



Heart of an Angel

Stephani
Hecht

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Heart of an Angel
Book 8

By

Stephani Hecht

Dedication

Aunt Vera. I miss you so much.

Chapter One

Karma could be a huge bitch. When a half-crazed archangel delivered it as he slammed you repeatedly into a brick wall, it went from being a bitch to holy-mother-of-god-what-the-fuck-just-hit-me.

As Cam watched his Uncle Mike deliver another spine-crunching blow to the poor frog-like demon, he almost felt sorry for the ugly little thing. Not wearing a stitch besides its smile and now a couple of bruises, the thing looked pathetic as it struggled in Michael's grip.

That was until it splayed out one hand and giant black claws grew on the end of its fingers. Cam opened his mouth to yell out a warning, but was too late. With a loud snarl the demon struck, catching Michael across the cheek. Three furrows appeared on the angel's flesh, blood quickly pooling, then dripping down.

"Ha!" The demon declared in a scratchy voice. "Made the Chief of Archangels bleed. Now who's the badass? Who's you're mama? Woo hoo! Oh,

yeah!"

Shocked at the way the creature was boasting, Cam looked around the deserted alley, half-expecting company. "Hate to break it to you, Mr. Badass," he drawled, "but all you did was piss him off more."

As if to prove Cam's point, Michael let out a roar of rage. "Tell me where she is and I just may let you live." To add emphasis to his threat, Michael pulled the demon closer to him so he could snarl into its twisted face. The angel's dark blond hair hung around his face in sweaty chunks as his normally warm brown eyes narrowed with fury, making him look like the true badass.

"Tell you where who is?" the demon asked innocently as it batted its stubby eyelashes at them.

Cam shook his head in disgust, knowing how this was going to end for the shit-for-brains demon. Taunting and teasing was such the wrong thing to do right now, given that Michael had gone off the deep end and was borderline psycho. It had been two days since his uncle had gone back to his quarters and been met with a nightmare. The bedroom had been in a shambles and Rachael was gone. The only thing left behind was a lock of her hair, which had been pinned to the wall by a demon's dagger.

"I say we kill him now," Appolion declared as

he entered the alley. "He's just wasting our time."

The demon's eyes grew huge at the site of yet another large, muscular angel and one who went by the nickname *The Destroyer* no less. Appolion glared back up at him in return, his dark blue eyes searing with hatred. A lock of his raven hair had fallen over his forehead and he brushed it back with an impatient gesture as he moved in even closer. Cam could feel the hurt and menace coming from the male, which was no surprise. As Rachael's twin, he was cut almost as deep as Michael by her abduction.

"If I tell you where she is, Moloch will kill me," the demon dropped the whole cocky routine and was now sobbing, big tears running down its dark green face.

Cam didn't know if the demon was bi-polar or if he finally had the sense to realize that he was up shit creek and there wasn't an oar to be found.

"If you don't, I'll kill you!" Michael roared.

"Better you than him." The demon's black eyes were full of terror, but Michael and Appolion weren't the cause anymore. "They say Moloch is the demon from the prophesy and he is the most evil thing created."

"They would be right," Michael agreed. "Did they also tell you that Moloch will destroy Earth if not stopped?"

"You lie," the demon rasped, shaking his head

in denial. "Many of Lucifer's followers live here. He wouldn't do that to us."

"Of course he would." Even after years of fighting demons, Cam still couldn't believe how naïve they could be in regards to their dark lord. "He would watch all of you die and not even yawn over it, so long as he could defeat the angel warriors in the process."

"I don't believe you," the demon continued to protest.

Cam could hear the doubt.

"Tell me, demon, do you know what the rest of the prophesy says?" Michael asked in a deceptively calm voice, even though Cam knew he wanted to reach down the demon's throat and rip the truth out of his gullet.

"It says that a group of angels called the Order of Four will be the only ones who can destroy Moloch and that unless they do, all mankind will die."

"Yes, and it looks like a great chunk of demonkind will join them." Michael gave a tight smile. "So I would think you would have a very huge interest in keeping the Order in the game. Even if they are angels. Do you want to guess who one of the members is?"

"Your mate?" the demon responded dully. "The one who's missing?"

"Bingo," Cam drawled sarcastically. "Someone

put a gold star right smack in the middle of ugly's forehead."

"So unless you want Moloch to start a whole bunch of hurt around you, then you'll start talking." Appolion stepped forward and said the next part in demon talk. "Unless you want to be the first to die."

"Like I said before," the demon answered in the same tongue. "Better to die by your hand than Moloch's. At least you'll have mercy on me and be quick."

"Too bad for you, asshole," Michael snarled. "I'm really not feeling the mercy right now."

"But you're the Chief of the Archangels. The one who defeated Lucifer in his revolt against Heaven. You have always protected those weaker than you," the demon stammered, his fear so thick it almost choked Cam.

"That was before my mate was taken." Michael pulled out a dagger and held the tip at the demon's neck.

Not that he could slice open his throat and kill him. Like angels, demons were immortal. They could make the fucker bleed a lot though and that Cam would truly enjoy. He knew his uncle was teetering dangerously close to the dark side but Cam just couldn't find it in him to care right now. Not until they had Rachael back and safe. Then, and only then, would they have time for regrets.

Cam and Appolion came to stand closer on either side of the demon so they were surrounding him and really invading his space. Cam whipped off his dark glasses so the creature could get a good gander at his eyes. Since Cam was half incubus, they were blue eyes, with cat-like pupils, he also had a nice set of fangs, which he bared with a hiss.

The demon in Michael's grip gulped, the movement making its neck press against the dagger. A drop of blood formed and beaded before it dribbled down the demon's sweat-soaked skin.

"The truth is, I don't know much," the demon admitted in a reedy voice. "I saw her once as they were moving her. Moloch was stuffing her into a van and she had some really heavy chains wrapped around her."

The Chains of Confinement, Cam sent telepathically. Just like what they used on me in Hell. That must be why we can't reach her via our mental link. Not only will those things make it so she can't use her lightning bolts, but will put up a psychic brick wall.

I know that, Michael responded irritably, I remembered them being on you. Do you think worry has made me an idiot?

Michael's rebuke stung a bit, but Cam didn't let it show. He knew the Chief was lashing out because of losing Rachael. He could only imagine

what his uncle was going through. If things had been reversed and it was Cam who lost his mate...well, he didn't even want to think about that.

"Where was the van going?" Michael asked the demon.

"I don't know." The demon moved like he was trying to shrug, but the way Michael was holding him made it impossible. "I'm low ranking. They never talk to me unless it's to give out orders."

"He's telling the truth," Cam said, reaching out mentally to scan the creature's mind. "I can't detect any deceit coming from him."

"See," Greenie crooned to Michael. "Camael believes me and he would know if I'm lying. He's the leader of the empaths and they always know a lie when they hear it."

Cam didn't know what pissed him off more, the fact that the demon knew him on sight or the fact that he'd used his full name. Clenching his hands into fists, he decided it was being called by his given name. That always pissed him off, no matter the situation.

Michael heaved a ragged sigh as he released the demon and let him fall to the ground with a sloppy *plop*. The ass-ugly thing landed in a greasy-looking puddle that was trailing from a nearby dumpster.

"You're not going to kill me?" the demon

looked up at them in awe.

“Unfortunately not.” Appolion flexed his fingers, his dark eyes filled with anger and hate.

“Get out of here before I change my mind and let these two have you.” Michael gave the demon a dismissive flick of the wrist.

The demon didn’t need to be told twice. He scampered to his clawed feet and ran as fast as his webbed toes could carry him.

“God, I’m never going to be able to eat grapes again.” Cam shuddered as they all watched the creature scurry away, his green balls flopping in the breeze. “Don’t they make underwear or pants in Hell? Shit, I’d settle for a loincloth right now.”

“The demon was rather nude,” Appolion agreed in a bored tone.

“So what’s our next move, Chief?” Cam gave one more mock grimace before giving Michael his full attention. Even though he was bone tired, he knew better than to recommend they go home. There was no way Michael or Appolion would be ready to give up yet, despite the fact they both looked haggard and about ready to drop.

“We meet up with the others and keep looking.” Michael ran a hand over his face, “We keep pushing our demon contacts—hard.”

Cam nodded and followed his uncle out of the alley.

Chapter Two

She was so cold.

Lying on her stomach, the hard floor making her shiver, Rachael felt every bruise and scrape on her body. Trying to get some relief, she struggled to her knees, her movements stiff and awkward. She had to pause a moment to get her strength back because the added weight of the chains looped around her waist made even that simple move difficult. The cement floor dug into the palms of her hands and the air was heavy with mildew and stale water, making breathing a chore as well.

Even though the footsteps and muffled sounds that carried through the ceiling told her others were moving about in the house above her, she knew it was useless to scream. Using her heightened angel senses, she was able to detect they were all demons. So she refused to plead with them since she knew it would only bring scornful laughter and not help.

How long had it been since Moloch had captured her? She'd lost count of the hours since he'd come and taken her from the room she shared with her mate. What was the demon planning on doing with her? Was he going to use her as a pawn against Michael? Was he planning on torturing and then killing her?

Fear clogged her throat, choking her. Wrapping her arms over her chest, Rachael took deep breaths to try and calm herself, only to fail when they became rapid and shallow as a full-fledged panic attack hit her.

"Calm down. I need to get a frigging grip if I'm going to survive this. It's not like this is the first time I've been at the mercy of demons." As memories of her childhood in Hell came rushing back, Rachael clapped her hands over her ears, as if to block out all of the screams that still echoed there. She shivered in her thin nightgown, but it wasn't from the cold damn air, it was from terror. Still on her knees, she tucked her chin into her chest so her long, dark curly hair formed a shield between her and the dreary cement walls of her small room.

"No." She shook her head, realizing that she was babbling to herself, but too far gone to really give a damn. "I won't let them break me." She thought of her brothers, Appolion and Abdiel, and how much they cared for her. Then she thought

about Michael and how deeply he loved her. They would come find her—she knew it. They would tear apart Earth to find her and heaven help anyone who got in the way.

She heard the front door of the old farmhouse open. Rachael was ashamed to find she was trembling. But her angel senses were alerting her who the newcomer was. His aura was black with evil, the strong fetid stench of decay, deep and cloying. She could hear boots stomping down the basement stairs and the shivers got so bad her teeth chattered together.

Still, she forced herself to her feet and stood in front of the heavy door of her room. She would die before ever cowering before him. She may be beat, she may be in chains, but she would never be defeated. She was an archangel, one of the Order of Four, mate to the Chief of the angel warriors. She'd be damned if she was going to let some demon know that she was weak. Eventually he would leave her alone and once he did, the pity party would be back on.

Holding her head up high, she straightened her spine and plastered on a haughty look. The key jangled in the door and the bitter irony made her want to break down into hysterical laughter. Before Moloch had captured her, there had been no lock that could keep Rachael in. One of the few angels blessed with the gift to be able to open any

door, window or dead bolt. She could get into anything and back out of it, too. But the demon had somehow managed to make even that gift useless.

The door swung open to reveal a small, young-looking male. While most demons lost their former angel beauty when they turned their back on their vows, Moloch still had a pure, unblemished face. With high cheekbones, full lips and wavy brown hair, he was quite beautiful. Until you looked into his eyes. Not only were they full of hatred, evil and anger, but they were also a deep red.

"How's my pretty angel doing today?" he asked as he came in and shut the door behind him, making sure to lock it.

Rachael tried hard not to shudder at his oily voice that just oozed malice. Although she was psychic, she didn't need that skill to tell her this demon didn't give a damn how she really was. "I'm not your anything," she replied coldly, making sure to show him nothing, not even anger. Moloch seemed to feed on fear and rage and she wasn't going to give him that satisfaction. "The sooner you realize that and return me to my true mate, the better for both of us."

"And the sooner you realize that you belong to me now, the sooner you can get out of those chains." He reached out to touch her.

She took a step back. "If you only knew how pathetic you sound, Moloch. I could never ever be with you." She let out a harsh laugh. "Do you honestly think you could ever begin to compare to Michael? My mate is twice the male you will ever be."

"I am more powerful than your Chief," Moloch raged as he grabbed the front of her gown and pulled her forward. "I'm even more powerful than Lucifer and he helped create me."

"Michael *will* find me. And when he does, you better hope that Lucifer has mercy on you when he sends your pathetic carcass back to Hell." She wanted to spit in his face, but held herself back, remaining the ice queen.

"Once I get done with you, he won't want you back." The way he suddenly threw her away from him was at direct odds with his threat.

"Michael will always want me, no matter what." Rachael truly believed that, too. The love she shared with him was deep and strong, nothing could break it.

"Maybe I'll bring him to you," Moloch sneered, his rage making him look older. "I'll carry him to you, piece by bloody piece."

"You would never be able to defeat him!" Rachael yelled back, her chin jutting out defiantly.

"I already have." Moloch smiled wolfishly. "I have you. I went right into his precious angel

warriors' compound and took you before he even knew I was there."

Rachael curled her hands into tight fists, her nails digging into her palms so hard she drew blood. "You're not the only one that can walk into places undetected," she taunted. "Think about that before you go to bed tonight because one of these times, you just may find yourself walking up to my mate's sword at your throat."

"That won't ever happen," Moloch snorted.

"Tell me." Rachael tilted her head to the side, mockingly. "When Michael destroys you, who will mourn your death?" She paused for effect. "You know what I think?"

"No, and I don't care."

"I think that poor Moloch has nobody who gives a damn."

"Shut up." He took a threatening step forward.

Rachael fought the urge to back down. "Oh, did I touch a nerve? Hurt your bitty-baby demon feelings?" She gave a brittle laugh. "You're just pissed because you know that not one soul really cares about you. Not even Lucifer." She knew it was stupid to push him like this, but it felt so good to be giving some hurt back.

"Lucifer cares for me," Moloch screamed, the tendons on his neck standing out. "He's my father. When he sees how I've defeated Michael, then he will welcome me back to Hell with open arms."

He'll even let me rule by his side."

"Just because Lucifer had a hand in your creation does not mean he's your father. You're an experiment to him, a means to the end, a little splatter in a cup, nothing more." Rachael felt a triumphant thrill go through her when she saw a look of hurt pass over the demon's face. Then something he'd said during his outburst clicked and she couldn't hide her surprise. "What do you mean *welcome you back*? Did he kick you out?"

"Bitch!"

Rachael saw him getting ready to lunge, but with the heavy chains, she couldn't move fast enough. Moloch tackled her and brought her to the hard ground. Biting back a groan of pain, she felt the impact with every bruise on her body. She struggled, but it was no use. Even though he was small, he was the strongest demon she'd ever encountered. Something shiny appeared in his hand and she sucked in a breath when she realized it was a knife.

Out of instinct, she tried to fire off one of her energy bolts. The chains around her grew white hot before they rebounded her own powers back on her. Pain sliced through her as her body arched up violently. Rachael tried to bite back the scream, but it still slipped past her lips.

"Very stupid move, my angel." Moloch chuckle in her ear.

She noticed that the chains' reaction had no affect on him. Which really wasn't fair as far as she was concerned.

Wrapping a hunk of her hair around his fist, he looked at it speculatively. "I wonder what Michael would think if I sent him a little present?"

Panicked, Rachael tried to struggle against him again. For all her efforts, she may as well have been trying to move a boulder. Moloch laughed, obviously amused at how the tables had turned.

"I never did like long hair," Moloch mused as he started to hack at her tresses with his blade.

As the cut pieces fell to the ground, Rachael bit her lip to keep from crying.

Chapter Three

By the time they finally got back to the angel warriors' compound, Cam was so tired he could barely put one foot in front of the other. Michael hadn't said a word the entire tense drive back. Instead, he'd kept his grip firmly on the steering wheel, his gaze forward.

Twice Cam had tried to strike up a conversation. Twice he'd been shot down. Part of Cam felt Mike was closing him out for somehow failing to get Rachael back. As they were walking out of the large parking garage, guilt finally compelled Cam to reach out and grab Michael's arm.

"Look, I can talk to some of my demon contacts again," he said, trying desperately to read the look on the Chief's face. It was useless though, for all the expression projected there, he may as well have been staring at a blank screen. Frustrated, Cam continued to babble, "As soon as we get back to our quarters, I'll call Brad and Lilith. Since

they're sex demons, they're always playing around, they may have heard something."

"What if I never find her?" Michael asked in a lost voice.

Cam's stomach clenched. The despair in that question was so heart wrenching. The fact that it was coming from the Chief made it even worse. In his entire immortal life, Cam had never seen his uncle this broken. "We'll find her," Cam promised. He reached out to touch his shoulder, wanting to sooth his ill feelings some, but the anguish ripping through Michael was so strong that no empath skills could help him.

"She may already be dead." Michael staggered a step and had to grab one of the walls for support.

"She's alive." That was one thing Cam was certain of. Since he, Appolion and Abdiel were the other members of the Order of Four, they shared a strong bond with each other. They would know if Rachael was dead, even with those damn Chains of Confinement on her. "We'll get her back, too."

"I can't live without her." Michael rested his forehead on the wall as he let out a ragged sigh.

Cam thought of his own mate, Amadeaha, and how he would feel if it were she that was missing. An ache built in his chest. No, he wouldn't be able to live without her. So he could totally feel with Michael on that one. "Why don't you go get some

sleep?" Cam gave him a light punch on the shoulder. "You look like hell."

"I can't, not while she's out there needing me."

"You won't be any good if you're dead on your feet."

"I don't want to go back to our room," Michael admitted hoarsely.

Cam nodded in understanding. Camping out in the middle of the scene of the crime wouldn't be the most pleasant of things. "Take Nathaniel's bed," he offered. "He won't mind, and unlike the rest of my brothers, he's not a pig so it'll be clean."

"I should probably check in with Ramiel and see if there's anything that needs my attention before I do," Michael continued to hedge.

Cam gave him a firm push in the right direction. "Go, I'll handle things," he promised even though he was bone tired himself. Right now, he wanted nothing more than to grab Amadeaha, make love to her and then fall asleep with her wrapped in his arms. As usual, that would have to wait.

Michael gave a curt nod before he left in the direction of their shared family quarters. Once a dwelling for elves, the newest angel warriors' compound consisted of several large buildings connected together by long hallways. Cam and Michael lived in one along with their mates, family, pets and just about everything else they

could cram in there.

With a defeated sigh, Cam headed in the opposite direction to his office. As leader of the empath angels, it seemed he spent most of his time there and now he was going to have to take on the added duties of as well. His only saving grace was that the leader of the healers, Raphael, was coming back and would be able to help some.

Halfway there, he ran into his younger brother, Bear. Cam was only slightly surprised to see the Goth empath had his blond hair highlighted with red today. He was wearing a tee shirt that proclaimed, *The only thing we have to fear is fear itself...and spiders.*

"Cam!" Bear jogged up to him. "I was just coming to get you."

"What's wrong now?"

"Where do I begin?" Bear fell in step with him. "Dina got into a fight with an archangel, Jules is refusing to leave her room, Tif is having morning sickness still and Dominic wants to drop out of school."

"Did he win?"

"What?" Bear cocked a brow in confusion.

"Dina. Did he win the fight?"

"Of course he did." Bear flashed a cheeky grin, proud of his friend.

"Good. Now, have Jules go get Wacky Winnow to whip up something for Tif. Fairies are great

with natural remedies and Jules will gladly come out of her room if it means helping her best friend."

"What about Dominic? He's really pissed about something and he won't tell me what it is. He's ticking me off."

"He's a teenager. That comes with the territory," Cam grunted. "I'll talk to him tonight and tell him he has two choices—either he goes back willingly or I carry him there over my shoulder. Nothing motivates kids more than the promise of humiliation. Until then, have Dina take him to the gym for some sparring. It will work out some of the aggression for both of them."

"I was never as bad as Dominic when I was young," Bear declared as they walked into the office. Already too small for the purpose it served, the place was even more cluttered from all the various desks, chairs and computers crammed in there.

"No, you were ten times worse." Cam nodded at some of the empaths on his way in. He sat down at his desk and looked forlornly at the stack of papers on it.

Bear plopped down in a chair on the other side and immediately started to organize the mess. "So did you find anything out about Rachael?"

"We just got a couple of demons who say they have seen her still on Earth. So maybe Moloch

hasn't taken her to Hell."

"Well, at least that's something," Bear said. "If he had taken her to Hell, there would be no way we could get in to take her back. Not with the anti-angel shields they have up there."

"It does make me wonder though," Cam murmured.

"Wonder what?"

"Why hasn't he taken her there? You would think that would be the first place he would go since he knows there is no way Michael could follow him."

"Maybe Uncle Lucy is mad at Moloch for something," Bear suggested, using his pet name for Lucifer.

"You really need to stop calling him that."

"What, Lucy?" The corners of Bear's lips twitched.

"No, Uncle. I don't care what his blood relation is. He's not family."

"You're just saying that because he loves me most," Bear drawled, never looking up from the pile of papers in front of him. "Seriously though, I wonder if maybe he and Moloch are having some issues."

"Lucifer doesn't have issues with others—he just destroys them and gets it over with."

"Unless Moloch has grown so powerful that Satan can't beat him."

Cam's heart thumped in his chest as the ramification of those words bitch-slapped him. If what Bear said was true and Moloch had gone rogue, then things had just got a whole lot worse because the end was nearer than they had feared.

As soon as he heard Raphael was back, Cam went to see him. Walking down the long twisting hallways leading to the family quarters, he was battling a potpourri of emotions. While he was glad the other leader was there to take some of the load of his shoulders, he was also anxious. He had some disturbing news regarding the aloof angel's family and he wasn't quite sure how the healer was going to take it.

He found Raphael in the kitchen instead of his private room. Cam was a bit surprised to see him there since the angel usually preferred to be alone. He was sitting at the table, eating a bowl of cereal. Cam smiled when he saw that it had marshmallows in it.

"I didn't feel like cooking and this is all that was left in the cupboard," Raphael said, glaring at Cam.

Even though Raphael probably hadn't had much more sleep than him or Michael, the healer looked impeccable as always. His short dark hair was perfectly styled and his deep green eyes were as alert as ever. There wasn't even a wrinkle in his

black button-up shirt. Just once Cam would like to see the guy with a cowlick or a tee shirt.

"Gabi told me that Bear is back to normal." Raphael tilted his head to an empty chair.

Cam took it. "Yeah, Nissa was able to exorcise the demon possessing him and now he's back home and as annoying as ever. Too bad we couldn't ask the fairy to expel some of his smartass attitude. That would be a true blessing." Cam scrubbed his hand over his face as he debated the best way to lay his bombshell on Raphael. "While I was in California, I did bump into someone interesting though."

"Really? Who?" Despite asking, Raphael didn't seem all that interested.

"Your younger cousin." Cam held his breath and waited.

"What was Jordy doing all the way over there?" Raphael frowned.

"Not him, the other one."

"Damn it, Cam." Raphael tossed his spoon down in disgust. "I'm really not in the mood for your games. I don't have any other cousins and you know it."

"Are you so sure of that?" Cam asked quietly.

"Of course I am. Jordy said it was just him and his father before they were captured by the slavers."

"I'm only telling you what I saw. It was a guy

who was around Bear's age and he looked exactly like you, Raphael."

"That doesn't mean anything," Raphael protested.

"I scanned him and he's part healer, part elf. Just like Jordy."

"It's probably just a coincidence. I'm sure Jordy isn't the only half-breed out there."

"He's your relative," Cam said firmly. "I'm sure of it. His essence was the same as yours."

There was a long pause and even though Raphael's expression didn't change any, Cam knew the wheels were turning in his head. *Think all you want, pal*, Cam thought wryly. *Two plus two is still going to come up as four*. Finally, a flicker of emotion went over the healer's face. It was so brief Cam couldn't read it, but Raphael finally seemed to accept what was being laid on him.

"Shit," Raphael cursed.

Cam was shocked—the healer rarely used foul language. With a sigh, Cam delivered the next zinger, "There's more. I sensed the presence of two others like him nearby. One male, one female."

"Why didn't Jordy tell us?" Raphael rubbed his thumb over his bottom lip thoughtfully. Besides the one cuss word, he was in control as always, his expressionless mask back in place.

"I don't know." Cam shrugged. "You're going

to have to ask him that yourself."

"I will. I don't like that he kept this a secret from me and I'm going to get some answers."

"You may want to try to smile or at least lose the stick in the ass while you interrogate," Cam advised. "Jordy's a good kid. I'm sure he had his reasons."

"Cam, you worry about your family," Raphael snapped. "Let me worry about mine."

Cam didn't take offense to Raphael's attitude since he'd long learned to shrug off the healer's snobby ways. "There is one more thing you should know." Cam nervously ran a hand through his hair. "Rolan is here."

"*Rolan?*" Raphael echoed with a blank face.

"Yes, Rolan," Cam shot back sarcastically, finally having enough. "You know, the crazy-ass fairy, with OCD. He claims to be your foster brother and that you lived with him while the fairies raised you. Since he knows about that cute little birthmark on your ass, I'm inclined to believe him."

"Oh, that Rolan," Raphael said stupidly.

"He looks like he's making himself comfortable, too. Although he's holed up in one of the smaller quarters and keeping to himself, I don't think he's going to be leaving anytime soon. Just thought you'd like a warning on the off chance you run into him."

"I've got to get going. Stuff to do." Raphael stood up so abruptly, his chair flipped over with a loud bang. Not even bothering to pick it up, he left the room so quick you would have thought telemarketers were on his ass.

Cam sat there, stunned for several minutes. If he hadn't known better, he would have said that the news of Rolan had upset Raphael. Hell, it had done more than that—it had terrified the healer.

Cam had seen Raphael in more than a couple battles and never once had he shown fear. Not even when they faced an army of demons, justice angels and Powers. Yet one small, dirty, drunk of a fairy had managed to just that. Cam only hesitated a second before he went off to search for Raphael.

He found him in the large gym that served as a training center for both the school and angel warriors. Thanks to it being so late, the place was deserted and Cam was damn glad for that since Raphael was presently punching the brick wall repeatedly.

The sweet smell of angel's blood filed the air as his knuckles popped open against the assault. Still, he continued to pound the wall, his face a mask of rage and angst. His lips were pressed into a thin grimace and there was an almost feral glint in his eyes.

"Raphael, what the hell?" Cam yelled trying to

get his attention. The healer never looked his way. Cam took a step forward and almost staggered under the wave of hurt that was rolling from the male. It was as if a dam had broken and an immortal lifetime's worth of hurt was rushing out.

Shit, why hadn't he ever realized? Raphael wasn't the way he was because he was cold. No, he was bottling up a whole lot of hurt and hate. There was an accompanying crunch as the healer's fists pounded into the wall again. Cam knew he had to find a way to stop this before Raphael did something really bad, like put a chip in the brick.

Running up, he jerked Raphael back by one shoulder. As soon as the healer tuned on him in a rage, Cam clocked him in the jaw.

Raphael staggered back two steps before he recovered and attacked.

Cam smiled and braced himself. One thing he'd learned growing up with seven brothers, nothing got your aggression out better than a good old-fashioned fistfight. They went at it several minutes, each giving as good as they took, until finally they collapsed on the mats, bloodied and bruised.

"Feel better?" Cam asked as he gingerly touched what felt like the start of a black eye.

"Much," Raphael grunted as he dabbed at his split lip with his tongue. "Thanks."

"I aim to please."

"What in the hell is going on?" Gabi stood in the doorway to the gym, her green eyes wide with shock.

"Busted," Raphael muttered out the side of his mouth.

Cam almost laughed.

Gabi ran across the room and knelt next to Cam despite the fact Raphael was just as wounded. That really wasn't a surprise, even though she and Raphael were siblings, they had never been warm and cozy, mostly due to his attitude. When Gabi moved to lay her hands on him to start the healing process, Cam gave a slight shake of his head and locked gazes with her. *I'm fine*, he sent out mentally. *Go to Raphael, he needs you and not just for his physical wounds.*

Gabi looked over at her brother's mangled hand and then to the bloody marks on the wall. Raphael didn't seem to notice the byplay as he sat with his elbows on his knees, his eyes down. Reaching out trembling fingers, she gently touched his wounds.

"What happened?" she asked timidly.

"Nothing." He ducked his head further down.

"*Nothing?*" Gabi repeated incredulously. "You just went kamikaze on the building."

"It happened after I told him about Jordy and Rolan," Cam tattled. Gabi was already up to date on both so she caught on really quick what had

Raphael's knickers up in a wad.

"Are you mad at Jordy?" Gabi asked.

Raphael shook his head. "No, after everything he went through I know it's going to be hard for him to trust us."

"Then was it Rolan?" Gabi's voice cracked.

Cam didn't blame her for getting emotional, the raw hurt on Raphael's face was hard for him to even take.

"So I guess you know everything then?" Raphael's question was laced with bitterness.

"That you weren't raised by angel nannies like me, but were fostered out to the fairies instead, yes." She scooted forward so she was sitting closer to him, taking his injured hands and holding them tenderly in her lap. "You should have told me sooner. Maybe then I would have understood why you are the way you are sometimes."

Cam gave a silent nod in agreement. Just knowing that the healer had spent his childhood with the fairies said a lot. Eccentric and at times brutally cruel, the species was never admired for their parenting.

"Let me help you," she pleaded as a tear slipped down her cheek. "At least let me heal your hands."

"No," Raphael rasped. "I don't want you to leave me right now, not even long enough to go into the healer's trance."

Cam didn't know who was more stunned by his request.

Gabi let out a broken sob as she brought Raphael's fingers to her lips for a soft kiss. "I have always been here for you, brother, and you will never have to feel alone again."

Just as Cam was thinking of a way to make his exit because the moment was so private, Raphael looked up and gave him a sad smile.

"You are so lucky," Raphael told him. "Wherever you go, you always have friends and family willing to stand by your side. I don't have that. For the longest time, the only one I could count on was Michael. Not any more though. You may not realize it because we both annoy each other so much, but you are one of my most trusted friends."

Cam couldn't have been more stunned had Raphael announced that he was going to let his hair grow long and join a boy band. All these years, he'd always assumed the healer only put up with him because they were both leaders. He never dreamed that Raphael was actually fond of him.

"Guess that makes me pretty pathetic, huh?" Raphael gave a harsh laugh.

"No," Gabi protested as she threw her arms around his waist. "I have never been more proud of you."

Raphael wrapped his battered hands around her, neither one appearing to care he was getting blood all over her. Resting his cheek on the top of her hair, he closed his eyes and let out a deep sigh. Despite the fact that the healer had finally got all this crap off his chest, Cam couldn't help but worry. Because now that Raphael had faced his past, it may just be coming back to bite him in the ass.

Chapter Four

“Tell me again why we just couldn’t meet at a neutral bar?” Michael grumbled as Cam pulled in front of the isolated house. Since he knew that he’d hurt Cam’s feeling earlier when he’d criticized him, Michael tried to keep his irritation in check. It wasn’t easy though because he had no clue on how coming to this Suzy Homemaker place was going to help him. Large, yet quaint, it almost resembled a dollhouse with its pink shutters and white scalloped siding. One would never guess it was home to an incubus and his harem of succubi.

“Because none of the bars want you around because it’s bad for business.” Cam turned off the ignition and tossed his sunglasses on the dash. “For some reason when the Chief of Archangels comes around, all the demons and rogues just want to hide. I can’t imagine why.”

Even though Cam’s patented sarcasm should have pissed him off, it brought a strange sense of

comfort to Michael instead. It was one constant he could count on. No matter how crappy the situation was. "Let's just get this over with." He got out of the car and slammed the door behind him.

"You think this is a waste of time?" Cam got out, too.

"Since when has Lilith given up anything willingly?"

"True," Cam conceded with a tilt of his head. "That little demon always did only worry about her own ass, but since Brad has taken over her group of succubi she's changed."

"So you trust her?"

"Hell no!" Cam gave a savage grin. "I wouldn't turn my back on her because I know my life would suddenly become very short. Brad I trust though and he is her leader now. She won't have a choice but to do what he says."

Michael wasn't too sure about that, but he gave a grunt of agreement anyway. Walking up the steps to the porch, he shook his head at the swing out front. It was so charming and sweet. Just the complete opposite of what he'd always come to expect from demons. The last time he'd been inside the home of a sex demon, it had been all about silk sheets and velvet, not cotton and lace. As Cam knocked on the white, wooden screen door, Michael opened his mind so he could get a

sense of what kind of demons were inside and how many.

"There is a dozen and all of them are succubi besides Brad," Cam mumbled, no doubt feeling Michael's probe. Empaths were always the best at sensing demon presences. Before the outbreak of the civil war when angel warrior teams were more prevalent, that was the empath's main function.

"Are they aggressive?" Michael asked, even though he could have found out himself, it was quicker if Cam did it.

"No, just horny, but that's nothing new for our kind," Cam said with heavy bitterness before he ran his tongue over his right fang.

"You're nothing like them," Michael reminded, hating to see the self-loathing in his nephew's eyes. "They chose to be this way. You never did." It struck Michael how hard it must be for Cam to be in the presence of so many painful reminders of his past. Yet, he was going headlong into them and all for Rachael.

"I'm doing it for you, too," Cam spoke so low it was almost a whisper.

"Stay out of my head," Michael growled.

"Sorry, you've been so upset lately that you've been projecting like mad." Cam gave a sheepish grin. "I'll try harder. Now let's get our game faces on, Lilith is coming."

The door opened to reveal a small demon with

waist-long blonde hair. Dressed in her usual red leather bustier and tight pants, she was a walking advertisement for promiscuity. Since she was in the narrow foyer, she had her long, black wings tucked tight to her back. Her green cat-like eyes went wide with surprise when she saw them.

"Cam, is that really you?" she asked as her face broke out into a huge grin, showing off her tiny fangs.

"No, it's the Easter Bunny," Cam said in his best *duh* voice.

Worried about pissing her off and ruining the whole deal, Michael started to admonish his nephew for his rudeness. Fortunately, Lilith was too dense to take offense. She opened the screen and waved them in. Once they were inside, she clasped her hands in front of her and rocked forward on the balls of her feet.

"So does this mean you came to play?" she quizzed Cam, completely ignoring Michael. For years, Lilith had an unhealthy obsession with the empath.

"No," Cam said firmly. "I still have a mate."

"Do you love her?" Lilith cocked her head to the side as if the whole idea of love was confusing to her.

"Yes, very much so."

"Bummer." She pressed her lips together in a small pout.

"We need to talk to Brad," Michael interrupted as frustration stretched his patience thin. Now wasn't the time for small talk. Lilith whipped her head around, acting as if asked as her face broke out he was there.

"No," she snapped. "I know what you want and if you see him, Brad will say yes. He's such a softy," she said that as if he'd committed mass murder.

"Now, Lil, that's not nice," Brad chided as he sauntered in. Although the dark-haired incubus had the same fangs and his amber eyes had feline pupils like the succubi, he didn't have wings. He didn't need them to look more dark and dangerous. Just standing there, he threw off all kinds of dangerous vibes. He flashed her a look of pure menace. "Maybe I'll just have to remind you what happens to those who think I'm weak."

For once, Lilith actually shut up. Nice," Brad chided as he down some, but not before Michael caught the look of arousal in her eyes. Giving the incubus his full attention, a weird mix of emotions went through him. Even though Michael had seen countless angels fall, he was still shocked at the huge change in Brad. In just a short time, he'd gone from a carefree healer to a hard demon. It both hurt Michael to see that happen and pissed him off at the choices the incubus had made in his life.

"Lowering yourself to come to here, Chief?" Brand curled his lip. "I'm shocked. I would ask if you were here to enjoy some of my girls, but we know better than that."

"Angels are so boring sometimes." Lilith gave a mock yawn.

"We came to ask you a favor," Michael said, swallowing his pride and white-hot anger. He'd never liked Lilith and having to come to her for help was a damn bitter pill to chug down. He would do anything for Rachael though—even grovel to a homicidal demon tart.

"We already helped you once not too long ago when the justice council attacked your compound," Brad reminded him blithely. "I nearly lost one of my girls, too."

"In case you need reminding," Cam cut in darkly, "your brother is still an angel warrior and he would have died right alongside with us had we fallen to the council. So you had a personal stake there, too, buddy."

There was a long stretch of tense silence as the two males faced each other off and Michael waited to see who would attack first.

Finally, Brad gave a slight nod and relaxed. "I'll listen to what you have to say, but only because you promised to look after Daniel." He turned to walk deeper into the house. "Come on, we may as well sit and pretend to be civilized."

"How about you help because you used to be one of us?" Cam asked as they followed him. "Don't you have regrets?"

"I used to," Brad admitted as he sat down in a chair and indicated for them to take the couch opposite of him. "But with every day that passes, I feel them less and less as my soul gets more adjusted to this state."

The demon didn't sound overly broken up over the fact, but Michael couldn't help but detect some hurt still lingering in his eyes. Looking around the cozy living room, he was hard pressed to reconcile that demons really did indeed live here.

"I got sick of the porn-set look," Brad supplied, blandly, catching Michael's overt glances. "So I told Lilith to redecorate. Unfortunately for us, she's going through a country-farm theme kick."

"Why don't you let me get you some lemonade and cookies?" Lilith offered with a vicious grin. "I made them myself."

"No thanks," Michael said. Knowing her, she would spit in it before giving it to them. Although Lilith had helped the angel warriors in the past, she'd also tried to kill them from time to time so he wasn't about to trust her.

She gave a slight shrug before she went to stand behind Brad, her arms wrapping around his shoulders in a possessive way.

"Where are your other girls?" Cam asked, his

gaze scanning the room. "You should know that I can sense them nearby."

"They're outside planting an herb garden," Brad replied in clipped tones.

Michael wasn't sure whether he was serious or not, but decided to let the matter drop for now. "I'm sure you heard about my mate?"

"Of course I have." Something that may have been pity passed over the incubus's eyes. "It's all the talk in demon circles. I don't see how you think we can help though."

"You and your females have an inside track that I couldn't even begin to tap into. I was hoping that maybe you may have heard something that could help me out."

"Perhaps." Brad ran the pad of his thumb over his bottom lip speculatively. "But you would have to promise me something first."

Think before you agree, Cam advised mentally. He's no longer one of us and we all know you can't trust most demons.

Michael gave a slight nod to show that he agreed. "How about you tell me what you want first?" Michael suggested.

Brad gave a sinister smile, flashing his fangs. "I guess that's fair enough. You may not know this, but the reason my sister went demon was because she was raped by three justice angels."

"I don't see how I can help you with that,"

Michael replied carefully. "Since we are at war with the council, it's not like their angels exactly fall under my jurisdiction."

"No, but there is a chance you may cross their paths—say in battle. If that were to happen, I want you to bring them to me. Alive."

When Michael could only sit there in disgusted silence, Cam spoke up, "So you expect us to deliver these angels to you for fun and games? Hell no. We may be at war with them, but that doesn't mean we're going to serve them up for torture either."

"Why not?" Brad snarled savagely, his eerie amber eyes glowing with rage. "They grabbed my sister and ripped her innocence from her without a second thought. When they violated her, they took away any hopes and dreams she may have had."

"I understand how that must have hurt," Michael said softly.

"I don't think you do. Those angels just didn't destroy her, they destroyed my entire family and I will have satisfaction. So if you want my help, you will help me. That's the deal. Take it or leave it as they say."

Chapter Five

Cam gave a snort of disbelief. "You don't honestly expect us—"

"I'll do it," Michael cut in.

Cam turned to him, his jaw slack in disbelief. "You can't be serious?"

"I will do anything to get her back. Even this."

"You know what the demons will do to the angels once you turn them over." Cam cast a dark look over at said demons.

"Yes, and I frankly don't give a damn. If it's them or Rachael, she wins hands down." Michael took in a harsh breath, hating that life sometimes handed out crappy choices like this. "I don't like it any more than you do, but Rachael is innocent where the justice angels that violated Ramiakle, aren't."

"I knew you would see things my way," Brad said slowly, a smug smile spreading over his face. "I will have to insist you take a formal vow to honor your word however."

"You sick sack of shit!" Cam jumped to his feet and pulled out his sword. "How dare you challenge the integrity of my Chief's word."

"Stand down," Michael admonished, forcing himself to feel calm despite the rage that was roaring through him. "It's rude to gut someone in their own living room."

Cam reluctantly sheathed his weapon, but kept his glare.

"You always did have such a temper, Empath King," Lilith admonished as she came around to slide into Brad's lap.

"You're one to talk," Cam grunted as he took his seat again. "How many times did you try to kill me?"

"I've turned over a new leaf." She grinned and almost managed to look innocent. "I'm trying to be nicer."

"How's that going?"

"Some days I do better than others," she admitted with a small pout.

"Let's get back on topic," Michael coaxed as he resisted the urge to rub his pounding temples. "Do you know where Rachael is?"

"No, but I know where she isn't." Brad ran his fingers up and down Lilith's arm. "Word on the street is Moloch isn't living in Hell anymore."

"We already guessed that," Michael said. "So far your information hasn't told me dick."

"Do you know why our favorite little demon was given the boot?"

Of course, Cam took a guess. "He kept breaking curfew? Run up the cell phone bill? Crash the Lucifer Mobile?"

"No, Satan is mad because his boy took Michael's mate."

"Why would that piss him off?" Cam frowned. "You would think he would be giddy about breaking up the Order."

"He knows it will bring the wrath of Michael on them." Lilith snuggled her cheek into Brad's chest.

The move was almost tender and something Michael would never have expected from her. "That doesn't make sense." Now it was Michael's turn to be confused. "He's tried to capture members of the Order before."

"The only one he wants captured is Bear. Lucifer really wants to get his hands on that empath so much so that he just doubled the bounty. The rest of you he wants killed on the spot." Brad shifted his gaze to Cam. "I wonder why he wants your baby brother so badly?"

"None of your damn business," Cam growled, his body going tense.

Michael shot him a warning look. Last thing they needed was for his nephew to lose his temper. "So do you know where Moloch has been staying since he left Hell?" Michael leaned

forward to call Brad's attention back to him.

"No, but it shouldn't be too hard for us to find out. I have complete confidence in my girls." He ran his palm over Lilith's ass, not caring that he had an audience.

Michael remembered how when Brad had been a teen, he used to hate having to spar in front of a group because he was so shy. Things had certainly changed.

"We love you, too, Brad," Lilith purred before she started to nuzzle his neck

"So what about it, Chief?" Brad asked as he continued to run his hands all over the succubus. "Do we have a deal? I get you the location of Moloch, you give me the three bastards that hurt my sister."

"Done," Michael said without hesitation. If the angels had really done what Brad had accused them of, then they deserved their punishment. "I vow it to you on my honor as an archangel." He could feel the shock coming from Cam, but decided to ignore it for now. No sense in letting the demons know the whole situation was throwing the empath for a loop.

"Fine, give us two days and we'll have the location for you." One of Brad's hands was threatening to slip under Lilith's skirt. "Oh, and I guess I should give you the names of the three angels you are going to deliver to me, Azreal,

Ezikel and Themus.”

Things just kept getting better and better. Not only were they all high-ranking justice angels, but they were the sons of some of the most influential leaders of the council. Getting to them was going to be beyond tricky. Despite all that, Michael nodded. “I’ll deliver them to you.” He got up and quickly got the hell out of there before the demons got even more frisky.

Once the angels got outside, they paused by the car, neither moving to get in. Cam was looking at Michael like he had a whole lot to get off his chest and Michael was deciding whether or not he felt like hearing it.

“You know what Brad will do when he gets his claws on those justice angels,” Cam said cautiously, almost like he felt like he was nudging a tiger with a stick.

“Yes, and I don’t give a damn. Think about it, Cam. What if it had been Ana they had violated? Wouldn’t you want to tear them apart?”

Cam gaped for a few seconds, his jaw slightly open before he clapped it shut and gave a slight nod. “If anyone ever harmed Ana that way, they would pray for their death before I was done with them.”

“Then I don’t see why we shouldn’t give Brad the same satisfaction.” He opened the door and got in. “The fact that it will help me find Rachael

makes it all that much better.”

They rode the rest of the way back to the compound in a heavy silence. For once, Cam didn’t have a million questions or smartass comments. While Michael should have been thanking his stars, instead he found the mute act unsettling. The only thing that could cut Michael deeper than having Rachael hurt would be to see his nephew suffer. “What’s up?” he finally asked.

Cam cast him a weary, sideways glance. “Nothing,” he mumbled. “I’ve got it handled.”

Michael suddenly realized how worn down Cam looked. His skin was pale and sallow, showing he hadn’t fed lately and his eyes were bloodshot and had dark circles around them. “When’s the last time you saw Amadeaha?” Michael asked. As half-incubus, Cam needed blood and sex on a regular basis or he started to get sick and damn cranky.

“Like I said, I’ve got it handled.” Cam reached out to turn on the heat despite the fact it was perfectly nice inside the car.

“Have you stopped since they took her?” Michael realized for the first time how things had been running way too smooth at the angel warriors’ compound. There had never been a day where he hadn’t had to deal with at least a dozen situations, yet things had been oddly quiet. “You’re trying to run everything, aren’t you?”

"It's no big deal." Cam gave a shrug. "I knew you would want to focus on getting her back so I told everyone to come to me with their issues instead. Bear and Ramiel have been helping me so it's not as bad as it sounds."

Not as bad as it sounds? Cam looked about two steps from passing out and he was trying to act like it was no big deal. Guilt slammed into Michael as he realized just how much he'd been loading onto his nephew's shoulders.

"Stop looking at me like that," Cam grumbled.

"Like what?"

"Like you killed my puppy or something. I don't mind doing it. I love Rachael, too, and I would do anything to get her back. If I have to give up a couple of nights' sleep, that's okay."

"You won't be any good to me or her if you keel over. As soon as we get back, I want you to find Amadeaha and take care of yourself." When Cam didn't immediately agree, Michael pressed, "I mean it. This isn't a suggestion. It's a direct order from your Chief."

Cam finally gave a reluctant nod, but remained quiet so Michael knew there was something still nagging him. He replayed the conversation with Brad back in his mind until he hit on it. "You're worried about Bear." It came out as a statement not a question because there was no doubt in Michael's mind.

"I'll admit I didn't like hearing the bounty on him had been doubled," Cam said. "I was hoping that the crush Uncle Lucy had on him would fade."

"Stop calling him that."

"What? Uncle?"

"No, Lucy." Michael cracked the first smile he had in days. "I used to love that show and every time you say that, I think of Lucifer in a flowered dress."

The somber look left Cam's face to be replaced with amusement. "Great, now I can't get that visual out of my head," he chuckled.

"Glad to be of help. We've got a while before we get to the compound. Why don't you catch me up?"

"Where to start? Where to start?" Cam drawled. "Oh, let's see. Raphael lost it for a bit."

"Crap," Michael sighed. He'd been afraid of this happening once the healer found out about Rolan. "Tell me everything."

Cam filled him in, finishing with how he had felt it was his *duty* to make Raphael feel better by starting a fistfight. It was obvious from the way Cam continued to shake his head that the whole situation was still a shock to him. Michael wasn't so surprised. Ever since the day he'd taken Raphael away from the fairies, he'd known that someday the healer would have to tackle his past.

"How bad was it for him?" Cam asked. "I mean, for him to go totally postal like that just because his foster brother was nearby, it must mean it was brutal for him."

"It was," Michael confirmed as he recalled how young, thin and lost Raphael had been all those centuries ago. Cam acted like he wanted to ask more questions, but they were pulling into the garage.

Amadeaha and Bear were both there waiting.

"How did they know we would be here?" Cam asked in a sleepy voice.

"While you were babbling, I mentally contacted Bear and told him that you really needed Amadeaha." Michael felt a rip at his heart when he saw the peace that came over Cam's face as he gazed at his mate. Tall, thin and a fire temper to match her red hair, she was one of the few people that could bully the empath around and get away with it. Before Michael had even put the car in park, she was already opening the passenger side door.

"What were you thinking?" she chastised Cam. "You look like hell."

"I missed you, too, Crazy Pie," Cam teased, using his nickname for her.

"Don't try to charm your way out of this." Even as she chewed him out, she lovingly caressed his cheek with her fingers. "You're vulnerable right

now and yet you still went to meet with demons. What if they had decided to attack?"

"Then I would have thrown Michael at them then ran in the opposite direction, screaming like a girl," Cam shot back sarcastically as he got out and wrapped his arms around her waist.

"That's your problem," she sighed, a satisfied smile spreading over her mouth as she returned his embrace. "I don't think you've ever run away from a fight."

"If I promise to be a good angel and go to bed, will you come with me?" He placed his cheek on the top of her head and closed his eyes as if he savoring her touch.

There were some more whispered endearments and Michael had to look away, the pain of his own missing mate making him ache. Swallowing down the hard lump forming in the back of his throat, he pasted a smile on his face. "Get him back to your room and take care of him, please. I'm tired of looking at his lovesick mug."

Amadeaha pulled back so she could give Michael a weak smile of her own. Then with a small cry, she ran over and threw her arms around him. The force of her body slamming into his, made him grunt in surprise before he recovered and gave her an awkward hug back.

"I know you'll find her," Amadeaha said with a sniff. "If you don't rescue her, then Rachael will

find a way to escape and come back to you. She's strong."

"Thank you." Michael stepped back and avoided looking anyone in the eye. "I'm going to go try and get some work done before I go back out." Making a hasty exit, he was somewhat surprised when Bear fell in step beside him. "You need something?" he asked the Goth empath.

"I thought I would hang out and help you out. Tif is sleeping so I have some free time."

"Let me guess." Michael threw his hands up in disgust. "All of you decided that I shouldn't be alone and you drew the short stick for tonight."

Bear didn't confirm or deny his accusation, but the flush that came over the young angel's cheeks spoke volumes. "Family takes care of each other," he finally said as if that explained it all. "I'll just try to stay out of your way."

Michael somehow doubted that, but he decided not to fight it for now. In the past few years since he'd reconnected with his sister's children, he'd found out that they tended to sometimes be overwhelming in their good intentions.

When he got to his office, he was surprised to find a small group of archangels clustered around his desk. There was a box sitting there and they all were acting as if it were dangerous.

"What's got all the big, bad archangels scared?" Bear snarled with a wicked grin.

"Devlin found this in the front seat of his car when he got back from patrol," one of them said as he poked a timid finger at the box.

"And you think it has something spooky inside?" Bear really seemed to be getting a kick out of seeing a bunch of archangels make an ass out of themselves. "If you were worried about it being dangerous, then why in the hell did you bring it inside our compound?"

Michael closed his eyes and slowly counted to ten. Not because he was ticked at Bear, but because his nephew had a very valid point. All of the warriors seemed to realize this and, at the same time, turned and gave him guilty looks.

"Crap, sorry, Chief."

"Don't go pissing your pants," Bear sighed, like it was such a challenge to be surrounded by dumbass lunkheads. "There's not a bomb or anything dangerous in there."

"How would you know?" Devlin growled.

"Because I'm magic." Bear waggled his fingers dramatically. When the archangels still made no move to open the box, Bear let out low curse word that would have made a lesser male blush. Pulling a dagger out, he sliced open the top and flipped up the sides. Looking down, the smile fled his face as he grew deathly pale. "Fuck, I'll kill him," the empath whispered in a harsh voice, the earlier carefree tone gone. He took in a deep breath and

an angry glare came over his eyes as a tick developed on his jaw.

Michael felt the air leave his lungs as fear crawled up his spine. It took a lot to rile up Bear. Pushing his way through the crowd, he slowly made his way forward. His heart thudded with each step he took as the box seemed to be daring him to look inside. Reaching the edge of his desk, he peered inside. What he saw there made the entire room seem to spin on its axis as his mind threatened to shatter.

It was Rachael's nightgown, nested in a mass of dark hair clippings.

With numb fingers, he pulled it out. Bloodied and ripped in half. It was the one she had been wearing the night she went missing. At one time, it had been a favorite of his because it was a cute little babydoll number that covered just enough to tease. The fact that now not only was she captive, but obviously being hurt, made him want to roar with rage. With a snarl, he pushed himself away and stormed out of the room. He could hear footsteps slapping behind him and didn't have to turn to know it was Bear.

"Where are you going?" the empath asked as he caught up. He was still pale and there was a cold, killing anger in his eyes.

"I don't know," Michael admitted. He still had the gown in his hands, unable to break the

connection to Rachael, no matter how painful it may be. "Maybe I'll canvas some more of the neutral bars. I just know I can't sit around and do nothing."

"Okay, I'm coming with you though. Like I said, family sticks together."

Michael nodded. Truth be told, he really could use them all because they were the only things helping him hold it together.

Chapter Six

Rachael fingered her now short hair and stifled back a sob. Once long and to her waist, it barely fell past her ears. Remembering all the times Michael had fingered her curls and brought them to his nose, she finally let some tears fall down her cheeks. He'd always loved her hair and now Moloch had managed to steal even that from her.

He'd also taken her gown but that hadn't bothered her nearly as much. She'd just taken a blanket from her hard cot and used that to cover herself. But there was no way she could cover the ragged hatchet job the demon had done to her head.

The door opened and the last demon she'd ever expected to see slid inside.

"Lilith?" Rachael stood.

"Shhh..." The demon put a finger to her red lips before she shot a nervous look over her shoulder and shut the door. She paused, slack

jawed as her weird eyes grew huge. "Oh my gosh, what did you do to your hair? Don't get me wrong. It looks nice cut short. It just makes your eyes stand out. But whoever did it really needs to go back to beauty school. They did a really bad job."

"Moloch did this to me—I wasn't given a choice," Rachael defended automatically before she caught herself. "What are you doing here?"

"I'm helping," Lilith announced with a proud smile. "I'm nice now. Although I'm really wishing I brought some scissors with me. It would be a really good deed to fix your hair."

"Lilith," Rachael bit out between clenched teeth. "What do you mean you're helping? Are you going to get me out of here?"

"I can't," Lilith sighed with a regretful pout. "This place is crawling with demons. Even if I could get you free of those chains, I would never be able to get you out of here."

"Then how are you helping me? By coming in and making fun of my appearance?"

"Now that's just not fair," Lilith pointed out. "I never once mentioned you were wearing a dirty blanket like a toga. It's been really hard for me to hold that back, too."

"Gee," Rachael deadpanned, "thanks."

"You're funny." Lilith giggled, the movement almost making her boobs pop out of her tight top.

"I think I like you."

"Are you going to tell me how you plan on helping then?" Rachael fought hard to keep the exasperation out of her voice, not wanting to get the succubus mad at her. Because, God help her, it looked like the ditz was her only hope.

"Brad promised Michael that we would look for you and it only took me a day." She breathed on her nails and pretended to buff them. "Damn, I'm so good I scare even myself sometimes."

"You're the bomb." Rachael didn't know whether to laugh or strangle the blonde.

"I know, right?" Lilith cocked her head to the side before she gave a jump. "Crap, I don't have that much time. I can hear that stupid demon guard calling my name. Listen, I'm going to get a message to Michael and let him know where you are. I'm sure between him and Brad, they will figure out a way to get you out. Too bad your little Order of Four couldn't take Moloch on on right then and there, but I think it would be hard what with you being naked and having ugly hair and all."

The real reason the Order wouldn't be able to take Moloch had nothing to do with Rachael's lack of clothes, but because she was weak from going days without food or drink. She didn't say that out loud though. Lilith started to leave, but stopped short and pulled back, her brow creased as she

nibbled on her bottom lip with one of her fangs.

"That last sentence where I called your hair ugly was bitchy, wasn't it?" she asked with what actually seemed like genuine concern.

"Just a little, I can handle it."

"Good." Lilith heaved another sigh that threatened to flash her boobs. She let out a dramatic cry before she ran across the room and flung her arms around Rachael. "Be brave. We will save you."

"I will cling to your words of strength." Rachael had to work hard to keep the sarcasm from her voice. She managed though because for some strange reason, she didn't want to hurt the succubus's feelings.

Lilith scampered from the room, pausing long enough to give Rachael's hair one last pitying look.

Once she was alone again, Rachael let her shoulders slump even as hope flared in her for the first time in days. Could it be possible that Lilith had been telling the truth, and if so, wasn't it ironic that her salvation would come at the hands of demons?

* * * *

Michael stood at the end of a dirt road that led to a rundown house that looked like it should have

been in a horror movie. Run down with peeling paint, cracked windows and a sagging porch. It was amazing that the thing was standing, let alone serving as headquarters for a group of rogue demons.

"Brad just called again," Cam announced as he came up to stand next to him. "His girls said Moloch is still at the bar and they're moving in to distract him. They also warned me that Moloch brings a whole new level to wham-bam-thank-you-ma'am so we won't have much time."

Michael nodded grimly as he looked over at the angel warriors he'd brought along for the rescue party. Knowing that a big group would bring unwanted attention, he had chosen to pick a few of his best to go in. So all that was there were his seven nephews along with Appolion and Abdiel.

"We go in, get her out and then I want the place burned to the ground." He looked pointedly at Cam. "You hear me? Light that place up. I want everyone to know that if they dare to touch my mate, then they're going to hurt."

"I hear you loud and clear, Chief." Cam emphasized his point by making a small ball of flame dance over his palm.

"Let's go," he ordered as he pulled out his sword and took lead.

A couple of demon assassins must have been on guard duty because they called an alarm before

they charged down the steps. Ramiel and Nathaniel ran ahead, cutting the demons down before they could even really begin to attack. Letting out a hoarse battle cry, Nathaniel ran his sword through his opponent again, even though he was already dead.

“Save some of that hate and anger for inside,” Ramiel ordered as he grabbed his brother by the arm. After giving the corpse one last snarl, Nathaniel obeyed. Michael barreled up the rickety stairs and kicked the door in, not even giving a damn how loud it was. He wanted the demons to know they were coming.

Fear was a good thing now. Let them run. Let them cower. Hell, let them piss their demon pants. It wouldn't matter in the end because none of them were ever going to see the outside of this shithole of a house again. Mercy wasn't something he was planning on dealing today, only death. Because maybe then all demons would think twice before they ever touched his mate again.

As the angels breeched the house, a demon came running at them. Appolion raised a hand and released an energy blast. With a loud scream of pain, the demon dropped to its knees before it exploded.

Michael grunted in approval. “Find her,” he commanded the angels. “Make sure that no demon survives. Moloch is going to learn that we

give it back just as hard."

Not one of them said a word, but they didn't have to, the cold hard fury in their eyes said it all. They all loved Rachael, too, and now there was going to be hell to pay.

They made their way through the house, brutally cutting a path through the demons that came out to challenge them. Again and again, Michael called out for Rachael, only to receive no response. Fear clogged his throat as he realized that they might have gotten there too late. Even though he stretched his mind out to find her mental marker, there was still that damn brick wall. What if Moloch had already moved her? Or worse, what if he killed her? Letting out a groan, he refused to allow himself to dwell on that, knowing it would make him useless in the fight. Instead, he took out his aggression on the enemy in front of him.

Finally, there were only a couple left and there was still no sight of Rachael. Pointing his sword at one of the survivors, he walked forward until he had the demon in a corner.

Even though it was a large, black muscular assassin, he still shook. "Where is she?" Michael asked in a low, dangerous voice.

"I'm not telling you shit?" the demon snarled through rotten fangs.

Michael didn't even bother asking twice or

giving a warning. Instead, he swung his sword in an arch and sliced through the bastard's neck. Before the body even had a chance to crumble to the ground, Michael turned and was aiming his blade at another demon. This one was smart enough to look piss scared.

"Please," the demon whimpered.

"Where is she?" Michael repeated, letting the ice-cold menace carry over into the question.

The demon dropped to his knees and bowed his bald head. "Downstairs with the other captives."

A whimper of fear came with the answer that made Cam snort in disgust. "I knew there were more here," the empath spat between clenched teeth. "As soon as we got out of the car, I could feel their suffering." He leveled a killing glare at the cowering demon. "What do you want us to do with that piece of leftover garbage?"

Michael looked over at Ramiel, and when he gave the next order, it was as a Chief to one of his top generals, not as an uncle to a nephew. "Take care of it."

Turning, he didn't even bother to glance back to see if Ramiel would follow his order. Appolion, Abdiel and Cam followed. Finding the stairs, he ran down and found a new kind of hell.

The basement had been converted into a crude prison of sorts. Several doors lined on both sides

of a narrow hallway. Even though Michael could now feel the suffering from numerous angels all around him, it was strangely silent.

"What the fuck is this place?" Appolion asked as he gripped his sword so tight his knuckles turned white. "I haven't felt this much raw pain since I was in Hell."

"I agree." Cam nodded, a bead of sweat trickling down his temple. "This place is alive with fear. We better make sure Bear doesn't come down here. All this will overload his empath feelers."

Michael opened up his mind and searched again for Rachael's familiar essence. Finally, he was able to detect it and he sprang forward. "Rachael!"

Then he heard a sound that almost made him cry in relief. "Michael? Is that you?" the voice was muted, but there was no doubt it was her.

Running to the last door on the left, Michael kicked it open and ran inside. His knees went weak with relief. Rachael was battered, wrapped in those damn chains and clutching a dirty blanket to cover her nudity, but she was alive. Crossing the room in two strides, he wrapped his arms around her and held her as tight as he dared to without hurting her.

"I knew you would come," she whispered in his ear. "I never gave up hope."

Cam came over and touched the locks on her chains before he tugged them loose.

Michael stepped back far enough so they could get them off, all the while helping her to hold the blanket in place. Once they were off, he took off his shirt and handed it to her. Since she was so small, it fell to her knees. "Let's get the other captives and get the hell out of here." He bent over and scooped her up in arms. Her hair was all scraggly and short, but she'd never looked so beautiful as she gazed up at him.

"Moloch made sure they all suffered so he could feed off their fear. That's what makes him so strong." Rachael tossed her arms around his neck and nuzzled into his chest.

"We'll see how strong he is when we're cramming some of his own fear back down his throat," Abdiel growled before he leaned forward and kissed the top of her head. "Nobody hurts you and gets away with it."

Michael carried her out of the dreary room. The rest of the warriors were there, helping the other captives out. Derel was the only healer out of Michael's nephews so Appolion ran forward to help.

"How bad is it?" he called.

Derel ran a hand through his blond hair, leaving behind a streak of blood. His bow was slung on his back and he was kneeling over a male

angel who wasn't moving. "Pretty bad," the healer announced – his face hard with anger. "The reason why none of them were crying for help is because most of them are dead or almost there. I'll be lucky if I save more than a couple."

"Let's get them evacuated quickly before Moloch comes back." Michael knew they were nowhere ready to take on the demon in the condition Rachael was.

Derel gave a curt nod of his head. The warriors quickly carried out the wounded and loaded them in the vehicles, making the angels as comfortable as they could.

The entire time, Michael kept Rachael in his arms. It felt so good to finally be able to touch her again that he knew he wouldn't be letting go anytime soon. She didn't seem to mind, clinging to him just as tightly. Once they had the house empty, Michael nodded to Cam. "Make this house ash," he growled. "I want to send the message loud and clear. We're done playing nice. You mess with me or my followers, then you're gambling with your life."

Cam gave a smile that was all menace as his blue demon eyes almost gleamed with wicked delight. "As you wish, Uncle Mike." Lifting his hand up, he formed a fireball and threw it.

Cam must have put everything he had into it because when it hit the house, there was an

enormous explosion. Fire, wood and debris shot up into the air as the ground shook with the force. Several of the brothers cursed and covered their heads as what was left of the house rained down on them.

Michael tucked Rachael tight to his chest to protect her as best as possible.

"That ought to let Moloch know you mean business," Cam said with a cockiness that showed for all his power, he was still young in angel years.

"Let's get home." Michael pressed a kiss to Rachael's temple.

Chapter Seven

Once they got to the SUV, Michael only put her down long enough so he could put on another shirt before he picked her up again. Getting into the backseat, he kept his arms around her, setting her on his lap. Rachael buried her face into his chest, savoring the woodsy, spicy scent that was her mate.

For the first time in days, she felt safe. In his arms, surrounded by Cam, Appolion and Abdiel, she knew nothing could harm her. Cam started the engine. She closed her eyes and let the movement of the car lull her almost to asleep.

"He didn't rape her, Uncle Mike," Cam whispered, obviously thinking she was out of it. "I would smell him on her if he had."

"He's right," Appolion agreed as he leaned over to place a healer's touch on her arm. He had hopped in the back so he could heal her on the way home. "I didn't detect it when I scanned her for injuries."

"He threatened but never went through with it," Rachael whispered, still keeping her face hidden in Michael's chest. She couldn't bear to see the looks of pity from the three males that she loved most of all.

"I wonder why?" Cam mused. "When we fought with him last time, I could sense the desire he has for you."

"Does it matter why?" Abdiel growled from the front seat.

"Yes, it does."

Cam reached back to touch her arm and she could feel the last of her anxiety and fear drift away. Rachael sighed in relief. It was so nice to have an empath around, especially one as strong as him.

"If we can figure out why Moloch couldn't go through with it, then maybe we can figure out a weakness of his," Cam persisted. "Right now the only battle plan we have for our next fight against him consists of us grabbing our ankles and getting ready to take it."

There was a heavy silence as everyone absorbed that statement. The only sound was the car wheels rushing over the pavement.

Rachael finally forced herself to sit up and face them. "Every time he tried, I would just be a real bitch to him." She trembled as she remembered the demon's fury. She had thought for sure he was

going to destroy her for getting him worked up so much. Moloch's red eyes would start to glow, fangs would pop from his upper gums and the air would crackle with his powers.

"Hey, come back to me, sweetie," Michael's soothing voice cut into her dark memories.

"We have to find a way to stop Moloch." She clutched his shirt so tight that her knuckles cracked. "He's just getting stronger."

"I think we gave him a huge blow today," Cam said viciously.

"Either that or we just pissed him off even more," Rachael hated that her voice sounded so shaky when she made that observation, but she was scared because deep down she knew Moloch was going to be out for revenge. What's worse, the angels he would be targeting were the ones who were in the car with her.

* * * *

Joe paused before the door and willed himself to knock. Several times, he raised his hand only to lower it as his bravery deserted him. "Get a grip," he muttered. "You're a freaking archangel for cripes sake. You've been in tons of battles, faced off against countless demons and yet you're scared of one fairy."

Despite his self-pep talk, he still couldn't get it

together enough to put fist to wood. It was because it wasn't just any fairy on the other side. It was Cliona. The female that he loved above all. The female who was his world. The female that he could never have.

Like the lovesick dope that he was, he pressed his forehead to the door as he yearned for her. He could swear that, despite the barrier, he could still smell her sweet scent of wildflowers. The one time he had been lucky enough to kiss her, she had tasted sweet, too. "Damn it, you pansy," he berated. "Just knock on the door and get it over with before you get caught by one of your brothers. Most of all, stop talking to yourself like you're a loon."

No, it was better that he just forgot about it and left. Every time he had to see Cliona, it was like a punch in the gut. To be so close to the thing he desired above all else only to know he can never touch it.

The door swung open so quickly, he stumbled forward a step and had to recover before he fell right into the petite female. Her brown eyes grew wide in surprise and he was so close he could count the freckles dusting her pert nose. She let out a small gasp of surprise that soon turned into a throaty giggle, which instantly sent his cock to attention. Even though her brown hair was up in a sloppy twist and she was wearing a baggy tee

shirt and sweats, he'd never seen anything sexier.

"Joe," she exclaimed in a husky voice. "What are you doing here?"

Stalking you. Knowing that was never the right thing to say, he cleared his throat and went with, "We got Rachael back. I thought you would like to know, seeing how you guys are best friends."

"I heard. I was just going to see her." Cliona flashed him a smile that made his mouth dry.

"She's sleeping right now." Joe instantly wanted to kick himself because of the look of disappointment that marred her cute face.

"Oh."

"I'm sure she'll wake up soon," Joe hastened to add. Anything to get her smiling again.

"Okay." She gave a small nod, still glum.

"I've got to go." Joe needed to make his exit now before he did something stupid. Giving a lame wave, he turned to leave.

"Why do you hate me?" she asked in a timid voice.

Joe halted in his tracks, his gut clenching at the hurt in her question. Turning, he saw that her eyes were wet with unshed tears. "What makes you think I could ever hate you?" he asked, his voice cracking just a bit.

"We used to talk all the time, laugh together, have fun. But lately, you've been so cold to me." A tear finally won and slid down her rounded cheek.

She wiped it away with a jerk of her hand. "Did I do something to make you mad?"

Before he realized it, he'd walked back and was cupping her face between his hands. "Cliona, you could never do anything to make me not like you." Using the pad of his thumb, he brushed away a tear, hating that he had been the one to cause them. "Every moment of every day, you are all I think about."

The front of his blond hair had a tendency to hang in his face and she reached out to gently brush it back. "Then why have you been so cold to me lately? Is it because I'm a fairy?"

"Yes, but not in the way you think. Michael is afraid that if I claim you, then it will destroy any chance we have of them aligning with us in the war. Fairies have never liked it for their females to be with our kind."

"But I'm half-human, too," she protested with a sob. "They don't care about me."

"Michael is afraid to take that chance."

"What right does he have to say in who you chose to mate with?" she asked, her eyes now bright with anger instead of tears.

"He's my Chief. I've taken sacred vows to always obey him."

"He's also your uncle," Cliona pleaded. "He should be more concerned with your happiness than stupid politics."

"He's got to think of the warriors as a whole and not give me special treatment just because I'm his blood." Still keeping his hands on her face, he leaned his forehead down to touch hers, their lips inches apart.

"What about Cam? He's your brother, surely he can help?"

"There's nothing he can do. Michael specifically forbade me from pursuing you. Cam can't go against that kind of order." Joe closed his eyes and just savored her scent, knowing he would never have the chance to enjoy it again.

"I love you," she sobbed.

"And I love you." He finally allowed himself the briefest kiss, just a feathering of a touch. "Which is why I have to leave. I can't continue to be around you when I want you so much. It's not fair to either one of us."

"No." She frantically shook her head, fresh tears falling. "If anyone should leave, it's me. I really don't belong here anyway—I'm not one of you."

"Don't talk like that," he admonished softly. "Everyone here loves you and the warriors would be lost without your help. All the kids here adore you so much and the school needs you. I'll just ask Michael to assign me to an angel warrior team that's working outside the compound."

"Do you really have to go?" She reached

forward to brush his hair back again.

"Yeah, I think I do."

"Can you do me one favor before you leave?" Her bottom lip trembled slightly.

"You can ask anything of me." She could, too. He would gladly cut off his sword arm for her.

"Can you come inside and hold me for a while?" When he opened his mouth to object, she hastened to add, "Just hold me, that's all I ask. At least let me have that. Please."

Even though he knew it was a huge mistake, Joe nodded and let her take him by the hand. He cast one guilty look down the hall before he followed her in and shut the door behind him.

* * * *

"What's the status of the captives?" Michael asked as he set Rachael in the bed, being careful not to wake her.

"Only two survived," Derel reported grimly. He was still streaked with blood and it was clear by the way his hands shook, he drained himself trying to help the injured. "I haven't seen wounds that bad since..." He broke off and swallowed hard. "Since we got Cam back from Hell."

Raphael, who had been leaning against the wall, walked over to Derel and lightly punched him in the shoulder. "Why don't you go get some

rest?" the lead healer suggested. "I'll take over from here."

"Are you sure, Master?" Derel asked slowly, one brow cocked in confusion.

"I'm positive," Raphael assured in a light easy tone that was totally not his usual self. "Go have some fun with that mate of yours. Let Heather take care of you."

Derel shot his leader a confused look. Not that Michael blamed him. Before now, he'd never suspected that Raphael cared enough to know that Derel was even mated let alone be able to name her.

"Okay," Derel finally gave in. "I should probably go take a shower anyhow." As he was leaving, he still paused to look over his shoulder a couple of times, almost as if he expected Raphael to change his mind and call him back.

Once he'd finally left, Michael sat on the edge of the bed so he could be close enough to stroke Rachael's arm. "Cam said you had an episode," Michael ventured. Actually Cam had said that Raphael had gone bat-shit crazy, but somehow that term didn't seem too tactful.

"Yes, I'm sorry." Raphael ducked his head.

Another new move for him. Ever since that day Michael had dragged him away from that run-down shack at the fairy camp, the healer had always held his head up in pride. "Don't be sorry.

After all this time, you were due to have a tantrum. If anyone should be apologizing, it's me."

"You?" Raphael's head shot up, confusion in his sharp green eyes. "What did you do?"

"It's what I didn't do. I should have called to warn you about Rolan. I got so caught up in him being able to help Bear, I never thought of how it might affect you."

"I don't blame you." Raphael gave a half-smile that never reached the rest of his troubled face. "Bear was dying and Rolan held the key to his cure. If it had been Gabi or Jordy, I would have done the same thing."

"Still, I should have told you ahead of time. If you want, later you can kick my ass for it. Cam says you have a mean left hook."

"I may take you up on that." This time when Raphael grinned, it was genuine.

"Why don't you pull up a chair and we can catch up." Michael suggested, sensing that the healer just needed to hear a familiar, friendly voice right now.

Raphael made himself comfortable and they spent the next hour talking.

For the first time since he'd met him, Michael felt as if he'd really gotten to see the real side of his friend.

Chapter Eight

Joe shifted his hips so Cliona didn't know how hard his cock was as they sat snuggled on her couch. The TV was on, but hell if he could tell what was even on. All he could focus on was her and how good it felt to hold her soft body in his arms. It was also pure torture.

She was half-on his lap, half-off and her cheek was resting on his arm. The soft curves of her body seemed to scream *touch me* and, before he could stop himself, he was stroking the soft rise of her hip, the dip of her waist before stopping just below her ribcage.

"Are you going to miss me?" she asked with a soft sigh.

"I already do."

"Until you find some pretty female angel that you can be with. The you'll forget all about me."

"That's not going to happen." Joe closed his eyes against the pain churning in his gut. "You're the only one that I could ever love. There will

never be another for me.”

“Does it make me a horrible person that I like hearing that?” She sighed, the movement making his fingers come dangerously close to her breasts.

“No, I feel the same way. If I were to ever see another guy touch you, I’d probably rip his head off.” Deciding to move his hand to safer ground, he started to make absent circles on her back.

“Your family is going to hate me. They’ll know why you left.” She let out a sharp gasp when he rubbed the area between her shoulder blades.

“Did I hurt you?” he asked alarmed, even though the way her eyes rolled back in her head wasn’t the move someone in pain would usually make.

“No, it’s just that the spot where my wings comes out is really, really sensitive.” Cliona moaned and arched back against his touch.

“So it feels good?” So much for moving to safer ground.

“Mmm...” She closed her eyes and got the satisfied look of a kitten with cream. “It feels fantastic.”

Although Joe didn’t have the skills that Bear and Cam did when it came to reading others minds, he did have some capabilities. Right now, they were telling him that Cliona was aroused. Hell, she was more than aroused, she was about to come off the couch.

The smart thing would have been to pull back his hand. The smarter thing would have been to get up and leave. The smartest thing would have been to never come back. Instead, he inched his hand under her shirt so he could touch her creamy flesh.

"I always knew your skin would feel this soft," he whispered as he caressed her sweet spot. She arched back even further, her hips hitting his cock. This time he didn't pull back, wanting her to feel how she was affecting him. The feeling of her rounded ass grinding against his erection almost drove him over the edge. Control. That was the key. He just needed to stay in control.

"Come to bed with me," she beseeched in a husky voice.

Well, hell, there went any hope of control.

"We'll just play a bit," she continued when he didn't immediately respond. "I promise."

Reminded once again of how sweet her lips had been, he wondered how the rest of her tight body would taste. He licked his lips as he imagined sucking the tips of her perky breasts until she was moaning before he moved down to lap up the syrup from her pussy. Direct order or not, he would be a fool to turn this down.

Scooping her up, Joe stood and walked to the bed. He laid her gently down in the center of her plush, pink comforter before he spread out on top

of her. With a whimper, Cliona buried her hands in his hair and pulled him in for a kiss.

Since he knew this was going to be his only chance to ever be with her, Joe tried to take it slow so he could savor every moment.

Cliona would have none of that. She attacked him with a desperate need they were both feeling. Her tongue invading his mouth to taste, tease and touch.

"Please. Please. Please," she begged between kisses. Before he had a chance to ask what she wanted, she took his hand and placed it on her breast.

"Fuck, Cliona. No bra. You're killing me here." He nipped at the side of her neck, then sucked to take away the sting.

"Do you want to stop?" She let out a keening wail when he started to tweak her nipple through the thin fabric of her shirt.

"Hell no."

"I love it when you talk dirty." She undulated her hips, making her pussy rub against his cock. Even with their clothes separating them, he had to bite his bottom lip to stop himself from yelling in pleasure.

"Then you'll really love this. Take off you damn shirt so I can taste those pretty breasts of yours."

"You're going to kiss me there?" she asked, her eyes glazed with passion.

"Babe, I'm going to taste every inch of you," he promised as he lifted the hem of her tee shirt. She wiggled to help him out and soon she was naked from the waist up. A slight blush covered her cheeks as she moved to cover herself. He reached out to stay her hands. "No, don't hide them from me. You're so damn beautiful."

Before she had a chance to cover herself again, Joe leaned down and took one perfect pink nipple in his mouth. Her wildflower scent seemed to grow stronger, or maybe that was just his imagination. He laved his tongue over one hard peak, making her jerk against his mouth.

"Sweet just like I thought," he crooned as his hand moved down to trace a circle around her navel. He playfully tugged at the waist of her sweatpants. "Tell me something, fairy. If I were to stroke your pussy, would I find out it's already wet for me."

"Are you kidding?" she writhed under his touch. "I just look at you and I cream my panties."

Now that it was her talking dirty, Joe almost came in his pants. The thought of those plump lips forming such crass words had him wondering what else her mouth could do.

"Cream yourself?" Joe swirled his tongue over her nipple. "I think I'm going to have to check for myself." Slipping under her panties, he stroked her slippery folds. A groan slipped out before he

could stop it. She hadn't been lying, she was hot, wet and so ready for him.

"I was thinking," Cliona said.

Joe's head jerked up as his ego took a hit. Here he was using some of his best moves on her and she was *thinking*? "Great," he muttered sarcastically.

"You've had sex with female demons before?"

"Yes."

"And Nix?"

"A time or two." His hand was still in her panties and she was picking now to ask about his experiences? "Do you want a play-by-play?"

"What?" Her eyes grew wide in shock. "Oh, Goddess no! I have a point I was trying to make."

"I can't wait to hear what that is." He finally took his hand out. His fingers were still wet with her essence.

"You had sex with them and you did it without leaving the mating mark on them."

"Of course." He frowned down at her. "They're not angels."

"So it would make sense that you wouldn't leave your mark on a fairy." She nibbled shyly on her bottom lip.

Joe's heart thumped in his chest as his thick skull finally got what she was saying. "I don't know, sweetie." His cock strained against his pants, as if arguing with him. Lord, now he did

want her—bad. But to go against his Chief? It was something that he'd never dreamed he'd do and if it were to come out that he had, the penalties would be fierce. Then she gave him another beseeching look with those eyes he loved so much and he knew the risk was worth it. In fact, if he gave up this chance, Joe knew he would regret it for the rest of his immortal life. "Are you sure?" he asked as he pressed a tender kiss to her temple. Cliona answered him by sliding her hand between them and unbuttoning his jeans.

"I'm very sure." She slowly lowered his zipper and pulled his cock free. "I know you still will have to leave, but I just want this one night with you." She wrapped her slender fingers around him and squeezed. "It will be our own, very naughty secret."

"I can live with naughty." Joe closed his eyes as she continued to work his cock.

She gave him a smile that was both sweet and seductive at the same time as she started to tug at his shirt. He pulled her pants down and between the two of them, they somehow managed to get their clothes off and soon he was spread over her again, but this time it was skin on silky skin.

Joe wrapped one of her legs around his hips and paused, his cock poised at the hot entrance of her core, wanting to give her one last chance to change her mind. Cliona grabbed his biceps so

hard, her nails dug in.

"Now." She lifted her hips. "Take me now, Joe."

With a groan of surrender, he entered her in one hard thrust. Too late, he felt the thin barrier and he couldn't hold back. Cursing himself, he stilled as she let out a cry of pain. "I'm so sorry." He brushed away a tear that had slipped out of the corner of her eye. "I didn't expect...what I mean is it's not like that with our females the first time." He started to move back, but she let out a low moan and gripped his arms even tighter.

"Don't you dare stop." She undulated her hips against him. "It may have hurt at first, but fairies heal fast."

Joe didn't pull out, but he did dip his head down and start to nuzzle her breasts again. Using his teeth, tongue and lips, he teased one nipple, then the other, giving her time to adjust to the girth of his cock. Only when she was slick with sweat and her eyes were heavy with passion, did he start to slowly move inside her. She wrapped her other leg around him and dug her heels into the small of his back.

"More, I need all of you," she panted between thrusts.

"Easy, babe." He grabbed one of her ass cheeks and gave a warning squeeze. "You're so tight, I don't want to hurt you anymore."

"It doesn't hurt. It just feels so good."

Like he was going to argue with that. He pumped harder and faster, her tight pussy sucking him in. Although each thrust, stroke and caress was pure heaven, it also brought a bit of regret because he knew he would never get to be with her again.

"Ouch, Joe. You're pinching my butt."

"Sorry, love." He moved his hand, but kept pumping in her. Michael himself could have come in the door right now and Joe wouldn't have been able to stop. A primal need had taken over and he would destroy anyone that came between him and Cliona.

Her body trembled under him as she found her release. Joe closed his eyes and let himself join her. He came with a ferocity that stunned him, his cock shooting off in her body as pleasure ripped through his body. "I love you," he moaned as the last waves of ecstasy washed over him.

"I love you, too." She trailed her fingers down his spine. "I always will."

He collapsed at her side and pulled her to his chest, wanting to savor her flesh next to him for just a bit longer. The room had grown dark so he could just see the outline of her hip as he caressed it.

"I suppose you have to get going?" she asked in a small voice, never turning her face to look at

him.

"Yeah." Regret tugged at his heart. "I should before someone notices I'm missing."

"Even though I feel like crying, I won't," she said in an adamant voice. "I don't want you to think I regret what we just shared. It was the best moment of my life and I will treasure it forever."

"I don't regret it either." He stretched forward to kiss her and caught a glimpse of a strange shadow on her left butt cheek. Even though he knew deep down what it was, he still stupidly shook his head as he switched on the light by the bedside.

"Oh, fuck," he moaned. Fear and a strange sense of relief mixed together in his gut, almost making him sick.

"What?" Her brows furrowed together in confusion. Following his gaze, she twisted her body so she could look, too.

Joe opened his mouth to offer some words of comfort, but she cut him off with an ear-piercing shriek.

Chapter Nine

The scream jerked Michael awake. Judging by the muffled voices and pounding footsteps on the other side of the door, he wasn't the only one either.

"What is it?" Rachael asked sleepily.

"Nothing," he replied, not quite sure if he was telling the truth. "Go back to sleep, I'll figure it out."

It looked like she wanted to argue, but she finally pressed her lips together in a firm line and nodded her head.

He suspected her acceptance had more to do with the dark circles under her eyes rather than her being a good obedient warrior. She was back to sleep before he had even left the room.

Shutting the door behind him, he almost ran into Ramiel who was tucking his shirt into his jeans. His normally perfectly groomed hair was in disarray. "What in the hell is going on now?" Michael grumbled.

"I don't know yet," the archangel answered. "I think it's coming from Cliona's room."

"Where's Joe?" Even as he put that question out there, Michael had a sneaky suspicion where his nephew was.

"Crap," Ramiel spat, seeming to come to the same conclusion.

By the time the pair had made it to the fairy's room, all hell had broken loose. Cam was yelling at Joe. Joe was clad in only a pair of jeans and a pissed off expression. He was trying to shield Cliona, wrapped only in a sheet, as much as possible with his body. Case was standing in between Cam and Joe, trying his best to diffuse the situation. Michael looked closer at Cliona and groaned.

"The idiot marked her," Ramiel sighed. Since all males instinctively sensed when a female was mated, they didn't need to see the intricate marking to know that.

"Hey, I didn't ask for him to put a tramp stamp on my ass." Cliona slapped her butt to prove her point. "It just happened, but I'm not sorry."

If the situation hadn't sucked so much, Michael might have laughed at her calling it a *tramp stamp* since the marks did resemble a tattoo of the male's family symbol. Since she had picked Joe, hers would be a tiger and a long sword.

"So what are you trying to say?" Cam snapped.

"That you and Joe were just standing around and your clothes accidentally fell off and you accidentally ended up doing the horizontal mambo?"

"Watch your mouth," Joe snarled as he balled his hands into fists. "You may be the leader of the empathes, but to me you're the same jerky little brother that I used to smack down."

"Ah, that might not be the best way to calm everyone down," Case advised his twin evenly, but nobody paid him any attention.

"If anyone should be smacked around it's you." Cam curled up his lip. "Maybe that would knock some damn sense into your skull."

"Everyone, settle down," Michael said loudly so his voice would carry over the chaos. As one, all eyes turned in his direction as the whole mood switched to an oh-fuck.

"Don't blame Joe." Cliona ran over and threw herself on the ground. Somehow, she managed to still look delicate and graceful, despite the fact she was clad in just a sheet and groveling at his feet. "Please, don't punish him."

"No, it was my fault, Chief." Joe dropped to his knees and bowed, in the formal mode of supplication that the warriors used. "I was the one who disobeyed your direct order. So I'm willing to take my lashes in order to restore my honor."

Cam, Case and Ramiel all let out a curse at

those words. By warrior law, Joe had just admitted to his crime and accepted the punishment of a public flogging. What was worse was it would be forbidden to let a healer tend to him after so he would have to suffer through his pain for days.

Looking at the heartbroken couple and the agony on his nephew's face, Michael was slapped with guilt. He'd always known how Joe felt about Cliona and that there would be a day where they would no longer be able to fight their attraction to each other, but he'd still ordered Joe away from him. By keeping Joe apart from his love, he was no better than Moloch.

"Don't blame Joe," Cam interrupted. "I offer to be his stand in. I'll take his punishment for him."

"On what grounds?" Ramiel growled, his jaws clenching together.

"As a telepath and empath, I knew how desperate they were getting. I should have done something to stop it."

"Bullshit!" Joe snapped. "Nothing you could have done or said would have stopped me. Cliona is mine and I'm willing to do this if it means I can have her."

"No." Michael ran a hand through his hair in frustration.

"Then you leave me no choice," Joe announced in a broken voice. "After my punishment, I'll take Cliona and leave."

"You mean you would go rogue all over some female?" Ramiel asked incredulously.

"It will break my heart, but yes." Joe reached out and grabbed Cliona's hand. "She's everything to me and I won't be apart from her anymore, even if I have to give up everything in order to do that."

"If anyone should be flogged, it's me." Michael gave his nephew a gentle squeeze on the shoulder.

Joe's head snapped up, his blue eyes wide in shock. "You? What did you do?"

"Right after we cured Bear, I decided I was going to figure out a way for you and Cliona to be together. But in all the chaos of Rachael being kidnapped, I forgot and you suffered for it."

"So does that mean you're not going to hurt him?" Cliona asked in a trembling voice.

"Yes, in fact you two have my blessing."

"That's all fine and dandy," the ever-so-helpful Cam interjected. "But how are we going to handle it if the fairies have a tizzy over one of their females being mated to an angel?"

"Let me worry about that." When Cam looked like he was going to argue, Michael cut him off. "I mean that. I'll take care of it. Now let's get out of here and give these two some privacy."

Cam gave the numerous plants, flowers and fountains a disgusted once over. "I don't see how Joe can even get it up in here. It's like a frigging

fairytale book come to life."

"Out." He gave Cam a shove in the right direction. Cliona scrambled to her feet and gave Michael an awkward hug since she was keeping one hand on the sheet.

"Thank you," she said. "You have just made me the happiest female in the world."

"I wouldn't thank me yet." He jerked his thumb in the direction that Cam had just left. "Now it means that your part of his crazy family."

"I thank you, too, Chief," Joe added, still in the bowed position.

"There's nothing to thank me for. Now get up and take your mate back to bed. I'll take these two with me." He waved Ramiel and Case out of the room. As he was closing the door behind him, Michael's heart grew lighter as the sounds of Cliona's delighted giggles floated through the air. He turned the corner to find Ramiel and Case both cornering Cam. They looked pissed while Cam looked downright bored.

"What in the hell do you think you were doing back there?" Ramiel snarled, leaning forward so he was inches from the empath's face.

"Fine," Cam drawled out sarcastically. "I won't make fun of Cliona's decor anymore."

"That's not what I'm talking about and you know it." Ramiel grabbed a fistful of Cam's shirt and gave a good jerk. "You're not responsible for

everyone in this family. If we make mistakes, then let us take the heat for them."

"He's right, Cammie," Case added. "You're still our baby brother."

"Bear's the youngest in the family, in case you forgot." Cam tried to shrug off Ramiel's hold, but the archangel wasn't giving.

Michael leaned against the wall and crossed his arms over his chest, interested in how this was all going to play out. Frankly, in his opinion, this conversation was long overdue.

"You're only a year older than Bear." Ramiel gave Cam another jerk. "So I hate to break it to you, but that makes you our baby brother, too. That's what you'll always be to us, no matter how many titles are slapped on you. So when it comes to taking care of the family, you leave it up to me. I'm the oldest brother so it's my job."

"Back off," Cam added a demon-like snarl to his order, but it only seemed to make Ramiel angrier.

"No, you back off. When are you going to learn that everything bad that happens in this family is not your fault?"

"You guys have always stood by me," Cam returned roughly. "It's only right that I stand by you."

"That's just it." Ramiel let go of his shirt, but he didn't move back. "You haven't stood by us.

Instead, you try to stand in front of us to shield us from harm. It's not your place to do that."

Michael almost wanted to applaud at those words because they were so true. Cam was killing himself trying to help, protect and guide everyone around him. For a while now, he'd worried his nephew was going to push himself too hard and snap.

"What's wrong with me trying to protect all of you from hurting?" Cam shifted his gaze to the ground. It was a move he'd always made before when he'd still been a small, weak youth just out of his teen years. It brought home how true Ramiel's words were. For all his power and wisdom, deep down Cam was still too young to be facing everything he was taking on.

"It's my place to protect the family and when you step in and try to take control, you make me look weak." Ramiel moved back and shoved his hands in the front pockets of his jeans.

"I didn't mean to make you feel that way," Cam argued earnestly. "You know I would never think you're weak

"Fine, then prove it to me by letting me be in charge of all the guilt and whipping boy duties."

"Okay, I'll back off." Cam shifted his gaze back up, a knowing glint in his eyes. "Although we both know you just manipulated my feelings to hell and back to get me to say that."

"If that's what it takes, then so be it. Now go get some sleep. You look like hell."

"Okay, Mom," Cam shot back, but there was an easygoing grin on his face. "See, now this is why I would never volunteer to be your whipping boy. You're way too bossy."

"Really." Ramiel cocked a brow as he smiled back. "If I'm so annoying, then why don't we meet up in the gym tomorrow for some sparring?"

"Because you'll just use that as an excuse to kick my ass," Cam chuckled.

"Damn straight I will." Ramiel punched him in the arm and it wasn't exactly a love tap either. "See you there at eight."

"Okay, okay," Cam bitched as he walked away.

"I mean AM and not PM, too," Ramiel called to his retreating back.

Cam didn't even turn around as he flipped the bird.

"And he's supposed to save the world." Ramiel shook his head in disgust. "Are we sure the prophesy is right and it's not just some big joke?"

"I've got a question for you." Michael turned slightly so he could give the angel his full attention. "What did you do with that demon back at Moloch's?"

"I took care of him." Ramiel's gaze never wavered. "Just like you asked."

"So you killed him then?" Michael tensed,

waiting for Ramiel to lie and deny it.

"No, he still lives," Ramiel admitted, still not showing an ounce of remorse or guilt.

In fact, his eyes were hard with defiance, something that Michael had never seen in his loyal archangel. "Did I or did I not say I wanted everything destroyed?" Michael asked in a biting voice.

"I seem to recall you saying something to that nature."

Case let out a groan. "What in the hell, Ramiel? Are you trying to get your ass in the same sling that Joe's was just in?"

Michael and Ramiel both jerked their heads over to look at the twin. He'd been watching everything with such uncharacteristic silence and Michael had forgotten he was there. "Why isn't that demon dead?" Michael returned his glare to Ramiel.

"He had surrendered and was cooperating with us," Ramiel nearly yelled. "To just cut him down would have been—" He broke off and directed his furious glare to his boots.

"It would have been what?" Michael challenged, even though he knew the word Ramiel had left off was *dishonorable*. Rage surged through him and he balled his hands into fists so he didn't give into temptation and wrap them around the archangel's neck. Had it been any

other warrior but one of his nephews, he'd already be doing that.

"It would just be wrong." Ramiel finally lost his bluster, no doubt because he'd realized how he was flirting with treason.

"And since when do you decide what is wrong and right as far as the angel warriors are concerned?" Michael took a threatening step forward. Most other angels would have stepped back, but Ramiel stood his ground.

"I took sacred vows," Ramiel declared with a deep breath. "Part of that was I swore to always protect you and I meant it." He looked up and pinned Michael with a knowing look. "Even if that means I have to protect you from yourself."

Michael took a step back as if Ramiel's words had been a physical blow. "What's that supposed to mean?"

"I know you, Chief. You've always done what's right no matter who was involved. You were crazy with worry about Rachael and not thinking right, but if I'd killed that demon over your orders, you would have eventually regretted it."

"That's just it, I wouldn't have regretted it," Michael said bitterly. "After everything that's been done to our side, I'm sick of playing nice. I'm weary of having to go to families and tell them that one of their loved ones was killed in battle. I'm done seeing our kids cower in fear and I'm so

over not being able to protect mankind like we're supposed to because we're too busy hiding in a hole. If that makes me a hard bastard, then so be it. You're one of my top generals, Ramiel, and I need to know if you'll stand by me on this."

Ramiel ducked his head to the side and for a second Michael thought he'd pushed the archangel too far.

Finally, Ramiel gave a curt nod. "You know I will always stand by you, Chief. I'm sorry I disobeyed you, it won't happen again."

"Good, because there are going to be some things I'm going to ask of you that you're going to want to question. I can't have that though. If my top warriors show doubt, then it will destroy the morale of all the warriors."

"What exactly do you have planned?" Case asked.

"I plan on taking back control of this damn war. I'm done being the justice council's bitch."

Chapter Ten

After he was done dealing with his nephews, Michael went back to his quarters. Going to the bathroom, he drew a bath in the huge garden tub, making sure to dump in some of Rachael's favorite bubble bath. She was still in his tee shirt and covered in the grime of her ordeal and he knew she would want it off her. Once the tub was full, he turned off the water, went back to the bed and sat on the edge. "Wake up, sweetie," he urged as he gently shook Rachael on the hip.

"I don't want to," she mumbled grumpily. "I'm afraid that if I open my eyes, I'll find out everything was a dream and I'll be back in that horrible basement."

Michael grabbed her hand and brought it to his lips. "Does this feel like a dream?"

"No." She smiled, but still didn't crack her lids. She pulled her hand free and let her fingers drift down to his cock that was straining against his jeans. "This doesn't feel like a dream either."

"What are you doing?" he asked, even though it was quite obvious.

"Exploring." She smiled, making a dimple pop out on her cheek. "Teasing."

"Just think of the teasing and exploring you could do if you opened your eyes." He sucked in a breath as her fingers squeezed him through the heavy denim.

"I don't want to get up." She gave a pout that was so un-Rachael-like he smiled.

"Are you sure? I have a hot bubble bath, but if you don't want it, I could always call Cam. I would hate for it to go to waste and he so likes to play with his rubber duckies."

"Don't you dare!"

She jumped out of bed so quick he had to recover quickly so he didn't fall to the floor.

"That's my bath."

Rachael ran to the door, pausing at the door to look back over her shoulder.

The sexual promise in her eyes, made his cock throb in anticipation.

"Are you coming?" she asked in a sensually husky voice. "The tub is big enough for two."

He got up, taking off his shirt as he strode over to her. "You, me, wet, slippery and hot? That's something you don't have to ask me twice."

She gave a throaty giggle as she took off her shirt, too, leaving her only clad in a pair of black

panties.

A surge of pride went through him at the site of his mating mark, a black and gold dragon wrapped around her waist and ending at her navel. "Mine," he growled as he reached out to her. She went into his embrace, her curves fitting into his hard body perfectly.

"Yours," she confirmed in a breathy whisper as she tilted her head back.

Michael captured her lips in a tender kiss. Even though the male in him wanted to pin her against a wall and reclaim her, he held back. After everything she'd been through, she deserved some tenderness.

Letting her take the lead, he held still as her tiny tongue darted out to tease his lips before slipping in to stroke his mouth. She let out a happy sounding sigh as she pulled back.

"I missed that so much." She licked her bottom lip as if she were savoring his essence. Michael closed his eyes and enjoyed the feeling of her soft breasts pressing against him. Hooking his thumbs in the sides of her panties, he tugged them down. "I missed everything about you. Even the way you love to argue with me."

"You adore the way I never back down from you." She gave him a saucy grin as she shimmed the rest of the way out of her underwear and kicked them to the side. Turning around, she

stepped into the tub, giving him a spectacular view of her ass. "So are you coming in with me or not?" She turned and licked her lips again and that was enough to draw a groan of desire from him.

"In you, out of you. I don't care so long as I get to come."

She paused, letting out a soft giggle. "I never thought I would hear the day where you said such a dorky, dirty joke. I like it."

"Do you?" He started to undo his jeans.

"Yes." She sat down in the tub, letting out a moan of pleasure as the hot water hit her. "I think you may be hanging out with Cam and Bear too much though."

Michael took off the rest of his clothes and joined her in the tub. Putting her on his lap, he drew her back to his chest and just treasured having her back in his arms again. The bubbles just covered the crest of her pink nipples and her cheeks were flushed from the steam. Her ragged hair was mussed in such a way that she looked even sexier. Then he frowned when he noticed it had some debris still in it and there was dirt streaking her face. "Here, sit up and let me wash your hair." He grabbed the bottle. When she reached a hand up to self-consciously touch it, he regretted even mentioning it.

"Do I look that horrible?" she asked timidly.

The question hit him hard. Rachael had always been so sure of herself, never caring what others thought of her. To see her this open and raw was almost as bad as seeing her in those chains.

"You look beautiful." He reached up to tenderly run a hand through her riot of curls. "I just want to spoil my mate."

* * * *

Satisfied he was telling the truth, Rachael closed her eyes and tilted her head back. As he gently worked the shampoo into her hair, she almost purred in pleasure. His fingers were truly a gift from the fates. For years, she saw him in battle and on the training fields and witnessed how brutal and unrelenting he could be. To know those same hands were now treating her so tenderly made desire spike through her body because she knew this was the Michael that only she got to see.

After he'd rinsed her hair, he grabbed a washcloth and soaped it up. Even though she was quite capable of washing herself, she settled back and let him clean every inch of her, from her toes to the tips of her trembling fingers. "Michael, please," she moaned as she arched against him.

"What do you want?" he breathed heavily in her ear. She could feel his erection jerk against her butt and even though she knew it was wrong to

tease, she thrust against it.

"I want you to touch me more." Again, she rubbed against his cock, loving how he hissed in pleasure.

"Where?" he asked as he dropped the washcloth into the water.

She smiled to herself when she noticed how ragged his breathing was. She undulated her ass against him again, letting his cock ride the entire length of her crack. Grabbing his hands, she placed them on her breasts. "Here." Placing her hands on top of his, she squeezed, making her nipples perk to attention. "I love it when you play with my breasts."

"I love sucking, kissing and touching them, too." He ran his tongue up the column of her neck, ending with a love bite to her earlobe. "They're so beautiful." He jacked his hips up so his cock ground against her even harder.

Letting him take over control of the touching, she moved her arms up behind her head so her hands could link at the nape of his neck. That arched her body out even more, making it so his hands and erection could get at her even better. The ridge of his cock brushed at the opening of her rear and for a second, she tensed. He'd never touched her there before. A strange thrill of fear and pleasure shot through her.

But he pulled back and continued to caress her

breasts, his thumbs brushing over her nipples. Pleasure ripped through her and she shrieked, not even caring how loud she was.

"We need to get back into bed or I'm going to fuck you right here in this tub," Michael said savagely as he continued to pluck her nipples.

Rachael pulled away from him and went over to the edge of the tub. Gripping the side, she bent over and presented her backside to him. "I've always wanted to make love in a bath."

Michael looked up at her from under the wet strands of his dark blond hair. His eyes were dark with passion and had the glint a predator gets before it goes in for the kill. Letting out a sensual growl that had her womb twitching in anticipation, he got to his knees.

Droplets of water ran down the hard muscles and planes of his body. Here and there were the faintest of scars marking his tan flesh, showing how hard of a life he'd led.

"Since this was our first time since you got back, I wanted it to be gentle and tender." He ran the palm of his hand over her ass cheek. "But, now it seems my little angel wants it hard and dirty."

Without any warning, he brought his hand down on her ass, giving her a sharp slap. Rachael gasped in surprise as her pussy clenched with desire. He gave her another smack, the palm of his hand warming her flesh. The vibrations went all

the way to her clit, eliciting a shriek of passion from her.

"More, I need more," she panted as she brought her fingers down to caress her wet folds. "I've been very bad."

"Have you?" Michael rubbed her flesh before delivering another slap.

"Yes!" she screamed. "I've been so, so bad. Punish me, please." Tilting so far forward that her breasts were crushed against the cold tile, she gave him more of her backside. She jerked in surprise when she felt the velvet path of his tongue against her warm, tingling, thoroughly spanked flesh.

"If you only knew the things I would love to do to this ass."

He pulled and grabbed her hips before he thrust his cock inside her pussy. Rachael let out a gasp as his thickness filled her because part of her thought that he was going to take her anally.

"Not yet, but soon," he crooned, obviously touching her mind. "Soon, I will fuck that pretty little ass of yours. I just need to feel your pussy this time, the heat of it sucking me in and how it grabs me like a fist when you come. It's like heaven inside you, I could stay there forever."

Rachael couldn't respond so she let out little mewls of pleasure instead. Michael pounded into her fast and hard because that was how she

wanted it. She continued to finger her clit, her hand growing wet with her juices.

She could feel Michael tense up behind her as he started to come so she let go of what little control she still had. A scorching orgasm ripped through her, taking away her breath. Distantly, she heard him moan as he found his own release and then she felt his cock pulsating inside her as he shot off warm jets of semen. As she was coming down, he brushed his lips over the nape of her neck, making her shiver.

"I love you and it was all worth it to get you back."

Rachael almost asked him what he meant by that comment and just what he'd done in order to rescue her, but the haunted look in his eyes stopped her. So she did what she could. Getting out of the bath, she took him to bed and spent the next few hours showing him there was still good left in the world.

* * * *

Michael walked down Woodward Avenue, the main street that ran down the center of Detroit. All around him, humans ran screaming as they tried to evade the ball of flames that had engulfed the nearby buildings. Several bodies littered the sides of the street, some were burned while others were

battered and bloody.

The air was thick with the stench of fear, smoke and death. Looking closely into the orange glow of the flames, Michael was able to make out the shadows of demons as they did a demented form of the *Happy Dance*. Their delighted cackles carried over the sounds of sirens, crying and screams.

A human mother ran by, her baby clutched to her chest. Michael reached out to help her, but his hands went right through her as if he were a ghost. That's when he knew his gift of prophesy had just picked a hell of a time to come back.

But then it was a good thing because his dreams always warned him of things that had yet to happen. So there was still a chance to stop this from ever happening. Frantic, he looked around the chaos, hoping to see something that would help him. If he knew what had caused this, then he would be able to stop it.

He almost tripped over his answer. A piece of plane fuselage lay on the ground, the edges blackened. As he walked deeper into the carnage, more pieces of the plane were lying on the ground. Hovering a hand over a particularly large piece, Michael felt his gut do a 180. Moloch. His evil essence was all over this, coating everything like heavy oil.

Having seen enough, Michael closed his eyes and thrust himself out of the dream. Back in bed,

he woke up with a start. Rubbing his eyes, he was confused for a moment because the yelling continued. Then he realized that was because there was a lot of shouting going on outside his quarters.

Throwing on the nearest clothes he could find, he stumbled to the door and opened it. Everyone else seemed to already be awake and they were all running around, getting ready for battle. Michael's heart dropped for he had a sneaky suspicion what had cause the alarm.

"We need to get going," Cam shouted over the dim. "There's just been a plane crash."

"Let me guess," Michael said grimly. "It was in Detroit."

"Yes, and the human casualties are high. We just heard from the warrior team stationed there and they say it was caused by demons and things are just getting worse. We're getting ready to go help them." Cam shrugged on his gun holster. "Of course, it's going to take us hours to get there. God, I miss the days when we could still flash around whenever we wanted to. Damn the justice council for blanketing Earth, now we're going to have to drive."

"Round up everyone and we'll leave in fifteen," Michael ordered, his chest heavy with guilt. Before his dreams had always told him before something had happened not while. What good was it to

have prophetic dreams if they told you about the here and now?

"You okay?" Cam narrowed his eyes.

"Fine," Michael dismissed his concern with a curt nod, not wanting to share how one of his gifts was now basically useless. "Make sure you grab Raphael. We're going to need him to coordinate the healers."

"No go." Cam shook his head. "He's not here."

"Where is he?" Michael didn't even bother to hide his surprise. Raphael had always been, if anything, reliable and very predictable.

"How am I supposed to know?" Cam shrugged. "You want to keep him by your side, then maybe you need to invest in one of those toddler harnesses."

Michael ran his hand through his hair in frustration. Just what he didn't need right now. "Fine, we'll put Derel in charge of the healers for this mission.

"I'll go tell him to put on his big-boss panties." Cam ran off.

"What's going on?" Rachael asked, she came up behind him, taking everything in with wide eyes.

Michael quickly filled her in on everything, including the part where his dream had been too late. She gave him a nod and turned back to go back in the room. "Give me a few minutes and I'll be ready to go."

"I need you here." When she opened her mouth to argue, he put a finger on her lips. "I'm not saying that because I think you're weak, just the opposite. Cam and I are going to be gone and Raphael is MIA. I need someone in charge while we're gone and, as my mate, that falls to you."

"What if Moloch is still there?" She bit his finger so he would move it. "You'll need me so the Order of Four will be complete."

"I don't think he'll be around. Now that the fun's over, he'll be onto other projects. I just wish I could figure out what they are."

"Abdiel's had prophetic dreams before," she suggested. "Maybe we can figure out a way to give him a boost."

"That sounds good." Michael was impressed at how quick she thought on her feet. "Why don't you talk to Lehor and Nix? They may have some suggestions."

"Okay, I guess I can put up with Nix for that long." Rachael pulled a face, showing how much she loved the oracle. "Now go do your thing. I'll be waiting for you when you get back."

Michael stalked her, making Rachael backpedal until they were in their room again. "What will you be wearing for me when I get home?" he asked before he leaned down and nipped playfully at her bottom lip.

"Black panties and a smile." She tugged at the

waistband of his jeans playfully. Despite the fact the door was open and all chaos was breaking loose, his cock still snapped to attention.

"Michael, we're ready," Ramiel yelled from the hall.

Reluctantly, Michael stepped away from Rachael. "I'll be back as soon as I can."

"Hopefully next time I can go with you. It's been a while since I got to kick some ass and I'm suffering withdrawals."

"You can start with Raphael when he decides to drag himself back here." Michael was more than a bit worried about the healer. "It's not like him to just go missing like this."

"He'll be fine. He probably went on a great quest to find his personality." She wrinkled her nose with a mischievous grin.

"Michael." This time it was Cam yelling. "Are we doing this or not?"

Letting out a growl of frustration, Michael gave Rachael one last parting kiss before he went to join them.

Cam was pacing the hallway and there was a fine sheen of sweat on his brow.

"What's going on with you?" He looked over at Bear and saw the younger empath wasn't fairing much better.

"We're picking up all the bad vibes and stress coming from Detroit." Cam raised a shaky hand to

wipe at his forehead.

"It must be really bad there if it's traveling this far."

"I'll say," Bear gagged like he was going to throw up, but managed to hold it in.

"Maybe you two should stay here." Michael touched Cam's arm and was shocked at how much stress was rolling off his body. But that was all he felt. Even though he was psychic, he didn't have the added burden of being an empath. So while he may sense what others were suffering, he didn't have to feel it with them.

"We're going," Cam declared.

Bear nodded in agreement.

"You won't be any good to us if you start puking or pass out." If empaths got too overwhelmed with bad emotions, they would start vomiting and get worse. If left unattended, they could end up in a permanent catatonic state.

"We go." Cam's tone was hard, showing this wasn't up for a debate. "You're going to need all the empaths you can get to calm down the humans so they'll stop panicking."

"I don't know."

"I'm going." Cam stood straighter, his dark side showing through rather than his carefree smartass half. "Even though I can't live there anymore, Detroit is still my home. I won't stand by and watch my city burn to the ground."

Knowing there was no way to change his nephew's mind when he was this firm, Michael nodded. "Okay, let's go save it."

Chapter Eleven

As soon as Michael left, Rachael went back to their room to get dressed. She knew that sleep would be impossible and she was hungry. Besides, if she really was going to help him with the warriors, she wasn't going to be able to do it hiding out in their quarters.

She self-consciously fingered her butchered hair as she wished she didn't have to go out looking like this. Female angels rarely cut their hair and it was a great source of pride to them. Even though she knew it was stupid to be upset over something so vain and trivial, she couldn't help the bit of shame that crept up on her.

"I could cut that better for you," a timid voice ventured.

Gasping, Rachael tuned to see a small teen girl standing in the hallway. She smiled as she recognized it as Ella, the young fairy they had rescued back at Myrtle Beach. The teen nervously slipped her hands in the back pockets of her

ripped blue jeans as she waited for Rachael to answer.

"Do you cut your own hair?" Rachael asked. Ella had white blonde hair with black highlights and it was styled in a spiky way that almost made her look like a dandelion poof. One had to look really close to see her pointed ears in all the mess, which was probably the idea.

"Yeah, with Nissa and me on the run so much, we didn't exactly have the time to go into Super Cuts."

Rachael fingered her hair as she looked over at the teen's handy work. It's not like she could make it worse so what did she have to lose? "Okay." Rachael nodded. "Let's go and do it in the kitchen though so I can eat while you work. I'm starved."

"Cool!" Ella beamed. "I'll go get my scissors."

It was obvious the fairy was thrilled at her acceptance. Rachael was glad she'd agreed. Going downstairs, she slapped together a sandwich and was grabbing a soda when Ella came in.

"Don't worry," she assured. "I'll make you look great."

"Just make sure I don't end up looking like Bear or Dina and I'll be happy."

"I promise no funny colors." Ella giggled.

As she worked, the two fell into a comfortable conversation. Since the fairy had just come to live with angels, she had a ton of questions about them

and Rachael was more than happy to answer them for her.

The peace was shattered when Jordy and Dominic came barging in.

Dominic the only son of Michael's sister, Amiteil, looked a lot like his uncle with dark blond hair and brown eyes. Even though the youth had started to come out of his shell, he still walked around with his shoulders hunched like he expected someone to attack him at any moment, not a surprise since Amiteil had mistreated him horribly before he'd come to live with them.

Even though Jordy's childhood hadn't been much better, he still had a much more carefree swagger. Although he was technically half-elf, he still favored Raphael in looks. The only thing that made him stand out was his pointed ears.

Ella stopped, scissors in the air, as she gaped at the newcomers. They eyed her back with as much curiosity. Jordy was the first one to recover as he smiled and looked at Rachael.

"Is there anything good to eat? They made us do extra sparring at school today and I am famished." He dumped his backpack on the ground before he opened the fridge.

"They let you go to their school?" Ella asked in an awed voice.

"Yeah." Jordy pulled out a pizza box and

opened it. Taking out a slice, he ate it cold. "In fact it's kind of a requirement as far as my cousins are concerned."

"But you're different than they are." Ella seemed shocked that the angels would accept a halfling.

"I'm different?" Jordy asked Dominic with a teasing tone.

"Sure are." Dominic grabbed a slice and bit into it.

"How?" A look of mock astonishment went over the teen's face and Ella giggled.

"You're an idiot. The only one we have in class." Dominic flashed a grin that looked so like Michael's it was almost scary.

"Now that's just not true." Jordy put his hand to his chest as he let out an exaggerated gasp. "I can think of at least ten idiots. So that can't be the reason why I'm different."

"I guess you're right." Dominic scrunched up his face like he was thinking really hard. "It would have to be your Spock ears then."

Jordy put his hands to the sides of his head as his eyes grew wide. "Holy crap and a bagel, you're right. Where did these come from?"

Ella laughed out loud at that and Rachael could feel all the tension leave the girl. In the span of a minute, Jordy and Dominic had managed to put her at ease. Michael and Raphael would be so

proud.

"My name is Dominic." He stuck out his hand and shook with Ella. "This dork over here is Jordy."

"I'm always pleased to meet a new female." Jordy wagged his brows at her.

"Leave the fairy alone." Dominic sighed.

Rachael had to bite her bottom lip to keep from laughing at their byplay.

"Why can't I have a fairy? Joe has one?"

"You're already dating an angel and an elf. How many do you need?" Dominic threw his hands up in disgust.

"I think I want three females like that guy on TV. I can be a pigmy."

"That's polygamy, you dolt." Even as he was criticizing his friend, Dominic exchanged amused looks with Rachael.

"What's your school like?" Ella asked as she started to cut Rachael's hair again.

For the next several minutes, the boys filled her in on all the details of angel warrior school. She asked several questions and it was easy to see that the fairy was fascinated with the topic.

"Why don't you guys take her with you tomorrow?" Rachael suggested as Ella finished with the haircut.

"Are you serious?" Ella's eyes grew so huge they almost dominated her face. "What if they

don't want me there?"

"Since Aunt Rachael is our Lady, they have no choice if she orders them to take you," Dominic said dryly. "Plus, everyone is going to love you." He blushed furiously after he said the last bit. Ella didn't seem to notice, she was too busy bouncing on the balls of her feet.

"Cool, I'm going to go ask Nissa if it's okay." She ran from the room before Rachael had a chance to thank her for the haircut.

"How does it look?" she asked the boys as she nervously fingered the stands.

"Said with all respect and fear of Michael, you look hot." Jordy picked up the shiny steel toaster. "Look for yourself."

Preparing herself for the rest, Rachael gazed at her reflection. Her hair was a dark halo of curls that framed her face, making her eyes look so much larger. She fluffed it as she stared in stunned silence at her reflection.

"Honest, Aunt Rachael," Dominic added, his face pinched with worry. "It looks really good."

"It does," she agreed, her voice heavy with amazement. "I just may have to keep it this way." It would be so much easier when she went on patrol, too, no more having to pull it into a braid. Next time she saw Moloch, she may just have to wipe that smug expression from his face by thanking him. "Hey Jordy," she changed subjects

as she put the toaster down. "You wouldn't happen to know where Raphael is, would you?"

"Why would I know that?" Jordy gave a disbelieving bark of laughter. "He never talks to me unless it's to yell at me or give me an order."

"Be nice." She pointed a finger at the teen. "You have no idea how many times he's gone to the school and defended you after you've pulled one of your stunts."

"He only does it so I don't dishonor the family, not because he cares about me."

"I seem to recall Raphael getting into a fist fight with some elves when they tried to take you away."

"Yeah and he hasn't said two words to me since," Jordy spat out bitterly. "If it weren't for Gabi and Abdiel, I would feel frigging invisible."

Rachael's heart ached at his words and she vowed to herself that she would give Raphael a swift kick in the ass when, and if, he ever showed his face again.

"Hey, don't get all sad over me," Jordy said with a crooked grin. "I still have it a million times better than when I was a slave. You guys have been really great to me."

Rachael got up and went over to the youth. Wrapping her arms around his slender frame, she gave him a tight hug. "Gabi and Abdiel aren't the only ones who love you. We all do. Even when

you keep getting into messes."

Jordy blushed to the tips of his pointed ears as he awkwardly hugged her back. "Thank you," he muttered in a voice so low she wondered if she'd imagined it.

Pulling back, she gave him a pat on the arm. "Raphael cares about you, too. I can sense it in him. Just give it time. It's not easy for him to show affection."

His face registered shock and disbelief, but he did give a small nod. "Okay, I won't knock him off my speed-dial list yet."

Dina came rushing into the kitchen, ruining the moment. Bear's closest friend and fellow empath, the small angel dressed in the same dark clothing and styled his hair just as wild. Today, his dyed jet-black hair was highlighted with blue streaks and spiked high.

"We have an incident," he announced in a breathless voice. "I need you to come with me now." He paused and then, as if remembering her new status, added, "Please, my Lady."

"What's going on?" She put her plate in the sink and drained the rest of her soda.

"Follow me." He motioned with his hand. "We can talk while we walk."

Leaving the family quarters, they started to navigate the long hallways of the compound. They passed by several angels along the way. Some

bowed to her, while others openly gawked. Rachael chose to ignore them for now, too intent on finding out what had Dina so worked up. "Are you ever going to tell me what's going on?" She tugged on his arm to make him look at her.

"We're going to the control room. One of our cameras caught something and I thought you should be brought in on it."

Interesting, it almost sounded as if Dina was the only one that thought she should be alerted. Did that mean the others didn't trust her? Shaking off that worry, she decided to focus on getting more information. "What did you see?"

"A group of demons are at our gates and they're asking for asylum." Dina's lips pressed into a grim line.

"Why would they come here? They have to know that we have anti-demon shields surrounding the building. Plus, several archangels who would as soon look at a demon as kill them."

"This is different. It's the incubus Brad and his girls."

Rachael sucked in a breath. She hadn't forgotten how it was he and Lilith who had helped rescue her. "Did something happen?"

"Yes, Moloch found out they helped Michael. He attacked their home and killed several succubi before Brad was able to retreat. They came here because they have no place else to go. No other

demon will take them in for fear of Moloch."

Dina pushed open the door for her and they went into the cramped control room.

Several archangels were crowded around a monitor and she elbowed her way through. A grainy image showed a battered and bruised Brad. He had several succubi with him and they didn't look any better. In his arms was another female demon and she was so still Rachael feared she was beyond any healer's help. "Lower the shields and let them in," she ordered, her voice breathy with horror.

"You can't be serious?" A sandy-haired male argued. "We have women and children in here."

"Look at them." She gestured to the monitor. "Do they look like they could harm anyone? They can barely stand."

"They're still demons." The archangel didn't even try to hide his disgust. "I would expect the bleeding heart attitude from this empath, but not from you." He raked Dina with a disgusted look so there was no doubt what empath he was referring to.

"They're demons who were attacked because they helped me." Rachael stood as tall as her tiny body would allow. "The least we can do is treat their wounds since they got them because of us."

"It would be a huge mistake. We can't allow demons to walk around free in our home," the

archangel argued back.

Rachael wanted to scream in frustration. How could he be so dense? "Surprise, Einstein. A demon was able to breach our shields and take me from my own bedroom so they have been walking around here. Now quit being a jackass and call someone to lower the damn shields."

"I think you better do what our Lady asks," a hard voice said. Raphael walked into the room and threw a furious glare at the archangel. "When Rachael gives an order, you are to treat it as if Michael himself gave it. As his mate, she is his equal and you will treat her with all the respect she deserves."

"Yes, sir," the archangel bit out. "I'll go issue the order right now." He started to leave.

Raphael pulled him up short by giving a sharp whistle. "Did you forget something?" he asked in a cold voice.

"Yes," the archangel cleared his throat before he bowed to Rachael. "Please forgive me, Lady. I never should have questioned your authority."

The rest of the room looked at her expectantly and Rachael gave a start when she realized they were waiting for instructions. "Round up some healers and empaths to tend to the wounded. We can use the gym to hold them for now. We're going to need some cots so make sure you grab them from the storage room. Alert the teachers so

they can prepare the empath children for the demon presence. It wouldn't be good to have any kids overload." She was shocked to her core when they all scrambled to follow her direction, leaving only her, Raphael and Dina in the room.

"If it's all right with you, I would like permission to let some of the older teens to assist the healers." Raphael tilted his head respectfully. "It would be good for them to get some hands-on experience with demon anatomy in a controlled atmosphere."

"I'll bet Jordy would just love to get his hands on a succubus," Dina muttered under his breath.

"He does want to be a pigmy," Rachael sighed as she ignored the confused look from the males.

"New haircut?" Raphael asked.

"Yes." She subconsciously touched her head.

"It looks cute."

Rachael and Dina exchanged astonished expressions as the empath mouthed, *Cute?* The healer had never said more than two words at a time to her before today and now he was complimenting her? She never dreamed that Raphael even noticed she had hair let alone to comment that it was—cute. "Thank you." She smiled, even though the comment had come from left field, it did make her feel good.

"Michael was looking for you," Dina said as he continued to eye Raphael up like he'd suddenly

sprouted demon horns.

"I had something to do," Raphael replied evasively. "Is it about the thing in Detroit? I didn't hear about it until I got home."

"How could you miss it?" Dina shook his head in disbelief. "It's got to be all over the radio and stuff."

Raphael just gave a bored shrug. "I'm sure Michael and Cam have it covered. Right?"

"Well, yeah," Dina was beginning to sound more than a little pissed. "They put Derel in charge of the healers going to the scene."

"Where exactly were you?" Rachael asked, her own exasperation growing. She didn't know whether to yell at the angel or give him a swift kick in the ass.

Raphael didn't say anything, but the way he lowered his head and blushed spoke volumes. She felt as if she'd just jumped into an episode of *The Twilight Zone*. First, he used the word *cute* and now he was blushing. This was so unlike the normally uptight, stuffy angel. Next, he would be dying his hair like Bear and Dina and using words like *sweet* and *fricking*.

"We should probably get out there," Dina finally ventured, breaking the awkward silence. "They should have the shields down by now."

"You coming" she asked Raphael. "Or do you have something else you have to do?"

"Let's get this over with." Raphael heaved a put-upon sigh as he left the room. Rachael and Dina exchanged another look before they followed.

"He's upset about something," Dina whispered to her as they made their way to the outer doors. "I can feel it coming off him."

"Do you think it's Rolan or the fact that he has more cousins out there?" she whispered back.

"How the hell should I know? I just know what they're feeling, not why. You tell me, you're the telepath."

"I never could read Raphael," she admitted. What she wouldn't give to be able to right now.

"Bear told me the same thing once. He said Raphael was a brick wall inside and out." Dina frowned, his own concern very evident in his gray eyes. "I don't like the way he's acting. I've seen it before and it's always before an angel's gone rogue."

"I'm not going rogue so stop whispering about me," Raphael bitched.

Now it was Rachael and Dina who blushed because they got caught talking about him. Thankfully, they were saved from having to make awkward apologies because they had reached the doors.

Raphael pulled out his long sword.

"It's just Brad," Rachael protested as she glared

at the weapon.

"No, it's a group of demons," Raphael corrected. "Even though I'm pretty sure they're friendly, I'm not taking any chances until we know for sure. Michael would have my ass if I let anything happen to you."

"Dude," Dina drawled. "He's already going to have your ass because of your disappearing act."

"Probably." Raphael pushed open the doors. "But no sense making things worse by not protecting his mate. Now get your weapons out and be ready."

Dina grumbled but he obeyed. Flicking his hands, he released his newest weapons, a pair of daggers strapped to his wrists. The empath sure did like his toys. But then again, given everything he'd been through, Rachael couldn't blame him.

Rachael kept her hands free of weapons, wanting to show no aggression when she faced Brad and his females. Somehow, it didn't seem right to roll out the welcome mat and aim a gun at the same time. It as hard though, her fingers twitched with the need to hold something. While she didn't think Brad would ever harm them, Raphael did have a point when he said they were still demons.

Brad was on his knees, the female still clutched to his chest. As they got closer, Rachael was able to see it was his sister, Ramiakle. The grief coming

from the incubus was heavy as his shoulders shook in silent sobs. The female demon's eyes were open and glassy, no life left in them.

"Brad? Ramiakle?" A male healer asked in a choked voice.

"Shit," Dina muttered. "That's their brother, Daniel. He's the only one who didn't turn demon."

"Ramiakle," Daniel sobbed as he grabbed a fistful of his own sandy brown hair. "No. Oh God, no! Don't be dead. Please, please, please."

Rachael felt tears stinging her eyes at the wrenching scene because she knew there wasn't enough begging in the world to bring the succubus back to life.

Dina moved forward to offer some comfort, but the healer dodged away.

"She can't be dead." Running across the grass, he sank down on his knees. Reaching shaking hands out, he placed them on his sister's bloody body. "I...I...I can fix this. I'll heal her and then we can go back to the way things were before you guys left. I can make this better."

Rachael let out a sob as she stepped forward to help, but Raphael beat her to it. Kneeling by the hysterical healer, he put a comforting hand on his shoulder. "It's too late for her," he said in soothing tones. "Let's get her inside so we can prepare her for burial. I promise she'll have all the honor of an

angel warrior."

"It wasn't her fault. None of it was." Daniel looked down at his bloody hands and balled them into fists. "She never wanted to be who she was, but I still shunned her. Now she'll never know I didn't mean it."

"She knew, Daniel," Brad choked as he reached a hand out to grab his brother by the back of the neck. Bringing him in an awkward embrace, they cried together. "She always knew you still loved her."

Chapter Twelve

It was two days before Michael was able to stabilize things in Detroit enough so he could go home. The first place he went was the gym that was now serving as a demon infirmary. Not only did he know that was Rachael would be, but he had a promise to keep.

As soon as he walked through the door, she came running up to him, a huge smile on her face. "I was just coming to find you." She threw her arms around his waist and embraced him. "I heard you were back."

"I see you were busy while I was gone." He looked around at the half dozen cots. Although the demons looked healed, they were still hanging around and it didn't look as if Rachael was going to kick them out any time soon.

"Are you upset about me giving them sanctuary?" Even though the question could be seen as submissive, the defiant glint in her eyes said otherwise. She was willing to stand up for the

demons if necessary.

"Of course not." He gave her a hard kiss despite the fact they had an audience. "It was the right decision and it took a lot of guts to stand by it. I owe Brad more than I can every repay and I'm proud of you."

Brad was on the furthest cot. His angel brother had his wrist pressed to the demon's lips so he could feed. Incubi always required a lot of blood whenever they were injured. It was somewhat of a surprise to see Daniel there since last Michael had heard the healer had disowned his demon sister and brother, but then grief has a way of bringing individuals together.

"Give us a minute," Brad muttered to his brother as Michael came to stand in front of them.

"No." Daniel grabbed a rag and held it to his bleeding wrist. "We stand together from now on. Whatever my Chief has to say, he can say in front of me."

Oh, not good, Rachael sent telepathically. I knew Daniel was talking to Brad again, but I hadn't realized it'd gone this far.

I agree, Michael responded in kind. With the way he's talking, he plans on leaving when Brad does. "I wanted to express my condolences about your sister," he said aloud.

"Are you really sorry?" Brad gave an arrogant tilt of his head. "Or are you glad that you have one

less demon whore to worry about?"

It wasn't lost on Michael that Daniel gave a slight nod, like he agreed with the demon's question. Rachael gave a gasp of shock, but didn't say anything, letting him take the lead.

"I regret everything that happened to Ramiakle and I mean *everything*. If I had known at the time she had been raped who had committed the act, nothing would have stopped me from avenging her. Nothing. Least of all who those bastards where related to." He caught Raziel entering into the gym and Michael waved him over. A tall archangel with brown hair and eyes, his attitude was almost as big as his build. Since he was also the brother to Tiffany, he was linked to Michael by the union of families. That didn't seem to soften the angel up to his Chief though.

"You wanted to see me?" Even though he saluted, there was no mistaking the defiant aura over him.

"Yes." Michael worked hard to keep the irritation out of his voice, for Bear's sake. For some reason, the empath actually liked the jackass. "I have a mission and I think it would be perfect for you."

"Please tell me it's not protecting another one of your nephews? Last time I ended up in a human jail and had to be sprung out by Lehor." His gaze shifted over to Brad and locked on.

"No, I need to help me with a promise I made."

"Really, what is that? Did you vow to rescue a kitten from a tree or save some puppies from a burning building?" Even though the question was beyond disrespectful, Raziel kept his tone very complacent.

"God, Tiffany said you were a jackass, but I had no clue how nice she was being to you," Rachael snapped as she flexed her fingers.

Knowing she was two steps from zapping the prick, Michael reached out and linked his fingers with hers, just like they were any other couple holding hands.

"Please, just a little jolt?" she pleaded in a low voice.

"No, I need him to cooperate." Michael gave her another warning squeeze. "He can't do that if he's flat on his back, crying like a girl."

Daniel snorted in laughter, earning a glare from Raziel.

"Am I going to get to know what my next mission is?" Raziel acted as if the whole thing was just one big bore.

"Have you heard about what happened to Brad's sister?" Michael asked.

"Yes." Raziel's gaze grew softer. "Bear told me that she was violated and that's why she turned demon."

"Then you know why I want those bastards

dead in the worst way," Brad growled.

"Of course I do. If someone did that to my sister, then I wouldn't rest until they paid for it. But what does your vengeance have to do with me?"

"I promised him that if I ever came across the three justice angels responsible, I would hand them over to him." Michael tried hard to ignore Rachael's gasp of surprise.

Raziel stared at him with what just might have been admiration. "So you're finally willing to get your hands dirty in order to win this war. I'm impressed."

"If you hate Michael and us warriors so much, then why do you stick around?" Rachael bit out between clenched teeth.

"Two reasons." Raziel ticked off on his fingers. "Number one, it would break Tif's heart if I went rogue, and number two, I made the same archangel vows you did and I happen to take them very seriously."

"Do you have to be such an ass while you're doing it?" Rachael was now showing her fiery side and even though it really wasn't the time, it was turning Michael on.

"I like her." Raziel grinned at Michael. "She doesn't take shit from anyone. It's going to be fun watching her slap your ass when you step out of line."

"Unfortunately, you're going to have to miss that show." Michael pinched the bridge of his nose with his thumb and forefinger. "I want you to go with Brad and help him hunt down the justice angels. You'll be able to go places he can't, plus you're the best tracker I have."

"So not only have you made a deal to hand angels over to a demon, but you're going to actively help said demon hunt them down? Wow, this just keeps getting more and more interesting."

"Does that mean you'll do it?"

Raziel's gaze flicked back over at Brad and a curious expression came over the angel's face. "I'm in. When do we leave?"

"My girls should be ready in a couple of days." Brad nodded respectively to Michael. "That is if you don't mind us staying that long."

"Is Lilith being good?" Michael asked. That succubus had been trouble more than once in the past.

"Look for yourself." Brad pointed to a nearby cot. The female demon was sitting with Dina and his mate, Megan, and the trio were playing cards. While they were sitting way too close to be just friends and Lilith had her hand on the empath's thigh, there was nothing that would indicate she was dangerous. When Lilith moved her hand even higher up on Dina's leg, Michael shot a look of annoyance at Brad.

"Hey." Brad threw his hands up defensively. "If a mated angel couple want a little extra spice from time to time, who am I do deny them? Besides, Lil is really fond of them so she'll be on her best behavior while they're around."

Michael shook his head. He'd heard Dina liked to watch and be watched, but he'd never thought the empath was into group play. It was obvious Megan was into, too. The way she smiled as she brushed Lilith's hair back was too intimate to be denied.

"Take as much time as you need. Just let Lilith know we'll be watching her." Michael looked over at Daniel. "How are you doing? Do you need to some down time?"

"I'm fine," the healer replied in clipped tones.

"I don't want to lose you because of this."

"Then give me your permission to go with Brad and Raziel." Anger made the healer look much older than he really was. "I have every right to avenge my sister's name."

"If I let you go, you'll swear to come back to me?"

Are you sure about this? Rachael asked, using the telepathic link so their conversation was private.

I don't think I have a choice. If I don't, then Daniel will go rogue or worse demon. He's so full of hate right now, he could go either way. Michael sent back.

Raphael is going to be pissed when he hears you let

one of his healers take off. She warned.

Raphael will get over it. He always does.

"I'll come back." Daniel dropped to one knee and formally bowed. "I swear it to you on my honor as an angel warrior. Just please let me do this. I need it."

"Then go. I'll settle things with Raphael. Now get your butt up and go start packing."

"Thanks, Chief." Although Daniel smiled, his eyes still remained bleak. The loss of his sister was still too fresh. Having lost loved ones in the past that was something Michael understood all too well.

Still holding Rachael's hand, he led her out of the gym and in the direction of his office. As they navigated the busy hall, several angels stopped to bow and Michael noticed with pride that they were now bowing to Rachael as well. "I like your hair, by the way." He reached over to gently tug on a curl. "It suites you."

"Raphael said it was cute," she supplied with a giggle.

Michael nearly tripped at her words. "He actually said that?"

"Yes, you can ask Dina, he was there."

"Interesting." Michael didn't know whether to be worried or laugh. "Cam said Raphael was cracking a bit around the edges, but I thought he was exaggerating."

"Why? Because he complimented me?"

"You have to admit, that is totally unlike him." Michael pulled her closer so he could put his arm over her shoulder. "Plus, that disappearing act he pulled. Do I even want to know what he was up to?"

"I'm thinking it's the same thing that Megan and Dina have been up." She blushed. "I sensed a succubus presence on him when he came back."

Now that one was shocking. The healer had never been one to go out and play. Sure, he had to get his needs taken care of somehow all these centuries, but he'd never made that *how* known to anyone. Michael used his free hand to scrub it over his face as the frustration built. Ever since that day when he'd taken the young, scared and abused angel out of the fairy camp, Michael had known the time would come when Raphael would have to face everything that had happened to him. Why did it have to be now when everything else was going into the crapper?

Going into his office, he steeled himself to face the mess that was always on his desk. Instead, he was met with neat piles and what look like an actual organized system. Rachael gave him a sheepish look.

"I kind of straightened up." She bit her bottom lip. "I hope you don't mind, I just couldn't stand looking at the chaos any longer."

"I don't mind at all. Thank you." He sat down and pulled another chair over to her.

"I might have taken care of a few issues here and there, too."

Even though she was acting all demure, Michael wasn't fooled for a minute. Rachael had always been a take charge kind of female. "What exactly did you do?" He couldn't help but smile at her. She gave a smug grin back before she spent the next five minutes getting him up to date. Even though he'd only been gone a couple of days, she managed to get a week's worth of stuff done in that time. Proud and amazed, he leaned back in his chair, relieved that for once that he wasn't swamped. "Is there anything else I should know about?" he asked as he tugged on her hand. She knew what he wanted without him having to ask. Getting up from her seat, she shifted so she was in his lap.

"I enrolled Ella in the angel warrior school." She tucked her head into his chest and started to idly trace the length of his fingers.

"You signed a fairy up to train to be a warrior?" Life was never going to be boring with Rachael around. He loved the way she flouted the rules.

"Why not? We already have a half-breed elf there." She snuggled deeper into him, her rump bumping nicely into his cock.

"What group is she studying with?" They were

starting to get some surprised looks from the few archangels manning the other desks in his office, but Michael didn't give a damn.

"I thought the healers would be best for her since you once told me fairies tend to lean more toward the art of healing."

"Is she getting along okay with the other teens?" After all the help Nissa had given in making Bear well, the last thing Michael wanted was for her young charge to be mistreated.

"She's hanging out with Dominic and Jordy. They've really taken her under their wing."

"Great," Michael groaned. "How long was it before Jordy hit on her?"

"About five minutes."

They settled into a comfortable silence and Michael just allowed himself to enjoy the sensation of having her in his arms and the way her small, curvy, yet muscular body fit so well into him. As the other angels got used to their Chief showing PDA, they got back to work and yet he still held her in his arms. After almost losing her, he didn't ever want to let go.

But he would have to let her go. Moloch was growing stronger and stronger and now he was attacking humans. That meant the Order of Four was going to have to face him soon. And since Rachael was a member of the Order and he wasn't, that meant she would have to face it alone.

Bitter resentment filled him. At one time, he had been a member. Centuries ago, there had been another Order, although they were to guide mankind rather than protect them since it had been before the fall of Lucifer and there had been no demons.

It was him, his sister, Lehor, and Rachael's parents, Eurynome and Astaroth. But when Satan had revolted, he had persuaded Eurynome and Astaroth to join him, splitting up the Original Order. So now he would be in this battle only as a soldier while the love of his life had to face the most evil demon ever created.

"I'll be all right," Rachael said softly as she tilted her head back so she could gaze up at him.

"Was I projecting my thoughts that loudly?" he asked with a wry grin.

"No, but I could feel you tense up and I knew why. I'm your mate, it's my job to know things like that."

"I'm so afraid of losing you," he admitted as he used a finger to trace her lips.

"We're stronger this time and we'll defeat Moloch."

Michael swallowed hard as he thought about the upcoming battle. It was just more than her going in. Cam wasn't just his nephew, he was the son he'd never had. Then there was Abdiel, one of his only true friends. Plus, Appolion who was

mated to Ana. Michael loved his niece and he knew it would devastate her to lose the angel.

Hugging Rachael tighter to his chest, Michael searched his mind for something that might give them an upper hand because failure was not an option.

With all the bleak thoughts it was only fitting when Raphael came in and announced, "We just heard from the team in Flint. An auto factory there exploded and there are human casualties."

Chapter Thirteen

Michael's heart pounded at the news. Another attack and he had no doubt Moloch was behind it. He let out a vicious curse under his breath. Things were getting worse, fast.

"He's attacking places that the members of the Order used to live or work in," Rachael said as she stood and started to pace. "He's trying to hit us where it hurts and drag down our morale."

Nodding, Michael saw the wisdom in her theory. Cam had been devastated when Detroit had been on fire. Appolion had a special link to Flint, too, since he'd once worked as a paramedic there before he'd come to live with the warriors. "I think you're right." Michael nodded. "He's probably trying to draw you out so he can fight you on his terms."

"Well that means we'll have to be sneakier than him." She pounded her fist into her palm. "We can use your gift of prophesy to tell us where his new lair is. Then we can attack him when he least

expects it. I would love to show him how it feels to have someone invade his home when he's most vulnerable."

"But I've lost control of that gift. Remember?"

"Yes, and I also remembered to talk to Lehor while you were gone and I think we just may have come up with something. It's crazy, but it just may work." She stopped pacing and crossed her arms over her chest.

"Okay, don't keep me in suspense."

"We're going to use the combined powers of the Order to give your next dream a little boost. Kind of like a jumpstart to nudge you in the right direction. Lehor and I were thinking that your gift has been getting weaker because Moloch's presence is somehow draining it."

"More likely he's blocking it," Raphael mused from the chair he'd taken. "The demon wants you flying blind so he can attack the humans at will."

"And maybe when the plane crashed, he got so excited in his success that he slipped and something came through," Michael said as everything suddenly clicked into place. "So I finally did see it, but it was too late."

"Exactly." Rachael tucked one of her short curls behind her ear. "So now that we know what he's doing we can start to fight back."

"Sounds like a plan to me." Raphael stood. "I'm going to Flint, you stay and get and give this a try,

Chief."

"You sure you're up for it?" Given Raphael's behavior lately, Michael couldn't help but be dubious.

"Sure I'm sure. I'll take some of your nephews with me for muscle and annoying company so I don't miss you too much."

It took Michael a few seconds to realize the healer was teasing. "You're making jokes? Now I'm really worried." When Raphael just blinked stupidly, Michael gave an aggravated grunt. "Fine, grab Nathaniel and Mael, then check out the situation in Flint." As the healer turned, Michael drew him short with a sharp whistle. "When you get back, we'll discuss your little AWOL act."

"Looking forward to it." Raphael's face was stone mask so it was hard to discern if he was being a smartass or not.

"Have you tried talking to Jordy? And I don't mean about the local weather either." Michael knew he was poking a mad dog with a stick, but the hell with it. He needed Raphael's head in the game, not up his ass.

"There's nothing to talk about," Raphael replied curtly. "Either he's been lying to me all this time or he doesn't know anything."

"Maybe he's too scared to come to you," Rachael put in tartly, her arms crossed over her

chest.

Michael knew that pose well. Raphael was about to get his ass royally handed to him.

"This is really isn't either one of your business."

Michael let out a groan as soon as Raphael uttered that unfortunate sentence. *Stupid! Stupid! Stupid! But it should be fun to watch Rachael kick his ass for it.* All the other archangels must have realized what was about to go down because they all scattered so fast you would have thought the office was on fire.

"Like it or not, we consider you and Jordy family." Rachael went up the healer and pointed a finger in his chest. "And I won't sit by while you continue to ignore him. It kills me to see him hurting because you keep rejecting him."

"What are you talking about? The instant I found out who he was I took him in."

"You took him in, but you didn't take care of him." Rachael continued to thump his chest. "Those are two different things. But you wouldn't know that because you're too busy shutting everyone out of your life. You live in this little bubble that you built just so you don't have to feel anything. Newsflash, buddy, life is about hurt, it's also about love. Something you might discover if you ever took the chance to reach out to someone."

"Are you done, Lady?" Raphael asked, all

formality and coldness.

Michael had to resist the urge to go over and slug the healer in the hopes of knocking some sense into his thick skull. Everything Rachael had said was true. Michael was pissed, both at himself for not saying those very words years ago and at Raphael for refusing to listen to them now.

"Go." She waved her hands in disgust. "Help the humans in Flint, but when you get back, you and I are going another round. I'm not finished with you yet."

"As you wish." Raphael bowed, then left the room, his posture rod stiff.

"Argh!" Rachael shook her fist at the door. "He's so arrogant and stubborn."

"He's almost always been that way." Michael could understand her frustration though because he was sharing it. He didn't know what was worse, the new Raphael who was flighty or the old one who was an ice chip.

"Gabi told me she found him pounding the wall the other night. It was so bad that he wounded himself and bled."

"Cam told me the same thing."

"Raphael is not going to get away with this." She spun and now it was Michael who was on the receiving end of her finger.

"I'm sure he did more damage to himself than the wall."

"Not that, you dork." She gave him a playful swat on the chest. "I mean he's not going to get away with ignoring this whole Jordy issue."

"Why don't I like that look you're giving?" he groaned. "What crazy *Lucy* plan to you have cooked up now?"

"Nothing big." She wrinkled her nose, mischievously. "I'm just going to have my own little chat with Jordy."

They found Jordy in the living room, playing Wii with Dominic and Ella. As soon as the trio saw him, the smiles fled their faces as fast as if someone had smacked them. Michael had to work hard to hide his displeasure at their reactions. It wasn't as if he got that response every day from countless followers, it just bothered him that they reacted that way since they were supposed to be family.

Okay, Ella wasn't exactly family, but she still lived in the same quarters as the rest of them so she should be used to his presence by now damn it. What hurt the most was Dominic.

Unlike Raphael, Michael had been really trying hard to reach out to his family. "Dominic, why don't you show Ella where the café is?" Michael suggested. "We need to talk to Jordy for a minute."

His young nephew looked over at Jordy with

an expression that read, *What did you do now?*

Jordy's expression seemed to say, *Got me.*

"Is everything okay?" Dominic asked the adults. The fact that he was willing to challenge anyone in authority showed how protective he was of his friend.

"Of course it is." Rachael gave him a reassuring smile. "Why don't you pick me up something while you're there?"

Dominic's eyes got all sappy and goofy as he gazed at her. It was clear he adored Rachael. "Do you want me to get you one of those energy drinks you like so much?"

Good God! He knew what she liked to drink? Next he was going to be coloring her pictures to put on the fridge.

"That would be great." The motherly love she had for the kid evident in the way her gaze softened.

Dominic hopped to his feet and motioned Ella to follow. Just as he reached the door, he pulled up short. "Sorry, Uncle Mike, I almost forgot to ask. Do you want some coffee?"

Well that was a step in the right direction. Michael had a bad rap for being addicted to the stuff and obviously that info had stuck with Dominic. "That would be great, thanks."

"You take it black, right? I think I remember that's what you have at dinner."

"That's exactly how I take it," Michael responded, amazed at how something as simple as Dominic remembering that little fact felt so good. It was stupid really, but it was still nice to know the kid cared at least a little.

"I need to talk to you," Rachael said gently as she sat down on the couch next to the terrified Jordy.

"Whatever it is, I didn't do it." The teen paused for a moment.

Michael could almost see the hamster rolling its wheel as he thought hard.

"At least I don't think I did it," Jordy amended his earlier statement. He nervously fidgeted with the game controller he still had in his hands.

"You're not in trouble," Rachael assured him as she wrenched the device from his fingers and sat it on the coffee table. "We just have a few questions."

"About what?" His bright green eyes looked over at Michael, then back at her again.

Michael could sense the nerves coming off the kid. "I've never had a chance to ask you about your captivity." Michael took the chair opposite Jordy. "All that I know is what I heard secondhand from Gabi and Raphael." What he really wanted was to hear it from Jordy's lips himself because as soon as he talked, Michael would be able to sense if the kid was lying or not.

"There's not much to tell." Jordy shifted his gaze down to his lap. "The demons captured my dad and me, sold us and I became a slave."

So far there wasn't any dishonesty coming from the young angel. Michael pressed on. "What happened to your father after you were taken?"

"I don't know for sure. They separated us because archangels were sold off to the gladiator ring right away. I was younger so I was put into the kitchens."

More truth, although there was a spike in his anxiety level. "Raphael said your mother was dead." Michael waited for the teen to nod before he went on. "Jordy, do you have any other family?"

"No, it was just my dad and me."

This time Michael caught the first whiff of something. Not a lie exactly, but like the kid was real unsure of something. Then it hit Michael like a slug in the gut. "Go get Gabi, now" he ordered Rachael in a harsh voice. If what he thought was true, then Jordy was going to need her big time. His mate nodded, her eyes wide, as she ran to do what he asked. Judging by her oh-shit expression, she'd come to the same conclusion he had.

"What's with all the questions?" Jordy let out a choking sound that might have been an attempt of a chuckle. "You guys planning on doing a Biography special on me?"

Michael paused a few moments for Rachael and Gabi to come back down. Rachael must have filled the female healer in some because she didn't say a word as she sat down next to her cousin. Wrapping one arm around his thin shoulders, she held him in tight protective grip.

Like you could protect someone from their past. Michael had learned the hard way there was no way you could do that. Better just to be there for them while they rode out the pain. "How old were you when you were made a slave?" Michael asked, breaking the tense silence. Jordy swallowed hard and even before he spoke, Michael could feel the lie coming.

"It was just a few years ago."

"You want to try that again, son?" Michael knew his voice was hard, but he had to show Jordy he meant business.

"Chief, is this really necessary?" Gabi objected in a stained tone. Her fingers were clenching Jordy's shoulder so tight her knuckles were white.

Michael tried to probe her mind, to see if she was hiding anything, but she slammed a mental brick off and blocked him cold. "I'm afraid it's very necessary," he said as he leaned forward so he could pin her with a glare. "You see, I was trying to figure out why Jordy would hide from me that he had a sister and two brothers. Then it came to me. Jordy didn't even know he had

siblings because he was so young when he was taken that he doesn't have any memories from before he was a slave."

Gabi and Jordy both stared at him, their jaws slack with shock. The surprise coming from the kid was all real, too, not even a hint of deception.

"What I don't get is why you would lie about how long you were a slave," Rachael remarked. "You went on and on about how your father taught you how to fight with a sword and everything."

"I knew I was already a freak because of being half-elf," Jordy replied in a dull voice. "It just made me feel a little bit more like everyone else if I acted like at least my angel dad raise me. I didn't want everyone to know that I'd been a freaking slave since before I could walk. If my dad were to come up to me on the street, I wouldn't even recognize him." Jordy heaved into a sob, but he ground his teeth together and held back the water works.

"You're good with the sword. One of the best I've ever seen. So someone had to teach you."

"There was an archangel gladiator who would sneak me out of the kitchen and give me lessons." Jordy gave a faint smile. "His name was Jeremiah and he was really nice to me. He wanted me to be able to defend myself. He said that one day I would be free and that I should come to you and

be a warrior. Jeremiah believed in me when nobody else gave a crap about my sorry ass."

"What happened to him?" Rachael looked on the verge of tears.

"He was killed in the gladiator ring. By then I had been moved from the kitchens to the infirmary. I saw them bring in his body, there was blood and stuff all over the place." He raised a haunted gaze back up at Michael. "So is it true? Are there really others out there like me?"

"Yes, Cam stumbled across them while he was in California. He says it was two males and one female. Although he didn't get close enough to talk to them, he was able to scan them. There's no doubt they're related to you."

"Do you think they know about me? I mean how could they not and why didn't they come to get me out of there?"

"They probably didn't know where you were, sweetie." Gabi had fat tears running down her cheeks as she tried to comfort him. "I'm sure they didn't just abandon you."

Jordy nodded, but the doubt was stamped all over his face. He extracted himself from Gabi's iron grip and got to his feet. His shoulders were stooped like he had the weight of the world on them. "I gotta go." He jerked his head in the direction of his sleeping quarters. "Homework and crap." He rabbited so fast, his Converse

almost left streak marks on the carpet.

Gabi wrapped her arms around her stomach and continued to cry, her dark hair shielding her face.

"Why didn't you tell me," Michael asked her. She brushed her hair out of the way and raised her tear-stained face to look at him.

"I knew that Jordy wanted to keep it to himself so I thought I could give him at least that."

"You should have come to me as soon as he told you." While he wasn't mad at her, he wished she'd trusted him with this tidbit.

"That's just it, he never told me, at least not on purpose. You know how some talk in their sleep while they're having dreams?" She let out a hard sob.

"Yes." Michael hated seeing his long time friend hurting this much.

"I found out that they talk when they're having nightmares, too." She pressed a shaking hand to her mouth. "If I live another thousand years, I'll never be able to forget some of the horrible things he muttered. Oh God, Michael, he was just a baby and he was alone with nobody to protect him."

Rachael threw her arms around Gabi as she dissolved into a fit of heart wrenching sobs.

Chapter Fourteen

“**D**oes anyone else feel like an idiot?” Cam asked as he opened his eyes.

Appolion and Abdiel both raised their hands.

Rachael glared at the three of them, making sure to project her irritation so they would know they were treading on thin ice. They were all in her bedroom and surrounding the bed Michael was lying down on it. While the plan was for him to go to sleep so they could help guide him into a prophetic dream, things weren't quite working that way. Not only were the trio of morons not cooperating, but Michael was still wide awake. “Close your eyes and go to sleep,” she hissed at him.

“I'm trying, but it's not easy with you all hovering over me.” He grinned up at her, looking suddenly boyish. “Of course things might be more interesting if you were in a black negligee.”

Both Appolion and Abdiel let out loud whoa-whoa's of protest. “Dude.” Appolion gave a mock

shudder. "Are you trying to scar us for life?"

"No, I was trying to scare you into leaving," Michael returned without even a hint of an apology in his voice.

"Why don't you give us a minute guys?" Rachael made shooing motions with her hand. "I'll put him down for his nap, then call you back in."

"Yeah, because I have nothing to do with my time, but wait until Uncle Mike gets sleepy," Cam quipped, but he got up and left. Appolion and Abdiel followed him.

Once they were alone, Rachael climbed in bed with him and snuggled up to his side. He gave a groan as he turned to his side so he could cup her ass and jerk her in to his erection.

"I like how you think," he rumbled into her ear.

"Down, tiger. My brothers are just outside the door and if they hear me getting jiggy, then they really will be scarred for life. I'm just trying to help you relax enough to go to sleep."

He cocked a brow at her and pulled her to his hard cock again. "Hate to break it to you, but your hot body against mine is having the opposite effect."

"Close your eyes," she ordered. He gave a reluctant sigh, but obeyed. Rachael didn't say anything more, she just stroked his hair in slow easy passes. With as little sleep as he'd been

getting lately, this should be a piece of cake.

Sure enough within five minutes, his breathing was even and steady and his face peaceful. The lack of an annoyed audience and her caresses had been enough to do the trick. Getting carefully up, she went to the door.

The guys were camped out in the hallway and they jumped to attention when she waved them in. Filing silently into the room, they resumed their positions around the bed and linked hands. Appolion was on one side of her, Cam the other, while Abdiel was in between the two other males, making a complete circle.

"Do you really think this will work?" Abdiel whispered.

"It has to," she replied. "We need to be able to make the first strike for once and this may be our only hope."

They closed their eyes and all went into a trance, channeling all their energy into Michael. The palms of her hands got warm as the rush of their combined powers surged through her. She gave a silent prayer that this would work.

* * * *

Michael was thrust forward onto a dirt road as if someone had picked him up by the seat of his pants and tossed him. Stumbling to his feet, he

brushed the dust off him just as a grunt to his right announced that someone else had joined him.

"Ouch!" Abdiel groaned as he got up. "I keep forgetting that when I dream like this I can still feel pain." His dark eyes scanned the surrounding area. "Where are we?"

"I don't know yet," Michael admitted as he looked around, too. "I think that's what we're supposed to figure out."

Everything was in black and white, like they were in Kansas instead of Oz. They were in the middle of some field that was overgrown with weeds and tall grass and off in the distance was a massive building that was all fence, brick and concrete. There was nothing homey or welcoming about any of it.

"How come it's just you and me here?" Abdiel scratched his head.

"I think because you and I are the ones who have prophetic dreams the most. Rachael's had a few, but no where as many as we have." Michael squinted at the building. Something about it was familiar yet damned if he could figure it out.

"Should we get closer?" Abdiel narrowed his eyes, too, as he studied the structure.

"No." Michael shook his head. All of the sudden the strong evil yet familiar aura of Moloch hit him. "He's in there. The last thing we want is

for him to sense us.”

“So what do we do then? Sit here and scratch our nuts and hope something comes to us?”

“That sounds like an interesting visual,” a cold voice said from behind them. “I know some demons that would pay good money to see that.”

Moloch!

Both Michael and Abdiel went to draw their swords only to find they hadn’t brought them into dreamland. Okay, that was no biggie. It was still two against one and Michael had always liked fists over blades. With a roar, he attacked the demon. As he was just within punching distance, Moloch flicked his wrist and shot off a bolt of energy.

It felt like a truck hit him square in the chest. The white-hot pain spread out to the rest of his body. Distantly he could hear Abdiel crying out in pain, but Michael couldn’t raise his head let alone get up to help his friend.

Then he sensed Rachael’s scream of protest. Even though she wasn’t with him in the dream state, he knew that she was still with his body and he took hold of that fact and anchored on tight. He pushed away the pain and instead focused on her. How he loved her and couldn’t leave her behind. How she needed him.

Come back to me, her voice whispered over his sweat-soaked skin.

Another energy bolt hit him and the connection with her was briefly jerked away. Desperately, he scrambled to find it again. *Hurts.*

I know it does, love, her soft words brought him so much comfort. *Let me in, I can help.*

He might get to you, too. Another bolt hit him and he writhed in the dirt, his gaze fixed on the odd-looking gray sky.

Trust me.

So he did. Michael let his mind completely open to her. As soon as he did, it was as if she grabbed him by the waist and tugged. As he was jerked away, he could hear Moloch's roar of outrage and then there was blackness.

He must have only been unconscious for seconds because when he came to, the chaos was still in full swing in his bedroom. Rachael was screaming, Cam was at the door yelling for Derel and Appolion was letting lose a stream of cuss words that would have made a rapper proud.

Flopping to his side, he looked desperately around for Abdiel. The archangel was prone, his eyes rolled back in his head and foam coming out of his mouth. Fuck, not good. Not good at all. While Michael had been able to get out from under Moloch's control, the other angel was still there and by the looks of him, they didn't have long to get him back.

Derel came busting into the room. "What have

you guys done now?" He ran over to Michael, but he held a hand up to deflect the healer.

"Not me, Abdiel." His voice sounded like he'd been gargling glass.

"But you're hurt, too." Derel was clearly torn between helping Abdiel, who obviously needed it the most, or protecting his Chief above all as custom dictated.

"Go help, Abdiel. That's a command," Michael said, saving the healer from his debate. His stomach rolled as he was hit by a series of dry heaves. Over his retching, he could hear Rachael sobbing and he wanted nothing more than to go and comfort her, but he couldn't move. Then Rachael came to him. As soon as she touched him, the same sense of calm he experienced in the dream realm, engulfed him again. Suddenly, he knew what Abdiel needed. "Get Gabi," he croaked to Cam.

"Not a good idea." Cam was pacing around the room, twitchy from not being able to do something more to help. "She'll freak if she sees him that way."

"She's the only one who can help him." He closed his eyes and breathed deep as his stomach settled back into place. "Trust me."

Cam studied him for a minute, before his gaze flicked over at Rachael. "I'll go get her now."

"Run, we don't have much more time."

Appolion and Derel were both in the healer's trance, their palms on the convulsing angel's chest. It was clear to see that he was getting worse and not better. The minutes ticked painfully by until the sounds of pounding feet announce Gabi's arrival.

She ran into the room, her eyes wide with terror. "What have you guys done now?" she screamed.

Seemed that was the question of the day.

Michael only hoped this would work. While the touch of his mate had brought him back, Rachael was a psychic where Gabi wasn't. There was no guarantee she could reach through to the dream realm. But he did know one thing, if they didn't try, Abdiel would go comatose or worse. "Hold him and tell him how much you love and need him," Michael told Gabi. "Right now he's surrounded by all kinds of evil and he needs something good to grab onto so he can pull himself back."

Gabi went to her knees and brought ran a hand lovingly over her mate's face. "Come home to me, babe," she whispered in a trembling voice. "I need you. Our son needs you. I don't know what's going on over there, but you need to fight it for all of us."

For a heartbeat, Michael didn't think it was going to work, then Abdiel seizing stopped. His

eyes remained glassy and his breathing was ragged, the wheezing rasps filling the room.

"That's it," Gabi urged as she wrapped her arms around him and pulled his limp body to her chest. "Keep it up. I won't let that bastard have you. You're mine, damn it."

Several of the other family members filed in and they all stood with a hushed silence as everyone waited to see how this scene would play out. Abdiel let out a scream in pain as if he'd been struck.

Gabi gripped her mate so tight her fingers turned white. "You can't have him!" she screamed at the unseen assailant. "I won't let you win this fight." Gone was the grieving mate and now she was in full warrior mode. This was the Gabi who'd fought demons for centuries. She gave Abdiel a jerk. "Don't you dare let him win. You're an angel warrior and warriors fight to the end. Now man up and get your ass back here where it belongs so I can kick it for this stupid stunt."

Abdiel's gaze snapped back into focus and locked onto her face. Letting out a hard gasp, he mouthed her name several times over and over.

"That's it," she kept that same hard commanding tone. "You show me you're an archangel of worth."

Abdiel let out another roar, but this was a warrior's battle cry rather than a scream of pain.

His body lurched up once more and a wash over energy rushed through the room. It was so strong papers scattered and swirled around wildly. Several of his nephews let out loud curses of surprise.

When it had passed over, Michael looked over to see that Abdiel was sitting up, doing the same retching act he'd done a few minutes ago. Gabi was rubbing his back, her lips moving in a prayer of thanks. She raised her gaze and shot a look pure fury over at Michael and the other members of the Order.

"What in the hell were you thinking?" she bit out between clenched teeth.

"Don't blame them," Rachael rushed out. "The whole thing was my idea."

"And as usual you all jumped right in without thinking first. I would have thought you would have learned your lesson the last time."

"Gabi, I know you're upset," Michael said, "but we had to figure out where Moloch is. We can't continue to sit on our hands and do nothing. When Moloch started attacking humans, he stamped his own death warrant."

"What are you trying to say?" All the color drained out of her face.

"It's time," Abdiel's voice sounded almost as rough as Michael's. "We're going to attack Moloch on his home turf and end this once and for all."

"We were trying to get my prophetic dreams back so we could figure out where Moloch is hiding out at. I just didn't expect the combined powers to thrust me into the dream realm and I sure as hell didn't expect Abdiel to tag along for the ride."

"That makes two of us." Abdiel gave a hacking cough, his color still not up to par. "I was just as shocked as you were to end up in that black and white mess of a place."

"What did you see?" Cam asked as he sat down in a chair and stretched his long legs out in front of him.

Michael spent the next five minutes describing the place in great detail. There wasn't much relief when he saw all the blank looks coming back at him. "So it doesn't ring any bells with any of you?" They all shook their heads, although Bear did tap his finger to his chin thoughtfully.

"It sounds like a prison and, judging from the way Rachael said Moloch likes to glom on bad emotions, that would be a perfect place for the little shit." The empath ran a hand through his hair that was...dear God, it was a multitude of colors now. It looks like he was expanding his horizons.

"Why don't you do some research on the internet and see what you can come up with? It would be something that's closed now—" A

phone started to ring, interrupting Michael's speech, he frowned before continuing. "I didn't detect any human presence, but there was a whole hell of a lot of demon stank."

The phone kept on ringing. Bear flushed as he pulled it out of his pocket. "Sorry, I keep it on in case Tif needs me." He looked down at the screen and his brow furrowed in confusion. "What the hell? The number is 666-6666. Someone has a really bad sense of humor. That gag is so old."

"Bear, no!" Michael barked, his stomach dropping. But it was too late, the angel had flipped open the phone and it was pressed to his ear.

"Dina, if this is another one of your jokes, it is so far from being funny..." There was a pause before a look of fear and dread flitted across Bear's face. Just as quick, cold hard fury replaced it. "Hey, Lucy, how'd you get this number?"

Cam cursed and tried to take the phone, but Bear danced out of the way.

"Why would we want to do that?" There was a long pause before Bear spoke again, "I can ask Michael, but I'm not making any promises." Taking the phone down from his ear, he punched the *end* key before he tossed the device away from him like it was suddenly blistering hot.

"What did he want?" Michael asked, anger making his voice flat and hard. He didn't want

Lucifer anywhere near Bear and even a phone call was too close.

“You’re never going to believe it. Uncle Lucy wants to set up a peace treaty with you. It seems not even he can control Moloch and he wants to help us bring him down.”

Chapter Fifteen

Unlike his nephew Cam, Michael hadn't been in that many neutral bars before. He'd certainly never been in one that had been this empty. The only patrons presently in there took up all of one table. The rest of the tables and chairs were scattered and tipped, like everyone had left in bit of a hurry. Not surprising given who was there now.

Not even demons liked to tip one back with Lucifer.

The Prince of Darkness, Satan, Uncle Lucy, whatever the hell you wanted to call him, was slumped over in his straight back chair like he didn't have a damn care in the word. Even though he was much smaller than the other demons flanking him, he still shot off the biggest badass vibes there. His aura was dark, dangerous with a thick shell of evilness. As usual, his mousy brown hair looked like it hadn't seen the business end of a brush since moon pants were in style.

Nodding to a couple of his archangels. Michael indicated for them to stand opposite of the demons guarding Satan. Cam and Appolion were by his side and he intended to keep it that way so he wasn't about to change that up. Michael pulled out the chair opposite his half-brother and took a seat.

Lucifer smiled, showing off his fangs. They were the only thing about him that had changed since he'd revolted and left for Hell. While all the other angels who had fallen transformed into hideous monster like creatures, he's managed to retain his angelic looks.

"I didn't think you would have the guts to come, Michael," Lucifer drawled out snidely. His gaze traveled over the angels, searching.

"Bear isn't here, so you can stop looking for him," Michael fired off between clenched teeth.

"Now, what makes you think I'm looking for my little empath?"

"He's not your anything," Cam growled, showing off his own fangs. "You better lose that boner you have for my brother before I snap it off and feed it to you."

"Oh, such imagery." The demon's eyes went wide with mock shock. "And they all say I'm the bad guy."

"You call him again and you're going to find out how I don't just don't throw comments like

that out for fun." Cam deliberately caressed the hilt of one of the blades strapped to his chest.

"What can I say?" Lucifer gave a half-shrug. "I put old Bear on my calling plan so I can phone him anytime and it's free." The demon flicked another glance over the angels before he tsked. "I don't see Abdiel or Rachael here. Naughty. Naughty. I specifically said I wanted all the Order of Four here."

Abdiel hadn't come because he'd still hadn't fully recovered from the encounter in the dream realm while Rachael wasn't there because Michael didn't want her anywhere near his half-brother. At first she'd gotten pissed off, then the gut wrenching fear he felt for her must have shown on his face because she relented.

It was stupid really, him trying to keep her out of this. In a few days time, she would be going off to fight an epic battle that could very well end in the death of the entire Order and then mankind. The worst part was there was nothing Michael could do to protect her from it. "Sorry they all couldn't be here." Michael plastered a fake smile on his mug. "Abdiel and Rachael are away on a mission and couldn't get back in time."

His head tingled as he felt Lucifer probing around to see if he was telling the truth or not. Careful to keep his face impassive, Michael threw up a psychic barrier. To add insult to injury, he

brought up a mental picture of the dog from Family Guy singing the *Peanut Butter and Jelly Time* song.

"Interesting thought, Chief. Very mature of you." The demon gave a scathing sneer in Cam's direction. "You must be spending too much time around this mental giant."

"Ouch," Cam deadpanned. "You hurt my feelings."

"Shit," Appolion groaned as he rolled his eyes. "Are you ever going to tell us why you called us here? That's what I hate so much about demons. They're too damn talky."

"Ah, the Destroyer." Lucifer acted as if he'd just noticed the dark-haired angel. "I guess you would know everything there is to know about demons and Hell since you grew up there. By the way, we still have your old room all saved and ready to your return."

"You'd have to kill me first." Appolion's blue eyes sparked with dark rage.

"That's not an option." Lucifer gave an oily smile. "Death would be too easy for you."

"You know what? I think Lucy is wasting our time," Michael said to Appolion and Cam. "Let's get out of here." They rose to leave.

"Wait!" Lucifer called out, his voice edged in panic.

Well wasn't that interesting? Since he'd fallen

from Heaven, Michael had never seen his half-brother show panic or fear. And he was feeling fear right now. There was no mistaking the up-shit's-creek look in his eyes. Letting out an aggravated sigh, Michael sat back down.

"Since you're obviously having trouble with this, let me help out a bit," Michael snapped, so ready for this tap dance to be done with. "When you helped make Moloch and were raising him to be your own personal demon toy, you could have cared less what happened to us or the humans. Now all the sudden you're calling me, asking me to help you bring him down. Why is that?"

Before Lucifer could answer, Michael did it for him. "Is it because your baby boy grew so big that you can't control him anymore, isn't it? You know that while you can't rein him in, the Order can."

"I don't want the fucker *reined in* I want him destroyed," Lucifer snarled. "While those parasites you call human may be weak by themselves, when they get together and work as a group, they can become a problem. I don't want to have another burning time on my hands. And Moloch is going to make that happen if keeps calling attention to himself."

Michael raised a brow, surprised he would bring that dark time up from the demon history books when humans had hunted and burned demons at the stake. "What's in it for the angel

warriors?"

"My demons will fight in the battle with you. Moloch has managed to amass a sizable army, you'll be in need of some extra swords."

"We already have allies." Cam leaned forward on the table and glared. "Or did you forget about the elves that put your asses in a sling during that last battle we had?"

"I know where Moloch is, they don't," Lucifer responded with a smug grin.

"You're right. The elves don't know where he's at." Michael gave a smug smile of his own. "But we do. He's holed up in an abandoned prison. The Briggsfield Correctional Facility for the Criminally Insane to be exact." Oh how he enjoyed watching that know-it-all look slide off the demon's face.

"How did you know that?" his voice was devoid of all the earlier self-assured cockiness.

"How do you think?" Cam piped up. "We Goggled it."

Sad thing was that had been how they had found it. Bear had kept pulling up pictures on the computer until finally finding the one Michael recognized from his dream.

"So you'll have to excuse us if we pass on this alliance." Michael regretted even coming to this little meet and greet now. The only reason he'd agreed to it in the first place was he thought the demon might have had something useful. But no,

as usual, Lucifer had been completely and utterly useless.

"I need a piece of this action." There was a quiet edge of desperation to Lucifer's words that brought Michael up short.

"Why is that?"

"I need to save face with my followers. They keep seeing me as weak and it's only a matter of time before they revolt."

"And we should care why?" Cam tilted his head to the side.

"You may not like me, but I do manage to keep order in Hell. Without me, the demons will be fighting with each other as they struggle for power. That violence will spill out onto Earth and affect your precious humans."

"We'll handle it." Michael refused to give. "We always have."

"Maybe you would be more agreeable if I had something you want." Lucifer nodded to one of the demon guards who put a hand inside his coat. The air filled with the whispering sounds of metal against leather as every archangel whipped their guns out and aimed at the demons.

Where others would have cringed at being on the opposite side of all that firepower, Lucifer just threw back his head and laughed. "Boy aren't we touchy today? I just wanted to give you a present, Chief of Archangels." The demon pulled out his

hand and displayed a black cord with a white stone circle tied to it. He passed it off to Lucifer who swung it back and forth slowly. "Do you know what this is?"

"Yes, it's the things you and the justice angels use so you can still flash around while the rest of us are still grounded," Michael answered in his best *duh* voice.

"I'll bet the angel warriors would love to be able to flash at will again. Ever since your civil war began, you all have been stuck, having to use human transportation. I wonder how many of your warriors have died because they were attacked and couldn't get away fast enough. So many deaths and all because you guys can't do something that most angels master at childhood."

"No dice." Michael gave a bored look. "We happen to know all these babies have a tracing device in them. As soon as we use it, the justice council will know and they can lock in on wherever we may be."

"Besides," Cam added. "How is one amulet going to help? Do you expect us all to huddle together and try to put it on together? I don't think it's going to stretch that far."

Lucifer snapped his fingers and two more demons flashed in. In their massive clawed hands, they held huge burlap bags that looked heavy. One opened it up to show what had to be

hundreds of more amulets. "All yours for the taking." Lucifer gestured ala Vanna at the bags. "And not one of them has a tracer."

"How can we trust you on that?" Appolion frowned. "For all we know you can be working with the justice council and setting us up."

"You can't trust me. I'm Satan." He smiled wide to show his fangs. "But when you get them back to your compound, you can have some of your best guys check them out all they want. They'll find that every last one of them is clean."

"So you'll give us these if we agree to let you join us when we take on Moloch?" Michael kept waiting for the *and*, but it wasn't coming. "There's just one thing I don't get." Michael scratched his jaw.

"Just one?" Cam snorted. Both Lucifer and Michael ignored him.

"By helping us get our flashing ability back, you have to know it's going to make it harder to fight us." He glanced at the bags, thinking about how many lives he could save with those things. Still to make a deal with the Devil? He didn't need a fiddle song to tell him how tricky that was.

"I have decided that you angels getting your wings back is the lesser of two evils." Lucifer's gaze grew way too knowing. "That's the shitty part of being a leader. Sometimes there is no black and white. Just black and more black and you

have to decide which decision will weigh less on your conscious."

"Like you have a figging conscious," Cam sneered.

"You'd be surprised." The demon's gaze grew pensive, almost sad. "Even I have regrets. Now do we have a deal or not?"

Michael let his gaze drift back to the bags and to the hope they held inside. He thought about how Jordy and Dominic had to fight off demons when the old compound had been attacked and all the kids were trapped. He thought about how they had almost lost Bear forever because it'd taken so long to drive to him when he'd been taken down by Moloch. Then he thought about how many angel warrior teams had been cut down in their homes because they had been cornered and unable to escape by flashing out.

Black and more black.

How true that statement was right now.

Michael didn't trust his half-brother for one second. As soon as his warriors took out Moloch, Lucifer would immediately attack. They would be fighting one second as allies the next as bitter enemies.

Cam and Appolion were for once silent as they waited for his decision. He locked gazes with Cam. The empath eyes were telling him, *your decision. I trust you to make the right one.*

Taking a deep breath, Michael took the plunge.
“Okay, I’ll agree to your terms.”

Chapter Sixteen

Using their new amulets, the angel warriors all flashed in front of the prison. Even though it had been closed down for several years now, the place was still in pretty good shape. The windows intact, the wall thick and foreboding. Double walls of fencing, topped with rolled barbed wire, surrounded the grounds, bringing forth images of barking guard dogs and manned rifle towers.

Of course, the guards and dogs were long gone, but the mood was still just as ominous. Michael looked closely at the windows. Even though there were lights on, there was no movement inside. Nothing. That didn't mean there was nobody inside though. Michael sensed the huge sprawling building was full of demons.

"This place once had great suffering in it." Bear tilted his head up, like he was testing a breeze. "There was so much pain and death here that I can still feel it lingering."

"Then maybe you better go back before you go

all empath and puke,” Cam suggested unkindly. He wasn’t really happy that Bear had insisted on coming.

“No, my place is with you, protecting your back.” The empath closed his eyes as the breeze ruffled through his multi-colored spikes. “There is going to be death tonight. A lot of it.”

Ooooookay, Michael knew that Bear’s gifts were growing stronger and stronger every day, but the empath was starting to get almost scary. Bear’s head snapped over in his direction, almost as if he could hear Michael’s thought, which was ludicrous since he had his mental shields up and locked. Still the way Bear continued to study him made him wonder. Might as well go with it and see how much the empath knew.

“What side is going to have the most loss?” his voice was hard as he asked the question, Cam and Rachael’s presence weighing heavy on his soul. If either one of them fell tonight, he didn’t think he could ever recover.

Bear closed his eyes and breathed in deep several times. With a slight shake of his head, he opened them, the light blue seeming to glow in the dark night. “I can’t see that part.”

“Bear, I don’t like this at all,” Cam argued. “We all know how much Lucifer would like to get his claws on you and he’s going to be here tonight.”

“I’m done hiding,” Bear snapped, clearly not in

the mood for this conversation. "I'm a warrior, just like you and my place is in the battlefield next to my Lord and my Chief."

"As your Lord I could make it a direct order," Cam growled.

"But you wouldn't do that because it would dishonor me," Bear replied, neatly pinning his brother into a corner.

Cam muttered a foul curse under his breath, but backed off.

"Don't worry, Cammie," Ramiel grunted. "I'll be on Bear's ass like white on rice. Nothing's going to get to him, I promise."

Michael realized he was still holding Rachael's hand, but he was reluctant to let go. He felt a rush of the same panic that was on Cam's face. This was it. The moment that had been foretold in the prophesy. The Order was going to face off against Moloch. Good versus Evil and only one side would walk away alive.

"Ouch," Rachael whispered. "You're kind of squeezing my hand tight there, sweetie."

"Sorry." He instantly loosened his hold, but he didn't let her go. Damn it, he was going to keep in contact with her until the last possible minute. Turning his attention to Abdiel, he asked, "You up for this?"

"More than ready. I twitching to go in there and give some hurt back." While the archangel was

still a little pale, the cold hard malice in his dark eyes was all predator.

“Don’t worry, Chief.” Appolion tossed off a sappy look that was beyond fake. “I’ll protect Abdiel’s backside just as fiercely as Ramiel protects Bear.”

There were a few twitters of nervous laughter as they all made last preparations to their weapons. There were no tearful embraces between mates, no last minute gruff pats on the back between brothers. They had all taken care of that back at the compound.

Lucifer flashed in with several dozen demons. The angels all gripped their weapons tighter, but made no move to attack, the uneasy alliance holding for now. Although Appolion did toss out a demon phrase that was far from friendly.

A couple of the demons tensed up and acted like they were going to attack, but Lucifer held them off by raising his hand. “Remember, we play nice with the angels tonight. If I see any of you so much as breath on one of them wrong, then I’ll cut off your nuts and use them to juggle.” His gaze honed in on Bear, an icy smile cracked his face. “Well, look who came to see me.”

Ramiel and Nathaniel moved closer to Bear as they snarled. “Don’t even think about it.” Nathaniel lifted his sword into fight position.

“No words of love for your long lost uncle?

You're going to make me think that you're playing favorites with Michael."

"You're not our uncle," Ramiel spat.

"So you all keep saying." Lucifer's gaze drilled into Bear. "But blood will tell. Won't it?"

"Yes, it will," Michael replied with confidence. If there was one thing he could rely on, aside from the love Rachael had for him, it was that his nephews and niece would always remain true to their angel side.

"What's the battle plan?" Lucifer cleared his throat gruffly, as if having to ask that question stuck in his craw.

Michael nodded to Ramiel who lowered his weapon so he could pull out a large printout of the interior of the prison. Rolling it out flat on the ground, he hunkered down and motioned for the demons to do the same.

"This place used to serve as a prison for the criminally insane before it was closed down. Now unlike all the other prisons that have been closed in Michigan, it wasn't because of budget cuts. There were reports of abuse and deaths. The scandal got so huge that the governor ordered this place shut down."

"Although the printout doesn't show it, we think there may be underground tunnels," Nathaniel added.

"There is," a demon interjected. He ran a

knobby finger down the center of the map. "Right here."

"Are you sure?" Ramiel looked down at the paper dubiously.

"Yes, like you said, that place used to be bad and...well," the demon gave a toothy smile that would have made a dentist scream in terror, "my kind happen to like those kinds of places."

"I can't believe I'm saying this, but that may be a good thing." Ramiel shook his head as if he were trying to lodge that thought out. "If you were there like you said, then I'm willing to bet you know that place inside out."

"That's true, I know every passage, doorway, exit and window."

"Okay, then with Michael's permission, I think you should go with Order. You can be their own private tour guide." Ramiel looked up to Michael for confirmation."

While Michael didn't like the idea of a having to rely on a demon for anything, he had to see the wisdom in his nephew's suggestion. No wonder the archangel was one of his top generals. Lehor's oldest son had a good head on his shoulders.

"I think that's an excellent idea," Michael said. He then addressed the demon, "What room do you think Moloch would most likely be holing up in? It would be the one that had the most suffering inside."

"Yes, it would." The demon stroked his dark chin thoughtfully, his claws making rasping sounds against his scaly skin. "That little fucker always loved the bad vibes more than any of us. There's a room that was used for *treatments*. All kinds of nastiness took place there, electroshock, patients retrained for days at a time and even worse things. If I were a betting demon, I would say that is where Moloch is."

"Fine, it's settled then." Lucifer clapped his hands together. "Gaap and I will go with you and the Order. Just think of it, Michael, this will be the first battle we fight together as allies. Father would be so proud of us."

Michael doubted his father gave either one of them much thought, since he couldn't remember the last time he'd seen the sperm donor.

"Again with the daddy issues, Lucy?" Cam sighed. "I thought you would have got over those by now."

Lucifer's gaze slid over to Cam and it was easy to read the homicide the demon had on his mind. Instead of acting on it, he took a deep breath and smiled. "Shall we get going? Knowing Moloch, he'll have already sensed our presence and be getting ready to face us."

"Do you think he might retreat?" Ramiel got back up and pulled his sword out again, the heavy steel blade catching the moonlight.

"No, he won't retreat." Again, they got a grin from Lucifer, but this one had a bit of pride in it. "I didn't breed that option into him."

* * * *

As they walked deeper and deeper into the pit of a building, Rachael studied the other members of the Order. Appolon. Abdiel. Cam. Two brothers by blood, the other brother of her heart. *Please, don't die tonight.* She pleaded silently.

If she were to lose any of them, she didn't think she'd be able to stand it. And the chances were high that some, if not all, would perish in the next few hours. While the prophecy had foretold that there would be the Order and that they would have to one day face the most evil demon, it never said a whisper about whether or not the angels would live through the battle.

As if sensing her turmoil, Michael reached out and grabbed her hand. Even though she knew it might make her look weak to the demons, Rachael clung to that lifeline, taking comfort from her mate's familiar touch.

"I love you," he said, low so only she could hear.

"I love you, too. You want to know something that will probably sound terrible?"

"Please." His lips twitched at the corners.

"Doesn't everyone like to hear terribles before they go into a fight?"

"I'm glad you're not a member of the Order anymore. It's bad enough that my brothers have to go in there and fight that monster. I don't think I could handle it if you had to face it, too."

"Ouch, I think my ego's hurt." He gave a slight chuckle.

"You know what I mean. It would drive me crazy if I lost you."

"I think I know that feeling." All the humor fled his eyes as his jaw clenched. "All I can think about is how you're going to have to face Moloch and there is nothing I can do to stop it or help you. I've never felt this useless or inadequate in my entire life. Not even when they killed my first mate."

"Promise me something." She tugged on his hand so he would look at her. "If I do happen to fall in battle today, you have to go on. Your warriors will need you more than ever if we don't succeed today."

He stopped short, the echoes of dripping water surrounding them. The others frowned, but didn't comment. Although Lucifer did let out an aggravated sigh. Michael and Rachael ignored them all, too intent on each other at the moment.

"That's so like you." Michael reached out and cupped her cheek as he gazed down at her with love and a bit of sadness, too. "You're getting

ready to go into a battle to the death and all you care about is mine and the warriors' needs. When are you going to start putting your needs first?"

"I don't have to." She lightly traced his lips with her fingertip. "That's what I have you for."

Even though they were surrounded by demons, she still stood on tiptoe so she could give him one last kiss. With a growl, he cupped the back of her head and pulled her in even closer. They put all their fears, hurt, sadness and hopes in it. She dipped her tongue into his mouth so she could carry the taste of him into the battle. She breathed in deep so his scent would be stamped into her mind.

"I'm going to gag," Lucifer's voice cut through her sensual haze.

Reluctantly, Rachael pulled away. Sweeping her tongue along her bottom lip, she closed her eyes and wished they just had a little more time. Now that she'd finally found love, she didn't want to lose it.

"Fuck!" Cam yelled as he starting to twist his head around, frantically searching. "Something's coming our way. Fast."

"What is it and how many?" Michael barked, back in Chief mode.

"I don't know." Cam rubbed his temple with his free hand, the other still gripping his sword. "Moloch is scrambling my empath feelers so I

can't get a good lock. All I know is it's a whole bunch of bad and ugly heading our way."

Cam turned around in a circle as he continued to try to pinpoint the source.

Rachael put her hand to the cold, wet wall and tried to use her psychic skills to help him. Since she grew up in Hell, she knew demons better than almost anyone. Closing her eyes, she shivered as the sounds of several clacking voices reached her thoughts. Harsh whispers that overlapped and vied to be louder than the rest. She could feel a Moloch's barrier around them. A gauzy cocoon that was so hard to get through.

Desperation made her determined and she pushed hard at it. A surge of rage and violence hit her so hard she stumbled back. Obviously, she was pissing off the demon with her efforts. Good. That just made her even more steadfast. Then with one last mental shove, she punched through the barrier and locked onto their attackers. "Cam! Watch out!" she screamed as she opened her eyes.

But it was already too late. A large black, bulbous body dropped from the ceiling and took the empath down.

Chapter Seventeen

Michael bellowed in outrage as he saw his nephew disappear under the body of the massive demon. Moving forward to help, he was stopped short by a site that was so terrifying he would have almost rather seen Moloch.

Dozens of spider like demons were scampering down the tunnel. Huge, black bodies glistened in the harsh florescent lights as they surged forward on clattering legs. Some came down the center of the water-stained floor while others scrambled along on the walls and ceilings.

"How big are those things?" Rachael breathed. Even though he could feel the terror coming from her, she hid it well. Her face was so expressionless, she would have put Raphael to shame.

"At least six-feet," Gaap said as he put his body in front of Lucifer's.

Since Nathaniel and Ramiel were already hacking at the demon on top of Cam, Michael moved protectively closer to Rachael. He still kept

a worried eye on the spider covering his nephew.

"Damn it!" he yelled. "What's taking so long?" Ramiel and Nathaniel briefly looked up at him, desperation, panic and demon's blood streaking their faces.

"It's got a really tough skin." Ramiel slashed hard with his blade, smiling when the thing shrieked in pain.

Suddenly the air filled with the smell of burning flesh. The demon let out a scream, its body started to pulsate and twitch. Now it was Michael's turn to smile. Never underestimate Cam. "Back off, it's going to blow," Michael called.

Ramiel and Nathaniel didn't have to be told twice, having witnessed Cam's power enough times in the past to take them lightly. Michael tucked Rachael's head to his chest and waited.

The demon let out one last shriek before it blew up in loud blast. Ash, blood and demon pieces rained down. When it all settled, he could see Cam standing at ground zero, a look of pure revulsion on his face.

His normally blond spiky hair was slicked back with a thick coating of demon's blood. Black viscous ooze was covering every inch of him. With a retch, he bent over at the waist and threw up.

While Michael wanted to go help him, the approach of the other demon spiders stopped him.

Cam let out a demon snarl as he whipped around and shot off a stream of fire down the tunnel. The spiders faltered, but continued forward, Cam's power not enough to take all of them down. Rachael pushed herself away from Michael and stood, her feet spread shoulder width apart. Raising her hand, she added her lighting to Cam's fire. Appolion joined them, adding his own energy. One by one, the spiders screamed as the combined powers halted them in their spindly tracks.

"Everyone duck, this is going to get really messy," Raphael yelled as he grabbed Gabi and put his body over hers.

There was a huge explosion followed by a large rush of air. The force of it knocked Michael and the others on their asses. He fought against it, trying to crawl to the spot he'd last seen Rachael. He called her name out, but the sound was lost in the concussion. Just when he thought he'd never find her, his hand touched the curve of her calf. Crawling over her, he held her tight to his chest.

Finally, the chaos passed over, leaving an eerie silence. Then there were a few moans, followed by random curses as the angels and demons struggled to their feet.

Every one of them was covered in blood and gore, but Cam was still by far the worse of them all. He pointed at the snickering Ramiel and

Nathaniel. "Not one word from anyone," he said between several deep breaths, as if the stuff was clogging up his sinuses. Amadeaha went over to hug him, but he held a hand to stop her. "I wouldn't touch me just yet, Crazy Pie. The last thing I want is to accidentally poison you because some demon's blood gets in you."

"Such a weakness your empath's have with that." Lucifer looked really pleased by that fact.

"Well, it doesn't do dip shit to me thanks to my fucked up DNA so watch it before I start snacking on your guards." Cam's incubus eyes flared as he made the threat. He turned and started to lead the way back up the tunnel.

"I think you look really nice covered in spider remains," Lucifer called.

Cam stopped dead in his tracks, but didn't turn around. "I specifically said for not one word about that." He flicked up a hand, sending a glob of black goo flying. "You just said ten, Lucy. Really pushing my buttons."

They all started to make their way back down the tunnels. As they got deeper and deeper, the air grew damper and the lights flickered. Michael let out a disgusted grunt when Lucifer came to walk by him.

"I've been wondering something," the demon said. "Why didn't the elves come today as backup?"

"Raphael, Cam and I all decided that they would be of better use staying back to guard the compound." Michael gave his half-brother a pointed look. "With the three of us gone, we didn't want someone to get any bright ideas that the place would be vulnerable and attack."

"Actually that's a pretty good idea," Lucifer agreed, surprising Michael. "I know I would have thought about attacking if I wasn't part of this mission." There was an uneasy silence that followed for several more steps before Lucifer spoke up again. "She's a weakness you know. They all are."

Michael decided to play dumb. "Who?"

"Your mate, Cam, Bear all of them. Your love for them is a huge chink in your armor and someone will eventually use that against you."

"Someone already has," Michael replied coolly. "You did when you had your goons capture and transform Cam. Then there was the time you had Legion possess Bear. Oh, and let's not forget the time you took Lehor and her mate down to hell and scrambled their brains."

Lucifer sighed. "It's not nice to hold a grudge, you know."

Michael looked over at him, aghast that he would say something like that. Especially since his tone of voice suggested he was dead serious. "I would be pissed that you said something that

jackass stupid, but I realize it's because you don't get it. My love for Rachael and the others isn't a weakness. Far from it. They are the source of all my strength. Which is why when this is all over and done and we go back to our respective sides, I'm going to keep doing whatever it takes to make you pay for every tear, every hurt, every little thing you've done to them."

"I'm your family, too." Even though Lucifer's eyes remained as dark and soulless as ever, he almost sounded wounded.

"No, you're not. The day you turned your back of the archangel vows, you became nothing to me." Michael quickened his step, leaving Lucifer behind him. As far as he was concerned, the conversation was over.

"You okay?" Rachael asked as he caught up to her.

"I will be when we get Moloch in the ground and I get you back in bed."

"Only if it's under you, baby," she purred back, making Appolion and Abdiel groan.

"Seriously, Ray, do you have to go there while we're standing here?" Abdiel grouched.

"Really," Appolion agreed. "I'd rather be covered in all that shit Cam is than listen to that."

"I think it's getting hard." Cam grimaced. "The spider guts that are all over me that is. It's getting itchy, too."

"As soon as we get back to the compound, I'll give you a nice bath," Amadeaha promised with a sultry smile.

"Oh, that almost makes it worth it." Cam smiled wolfishly.

Ana and Gabi joined them so they were all walking the last little distance in the comfort of their mates. Michael had a sick sense in his gut that they were almost there. The spiders had been like the guards at the door and, by going through them, the warriors had made the final leap and there was no going back.

His heart hammered in his chest and he had to resist the urge to grab Rachael and run the opposite direction. He looked over at Ana, Amadeaha and Gabi and saw the same fear he felt reflected on their faces. He also saw the same hopeless despair.

They reached a pair of large double doors. Rusty and covered in cobwebs, it looked as if they hadn't been used in years, but Michael knew that was deceiving. Even with Moloch shielding his presence, he knew the demon was in there. Almost as if on cue, like some B-horror movie the doors swung open all on their own.

"Duh, duh, duh," Cam hummed under his breath, obviously making the same connection.

"Gooooood evening," Appolion drawled out in a bad Dracula accent.

Rachael gave Michael's hand one last squeeze before she stepped forward. Cam, Appolion and Abdiel moved up to so the Order was standing together, shoulder to shoulder. Michael did the only thing he could do, readied his sword.

All of the sudden some unseen force seemed to grab the Order by their waists and drag them forward. As Rachael was jerked away, Michael screamed her name and rushed forward to help her. He could hear Ana, Gabi and Amadeaha doing the same. Just as they ran up, the door slammed in their faces.

With a roar, Michael pulled on them, but they wouldn't budge. Ramiel and Nathaniel ran forward to help, but even with their combined strength, they couldn't get them open.

"Let me try." Lucifer raised a hand and released a burst of energy although it wasn't nearly as strong as any of the Order. The ball hit and fizzled out without so much as leaving a scorch mark.

"Shit!" Michael yelled his frustration. "Can things get any worse?"

"Yes," Ramiel replied grimly. "Bear just mentally contacted me. The outside group is under attack by some Hounds from Hell. From what he said, it's a butt-load of them. His words not mine."

That grim announcement was accompanied by the all-too-familiar sound of those legs, clicking

along the floor and walls. More of the spider creatures were coming at them. A lot more and now they didn't have the Order to zap them away.

"A word of advice, little brother," Lucifer deadpanned. "You never, never ask if things can get any worse."

* * * *

As Rachael flew through the air her first thought was *What in the hell is happening?* Her second was, *Oh shit! Big, hard-looking wall ahead.* Twisting her body so she didn't go in headfirst, she made it just in time before her back hit hard. Sliding down like she as a cartoon coyote, she landed in a pile of pain and groaned on the even harder floor.

Not taking time to count the birdies dancing around her head, she quickly shook it off. She could hear three grunts that told her Cam, Appolion and Abdiel had been introduced to the ground, too. As her vision cleared, she could see the others were on their feet as well. Unfortunately, Moloch had spread them out so they were several feet from each other. They were in a huge treatment room that had all kinds of old, dusty hospital equipment scattered around. Moloch's red glowing glaze traveled slowly over them all as he licked his lips. Almost as if he was anticipating a yummy meal.

"Camael," the demon said slowly, giving the name great emphasis. "Looking good. I think you look darn dapper in demon's blood."

"Did you just say, *dapper*?" Cam snarled. "Wow, you're a bigger pussy than I thought."

Moloch dismissed him without flicking his glance over at Rachael. "Oh, look my Honey Bunny has come home."

"*Honey Bunny*?" Rachael echoed, picking up her smartass cue from Cam. "Yeah, I think he's definitely a pussy."

Moving so quick she didn't have time to react, Moloch raised his hand and hit her with an energy bolt. The room moved on an axis as she spun around in the air several times before she was reacquainted with the wall.

Owe! This is getting old, fast. She scrambled to her feet, glad to see that Appolion, Cam and Abdiel had stood their ground and hadn't broke formation to go to her aid. The last time they had faced Moloch, they had been defeated because they had lost their cool. If they were going to win this time, they had to keep their act together.

Rachael smiled as a thought suddenly occurred to her. That didn't mean she couldn't help Moloch loose his game though. Squaring her shoulders, she leveled the coolest of stares at the demon. "Where are your guards, Moloch?" she asked, before she gave a *tsk* of disappointment. "Maybe

you don't want them to see how inadequate you are around females."

"No, I just know I don't need them to beat you." A low growl rumbled in his chest.

"I think you don't want them to witness how whenever you get around me, your little demon erection does a disappearing act." She laughed, making sure it sounded harsh and mocking.

"Dude." Cam joined her in the laughter. The gleam in his eye letting her know he'd caught on to her plan. "You can't keep it up when you get around a pretty female? Now that's just sad. You make all demons look bad with that one."

Moloch snarled and spun, his hand already up.

Rachael's chest grew tight as she saw the demon fire a shot off at Cam. At the last fight when the angel had been hit, he hadn't got up for hours.

Abdiel threw up a shield and tried to deflect the shot against Cam. It worked—almost. The invisible wall of power managed to make the energy bolt veer to the left, but it still clipped the empath on his shoulder. Cam let out a guttural yell of pain as blood spurted from the fresh wound. He dropped to his knees, one hand going up to cover his injury.

Even though every instinct in her cried for her to run to Cam's side, Rachael forced herself to stay put. She didn't even give Moloch the satisfaction

of seeing her concerned. Not willing to give this demon who so loved pain, the thrill of knowing she was upset. Just to make sure he didn't send out a mental probe, she slammed up a psychic brick wall, not unlike the one he'd used earlier to block the angels.

"Look at who's throwing himself a little demon hissy fit." She cocked her head to the side, catching that Abdiel and Appolion were both inching their way in closer, boxing in the demon. Hoping to keep him distracted, Rachael kept up with the mocking game. "Truth hurts, doesn't it?"

"Shut up!" Moloch snarled, his voice at a supernatural volume. The walls shook from the force of it and the lights flickered more rapidly. "You don't know anything about me."

"Don't I? What's let review, shall we?" Rachael clucked her tongue. "I was kidnapped and at your mercy for days. Yet I was able to return to my mate untouched. Why? Because he's a real male who knows how to please a gal, while you get so scared you deflate."

Now Cam was up and he was slowly shuffling into position, too. Although none of them dared speak mentally for fear of Moloch overhearing, Cam's eyes told her all she needed to know. *Keep it up. We've got your back.*

"I am more male than your pathetic archangel can ever dream of." Moloch raised his hand, but

couldn't seem to bring himself to strike out at her again. His face was twisted with some emotion that looked so foreign on his face.

Rachael almost gagged when she realized it was love.

Roaring in frustration, Moloch directed his hand to the side slightly and instead hit the wall behind her. Rachael ducked to the side. Out of the corner of her eye, she could see Cam, Abdiel and Appolion continue to inch their way forward.

Chapter Eighteen

Michael's gut twisted in fear as he heard a loud commotion coming from the other room. It sounded as if all hell was breaking loose. Even though he knew it was useless, he still pulled on the doors.

"Give it up or else I'll feed you to the spiders myself," Lucifer snarled from behind him.

"We really should flash out of here," Gaap suggested as he griped his kris, the wavy blade caught what weak light there was coming from the ceiling and cast reflections on his sweaty bald head.

"Not an option." Lucifer let out a frustrated sound. "I refuse to leave until I see Moloch's head on a platter."

Gaap looked dismayed at Lucifer's words, but he finally nodded and crouched into a fighting stance. The other demons copied his moves, sweat beading on their brows as the spiders got closer and closer.

"Are you going to fight or are you going to stand there and let them eat you?" Lucifer's voice was laced with outrage.

"Just wait for it," Michael murmured as he continued to tug on the doors.

"Wait for what?"

Bear and the other warriors suddenly flashed in between Michael's group and the spiders. As the empath's gaze honed in on the spiders, his eyes got so wide they almost seemed to swallow up his face.

"Holy shit and a bagel," he declared in a shocked voice. "You weren't kidding when you said those frigging things were huge. Guess we're going to need more than the wadded up Kleenex we brought."

The spiders surged forward, the long pinchers on the front of their curved faces clacking menacingly close. A thick, jelly-like substance dripped down and Michael didn't even want to think what it might be.

"These things are digesting," Bear declared as he swiped at one with a dagger.

"You should see what they look like on the inside." Ramiel swung his sword around taking off one of the spider's hairy legs. "Cam got covered in the shit, too."

"Where is Cam?" Bear stabbed a demon in one of its eyes.

Another roar came from behind the double doors. It was so loud it could be clearly heard, even over the chaos going on in the tunnel. Several of the angels paused long enough in their fighting to cast fearful looks over at the closed room.

"He's in there," Nathaniel said, his jaw clenching in a grim, hard line.

"Oh, shit," Bear breathed, the color draining from his sweat-streaked face. "That's not good."

Michael would have agreed with him, but another wave of spiders approached. Getting closer and closer to the already exhausted angel warriors.

* * * *

Rachael bit back a scream as Appolion was thrown to the ground, the latest victim of Moloch's energy bolts. So far, he had been hit twice and Cam three times. Their plan was working though. Rachael kept getting into his head while they occasionally took a hit to drain the demon's power. Abdiel did his best to make sure those hits were deflected some.

It was effective, too, besides Cam's shoulder and a few bumps and bruises, the two weren't injured. Which was a turn of luck because, after the spider attack, their powers weren't exactly top level. Still, this was their only plan so they had to

go with it.

"I loved you and you threw it back in my face," Moloch roared at her, his face was twisted with grief and more than a bit of crazy, too.

Behind the demon, she could see Abdiel give her the slightest of nods. Time to go in for the kill. "Don't you still love me?" Even though it sickened her, she added a dash of simpering hurt to her voice.

Moloch's head snapped up in surprise. "Of course I still love you. Which is going to make me so sad when I have to kill you."

"You don't have to kill me." She took a couple of steps forward, glad when he didn't appear to notice. "You can just destroy the others and you and I can leave. Go someplace where nobody can find us."

"Do you actually think I'd believe for one moment you'd stand by while I killed your brothers?"

Rachael gave an indifferent shrug. "You forget I was raised in Hell. My mother and father were demons. I think it's time I followed in their footsteps."

"Liar," Moloch snarled, his eyes glowing brighter. "You're just saying that to trick me."

"Do you know how the angels have been treating me since I came to live with them?" Rachael gave Cam and Abdiel a look of disgust.

"They think I'm a freak and they all act like I'm going to go demon. May as well live up to expectations."

"But you're Michael's mate." Moloch lowered his hands, confusion and distrust stamped on his face.

"True." She nodded slowly as she inched forward a few more steps. "But Michael is old and this war is making him weak. I'm thinking it's time I find someone that can match my skills. Someone that can give me all the power I deserve." Her stomach rolled at her own words and she prayed that Michael never had to hear them.

"I am more powerful than both him and Lucifer." There was no mistaking the proud glint in the demon's eyes.

"Yes, you are," Rachael purred.

"If you like me, then why did you say all those mean things to me?" Moloch sounded like a petulant child.

"Come on." Rachael smiled when she wanted to gag instead. "We both know it's so much more fun that way."

"You won't regret this." Moloch beamed, won over. "I'll do everything to make you happy."

"Good to hear. The first thing you do to make me happy is die." Before those words had a chance to register in his small, demented brain,

she whipped her hand up and shot off lightning.

His eyes rolled back into his head briefly before he chuckled. "Did you honestly think you could defeat me?"

"No, I didn't." Rachael smiled and knew it looked just as predatory as his did. "But *we* can." As soon as she said that, Appolion and Cam released their own powers.

Moloch screamed as the combined powers of the Order hit him from all directions at once. He tied to strike back, but Abdiel lifted his and threw up a shield.

Moloch's body began to pulsate and distort, making him look grotesque. Blood started to stream from his nose, ears and eyes as he screamed in agony. Rachael could feel her powers going erratic. More so than ever. Black spots swam in front of her eyes and she grew dizzy. Swaying on her feet, she had to fight to keep up a steady flow of energy. If they let up now, then they would never be able to get Moloch again.

"You may destroy me, but you haven't won." The demon let out a laugh that came out garbled and harsh around his mangled mouth. "I'm just the first one. There are others. So many others." Then the demon let out one last scream of agony before he blew up.

Rachael fought hard to bring her powers back in, but she couldn't. They seemed to have a life of

their own as they continued to surge.

Cam and Appolion were having the same problem. Cam's face was twisted in pain as his flame went all over. A stream hit one of the cots alongside the wall, making it burst into fire. Appolion vaporized an old medical cart, before leaving a long scoring mark in the wall.

"Abdiel!" she managed to scream between clenched teeth.

"I'm trying," he yelled back as he swayed on his feet. Sweat covered his face and he was trembling. "I can't bring you all back in. It's too strong."

"We better do something," Appolion said. "If we don't get control, we're going to damage more than just this room."

Rachael thought about the angels in the hall and all the houses nearby that had innocent human families in them. There was no saying how far the damage would be if their powers went critical."

"We have aim for each other," Cam ordered.

"Are you crazy?" Rachael screeched. "We could make it worse."

"I don't think so. Besides we have to try something."

Any other time, Rachael would have taken the time to reflect on the terrible decision they were going to have to make. She would have let herself

wallow in the grief and fear, but they had to do this now. Giving a nod, she leveled her hand at the others as they did the same.

The blast should have knocked her from her feet. Instead, her body went rigid, locked in unbelievable pain and agony. She would have screamed, but her jaws were clamped so tight together all that came out was a muffled groan.

Then just when she thought she couldn't take anymore, a soothing black blanket of unconsciousness overcame her.

* * * *

Michael never thought that he would die because he didn't have a big can of bug spray handy, but it looked like that was what was going to happen. Two of the spiders had him cornered and were taking turns lunging at him. One of them caught his leg in their pinchers and bore down, hard. The sound of snapping bone carried over his scream of pain.

He didn't even know how the others were fairing. Even if he had dared to look, he wouldn't have been able to see over the mass of black bodies. Yelling out, all he heard back was the sickening clacking sounds from the spiders. "You may kill me," Michael snarled, "but you're going to have to bleed to do it."

He lunged at one with this sword, but the creature batted away his blade with a swing of its head. The other one latched onto his arm and bit down. Michael bit back a cry of pain as he heard another bone snap. Damn it, why didn't they just kill him and get it over with? Then his heart slammed into his chest as he realized why.

They were toying with him.

The spiders weren't just going to kill them, they were going to torture them first. All of them, Bear who was giving to a fault, Ramiel who would was so dedicated to the cause, Nathaniel who had already suffered too much, Ana who was the most loving female he'd ever known. They would all be chewed on, mangled, then finally killed and there was nothing he could do to stop it.

Forgive me, Lehor. He gave a silent apology to his sister. *I tried to protect them, but it wasn't enough.* Just as he closed his eyes and waited for the final blow, a huge explosion ripped through the air. He was slammed into the wall and pinned as a rush of wind, fire and energy ripped down the tunnel. The spider demons all froze in place before they let out a collective wail. Screeching and high-pitched, it hurt his ears. If he could have, he would have clapped his hands over them to muffle the sound.

There was one less crescendo of wailing before the spiders blew up, one by one. A thick wave of

blood, goo and spider chunks hit Michael. He clamped his lips together, not wanting to swallow any the crap as it covered his face. The force holding him to the wall passed and he scrambled to get his feet under him. No such luck, he fell onto the gore-covered ground with a wet sloppy, *plop*.

"Everyone inject themselves with the antidote," Derel screamed as he staggered around the fallen bodies of the angels. The healer was coated in the same black blood that had been all over Cam earlier.

Michael grunted as he looked down at himself. *Make that the same stuff I'm covered in, too.* He shot to his feet to help the injured, pausing long enough to let Derel inject him with the antidote. Since they all had open wounds, they couldn't risk any of the demons' blood getting inside their blood systems.

The angels all slowly got to their feet and Michael was weak with relief when he was eventually able to make out all of his warriors under the muck. *Alive! They had all made it through.*

Lucifer and his demons were getting up, too, and they hadn't seemed to suffered any casualties either. One of the demons pulled out a cloth and tried to wash the stuff off Lucifer's face.

"Rachael," Michael moaned as he pushed his way through the crowd so he could get to the

double doors again.

They were open and the room inside was strangely silent. Running through, he was met with a mess. Small fires were broke out and smoke hung in the air, making everything hazy. Everywhere there was broken equipment, debris and what looked like it could be part of the ceiling.

Yelling Rachael's name, Michael picked through the rubble, looking for any sign of her. His leg screamed in pain whenever he moved. There was no question it was broke, and if he had been human, he wouldn't have been able to stand on it, let alone lead a search and rescue party. Thanks to his angel body, that wasn't an issue. The warriors joined him in the search, calling out the other angels' names. His hands trembled more in fear as each second passed without finding her.

"Please don't be dead. I can't live without you," he chanted over and over. Just as he was beginning to think he would never find her, he spotted a slender hand. "Rachael," he sobbed as he tried to move a heavy slab of ceiling. When it wouldn't budge, he yelled, "I need help!"

The twins and Raphael picked their way across the rubble and joined him. Together, they were able to lift it and pull her free. Michael pulled her tiny body into his arms and looked down into her pale face, trying to see if there were any signs of life.

He almost wept in relief when she took in a huge breath and started coughing. Her eyelids fluttered open and she gazed up at him. For a second, neither one of them said anything, they just stared at each other. Then she raised a hand and touched his cheek.

"Oh my God," she said, her voice weak. "What happened to you?"

"Spiders." He ran his hands over her body, looking for injuries. "More of them attacked us. We were beat and then whatever you did in here carried over and it blew them up."

"Where are the others?" She struggled to get up.

"Status report!" Michael called.

"We have them," Ramiel called back from across the room. "All are alive and accounted for except for Moloch."

"So is he dead then?" Lucifer asked.

Rachael nodded.

Lucifer saluted her with his sword. "Then my demons and I shall take our leave. It's been fun, Michael." Looking over at Bear, Satan nodded his head. "I'll be thinking of you, my little empath." With that, he flashed out, taking his demons with him.

Bear leaned over at the waist and started dry heaving. "Oh man, that's just wrong."

"That Lucy is going to be thinking of you?"

Cam asked as he hobbled over. He was leaning heavily on Nathaniel for support.

"No, I had my mouth open when those spiders went boom and I swallowed some of their guts." He spat on the ground. "I'm never going to get that taste out of there."

"Tastes like chicken?" Appolion quipped. He was standing on his own, but Ana still had her arm around his waist.

"No, not even close." Bear spat again. "It tastes like, *gwah!*"

They all laughed and the tension of the battle broke. It wasn't as if what Bear had said was even funny. It was from the giddiness one gets when they realized they looked death in the face and kicked its ass.

Chapter Nineteen

Raphael walked out of his bathroom, feeling halfway normal again since he'd finally got a shower. There was still a nasty spider bite on his side, but that could be healed later. Right now, it was just pure heaven to have the blood and guts off him.

Stepping into his room, he found Jordy perched on the edge of the bed, waiting. By the way the kid's hands were clenched together and the pained look on his face, he wasn't exactly happy to be there. Raphael frowned, more than a little bothered that his cousin wasn't comfortable around him. Hell, it wasn't as if he expected to have the same easygoing, huggy thing the Lehors did, but would it would be nice to get at least a smile.

"You wanted to see me?" Jordy asked, his gaze directed at the wood floor.

"Yes, I did." Raphael sat down in a chair, wincing when the movement aggravated his

wound. "Michael told me about the conversation you had."

Jordy looked up at him, fear in his eyes. "I'm so sorry I lied to you." He nervously twisted his fingers so tightly together it was a wonder he didn't snap them off.

"Are you sorry that you lied or sorry that you got caught?" Raphael leaned back and tried his best to look non-threatening.

"Both," Jordy admitted, surprising Raphael with his honesty.

"Why didn't you just tell me the truth from the beginning?"

"I was afraid that if you really knew what a freak I was, you would send me back."

Oh God, it hurt to hear the pain in the kid's voice. Right now Raphael would do anything to make Jordy feel better. Anything. The thing was he'd never known how to act in situations like this. He wasn't smart like Michael or kind like Cam. He was...well the cold one in the bunch. Still, he had to try. "When I was just a baby I was sent to live with the fairies," he said, gruffly. This was something he hadn't shared with many others, the memories were just too raw.

"That sounds like it might be kind of cool I guess." Jordy returned his gaze down as he started in on his fingers again. Round and round, back and forth. The digits getting red from the exertion.

Raphael finally couldn't take it anymore and reached forward to stop him. "Fairies aren't as much fun as one would think. Usually they aren't nice like Cliona, Winnow, Ella and Nissa. What's worse is most of them despise angels." Now it was Raphael who slid his gaze away, not wanting to see the pity or revulsion on his cousin's face.

"They were mean to you?" Jordy asked in a small voice. "Did they hit you and stuff?"

"Sometimes." Raphael took in a deep breath and admitted something he'd never told even Michael. "Mostly they ignored me. I didn't even know I had a name until I was older because they used to call me *the creature*."

"So you were a lot like me." There was a hint of awe in the kid's voice.

"Which is why I know where you're at now and why you do and say some of things you shoot off."

"Really, I didn't think you liked me." Jordy sniffed.

"Are you kidding? You are one of the few bright spots in my life."

"But you don't even seem to know I'm around." Jordy ducked his head, as if embarrassed his outburst.

"I know that you pull to the left when you fight, you hate pepperoni on your pizza and that your favorite TV show is Family Guy. That's not all

either. I've known every time Gabi had to go to you because you woke up screaming from another nightmare because each time I had to hear you in pain, I vowed to someday make those responsible pay."

"Oh." Jordy squeezed his eyes shut and let out a choked sob. "Oh fuck...I mean, damn...I mean..." He let out a shaky breath.

Raphael realized the kid was fighting for all he worth not to cry. Since he knew that Jordy wouldn't come to him, Raphael got up and sat down next to him, pulling the teen into a hug. At first, Jordy was stiff, as if shocked and unsure of what to do. Then he finally relaxed and wrapped his arms around Raphael's waist, holding on so tight it hurt the healer's wound. Raphael was willing to put up with the pain though.

"I'm not crying," Jordy said, despite the fact tears were falling down his face now. "I swear I'm not sobbing like some frigging baby."

Raphael didn't call him out on it, content to hold the kid and let him get it all out of his system. Hell, he was tempted to join the kid in the whole tear act. Finally, after several minutes, Jordy gave one last sniff before he pulled back. His hand brushed against his wound and Raphael hissed in pain.

"Oh, crap!" Jordy's eyes grew wide with concern. "You didn't tell me you were hurt. Do

you want me to, you know, heal you?"

"That would be great." Raphael grabbed Jordy's hand before he could start the healer's touch. "I just want you to know one more thing. I promise I won't rest until I get the rest of your family back. Consider it a sacred vow."

They locked gazes and at that moment, Raphael knew he would kill for this kid. Now he understood why Michael went out of his way to protect Cam and the others.

Jordy nodded before his lips curled up in a smile. "Thank you. Just so you know, I don't feel so alone anymore."

* * * *

Michael woke up to the wonderful sensation of his mate in his arm. Rubbing his cheek against her silky, rain-scented locks, he breathed in deep and, for the first time in days, felt at peace

When they had got back home last night, they'd showered, then went to bed and made love for hours. There had been a passionate reclaiming of each other as they worked out the last bit of fear left over from the battle. Even though he'd tried to be tender with her, Rachael hadn't let him hold anything back.

He let his fingers trail up the side of her body, along the curve of her hip, the dip of her waist, the

swell of her breast. She hitched in a breath and he knew that she'd woken up. With a moan, she arched her back a little so her softly rounded ass brushed against his hard cock.

"You really know how to wake someone up," she moaned as she rolled her rump against him.

"Funny." He licked the shell of her ear before going lower to nip at the lobe. "I was just going to say the same thing about you." He thrust his hips forward so she would get the point.

"That was so bad. I think you have some of the worst one-liners of all time." She giggled, the sound making him feel warm all over.

"Probably," he agreed as he reached around and palmed her breast. Pinching the velvety nipple, he enjoyed hearing her gasp of pleasure.

It still wasn't nearly enough for him. Rolling over, he pinned her to mattress and slowly kissed every single inch of her. Only when she was slick from sweat and writhing under him, did he got between her thighs and push his cock inside her warm heat.

"So good," he moaned as he started to move in and out of her. "Being inside you is like paradise. I don't need to ever go back to Heaven because I find it every time I'm with you."

"I love you so much, Michael." She dug her heels into the small of his back, driving him in deeper. "I have since the moment I first laid eyes

on you."

"I love you, too."

"Don't tell me." She looked up with passion-glazed eyes. "Show me."

With a growl, he did just that, thrusting so hard in her that her hips lifted up from the mattress. She shrieked in pleasure as she arched back against the pillow, her dark hair a halo around her head.

The musky scent of lovemaking wafted through the air as the sound of flesh hitting flesh filled the room. She met him thrust for thrust, her slender body rising up to meet him. The soft walls of her pussy rippled around him and he knew she was about to orgasm.

"That's it, baby, come for me." He pinched her nipple again, teasing her along. "Let me hear you scream my name."

She did just that, yelling so loud the entire house probably heard. At the same time, she gripped his arms so tight, her nails dug in. Sick puppy that he was, that bit of pain mixed with pleasure sent Michael over the edge. With a hoarse cry, he let himself go. The orgasm that ripped through his body was so intense it almost snapped his spine in two.

His semen shot into her, her hot pussy gripping his cock hard like it was eager to get every drop he had to offer. There was another sharp pain on his

arm and he realized she had bit him in the moment of passion.

"Hey," he teased, looking down at the red-crescent shaped mark. "You little vampire."

"It's the least I can do after you gave me such a good spanking the other day." She flashed a smug satisfied grin.

He chuckled at her impish behavior before he kissed her nose and got out of bed.

"Where are you going?" she asked as she rolled on her side, going up on one elbow.

"I've called a meeting with some of the family and Nissa." He looked back regretfully to the bed and the alluring picture she presented in it.

"Are you thinking of finally using her to bring the fairies in as our allies?"

"I don't see where we have a choice." Michael pulled some jeans on and reached for a shirt. "You told me yourself that Moloch said he was just the first of many."

"Do you think that maybe he was lying?" Rachael got up and started to get dressed, too.

"Do you?" Michael countered as he jerked his shirt on.

"No," she admitted. "I think that while we thought this was the final battle, we were wrong. It's just the beginning."

By the time Michael and Rachael had finished

getting dressed and made it down to the living room, the rest of crew was already there. They were loud, bullshitting and throwing comments back and forth, but as soon as they saw him, they all got quiet.

Michael scanned the room until he spotted Nissa sitting in the far corner. She had long brown hair with pink streaks through it and it was up in a twist. The large gray sweatshirt she had on seemed to dwarf her slender frame. Like all fairies, she had a rounded face with almond-shaped eyes, but there was nothing whimsical or soft about her. The way she scoped out the room, her shrewd gaze missing nothing, showed that she was just as much as a battle-worn fighter as any of them.

"I'm sure by now you've all heard about Moloch's little statement," Michael began the meeting. A chorus of grumbles and curses came back his way.

"So what's our next move, Chief," Cam asked from the couch. He had his mate, Amadeaha, tucked tight to his side and it didn't look as if he was going to let go anytime soon.

"I think it's time to go to the fairy camp and demand an audience with their leaders." He looked over at Nissa to gauge her reaction, but he couldn't read anything off her.

"How do we know they won't try to kill Nissa on the spot?" Ramiel asked, his arms were crossed

over his chest as he leaned against the wall. "Didn't they assassinate her family?"

"Yes," Michael conceded as he continued to watch her for a reaction, any reaction. But she kept the same impassive, cool expression. It was as if she'd taken lessons from Raphael. "But I talked to Rolan and he said things have changed within the ruling parties and the fairies would be happy to have someone of the ancient royal blood back in their midst."

"And what if I don't want to live with them?" Nissa finally spoke up.

"I won't force you to do anything you don't want," Michael assured. "In fact you can come back here right after you get done showing your face there. All I ask is you plead our case to them and urge them to ally with us."

"Would Ella have to go?" she asked tightly.

"Not if you don't want her, too. She has a home here for as long as she wants it."

"We'll make sure she's taken care of, too," Rachael added. "We'll treat her as one of our own family members."

"That would be nice." A sad smile played on Nissa's lips. "I've seen how strongly you care for one another and Ella is happy here. She feels safe."

"And we'll make sure things stay that way," Michael promised.

"Okay, I'll go, but I have one concession." Nissa

pointed a finger in Ramiel's direction. "You vowed to me one more favor, archangel."

Michael's gut grew tight as apprehension hit him. Suddenly he had a very bad feeling about this. "You made an open-ended vow?" he asked Ramiel. "Why in the hell would you do that?"

"At the time I did it in exchange for her helping Bear," Ramiel replied, casting a suspicious look over at the fairy.

"Do you realize how stupid that was?" Michael didn't even bother to hide the disgust in his voice.

"I think I'm about ready to."

Nissa stood, straightened her spine and took a deep breath. "I will go to my people, I will beg them to ally with angels on one condition. Before I go, I want to be mated to Ramiel, son of Lehor, in every way possible."

The silence following her announcement was so heavy you could almost hear crickets. Every angel in the room gapped at her in slack-jawed shock.

Finally, Ramiel pushed away from the wall and tossed her a stone cold glare. "Sugar, there is no way in hell that is ever going to happen."

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.