

ELLORA'S CAVE TWILIGHT



HEL
HATH NO *Fury*
K.C. SEHLHORST

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For some, the worst enemy one can have is family. Make it a family of gods and the results aren't just deadly, but biblical. Hel, the Norse underworld goddess, has that kind of family. Odin, her uncle, cursed her into their underworld then Loki, her father, took it over, making her the one thing all gods fear—human. There was one, though, who was willing to help her, only one. A god from another pantheon, one who could be just as evil as her father, the same one who had been trying to seduce her for thousands of years—Lucifer.

He is what he is and offers no apologies for it. Hel changed the rules though. Fighting humans and backstabbing gods sounded like a good time. It also helped him get what he wanted. Something he would do anything to get. Anything. What he wanted was Hel. What he didn't expect was the possibility of losing his soul to her in the process.

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Chapter One

Breathing heavily, Hel ran as fast as her legs would carry her. She didn't have to look behind her to see that the monsters were gaining on her. Their loud howls and snarls were enough.

With a wave of her hand, everything in front of her changed. She had to jump to miss a stone bench that was suddenly in her way. The hideous sounds that had plagued her for the last twenty minutes were suddenly gone. Deciding she was safe, at least for the moment, she stopped and leaned against the heavy stone wall to catch her breath.

The large mason stones her back was pressed against were so high she almost couldn't see them curve into the cathedral-type ceiling. The hall was impossibly long, like Great Wall of China long, but very similar to a human's medieval castle. The difference was, there was no light source, no windows, but there was dim light.

A low roar froze the hairs on her skin. It sounded as if they were in the one of the walls, following her through space.

"Shit!" she growled to herself.

She turned to run and smacked straight into a fleshy wall. A thick hand clamped on her arm like a vise, bruising her. The moment the monsters' black dogs appeared, another hand flashed out, stopping them in their tracks.

"What are you doing, Hel? This is pointless." The hand tightened even more as she struggled to pull away.

"I won't let you do this!" she yelled up at the man holding her.

He was six inches taller than she was and was considered to be one of the most handsome gods in their realms. His bluish-green eyes laughed at her, taunting her as if she was the object of one of his sick, twisted games. The corner of his pink lips tilted upward. In the light, his chiseled face seemed unusually harsh.

He actually laughed at her. "You can't stop me."

"It's mine, Loki!" Fear radiated all the way through her, even to the tips of her hair.

"No, Hel. It's mine now. As it always should have been and as it will be in the end."

She was scared and pissed. Loki was always up to something, but never in her wildest dreams had she imagined that he would try doing this.

His magic started to tickle along her skin. Fear suddenly choked her. He was sending her somewhere. If he sent her, there was no telling where she would end up. "Goodbye, Hel."

"No!" she yelled up at him angrily. Yanking her arm free, she didn't breathe. She just closed her eyes, waved her hand in front of her and thought of help.

The first thing Hel felt was the brief feeling of falling before water rushed at her so fast that she inhaled some. Coughing, she surfaced. Her fingers found cool porcelain as she grasped for anything to help her up. She grabbed at it when she started to sink again. Lifting herself above the warm, soapy water, Hel gasped for air.

A gargled scream was stolen from her when large, warm fingers snaked around her waist.

Leaping over the ledge of the tub, she stumbled a few feet before whirling around to face her new attacker. Everything and nothing went through her mind. The only thought she could hold on to was self-preservation. Magic tingled at her fingers and filled her hands as she confronted her new threat.

She couldn't help but groan when she finally saw who was in front of her. Naked as the day he was made, he stood there, just as ready to kill his unexpected intruder as she was her attacker. Slowly his icy-blue eyes melted at the sight of her.

"Hello, Hel. If you wanted to bathe with me, all you had to do was say so," he chuckled as he straightened to his full height. The yellow fiery balls he had formed in his hands to strike her down disappeared with a smoky poof.

Hel clenched her teeth together but shook the power that had pooled in her hands away. "If I'm not getting into bed with you, then I'm not getting into a bath with you, Lucifer!"

"I beg to differ." His lips curled into a little smile, twisting her gut as he did.

Since the day he showed up at the Olympus Winter Ball, all he had to do was smile at her. Every time he did, it turned her tummy to soup that pooled at her feet on the floor. She felt alive whenever he was around, but he made it hard to think. She assumed that the feeling he created in her was what a crush felt like. Whatever it was, she did know that it was a painful feeling and she didn't like it.

"Go away," she snapped, irritated that of all places, she had ended up here, with him, with him naked and wet, looking like a piece of honeyed candy she wanted to lick.

He chuckled. "You dropped in on me, my pretty little Hel."

A droplet of water dripped from his hair, landed on his shoulder and rolled down his chest. She couldn't have pulled her eyes from it if Odin himself were in the room as it slid over his softly covered chiseled muscles. The urge to lick it up with the tip of her tongue was tempting, instead she settled for wetting her suddenly dry lips. Temptation and Lucifer never mixed well. She had heard the stories.

Determined to ignore him, she turned around and tried to think. Where did she need to go? Back to Hel. If she could get to her people, servants and the few friends she had maybe they could help her stop Loki. She waved her hand in front of her to send herself back to her hall Éljúðnir, but nothing happened. Confused, she tried repeatedly until frustration and anger built in her.

"What in the name of Valhalla is going on!" she screamed as she turned back to Lucifer.

He was still standing there soaking wet, naked, with his arms crossed. There was a silly little smile on his face as if he was enjoying the scene in front of him.

Angry at the world, she crossed her arms over her chest and prepared to take him on too. "What are you grinning at?"

"You're gorgeous when you're mad and...wet?" he offered slyly.

Hel couldn't help but shake her head and frown at him. This was one of the times she did not need for him to be him. "Go to hell, Lucifer."

"In case you haven't noticed, I'm already there." He waved his hand at the room. "Tell me what's going on."

Two black-cloaked figures slid in through a large side entryway, carrying a snow-white thick robe between them. When they got close to Lucifer, he simply put his arms out and waited while they slid it on him and then tied the belt around his waist. As silent as when they had come in, they left.

When she turned back to Lucifer, he was standing next to her with a fluffy towel. Holding it out to her, he waited until she snatched it out of his hand. She didn't want him near her if she could help it. She needed her wits about her and he was making it hard to keep them.

"I can't get to Hel," she finally admitted softly while rubbing the towel against her drenched hair.

Lucifer raised a questioning eyebrow at her.

"My Hel, not yours!" she yelled at him, irritated again.

"Hel, no one can keep a god out of their own domain," he chided her.

She threw the towel at him, annoyed. "Well, Loki's found a way."

Turning, she looked for a place to sit. The room was huge and bright. She had always assumed that Lucifer's Hell would be dark and forbidding. Evil, for lack of a better word, but the room they were in was bright and inviting. The floor was covered with large white tiles. The walls were the same color with many large, curved doorways. The bathtub she had fallen into was a large rectangle of white porcelain in the middle of the room. Besides that, there was nothing else. It sort of seemed like a waste of space to her.

"Your father?"

Hel looked back at him through the corner of her eye and hissed through her teeth, "Don't call him that. Don't *ever* call him that. He's not fit to be a god, let alone a father!"

He held his hands up in surrender. "Okay. How'd he ban you from Hel?"

"I don't know but I have to get back. I can't let him do this."

"I thought you said you can't get back to Éljúðnir."

"I can't." For some reason she couldn't look at him. She had to get back and if she couldn't do it on her own, then she needed help. She needed his help.

After a few tense moments, Lucifer tilted her head up so she was looking into his beautiful icy-blue eyes. His short, black hair was still a little wet, but had started to lie flat as it dried. The light mustache and goatee lifted as he gave her a little smile. When he smiled, his dimples showed, and she couldn't help but feel a bit better. It was as if the world had gotten lighter. If she had to create a man, he was what she would make. She even thought the way the tips of his ears were slightly pointed was sexy.

"Then I'll take you." His finger under her chin moved to her cheek and lightly trailed down, causing a shiver to spike through her. She suppressed it before he could see it. "Let me get dressed."

He strolled out of the room as if he didn't have a care in the world. She—on the other hand—her world was falling apart around her as she waited. What did Loki have to gain by betraying her like this?

Unable to help herself, she looked around the large room as she waited. It didn't tell her anything about the man. Not that she really wanted to know, she tried to tell herself.

"Ready?" Lucifer asked a few moments later, walking back in.

His shiny dress shoes lightly echoed on the tile. He was buttoning a cuff of his pale white dress shirt. She thought he looked dressed for the humans' boardroom instead of going up against a god. But then, how did one dress for something like that?

Hel had to take a second to catch her breath at the incredible sight of him. Finally, she mentally shrugged her mind back into place. "Yes."

He had a confident grin as he stepped up within an inch of her. All she could do was watch as he lifted a perfectly manicured finger up to her face. She suddenly shivered with a wet coldness she hadn't noticed before. The tip of his warm finger lightly brushed her forehead. It felt like a warm breeze surrounded her, hugged her. Within a breath, she was dry and warm, a little too warm though. She couldn't tell if it was from what he did or his closeness.

Lucifer let his hand drop away. His brow rose, questioning her again, making Hel step back to prepare herself. He quickly snapped his fingers and disappeared, leaving her gasping and alone.

What in Valhalla was going on? She mentally screamed and threw her hands in the air. Her face became hotter with every moment that went by. Did he leave her? She should have known she could never trust Lucifer. Angry with herself, she spun around to figure out what to do. First, she would have to get out of his underworld and find a way to get back to her own.

Lost, she looked around to the line of doors. There were many to choose from, including the one his cronies had come through.

Lucifer appeared right back from where he had vanished, startling her even more. "What happened?"

"You fucking left me is what happened!" It felt as if the veins in her forehead were about to pop. She was so mad, more with herself than with him.

"I took you with me." Then confusion seemed to fog over him. "But you didn't come with me."

"Like hell you did!"

"Hel, seriously. Here." He held out his hand to her. "Maybe if we're touching."

She reluctantly took his hand. Getting back to Hel and getting Loki out were more important than the prickling on her skin or the knot in her stomach. She would do whatever it took to do that, even if that meant touching Lucifer.

His thick, warm arms wrapped around her, pulling her against him. He smelled like nectar and some kind of sweet, dark musk. It was something she had never smelled before, something she almost wanted to eat.

A giggle rose and stuck in her throat when her arms folded around him. There had been many daydreams and fantasies about him and now she was finally touching him. He was warmer than she thought he'd be, but just as hard. His fuzzy chin brushed against the top of her head. It took her a moment to snap out of the trance. How was he able to do this to her? She was Hel! Goddess of the Halls of Hel, Lady of the Underworld. She was above men turning her into a blubbering schoolchild.

With his hands free behind her back, she prepared herself. He snapped his fingers and a muffled cry escaped her when he ripped away from her embrace, leaving her like a jilted lover.

That one action and she felt like crying. Loki had truly banished her from her own land, her own domain. If Lucifer couldn't get her back, then it was hopeless. Slowly, she sank to the tiled floor. The bleakness started in her stomach then formed a lump in her throat.

"Hel, now's not the time for you to be getting on your knees for me."

"Shut up, Lucifer," she croaked out. Hot tears started to form in her eyes at the bleakness of her situation. Never in all her years had she felt this way – this complete desperateness – not even when Odin had cast her down to the underworld. To top it off, it was all there in front of Lucifer, who, she had no doubt, would exploit it somehow.

In one fluid motion, he grabbed her, pulling her to her feet. She had never seen his face so set and serious. "Snap out of it, Hel. Now's not the time for you to get all bitchy on me."

"Bitchy? Bitchy!" she screamed up at him, finally feeling her last nerve snap. "Loki has banished me from my own domain! And you're telling me to not to get bitchy?"

The tears dried in her anger, and when she was over with the ranting, he was grinning at her. "That's my girl. Anger. Justice. Self-pity won't help you right now."

She shoved him away. "I'm not your girl and damn skippy I'm angry. Wouldn't you be if someone kicked you out of hell?"

He simply crossed his arms over his fit chest, making the white cloth stretch across it. A fresh wave of whatever fragrance he was wearing hit her. "That wouldn't happen.

Calm down and let's think about this logically. You haven't asked, but I'm going to help you, Hel, any way I can. I'll go see what I can find out."

All she could do was shake her head, confused. He seemed so sincere and willing, so unlike him. "Why would you do that?"

"Why not? You need my help and I'm offering it." He grabbed at her arms again and spun her around so she was facing one of the doorways. Behind her, his hot breath was teasing her ear and sending shivers down her spine. "Go through there. It's to my private chambers. No one will disturb you there. If you need anything, just ring the little bells on the tables and someone will come for anything you need. I'll be back as soon as I know something."

Between his heat and the smell he was still giving off, it made her want to melt against him. Before she could, he gently pushed her toward the door and was gone by the time she was able to turn around.

Silently, she went through the door Lucifer had directed her to, her mind reeling with his words, the confusion of his wiliness to help her and how fast everything had happened. Less than an hour ago she had been reading over the logs her secretary had given her. Everything was going normally, as it had for the last few thousand years. Then Loki had walked in. She had known from the look on his face the moment he stepped into the room it wasn't a casual "How's my daughter doing?" call. Not that he had ever made one of those in her lifetime.

All thoughts left her though when she saw Lucifer's room. It wasn't what she had expected either. It looked warm and inviting. The man seemed to be a contradiction she couldn't quite figure out.

A large canopy bed was against a wall, covered with a spotless, airy-white comforter and a mound of pillows at the head of the bed that screamed "jump in me". The canopy overhead was heavy, white velvet so the sides could be shut to give the occupants privacy but still feel as if they were in the open. There were even several stylish chairs around the room. It was all very elegant though sparsely furnished.

To the left was a doorway leading into a large sitting room that seemed a little more fitting to him. It was all black and white, from the chairs to the rug on the floor and the walls, like a giant chessboard. Beyond that was another open entryway into another room and another. There seemed to be no end to the doorways and rooms.

Hel dropped onto the bed and closed her eyes to think. How was any of this even possible? The worst part was, here she was, lost in Lucifer's world, waiting for him to find out what was going on and what her next move should be. As much as she hated it, she needed him. Lucifer, of all deities. How was it that the Lord of Christian hell was going to be her only savior? He was a Christian form of Loki!

When she opened her eyes, there was a large goblet with some kind of steaming liquid on the little table next to the bed. She hadn't even heard anyone enter. Sitting up, she eyed the concoction she was apparently supposed to drink. The warm cup was heavy but sweet-smelling. Part of her mind warned her against it. Anything that Lucifer

had to offer couldn't be good. At the same time, she wondered what she had to lose. At this point, nothing, she told herself. Resigning herself to the latter, she downed the sweet, warm liquid in two large gulps.

The moment the cup left her lips, she cursed herself. She should have known better than to trust him. The goblet clattered to the floor as her eyes drifted closed. She muttered Lucifer's name as she fell back against the soft bed.

* * * * *

Lucifer bent down, picked the silver chalice up from the floor and quietly placed it on the nightstand. Hel had passed out as he planned. She would be furious with him and he didn't blame her, but the more he thought about it, the more he knew it was the right thing to do. She had been upset, and rightly so, but her emotions were ruling her at a time when she needed her head. If it were up to her, she would still be awake, fretting, worried, angry and upset until a plan was formed. Nothing was going to be planned if she didn't calm down.

What he had found out in Hel only proved him right. If she was going to fight her master, then she needed the rest. Loki had in fact taken over, casting Hel out. It wasn't right and Lucifer was going to help her. The fact he would use any excuse to get close to her wasn't the point. It was that she needed him, actually needed him—Lucifer—the one who everyone thought of as the lowest of the low. It was a nice feeling for once.

With a snap of his fingers, her slinky boots and clothes were off. He had wanted to see her in her underwear, or less, for eons. Even now, he wanted to run his tongue up her flawless thigh that seemed to go on forever, but as low as he could sink, he just couldn't do it to her. For some reason, when it came to Hel, he just couldn't be what everyone thought of him.

Lust had always been one of his favorite sins, but that wasn't what he was feeling for her. While she did provoke that feeling in his groin, it was what pained him higher up that told him that wasn't it.

He carefully slid his arms under her and turned her so her head rested against the pillows. Before he could pull his arms out, she turned in to him. Her angelic face rubbed against his shoulder. Holding his breath, he watched as her eyes fluttered open and she smiled dreamingly at him, a look that stabbed at his heart, a look of complete and utter happiness. Then the moment was over as she fell back into a deep, drugged sleep.

"You're killing me, Hel," he muttered as he pulled his arms out from under her and covered her with the comforter.

He unbuttoned his shirt as he watched her sleep. Her extremely short pale gold ringlets fell delicately across the pillows. Those pink pillow lips begged to be kissed. Her skin was so milky-white that it was hard to believe it had ever seen a day of sun. Though being a goddess, it didn't matter. She looked however she wanted, whenever she wanted. He had seen her take on dozens of appearances. This was one of his favorites though. It wasn't his top favorite, but close.

From the first day he met her, he had wanted to get close to her and now—thousands of years later—she was in his bed. It would be so easy to take advantage of the moment. She would never forgive him and he would never forgive himself. It also wouldn't get him what he wanted, and that was her—in every way possible.

His pants and shirt were hung over the back of the chair on the other side of the bed. He might not do what he wanted, but there was no way he wasn't going to take the opportunity when it presented itself. Sliding in between the sheets, he moved closer until he could smell her intoxicating scent.

When Hel flipped over, slapping him in her sleep, Lucifer chuckled, actually finding it amusing. Hel, the goddess of the Norse underworld, was so going to be his one day.

Chapter Two

The corners of Lucifer's lips tugged upward as he looked down at Hel. She had curled up against him in her sleep. Literally half her body was wrapped around him, her leg draped over his hips, her arm over his torso. Even those blonde curls of hers seemed to reach out to embrace him.

His fingers trailed over her shoulder and down her arm, feeling the smoothness of her skin. A lump formed in his throat and his chest tightened. She felt so good in his arms. Women were simply an object to satisfy his needs. He did take care of them, but never became attached, never got the warm, fuzzy feeling he was getting because of her. It was a novel feeling for him, being who he was, he shouldn't care about anything other than getting who he wanted in his bed and he didn't, except with her. It confused him. Put him in a place where, for the first time, he wasn't sure which way to go, to be who he was or be what he wanted to be when she was with him.

She moaned softly and rubbed against him. Her soft thigh rubbed against his dick, making him even harder than he'd been when he had woken. He could tell the moment she started to wake as her breathing changed. With a smile on her lips, she gazed dreamily up at him. There was such trust in her eyes, but then it melted as she fully woke and froze against him. For a second, something passed in her eyes, something he knew all too well. Fear. It was Hel though, she was a goddess, and so had nothing to fear from him or anyone else.

"You creep!" She jerked away.

With her rumpled bed hair, beautiful parted lips and her flushed cheeks, he decided he could live with being called a creep.

Grinning, he continued to lie there as she started to roll away from him as quickly as she could. She grabbed the edge of the comforter as she pulled away, until she literally fell to the floor with a thud. Not able to help himself, he leaned over to see her better just as she jumped up, surrounded with the white cloud of the blanket so she was almost entirely covered.

"Get real, Hel."

"Fuck you, Lucifer. I knew you could be low and desperate, but so much so as to drug and rape a goddess? I didn't know you could be that...that..."

"Low and desperate?" he finished for her.

"Yes!"

He slid off his side of the bed and strolled around to her, completely comfortable with his nudity. It was amusing that she would look anywhere but toward the one place where she so obviously wanted to see. It was so innocent and virginal, so not her.

She was accusing him of rape and she had to know he would never do that, especially to her.

With a finger under her chin, he pushed her face up so she had to look at him. "Think what you want, little goddess, but I have never raped anyone since the day I was made. Not even you. The fact you're still in your underwear and there isn't a mark on you should prove that. Because, when I finally get you, I doubt I can be gentle enough not to mark you."

"Then why did you drug me? And why in the name of Odin am I in my underwear?"

"I took your clothes off so you could sleep more comfortably and I gave you the sedative so you could rest. You needed to calm down so you could think rationally. You were so upset last night you were practically vibrating. If you hadn't been so distraught, it would have simply mellowed you. The fact you crashed meant you needed it."

"You took advantage of me!" she screamed up at him.

"If I did that, you wouldn't be left untouched, believe me," he chuckled, finding her defensiveness amusing and completely unnecessary.

"You took advantage of my vulnerability, Lucifer! I came to you for help and you did what you wanted without asking me!"

"Of course I did, Hel. This is my domain. I do what I want, when I want. I still stopped at your clothes. I could have taken more if I so desired and no one, not even you, could have stopped me but I didn't. You're just upset I got the upper hand on this one and deep down you know I was right. You wouldn't have stopped until you ran yourself into the ground or gotten yourself into a situation you couldn't get out of."

Her head shifted down so she was looking at him through her eyebrows. He waited patiently for her to realize he had been right. After a few eternal minutes, she took a deep, cleansing breath and he could see the mental shift in her. "Can you do me a favor?"

"For you, my pretty little Hel, anything," he admitted. His hand cupped her chin while his thumb lightly rubbed her soft cheek. He loved touching her, had longed to touch her for far too long.

"Get some clothes on." With her request actually came a little smile that wrenched his gut, not to mention his dick. The flush in her cheeks though, told him what he needed to know. While she denied it, she was at least attracted to him. He had always known—this was just confirmation. It was also a place for him to start.

"Of course." He grabbed her shoulders and spun her toward a tall wardrobe. "You'll find fresh clothing in there."

Leaving her wrapped like a cannoli, he headed out the doorway toward another room.

"I'm guessing they're all my size too." Hel frowned as she stared at the wardrobe.

"Might be a size off here and there."

"I still don't like you," she snapped at him.

"I wouldn't expect anything less." He left her looking at the clothes and headed for his dressing room where a manservant was waiting for him.

"Good morning, master."

"And a good morning it is, Abdon," he told him as he stepped up to one of the many angled mirrors.

The room was large and bright, with racks of dress shirts and suits behind him. Light tan wooden shelves held all the shoes he had ever worn and would possibly ever wear with room to spare. On either side of the large mirrors were dozens of drawers that held accessories, and beyond them, clothes that didn't need hanging.

The elderly looking man stepped up behind him. He had waited on Lucifer for centuries and was one of his most trusted friends. He looked like the position, old but able, wise but caring. The only difference between him and others with his job was he wasn't human. Like everyone in Lucifer's "employ", he was a demon. "I take it you had a good evening."

"More like interesting."

Lucifer inspected the side of his face in the mirror, noticing the way-past-five-o'clock shadow had grown. It was a constant problem in human form. "I think the white silk shirt and the black pants today."

The man suddenly had the clothes in his hands without ever leaving his position. With the pants draped over an arm, he held out the soft shirt and Lucifer shrugged into it. His fingers worked the buttons but his mind went to Hel. He had picked clothes out for her that would fit her current trend, but then she could always conjure up her own. It was more out of habit to provide than anything.

"If I may be so bold, master, she doesn't belong here in hell, so I would like to know the proper protocols with her." Abdon lowered his head while explaining why he was asking what he wanted. "Who is she, master?"

Lucifer could feel the corner of his lips pull into a knowing, satisfied grin as he thought about her. "She's Hel, Abdon, the ruler of the Norse underworld that shares her name. Daughter to their god of mischief Loki, and niece to the chief god Odin."

"Is the lady staying, master?"

"No, I have a feeling she'll be heading out soon. Loki found a way to kick her out of her Hel, which I have to admit, is a feat in itself. Other than death, I didn't think there was a way to do it. Another god in control of a domain that isn't theirs can never be good. She needs to get back as soon as possible, before he wrecks the balance everything lives on."

"And you, sir?" the demon asked, handing him the pants.

He waited to answer as he slid the pants on and did them up. "I'll be going with her, Abdon. She'll probably head to one of Odin's halls, maybe to Olympus."

"Master, if you don't mind me saying, you seem more chipper than you have in a long time."

He smiled back to his servant. "It's her, trust me. She challenges me like no other."

"That's because no other woman says no to you, master."

Unfortunately, he was correct, but Lucifer knew that wasn't it. When he was fully dressed, he looked in the mirror one last time. The stubble annoyed him, and with a click of his fingers it was gone, leaving the light mustache and goatee untouched.

Hel was sitting on the bed, kicking her leather boots, waiting for him when he stepped back into the room. She had combed her hair, making the curls tighter and exposing more of her dainty little ears. He wondered when she had put hoops in them. It wasn't that she just had a few earrings. It was that the small hoops went from the bottom of her earlobe all the way up to the top. From a distance, it looked like the edge of her ear was dipped in gold. With her lounging back, her halter-top hiked up her stomach, revealing a gold navel ring.

Suddenly he regretted being such a gentleman last night. It did annoy him a bit that she had dressed in her own clothes instead of ones he'd provided for her. He enjoyed the idea of providing for her, for her to be wearing something of his. Apparently, now wasn't the time. Yet.

"What else did you decide to poke with a needle?" Lucifer asked as he stepped up to her with his hands in his pockets. He didn't trust himself to leave them out with her in reach.

"Like I would tell you." Her deep blue eyes flickered at him.

"I kind of miss the black-blue phase you went through." That had been his favorite. It had suited her personality perfectly.

"Deities don't go through phases. They change with the times. You should try it," she bit back at him, but one corner of her lips twisted upward, revealing her amusement.

"Maybe in the next century." He sat carefully on the bed next to her. "Back to your crisis. You obviously can't get back to Hel but you need to—"

"What did you find out?" she interrupted eagerly.

"Only that we need to get you back there as soon as possible. He didn't just exile you, Hel." Lucifer looked at her hard. "He has fully taken over. There was no honeymoon period or anything. From what I saw, your domain is just a stepping stone to his main goal."

"So, the question is, what is he planning?" Hel added, looking out in front of her, lost in her own mind.

After a few moments, she jumped off the bed and grabbed a leather jacket off the chair in the corner he hadn't noticed earlier. "I have to go."

Stunned, he blinked at her, confused. "Go? Where to?"

"Outside," she said, casually readjusting her jacket.

"What?" Lucifer yelled as he jumped off the bed and ran in front of her to stop her. "Earth? You're going to Earth?"

"Is there an echo in here? Yes – Earth."

"Hel, you're not thinking straight. Why in the name of everything sacred would you go there?"

She stopped and looked at him. "Because like your hell, there is a back door to mine there. I have to find it."

"Find it? You don't even know where it is?" he asked, flabbergasted.

"Lucifer, when was the last time you were outside?" She put her hands on her hips and glared up at him. "I'm older than you and I haven't been outside in eons. Besides, I never had to get into my own domain the human way."

"Why not go to Odin or any of the other Norse gods, or even to Zeus? They could help you!"

"Zeus doesn't care about what happens in another pantheon. And my own don't care unless Loki comes directly after them. You forget that I'm an outsider to them, like you are among your own. I have to go outside to get in."

She left him standing there, stunned, as she headed into his bathroom. He had expected her to stay in limbo, the place where the realms existed. Instead, she was going outside. He didn't like the outside. None of them did. In their own realms, everything was in their own control. Nothing happened without their permission. They were, for lack of a better word, control freaks. On Earth it was a different story. There were hundreds of different deities working on an outside force, not to mention the humans, who were a force of their own, billions of different minds and wants working against each other. Saying that it was outside of their comfort zone was an understatement.

If she was going though, he would go with her. It wouldn't kill him and it would actually help him with his personal goal.

Following her out the door, he found Abdon waiting for him with his suit coat in both hands.

"Thanks, Abdon. Keep things running for me for a while." Lucifer took the coat from him and slid his arms through the sleeves.

"Yes sir."

The servant bowed slightly and started to walk away until Hel stopped him. "You may want to keep an extra eye out for anything suspicious." She noticed Lucifer looking at her and shrugged. "What? If Loki has plans, then there is nothing to stop him from coming after anyone who'd help me."

She had a point he hadn't thought of so he simply nodded his head at Abdon, agreeing to her directive.

When Abdon disappeared through one of the doorways, he turned back to Hel. "So – outside. Earth is a big place, Hel. Do we have a starting point?"

"North America."

"Can we be a bit more specific?"

Hel shrugged. "Not really. There's someone there who can point me in the right direction. But there's a problem."

"There always is. What's the problem?"

"Once we go outside, we can't come back to limbo. Obviously, my domain would be out of the question, but so would yours. Loki will no doubt have others who will be watching. It wouldn't be hard for him to figure out what we're up to and I can't have him going after those who help me."

Lucifer gritted his teeth to stop saying something he'd regret. "Hel, I like this less and less."

"You don't have to come, Lucifer." She stepped up to him and grabbed the lapels of his coat lightly with both hands. "I'll make you a deal, Lord of Hell. If you still want to, we'll do it my way until one of us figures out a better way."

When she was finished, she smoothed his collar and gave it a light tap with her fingers.

He couldn't help rolling his eyes and wonder yet again what he had gotten himself into.

* * * * *

They had popped up on the outskirts of a little town that had long ago been forgotten.

"Well, we're here. Now what?" Lucifer asked her, looking at the dusty road with a tiny gas station across the way and the line of pine trees behind them.

"We need a map. I don't suppose you have one?" she asked him with a twisted little smile.

He frowned at her. "Abdon must have put them in my other pants."

"Joyous. Well, let's get going so we can get moving, daylight's wasting." She jogged across the street, leaving him behind.

The gas station was exactly as she expected—dirty, stocked with the barest of necessities and an old, wrinkled man watching a TV at the front. But like every station and waypoint she had ever been to in the humans' realm, they all had some form of a map. In this case, a rickety rack full of them.

Hel almost laughed when Lucifer walked in. He rubbed his hands lightly together as if making sure he didn't touch anything. "Find it?"

"Yes." She held the one she wanted up to him then put it on the counter, smiling to the old man. "How's the weather looking?"

He gave her a half-toothless smile as he rang up the map. "The news says forty percent chance of rain."

"What do you say?" The locals always knew the weather better than any meteorologist ever could.

He looked over at Lucifer and then outside through the small, dirty window. "I'd say kinda more than a good chance, but if it does, it won't be more than a light shower. That will be \$3.50."

Suddenly she realized that she didn't have any money. She didn't want to have to do it but had no choice. "Umm...Lucifer?"

He chuckled behind her and handed her a twenty-dollar bill.

Grabbing it, she handed it to the old man with a smile and walked out, leaving the change. She figured the human could use it more than they could.

"So where to?" Lucifer asked as they crossed the street again.

Holding the map, Hel carefully scanned it, looking for the best place to find who she needed to consult. Terrains changed over thousands of years, but some things stayed roughly the same. It took a few moments but she found the landmarks she was looking for. They were surprisingly close to it. "Toward Devil's Tower."

"Seems ironically appropriate."

She couldn't help but look Lucifer up and down. They were about to go trekking over some rough terrain for who knew how long and there he was, still in his normal look. It was sexy on him and fitting, but not appropriate for backpacking. His dress shoes alone would make it nearly impossible to hike over the dangerous landscape. "Do you even own a pair of jeans?"

He gave her a blank stare. "What are jeans?"

Oh brother, she moaned to herself. Letting him come along had been a mistake. He was too pampered to ever leave his servants.

He snapped his fingers. In the blink of an eye, Lucifer had changed into rough boots, a pair of jeans and a thick, black knit sweater. The silly little grin on his too-handsome face ate her up.

Was her mouth hanging open? She had never seen him in anything other than dress clothes. The man was always sexy, but this was a whole new look and she liked it. "You look good."

"Let's go, little goddess."

Chapter Three

The day dragged on silently until the sun began to set and it started to rain. She wanted to push on, but at the speed they were losing light and with the rocky terrain, it would be foolhardy to continue and she knew it.

Finding a small clearing, she sat down under a large pine tree. It helped block most of the rain that had been pouring down on them for the last few hours, but it only made her colder. Lucifer stopped in front of her, looking a bit like a wet dog. Did she also look that miserable?

"Are we lost?"

"We're right where we need to be. It's just a matter of time until we find him. It's why we've been going in circles."

"We've been going in circles?"

She blinked up at him. "You really don't know anything about nature, do you?"

"What can I say, it isn't one of the sins I concentrate on," he tried to joke.

Baffled at his frankness, she blinked up at him. "We'd better stop for the night."

"Are you serious? Don't we need to find someplace to stay the night and try again tomorrow?"

"You're such a snob, Lucifer, you know that? I'm not hiking all the way back just to start again tomorrow. Not when we're in the middle of the area," she told him firmly. The idea alone annoyed her and revealed just how spoiled he was. Did he really want to walk and climb all those miles back, just to have to do it all over again? Even if it was a possibility, it was a waste of time, and it was time she didn't have.

"What are you suggesting? We stay here overnight? Hel, it's cold and wet." If he wasn't whining, then he was close.

"And I repeat. You're a snob. Sit down. I'll get a fire going."

If he wanted to go back and try to find a hotel in that little town, he was welcome to it. She wasn't going anywhere other than to find wood, and then was going to relax and sleep. The person she was looking for was only going to appear when he wanted to be found and not a moment sooner. In fact, he had to know they were here by now and she had no doubt he was watching them. So, if she left, she could miss her opportunity to meet up with him and she couldn't afford to do that.

Within a few minutes she had the branches for the fire in her arms, only to drop them when she saw Lucifer. He was reclining on a large, thick pad lining the ground with pillows propped up behind him, drinking from a silver goblet. There was even some kind of meat on a spit over a fire, filling the air with a hearty scent.

Two silver trays balanced on the stone ring, one tray held a large steaming cup. The other was piled high with different kinds of fruits, breads and cheeses. When she saw the dark, heavy tarp above him, she almost wanted to laugh in disbelief.

"Wow, you just don't know how to rough it, do you?" Hel plopped down on the corner edge of the soft mat away from him.

Lucifer sat up, balancing a goblet in his hand. "Why bother when the comforts of our lives will go wherever we do?"

"It isn't the point."

He popped a grape in his mouth and gave her a smile. "Then the point is, my little goddess?"

"Will you stop calling me that!" she finally growled at him, feeling the thread in her about to snap.

"Why, what's the matter with it?"

"You make it sound like a cross between a snide remark and a term of endearment. Whichever one it is, don't."

"It's more like a pet name. Why don't you like me, Hel?" he practically purred.

"Because I see through you?" she offered quickly.

It was true but probably not the way he was thinking. She didn't like what he did to her whenever he was around. He was her equal in a different pantheon, but at the same time, they were so different, as different as night and day. He was evil. She was neutral. Yet there had never been another like him. There had never been another who affected her the way he did. Just in glances across rooms, small one-line talks and the few touches, he made her feel like the most important and beautiful goddess in all the realms. She honestly didn't think there was another god who was as desirable as he was. That was part of the problem, he knew it and the rest was lies. He was the only one though who could make those lies so sweet. The rumors and information she had heard about him didn't help his case either.

"And what is it you see? Exactly?"

"I see a god who is everything he is supposed to be and more, which is everything I stand against. I'm neutral, you're evil. Besides, I know about your little game. I'm nothing more than a tiny side note in your history, a blip if you will. What you really want is my Hel, my underworld. Being the god of two pantheon domains would be so powerful that the others wouldn't stand a chance."

"It's a matter of evolution, Hel. Whenever you have so many forces together, one will be top. Why shouldn't it be me? You could play a major role in it." He didn't deny her allegation.

She frowned at him, knowing exactly what he was insinuating. "Lucifer, I'm not stupid, so don't treat me as such."

"You are far from stupid, Hel," he said flatly, but with a hint of a smile.

With a sigh, she stared into the yellow flickering flames. "I know there will be a god of gods one day. I also know it won't be me or one of my fellow Norse gods. There aren't enough believers left for that to have a chance of happening. There never was. However, I'm not giving up my Hel to Loki or to you. Until the end of time, it's mine. So, if that is the only reason you're helping me, go back home."

She kind of hoped he would leave. She didn't have the energy to deal with what he wanted or the fight that would ensue if he pursued it. Fighting one war was hard enough, fighting two would be impossible. She would lose one or the other and that simply wasn't an option.

He moved closer to her and crossed his legs. "Have you ever noticed that religions, all of them, are so similar? A god, or more than one, who all do the same things, control the same things? There is good and evil. And more importantly, every one of them has the end of days."

"I don't pretend to understand some things, Lucifer. There are some things that even the gods are powerless against, like destiny and the universe." She took in another deep breath, trying not to care about his scent or the closeness of him. "If it weren't for humans, the gods wouldn't exist and if it weren't for the gods, humans wouldn't exist. So, who made whom?"

"A riddle. I'd like to think that we created each other and each pantheon stands for what humanity needs at any given time. Come here."

"What?" Hel blinked up at him, confused.

He patted the mat next to him. "You're shivering. You're cold and wet and there's no need. Let me take care of you."

"Lucifer, forgive me. I thank you for your help, but I'm not willingly getting close to you. I'd rather be cold and wet." A chill rattled her. Her fingers felt just how cold her wet jacket was when she crossed her arms. The moment she noticed, goose bumps spread along her skin. It surprised her she hadn't noticed. Was he just that good? Or was she just that affected by him?

"You don't trust me," he stated softly.

"No, I don't. The last time I tried to trust you, you drugged me and I woke up in my underwear. Not to mention you are Lucifer. The evil deity of your pantheon, just as Loki is with mine. How can you trust evil?"

"I am nothing like him, Hel. One day you'll see that."

They sat in silence for a few precious moments. What confused her was she was comfortable with him. A comfort she had never really felt before, one that felt right all the same.

"If you won't let me warm you, then have some wine." He set his goblet down and picked up the fresh one from the tray, handing it to her.

It was warm in her hands, but she didn't drink it. She couldn't after the last one. There was no telling what tricks he would pull.

"I didn't drug it, Hel. I did it once because I had to, but I'll never do it again."

Her brow rose at him questioningly. "How do I know that?"

"You don't. You'll just have to trust me."

"I can't."

"Then why did you come to me?" he asked softly, with his hands wrapped around the goblet. "You could have run anywhere, but you ran to me. If you didn't think I could help you, then why did you?"

He had a point. When she had fled, all she could think of at the time was finding help and then she had landed in his lap. As much as she didn't like him, something inside her wanted to...wanted to trust him, wanted him to be more than he seemed.

"At some level you already do. I'm just asking for you to take it to the next level."

His long fingers slid over hers, pressing hers against the warm metal. She watched in awe as he guided the cup to his lips and took a big sip, his cool eyes never leaving hers. Some wine was lightly coating his lips as he pulled the goblet away. She couldn't believe it, but she wanted to lick the thick liquid away, wanted to taste him. In his arms, he was offering a place to feel safe and wanted, even if it was just an illusion. Her problem was, she wanted it to be real. Another difference between them.

"If it is drugged, then I just did it to myself. Trust me, Hel, I'd never let anyone, including myself, hurt you."

It had to be a lie. That's what he did. He breathed lies like others breathed oxygen. In that moment, it didn't matter. It was the tone in his voice, the way the fire lit up his icy-blue eyes as he looked at her. If he was lying, she would have followed that lie to the ends of the world.

The liquid was like a lover's kiss against her lips. She had to close her eyes as it caressed its way down her throat. Never in her life had she drunk anything that was so sensual, so physical.

"See?"

"What is it?" she slowly asked when her eyes fluttered open to look at him.

"If I told you, you wouldn't come back for more. And I so want you to come back...for more."

It was a game and she wasn't going to play. Annoyed with herself, she thrust the cup back in his hands and stood. She had to put some space between them before she went insane.

When she sat down in the dirt on the other side of the fire, she saw him staring at her, confused, and it may have been her imagination, but he even looked a little hurt. It played with her sympathy, but she wasn't going to feel bad. This was Lucifer, how could she hurt the Lord of Hell? She didn't know, but somehow knew she had done it.

Crickets started to chirp as the rain let up to barely a drizzle. The canopy he had put up was keeping the water off them, but it had still taken over an hour before she was

completely dry. When she couldn't keep her eyes open any longer, she waved her hand and a thick sleeping pad and blanket appeared.

She didn't mean to, but when she lay down, her eyes went to Lucifer. He was still sitting in the same spot as earlier, staring into the fire—lost in his own thoughts. The look on his face pained her. For the first time he looked completely unguarded, exposed and vulnerable. It didn't suit him. He was supposed to be the cool, commanding Lucifer. He was the one who was always in control and who was never daunted because he knew he would always get what he wanted. It made her want to comfort him, but she couldn't. The moment she did, she knew what the cost would be and it was something she couldn't afford to pay.

* * * * *

His sweet, soft voice slowly pulled her from a deep sleep. Determined to ignore him and fade back into her slumber, she rolled over, only for the voice to become louder and more determined.

"Go away. I'm not dead enough to say yes, Lucifer," she moaned, turning her head into her arm to get more comfortable.

"That's nice to know. You need to get up."

Unwillingly, she cracked an eye open to see that it was still dark. The air smelled fresh and faintly smoky, meaning it was early morning. She gave sunrise only a few more minutes. "Lucifer, it's too early to get started, go back to sleep."

He grabbed her arms and shook her until she opened her eyes—ready to slap him.

"Shh...listen." He stared hard at her, but it was clear his mind was elsewhere.

Following his directive, she strained to listen. Then she heard it. Something was moving in the woods. It was still a distance away, but they weren't being careful not to be heard. When the howl echoed to them, she froze. She knew that animal's scream. How had he found them?

"Shit!" Hel breathed in a whisper, jumping off her mat.

Grabbing Lucifer's hand, she ran out of the camp.

The sun started to rise, and that gave her just enough light to see so she didn't trip on fallen branches or run into trees. Lucifer moved faster than she could. When her hand started to pull from his, he tightened his grip, refusing to let her go. The sounds of the dogs got closer.

Lucifer ran with the grace and ease of a deer, she suddenly thought, when his long legs leapt over a fallen tree. Shaking her head, she wondered where that thought had come from.

"What are those things?" he yelled back as he took them around a tree.

"Loki's hounds! They're what he sent to chase me out of Hel!"

When another howled, she chanced a look back. They were catching up. She could just make out the black forms in the shadows of the trees. It was useless. They would catch them and then it would all be over. Loki will have won.

Panic caught in her throat the closer they came. She tried to count, but they kept swerving around trees, dipping between themselves. One would disappear only for another to appear. Her best guess was that there were seven of them.

When she could see the red of their eyes, she knew it was over but that Lucifer still had a chance.

One of them started to lunge at her heels. "Luc..."

He suddenly dodged behind a tree and spun so her back slammed against it. Sharp pain dug into her skin. Lucifer released her hand and grabbed the bark on either side of her, shielding her completely from the beasts.

Scared, she looked up at his face. He gave her a little smile then screamed as his body jerked violently to the side. His fingers dug into the bark, his eyes slammed closed. Still he didn't release the tree.

The menacing growls surrounded them. They were preparing to attack as a pack.

She blinked up at Lucifer. He needed to go and leave her to her fate. "Save yourself."

"Run!" a throaty growl yelled from a few feet away, startling her and clearly Lucifer too.

Hel pushed Lucifer out of the way in time to see an enormous mangy gray wolf charge the pack of beasts. It plowed through them like a bowling ball.

Seeing their moment, she grabbed Lucifer's hand and ran. She pushed through the brush to almost fall into the rocky clearing that had suddenly opened for them. He grabbed her arm with his free hand and steadied her. The gray wolf broke through the woods a few seconds later. There was no sign of the monsters, but if the wolf was running, then they were too.

The clearing sloped steeply upward and she could only hope that over the crest were more woods so they could try to hide. They weren't that lucky and had to come to a screeching halt as the ground gave way to a sharp, rocky cliff down a good couple hundred feet down.

"What the hell is this? A clip from a bad movie?" Lucifer yelled, breathing hard when he noticed the large waterfall not far away.

She had to agree with him but then saw the good point. If they ran past the waterfall, there was a chance there would be a place to cross.

The monsters broke through the tree line and charged toward them just as the gray wolf caught up to them. "Jump!"

"But the fall!" Lucifer yelled.

"The fall can't kill you but they can!"

Not letting herself think about it, Hel tightened her grip on Lucifer's hand and jumped.

For a split second, she thought she saw grayness pass over them in the free fall, and then her world turned black as the icy water crashed painfully over her body.

Chapter Four

He was going to kill her he decided when he finally collapsed on the muddy bank. The hard impact of the water had jolted every bone in his body, made his side burn, and had caused him to lose his grip on her. The only thing that saved her from his wrath was after all that and being pushed downstream for miles, he was too tired and sore. The fact she fell beside him in the muck and looked just as miserable as he was helped too.

The wolf who had saved them pawed his way up the bank a few feet away before collapsing. After a few moments of them all breathing hard, the canine struggled to his feet. "Come on."

Hel moaned and then forced herself up out of the muck. She offered Lucifer a hand, which he took. When they were all finally standing, the enormous wolf led the way into the woods.

He wanted to ask how the creature was even possible. It was so big that its shoulder blades came up to Lucifer's chest. How could it talk? And just who was he? If it were a man he'd be jealous, but that didn't mean he wasn't leery of it. He didn't like things he didn't understand and he understood a lot.

Not really feeling up to talking yet, Lucifer followed Hel's lead while holding his side, trying to keep the pressure that was burning inside at bay. His shirt was dripping wet and freezing, but slowly heat leaked through, seeping between his fingers.

They didn't walk long when the creature disappeared under some brown, shriveled-up vines that were growing out the side of a small hill. Hel held them out of the way, revealing an entrance into the rock that was just big enough for them to fit through, one by one.

The pathway in the rock was narrow but high, sloping downward into the earth. At first, he thought he had lost the wolf and Hel, it had become so dark, but then it started to brighten the farther they went. The pathway widened and Hel fell back to walk next to him. It made him feel better that he could see her, could feel her next to him. After the chase he didn't know if he'd ever let her out of his sight. He knew he didn't want to, even if she was out of danger.

Wet ice covered the walls, the floor and even the ceiling. Pale silvery-blue light was coming from stalagmites and stalactites as if trapped inside the icy columns. Lucifer shivered and a painful spike railed up his wounded side. While cold, it wasn't overly so. The chill was coming from their wet, frozen clothes more than the frosty air.

Finally, after so many twists and turns through the massive cavern that he had gotten lost, they came to a small entrance carved into the ice.

Inside was cozy and strangely inviting. A small stream of crystal-clear water trickled in the corner and then ran along the floor in a shallow ditch. A dirty fire pit was in the floor. What surprised him was the furniture. It looked as if a person lived here, not an animal. Large, thick furs covered a bed against the wall, table and chairs, bookshelves. Some shelves were lined with books, others with odds and ends. There was even a wooden door built into one wall.

Where the fuzzy creature had been, there now was a tall, thin, naked man standing in its place. A defensive feeling started to build in Lucifer. The man was good-looking, though straggly, and very well endowed—even by Lucifer's standards. Wolf boy's brownish-gray hair fell to his shoulders and was unkempt, as was his close-cut beard. It was the look of happiness on Hel's face though that made the feeling twist into his gut like a knife.

The man walked over to the foot of the bed where an old wooden chest sat and opened it. Within a minute, he had on old pants that had seen better times. Still he didn't produce a shirt or even shoes. Instead, he walked around the ice room half naked. "Hel, it has been such a long time."

"Too long. I've missed you."

She stepped up to him, giving him such an embrace that it was clear she loved and missed him. Were they lovers? It didn't matter, but if this shapeshifter still had her heart, then there wasn't room for Lucifer and that *did* matter. As much as he tried to stomach it, he didn't take rejection from her well. He wasn't known for his patience or acceptance. Seeing them together, he was feeling everything evil that had ever been said about him.

"Where are my manners?" She wiped a tear from the corner of her eye and turned to him. "Fenrisulfr, this is Lucifer. Lucifer, this is Fenrisulfr, my brother."

Brother? He definitely liked brother better than lover he decided when he gave the man a smile he really didn't feel while shaking his hand.

Fenrisulfr wrapped an arm around her shoulders, hugging her to his side. "I take it you are in some kind of trouble, Hel."

"I'm sorry to bring it to your doorstep, Fenrir. I had no one else to turn to." She had used a name—a pet name, Lucifer guessed—for him that few others would even dare.

The man's eyebrows rose at her. "Take care of your friend first. He's bleeding on the floor and it's rousing the wolf in me. You'll find what you need in the closet. I'll scout the area and be back in a little bit. Then we will talk."

Dread quickly filled Lucifer. "We need to keep moving. Those monsters will find us if we stay too long."

"They won't find you here. Even if they did, they can't get in. This is fairy land." The man gave him a toothy canine smile then headed out the open doorway. In the blink of an eye, the man crossed the threshold, the pants left behind in a pool on the floor, and a fuzzy tail heading back out into the tunnel.

"Fairy land?" Lucifer asked Hel, but she had disappeared into the room the wooden door had hidden.

"Take your shirt off and lie on the bed," she yelled out at him.

Still confused, he did as she asked. Lying on his side on the stiff bed with the fur tickling his bare skin, he watched as she went in and out of the closet several times with her arms loaded. By the time she was done, she had a fire going in the pit, a bowl of water from the small stream warming and another bowl of crushed herbs soaking in water.

She placed one of the bowls on the floor and balanced the one filled with water on her knee. Squeezing a rag he hadn't seen in her hand, she slowly started to wipe his side clean.

His skin jumped when her fingers gingerly touched him. He had to remind himself to breathe when the pain started to blind him and he wanted to double over. He had known he was injured. The animal had raked him pretty good, trying to get to her. The river water had made it sting like holy hell, but he had ignored it. The gashes would heal and would disappear the moment he got to hell, he told himself. Now it was stinging, like being stung with thousands of bees, telling him how bad this injury really was to his human form. He had no doubt she was trying to be gentle, and because she was finally touching him, he would endure it. He could actually fix the gashes with a simple snap of the fingers, repairing the human body was one of the easiest things he could do, but then Hel wouldn't be touching him.

The look on her face as she cleaned the wounds helped him through the pain. She was concentrating so hard that little lines had formed around her mouth and eyes. In one hand, she had the rag, rinsing it out once in awhile, the other was lightly tracing his skin as if she could feel the damage.

"I want to thank you," she whispered, touching the edge of one of the cuts.

"For what?"

"Protecting me the way you did. If you hadn't, they would have gotten me. Loki would have me now. That is, if he hadn't told them to kill me first."

"I told you, Hel. I'd never let anyone hurt you."

She seemed to want to say more but didn't. There was pain on her face he wanted to erase. A woman like Hel should never have to experience pain.

Reaching up, Lucifer placed a hand against the side of her face, making her stop her cautious touches. Her eyes seemed to water when she finally let herself look at him. He leaned up as far as his side would let him and slowly guided her the rest of the way closer to him.

Everything seemed to click into place when her lips brushed against his. The ice around them melted, the world shifted and the sky burned. Everything he needed was wrapped in her. He kissed her again and again until she gave a sigh of surrender. With her lips parted, he deepened the still kiss, keeping it slow and gentle.

She leaned into him, pressing herself against him. He started to lie back, never stopping with his kisses. This was what he needed more than anything. He needed her.

When she shifted above him, it felt as if barbed wire hugged his skin, making him gasp.

"Shit!"

"No, no, no!" he breathed when she started to pull away. He tried to keep her where she was, and kissed her again, but she pulled away, leaving him empty.

Hel braced herself above him and then sat up. All he could do was drop his hand and look at her beautifully flushed face.

"You could tear the wounds farther," Hel protested softly.

He'd do anything to get her to kiss him again, including letting the damn gashes tear. He needed her and reached for her again. "I don't care."

Hel stood and walked a few feet away with her arms crossed. She suddenly reminded him of a wounded animal. "I didn't know you were a masochist, Lucifer."

"A masochist, sadist, I'm anything you want, Hel," he admitted softly.

"Lies. It's all lies. You're a lie," she whispered.

There was no dispute there. He was a lie. It simply was what he was, but he was also so much more and he wanted her to see that too.

"Am I interrupting something?" Fenrisulfr asked when he stepped back into the room.

Hel put a blinding smile on her face and turned to her brother, who had put the pants back on. "Never, Fenrisulfr. I just finished cleaning him up."

"They went downriver. They didn't even sense the domain change. How are you feeling?" The wolf man stepped up to the side of the bed and smiled down at him.

"As good as can be expected." Lucifer frowned. He wanted to continue with Hel, wanted to convince her he was what she wanted. He wanted to take that look from her face and make her happy, and he couldn't do that with her brother in the room.

"Good." He turned back to Hel. "Why don't you finish while I get the wine?"

Lucifer could see the hesitation in her eyes before it was blinked away and she sat back down with the bowl from the floor in her lap.

The silence killed him as she applied the sweet-smelling moist herbs to the gashes. The wounds stung for a few seconds while she tended to them, but it wasn't bad. What concerned him more than the minor pain was the way she was acting. It was as if the woman who was in his arms only moments ago was gone.

Her face was set, he tried everything, including willing her, but she wouldn't look at him. She looked as if her mind were a thousand miles away, yet she was completely focused on what she was doing. Her touch was gentle but determinedly firm as she continued the job. It seemed that the simple kiss was so much more than he thought it

would be for her and that was very good news for him. Bad news for her though, because it made him even more determined.

With Fenrisulfr's help, they sat Lucifer up and wrapped a large white bandage around his torso, keeping the herbs pressed against his skin. They seemed to be already working as the pain had become nothing but a dull reminder he had even been injured. When she was done, he watched her clean up the mess and hang his sweater on a peg near the fire.

Tired of being cold and wet, Lucifer snapped his fingers to dry the rest of his clothing, but it didn't work. Hel crouched next to the fire, rubbing her hands together. Her dark blue eyes watched him. He frowned and snapped his fingers again.

"It won't work," Fenrisulfr laughed when he came back in with a bottle in one hand and shallow bowls in the other.

"What?"

Hel stood, crossing her arms over her chest. "Fairy land. They have a unique magic that negates ours. Your powers won't work here. They built this place for Fenrisulfr when he was first cursed. It's the only reason he can be in human form in here."

"And outside?"

"He is forever a wolf," she confirmed.

Taking off his shoes and socks, Lucifer stood. The ice was cold and chilled his feet, but since he couldn't dry his items with magic, he wanted to put them next to the fire. There was no telling when they would have to leave and if they had to in a hurry, he didn't want to be miserable.

"Here," Hel said softly, handing him a wooden bowl filled with some kind of bitter-smelling liquid.

The table only had two chairs and he wanted to sit down at it to get his feet off the cold floor, but he wasn't about to break up the happy reunion by making one of them sit elsewhere. He also wanted to be by the fire where it was warm.

Fenrisulfr must have sensed the problem because he grabbed a large fur from the chest and laid it out on the ice.

"Sorry, I know it's not what you're accustomed to, but life is very simple here," the wolf man said apologetically as they all sat down. The shapeshifter smiled at him, placing a large bottle with no label next to the flames between them.

"It's fine."

"What's Loki done now?" Fenrisulfr took a sip from his small bowl. His bright eyes watched Hel over the lip of the cup.

In the firelight Lucifer looked between them, trying to see a resemblance, but there wasn't one, not that this was surprising. Gods followed their own rules in every way, so children looking alike were actually uncommon and Hel changed her looks at whim. While her brother had bright pea-green eyes, hers were a grayish-blue that had a

mystical dark blue ring around them. He thought they were the most beautiful eyes he had ever seen. They truly were otherworldly.

"He's managed to kick me out of Hel and sicced his hounds on me."

Fenrisulfr's eyes widened. "Wow. He's really going for it then. I didn't think he'd do it. I can't do much to help, Hel. You're welcome to stay here as long as you need to. But you know you can't."

"I know, Fenrisulfr. I need to find the Helvegr."

Lucifer interrupted. "The what?"

"Helvegr, the human's path to Hel," Wolf man answered for her. "Hel, you know the risks involved with going that way, so I'm not going to say them. But there has to be an easier way."

Hel placed her drink on the ground and turned to her brother, who was sitting cross-legged on the blanket. "If there is one, I haven't thought of it. I can't even have another god take me to Éljúðnir. Lucifer tried. Loki has completely cut me off. Helvegr is the only way he can't keep me out."

"He's been coveting your domain since the beginning, sister."

"Don't I know it," Hel moaned sarcastically, "I just can't figure out what his angle is this time. Why now? And why my domain? If he wanted it so badly, he could have taken it without throwing me out. But it's as though he wants me out of the picture."

"Jealousy," Lucifer said softly. In the short conversation they had had and knowing Loki the way he did, he knew why. "He's jealous, envious. He wants control where he has none."

"How would you know this?" Hel raised an eyebrow at him.

"Trust me, the one thing I know are sins. They may not apply, but I still see them."

Fenrisulfr shrugged and took another sip from his bowl. "Lucifer would know. What are you going to do, Hel?"

"Try to get back in by going through Helvegr. He can't stop me if I go the human way. Once I get there, I'm not sure. Get my people and servants to help start a rebellion? We both know that Odin won't help me. And none of the other gods will either for fear of angering Odin or Loki."

Fenrisulfr shook his head, sending his mangled mane everywhere. "Get the dead. They'll rally behind you. It's a choice of a reasonable Hel under you or a hell like his," he paused, glancing at Lucifer, "under Loki. No offense," he quickly added.

"The dead have no power." Hel shook her head, distracting him for a moment. It was probably a good thing, because Lucifer wanted to dispute that his hell was in fact quite reasonable.

"Yes, they do, Hel. It's why Loki wants your domain. You have so many more souls than Valhalla. If it were a matter of numbers when Ragnarök comes, it wouldn't be a contest because you have like a thousand to one in the soul department. What about

Baldr and Hermóðr? They're gods living in Hel. They could help you. Baldr was, last I heard, a friend."

Hel took a deep breath and rubbed a hand over her angelic face. "He was more than a friend at one time, but that is in the past. Even so, he would never help me and neither would his brother. They are simply waiting until Ragnarök comes and goes so they can play their part in the new world. I'll figure it out, Fenrisulfr. The one thing I know is I have to get back there before I can do anything. Do you know where I can find Helvegr?"

"Half stone and half ice, in the sea of nowhere, on the edge of the old world, on the edge of the forever ice." He playfully shrugged, his fingers trailing along the rim of his cup.

Lucifer snorted. It figured – another riddle, another roadblock. "That's helpful." His voice was full of sarcasm.

Fenrisulfr chuckled as he stood. "I know it isn't."

Hel turned so she could watch her brother. Lucifer couldn't help but watch her glow in the firelight. She looked radiant, like an angel. The thought caused a painful lump to creep up his throat. An angel, as he used to be, like the brothers and sisters he hadn't seen in so many lifetimes. He suddenly missed home.

"Here," Fenrisulfr said while opening a thick, dusty book from the shelf. Flipping the pages, he sat back down, placing the book between them. His thin, bony finger pointed to what looked like the middle of the ocean. Then he moved, revealing a small dot just above Russia in the Arctic sea labeled *Остров Ушакова*. "Ostrov Ushakova."

"Why Russia?" Lucifer asked, pushing away his homesickness to concentrate on Hel's problem.

"Thousands of years ago, the known world was only a fraction of what it really was. To sailors it would be the edge of the world," Hel commented while turning the book so she could see it better. "Look. There's the line of permanent ice. That must be the forever ice, which back then would have easily reached the isle. This would have been nearly impossible to find even if you were looking for it. What can you tell us about it?"

"Hel, I have never been there. Based on where it's located and the clue, I'd say it's cold. How are you going to get there?"

"I honestly don't know." She blinked hard, shaking her head. "However we go we'll have to be careful, now that we know Loki is truly hunting us. Those animals could show up at any time."

"Where did he even get those things?" Lucifer finally asked, looking between Hel and Fenrisulfr. "The only time I've seen animals like that are in the various underworlds. I mean I have some, so does Hel, Hades, Dis, Osiris. How does a non-underworld lord get one?"

Hel shrugged. "They could have been a gift from one of the others, or maybe he stole them. There's no way to know."

Fenrisulfr stood and put the book away. "I'll ask the fairies if they can take you to the edge of the land. I'd call Jörmungandr once you get there. He could help you. That is if you find him."

"I like this less and less, Hel," Lucifer groaned.

Hel's eyes shifted to him. She seemed angry all of a sudden and he couldn't figure out why. First, they had to go outside then monstrous dogs were chasing them, and now they were going farther out into the human world, never knowing if they were going to be found. What was there to like?

"Hel, you two should rest so you can leave as soon as you're able." Fenrisulfr seemed to be silently telling her something, something Lucifer wasn't supposed to know. Whatever it was, she seemed to get, making him feel left out.

Chapter Five

"So, what are you doing here, Lord of Christian hell?" Fenrisulfr asked when he sat back down next to him. The fire was going strong after Lucifer had thrown some more logs onto it and Hel had fallen asleep in the bed. When he looked, all he could make out was some of her golden hair. The rest was wrapped in the fur and she had moved so close to the ice wall on the far side of the bed that he wondered if she was freezing her nose off.

Lucifer looked over to his host's soft, angler face. Even in pale skin, the man seemed to have the face of a wolf. "If you really know who I am, why haven't you kicked me out? Most would."

"Very true. But I'm not like others, as you see. I don't fear you as they do. I even know more about what goes on in the realms simply because I don't have a place there. I 'see' more than they do."

"Why don't you have a place there? Every god does."

"A few non-gods too." Fenrisulfr gave him another grin as he drew his legs up to his chest, wrapping his arms around them. "I know you've been waiting to ask about her."

"She won't tell me anything. Everything I've gotten is from a few tidbit conversations and from the others in the realms," Lucifer admitted before taking a sip of the wine.

The man smiled at him again. "She's been a solitary creature since she was a child. She wasn't always like that. When we were kids, she was bright and fun, the troublemaker. Not like Loki or..."

"Me?" Lucifer added for him when he paused.

"I didn't mean it that way."

"I know. Trust me. I know what is said and thought of and about me. They're supposed to think that way, but there is more to me than what is known or assumed."

"There always is. She changed when Odin found out Loki had children. Loki had done a good job of hiding us away in Jötunheimr. Normally one god can't curse another, but we were children and left unguarded. Hel was the luckiest." He nodded over to her still frame on the other side of the room. "She got a realm of her own, but was cast as an outsider much like you. I wasn't so lucky. I became the wolf, never to be allowed to go back home. Jörmungandr was even more unlucky and was thrown into the ocean as a sea serpent. We all find ways of dealing, of living, I guess. But with Hel, I just don't know. It's almost as if she took the brunt of the blame for what happened. Sometimes I envision her as a cracked doll."

Lucifer blinked at him, confused. "A cracked doll?"

Fenrisulfr nodded.

Anger slowly filled Lucifer. The idea of Hel being broken like that by anyone gave him a vengeful, hateful feeling. The person responsible would pay, he promised himself, even if he had to pull down the halls of the gods himself to do it. Already images danced in his head of his personal wrath on the one who had done it. It wouldn't be pretty to anyone other than him. Only he would get the irony. It would be hell. "And this was all because of Loki?"

"Well, him and a prophecy." The man was silent for a few moments, picked up his discarded bowl from earlier and filled it from the bottle that was still sitting next to the fire. "A völva, a priestess or prophet, foretold that I was destined to kill Odin during Ragnarök. Jörmungandr and Thor will kill each other. Odin did this to us to prevent it from happening."

Lucifer was confused. How could any god go so far as to stop a foretelling? "But it's only a prophecy. It may not even happen."

"True prophecies are destinies. Something no one, not even the gods, can change or manipulate. They simply are." Fenrisulfr lightly shrugged as if he didn't really care. He took a noisy slurp from his bowl and stared into the fire as if remembering something long forgotten.

"What about Hel?"

The man looked to his sister again then back to the flames. "There's no prophecy, only theory."

"Which is?"

"Lucifer..." He seemed conflicted for a moment. His eyes squinted and his thin lips pressed together as he thought about what to say for a moment. "How far do you want to get into this mess?"

"I'm here to help her. I'm not leaving until I do."

"After that?"

Lucifer turned his head to look at Fenrisulfr. His face was set and blank, leaving him to guess what he was trying to say. "That's up to her."

"I see." He was silent for a few breaths as he stared back into the flames. "She needs you, Lucifer. She won't admit it, but she needs you. She's going into a war that one should never have to do alone and it will continue long after our father's fate has been decided with his newest endeavor. Loki wants the domain of Hel. It is said that he will show up on the fields of Vígríðr with all of Hel's own at Ragnarök. If you leave it at that, it could be anything from Hel's death to a hostile takeover."

"You're a seer, aren't you?" Lucifer finally asked. He had been getting the feeling that Fenrisulfr was. Now he was almost positive.

"Not in the traditional sense. It's more like I take all the facts and come to a new conclusion that others haven't thought of. The Twilight of Gods won't just be a collision

within the Norse gods. Ragnarök, Armageddon, Last Judgment, Yawm al-Qiyāmah, whatever you want to call it will involve all the gods. And I believe Hel will be one of the deciders."

"All of them? What could possibly cause all the gods to get involved with their own destruction?"

"Humankind." Fenrisulfr stopped to take another drink. "The Twilight of Gods, Ragnarök, will be over the outside and mortals, not in a grab-all, who's-king-of-the-world kind, but over their existence. The gods will be split over if they should be allowed to continue."

"If the humans stop existing, then so do we," Lucifer stated, horrified at the thought of trying to get rid of what kept them alive and powerful.

"That is simply a way of thought, it's not proven. Unfortunately, to prove it could be everyone's downfall. Everything will be involved. Living and dead will fight alongside each other, brother gods against each other. Loki will be on any side that is against Odin, but if he wants to make a name for himself on the victorious side, he'll need to control some aspect of it. He can't get Valhalla, so he wants Hel. He also thinks that Odin should have given him Hel in the beginning."

"He craves power." Lucifer nodded his head in understanding.

What had they gotten into? No wonder Hel was leery of anyone who wanted to get close to her. Everyone who was supposed to care for her had thrown her away and then decided to take all she had left when they figured they wanted it. What was worse, was that everyone she loved would die and deep down she blamed herself.

* * * * *

Soft fur brushed against her naked thigh, moving higher until it reached her hip. She had a moment to wonder where her clothes had gone, but she honestly didn't care. The only thing that mattered was the unbelievable cloud of fur didn't stop, it was the only thing that existed as it grazed against her ribs. It was holding her, caressing her.

Coarse hairs suddenly scratched at the skin just above the softness, making her moan at the contradiction between them. Gentle lips kissed her in the center of the roughness. Her hips moved of their own accord, closer to the caress.

Inch by inch, both sensations slid higher, the lips leaving kisses without ever stopping. Bumps spread along her when his greedy mouth licked up the underside of her breast. Her hands started to leave the soft material under her to reach for whoever was above her, but she grabbed fistfuls of it to stop herself. She didn't want whoever it was to stop. It all was too dreamy, too perfect, as if every move was made with purpose and knowing. They seemed to leave her in a fuzzy haze so nothing existed but their touch.

Her nipples hardened with needlelike sensations the closer he came. The coarse hair surrounded the tightened skin. The tip of a tongue tickled and licked it, cooling the

burning that danced up her. But it only helped in that one spot as the flames spread beyond the area. The consuming fire concentrated on her throat, making it hard to breathe, and that spot just between the butt and thigh. Muscles in her legs tightened, broke out in a thin sheen of sweat before it moved on. The moisture that started to slowly leak out of her should have cooled the hungry blaze, but it only seemed to feed it, as though the wetness were gasoline. She didn't know if it had only been moments or hours. Since the tongue had started feeding on her, she had lost all track of time. When it stopped, everything seemed to jolt her back to the present, drawing from her a whining protest.

The hard fuzz moved upward again. This time she could feel the weight hovering above her like a blanket. She could feel the warmth from his body rain down on her. Her head moved to the side when that mouth reached the side of her neck, gliding up to her ear.

"Open your eyes," he whispered hotly. She knew the voice right away but forced herself not to think. If she thought about it, then the moment would be over.

"Come on, little goddess. I want you to know who is loving you."

Unable to stop herself, Hel blinked up. She tried to focus on the room but it wasn't clear, as if everything around them couldn't be focused on. What she did manage to see was the white floating above her. Were they in his bed? "This isn't real. Where are we?"

His long fingers brushed against the side of her face, turning it so she was looking at him. "A dream."

"No," her voice broke.

"Don't think, little goddess. As you said, it's not real."

There was so much she should be thinking about right then. So much to worry about. If what he said was true, she had a moment. She had a piece of time where nothing in the real world mattered because it didn't exist where they were. It also meant that nothing they did would really happen. It was her dream. Apparently, this was what she wanted, why should she deny it here of all places?

"If this is my dream. Then I don't have to worry about you in the morning," she said with a little smile.

Rolling, she landed on top of him, arms on either side of his head. Lucifer smiled up at her, his icy eyes shining. His mouth started to open as if he was going to say something, but she didn't give him time.

Her lips didn't hesitate because she wouldn't let herself think about it. Thousands of years of teases and fantasies and she was so ready she could feel herself practically vibrating over him. She doubted she could keep her hand steady if she tried. Those pink lips that had beckoned to her she could now taste and, as her tongue licked across them, she knew that only he could taste the way he did. It wasn't just the man she tasted but something else. It was sinfully delicious. As if everything he was was wrapped into his taste. He was something even the gods could get drunk on, and here of all places she was going to do just that.

As she licked and tasted his mouth, she could feel hands starting to snake around her hips. It wasn't just a smooth movement. There were hands and fingers, but they somehow seemed to slither like a snake. It should have been creepy but it was erotic.

Grabbing the wrists, Hel brought them back around and slammed them into the pillow under Lucifer's head. He chuckled as she got busy kissing him. She could feel his naked waist under her thighs. His cock pressed hard against her opening, as if trying to enter her already, leaving her to smile this time. A new flood of hot wetness started to spill out of her, and the farther down it spread the cooler it became. It coated both her thighs and his impressive cock, made him slippery enough he started to enter her.

The moan caught in her throat as the head started to push through her. Not wanting everything to be over so soon, Hel rose higher on her knees, letting his cock fall out. She both wanted to applaud herself for her strength and curse herself for delaying it. The tiny growl that radiated from him told her it was worth it though.

With a bigger smile, Hel released his mouth to nip at the skin on his neck. She didn't bite hard but she did use enough pressure to get a sound out of him. It was priceless to her to make him do that, so she did it again on his collarbone. Her next aim was for his nipple but she couldn't hang on to his hands and continue to slide down the length of him. Caught between the two, she released him and found her target. Her tongue lapped at the little bud that tightened just before she bit him. The growl sounded above her again, louder.

There was only a moment to feel his hands grab her hips before he rolled her. Somehow they ended at an angle on the bed, her head hanging over the edge. Laughing, she hung there as Lucifer licked at her breast, his nails dragging down her sides and over her hips. It wasn't painful, but it was hard enough that she was sure they left red streaks. It was more the threat of damage than anything that kept the whole situation refreshing. The lovers who she'd had over the last thousand years had been simple men in Hel. They were always too scared to get too rough with the lady of their existence to be anything other than gentle lovers. When was the last time she had an equal for a lover?

The sudden grip on her throat stole the thought before she could answer her own question. The fingers were tight enough to slow her breathing but not so tight she couldn't breathe. It left her looking at Lucifer, who was staring at her. There was a dangerous glint in his pale blue eyes and a sinful smirk on his lips. The look held a knowing, as if he had read her thoughts.

With grip possessively holding her, Lucifer entered her so fast Hel's body tried to curl up. Her eyes widened until the feel of him completely washed over her then fluttered closed as if surrendering to him. Her head tried to fall back, but his grip wouldn't let it get far.

"You're mine now, my pretty little Hel." His hot breath tickled her ear again.

Warning bells should have sounded, but they lay silent. He could have told her he was eating her soul and she wouldn't have cared. Besides, it was all just a dream.

Her fingers circled his wrist and, in one fluid movement, she tossed him up, flipping him back. Hel landed straddling him, her nails digging into his chest. Slowly, she dragged them down, leaving him to gasp, his eyes rolling back in his head as they slid closed. So, he was a masochist, she thought with a chuckle as a hint of red leaked from the fresh scratches.

On her knees, she raised herself up only to slam down on him, her nails digging into his skin. His hand on her throat tightened slightly. The other hand clamped onto her hip, grinding her down farther on him until she gasped, throwing her head so far back she could feel her own silky curls against her back.

Hel moved only about an inch before he ground her back down on him. His nails nipped at her hip, not enough to cut the skin but enough that she felt them. Though under her, Lucifer let her know that he was the one in control. She didn't know if that was good or not, but it was fun to test it, to test him. The little threatening pain was the edge of the knife that heightened everything in her.

Lucifer sat up, his arms looping under hers. His fingers of one hand clamped on top of her shoulder, the other entwined in her curls, keeping her head pulled back. He moved her on him, fast and hard, so it was more like him pushing her down, over and over. A painful burning consumed where they touched. The blaze rolled through her in waves, giving her just moments to gasp for air, her cries into the empty space above them.

His teeth nipped at the corded muscle running up her throat. She could feel the tidal wave starting to build in her and she welcomed it, wanted it to sweep her away with the force that it promised.

Just as the dam threatened to break, things wobbled to gray before snapping back into place. Lucifer's hands tightened on her as she looked around, trying to figure out what happened. His hips rolled under her again, sending a shudder through her. The gasp was cut off as the gray overtook her again, this time pulling her away from everything. Lucifer yelled "No!" and tried to hold her, but there was no use as everything vanished and she blinked up at an icy ceiling.

Taking a moment to collect herself, Hel closed her eyes again. The intense dream still ran through her mind, her body so tight it was throbbing. Relieved and frustrated that it had ended when it did, now awake in the real world, she knew that even in a dream she couldn't risk things with him, it was too dangerous.

She took slow, deep breaths, but they didn't seem to help the rapid racing of her heart. Slowly the cold from the ice wall at her back seeped into her, cooling the heat that had built. It was the warmth at her front that confused her.

Hel was tempted to give Lucifer's large, warm frame a good shove for his audacity. What made him think he had the right to crawl into bed with her without even asking? His hot breath brushed against her face like a caress every time he exhaled. It both melted and chilled her skin and did nothing to help her forget the dream. Even though

he was asleep and he wasn't even touching her, her nerves were still on edge and there wasn't much more she could take.

Letting the memory leak from her mind, she took a moment to look at him. He actually seemed at peace. It was both endearing and scary. While he slept, she got to fully look at him without those intense blue eyes staring back. It felt less like a contest and less intense.

His face was relaxed with its lines barely showing. The heavy black lashes flickered as his eyes moved behind their lids. His dark goatee and mustache were more like a dusting of hair instead of the full, dense style men went for today.

Watching him, there was a strong urge to kiss those pale pink lips as she had in her dream. She knew she had to ignore that urge, and him. He wanted what the rest of them did and she wasn't giving it up. Even with the angry thought running through her mind, she had to admit that he was an irresistible devil. His charm and protectiveness only added to his allure. If he were any other god she'd let temptation get the better of her just to get him out of her system, but he wasn't, so she couldn't.

Those icy eyes slowly opened and focused on her as if he had known all along she had been watching him.

Her annoyance of him next to her leaked back in as he watched her. "What are you doing?"

"I was having an amazing dream that your sweaty, hot, naked body was pressed against mine." He gave her a deep smile that showed his perfect white teeth and dimples.

She rolled her eyes to hide her annoyance and shoved at his completely healed naked chest, tipping him off the bed. He disappeared backward, laughing, even when he hit the ground with a hard thump. She figured he'd at least be irritated with her assault, but he was still smiling when his head popped up over the edge of the bed. "Does anything deter you?" she muttered.

"Not when it's something I really want."

The fur was tossed to the side and Hel slid out of the bed. Though annoyed, she felt strangely better after that one action, more like herself. "Well, you're not getting it so bugger off."

Someone, more than likely Fenrisulfr, had put out wine, cups and a large round plate of flatbread on the small table in the room. Tearing a chunk off, she nibbled on it, hoping to quash the pain that had started in her stomach. It wasn't really a pain, but an empty, rumbling discomfort, one she had never felt before. It was either something he was doing to her or she was getting hungry.

Lucifer came up behind her, trapping her between the table and his body. He placed his palm flat on the table while he leaned into her and grabbed the bottle in the center of the table with his other hand. With her back to him, she closed her eyes, feeling the way he moved behind her. He was purposely teasing her, trying to seduce

her. Why did she have to fall for him, of all gods? The bread suddenly became drier until it was a hard lump in her mouth. "Why are you doing this, Lucifer?"

"To get you some wine," he whispered feverishly in her ear.

Hel tried to swallow again, only managing to get a tiny portion down. "Why are you trying to seduce me now?"

"I've been trying for the last two thousand years. Are you only now noticing?" he asked just as hotly. If he was annoyed with her questions, he didn't show it. His breath brushed against the back of her neck as he carefully studied her, seemingly more determined than ever.

"No. I've always known, but I've been able to stay clear of you. Why now? I'm fighting for my world. I don't have time for this."

He shifted behind her again, the tips of his fingers breathlessly trailed down the curve of her neck. "Then make time. I'm not asking you to stop this crazy adventure. I'm just asking for you to accept me. Give me a chance, my pretty little goddess. I promise you it will be everything you want and more."

What he was offering, she needed. She caught herself starting to fall for it, but the tiny voice in her head reminded her it was a lie. Opening her eyes, she stared ahead to the ice blue wall. "What do you want?"

"You. I simply want you." His words were slow but powerful.

A shiver rode through her body before she could stop it. Her body's betrayal frustrated her. "You want the chase, the one you can't have. You want my domain. I'm weaker than Loki. Are you hoping that if you stay with me long enough to expel him, and if you seduce me, you'll have your chance at it? Are you going to try to dethrone me too? Or are you going to try to be the power behind it? Make me into your pliable little kitty who will do anything for you to keep your 'love'?"

His body stiffened behind her, proving she had hit a nerve with her theory. He thrust the cup into her hand. She turned to watch him walk across the room and grab his sweater off the wall. He forcibly jerked it over his head, pulling it on. "You of all people shouldn't assume that you know everything. I don't want your realm. Never have."

The warm liquid was dry and tasteless, but it washed the soggy lump of bread down. He didn't look at her when he pulled on his socks and shoes. His hair was rumpled from sleeping, giving him a bedroom look that made her want to rip the sweater back off and lick every inch of his body. He had to know what he did to her. Couldn't he see what she was up against? She couldn't trust anyone, especially someone like him.

"Right," she snorted at him.

"They're waiting for you outside," Fenrisulfr told them, walking in a few silent moments later, naked and solemn.

* * * * *

The night air was colder than it was in the ice cavern, but it felt good to get out into the open nonetheless. While the cave was nice, it was beginning to get claustrophobic.

Small colored dots started to trail in the air around them. It was like being in a rainbow blender as they swirled around the three of them.

"They'll take you to the river. It's as far as they can go, but at least you'll be undetected for a little while longer. It should give you a good head start."

Sadness swelled inside her when she looked to Fenrisulfr. Sitting on his rump, his gray shaggy fur fell over his eyes. When would she see him again? Would she? How much longer did he need to be unjustly punished?

"Thank you, Fenrir."

"Take care of yourself, Leikn," his muzzle butted up against her shoulder as he used his pet name for her.

Kneeling, she wrapped his arms around his fuzzy neck. "You too. I'll see you when this is over."

"No you won't, but get word to me that you're okay."

She was about to cry, the pain in her chest was too much. When she stood, the stream of lights started to speed around them. They moved so fast, if she tried to follow the rainbow she grew dizzy.

Nothing felt different. Nothing changed other than her vision. Things shifted around them. Fenrisulfr slowly grew as they became smaller. He watched them, his wolfish face slowly moved downward. His body grew larger and larger. She focused on his black snout that hovered over them like the Eiffel Tower. Finally the whirlwind stopped. Her brother was so large it was frightening. At her feet, the ground that had been dirt and pebbles was suddenly smooth with large stones all around them.

A green streak floated down. A figure cloaked in the bright, grassy-green light with large butterflylike wings slowly dropped in front of them. Everything from its hair, skin and wings was the same fuzzy, blinding color. Its soft facial features were both feminine and masculine, making it hard to tell if it was a man or woman. Silently, it motioned behind them with a wave of its hand.

It was like nothing she had seen before. Shaped like a large deformed boat with veins, she had to wonder if they had really shrunk that much?

Lucifer leaned toward her as they started walking to where the fairy directed. His voice was flat as if he didn't believe what he was seeing either. "It's a leaf."

"Yes, it is."

The outside felt waxy when her hand rested against it. The green leaf felt like very thick and stiff waterproof fabric.

Lucifer grabbed the stiff edge and pulled himself up. His legs swung over and he dropped down, disappearing from view. A few moments later, he reached over for her. "Come on."

His large, warm hand gripped hers and heaved her up. On the ledge, she lost her balance and fell over, knocking him down.

"Now this is a position I could get used to," Lucifer chuckled.

She had landed on top of him, her face against his sweater, her legs straddling him. If they had been naked, it would have been a very provocative position. Even with clothes on, it wasn't exactly innocent. "Drop dead."

Once she climbed off him, she sat in the middle of the large makeshift boat. The rays of color, much larger than before, swirled above them again. Lying back, she watched the lights in amazement. It was like the aurora borealis just for them.

Shakily lifted, the leaf was tossed into the air. The colors disappeared and they floated softly away. In the distance, she heard a lonesome howl that broke her heart. Her brother was saying goodbye for the last time.

* * * * *

They dipped and rose through the black-velvet night. The sky twinkled with stars rarely seen anymore and seemed to want to be touched. The air grew colder. Lucifer sat with his back against a curved wall, watching her. Drawing her leather jacket closer, she tried to stay warm, but it wasn't working. The wind didn't help. She expected it to start snowing – it was so bone-chilling cold.

"Come here, Hel." Lucifer held his arms out, inviting her to join him.

She smirked at him. "I don't think so, Lucifer."

"No funny business. You're cold, I'm cold. If we combine our body heat we'll be a little warmer."

It took a minute for her to decide. It made sense, and if she kept her wits about her, she'd see anything he did.

She crawled up to him on her hands and knees. It wasn't until she reached him and saw his corny grin that she realized how she looked.

"You're not making this easy on a man, Hel," he chuckled when she finally sat next to him. His arm wrapped around her shoulders, pulling her close. In an instant she was warmer, not much, but enough to notice.

"You're not a man, besides your mind is always in the gutter. Why should now be any different?"

"Too true. Where do you think they're taking us?"

She just shrugged.

They sat in silence. Hel tried to ignore the way his hand rubbed her arm and the way he moved so she could press more of herself against him. She had thought she had been careful, but he noticed anyway.

* * * * *

It was hours before the boat shifted around them, the end of the leaf angled downward and they could see a city's bright lights approaching them.

Hel sat up to better see. "Where do you think we are?"

"St. Louis. Look, there's the archway." He pointed to the silver monument on the edge of the river.

The vessel started to shift and plummeted radically, sending Hel toppling into Lucifer. His grip on her tightened as if he were afraid she would fall out of the high-walled boat. Before she could even pick herself off him, the craft landed with a heart-stopping drop.

"I think we've landed," he chuckled lightly.

If it was meant to help her feel better, it wasn't working. It felt as if her heart were in her throat and there was some idiot in her ears with a drum, beating it repeatedly so she could barely hear anything else.

Managing to stand, she noticed the miles of dark wall on either side of them. The same thing that had happened earlier started again. This time in reverse as everything around them grew smaller. The dark green leaf was crushed under her boot.

"Do I look all right?" Lucifer asked as he patted his hands over himself, checking to make sure everything was still in order.

He looked normal. Hot, sinful and normal. Stuffing her hands in the pockets of her slacks, she turned to look down the end of the now-tiny alley where the fairies had dropped them. "Yes, you look fine. Thanks for seeing if I did."

"I already know you look normal. I checked before I asked. Trust me. I know every little detail about you and would notice if anything were amiss. Come on, we need to get out of here." He grabbed her elbow and started pulling her toward the lit street ahead.

Lucifer stopped at the curb and looked down the road. The street was filled with buildings that had seen hard times. Bars covered the windows, graffiti marked the walls. It was the part of town even if those things were missing and it was properly lit, it would have given a bad vibe, as if monsters were waiting to come out of the dark and attack.

"Come on. We'll head to the river. I saw some hotels there," he said, his hand still on her arm.

She stuffed her hands into her coat pocket and walked faster to keep up with him. "Think we're going to be molested? This early in the morning?"

His eyes were focused as he quickly searched everything. Every time there was a sound behind them, he looked and picked up his pace a little more. "Can't you hear them?"

"What?"

"Intentions," he said flatly.

A man dressed in jeans and a hooded sweater stood on the front stoop of a building in front of them. Lucifer's body tensed and his grip tightened. The young kid with his hands in his pockets stepped closer to them as they started to walk by. Lucifer suddenly released her and grabbed the man by his dirty gray sweater, slamming him into the cold brick wall.

"Do it and you'll be mine," he growled so low it sent shivers down her back. His face was pressed within an inch of the boy's. Lucifer still looked human in every aspect, but there was now a vibe radiating that scared her. It wasn't just evil, but pure raw power. It left no doubt that if he wanted to, he could rain hell down on them all.

The kid stood there gasping, clearly shaken. His hands froze on Lucifer's grasp. Sheer terror was written on his face as he looked into Lucifer's eyes. Lucifer gave the human one more look before dropping him and then turned back to her.

"Those intentions," he muttered harshly when they were a few feet away. It left her wondering if she really wanted to know what the kid had intended to do.

Chapter Six

The hotel suite Lucifer located for them was large and spacious. Hel counted four rooms before the bedroom, and the bathroom was almost as big as that. It was more than she expected. A simple room with a shower and bed would have been enough for her, but leave it to Lucifer to never do anything small.

"They're going to pick up our clothes and deliver the food in about a half an hour. So, you have time to take a long shower before they come. Or would you prefer me drawing you a hot bath? I could scrub your back." Lucifer grinned as he dropped the keycard on the dark mahogany bar.

"I don't think so. What do I wear until they bring the clothes back?" Hel quickly asked, looking around.

He gave her a cocky smile that said he was already imagining something. "I vote for nothing. But there should be a robe in the closet if you prefer."

Determined to ignore what he was hinting at, Hel grabbed the robe and headed into the bathroom.

The hot water felt like heaven as it beat down over her head and shoulders. It slowly melted a chill that had settled deep inside her. She had started to notice minor aches and pains she hadn't felt earlier, another reminder they needed to hurry—that time was running out.

Tying the belt to the thick terry-cloth bathrobe around her waist, she went into the main room to see Lucifer escorting a young man out the door. On a small table placed by the large window was a silver-domed platter, a bottle in a matching decanter, a single blood-red rose, and two oversized wineglasses. It was all very simple yet elegantly set on a white tablecloth.

"I hope you're a meat and potatoes type of girl," he said when he stepped up to the table and pulled out a chair, inviting her to sit.

He had put on a pair of black loose-fitting pajama pants. It wasn't something a hotel was likely to have on standby so he must have conjured them. She didn't know which was worse, him naked, or the pants that left just enough to the imagination.

Sitting, she watched as he walked back around the table. She couldn't get over his bare feet. Even though she knew the Lord of Hell had them, it was human anatomy, it was something so simple and normal she didn't even think a man like him to have them. He was supposed to be above having long, sexy toes.

Turning back to the plate in front of her, her stomach loudly greeted the dark meat and vegetables before her. "I honestly don't know. I've never had steak and potatoes."

"Well, here's the chance to find out," he chuckled before disappearing behind the bar to pour himself something tan to drink.

She took small bites and looked out the window, past the rain streaks to the silver arch. The sky slowly melted from black to gray then pink before becoming a cloud-covered blue.

"The concierge is making travel arrangements for us. I'm thinking private plane to the Gulf. Then travel by taxi or rent a car to the water. It makes the most sense without getting there with powers that can be detected."

"Probably," she agreed after swallowing the last of the steak. "I'll contact Jörmungandr once we get there. He needs to know what Loki is up to and he'll know the best way to get to the island."

Thirsty, Hel picked up her glass. The cold liquid was way too dry for her tastes, but it did help to wash down a lump of potato that seemed to have caught in her throat. His smiling eyes glittered over her, his figure slightly distorted through the glass. His gaze held the knowing want that was usually in his eyes whenever he looked at her. This time though it seemed almost—she grasped for the word before finally finding one that suited—fiery.

Heat spread through her until her toes tingled. To buy time, she downed the entire glass of wine. She tried to think of the problem at hand to get her mind off where it was going, of what Loki was doing with her world as they sat there, waiting. Her mind wouldn't let her though. She had the urge to walk over to Lucifer, straddle him in that chair he was in and kiss him until neither one of them could breathe.

"You're staring at me," he chuckled with a cocky grin.

"Sorry," she offered weakly while putting the glass back down. Suddenly she felt a bit lightheaded, almost as if her mind were swimming. Hel blinked hard, trying to get the mild dizziness to stop. Her body was getting warmer by the second and his gaze was making it worse.

Lucifer snickered again. "I do believe it's called buzzing."

"What is?" Hel asked with tingling lips.

"What you're feeling. You drank the wine too fast. Tell me what's going on, Hel," he said more firmly, his face determinedly set.

"Nothing." Suddenly feeling restless, she rose and started to pace. A chill rippled through her. It felt as if she was getting weaker inside. Her will, her resolve was diminishing and it wasn't the wine.

Before she got halfway across the room, Lucifer had her by the arm and spun her around to face him. His blue eyes were icy hard as they searched her face. The warmth from his hand radiated through her until it felt as if her insides were melting. "Tell me, Hel."

"Nothing that you don't already know."

"Bullshit, Hel. Last night in the cave, you dreamed. From what I could tell it was a pretty hot dream too. You practically inhaled a plate of food that was enough to feed a lumberjack when gods don't need to eat. The wine made you tipsy. You think I don't notice the changes in you. Something is going on and I want to know what it is."

Hel tried pulling her arm away again but he held on. "What's the big deal, Lucifer? Everyone changes. You dream, almost everyone dreams."

"Gods don't," he said harshly.

Everything was building up in her, every feeling she had ever known and felt. Except this time they threatened to overwhelm her. *He* was threatening to overwhelm her and she was actually hoping he would. The feelings gave her the promise of getting lost, lost in herself and in him, of taking her to a place where nothing mattered but them. "You do."

His teeth clenched together and his words were slow. "I am not a god."

"Yes you are!"

"No, I'm not, Hel. I never have been, never will be one." Lucifer backed her up until her back pressed against the cool glass of the window. His breathing sped up until his chest started to move with each one.

"You can't lie to me about this. I'm not stupid. Look at where you live, your realm. Look at your powers, your abilities. Hell, look at your ego and conceitedness. No one would dare have as much as you do if they weren't one!" She searched for a hint as to why he would lie about this. What could he possibly have to gain? Nothing.

His frozen eyes stayed on her. "I am simply doing my job, Hel. The job is what has those things, not me. The position has to be what you think of it for the world to have order. I do the job, but I am more than it."

"What are you then?" she asked, slowly trying to understand what he was telling her.

"Simply what I was made. An angel. One banished from his home and willing to do what his master has bid him." He reached up to her, his fingertips barely touching her cheek. "One who every time he looks at you feels as if he is touching home one more time, touching heaven again, even knowing I can never go back. Hel, you take me home every time I see you. You give me a piece of myself back. Please let me return the favor. Let me help you. I promise I will not fail you."

A hot tear trailed down her cheek onto his fingers. She closed her eyes and steeled herself for the confession she was about to tell. "I'm human."

He was silent for so long she was sure he had just rejected her. "The curse?"

All she could do was nod, spilling her curls everywhere.

"That's why the hurry to get back any way you could?"

"Odin is so afraid of my brothers and me together. I haven't seen Fenrisulfr or Jörmungandr since we were banished. Jörmungandr can't leave the oceans, Fenrisulfr

can't leave the area he's in, and I can't leave the realms. The longer I'm out of Hel the more human I become."

"I'm still here, Hel, and I'm not going anywhere. No one can send me away but you," he whispered softly. His eyes darkened, almost melted as he looked at her. The lines in his face slowly disappeared. She had a moment to wonder if he truly understood what she was going through. Everything from his face to his actions and words said he did. "I don't care what you become. Goddess, human. I want you any way I can get you. I have for the last two thousand years. I'll do anything to make you happy, to take away your pain. Let me in, Hel."

He had said the all the right things. Lies or not, it was what she had needed to hear. He could give her everything she needed at that moment. He could make her forget. He could make her feel like the world, like a woman who was desired by one man and the reasons didn't matter.

His mouth crashed down on hers, taking her by surprise. She could feel the breath he wasn't taking. The kiss was filled with such passion and wanting that he was almost purring against her. It was as if all those years of waiting for her were put into that one action. It was so hot that he threatened to melt her on the spot. Best of all, it was very real.

The tip of his tongue played across her lips until she opened them, letting him in. If he was afraid she'd say no, then he was an idiot. To think, all these years and all he'd had to do was kiss her to get her to say yes. He should have kissed her sooner, she thought, but the smart joke fled as soon as it appeared.

His tongue darted in, licking every inch of her mouth. She could taste the liquor he had drunk and she found it intoxicating. Her body became molten lava that erupted down her bare thighs. Lucifer must have noticed because his mouth became even more fevered, devouring hers.

His naked chest pushed against hers, pressing her harder against the glass. The cool glass and his unyielding body made it so there was nowhere for her to go, that was, if she wanted to go somewhere and she didn't.

She could feel his hard cock pressed against her stomach through his thin pants and her bathrobe. It seemed to be tapping against her, wanting out of its loose restraints. What shocked her more than the enormous feeling of it was he had that hard-on for her. It gave her a feeling of power she had never felt before.

His fingers found the knot to her belt and, in a fury, was undone. Pulling the robe apart, it hung precariously on her shoulders as her bare breasts pressed against him. He was so warm. Everywhere his skin touched hers sizzled. A desperate, dark need had built in her without her even noticing. What was he doing to her? She didn't care as long as he filled that need as promised.

The hand on her face slid down her throat to brush the side of her breast, his thumb grazing against her already painfully erect nipple. She trembled in his grasp. He had only just begun and already she was ready to scream at him to take her now.

She was disappointed when his hand continued down to her waist, stopping on her hip. Of all the bloody places he could finally put that hand, why there? Hel wanted to scream. Her breasts were aching to be touched and her pussy was actually hurting, it wanted attention so badly.

His other hand slipped under her robe to cup her ass. She gasped into his mouth when his fingers dug in, pushing her harder against his cock.

Needing him closer, she stood on her toes, her leg lifted so her knee was on his hip. With her moving, he shifted between her thighs. His clothed erection rubbed against her clit, sending spirals of intensity through her. She couldn't suppress the little cry that sounded. He moaned into her mouth, leaving a spike of excitement to chase the intensity. It left her dizzy and spellbound. It made her want to crawl into his mouth, explode and shed her skin. It made her want to do everything and nothing all at once.

A strange giggle escaped her when he tightened his arms around her, suddenly picking her up, and she wrapped her legs around him. His cock pressed harder against her wet pussy, making the fire that ravished her even hotter. How did the human body survive such temperatures?

The robe piled behind her when he set her down on the cold wood. A cascading shiver overtook her with the contact of it against her burning ass cheeks, but it did nothing to quench the consuming need coursing through her.

He leaned her back and, with a swipe of her arm, everything on the table tumbled off with a thunderous clattering she barely heard. The thick cloth of the robe bunched under her hips, raising them up to him when her back hit the table.

She missed him the moment he released her. Cold air blew over her smoldering skin, marking where he had been touching even more. Their lower bodies were still touching but she felt lonely and empty. Before she could stop it, a begging little moan escaped her.

His long fingers brushed softly against her collarbone and then moved down. They trailed down her breast, over her erect nipples, before he gave them a tight pinch that made her shudder and him grin. Down the underside and to her rib cage, he stopped at her hips, his long fingers wrapped around her waist, holding her firmly.

At first she thought he would kiss her again when he leaned over her. His warm body hovered over hers like a heated blanket, warming her rapidly chilling skin. She needed him to kiss her again, needed his mouth conquering hers. Hot breath teased the skin on her neck instead. A tremble of anticipation took her by surprise. His continuous trail of steamy breaths followed the path his fingers took. Her nipples became painful as blood rushed into them. It wasn't until he reached the space between her ribs that he pressed his lips against her skin. Each tiny kiss moved downward. He was so tender, so painstakingly delicate with her, that it felt as if he was paying her homage. It both thrilled and annoyed her. Where was the urgency she was feeling? Wasn't he feeling that burning, dark need too?

The hair on his face tickled her skin, making her moan when he reached the ring in her bellybutton. His tongue dove into her navel, toying with the ring. A hard breath left her when the gate in her cunt broke again, soaking them in a fresh wave of her scent. If she had known the small hoop could be used against her, she would have never gotten the damn thing.

"Do you want me, Hel?" he asked in a throaty whisper.

She looked down at him, confused and irritated that he had stopped. The cold air started to penetrate her skin. "You ask me now?"

"I have to know. Do you accept me? As I am?"

"What do you want, wedding vows?" she said hoarsely, not bothering to hide the frustration.

He gave her a sad smile. His fuzzy chin was less than an inch from her belly. "No. Just your acceptance."

"Yes." If he accepted her as a human, then she could accept him, whatever he was.

It seemed to be enough for him. He looked down at her navel ring and exhaled. His hot breath caressed her. It alone was a lover's touch that left her skin tingling. She couldn't help it, her eyes fluttered closed and her head went back to rest against the table as a wave of calm washed over her.

When her skin started to chill from the lack of heat, she looked back down at him. He had a very strange satisfied grin. Then his eyes slid up to hers and the smile turned into something else. The look she had gotten used to with him was back with a vengeance.

He grabbed her legs, wrapping them back around his waist. His arm slid under her, pulling her back up so she was sitting. The robe fell to the floor. Laughing, her arms went back around his neck as he lifted her up. His fingers dug into her flesh, the light bite of his nails on her ass caused her to squeal and moan. When she looked at him, he had a troubling smirk on those slightly swollen lips. She knew that look. He was plotting something and this time she didn't care what it was.

Trying to not move so he wouldn't drop her as he walked proved difficult. He was so warm that she wanted to rub against him like a cat marking its territory. She could feel his strong muscles flex and move around her. There was a deep purr struggling to come out.

His hot breath teased her ear, sending shivers down her spine. Unable to take the chills anymore, she turned her head and captured his mouth with hers. He was just as eager as she was, his teeth nibbled on her lower lip until she moaned.

He dropped her onto the soft bed. Propped up on her elbows, she watched him strip out of his pants. His eyes flared black as, one knee at a time, he crawled up the bed, stalking her carefully as if she were his prey. It only served to make her hungrier for him, which was probably his intent.

She cried out when his mouth latched on to her rigid nipple. Her head fell back as his teeth nipped and his tongue swirled. One of her hands grabbed the back of his head, her fingers sliding through his short hair. Her other hand went to the hard muscle running down his back. His fingertips pressed into her skin, anchoring her to him.

Her legs came up around him. She could just feel the head of his cock at her wet opening. The agonizing pain in her cunt was driving her crazy. It would take only one deep thrust to make it bearable, but when she tried to impale herself on him, he only chuckled and moved his hips away.

Whacking him upside the head sounded very good at that moment. How could he be torturing her like this?

His sharp teeth grazed her skin as he nibbled one breast and then the other, giving it the same attention as the first. Sliding her hand down his tight stomach, she grabbed his stiff erection firmly. He gave her a deep moan before snatching her hand away.

Lucifer looked at her with hazy eyes. Her hand was firmly gripped in his fist. Before she could protest, he had both hands pinned above her head.

"I've waited too long for this," he kissed her hard, leaving her dizzy, "for it to be over too fast." His lips pressed against hers again, the tip of his tongue traced over them. Hel tried to deepen the kiss, but he kept denying her until she couldn't keep the whine inside any longer. "And I want to hear you beg."

"I'm begging, I'm begging!" she protested.

He simply chuckled, planted a fat kiss on her mouth, and then sat up. "Not nearly enough."

His finger drew a little design in the air and, before she could protest, her wrists were anchored together above her head, stuck to the bed. Pulling on them, she tried to get free, but she was definitely stuck. Lucifer just grinned at her.

"You're evil, you know that!"

"I am Satan," he chuckled. "And now that I have you where I want you I'm going to do what I wanted when you passed out in my bed." His grin was completely devilish.

Hel felt her face flush and her eyes widen. He was getting payback and there was no telling what he had on his mind.

He moved down the bed so he was completely between her legs.

Her body jerked in his grasp as his tongue slid up the inside of her thigh. It felt as if wet silk were sliding over her. All she could do was moan the higher he went as her body tried to curl itself around him.

When he reached the top of her thigh, she expected him to slide over to where the ache was hurting her most, but Lucifer never did what one expected. Instead, he shifted and started with the other leg. His hand slid down her hip, over her outer thigh, only to have it travel back around and grab her ass. The bite of his nails made her squeal and him smile up at her.

Her wrists pulled on her invisible bonds. Her body shuddered and jerked in his ironclad grasp. The tip of his tongue slid up her wet pussy. It was the contrasting feeling of the silkiness of his tongue and the prickly sandpaper from his facial hair against her delicate skin that sent her over the edge.

A pool of black ecstasy surrounded her. Somewhere in the distance someone was crying out. She could hear her own blood pumping through her veins. Every muscle seemed frozen yet twitched at the same time. She could almost reach the oblivion that was promised, only to be pulled away. He was lapping at her as if she were a long-awaited creamy dessert.

She could feel his hands slide up her stomach, over her breasts to her shoulders, only to trail up her arms. Her hands became free and she did the one thing she wanted most, she touched him.

Every cell in her body burst when he finally entered her. Her fingers dug into his back to hold on as oceans of color swept closer and closer. Icy flames licked at her insides, threatening to consume her. She tried to concentrate on what he was doing, only to get lost in the feeling he was creating.

Sweat dripped down the side of his face and his eyes hazed over.

His pace picked up until the sounds of flesh slapping flesh echoed in the room. Shifting her hips, he slid in even farther, deeper. She tried to focus, it was as if there were nothing left in the world other than the feelings he was giving her. It was so primal, so human and, at the same time, so magical.

He sent her soaring into the heavens only to drop her into the pits of hell. Every time she thought he would consume her soul, he would send her back until it became a ride she could barely keep contained. That was when the world exploded. Colors collided into her. Waves of blackness swept her away. At that split moment he could have taken her soul and she wouldn't have cared.

Chapter Seven

Lucifer, covered in sweat and out of breath, collapsed on top of her. She was breathing as hard as he was and just as worn out. Now she understood why humans were exhausted after sex. She was surprised they survived the experience at all.

After a few long moments, he rolled off her only to lie on his side with his arm over her. He had a content, silly little smile. It was one she had never seen but liked. She liked the fact she had put it there even more.

"You could pull the devil out of me. You know that?" he chuckled tiredly.

She couldn't help but lick her way-too-dry lips while looking at him. "If you promise not to tell anyone, I kind of like that devil. Always have."

"You have?" His eyes squinted as he looked at her, but the cocky grin appeared again.

"Yes."

His eyes narrowed a bit as he thought about it. "Then why run from me? Afraid of becoming what you thought I was?"

The corner of her mouth twisted. "Afraid I could fall for you. I can't afford to have a weakness. Besides, I knew what you wanted."

"Hel, I don't want your realm. Even if I did, I can't. Don't you think if a god could rule more than one pantheon realm they would have by now? It simply can't be done. All I've ever wanted was you."

"You don't get to chase me anymore," she joked, changing the subject. Now wasn't the time for it. She wanted to enjoy the moment and was willing to not argue to have it.

"The chase was fun, but I prefer actually having you." His hand slid down to her navel ring. The moment he got close to it a shudder ran through her. It felt as if he had just run his fingers through her body, gently caressing it. It left her breathless and hot. The moment his hand left her, it stopped, leaving her cold and empty.

"What the fuck?" She shuddered the moment she could catch her breath. "What was that?"

He gave her a little smile, his finger drawing a large circle on her abdomen. "A present."

Leaning up, she looked to where his hand had been. An iridescent crescent moon graced the one side of her navel. If she made a perfect circle with the tips, she would come to a matching star on the other side.

"You marked me?" she asked harshly, confused and upset. How could he do such a thing?

His voice was slow, low and filled with pain. "In a way, yes. It's more of a gift."

"A gift! You marked me as one of your whores!" Furious, she moved away from him and grabbed a pillow, hugging it to herself. It was a weak cover but she just needed to put something between the two of them.

"No." He slowly sat up but stayed away to let her have her space. "It's my symbol. I have never given anyone this. I've never wanted to."

Tears welled in her. A painful lump formed in her throat, making it hard to breathe. She had trusted him. She should have known better. Of course he would lie to her, would deceive her somehow.

"No one will know it for what it is. Even if you wore it on display, no one will, not unless you tell them. And as a goddess, you can get rid of it at any time," he offered slowly.

Her burning eyes turned up to him. "And as a human?"

"All you have to do is ask and I will take it back. Before you do, you have to know that I have never given anyone the power over me I have given you. I never will again either."

"Power! You fucking treated me no better than one of your pissant little hell harpies. How does that give me power?" she screamed at him, the hot tears trailing down her cheeks.

"Ask me a question."

"What?"

"Ask me a question," he persisted. "Anything you want."

"I'm not playing your game, Lucifer!"

His face hardened even more as he spoke through his teeth, "Just ask me a question!"

"Fine. Did you mark me as one of your whores?"

With a blank face, only his lips moving, he answered, "Yes."

The moon started to burn. It wasn't bad but it was very uncomfortable. Hel dropped the pillow to see it glowing faintly black before fading to its original color.

"That power, Hel. It's just one of the things it can do. I am the father of lies. I don't want to lie to you and now I can't. Now you'll know if I do. I can't take it away either unless you ask. As long as you have it, you can tell when I lie."

"I don't understand. Why would you? If the others find out, they could use me against you. I could turn and hurt you or worse with it."

"A risk I'm willing to take. But there's more to it than that."

Curiosity and concern filled her. "Okay, I'll bite, what else does it do?"

The evil grin was back. He slowly crawled up to her. His hands slid up her thighs, pulling her up to her knees. Confused, she let him move her to where he wanted her,

but apparently upright was it. His icicle eyes watched hers as he glided back down the length of her, his fingers at her hips, telling her he didn't want her to move.

His hot breath grazed her abdomen as he leaned into her. He started at the blonde curls, licking his way slowly up. Tiny bumps graced her skin the higher his wet satin tongue went. When his tongue touched the edge of the mark, her eyes rolled back and a throaty moan tumbled out of her. Lucifer's grip changed, his arm wrapped around her back so he held her up when her body went boneless. As his tongue slid up her navel, she felt it over her entire body. It was as if her body were in that one spot, or he was licking every inch of her. It was more than a skin sensation—it was deeper. It was completely physical.

She wasn't sure and didn't care as the satin rays caressed every internal inch of her. Her mind was still there and she could think, but it felt as though it had been wrapped in a warm thick cloud, comforting and supporting her.

When he reached the top line, she felt him move away. She tried to move, to at least pick her head up to look at him, but she couldn't—every bone in her body felt like hardened jelly. Breathless ripples still cascaded through her.

Gently, he lowered her back into the support of the pillows. She could feel him move around on the bed, but when she opened her eyes, everything was cloudy and distorted.

"Oh wow," Hel breathed out. Blinking repeatedly, the world slowly came back into focus.

"I take it you like that," he whispered, lying next to her.

It took all her strength to roll over so she could look at him. "That was...there are no words to describe what that was. I can see a problem though."

"Which is?"

"I can't be going hot and heavy every time something touches it."

"You won't." He smiled at her as his finger slowly drew a large, careful circle around the moon. "It only reacts to my touch. Even another lover wouldn't get a reaction."

Her eyes fluttered closed and a grin spread across her face as she thought of the possibilities.

* * * * *

The monstrous dogs were on to her again, but this time there was something else with them, something darker and much more dangerous. Her hasty steps echoed against the gray brick walls. She could feel the fear but didn't. It was as if it were happening to someone else instead of her. The air burned in her lungs as she gasped for every breath.

Turning a corner, she found a staircase she hadn't seen before. Knowing she was still being followed, she ran down the steps that curled around and hugged the wall of the deep abyss. She

didn't remember this, had never seen this. Where in her realm was this? Her mind screamed as her legs pumped down the staircase.

The sounds were now way above her and sounded as if they were slowing down. Hopefully they were having problems with the stairs. Her luck was never that good though.

She didn't look behind her. All her concentration went to the stone steps in front of her. With no railing, it would be too easy to fall and go over the side into the bottomless pit under her.

Finally, when she had given up on ever reaching the bottom, the last step appeared.

Her boots sounded hollow against the dark floor. Only two lone torches lit the large round room, one on either side of enormous double doors. The first thing she noticed was the large rods that ran across them to keep them from opening. The markings on them were some she had never seen.

Part of her wanted to run from the eerie feeling this was giving her, the other wanted to touch it. But she didn't have to in order to feel the enchantment used on it. Someone never wanted these doors opened.

Trapped between the monsters closing in on her and the forbidding door, she didn't know what to do. There was no other way to go.

The doors suddenly bucked loudly against the bars.

Oh shit, echoed through her mind.

A low, snarling growl spun her around to see the pack of ravaging dogs that slowly descended the last steps. One by one, they encircled her, blocking her way to the stairs.

The doors behind her shuddered again. This time louder, more determined to break free of their restraints.

The monsters started to shift, preparing for the attack. There was no herding her somewhere. They were there to rip her to shreds.

The moment the first dog started to lunge at her, the doors exploded outward, sending stone and wood shrapnel down on them all.

Screaming, Hel bolted upright in the bed. Sweat dripped down her forehead. Breathing seemed to be the hardest thing she had ever had to do. Her eyes looked around but she barely saw the room. Her mind kept playing the scene and the fear, over and over.

"Are you all right?" Lucifer asked, wrapping his arms around her.

"I think," she stopped to take a breath, "I just had my first nightmare."

Then it suddenly clicked and she scrambled off the bed. Grabbing the robe off the floor, she forced her arms into it, quickly tying the belt around her waist. The door came back into her mind.

Chewing on the edge of her nail, she started to pace. Restless, she had to move. "I know what he wants. We've been concentrating on what he's doing, not how he's doing it. I can't figure out how he intends to do it."

"I'm not sure I follow."

"Odin imprisoned Loki until Ragnarök. He's been there for thousands of years and never once even a glimmer of him. Suddenly he's out and just as ruthless as ever. But how? How did he escape? If he could have escaped at any time, he would have done it by now. If we knew that, then we'd know how it all started and what he wants."

"Hel. He wants your realm. We already knew that." Lucifer frowned at her.

"Yes, but why?"

Lucifer moved on the bed. "He's envious. He always wanted it."

She didn't pay him any attention. The meaning was right there in front of her. Why hadn't she seen it sooner? "I'm not the easiest target. If he had just escaped to get out of the hell he was in, he could have gone anywhere or fought one of the smaller less-powerful gods for their domain. It's the fact he did escape and then found a way to banish me is what says it all. He wants to start Ragnarök. In fact, he thinks he's already started it. He may have, but I don't know."

Rambling wasn't something she did, but if she got it all out, maybe she could put the pieces together.

"Ragnarök will start with numerous events. He may have bypassed some or they may be on the way. Being released from his prison is one. Loki having my domain is another. By getting free, he may have started the end of the world. It's what he wants. What I don't understand is how he got free. Odin imprisoned him. No one knew exactly where either. How did that bastard escape?"

Lucifer shifted on the bed, his brows scrunched together as he thought about it. "If he started all this just to get to the End of Days, he has to know he will die. Die a death then, and there is no soul to go anywhere. He will no longer exist. Why would anyone want that?"

"Easy. To stop the pain and get revenge. He wouldn't care about self-preservation as long as he succeeded in those." Flecks of information floated down to her. The more she said aloud, the more thoughts seemed to come to her. "He'll want to continue after. It's a risk he would be willing to take though. But what's more important than the aftermath is that he needs to control my realm for Ragnarök to begin."

Lucifer lightly shook his head. "I don't know, Hel."

"I'm telling you," she said firmly when she finally sat next to him, "he's trying to start Ragnarök. It's what I would do if I were him."

Chapter Eight

Lucifer had gotten them to the Gulf in what she was thinking was record time and then found the perfect spot on the beach to watch the sun go down and the waves come in.

The sand was cold, the ocean even colder. The sun slowly descended behind them, the moon rose in front of them followed by a chorus of stars. The only thing keeping them warm was the small flicker of a fire. A thick, large mat had appeared next to it to help keep most of the sand from seeping into their shoes.

He intended nothing other than waiting, simply having her near, touching her was enough. Hel apparently had other ideas. Lucifer had just gotten comfortable when soft, thick fabric landed over his face. With a chuckle, he pulled the discarded shirt away and looked up just in time to see her undo the hook of her bra at her back. An evil smile spread across her lips when she actually flung it at him. Lucifer snatched it out of the air, his eyes never leaving her happy, glowing face.

Her fingers played with the snap of her jeans, and while there were body parts and a striptease to watch, he couldn't seem to stop looking at her face. The light from the fire and the low-rising moon danced across her pale skin. There was such happiness in her face and eyes, that just looking at her lifted his soul.

The jeans were pushed down to her knees before she stopped, her thumbs still hooked on the waistband. "Are you paying attention?"

Snapping out of his trance, he blinked at her with what he was sure was a cheesy grin, but he couldn't seem to stop.

"Well, if you're not paying attention..." She started pulling the pants back over her hips. Her lips tried to pout but the corners tugged upward, revealing her amusement.

"Oh no you're not," Lucifer laughed, grabbing her arm.

She finally gave up trying to pretend and kicked the pants off as she stumbled toward him. In front of him, Hel dropped to her knees in the soft sand.

"On your knees for me at last," he chuckled in a whisper.

Hel pursed her lips, squinting, giving him a snarky, playful look. "Ohhhhh."

With one hand, she shoved at his chest, pushing him onto his back. He had just a moment to pick his head up and look at her before her fingers attacked his belt buckle. Dropping his head back to the mat, he let her do what she wished with him. The moment the zipper went down, his dick jumped out into her waiting hand.

Wet, rough silk suddenly surrounded his cock, encasing all of him, pulling at him. His eyes shot open and his mouth dropped. He wanted to tell her how incredible the

feeling was, but he couldn't seem to form words. The stars seemed to blink with the intensity of what she was doing.

He wanted to grab fistfuls of her hair, pound into that hot mouth. He settled for grabbing the cushion under him. No matter what state she put him in, he couldn't forget that she was now human. The thought didn't help when his stomach clenched into a tight ball as she milked him again.

Feathery hair tickled his naked abdomen. Fingers slid up under the bunched-up sweater around his chest. Sharp nails grazed the base of his throat then scraped down his chest. It wasn't even hard enough to leave a mark, but the sharp burn spread throughout him until it felt as if he had been dropped into one of his own fiery pits.

Everything in him tried to tighten into a ball and explode at the same time. The strain pulled at every cell in his body. Her mouth glided over him until it felt as though his balls were being sucked through his dick.

The world started blinking white around him, leaving him gasping. The sound of waves crashed in his ears as if he were completely surrounded and they were coming to get him. He felt everything and nothing but the ecstasy.

Heaven was starting to crack above him, and just as he thought it was about to shatter, her hot mouth slid off him, leaving the cold air to hit him.

Reality started to crash around him. Just when he thought she had teased him to the point of pain, her leg was thrown over his waist, her hand on his dick as she lowered herself onto him. He tried to watch her, but couldn't as she washed over him, surrounding him until he couldn't breathe.

A satisfied, eager moan reached him when she had nowhere else to go, her moist thighs pressing against his own. Her nails scraped against his stomach when she started gliding tightly up and down. Not able to help it, his hands found her hips, helping her.

His teeth clenched together and he had to keep telling himself to breathe since his body seemed to forget how as she rode him.

Her head had fallen so far back, Hel could feel her curls brush against her shoulders. The sounds coming out of her echoed against the night sky. The slapping of flesh mingled with the sounds of the waves beating at the shore. It seemed everything was working together, heightening every sensation.

Sliding down on Lucifer, she marveled at the fullness, the way the muscles inside her body spasmed around him. It sent shivers up her spine and down her limbs, making even her fingers tighten against his damp abdomen.

The light moans and gasps from him turned rougher, harder until they were almost purring growls. His grip tightened on her hips, squeezing her until she was worried she might break. It slowed her pace but just for a moment. That was, until he shoved her down on him, holding her there as his body shook. Out of nowhere she was filled with a heat that made everything around her explode in a fiery blast. It was so sudden. She was so unprepared for it that she screamed as the energy seemed to pour out her throat.

In a single flash, she was evaporated into the night, mixing with the stars until she came crashing down to earth in a sweaty heap on top of Lucifer, who was just as much of a mess as she was.

Time passed slowly as they were both lost in their own thoughts. It wasn't until the chill had reached her bones and Hel shivered that Lucifer shifted under her so he was farther up on the mat and positioned her so she was still on top of him. Out of nowhere, he pulled a thick fur over her, tickling her sensitive skin as he did.

"Mmm," she moaned then rubbed her face against the bare part of his chest. "I should probably get dressed."

His fingers trailed down her arm and he kissed the top of her curly head. "Not yet."

The moon streaked across the dark water, filling the air with enough light to see the white of the waves as they crept across the sand. With a deep sigh, she settled closer to him, loving the feel of him. "I forgot how beautiful outside was."

"When was the last time you were out?"

She thought about it. "I don't remember."

"You didn't form something in your realm?"

"It would have been too painful."

"Well, when all this is over, we'll spend at least a week anywhere you want and if you can't, then I'll bring it to you."

"You would do that, wouldn't you?" she laughed.

"For a week alone with you? Anything. When are you going to call him?" His arm tightened around her shoulders, keeping her a little warmer.

She had purposefully shoved the reason they were there out of her mind. She wanted to believe they were there just for themselves, at least for a little while, but his question brought her back. "When the moon is high is the best time. Tell me more about this 'you are the job but more'. I don't understand. I would think that after a certain amount of time you'd become the job."

She could feel him smiling above her. "Picture a job or position, like a CEO of a company. Then you have the person in the job. They are separate, but at the same time the same. The person is now CEO John Doe."

"We're not talking about a job in a Fortune 500 company. We're talking about a god."

"It's a good comparison though."

In a way it made sense, but at the same time it didn't. Maybe the explanation was that easy, but even if it was, she couldn't seem to wrap her mind around it. "Maybe I'm becoming more human. I don't know. Can't you show me?"

He stiffened around her. "I could. But if your mind is as human as you just implied, it wouldn't be pretty. My powers are based on something the human mind simply can't comprehend. You might, but I'm not willing to risk it."

"How can your powers be based in evil, but you're not?"

"It's not something I can explain. The misconception is that our powers are based on numbers. It is, but it isn't. The numbers give it to us, but don't limit it. If you have an understanding of yourself then nothing can stop you. Not even another god."

"Are you saying that's the curse?"

"It wouldn't even exist if you fully understood yourself and your position," he confirmed slowly.

It blew her away. Trying to comprehend the simplicity and complexity of what he had just said. "All the suffering? The banishment?"

"It wouldn't happen if you could reach the understanding." He nodded above her.

"Why haven't the other gods figured this out?"

"They almost never want to see more than what's in front of them. If they did, it would ruin their illusion they are the biggest things out there. They don't want to know that there is something higher than them. What they don't understand is it would make them more. It would make them more powerful. It's almost like enlightenment for the divine. To the ones who can't reach that far—they would become weaker, less important. They're so afraid of not being on top of the food chain they'd rather not try."

The silence between them was comfortable, but left more. The sounds of the waves echoed mindlessly through her.

If what he said were true, then so much suffering and pain could have been avoided. She could have avoided it. She could have saved her brothers, herself, and so many more.

In the darkness, she saw shadows move down the beach. At first, she thought nothing of it, until Lucifer slowly sat up. He kept her close but shifted on the mat. Something was making him uncomfortable.

"What is it?"

"I don't know," he whispered so low she almost didn't hear him.

It wasn't until the shadows were closer she saw that they were really a group of men. There were dozens of them in warm beach clothes. Even though they had chosen a spot so no one should come across them, it wasn't out of the realm of possibility. Still she had a feeling that Lucifer didn't like the way the situation had turned.

"What's wrong? It's a group of kids, probably sneaking off to a party."

"Something's wrong. I can't read them. Someone's shielding them." Slowly he stood, leaving her to follow, clenching the fur around her. "I don't like it."

It wasn't until the men got into the light of the fire that she saw the danger. Each of them was armed with various weapons. So much for the party theory. As fast as she could, she snatched her clothing up off the beach, but before she had a chance to put them on, Lucifer snapped his fingers, fully dressing both her and him. The fur disappeared as did the mat, leaving them alone on the sand with the small, sputtering fire.

They didn't look like one would think, clean-cut, nice clothes, even pleasant-looking. That was until she got to their eyes. There was such hatred and lust there that it scared her. She knew people like them existed, but had only met their souls after their deaths. She had never dealt with one in the presence of their intended crimes.

"Time to go home to your master," one ordered as he stopped on the other side of the fire, his knife pointed at her.

Lucifer took a sidestep so he fully blocked her from them. His hands behind him, he grabbed hers. She didn't know if it was so he could keep track of her or not, but the touch was reassuring. "How'd you find us?"

"Give her to us."

Lucifer chuckled. "You're supposed to offer a deal. You're new at this, aren't you, boy?"

The gunfire erupted quickly. Lucifer's body twitched and jerked. Screaming, she tried covering her mouth with her hand to silence it, but it didn't work. Her mind froze on the image of the blood, flesh and tiny pieces of sweater exploding out from him.

"Run!" his voice suddenly shouted above the deafening noise.

His hands burst into flames. She watched as he threw the fiery balls he had conjured. Two of Loki's men instantly went up in flames. The two of them started screaming. One ran toward the water, the other just ran in a circle, painfully screaming until one of his own men shot him down.

Lucifer looked behind him. His eyes were black, his teeth pointed. Just the sight of him sent sheer terror through her. "I told you to run!" he roared.

At that moment, she didn't know who she feared more so she ran from all of them.

The loose sand slowed her down. She didn't look behind her to the shouts and gunshots. All she knew was she had to get away.

Searing pain ripped through her lower back and out her abdomen. She cried out as the force sent her tumbling into the sand. Her impact was softened, but a new scorching pain enflamed her as the grit dug into the freshly torn flesh and oozing hole.

She didn't look. She didn't touch it as much as she wanted to. What she did know was she needed to get help. On her hands and knees was as high as she could manage. Using strength she didn't know she had, she crawled toward the water. Every inch felt like a mile and an eternity. She tried to ignore the pain, but it was too much. On top of that, her body wouldn't move the way it was supposed to.

Finally, after thousands of seconds, she couldn't go any farther. Everything in her had turned to lead. The pain melted away only to be replaced by a frozen shiver that she couldn't control, forcing her to sink to the sand. Reaching, she tried to touch the water but it was too far away. Then a wave answered her silent prayer and came in. The tips of her fingers slipped into the warm ocean. For a few precious moments, everything stopped.

“Jörmungandr.” Her voice was as broken as her body, but she could feel the ripples go out into the endless night before her.

Help would be on the way, she just had to hold on. Her brother would come, she told herself.

That thought didn’t help her though when she finally managed to roll over. She couldn’t tell if the blackness in her vision was a result from the hole through her stomach or the sky. The waves brushed against the top of her head, but it wasn’t as cold as it used to be. It was almost welcoming her.

“Quick, get her through the portal before she dies,” a strange voice yelled. It sounded far away and distant, but something inside her said it was closer than she thought.

Where was Lucifer? a voice echoed in her mind. She was scared, but she was more frightened at being scared than the unknown of what was happening to her. Where was Lucifer? the voice whispered again. She wanted him there but didn’t know why.

Then everything slipped away like sand pulled by the waves.

* * * * *

The man who had picked Hel up dropped her back into the sand when Lucifer punched a hole through his chest with his bare hand. The man looked behind him to Lucifer, his eyes blinking, not really seeing.

“You’re mine now,” he told the human before he faded completely away. The plans for his soul were already set in motion.

The body slid down Lucifer’s arm as the last glimmer of life fled from his eyes.

All of Loki’s men had been dispatched in one way or another. Their carnage littered the once-pristine beach that had been their paradise for too short a time.

With the last one gone, he could finally get Hel. Throwing the man’s body to the side to join the one he had dealt with seconds before, he hurried to see how bad she was.

A small fireball exploded into his hand, ready to be thrown as soon as he saw the new person. He reeled his arm back to strike the intruder down, but stopped when he realized the wet man crouching next to her wasn’t hurting her or even trying to. “Who are you?”

“Her brother Jörmungandr. Hold her down—this is going to hurt,” he said, softly but firmly.

The fire in his palm burned hotter at the mention of her being in pain. “Don’t touch her!”

The man’s ocean green eyes rolled up to him. His thin face was hard and set. Nothing gave away what he was thinking, which worried Lucifer. “You have a choice here. Drop the power and let me help her or she dies. I’d hurry because she’s fading fast.”

"You won't let her die if you can stop it. That is, if you are really her brother," Lucifer bit out with his teeth clenched.

"Gods die. It is a fact of our life. As a human, she dies just as dead as we do if not more. For all I know, she is supposed to die. So we can fight, she will die, or you disarm and help me keep her around to do whatever she's supposed to."

Lucifer looked between her and her "so-called" brother, trying to figure what to do. The man was new, showed up at a bad time, and at that moment, he didn't trust anyone. Every ragged breath she took ate at him. It could be her last.

"Do it!" he yelled, letting the ball snuff out, dropping to his knees alongside her. Silently he was glad she was out when he saw the blood gushing from her torn shirt. His mind wanted to scream "too much blood", black blood, which meant they had even less time than he thought.

Her face was so peaceful. Except for a few blood smears across her cheek, he would have thought she was asleep. Still looking at her, he carefully brushed the sand from her skin. He kept telling himself she would be all right. He wouldn't let his mind go to what would happen if she wasn't, to what would happen if she died.

Lucifer looked up as her brother formed a circle with his thin lips. A clear, glistening bubble formed and grew larger by the second. The moment it was about the size of his fist, the green-haired man closed his mouth, letting the sphere float down to his waiting hand. With gentle fingers, he moved it to the other hand then settled over Hel.

Her shirt slid up, revealing the ugly, deep hole just above the crescent moon that was still leaking her life out. Lucifer watched with amazement as the man in front of him carefully placed the bubble on the wound. Not believing what he was seeing, Lucifer leaned closer. It looked like either her skin was absorbing the bubble or it was sinking into the bullet hole. Either way, the hole was plugged and the bleeding stopped. Little by little, the bubble became smaller until it disappeared with the wound.

It started with a small jerk of her arm. Then her back jumped and started bending, hard. Even with his hand pressing her down, she still came off the sand. He was afraid to apply any more pressure but at the same time, it looked as if her back was trying to break from the tension.

The second she collapsed to the ground, he searched her for any signs. She was still breathing and fresh white skin was now where not seconds before it had been torn. There wasn't even a scar to mark the location.

The man didn't give any indication it had worked. He just sat there with a blank stare. That was, until her breathing picked up until they were quick, deep inhalations.

"Getting in trouble again, I see?" he finally chuckled, wiping the sand from his hands.

The corner of her lips pulled upward, but her eyes stayed closed. "Just like old times, eh, Jörmungandr?"

"The last time was world-changing enough for me, thank you. Let's get you somewhere you can rest."

"No," she groaned while trying to sit up. "We have to keep moving. We need to go to Ostrov Ushakova."

Not able to take her weak attempts, Lucifer helped her sit then moved behind her so she could lean on him.

"That's a long way from here, Hel. What would make you even go there?"

Finally, her eyes opened and she looked to the half-naked man next to her. "Loki has Hel."

He seemed to understand and stood. "Come."

Standing, Lucifer helped Hel to her feet. She grabbed the front of his sweater almost as soon as she was up. Not taking a chance, he swept her up into his arms and then followed her brother into the water.

It was hard to stay upright as they went deeper. He simply tightened his grip and pushed though, determined not to drop her.

"You know you're kind of cute when you're fighting something as immovable as the ocean," she chuckled.

"Considering you're as weak as a newborn kitten, I wouldn't be pushing it, little goddess. I could do whatever I wanted to you in this state." He shot a grin at her, leaving her mind to fill in the details. "In fact, I kind of like you this way. Remind me to do this to you later."

"What, shoot me?" She yelled out with a laugh when his foot sank into the soft sand, almost tripping him.

"There's more than one way to give you the effects of blood loss. I could always just bite you." He lifted a brow at her, giving her a sinfully dangerous glare that sent her chuckling against him.

When they got to where the water was mid-chest, Jörmungandr stopped and turned to them. He waited until the water settled around them, raised his arms and brought his hands together.

It was slow at first, almost unnoticeable, but then the pull at his legs became almost too much as the water started swirling around them.

"Hold her tight. This is going to get rough at first," was all the man said before disappearing down the vortex.

Suddenly, Lucifer was pulled under as the giant vacuum at his feet sucked him away. Growling and holding her as tight as he could, he tried to look around, but all he could see was green and white water swirling unnaturally fast around them.

It was a good few minutes before the vortex righted him again. What amazed him was that though all the water was churning around him, he wasn't even getting wet. It was windy and that was about it.

Hel had lain back with her head on his shoulder. With her eyes closed, he wondered if she was sleeping.

Dropping down on rough terrain, Lucifer flinched, waiting for ocean to crash over them when the vortex closed. When it didn't come, he braved a peek. Looking around, he saw they were in a giant bubble on the ocean floor. The turbulent waters above slowly calmed. It felt as if they were in a giant reverse aquarium.

Jörmungandr just looked at him and chuckled. "Afraid of a little water?"

"Little water, no. Billions of gallons of water crashing over me isn't what I consider a good time," he bit back, annoyed. "What are we doing?"

"Waiting," was all he said as he turned back to the wall of water.

In the dark, murky depths, he saw a small, black blob swimming toward them. After a few moments, he saw the dot reveal itself as an enormous turtle, the biggest he had ever seen.

"This is Koluspa, he'll take us to the frozen isle," her brother mentioned with a wave of his hand as the sea creature came to a stop just outside the air bubble.

The name of the animal honestly wasn't important to Lucifer. What was, was how they were going to get to the animal. While Jörmungandr might be able to breathe in water, they couldn't.

The half-naked man with his pale green hair clapped his hands together again. Lucifer could almost see the power waves come out from his closed fists to slam into the barrier. Another vortex formed, this one through the water leading right to the sea beast. Somewhat amazed, he followed her brother in, only to be lifted and carried through and up onto the turtle's back.

With the portal closed and them all sitting on the hard shell inside another clear bubble so that Lucifer and Hel could breathe, the tortoise started moving. Snapping his fingers together, Lucifer produced blankets and pillows and gently placed a sleeping Hel between them.

He could feel Jörmungandr's eyes on him, watching Lucifer as he moved his sister around on the covers. Once her head was comfortable on the pillow and she was snug between the blankets, he brushed the hair out of her face. Taking the first deep breath since Loki's men had shown up, he felt strangely better. Her being okay helped with that a lot, he had no doubt. He couldn't even imagine a world without her so he didn't try. Just the glimpse of the thought was too painful.

"So, you're Lucifer," her brother finally spoke.

Not sure if he really wanted to answer, Lucifer settled next to Hel. It wasn't hard to tell that her brother didn't like him. He was used to the look and tone to know it well. "And you're Jörmungandr. Not exactly what I pictured."

"And what did you imagine from a god of the oceans?" the man practically growled back as he crossed his legs.

"Someone with a little bit more modesty. At least that's what I imagined after meeting Hel and Fenrisulfr."

"You're a funny one to mention modesty. What are you doing with my baby sister?"

"Helping her." At the mention of Hel, Lucifer turned back to her.

Hel rolled over and wrapped an arm around his waist, her face pressed against his hip. He couldn't stop as his fingers started running through her blonde curls.

Turning away, he looked out to the waters. They dove deeper into the blackness until the only glimmer of light was a white dot from the moon above them that was fading fast. Jörmungandr slammed his hands together again, this time making the shell they were on glow a pale green. It wasn't a lot of light, but enough they could see each other.

"Cute trick," Lucifer snickered.

"Really? And what can you do? Besides get my sister shot."

He could feel his temperature rise and his blood start pumping. He wasn't used to people talking to him like that and he didn't care for it. It was Hel's brother though, and she'd be angry with him if they got into a fight. That was one thing he feared more than anything. "I'm not going to get in a pissing contest with you, Jörmungandr. You're her brother."

"And you, I'm guessing, are her lover."

"Shut up, Jörmungandr," Hel muttered, not moving. "What he is doesn't matter, and you don't need to be starting a fight to defend your sister's honor. We have no honor left, you know that."

"Glad to see you're back among the living," he muttered slowly.

Her eyes cracked open and she looked up to her brother but didn't move from where she was against Lucifer. "I never left, thanks to you and Lucifer."

"Want to tell me what's going on? Or am I going to a frozen wasteland for nothing?"

Hel moaned and rubbed her face against Lucifer's leg before starting to sit up. With as much care as he could, he tried to help, only to have her laugh at him.

Pressing his lips together, he pushed her up long enough to prop pillows behind her so she could sit and see her brother. "Loki's made a move on Hel. He's taken it over in what at least I believe is an attempt to begin the Ragnarök."

Lucifer watched as dread slowly filled her brother's face. It seemed to take a few moments for him either to fully comprehend or figure out what to say. "Is our father that much of a bastard?"

"Yes. We knew that," Hel agreed weakly with a nod.

Jörmungandr stood and started to angrily pace. "I mean, on one hand, I agree with him. I'm so tired of this..." He stopped to think of the word that eluded him.

"Hell?" Lucifer finally offered for him.

"Yes! Thank you! But even I wouldn't go so far as to kill the world for it." Turning, he walked the other way. "I've got to...I've got to leave for a bit and cool down. You all right now, Hel?"

"I'm fine, Jörmungandr. Just don't take too long. Don't know when I'll get to see you again."

Her brother turned and ran across the shell to dive through the bubble. His dark form quickly disappeared in the dark waters as he swam away.

"How many brothers do you have?"

She chuckled and leaned against him. "Four. Fenrisulfr, Jörmungandr and two half brothers Narfi and Váli. Unlike us, Narfi and Váli grew up and were actually living among the gods. After Loki killed Baldr a thousand years after I was cast into Hel, Odin turned Váli into a wolf and made him kill Narfi so that Narfi's entrails could be used to tie Loki into his prison. No one's seen Váli since not that I blame him. Narfi's daughter is Nótt, the goddess of night. I've met her twice in my life. She's always been allusive. Most wouldn't leave the realms of the gods to save their lives. Her, you can't drag into the realms."

A frown overtook him as he thought about all the problems caused by one god. "Some family you have there."

"With the Ragnarök, it is said family will turn on family. Brother against brother. If you look at our family tree, the family has always been divided. Loki and Odin have almost always fought, his children fight Loki's and so on. When it happens, we will be killing our own kin, our cousins and brothers. I don't want more of my family to die."

"I wish I could change that for you, but I can't."

"Can you do one thing for me? Fix me? This being too weak to sit up is greatly wearing on my nerves," she muttered, trying to straighten the slouching position in which she found herself.

Lucifer looked her over as she struggled. Even with the blood splatter and ruined clothes, she was still the most delicious thing he had ever seen. Smiling evilly to himself, he slid down the length of her and then rolled so her legs were trapped under his. With his hands on her hips, he slid her shirt up so his mark was revealed.

"I like you this way, remember?" he muttered against the warm skin along the waistband to her slacks.

Hel laughed and tried to move out of his grasp. Even if she had been at full capacity, it would have been impossible. Now her futile attempts were amusing, even to him.

"I wonder if my little weak kitten can purr." He left a delicate kiss just above her clothes.

She started laughing protests and wiggled under him. It only proved to excite him more.

"Lucifer!" she yelled out when he licked a bit higher. "Stop!" She chuckled again. Her actions were telling him she really didn't want him to though. "My brother may be coming back at any moment."

"I think he knows what we do." He kissed her higher so his lips brushed against the edge of the white symbol. Her insincere pleas were replaced with a deep moan as her head fell back into the cocoon of pillows. He hadn't meant to go quite that far yet, but since he was already there, he'd do whatever it took to keep giving her the pleasure he saw written on her face.

Carefully, he traced the edge of the moon with his lips, letting his hair tease her skin as he went. Her back arched against him. He could hear her nails scrape against the cloth under her and the smell she gave off when she was aroused made him want to melt and go crazy with madness at the same time.

In one bold stroke, he ran his tongue up over the mark, moving his body with hers as it started to curl under him. Her one hand grasped his shoulder, nails digging into his skin through what remained of the thick sweater. The nails of her other hand scratched at the material again, threatening to tear it. Her gargled cry was thoroughly intoxicating.

He decided to give her a moment to breathe and look at his handiwork. There was a moment of triumph when he saw the ecstasy glowing from her face and heard her raspy breathing. Then it was interrupted by a loud splash that sent frigid water over him. The harsh growl escaped his lips before he could check it.

Rolling over, he clenched his teeth as he saw the tall, skinny, soaking-wet man standing only a few feet from them. Jörmungandr had his arms crossed and looked even madder than when he left. This time it was all focused on him. Hatred did not bother Lucifer. He was used to being the most-hated being around. He had hoped though for Hel he could at least get along with the family she loved. With Jörmungandr, he had a feeling it wasn't going to be possible.

With his head next to Hel, he could feel her fingers softly start to caress the top of his head. "Something tells me your brother doesn't like me much."

"It's not you. Can you fix me now please?"

He wanted to slap himself. In his fun, he had forgotten that she was still suffering the effects from blood loss.

Lucifer sat up, leaned over her, and with his mouth pressed against hers, he waited until she opened to him. Once she did, he exhaled into her until she couldn't take any more.

Leaving a chaste kiss on her lips, he backed away, leaving her blinking as she mentally checked herself.

Slowly she sat up next to him, laying her head softly on his shoulder, but looked to her brother. "It's not you, Lucifer. It's me. I'm the one Jörmungandr hates."

He tried to think of the words but they wouldn't come.

"I don't hate you, Hel. I never did," Jörmungandr said softly, his face saddening just a bit.

When she stood, Lucifer wanted to protest. He didn't want her around someone, even a brother, if he hated her, and he didn't care about the reason. Still, he kept himself back. Whatever she was doing, it seemed as if she needed to do it. That didn't mean he didn't stay on edge. If there was even one hint Jörmungandr intended to hurt her, Lucifer would rip his throat out.

Her hand graceful slid over Jörmungandr's crossed arm. "Yes you do. And I understand why. It was my fault. All of it."

"You were only a child, Hel."

"I was three hundred years old. I had the warnings. You, Fenrir, our mother, the giants all warned me not to. I was the one who left Jötunheimr anyway to see how the other side lived. I was the one who watched the party and the one who was there when Odin was told of us. I remember thinking when he was told that I just couldn't believe he didn't know. If he knew, he would welcome us into the world with open arms. Then I heard the declaration we had to be found, and the pit it left still haunts me. In the end, I was the one who was followed back into the land of the giants and who led his mob straight back to you." Hel swallowed, her hand started to rub along Jörmungandr's long, muscular arm. "It was all my fault you and Fenrir were found and cast out."

It took a few minutes for Jörmungandr to speak again. "I don't hate you, Hel. I blamed you, yes, but I never hated you."

Chapter Nine

Hel laughed as Jörmungandr started recounting some of the stories of her getting into trouble as a child. If it were possible, this would have been the time she feared he'd bring out the baby photos. Luckily for her, there were none and the gods still hadn't gotten into technology.

It felt good to finally talk to him. Odin had made it impossible for her to ever tell him how sorry she was for what happened. He would never fully forgive her, which she understood. While it pained her, it was a pain she could live with. What she wanted more than anything was for him just to talk to her.

"So, you decided on the Christian Loki. I know they say you are supposed to look for a father figure in your mate but even you have to admit, Hel, this is a stretch," Jörmungandr chuckled.

She knew it was meant as a joke but it seemed to hit too close to home. The same accusation was made not too long ago, by her no less. Lucifer was silent. It took a second to figure out if he was even still breathing. "He's not Loki, Jörmungandr."

He seemed to think about it for a few seconds and then leaned forward, resting his arms on his knees. "Has he done anything to prove that, little sister?"

Lucifer's breathing stopped, making her look at him. It was as if he had turned to living stone. Nothing moved. She couldn't even begin to attempt to guess at what he was thinking, as even his eyes seemed dead.

"He doesn't have to." Hel turned back to her brother. "He's not Loki. He's not the reason for what happened to us."

She could tell Jörmungandr wanted to argue more, but she quickly ended it. It was an area of conversation she wasn't prepared for. She didn't think Lucifer was either.

The black water around them lightened to a dark green then slowly paled. Far above them, she could make out the white, rippling dot that marked the sun. Their time was ending. As much as she wanted to stay and spend more time with her brother, she couldn't. It probably wouldn't be for the best anyway. Where Fenrir welcomed her with open arms, her relationship with Jörmungandr was strained. She could live with the middle ground they had found.

The water crashing around them, pouring over the sides was amazing and breathtaking. It made her heartbeat race through her ears as the dulled waves broke away for them.

Hel turned until she saw the tiny gray and white island. They were still a far distance from it, slowly closing in. The sun beat down at them, but she had a feeling

that once the bubble they were in went away it wouldn't matter. The place just screamed cold.

"At least we don't have to worry about mortals seeing us," Jörmungandr laughed as he stood.

Climbing to her feet, she watched the shoreline get closer and closer until the turtle glided right onto the bank.

Time was short so she quickly turned around to her brother. "I'm sorry it's taken me this long to tell you how sorry I am. For everything."

"Was not your choice, little sister. Just make sure you defeat him. For us all."

The bubble around them suddenly popped, freeing them to the atmosphere. Immediately she was cold but quickly moved onto land. However cold she was, Jörmungandr had to be colder. There was no hug or long goodbye, for which she was grateful. At the same time, she felt a void because of it. They had never been as close as Fenrir and she, but he was still her brother and she did miss him.

"Why didn't you say anything when he accused you of being like Loki?" she asked, pulling the weak leather jacket closer around her.

Lucifer stepped in front of her after the last ripple of water settled over where her brother and his pet had disappeared. "Because I need to hear you say it."

He left her to think about what he had said and started walking. The air was bitter. At the temperatures they were in, they were going to freeze long before they ever found the cave. As it was, he thought his whiskers were starting to crystallize.

Hel's muffled cry chilled him more than the weather ever could. Spinning around, he saw the human man with his hand over her mouth, trying to drag her back. Behind him was a score of others trying to hurry their comrade along. The pearl-colored oval portal behind them didn't escape his attention either. Loki was trying again.

The man jerked her again, revealing a glint of steel in the sunlight. Lucifer hadn't known it was possible to make him as angry as he was that moment. It felt as if flames were shooting out from the top of his head. His blood was rushing through his veins. Power tickled along his skin.

"Release her!" he growled, his hands bursting into flames.

Dark eyes slid from Hel to him as the knife moved farther around her throat. The men behind the human suddenly had every personal weapon known to man pointed at Lucifer. None of them mattered though. Hel did. Her tear-filled eyes, shaking, begging for help did. The tear trails down her cheek did. They caused her pain.

"Don't move, Devil man. We're not afraid of you," the mortal spat back venomously.

Lucifer rolled his eyes up to the sky and smiled. He knew what he looked like. If he slipped any further he'd be the closest to his real form than he had in a thousand years.

In one hand, the fire went out as he raised it to the heavens. "You should be, mortal. You should be very afraid."

He was lost in the power he was calling. He could see, but didn't. His focus was far away, looking down as if through a telescope. His hand came down and with it a tiny piece of the cosmos. Meteorites the size of peas rained down on them, tearing the large group to pieces, sending them screaming as they were lit on fire from the heat or suddenly missing a limb from the impact. The lucky ones went down as one ripped though them. The fireball was thrown. It curved around Hel and her attacker only to slam into his back, bursting him into flames.

It took several minutes for him to get his focus back. By the time he did, Lucifer found himself on his knees on the rocky beach. The screaming around him had stopped, but now the stench of burnt flesh filled the air. It had ended before it even began. Then he found Hel before the sea of bodies.

On her back, her legs bent in unnatural positions. He couldn't even see her hair. What scared him was that she wasn't moving. Did he hit her by accident?

"No, no, no, no," he muttered over and over as he crawled to her.

His body was sluggish and worn out from using the power he had, but finally he made it to her. Patting her legs the higher he went, he noticed they didn't move. Then he saw her face. Her eyes were open but stared blankly at the sky. Blood rushed from the gash in her throat. When the man on fire wrenched away from her, the knife must have cut her. Feeling the painful scream wanting out, he fought it as he picked up her head and noticed the hot liquid pouring into his hands from the back of her scalp. What had he done? They were so close to her goal he couldn't believe he had failed her.

With a shaking thumb, he ran it over her face and sat hard on the ground, her head resting in his lap. He could feel his eyes burn with unshed tears as he looked at her. One got free to fall onto her forehead. The moment it did, her body shifted in his hands as it started to dissolve. Confused, he watched her form crumble away in his grasp, as if her form were nothing more than ash or dust that blew away with the harsh Arctic wind.

"What just happened?" He didn't know, but he knew where to get the answers.

* * * * *

"Loki!" he shouted, slamming both massive doors to Hel's office open.

Loki turned from the bookshelf he was looking at and smiled at him. "Lucifer, my friend. Bad night?"

All of Lucifer's attention was focused on the god in front of him. He couldn't have seen anything else if he tried. "Where is she, Loki?"

The god had airs even with no one around. He held himself as if he were better than Lucifer. With Loki being a god, he guessed that was true in a way, but he didn't care. The Norse god had crossed a line.

He started to chuckle as he looked Lucifer over. "You look like hell. Oops, bad choice of words. You look like shit. Yes, that's better. I've been brushing up on the current lingo and such."

"Where is she, Loki?" he growled again.

Loki slid a thin book from the shelf and then went around the slate gray desk to sit down. "Did you lose her, Lucifer? And here I thought you were going to take good care of my daughter."

Lucifer flew across the small room, grabbed the god by the front of his shirt, pulling him partway over the desk. "I swear. If anything has happened to her, I will be your personal devil."

"Wow. Such a threat, and from you. I'm flattered. However, there is nothing to fear. She's safe and being taken care of." Loki slowly peeled Lucifer's fingers off him and then coolly sat back down. "Not exactly the way I wanted her out of the picture, but it was still effective."

"Taking her realm so you can end the world as we know it, her becoming human, her dying, wasn't part of the deal, Loki!"

Loki shrugged. "So I amended the deal. It worked. She came running to you for help. You got to play the guardian angel. I'm guessing that she still gave you a run for your money. Didn't get her in bed, did you? And here I thought you were capable of anything." Loki looked up at him through his eyebrows and then leaned back, laughing, "You did! You're better than I thought. She must be damn good for the Lord of Hell to want her back. Does she know? Does she know that you were behind it all?"

"No, and if you tell her, there is no depth I will go to tear you to pieces. Now where is she?"

"Where all souls who are a part of this religion go when they die in battle. Are you going to try to get her back?" He chuckled again. "Leave her be, Lucifer. You can have any girl you want. This one should be no different from the last. Besides, once there, you can't leave. Once Odin finds out, there will be no going back. He's almost as afraid of her as he is of me."

"Tell me how you can do this to your own daughter?" Lucifer growled at him.

"Oh please. Where are your children? Are they living it up being Lucifer's children? Or are they in the pits of your hell? Did you bounce them on your knee as they grew? No? They're plotting against you as my own will do to me. I'm simply beating them to it."

Lucifer clenched his teeth. "I've never tried killing mine."

"Neither have I," Loki shot back sharply. "I wanted her safe, out of the way. That was your job and when you failed, I had to improvise. Her death was unintended."

Loki was stalling. He had to know that there was no way Lucifer was changing his mind. He leaned heavily against the desk and his fierce black eyes bored into Loki. "I will get her out, Loki, and when I do, I will help her put you back where you belong."

"Mmm...afraid that you opened a Pandora's Box with me, aren't you? Your presence will not go unnoticed in Valhalla. Odin will notice. And if he does, what do you think he'll do to both of you?"

"You'd better hope I can get her out, Loki, because if I can't, the hell I will rain down on you will make Odin look like a choir boy."

Loki stood, matching Lucifer's stance. "Then I recommend that you hurry. The longer she's there, the more impossible it will be for her to leave."

* * * * *

Standing just inside the massive doors, Lucifer saw the daunting task ahead of him. He really needed to learn more about the other pantheons, he thought, when he looked across the loud, smoky room that was Valhalla.

It was like the entire realm was just a big, open, loud room. He couldn't even see the walls on either side and the one in front of him was only barely visible. Warriors from every era were everywhere. Most were sitting on benches at large tables, eating and drinking. Others were fighting in contests. Most were men, but there were a few women mixed in at the tables. It seemed most of them were serving the tables though.

He was tempted to start asking the waiting girls if they had noticed a new woman today, but then thought better of it. If any of what Loki said was true, the less attention he called to himself, the better.

With his eyes closed, he muttered a few choice words and then opened them again, looking around the room. With his hand held palm up in front of him, he saw his simple symbol floating and turning. It was a small iridescent version of what he had given Hel and the spell would call mark to mark.

"Show me," he whispered to it.

It zoomed off to the left, leaving Lucifer to quickly follow. He was slow so as not to draw any attention. It was over a mile before he found the table where it had stopped. As soon as he caught up to it, it darted down between the two rows of people at the table.

No one even looked his way. They were all busy with the people closest to them. The place smelled of sweat, bloody bodies and alcohol. There were men arm wrestling, telling stories, and even some—a few men and women—were in various stages of foreplay. It seemed anything went here.

The small mark that only he could see finally stopped at the middle table between six people. Lucifer searched for his small blonde in the mix as he got closer but couldn't see one. At first, he thought the spell had gone wrong, and then he heard her laugh.

His symbol flickered brightly and then vanished when he caught up to it. The figure he had stopped behind turned to look at someone, making Lucifer's breath catch in his throat. She had changed.

"Hel?"

He watched as she turned her head, her blue eyes grazing hungrily over him. "Lucifer!"

She spun on the bench and leaned against the table. He should have known that her looks would change here, but he hadn't thought of it. Even if he had, he would have never thought she'd go with the one she chose. To him, this was Hel. More voluptuous, more curvy. The raven-black hair that floated well past her waist was tightly braided. Bangs went down to her chest. Parted in the middle, they were a bright pale blue to match her eyes.

Her clothes were gone, replaced with soft black leather boots and woven leather slacks that hugged her hips. Her belly was exposed, leaving his symbol and the small now-silver ring to show. The leather halter-top started just under her breasts. It seemed more like a sports bra than a shirt. Bracers, arm cuffs, she was dressed for battle.

She smiled carefully at him and then yelled behind her, "Hey, guys! Meet Lucifer."

Cheers, hellos and welcomes went up around them.

"Come on, Hel. We have to go!" he said harshly while grabbing her upper arm, pulling her from her seat. The fact she was so laid back in what should be a hostile environment worried him.

"Go? Go where?" she laughed.

He bent toward her. "Hel, we need to go."

"Lucifer, come sit down. Get something to drink. Hector was just telling us when his wife and a camp girl ganged up on him." She turned to the one he assumed was Hector.

The way she acted screamed wrong to him.

She suddenly spun around to him, pressed herself against him. "We could always go. I know where a field is that will be deserted until dawn."

Her hands slid around his hips to his ass. He had to hold back a groan when her fingers dug in, pushing him against her. His dick instantly went hard. She was being aggressive and he liked it, but as much as he'd love nothing more than to fuck her on the table right there, there was the more pressing matter of leaving.

"Hel, Loki? Your domain? The End of Days? Any of this ringing a bell?"

"What about it?" Her fingers started lightly massaging circles in his ass.

The way she looked up at him told him everything. She was in a thrall, a dreamlike state. Is this why Loki told him to hurry? He felt it was cruel to do it to the souls. He didn't even do it. An alternative mental reality didn't help anyone with anything. It took away what made them a person.

"Hel, please. We have to go."

"Oh relax, Lucifer. Let him have it. I'm tired of fighting for something I never wanted anyway. Here I can be me." She waved around the room before placing her hand back over his ass.

"This isn't you, Hel. You're a goddess. You're above this. You are a part of the counter realm for here."

She rolled her eyes at him, telling him that she wasn't really listening. The thought of slapping her to snap her out of it entered his mind, but he could never strike her. Instead, he had another idea.

Grabbing a fistful of hair, he yanked her head back. There was more than one way to get a person to weaken their defenses enough to get what he wanted. His mouth crashed down on hers. In the background, cheering suddenly erupted.

He wasn't gentle and he wasn't slow. Lucifer grabbed her ass, picked her up and then dropped her back on the table. Since she had turned into "warrior woman" here, he could most certainly play the part that would get her attention.

His fingers stayed on her hips, if he touched any other part of her he'd lose it and take her right there. When she came to, he had a feeling she wouldn't appreciate it. He had to fight back a moan though. Her hands were not being still like his and it was driving him crazy. They were everywhere, almost making him forget what he was doing. Nails dragged across his ass, up his back, under the sweater before coming back down even harder, making him growl into her mouth.

Her tongue teased at his as he licked every bit of whatever he could find. He yanked her hips toward him hard until he knew she could feel his hard dick pressed against her. In a hot breath, she tore her mouth from his and for a moment he was grateful, until her lips latched on to his ear, teeth grazing the skin while she sucked on it. He never knew ears could be an erogenous zone. Those hot nails dug into his shoulder blades so he couldn't move even if he wanted to, but he knew he had to. Unable to take much more, even his resistance starting to fade, Lucifer pulled the top half of himself away. With one hand, he grabbed her chin and kissed her again. He never thought in his life that he would think that her lips on his were the safest place for them, but apparently it was one of those moments.

Using his torso, he lowered hers back onto the table, so her body only went where he allowed. Finally feeling her slide into complete submission, he made himself stop. Normally he would kill to get her into that mind frame, to get her to a place where he could literally do anything to her. It was a place where everyone, human and god, were most vulnerable. Instead, he sent a small command into her to remember.

Everything in him froze and waited to see if it would work. He didn't know if it would, but he had to try. The next resort was to kidnap her from this place and get her into his domain. Something told him he wouldn't get out the front door with her kicking and screaming over his shoulder.

Her eyes started rapidly blinking and she slowly looked up at him. The moment he caught her eyes with his, he knew she was back.

"Lucifer?" she whispered up at him.

"Yes. Are you ready to go now because I have a raging hard-on and can't take any more."

Hel lightly chuckled and pushed him away so she could sit up. "Please get me the fuck out of here."

He offered her a hand, which she took, and then hopped off the table. With her hand clenched in his, he started leading her back the way he had come. Noticing a cloak lying between two large men, he grabbed it as they walked by.

"Put this on." He handed it back to Hel, who let go of him and snatched the cloth.

She didn't stop, just tied it around her throat and slid the hood over her head, hiding her face as they walked.

The doors he had come through were less than a hundred feet away when he noticed a shift in the mood of the room. Hel grabbed his hand again and he picked up the pace.

All attention was on the large man walking between the rows of tables that led out to their freedom. Thickly braided white hair trailed down his back, white beard, leather duds. He was dressed more simply than most warriors, but there was no doubt in anyone's mind he was the one who controlled the realm.

Lucifer hoped they could make it out before he noticed them.

There was no such luck. The voice boomed, echoing loudly so every being in the hall who could hear him startled to a stop. "Where are you two going?"

"To Idavoll, my lord!" Hel, keeping her face hidden, shouted back so Odin could hear her. "He's challenged me to hand and hand."

Odin smiled widely and motioned to the room. "Why not here then? We'd all enjoy a scrap like that."

The room erupted in cheers and agreements.

"Not that type of fight, my lord!" she shouted back.

It was like an explosion when the hall and Odin erupted in laughter that actually shook the walls.

Slowly Odin took a few steps toward them. His laughter died away and was replaced with a frown.

"Why are you hiding your face?"

His crystal ageless eyes slid to Lucifer. "I know you!" The massive doors slammed shut behind them, locking them in. "What are you doing here, Lucifer?"

So many answers fled through his mind, but then he realized that the god's attention was on him and not Hel. That she had more than likely been forgotten when he was noticed, which was good. He much preferred Odin's wrath on him. If Hel were smart, she would run while she could.

Personally, he wished that he and Odin could just get into it. Just thinking about what he had done to Hel made his blood boil, but that moment wasn't the time. It wouldn't matter who won, it would be bad for her and his first priority was getting her out of there. Later, he promised himself, later he and the god would go a few rounds.

"I came for the party," Lucifer chuckled, walking up to one of the tables to his side. "I was told I had to try the food. That it was to die for."

He grabbed a grape from one of the platters and plopped it in his mouth before turning back to the god with a smile.

"You're not welcome here, Lucifer. You know that!"

"I'm not welcome in most places, Odin. That's never stopped me before," he chuckled.

The god's back was to Hel so he tried to tell her to leave with a tiny jerk of his head, but she stayed frozen to her spot, hidden behind her hood.

"Leave!"

His mind searched for a way to do just that with Hel, but he couldn't think of any. Unless Odin willingly let them, they couldn't leave and he couldn't just bop them out. He had tried coming in that way, but whatever control the god had over the hall, it was good. They had to come and go through the doors.

"I'll leave when I'm ready, Odin. This isn't a great way to treat a visitor, you know. Where's the party for the guest? The wine and celebration? You're not a very gracious host."

The power in the room started to crackle. He could feel it being directed at him.

"Don't do it, Odin. Even you are not powerful enough to strike me down," he told the god flatly. Lucifer had no doubt in a power match the god could do some damage, but he couldn't kill him, even in Odin's own domain. That didn't stop him from wanting to stop any battle before it began.

The souls around him quickly scattered as far away as possible. Odin's fist shot out and Lucifer could feel all the power plow toward him. Holding his hand out, he countered the force as it tried to slam into him. Sweat started to bead on his forehead from the concentration it was taking to deflect the god's power.

It stopped so suddenly he almost fell forward.

Lucifer couldn't breathe. It felt as if someone were choking him. Unseen long fingers wrapped around his throat. He tried clawing at whatever was there, but found nothing. White stars exploded behind his eyes, blotting out most of the room. Fire started to consume his lungs.

"You are not welcome here!" Odin yelled.

Thunder started rumbling around them. Lucifer's skin started to freeze and harden. Panic rose up in him, but he couldn't counter it, or the god. He had focused too much on his first defense that he never saw the undercut of power that had come at him.

"Release him, Odin!" Hel's voice screamed a distance away.

Odin relaxed his magical grip on Lucifer long enough for him to see Hel. The pain in his chest roared with new life, but at least he was getting air. All he could think was "Oh no". There was no way to keep her existence in the hall hidden now.

Hel had climbed up on a table, the cape flowing around her, her face still hidden. It was the large golden rooster in her grip that he didn't understand.

"Who are you?" Odin yelled back, his attention now on her.

She swept back the hood and Odin flinched. The room went extremely silent. "I said release him. Or this one will never be calling you to battle again and he'll definitely be unable to call you to Ragnarök."

Lucifer dropped to the floor, coughing. Air flooded into his lungs, but they were protesting. Hel looked fierce and pissed. She looked like a warrior queen, a goddess, an angel.

"I released him, Hel. Now it's your turn."

"Not until we're out the door, Odin. I know you. You can be just as much of a snake as Loki."

"What are you even doing here?" The god slammed his fist against his leather-clad hips.

"I got an extended invitation by you when you cast me into Hel then by Loki when he banished me from there, making me a human. The knife that sliced my throat was the seal. And now that I'm here, I'm declining your invitation, Uncle."

A hard scream was ripped out of Lucifer as he was suddenly picked up, his arms and legs threatened to rip away. Every fiber of muscle and every joint was pulled to its limit.

Hel started to come off the table and then stopped. "Don't do it, Odin!"

"He came here without permission! Every god knows the rules of entering another's domain without notice. You, I can excuse in your apparent current state. Him, I cannot."

"Then you're going to have to kill me first and I promise I'll get the rooster Gullinkambi before you do me in. This will be a shame because with me dead, Ragnarök is around the corner and you'll have no way of knowing when."

"What are you talking about?"

"Loki is in Hel, has taken control of it. He's trying to start the Twilight!"

"Let him!" Odin shouted for the crowd, egging them to a standing cheer. "Let him!"

"Odin! If he succeeds, then your time is over! So is all of theirs. No more battling, no more drinking and celebrating its pending arrival. Everything will end."

He took his time thinking over what she said. "What is it you want?"

"More time. Let us go. If we stop Loki, you exist a bit longer. If I fail, then Ragnarök is truly here and you will have your great war. You win either way, but so will he. He will have called it on his terms."

The grip on Lucifer changed and he was slowly let down, his limbs protesting every tiny movement. There was a new surge of protesting pain, but Lucifer just gritted his teeth until he dropped to his knees, free from the magical grasp.

“Go. Don’t ever let me catch you in here again.” Odin glared at him.

The god had nothing to fear on that level. Lucifer wouldn’t be back, the next time they squared off it was going to be in a very neutral place. One where neither would have the advantage.

Hel jumped down from the table and ran to him. He tried to stand but his legs didn’t want to cooperate.

Her arm hooked around his back and helped him. Step by painful step, they made it to the doors Odin had flung open for them.

As soon as they passed over the threshold, she flung the rooster behind her and used both hands to support Lucifer.

“We’re out of the hall. Can you get us out of here?” she whispered to him.

All he thought was, *Fucking watch me.*

Chapter Ten

He looked at himself in the mirror. Nothing had changed other than his wounded pride. Being tossed around like a rag doll, humiliated and treated as an ordinary human wasn't something he was accustomed to.

Instead of taking them back to the human realm, he had brought them to his hell. It may not have been the wisest idea but it was a risk he was willing to take, to change clothes and to heal. He needed a bit of home to feel normal and, back in dress pants and shirt, he did feel more himself.

Hel stepped up behind him. He watched in the mirror as her dark blue nails slid around his waist and up his chest. Her face pressed against his back. It felt so wonderful to have her back, to have her freely touch him because she wanted to.

"That was close."

"You have no idea," he breathed out, looking back to his face.

"I want to thank you. You saved me. Again."

"You should have left the moment I had his attention," Lucifer said softly, his hands pressing hers against him.

"Even if I could have, I wasn't going to leave you." Her face rubbed against his back. "What you did—facing off with Odin. No one's ever done that for me before. Thank you for trying."

"I don't want your thanks, Hel. What I want I can't have."

She shifted behind him, her face still out of view. "What do you want?"

That was the question, wasn't it, he thought. What did he want? He knew. He also knew it was useless. He wanted her to want him as he was. Everything he was. He risked himself in Odin's domain, knowing that there was a possibility he wouldn't leave wasn't a sacrifice as long as Hel was safe and back to herself. He did it for purely selfish reasons.

Grabbing her hands, he removed them from his chest and then stepped out of her embrace. She gave him a small smile when he turned toward her, but just a glimpse into her eyes was painful. They were so trusting, no hint of the fear she had felt only a day before. Hel had always been the only thing he had ever truly wanted for himself. Now he had her, but he knew it was all because of a lie and he found he couldn't stomach it.

In the back of his mind, he reminded himself he truly was what everyone thought. Everything else was a dark phantasm. He would do anything to get what he wanted, including her, but he just never thought he would fall in love with her in the process. The woman who had threatened Odin was what he wanted and he wanted her to love

him back for all that he was. The good and the evil. What he had done, what he was, and what he wanted. Now that he had it, he didn't know what to do.

"Where to?" he asked before the urge to tell her everything overtook him. He would help her get back to where she belonged, and then he would let her go. It was the least he could do for the deception.

"Can you take us directly to Helvegr?"

He slipped the heavy coat over his shirt. "Why not directly to the gates? To Helgrindr?"

"Because you won't find it. The only way to find the Helgrindr is to go through the human way. Trust me if I could get there any faster I'd say let's do it."

Lucifer stepped back and held his arms out for her. She didn't hesitate. She stepped right into his embrace, her face pressed against his shirt. He gave himself a moment to feel her in his arms before sending them back to the frozen wasteland.

* * * * *

This was what an icy hell looked like she decided when her skin almost instantly froze. The first time she had barely gotten to look at the island, now there was no threat, no one grabbing her, so she got to take a good, hard look at her harsh surroundings.

The thick leather clothing was no match for the Arctic air or the bone-chilling cold water that sprayed up at them from the ocean. Trapped between the deadly water and the unforgiving rocky wall, she started to wonder if Lucifer had gotten the place wrong. Then she found what they were looking for fifty feet away, a black hole in the rock's face. A tiny snow-and-ice-covered ledge that was no more than a toe's width was the only way over to it. Taking a painful breath, Hel steadied herself and started to inch onto the shelf.

Without warning, Lucifer grabbed her and snapped his fingers. In a blink of an eye, they were standing just outside the small, sinister-looking cave. Looking back to the small ledge they had been perched on, she was glad he had taken them the way he did. From this angle, she could see that the way would have been suicide.

With a hand on her arm, he pulled her inside the mouth of the cavern. Even without the blade-edged wind, it was still like trying to breathe through an icicle. At least it now seemed to melt a bit. The faint sunlight lit up the first few feet of the dark gray walls but everything beyond was cast in total darkness. What she found interesting was the feeling it gave. That even with the scribbles, carvings and drawings on the walls, it was still untouched by time. "Please tell me this is it," Lucifer said through chattering teeth.

Hel stepped up to the wall to see the drawings better. "It is."

"How do you know? There must be hundreds of caves on this frozen rock."

Turning to face him, she thumbed behind her to where she had been just looking. "That one's one of mine."

Someone at some point had deeply carved one of her oldest symbols in the doorway for those who entered to see. She doubted anyone had even seen it in at least a hundred years.

"We should have brought horses," she commented softly as they looked down the black pit that led to home.

"Horses are for mortals."

His hand was held out, palm toward the ground. A large square in front of him started to shake and shiver as it pulled itself from the ground. Dust, dirt and frozen pebbles rolled off it as if invisible hands softly shook the hard rock, making it roll and tremble.

Once the block of rock started to hover, she chuckled. "A flying carpet?"

"Of sorts," he gave her a tiny smile, "doesn't seem right though, does it?"

"Seems like a floating hunk of rock to me." She almost giggled.

Stepping up to the rock, his finger tapped its edge, making large pillows appear over a third of it. Thick, soft gray furs lined the hard rock as if waiting for them to slide between them. A small fire was blazing in a pit on the far end, giving off more light and warmth than any fire that size should.

"Your chariot awaits, my lady." Lucifer held out his hand and helped her up into the cocoon of soft pelts.

"You never do anything simple, do you?" she asked with a smile while settling down between the blankets.

"Simple is not what I am," he reminded her as he climbed next to her.

That she knew all too well.

What should have taken a day took an hour. They moved so fast that everything blurred by them. His "magic carpet" seemed to know where to go and turned every corner with ease.

With his warm arm wrapped around her shoulders, they sat in comfortable silence. The stolen cape was piled at their feet, forgotten. The only light in the tunnel was from the flickering fire whose wood never seemed to turn to ash. She couldn't even feel the wind on her face. It was as if he had put them in a bubble from the elements.

In a few hours, she would be home, and there was no telling what would happen or what Loki had in store for her. She could return to being a goddess again, dead, or even a human. In only one of those did she know what would happen. Would she ever be as happy in any of those as she found she was at that moment?

How did Lucifer do it? she wondered as his thumb ran softly over her bare arm. In three nights, he had gotten her where he wanted. Now the thought of leaving him or sending him away bothered her. For all her fighting and reluctance, he was the best thing that had ever happened to her.

As long as he was willing to stay with her at least through the transition, if it was even possible, she could face anything. Even dying or staying mortal. Would he even

want her as a human? As a soul, it would be impossible, but then she wouldn't even remember who she was, so did it matter? "Lucifer?"

He lightly moaned against her hair.

"What's going to happen to me?"

"What do you mean?" he asked, sitting a little straighter. She could feel his eyes on her, but to get out what she needed to she couldn't look back.

"If I fail? If I fail, I stay human or I die. I honestly don't know which idea scares me more."

"Hel, you have nothing to be afraid of in either case." His arm tightened around her.

"Would you even still want me? I wouldn't be a deity anymore," she finally said while trying not to cry. Up until now, being alone hadn't been a problem. It was a way of life for her. It was different now. The thought left a pit in her throat that made talking difficult.

His large hand suddenly encased hers, his thumb brushing against the back of her hand. "I've always wanted you, Hel, and your form won't change that. You'll always have a place with me in my hell. Human or soul. Even if I have to, I'll go to Hel or Valhalla to get you. If it's in my power to give, all you have to do is ask."

She gave him a little smile as she looked up into his serious, icy eyes. "Are you promising me forever?"

"Forever is a human's term and they have no concept of what that really means. You and I do though. One day you will tire of me, which is natural. Even then though, you will still have a place to call your own. As long as I breathe, I will make sure you are protected and will never want for anything."

Her mind wanted to melt. He had said all the right things, again. Well at least for the most part. "I don't want your protection, Lucifer."

"What do you want?"

"You." She shifted toward him with a hand resting on his chest. With all the thinking about what was going to happen, she was afraid. Afraid that what she had just found with him would melt away like a dream in the morning.

She felt him inhale deeply as she turned into his lap. His shirt of snow-white silk was soft and smooth under her fingertips. The thin material folded between them as she pressed her lips against his. His arm gingerly slid around her back, giving her something to lean against.

The tip of her tongue caressed his luscious lips, tasting them. Her skin started to tingle when his hand rubbed against the bare skin in the middle of her spine. Not paying attention, her fingers toyed with a small, cool button on his dress shirt.

Slowly, almost delicately, he began to nibble on her lip, making her sigh against him. Her eyes fluttered closed. The man was doing it again, she decided. He was turning her into a puddle of molten wax with just one kiss.

Through his shirt, he seemed warmer. She felt so cool against him that goose bumps formed on her skin. The butterflies started slowly, but with each passing moment, they were getting bigger, until they were elephants of anticipation in her throat.

Pulling away from his teasing mouth, she leaned into him, breathing in his scent. He still had that dark honey smell she had smelled earlier and still craved like a drug.

With one last heavenly inhalation, she left a breathy kiss on the hot skin just behind his ear. A small smile spread across her face when she felt a light shiver run through him. Testing it, she left another, lingering this time. Then he moaned and hot joy spread through her.

One by one, Hel left a gentle trail down the side of his throat to the crook of his neck just below his starched collar. She wanted to memorize and kiss every curve and line on his fabulous body. Her chilled skin warmed when she made it to his Adam's apple and then up to his fuzzy chin. Reaching his lips again, she kissed the corner of his mouth. Slightly parted, Lucifer exhaled heavily when she moved to the other side.

His eyes closed, his face relaxed as the kisses moved up his cheekbone to his temple. The fluttering of his lashes tickled when she pressed her lips to his eyelids. The man was beautiful in every way. She wanted to show him that, unlike any other had.

He was showing as much restraint as he could muster under the circumstances, but he wasn't made of stone and she was determined to make him slowly melt with pleasure.

With his hands against her bare skin, she could imagine them glued to her with the way they stiffened and flexed but didn't budge from the spot where they had planted themselves. Hel shifted again until she was straddling his lap. Her fingers barely touched his face as she tilted his head away from her so she could reach the other side.

The whiskers tickled her skin as she kissed along his jawline up to his ear. Slowly her fingers worked at the buttons of his shirt. When she reached his belt, with the same care, the soft material slid out of his pants. The silky fur that had stayed around her shoulders slipped off, pooling behind her.

When she moved back a few inches to look at him, his eyes opened. She could get lost in those blue eyes, the eyes of the devil, and the eyes of endless promise. They were softer than normal, warmer. It was beyond contentment. They were almost like a soul-satisfying happiness.

The tips of her fingers glided through the light dusting of hair on his chest. Feeling the smoothness of his skin on the palms of her hands, the white shirt slid over his shoulders and down his arms. His long legs shifted for a moment under her, and then again before settling.

With him hungrily watching, she undid the buckles to the bracers on her forearms. She made it into a slow tease, taking her careful time. Since her fingers were having a hard time, it worked in her favor. She had never worried about if she was pretty enough before. Being seductive hadn't been high on her list of priorities. Now she

wanted to be all of that and more. The look on his face gave her the hint of confidence she needed.

Her thumbs hooked into the cord tying up the sides of her leather shirt. After a few tugs, they loosened. The top slid over her head and was set behind her. A cool breeze chose that moment to grace her smoldering skin. Between the air and him, her nipples tightened to painful points.

Out of nowhere humility rushed through her. Her arms crossed over her breasts, hiding them from view. She had never felt so naked, so vulnerable. She couldn't even bring herself to look at him. There in front of him on her knees, half naked yet covered, head down because she couldn't get it up any higher if she wanted to, both laughing and crying at the picture she had to be.

"Hey," Lucifer offered softly. He pulled his legs out and knelt in front of her. His hand grasped both of hers while the back of his fingers brushed up her cheek. "My timid little goddess." His hand turned to cup her cheek, his thumb tilting her head up. "Why are you suddenly scared of me seeing you?"

Not trusting her voice, she shook her head.

"Think you won't measure up?"

This time she nodded.

"There is no competition, Hel. You won it before you ever let me have you. Every form is perfect."

"Why?" Her voice was so shaky that she was surprised he understood it.

He was silent for a few painful moments. "Because I love you. Always have."

Confused, her head shot up and she searched his face for any indication he was lying, but there was none. Even the mark was silent at his truth. For the first time he looked completely vulnerable, so pained.

Pulling her hands from his, she touched his face as her lips pressed against his. It wasn't as if she needed or even wanted to hear it, but now that it was out between them, it was nice to know.

His mouth tenderly dominated hers, nibbling and licking. The dark need built up low in her tummy and radiated out to her very fingertips. The palms of her hands slid down his chest, her fingers finding the buckle to his belt. Lucifer smiled against her lips, his pants were pushed down over his hips and to the fur at his knees. His arm snaked around her back, twisting her until he was laying her down against the soft cushions.

Hel watched through the flickering firelight as he held himself above her with one arm, his free hand tugging his pants off his legs. Naked, she watched the pale light dance along the finely defined muscles in his arms and chest. The dim illumination cast a magical glow around him.

Kneeling up, he pulled her soft leather boots off. She waited with bated breath as his fingers teased with feathery caresses around his star and moon mark, not quite touching them. His free hand loosened the front laces of her leather slacks.

He made the act of stripping her slacks off so sensual that everything from her skin to her insides started to throb and burn with a slow anticipation that was consuming her. At last, she was free from restraints she wasn't aware she had.

Those beautiful icy-blue eyes never left hers as he settled back over her. With his arms on either side, his body on top of hers, she felt as if she were in a haven of muscular safety. Her fingers slid up his arms to his shoulders.

Her eyes closed and her body seemed to sigh when he kissed the curve of her neck. His goatee lightly brushed against her hot skin, both rough and caressing.

"I love you," he whispered against her every time he kissed her skin.

The declaration seemed as much for him as her. She could imagine that if he had really kept it bottled up for so long, that it was like a flood bursting its dam. Each time he said it, he got a little relief each time. She would leave alone the fact that every time he said it, his words seemed to ring deeper and closer to home, threatening to overwhelm her.

His words and mouth reached her lips. He whispered it again and again between gentle kisses. Her fingers slid down the rolls of muscle on his back.

Finally, he left the last assertion firmly on her lips. Her hand slid around to the back of his neck, her fingers brushing through his short hair.

She was about to start begging when his hard dick slowly slipped into her aching, wet pussy. Her entire body bowed against him and he swallowed her silent moan as he deepened their kiss. Just when she thought he had gone as far as he could, he shifted and rolled his hips, digging him in farther.

He held himself deep inside her, only his eyes moved as they opened to look at her, holding hers in a trance. They took her to another world, one where she would never be without him.

Her cry startled her when he slowly glided almost all the way out.

Lucifer rose up, their bodies still touching. Before she could catch the breath she wasn't aware she was holding, he moved again. Her legs curled up around him and her hips shifted. Without meaning to, her nails bit into his back while she tried to hold on as he sent her into a painfully slow whirlwind.

Hel found herself moaning and crying out every time he pushed himself farther into her. His hot breath teased the front of her throat before lingering above her lips. She tried to kiss him, but he moved with her so he always stayed just above her.

He was pulling her into madness, she decided. Her body didn't know if it wanted to zig or zag. She consumed by icy flames that both made her want to pick up the pace and stay just where she was. Never in her life had she been as confused of something as she was with this.

As Lucifer started to pull out again, she tightened her muscles around him, squeezing him. He actually froze and shuddered, his eyes closed again, his head fell

back as he gave a breath-filled moan. Instead of continuing to slide out of her, he pushed himself back in firmly, making her gasp as a lightning bolt ripped through her.

The collision exploded inside her before she had even seen it coming. There was no warning. It was just there, sweeping her away, leaving her screaming. If she tried hard enough she could have seen anything in the world she wanted, but she didn't want to. She wanted to stay in the fleeting feeling of freedom that she had. Nothing mattered but the cyclone of Lucifer and her. Colors swirled before colliding into an untouchable rainbow that threatened to eat her alive. It left her convulsing even after dropping her into a sweat-sheen pile.

Chapter Eleven

His fingers trailed the length of her arm. She had completely wrapped herself around him and was smiling contently while watching the fire. The remains of the food and drink he had conjured for her were still set out by the fire after she had taken her fill and then collapsed against him again.

He had had the urge to use his powers while making love to her, but decided against it. In what could possibly be their last time, he wanted it to be just a man loving a woman. He had never had sex without magic. Now, looking down at her and exhausted beyond memory, he was glad. His women were always easily satisfied to the point of begging for more, but not one had given him the look she had. One that he would say was the beginning of love, even if she didn't admit it herself.

With a deep sigh, he decided nothing could beat that moment. Everything was perfect. She rested on him with a look of complete happiness.

In the distance, the tunnel started to glow orange. It started like nothing more than a flashlight's beam but then grew.

Hel saw it too. At first, it was a look of curiosity on her face then fear. Still watching the light they were gaining on, she snatched up her clothing and quickly put them on. Lucifer snapped his fingers and in the blink of an eye, he was dressed.

When they reached the intense light, he slowed the magic rock down. The illumination bounced off the walls and ceiling, making everything bright so for the first time they could see their way.

"Stop!" Hel yelled as she leaned over the fur-clad edge so she could see the ground.

Before he could stop her and before their cushioned ride had completely stopped, she jumped off.

"What is it?" Lucifer asked as he joined her.

As far as he could see, the solid stone pathway had cracked in numerous places. The hot orange red light and steam bellowed up from them. It was so hot that sweat started to form on his skin. Without the protection of the ride, he could smell the sulfur in the thick air. It was almost choking it was so bad. It took him a moment to realize what he was seeing. Molten magma was starting to push its way through the earth. It was already close enough to damage the tunnel. It meant they didn't have long before it reached them.

"Ragnarök has begun," she said softly while crouching down to see one of the geysers closer. Her voice was pained as she continued to look down into the fire hole. "The pathway to Hel will burn. He's started the Twilight."

One look told him just how lost she was in thought she really was. She started to reach out, her fingers grazing the beam of hot light. He snatched her hand away before she could burn herself.

"Let's go," he quickly said, still not letting her go. Suddenly he got a bad feeling about the place they were in. There was no telling how long it would be before the entire cave was filled with the lava.

The moment they returned to the stone carpet, the miserable heat and terrible smell was gone. He set a faster pace than before. In the beginning, it was a matter of getting them there quickly. Now he felt the urgency. It was sitting on his chest like a giant boulder. If Hel itself was breaking apart, they didn't have any time to waste.

"Be careful of the Gjöll Bridge," she warned after a while.

"Of the what?" he asked, looking at her.

Suddenly she grabbed his hand and pointed. He had just a moment to see the glittering gold-covered bridge, but before what he was seeing registered, they passed through it. Hel looked behind them at the structure before turning back around in her seat.

She didn't need to warn him about the gates. He could make them out thanks to the lit cracks below them. It was as if the tunnel just ended at the dark gray wall.

The rock slab slowed then finally stopped a few feet away from some of the biggest doors he had ever seen.

Hel carefully scanned them as she let him help her down.

"Have you ever seen them before?"

"Not since I had them built. You'd think I would have used more of something with them. They're so..."

"Plain?" he offered.

She nodded, stepping away toward the smooth flat stone. "Yes."

Plain was an understatement, he decided. It was literally nothing but smooth stone, nothing to mark what it was or where they were. There wasn't even a handle or knocker. Only a tiny seam that ran from floor to ceiling.

He watched as she stepped up and lightly knocked on the stone door. They seemed to give a loud hiss as they shifted.

Hel stepped back, joining him as the doors noisily opened. Grimacing, Lucifer was tempted to cover his ears as the stone ground against the stone floor. It sounded as if they hadn't been opened in a while.

Worried about her, he watched as she led the way, but she paid him no heed, only looking around at everything as if it were new. He had a feeling that she hadn't seen any of what they passed in a very long time. Even then, she had seen them as a goddess. As a human, everything looked different.

They passed hallway after hallway. Only glowing torches greeted them. There didn't seem to be a soul of any kind around the old mason-block halls. "Where is everyone?"

"Preparing," was all Hel said as she turned another corner.

She was silent to the point it was starting to bother him. What was she thinking? Was she ready for what was coming? When she stopped in front of a set of slate gray doors with the same symbol he had seen at the entrance to the tunnel, he knew it didn't matter. They were there.

Her pale hand started for the handle when fear choked him. Once those doors opened, everything would change. There was no way to stop it.

Grabbing her shoulders, he spun her around, pressing her back against the door. The look she gave him was of pure bewilderment, but he couldn't let her go yet. He needed just a moment more.

His lips pressed against her soft ones. It took a few seconds until she melted against him, her arms wrapping around his neck. Taking a deep breath, he kissed her again and then braced himself. With his hands on either side of her face, he looked at her, not able to keep his breathing normal. Her pale blue eyes smiled up at him, causing a pain he didn't like. One way or the other, he was going to do right by her, he promised himself.

"Before we go, I need you to know something."

"What?"

He swallowed hard. "That I love you. I always have. I always will. And I need you to know that I'm sorry."

"Sorry for what?" Her head lightly shook with her confusion.

Shaking his head, he pressed his lips together and took a few steps back, freeing her. He had said his peace. She would find out sooner than later.

Leaving her a little dazed with his words, he watched as she turned back to the doors. He would be there for her, but once she passed through the doors, he was a spectator.

With one hand, she yanked it open and stepped through the threshold. Now it begins, he thought as he quickly followed.

This was it, she thought the second the doors opened. Everything since her *father* had walked in. Her world ended or began here. She would live or die here. The world would fall apart or last a little longer, all depending on her. Lucifer seemed to be the only thing that would remain consistent. It wouldn't be enough though, she decided, if she failed. Everything would still end. If it ended, there would be no Lucifer either. She had never been so frightened or nervous in her life.

The battle in her mind and all her mental preparation fled when she saw Loki sitting at her desk. The god had the audacity to act as if everything were normal as she marched up to him. He simply set down the scroll he was reading and smiled up at her.

"Daughter! You made it." He sat back in the chair with a smug grin on his face. "I knew you would."

Every ounce of hatred she had ever felt for him boiled up inside her. There was no fear this time even though she knew she should be afraid. She had gotten to the point where she didn't care what happened to her as long as Ragnarök was stopped. The world wasn't ready for it.

With clenched teeth, she leaned over the desk. "Get out."

Loki stood. His hands went into his pockets as he walked around the desk toward her. She felt Lucifer move behind her. "Hel's mine now. You go."

She watched as Loki raised a hand and waved it, but nothing happened. Slowly a smile spread over her lips as she finally got it. Whatever he had done to cast her out could only work with her as a goddess. As a human, she had made it here and he couldn't send her away. "You can't send me away, Loki. Being human does have its advantages."

His face started to turn red as his anger rose. Every line started to show, making the handsome god look haggard and tired.

When he reached for her, she was too startled to move. Of everything she had expected of him, physical violence wasn't one of them. His fingers looped around the straps of her shirt and before she could protest, he lifted her, her feet leaving the floor. She had just a moment to fear him before he threw her across the room.

The pain of the impact with the floor barely registered when she felt large needles sink into the flesh of her leg and arm. Screaming, she looked to see his monstrous dogs' mouths around her, threatening to tear chunks out of her.

"Get rid of her!" Loki shouted in the background.

The dogs growled as they started to drag her toward the door. She cried out as her skin tore more with every tug. Her nails broke against the stone floor as she tried to grab whatever she could to stop them, but there was nothing to grasp. The noises and pain coming from the hounds were too much. Then they were gone, the monsters went up in flames, giving a painful whine as they turned into fiery ash.

With their teeth out of her, her limbs were free but felt like they too were burning. Out the corner of her eye, she saw Lucifer. He grabbed her roughly by the arm and yanked her to her feet. His grip was bruising, but it was the only thing that was keeping her upright. The leg the dogs had bitten into was useless. The pain had melted away to be replaced with numbness.

"She's mine, Loki! You agreed," Lucifer yelled across the room as he jerked her closer to him. His grip was painfully tight. His words were as sharp as a blade's edge. In that moment, she was honestly more scared of him than Loki.

"Maybe if you had kept your part of the deal, it wouldn't have come to this. But you didn't! You were supposed to change her mind about wanting this! You were supposed to keep her from this domain and me. You failed! So the deal has been amended."

Hel heard every word although she couldn't seem to keep her eyes open due to the pain that was eating her body alive. She could feel the blood gushing out the puncture wounds and the fire that was racing down her arm and through her chest from her shoulder. The words seemed to mean everything, but nothing.

She barely felt it when Lucifer pulled her around and it took her a second to realize that his lips were pressed against hers, hard. The world melted away until there was nothing left.

She saw the gray darkness that surrounded her. Images and sounds of every kind flew past her in every direction. When she blinked again, Lucifer suddenly stood in front of her with his hands clasped in front of him a distance away. Dressed in all black dress clothes, he looked like himself, stunning and full of dark, mischievous deeds.

"No, you're not dreaming this. This is real. You need to know and understand your powers. I wish there was some other way to show you, but there isn't time. Remember when this is over that I still love you and I'm sorry – for everything."

Confused, she watched as his manicured hand came up and his fingers snapped hard together. The sound echoed loudly like a gong that wouldn't stop.

In an instant, he was gone. The images and noise suddenly rushed her like a ribbon. She started to feel like a movie projector with the way they ripped through her. It left her in agony as one experience was replaced with another. Some were pleasant, most were the furthest thing from it. Out of nothing, she suddenly knew why. She was seeing, hearing and experiencing everything that was Lucifer.

In the distance, she felt movement and sounds that didn't belong.

"Fine! Take her then!" she heard Lucifer yell as everything around her went black.

She found herself soaring through the air. Finally understanding, she put her hand in front of her, stopping the free fall in its tracks. Anger rode through her, followed by a peaceful calmness she had never felt. Suddenly she knew just who she was and what needed to be done. She was the one who had let Loki cast her out with her self-doubts. That she was the goddess of Hel and no one, not even Odin, could take that from her.

Her hand waved again and her body slowly swung upright and lowered itself to the floor.

"What?" Loki bumbled, confused about what just happened. One step after another, he backed.

Her eyes started to burn as they turned to her father. "Get out."

"You can't make me!" he shouted. "Just who do you think you are?"

A small smile formed on her lips as she thought about it. Her hands rose up and out to the height of her shoulders. Slowly she brought them together. The closer her palms came to each other, the harder the wind blew out from them. She watched as the gust beat against Loki, pulling the skin on his face. He tried to battle her powers, but it was useless. This was her domain. It was a part of her, not him.

"I am Hel, Hel is me. We are one. And you? Go back to where you belong," she calmly said. Her hands slammed together. As they did, Loki was tossed backward. He was screeching curses and insults as he was hurled through the wall. In the back of her mind, she followed him until he was safely anchored back to his rock and the massive doors she had seen in her dreams were securely closed behind him.

She would be her father's watcher as Odin intended, but this time she would do it for her own reasons.

Dropping her hands, she turned to find Lucifer watching her. His face set, his eyes icy dull. She knew everything now. In fact, she knew more than he probably intended, including his voluntary exile into what he now was. "You betrayed me."

"Yes."

"You lied to me," she said. It wasn't an accusation. It was the truth.

"Yes."

"Is there anything you want to say?"

He held his hands up in a small sign of surrender. "There's nothing to say. You know it all."

Slowly she nodded her head. There was nothing left to say.

Epilogue

He waited patiently in a cushioned chair against the wall while the others mingled and danced in front of him.

It had been six human months since he had last seen her. Her hatred of him was expected and understandable, but it didn't stop the faint glimmer of hope, hope that she would break down and at least send him a message, but there had been nothing. Even the Olympus Winter Ball had come and gone and she was a no-show.

The best he could get was from rumors and whispers. Apparently, Hel had made many changes, not only in her own domain, but also in how she ran things and interacted with the other gods and the outside world. There was awe and respect now when people talked about her. The tale of her adventure had grown into a heroic one. He was only grateful that he wasn't mentioned in it. No matter what had happened, he still had a reputation to guard and the only one whom he wanted to know the truth was her.

Just when he started to give up all hope of seeing her, he had received the invitation to her masked revelry. Now he was scanning the crowd, hoping for a glimpse of her, his pretty little goddess.

Through the swirling couples, he spotted her. His heart leapt into his throat, choking the air from his lungs. She had kept the look he loved the most, the one he had last seen. The dress was a dark blue strapless corset top with flowing skirts, and as she turned, the material shimmered back and forth between blue and black. Her skin was as pale as the moon on a clear night. Blue eye shadow graced her eyelids, making her eyes seem more magical than before. Her mouth was an iridescent blue, just a hint of pink from her kissable lips showed through. The black part of her hair was combed back away from her face, leaving tight curls to spiral down her back. The blue bangs simply curled to frame her angelic face and rest gracefully across her breasts. In the center of her forehead was a perfect oval sapphire with two silver bands on either side, wrapping around her head to keep it in place. He didn't think he had ever seen her so beautiful.

Her laughing eyes finally found him across the room. He watched as she froze. The tip of her tongue licked her lips. Mentally he wanted to groan as his dick tried to stand up. She did that on purpose, he decided.

Staying where he was, he lightly touched his forehead, giving her a seemingly nonchalant greeting. As soon as he gave it though, she disappeared as another couple whirled past him. When he stood, he found her in the arms of a large blonde. It wasn't the man that bothered him, but the fact he had her laughing.

He found his entrance to talk to her as they came closer. Taking a deep breath, he stepped up to the whirling couple. Tapping the man's shoulder, he asked to cut in. The blonde seemed hesitant before Hel told him it was okay.

With her back in his arms, he felt as if he were back in heaven. There was no one there but them.

"That wasn't very nice of you," she chided when he spun her around.

"And you keeping me in a personal hell for the last six moons was?"

"You're the Lord of Hell."

He leaned in to whisper in her ear, "And you're the mistress."

A small victorious smile spread across his lips when she shivered in his arms.

"Not of your hell, of my own."

"Of your own and of mine. Don't you see we belong together?" he asked, straightening in time to turn her again.

"Like acid rain," she bit back.

The grin froze and twisted until he was frowning. How could she not feel it? How could she not be as miserable and in as much pain as he was? How much of his soul did she need to see before understanding? "We belong together, Hel."

"What do you want, Lucifer?"

"For you to give me one more night to show you how I feel."

"You betrayed me," she reminded him flatly.

"I'd give my life for a chance to make it up to you. It was the only way to make you notice me."

When she looked away and didn't answer, he knew he was getting close to the truth, too close for her liking.

"I've tried to let you go as I'm sure you tried to do too. Tell me you were able to, unlike me. Tell me you found someone who can take you from me. Tell me they were able to make you forget about the pain. The pain I feel without you is different and I can't bear to think of you being in the same. Tell me that it isn't. Then I will let you go."

"Lucifer, I can't live through another betrayal like the last. I'm not that strong."

"I swear you won't. You are my guiding light. You keep me from falling too far, from losing my soul in a sea of evil. I need you, Hel. I love you. I would rather become what the world fears than ever hurt you again. Please let me in. Give me a chance to make everything up to you."

Slowly she looked back at him. A small smile spread across her lips. Not giving her another moment to change her mind, his mouth crashed down on hers. He stopped moving, his hands slid down to her hips, pulling her firmly against him.

The rest of the room would now know, know that she danced with the devil in every way, but he didn't care. He didn't think she would either.

He practically purred when she leaned against him. The tip of her tongue licked against his lip.

Someone bumped into his arm, breaking their kiss. He looked up in time to see Apollo give his apologies before moving away with his partner. When he looked back to Hel, her closed eyes and the breath on her lips gave her a look of ecstasy. It took a moment to realize where his hand had fallen.

She couldn't, he told himself. There was no way. Yanking his hands off her, he grabbed her hand and pulled her through the crowd, leaving the other gods and goddesses gasping in their wake.

Hel started to laugh as she finally picked up her skirt and ran with him. He barely made it out of her hall and into the hallway. Finding the first door he could, he ripped it open and shoved her in. The moment the door closed behind him, he grabbed for her again, spinning her against the wall.

Even with her facing away from him she was laughing, his hands tore at the lacings of her corset until it was barely hanging on. Turning her again, he reached for the bottom of her top and pulled it down until the dress pooled at her feet. Lucifer took a step back to look at the shimmering moon and star around Hel's pierced bellybutton. Joy filled him until he thought he would burst. She had kept it.

Slowly he looked up her, taking his time, marveling that she was back with him. The absence of a bra didn't surprise him. In the dress that was now nothing but a heap of fabric on the floor it would have been impossible to wear one. The lack of panties though almost tickled at him as if she had forgotten them just for him.

When he got to her face, he noticed the smug grin on her lips and the way her pale eyes seemed to playfully twinkle at him. It took him back. She was challenging him. Hel, challenging Lucifer. He had no doubt that's what the look was. He knew the look all too well.

The grin slowly spread across his lips. He moved so fast she didn't even see it until his hand was pressed flat against his mark. Her eyes flared at him, hands went to the door behind her head as if trying to grab it for support. It didn't help.

He watched as her jaw set and her eyes slowly focused on him.

Lucifer wasn't playing fair and, for once, that was just fine with her. Two could play at his game.

Hel was just barely able to push past the touch that went right through her, touching all her intimate places at once. Finally, she was able to figure it out. When he touched the mark, it was like touching her soul. That was why it was so intimate. The touch was beyond physical. He was touching what was inside her, was touching her, not the body they all wore.

Steadying herself, she lashed out, grabbed the front of the vest and shirt under his long suit jacket with both hands and yanked him toward her. This time it was he who showed the shock.

"Welcome to *my* world, Lucifer." She chuckled hotly against his face.

Buttons flew as she pulled the fabric, tearing. Another tug and the destroyed vest and shirt were over his shoulders, taking the coat with them, restricting the movements of his arms. He gave her an evil smile then snapped his fingers, disappearing all the clothing on his upper body.

His body pressed against her, trapping her between him and the door. She wanted to cry out when his fingers latched on to her ass, jerking her up until she was off her feet, her legs wrapping around his waist. The hot flesh and the coolness of his belt and pants against her inner thigh were sharp. She was the only one naked; it felt as if they were naughty and sneaking around.

He kissed her hard, trying to dominate her mouth, but Hel did some dominating of her own. Her finger wrapped around his neck, the edge of her nail pressed into the soft spot under his jaw. Instead of pulling away, he laughed into her mouth.

In the distance, she heard the faint snap of his fingers and then his cock was jammed into her. It was fast, with no warning, almost violent, but her body readily took him in. The wetness that had gathered between her legs started leaking around him until it flowed down her thigh. The fullness was startling, making her breathless. Her head fell back with a hard knock against the door. The grip on his neck changed on its own so she was holding on instead of threatening.

Before she could even recover Lucifer's grasp on her changed. He fell back, taking her with him. There was a long moment of air rushing past them before they landed on a soft pillow of bedding. Hel found that she was now riding him, with him on his back.

Stunned, she stared down at him, remembering the game.

"No, Hel, welcome to *my* world," he laughed.

Grinning, she placed her hand on his chest then slowly scratched down. Lucifer's back arched under her, his fingers dug into her thighs. Hel ate up the look on his face when his eyes closed and his head dug into the mattress. The look was priceless, filled with ecstasy, tension, peace and stress, but most of all truth.

His hands slid hard up her skin until they found her hips. He started moving her up and down on him. It was slow but hard so she felt all of him in her, every bump and ridge. Her muscles felt as if they were on fire, but her spine was freezing as shivers started riding up it. She tried to take back the lead, but he was determined.

Lucifer suddenly rolled, but before she was flat on her back, she managed to wave her hand so she landed on a bed of pillows and fur. Above her, he looked down, not paying attention to where they had ended up.

The soft hairs tickled at the burning, cooling the fire and fanning it on. The air suddenly became so hot it was almost choking. A cool breeze fluttered over her, helping to balance it out, but it did nothing to help the sweat that broke out along her skin.

He picked up her leg, resting her calf on his shoulder, and leaned so close she could feel his breath on her face. The angle was incredible, deeper, stronger. His balls slapped against her ass. His fingers dug into her skin until she felt the bite of nails. His rough chin brushed against her collarbone when his teeth latched on to her shoulder. He

covered almost every inch of her, threatening to consume her as if they could melt into one being.

His strokes were deep and hard, so she had to hold on. She tried to keep quiet but finally gave up and just let the passionate noises fly out as they came. The combination of moans and screams seemed to push Lucifer on.

Her grip on his shoulder blades slipped, her nails burned across his back. His growl vibrated through her. His pace stuttered. The look he gave her singed her insides. He released her long enough to snap his fingers.

Hel found herself bent at the waist, facedown in a pillow, her wrists tied together in front of her, anchored to a post that she could just wrap her fingers around, her feet on a fur-covered floor. What startled her the most was that she was empty. Lucifer was behind her, but not in her. It left her cold and pulling against her restraints to get to him.

Long fingers slid up her spine, tangled in her hair, pulling her head back, leaving her gasping. His other hand grabbed her hips, steadying her as he speared into her, and she bucked both with and against him. She felt like a wild horse being ridden for the first time.

He tugged on her hair and hip until she managed to still herself. His tongue suddenly licked the base of her spine, working his way up to the base of her neck. Hot breath teased at her ear, making her jump again. The way he was holding her, every time she moved it worked against her, moving him inside her.

"Lascivious minx," he muttered against her skin.

The words cascaded through her, making her buck on him again. He held her still and moved himself.

Hel screamed, her body jumping on its own. Nothing in nature moved as fast as he did. It was as if he were a jackhammer. Even the sound of flesh slapping against flesh was blurred into one sound. Her ass cheeks started to burn, which only heightened everything she was feeling. It felt as if he were breaking her down one cell at a time so he could rebuild her.

Finally, she hit rock bottom, the scream that ripped out of her was one she had never heard before. It sounded like steam violently being released, and that was what she felt like, dropped into a raging volcano only to be shot out so she could dance with the stars before crashing back. His animal growl was barely heard over her own.

By the time Hel opened her eyes he had them back on the cushioned fur in her realm. Her arm had fallen across her forehead. Lucifer was draped on her just as sweaty and out of breath as she was, his thumb caressing the skin above her hips. "You still have it."

"You know that all you had to do was ask." She chuckled at him after a hard swallow even he could hear.

He placed a gentle kiss on the white star, leaving it to shimmer and flare under his lips as it recognized his touch. It felt like it was welcoming him home.

Her eyes fluttered closed and her head fell back against into the cocoon of softness.

"Why?" he muttered against her hot skin. Getting rid of his sign was the first thing he had assumed she would do. Never in his wildest dreams had he imagined that she would keep it.

"Because," she finally whispered when he put an inch between him and his mark, "I love you too. But you had to pay first."

He froze before his lips twisted evilly upward. Slowly he rose so they could look into each other's eyes. His hands were on either side of her head and she couldn't move. "Pay?"

Her brow rose at him, but her lips twitched until she gave him a matching grin. "What? You didn't think you were going to get away with what you did without punishment, did you? We are the masters of punishment."

Lucifer wanted to laugh. Instead, he kissed his little goddess until she moaned under him. The next eternity was going to be an interesting one, he was sure of it.

About the Author

Fantasies are always better than reality. Writing gives me a good excuse to play in mine.

I've had the good fortune to meet and marry my G.I. Joe, who still makes me laugh after eleven years, and have three children who make me want to write a book called *Everything You Never Thought You'd Say, Until You had Kids*.

As an avid reader my entire life, I have visited, lived, laughed, cried and even loved others' worlds and characters. If I can even get you to do one of these then I am grateful, because each story is a piece of me.

What can I say to make you want to come back for more? If I said I was shy, would you believe me? I was a Catholic schoolgirl throughout high school and am now a disabled army veteran who should never get bored. I do bad things to my characters when I do. Then again, I do bad things to my characters whenever I'm in the mood. As a multi-published author, I have been called a tease, dark and twisted, and everything in between. All I can say is that I enjoy every moment of it and I hope you do too. Let me know if I have succeeded even a little.

K.C. welcomes comments from readers. You can find her website and email address on her [author bio page](#) at www.ellorascave.com.

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