching his nephew inside out. When he found nothing but angel, Michael couldn't hold back the whoop of delight. Taking Bear in his arms, Michael held him close, his chest tight with emotion. A light rain started to fall, the warm drops washing away some of the ash and blood from the battle.

"Does this mean I can go home?" Bear asked, his voice muffled.

Since Michael didn't trust himself to look his nephew directly in the eyes, knowing he would bawl like a baby, he kept his death hold on him. "Yes," he replied his voice thick with emotion. "It's time for you to go back where you belong. Tif has been waiting for you. We all have been waiting for you."

## Chapter Sixteen

Nissa found herself unable to tear her gaze off the touching moment between the Chief of Archangels and Bear. He clutched his nephew to him like he never wanted to let go, the tender look of caring on his face completely foreign to her because in all of her life nobody had ever gazed at her that way. It must be nice to know that someone gave a damn about you. She still hadn't got up from the ground, all of her energy sapped from the magic.

Brolan was sitting up on his knees, a glazed look over his eyes, looking a little green around the gills. The other angels were slowly making their way to Bear and Michael. Some were having to help the wounded walk. The half-demon angel and one of the dark-haired males were having to be practically carried. She scrambled through her memory to come up with their names since she had met so many of the angels it was getting confusing. She knew the half demon one was

Cam, it wasn't like he was easy to forget. The other one was something with an A. Aaron, Adam, Avian... "Appolion!" she shouted, then felt a warm heat burning her cheeks when she realized she'd spoke aloud.

"Yes?" Appolion shared confused looks with the other angel.

"Ah... Sorry I forgot what I was going to say. Never mind." Fantastic! Now they were all looking at her like she was as crazy as Brolan. It didn't make matters better when the corners of Ramiel's mouth quirked in what might have been the start of a smile.

"You'll have to excuse her guys," he told the group as his eyes twinkled. "The whammy she placed on Bear really knocked her for a loop."

Nissa seethed with anger. How dare he talk about her like she was a tired baby or a naughty puppy who had pissed on the rug. She bared her teeth in a soft growl before she shot to her feet.

Big mistake. The whole world seemed tilt, then whirl as a wave a dizziness made her almost puke. Her legs wobbled and, for one brief horror-filled second, she thought they were going to give out on her. Ramiel reached over to help her and she jerked away from him.

"I'm fine," she snapped as she took a couple unsteady steps back. She locked her knees and prayed that she could keep standing. The last

thing she wanted was to give that jackass the pleasure of seeing her fall on her rear.

"Yeah, you are as pale as a ghost and you're walking like a drunk frat boy," he drawled. "Sure thing there, sugar. You're just dandy."

"Call me sugar again and I will shoot you with your own gun," she hissed before she spun to walk away, taking care not to teeter. How dare he assume how she felt? Stupid, arrogant, pigheaded, mule of an angel.

"Where are you going, peaches?" he called after her.

She stopped dead in her tracks, her spine snapping up as if someone had slapped her. *Oh no he didn't!* "I am going to the car." She didn't even bother to turn around to glare at him because if she saw his smirking face, then she just might make good on her promise to shoot. "If I hang out with you angels too long I may be tempted to do something holy like break out into the Hallelujah chorus or start wearing all white."

Brolan snorted with laughter.

"We don't do that," Ramiel shot back. "Well...not all of us that is."

"Ah, different categories of angels. So that must mean you belong in the asshole and idiot division." His brothers roared in laughter and she couldn't help but admire how they could find humor in anything after the hard battle they'd just

Her amusement lasted exactly two more steps before her legs gave out and she landed hard on her knees. A ripping sound followed by the sensation of cold gravel on her skin told her she'd torn her favorite pair of jeans, too. Wanting to save face with the lunkhead archangel, she continued on, shuffling on her knees. Maybe just maybe if she acted casual enough about the whole thing, he would think she was acting out some crazy fairy ritual. She could tell him it was the *Praying Fairy Dance*.

After a couple weak stiff moves, she pitched forward on her face, her body smacking loudly on the wet ground. Desperate to save some face, even though said face was now all muddy, she tried to push herself up. No such luck, she couldn't even get her hands under her chest. The rain picked up and started to beat on her back, soaking her through to the skin. She took a heaving sigh and, at that moment, her wings popped out with a huge *thwump!*

*Perrrrrfffffffect.* This day just keeps getting better  
and better. The only thing missing was her fly  
being unzipped or for her to find a piece of stray  
toilet paper stuck to the sole of her shoe. Then her  
humiliation would be complete. She used her last

little bit of energy she had to call on her wings and then just lay there like a slug, hoping the earth would open her up and swallow her whole.

An aggravated sigh was her only warning before a set of arms scooped her up and she was slammed into a hard chest. Warmth surrounded her along with a dark, spicy male scent. Even without looking, she knew it was Ramiel. She also knew it felt way too right to be in his arms.

"Why do I get a feeling you are going to be menace?" he asked lightly as he started to carry her to the car. "You seem to have a bit of trouble with those wings of yours."

Yes, she did. Every since she'd got them at puberty, they had always come out whenever she'd been scared, hurt, angry or sick. But it wasn't as if she had other fairies around to teach her how to control the damn things. Until Ella, the only ones she'd ever lived with had been humans. "Shut up," she slurred as she rubbed her cheek against his shirt to get some of the mud off.

"You're right I should shut up. I didn't mean to piss you off earlier. In my family, we always tease each other, it's how we show we care about one another." The sincerity of his voice shocked her.

"I'm not your family."

"True," he conceded as he shifted his hold on her. "You're damn important to us though."

If only that were true. It would be nice to



belong somewhere. "I barely even know you and now you expect me to believe I'm important to you?" This time when she buried her face into his chest, it wasn't to get rid of the mud. He paused and she looked up at him, wondering if she had made him pissed. His gaze was intense, so raw with emotion that a shiver slid down her spine, but there was no anger there.

"You gave us back our brother when we thought he was lost forever. Don't you realize how much that means to all of us?"

She could only shake her head. No, she didn't know. The only one she'd ever cared about was Ella.

"My brothers and I are forever in your debt."

"Great," she mused, trying to get off the subject. She wasn't used to gratitude. "Just what I need. A whole bunch of you as my protectors."

"After how you saved Bear, we are more than your protectors. Any one of us would gladly give up our lives for you, Nissa."

The way he said her name made her shiver. It was as if he were savoring every letter. The way he held her. The way he showed his love for his family. The way he made her feel protected. Everything about him was perfect. Even when he was being a stubborn jerk. Despite knowing it was one of the biggest mistakes, she was beginning to care for the angel. Which made her almost feel

guilty for making him take that second vow. The one she had yet to name to him.

Almost, but not totally guilty. Because she would do anything to keep her and Ella safe from other fairies. Even this. Although it was going to break her heart because, once Ramiel found out what it was, he was going to resent her and probably never want to see her again.

\* \* \* \*

As soon as they got back to the condo, Michael immediately got into Chief mode, trying to get some order back as they organized the wounded and decided what their next move would be.

"We could really use some healers," Cam observed as he looked over the bloody and bruised angel warriors. "Appolion is too hurt and although Derel's awake, he's still not with it."

"How bad is he?" Michael asked as he pulled Rachael close to his side. After coming so close to losing her, he had to keep touching her to reassure himself that she was okay.

"He just told Brolan he's a snazzy dresser."

"Then he must be really bad."

Cam smiled although it never reached his eyes, which remained troubled. "Why couldn't we beat, Moloch? We are supposed to the Order and last time I checked, that was our destiny."

Before Michael could answer, Abdiel beat him to it. "It's because we weren't fighting together. All of you were going off half-assed with your own agendas."

"What in the hell are you talking about?" Cam growled, never being one good at taking criticism, even if was someone who he considered a brother.

"You, Ray and Appolion all broke rank and tried to play hero. The only way we're going to win against Moloch is if we stand together as one unit."

"What was I supposed to do?" Cam was snarling from time to time as he flashed glimpses of fang. A real sign that he was getting seriously pissed. "Let Lucifer take Bear? That's not going to happen. Prophecy or no damn prophecy."

"If we had fought him as one united front, then maybe things wouldn't have got so fucked up." The fact Abdiel was cussing, showed he was getting a little more than ticked, too.

While Michael normally would have intervened and played peacemaker he held back and let them have it out.

"Last time I looked, I don't answer to you." Cam finished his sentence off with a very unpleasant Demonish slur.

"Wrong," Abdiel said in hard curt tone. "As Control of the Order, I am the one who is in charge. While you may be the leader of the

empaths, that doesn't mean squat when we go out together. If I tell you to jump, you ask me how high and you even throw in a please and thank you."

"The days of me being some archangel's lapdog are long over. I'm nobody's bitch anymore."

"Funny you sure looked like Lucifer's bitch when you were kissing the pavement today."

Cam let out a loud snarl and bent his knees like he was about to attack. Abdiel clenched his fists by his side and stood his ground. Neither one of them looked ready to back down.

"He's right, Cam," Rachael interjected in a calm voice.

"Why are you taking his side? He was cutting you down, too."

"Because everything he said was true." She sat up straighter and fixed Cam with a stern glare. "You, Appolion and I made mistakes today and we all could have died for them. We fought with our hearts instead of our heads."

"So what are you saying," Cam spat, his tone incredulous, "that I should have just stood by while Satan manhandled my brother. What if he'd grabbed Bear and flashed out? I could have lost him forever."

"And what if the battle hadn't turned out the way it had?" Abdiel countered, unmoved. "In case you missed it, which you did because you were

already out for the count, we were losing. If it hadn't been for the winds and earth shaking, the demons would have stayed around long enough finish us all off."

"I wasn't about to sacrifice my brother!" Cam roared, his demon eyes glowing.

"You need to get your head on straight," Abdiel retorted, his tone growing a bit softer. "We all know this isn't over."

"What's that supposed to mean?"

"Lucifer isn't going to give up until he has Bear," Michael supplied, his stomach clenching at the thought of his nephew having such a big target on his back. "And next time, you can't look away from the bigger picture."

"Are you guys trying to tell me I might have to sacrifice Bear for the greater good?" Cam's voice cracked. When Abdiel looked away and refused to answer, Cam let out another demon curse. "No fucking way. I didn't grow up like you, Abdiel, I know the meaning of family. Just because you had demons for parents, don't try to rub off that crapped up family dynamics on us. We Lehors stick together. We don't sell each other out."

When he felt Rachael cringe next to him, Michael finally had enough. Screw not being an official member of the Order anymore. "Enough, Cam. By insulting Abdiel, you insult Rachael and I won't stand for it."

"So are you agreeing with them?" Cam asked in a low dangerous voice.

Michael hesitated, torn on between what was right by his heart and what was right by his followers. He loved all of Lehor's children and he would gladly die for any of them. But it wasn't right to ask his angel warriors to do the same. Unfortunately, Cam took offense to his silence.

The empath leader punched the wall before he spun around and pinned him with a murderous glare. "Would you feel the same way if it was Ray?" Cam asked, a bitter grin on his face.

"It's not Rachael, so the point is useless," even as he spoke those words, doubt plagued him. Cam knew something, the almost smug look on his face screamed that fact.

"During the battle, I may have been *out of it* as you were so kind to point out, but I was aware enough to touch minds with one demon. Wanna take a guess who it was?"

"Quite playing games and just spit it out."

"Moloch. Really nasty business, being in his thoughts, by the way." Cam gave a mock shudder. "I did find out one interesting tidbit though. Lucifer's not the only one who's in the market for a new angel toy. Moloch isn't just intrigued by Ray, he thinks he's in love with her. While Lucifer may be hunting down my brother, and while you may be okay with that, Michael, know that

Moloch will be right next to his dark lord, hunting down your mate."

Michael let out a roar and launched himself at his nephew, but Abdiel beat him to it. The archangel grabbed Cam by the front of the shirt and slammed him into the wall. Cam fought, but Abdiel pulled him back and slammed him again, this time even harder.

Moving in so their faces were inches apart, Abdiel pulled his upper lip into a snarl. "You dare insult my family and disrespect me?" he asked, punctuating each word with another slam. "You forget what you were before I took you under my wing. Before I trained you, your pathetic ass couldn't have fought a stray dog."

"Stop it all of you!" Rachael commanded, this time in a stern voice.

All the males stopped to look at her. For years she had made it a practice to boss them all around and to diffuse explosive situations. After all this time it was almost second nature to obey her. Even when they were all pissed off enough to rip each other apart. "We're all upset and taking it out on each other isn't going to solve anything," she told them as she grabbed Michael's arm.

Her touch brought him comfort and that was the only reason why he didn't push Abdiel aside so he could have a go at Cam.

"That doesn't excuse what he just pulled."

Michael shot a condescending stare at Cam who had the good grace to drop his gaze in shame.

"Why?" Rachael asked. "We all know deep down it's true. As soon as Moloch touched me, I felt the possessiveness he had for me."

"It still doesn't mean he had to drop it on you like that." Abdiel had stopped using Cam as a human battering ram, but he continued to hold him in a strong grip.

"And you didn't have to be so harsh about Bear either," Rachael chastised gently.

"Cam's just jealous because Uncle Lucy loves me best," Bear said from the door. He still looked pale and the dark circles were around his eyes, but he was moving and that was a huge improvement. The best part was the smile on his face.

Michael hadn't realized until now how much he missed, that smartass grin.

"*Uncle Lucy*," Cam echoed as he cocked his head thoughtfully. "I like that. We'll have to make sure to use it next time we see Lucifer."

As soon as Bear came in, the situation completely diffused. Yes, Rachael had a part in calming their tempers, but it was nice to have Bear with his unmatched empath skills back in commission.

"Cam, you need to apologize to them," Bear stated matter of fact as he flopped down on the couch. "Everything they said was right."



"You overheard all that?" Cam asked as Abdiel let go.

"Yeah." The corners of Bear's lips tilted up. "The whole house kind of did."

Cam and Abdiel both looked a bit embarrassed by that revelation.

"Shit," Cam muttered. "You shouldn't have had to hear that. You've had to deal with enough crap."

"I think I have a right to know that Lucifer wants to make me his own personal cabana boy," Bear replied dryly. "I also think I should have a say in whether or not you stupidly choose me over your followers."

"Not you, too?" This time there was no anger behind Cam's words.

"And you really need to cut Cam some slack?" Bear cast a lazy gaze toward Abdiel.

"I do?" the archangel grunted in response.

"Yes, you do. Think about the stress his thick head has to go through. Not only does he have to be an archangel and an angel warrior, but he has to deal with being the leader of the empaths and a member of the Order, too. That's before you even pile on the fact he has to wrestle with his demon half on a daily basis. Take it from someone who's tangoed with a demon, that's not easy either. So if Cam acts like a complete and utter asshole sometimes —"

"Hey!" Cam exclaimed with a wounded expression.

"We should look the try to excuse him from time to time," Bear went on like he hadn't been interrupted.

"How about me?" Rachael asked as she sat down on the couch next him. "Any words of wisdom?"

"Nah." Bear yawned and gave her a weak smile. "You're perfect the way you are, Auntie Ray."

"Of course I am." She gave the softest of smiles.

Michael felt a tug in his heart at the tenderness on her face. His mate had to be one of the most compassionate females on creation. He could think of nobody more perfect to stand by his side and rule. Even if she probably would do it in a miniskirt and six-inch high heels. She patted her lap and Bear rested his head there, lying on his side. A grateful sigh slipped from him as she brushed her fingers through his hair.

Michael could see how wonderful she would be someday with their children. His breath left his body as he realized he was actually looking forward to that day. Behind him, Abdiel and Cam were mumbling apologies to each other, but he hardly heard them. Too caught up in the beauty of her and the happiness of seeing his nephew whole

and safe.

"Can I go home now, Chief?" Bear asked, his voice heavy with weariness.

"Yes, we all can."

"I have to make sure I thank everyone for leaving behind their loved ones. I know how much Appolion, Abdiel and Dina are missing their mates."

"You were worth it," Abdiel said gruffly.

"And we would all do it again," Rachael added as she continued to stroke his hair. Bear closed his eyes and seemed to soak in her affection. As if it were so nice to be able to enjoy the comfort of being around others after his exile.

An exile that had been imposed on him by his own Chief. Michael tore his gaze off his nephew as his gut churned with guilt. Even though it had been the right decision, he didn't know if he could ever forgive himself for that decision. No wonder Cam had flown off the handle earlier when it had been suggested that Bear might have to be sacrificed.

"When can we leave?" Bear snuggled deeper into Rachael's lap, looking as if he planned on staying for a while.

"As soon as we get everyone healed."

"I can't wait. I haven't called Tif yet and told her the good news. A part of me is still afraid that all this way one great dream and I'll wake up and

Legion will still be inside me."

"It's over," Rachael assured. "He's gone for good, I promise you."

"I know." Bear opened his eyes and looked at the group. "Don't worry about this whole Uncle Lucy situation. I don't plan on doing something stupid again and making it easy for him to get his claws on me. I can take care of myself."

"And I can take care of myself, too," Rachael added as she shot the males a defiant glare.

Michael only prayed that they were right.

## Chapter Seventeen

**I**t was three days before everyone was well enough to travel and then it took them nearly another whole day of driving before they reached the angel warrior compound. As they got further and further north, the weather grew colder until finally there was big drifts of snow on the roads and the trees all around the highway were covered in the white stuff. Nissa, Brolan and Ella all grumbled since fairies thrived on warm. Cliona just took it in stride since she was used to it after living with the angels so long.

Cliona. Now that was one worry that was starting to nag Michael more and more. He'd half-expected Joe to disobey his order and take the fairy by now, but he hadn't. Judging by the miserable looks on both his and her face though, it hadn't been easy.

Bitterness rose up within him. Yet another example of having to chose honor over heart. Frankly, he was getting damn sick of it. Maybe he

should just say *fuck it* this one and tell Joe to go for it.

The more and more he thought about it, the more he realized that Joe would never be able to find happiness with some female angel. It was obvious Cliona was his heart and no one would ever be able to take her place. If someone had tried to tell Michael not to claim Rachael, would he have been able to resist? Was it right that he commanded Joe to deny the same strong draw he had to claim Cliona?

No, it wasn't. Damn it. He decided that as soon as they got back to the compound and things settled down he would go find Brolan and see if there wasn't some way to make it so Cliona and Joe could mate. His nephew deserved at least that.

"What are you thinking about?" Rachael asked from the passenger seat. She was bundled up in a white parka that made her raven hair look even darker. Her lips were red and ripe for kissing and excitement made her eyes sparkle.

"Right now I'm thinking about how beautiful my mate is. I can't wait to show everyone back at the compound that you're mine."

"What if they don't accept me?" She worried her bottom lip with her teeth.

Damn, he hated when she looked self-conscious like that. For his normal vivacious fireball, it was unnerving. "They are going to love you," he

promised. "They already do so why should now be any different?"

"Being admired as an archangel who has good fighting skills is one thing. Being put on the same pedestal as their Chief is another."

"Hey," he chided in a teasing way. "This is not the Ray I know."

"It's not," she cocked a brow at him.

"No, the Ray I know doesn't care what anyone thinks about her. She does things her own way and the hell with who cares."

"It was different when I only had myself to think about. Now I worry that I will somehow let you down or embarrass you." Absently, she twirled one of her curls.

"After all these years of Cam ruling the empathys, I don't think there is anything you can do to shock the rest of us," Michael drawled. He was relieved to see his comment elicited a smile from her.

"I'm trying to be serious."

"I am totally serious. Did you know that the first council meeting he ever went to, he brought his iPod and sang Nirvana's *Smells Like Teen Spirit* out loud? Then there was the time he threw one of the council members over the table, just because the guy bumped into Ana and didn't excuse himself. Let's don't forget the time he insisted on using a Darth Vader voice the entire meeting."

When she giggled, his heart felt lighter. Even though she was caught up in all the happiness over getting Bear back, he could sense her anxiety over the whole Moloch situation. Not that he blamed her. The whole thing made him twitchy as hell, too. Ever since he'd seen how lost and sad she looked on that couch, he'd wanted nothing more than to take her in his arms and hold her tight. Things had been so crazy the past few days, he hadn't even got a chance to do that.

They weren't even stopping at a hotel on their way home, preferring to keep going and drive in shifts. Everyone was anxious to get back home and to the ones they loved. Bear was the worst. Once he felt it was safe enough to tell Tif the good news, Michael hadn't seen a moment where the empath didn't have his cell phone glued to his ear.

As they rounded the corner and the compound came into view, Michael couldn't help but feel a bit of happiness himself. The building was huge, mostly stone and mortar. Even though it didn't look it, it was centuries old. Having been built by elves at the beginning of human history.

The angel warriors had made some improvements on it when they moved it so they could be up with modern times. One of which was a huge parking garage. Once they had passed the archangel guards, the caravan of cars pulled in and parked.



Ana and Gabriella were already there waiting for their mates. As soon as Appolion and Abdiel got out of the car, they ran to the females and embraced them tightly. Ana pulled herself away long enough to give her brothers hugs and Michael was pleasantly surprised when she gave him one, too.

"You did good, Uncle Michael," she whispered in his ear before pulling away.

She gabbed Bear next and hugged him so hard, it was a wonder she didn't break his back. A choked sob filled the air as she pulled back and ran her hands over his face.

"Don't cry, Ana Bana," Bear said, using the family nickname for her. "I'm okay now."

"It killed me knowing that thing was in you and how much you were suffering."

"Well it's over so I don't want to see anymore tears." He gave her small grin before he scanned his gaze over the garage. "Where's Tif?"

"She and Megan are on their way. Tif would have beat us here, but all excitement made her morning sickness kick in."

"Is she okay?" Bear's eyes grew wide and a look of panic came over his face. "Where is she? I should go check up on her."

"Dina!" A shriek proceeded a blur of movement as Megan came barreling through and launched herself at her mate. They fell over and landed in a

tangled pile of limbs.

"So you missed me?" he teased, looking up at her. Somehow he'd ended up on the bottom.

"Shut up and kiss me," she demanded.

Michael looked away, already having seen way too much. Judging by the way the two were going, they were set to have their happy reunion right on the floor of the parking garage.

"Bear?" Tif came slowly into the view. Clad in oversized blue sweats, she looked smaller than usual almost the size of a teen. Her brown hair was pulled into a set of braids, making her look even younger. It was only her eyes that spoke of her true age. They were weary and haunted. As if she was still too afraid to believe Bear had come back.

"Oh, God. Tif," Bear breathed as he ran to her. Once he got in front of her, he stopped. They were inches apart, but neither made a move to touch one another as they stared at one another. The raw emotions coming from them had everyone stopping to look at them. Finally, Bear raised a shaky hand to touch her cheek. "I dreamed of this moment every night I was away," he said, his voice ragged with feeling. "Even though I didn't think it would ever happen."

"I knew it would happen," Tif responded, tears running down her cheeks. "I believed in you and I knew you would always come back for me."

Bear dropped to his knees before leaning forward to reverently kiss her belly.

Michael heard Rachael give a sob, the touching scene was making them all tear up a bit.

"You look so beautiful." Bear reached over and grabbed her hand, grazing his lips over the back of her fingers.

"I'm getting fat." The corner of her mouth kicked up.

"No." Bear stood and framed her face with his hands. "You are the most sexy thing I've ever seen."

"Prove it to me," she challenged.

Bear scooped her up in his arms and carried her out of the garage, neither one of them looking back.

Raziel came up and glared after them, a scowl on his face. Despite all his repeated declarations of hatred for Michael and the warriors, the archangel had still come back to the compound to check on his sister.

"Hello to you too, Tif," he called sarcastically. Even though she was long gone and couldn't hear him. "It's nice to know how much you missed your big brother. Don't mind me at all."

Michael grabbed Rachael's hand and started to walk away, too. As he passed Ana, he asked, "Could you find a room for Nissa and Ella? Preferably as far away from any elves that might

be living here.”

“We already have one set up for them in our family quarters.” Ana shot a grateful smile at the fairies. “After how Nissa helped Bear, I think it’s only fitting we take care of them now.”

“Where are you going?” Cam asked, his voice laced with annoyance.

“I have my own homecoming to celebrate.” He shot a wicked look at Rachael so she knew just how he planned on doing that, too. Her eyes grew dark with desire as she licked her full lips.

“But we have a ton of stuff to do.”

Cam looked so dumfounded, Michael almost laughed. “It can wait.”

“We have emails to answer, bitching archangels to deal with and I’m pretty sure there are at least two warriors who have gone rogue. We have to find them and bring them in. Then Emmanuel called and said there is some demon activity at—”

“It. Can. Wait.” Michael stressed each word so he got his point across.

Leaving him to his muttering and bitching, Michael led Rachael through the compound and back to the family quarters. He was well aware of all the surprised looks and gasps they elicited along the way, but he didn’t give a damn. There would be plenty of time for *howdys* later. Right now, he had to get her to his bedroom before he did something stupid, like Dina, and start

ravishing her right in the front of everyone.

Racing into the door of the family dwelling, he beat a path to his bedroom. Correction, *their* bedroom. After so many nights of lying awake alone in his bed, she was now going to be in it with him. Starting now. Shutting the door behind them, he turned to look at her.

She was standing in the middle of the room, her eyes heavy with desire. Today she was in one of those short skirts of hers again, this time a black one. Her dark blue top was just short enough to show off his mark.

"Are you wearing black panties today?" he asked casually as he moved to her, unbuttoning his shirt.

"Maybe," she hedged.

"Don't tease me, mate." He slipped off his outer shirt, leaving the tee shirt underneath on for now, then toed off his boots. "I can sense your arousal so I know you panties are already wet, now I want to know what color they are."

"They're black." She swallowed hard before her tongue darted out to moisten her bottom lip. "I wore them because I knew that was your favorite."

"Do you want to know why I like it so much?" He grabbed the hem of his tee and pulled it off.

"If I tell you no, does that mean you'll stop taking off your clothes?"

Her voice was husky with need and his cock strained against his pants as the sound. Fuck, she could read the menu from the local diner and make it sound sexy. Jessica Rabbit had nothing on her. "I love the way your creamy white flesh looks against it." He circled around her slowly, trailing his hand over the curve of her ass. "White skin against black silk, there is nothing better looking in this realm or any other. I think I'm going to invest in some silk sheets in that color. The thought of your naked body spread out on them pleases me very much."

"I'd rather be spread out over you," she countered as she pulled away so she could tug her shirt off. It was so tight she had to wiggle a bit, making her breasts strain against her lace bra.

He could see the outline of her nipples straining against the thin fabric. "Do you have any idea how beautiful you are?" He kissed the swell of one breast, inhaling her fresh rain scent.

"I'm just me." She cupped the back of his head and brought him in for a kiss.

Never had he thought lips could taste so sweet and carnal at the same time. He held back, letting her take control of the kiss. She did a damn good job of it, too, using her teeth to nip his bottom lip, between slow sweeps of her tongue. He groaned as he buried his hands in her silky hair and let her work her magic on him.

Her small body pressed against him as her kiss became more urgent, little whimpers coming from her. It was she who finally unclasped her bra and slid it off. He hissed in pleasure when her full breasts pressed into his chest, the hard nipples beckoning him. "I hate to break up this kiss, but I'm going to die if I don't suck you," he moaned against her lips.

"Where?" she asked, breathlessly.

In response he leaned down and took one of her berry-colored nipples into his mouth.

With a shriek of pleasure, she threw back her head as she thrust her chest forward.

That was one of the many things he loved about her. How she wasn't afraid of letting her guard down and giving her passion free reign. Her hands grabbed two fistfuls of his hair as she urged him on.

"More, I love it when you kiss me there," she panted.

His cock screamed for freedom so hard it was a wonder it didn't burst through his zipper. Still using one hand on her, he used the other to undo his fly and free his erection. Wrapping his hand around himself, he pumped up and down while he continued to lave her sweet tasting flesh.

"I never knew that the sight of a guy jacking off could be so hot." Her voice was filled with wonder. "If you thought I was wet before..."

"Turn around and grab the edge of the dresser," he growled as he straightened back up.

With an impish smile, she moved to obey him, the movement making her backside tilt up just right, the fabric of her skirt stretching over her rounded globes. Michael finished taking off his jeans before he moved to stand behind her, his breath catching at the erotic image she presented. Jerking her skirt over her hips, he ripped her panties down, the sound of rendering fabric filling the air. She helped him out by kicking the pieces to the side before resuming her position. Reaching between her legs, he ran fingers over her mound.

"Fuck, you weren't lying." He circled her opening, allowing a finger to briefly dip in. "You're pussy is so hot and wet for me." Grabbing her by the hips, he drove his cock into her in one hard thrust. Since she was so ready for him, he went all the way to the hilt on his first try.

Rachael let out a surprised gasp as she tossed her head back, the raven locks cascading over the slope of her back.

"You're so tight around my cock." He started to move in and out of her. "Squeezing me so hard."

"Please, Mike." Her nails dug into the edge of the dresser. "I need it fast and rough. After being touched by that demon, I need to feel you claiming me again."

He let out a roar, both from passion and anger



as he remembered the way it felt to see that demon's hands on his mate. Giving into her pleas, he took her hard. Each stroke, each thrust was one of possession. "Mine," he growled.

"Don't just say it." She looked over her shoulder at him. "Show me."

So he did show her, pounding into her so hard that he didn't know where he ended and she began. Reaching around her, he pinched her clit in time with his thrusts. She let out mewls that grew into full out screams as her passion built. He felt her tiny body tense under him before her pussy pulsed around him as she came. Throwing his head back, he allowed his own release.

"I love you so much," he said after he came back to earth. He was still inside her and had no desire to move just yet.

"I love you, too, now come to bed with me so I can show you how much.

\* \* \* \*

It was many hours later that he finally was able to tear himself away from her. Reluctantly leaving her sleeping, he got dressed and went to his office. Cam had been right, even though he had only been away a week, there was a ton of crap to do.

Cam came in and they worked together for several hours. It was amazing how well they

worked together as leaders. Whenever Michael was in danger of taking anything too seriously, more often than not, Cam was there to make sure he saw the humorous side of it.

"Have you told Raphael yet?" Michael asked once they had most of the in-pile done.

"That there are even more Mini-Hims running around? No, he's away on a mission. Besides I thought it would be better coming from both of us."

"Probably a good idea,"

"So are you and Ray going to have a formal mating ceremony?" Cam changed the subject as he settled back in a chair and put his boots on Michael's desk.

Every since the angel warriors had left Heaven, there hadn't been an official mating ceremony since the compound didn't have a proper hall.

"Do you think I should?" Michael asked. Even though his nephew was much younger than him, he still valued the brat's input.

"I think since you're our Chief, it would make sense. You know, kind of formally introduce Ray as your co-leader."

"That's a great idea." Michael tossed a paper aside and got up. "Why don't you and Amadeaha have one, too, at the same time? I know you two already have been together a while, but I bet she would love it."

"Only if you promise me we won't have to get matching tuxes," Cam shot back, an easy grin on his face.

"God no. You would probably insist on powder blue." He gave a mock shudder. "I'm hitting the sack. I don't know about you, but I'm beat."

"Sure," Cam replied. "See you tomorrow."

Michael walked back to his quarters, making small talk to some of the angels he passed by. It wasn't until he was inside the quarters and in front of the bedroom door, he knew something was wrong. From the outside, nothing was amiss. There wasn't even a ripple in the psychic air, but he knew deep down his mate was in trouble. "Ray!" he yelled as he burst through the bedroom door.

An empty room met him. Furniture lay broken and crap was scattered all over the place. Ripped bedding, clothes from the overturned drawers and blood.

There was a lot of blood.

He screamed her name again and again as he wondered how in the hell nobody had heard anything. Forget about sensing it. Judging by the way the room was trashed, there should have been plenty of noise. Then he saw something that made his blood run cold.

A knife was buried into the wall. Pinned under the blade was a lock of wavy black hair.

"No," he breathed, his chest tight with grief.

"Chief." Cam came running into the room, his sword out and ready. "What happened?"

"It's Rachael. Moloch has her."

## **About the Author**

Stephani Hecht is a happily married mother of two. You can usually find her snuggled up to her laptop, creating her next book.