

ELLORA'S CAVE TWILIGHT



NOCKED  
*Asunder*  
SAM CHEEVER

## **Nocked Asunder**

*Sam Cheever*

*Gods of Love, Book Two*

In her line of work, Athena Googlios is accustomed to hot, sexy men. But Damian Leandar brings hot to a whole new level. His touch, even his gaze, makes her body clench and warm with lust. Athena's mind tells her she needs to treat him like any other client. But her body has its own agenda. And when Athena finds herself facing off with a pair of truly ugly mythical creatures, Damian may be the only one who can save her from a fate worse than death.

Unfortunately, Damian has some pretty big secrets. And despite the feelings they can no longer ignore, something bigger than love may yet come between them. In the end, it might take losing everything they have to make them realize how much they have to lose.

An Ellora's Cave Romantica Publication



[www.ellorascave.com](http://www.ellorascave.com)

Nocked Asunder

ISBN 9781419925535

ALL RIGHTS RESERVED

Nocked Asunder Copyright © 2009 Sam Cheever

Edited by Helen Woodall

Cover art by Willo

Electronic book Publication October 2009

The terms Romantica® and Quickies® are registered trademarks of Ellora's Cave Publishing.

With the exception of quotes used in reviews, this book may not be reproduced or used in whole or in part by any means existing without written permission from the publisher, Ellora's Cave Publishing, Inc.® 1056 Home Avenue, Akron OH 44310-3502.

Warning: The unauthorized reproduction or distribution of this copyrighted work is illegal. No part of this book may be scanned, uploaded or distributed via the Internet or any other means, electronic or print, without the publisher's permission. Criminal copyright infringement, including infringement without monetary gain, is investigated by the FBI and is punishable by up to 5 years in federal prison and a fine of \$250,000. (<http://www.fbi.gov/ipr/>). Please purchase only authorized electronic or print editions and do not participate in or encourage the electronic piracy of copyrighted material. Your support of the author's rights is appreciated.

This book is a work of fiction and any resemblance to persons, living or dead, or places, events or locales is purely coincidental. The characters are productions of the author's imagination and used fictitiously.

# ***NOKED ASUNDER***

**Sam Cheever**

### *Trademarks Acknowledgement*

The author acknowledges the trademarked status and trademark owners of the following wordmarks mentioned in this work of fiction:

Jacuzzi: Jacuzzi Inc.

Jeep Wrangler: DaimlerChrysler Corporation

Teflon: E. I. Du Pont de Nemours and Company

## Prologue

### *Lucky Cupid?*

I am Cupid.

No, I'm not a cute little chubby guy with a large bow and a quiver of arrows.

In fact I'm not even a guy.

But I am a Cupid. As were my parents and their parents before them, on and on throughout time, back through the millennia of our Greek ancestry.

I'm not sure where the whole chubby little guy thing started. It's probably because Cupid was represented as a guy in both Greek and Roman mythology. Of course in Greek mythology Cupid was called Eros. And Greek writer Hesiod once described Eros as the "loveliest of all the immortals" and said that Eros "makes...men's bodies go limp, mastering their minds and subduing their wills". Now I ask you, does that sound like a guy?

Of course there are some men who are Cupids, though not one of them is chubby. They're all devastatingly gorgeous in fact and they certainly wouldn't appreciate being called "cute" in any way. As a whole the Cupid race is exceedingly good-looking and pleasing in every way.

Which has done us very little good over the millennia.

Our deepest, darkest secret is that we look like every man's or woman's dream but, up until recently, we were destined never to find love of our own. Unfortunately, that part of mythology is correct. Cupids have been like Teflon when it comes to attracting a love interest. We could give love to others but we couldn't take any for ourselves.

Recently though, a special Cupid named Daphne Charissa found her perfect love and fought the Furies to keep it. Since that time things have changed for Cupids.

Under very special circumstances we can now find love of our own.

But special circumstances don't come around every day. Which is why they're called special circumstances. And I figured I was too ordinary to warrant a special circumstance of my own.

My name is Athena Googlios and I work for Cupid's Arrow, an Earthbound matching service for humans.

Like most of my fellow Cupids, I figured I would live out my five hundred or so years in lovelessness.

I had almost resigned myself to that fact.

But then the strangest thing happened...

## **Chapter One**

### *Phantom Applicant*

I squinted at my computer screen and frowned. Nope. I hadn't imagined it. There it was again.

Blip.

The face on the screen, expanded as large as I could make it, was a new application, provided online, through cyberspace. It had popped into my inbox just that morning. And I'd opened it up with nary a clue of what it was going to do to me.

Not a clue.

But when I looked at the face on the screen my heart did a little blip thing. It was subtle. But to a Cupid, who is unused to experiencing that type of thing for herself, it was anything but inconsequential.

His face was wide and square, with strong features that reminded me of his Greek heritage. His hair was dark gold and longish, framing a wide face and curling softly to his neck. Somehow it enhanced the thick column of his throat rather than feminizing it. His eyes were intense, wide and dark blue, with a thick fringe of dark gold lashes around them. His chin, impossibly square and masculine, was covered with dark gold stubble. He had long creases in his cheeks, like elongated dimples, that told me he liked to smile.

His lips were full and his mouth wide.

The eyes smoldered from my screen.

He looked like a man who was used to passion.

My nipples hardened.

My inbox chimed as another application dropped into it from cyberspace and I ignored it.

That face. That body.

Holy mother of all that was rich and fertile.

I wanted that man with every fiber in my being.

Blip. Blip. Blip.

My thighs clenched together as a wave of pure lust swept through me.

I made a little choking sound and sat back in my chair. I had to get a grip. I was a professional for the gods' sakes. I saw gorgeous men all the time. I worked with several of them in fact.

But nothing had ever...no one...

I jumped as my phone rang and reached to answer it.

"Cupid's Arrow, we aim for your heart. This is Athena."

A brief pause. And then a throaty female voice oozed over the line toward me. "Cute slogan. I hope you can live up to that."

"Mm-hmm." I wasn't paying attention. I found myself staring at the picture on the screen again.

"Miss?"

I shook my head and flipped the monitor off so I couldn't see his face. "Sorry, I'm just a little buried here... How can I help you?"

"I want a match. A particular match. I want to be matched with Damian Leandar. I believe you just got his application?"

Now that got my attention. "Leandar? I'm not sure—"

"Check your email, sweetie. I watched him send it."

I flipped the monitor back on just to be sure. Yup. It was him. Damn! Feeling my heart drop sadly into my stomach, I sighed. "I have his application, yes. But if you already know you want to be matched with him, why do you need us?"

I figured I already knew the answer to that. Hope soared in my chest. Maybe he didn't *want* the woman on the phone. Maybe she was butt ugly or something.

I could always hope.

"He doesn't know my feelings. When he finds out I'm interested he'll definitely return my interest. But he's horribly shy. So I think it would be better if you set us up. I just sent you my application."

I bit my lip as I opened the second application to hit my mailbox that morning. I nearly gasped when I saw the woman's picture.

Nope. Not butt ugly.

Not even close.

Ms. Megan Megara sat astride a flawless, white horse, long legs draping effortlessly down its sides. She was barefoot and was wearing a light summer dress, looking out over the ocean with a dreamy look on her perfect face. Her features were delicate and perfectly matched on her pale, oval face. Her hair was a thick, red-blond mane falling over her shoulders and down her back, curling softly just above her narrow hips.

She held the reins softly in one hand, the other appeared to be smoothing over the horse's glossy neck. She could easily have fitted in with the goddesses on Olympus.

My last hope fled me.

No way Damian Leandar would tell this woman no.

I bit my lip. "Okay, Ms. Megara. Let me do some preliminary work. Then I'll contact Mr. Leandar and try to set up an appointment for you two to meet. You'll both need to go through our pre-screening process though. It's a requirement."

"Pre-screening?"



"Yes ma'am, it requires that a Cupid's Arrow representative spend at least ten hours with every prospective match, in a dating environment, just to make sure we completely understand your needs...so we can match you more perfectly," I added, feeling hopeless at the thought.

I wanted to be Damian Leandar's perfect match. A part of me, a mean little part, relished the thought that I would get him to myself for ten hours...maybe more if I could swing it...before I had to hand him over to her.

I felt a little better at this thought.

"I'll have one of our male representatives call you to set up your pre-screening."

The woman sighed audibly. "All right. If I must. But I want to move forward with this quickly...I've waited long enough..." Clearing her throat, she stopped in mid-sentence, as if realizing she'd said too much. "Anyway, I'll be expecting that call today."

"Thank you for contacting Cupid's Arrow." I hung up, pleased that I'd sounded sort of sincere.

Then my gaze slid back to my monitor, where Damian Leandar's brooding, bad boy face called to me. My heart did that little blip thing again and I sighed. What was it about the man that called to me? Was it the thick tangle of dark gold hair, curling softly around a masculine face with a square jaw and strong nose? Was it the full, kissable mouth? Or was it the sad, blue eyes, which looked like they'd seen way too much of the world and needed someone to make it all better?

Nah, I decided, it was the broad shoulders, smooth golden chest and muscular arms that called to me.

Leandar was standing on a beach—I didn't miss the obvious connection there—shirtless, wearing body-hugging jeans and nothing else. He held a light-colored wad of cloth in one hand, as if he'd just stripped off his shirt and he stared toward the camera, yet his gaze was unfocused, as if he didn't know it was there.

He looked as if his heart were heavy, his thoughts deep. He appeared to be a very unhappy man.

I suddenly realized I wanted to fix that for him.

I wanted to take away the pain in his beautiful eyes.

No matter what it took.

Even if it meant giving him to *her*.

Sighing, I picked up the phone to call him.

It would be all right, I told myself.

After a couple hundred years as a Cupid, I was used to self-sacrifice when it came to love.

I could do this.

But as the phone started to ring on the other end of the line, my heart did that little blip thing again.

Only this time it hurt.

\* \* \* \* \*

I tried Damian Leandar's number for the tenth time, fully expecting the phone to ring through again as it had been doing all day. Instead I jumped as a soft, deep voice answered. "Yes?"

I sat there, my lips flapping like a wounded fish, suddenly at a loss for words. Then I remembered why I was calling him. "Damian Leandar?"

There was a short beat of silence before he responded. I discovered I was holding my breath. "No. This is his brother, Peter. Can I take a message?"

Frowning, I tried to ignore the way the sexy voice had jump-started my pulse and the entire southern geography of my body. "Yes. Thank you. My name is Athena Googlios, I'm a representative of Cupid's Arrow and I'm calling in regard to your brother's application."

Another silence. "Cupid's Arrow?"

Reluctant to discuss his brother's private business, I didn't elaborate. "Can you ask him to call me, please?" I gave him my office and cell numbers and hung up, feeling very frustrated.

It wasn't often I had this much trouble locating a client.

My phone rang as I was preparing to leave for the day and I snatched it up, hoping it was him.

"When am I meeting him?"

I sighed. "I haven't been able to get in touch with him, Ms. Megara. I'll keep trying and, when I do, I'll be sure and contact you right away."

"What's the problem?"

My teeth started to grind together as I clenched my jaw. The woman was worse than pushy and I just wasn't in the mood. I figured my best bet was to get off the phone before I said something we'd both regret.

Well, at least I'd have regrets if I said something wrong. I wasn't sure Ms. Megan Megara was sensitive enough to have regrets.

"I'm sorry, Ms. Megara, I have to run. I'll be in touch."

Heading out of the office, I waved to Christian Kairos, who'd just come home from Olympus and was cleaning out his office to go back. He'd apparently found his perfect match in a young goddess named Arion and was returning to the city of gods to live.

A wave of pain swamped me and I realized I was jealous.

Really jealous.

I headed to my car, a bright red Jeep Wrangler, and slid inside, anxious to get home and climb into a hot tub with a chilled glass of wine. I pulled out into traffic and hit the

power button on my radio, settling back wearily into my seat and laying my head against the leather headrest.

The sun warmed me through the open roof of my little car, great tunes pulsed from my radio and my body started to de-tense.

My cell phone rang and I reached for it. "Hello?"

"You're a matching service?"

I blinked. It took me a moment to place the soft, sexy voice. "That's right. You looked us up?"

"Of course I looked you up. I don't believe my brother sent you an application. Why would Damian need a dating service? The idea is ridiculous."

I changed lanes and flipped on my turn signal. "I can't discuss this with you, Mr. Leandar. It's between your brother and Cupid's Arrow. I'm sorry." I hung up and concentrated on driving.

My cell rang again.

Sighing, I looked at caller ID and saw the name Leandar. I almost didn't pick it up. But something told me I should.

"Hello again, Mr. Leandar."

"I can assure you my brother didn't send you that application. You can destroy it. He won't be returning your call."

I felt my hot Greek blood beginning to simmer, not in a good way. "Are you saying that you won't give him my message?"

"I don't need to. He didn't send you any damn application."

"How do you know that, Mr. Leandar?"

"Because I know my brother. He'd never do something so stupid."

"Stupid!" I was aware of a certain shrieking tenor to my voice but couldn't seem to do anything about it. "Cupid's Arrow is not stupid, Mr. Leandar. We've been in business for a hundred and fifty years and we have a ninety-nine point nine percent success rate matching people with their per—"

"Yeah, yeah. Save the commercial. I know what you people do...you match the ugly and unpleasant with the desperate and unsociable. My brother doesn't fit into any of those buckets. He doesn't need a matching service to get a girl, I assure you."

At this point I was shaking with anger. I was so mad I fully expected flames to come out of my ass at any moment, propelling me out of my car like a shooting star. "And I assure you, Mr. Leandar, Cupid's Arrow matches wonderful people to other wonderful people to make wonderful connections. Our clients are *not* unpleasant, desperate, or ugly." Okay, a few of them were unsociable...I'd give him that.

Horns blared around me and I realized I'd crossed the center line and was intruding on oncoming traffic. I swore softly and overcorrected, nearly running the car next to me off the road.

"No need to swear at me, Ms. Googlios."

Was that humor in his voice? How dare he. "I'm not swearing at *you*, Mr. Leandar." Though it certainly was warranted. "I need to hang up now and concentrate on my driving. Please, have a *nice* day." I disconnected and threw the phone on the passenger seat.

I took deep breaths to try to calm down and realized that I had a death grip on the steering wheel and my heart was pounding in my chest. I hadn't experienced that much emotion in one sitting since I'd been a hormone-infused teen.

Pulling onto my tree-lined street I finally felt myself starting to calm down. As I pulled the Jeep into my garage, my cell rang again.

I grabbed my purse and, reluctantly, my phone and started into the house. "Hello, Mr. Leandar."

"Okay, maybe I was hasty."

I set my purse on the table by the door and went straight to the refrigerator. Maybe I'd skip the wineglass and drink straight from the bottle. "Maybe you were."

"I'm willing to give you the fact that Cupid's Arrow is a legitimate business."

"That's very kind of you, Mr. Leandar."

"Okay, my bad. That sounded really arrogant, didn't it?"

No comment. I pulled the bottle from the refrigerator and headed toward my room, bottle clutched in hand like a street bum. All I needed was a brown paper bag.

"What I meant was...obviously you do good things. You help people who need help finding love."

Sensing just the tiniest bit of condescension in his tone, I frowned. "Actually we do help people. And we're very good at it."

"I get that. It's just, my brother isn't that type of person. He would never have sent you that application."

Tucking the phone between my ear and my shoulder, I kicked off my shoes and dragged my short black skirt over my hips. My tights followed.

It was a little tougher to pull the white t-shirt off while using the phone but I managed.

"As I told you before, Mr. Leandar, I can't discuss this with you. It's your brother's private business." I headed into the bathroom. "He must have had a reason for sending us the application. Maybe you just need to trust his judgment."

"He didn't send you that damn application! Oh hell..." The phone went dead in my ear. I shrugged and set it down on the toilet so I could reach it if I needed to. I cranked the water of my Jacuzzi tub to hot and added some soothing bath salts.

At that point I needed all the help I could get with the soothing thing.

I divested myself of my bra and panties and climbed into the tub with my bottle.

"Ahhhh. Now that's more like it." Settling back into the lusciously hot and silky water, I took a tug from my bottle and closed my eyes. "An hour or two in this tub and I might feel human...er...goddesslike again."

My cell phone rang.

I grabbed it and squeezed it so hard I heard the plastic of its poor little casing groan. Forcing myself to remain calm, I took a deep breath and pushed the little green phone icon. "Mr. Leandar, I'm trying to relax in a soothing tub—"

"Now that's a pretty picture. Want some company?" The soft voice had lost all vestiges of anger and had been replaced with a decidedly lascivious tone. I wanted to believe it didn't affect me but a tightening sensation between my legs would have made me a liar.

I sighed audibly. "Mr. Leandar..."

"I can be there in fifteen minutes."

I sat up straighter. "I don't even know you..."

"I mean, just to talk."

I blinked. "Oh. No, that's not a good idea. We have nothing to talk about."

"I think we have lots to talk about. Do you need more time in your bath? Let's make it an hour."

"No. Mr. Leandar..."

"Man, you take really long baths. Okay, two hours but that's my final offer. I'll see you then." He hung up.

I stared at the phone, my lips moving but nothing forming in my brain to push through them. I was shocked...appalled...disgusted...tingly. No, scratch that. That last emotion didn't fit at all with the others.

I stood up and grabbed a towel. I had to stop him from coming to my home. It was wrong on so many levels.

I had climbed out of the tub and was nearly dry when it hit me. How the hell did he know where I lived?

*Oh shit!*

I dressed quickly in jeans and a t-shirt and headed out the door. I had Damian Leandar's file in my car and I got the address off that. Driving way too quickly, I headed out of town, up nearby Mount Chartrain and toward the address listed on the application.

I found it on a winding, tree-lined road where huge, expensive homes sat nestled in the trees on the roadside, with an ocean view at the front.

It was a breathtakingly beautiful spot. And mind-numbingly expensive.

I rang the doorbell and waited, my heart pounding hard.

When the door opened I was shocked to find myself looking at Damian Leandar.

"Can I help you?" The voice was not unlike his brother's but had a harder, more suspicious edge to it.

"Hello, I'm Athena Googlios, from Cupid's Arrow."

He stood there, looking at me with dark, sexy eyes.

When he didn't speak I felt inclined to babble on. "You sent us an online application form."

Finally the yummy lips parted and he said, "You make house calls?"

I laughed, flustered. How the hell was I going to explain? "No. I mean, I... It's just that your brother..."

One thick, gold eyebrow lifted. "You're here to see Peter?"

I dropped my purse and had to pick it up. When I stood my knees buckled and I almost fell. I dropped my purse again.

Laughing stupidly, I started to bend down again.

A strong hand grabbed my shoulder. "Let me get it."

When he straightened with my purse he had a soft smile on his face.

I couldn't help feeling like he was laughing at me. I frowned. "We need to schedule your pre-screening and I have a potential match for you..."

He held up a square hand with long, thick fingers to stop me. I couldn't help wondering if what they said about a man's fingers and his...well...other parts of his anatomy were true.

I licked my lips hopefully. Then berated myself silently for being a slut and a whore.

"Ms. Googlios, I don't want or need any matches. I don't know who sent you that application but—"

I nearly stomped my foot in frustration. "You didn't send me the application?"

He shook his head. "No."

I blew out a frustrated breath. "Then who did?"

He smiled, showing me beautiful, straight, white teeth. "I have no idea."

My heart dropped in my chest. *Damn!* "Oh, okay. Then I guess we have no further business." I turned and started walking down the steps.

I made it almost to my car before he stopped me. "Ms. Googlios..."

I turned, trying not to grin too widely. "Call me Athena, please."

He smiled too. "Like the goddess."

I laughed. My behavior to that point had been far from goddesslike. "That's what I'm told."

"You've come all the way out here. And it looks as if we have no business to conduct. But I wondered..."

He seemed to be struggling with something. His beautiful eyes swung away from me, searching the area carefully, before he continued.

I forced myself to stand patiently, waiting.

His dark blue gaze finally swung back to me. "Would you like to come inside? Maybe have dinner with me? I was just fixing a light dinner and I'd be pleased if I didn't have to eat it alone."

I wanted to scream, Yes! And run back up those stairs but I forced my head to nod sedately as I said, "I'd like that very much."

He smiled and I moved toward him, climbing the stairs very carefully and dropping the long strap of my purse over my head and one shoulder so I didn't embarrass myself again.

He stood aside and motioned with a hand for me to enter ahead of him.

I turned as I entered the house and caught him looking around the area again before following me in.

I wondered what exactly it was that he was afraid of. Because it was obvious that something had him spooked.

Unbidden, the picture on his application, where he looked haunted and brooding, flitted across my mind.

There were layers to the man who now ushered me toward the back of the beautiful house. Serious layers.

And I was as anxious as hell to start uncovering them all.

## Chapter Two

### *Reluctant Applicant*

"So where's your brother?" I tried to keep the question casual but I saw Damian stiffen nonetheless.

He shrugged, closing the heavy door behind him and locking it. "He went into town for something."

And I knew what that something was. Deciding a quick change of subject was in order, I said, "You have a beautiful house."

"Thanks." He didn't look happy about it. "Kitchen's this way."

I followed him down a long hallway that opened into a bright kitchen with a wall of windows that overlooked the ocean. I made delighted noises. "It's so beautiful! You must love it here."

He shrugged again. "It's nothing compared to the place where I grew up."

I settled my butt onto a tall stool at an island topped in black marble and rested my chin on my hands. "Where was that?"

He was fussing with some pans on the stove, lifting lids and stirring. "Huh?"

"Where did you grow up?"

He turned his head, his features closed. "You wouldn't know it."

And apparently that was that.

All righty then.

I looked around, searching for a topic of conversation. Apparently I was on my own in that department. "So, your application said you're a sculptor."

He turned around, jamming his hands into the pockets of his jeans. "I'm concerned about that application. I don't like thinking someone knows so much about me."

I had to agree it was a little creepy. "Could your brother have sent it?"

He frowned. "Peter? Why would he do that?"

I shrugged. "Why would anybody?"

His frown deepened.

I decided to try to lighten the mood. "It's too bad you don't want to go through the process. I already have a gorgeous woman interested in you."

His eyes widened. "What did she look like?"

My smile faded away. Obviously *this* was not a good subject either. From my perspective anyway. "She had long, red-gold hair."

He stepped toward me. "Hair?"



I laughed, "Yes." Was the man used to bald women?

He tilted his head, a spark entering each ocean blue eye. "What about you?"

My heart did that blip thing and color flooded my face. "Me? Yes, I have hair."

He chuckled and the dimples in his cheeks deepened. My pulse picked up. "No, I meant, tell me about your job. What's it like working where you work? What was it called again?"

"Cupid's Arrow. We help people find love."

He snorted. "Nice concept."

I shook my head, perfectly used to this reaction. "We have a nearly perfect record of finding long-lasting matches for our clients. It's the real deal."

He leaned on the countertop, resting muscular forearms on the marble and clasping hands that looked like they were used to hard work. His face finally showed some interest. "How does this work? This matching thing?"

I grinned. *Gotchya!*

"First we complete the application process. There was some information missing from your application. We'd need to fill that in. Then we begin the pre-screening process."

"Pre-screening?"

I nodded, smiling. This was my favorite part. "You spend a minimum of ten hours with a Cupid's Arrow representative so we can get to know you better, in a dating environment."

His perfectly shaped lips spread in a smile. "With you?"

I shrugged, trying to appear nonchalant. "If you'd like."

He nodded but didn't commit.

Ouch, that hurt.

I heard sounds in the basement and looked down. "Is there someone else here?"

He shook his head and opened the refrigerator door. "No, just a pet."

I liked men with pets, it meant they had a softer side. "What kind of pet do you have?"

He frowned. "It's a bird."

"A bird?"

"Can you set the table?"

"Oh...sure."

We worked in silence for a few moments and I couldn't help wondering what I was doing there, in that house, with a man I didn't know, who didn't appear certain he wanted me there.

A man who kept a bird in his basement.

Then the most incredible smell wafted my way and I turned as Damian Leandar placed a dish from my childhood on the table.

I almost clapped my hands in delight. "You made pastitsio! Oh my gods! And it smells wonderful!"

He narrowed his eyes at me, his intense blue gaze searching my face carefully.

I flushed. I'd probably gone a little overboard with the enthusiasm. "Sorry. I don't get home cooking much." I glanced away, toward the ocean outside the wall of windows, in an effort to regain my equilibrium. Something about the way he was looking at me made my toes want to curl.

I was very warm in some really special places.

"Wine?"

I nodded and sat down, folding my hands in my lap like a good schoolgirl. In the short time since I'd met Damian Leandar I'd jettisoned my dignity at least twice. It was so unlike me to play the dunce.

I prided myself on being cool and in control.

My traitorous mind flitted back over my conversations with Peter Leandar and I flushed again, dipping my head to hide behind my hair.

Apparently the entire Leandar family was capable of throwing me off my game.

Damian put two glasses of red wine and a basket of bread down on the table and sat so that he was facing the window. He grabbed my plate and dished up a pretty hefty portion of the gooey creation, a type of Greek lasagna, and set the plate down on the table in front of me.

I waited until he'd scooped some out for himself before digging in.

As the first creamy bite hit my tongue I nearly swooned. "Ohhhhhh. This is incredible. Where'd you learn to cook like this?"

He shrugged. "In my profession I spend a lot of time alone. I get bored."

The bread was warm and crusty and had a wonderful yeasty flavor. I tried not to moan as I ate.

Damian picked at his food, his dark blue gaze climbing regularly to the sky beyond the windows.

I glanced in that direction and noticed the sky had darkened and a thick bank of nearly black clouds was moving in over the ocean. "Looks like a storm is heading our way." Okay, being reduced to talking about the weather was the death of any date.

Rule number three in the Cupid's Arrow pre-screening manual.

But his reaction to the storm was interesting. He'd settled his fork back onto his plate and stared, transfixed into the distance.

Below us, a rhythmic thumping and banging had started up.

It sounded like a damn big bird.

Damian stood. "You'd better go."

I dropped my fork and stood up. "What is it? What's wrong? Maybe I can help."

He shook his head. "No. It's what I do. I'm trained."

Such a strange thing for him to say. A sculptor, trained to deal with storms. Was he gonna sculpt it?

"I don't understand..."

He grabbed my arm, pulling me toward the front door.

The banging in the basement was louder now, nearly shaking the walls of the huge house.

I tried to argue as he dragged me toward the door but the storm had gained such intensity that my words were almost entirely lost in the roar of the wind outside.

Damian reached the front door and jerked it open.

What we saw outside made my skin crawl.

The sky was black and roiled with violence.

Trees were bent nearly in half by the aggressive wind and raindrops slashed like knives against our skin.

Debris flashed by so fast and so hard that it was impossible to discern what it was. There was a low keening sound in the tempest that made the hairs stand up on my arms.

It sounded almost human and not at all pleased.

I rubbed my arms and turned to tell Damian I had no intention of going out into that squall when my car suddenly lifted off the ground, spun sideways and headed for the door where we stood.

Damian grabbed me around the waist, flung the door shut and dived into the room with me in his arms.

The car hit the house with a horrendous slam, followed by the groan of settling metal as it slid back down to the ground.

Amazingly, the wall held up against the onslaught, in fact, from my admittedly mostly obscured vantage point of peering out from under Damian's arm, it had looked, just for a blink in time, as if the wall shimmered upon impact and then went solid again.

I blinked and jabbed Damian's broad chest with an elbow.

"Lmfb omff be!"

He lowered his lips to my ear, competing against the constant rush and roar of the storm outside. "What did you say?"

I jabbed him again and he lifted off me a few inches.

I pushed myself off the floor, shoving my hair off my face so I could see. "I said, get off me!"

He shot up as if I'd given him an electric shock. "Sorry." Reaching down, he grabbed one of my hands and pulled me off the floor. "We need to get you out of here."

I was shaking my head before he finished that thought. "No way am I going out in that. I'm safer in here."

He frowned, looking around with a trapped look on his face. Finally he nodded. "I guess you're right. I won't be able to protect you if you leave."

My eyebrows went skyward. "Protect me! From what!" There was a definite shrieking tone to my voice. I stopped, cleared my throat and tried again. "It's just a storm. As long as we stay inside we should be fine, right?"

He frowned at me.

The light in the room had dimmed to the point where I could barely make out his features. What I could see was a very worried—and very sexy—face not too far from mine.

I had a sudden urge to kiss him, just to see what he tasted like. My tongue swept over my lips in anticipation.

Something crashed into the roof and our eyes jerked skyward. He took off toward the kitchen. "Stay here!"

Having never been very good at taking orders, I shook off the strangely timed lust and ran after him.

I found him standing in front of the glass, his arms raised above his head, palms open and facing outward.

"Damian?"

Nothing. He seemed totally oblivious to my presence. I walked over and looked into his face.

He was beautiful. His skin looked silver in the intermittent flashing of the lightning outside. The lines of his wide face had sharpened somehow and looked less malleable.

He looked less human and more...like a beautiful sculpture.

I waved a hand in front of his face. "Yoo-hoo."

He didn't even blink.

His eyes were wide and fixed on a spot outside the glass.

I turned to see what he was looking at.

My knees buckled and I almost hit the ground.

"Gods help us!" I murmured.

I'd only seen them once. On Olympus. It had been a terrifying sight. The sky had darkened and clouds had roiled overhead.

Every bird, every wild creature had skittered away and hidden, recognizing a consummate predator when they saw one. Or three.

They'd swooped down from the roiling sky and landed in the middle of the street on Olympus. Standing in formation with Medusa at the front.

Her hair had writhed and spat around her, making my skin crawl.

I had backed into the protection of an alleyway and hidden from their view until I was sure they'd passed. Then I'd hurried home to tell my parents what I'd seen.

I later learned they'd caused some serious damage on the streets of Olympus that day. And the gods had ordered them contained.

Some poor fool had been put in charge of guarding them for all eternity.

I shivered. Poor sod.

I shook my head, realizing suddenly that what I was seeing in the sky outside meant they were no longer contained.

Turning, I grabbed Damian's arm and shook him. "Come on. We need to get out of here!"

He didn't react. Didn't move at all.

I became aware of a low keening sound coming from the basement and realized that whatever was downstairs was reacting to the gorgons in the sky outside.

I tried tugging on Damian again with no better results.

He just stood there, arms stretched above his head, palms out.

A horrible shrieking noise pierced the sound of the storm and I turned to see one of the gorgons surging toward the house, her terrible eyes fixed on the window, where Damian stood.

"Shit!" I turned and ran toward the sink, grabbing a dish towel and throwing it over Damian's head. I made sure it covered his eyes and then ran to the nearby door, which led to the patio outside. Ripping the door open, I ran outside.

The thing was only a few feet away, her horrible head writhing and spitting and her massive wings pounding the air above the beach.

She flew straight toward me, shrieking incessantly.

Fishing my arrow mechanism from my purse, I slipped it over my hand, closed my eyes and did the only thing I knew to do.

I shot the gorgon with a love arrow.

At least I hoped I shot her.

I had my eyes closed.

I heard an angry shriek, mere inches from my head and threw myself to the patio, covering my head with my arms.

The *thwump, thwump* of dense, powerful wings throbbed overhead and something scratched deep, painful tracks down my back.

Then, unbelievably, I felt a gentle kiss on the back of my neck.

The sound of the wings lifted and began to fade as if the creature were flying away.

I stayed where I was until the wind stopped and birds started to sing again.

Then I shoved myself off the wet, warm stones and sat up, grimacing from the bloody scratches on my back.

"Athena?" I looked up to find Damian standing a few feet away, looking perplexed. He was holding the dish towel toward me. "Do you have any idea how I got a dish towel on my head?"

Biting my lip, I shook my head. "Nope. No idea. Maybe it was the wind."

He shook his head. "Doubtful." He really looked at me for the first time. "You're bleeding." He rushed over, pulling me carefully to my feet. "You shouldn't have come out here."

"I guess I panicked." I pulled my hand away from his as soon as I was on my feet, glancing toward the door.

I had to get out of that house. I needed to tell somebody on Olympus that the gorgons had escaped and were creating havoc on Earth. "I guess I'll get going now."

"Not a chance. We need to dress those wounds and, well, your car is a crumpled mess on my front sidewalk."

My heart sank. "Oh crap! That's right."

He pulled me toward the door, back into the kitchen. "It's okay. We'll call a tow truck and I'll take you home. But first I want to take a look at those wounds."

How the hell was I going to explain the scratches to him?

He'd obviously gone into some kind of seizure and didn't remember anything that happened. The poor guy would probably run screaming for the hills if I told him he'd almost had a gorgon in his kitchen.

He sat me down sideways in a kitchen chair and rolled the back of my t-shirt up to my shoulders, tucking it under my arms so it would stay out of the way. "I need to unhook this."

I jumped as his fingers found the clasp of my bra and released it easily. Pressing my arms against my chest, I concentrated on keeping everything covered and tried to ignore the tingle between my legs his fingers were creating.

I forced myself to sit patiently while he tended my back. His touch was warm and gentle and eminently soothing. He worked on the scratches as if he'd tended similar wounds lots of times.

I closed my eyes and let my mind drift. My world went hazy and soft, until all I could feel was the warmth of strong fingers kneading the tender flesh of my back. Damian's fingers swirled across my skin, creating a vortex of heat and sensation that spiraled into my belly and lower, making my pussy clench with need.

I leaned into the firm pressure on my back, my head drooping forward in complete submission. His fingers left my back long enough to sweep the hair from my neck.

I waited, suddenly knowing what would happen next.

Warm, soft lips touched my neck and I sighed. The massaging pressure softened on my back and his hands slid to rest lightly on my shoulders. The fingertips fluttered up my throat and across my jaw, creating a tingling sensation wherever they touched.

A strong hand tipped my head back and soft lips touched the spot where the hand had been. His fingers moved across my face, just ahead of his questing lips.

He touched the corner of my mouth with a lingering kiss, his warm breath tickling across my face.

I waited, aware on some level that he was sensing me, judging my acceptance of his touch.

*I know you, Athena.* His voice in my head was filled with such pain. Such need.

And then he was gone.

The world hardened and gained depth. Damian tugged my t-shirt higher, away from the greasy concoction he was rubbing on my scratches. "Hopefully this ointment will heal you right up."

I jerked and my eyes flew open. Had I fallen asleep and dreamed the whole thing? I sat up straighter, holding my t-shirt and bra more tightly against my chest with my arms.

I blinked, trying to figure out what had just happened. It had felt so real. My body still throbbed with frustrated lust.

Behind me, Damian seemed oblivious to my predicament.

What had it meant? Why had he told me he knew me? Or had that just been a figment of my apparently overactive imagination?

I realized I knew next to nothing about the man who was currently rubbing some kind of wonderful-smelling ointment onto my back and I suddenly wanted to know more.

Much more.

"So when can we start the pre-screening process?"

His hand stopped moving on my back, just for a moment and then continued working. He chuckled and my heart did that little blip thing. "You're certainly determined."

I smiled. "Yes. I certainly am."

He rubbed in silence for a moment and then said, "I'd like to see the profile of the woman who's interested in me."

I swallowed hard. *Dang. That had been way too easy.* I realized at that point that I didn't want to give Damian Leandar away.

I wasn't sure I wanted to keep him either.

He seemed to be a sad and complex man.

But I certainly wasn't ready to hand him over to the cocky woman I'd spoken to on the phone. I took a deep breath and dived in. "I'd be happy to show it to you. But we need to finish the application and begin the pre-screening process first. I don't know who sent this application to me but whoever it was didn't complete all the information."

I felt his warm breath on the back of my neck as he sighed. "All right. Leave the application here and I'll complete it."

I smiled. *And another one bites the dust.*

"There, that should heal nicely now." He clasped my bra again and tugged on my t-shirt, pulling it back into place when I released the pressure of my arms.

I stood up. "Ready?" I was calmer than before but still cognizant of the need to get home and warn the Fates about the gorgons.

He grabbed his keys, walked me to the front door and pulled the door open. We stood there staring at my car, slightly crunched and torn-looking, on his front porch. It was snugged up tight against the house and there was no way to get around it.

Damian smiled at me. "Over or through?"

I shook my head, not feeling particularly chipper about the whole crunched car thing. "I loved that car."

He patted my shoulder. "It'll be fine. I'll take care of it." He put a companionable arm around my shoulder and we went out the back, walking around the house. I marveled at the abundance of pretty flowers lining the sidewalk leading around to the front of the house and Damian admitted, with some embarrassment, that he liked tending things.

On the street side, I was shocked to see the damage the storm had done. To everything but the house. As far as I could see, despite a thick layer of debris and broken vegetation all over the ground and the roof, even stuck into the nooks and crannies of the huge, brick home, the house itself seemed completely untouched.

I didn't even see any scratches or dents where my car crashed into it.

Seeing me frowning at the house, Damian circled my arm with one large hand and pulled me gently toward his car. "Let's get you home. It's getting late."

We drove in silence for several minutes, both seemingly lost in our own thoughts. I was searching for a way to bring up the seizure issue.

If Damian Leandar was subject to seizures he should be on some kind of medication. And if he wasn't on medication he wasn't a good prospect for a match, unless the woman we matched him to was aware of the issue and was okay with it.

At Cupid's Arrow we believed in total honesty. Full disclosure. Nothing less would guarantee a long-lasting union between two people.



The sun was nearly set when Damian pulled up in front of my house and stopped the car. He turned to me, his dark, gorgeous face serious in the dim light. He smiled suddenly and I felt the effect of it like a jolt to my system.

Blip.

"Thank you for joining me for dinner, Athena. It was..." the smile widened, "interesting."

I laughed. "It certainly was that. Maybe next time we won't have the storm from hell in the middle of it."

He reached over, lifted my hand off my thigh and raised it to his lips. "I'll make sure of that."

Hoping he was just being clever and didn't really think he could stop storms from happening, I smiled.

He touched the back of my hand again in a soft, lingering kiss.

Heat flashed through my system like fire and my sensual core clenched with sudden need. I drew a quick breath as my body succumbed to the flash fire.

Then he released my hand and I almost forgot to retrieve it. I sat stupidly, staring at him, fully entranced by his incredible beauty and the aura of sensuality he gave off like heat.

He just smiled.

I finally jerked myself out of the sensual daze and said good night. As I was climbing out of his low-slung two-seater he leaned down so he could see my face and asked, "When do we start pre-screening?"

"As soon as I get your completed application."

He nodded. "G'night, Athena."

I gave him a little finger wave and closed the door. I couldn't make myself go into my house until his little car had turned the corner at the end of my street and was long gone.

I felt lethargic and sensually charged as I turned and headed toward my front door. Like someone had given me a drug.

My greatest fear was that the drug's name was Damian.

As soon as I entered my house I dialed the number three on the phone in the kitchen and hung up. I had managed to remove my tattered and dirty clothing and pull on clean, soft jammies before the phone rang for my callback.

I answered on the second ring. "Hello."

"Hello, Athena." I smiled. Good, it was Clothos, she was my favorite of the three Fates.

"I have something to report."

Brief silence. As always with the Fates, I wondered if they already knew what I was going to tell them. "I saw the gorgons today. On Earth."

The sound of whispering met this announcement. I assumed Clothos was informing her sister Fates, Atropos and Lachesis. "All three of them?"

I frowned, trying to remember. "No. I only saw two."

More whispering. "Okay, thank you for letting us know."

"That's it? Aren't you going to do anything?"

"We already have, Athena. It's under control."

"It certainly didn't seem under control at my client's house today."

"What client?"

I couldn't possibly miss the sharpening of Clothos' tone. "Well, technically he's still a prospective client. I haven't completed the application process yet—"

"Athena!"

The Fates were not known for their patience. "Sorry. It's a man called Damian Leandar."

More whispering ensued. It sounded like angry whispering. When Clothos came back on the line I expected her to declare that they would follow up on my information. Instead she said, "You are to stay away from Mr. Leandar, Athena. That is an order."

I pulled the phone from my ear and looked at it. *Are you kidding me? Had the Fates just told me I couldn't help a potential client?*

"Why?"

"That isn't your concern. Just do as you're told, child."

Anger sparked and I saw stars. I hated when the Fates interfered in my life. Especially when they meddled in my work. But usually they at least gave me a good reason for their interference. "I need you to tell me why, Clothos."

"Sometimes we don't get what we need, dear," she informed me in a soothing tone. And then she hung up.

I slammed the phone down and screamed my frustration.

It was inexcusable!

I wouldn't do it.

The Fates were *not* going to tell me what to do without giving me a good reason for it.

I was still stomping around in a full-fledged temper when my cell phone rang.

I grabbed it up, hoping it was the Fates calling back to explain.

Fat chance.

"Hello, Athena. Did you have a nice visit with my brother?"

*Peter!*

## **Chapter Three**

### *Three-Alarm Day*

"Hello, Peter."

"I understand you had a little adventure today."

I shrugged. "Just a bad storm."

Silence.

I took a deep breath and asked Peter the question I'd wanted to ask Damian. "Peter. While I was with your brother, I witnessed something."

"Really? What's that?"

"Does Damian have seizures?"

A bark of laughter came through the line. "Seizures! What the hell are you talking about?"

"I saw him...he kind of blanked out for a while. I wondered if he was on medication for seizures. If he's going to be a client I need to know."

"Well, there you go. He's not going to be a client so there's nothing for you to worry about."

"He's filling out the application today."

More silence.

"No. Damian is not on medication. Because he doesn't have seizures."

I frowned. "But I saw —"

"What you saw was not a seizure. It was a trance. Totally different thing."

"A trance? Why?"

Peter laughed. "Damian has reasons for everything he does. He's got a lot of responsibilities."

It was my turn to laugh. "Beating clay into shape? Come on, Peter. I'm sure he's very talented but sculpting is hardly a high-stress job."

"Don't judge people by what you *think* you know, Athena. It's a huge mistake."

Sighing, I rubbed a hand over my eyes. It had been a long day and I was exhausted. "Look, Peter, I know you're protective of your brother. I get that. But I need to know if he's on medication for the 'condition' I witnessed. I owe it to any prospective matches to let them know."

The air throbbed with the response he wasn't offering. Finally he said, "Damian isn't on any medication. There are no medications for Damian's 'condition' as you call

it. It doesn't matter anyway, because Damian won't be allowing any manufactured matches. He knows what he wants. And when he sees it, he goes after it."

"Hey..." I said, "I didn't send the application in. If your brother didn't do it I don't know who did. I'm just trying to do a damn job here!" I disconnected the call and threw my cell phone onto the kitchen table, totally disgusted with the whole thing. I'd had quite enough of the Leandar brothers for one day. For a year or a lifetime in fact.

With that unhappy thought I headed for bed. Maybe things would look brighter in the morning.

\* \* \* \* \*

I had three matching ceremonies planned. A busy day for me. But it was good because the ceremonies got me out of the office for part of the day. The first thing on my agenda, unfortunately, was a rental car, since my car was a twisted lump on Damian Leandar's doorstep.

The car smelled weird and had a slight hitch in its giddyup but it got me from point A to point B, which was all I really needed for the moment.

Every time I thought about my car I felt nauseous. How was I ever going to explain its condition to my insurance company?

Sighing, I headed into the fire station, where my first match would be. He was a fireman and she was a Lutheran pastor.

They'd met at a four-alarm fire. He was dousing, she was consoling. They went out once and hit it off. But then endured unending grief from well-meaning friends and family, for going out with a virtual stranger. So they agreed to go through Cupid's Arrow for the match, to assuage everybody's fears.

I'd been pleased to take them on, realizing from the very first meeting how well matched they were.

Since then they'd been creating a fire of their own.

Now it was time for them to put the crowning touch on their relationship. The arrow ceremony would lock them on course for a long and happy life together.

The large doors of the firehouse were up and a couple of the firemen were sitting in folding chairs out front. They had mugs of something hot in their hands and were busy dissecting the events of the last fire alarm they'd responded to when I walked up.

As I approached they stopped talking and I watched casual interest spark into definite awareness. One of them, a big, burly black man, stood up to greet me.

A gentleman. Nice.

I was used to garnering interest from human males.

Though I'd remained loveless for over two hundred years of my adult life, I was not unaware of how I looked.

I was five foot nine, with shoulder-length hair of such a deep black color that it had blue highlights. My body was definitely feminine, with softly rounded hips, narrow waist and firm, well-developed breasts. Men tended to notice those things first, of course, before they fixed on my face, which was heart-shaped, with wide, olive green eyes, a long Grecian nose and full, perfectly shaped lips.

I knew I was beautiful.

Beauty had never been a problem for Cupids.

It was real, lasting love that escaped us.

"Good morning. I'm looking for Chad Roberts."

Somebody murmured, "Lucky bastard," and I smiled. "I'm supposed to meet him and Lila James here."

"Oh." The man who'd stood up when I approached glanced toward one of the fire trucks. "Chad's on the truck, checking the hoses. I don't think Lila's here though."

"May I?" I glanced meaningfully toward the fire truck in the first bay.

"Sure!" The man jumped to attention. "This way."

I followed him into the spotless garage, my eyes taking in the painstaking organization of the place. Every tool, every object in that building had an assigned spot and it was there.

There were no stragglers in that garage.

Except for me.

Someone was clanking around at the top of the huge red truck.

"Chad. You have a visitor."

A dark head popped up. Chad Roberts smiled down at me. "Ms. Googlios. How nice to see you." He scrambled down and pulled me into a bear hug, amid murmuring from the other men in the firehouse.

I patted his wide back, enjoying his clean, fresh scent as I always did and smiled. "How are you, Chad?"

"I'm wonderful. Just wonderful. How about you?"

His small brown eyes examined my face closely. I knew he was cataloguing my emotions like other people catalogued inventory. Chad was an emotive, someone who could read emotions as easily as others read the printed word on a page. He wasn't aware that he had the power. He had, in fact, been denying it all of his adult life but he used it with every human interaction.

It had made finding his one true love a real challenge.

Until he'd found Lila.

"I'm fine." When he continued to stare hard at me, cocking his head slightly in question, I smiled. "Really. I'm just tired."

He frowned just the tiniest bit and then smiled again. "That's good. You look wonderful as always."

"Thanks." Chad Roberts always brightened my day. When he complimented me I knew he really meant it.

"Lila's running a little late. One of her parishioners went into the hospital this morning and she wanted to stop by there first to visit. She should be here soon. Would you like something? Coffee? Tea?"

"Me?" offered a fireman nearby.

Male laughter rumbled through the building.

I laughed with them. I was okay with flirting. I liked flirting. "No thanks. I'm fine. I'll just sit with you while you work if that's okay?"

Chad's smile widened. "Sure. That would be great. As long as you don't mind sitting on the truck?"

My chest filled with childlike delight. Who wouldn't want to sit on a fire truck? "Really? That would be cool."

Chad laughed. "Come on." He scrambled nimbly back up onto the truck and lowered a beefy hand toward me. "Put your foot there...that's right...and then on that metal rung there...good." He pulled me up and then, grabbing me around my waist, lifted me to the back of the cab like I weighed nothing.

"This hose is twisted somewhere and I'm trying to figure out where."

I nodded, looking around. There were a lot more switches, valves and doohickeys than I expected. Apparently being a fireman was more complex than I'd assumed.

Chad and I chatted amiably for several minutes.

His cell phone rang and it was Lila. I could tell by his disappointed face that she wouldn't be coming after all.

"Okay, honey. No, that's all right. Maybe we can sign the papers individually. No, I'll ask. I'll see ya later, hon. Bye now."

He hung up and looked at me. "Her parishioner is dying and Lila doesn't want to leave her."

I nodded, understanding, but still disappointed. I was there so that Chad and Lila could sign their paperwork, closing the case and officially kicking off their relationship. We refer to it as the arrow ceremony because that's where I ping them both with the arrows that will lock their love into place.

The couple knows it as the launching ceremony. For them it's a new beginning.

"Can we just sign the papers separately? Lila said she could come to your office later and sign hers."

This created a problem because I needed the happy couple to be looking into each other's eyes when I hit them with the arrows. But the big man looked so hopeful I didn't have the heart to tell him no.

There was another way. "If I could just have a quiet place to sit for a few minutes to pull the paperwork into order I think that could be arranged."

Chad nodded, smiling widely. "That would be awesome!" Before I knew it he'd scooped me up into another bear hug. I laughed as he swung me around, trying not to notice how far below my swinging feet the floor was.

"Put me down, Chad, I'm getting truck-sick." I laughed.

He complied, scrambling down and helping me to the floor. "We have an office but it's usually filled with guys this time of day." His eyes landed on the truck. "How about in there? It's empty and quiet."

"That'll work." I climbed inside the large cab of the fire truck and Chad closed the door behind me. Settling myself on the bench seat at the back, I opened my folder to make sure I had everything I needed.

I needed to fill out a few pieces of information, which I usually tried to do in front of the couple to be matched. In this case the couple would have to consist of Chad and a picture of Lila.

If he was looking at the photo I had in my folder when I shot him with the arrow, the effects would be the same.

I'd just have to repeat the process later with Lila and a picture of Chad.

A bell clanged out suddenly and I jumped.

The garage filled with activity as firemen appeared, running from all directions, holding turnout gear in their arms and throwing helmets onto their heads.

The doors on both sides of the truck opened and men flooded in. I grabbed up my papers with a squeal of alarm and quickly found myself cocooned in large, fire-retardant males.

"Let's go!" somebody shouted.

Sirens seared the morning, making me jump, and the truck surged out of the firehouse.

We took the first turn on two wheels and I gasped, reaching out to grab a thickly garbed forearm on either side of me.

The two men turned to me and grinned. "Hey, there's a girl in here."

*Well, duh!*

"Hope you like fires, gorgeous," the fireman to my left said, "'cause this one's a beauty."

\* \* \* \* \*

It was indeed a beauty.

The building had been a hotel once. A beautiful old place. It had been converted to apartments about ten years previous. The old yellow stone of its walls had been weathered to burnished gold and covered with ivy. The doors had once been solid mahogany, lacquered and polished to a mirror-like sheen.

The stairs climbing up to the structure's heavy front door were cut from granite. The railing was wrought iron.

It had been a stunning place. A highly desirable address in the city.

Now it was an inferno.

I stood across the street, out of the way, as firemen rushed around me, pulling hoses, breaking down doors and walking into the wall of flames to look for survivors. Despite the heat of the day, I shivered and rubbed my arms briskly.

Overhead, thunder grunted out a warning and the sky darkened.

I looked up, hoping for a strong downpour to help the firemen with their dangerous job.

The clouds overhead were strangely familiar.

A deep, husky voice from behind made me jump. "Hello, Athena."

Jerking around in surprise, I was amazed to find myself staring at Damian. "What are you doing here?"

He smiled and the sight of those dimples made my knees wobble. "I was going to ask you the same thing. Do you know someone who lived here?"

I shook my head. "You wouldn't believe me if I told you. Let's just say I was carried along with the tide."

He nodded, his dark blue eyes straying again to the raging fire across the street.

I watched him carefully. He looked tense. "What about you? Do you know somebody who lived here?"

His eyes stayed locked on the inferno. His jaw clenched with tension. "My brother."

I felt the blood draining from my face. I'd just talked to Peter the night before. "Oh my gods! Is he okay?"

Damian flashed me a look filled with questions. His beautiful, wide eyes narrowed on me. "He's not here. He's out of the...country...right now."

"Oh, good." I shivered under the onslaught of his penetrating gaze. Turning my head back toward the fire, I tried to ignore him.

It didn't work. I could feel his eyes on me like a physical thing.

For that matter, I could feel his heat, smell his skin...I was more deeply attuned to the man standing next to me than I'd ever been to another creature.

It was discombobulating, to say the least.

Finally I couldn't take it anymore. I jerked my head around. "What?"

He blinked. "Huh?"

"Why are you staring at me?"

He smiled that smile again and my thighs clenched on a wave of pure lust. I had to lean against the warm brick of the building behind me for support.

"You're a beautiful woman, Athena."



I frowned. "Okay..." I peaked an eyebrow at him in question.

He laughed softly. "You took that pretty well."

Sighing, I looked away again. My system could only take so much of Damian Leandar or I feared I would explode from sensual overload. "I only meant, it wasn't *that* kind of staring. You looked as if you wanted to ask me something." My eyes slid back to him.

He took a step closer, leaned down until his lips were a hairsbreadth from mine and said, "I find myself somehow...drawn...to you."

I jerked my gaze back toward the fire, fighting with everything I had not to give in to an urge to pull him into my arms and consume him with my lips and body. But I knew that wasn't right. It couldn't be right. I barely knew the man.

He didn't move away. His breath against my face was a warm, sweet promise. I stopped breathing, trapped within my body's raging need like a deer in oncoming headlights. I closed my eyes and prayed my stillness would help me resist. But it didn't help. My body nearly vibrated with need.

He touched my cheek with his lips. "Athena."

I whimpered slightly and turned, closing the distance between us, my lips melting hungrily over his.

As soon as our lips touched it was as if a spark had ignited and something exploded through me. The flash fire was more than heat, it was light and sound and incredible sensation.

His arms snaked around my waist, pulling me indecently tight against his body. His teeth drew my bottom lip in, nibbling softly before his tongue swept over the tingling aftermath and slid into my mouth to tangle with mine.

I slipped my hands under his t-shirt and up his smooth back. His skin warmed and tightened under my hands and the scent of him wafted over me, infusing itself into my senses like a drug.

The kiss deepened and held, pulling us both inexorably into our own place, our private niche, apart from the real world playing itself out on those streets around us.

An untouchable, incredible place.

I thought I'd stopped breathing. But discovered I was sharing his breath.

Between my thighs, a clenching wetness told me I wanted the man in my arms more than I'd wanted anyone in a long, long, very long time.

A warm, salty tear slid between our lips and Damian pulled away. "You're crying." He looked so alarmed I laughed.

"It's okay. I'm okay."

He stared at me for a beat longer and then lowered his head again.

I closed my eyes in anticipation of another kiss. Instead I felt his hot tongue, sliding across my cheek where the tears had been.

His hands fell away. The air around me grew cool again.

I gasped and opened my eyes.

He was gone. Leaving only a thought in my mind, which I was pretty sure had to be a figment of my imagination.

*Take care, Athena.*

\* \* \* \* \*

When I got home I found my car sitting in the driveway. I parked the rental car, walked over to it, and stood, staring in amazement.

It didn't even have a dent in it.

Not a scratch.

For a moment I thought he'd just replaced my mangled car with a brand-new one. I pulled the driver's side door open and slid inside. Nope. The spot of red nail polish I'd deposited on the leather seat, compliments of a particularly nasty pothole, was still there.

It was my car.

Looking like it had never left the ground, spun around twice and crashed into a brick house.

I dialed Damian on my cell.

"Hello."

"What did you do to my car?"

Silence. Then, "I had it delivered to your house. Is there something wrong with it?"

"No. That's the problem. Why doesn't it have any dents in it, or scratches at least?"

"I got a dent guy out here. It only had a couple of small ones. No scratches. Two of the tires were flat, we fixed those too."

I was speechless. A man I barely knew had repaired my car for me and returned it to my doorstep better than before.

It was even clean.

"I don't know what to say. That was incredibly nice of you. And fast."

He chuckled. "Don't worry about it, I take care of things. It's kind of what I do."

I headed into the house. "You'll send me a bill though, right?"

His response was noncommittal. I would have argued with him about it except for two things, first he'd already hung up and second, I had three Fates standing in my living room when I entered the house.

## **Chapter Four**

### *Visitors Abound*

Clothos had chocolate smeared over both cheeks and was licking her elegant fingers. She looked up guiltily when I came through the door, pursing pouty lips and pushing a long strand of wavy blonde hair off her narrow face. "Hello, Athena."

I smiled at her. "I see you found the chocolate bar I had hidden under the potpourri."

She grinned. "You can't hide chocolate from me, Athena. I don't know why you even try."

I shook my head. I'd had to try something. The goddess was eating me out of house and chocolate.

Lachesis' perfect, heart-shaped face creased in a frown. "Sister, the world could be ending and you'd be nose deep in chocolate and never notice." She tossed her head, flipping her soft auburn hair with disgust.

Knowing they'd help themselves anyway, I decided to offer first, thus preserving at least the appearance that I had some control over my life and groceries. "Would you ladies like some wine?"

Atropos' eyebrows lifted with interest and her startling golden eyes widened. "I for one am parched. We've traveled far and done much today." Her thick wave of black hair flowed to her shoulders in soft curls.

I smiled at her, motioning for them to follow me into the kitchen. "What are you doing here? Has some young god or goddess been foolish enough to defy you and get up to mischief?"

Clothos linked her arm through mine. "You should know, Athena. You saw them."

I stopped, turning to look at the three beautiful goddesses. "The gorgons? They appeared again?"

Atropos sighed, pushing past me to get her own wine. The Fates were never shy when it came to refreshments. "They were at your fire today. You looked up at the sky so we thought you'd seen them."

I fought a shiver. "You were there?"

Lachesis laughed, "Of course!"

"And we saw you with *him* again," added Clothos in dire tones.

"*Him*?" I was more than a little afraid that I knew *exactly* who they were talking about.

Atropos handed Lachesis a glass of Cabernet and settled onto a stool at the counter. "You must stay away from Damian Leandar, Athena. We can't stress that strongly enough."

I frowned. "I can't stop him from approaching me."

Clothos lifted the lid off my cookie jar and pulled out a chocolate sandwich cookie with an exclamation of delight. "But you must, Athena. It's imperative." Clothos jammed the cookie into her mouth and licked crumbs off her pink lips. "The man is very dangerous right now." Soggy brown crumbs shot out of her mouth as she talked. I grimaced, watching the crumb pile grow on my once clean kitchen floor as she grabbed another cookie and shoved it in.

"Right now?" I leaned against the counter and crossed my arms. "What exactly is wrong with him?" *Aside from his nearly fatal charm*, I added to myself.

Lachesis set her empty wineglass on the counter and grabbed the bottle off the counter. She poured her sister another glass and started to pour herself one. But then she shrugged and just drank right from the bottle.

I sighed. The gods should really give me a grocery allowance to account for the Fates.

"We can't tell you what Mr. Leandar is up to, Athena. You just need to trust us on this. He's bad for you."

Bad for me. Which, translated, meant he was probably the key to my finding out something the Fates didn't want me to know. "Okay, what about the gorgons? What's going on there?"

Clothos had finished her cookies and was eyeing the wine bottle. "They escaped their handlers on Olympus and have come here for some reason."

I lifted an eyebrow at the pretty goddess. "I'd figured that much out for myself, Clothos."

She grinned at me, showing me chocolate-covered teeth.

"We almost had them last night but they managed to elude us again."

I looked at Lachesis "What were they doing at that building today?"

She shrugged slim shoulders and tipped the bottle again. I watched a thin stream of high-quality wine dribble down her chin and onto her pretty dress. She was like a high-class gutter bum. All she needed was a brown paper bag to complete the picture.

I frowned, grabbing the bottle from Lachesis and taking a slug from it. Maybe a good drunk would stop my poor head from spinning.

\* \* \* \* \*

Once the Fates left I was at a loss, restless and unsure what to think about recent events. I finally decided a hot bath would settle me down so I could get some rest. I

started the water running and added bath salts before pulling off my clothing and throwing them in a smoky pile on the floor.

My cell phone rang as I immersed myself in the hot, fragrant water.

"Hello?"

"Ms. Googlios? Have you set up the meeting with Damian Leandar yet?"

I closed my eyes and settled chin deep in the hot water, biting back a sigh of incredible pleasure as the water soothed my taut muscles almost immediately.

At first her name escaped me. "I'm sorry, Ms..."

A disgusted sigh slid through the phone line. "Megan Megara. I spoke with you yesterday."

"Oh yes, sorry, Ms. Megara, it's been a difficult day."

"Well? Did you set up the appointment?" Apparently Ms. Megara couldn't care less about my difficult day.

I lifted a foot out of the thick mound of bubbles at the top of the water and examined my toenails. My dark red nail polish was still holding. But the nails could use a trim. "Not yet, Ms. Megara."

"What's taking you so long?"

There was a scraped area on my kneecap that I figured must have happened when Damian threw himself at me to save me from my flying car.

"Ms. Googlios? Are you there?"

I sighed inwardly. "I'm here, Ms. Megara. I still need some information from Mr. Leandar for his application before I can schedule a meeting. He's not officially in the Cupid's Arrow system yet. As soon as I have that information we can proceed."

"How long will that take?"

"That depends on Mr. Leandar. I can assure you I'm doing everything I can to expedite the process."

The woman actually snorted. "I'll bet you are, honey. Don't even *think* about keeping him for yourself, Ms. Googlios. He belongs to u...um...me. If you interfere with that I can't promise you'll walk away unscathed."

Now *that* got my attention. I sat up straighter in the tub. "Are you threatening me, Ms. Megara?"

"Are you simple, Ms. Googlios?" And the woman hung up on me.

I pulled the phone away from my ear and stared at it with my mouth hanging unattractively open. I'd never been threatened by a client before.

Surprise slid away and my Greek heritage kicked in. I frowned, slamming the poor phone down on the toilet seat next to the tub. We'd just see if Ms. Megara got away with threatening me.

We'd just see who held the power on this one.

Feeling only slightly better, I settled back into the cooling water, trying not to remember how good Megan Megara had looked on that horse.

Damian Leandar was too good for that horrible woman. I'd be damned if I'd match her up to him.

To hell with Megan Megara and her threats. If I had my way she'd be a lonely old woman, riding a wrinkled and crotchety old horse along a polluted stream.

All by herself.

\* \* \* \* \*

A heavy weight pressed me deeply into my soft bed. Strong, warm hands slid across my belly and northward, gliding over the eager peaks of my breasts and giving each happy nipple a little tug.

In response, hot cream flooded from between my legs and my body tightened with need.

The slightly calloused fingers were replaced by moist heat and I moaned, arching my back to drive the painful peaks of my nipples into the warm cave of an invading mouth. Soft lips trailed from my breasts downward, creating a tingling trail toward the place where I throbbed with need.

The fingers slipped down my sides, toward my hips, and slid over my hipbones, into the crease between my thighs and my hips. They swirled against my skin, creating sensuous circles on the tender skin of my inner thighs. I sighed and tried to pull my legs apart, but they seemed to be weighted in place by a heavy body.

A hot tongue laved my belly, causing my skin to quiver happily under its attention. The tongue rimmed my bellybutton and I shivered, eager for more.

I plunged my fingers into thick, silky strands of hair and encouraged the invading head downward with gentle pressure from my fingertips.

As the weight on them shifted, my legs spread wide and warm breath centered over the throbbing bud of my clitoris.

The head lowered.

A hot tongue flicked out.

Cream ran in a soft trickle from my pussy.

The hard, slightly rough hands slid beneath my buttocks, lifting my hips toward heaven.

I whimpered, frantic to feel the warm, wet tug and pull of talented lips on that painfully expectant bud.

I waited, holding my breath.

Thick fingers slid into me. My thighs spread even wider in expectation.

Attentive lips lowered onto my throbbing clitoris, enveloping the sensitive bud in moist heat. The phantom lips and tongue pulled gently on the expectant nub. I arched my back and sucked air into my starving lungs.

Long, thick fingers plunged deeply into my heated channel and then scraped slowly back out. With every sensual stroke the lightly calloused fingers created toe-curling friction on the tender skin inside my body.

Feelings of pure contentment spiraled through me, my skin warming and my limbs growing soft with pleasure.

My pussy clenched under the tender ministrations of the ghostly lips, drenching the probing fingers in warm cream.

My pleasure built, spiraling through my pussy and shooting outward to pull my limbs into rigid expectation.

Release called to me, waiting just beyond the next stroke of a thick, strong finger, or the next pull of firm lips against my clitoris.

My face heated with expectation, my breasts swelled, and I arched my back as the wave started to break over me.

Then, just as I prepared to meet sensual divinity...pain cut through me like jagged glass.

I gasped and sat upright in my bed, panting from the close call of a truly hot dream and found myself face-to-face with a horrible thing.

A gorgon, in full gorgon mode, breathing her horrible stench over my face and driving a single, curved metal claw into the soft flesh beneath my chin.

I barely remembered in time not to look directly into her eyes. Jerking my gaze downward, I focused on the thick, scale-covered chest, which was a slimy, seaweed green color and the rough bristle of the beard that rested against it.

"Hello, Athena, Cupid goddess."

I grimaced against the foul expulsion of breath and tried to lean away from the razor-sharp claw. "What do you want?"

She laughed, spewing even more fetid air in my direction.

Though I didn't look at her face, my peripheral vision caught roiling, frantic movement around her head that made me shiver with revulsion and fear.

She leaned closer, following my movement across the bed as I scooted backward. I shrieked as one of the snakes on her head slithered across my skin, wrapping its dense coolness around my upper arm to hold me in place.

The sound of hissing grew in proportion to the monster's nearness. "You have been plotting against us, pretty Athena."

Keeping my gaze on my hands, I forced breath back into my lungs and responded. "I've done no such thing." I forced myself not to think about my recent conversation with the Fates.

She laughed, creating a strange echo in the room that made my blood run cold.

There were two of them.

I nearly wet myself from fear.

"We want what you cannot give us. But you might create the right incentive to the person who can."

I really didn't like the sound of that.

"Come!" I was jerked off the bed by the slithering appendage on my arm and was being dragged toward the open French doors of my bedroom before I had time to even gasp in horror.

As soon as we cleared the door, the heavy wings spread and flapped, startling me into screaming as my feet left the ground.

Something slashed past my face and the creature holding me screamed as I fell backward. I hit the ground hard enough to knock the breath from my lungs and rolled away. The thing on my arm hissed and writhed as blood spewed from the end that had been hacked away from the gorgon's nasty head. In its death throes, the snake spun and sank its nasty teeth into the breast nearest its flailing head and I screamed, yanking the nasty thing from my flesh and flinging it as far away as my quickly fading strength allowed.

I huddled under the heavy stone table of my patio, dimly aware of the sounds of fighting nearby as consciousness dimmed and light faded from my struggling sight.

The last thing I heard was a bloodcurdling scream as something heavy crashed to the ground beside me.

Then the gray edges of my vision met in the middle, closing off the light completely.

\* \* \* \* \*

I woke slowly, squinting against a thin stream of light that was focused on my eyes. I could feel heat and hear birds singing somewhere in the near distance, so I figured it was the sun on my face rather than artificial light.

After a few tries I managed to get my eyes open slightly and was alarmed by what I saw.

I didn't know where I was.

The heavy bed of some kind of dark wood I was lying on was massive and incredibly soft. The thick comforter that was tucked under my chin was a deep gold color with chocolate trim and appeared to be made from Egyptian cotton.

The room was bright, with one whole wall taken up by windows and a sliding door that led outside to a small deck. In the distance, past the narrow railing, I could see the ocean.



I pushed the heavy comforter back and slipped out of the bed. Squinting against the bright sun, I slid the door open and walked outside. Wrapping my arms around myself in an effort to rub the chill from my arms, I looked around. It took me a moment to figure out where I was.

"Good morning. Are you feeling okay?"

I swung around to face Damian Leandar. "How did I get here?"

He leaned against the doorframe, crossing arms dense with muscle and covered with soft, curly gold hair across his chest. Despite my best intentions my eyes slid down to assess the nicely rounded front of his jeans and over the well-formed thighs.

He was barefoot. He even had sexy feet.

"I brought you here because you need to be protected."

"Protected? From what?"

He cocked his dark head at me and lifted one eyebrow. "Haven't you been paying attention, Athena?"

I frowned, not sure how much he knew about my brush with death by gorgon, I was reluctant to bring it up.

"I found you bleeding on the ground. Someone had attacked you."

I jerked, my gaze flying to his face. "You found me? How?"

He stood there, staring at me. He wasn't hostile but there was something in his eyes, an assessing quality. I kept my gaze firm and waited him out.

"I came to your house. I heard crashing and a scream. By the time I broke the door down and got inside you were just lying there. I panicked and brought you here."

"Why did you come to my house?"

His smile was a little sad. "I was going to ask you out."

Forget the blip, my heart did a *bawhump, bawhump* in my chest. Could it really have been that simple? Two attractive, lonely people just...going out? "And you didn't see who attacked me?"

He shook his head. "I know you were dragged from bed by something last night. I saw the signs." He narrowed his beautiful dark blue eyes at me. "I heard the sound of heavy wings on the air when I came outside and found you."

I tried to keep my expression blank. "Really? How odd."

"You're different, Athena. I know that. And I've sensed that something is pursuing you. I've decided that you need to stay as close to me as possible until whatever it is stopped. Because, until you do, your life is in danger."

I shook my head. He'd said "*whatever* it is" not "*whoever* it is" I didn't think that was a mistake. "*You've* decided?" It was much easier for me to get angry than succumb to the panic that was beating in my chest.

He nodded as if the subject were closed.

We'd just see about that.

"I have to go to work."

He nodded. "No problem. We'll consider this the beginning of my pre-screening process."

I frowned, thinking about whether that would work. It was highly unusual for pre-screening to occur during office hours but it had been done before. "I guess we can work around that. But you'll need to give me space at the office."

It was his turn to frown. "How safe is Cupid's Arrow? Do you have any security there?"

"Of course!" We had protection spells throughout the building and on the perimeter. The Council of the Gods provided spirit warriors on rotation to protect us. And guardian angels had an office on the third floor. But I didn't, couldn't tell him any of that. "We're well protected, with guards on every floor. We deal with crazies from time to time."

"What about..." He hesitated as if he were struggling for the right words. "Non-traditional attacks?"

I lifted a dark eyebrow. "Trust me, we can handle anything that's thrown at us."

Damian nodded. "All right. I'll deliver you to the building and come back for you at the end of the day."

I sighed, remembering the warning the Fates had given me about spending time with Damian.

"What?"

My gaze jerked toward his face. He was very perceptive. I'd have to guard my face around him. And I still didn't know why the Fates had warned me away from him. So I just shrugged. "I'm not comfortable having you squire me around all the time."

He took a step toward me and, before I knew what was happening, I found myself in his arms. His lips captured mine and my breath left my lungs in a rush of excitement as his scent and warmth enveloped me.

His arms went around me and he pulled me up tight against his body. His hands slid up beneath my flimsy nightgown and pressed me close, smoothing my back in gentle circles that made my skin warm and tingle with pleasure. Something long and hard pressed against my stomach.

He smelled of soap, sun and salt air. His own personal musk. I found it extremely sexy and my knees weakened as it enveloped my senses.

A wave of helpless lust swamped me and I whimpered against his lips. I slipped my fingers into his hair and pulled him more deeply into the kiss. I hadn't asked him to kiss me, hadn't expected it, but now that he'd started I was desperate to keep it going.

Damian lowered his hands to my thighs. He slid them upward, toward my hips, carrying the hem of my nightgown up to bunch there. The fingers of his other hand tugged against the lace of my panties and slipped underneath.

I groaned against his mouth as one long, thick finger slid inside me. His free hand covered my bottom and pulled me against his hard cock, visible through the thin denim of his jeans. He pressed his cock against my thigh, grinding it into me as his finger worked inside my body and his thumb rubbed my clitoris in firm circles.

Frantic with need, I consumed his lips. My hands slid out of his hair, down his back and under the soft cotton of his shirt. His skin was smooth, hard with taut muscle, and impossibly hot under my fingers.

I pulled my lips from his and buried my face in his throat, sucking and nipping the throbbing vein while inhaling the warm, clean scent of him.

I was quickly losing all control and I didn't care.

I couldn't remember ever being so hot for a man. So free of sexual inhibition. It would have scared me to death if my mind had been working. But my brain had shut down under sensual overload.

Rational thought had been replaced with physical necessity.

And I was mostly okay with that.

Damian pulled away with a small growl and his teeth captured my bottom lip, tugging gently. His breath was warm against my face. "You turn me inside out, Athena Googlios. I don't seem to have any control over my emotions when you are near."

I sighed and murmured, "I know the feeling."

He disengaged himself from my clutching fingers and stepped away, pointing toward a door at the side of the room. "There is a bathroom there. I took the liberty of bringing some of your clothing here. They are in the closet and dresser." He moved to the door and looked back, his dark face unreadable in the shadows. "I'll be waiting for you in the kitchen."

He turned and left the room.

Leaving me standing there with a tsunami of emotions crackling beneath my chest and my thighs soaked with evidence of my own lust.

I leaned against the nearby wall and closed my eyes. I wasn't sure how I was gonna get through the ten-plus hours I needed to spend with Damian Leandar for his pre-screening.

It was all I could do to breathe the same air he did without flinging him to the ground and leaping on top of him. My body clenched at the thought alone...and I sucked in a breath.

I decided a shower was definitely in order. I just hoped the man knew the value of a showerhead that lifted down. With a setting for pulsating jets of water.

I was truly a desperate woman.

\* \* \* \* \*

I entered the kitchen an hour later feeling much better. I'd had a close encounter with a Jacuzzi tub jet and some of the tension had been successfully driven from my aching body as a result.

Unfortunately, a pretty good dose of that sexual tension returned as soon as I entered the kitchen. And found Damian Leandar standing with his back to me, stirring something that smelled wonderful on top of the stove.

His shoulders were broad and his hips narrow. He had mouthwateringly round, taut butt cheeks. His curly dark gold hair was pulled back and secured at the center of his muscular neck with a piece of brown leather.

The dark t-shirt he wore flexed and molded with his movement, highlighting rather than obscuring the muscular shoulders and, when he turned with the frying pan in his hands, a truly awe-inspiring set of pecs.

He smiled at me and the double row of dimples on his cheeks nearly caused the ligaments in my knees to melt. "Feel better?"

Blip, blip, blip.

I nodded, returning his smile. "Yes, thank you."

He scooped scrambled eggs with fragrant herbs and fat chunks of half-melted feta cheese onto my plate. Toast popped out of the toaster on the nearby counter and he grabbed the golden slices and dropped them onto my plate. "Eat up."

"I'll wait for you."

He shook his head. "I already ate. I have something I need to do before we leave."

I took a bite, watching him fill another plate with fruit and thick slices of cheese. He turned to me. "Stay here." I stopped mid-chew and watched him disappear through a door across the room, which I presumed led to the basement. He pulled it shut. I listened carefully and heard the lock snick behind him.

Standing up, I walked over to the door and tried the knob. Yup. It was locked. That must be *some* bird he had down there. I placed my ear on the door and listened carefully. I thought I heard the rumbling sound of a male voice and then a squawk, followed by a sound that resembled a woman's scream.

The scream was cut off quickly behind a loud thump.

Had Damian struck the bird? Surely not.

I frowned and tried the knob. Then pounded on the door hard. "Open the door, Damian!"

A moment passed and then footsteps sounded on the stairs. I stepped back as the lock on the door turned and the door swung into the kitchen.

I tried to shove past him.

He grabbed my arm. "You can't go down there!"

"Let go of me! What do you have down there, Damian, and why did you strike it?"

Cackling rolled up the stairwell and Damian shut the door on the sound, turning the key in the lock before dropping it into the pocket of his jeans. "You have no business down there. It's dangerous. I don't want you to go down there, Athena." He pulled me up hard against his body, causing me to squeal with alarm. "Promise me!"

I shook my head.

His hand tightened slightly on my arm, not to the point of pain but the promise was definitely there. I got the impression he was really holding himself back. "Promise me, Athena!"

I just stared at him until he let go of my arm with a sigh. "Let's go. You'll be late for work."

The drive to Cupid's Arrow was quiet and filled with tension. I couldn't help remembering the Fates' warning about Damian and, now I had all sorts of new concerns about what he kept in his basement.

I decided I really needed to get down to that basement.

Without warning, his hand slid across the car and covered mine, resting on my thigh. He turned and smiled at me. "I'm sorry I yelled at you, Athena. I promise I'll explain about the creature in my basement. I just need to make sure it's safe first."

Warmth spread outward from where his hand rested. I tried to ignore the tingling awareness between my legs as his thumb stroked the back of my hand in slow, sensuous circles.

My body reacted to him in an immediate and overwhelming way. Despite the fact that my brain didn't trust him, my body didn't care. I returned the smile he'd given me but didn't speak.

I was truly out of my element. I didn't really believe he would come clean on the basement thing. But I couldn't deny his effect on me. It was a situation I'd never found myself in before.

I didn't like it at all.

And I had no idea how to deal with it.

## Chapter Five

### *Ugly Battles, New Possibilities*

Damian left me at Cupid's Arrow as promised and I moved gratefully into my office, closing my door behind me. It was refreshing to have the space to myself to think.

I settled down behind my desk and started going through my emails. There were several from Megan Megara. The gist of all of them was a demand for me to set up the meeting between her and Damian. I hit delete on all of the emails and then, after giving it some serious thought, pulled up her application.

I made a notation in the file and attached it to a new email, which I sent to one of the male Cupids to deal with. The notation I'd placed on the file would ensure she wouldn't get a chance at Damian. But she'd get a shot at another match if one could be made for her.

It was the best I was willing to offer the terrible woman.

I hit send and smiled with relief.

Then I turned to the other work in my queue. I had two applications to approve, an arrow ceremony to complete and I still needed to get Lila James stuck and struck. That was Cupid's Arrow lingo for shooting her with the love arrow and striking the final contract that would set her on a course for long-lasting love.

Sighing, I picked up the phone to call her. I made an appointment with Lila for later that day and took care of a few other things.

Then I grabbed my purse and prepared to leave the office for the arrow ceremony.

I didn't get far.

My office door opened and a gorgeous woman with red-blond hair walked in.

It took me a moment to recognize Megan Megara. She was dressed in a smart pink suit and had her impressive locks pulled back in a smooth chignon. "Ms. Googlios?"

I gave an internal sigh and plastered a smile on my face, walking toward her with my hand outstretched. "Ms. Megara? I recognize you from your photo. How are you?"

She shook my hand and then dropped it like it had caused her pain to touch me.

I resisted the urge to drag my hand across my short skirt. Instead I lifted it toward my desk. "Have a seat. Would you like something to drink, or eat?"

The woman shook her head and stood looking around my office, a slight but discernable smile on her beautiful, cold face.

Since she didn't move into my office I didn't sit down behind my desk. I folded my hands together in front of me and kept my smile in place as best I could. "What can I do for you?"

As if I didn't know.

She leveled startling blue eyes on me. "Is he here?"

I frowned. I hadn't been expecting that. "He?"

She all but stamped her foot in frustration. "Damian. Is he here?"

To give myself time to consider my response to this incredible question, I turned and walked across the room, sitting down behind my desk.

I felt better as soon as I had the desk in front of me. Safe behind professionalism. "Please, sit down, Ms. Megara. Are you sure you wouldn't like some coffee, or tea?"

The woman squared her shoulders and leveled a hard gaze on me. Her beautiful face transformed into an icy mask as if by magic. "I know he came in here."

I realized good manners weren't going to be enough with Megan Megara. So I decided to shoot straight with her. "Ms. Megara, if you saw Mr. Leandar come into this building then I'm sure you saw him leave shortly after that."

She shook her head and approached my desk. Stopping only when the desk stood between me and her, she placed both hands on its surface and leaned toward me.

I fought the shiver that ran down my spine.

"I watched him deliver you here, Ms. Googlios. And I didn't see him leave. I want to see him immediately."

Keeping my face carefully blank, I pressed the emergency button on the underside of my desk. "First of all, Ms. Megara, I find it a bit creepy that you were apparently watching the building. If we're going to work with you to find you your perfect match, we need to develop a relationship that includes trust. I have to tell you I'm not feeling that with you right now. But that aside, I couldn't tell you where Mr. Leandar went. He dropped me off and left."

Suddenly, the atmosphere in the room changed. It was like most of the light was pulled from the office and what was left gathered around her. She pulled herself up and seemed to grow a couple of inches, looming over me. I blinked, certain I was imagining things. The hair on her head appeared to move as if from a stream of wind passing through the office.

The door to my office slammed open and two male Cupids, accompanied by a security guard, strode into the room.

She turned with a hiss and I stood up, ready to help my peers deal with the woman if necessary.

It wasn't necessary.

My peers, Milan and Hermes, both longtime Earthbound Cupids who were used to dealing with all manner of human behavior, stopped in their tracks and smiled at Megan Megara.

The security guard with them looked at his feet.

I frowned as the terrible woman walked toward them, hands outstretched to capture theirs in greeting. "Hello, I'm Megan Megara. How are you?"

Milan, of the short, spiky black hair and flashing black eyes, grinned at the bitch and lifted her offered hand, turning it over and kissing the palm gallantly. "Honored, Ms. Megara. What can we do for you?"

Hermes, our most love-resistant Cupid, all but shoved Milan aside and grabbed the terrible woman's other hand. "I am Hermes. It's always a pleasure to meet a beautiful woman."

I rolled my eyes and glared at them. "Ms. Megara needs an escort out of the building."

Their grins widened. Milan turned and offered her his arm. "Shall we go, Ms. Megara?"

Not to be outdone, Hermes grabbed her other arm and turned toward the door.

Megan Megara turned to me before taking Milan's arm and smiled. I shuddered at the depth of hatred in that smile. "I'll be seeing you soon, Ms. Googlios."

As they left I heard Hermes say, "Why would a beautiful woman such as yourself come to Cupid's Arrow, Ms. Megara? Surely you have no trouble getting men to fall at your dainty feet."

The security guard stumbled after them, still staring at his shoes, and Megan's musical laughter was cut off by the closing of my office door.

I dropped into my chair with my mouth open. What the hell had just happened? I shivered and realized my teeth were clacking together. The woman had really unnerved me. I'd felt decidedly threatened in her presence.

One thing I knew for sure. I was NOT fixing Megan Megara up with any of our clients. I'd much prefer introducing her to the Council of the Gods. They could give her a job washing sheets in the orgy room.

I grinned. That made me feel better.

I sighed, realizing I couldn't do it. She was human.

My cell rang and I answered without looking at caller ID.

"What was that woman doing there?"

I frowned. "Damian?"

"Yes. Please answer me. What was she doing in your office?"

"Ms. Megara? She's the woman I told you about...your future match."

Damian swore. "You have to stay away from her!"

"No kidding! The woman's a total fruitcake. And she really wants to date you."



He snorted. "She wants to do more than that. I'm coming back for you now. Stay in your office and tell your people not to let her in again. But be careful. She's very dangerous."

I opened my mouth to argue but the phone went silent as he hung up.

"Shit!" I disconnected and stomped over to the window that overlooked the street. I watched the people passing by on both sides of the road for several moments but couldn't see either Megan Megara or Damian.

Finally, I turned away with a sigh. When had my life gotten so damn complex?

It was about to get worse.

The Fates stood just inside my door, which I hadn't heard open or close. But apparently it had done both.

I inclined my head by way of greeting. "Ladies."

Clothos stepped toward me. She had dark circles under her eyes and her hair and clothing were disheveled. "Athena, we need to close down Cupid's Arrow for a while."

Shock kept me silent for a beat. I saw stars as most of the blood drained out of my face. "You what?"

Atropos walked over to my desk and started rifling through the files. She opened one of them and started reading.

I reached over and grabbed the open file, closing it and holding it against my chest, my arms crossed over it. "What are you doing? These files are confidential."

Atropos cocked her head. "It's all lies anyway. You need to come with us, Athena. We think you'll be safer on Olympus for a while. Once we get things under control here you can come back."

Thinking of my clients, particularly Lila James, whom I still hadn't had time to visit, and Chad Roberts, who was counting on me to finish what we'd all started so he could begin his life with the woman he loved, I shook my head.

"Not a chance. I don't know what's going on but I'm not leaving. I have clients who are counting on me to help them."

"They'll wait for you, Athena. This isn't only to protect you. They'll need protecting too if you go near them." Lachesis crossed her arms over her chest and scowled at me. I knew she was the most stubborn of the three Fates. I'd have my work seriously cut out for me if I was going to out-stubborn her.

So I softened my glare and tried to look reasonable. "Okay, close the Arrow if you must. But I don't need to go to Olympus, I have protection."

Atropos snickered. "Unless you're talking about a giant condom your protection is part of the problem, girl. Don't you get it?"

"No!" I shouted at them, finally losing my patience, "I don't get it because nobody's giving me any information. It's all secrets and clandestine activities around here. I demand that you tell me what's going on!"

The air in my office thickened rapidly, sparking with magic. The Fates' hair and clothing snapped around them as if they stood in a sharp wind. Their beautiful faces hardened and their feet left the ground.

I gulped. I'd unleashed the Furies.

What the hell was I gonna do?

That decision was taken out of my hands. The window I'd been standing in front of blasted inward and a sound like a roaring train entered the room, along with a foul smell I recognized.

I was thrown across the room and rolled to my feet. A swirling black mass of dark power spun like a small tornado where I'd been standing, pulling papers and small objects from all over the office and flinging them around the room. I backed toward the door as the Furies, forgetting me and turning to the new enemy, lined up and lifted their hands to coat the room in dark and powerful magic.

My chest heaved and my eyes stung from the level of power swirling through my office.

The deadly black swirl began widening out until it became two funnels. Slowly the black haze took form and I recognized the gorgons.

I turned my head quickly to avoid meeting their gazes and reached for the doorknob out of my office.

I had to warn the other Cupids and evacuate the building.

I plunged through the door and ran up against the hard, broad chest of Damian Leandar. He grabbed my hand and turned toward the elevator at the end of the hall. "Come on!"

I resisted. "The others!"

"Already out of the building."

I let him pull me toward the elevator, only glancing over my shoulder once, when it sounded as if my desk smashed against the door and slid to the floor.

I winced. With three Furies and two gorgons in the room, my beautiful office was toast.

My office door blasted off its hinges as we reached the elevator and Damian took a sharp right, pulling me through the door and into the stairwell. We flew down the stairs at breakneck speed and reached the street just as the door at the top blasted into the stairwell.

We pushed the door open and plunged into unnatural blackness outside. The sky roiled with purple-black clouds and the air was hot and muggy as if rain hung thick and ready on the air.

People scurried toward whatever shelter they could find, looking toward the sky with worried faces as thunder roared overhead.

Lightning slashed toward the ground, exploding the concrete beneath our feet as we ran. Damian wrenched the door of his sporty, two-seater open and shoved me inside. "Get in!"

He ran around and jumped over the driver's side door, turning the key in the ignition almost before his butt was fully in the seat.

We shot away from Cupid's Arrow at a speed that shouldn't have been possible in a regular, human vehicle. I clutched the dash and the door and turned in my seat, just in time to see a lightning bolt slam into the roof of Cupid's Arrow, blowing a large part of the roof into the street.

In the distance, sirens split the unnatural silence that followed.

I hoped the silence meant the Furies had finally gotten the snake-head sisters under control and taken them back to Olympus.

With a little help from that lightning bolt.

I'd recognize Zeus' signature bolt anywhere.

Turning to Damian, I realized he'd never even asked me what was blowing my office apart from the inside. This apparent lack of curiosity flashed like a huge question mark in my mind under the circumstances. Was it possible he'd known what was going on in my office when he'd dragged me out of there? Frowning, I did a mental headshake. That just wasn't possible. I sighed and mentally added it to the long list of things that I needed to learn about Damian Leandar.

I started to open my mouth to tell him we could go back. But he looked so intense I knew he wouldn't hear me or listen if he did. So I sat back to wait for him to calm down.

From the look on his hard, beautiful face I figured that could take a while.

\* \* \* \* \*

I woke up when the car stopped. I must have dozed off during the endless flight down the highway to gods knew where. I sat up and looked around. We were standing in front of a small cottage deep in the woods. In the distance I could hear water lapping against a shoreline.

Damian got out and walked around to my side of the car, opening the door for me. I gave him my hand and allowed him to help me out of the car. "Where are we?"

"Somewhere safe."

He led me inside and flipped on the lights. The interior of the house was charming. The floor was a light, polished wood with scattered, brightly colored rag rugs. The walls were painted a clean, crisp white. The main floor was open, with the kitchen and living area side by side under a high ceiling.

In front of a stone fireplace that ran from floor to ceiling in the middle of one wall, a comfortable-looking sofa and two matching loveseats created a cozy seating area.

A fire burned softly in the fireplace.

It looked as if somebody had known we were coming.

Damian went directly to the kitchen and opened the refrigerator. He glanced over the door at me. "Beer or wine?"

"Beer."

He pulled two icy bottles out of the large refrigerator and handed one to me.

"Thanks."

Damian gave me a brisk nod and put a hand on the small of my back, guiding me into the living area. He sat down on the sofa and I sat down next to him. We stared into the fire for a few moments in silence.

Finally I turned to him, intending to tell him I wanted to go back. The words died in my throat. His profile was perfection. In the soft firelight his eyes sparked with animation and his jaw looked as if it was made of stone. His hair rested against the tops of his shoulders, the strands glowing like gold and silver in the firelight.

He sat with his legs spread, the beer resting on one long thigh, wrapped in a large, strong hand.

A wave of pure lust swamped me. Before I knew what I was doing I'd laid my hand over his, which was resting on his other thigh and was clenched with obvious tension.

He turned to me and I fell into the dark pools of his beautiful blue eyes.

Feeling as if I should say something, I opened my mouth. "I..." I gulped. My brain melted. I had no idea what I'd been about to say.

He stared at me for a long moment. Then he leaned forward and set his beer down on the table in front of us. He reached for mine and took it out of my hand, setting it next to his.

He reached for me and my body clenched with need, my heart stuttering in my chest.

He dragged me gently across the couch, settling me on his lap. His hand lifted and touched my face, sliding like warm satin across my cheek, over my lips and down to my throat.

I stopped breathing.

His perfect lips followed the path his fingers had initiated. I gasped at the first electric touch of his lips. When his mouth settled over mine all thought stopped. Sensation started where our flesh touched and our breath mingled softly, flowing through me like blood through my veins. The sensual wave drove out all awareness of anything outside the small sphere where we existed.

Damian's hands circled my throat, his thumbs rubbing sensual circles in the sensitized skin of my throat. I dropped my head back and his lips forged a trail over my chin, down my throat, setting fire to the skin he'd already warmed with his caresses.

His hands slid from my throat and over my shoulders, pushing aside the soft cotton of my blouse and his head dipped farther, to press kisses into the tender spot where my neck met my shoulder.

He nipped me gently and I shivered.

The small buttons of my blouse let loose and the fabric slid off my arms.

Damian's mouth found the quivering mounds of my breasts and his tongue came out to slide along the edge of my bra, dipping beneath to taste the puckered edge of each brown nipple.

Warm wetness flooded my panties. My legs spread of their own volition and I moaned and arched my back in silent entreaty.

Damian suddenly slid one arm under my shoulders and one behind my knees and stood. I wrapped my arms around his neck and found his soft lips, drinking in the sensual musk of his warm breath as he carried me to another part of the house, where I prayed he intended to continue what we'd started.

We entered a cool, dark place that smelled of roses and Damian laid me down on the softest bed I'd ever felt. He bent over me and removed my skirt, pulling it over my hips and off and leaving me dressed only in my matching lace bra and panties.

I watched hungrily as he pulled the chest-hugging dark blue t-shirt off over his head and unbuttoned his well-worn jeans. My tongue came out to swipe over my lips as he unzipped those jeans and dragged them down, over his narrow hips.

He was wearing dark silk boxers that were tented in a truly impressive way.

I scooted backward on the bed as he approached, anticipation creating ripples of lust that had my stomach fluttering and my thighs clenching against a flood of warm cream.

Damian's dark, intense gaze held mine as he grabbed one of my ankles and pulled me back to the edge of the bed, so that my legs dangled toward the floor. His eyes never left mine as he dropped to his knees and, grabbing both legs behind the knees, pulled me close and buried his face between my thighs.

I screamed, throwing back my head as he sucked gently on the tender mound at the juncture of my thighs. My body convulsed almost immediately into climax. Before the last incredible wave of pleasure finished rolling over me, Damian slid his tongue past the soaked edge of my panties and drove it into my hot, wet pussy.

He licked upward, caressing the tender bud of my clitoris with his strong, talented tongue, before pulling it into the heated cave of his mouth and sucking gently, bringing me closer and closer toward another bone-shattering release.

I lay helpless with pleasure, my hands wrapped within the silken strands of his long hair and my head thrashing from side to side as my delight built to near uncomfortable levels and just as I found the top of that sensual wave, teetering on the micro-edge of release, Damian's head came away and he stood.

I whimpered and grabbed for him.

He dropped the boxers and I gasped. He was a gorgeous specimen, tall and perfectly formed, with broad shoulders, a narrow waist and a long, thick cock that hung rigid and dusky with need before me. I couldn't wait to have him inside me.

Damian bent over and pulled me into the center of the bed, dropping onto me with a gentle groan as his hard cock pressed against my fluttering belly.

Reaching down, he grabbed the side of my flimsy panties and wrenched them away. He drove into me, hard and deep, and I went over, screaming his name to the sky.

Damian held himself perfectly still, his teeth clamped gently on my bottom lip and the sweet musk of his breath flooding my face, until my pussy stopped milking his thick cock and settled into the aftermath of my orgasm.

Then he licked the lip he'd been biting and covered my mouth with his as his body moved into a more deliberate, sensual rhythm.

My toes curled at the incredible feeling of his hard flesh scraping across the highly sensitized skin between my thighs. He lifted and moved forward, so that the tip of his cock brushed against my G-spot with every stroke.

It didn't take long for me to fall screaming over that edge again. This time Damian couldn't withstand the insistent pull of my body against his.

He stiffened, groaned and buried his face in my hair as he pulsed within me. He held his weight on his forearms and rotated his hips to pull the last ounce of pleasure from our bodies.

I placed my hands on his firm, round buttocks and held him tightly against my body, desperate to hold on to the pleasure forever.

Finally he softened over me and his lips touched my cheek in the most heartbreaking kiss.

It felt as if he were thanking me.

I pulled a deep, shuddering breath into my lungs. Sadness rolled off him in waves I could almost taste. My eyes filled with tears and I blinked them determinedly away.

Damian sighed and lifted his head, feathering kisses from my ear to my nose and over to the other side. Then he moved to the über-sensitive spot at the juncture of my neck and shoulders and I stiffened slightly, giggling.

He lifted his head and he was smiling. "Ticklish?"

I laughed again and shook my head. "Not a bit."

His grin widened. "That's good. Then you won't mind if I do this..." He lowered his head and blew softly on the same spot.

I shrieked and clamped my shoulder to my ear so he couldn't get to it.

Damian laughed and quickly found the other side. I was laughing so hard I was having trouble breathing. "Stop!"

Like a true gentleman he did stop. He lowered his smiling lips toward mine. "Then I guess I'll just have to do this instead."

And his lips were on mine again, his body began to harden within me and his hips arched back into that gentle rhythm.

And the wave of pleasure started to build again.

## Chapter Six

### *Finally, the Brother*

We dragged ourselves out of bed a couple of hours later and wandered toward the kitchen for some food. I opened the refrigerator door and stood staring at the contents with awe. It was overflowing with food.

Damian came up behind me, wrapping his arms around my waist and settling his chin on top of my head. "Eggs would be nice."

I nodded and was reaching for them when a voice from the dark living area caused me to squeal and jump.

"I'd like some eggs too please."

We turned and a tall, dark god of a man walked into the light. If it wasn't Peter Leandar it certainly should have been.

Damian smiled and walked over to hug his brother. "You're okay?"

Peter nodded, slapping his brother on the back and winking at me over Damian's shoulder. "I'm good."

Damian pulled away. "What about the..." he glanced at me, "package...you've been keeping for me?"

Peter walked over to the refrigerator, sliding an interested gaze over me as he reached for the door. His dark blue eyes were shaped the same as his brother's but were totally different. His gaze was playful, where Damian's was intense and serious. "She's right where you left her."

I peaked an eyebrow, deciding this was as good a time as any for the brothers to tell me what the hell was going on. "She?"

Damian took the beer Peter handed him and they walked into the living area together, ignoring me.

Apparently they didn't agree.

I grabbed a beer and followed, determined to get some answers.

They settled on the couch and propped their feet on the coffee table, crossing their legs at the ankles in identical fashion.

I settled into the corner of one of the loveseats, tucking my legs under me. I pulled the hem of Damian's t-shirt down over my legs, happy that I'd pulled it on before coming out of the bedroom.

The firelight flickered over the two men across from me. It caught silver highlights in Damian's dark gold hair and painted Peter's light brown hair, cut military short, with red-gold sparks.



Damian's face looked dark and sensual, with heavy eyebrows over deep-set blue eyes and full, well-shaped lips.

By contrast Peter's face was animated and playful, despite the dark circles under his eyes that the firelight was accentuating. His features were very similar to Damian's but not quite as strong, except for his jawline, which was square and very masculine like his brother's.

He was tall, leanly muscled like Damian but had slightly less broad shoulders.

I hadn't noticed if he had the sexy double slash of dimples.

"So what's going on here, guys?"

Peter turned to his brother with a grin.

*Oh! There they were.*

Damian continued to stare into the fire, lifting the beer to his lips.

"What my big brother means," Peter offered with a chuckle, "is that, if we tell you we'll have to kill you." He nudged Damian with an elbow. "Isn't that right, Demon?"

Damian just turned his head and glared at his brother. Peter laughed, tilting back his head and gulping his beer with gusto.

"Demon?"

Peter laughed again. "Don't look so dire, Athena. It's just a nickname. I've called him that ever since we were kids, when he used to torture me relentlessly."

Damian's dark blue gaze swiveled toward me and I fought the urge to shiver. All the heat he and I had so easily generated in the bedroom had fled from Damian's gaze and the cold sadness I was growing to hate had replaced it. "What can you tell me about the woman who visited you today?"

I blinked. Now *that* I hadn't been expecting. "Megan Megara? Other than that she's totally crazy? She was watching the building, you know. She saw you drop me off."

Damian and Peter shared a look.

All traces of joviality fled from Peter's expressive face. "Did she try to follow him?"

I shook my head, sipping my beer. "She was mad because I couldn't tell her where he'd gone."

"She didn't hurt you, did she?" Damian's face darkened with emotion, his blue eyes flashing.

I shook my head. "I pressed the emergency button on my desk and two male Cu..." I caught myself just in time, "um, coworkers and a security guard came into the room." I looked at the two men on the couch. "It was strange. She changed just like that..." I snapped my fingers, "when they came into the room. Suddenly she was all sweet and harmless. They escorted her out."

The brothers shared another look.

"I've never heard of an ability to change like that." Peter was frowning.

I nodded. "Yeah, it was strange."

They looked at me like I was simple-minded and then turned away again, ignoring me.

"It's got to be her though." Damian stared hard at his brother until Peter sighed.

"You're right."

I lost all patience at that moment. Standing up, I stomped over and shook a finger at them. Unfortunately the other four digits were wrapped around a beer bottle and the beer sloshed out and landed on Peter's jeans. "Oops. Sorry." My hand reached toward his lap before my brain inserted common sense and I stopped just a hair away from brushing at the spilled beer on Peter's crotch.

Peter grinned up at me.

Damian scowled.

I jerked my hand back with a flustered, "Oh!"

"Dammit!" I screamed, making them jump. "You're about to witness an enraged female if you don't start talking right now. I want to know what's going on!"

Peter looked at Damian. "You'd better tell her, Demon. I hate the enraged female thing."

Damian smiled and jerked his head toward my beer. "I'll tell you if you'll take your weapon back over there and sit down."

Peter chuckled.

I showed him my teeth. "*These* are my weapon, buddy. Don't you forget it!"

He smiled at me and I retreated before those dimples turned me into a Cupid puddle in the middle of the floor.

When I was settled safely into my corner again, Damian told me a truly astounding story, which I only half believed.

"When you came to visit me the first time, Athena, I sensed something about you..."

"He's a seer," Peter added helpfully.

I frowned. "A seer?"

Damian twisted his lips. "Kind of, yes. I know things. Things there should be no way for me to know."

*Okay, I told myself, this is so not what I'd expected to hear.*

"With this particular..." he glanced at Peter, "skill, I have been asked to help guard a certain...creature."

"What kind of creature?"

He sighed. "It's nothing you've ever encountered before, I'm sure."

"It's the product of a horrible genetic experiment."

Damian threw a glare at his brother. Peter just grinned.

"Something like that," Damian said. "Anyway, there are those who would like to get their hands on this..."

"Experiment." Peter's grin widened. He seemed to be having a lot of fun, despite his brother's obvious discomfort with the story.

Or maybe because of it.

"Yes."

The story had more gaps in it than a Britney Spears outfit.

I tried a recap, hoping that would help clear things up for me. "So...because of this...ability...you have to see things, you're guarding this poor creature?"

Damian winced as if he was fully aware of how lame his explanation sounded. But he appeared unwilling, or unable, to explain more clearly.

"Is it dangerous?"

"Extremely."

Peter nodded. "You need to stay away from the thing, Athena. Damian is right about that."

I bit my lip. "How does this ability to *see* things make it safe for you to be around it, Damian?"

The brothers shared another look. Peter shrugged as if they'd had a silent communication of some sort.

Damian slid his intense gaze back my way. "Obviously I have other skills, Athena."

"Obviously," I responded, frowning. "But you aren't going to tell me what they are. Are you?"

He just shrugged.

"So how does Megan Megara fit into this story?"

Damian stared into the fire, shaking his head. "I'm not sure. But she fits somehow."

Shaking my head in frustration, I stood up. "I'm going to bed."

I stomped off, knowing almost less than I'd known before. Questions swirled around in my mind. Whatever Damian Leandar was involved in, it was something the Fates didn't like. And I still didn't know if Damian was involved with the whole gorgon thing. He'd never mentioned magic during the telling of his holey story. But I had to wonder if magic didn't have something to do with Damian and his brother. Too many things just didn't fit.

I sighed and climbed back into the tousled bed, burrowing my nose in the pillow under my head. Damian's scent filled my nostrils. My body tightened with instant need.

I had to figure out what was going on and fast. Before I lost my heart to a man who was playing on the wrong mythical team.

If it wasn't already too late.

\* \* \* \* \*

Peter was gone when I woke up. It was early. Too early to get out of bed.

Damian was standing in front of the French doors with his back to me, staring out at the surf I could hear crashing against the shore.

He had a hand on either side of the door and he was totally and completely the way the gods had made him. His sun-kissed skin was smooth and flawless, with only the soft gold hair covering his arms and legs, glistening in the sun, to mar its smooth perfection.

I lay there watching him for a moment and he turned. "Good morning, Athena."

I plastered a serious look on my face and said, "Good morning, Damian."

He smiled and my thighs tightened, cream flowing from my body. The sun surrounded his form like a golden aura, making his dark gold hair almost glow. His long arms dropped to his sides and his hands clenched gently into fists as if he were fighting some internal battle.

I smiled and patted the bed beside me. "I'm feeling lonely over here."

Damian's smile widened and some of the intensity left his dark blue eyes. He stalked toward me, evidence of his pleasure at my invitation bobbing happily before him.

I licked my lips.

He hit the bed and went to his knees, crawling toward me with the look of a starving man. He bent over me like a golden lion. His soft lips found mine and devoured, hungrily pulling a gasp from me as his warm, hard body covered mine, pressing me into the soft mattress beneath us.

My legs came around his buttocks and he plunged, entering my dripping-wet pussy with a groan and making my heart pick up in an effort to meet the demands for hot blood throbbing at my sensual core.

He captured my hands and pulled them over my head, holding them there while he feasted on my lips and drove his long, hard cock deeply into my pussy.

Despite the urgency with which he'd engaged our mating, Damian settled into a slow, leisurely roll of hips that created deep, toe-curling friction against my highly sensitized skin. He thrust deeply, then dragged the dense heaviness of his rigid cock back out, almost to the tip and drove deep again, agonizingly slow and with overwhelming sensual awareness.

My body tightened toward release within the space of a few, delicious strokes. I pulled my mouth away from Damian's and cried out as the wave swept over me, then dragged my fingers into his hair and laid my teeth over his shoulder, biting down hard as he arched into his own spine-bending release.

Damian cried out, his long body stiffening and I felt his hot seed shooting into me. The feel of him pulsing within me sent me into another toe-curling orgasm.

Damian sagged onto his arms and knees, our bodies still joined and throbbing in gentle aftermath.

I feathered kisses over his face and licked the reddened spot where my teeth had laid claim to him.

He chuckled softly. "You bit me, Athena."

I grinned at him. "I did. And you liked it!"

He shook his head and slipped sideways, pulling me tightly against his body as he curled around me. "You can bite me anytime you feel the urge, beautiful goddess."

My heart stopped. *Goddess?*

He leaned over and pulled a nipple between his lips, sucking gently. His hand smoothed over my stomach and traveled down to rub the hungry nub nestled in the midst of my dark, wet curls. My legs spread and I arched toward his finger, my body sparking into instant need at his touch.

I reached to cup his balls and leaned toward him, flicking my tongue out to run along the seam of his lips. He opened his mouth and let my tongue inside, instantly tangling it with his own. We lay on our sides, facing and pressing close to each other. Damian lifted my leg and tucked it over his hip, nestling the newly hard length of his cock into my wet curls.

I rocked forward, bringing the fat tip into contact with my clitoris and sending jolts of pleasure spiraling through my body. Damian nestled his head at the juncture of my throat and shoulders and blew gently on the sensitive spot.

I stiffened, giggling. My giggle fell away quickly as he plunged his cock into me, driving so deep I gasped with startled pleasure. His teeth clamped gently on the ticklish spot and he growled softly.

His body drove hard and fast into me, plundering rather than savoring. I threw my head back and gave myself over to the intensity of his lovemaking, savoring it and meeting it thrust for thrust, as he took me to a place I'd never been before.

It was a dark place. A delicious place. A place where sensuality gave over to passion and gentle pleasure bowed to raging lust. It was a place where the growling noise I heard coming from my own throat was not only acceptable but was a necessary component of the communication between two starving lovers. Our only thought was to reach that volcano of pleasure waiting to spill over us, counting on the melting heat to burn away years of loneliness and deprivation that scarred us both.

When that volcano finally spilled, we both screamed and I felt sharp, wondrous pain in the spot where Damian's teeth pierced the tender flesh of my shoulder. My body convulsed in outrageous need and fell over into heaven. My limbs turned rigid, stars burst before my eyes, my breath stilled in my chest and my pussy throbbed with a pleasure I hadn't even dreamed existed.

The last thought as I drifted off to healing sleep again was that I was in deep, deep trouble.

And it wasn't coming from a couple of ugly snake-heads, or even from three testy goddesses with anger issues.

The trouble I faced was planting soft kisses across my throat as I drifted back to sleep. And had already staked a tentative claim on my tender heart.

\* \* \* \* \*

The sun warmed my eyelids and the smell of something wonderful cooking tickled my senses.

I opened my eyes and stretched, feeling loose and relaxed.

Climbing out of bed, I dug through the closet until I found an old, white terry cloth robe and slid it on.

I found Damian in the kitchen cooking breakfast.

He handed me a cup of hot, wonderfully fragrant coffee and kissed me on the nose.

I could get used to that.

"Smells wonderful."

"Sit down and drink your coffee. It'll be ready in a minute."

He was wearing silk boxers and nothing else. I stared at him over the rim of my coffee cup, feeling my body warm to the idea of dragging him back to bed. But it turned out Damian had other ideas.

"I thought we'd go shopping today."

I blinked. Was he kidding me? "Are you for real?"

He laughed and settled a fragrant plate of eggs and bacon in front of me. "I'm just being practical. You need clothes and stuff."

I blinked again. It had never occurred to me that we would be staying in that house. "I just assumed we'd go back to the city."

He dug into his eggs and shook his head. Swallowing, he said, "You can't go back there until we catch her."

"Her?"

"Megan Megara."

I ate some bacon and thought about this. "So you think she's dangerous?"

He wiped his lips and sipped his coffee. "I know she is."

I frowned. "So you know her?"

He just looked at me.

"She seems to know you pretty well."

He shook his head and dug into his eggs again. "I might know her, I'm not sure."

"You're not sure?" I just shook my head, perplexed.

"Eat your eggs. I want to hit the road early, before it gets...hot."

We ate in silence for a few minutes. I settled my fork next to my plate and sat back with my coffee. "That was really good. Thanks."

He nodded.

"Where'd Peter go?"

He jerked, looking surprised. "He's at my house."

"Guarding your...pet?"

"Something like that."

Suddenly losing my temper, I slammed the coffee mug down on the table. Damian's only response was to lift his gaze slowly upward. "What the hell's going on, Damian? Everybody seems to know but me! I'm getting pretty sick of it."

"Everybody?"

I blinked. I couldn't tell him about the Fates. "You and Peter."

He stared at me for a long moment.

I tried not to squirm in my chair.

"You never talk about yourself, Athena."

I frowned. "You're changing the subject."

He shook his head. "I just realized you know more about me than I know about you."

That set me back. I knew next to nothing about him.

I grabbed our empty plates and carried them to the sink, trying to avoid the subject he was warming up to.

"What is there to know?" I shrugged, hoping he'd take the hint and drop the subject.

"How old are you?"

*Two hundred and fifty.* "You're not supposed to ask a woman her age. It's impolite."

He chuckled. "Okay, then where do your parents live?"

*Mount Olympus.* I slammed a plate into the dishwasher. "My family's not from around here."

Silence behind me as I rinsed the second plate and settled it more carefully into the dishwasher.

"What's your favorite color?"

The tension flooded from my body and I laughed, turning around. "Blue."

He grinned and my knees melted.

Standing up, he held his hand out to me. "Let's go get dressed. I know the perfect place to shop. There's a little restaurant down the street that serves succulent crab cakes for lunch."

I allowed him to tuck me under his arm and guide me toward the bedroom. It occurred to me that I should grill him about his own life, as he'd done me. But then he turned me so that his lips could cover mine.

And I forgot all about grilling.

\* \* \* \* \*

Four hours later our hands were full of bags and we were heading up the street to the restaurant. I was enjoying the day immensely, reveling in the atmosphere of warm sun and salty sea air that was suffusing my senses.

It was a beautiful coastal town. The buildings clustered along a stretch of road about a mile in length, with the ocean nestled up against its moorings on one side. The stucco structures of the clothing stores, jewelry shops and more mundane offerings such as a hardware store and a bank were a variety of pretty pastels that made me think of an ice-cream display.

My stomach rumbled and I realized we'd worn breakfast off with a vigorous workout in the shower and then a few hours of shopping.

Damian took my hand as we walked down the busy street, making our way through hundreds of aimlessly strolling tourists and a few obvious locals who had looks of resigned patience on their faces.

My head swiveled as I tried to take in everything around me at once. The brightly colored clothing, shiny gold jewelry and softly draping, gauzy fabrics were like a beacon to me, pulling me into their tempting sphere like sirens on a rocky shore.

I sighed, tempted to think I might be in heaven.

Then a flash of red-gold danced across my peripheral vision. I jerked my head around, sucking in a breath.

"What is it, Athena?"

I searched the crowd but didn't see her.

"Athena?"

I turned back to him, shaking my head. "Nothing. I just thought I saw someone I know."

We entered the cool darkness of the restaurant and asked for a seat on the deck outside, looking over the ocean.

The heat hit me again as we reemerged into the sun and took seats under a big umbrella at a table with shells embedded into its top. Stuffing all our bags under the table, we ordered drinks and settled back in our chairs.

A soft breeze brought the scent of salt and sea into our sphere and the sound of water lapping against the startlingly white sand was soothing. "I love this place," I told Damian.

He nodded. "I find the ocean soothing."



I narrowed my eyes at him. "You don't strike me as someone who seeks soothing."

He smiled. "Trust me, I need it more than most."

"You have a stressful job?" I was grinning, teasing him.

But he nodded as if I'd asked a serious question. "It certainly can be."

Then I remembered he wasn't just a sculptor. "What exactly do you *do*, Damian?"

He shrugged. "I'm kind of a bodyguard...in reverse." He grinned.

I laughed. "Interesting. So you make sure the person you're guarding *is* harmed?"

Chuckling, he shook his head. "Not quite. I protect others from the body I'm guarding."

"So, you're more like a jailer."

He frowned. "Jailer has such negative connotations."

I laughed out loud.

The pretty, young waitress brought our iced teas and took our orders and then left.

I sipped my tea and looked out over the ocean. The sky appeared to be darkening farther out.

Fat, dark clouds, shot through with the occasional flash of heat lightning, made an interesting horizon. "Looks like a storm's coming."

Damian didn't look out over the ocean, he kept his gaze on my face. "Yes. There is a storm coming."

I looked at him. Our eyes locked for a long moment and then my gaze swung away, suddenly uncomfortable with the intensity of his stare.

We sat in silence for a moment, watching the interesting array of people passing by on the beach.

I looked up as my crab cakes arrived and smiled at the waitress.

When I looked back to the beach, my fork poised over my plate, there was a woman standing there who hadn't been there a second earlier.

She was tall and slim and wore a long gauzy dress that molded to her slender curves as the breeze swirled lovingly around her. Hanging down to pert buttocks, thick red-gold hair rustled softly in that same breeze.

She stood straight, her back to us, staring out toward the sea.

My gaze locked onto her. My heart pounded in my chest. I stopped breathing.

And then she turned and I gasped.

Her smile was filled with oily malevolence, her body stiff with anger.

"Oh shit!"

## Chapter Seven

### *The Monster's Lair*

Damian surged to his feet, knocking the table hard with his thighs on the way up. The table dropped back to the stone patio with a crash and my iced tea went over. I gave a little squeal and jumped out of my chair to avoid the quickly spreading tea.

People turned to look as Damian took off toward the beach, heading right for Megan Megara.

I jumped up and started after him.

Somebody grabbed my arm. It was a man wearing a t-shirt that bore the name of the restaurant on it. "You need to pay for your lunch, ma'am."

I turned back to the beach but both Damian and Ms. Megara were gone. Looking both ways down the long stretch of white sand, I saw hundreds of people littering the beach but none of them were Damian or the evil woman.

Sighing, I reached into my purse and gave the man a twenty, then I gathered up our bags and walked down off the patio and onto the hot sand. I settled myself at the water's edge, just outside the reach of the warm, insistent water and waited.

The dark clouds on the horizon moved inexorably closer. The wind had picked up from a soft breeze to a fairly sturdy current of air. The water had gone from a soft chop to a wild tangle and the beach was quickly emptying of people.

I watched the incoming storm with a sense of impending doom, feeling small and alone in the face of it.

Strangely though, it never occurred to me to leave that beach and flee. Somehow I felt as if I needed to face whatever was out there. If I was going to get to the bottom of what was going on, I was gonna have to stare the ugliness I'd been sensing right in the teeth.

It was with this attitude firmly in place that I saw the first waterspout beginning to form from the midst of the growing storm. I didn't feel surprise so much as relief. At least I had something to focus my attention on.

The second waterspout gave me pause.

I was determined. I wasn't stupid.

I stood up and reached into my purse. Pulling my Cupid's bow and arrow assembly from its depths, I looked around.

The beach was empty.

Everyone had fled.

I held the small assembly out and closed my eyes, pulling on my powers to change it. As I focused, the assembly grew and changed, creating a real bow and arrow from the small one I used for my arrow ceremonies.

It was much more difficult for me to use my power on Earth than it would have been on Olympus but long years of practice allowed me to pull it forward when I needed it.

The golden bow I conjured, with the hair of Medusa as its string, would be deadly to the creatures spinning toward me across the ocean.

The trick was not to look into their eyes as I shot the arrows or I'd be turned to stone.

A tricky thing at best.

I nocked an arrow and waited.

A tiny sound behind me made me spin around, the bow aimed high. At heart level.

Damian Leandar stood there, his blue gaze intense on my face and his dark gold hair blowing back in the stiff wind coming off the roiling sea. "It appears we both have secrets, Athena."

I lowered the bow but kept the arrow nocked. "Where did you go?"

He jerked his head toward the bow. "You carry that around in your purse?"

I gave him a slow smile. "Actually, yes. I do."

He stared at me a moment longer and then matched my smile, shaking his head. "Apparently we have much to discuss later." He jerked his head toward the spouts, which were only about three city blocks from the shoreline at that point. "Medusa's coming and she and Euryale are not happy."

He reached one hand behind his back and came up with the longest sword I'd ever seen. From his other hand dangled a long, thick chain that looked as if it were made of heavy silver.

I gasped and he grinned. "Yeah," I told him, shaking my head, "We *will* be talking later."

The thunderous sound of the waterspouts roared behind me, I turned to find a wall of water rising just before the spouts, heading directly toward us.

Damian grabbed me around the waist and pulled me off my feet, yanking me backward as the wall of water crashed into the spot where we'd been standing, creating a five-foot-deep crater in the sand from the force.

The spouts hit the beach, spinning sand into the air that sliced and scoured our skin. I ducked, trying to hide my face from the sand-embedded wind.

Then the wind died down and I uncovered my face. Damian moved in front of me, holding the sword out. He lifted his head and looked at the two horrible creatures standing there.

I screamed, "No!" and lunged toward him, hoping to cover his face before he looked directly into their eyes.

Damian caught my hand and shoved me behind him. Amazingly, he didn't turn to stone.

"Where is she, Guardian?"

*Guardian?*

Damian released me to move his chain-covered fist forward again. He was obviously ready for them to attack.

"You can all be together again, Medusa. All you need to do is return to Olympus with me."

I peered around him, taking care to keep my eyes cast downward, so I was looking only at their feet and legs.

The legs were the same seaweed green as the scales on their chests and were covered in long, coarse hair, ending in wide feet with elongated metal claws curving from them.

The garbage dump aroma I remembered from before was now "enhanced" by the scent of rotting seaweed and dead fish.

"We're tired of being prisoners, Guardian. Just give us our sister and we'll go, letting you and the pretty Cupid live."

Damian stiffened slightly and I realized he hadn't known what I was. Not for sure anyway.

I wondered if it would matter to him.

Then I did a mental head smack. Not exactly the time to be thinking about romantic relationships.

"Can't do that, Medusa. You and your sisters won't behave...you've proven that here on Earth."

"Bawww! These cattle are not important! We've left the gods and goddesses alone."

"These 'cattle' as you call them would beg to differ, Medusa."

The wind picked up suddenly and the sky roiled above us. "We will never put ourselves under your control again, Guardian!"

Damian lunged forward, slashing his sword at Medusa and swinging the chain toward her sister.

The sisters let out a horrifying scream of rage that was half bird and half enraged female. My instincts told me to duck but I forced my spine to straighten and I pulled my bow forward.

Damian had the chain around one of the horrible creatures and her snakes were attacking him, biting repeatedly at his arm as he jerked the chain in an effort to bring her to the ground at his feet.

Blood ran in rivulets down his muscular arm, dripping into the sand beneath them.

With his other arm he was keeping Medusa and her deadly claws away.

From the number of deep, bloody gouges I saw on his chest I realized he'd had only partial success.

Suddenly Medusa spun away from him with a screech and lifted off the sand with a few powerful beats of her enormous wings. She hung in the air above Damian for a moment, slashing at him with the razor-sharp claws of her feet and then swung upward and away.

Directly toward me.

I barely got my bow up before she struck.

The arrow I'd unleashed embedded itself into one of her wings and she shrieked, slamming her other wing into me and sending me flying several feet. I skidded across the sand and felt the top layer of my skin ripping away along one side.

I nocked another arrow as I slid across the sand.

She was on me again as soon as I stopped, all four sets of claws digging into the sand around me. I managed to wedge the bow between us, the point of the arrow nudging against the hard scales of her chest, as she lowered her head toward me.

I squeezed my eyes tightly shut. The hissing sound coming from her head made my breath lock in my chest. "Get off me or I'll let this arrow go."

She laughed. "Pretty, Cupid. You cannot harm one such as I."

Something cold and dense slithered across my wrist and I jumped, nearly losing my grip on the deadly arrow. I decided my best defense was bravado, false though it might be. "I wouldn't be so sure of that, Medusa."

Another snake found my other wrist and I realized what she was doing. Before she could yank the bow from my hands I unleashed the arrow.

An unearthly howl filled the air and lightning blasted the sand above my head. Medusa flew upward, the snakes around my wrists holding tight so that I lifted upward with her.

Her thick body writhed in pain as she pounded her mighty wings to bring us off the sand and warm, frothy blood bathed my face and body as she thrashed.

I risked opening my eyes enough to see where I was and saw that the monster had managed to carry me quite a distance out to sea. The sky above still roiled angrily and below my feet, dark water surged and spun in response.

A second pair of wings pounded the air beside us and I risked a glance in that direction.

Both gorgons were bloodied and torn but they were whole and I was now their prisoner.

I had no idea what had happened to Damian.

Tears stung my eyes as I realized he had to be dead, or at least gravely injured.

I was on my own.

Hours later I was jolted from a semiconscious state when my body was flung to the hard, rocky ground. I rolled several feet before hitting an unforgiving, slimy wall and stopped.

I just lay there, hiding my eyes and hoping they'd kill me fast.

"Athena?"

I kept my face covered with my arms, peering out from under my arm at the huge clawed feet and thick legs crouching there.

"Athena?" The voice was deep and gravelly but had a lilting quality that told me it was a woman's. Something sharp hit me in the ribs, piercing the skin. I gasped but stayed on the ground, face hidden.

The rock beneath me groaned slightly as the gorgon's incredible weight settled onto it. Her stench, which had been merely disgusting on the wind-strewn beach, was now an almost physical presence in that sheltered spot, making my stomach rebel violently. I clenched my teeth against the bile that threatened to spill and kept still.

Something touched my hair and I cringed away. I didn't get far because I was up against the wall.

Her claws tangled in my damp, windblown hair as she caressed me. I shivered with revulsion.

"Such pretty hair, Athena." She sighed. "I used to have pretty hair, you know. Men came from all over Olympus to touch my golden hair."

The air sparked and thickened and suddenly dainty feet and slender legs replaced the monster's legs. "Do you see, Cupid? Do you see how beautiful I am?"

When I didn't move she grabbed my hair and jerked me off the ground. I squeezed my eyes closed until I felt her nails on my lids. "Open your eyes, girl, or I'll gouge them out."

I bit my lip, trying to decide whether it would be better to have my eyes gouged out or be turned to stone.

Medusa laughed. "You're safe when I take this form, Athena. If not you'd already be dead."

Now I was curious. I reached up and grabbed her wrist, pulling the strangely soft hand away from my face. Taking a deep breath, I opened my eyes.

I was looking at Megan Megara.

Her perfect pink lips were spread in a grin, showing me straight white teeth. She held a lock of her beautiful red-gold hair in her hand, showing it to me. "This, Athena. This is what I once was."

I wasn't sure what to say. So I decided to play along. "What happened?"

She sighed, the madness swimming in her eyes softened in memory. "It was the goddess you were named for, Athena. She was jealous of me. She changed me into the

monster you turn your eyes from in fear and horror." She took a step closer, grabbing my wrist. Her form wavered until I thought I could see snakes around her head but then she stamped her foot and the snakes settled back into the thick fall of red-gold hair. "I must fight to keep this form, which displeases me greatly."

Something warm and wet ran down my arm and I looked down to see blood. She'd dug her nails into my skin. I tried to wrench my arm away but she refused to let go. "Why did you bring me here, Medusa? I had nothing to do with Athena's curse. I promise you I barely know her."

She laughed, her form slithering away slightly, like a shadow of something horrible overlaying her lithe, beautiful persona. "I am not that stupid, Athena. You are here because Damian Leandar has something I want badly. And I'm counting on his feelings for you to force a trade."

I shook my head. "He won't do it. We barely know each other."

Medusa laughed and it echoed in the chamber as her sister lumbered heavily into the cave, bringing her own special stench with her.

"A man would not allow himself to be killed trying to save a woman he cared nothing for." The second gorgon's voice was slightly more feminine than Medusa's but not by much.

My world spun and tilted. "You killed him?"

Medusa finally released my wrist so she could caress her hair, examining the thick, silky strands as if looking for flaws. "Nay. I need him alive." She lifted her mad, blue eyes. "For now." She took a step toward me, grabbing my hair and pulling my head toward her face. I watched in horror as her beautiful form slid away and was replaced by a horrible green face with a coarse beard and snakes for hair.

I barely managed to slam my eyes shut before I caught her gaze.

She laughed, flinging me toward the wall. My head slammed against the slimy rock and I slid bonelessly toward the ground.

The last thing I heard before succumbing to blessed darkness was Medusa's hated voice in my ear. "You'd better hope your demon lover gives my sister back to me. Or I'll have to turn you to stone. Maybe I'll do it anyway. You'd make a very pretty ornament for my flower garden."

My mind fought to make sense of her words. The words tangled around each other, leaving behind only a sense of horror at their meaning. Somewhere in the depths of my consciousness I grabbed hold of the two words that scared me the most.

*Demon lover.*

Gods, no!

I'd rather be a statue in Medusa's garden.

## Chapter Eight

### *A Knight on Shining...Harpy?*

I woke slowly, cracking my eyelids against a thin beam of light that managed to find its way into the cave where I lay. The cave was empty so I sat up.

My head throbbed painfully as I moved and I had to rest against the slimy wall behind me for a moment before I could push to my feet.

Pressing my hand against the wall I got my feet under me and stood. Nausea swamped me. I stood completely still for a moment, leaning against the wall, until it passed.

I listened carefully for a moment to make sure I was alone and heard only the crash and roar of the ocean outside.

I left the cave and emerged into a bright, hot sun.

A small cluster of pelicans lifted off the rocks as I moved into view. They swirled around for a few moments and then disappeared over my head, presumably to settle on the other side of the small island.

I squinted into the distance and saw only ocean. No land in sight. Looking around, I decided the island was barely a city block wide and, though it rose to a peak not too far behind me, had a fairly low profile in the water. The tallest part looked to be no taller than maybe thirty feet.

I decided to walk around the perimeter just to see how big the island was.

Not so big. It was about as deep as it was wide. Not a natural formation then. The gorgons must have created it as a prison for me.

Which meant no one would ever find me there.

Panic clenched my lungs so that I found it suddenly hard to breathe. The nausea that had threatened inside the cave returned and I retched until I thought I would die from it.

Finally my stomach stopped heaving and I sat back, wiping a shaky hand across my mouth. I lay back in the sunlight, fighting tears.

My best hope was for the gorgons to return.

*Ish!*

\* \* \* \* \*

I lay where I was until nightfall, feeling my skin burn and blister but unwilling to go inside the cave just in case someone would pass by and I'd miss them.



Night brought bone-chilling cold to go with the damp that had permeated my clothing and my bones and I found myself in the fetal position well before morning.

As the sun started to break over the horizon, I had passed the self-pity phase and had entered the anger phase.

I decided I'd be damned if I'd just lie there and let the gorgons use me as live bait to get Damian to release their evil sister.

I surged to my feet, probably half mad at that point from sun, cold and dehydration, full of anger and nowhere to go with it.

I managed to hold on to the anger for a few hours, until about midday according to the level of the sun in the sky and then collapsed into myself again with despair.

I crawled into the cave and curled back into the fetal position, willing my body to give in to the excruciating pain being caused by lack of food and water and die.

I must have dozed.

When I woke up I just lay there for a while, listening carefully to the sounds around me as was becoming my habit. I slowly became aware of the sound of huge wings beating the air in the distance.

My first instinct was to cringe against the wall, hiding my eyes. As if that would make it go away. But my pride quickly resurfaced and I forced myself to my feet. If I was gonna die I'd go out fighting. I tried to pull my power forward to create a weapon but it didn't work.

I was too weak.

Looking around, I found a large rock lying on the ground a few feet away. I picked it up and held it behind my back.

And walked out into the sun.

One enormous creature flew toward me, its massive wings undulating powerfully in the air currents that swirled above the roiling water. The sun played tricks with my eyes, making the thing look purple-black rather than the dark green I knew it to be.

As it neared, the sun glinted off the long, slender body and I spotted a second head behind the first. I realized it wasn't a gorgon. And, whatever it was, somebody—or something—was riding on its back.

Friend or foe? I didn't know but at that point my options were so limited I was willing to take a chance. Dropping the rock, I lifted my arms over my head and started jumping up and down.

The creature held to its brisk and steady course in my direction.

As it neared I finally recognized it.

"Holy shit!" I grabbed the rock off the ground again and glanced toward the cave. Did I want to trade the false comfort of a few walls for the real possibility that I'd get trapped inside with nowhere to go?

The creature stopped a few yards off the rocky shore of my small island and hovered in a nearly vertical position. All I could see of her rider was a pair of strong legs wrapped in soft, knee-high boots. The Harpy's fang-filled face opened wide below a pair of beautiful, violet eyes as she shrieked.

I shivered and lifted the rock. I wasn't exactly sure what I was gonna do with it against a full-grown Harpy, with a rider. But I'd try to make the most of it.

The thing hovered there, her massive wings pounding the air and creating new chop against the shoreline of my small island.

Suddenly, with another nerve-shattering scream, she dived straight toward me.

I lifted the rock and flung it toward the Harpy's head as hard as I could.

The rock flew true to its target. It headed right for the tender spot between the monster's eyes. I didn't know if it would be enough to knock the huge creature out of the air but it was all I had.

At the last moment the Harpy ducked her head with a shriek of anger and a large hand, connected to a very strong arm, reached up and plucked the rock out of the air before it smacked into a very handsome—and very familiar—face.

*Damian!*

The Harpy landed with a grace that seemed impossible given her size and clunky build. She stood several yards away glaring at me, saliva dripping from her many rows of needle-sharp teeth.

Damian climbed down and reached into his pocket, throwing the Harpy a chunk of something that flashed green and gold in the sun before it was turned to mush in the monster's mouth.

Then he looked at me, his dark blue eyes narrowing as if he wasn't sure how welcome he would be. "Athena. Are you all right?"

Maybe it was the heat.

Maybe it was the fact that I hadn't had anything to drink or eat for two days.

And maybe it was the shock of seeing him standing there.

But I'm pretty sure it was the fact that I knew my Olympian history.

I knew all about the demon guardian who rode a Harpy and kept the gorgons safely imprisoned on Olympus.

And now I knew who that guardian was.

And I'd definitely slept with him.

The world turned gray around the edges and I felt my legs giving out.

I tumbled downward but I never hit the rocky ground.

A pair of strong, warm arms stopped me before I did.

\* \* \* \* \*

I sat at the table and watched Damian cook me dinner. Something with chicken, spinach and feta cheese. It smelled incredible.

I sipped from a tall glass of water and pulled the blanket closer around my shoulders. It smelled like Damian and I barely resisted the urge to bury my nose in it. I was enjoying the view.

Demon or not, Damian had the finest ass I'd ever seen.

I'd discovered that my voice didn't work too well after going without water for two days, so I'd been content to just sit there, sipping my water and letting Damian wait on me.

But I knew we needed to talk about some things, so I tried again. Clearing my throat, I said, "How did you find me?" The words came out rough and low but Damian seemed to have heard. He turned away from the stove and set a plate in front of me. It looked as good as it smelled.

He sat down across from me, motioning for me to eat. Then he sighed.

"It's a long story."

I shrugged, indicating that I had the time.

He watched me eat for a moment and then sat back, crossing his arms over his chest. "I'm sure you've figured out by now that Peter and I are the guardians of the gorgons."

I nodded and tried to swallow. My throat was swollen and it hurt. But the food felt good in my stomach.

He stared at me a moment, probably trying to decide if we wanted to get into the whole "demon" thing at that moment. Finally he went on without mentioning it. "We lost them about a month ago and followed them here."

"How'd they escape?"

He looked sheepish. "A rare moment of miscommunication between Peter and me. I'd rather not discuss it."

I narrowed my gaze at him. "Did they hit you over the head with a rock and escape?"

He snorted. "Hardly!"

I chewed and thought. "Did they seduce one of you?"

Damian's face clouded. "Bleugh! Of course not!"

I barely hid a smile. "Then what?"

He blew out a frustrated breath. "The Succubus Sisters."

I grinned. "The who?"

He stood up and walked over to the refrigerator, pulling out two beers. He handed me one and flopped back into his chair, touching the cap of the beer to pop it off and taking a long drag.

I was still grinning and waiting when he cast his gaze back my way.

He sighed, realizing he wasn't going to get out of telling me. "The Succubus Sisters, Simone and Sidra. They have a pleasure house on Olympus. That night, Peter and I both had appointments with the sisters, each thinking the other one was guarding Medusa and her sisters.

"As soon as we discovered it —"

"How?"

He frowned. "What?"

"How did you discover it?"

He glared at me and I cocked an eyebrow.

He sipped his beer again.

"Hello?" I said.

His glare deepened. "We ran into each other in the bathhouse."

I snorted. "Wearing towels?"

Damian gave me a look.

"Okay, I'm just trying to get all the facts."

He shook his head. "Anyway...as soon as we figured it out we returned to the compound but the gorgons were gone."

I nodded, using my power to pop the cap off my own beer and sipping it gratefully. It tasted wonderful.

"We've been hunting them since that night. We discovered they'd come to Earth about a week ago and managed to capture Stheno a few nights ago. Medusa and Euryale have been trying to get her back from us."

I nodded. "So that's why they didn't kill me?"

He nodded. "They thought they could use you to get me to release her."

I suddenly felt very cold. If I'd been responsible for his unleashing another one of those monsters on the human world... "Please tell me you didn't release her."

"I didn't release her."

I sighed, nodding. "Good." I tipped my beer back, enjoying the way the cold liquid felt on my sore throat.

"I killed her."

Beer sprayed everywhere. Damian swiped his sleeve over his face to remove beer droplets and stood up to grab a towel.

When I'd gotten over nearly choking to death on my beer I went for a clarification. "You killed her? Are you sure?"

He snorted. "I'm pretty sure, yes. Unless she can grow her head back."

I thought about this for a long moment. Then shook my head. "Medusa's gonna be pissed."

He snorted again, nodding.

"Why'd you kill her?"

"She tried to take you."

Then I realized, it must have been the night the gorgons had come to my home. I frowned. "But there were two of them. Didn't the other one know you'd killed her?"

He shook his head. "Peter had drawn her off."

"Peter was there too?" My voice was embarrassingly high pitched. I cleared my throat and sipped my beer, trying to pretend I hadn't just shrieked.

Damian's lips twitched. "Yes. He liked your jammies."

I scowled at him. "Wonderful."

We sat in silence for a moment, sipping our beers. Then I realized he hadn't answered my original question. "So...how *did* you find me today?"

"Snuggles."

I chuckled. "Snuggles?"

He smiled. "My Harpy. She tracked them there."

I nodded. I knew harpies and gorgons were natural enemies but I hadn't known harpies could track them across distance.

I thought about this for a while and then smiled. "I'm starting to like your Harpy."

Damian frowned. "Don't. She'd eat you in a minute. I was serious when I told you to stay out of my basement. Snuggles is incredibly dangerous."

I stared at him. "Unless you're a demon?"

He held my gaze, never flinching. Then he shrugged. "Not all demons are evil, Athena."

I looked away. "No. But most are."

A sigh slid between his lips but he didn't respond. There wasn't too much he could say.

I knew why demons were used to guard the gorgons. It had been that way for millennia. Demons aren't susceptible to a gorgon's deadly gaze. They didn't turn to stone when they looked into the gorgons' eyes. And they were strong and...morally flexible. It was a good match for the purpose.

I wasn't sure it was a good match for my purposes though. "Did you know I was a Cupid when we met?"

Damian shook his head. "I knew you were different...but I wasn't sure how."

I frowned. "Why?"

He shrugged. "Little things. You said 'gods' a couple of times, instead of God. Humans don't do that. Then when Stheno tried to take you out of your house and you didn't even mention the fact that it was a monster. I knew you weren't human. That was when I checked out Cupid's Arrow and discovered what you were."

"I'm surprised you didn't already know about us."

"It's isolated in the compound. I'm not always aware of what the gods and goddesses are doing."

"Compound?"

He nodded. "Where we keep the gorgons. It's a remote area on Olympus. It's been specially magicked to keep them in. The place is covered by a giant...bubble."

"Like Atlantis?"

He nodded.

I thought about this, realizing that, even if he weren't a demon, his job would keep him away a lot. He and I could never have any kind of long-lasting relationship. Guardian to the gorgons was an incredibly lonely and isolated job. Which explained the sad look in his eyes when I first met him.

The thought made me sad too and I fell into a brooding silence.

After a few moments I looked up and found him watching me. "So what now?"

"I have a plan."

Nodding, I got up to grab us two more beers. Handing him one, I sat back down across from him. "Let's hear it."

He shook his head. "You're not going to be involved, Athena. It's too dangerous."

"Yes, I am. I can take care of myself."

"Yeah, I noticed that on the beach."

I scowled at him. "That was low."

He shrugged. "These creatures are very dangerous, Athena. I don't want you to get hurt."

"Why?"

He stopped in the middle of lifting his beer and looked at me like I was crazy. "Why? Why what?"

I shrugged, peeling the label off my beer. "Why don't you want me to get hurt?"

He stood up and walked over to the sliding doors that led out to a deck overlooking the ocean. "Don't ask questions you don't want the answer to, Athena."

But I thought I did. It suddenly felt very important for me to know how he felt about me.

I stood too and walked up behind him. Standing there, I could feel the heat of his body and smell his clean, male scent. My hands twitched to touch him. My brain told me he was a demon and I should stay as far away from him as possible. Demons were a lower life form. I'd been taught that all my life and I'd had no trouble believing it...until recently. Very recently. The stories I'd heard about them...well...let's just say they functioned from a different perspective than I did.

But Damian's body called to me. His sadness called to me...his loneliness. If we had one thing in common, demons and Cupids both understood loneliness. In his case his calling demanded it. In mine, the interference of the Fates and millennia of tradition

combined to create an existence filled with lovelessness. Which was why I was willing, I decided, to overlook Damian's demonic nature for a short time to ease some of my loneliness...and yes...his too. Though I knew we couldn't have anything permanent together. I suddenly knew I wanted to explore what we *could* have for as long as possible.

"I want you to say the words." My voice came out in a husky whisper.

Damian swung around, looking surprised to see me standing so close. He took a step back, through the door.

I followed him, feeling like a predator and kind of liking it. He looked so vulnerable. I let the blanket slide off my shoulders and placed my hands on his hips. Lifting up onto my toes, I settled my lips over his.

Damian slid his hands into my hair and pulled me more deeply into the kiss, his hard body pressed against mine.

I whimpered and grabbed his perfect, denim-covered buns in both hands, pressing the long, hard length of his cock into my belly. I rotated my hips and Damian groaned.

He reached down and slid his hands under my thighs, lifting me so that I could wrap my legs around his waist. He walked with me into the bedroom and settled me onto the bed, bending over me so that our lips never parted.

Sliding the sweats I was wearing off over my hips, he lifted his mouth off mine. He pulled his clothing off and reached for my sweatshirt, leaving me naked and ready beneath him.

I lifted my hips and gasped as Damian plunged into me, driving deep and hard. I grabbed his hips, stopping him.

He threw his head back and groaned but stilled in my hands.

"Say the words."

He reached down and grabbed one of my hands, lifting it to slide a finger into his mouth.

As he sucked gently on my finger, my eyes closed in ecstasy.

He let my finger fall away. "I..." his lips found the pulse at my wrist and pressed a sweet kiss there, following it up with a trail of kisses along the tender skin of my inner arm. He stopped at the inside of my elbow. "Care..."

His tongue came out and swirled over the skin there and I shivered, my thighs clenching violently in response.

His tongue slid up the inside of my arm and across my shoulder. "About..."

Warm cream wet my thighs.

He left my shoulder and pulled a rigid nipple into his mouth. The wet heat of his mouth was soothing to the painfully expectant nub of flesh and exciting at the same time.

I tugged on his hips, urging him to move inside me.

He complied but kept his rhythm slow, driving his thick length slowly over the sensitized skin of my sensual core until my body tightened toward release.

He lifted his head from my nipple and took my mouth in a featherlight kiss. "You," he said against my lips.

He plunged hard and deep. I threw back my head and screamed. "Again! Oh my gods! Say it again!"

He plunged deeply into my body and bit my throat gently. "Gods, Athena! I do care about you." His voice was husky with need, his body covered in a fine sheen of sweat as he drove faster, harder with every passing second.

I built toward that wondrous peak, my body tightening delightfully with every deep stroke and each tender nip of his teeth on my flesh.

My body throbbed and pulsed, frantic with need. I tangled my fingers in his hair and pulled his head down to mine, consuming his hungry lips with my own sweet fervor. "Damian!" I screamed.

He lifted my hips and pounded into me, biting my shoulder as his body tensed and rolled over into release. I followed him over, screaming into violent climax as my body wrapped his tightly, pulling every sensation to the top of my awareness.

Every smell, every sound, every sight burned through me like a drug, until all that was left was a throb of feeling, rippling through me and leaving me soft and wrung out beneath him.

Damian collapsed over me, taking care to hold his weight off me as he did.

I ran my fingers through his sweat-dampened hair and kissed his face repeatedly. He closed his eyes and breathed heavily.

"I care about you too, Damian."

His eyes flew open, bathing me in a dark blue gaze. He pulled back, looking as if he wanted to say something.

My gut tightened in despair at what it would be.

Suddenly a voice rang out from the front of the house. "Damian! We're here."

*Peter.*

I looked at Damian. He smiled, breaking the spell.

He jumped off the bed and pulled me off with him, wrapping me in a quick embrace before kissing the tip of my nose. "Time to put my plan into action. Get dressed, I'll see you in the living room."

I watched him pull on jeans and walk away, wondering what revelation we'd just averted. And trying not to notice how relieved I was that we had.



## **Chapter Nine**

### *Best Intentions*

Peter was standing before the fire with his hands on the mantel. He was wearing butt-hugging, faded jeans, a cream-colored sweater that molded his broad back and muscular arms and a woman.

Or, to be more precise, a succubus. She was draped all over him like a cheap, horny suit.

I stopped dead in my tracks when I saw her and looked at Damian. He grinned widely.

"I assume this is one of the sisters?"

He nodded and placed a hand in the small of my back, guiding me into the living area and indicating one of the loveseats.

I sat down in the same spot I'd vacated earlier when Peter had been there and tucked my feet under my butt. I was glad for the soft, oversized sweats Damian had given me to wear. Damian sat down next to me.

Peter extricated himself from the succubus long enough to return Damian's back-slapping hug and then settled himself...and his succubus...into the loveseat across from me.

The sex-demon sprawled alongside him, nearly in his lap and proceeded to suck on his earlobe. He tried to flick her away but she grabbed his hand and growled softly. Peter gave me a sheepish smile.

I grinned back. "What's your girlfriend's name, Peter?"

"Simone." She tried climbing into his lap but he grabbed her arm and pulled her off. "Simone! Stop it! Say hello to Athena."

The demon turned her almost painfully perfect features in my direction and spoke. Her voice was soft and had a slightly lispy quality that was oddly endearing. "Hello, goddess Athena."

I opened my mouth to correct her, I much preferred to downplay that whole goddess thing but Damian grabbed my hand and squeezed it. I looked at him and he shook his head.

I did a mental shrug and sat back to enjoy the show.

Damian turned back to Peter. "Is everything in place?"

Peter nodded. "The gods reopened Cupid's Arrow so we could use it to draw the gorgons into a trap. Simone has made contact with the agency and she used her wiles with the Cupid to get a meeting set up with you."

I sat bolt upright, my mouth flying open in surprise. "What? Damian?"

He squeezed my hand again. "We're going to try to lure Medusa out by convincing her that Simone is my match."

Peter pulled Simone off his shoulder again and sat forward, resting his elbows on his knees.

Simone immediately climbed his back and wrapped her arms around his neck, feathering the back of his neck with kisses.

He sighed and tried to ignore her. "We're going to lure her back out to Damian's house. Hopefully we can trap her there and get her back to Olympus."

I frowned. "I don't understand. Why didn't you do that the other night? When I was there?"

Damian smiled and pulled me close, wrapping a warm, heavy arm around my shoulders. "Because *you* were there."

I thought about this for a moment. "Okay, then why that house? Couldn't you do the same thing here?"

Damian shook his head. "That house is a portal to Olympus. It's protected by extraordinary warding and built on special ground. If I can get Medusa and Euryale into the basement we've got them."

"You didn't need Simone. You could have used me to lure them."

Peter shook his head. "No offense, Athena. I know Cupids are decent fighters in a pinch. But dealing with this type of monster is a little out of your realm. Succubi are excellent fighters." He glanced at Simone. "And a bit more...shall we say...expendable in case the worst happens."

I frowned at this. Yes, Simone was a lust demon. Yes, she was without morals or a sense of right and wrong. Yes, she'd probably done horrible things over the course of her lifetime and had never given it a second thought. And yes, she would probably kill me in a heartbeat if she thought I was interested in Peter...okay, yeah, I was starting to see Peter's point.

But it didn't make me feel good about myself to realize it.

"Okay, so you got Simone a meeting with Damian. How are you going to pull that off with Cupid's Arrow a pile of ashes on Main Street?"

Damian lifted a dark blond eyebrow. "Cupid's Arrow isn't a pile of ashes."

"Of course it is. The Furies and the gorgons destroyed it. We saw them do it."

Peter laughed. "You underestimate the gods, Athena. Reality can be altered in the blink of an eye when it suits their purposes. And trust me, getting Medusa and her sister rounded back up definitely suits their purposes."

I nodded, he was right. It was highly probable that Cupid's Arrow was sitting where it always had and looked as if nothing had ever happened to it. "Okay, so what's the plan?"

"First, we need you to go back to the office."

"Of course."

"You'll go about your business as you always do."

I nodded. "Okay. Then what?"

Damian shrugged. "We'll take care of the rest."

"Uh-uh. No way. I'm going to help."

Damian shook his head. "You can't. My folder was given to a Cupid called Hermes. It will look strange if you intervene."

I stood up and moved to the fire, pacing in front of it in my exasperation. "This sounds dangerous, Damian. Does Hermes know what you're doing?"

"No. And we need to keep it that way. The fewer people who know the gorgons are here the better. They tend to instill panic."

I stopped and looked at him in disbelief. "You don't think the Cupids know about the gorgons? They were in the building when the monsters blasted through the wall."

Damian and Peter shared a look. Damian shook his head. "They were gone when Medusa arrived."

I frowned. "Gone? What are you talking about? I saw Hermes and Milan."

Peter shoved Simone off his back and straightened his shirt. "I kind of emptied their memories and shoved them out of the building too, along with the security guard."

I just stared at them, sliding my gaze from one to the other. "Explain please."

Damian shrugged. "We were watching the building and saw Medusa go in as Megan Megara. So we entered the building and told everyone there was a summons from Zeus. But those two were already in your office so we grabbed them when they left."

Peter nodded. "We tried to grab Medusa but she used the two Cupids as shields and got away."

My knees buckled and I dropped my butt onto the nearest stable surface. It turned out to be the coffee table. "Are Hermes and Milan okay?"

Damian nodded. "They suffered only minor injuries. We sent them to Olympus with the others."

I shook my head. I couldn't believe all that had been going on in the building while I was completely oblivious. I realized Damian and Peter were right. The whole thing was so above my head it was ridiculous. I'd be better off letting them handle the snake-head sisters and staying out of the way.

I had a sudden thought. "The Furies?"

Damian laughed. "They got their asses kicked again."

"Man, were they pissed." Peter shook his head, chuckling.

I fought a smile. The Furies didn't get bested very often and when they did, they more than earned their names. "They didn't cause any damage on Earth, did they?"

A soft, lisping voice from behind Peter said, "Not on Earth."

Simone was lying full length across the loveseat behind Peter, her lithe form curled around him. All I could see from where I sat were her shapely legs. She lifted one leg as I watched and draped it over Peter's shoulder suggestively.

Though she certainly appeared to be completely focused on Peter and his body, apparently she *had* been paying attention.

He shoved her leg off his shoulder. "They chased Medusa and Euryale back to Olympus and lost them in the caverns underneath the mountain. The ground rumbled and the skies flashed for hours from their fury."

Damian frowned. "They shouldn't have to deal with them. That's *our* job."

Peter looked at the floor. Obviously they'd had that conversation before.

I stood up and headed into the bedroom to dress. "I'll be ready to go in a few minutes."

\* \* \* \* \*

"Oopsies."

I glared at Simone. Newly christened the Queen of Understatement, by me.

My house was a smoldering mess.

Apparently the gorgons had been there looking for me.

Damian put his arm around my shoulders and turned me back toward the car. "I was going to try to talk you into staying with me anyway. It'll be much safer."

I numbly allowed him to walk me to the car and nudge me inside. I even managed to hold back the tears for most of the drive up the mountain to his house.

But when we rounded that last curve and his big, beautiful, gorgon-free home slid into view, I couldn't hold the wave of despair and tears at bay any longer.

It just wasn't fair. He lost the stupid gorgons because he wanted to have sex with a succubus. How come it was my beautiful house – and all my wonderful stuff – that had to get obliterated?

Peter and Simone popped off almost as soon as we got safely to the house. Peter was going to take the succubus to Cupid's Arrow and walk her through the plan. Watching her drape herself all over him as Damian gave Peter final instructions, I didn't envy Peter trying to explain anything to her that didn't have to do with sex.

As if reading my thoughts, Damian said. "Don't underestimate her. They're very intuitive and cunning creatures. She doesn't miss a thing."

I stared at the spot where Peter and Simone had just been. "Why don't you do that popping around thing like Peter?"

Damian shrugged, turning toward the house. "I do. But I can't pop around with other creatures. That's Peter's special magic. Mine is my special sight. Demons all have certain things they do better than others."

I nodded, feeling drained and depressed. I let him take my hand and pull me toward the house.

"Are you okay?"

My gaze slid to him and I watched his features soften as he saw my red, wet eyes. He pulled me against his chest. "I'm sorry about your house, Athena."

I sniffled, fighting to hold on to being mad at him. It wasn't easy when he felt so damn good wrapped around me. "I know. It wasn't your fault," I said with at least a tinge of sincerity.

He pulled me away so he could look into my face, smiling softly. "I know you didn't mean that and you're right to blame me. Centuries of strict dedication to duty and it only took one night, just a couple of hours really, to screw it all up." He shook his head. "I'm an idiot."

Okay, I wasn't mad at him anymore. I lifted up onto my tiptoes and planted a soft kiss on his lips. "Well yeah, you're a guy."

He looked surprised for a beat and then he smiled, realizing I was teasing him. He wrapped an arm around my shoulders and we turned toward the house. "Actually I'm a demon."

I winced before I could stop myself and felt him stiffen beside me. In an attempt to make light of it I said, "That's twice as bad."

He stopped just inside the door and turned me to face him. "Or twice as good." His dark blue gaze on my face was searching.

I squirmed under the questions in his gaze. Forcing a smile, I said, "You'll have to convince me."

He lowered his head, stopping with his lips a breath away from mine. "With pleasure."

His warm, soft lips feathered across mine.

I closed my eyes and held my breath as liquid heat shimmered through my body in response. His hands slipped beneath the oversized sweatshirt and cupped my breasts, rubbing my nipples between his fingers.

I placed my hands on his forearms, feeling the play of hard muscle under the cloth of his shirt.

His hands slid down my hips, pulling the formless sweatpants down my thighs as he went. I stepped out of them, leaving them in a puddle on the floor at our feet. Damian grabbed my buttocks in both hands and pulled my lower body against his so I could feel the hard ridge of his desire against my skin.

I gasped and lifted one leg, wrapping it around his hips, to bring my aching mound into closer contact with his denim-covered cock. I rubbed against him like a bitch in heat.

With his big, calloused hands still on my buttocks, Damian lifted me, placing my whole pussy over the hard ridge in his jeans. I wrapped my legs around his waist and

my arms around his neck and grabbed his hair in one fist, yanking his head back so I could consume his mouth.

Damian growled as my tongue plundered his mouth, dancing hungrily with his. He reached down and fought with the button and zipper of his jeans, his fingers rubbing against my tender flesh as he worked.

I moaned and threw my head back, grinding mindlessly against his fingers.

Damian inserted two fingers into the volcanic heat of my pussy and I gasped. He drove the fingers deep, spreading them to fill me as his thumb worked over my throbbing nub.

I came within seconds, bathing his questing fingers in warm cream.

*Are you convinced?*

My eyes jerked open. We were still standing by the door, fully dressed. "How'd you do that?"

He grinned and lifted his hands to the side. "Demon."

I stared at him, my emotions wavering between anger and awe. What he'd done had been an unsanctioned intrusion into my mind. That was bad. But it had felt so damn good. And I *had* demanded convincing. Finally, remembering how incredible the orgasm had felt, real or not, awe and delight won the day.

I grinned back. "It was good for me. Was it good for you?"

In response, he growled and dragged my sweatpants down my legs. Yanking his jeans open, he pulled himself free and lifted me so that the fat head of his cock rested just inside my still-throbbing channel.

I moaned in delight as he allowed the weight of my body to drive his cock deep.

I used the strength of my thighs to lift me slowly off again, until his shaft came almost completely out of my body and then softened my muscles and slammed down hard over his rigid cock.

Damian gasped and leaned back against the wall, widening his stance on the glossy surface of the hard wood floor of the foyer to keep from going down under my sensual assault.

I rested my forehead against his, pulling the sweet breath he expelled into my lungs and savoring it. I kept up that same rhythm, with the slow ascension, enjoying the wonderful brush of his thick, hard cock against the sensitized skin of my vagina and then dropping back down, hard and deeply, onto his hard shaft, making him groan aloud.

After a few strokes Damian pushed himself off the wall and pulled me tight against his body, walking into the living room with me attached to his waist and riding his wonderful cock.

He lowered me so that I rested against the wide back and arm of the couch and, wrapping his arms around my knees, drove deeply into my body and increased the

tempo of his strokes until my head was thrashing from side to side and my whole awareness was wrapped up in a single thought.

Climb that building wave and find my way to the other side, into delightful oblivion.

Hot sweat ran down Damian's belly and anointed my thighs. His arms around my knees were slick. His hard thighs smacked against the back of my thighs as he drove into me, his tempo rising exponentially with my level of sensual madness.

Finally, I saw the edge of that wave and crested it. I screamed as pleasure bloomed at my sensual core and spread like sunlight through my body, warming and sensitizing every nerve ending in my skin and creating a shattering sensation in my mind.

Stars burst before my eyes.

The room dimmed and fell away, as every fiber in my being zeroed in on the man standing over me, watching him stiffen and cry out. Feeling his cock buck and fill my body with hot liquid. And pulling him more tightly and deeply into my starving body with my heels on his sweat-slicked buttocks.

The aftershocks of his release were enough to take me over again. I lay there, trembling and helpless against another wave of delight, my body going limp from the shock of being wrung so thoroughly free of sexual tension under Damian's talented ministrations.

My pussy throbbed around his softening cock. My chest heaved. And my mind filled with euphoria.

I couldn't move.

Couldn't even think about moving.

My legs were rubber.

My toes were permanently curled.

And my ears were ringing.

Damian pulled away and reached for his jeans, pulling something out of the pocket. "Hello."

I laughed. So much for the ringing in my ears.

He glanced at me, looking embarrassed. "Yeah, sorry. We got...distracted. We'll be there in a few minutes."

*Oh yeah, the gorgons.*

I groaned. How was I gonna help Damian and Peter recapture Medusa and her sister when I wasn't even sure my legs would work?

Damian hung up and reached for my hand, pulling me gently off the couch. "Let's find you some clothes. You need to go to work." He inserted one of my fingers into his mouth and bit it gently, causing a flood of warm cream to run down my thigh as my pussy clenched in reaction.

Oh yeah. Work was what I needed.

Not!

\* \* \* \* \*

The Cupid's Arrow building looked as if nothing had ever happened to it. I greeted our receptionist, Becky, with a smile and she responded as she always had. I watched her face carefully for any signs that she was in on our little escapade but she was either an excellent actress or she had no idea anything was "afoot".

I walked on down the hallway, toward my office. On impulse I stopped and knocked on Hermes' door.

"Come!"

I opened the door and stuck my head inside. He was sitting behind his desk, a pile of paper in front of him. He looked a bit frazzled and maybe frustrated but nothing out of the ordinary.

"Hello, Hermes."

He lifted his dark head and gave me a smile. My stomach did a little tumble, despite the fact that there was nothing at all romantic between us. Hermes was the least romantically interested of all the Cupids, having gone through a particularly nasty episode with a human woman that left permanent scars on his heart. But that took nothing away from his ligament-melting gorgeousness or his obvious sensuality.

"Hello, Athena."

I stepped inside. "I just wanted to make sure you were okay. Ms. Megara is a very scary woman."

He cocked his head at me, his dark brown, nearly black eyes narrowing slightly. "Ms. Megara?" He shook his head, obviously uncomprehending.

"The woman you escorted from my office a few days ago."

Hermes stared at me for a long moment and then grinned. "You're punking me, right? Where's the camera?"

A cold sweat broke over me. He really didn't remember.

"Did Milan put you up to this? He's been trying to prove that I'm losing my mind for months." Despite the words, his grin didn't waver. Obviously the two men had some mutual, fun-loving torture thing going on.

Must be a guy thing.

I laughed, hoping it sounded more natural to Hermes than it did to me. "I am, yes. I'm teasing you. I understand we're having lunch together today."

He looked at the folders on his desk and nodded. "Yes, the Simone Succi/Damian Leandar match? I just got Ms. Succi's file yesterday. I made a reservation at Gnocci's."

I cringed inwardly. "That's perfect." Gnocci's was an elegant Italian restaurant that was located just a few blocks from the agency. We often had client meetings there and it was one of my favorites. But this time, the restaurant's gilded elegance and pristine



white tablecloth aura seemed wrong somehow, for a meeting that could conceivably erupt into violence if Medusa decided not to wait around for a more private “audience” with her prey.

Maybe a biker bar would have been a better choice.

I agreed that Damian and I would meet Hermes and Simone at Gnocci’s at noon and left his office. I hoped I’d been successful in hiding my misgivings with the whole thing but wasn’t sure I’d succeeded. I could feel his dark, speculative gaze on my back as I left.

I was half afraid to open my office door. The last time I’d seen it the outside wall had just been blown out and the space was a battleground for three Furies and two gorgons.

I wasn’t sure there was enough magic in all of Olympus to recover from that.

Clasping the knob, I bit my lip and closed my eyes. I pushed the door open and opened my eyes. The room looked completely normal. The window and wall were whole again. The furniture was intact. And my files were neatly stacked in the center of my large mahogany desk just as I’d left them.

I grinned and walked inside, closing the door quietly behind me. I fought the urge to walk on my tippytoes, expecting it all to fall apart around me if I so much as made too large a noise.

As I walked toward my desk something sparked in front of my eyes and I sneezed. Magic dust still hung on the air. The only proof that my office had recently undergone mystical interference.

Sitting down at my desk I looked at my files, for the first time in my long career as a Cupid, I wasn’t sure what to do next.

What did one do when one awaited the end of the world?

Just going back to work as if nothing had happened didn’t seem right. While I’d always felt that what the agency did was important, somehow it now paled against the fight I knew was coming.

My phone rang, saving me from my dilemma. “Hello?”

“Are we on track?” It was Damian.

“I just spoke with Hermes. He said we’re to meet at noon.”

“I’m in the building.”

I sat up straighter. “What? Why?”

“Look outside.”

I stood up and walked over to my window. Though it had been clear and sunny when I entered Cupid’s Arrow, the sky outside had darkened and now roiled with fat, black clouds, shot through with bolts of deadly-looking lightning. “Damian, please tell me that’s just a normal summer storm.”

"Fraid not. Medusa and Euryale are nearby. After what happened last time, I doubt they'll attack you at the agency again but I'm not going to stand out there and wait for that to happen. I'm afraid you're stuck with me for the next couple of hours."

Not an altogether unpleasant thought...if we were anywhere but Cupid's Arrow...and didn't have two very pissed-off gorgons gunning for us.

I grinned. "Sounds awful. I'll try to deal."

"I'll try to make it painless for you." His voice had a smile in it. "I'm going to spend some time with Hermes, to make sure his...mind...is set right for our lunch. But if anything happens just scream and I'll be there in a heartbeat."

After I hung up I decided to call Lila James. I still hadn't had an opportunity to complete their arrow ceremony and I felt bad about that. They'd both looked so long and so hard for the perfect match and I didn't want anything to go wrong before I could get them well and truly matched.

When Lila answered her phone, the tears in her voice were a bad sign. "Hello." Sniffle.

I bit my lip. "Lila. It's Athena Googlios. How are you?"

Another sniffle. "I'm just fine, Ms. Googlios. It's so nice to hear from you."

The poor woman's voice wobbled dangerously on the word "fine". She obviously wasn't. "Lila. Are you home right now? Or at the church?"

A sigh. "I'm home. I haven't been...feeling very well for the last couple of days."

"Oh, I'm sorry. Nothing serious, I hope?"

"No... I mean...yes... I mean." A bigger sigh. "Chad and I have had a big fight." Her voice broke totally. "I think I've lost him."

"Oh no." I listened to Lila sobbing across the phone line for a few seconds and made a sudden decision. Glancing at my watch, I saw that I had plenty of time before our lunch meeting. "Lila, I'm coming over there now. I'll see you in about fifteen minutes."

I slung my purse over my shoulder and hurried out of the building. I didn't call Damian until I was in my car and on my way.

I knew he'd try to stop me.

As I pulled up to the first red light I glanced at the sky. It was so dark that the lights on my dash had come on. The sky roiled with new energy and the cloud cover had thickened. The horizon was now nearly black except for the violent bursts of lightning that provided regular illumination to the boiling cloudbank.

I pulled my cell phone out of my purse and redialed my last call. Damian didn't pick up so I left a message on his voice mail and disconnected, feeling fortunate not to have spoken to him.

I was pretty sure he wouldn't have been supportive of my current mission.

The first fat drop of rain hit the windshield when I was about five minutes from Lila's place. Within the space of a mile I could no longer see to drive. I had to pull off the highway and wait for the rain to slow down.

It didn't look as if it was ever going to do that.

I sat there for a few minutes, listening to the thunderous roar of water hitting the top and sides of my car. Unsettling bursts of wind rocked us from side to side at regular intervals.

The air in the car warmed and thickened noticeably. Rubbing my arms against a sudden wave of foreboding that brought goose bumps up on my arms, I considered starting the car and taking to the road again. If only to feel like I was taking steps to escape the claustrophobic atmosphere outside the car.

I reached for my cell phone and tried to dial Damian. The call wouldn't go through. There was no cell service.

I threw the phone back down on the seat and looked up.

Thunder pounded the air and I jumped. A second later, lightning flashed briefly, illuminating the road directly ahead.

Two horrifying creatures stood in the illuminated area.

Only a few feet from my car.

*Medusa and Euryale.*

## Chapter Ten

### *Succubus Dreams*

I screamed and reached for the key, turning it frantically in an effort to start the car and get the hell out of there. The car ground painfully but didn't start. The smell of gasoline filled the interior.

I'd flooded the engine.

Lightning flashed again and the road ahead was clear.

My gaze flew around the car, searching the blackness outside for some sign of where they'd gone.

Something hit the top of the car, sending it rocking. I grabbed the steering wheel, looking around with panicked eyes. A second concussion followed quickly. That one sounded as if it had hit the back of the Jeep.

Then nothing.

Silence.

The rain continued to drill against the outside of my car but no other sounds emerged.

The glass of my moon roof shattered and a huge, scaly arm plunged toward my face.

I shrieked and dived into the backseat, huddling as far from the grasping arm as I could get. The arm pulled back and a horrifying head, writhing with snakes, replaced it. I quickly averted my eyes, using only my peripheral vision to avoid the slithering invaders as they strained toward my skin.

The sound of hissing filled the car. All too soon I felt the questing flick of several tongues against my arms. I sobbed in horror, wishing I'd never been stupid enough to venture out alone.

I lashed out with an arm and managed to knock the snakes away but they came back, madder than before. I had time only to worry whether they carried any venom before the first one sank its fangs into my forearm and yanked me across the car, wedging me between the seats, mere inches from the gorgon's ugly head and within easy reach of a dozen more writhing snakes.

Screaming frantically now, I flailed around on the front seat for something to beat them back with and found my purse. I grabbed it and swung hard, managing to send them scurrying away, only to return and pierce me several more times with their fangs.

Finally the head withdrew and I barely had time to take a breath before the arm returned. The huge, clawed hand grabbed the front of my shirt and hefted me upward, toward the gaping, glass-edged hole in my car's roof.

I spread my arms and legs and made it impossible for the thing to pull me through.  
But the price was steep.

My back felt as if it would shatter into a million pieces as the pressure increased and my body didn't want to fit through the hole.

I screamed as something popped painfully across my shoulders and the claw released me. I hit the gearshift with my back and had the wind knocked out of me for a moment.

When I could breathe again I crawled into the backseat and huddled there, listening to the sounds of scuffling and cries of pain outside the car.

It was still pitch black outside.

All I could do was wait for a bolt of lightning to illuminate the area around the car enough for me to see what was happening outside.

The only thing I knew for sure was that I was not going out there. Not until I saw two dead gorgons draped across the car, or a friendly face at the window.

Something crashed behind me and I jumped, screaming a little.

Shrieking pierced the air and a series of thumping sounds followed.

Then silence.

The sky started to lighten and I peered around.

Something hit the side of the car with a thud and I shrieked, scrambling to the other side, my terrified gaze locked onto the window across the car.

A startlingly white face appeared. "Open the door, Athena."

*Damian!*

With a sob I flung myself across the car and hit the unlock button. The door came open and I launched myself into his arms, sobbing wildly.

He wrapped me in a spine-crunching hug and buried his face in my neck. Just holding on, waiting out my hysteria.

But when I'd calmed I realized he was quaking too.

The muscles of the arms wrapped around me were taut with tension and his breaths came in short, violent bursts. His heart thudded hard against my chest.

I tried to pull away. "Damian?"

He clutched me harder. "You could have been killed."

I shook my head, trying again to extricate myself. "They still think you have Stheno. They wouldn't have killed me."

Something warm and wet ran down my chest. I realized then I was smelling the metallic tang of blood. I pulled back enough to look at Damian's throat. It was torn nearly from ear to ear. And bleeding profusely. "Oh my gods! Damian!"

His eyes rolled back in his head and he sank like a rock. I couldn't stop him from hitting the road. All I could do was slow his fall.

I lowered his head gently to the road and stood, looking around frantically. Unfortunately I'd chosen an isolated stretch of highway to pull over onto and there were no other cars in sight.

I remembered my cell phone and ran to the car, praying I could get a cell now that the snake-head twins were gone.

My foot hit something semi-squishy on the way to the car and I looked down. A severed head rolled down the road alongside my car. The snakes still writhed and snapped as it rolled away.

I jumped back in disgust. "Gak!"

Grimacing, I reached into the car, grabbing my phone. It rang before I could dial a number.

"What's wrong with Damian?"

"Peter, I—"

"Athena, tell me what happened to my brother!"

"He's...oh, Peter. Hurry."

The phone disconnected and Peter was suddenly there, bending over Damian.

I hurried over. "If you could do that why didn't you do it before you called me?"

He reached under Damian and lifted him, holding him as if he weighed nothing. "Touch my arm."

I shook my head. "What?"

"No time, Athena. Touch me."

I grabbed his arm and the area around us dissolved in a fit of sparkles. The world went white, losing sound and color. I could feel Peter's hard arm under my hand but I couldn't turn my head to look at him.

Finally sound returned in a *whoosh* and I sneezed as the sparkles tumbled into my nose.

Peter laid Damian on the bed and sat down beside him.

"Can you help him?" Tears slid down my cheeks as I realized how pale Damian had become. I didn't know how sturdy demons like Damian and Peter were. I suspected they were hardier than your average human. But the gash across Damian's throat was impressive and I figured he'd lost a lot of blood.

Peter lifted his wrist to his mouth and ripped it open.

I gasped. Thinking he'd lost his mind, I ran over and grabbed his arm. "Peter, what are you doing, stop!"

A soft hand closed over my wrist, pulling me away from Peter. "Leave him be." Simone's pretty face was stern but I saw only kindness in her eyes. And she was damn strong for someone who looked so dainty. She wrenched me away from Peter and pulled me to the other side of the room.

Peter lifted Damian's head and held his wrist to his brother's lips. "Drink, Athelphos. Heal."

Damian stirred, his hands coming off the bed to clasp Peter's arm. At first I thought he was going to push it away. But instead he grabbed the arm in both hands and yanked it down, spreading his lips over the torn flesh and pulling Peter's lifeblood into his body.

Beside me, Simone began writhing and moaning. I pulled my eyes away from the bed when her hands slid around my waist and she pulled me back against her lithe body, rubbing herself against me and licking my neck.

"Whoa, girl!" I said and shoved her away.

She only smiled at me and licked her lips suggestively.

I glared at her. Repulsed. Or...mostly repulsed... I tried to ignore the slight tightening between my thighs, writing it off to the succubus's magical influence.

When I turned back to the bed Peter was standing again and Damian seemed to be asleep. His color was much better.

I hurried over to the bed and looked at Damian. Already the horrible gash on his throat was starting to heal and close. I turned to Peter. "Thank you, Peter. He..."

I caught him as he started to topple. His weight almost threw us both to the floor.

Simone suddenly appeared and wrapped herself around him. "Come, Peter. Let us rest." The succubus practically carried him out of the room. Peter could barely hold himself upright let alone walk. Once again I marveled at Simone's strength.

Damian groaned and tried to sit up. "Oh no you don't. You just lie there and rest for a while."

I pushed him gently back down and sat on the bed next to him, clasping his hand in my lap. I reached over to brush a lock of dark gold hair off his forehead. He had more color in his face but his skin was still clammy to the touch. "How are you feeling?"

His eyes were closed, his lips pinched as if he were in pain. "I'm fine. I need to get up. Medusa..."

I settled a hand on his chest to stop him from even considering getting out of the bed. "Medusa is gone and we're in your house. We're safe here. You need to rest and so does Peter."

His eyes snapped open. The intense blue gaze raked the room. "Peter? Is he all right? He didn't get hurt, did he?"

I stroked my hand down his cheek, hoping to soothe him. "No. Peter's fine. He's just worn out from saving your life. Simone took him into the other room to...erm...rest."

Damian chuckled. "Poor Peter. I have a feeling he won't be getting much rest."

I laughed too, remembering the predatory look on the succubus's face. "I'm afraid you're right." I stood up and bent over the bed, reaching to pull Damian's shoes off. Settling them on the floor beside the bed, I pulled the covers up and tucked them

around his shoulders. "You go to sleep. When you wake up we'll talk about what we need to do next." He sighed and gave me a stiff nod. After a moment I felt his muscles starting to relax and a minute later he was breathing deeply and evenly.

I was exhausted myself, but I had one more thing to do before I could go to sleep. I found my cell phone and called Lila, leaving her a message that something had come up and I would get back to her as soon as I could.

Then I climbed into bed and wrapped myself around Damian, kissing him on the forehead. His skin felt warmer and drier. A good sign.

I closed my eyes too. And dropped deeply asleep almost immediately.

\* \* \* \* \*

I woke to the sound of groaning. At first I thought it was Damian, in pain. But when I propped myself up on an elbow and looked at him, he seemed to be sleeping deeply and peacefully.

The groaning started again, louder this time.

I climbed out of bed and headed for the door, opening it to peer out into the hall. The groaning was louder as I moved into the corridor. I followed it down the hall and stood outside a door that was slightly ajar.

Knocking softly, I called out. "Peter? Are you all right?"

Peter didn't hear me.

Neither did the lithe, beautiful succubus who rode his cock in the center of the huge bed. Simone's skin shone with a pale, flawless light as she writhed and undulated upon Peter's body. Her long hair shimmered through a changing array of colors, hanging in soft curls that caressed her back, her waist, her hips and touched against Peter's quivering thighs.

Her hands stroked his smooth, golden chest. Her feet, wrapped around his legs as she rode his body, caressed his softly furred calves. Peter seemed to be enjoying himself, though his eyes were closed and he appeared to be asleep.

He still looked pale, with dark circles under his eyes.

I knew the succubi preferred taking their sensual prey in their sleep and it seemed wrong that she would take advantage of him that way. In his weakened state.

I knew I should step forward, enter that room and stop her. But something kept me rooted to the spot. Something made my mouth go dry and my thighs clench. Something made my skin break out in a sweat and my skin bubble into gooseflesh.

I clasped the doorframe and leaned hard against it. A jolt of pure, sensual pleasure swamped me, making my knees almost give out underneath me, as Simone leaned over Peter and captured his mouth, nibbling and sucking his lips as if they were the finest chocolate and then continued down his body, licking the glistening flesh between his pecs and pulling first one and then the other hard, brown nipple into her lush mouth.



The succubus lifted off Peter's cock and slid down his body, wrapping herself like pale silk around his long limbs and lapping at his flat stomach.

I licked my lips and leaned harder against the doorframe. Warm cream flooded my panties and I realized I needed to stop. What I was doing was wrong.

Instead of watching the succubus take advantage of Peter, I should be stepping in and helping him. But my feet wouldn't move. My legs barely stayed functional beneath me. Overwhelming sexual need infused my body, making me helpless and weak.

I knew the exact moment Simone's lush mouth closed over Peter's cock. He stiffened and cried out, his pale face suffused with the most incredible pleasure.

At that moment warm hands slid around my body. One hand lifted the soft fabric of my sweatshirt and cupped a breast, pulling gently on the rigid peak of an energized nipple.

The other slid down my belly and into my panties, heading unerringly to the throbbing nub of my clit, where I thought I'd die of frustration if I didn't get some release soon.

I moaned and my head fell back, resting against a broad, warm chest with a strongly beating heart beneath it.

As the incredibly talented fingers pulled on my nipples and made mind-shattering circles upon my throbbing clit, soft lips touched my ear. "Come to bed, Athena."

I turned in his arms and climbed his body, wrapping my arms around his neck and my legs around his waist.

My lips fastened on his.

I consumed him, a starving woman who was frantic for relief from her starvation. My fingers wove through the silken strands of his dark gold hair, pulling him to me and forcing his mouth to open and capitulate.

When it did, my tongue speared inside, tangling frantically with his.

Damian carried me back to bed and laid me on it. He pulled the formless sweats from my body and bent over me, covering my throbbing mound with his hot mouth.

I screamed in pleasure as the warm, wet pressure of his sucking mouth pulled the near-painful pressure from my clit, bringing me inexorably toward that soothing edge. I wrapped my fingers in his hair, my head thrashing mindlessly on the bed and felt myself go over.

I hung suspended at the top of my release for the beat of a heart, incredible feelings of pleasure and warmth suffusing me and then plunged, screaming into the vortex of sensation.

Before I'd even found the bottom of my orgasm, Damian pulled his lips from my clit and covered me with his body, plunging deeply into the still-convulsing flesh of my pussy.

I screamed again and tightened around him as my body was thrown into a new level of sensual awareness.

Wrapping my legs around his hips, I allowed myself to become immersed in the essence that was Damian.

His musky, male scent, the warm satin of his skin, the soft puffs of his sweet breath against my face, the cool silk of his hair and the incredible rigidness of his hard flesh within my body.

It was all Damian.

It was all good.

And it was, I suddenly realized, all I'd ever wanted.

Damian lifted my hips and drove more deeply into me. I could feel the fat tip of his cock bumping against a barrier inside my body. It was slightly painful but the pain made my clitoris clench with pleasure. "Harder!"

Damian complied happily. He increased his tempo and, shoving his knees under my butt to hold me upright, grabbed a breast in each hand and gave himself over to pounding into me, hard and fast.

Sweat gave a sheen to our skin, dribbling down between his taut pecs and running in sexy rivulets down his hard abs.

I experienced a strong urge to lap those droplets off his belly, savoring them on my tongue like fine wine.

My mind fractured, my body screamed for release.

My muscles tensed with expectation.

I was almost there.

I only needed a tiny impetus to take me all the way over. Damian pulled out of me and flipped me over, plunging deeply into my body from behind. I felt myself falling over that edge, hanging there in sheer delight for a long moment as my body tensed and throbbed in anticipation of full release. Damian reached around and covered my clit with a hand and pressed gently, sending me completely over.

Screaming like a madwoman, I exploded into release, pulling Damian over with me. He stiffened against my back, his cock stilling within my body and I felt him spurt and pulse within me as he came.

His head rested against my back, his hand pressed gently against my mons, pulling the final, satisfying surges of pleasure from my body and leaving me totally spent, blissfully lax and incredibly happy.

We collapsed in a limp pile on the bed and lay panting in each other's arms.

After a moment, Damian pulled the covers back up and it didn't take long for us to drift back to sleep.

When I awoke the second time that morning the rest of the house was quiet. I grinned, thinking poor Peter was finally getting some rest.

I was wrong.

He and Damian were sitting outside together, drinking coffee and making plans. I got a cup of coffee myself and stood inside the house for a few moments, just watching them. They looked very intense and very sexy, sitting side by side on the rock wall that separated the patio from the raging shoreline below the house.

"Did you enjoy the show?"

I spun, finding myself face-to-face with Simone. She wore only a sheer robe, which hid nothing and her hair tumbled sexily around her small face. She looked as if she'd spent the night rolling around in bed with a sexy demon.

"Good morning, Simone."

She gave me a mocking smile and jerked her head toward the men outside. "Yummy."

I turned back to them. "Yes. Extremely." I frowned, suddenly realizing what she'd asked me. "Show? What show?"

Her smile was hungry, predatory. "Last night. I know you watched. I smelled your lust." She moved closer, pressing herself against my side and resting her chin on my shoulder. She smelled of flowers and tousled sheets and illicit delights.

I stepped away, putting up a hand. "Whoa, girl, I don't play on that team."

Her pointed, pink tongue swept out and slid suggestively across her swollen lips. "Too bad. You're yummy too."

I grabbed the door handle. "Let's go outside, shall we?"

She placed a small, pale hand over mine, stopping me from pulling the slider open. "Damian cannot be yours, pretty Cupid. He is demon. He must serve at the whim of the gods on Olympus."

I frowned. My first instinct was to tell her to stay the hell out of it. My second was to crumple into a sobbing ball on the floor because I knew she was right.

Simone lifted my chin with a strong, delicate-looking finger. "He cares much for you. He will die to save you. It is a great burden. *He* must not die."

I sighed. I hadn't missed the implication in her tone. "I care much for him too."

She nodded. "Good, then it is settled. You will leave."

She swept through the glass door and out onto the patio, her sheer robe flowing out behind her like gossamer wings, leaving everything the gods had given her in the way of physical beauty exposed for all to see.

The men turned, taking in her nakedness with smiles of approval.

I frowned and slouched out after her.

Wearing my sloppy sweat suit, which bagged around my ankles and wrists and sagged at the butt.

Oh yeah. I was fully armed for battle with a succubus.

## Chapter Eleven

### *Stone-Cold Sobered*

Simone leapt into Peter's lap with a giggle. He laughed and pulled her lush mouth down for a kiss.

I watched Damian carefully. His eyes slid to me and he smiled. I pulled self-consciously at the overlong sweatpants so I didn't trip over them. I stopped in front of him, my eyes sliding toward the ocean uncomfortably.

I'd never felt more clunky and unsure in my life.

Damian grabbed my hand and pulled me close. Lifting the loose bottom of the soft sweatshirt, he swiped a hot, wet trail with his tongue from just below the folded waistband of the pants up to my bellybutton.

He laid a tender kiss on my belly. "You look scrumptious."

I laughed, feeling instantly better. "Oh yeah, the sweat suit goddess. How can you resist me?"

His smile widened and his eyes sparkled. "How indeed?"

"I need to get some things today."

He nodded. "It seems we've been doing a lot of that lately."

I frowned.

He turned to Simone. "Do you have something Athena can wear to go shopping?"

I opened my mouth in horror, visualizing myself walking down the mall in a sheer jumpsuit with cutouts in all the strategic areas...just in case the world hadn't gotten a good enough glimpse of my nakedness through the sheer fabric.

Simone's eyes sparked with something that looked like playfulness and she nodded. "I have a couple of dowdy things she might like."

I was too relieved to be offended. If Simone thought the clothing was dowdy, at least hopefully all my important parts would be covered.

I gave her a grateful smile. "Thanks."

Gratitude was a big mistake.

I tugged the plunging neckline of the blouse up, trying to at least cover my nipples and dragged at the hem of the micro-miniskirt in an attempt to keep my butt cheeks from peeking out at the world.

At least the fabric wasn't totally see-through. Not totally. Rather than clean air sheer, it was more like smoggy air. Slightly opaque but not really.

Damian screwed up his lips, trying hard not to laugh at my predicament. "I like it. You look..."

I glared at him. "Naked?"

He barked out a laugh before he could stop himself. "Naked is good."

"Not at the mall, Damian. I can't go out into public wearing this. You'll have to go in without me. I'll just tell you my sizes."

He wrapped an arm around my shoulders and nodded. "Let's get going. My senses are telling me Medusa will be paying us a visit today. I don't want Peter and Simone here alone if that happens."

We drove to the closest shopping mall and I sent Damian in with a sheet of paper bearing sizes, colors and brief instructions about style.

No hooker clothes, nothing lighter than air or just as sheer and nothing that needed to be pried off my body with tools.

Simple really.

Jeans and t-shirts.

He was inside only a few minutes before the sky started to darken.

"Oh shit! This is getting sooooo old! Don't you know another trick!" I screamed toward the sky.

Blowing out a frustrated breath, I leaned forward to watch the sky through the windshield, watching the clouds move in from a distance. I prayed it was just a natural occurrence. A normal summer storm.

As the clouds thickened and started to roil overhead I lost that hope completely. I dialed Damian's cell but he didn't answer. I tried his house. Peter didn't pick up either.

"Damn!" Looking down at my vastly underdressed self, I was filled with the horrified realization that I'd have to go looking for him.

I sighed, pushed the door open and stepped out into a building wind. Just what my little outfit needed.

Wind.

I tried to hold the little flippy skirt down over my butt as I bent forward into the wind and pushed toward the mall, dodging flying debris as I went.

I dodged to one side to avoid a flying plastic bottle, only to get hit in the face with an airborne plastic bag.

I peeled the bag off my face and gasped.

Megan Megara stood before me, arms akimbo, Olympus-style gown fluttering around her slim ankles and her beautiful red-gold hair flying around her face like a silken halo.

"Hello, Athena."

I reached into my purse and clutched my only weapon, allowing the purse to drop away from my hand. "What do you want, Medusa?"

She smiled. "I want my sister. You know that, Athena."

Nodding, I decided a little misdirection was in order. Hopefully Peter and Simone could hold her off until we got there. "Damian's keeping her in his basement."

She smiled again. "Is he? How convenient for him!"

I took a step backward. Her beautiful face had morphed for the merest beat of time and I'd caught a glimpse of the real Medusa under the pretty shell. At a loss for how to deal with her reaction, I decided I'd just keep her talking as long as I could.

"I heard her down there. She's not happy of course but he's treating her well, Medusa. He's feeding her good food and keeping her safe."

The beautiful woman before me threw back her head and laughed, the throaty sound of it morphing into a roll of thunder across the sky.

Lightning flashed and the parking lot beside me exploded, sending large chunks of black asphalt flying toward me. I threw myself behind the nearest car.

Okay, so much for keeping her talking.

"He killed Euryale. So you will die."

*Hooboy. Wait until she found out about Stheno.* I fingered an arrow into my tiny Cupid's bow and concentrated on pulling power into my hands, growing it.

The car I was hiding behind suddenly flew into the sky and blew over my head, landing on another car several rows away with a resounding screech of metal and shattering of glass.

I stood up to face the angry monster with my loaded bow. "I don't want to kill you, Medusa. Leave now and I won't have to."

She laughed again and thunder rolled across my senses, making them vibrate with tension. In the blink of an eye she was a gorgon and I was looking into her eyes. I cried out and turned my head, my finger releasing the arrow as my legs buckled and I dropped toward the ground.

"Medusa!"

It was Damian's voice, booming above the thunder and wind.

I fought against the claiming of my body by Medusa's horrible magic. Before my eyes I watched my feet start turning to stone. And then my calves...and my knees...

"Damian!" The cry tore from my throat before I could stop it. I hadn't wanted to distract him from the lethal battle I heard him fighting nearby. But fear enveloped me as the inexorable creep of stone moved up my torso, toward my heart and lungs.

I sobbed and waited for the inevitable. My lungs struggled to breathe and then stopped. My heart beat frantically in my chest, trying to outrun the horror that was coming its way and then just stopped, encased in stone.

I gulped, my eyes widening just before I succumbed to death.

A shadow passed over my eyes and something warm and wet touched my lips.

I felt it trickle slowly down my throat.

The sky above was light. Filled with the music of the gods. I reached for the light, craving its soft warmth as respite from the cold, hard stone that claimed my Earthbound body.

I smiled as the light touched my finger, reached farther to grasp more of it and then cried out as the light flew away, retreating from me as if swept away by something much stronger.

Damian's face filled my vision, replacing the light. I blinked and moved my lips, tasting flowers and love in the thick substance coating them.

"Athena." He pulled me off the parking lot and into his arms. I lay limply against him as he carried me to his car. "We need to get back to the house. Peter can't hold her off on his own."

I lay against the car seat, half dazed as he flew from the parking lot and up the mountain, where I could already see the sky darkening in the vicinity of his magicked house.

Energy slowly seeped back into my muscles until I was able to sit up. "What did you give me?"

He glanced my way and smiled. Grabbing my hand off my lap, he pulled it to his lips. "Gorgon blood. It's the only thing that can reverse the magic once you start turning to stone." A shadow passed over his face and he shook his head. "Another second and I'd have been too late." Then he squeezed my hand and smiled. "You pierced her wing with your arrow. It's the only reason she ran instead of staying to fight."

I shuddered, remembering all too clearly how it had felt to slowly harden and die. "What will you do?"

He took the final turn to the house on two wheels, the tires shrieking as they fought to hold on to the rain-slicked asphalt. "Together, Peter and I should be able to restrain her."

I frowned. "*Should* be able to restrain her? Haven't you done this before?"

"She's stronger now. She fed off Euryale when I killed her."

I grimaced. "Eew!"

He jerked the wheel hard and threw on the brakes. The little car spun in the gravel before the house and slid to a stop in a shower of small white stones. Damian threw the car door open and ran around to grab my hand as I climbed out.

He pulled me into the house, calling out to Peter as he ran.

We went all the way through the house and through the open patio door in the kitchen. The backyard was a war zone.

Broken trees and bits of metal and glass littered the area.

A small pool of blood was puddled in front of the door.

Damian stepped over it, let go of my hand and ran across the patio, leaping the rock wall before I could even get outside.

I picked my way carefully across the glass, cursing the stupid, spike-heeled shoes I'd borrowed from Simone and stepped carefully onto the rock wall. Peter was locked in combat with Medusa on the roiling, rock-strewn beach.

His sword was covered in blood and he'd managed to get his chain around one of her thick wrists but her wings thrummed hard against the air and he was in danger of being pulled off his feet and carried out over the ocean.

Damian ran headlong toward the pair, his sword and chain appearing in his hands as he flew at an impossible speed across the sand.

Something bright and fluttery descended on Medusa from above and the gorgon shrieked as several of her nasty snakes were ripped from her head.

Simone was barely recognizable in her full succubus form. She was vibrantly purple, with a long tail that whipped with the intensity of her mood and butterfly-shaped wings that allowed her to flit briskly around over the thrashing gorgon, making her very hard to nail down.

Her wings looked delicate beside Medusa's but I knew from personal experience not to underestimate the succubus.

I felt helpless and stupid standing there while they fought the monster. I still had my bow. I remembered seeing it in the backseat of the car as we drove up the mountain. Damian must have flung it into the car before we left.

I turned and made my way as quickly as I could back into the house.

As I entered I was surprised to a stop by the shrieking and pounding coming from the basement.

*Snuggles.*

I glanced toward the basement door and saw that it was unlocked and partially ajar. Peter must have been going to get her when Medusa struck.

Realizing that the Harpy could be an excellent ally for the three demons fighting Medusa outside, I hesitated only a second.

Kicking off Simone's stupid, spike-heeled shoes I ran to the stairs and down, into a dank cave of a room that smelled of mold and rotted food and what could only be Harpy poop.

*Ish!*

The thought crossed my mind that I might have to reassess the level of care Damian had been providing his "pet". Looking around, however, I realized the room was basically clean. But the cage where Snuggles was kept was strewn with food and much worse things.

It appeared the Harpy had been having herself a little temper tantrum.

The room was large, unfinished and held very little aside from the Harpy's enormous cage.



One wall was open, with a small door and a large picture window that looked out on the ocean beyond.

What I saw out there made my heart nearly stop. Damian was on his knees in the sand, his sword arm still up but now coated red with blood.

Peter still fought on but he staggered and nearly fell every time he moved.

Simone had disappeared.

I turned back to the Harpy. Her violet eyes glowed as I approached. She wrapped her clawed hands around the bars of her cage and hissed at me, showing me several rows of gore-covered, razor-sharp teeth.

I almost passed out from the stench. "Oh my gods, girl. Get a giant mint!"

Covering my nose with an arm, I slammed a palm against the bars, hoping to scare her back so I could get the door open before she was on me.

She just stood there, her deadly claws mere inches from the padlock. She was well within skin-ripping distance when I grabbed the lock and yanked on it, hoping by some miracle it would be unlocked.

I was shaking so hard my teeth were clacking together.

The Harpy seemed well aware of my fear.

I'm sure she could smell it. If she didn't already recognize it in the sound of my knees knocking together.

First things first.

I needed the key.

I looked around the basement for an obvious place Damian would keep a key. There were no handy hooks on the wall with keys dangling from them. No tables with keys lying helpfully on their surface. No blinking signs announcing their location.

"Dammit!" I swiped a shaky hand over my face and closed my eyes. "Think, Athena, think!"

*If I were Damian...where would I hide a key? In my jeans pocket. Damn and damn again!*

Snuggles shrieked again and I jumped, opening my eyes to glare at her. "I'm trying! And you're not helping!"

The Harpy glared back at me and her thick, purple-black tongue came out to swipe across her teeth.

I frowned. "This is no time to think about eating me, Snuggles. I'm here to release you."

The Harpy screamed and turned her horrible face toward the stairwell. She lifted off the ground and slammed her chest against the bars.

The entire house shook from the impact.

"The kitchen!" She was trying to tell me the key was upstairs.

I ran back up the stairs and started ripping out drawers, dumping them everywhere in my search for the key.

There was an empty hook on the wall beside the door. I figured Damian had removed the key when I'd come around. To keep me from going downstairs. "Very helpful, Damian."

A horrible roar sounded outside, followed by some truly ear-shattering shrieks. I ran over to the open door and looked outside.

Peter was down and there was blood everywhere.

Damian was a madman, ripping and lunging at the tattered gorgon above him but he was covered in blood too and, even from where I stood I could see several horrible gashes in his back and shoulders.

Another shriek from the basement gave me the impetus I needed to tear myself away from that door. If I wanted to help Damian I had to get the Harpy free.

I finally found the key inside a small jar on top of the counter.

I plunged down the stairwell and ran toward the cage. I was well past the point where I worried for my own safety.

I inserted the key in the lock, my hands shaking so hard I could barely get it into the slot.

Snuggles shrieked and threw herself at the door, knocking the key back out of the lock. "Stop it!" I shrieked at her.

Apparently the fishwife tenor of my voice startled her because she complied.

I managed to slide the key home again and turned it, slamming the lock open.

With a final impatient shriek, Snuggles plowed through the door, shoving it into me and trapping me behind it against the cage.

I opened my eyes and found her bright violet eyes and teeth, dripping with saliva, mere inches from my face. She made a strange rumbling noise and her tongue came out. I closed my eyes and prayed she'd remember Damian before she ate me.

The thick, slimy purple thing swiped up my chin like a promise and then she turned away.

I opened my eyes and watched her lumber toward the large window looking out over the ocean beyond. She smashed right through it and took to the air, announcing her presence with a truly horrifying scream.

I sagged to the ground, giving myself a moment to push my heart back down into my chest and remember to breathe.

At least I hadn't peed myself.

Darn close though. That was one ugly, bad-smelling pet. I scrubbed Harpy spit off my chin with my sleeve.

I climbed to my feet and headed for the hole in the wall Snuggles had made. Climbing carefully through the jagged glass, my gaze was drawn immediately to the

sky, where dual, horrific shrieks of aggression barely preceded the sound of two huge, solid bodies pounding together in midair.

A rumble went through the ground beneath my feet at their impact, telling me more than anything how powerful the two creatures doing battle above my head really were.

What I was witnessing was a truly epic occasion.

But there was no time to enjoy it.

I had to get to Damian.

He was facedown in the sand, covered in blood.

"Oh my gods...Damian!" I ran toward him through the dense sand, feeling it pulling on my heels, trying to drag me to a stop the whole way. The glistening sand was littered with blood, scales, hair and chunks of things better left unexplored at that moment.

It was the sight of a mythical war.

Unfortunately it was all too real.

After what felt like an eternity, I reached Damian and bent over him. His back was crisscrossed with deep, bloody welts, embedded with sand and gorgon hair. But I was vastly relieved to see it rising and falling. He was still breathing. I dragged the thick curtain of his hair off his face and winced at the bloody claw tracks scoring his cheeks and forehead. "Damian?"

His eyelids fluttered but stayed closed. "I'm just resting."

I laughed, bending over him and enjoying the feel of his expanding lungs against my chest.

He groaned and flipped over onto his back. His chest looked even worse than his back. His eyes came open and he looked overhead, where the sounds of battle were still going strong. "You let Snuggles out."

I nodded.

"She didn't eat you."

I shook my head.

He sighed. "That's good. Thanks."

Suddenly he jerked and turned his head toward the spot in the sand where Peter lay. His brother was motionless. Simone had draped herself over Peter's body and was totally silent, her beautiful dark gray eyes focused on us without expression.

It was a truly horrifying sight.

Damian jerked to his feet and ran over to his brother. Shoving Simone aside none too gently, he felt for a pulse on Peter's neck. His eyes flew to the sky and he let out a whistle like I'd never heard before. It hurt my eardrums and made the air around us throb.

Facing each other in midair, claws slashing and wings pounding in an effort to gain the upper hand, the two monsters hovered far above us. At the sound of Damian's whistle, Snuggles jammed her huge, clawed feet into Medusa's belly and shoved hard with her powerful back legs, sending the gorgon flying through the air away from her. Without missing a beat, she dived toward us.

I looked at Damian. He stood with his blood-coated sword and chain and was waiting for the Harpy. Snuggles didn't land. She flew by close enough that Damian could grab her hair and flip himself onto her back.

Almost before Medusa could right herself to renew her attack, they were headed toward her again and Damian had blood in his eye.

I turned to look at Peter and Simone was draped over him again, this time soft sobs emerged from under the multi-hued curtain of her hair.

A cold wave of dread swept through me. Peter was dead.

And Damian was wild with grief.

This could not end well.

A bloodcurdling roar filled the sky above my head. My gaze jerked skyward just in time to see Damian and the Harpy meet Medusa.

Snuggles swiped her claws across Medusa's middle, drawing a scream from the gorgon and bringing a quick, retaliatory response.

Medusa swept one powerful wing toward Damian, hitting him hard in an attempt to unseat him from the Harpy.

I thought at first that it had worked. He left Snuggles' back in forward flight that carried him right into Medusa's deadly embrace.

Like a large spider, Damian wrapped his arms and legs around her thick body and slashed his sword toward her face, cutting a deep gash down the right side of her face. He plunged his hand into the gash and Medusa threw her head back on a scream of agony, lashing out at Damian with her claws.

But he was already gone. With a backward flip, Damian launched himself into midair and tumbled toward the sand below.

I screamed but Snuggles dived quickly, catching him before he landed and swooping close to the ground so he could jump off.

He ran immediately toward his brother and knelt beside him. Damian flipped Peter over and slathered his chest with the blood coating his hand. A heartbeat later Peter's chest heaved and he gasped, surging into a seated position and looking perplexed.

Damian slapped him on the shoulder. "Welcome back!"

Peter blinked. Simone flung herself at him, taking him back down to the sand.

A horrendous shrieking noise erupted above our heads and we all looked up. Snuggles and Medusa crashed together, claws ripping and flailing frantically.

Snuggles opened a wide track of claw marks down Medusa's scaled chest and fastened her jagged maw around the gorgon's thick neck.

Medusa wrapped her thick arms around the Harpy and whipped her tail hard, sending them plunging and spinning across the sky.

They rolled by, just over our heads, heading directly toward Damian's house.

Sparks flew into the sky. The air around the house wavered and the two monsters disappeared, apparently sucked right into the magic force field Damian had in place around the house.

The beach was totally silent for several beats. We all stared at the spot where they'd disappeared and tried to assimilate what had happened.

I blinked a few times and then turned to Damian. "Where'd they go?"

He looked at Peter.

Peter sighed and pushed himself painfully to his feet. "I guess we're back to Olympus then."

Damian grinned.

I frowned. "But I thought you said Medusa couldn't breach the magic you had around the house?"

Damian shrugged. "I guess Snuggles carried her through. In any event, there's now a very pissed-off gorgon and a very cranky Harpy loose on Olympus. And if I know Zeus he'll be sending a lightning bolt to fry my ass if they wreck anything important."

Peter stood unsteadily on the beach, Simone draped along his side. "Remind me not to stand too close to you."

Damian sneered. "Har! Let's go."

I grabbed his arm. "Oh no you don't. Not without me."

He pulled me into his arms and lowered his lips to mine. "I wouldn't have it any other way."

And we were off.

## Chapter Twelve

### *Life-Changing Moments*

We landed in the golden streets of Olympus, not too far from the Garden of Life and the Building of Judgment, where all the laws were made on Olympus and the gods held court.

The streets were paved in gold brick and shone in a warm, midafternoon sun, seen now through a thick filter of dust that clung to the air above them. It looked as if a tornado had buzzed through. Debris from splintered carts and broken buildings littered the street. Signs hung at odd angles from their posts. Lamps lay shattered on the ground, fallen from their twisted poles. And, here and there, gods and goddesses were scraping themselves off the dusty ground and trying to pull and tuck their silken robes back into order.

Damian grabbed the arm of a passing page, whose white tunic was splotted with something brown and gooey that didn't smell very good. "Which way did they go?"

The page turned wide, brown eyes up to Damian and gulped. The small boy couldn't have been more than eight years old and was scrawny and knobble-kneed as you'd expect from a child of his age.

His chin-length blond hair had probably been tidily arranged under a gold leaf headpiece when he'd left his quarters that morning but now the gold leaves were clamped under his ears and the band stuck out beyond his scrawny neck. His gold tresses stuck up all over his head and sported vegetation, feathers and mud.

He looked like he'd been pounded into the ground with a feather mattress.

He opened his mouth but nothing came out. Instead he pointed a filthy finger down the street, toward open country and the mountain's peak in the distance.

Damian looked at Peter. "She's taking her toward the compound. That's good."

In the distance a fountain of dirt shot into the sky and two huge figures, still locked in mortal combat, lifted into the sky.

Something screamed and a chariot came barreling down the street toward us. The two white horses pulling the gold-trimmed chariot were wild-eyed, their nostrils flared in alarm.

The young couple standing inside were pale and so rigid with fear they looked as if they'd already been turned to stone. Damian stepped in front of the chariot, holding his sword out before his body and murmuring something I couldn't quite hear.

The two young people blinked and the young man pulled the reins hard, stopping the horses in a swirl of dust and flying debris just inches from the spot where Damian stood.

Demon magic.

Cool beans.

Peter and Damian climbed into the chariot. They “helped” the young couple out and Damian offered me a hand. “Coming?”

Simone took to the air and flew toward the distant peak of Mount Olympus.

I climbed up and Damian tucked me in front of him, so that I was braced by the chariot in front and his hard body in back.

I was in a happy place.

That is, until he took the reins and whipped them, sending the white horses flying at breakneck speed down the street.

I clutched the rounded edge of the chariot before me and turned my head. “Aren’t we going the wrong wa-wa...wait a minute!”

The horses lifted off the ground and headed toward the clouds. We climbed on an almost vertical slope and began to roll into a steep turn. I gasped and Damian wrapped an arm around my waist, holding me tightly against his body.

I could feel how much he liked me through the soft denim of his jeans. “Just try to breathe, Athena. You’re fine.”

“Oh...my...gods!” I looked down and the town of Olympus looked like something a five-year-old would play with. The young page we’d been talking to was a small speck on the ground, waving at us as we headed off after the dueling monsters.

I looked at the horses’ flailing legs and saw that small, white wings had sprouted from their heels.

Damian handed the reins to Peter and wrapped his other arm around me, grinding his hard cock into my nearly naked buttocks which, thanks to Simone’s slut skirt, were pretty much exposed to the world. I glanced at Peter but he had his gaze determinedly fixed on the sky ahead.

Damian’s lips found the side of my neck and his tongue slid out to forge a heated trail down my throat. “Relax, Athena...” His hands slid up my thighs, quickly breaching the worthless skirt and creeping easily beneath the flimsy silk of my panties.

I gasped and reached for his hand, covering it with my own and glancing again at Peter.

Though his face was a mask, determinedly blank, I could have sworn his lips were tucked up just a bit in the corner.

“Damian!” I whispered, outraged and more than a little alarmed by how much I wanted him to continue doing what he’d been doing.

He laughed and slid the errant digit into my pussy and then dragged it back out, running it over the throbbing nub of my clit. I moaned softly and laid my head back on his shoulder. Then I caught myself and wrenched his finger from my soaking crotch. “Stop it!”

He bit my shoulder. "War makes a warrior very hard."

I sucked in a breath and turned in his arms, wrapping my arms around his neck. "It has that same effect on warrior-ettes too, it seems."

He captured my lips on a husky laugh and pulled me up against his body, grinding himself firmly against me.

"You might want to table that for a while, kids. We have company."

The words barely cleared Peter's mouth before something massive swept past with an enraged screech. Snuggles' powerful wings flapped hard in an effort to stop the backward impetus of her flight and her thick claws grasped the air with complete futility.

She hurtled toward the ground, apparently unable to stop herself from falling. It looked like she held one wing at an odd angle.

Medusa hung in the air before the horses, her hissing, swirling hair roiling violently around an even more repulsive face. Her massive wings throbbed in the air, holding her upright as she assessed her prey and sent the capricious equines into spasms of hysteria. The horses reared and lunged, upsetting the balance of the chariot and sending us plunging toward the ground in a stomach-clamping maneuver that fortunately didn't give me time to shriek like a girl and embarrass myself.

Medusa plunged after us.

Peter leapt from the chariot, landing on the back of one of the horses and reaching back with his sword to cut the tether holding the horse to the rig. He swooped upward and away, toward Medusa.

Damian wrapped an arm around me and leapt onto the other horse. I screamed, clutching him around the neck as we landed hard and, as a result of my panicked scrabbling for purchase, we nearly slid over the horse and off the other side.

Damian struggled to keep us upright and on the horse and almost didn't clear his sword in time to cut the tether. We managed to swoop away mere seconds before the chariot crashed into the rocky ground of Mount Olympus' highest peak.

Simone and Peter surrounded Medusa. She flailed with her claws and pummeled them with her wings and tail but they danced away too fast for her to catch.

Her thick, green body ran with blood. Her beard was matted with dried black blood and her claws were thick with it. She seemed to be losing focus, her swiping attacks becoming more wild and less effective and her reactions to Simone and Peter's deadly attacks was noticeably slower.

Simone had a long, thin sword in her hand and was having great success finding openings in Medusa's defense to slice her thick skin over and over again. The cuts were small and shallow but in the numbers Simone was delivering them, just as deadly to the gorgon in the long run as a full-out body thrust to the heart.

The gorgon's wings were tattered. While they still held her in the air, she would occasionally drop several feet as if her wings were having trouble holding her up.



We hung in the air a moment. Damian watched the battle before us and then turned to me with an assessing look. I returned his stare, wondering what he was thinking. With a sigh, he jerked the reins of the horse away from the scene, back in the direction of the town.

I frowned. Surely he wasn't running away and leaving Peter and Simone to handle Medusa alone.

But up ahead, on the ground, Snuggles was pulling herself upright and testing her wings. Damian dived toward her. The Harpy looked up and screeched as we approached.

He dropped the horse gently to the ground and the wings on its feet disappeared. We dismounted and Damian slapped her on the rump, sending her on her way.

I watched the beautiful animal run for freedom and suddenly wished I could go with her.

I had a feeling I knew what was coming next and I was soooo not ready for it.

When I turned back around Damian was on Snuggles and the Harpy was lifting her powerful wings in flight.

"Hey!"

He turned to me, his face hard and filled with the loneliness he'd been carrying around like a mask when I'd met him. "This isn't your fight, Athena. It's too dangerous. You have no place there."

Snuggles lifted off the ground with a shriek, her powerful wings creating a backdraft that nearly blew me off my feet. I braced my legs and watched them leave, my stomach clenching in despair.

His words cut me deep. Not just because he didn't want me to be involved in the current battle, in the current place, in the current time. But because what he was doing was his life. It was his calling. It was what he would always do and be.

And I had no place in it.

Whether he lived or died on that mountain, I would remain alone.

Without him.

I watched him rejoin the battle, taking Snuggles high above Medusa and dropping down quickly so he could leap from her back and wrap his chain around the gorgon's neck. Peter quickly followed his brother's lead and wrapped his chain around Medusa's thick, flailing legs, pinning them together so that she was well and truly trapped.

Snuggles landed on Medusa's back and clamped her deadly jaws over the gorgon's massive shoulder.

Simone landed on her chest and positioned the thin, deadly sword she carried against Medusa's throat, holding it there in warning as they slowly drifted toward the ground. Medusa hung limp and exhausted between them.

I sighed and glanced away, swiping at tears. I was glad it was finally over.

A horrendous roar brought my terrified gaze back up, just in time to see Damian take a deadly blow to the chest. Medusa struggled a moment longer before finally succumbing to defeat and allowing herself to be taken down.

But it was too late for Damian.

My horrified gaze was riveted to his limp, lifeless body as it plunged toward the ground. I screamed and started running, sobbing his name as his body hit the rocky surface of the mountain and bounced twice, like a broken rag doll.

My legs couldn't carry me fast enough.

My lungs felt as if they would burst in my chest.

But somehow I never reached him.

I felt as if I ran in the clouds, with no purchase for my feet to carry me forward. The scenery stayed the same, my body surged with effort and my heart shattered in my chest. But I never reached him.

The Fates suddenly floated before me.

"Stop, Athena!" Clothos' beautiful, narrow face looked angry. Beside her, Lachesis let her pity show. "You must let him go, Athena."

"No!" I renewed my efforts to reach him. My legs growing rubbery and my feet numb against the cutting rocks. I stumbled finally and landed on my face, sobbing his name as pain rolled through me, pressing me helplessly to the ground.

Atropos bent over me, stroking sweaty strands of hair from my brow. "It's all right, Athena. It will be all right. Just try to breathe, child."

I threw back my head and screamed my pain.

*Just try to breathe, Athena.*

Damian's words to me. Set into such a different context mere moments earlier. Sliced the last working chamber of my heart into tiny little, irretrievable pieces.

I felt myself falling into a black abyss of depression.

From which I had no desire at all to return.

## **Chapter Thirteen**

### *Life Again*

I lay on my back, staring up at the fat, white clouds rolling by overhead. The birds of the Garden of Life sang happily, totally oblivious to the fact that my life was over. The trees whispered around me, fat with stories and gossipy tidbits they wanted to share with me about the gods and goddesses on Olympus.

I closed my ears to them, immersed in the comforting cloak of my misery.

The air stirred and a soft pair of slippers moved into view. I ignored her until she reached out and tapped my arm with the slipper. "Athena."

I sighed.

The slipper tapped a little harder.

"What, Clothos?"

"You need to snap out of it, girl."

I narrowed my eyes on one cloud in particular, if I looked at it just right I thought I could see Damian's eyes in its depths.

When I continued to ignore her, a frustrated sigh emerged from the goddess of Fate standing over me. Her pristine silver and white silk gown rustled as she lowered herself to the ground beside me and lay down in the lush grass. "That cloud looks like Zeus' penis."

I rolled my eyes. "As if you'd know."

She turned her head, her long, pretty face creasing in a smile. "I would."

I smiled too. I couldn't help it.

She took my hand. "The trees want to tell you a story."

I shrugged. "I'm not interested."

"Then I'll tell you."

I started to get up to avoid hearing Clothos' story but she held me down with her grip on my hand.

The air shimmered again and Lachesis was standing there. "Is she still lying around moping?"

Clothos and I rolled our eyes up to her.

She shrugged and lowered herself daintily to the ground, stretching out along my other side.

I'd become a Fate sandwich.

Lachesis giggled, pointing. "That cloud looks like Zeus' pe—"

"Has everybody seen Zeus' penis!" I objected loudly.

The Fates looked at me like I was mad. "Well...yes...of course," said Lachesis with a grin.

I shook my head and tried to regain my previous calm depression. I wanted no emotions rocking my boat. Any emotion at all might swamp me. Take me completely under to drown. Irretrievably lost. Only a calm, unfeeling, flatlined existence was safe.

"Go away," I told them.

The air shimmered and I sighed.

Atropos stood looking down at us. "What are you ninnies doing lying on the ground?"

"Looking at Zeus' penis," responded Clothos.

Atropos looked up. "Oh, yes. There it is."

I closed my eyes, hoping they'd go away if I pretended they weren't there.

Atropos settled her delicate rear end onto a nearby concrete bench. "It is a beautiful day."

I felt her two sister Fates nodding in silent agreement.

"The trees are full of stories today," added Atropos.

"I was going to interpret for Athena," Clothos informed her sister.

"Good. Proceed."

I sighed again. Apparently I wasn't to be spared a story. I tried to fall asleep. Maybe I could doze through the whole thing.

"Long ago a beautiful goddess fell in love with a demon god."

My eyes shot open. "Are you kidding me!"

Lachesis slapped my arm. "Silence, child!"

I lay there silently fuming.

Clothos glared at me, angry at being interrupted. "Don't kill the messenger, Athena."

I turned my head and scowled at her.

Clothos sniffed and turned her face back toward the sky. "As I was saying. The goddess fell deeply in love with the demon, who'd been chosen by the gods for a very important task because of his bravery and strength and innate goodness."

That caught my attention. "Goodness?"

"Well, of course, child!" Atropos was so obviously disgusted by my ignorance I was unwilling to pursue that line of questioning.

"The goddess and the demon had many enemies, they fought them all bravely and eventually won. But their harshest enemy was not known to them. So they could not defeat it."

I nodded. "Death."

"If you say so, child," Clothos responded.

I frowned and opened my mouth but Clothos continued, cutting me off.

"Because they could not see this enemy and did not acknowledge it, it succeeded in separating them. They went about their business thinking all was lost and they would never find their way back to each other."

"What the hell has this got to do with Damian and me?"

Lachesis slapped my arm again and I settled back into disgruntled silence, closing my eyes.

"Then one day the kindly Fates intervened." Clothos stopped and I imagined her grinning at her sisters, doing a virtual high-five over their mutual wonderfulness.

I rolled my eyes. "Whatever!"

"The Fates urged the young goddess to rejoin life. To return to her responsibilities. And to forget about her demon lover."

I turned my head. "Is that what you're urging me to do?"

Clothos shrugged.

"And did I... I mean, did *she*? The goddess? Did she return to her responsibilities?"

"Yes," said Lachesis, pushing herself off the ground and swiping lush grass off her gown. "She stopped moping around the Garden of Life and went back to Earth, where lots of people still needed her help."

Clothos stood too. "You must write the rest of the story, Athena."

I sat up. "But that's a stupid story. The trees didn't tell you that story, Clothos."

The three Fates linked arms and strolled away from me, heading more deeply into the Garden of Life.

Clothos had a long, green grass stain on her butt. "Did they not? How strange. I was certain they had."

The sisters' laughter filtered back on the bright morning air as they disappeared into the garden.

I sat for a few moments longer, no longer numb but somehow, not completely dead inside either.

It had been a stupid story.

But maybe that was because I had been acting stupidly.

Yes, I'd lost Damian. And I was pretty sure I'd loved him. Though I had to be honest with myself and admit that I'd thought he wasn't worthy of my love at the time. Being a demon and all.

I'd been stupid. Damian was worthy of all the love in the world.

I knew that now. When it was too late.

But moping about would not bring him back to me. Two months of deep mourning was enough. And I was being selfish. I was needed on Earth and I had to return.

I pushed myself to my feet and took off after the Fates.  
I'd say my goodbyes and return to Earth.  
And start trying to rebuild the pieces of my life.

\* \* \* \* \*

I hugged Lila James and smiled at Chad Roberts. Fortunately for all of us they'd managed to hold their relationship together while I'd been missing in action and I'd just finished the arrow ceremony for them.

They could barely take their eyes off each other long enough to say goodbye to me. I grinned widely. Glad that someone would get the happily ever after they'd been hoping and looking for all their lives.

I climbed into the car I'd purchased upon returning to Earth, a shiny red Jeep Wrangler with a soft black top, and headed home. I had no idea what happened to my other car, which I'd abandoned alongside the highway when the gorgons attacked me. I'd rented the apartment when I'd returned too. It was stark and barely furnished, but I didn't have the energy needed to try to make it into a home just yet.

But I was working on it. I'd been getting a little stronger every day.

The nights were another story though.

My nights were long and lonely and filled with dreams of Damian, his strong arms and sizzling kisses. I'd wake up hot and bothered and sexually dissatisfied, my heart crying out for my demon lover and my arms clutching a cold pillow when they wanted to be wrapped around a hot, hard body.

I stopped at a red light and turned my blinker on, intending to make a right turn toward my new apartment. But my eyes slid to the road ahead, straight through the intersection, which I knew would lead me out of town and up the mountain toward Damian's house.

Something drew me toward that house. I'd been fighting it since my return to Earth a couple of weeks earlier. I told myself it was simple curiosity but I wasn't entirely sure that was true.

The light changed and I went straight instead of turning, oblivious to the blaring horns of people who didn't appreciate my surging across the road from the turn lane. Suddenly it was vitally important for me to go to that house and put the last demons in my memory to rest.

It seemed like a small thing to make myself feel better. To put Damian behind me for all time.

Though I secretly doubted that was possible.

As I climbed the mountain I felt myself becoming excited. My hands clenched the steering wheel more tightly as I neared the last turn, until my knuckles were white and the tips of my fingers tingled from a lack of blood.

I didn't know how I would feel upon seeing the house until I made that last turn and it was there. It was perched just as I remembered it in a copse of huge, old trees, settled back a short way from the road.

Looking as if nothing had ever happened there.

I pulled into the short driveway and stopped the car, staring at the house.

I wasn't sure what to do now that I was there.

Finally I opened the car door and stepped out into the bright, sunny day. I walked around the house, intending to sit for a while on the patio and then make my way home.

The sound of the ocean met me as I rounded the corner of the house. Flowers spilled toward the narrow sidewalk from both sides, bright and lush and touched with sparkling drops of moisture, as if someone had just watered them.

I stepped out of the relative shade at the side of the house and onto the sun-bleached and wind-scoured stone patio. The low rock wall on the perimeter beckoned to me.

My memory flashed back to that last day, when I'd sipped my coffee and watched Damian and Peter discussing something important, judging by the intense looks on their handsome faces.

When Simone had told me I had to let Damian go. Because I didn't belong in his world.

I jerked as I realized I'd agreed with her. Not consciously of course. But deep in my heart I'd known that what she said was true.

His world was not my world.

And I hadn't believed we could integrate our worlds.

I'd been a fool.

Our worlds integrated seamlessly the day I tasted his lips and felt as if I belonged in his arms. We hadn't needed anyone or anything else to make us work.

Only our own, undying belief that it was possible.

Looking back now, I thought that maybe Damian had found that belief. He'd been waiting for me to find it too.

But it had taken his death for that to happen.

I sat on the low wall and stared out at the ocean. The water rolled blue and white under a bright sun, frothing at the edge of a rocky beach that no longer contained evidence of the battle we'd fought there. It was peaceful, soothing and made me very sad.

Tears slid silently down my cheeks as I pondered everything I'd lost.

"Hello, Athena."

I spun, gasping at the sound of his voice.

"Damian!"

My first instinct was to run to him and fling myself into his arms. But something in his eyes held me back. Tears slid down my cheeks and my hands lifted toward him. "How?"

He smiled but it didn't quite reach his eyes. The sad loneliness I'd seen in his dark blue gaze when we'd first met was back and if anything it looked deeper. "You know your gorgon history, don't you, Athena? Blood from the right side of a gorgon's face can restore life. Blood from the left side is like poison..."

My hands flew to my mouth. I should have known it was possible. I'd watched him save his brother in exactly that same way on the beach. "You're alive?"

He laughed. "Yes. I'm alive."

"I've been so miserable. All this time I..." My hands dropped to my sides and clenched into fists. Anger filled me.

He'd been alive and he hadn't come for me. Hadn't told me. The Fates had to have known he was alive and they hadn't told me either. The anger leached away and my knees buckled. I dropped to the rock wall, staring at my clenched fists.

"Why didn't anybody tell me?" The words came out in a choked whisper.

Damian didn't move any closer. I felt a new coldness between us as he said, "You weren't ready to hear it."

My gaze jerked toward his face. "Are you kidding me! I've been in deep mourning for months. I've barely been able to function. How dare you all keep this from me? I've been in such pain!"

His eyes softened a little but his face stayed hard. "Maybe that was the price you had to pay."

"For what!" I threw my hands into the air and stood up.

Damian finally moved, closing the space between us quickly. He grabbed my hands and pulled them to his lips. "For love, Athena."

I shook my head, my lips moving but no words emerging. What in the world was he talking about? I'd already found love. With him. I didn't need to be tortured to near death to find love. I had it already...

But a little voice inside my head begged to differ.

I'd had love within my grasp. But I hadn't really decided to reach out and grab it. I'd told myself he was too different. He was a demon. Demons weren't worthy. And besides, he was called by the gods to serve and his life couldn't include me.

I didn't want it to include me.

Or did I?

I'd told myself we could just enjoy a short time together and then go our separate ways.

I hadn't committed my heart to him. Not until I'd thought he was dead.



I reached a hand toward Damian and touched his face. "Oh my gods, Damian. I'm so sorry."

He smiled and this time the smile washed some of the sadness from his beautiful blue eyes. "I love you, Athena."

Joy surged through me, filling me with a light and warmth the sun could never match. I leapt into his arms and lifted my lips to his, consuming his mouth in a kiss that demanded as much from him as he could give and offered everything I had right back. I pulled my lips from his only to tell him that I loved him too and then recaptured his sweet mouth with renewed intensity.

My hands rose and twined through his hair. My body strained toward his. Damian put his hands under my buttocks and raised me into the air, carrying me into the cool, dimness of the magic house and to his huge, soft bed. I wrapped my legs around his hips and held on, enjoying the ride.

Laying me down on the bed, he quickly stripped me naked and bent over me, licking and sucking and kissing his way down my body. I arched toward him, aching for him to soothe the pain of my need with his hot mouth.

Damian covered my pussy with his mouth and sucked gently. I wove my fingers through his hair and moaned, feeling the gentle pull of his lips all the way to my toes.

Everything stopped but the sensation he was creating between my thighs. The world waited, breathless, as I climbed the sweet sensations building there to reach the top. My lungs stilled, my heart slowed and my stomach tightened as he sensed how near I was to falling over that bright edge and sucked harder, pulling me screaming into my release.

My thighs tightened and my toes curled and my body pumped gently against his mouth, pulling every last wonderful sensation I could from his hot, hungry lips.

Damian stood up and I cried out, trying to grab his shirt and pull him back to me.

"Shh, Athena. It's okay. I'm not going anywhere." He smiled at me and the sight of those double dimples sent warm cream rushing from my body and trickling down my thighs.

He pulled his shirt off and rid himself quickly of his jeans and silk boxers, springing free for my hungry gaze.

He stood there looking perfect and I licked my lips, suddenly unwilling to wait another moment to have him in my mouth. I rolled and climbed to my knees. Grabbing his hands, I pulled him nearer to the bed, until his thick, rigid cock bounced happily before my hungry lips.

I dropped to my belly and clasped him in a gentle grip.

A small bead of pre-cum sat on the very tip, reminding me of the glistening drops of water on the flowers outside.

My tongue flicked out and swept it away.

Damian groaned low in his throat and reached to touch my hair. I felt a featherlight touch on the loose strands but he pulled his hand away, clenching it into a fist in an apparent effort not to drag my head closer.

I pursed my lips and pressed a tender kiss on the thick, purple head.

He groaned again and both hands clenched into fists.

The muscles in his forearms tightened into hard ridges as he fought to retain control.

I parted my lips and let them slide over the fat head of his cock, sucking gently until his hands tangled in my hair and he moved, pushing himself more deeply into my hungry mouth.

I tightened my lips and let him set the pace. Reaching up, I cupped his tight balls in one hand, massaging them as he gently plundered my mouth.

My other hand slid behind his balls and rubbed the tender spot there. Damian moaned and increased the tempo of his thrusts.

As he neared release, Damian tried to pull away. "I want to be inside you," he murmured huskily.

I shook my head, wrapping my arms around his hips and holding him in my mouth. I increased the pressure of my lips on his cock and he groaned, his head falling back as his hips increased the speed and intensity of their sensual dance.

His cock thickened in my mouth. The fat vein on the underside pulsed against my lips. His balls tightened and his butt clenched beneath my hands. Damian wove his fingers into my hair, holding me completely still as he groaned, stiffened and plunged one last time between my hungry lips.

He pulsed heavily in my mouth, his release bathing my tongue with hot, salty sweetness that I greedily devoured.

I licked and savored every drop of his offering and then loosened my lips and let him slide back out of my mouth, kissing the tip of his slightly softened cock.

Damian grabbed me under the arms and dragged me backward onto the bed, climbing onto the bed over me and pressing his still-hard cock against my aching pussy. "You've been a very bad girl, Athena," he told me as he kissed my lips.

I grinned. "I'm counting on being punished."

He nipped my lip and pressed himself into the juncture of my thighs. I felt the stiff head of his cock at my entrance and lifted my hips, capturing it and writhing until he slid deep within me with a sigh of pleasure and contentment.

He groaned against my mouth. "I never want to leave this bed."

"Okay," I said with a smile. "If that's my punishment. Somehow I'll manage..."

Damian laughed and bit my nose. "Oh no, my beautiful Cupid, your punishment will be much harder than that."

I reached up and traced those incredible dimples with one finger. "Whatever it is I'm up for it."

He turned his head and sucked the finger into his hot mouth. "You will stay with me here, in this house, forever and be my mate."

I gulped, my eyes growing wide.

For just a beat in time Damian looked as if he was afraid I'd say no.

But then I closed my eyes and sighed. "Thank you, gods, for this gift you've given me." When I opened my eyes he was grinning and I couldn't help joining him.

"I love you, Damian. I'd like nothing more than to live with you forever in this magic house."

He lowered his lips to mine in a tender kiss. "And tend my Harpy?"

I choked and sputtered.

He laughed. "She's part of the bargain."

"Oh my gods, Damian! You've got to be kidding me!"

He moved his hips, reminding me that he was still nestled delightfully inside my body.

I gasped.

"You were saying?" His hips picked up a long, slow, deep rhythm that made my toes curl so tightly I thought I might need surgery to release them.

"Maybe we can get me a Harpy too," I gasped as he lifted my hips and drove more deeply into my body.

"Snuggles would love the company."

After that we didn't speak again for a long time.

Unless, of course, you count the language of love.

## About the Author

Award-winning author Sam Cheever mixes in a little fun, a little magic and a little real-life spice to create her sexy fantasy characters. Sam's fun-loving creations fight their way through a dizzying array of dangerous challenges without letting little things like the end of the world, angry, manipulative gods, evil dark-world denizens, or killing Furies dampen their zest for life and hot love!

The author loves to chat with readers. You can find her website and email address on her [author bio page](#) at [www.ellorascave.com](http://www.ellorascave.com).

### *Tell Us What You Think*

We appreciate hearing reader opinions about our books. You can email us at [Comments@EllorasCave.com](mailto:Comments@EllorasCave.com).

Also by Sam Cheever

Gods of Love 1: Nocked Over

Gods of Love: Nocked for a Loop

*Also check out Sam's other books at Cerridwen Press ([www.cerridwenpress.com](http://www.cerridwenpress.com)):*

Dancin' With the Devil 1: 'Tween Heaven and Hell

Dancin' With the Devil 2: 'Tween a Devil and His Hard Place

Dancin' With the Devil 3: 'Tween Heart's Fire and Devil's Delight

Dancin' With the Devil: 'Tween Hopeful and Hopeless



Discover for yourself why readers can't get enough of the multiple award-winning publisher Ellora's Cave. Whether you prefer e-books or paperbacks, be sure to visit EC on the web at [www.ellorascave.com](http://www.ellorascave.com) for an erotic reading experience that will leave you breathless.

[www.ellorascave.com](http://www.ellorascave.com)