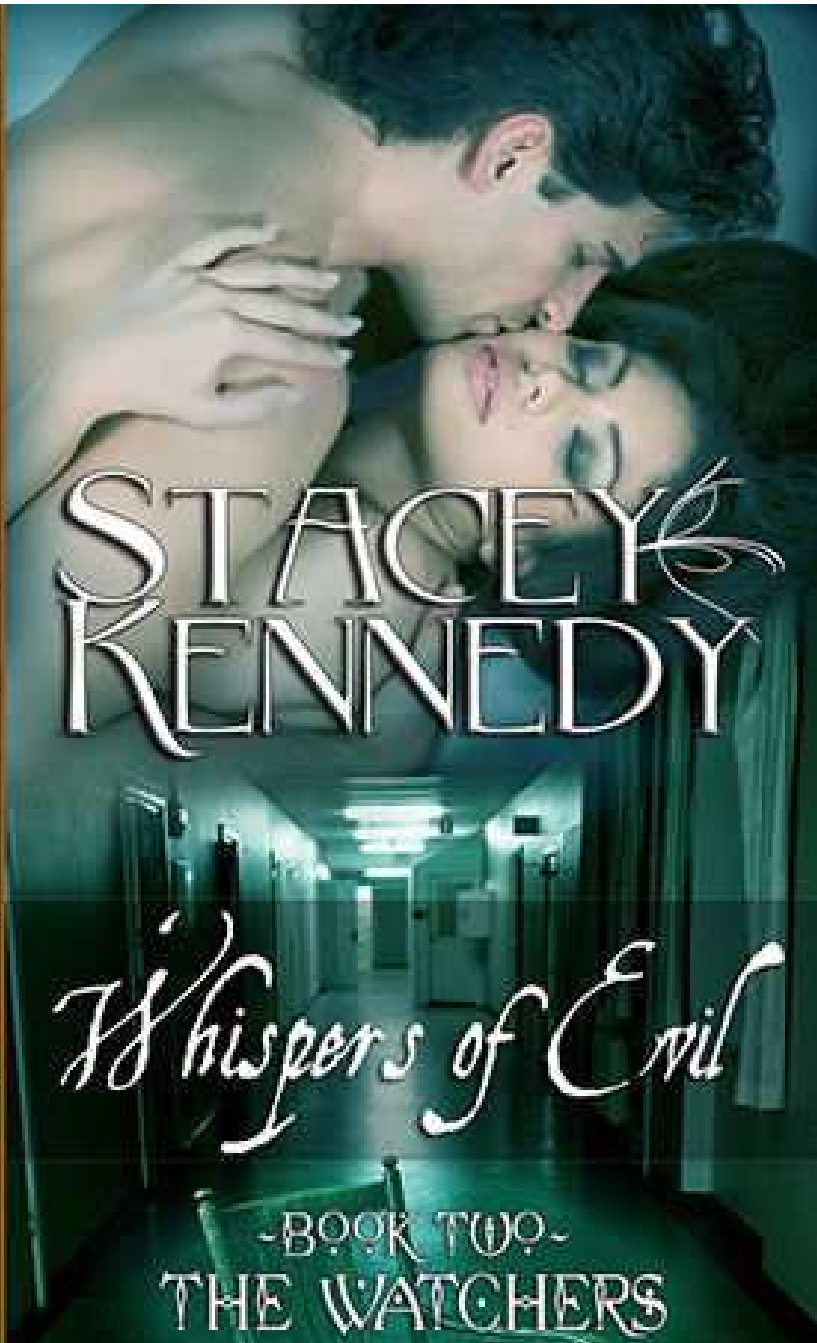


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STACEY
KENNEDY

Whispers of Evil

-BOOK TWO-
THE WATCHERS

Whispers of Evil by Stacey Kennedy

Whispers of Evil

By

Stacey Kennedy

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Whispers of Evil

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Dedication

This one goes out to author, Eve Langlais, who critiqued this story. With comments like, "Holy sentence, Batman. I'd break it up.", rewrites were actually fun!

Chapter One

The cold damp air set into Griffin's bones, or maybe it was the decrepit brown brick building that caused chills to sink into his soul. On the outside, the building needed a complete renovation due to the paint peeling off the posts at the entrance, the foggy glass on the door—withered from time—and the rusted steel bars on the windows. But it wasn't the building that held his intrigue; it was what lived inside.

His Watcher.

"Tell me again what you're planning on doing?" Paxtyn asked, tucked in behind a large bush.

Griffin steadied the nerves that shook him and glanced at her. The newest Watcher was indeed a powerful woman and had proven herself with regards to her abilities to converse with the dead. Her assistance led to the banishment of Balan, a Prince of Hell, that he suspected, as did they all, had been sent to Earth as a punishment. The fighting had been intense, but all four of his brothers, who now included the new Seeker, Tate, remained standing.

Paxtyn's personality matched her spitfire looks, though the curly strawberry blonde locks that cradled her face were almost too soft of a shade for her. Dynamic red would have suited her more. Nonetheless, the woman was simply beautiful with turquoise eyes and feminine features. Knox, his brother, counted himself a very lucky man to have her as his Watcher.

Griffin hoped for the same blessing.

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When Paxtyn suggested she come along, Griffin didn't deny her. Now, he rethought that choice. "As I have told you a hundred times now, I plan on going in there and getting my Watcher."

Paxtyn looked back to the building, then met Griffin's eyes again. Confusion filled her face. "And just how are you going to do that? Go knock on the door?"

Knox laughed next to her.

Griffin shot him a look to shut it. Of course, his brother, not blood related, but bonded from a long friendship, continued on as if hadn't seen the look. His grey eyes beamed with his usual confidence. Griffin scowled, earning a wink from his brother before looking back to the building. "I'm not quite sure what to do. It looks as though security will be tight."

"You fight demons and you're worrying about what security might lay behind the door of a mental hospital?" Paxtyn chortled.

Griffin ignored her sassy remark and studied the building. The only way in was through the front door. He suspected, if he pulled hard enough on the bars caging the windows, his enhanced strength would remove them. However, it would be loud. His hope was to get in, rescue his Watcher, and run.

Knox let out a long impatient sigh and ran a hand over his short mocha hair. "Griffin, just knock the damn door down and find her."

It wasn't the ideal situation. He didn't want to frighten her by just barging in, snatching her up and running away with her. But, what choice did he have? He stood, decided he was making the right choice. "Are you waiting here?" he asked Paxtyn.

"No," she replied.

"Yes," Knox retorted.

Griffin smiled. The two were at a constant tug-of-war about who should be in control of their relationship. It amused him. The Knox he knew wouldn't stand for a woman ordering him about, but this small woman seemed to stop him in his tracks. He wondered if such would be the case with him.

He'd had women—lots of women. He took them to bed, but cared for none. Not truly anyway. His interest resided in what sat between their

legs, nothing more than that. He wondered at times what love was like, felt like, and wondered now if he'd be a man capable of such an emotion. He doubted it. But he hoped to be proven wrong.

"Well, I'm going in there," Griffin remarked. "Are you going to join me or argue about it out here?"

Paxtyn snorted at Knox before she walked toward the hospital. "We're going with you."

Knox let out a loud frustrated groan. He gave Griffin a knowing look. "Are you sure you want to go in there and get yourself one of those?" He pointed to his Watcher as she strode with purpose toward the hospital.

Griffin laughed and nodded. "Yes, my friend, I do."

A small smile lifted the corner of Knox's lips. "Well, then—let's go get her." He gave Griffin a hard slap on his back.

Of all, Knox would understand Griffin's urgency here. He'd only found Paxtyn weeks ago. Plus, the friendship born between them made for a bond that wanted the other to find happiness—one that was only obtained from the bond with his Watcher. Griffin had seen the change in Knox, seen the peace, the happiness that now lived in his brother's eyes. Of course, Knox made a royal mess with Paxtyn at first, because she was left confused by his intentions. Griffin would not make the same mistake.

Quickly, the two men trotted up to Paxtyn's side as they neared the front doors. She looked back over her shoulder when she met the door. "So, what's the plan then?"

Griffin raised his foot and kicked the door in one hard fluid movement. "There is no plan." When the door broke free of its lock, sirens rang out loud around them as he rushed in.

An unmanned desk sat to his left. To his right, a sitting room lay empty at this time of night. Straight ahead was a cement hall with too many doors to count and a horrible stench of sterilizer.

"Do you feel her?" Knox asked, his tone hurried.

Griffin closed his eyes for moment, moving past the scent that made his stomach turn, and concentrated. Yes, he could feel her here, but she felt weak.

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“Griffin!” Paxtyn shouted. “Someone will notice us here, hurry up.”

His eyes snapped open. He kept the weak feeling close to his heart and ran straight ahead. The building, previously dark, now lit up around them. Chances were Paxtyn was right, and any minute security guards would be all around them. Not that he was worried any. A good jab to their face would render them unconscious. Still, it wasn’t his intent to hurt anyone if he could help it. The walls passed by him in a blur as the feeling, the pull he could never explain beyond a yearning, yanked him forward.

Knox and Paxtyn stayed right on his heels. “Where is she?” Knox called out above the sirens.

Good question. Her essence was there, subtle, but there. Not to his left, or his right, but right above him. “Upstairs,” he yelled in return. The end of the hall approached, but a keypad to the left indicated the door was locked. He picked up speed, clenched his jaw in preparation, and a foot away, he launched himself at the door, kicking out with both feet. On contact, the door blasted free from its lock, and with the force of his hit, the window glass shattered, raining down up on him as he landed on the floor.

The pain of the glass sliced into his arms, but did not hinder him. Nothing would stop him now. Behind him, Paxtyn and Knox’s feet crunched against the broken shards. He hurried up the stairs, and his breath drew out in quick pants of urgency.

At the top of the staircase, the pull commanded him to increase his speed. He drew closer. His heart pounded in his ears. Soon, he would hold her.

Right on cue, he heard the thumps of footsteps coming down the stairs above him. Quickly, he looked back to Paxtyn. “You need to hide—now.”

Knox didn’t wait. He picked her up around the waist and opened the door next to him. “Hey, put me down,” she squeaked as he threw her in.”

Griffin steadied himself. Waited. Counted down the footsteps that barrelled toward him. By the different sounds created by their weights,

three men were approaching.

Knox slammed the door closed. "Damn woman." Then, he came up to Griffin's side, cocking his head. "Three."

"Three," Griffin repeated. Suddenly three men appeared on the staircase above them with hands on their revolvers. Griffin's knives felt like heavy weights against their sheaths resting along his black shorts. But his kind saved humans, not injured them so he needed to subdue these men. They didn't injure them.

"Stop! Freeze!" one of the men called out.

Knox rolled his eyes and snorted.

Griffin chuckled. "We're not moving."

"Stop right there," another one called out.

Griffin could only shake his head and let out a deep breath. He thought they should at least provide some men worth fighting. The idea of fighting this ridiculous display of three heavysset men with stomachs that insinuated they were with child and sweat beading down their foreheads from the short run, was going to embarrass him.

But still, the weapons they held in their hands were a concern. Even as an immortal, he was susceptible to death. If a bullet entered his heart, he would die just as a human would.

Knox held up his hands in surrender. Griffin followed the move. Bringing the men close was ideal.

"Get your hands up," the third man demanded.

"They're up," Griffin retorted and gave a smug smile. He waited, annoyed that they were keeping him away from his Watcher, but he didn't make his move until the men had them surrounded.

He glanced sideways at Knox, who gave a smile that said what words couldn't. He was ready. Looking back to the guards, Griffin drew in a deep breath and levelled the one closest to him with a hard jab to head.

The man dropped like dead weight.

Quickly turning, he repeated the move to the other closest to him before the man had a chance to grab his weapon. After the bang against the man's jaw vibrated off his arm, he dropped unconscious, and just as

he went down, Knox sent the other to join him.

"I'd suspect that isn't all of them," Knox said, grabbing onto the door handle. "We must be quick here, Griffin." The door flew open, and Paxtyn stood in the opening, irate.

She gave him a hard punch to the shoulder. "If you ever man-handle me like that again, I will castrate you."

Knox frowned. "I needed to—"

Her glare deepened, her eyes narrowing. "You needed to what?"

Knox's lips tightened into a firm thin line, then he sighed deeply and grumbled. "I apologize."

"That's right you do." Her glare met Griffin's. "You waiting for something or do you plan on going to get her?"

Griffin snapped out of it. Seeing Paxtyn render Knox into an apologetic fool for protecting her left him a little stunned. *Will this be how I act once my Watcher joins me?* He just couldn't imagine it. "Right." He began to run again. "She's this way."

Now focused back on the job at hand, the pull returned inside of him—the feeling strong, but the signal sent from her weak. The need to get to her captured him, but something was off. Her essence felt so tired. His feet pounded against the floor, and the stench of antiseptic filled his nose. He opened his mouth to block the disgusting smell.

Halfway down the hall, the power hit him like a blast of electricity. He stopped dead in his tracks and looked to the right. *Here.*

Without hesitation, he rushed into the room, and his world stopped. He couldn't have imagined this. The scene was far more horrific than even his mind was capable of producing. Here lay his Watcher, the most beautiful sight he'd ever seen, her ebony hair pulled up in an elastic, but he suspected once let down, her hair would be long. Her thick lashes coated her closed eyes, and he wondered what color lay under her lids. Her lips—plush and pouty. Her body under the white thin nightgown was frail, pale, and made of bones. If he hadn't seen her chest rising and falling, she'd appear dead.

"Oh my god," Paxtyn cried out. "What have they done to her?"

Griffin couldn't take his eyes off of his Watcher. Her hands bound

to her sides were strapped to the bed as were her feet. That hair that he thought so beautiful stuck along her face as if she had been screaming, fighting against her shackles. Bruises marked her wrists and ankles, bloody from where she'd pulled to get away.

If he hadn't sworn to take an oath to defend humans, he'd kill whoever had done this to her. His breath gasped out, snapping him back to the present. He had to get her out of this prison. Rushing forward, he unclipped the restraints on her arms and legs and swept her up in his arms.

He cradled the dead weight in his arms. Her head fell back, and her arms dangled at her sides. Griffin placed his hand around her head to hold it close to his bare chest. The feel of her near him sent a warmth to his heart he'd never known before. But what had been done to her? Why was she held in this manner? Rage consumed him.

He glanced back to Knox, and by the look on Knox's face, Griffin assumed his eyes looked deadly. "We must go now, before I forget my vows and make those responsible pay."

Knox nodded, and his brows drew together in displeasure. "I think I agree with you on that point."

Without looking back, Griffin kept his Watcher tight in his arms. She may have been mistreated, may have even been forgotten, but from this day forward, he would see that she wouldn't see another day of unhappiness. *She's mine now, and I will keep her safe.*

Chapter Two

Nayeli groaned. The last round of Haldol—the favorite choice of a knock-out-drug—had taken its toll. Obviously, Dr. Dickhead had given her an extra dose of meds to sedate her. Her body felt heavy and her head groggy. She'd endured four days of being awoken by the whispers of evil, only to be knocked out again. Not that she minded the silence. The drugs were an end to the voices that spoke of Hell itself. It was an affliction she'd suffered for as long as she could remember.

Chants and low growls of hatred. If only she had an answer for it all or someone who could tell her the reasons her mind was warped enough to justify why her parents had abandoned her in a mental institution at the age of ten to never return. Twenty-five years old now, and still she had no answers for what caused this disease in her mind.

A couple months ago, the voices intensified, and the doctors resorted to the use of drugs to keep her sedated. Not that she could blame them. An unruly woman screaming of demons and terrible murders needed to be restrained.

Her head spun a little as the lasting effects of the medication began to wear off, leaving behind a throbbing head, an unsteady body, and waves of sickness passing through her gut. But this was the norm for her. She had yet to really experience life. Her world revolved around therapy sessions. And of late, she slept more than she was awake. Her life had become that of a dead person, one that yet breathed. Who was she kidding? This couldn't be called a life.

“She’s waking up,” a woman’s voice said.

A voice she didn’t recognize. *Wonderful*. More eager students to learn about the inner workings of a crazy mind. Slowly, the haze of the drugs cleared her mind, and she succumbed to the voices, opening her eyes.

A man stood over her. Not just any man, a half naked man, and a gorgeous half naked man at that. His face was angular, chiselled with masculine features, and he had sculpted lips. His hazel eyes stood out against his tanned skin, while his charcoal shoulder-length hair draped around his face.

She blinked. Then repeated the move a few times over, attempting to get a sense of understanding here. *I’m dreaming*. Damn, the sedatives were making her crazier than she already was.

“Are you feeling all right?” the man asked, his voice a deep smooth rumble.

He speaks. Her fantasy dream had just kicked up a notch. She smiled. “Why wouldn’t I be all right? I’m looking at the hottest man I’ve ever seen.”

Surprise flickered across his face. A reaction that confused her, he should be whispering sweet nothings to her, seducing her as she’d seen in romantic movies she’d been allowed to watch every now and again, not been surprised by her words.

Unless...

She blinked again. *Wait*. No, she wasn’t dreaming. She moved her toes, and her fingers ran across a velvet blanket beneath her. All felt real. Understanding slowly came to the forefront of her mind, and she shot up from where she was lying in such a fast move her head smacked against the man’s.

He groaned.

She squealed and grasped her head in pain. Oh no, she wasn’t dreaming. The pain was real, and it throbbed. “Ow,” she complained and rubbed the sore spot above her right eye.

“Nothing about that was romantic.”

A spunky laugh sounded next to her. Nayeli followed the sound. A

woman stood off to the side, along with three other men and one woman. The men were all clad in black, skin-tight shorts, sort of boxer-brief like, only shorter. Talk about handsome; all the men had impeccable bodies. The women were clothed in jeans and T-shirts.

Where am I? Confusion stole her senses. She glanced around the room. Crimson curtains lined the walls and candles lit the space dimly. Glancing down, she noticed she sat atop an altar of some type, the velvet covering it soft beneath her fingertips.

What the heck is going on?

The man rubbed his hand against the red spot where she'd marked him. "Are you all right?" he asked her again.

"I'm not sure," Nayeli answered honestly as she looked around at the faces surrounding her. "Um...where am I, and who are you people?"

The man lowered his hand and smiled gently. "I'm Griffin."

"Nayeli," she responded. It seemed the appropriate thing to say rather than screaming madly and running the hell out of here, which was definitely an option. But, there was something about him that stopped her, something in his eyes that begged, *Don't run*.

"Nayeli," he repeated. His smile grew as if her name was the most beautiful sound he'd ever heard. He stepped in closer toward her and took her hand. "I am yours."

His rough hand closed around hers, and her heart did a little pitter-patter. To be touched, in a personal way... She'd longed for this. Tears began to pool in her eyes at the wonderful feel of it, but the distraction of the others' laughter stopped her from actually crying.

The interruption broke the emotional connection and brought clarity to her mind. Did she hear him right? "You're what?"

"Yours." His eyes didn't lie. A possessive twinkle appeared in those hazel depths. "As in you're mine and we're destined to belong together."

The woman stepped forward, laughing. "It's called being subtle, Griffin. Learn it." She glanced over to Nayeli. "Hi, I'm Paxtyn. It's really great to meet you."

"Ah...hi..." Nayeli responded.

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Silence fell in around them, and Nayeli waited as she searched the faces of these people, wondering what to say. Her mind swirled with confusion, yet, she wasn't as nervous or frightened as she'd have expected to be. With Griffin's touch on her hand, his thumb running across the back of her hand, she couldn't deny that something about this felt right.

Finally, Griffin broke the silence. "I—we—have long awaited your arrival."

"Where..." Nayeli started, but suddenly a pure wave of calm washed over her, quieting her words.

"Nayeli," a soft voice spoke from behind her.

She glanced over her shoulder to meet the woman's gaze. An image of pure perfection, she was flawless. Her long brown hair swept across her body as if the energy that surrounded her made it move in waves. Eyes, bluer than Nayeli had ever seen, could only be described as the color of the sky on a perfect sunny day. Something angelic lived within her, and Nayeli could find nothing in her to deny that this woman wasn't human. "What are you?" Her voice came out in a whisper.

The woman smiled, and a glow emanated of her. She leaned forward and took Nayeli's hand. "I am Elysia, and we," she waved toward the others with her other hand, "are your family."

"You're my what?"

Paxtyn laughed. She sat up on the altar at Nayeli's feet. "Let me tell you. I'll give you the short version to spare you what I went through. She," she pointed back to Elysia, "is a Fallen Angel. Put here to protect humans against demons, and yes, I see the question on your face. Demons are real. Satan, Hell, evil... it all exists. Your mother did the nasty with either one of the two male Fallen Angels here on earth, those who stay in hiding to keep producing us, Watchers and Seekers. These," she pointed to the men, "are Seekers, men who fight against the nasty creatures and bring them back to her," she pointed back to Elysia, "so she can send them back to Hell." She took a long deep breath then continued. "We—Daleyn and I—are Watchers. We have the gift, or as some would say curse, to see a demon in the act of killing a human. You are one of us. We help discover as much as we can about the demons so the Seekers can hunt them down.

I think that's about it." Her eyes rose to the ceiling, and her lips pursed. She glanced back and smiled. "Yes, I think that covers it."

Nayeli glanced to Daleyn, who was bright-eyed, rosy cheeked and currently gave her a smile that eased her worries. Anyone who looked that sweet wasn't about to cause her pain. But then, everything that Paxtyn said sunk in. "I'm one of you?"

Paxtyn shrugged and gave her an innocent smile. "Hard to believe, right? That's the lowdown. Trust me. It took me days to get all that processed. Spelling it out like that is just easier, and once you accept it, believing will save you a big headache."

Griffin took Nayeli's chin in his hand, bringing her focus back to him. "Why were you kept in that hospital?"

The rage in his eyes was unmistakable, and she felt oddly protected by it. "Well...I...um..." Still, to admit her flaw out loud to strangers unsettled her. It was hard enough to talk about it with the students or doctors. Discussing this with people she didn't know, plus this sexy man who sent his steel, penetrating gaze at her, wasn't easy.

He gave his head a soft shake and continued to rub his thumb against her hand. "Do not be ashamed. What you can do is a gift, nothing less."

This was all backwards. For years, she'd been an outcast. His implication that what she endured in her mind was an ability, a treasured one, was ridiculous. "A gift?"

"Yes," Elysia said and came around the altar to stand beside Griffin. "As Paxtyn has told you, both she and Daleyn share an ability such as yours. And Griffin is right. You hold a special talent that will only strengthen our family."

Nayeli couldn't wrap her head around this. "When you say ability, are you talking about how I can hear strange words in my head?"

Elysia's eyes lit up, and she gave a soft nod. "Yes, my young one, that is what I am talking of."

If she hadn't lived as a crazy person for so long, this all might be a bit much to take. But really, what was strange to most was normal to her. Nothing real existed in her life. And truthfully, to have an answer for it

all, sounded too good to try to deny. "You can hear the voices too?" she asked Paxtyn.

"No." Paxtyn visibly shuddered. "Sorry, but I'm glad I can't. I've got enough to deal with. When I pass over a place where a person has been killed by a demon, the vision of that act comes back to me." She nodded to Daleyn, who smiled. "That's what she can do too, but I can also talk to the dead."

Nayeli's eyes grew wide. She'd thought she was nuts, but that was absurd. "You can talk to dead people?"

Paxtyn chuckled. "Fucked up, right?"

Yes, it's certainly that. "Um...well..." Nayeli felt spun around, like the world was collapsing around her.

Paxtyn jumped off the table just as Daleyn spoke up, her voice cheery and happy. "I know you're so confused right now. We've all been there, but once you and Griffin are joined, it'll be all straightened out."

"Joined?" Nayeli repeated. Joined to him? What for and how? Sure, the man was sexy as all get-out, but she still hadn't processed what he'd told her before. What had he meant by they were destined to be together? Not that she'd mind being destined to him. She couldn't have dreamed up a more perfect man, but her experience with men equalled zilch. She'd never even had a boyfriend, let alone thought she would one day get married.

Griffin squeezed her hand, drawing her eyes to his. His features softened. "A power lives within you, a means to make you an immortal. To join our family, we must be bound together, and it is I who will release this power to you."

"Immortal? Like never die immortal?"

Griffin nodded, and a grin reached his eyes. "Together—forever."

She just couldn't wrap her head around it. "But you don't even know me. How can you be sure you'll want me forever?" She wasn't ignorant of the fact that she hadn't mentioned she had no hesitation in being joined with him. His soul shone through his eyes, and what she saw, she liked. Nothing in her would refuse this union. It was a pull almost, a yearning she'd never felt before. Odd but true.

Griffin snorted a chuckle. He raised his other hand to her cheek and brushed her face with a light touch. "Can you not feel it now?"

She shrugged and found herself leaning against his touch. It felt so good, so loving to be touched, not poked and prodded at, and her body revelled in it. "I feel something...a pull of sorts."

He nodded encouragingly. "Yes, that is our pairing." His smile confirmed the truth in what he said.

"Okay..." She paused for a moment to gather her thoughts. "What would I have to do to join this family?"

"You have to get it on while we watch," one of the Seekers called out.

A typical playboy, like she'd seen in movies, sexy in all the right places, and by the tone he'd just used, he appeared to have the attitude to go with it. Before, she could voice her shock, Griffin scowled at him. "Tate, if you can't keep your mouth shut, get the hell out."

Tate only grinned in return.

Another Seeker stood next to him, nearly a mirror image, but where Tate was entirely muscular, the other man was more slender. They were both blond, blue-eyed, handsome men, and this one appeared to hold the same arrogant expression. His nod came quick as a grin rose to his face. "I'm Shep. Nice to meet ya."

Beside him, another Seeker had his arm draped over Daleyn. His amber eyes reflected his happiness and provided a little light to his face topped with a head of dark hair. He smiled and gave a firm nod. "I am Zane. Welcome."

No one looked scary, nor did they look as if they were lying to her. By Paxtyn's explanation, plus every set of eyes on her awaiting her response, she suspected this was all really happening. But only one thought captured her. "So, if we...do this...I will get to stay here? I won't have to return to the hospital?"

Griffin's look turned deadly, and his eyes narrowed. "You'll never go back there again."

With that, she was right ready to strip down and get to business. To never go back to the hospital, to never be medicated again...of course she

wanted that. But, there was a little problem with this. She looked back to Griffin, mortified she had to make this known. "I can't have sex with you." His expression fell with unhappiness, and she instantly regretted her word choice. She hadn't meant to disappoint him, and she needed to rectify this. "No, it's not that I don't want to. It's that I can't do it with everyone here...watching."

Griffin smiled with a grin that spoke of reassurance. "I understand it is unusual for you, but we are all comfortable with this. It's our way. No one here will judge you, and many Watchers and Seekers have done this before along the way. For us, it is a beautiful sacrament. Watching immortality be given to a new member of our family is a blessing and not one any of us would miss."

Okay, well that relieved that concern, but it still didn't ease her totally. She leaned forward, kept her gaze on his, and whispered, "I've never done *it* before."

Griffin's brows rose, and shock flashed across his expression. "You've never..."

Could this be any more embarrassing? "No...well...I've been in a hospital since I was a kid." She shrugged away the humiliation. "Who wants to date a crazy girl?"

Griffin frowned, took a deep breath, and looked to Elysia. "I will not take her here."

"This is the ceremony, Griffin," Elysia said with a sweet smile on her face. "You know this."

Griffin crossed his arms over his chest, squaring himself in front of her. "I will say again. I will not take her here, not if she's never been touched in that way before."

Nayeli glanced between them. Elysia smiled as if she was being offered a diamond. Griffin glared. She began to feel silly. They'd all done this before, just this way, so who was she to be treated any differently? Sure, she found this odd and wasn't about to say she was comfortable with it all. However, if this meant she didn't have to return to the hospital then so be it. Besides, there was something to this place—she could feel it soul deep—something that commanded her to stay and agree to this. "It's

really..." she started.

Griffin's glare stopped her. "I will not."

Nayeli looked anywhere but at the anger on Griffin's face. She thought it sweet he was concerned for her, but at the same time, rules were rules. She'd been treated differently her entire life, and she didn't want that to happen here.

"I have an idea," Paxtyn exclaimed.

"What idea?" Griffin growled, low and deep.

"Okay." She took a deep breath. "Go to your room, get her...er...ready, then come back and finish her...er...off here." Was she blushing?

Nayeli sure was.

Griffin's eyes fell to the floor. He moved his foot along the carpet as if he was deep in thought, then a moment later, he looked at Elysia. "Would you be agreeable to that?"

"The transfer of power does not take until the moment of climax. It would be fine if you readied her as you wish, and prepared her body with yours before you brought her to the ceremony. I would agree to that, yes."

Nayeli's blush deepened. "What?"

"Your immortality, the joining of our family, happens in the moment of your climax." Elysia answered as if she was ordering a double coffee at the cafe.

Nayeli laughed, a nervous sound. "Oh." No one had ever given her the birds and the bees talk. Of course, she wasn't dead. The need to pleasure herself had taken her every now and again, and she indulged in the sensations to ease her ache. Still, it wasn't talked about. Having such a candid conversation on the subject left her blushing like a teenage girl.

Griffin watched her, seemingly deep in thought. Finally, he let out a deep breath. "I will agree to that." Then, he took Nayeli's hand and pulled.

Paxtyn lunged forward, wrapped her arm around Nayeli and pulled her back. "No, you don't."

"What is it now?" Griffin snarled.

Paxtyn smiled, and the men all laughed. "She has been in a hospital

for way too long. She hasn't had a shower...and...needs to do girly things." She levelled him with a stern look. "She's coming with me first."

Relief washed over Nayeli. First off, she couldn't have a razor at the hospital. Never once had she shaved her armpits, legs or anything else for that matter. If she was expected to get naked with him, she wanted to look as most women did she'd seen in the hospital with their skirts on, silky smooth.

Before Nayeli could say anything word, Griffin nodded to Paxtyn, turned back to her, took her chin, and brought her face up. He grinned in a sultry way, with an arched brow. "This will give you something to look forward to." Then, he captured her lips in a kiss that completely surprised her.

The annoyance she'd seen on him a moment ago did not manifest in his kiss. His lips were gentle, like an introduction, and she accepted it. Never had she been kissed before, and the feel of a man's lips—Griffin's lips—across her skin was heaven. She expected him to back away. He didn't. He put a hand on her lower back and drew her in closer, raising his hands to her neck and placing his thumbs along her cheek as he stroked the skin gently. He pushed harder against her lips, willing her to open them.

She did. With a light flick, he slowly met her tongue, then gripped her face tighter and brought her into a kiss that shook her knees. His tongue swiping against hers and their mouths working in unison was simply divine.

Abruptly, he drew away, then gave her lips another soft kiss. She opened her eyes. His gaze bore down into hers, a statement that there was nothing to fear. She'd seen this look before. Actors gave it to actresses in movies, but she never thought it real. Impossible as it seemed, adoration and appreciation shone in his eyes. The warmth of it made her swoon.

"Okay, well, passion isn't going to be a problem between you two." Paxtyn laughed and took Nayeli's hand. "Let's get you pretty."

Nayeli went, but glanced behind her to look at Griffin. He wasn't lying. There was something between them that defied logic. And something that said her days of sadness and loneliness ended today.

Whispers of Evil by Stacey Kennedy

Chapter Three

Daleyn gave Griffin a kind smile as she closed the door. Part of him was grateful she'd gone with Nayeli—maybe Paxtyn would mind herself. The other part of him worried that having the two of them together would only make matters worse.

"Good to be home I bet?" Zane asked.

Griffin turned back to his brother. Zane's amber eyes were a good reminder of the bond he shared with his Watcher—nothing but happiness lived within their depths. Knox, Zane and Griffin had all had found their Watchers. They'd spent years—too many years—together, all waiting. Now, that journey was over. Now their family grew stronger. A certain peace came with that. The long, drawn out fights were being shortened by the talents of the Watchers. It settled a little bit of the unease that always lived close to his heart. "It is good to be back." An understatement really, being home felt fantastic. These men were a solid in his life, and he was glad to be back, surrounded by them again. "Have things been well here?"

Shep jumped up onto the altar and let his feet dangle over the side. He beamed, his face showing a bit of arrogance. "A few lesser demons over the last month—nothing strenuous."

"Glad to hear it," Griffin said through tight lips. He watched those legs bang against the altar—his altar for today—and fury burned inside of him. "Do you mind getting off of there?"

"Why?" Shep gave him a mystified expression. He cocked his head

as he studied Griffin. Then, he looked down at where he sat, laughed, and jumped off. "Right, I forgot."

Forgot? How could he forget that in just a short time he was going to have his Watcher spread across that altar, naked, while he indulged in her body? He scowled, but forced himself to rein back in his aggravation. Shep was young—only here just over a year. Tate was even younger. He'd come to them with Paxtyn. Both men hadn't had the experience that he, Knox and Zane did. The importance of today just wouldn't register with them. "I've waited two hundred years for her—more time than you can imagine. Picturing your scrawny ass on that altar is not where I want my thoughts to go."

Tate gave a loud shout of laughter. "Come on, man. Once you've got her spread wide for you, your cock is the only thing you're going to think of."

Griffin growled. Knox stepped in beside him, putting a hand on his shoulder. "Forgive them." He shot both men a stern glance. "They're not going to say another word on the subject." His look became deeper, almost daring them to open their mouths. Of course, they didn't.

Knox out-ranked them, as well as Griffin. The man's skill in archery couldn't be beat. Griffin had rights to the position Knox held within their family as leader with his talent using daggers. The two held the same strength in fighting and knowledge. But, he never wanted the leadership role. Dealing with the young ones held no interest for Griffin. Now, he was only too grateful he didn't hold the reins. It would have meant time away from Nayeli, and that he would not allow.

"Griffin." Elysia's voice came through his annoyance. He looked back to her. She gave a kind smile and smoothed out the velvet draping the altar with her hand. "You will have to be gentle with her."

As if he'd be anything but. He was the one who'd suggested that he not take her initially in front of the others. What did she think he'd do? Just shove himself inside this small woman and tear her to shreds? "Your instruction here, Elysia, is not needed."

She laughed. The sweet sound filled the room. Her beautiful blue eyes twinkled with amusement at him. "Of course you don't. However,

it's not the physical act between you that I am talking of."

The men laughed. Griffin shot them a look that said if they did not stop his fist would remove their smiles. "What are you talking of then?" Tate, Shep and Zane went dead silent. Knox disguised his laugh as a cough. Not too well, he might add.

Elysia stepped around the altar to come close to him, with an expression only a Fallen Angel could wear—calm and lovely. "She is very damaged."

Anger burned at him at her choice of words. "Like hell is she." She had a rough go of things. He would concur with that. But, nothing in what he'd seen so far resembled a woman that was damaged beyond repair.

"I'm not telling you this to upset you," Elysia said as she raised her hand and placed it on his shoulder. "I mean it in a way to help you. The woman I see in her is there, but buried beneath years of pain and mistreatment. I fear that if you don't help her ease the hole in her heart, she will suffer more because of it."

The thought nearly consumed him with rage. What would that get him though? He only raged against everyone who didn't deserve his wrath. It was his job now to see Nayeli well, and if he didn't understand her properly, he'd never succeed. Resolved, he sighed away the anger.

Elysia settled back to lean against the altar. The woman always did know how to get the men around her to listen and how to settle the testosterone that coursed through their veins. She continued, "The voices she hears have become a part of her now."

"What does that fucking mean?" Tate exclaimed.

Griffin didn't mind his question. Her admission left him a little stunned. Was the meaning that Nayeli was now dark, evil? He hadn't seen any of that in her. But, he also might be blinded by the bond they shared. His need of her could hide her flaws.

Elysia's brows furrowed slightly. "Hearing such things for so long, with no understanding of what they were would leave a lasting effect on any heart."

"So, you are saying that she has been affected by these voices, not consumed by them?" Knox said.

Griffin still processed what she'd said earlier, but was glad Knox had the mind space to ask the next appropriate question. His thoughts were too wrapped up to really think about what needed to be asked.

Elysia nodded. "Yes, Knox, that's exactly right. Darkness weighs heavy on her shoulders, but it hasn't overtaken her. Not yet, anyway. You need to get her away from this dark part of herself. Bring her back into the light."

That reference woke him up like an ice cold bucket of water being thrown at him. "You're saying it will?"

Elysia's expression was soft and full of knowledge. "No, I am only saying that she needs to be handled gently. We cannot push her. She is not strong like Paxtyn and has had a much harder life than Daleyn. I worry if we push her too hard, too fast, her mind will not be able to hold up. But it is important for her to shed this protection around her. It confuses her judgment, and she never acts on her heart, only on instinct."

"She seems to be handling everything well so far," Zane commented. "She's agreed to all this, hasn't she?"

Good point. Griffin hadn't noticed a moment of instability in her as of yet. Her strength seemed faultless. Was he missing a piece of her that lay hidden? He'd never known Elysia to be wrong, and he'd bet his life she wasn't wrong now. Still, he had a hard time believing this sweet woman with kind eyes who seemed entirely put together was really crumbling to pieces. "How can you be so sure?"

Elysia gave them all a knowing look. "What you see on the outside isn't always what is going on inside."

"Does she have a few screws loose then?" Shep laughed.

Griffin snarled at him. "Say that again and you will lose an arm." Shep's laughter ceased.

"No, she is not ill in that regard, but she has lived a long time numbing these voices, ignoring them." Elysia's eyes held worry. "When she begins to allow these voices to come through, and listens to them, I am fearful it will be very overwhelming at first. You need to really explain things and be there for her. Allow her to take some of your strength when she first encounters these voices."

“She is important,” Knox commented.

“Quite important,” Elysia remarked. “She holds an ability that will allow us to know what is being planned.” She glanced around the circle of men and held each of their gazes before moving on to the next. “You can all understand just how much this would strengthen our stance against Hell.” Griffin nodded, and so did the others. “Her soul is broken, and it will do you all well to remember that.”

“Do you wish to speak with her?” Griffin asked.

Elysia shook her head. “Paxtyn was able to explain this to her. I feel that her forwardness might be exactly what Nayeli needs.” She looked to Knox. “You two need to join Griffin in her teachings.”

Knox gave a firm nod.

Griffin mulled this over a moment. He put his feelings for her aside and listened only to what Elysia told him so he could see straight. It wasn't about proving who Nayeli was and defending that to his death. He was being told this because Elysia thought it wise too. He wasn't arrogant enough to say he understood women. If she saw something he and the other men didn't, he wasn't really that surprised. His trust in her had been built on years together. He wouldn't dismiss that trust now. “Be gentle with her then.”

Elysia nodded, smiled, and let out a very soft sigh. “Yes, Griffin, be gentle.”

* * * * *

Nayeli couldn't believe she was doing this. *What am I thinking?* It wasn't all the demon stuff that had her stunned. She'd seen enough evil walk through the doors of the hospital to know it existed. It was that she was about to make love to someone she didn't know, and in front of others too. Yup, she really was completely out of her mind.

The truth of the matter was she couldn't go back to the hospital, which resolved her hesitation. Anything was better than that.

After a final run of the razor on her leg, she rinsed off her leg, and put the razor on the edge of the shower. She still felt a little flushed over

the incident with the razor since she'd never shaved before—anything. Paxtyn had to give her a quick lesson. Not something she wanted to repeat anytime soon, although she was appreciative. She rose back up, and the warm water came down around her face. She felt undeniably clean and silky smooth—very sexy.

Suddenly, her entire body tensed as a very familiar sound came into her mind. "*Yen holm tagon, fesir slarn.*" The warmth of the water went ice cold as the whispers of evil stole her thoughts. The words were said three times in a row, nothing she could understand, but the tone was as it always was —pure evil.

She waited for more words to come. They never did. But that wasn't unusual. It always started just like this. Once a voice came, she'd hear it once a day to start. Then as it grew in strength, the episodes would come more rapidly until they came each hour, each minute —after that, sedation was a must.

On that note, she turned off the water, wrung her hair out and opened the shower door. A little squeal of surprise passed her lips. "Oh gosh, you scared me."

Paxtyn laughed as she handed her a towel. "Sorry. I was wondering if you were stalling and needed a little push."

Nayeli laughed, a nervous sound, and wrapped the towel around her. *Should I tell her what I just heard?* She pondered that a moment, then decided against the idea. Until she knew more, believed all of what they were telling her, she didn't want to make herself look crazier than they probably already thought she was. "No, I wasn't stalling. It just felt really good to shower alone."

Paxtyn's face became puzzled. "You've never showered alone before?"

It's why being naked in front of Paxtyn or anyone else for that matter wasn't at all unsettling. She was used to it. "At the hospital the nurses did random searches on the patients' bodies to be sure we weren't hiding anything and showers were always public. Guess they thought I was going to bash my head against the tiles to kill myself—or something." Not that the thought hadn't crossed her mind, but usually by the time she

resolved to kill herself, she was knocked out by the medication—a really vicious cycle.

“That’s fucking awful.” Paxtyn’s expression crinkled in disgust. “And I thought it was bad seeing dead people. You’ve won the trophy—you had it worse.” She grabbed onto Nayeli’s hand. “Come on, Daleyn’s waiting for us.”

Nayeli stepped out of the shower. Her warm feet hit the cold tiles as she followed behind Paxtyn out of the bathroom and into the living room. The room was very warm and inviting with dark painted walls, wooden floors, and rich furniture. But in contrast to that, there were flowers in abundance, colourful decorative pillows, and fancy art work on the walls.

Daleyn sat on the couch examining her fingernails. As Nayeli cleared the bathroom door, she glanced up and smiled. “What did you do in there? Fall asleep?”

Paxtyn kept a firm hold on Nayeli’s hand. “She was just enjoying the water.” Then she stopped her in front of Daleyn and a single wooden chair. “There’s your spot—sit.”

Nayeli did as asked. She looked between them. “Okay, what’s up?” Her voice sounded as hesitant as she felt.

Daleyn jumped up and bent down beside the couch. When she stood, she had over ten bags from different shops with names Nayeli had never heard of. Well, not like she would have in her prison, but television always had commercials for places like Target. This Guess written on the side of the bag wasn’t a name she recognized. “After we got back from the hospital and while you slept, Tate and Shep went out shopping for you. They came back not long ago,” she held up the bags, “with this.”

“You sent men to shop for me?” Nayeli exclaimed.

Paxtyn took one of the bags from Daleyn, which read *Mac*. “Tate is one of the best—the man has good taste. I’m sure they picked out clothing that will please Griffin.” She placed the bag on the coffee table, reached into it and pulled out a headband. “Besides, we gave them a little list of things that were a *must*.”

She placed the headband on Nayeli’s head, pushing back her damp

hair, then dug back into the bag and took out an obscene amount of little containers, round tubes, lotions of all kinds. Finally, Nayeli understood what was going on here. "Oh...you're going to put makeup on me."

"I'm guessing you've never applied makeup before?" Paxtyn asked. Nayeli shook her head in answer. "Well, you do want to look your best for today's events, and every woman needs blush, no matter who she is. So, I'll do this today for you, and then maybe tomorrow, I'll teach you how to do it yourself." She smiled. "Okay?"

A rush of emotion sent a wave of heat to course through Nayeli's body. Her throat closed, her chin tingled, and tears filled her eyes. "I..."

"No you don't," Paxtyn said firmly. "Number one rule of applying makeup is no crying. It will smudge it."

Nayeli gulped back her tears.

Daleyn smiled and rested a hand on her bare shoulder. "We all understand what you're going through. Each of us has been where you are. It's very overwhelming, and we're all sympathetic to that."

"It's not that." Nayeli forced her voice to come out strong and kept her tears at bay. "It's just I always dreamed of moments like this. Simple girly moments—happy moments." She glanced to Paxtyn then to Daleyn. "I never thought it'd happen."

Tears glistened Daleyn's eyes. "Oh, Nayeli..."

"Now you've done it," Paxtyn exclaimed. Black makeup ran down Daleyn's cheeks. "See? Point proven. Don't cry."

Daleyn laughed, wiped her eyes, and squeezed Nayeli's shoulder. "You won't have to go back to the hospital, ever. You're not crazy. You never were. Just no one knew it to tell you. It may take you a while to come around to the idea of accepting what you are and the gifts you have. But this is your home, has always been your home. It just took you a little while to get here. You're safe now. No one will take you away from here. Griffin would kill anyone who tried."

Her words brought up the perfect moment for another question that had been stuck in Nayeli's mind while she showered. "About that, is what he says true? I'm really destined for him, for my whole immortal life?" Just the thought sounded so ridiculous. At the same time, no one

was lying to her. She could sniff out a lie like a K-9 did a bomb—a defensive mechanism from being hospitalized. It was the only way for her to have any sense of reality, because nothing told to her was ever the truth. If she hadn't learned that lesson well, she would've lost herself in that hospital years ago.

Daley and Paxtyn both nodded, but Paxtyn answered. "I'm still laughing about how he told you, blurting it out like that—real smooth." She shrugged. "Maybe it was better that way. Knox kept it from me 'cause he's an idiot." A smile rose to her face. "But he's my idiot, just like Griffin is yours."

Nayeli considered that a moment, while Paxtyn began to open the lotion and dabbed her finger in it. "I guess what I'm wondering is how will he know I will make him happy? What if it turns out he doesn't like me?"

Both women laughed.

Daley said, "He's already decided, trust us."

All of this was overwhelming to say the least, the talk of demons and the people who destroyed them. But she couldn't wrap her head around the whole concept of destined love. "But how can you be so sure?"

"Close your eyes," Paxtyn said. Nayeli did so, and Paxtyn started to spread the lotion along her face. "It's a soul bonding. You and Griffin are a perfect match for each other. Your personalities will fit. You'll give him what he needs, and he'll do the same for you."

She finished up applying the cream. Nayeli opened her eyes. "So, it was like that with you and Knox?"

Paxtyn laughed. "Sort of, but don't use us as an example. It was complicated, and Knox was difficult."

"I'd say you were equally difficult," Daley added with a sly tone.

Paxtyn scowled, then sighed and relaxed her face. "Okay, fine, we were both difficult. But, in the end the connection will always bring you together. It's a happiness that you cannot imagine." Then, she started applying a cream that matched Nayeli's skin tone over her cheeks. "To understand it, you have to realize Griffin has waited two hundred years to find you. All he feels is overjoyed you are here. He's no longer alone. He

has the one destined to share his life with him.”

“Really, you have nothing to worry about,” Daleyn added. “Griffin is a wonderful man. If I wasn’t with Zane, I’d snatch him up in a second.”

Paxtyn nodded. “Damn right.”

As much as it was hard to imagine and difficult to grasp, Nayeli didn’t really doubt any of what had been said to her. Something felt so instant with Griffin, something she’d never felt before, a real pull right from the bottom of her soul that declared love between them. Still, it felt better to have it confirmed out loud. Knowing Daleyn and Paxtyn had been through the same thing settled her a little. It felt nice to have friends, women to laugh with, cry with, and tell your deep dark secrets to.

Even as the thought settled in her mind, a heavy weight in her heart crept up to remind her life wasn’t always pretty. Did she deserve it? Was it all going to be taken away? Happily ever afters were fairytales given to others—not to her.

“Do you have questions?” Paxtyn asked as she applied some rose powder to Nayeli’s cheeks. “You know—about sex?”

Nayeli blushed beneath the coat of makeup. “Um...I’m not sure.”

“Oh, sure you are, you’re just too shy to ask.” Paxtyn’s eyes rose to the ceiling as if she was in thought, then they snapped back to her. “We’ll start at the beginning. Do you know the basics?”

“Of course, she does,” Daleyn exclaimed. Her brows furrowed, and her head cocked in question. “You do, don’t you?”

“Well...” Nayeli hesitated. Quickly, she sighed away the embarrassment and got to it. This would be her only chance to ask any questions. She didn’t want to go in there today unprepared and looking foolish in front of everyone. “I know that there is kissing, touching, and that his manly bit will...”

“Rock your world.” Paxtyn grinned.

Nayeli laughed.

Daleyn just nodded with excited eyes.

Paxtyn continued, “That’s pretty much it. Don’t worry about really doing anything to him. Just let him explore your body.” She wiggled her brows. “Then, widen your legs and you’ll be all set.”

That simply confused her. Sure, her experience was zilch, but wasn't this a two-way street? "Shouldn't I touch him...?"

Paxtyn shook her head. "Not right now. Enjoy it. Because soon they'll be demanding you're on your knees with your lips around their..."

"You don't have to worry about it," Daleyn interrupted, chastising Paxtyn with a look. "Griffin will want to have his way with you, especially considering you've never done this before. He won't expect anything from you."

"But..." Nayeli paused, searched for the right word. "Won't that make me look, I don't know, selfish?"

Laughter filled the air once again.

"Your body will be a treat for him all on its own," Paxtyn said.

Nayeli looked down to her bony legs. *What a treat!* "I want to make sure he gets...pleasure out of this."

Paxtyn took her hand, squeezed and smiled a shit-eating grin. "Trust us, he'll be happy enough to be settled between your thighs." She glanced down to Nayeli's legs then looked back up to her. "Speaking of which, by the way, you're now on a strict diet. Eat everything and anything, all the time."

"Oh, I almost forgot," Daleyn said. She went over to the coffee table and grabbed a huge cheeseburger with fries. "Time to talk is over. You eat, and Paxtyn will finish your makeup." Then, she held up a hair dryer. "I'm going to do your hair."

Nayeli may have argued with being fussed over, but the burger looked simply divine. Thick, juicy, pure heaven. She'd seen Burger King commercials on the television, but now, the sight of it, the smell of it made her nearly salivate on her plate.

"And there's the look." Paxtyn laughed.

Nayeli looked away from the burger, but kept her hand on it just to be sure it wouldn't disappear. "What look?"

Paxtyn winked. "The look you're going to have when you're staring at something else thick and meaty."

Chapter Four

Griffin glanced around his room. He'd left in such a rush because Elysia had told him she discovered his Watcher, he hadn't considered what she'd be coming home too. His space was masculine, dark grey walls, mahogany four-poster bed and matching dresser. No artwork, nothing that resembled a place a lady should stay in. He would see to fixing this space up immediately once he had her settled.

A noise drew him away from his thoughts. He glanced over his shoulder, and Nayeli stood behind him, a stunning beauty. The women had obviously not only let her shower, but had given her clothes and makeup. He thought her beautiful before. Now, she was breathtaking, wearing a black camisole and jeans. Her dark hair fell soft and silky over her shoulders. Her eyes appeared sexy outlined by dark eye-shadow. Her cheeks were rosy, and her lips an enticing soft pink. He'd questioned if he could love—*Am I capable*—now he had no doubt. This woman belonged to him. "You're back," he said gently.

"I'm back," she whispered, now standing in the middle of the room.

He could see her tremble, the fear of what was to come reflected in her eyes. He'd rectify that. She might be afraid of his touches for now. She probably worried that this would hurt, but he would bring her to a point

where she begged for his advances. Bring her to a state where she whispered his name from her pouty mouth. "Come here, Nayeli."

She paused, a moment that left Griffin's breath in his throat. Her soft green eyes were wide and looked worried. "I...I..."

He let out a long breath and went to her. With each step he took, she reciprocated by taking a step back. He stopped, not wanting to startle her. "Why do you fear me?"

She looked away from his gaze to the prevalent bulge in his black shorts that appeared the moment he saw her. "It's not you so much, as that."

Withholding his grin was near impossible. He began his approach to her again in slow, steady movements. She continued her movement backwards until she met the wall with a loud thud. She gasped.

"You fear it now, but in time, you will grow to crave it."

"I'm not sure I can do this," she whispered.

He closed in on her, stopped in front of her, and looked down into those eyes that could melt his soul. "You can." He gave her a firm look. "And you will."

"But I..."

He leaned down close to her mouth, and her breath came out in quick pants he was sure were due to fear. "Nayeli, you're safe with me. I have waited years, more years than you could fathom, to have you just like this. I'm only pleased that no one has shared your bed. You have a right to be nervous, even a right to fear what will happen here, but this has to be done, not only for you to join our house, but because I cannot wait another moment not being connected to your body."

"Will it..." She looked up to him with sweet innocent eyes. "Will it feel good?"

He grinned. "I will ensure it does." Then, he ran his finger along her soft rosy cheek. "Of course, it may hurt a little at first, but I promise to erase that pain with pleasure."

A little smile lifted the side of her face. She stepped in closer, and her body came tight against his hardened length. "Well...that doesn't sound so bad."

He arched his brow, grinning in return. "No, it doesn't." Then, he leaned down and captured her lips, gentle at first, testing her ways. His hands came up around her face as he tilted her head back, bringing her mouth higher to meet his. Slowly, she succumbed and parted her lips, and he continued with open mouth kisses. He worked his mouth along with hers in a manner that would weaken her in the knees.

She sighed against his mouth. He took it as an invitation, and lightly he released his tongue from his mouth, skimming her bottom lip. Her sigh came again, this time more heated. She parted her lips wider as he continued to work his lips with hers in a slow movement. He slipped his tongue past her lips and connected with her warm wet tongue. A growl rose from his throat from the taste of her, the feel of her. His only thoughts were of her lips below. Would she be as warm and as wet as what he felt now?

With their tongues sliding across each other, their mouths continuing to work in unison, and her body slowly released the tension that had captured it. She came closer toward him, her arms reached up to stroke the muscles along his chest, and his cock throbbed at the feel of her small hands discovering him.

She made him feel powerful, a man capable of defending her at all cost. Her little frame was nothing in comparison to his strength, and he enjoyed that fact, enjoyed that if he picked her up, he could make love to her as he stood without a struggle.

Time for that would have wait. Now, he had to remember to be gentle. Her small body was going to have difficulty accepting his cock. For once, he wished he wasn't as well endowed. She was going to have to stretch for him, and the pain, he suspected, would be great.

His lips stayed on hers, forcing her to lose herself in him. He brought his hands down from her face and ran his fingers slowly down her arms, pleased to feel her shudder. He took her hands in his and pulled her forward. Slowly, he stepped back. His legs hit the bed, and he opened his eyes as he removed his lips from her mouth.

Her eyes slowly opened, and her dark wide pupils met him. How beautiful she looked now—heated, filled with desire. He found it

endearing.

He was going to enjoy teaching her, pleasuring her, and he was sure as hell going to enjoy watching her experience her climax for the first time. Slowly, ever so gently as to not scare her, he took the hem of her shirt and lifted it until she was bared. *Just how I want her.* Leaving her bra on, he ran his finger down the center of her chest, down to her belly button and along the rim of her pants.

Her reaction nearly made his control falter. She panted slightly and squeezed her thighs together. His only response was to clench his jaw in need and close his eyes. Clearly, she was eager for him to make his move, and witnessing that display nearly levelled him.

“Are you all right?” Nayeli asked in a whisper.

He opened his eyes and nodded. “My control around you is limited. Your reactions, your movements, are driving me to near insanity.”

A proud look flashed over her features. “I really do that to you?” The little grin that rose on her face only made his statement truer.

He groaned. “Yes.” He took a breath to stabilize himself. His body burned to yank her pants off and slam inside of her. He could only hope he’d not forget to be gentle once he caught sight of her naked skin, once his lips touched her sensitive flesh and his tongue tasted her. He prayed to God above that his control would remain intact.

Her soft stomach tightened beneath his finger, and she quivered and gave a little moan for more. He stopped over top of the button of her jeans and kept his stare focused on hers as he unhooked it. Her breath drew deeper, and her eyes were hooded, the pupils dilated farther to hide the pretty green color. He unzipped the jeans, freeing her with a painful slowness.

He placed his fingers inside the rim of her jeans and her panties and began to pull them down slowly, over her rump, past her thighs until they pooled at her feet. She was brave enough to step out of them. His cock jumped. His Watcher was more eager than she was letting on, and he felt oddly proud. She may have been afraid, but she was conquering that fear—willing to let him inside of her without really knowing him—and

trusting him enough to expose herself.

Indulging himself, he ran his hands along her thighs, her rump, any place he could just feel the body that now belonged to him. Slowly, he reached up, continuing to feel her skin up her sides, and shifted his hands to meet the back of her bra where he unclipped it. The black lace immediately began to fall off her shoulders. He assisted the light fabric, latching onto it and pulling it down off her arms so it joined her clothing on the floor.

Her gaze remained glued to his. He suspected if she looked away, her courage would fail her. He didn't have the resolve to not enjoy the sight of her. Her beauty astounded him, and even more astonishing, she had no idea of her worth. No arrogance. No vanity, just an innocence that begged to be appreciated. It was a look he would see replaced by one that spoke of a powerful woman. One that could cripple a man to his knees, and one that he believed she was surely capable of being.

His eyes travelled the length of her, over the long thin lines of her neck and her shoulders that were feminine, yet not held high. The explorations of her body stopped at her two small breasts with dark nipples, already erect and waiting for his mouth to enjoy them. He pondered doing just that, but thought it impossible to deny himself a further look over her.

Her ribs stuck out from her body, a sign of her malnutrition, a look that did nothing for his arousal and sparked a possessive trait in his soul that made him want to rage against the ones who put her in this condition. Her stomach was thin and lined with muscles that he suspected would develop into a stunning mid-section once she was fed properly.

Then, his eyes stopped. Her thighs were close together, but the thinness of them left a space that showed off her splendid pussy. He expected to find soft brown curls hiding what he sought. Instead, she had delighted him with a shaved pussy that only left a strip of hair pointing the way to her clit. He was sure Paxtyn assisted her in this knowledge, because he doubted she would have had the experience to know to do this.

He'd seen pussies. Hell, he'd seen hundreds of them through the

years, some wildly unmanaged, others trimmed, others bare. But this sight was simply heaven to him. He could see every part of her, and it was a most beautiful sight. Her body was tight, every square inch of her. She was perfectly stunning.

He reached out, unable to hold back and traced a finger along the hair that lined sex. "You are very pretty here."

Her breath caught, and she squeaked, a sound he suspected was meant to be words, but she was incapable of forming them.

His eyes drew back to hers to find she'd leaned her head back slightly and shut her eyes tight. Her bottom lip had been drawn into her mouth, and she nibbled on it. He wouldn't wait any longer. He stopped his finger's dance over her body, put his hands on her hips, and turned her around to help her onto the bed.

She went willingly, her eyes now open, seeking, begging him to give her more of what he was just doing. Griffin rejoiced. He would give her that and more. The thrill of being able to welcome her into the world of pleasure made his cock stiffen like a rod.

He laid her down on the bed. Her long ebony hair cradled her head, creating a vision of perfection in front of him. Her legs drew together, and that he would not have. "Do not hide yourself from me. I couldn't bear it." He gently nudged at her legs, and in very small moves, she widened them for him.

Griffin groaned deeply. Needing more, he latched onto her thighs with his hands, raised her knees up and pushed against her legs to spread her wide. His heart pounded in his chest. *By God above, she's something to behold.*

Her hands came down beside her and grasped onto the bed sheets. He was unsure if she was still nervous, or if she was on the brink of demanding he do something to her. He stepped in closer to her body, leaned down over her, and gave one very long slow lick across her nipple.

She shuddered, and her hands came up quick and wrapped in his hair. Griffin smiled. She was about to become undone, and he'd enjoy every damned second of it. With his teeth, he took the little taut nipple in his mouth and gave it a squeeze. Her response was to arch her back up,

pushing her breast against his face.

He released her skin and ran his hands along her breasts. Small, perfect for her body, but enough to fill his hand. He brought her nipples close together and played with each, one after another. Light licks, simple nibbles to stir her.

It did just that. Soft moans poured from her mouth, and she squirmed as she leaned her head back against the bed with closed eyes. He could have stayed there a lifetime watching her and licking her perky breasts. But he wanted—needed—more.

He craved a taste of her.

With his hands still on her breasts, he began to trail kisses along the middle of her chest to her stomach, stopping just above her public line. She responded by angling her hips up and rubbing herself along his chest. Oh, this woman could control him if she wanted or discovered she was capable of doing so.

His head came above her warmth, and he inhaled deeply, smelling her musk. The smell of her arousal drifted through the air around him, and the scent of woman titillated his senses. He lowered his head, not waiting for a moment. He licked against her soft sensitive skin, and she let out a loud whimper.

“Shhh...” he purred against her flesh. “You do not need to fret. I will erase the ache you feel here.” Then, he licked out again, lapping at the wetness under his tongue. He drew the moisture back into his mouth and let it sit on his tongue. Her taste drove his need to join with her to a limit he could hardly control.

But he would. He would give her what she deserved. Treat her body like the treasure that she was, and enjoy for himself the gift she gave him. With slow licks, he prepared her, letting her experience the sensations washing across her before he proceeded to bring her to climax. Her breaths were deep, filling his ears, and each inhale brought his own arousal to lethal limits.

His tongue swept across her skin until he had devoured all of the sweetness that had escaped her body. Then, he placed his hands under her rump, angled her hips up farther and rose above her slightly. With

butterfly kisses, he reached her clit. He swore he could feel the throb of it on his lips.

She began to show her impatience and swirled her hips, pushing herself against his face to ease the ache of her clit. He allowed it and stiffened his tongue to give further pressure while she sought to gain relief.

As he expected, the relief she looked for was near impossible to reach on her own. Steadying her with his hands, he licked out, and she screamed, squeezing her hands that still were tangled in his hair. He glanced up to her to see she burned with lust.

He drew in a deep breath, kept his eyes on her and unleashed himself, gentle no more. With firm licks, he came at her clit, swirling it, sucking on it, biting it with his teeth, and his Watcher beneath his mouth lost control. Her screams echoed around him, and her body shook in his hands as he held her to him.

It only took moments before her entire body froze, her eyes rolled back into her head, and his wish was granted. She shouted out his name that roared of pleasure and acceptance.

Then, she completely relaxed.

Griffin lowered her bottom back onto the bed and began to kiss back up her stomach. She still hadn't moved. He hovered over her and waited. A few minutes later, nothing. No movement.

He chuckled deeply. "I hope I have not killed you."

Her eyes slowly fluttered open, and she laughed so sweetly it was music to his ears. "I think you did." Then, she reached out, trailing her hands along his chest, circling his nipples then running down each plane of his abs.

His cock strained against his shorts, and when she stroked the tip of it, his hips thrust forward. She laughed again. "I've never touched...this...before. It feels needy."

He groaned and closed his eyes as she ran her hand up and down the shaft of his cock over his shorts. "It is that." Then, he looked down to her. "I cannot wait any longer, Nayeli. I am sorry this will cause you pain, but I must have you—now."

The worry shifted back on her face, but she nodded. Griffin stood, freed his cock from his shorts and let them fall to the ground. When he glanced back up, Nayeli had wide eyes as she looked him over.

"It's understandable that you are nervous," he said, hoping it would console her worries. He wasn't pleased to see this fretful look cross her face again. He would be gentle. Yes, there would be pain, but if he took his time, he'd also show her pleasure that followed the sting.

"No, it's not that," she answered, continuing to stare at his hard-on. "It's that you're really quite magnificent." She looked to him again. The worry had evaporated, replaced by a hunger he'd thought her not yet capable of.

Happiness soared through him hearing her approval. He never thought of himself of a man that needed a woman to whisper sweet nothings to him. Apparently, he was wrong. He leaned back over her, bracing his hands beside her head. "I can only enter you here. After we manage that, we will need to do this with the others."

"Okay, that is just weird when you say it like that." She laughed. "But, okay...I think."

He smiled at her apprehension and closed his body on hers. Then, he laid his lips against hers, his intent to bring her mind away from his cock drawing close to her. He was pleased to see, with his mouth busy on hers, that she did not flinch when his cock sat against her opening. He gave a little push with his hips, and the tip slid easily into her due to the wetness. She moaned slightly, and her body tensed, but he continued with his kisses so she would forget the pain.

Moments passed. He pushed a little farther, only to be met by resistance. Her body was tiny, and her pussy so tight. He groaned in frustration. She was going to be in grave pain here, and there wasn't a damn thing he could do about it.

He pushed again; his cock didn't slide farther into her. She whimpered, and her lips froze against his mouth. Fuck, why did he have to have such a large cock? Right now, he cursed this attribute.

"Nayeli," he drawled against her lips. He could prolong this, keep inching his way in, but he suspected it would only draw out the pain. She

was just too tight.

“Mmmm...” Her words came like a soft whisper, filled with a husky tone that declared how aroused she was, yet she was strained by the pressure of his body against hers.

He raised his head, looked down to her, put his arms under her body, and reached in behind her to hold onto her shoulders. “I can only hope you will forgive me for this.” Then, he gave a steady strong push inside of her.

Her mouth parted as if she was about to speak, but instead she screamed, a pain-filled sound that broke his heart and tore him apart. But he’d finally breached her. He slid in and settled in deep, and the intensity of that washed over him with a wave of bliss. So warm, so wet, so tight—he had found eternal bliss.

But her whimpers and cries broke his happy moment. He glanced down to her. Tears fled down her cheeks. Horror overtook him. “Please...forgive...”

She shook her head, and tears poured down her face with the movement. “Just...give me...a moment.” Her voice sounded so strangled, so pained.

Griffin loathed himself, hated that his body was the cause of her pain. What he wanted to do was get out of her body and throttle himself. He shouldn’t have taken her like that. He should have been more gentle, should have handled it a different way.

Suddenly, in the midst of his inner hell, a soft laugh broke him away from it. He snapped back to the present. Nayeli had her hands on his cheek, smiling at him. “You can stop hating yourself now.”

“I...”

“Needed to do what you needed to do.” She gave him a steady look. “Really, I’m fine now. I always cry if something hurts.” She wiggled her body beneath him, which caused him to slide out a little and then back in. “Really...it doesn’t hurt anymore.”

The playfulness that ran across her face and the movement of her body sliding on his caused his control in that moment to falter. He needed to take her to the others, and he needed to do it now. He grasped her

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around the waist with one arm, the other on her back, and with his cock still inside her body, he stood. He was too afraid if he withdrew it would cause her pain again and they'd have to repeat the whole process. This way she stayed accustomed to his body.

She wrapped her arms around him and locked her legs across his hips as he headed for the door. His jaw clenched, but his cock was being treated to sensations of glory as his walking caused her to move erotically on him.

Now that she couldn't feel pain, she was about to learn that the part of his body she feared most was the part that was going to make her lose her mind.

Chapter Five

Nayeli cringed with every step Griffin took. Okay, so she'd lied. Her pain was intense. Every move nearly made her gasp out in agony, but seeing Griffin's regret and the way he beat himself up about it, she wasn't about to show it.

Besides, she meant what she said. He'd only done what he had to. At the time, she doubted he would fit. Finally, getting him inside of her and settled actually eased her worry. She'd just have to deal with the pain.

Part of her hoped that at some point this would get better and that the pain would fade away. It couldn't hurt forever, right?

With each step he took, her teeth ground together, but she kept her little flickers of pain to herself and locked her arms around his neck. It helped a little bit that he groaned deeply as if he enjoyed her in this position. At least, someone got some pleasure out of this embrace.

The walk down the hall felt like a lifetime, her head buried in his neck, his long hair tickling against her face. His one arm wrapped around her back, and the other cradled her bottom. She felt safe here and an odd sense of love almost. But, she suspected she was only overwhelmed. They'd only just met him. It wasn't possible to feel such a strong emotion this earlier on. Still, a deep bond was present, one her soul wouldn't let her ignore.

Suddenly, Griffin stopped, held her tighter, then kicked on a door with his foot. A swish of air followed by a deep chuckle came around her.

"That is certainly an entrance." Paxtyn's amused voice came, followed by a little laugh.

"Fucking right about that," said a man's clipped voice.

Nayeli lifted her head out of Griffin's neck to see it was Tate who had spoken, and he had a look of amusement on his face. But that wasn't all she noticed. He was naked, erect and eager. She looked to Paxtyn, and she was naked too. Before she had a chance to process that, Griffin stepped forward purposely in long lengthy strides, and the movement reminded her, he was still in her body.

She closed her eyes for a moment and allowed herself to accept the pain. Then, she felt herself being lowered. She opened her eyes. Griffin had placed her on the altar. His eyes were deep and sensual, and it was a look she'd never seen directed at her before. A look that made her insides go all mushy.

"Are you in pain?" he asked. Concern tightened his eyes or maybe it was restraint.

Undecided which it was, she gave a shake of her head. "Just a little." *Yes, very much.*

He remained in her body, which throbbed and sent aching flickers within her. Every move tore at her body. She hurt.

After he settled above her, he moved away the hair that trailed over her face and smiled down to her. "You are very beautiful lying beneath me like this."

She returned the grin, because he made her feel exactly that. For what seemed a lifetime, she felt worthless and a strain on those around her, a person to be caged and hidden. The way he looked at her, spoke to her... she could almost believe she had value.

He leaned down and took her lips in a slow, enduring kiss that left her no room to wonder what was about to happen next, or to care at all that others were in the room watching this. All that mattered was him, the way he touched her, caressed her as if he'd found a treasure in her.

It only pleased her that their kisses weren't awkward, maybe due

to him being so good at it. All she had to do was follow his moves, and they set a perfect rhythm of hot embraces.

Never having kissed before, she worried she'd be awful at it. With Griffin as her teacher, she had nothing to fear. He was gentle, restrained almost, in the way his lips were tight against hers. Every move he made was skilled, meant to pleasure her further, and by now, she had already accepted he would succeed in doing just that.

His lips left her mouth to trail along her jaw down to her neck where he nibbled at her flesh. Little shivers spread through her. She was undecided if this tickled to a point she couldn't bear or if it was something she enjoyed. Ignoring the need to decide, she angled her head farther to allow him more access. She wanted to tease herself. Yes, she liked that.

He cradled her head in his hands to hold her close, and she wasn't about to argue with that. There wasn't any place in the world she'd rather be than right here, being held, near him, with his warm hard body pressed against hers.

His lips continued to dance along her neck, licking and tickling her skin with his heated breath. She began to squirm, the warmth in her body building again as her arousal began to overtake her.

He brought his lips back up to her mouth, where she met him with a searing kiss. A kiss to stop time, to forget everything and all except the pleasure soaring through her body.

His mouth stilled on hers, and he backed away to meet her gaze. "Are you all right if I move now?"

"Please do." Her voice a whisper of lust, a tone she'd never heard come from her mouth, but one she'd want to hear again.

If the burn in Griffin's eyes had anything to say about it, he'd agree with her on that point. "Wrap your legs around mine," he said. When she did, he continued. "Yes, that's right." He kept his hands behind her head and pinned her beneath him. His forearms rested beside her head as he gently ran his fingers through her hair.

Slowly, he withdrew in a move that froze Nayeli's breath. She prepared for the next part. While her body released his, the ache, the stretch released. When he pushed back in, a sharp pain roared through

her body and froze her still.

“In time,” he whispered. “In time you will accept me here, and the pain will be gone.”

She hoped for that. This was not something she’d want to continue. He pulled out, only very little, and continued to push back in, slowly, with gentle care of her body.

She gritted her teeth and closed her eyes as she did her very best to keep the shouts of pain to herself, not wanting to cause that regretful look on his face again. Those pained eyes tore at her. If she could avoid that look, she would.

In her mind, she followed the movement. *Out...breathe. In...ouch. Out...breathe. In...ouch.*

Over and over again, he continued to work her body. Every so often, he’d pull out more, only to fill her again deeper. Nothing existed around her, but the pain of this embrace.

A worry started to creep up. How was she going to climax? Elysia said she needed to climax to gain the power. But nothing in her felt close to doing that now. She opened her eyes to search for an answer, and when she did, the pain vanished.

What sat above her was a man relishing her body. His brows were drawn together, his pupils were large, losing some of the soft hazel she liked. His jaw clenched with each movement as if he was on the very edge of losing control himself. His shoulders flexed with muscles, and his arms bulged, rippled and curved just as a man’s arms should. His chest—oh , his chest—was filled with squared muscles, smooth skin.

She reached up and ran her hands across his warm flesh. He groaned. His abs flexed. Inviting herself, she ran her fingers over each ridge along his stomach, and his body quivered, tensed, the muscles contracting and defining themselves further. He was certainly something made of beauty. Every inch of him was pure man.

Her gaze stayed on his, and a spark stirred there. He liked her touching him. Empowered, she continued to run her hands all over his body, and his movements began to quicken as his control faltered.

But she never felt pain. No, what she felt now was unadulterated

desire. Those eyes of his bore into hers with a passion that caused her pussy to clench and create more moisture for him.

“Do not do that again.” He groaned deeply.

What had she done? That answer was unknown to her. Still though, she enjoyed this sense of empowerment she apparently had. He was so entirely consumed with her, and she felt beautiful. For the first time in her life, she felt wanted and in control of something.

The feel of him around her, the scent of his delectable cologne... She needed more. She leaned her head up. He let her, assisting her by holding onto the back of her neck to support her weight. With a soft lick, she moved her tongue along his neck, pleased to hear him moan in response. She liked that.

Smiling, she trailed her tongue across a shoulder and bit a little. He shuddered. Oh, she liked that too. She gave him light kisses on her journey back toward his mouth, then when she met his lips, courage she didn't know existed unfolded, and she licked his top lip with a flick of her tongue.

He froze.

She froze. “What's wrong?” His expression was unreadable. In actuality, he looked angry. “Have I done something wrong?”

He took a steadied breath, long and deep. “Are you in pain any longer?” His voice came through gritted teeth.

“No,” she answered honestly, a little taken back at the sight of him. Was he angry with her? Had her boldness been something he didn't like?

He brought his face down to hers, and just before he met her lips, he growled, “That is a good thing.” His lips came down on hers in a kiss that left her breathless. Tongues collided together, and lips crushed against each other as his breath sent waves of heat to wash over her face.

When he broke off the kiss, she gasped. He pushed himself up onto his knees, widened her legs, grabbed onto her arms and held them by her side. Unable to move, she could only watch him.

But what she witnessed was a sight of heaven in all its glory. His body was fully exposed to her view. Muscle after muscle met beautiful perfect skin, a face of a man completely and utterly lost in pleasure.

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Withdrawing almost completely, he thrust back inside her in one easy move. Her head tilted backwards as a moan of pleasure escaped her mouth. No pain came with his move, and the sensation washed across her in pure bliss right down to her toes.

Again, he thrust in, his hands on her wrists pinning her to the altar. Her response was to moan again, only louder this time. He had shown her magnificent pleasure with his mouth. This was something entirely different, and her control over anything fled her.

She brought her head back up to meet his eyes just as he gave another thrust in. "Ooo...ahhh..." was the only thing capable of spilling from her mouth.

He grinned, a sensual smile that caused her body to clench around him. He groaned. "Woman, you are going to undo me." He took her wrists and raised them a little off the altar, gripped them tight with his hands, then he began a steady rhythm of hard, quick thrusts.

She forced herself to keep on his gaze, even though all she wanted to do was lean her head back and relish the sensations capturing her. His grip tightened around her wrists, and she pulled back against them, creating more force for him to come at her with his thrusts.

Nothing had ever felt so good.

Her moans became pants as he continued to thrust in short, quick movements, and her body completely unleashed with pleasure. "More," she cried out.

He didn't hesitate. He dropped her hands, grabbed onto her hips and arched her body upwards, then he rocked her back and forth on top of him. Her eyes began to water, and screams of complete ecstasy shot from her throat.

Harder now, he went even faster. He rocked her so quickly against him, if he didn't have the strength to continue, she would scream obscenities at him. Almost there, she thought to herself. Something was so close, yet too far away.

"More," she roared. The urgency for her to get there, for her to release this pressure building inside of her made her beg. Nothing would stop her now, not until she met that final release she searched for.

His grip around her hips loosened. He steadied her, and instead of rocking her, he continued to hold her hips off the altar, shifting his weight on his knees so he could kneel in front of her. With his hands firmly in place, he gave a very hard thrust in.

She screamed, a sound that should mean pain, but could only be described as pleasure. "Yes. More...more..." She begged for him to do that again.

And he did.

Harder.

His growls came louder with each hard thrust, echoed by her screams. His body grew in size. Her eyes grew wider with it. The stretch of her body now should have caused her pain, but none existed in her now.

He lowered his head now to only a hairsbreadth away from hers and growled a feral sound as he pounded against her body. But she still teetered on the edge, hung there, suspended in time. She grasped his face in her hands and squeezed as hard as she could. "More." Now, she'd stopped begging; she demanded.

And he responded. Another growl rose from his throat before he unleashed himself. Instantly, her body arched up toward him. She leaned her head back. She couldn't keep his gaze any longer, and her eyes shut tightly. His thrusts were hard and fast, leaving her immobilized. She screamed out as the pressure building filled her to a place where her heart could skip a beat.

Her body clenched around him, vibrating. He grew harder within her. All it took was one hard final thrust and she was consumed with a power that had no beginning and no end.

Vaguely, she could hear Griffin's deep groan beside her ear and feel his fluid pumping inside of her. But her focus remained on the steady stream of pleasure coursing through her body, lifting her to a point that awoke every nerve. Her scream was loud and halfway caught in her throat as the power tore through her.

As the intensity lessened, the scream poured from her mouth, dying off to be a low hum. She lay, sweaty, her heart pounding in her ears,

and her body relaxed, yet altered. A renewed strength sat in her chest along with a feeling of well-being, health and vitality.

Immortality.

She was sure of that. More than that though, she felt a peace she never knew existed. For the first time ever, she wasn't alone. She was home. And the reason for all this just happened to shift on top of her to look down at her. Sweat beaded his forehead, and his hair dangled around his face. He was all. This, whatever *this* she was, whatever demons whispered evil into her ears, he'd be worth it all.

"That to me looked like lovemaking." Paxtyn sounded grumpy. "And if I remember correctly, when we did this, you said you don't do that."

Nayeli glanced to the side to see her glaring at Knox, who just looked annoyed. "I...that is..." Knox fumbled his words and suddenly sighed. "Our situation was different."

Paxtyn huffed at him.

Now with the conversation around Nayeli, sense had returned and their lack of clothing came back to the forefront of her mind. "Please tell me the reason everyone is naked has nothing to do with what we just did, because I honestly don't think I can do that again." Her breath was restless. "Well...for a little while anyway."

Griffin chuckled and leaned down to kiss her lips softly. "It's just part of the ceremony—a cleanse you could say—to be in your natural state." Then, his expression became firm. "If anyone tries to lay a hand on you, I'll kill them." The strength in his eyes, the truth she could see raging through them, said only one thing—he wasn't lying.

And she believed him.

Chapter Six

Griffin ground his teeth together. He didn't want Nayeli to be walking about so soon after the ceremony. Immediately, upon returning back to his dorm, he ran a bath to let her soak for a while in hopes it would soothe her sore skin.

After a while, she exited the bathroom to join him, Paxtyn and Knox in the living room. Dressed casually in a pink cotton v-neck T-shirt and jeans, she looked very pretty. The soft color played nicely against her dark hair and pale skin. But his admiration of her quickly fled him as he refocused his thoughts on what was important. Even though it was only mid-afternoon, he wanted nothing more than to get her back to his bed—to rest, that is.

Not that he held regrets. He'd gotten the first feel of her. No man had laid his hands on her—except for him. She belonged to him, for now, for always. And he had his first taste of just what a woman could do to a man if he loved her. Whatever she asked of him, he'd never refuse.

When she sat down on the gothic-inspired couch next to him, his displeasure only deepened as he watched her sit more on her hip than her bottom. Once the training session was over, he'd stick her back in that tub to let her soak longer, maybe get some Epsom salts. He wasn't thrilled that he'd caused this pain, even if he'd enjoyed the act that caused it.

She looked up at him with a curious glance. It was a look he found utterly sweet and was sure he'd see many times over the next few days, one he thought he'd never grow tired of.

“What’s going on?” she asked.

“Nothing to concern you,” he answered. When her brows furrowed deep in unhappiness, he laughed quietly, taking the hint that he needed to tell her more and continued, “Elysia wants to test your abilities. Before we can home in on your gifts, we have to understand them. We need to understand the power you yield so we can focus you in the right direction to give you strength in your abilities.”

Her mouth parted as if she wanted to ask more, but instead, she looked around before meeting his gaze again. “Where is Elysia?”

“She won’t be joining us this afternoon and has given us the right to explore your abilities.” In truth, Elysia had asked Paxtyn to join him because she got to the point quicker than the others. He wasn’t about to argue. The less confusion the better.

Nayeli’s expression tightened. A little “hrmph” escaped her lips.

Griffin wasn’t sure what bothered her, but he suspected her mind was too full of questions to have any other response. After a quiet moment, she spoke up. “Where are we exactly?”

Home, Griffin wanted to say, but he wouldn’t declare this as her home, not yet anyway. Not until she came to view it as such. Instead, he answered her more specifically. “Sedona, Arizona.”

She glanced around the room again, then, obviously baffled, she looked back at him. “So, we all live together here?”

Griffin nodded, pleased she’d resolved to thinking of this as home so quickly. The protector, the man inside him, beamed with happiness. “Yes, our home is here at the compound. We all stay on these grounds.”

A little spark of curiosity hit her eyes. “How many of you are there?” She hesitated and gave her head a shake. “I mean, of us?”

Thousands, he almost said. However, he feared if he did, it would only frighten her. Many Watchers and Seekers had died over the years—too many. He swallowed deep at that truth. “I have met many in my two hundred years.” It was half a truth, but enough to settle himself that he wasn’t directly lying to her.

“Pardon me?” Her voice came out as a soft gasp of surprise.

Paxtyn laughed. “Oh snap. I remember that moment.”

"Looked very close to that," Knox agreed.

Nayeli eyes went wide as a baffled expression danced around her face. Griffin ran through his words quickly in his mind, not knowing what shocked her. Was it the thought that so many had existed? He was careful not to scare her, but now, she appeared just that. What had he done?

He quickly looked back to Knox for clarity and was met with a wide smile. *Daft fool!* Humans had trouble accepting their age. Knox and Zane had both said their Watchers were troubled when they learned just how long they'd been alive. He looked back to Nayeli, curious. "Does my age surprise you?"

"Paxtyn had mentioned that you'd been waiting a long time for me before, but I think it just really sank in." She laughed. "I'm twenty-five, and you're over two hundred. Isn't there some law against that?"

He leaned toward her. His face came close to hers, and his lower body responded accordingly. He suspected he'd never get enough of her, yet he'd hold back until she healed properly. Still, her innocent pretty eyes made the man in him roar. "Does my look not agree with you?"

"Um...you look...good." She winked in a playful manner. "For an old guy."

He laughed and sat back in his seat. "Then, it is only a number. Hmm?"

"Right, only a number." She snorted. "A very large number."

Paxtyn laughed. "Took a bit for me to swallow that too, but really, age means more experience." She grinned at Knox. "It's useful in certain areas." Then, a smile of pure amusement flashed across her face. "Speaking of that, I noticed you're walking a bit funny."

Griffin scowled. "Paxtyn, for the love of God." The woman had no off switch on her mouth.

"What?" She continued to laugh. Knox joined in. "I'm just saying, she looked like she was walking funny."

"No, you're right, I am," Nayeli said with a shy voice. "Is..." She trailed off.

Griffin looked to her, hoping to help her finish. What was she getting at? Damn, if only he could read her mind to ease her. His fists

clenched as his Watcher sat uncomfortably, her words caught in her throat.

“Are you going to hurt forever?” Paxtyn offered. Nayeli gave a shy nod. “No, give it a day and you’ll be back to normal. Well, not really normal since he popped your cherry, but you know what I mean.”

Griffin’s scowl only deepened. What in the hell was wrong with her? Did everything have to be so blunt that came out of her mouth? He wished she’d keep her thoughts to herself.

Nayeli laughed and patted him on the knee. “Stop scowling at her, really, I’m glad I have someone to talk to.”

That relieved a little of his tension. Once his anger fled him, he had enough sense to realize why Paxtyn had done it. It broke the ice. Nayeli did seem more relaxed now that she had laughed. He wasn’t sure, but now seeing her reaction, he suspected she felt uncomfortable about making love in front of the others. He chastised himself for being blind to her needs, but, at the same time if she needed to have questions answered, he wanted her to ask him. “You can come to me with these concerns.”

Paxtyn laughed loudly. “You’re a man, Griffin.”

His brow arched as he looked to her. He wasn’t going to dignify that with an answer. The look on his face probably told her her words were ridiculous. “Your point?”

“My point is...how will you answer her? Do you have a pussy?”

He sighed, not going to voice anything to allow her the right to take his words, play with them a while, then say something snarky back in return.

“That’s right, you don’t. As we all saw not long ago.” Paxtyn’s smile vanished as her expression became firm. “So, just hush.”

Knox gave him a knowing look, which clearly said, *I did warn you.*

Griffin wanted off this subject. Nayeli seemed amused by it all. She sat chuckling, her hand over her mouth. “Would medication ease you?” he asked her.

Nayeli shook her head, lowered her hand from her mouth, and her smile slowly drifted away. “Well...maybe later, but I’m okay right now. The bath was nice.”

Griffin gave a firm nod, more than ready to move on. "Back to the topic at hand. Our home here was given to us by the United States Government." Nayeli's expression became perplexed. Griffin intercepted before she got ahead of herself. "We work together with the CIA to defend humans against demonic forces."

Her breath left her in a gasp, and her eyes widened in complete disbelief. "So...all the murders...are caused by demons?"

"Not all, but some," Griffin corrected. Humans were evil in their own right, but those matters were handled by others. Only spawns of Satan captured their focus. "We're only contacted when it's discovered that the murder is committed by a demonic force."

"How do they ascertain that?"

Griffin clenched his jaw. How to put this without scaring her? Before he could respond, Paxtyn said, "Trust me, when you see it you'll know. They're gruesome."

Nayeli looked to her lap, taking a moment of process.

Griffin sat worried. What ran through her mind? Was this all going to be too much of a strain on her? She had already been through so much, how much more could she handle? And, Elysia's advice to be gentle with her came as a warning in his mind. Finally, after a moment, she looked back up to him. "And these demons who kill, can you see them too?"

Nayeli's question surprised him. She took to the idea very well, too well. Nothing had really shocked her, or frightened her for that matter. It didn't sit right with him, and he suspected there was more going on here, something he would get to the bottom of.

Now was not the time though. He needed to learn more about his Watcher before he could understand the inner workings of her mind. "Not in the way Paxtyn and Daleyn can. After the Watchers discover more of the demon, and we find out its whereabouts, they are not hard to miss."

Curiosity crossed Nayeli's features. "What do they look like?"

"Disgusting things," Paxtyn replied. "You don't want to see a Prince of Hell, let me tell you—they're fucking nasty creatures."

"A Prince of Hell?" Nayeli repeated. Griffin nodded. "There are different classes of demons. Weekly, we deal with lesser demons, all here

to serve under whoever commands them. But at times, a higher class demon will come through the vortex, which usually means we have to work together to destroy it." When he saw her mouth open, he answered her question. "The vortex opens at Bell Rock. The natural elements contained in the red rock formations are what create the energy needed for the demons to gain access into this world. It's their portal, the way they enter our world."

She stayed quiet a moment, then glanced up at him with inquisitive eyes. "Do the Princes, or the higher class demons as you call them, get through this vortex often?"

"It happened a couple months ago with Balan, and it sucked," Paxtyn declared, running her hand over Knox's hair. "Luckily, most of the time, it's just little evil bastards we deal with, nothing too scary."

Nayeli's eyes lit up a little, a spark that showed a shared connection between them. A moment of happiness spread across her face. "So, you do get scared then?"

Paxtyn's brows furrowed, her expression aghast. "Are you crazy? Of course I get scared."

Nayeli laughed, snorted, as if that was an accurate statement. "I was, yes."

"I'm sorry," Paxtyn replied with no hesitation. Guilt washed over her face. She looked to Griffin, seeking forgiveness. "I didn't mean for it to come out like that."

Nayeli waved it away, smiling. "Well, I was...or I thought I was."

Quite abruptly, Nayeli tensed beside him. He studied her a moment. Her eyes darkened, and her cheeks burned with crimson as her brows furrowed. "Are you all right?"

Nayeli's breath whooshed out from her mouth, the lines of tension that sat on her face settled, and she smiled. "Yes, I'm fine thank you."

Her response unsettled him. What would make her go from calm to filled with tension in a moment flat. He thought back over what Paxtyn had said. Maybe it affected her more than she let on. Somehow, he doubted that was the case.

His mouth parted to ask her more, but Paxtyn interjected. "Don't

you worry about it. I thought I was crazy too.”

Knox deeply chuckled and winked at Nayeli before turning his gaze back on Paxtyn. “I’m not entirely sure if you can really be declared sane.”

Paxtyn smacked his arm. He flinched, grinning back at her. “Keep talking like that and I’ll sick Balan on you.”

“Who is this Balan exactly?” Nayeli piped up in a calm steady voice.

And that made Griffin understand what had just happened with his Watcher. She was very good at hiding her emotions, and he suspected this was what Elysia spoke of. He hadn’t seen it before, but maybe now that he was looking for it, it became very clear to him. It was a bad habit he needed to help her break. Elysia had been dead on. Clearly, discussing her sanity upset her, yet she forced herself to not show it. If they were not careful, she’d not share what she suffered, and that would be detrimental.

Paxtyn, of course, noticed nothing and continued on. “Balan’s frickin’ scary as Hell and very, very powerful, but thankfully we banished him.” She shook her whole body, drawing in a deep breath. “Anyway, yes, I do get scared—very scared. It’s kinda hard not to when a demon bites the head off a person.”

Griffin could throttle this woman. He glanced to Nayeli, and a look of surprise was stuck on her face. He would rectify the result of Paxtyn’s thoughtless words. “It’s not always that vicious, but yes, when a demon devours a soul, the person dies.”

Nayeli drew in a breath and glanced to her hands as they twisted in her lap before she looked back up. “I guess nothing can be worse than living like the dead, even though you’re still alive.”

Silence came around them. All heard the truth in her words and saw the pain that washed across her features. He needed to get a hold of this part of her and draw it out, heal it.

He could roar against what had been done to her, what made her retreat so and suffer all this alone. But, where would that get him? Nowhere. His only concern was her; nothing else mattered except that. “I will be there to protect you. That is my promise to you.”

Whispers of Evil by Stacey Kennedy

Nayeli smiled at him, and a sweet kind of softness filled her face. "It's funny really, but when you say that, I believe you."

"A good place to start," he said, more to himself than to her. A perfect place to build upon—to restore her—to heal the wounds given to her. And he knew the first step to this was facing what she'd long avoided. "Now then, since you've managed very well so far, it's time to go and meet your first demon."

"Sorry, what was that?" Nayeli exclaimed.

Chapter Seven

Nayeli glanced around the bland room as she stepped in with Griffin, Paxtyn and Knox in front of her. Cement walls met hardwood floors. Her gaze fell back to Griffin. "Where are we?"

"Our training room," Griffin responded, stopping in the center of the room.

Nayeli continued to look around. Training room to her meant a gym, or something like it. This room was completely bare. The only thing that stood out in the room was the four large doors resting against the back wall. Thick steel, almost vault like. "What's in there?" she asked, pointing toward the doors.

Griffin let out a deep breath and gave her a knowing look. "I did say you were going to meet your first demon."

Paxtyn laughed. "Hope you wore diapers, deary, cause pick a door—any door—and you'll find a demon behind it."

Fear coursed through Nayeli's blood. When Griffin said she'd be meeting a demon, she was thinking more along the lines of a picture book, not face-to-face with one. Her breath shortened, sweat formed along her forehead, and her stomach twisted and turned. She couldn't do this.

Griffin took her hand in his, squeezing it tightly. "I won't let harm come to you. That was my promise to you, and I will stand by it. You're safe; nothing can hurt you here."

Easy for him to say, he has daggers strapped to his waist. What did she have? Nothing. As much as that worried her, she couldn't wrap her

head around this. Wasn't this what they fought against? Nothing made sense. She doubted demons would be classified as good pets. "You really keep demons here?" They all nodded in response. "Why?"

"Training purposes," Knox answered. "Not only to train new Seekers who join our family—which is few and far between—but to keep our skills sharp."

Okay, she guessed all that made sense. Even if it still made her tremble in fear. Suddenly though, a realization came to her. She cocked her head, listening hard. "I can't hear them. If you say I hear demons, shouldn't I be able to hear them now?"

Griffin shook his head. "Those doors have been blessed by Elysia. Within those walls, those demons are powerless."

Oh, she didn't like where this was going one bit. "And when they get out here?" Her voice came out as hesitant as she felt inside.

Knox strode past and headed toward the door as if he was about to open it. "They can kill any one of us where we stand."

He's not opening it...is he?

At the first door, Knox slammed his hand down, and like a garage door, it opened.

Before Nayeli's mind could comprehend that this was actually happening, a wart-hog, or bear, no wart-hog with thick fur and a bigger bear size, ran from the dark room. He came out snarling and spitting, waving his head around with teeth barred. And not normal teeth, more like razor sharp fangs ready to sink into warm Nayeli skin.

She screamed and tore her hand from Griffin's, only to fall on her butt. Griffin was there in a second. He yanked her up, stepped in behind her and wrapped his arms around her waist. "Your fear only gives them strength. Try to calm yourself."

"You're kidding me, right?" she yelled. "I'm scared—very very scared."

Griffin's voice came right behind her ear, soft and collected. "Listen, do you hear anything?"

Her pounding heartbeat, yes, she heard that. But she did feel safe in his arms—protected. His tight grip told her he wouldn't let go and that

demon wouldn't get close to her. In the hopes this would just end, she focused away from her body which trembled in fear and waited for the voices to come into her mind.

A minute later, nothing came. "No, I don't hear anything."

"Right then," Griffin said, stepped away from her.

Suddenly, a swoosh through the air followed by a thud sounded. Nayeli looked to Griffin and saw his arm extended as if he was pointing at something. She glanced back to the demon, where it lay on the ground in a circle of black blood.

Her breath finally decided to leave her body. "Is it...is it..."

"Dead?" Paxtyn offered.

Nayeli nodded. "Yeah that."

"No," Griffin said. Approaching the demon, he grabbed it by its leg and started to pull it toward the room that originally caged it. "I have just broken the life source that lives in its chest. It disables them, for a little while anyway."

"A life source?" she repeated.

"It's what ties them to the dark world," Knox answered as he left his post at the doors and walked back toward her. "This is the only way for us, Seekers, to capture and contain them. It gives us time to bring them here, back to the compound, so Elysia can banish them back to Hell."

What the what? "How does she do that?"

"It's actually really neat," Paxtyn said. "She's got these four crystal things, given to her by the archangels."

"Like, Raphael...Gabriel...those archangels?"

Paxtyn nodded. "Yup, that's them. Anyhoo, when they left *Earth*," she grinned the latter, "they gave the crystals to Elysia to protect humans from demonic creatures. So, long story short, the guys bring the demons here—normally Daleyn and Zane find out who the demon rules under—Elysia draws a circle around them with Holy Water, and then chants in some weird Latin words and poof they're gone, back to the higher ranking demon who controls it, and they can't come back again."

Nayeli gave her head a shake, trying to process that. After a moment, she decided it better just to accept and move on. She wasn't sure

she'd ever fully comprehend what they told to her. "I guess it's good she has those crystals then."

Griffin gave her a soft nod. "Indeed."

"So, you heard nothing from that demon?" Knox asked, now standing beside Nayeli.

"No, nothing at all." She glanced to Griffin. "Was I supposed to?"

He shook his head. "You will only hear what is gifted to you. No one is going to push you here. Do want you can, listen. If you hear something, it will give us a better understanding of what you can do, then great. If you hear nothing, then I am only too glad these demons have no effect on you."

She smiled, reassured by his words. At least, she wasn't going to be a cause of disappointment. That came with a bit of peace.

"It's not lesser demons that speak to her," Knox said.

Griffin looked down at Nayeli and didn't appear happy. "Appears not."

Something about his look made Nayeli's stomach tighten. Whatever was going to happen, Griffin was less than thrilled about it, which only made her feel nervous. *This is going to be bad, very bad, undeniably bad.* Her gulp came deep before she spoke. "What does that mean?"

"It means we will have to test you against a higher ranking demon." Griffin's expression became soft. "Now, I don't mean to frighten you, but I want to prepare you. The look of them..." He paused. "Their look is not like what you just saw."

Oh gosh, it gets worse? How could it be worse than that horrid wart-hog, bear-like creature? "W-what d-do you mean, worse?"

"Like big," Paxtyn answered. "Scaly, hairy." She raised her hands up, curled her fingers. "Big claws, spooky-evil eyes, teeth that look like knives. Hmm..." She tapped her lip as if in thought. "And really tall. They usually walk like people do, but don't kid yourself, they ain't pretty."

Nayeli's mouth parted as a soft breath passed through her lips.

Griffin scowled. "Must you do that?"

Paxtyn smiled, unashamed. Knox laughed.

Griffin glanced back down to Nayeli and spoke softly. "Yes, they are slightly larger."

"Slightly?" Paxtyn guffawed.

"All right," Griffin ground out. "They are very tall and do hold traits that some consider frightening." He stepped in closer, took her chin in his hand, and tilted her head up. "But you have nothing to fear here—nothing at all. We wouldn't let harm come to you, and we could disable it in a quick moment."

"Oh yeah, and don't run or scream," Paxtyn added. "I did that and almost died."

Nayeli looked to her, horrified. Griffin had just said she was safe. Was she really? If it almost killed Paxtyn before, couldn't it kill her too?

Griffin let out a frustrated sigh. "That was a different circumstance she is referring to. And she was not mine to defend."

"What was that?" Knox growled.

Griffin waved the question away with his hand. "I'm only trying to say that you will be safe." His words came with a breath of aggravation.

"Yes, that is all you were trying to say," Knox said through gritted teeth.

Paxtyn laughed. "Oh, boys, don't get your balls in a knot. Listen," she looked to Nayeli, "it was really my fault. I was unprepared for it and got scared. But honestly, there's nothing to be worried about. The guys will protect you. If you died so would Griffin."

"Paxtyn!" Griffin roared.

Nayeli swallowed. "Pardon me? Did you just say that if I died so would Griffin?" She couldn't have heard that right.

Paxtyn nodded in a very simple way. "Yeah, you heard me right. That's the bond we share. Once bonded, if the Seeker dies, so does his Watcher, and the other way around."

Nayeli pondered that for a moment. Hearing that should have shocked her, but really all it did was ease her. Obviously, Griffin wouldn't want to die, therefore, his word meant more than ever. He'd never let anything happen to her 'cause he'd pay for it with his own life. The thought appeased her worry. "Okay then, go ahead, open the door."

Griffin gave her an odd look. "Just like that?"

"Um...yeah, just like that," Nayeli replied. "Let's just get this over with."

"I agree," Paxtyn said. "I'm getting hungry."

How she could think of food at a time like? Food was the furthest thing on Nayeli's mind. Just having a moment to process all this sounded better. Eating, no, she didn't think it possible.

Griffin gave Knox a nod, and he responded by heading back toward the last door on the left. "You ready?" Knox asked, turning back.

"One sec," Griffin replied. He stepped back behind Nayeli, wrapped his arms around her waist, and leaned in, in the most protective of ways. "Ready, luv?"

No. "Yes."

Without another word, Knox hit the button, and the door flew open. A beast that could only be a spawn of Hell slowly walked through the door. Its head was lizard-like in appearance, and dark black scales spread across its face. Its eyes were the color of blood, which she didn't doubt it had imbibed large amounts of in its lifetime. His body appeared ape-like, big, thick, and ready to crush her in a second.

But that was only what caught her attention first. The moment it appeared, his voice echoed in her head. Deep, dark and slurring with hate, the words she knew were evil, even if she didn't understand them, and the tone spoke of the pain he wanted to inflict on them.

Her scream rose in her throat, but she clamped her mouth shut, denying its release. She didn't intend to stir it and make it stronger.

Griffin's arms were tight around her, a much needed support and one she was quite thankful for, because now, she fought against the urge to run as fast as she could out of this room. "You're safe, it's only voices," he said, his head buried in the nape of her neck.

Yes, it was only words, but loud words. Never had it been so piercing before. She assumed the reason was because she'd never been this close to a demon before. The sound shouted in her mind, but the slithery tone made it manageable. Every word slid around her body in the most disgusting way. She wanted to vomit, but willed herself not to.

“Enough!” Griffin shouted, his body tense behind her.

The demon turned from its current position of staring down Knox as if he was about to become its dinner. Its gaze turned toward Griffin. With a snarl, it lunged forward. Nayeli let out a little scream and leaned back against him, willing him to help her run from the room. “Wait...just wait.” He held her tightly in place.

Wait for what? To die?

A split-second passed, and the demon was on the ground, bleeding just like the other had. Knox, standing behind it, lowered his bow and returned it to his back before he strode forward. When he met the demon, he pulled the arrow out, placed it in his quiver, then proceeded to drag the creature back to the room.

Griffin spun her around and took her chin to force her to look at him. “Are you all right?” Concern weighed heavy on his features.

“Yeah,” she gulped, “Yes, I’m all right. It was just so loud—it’s never been like that. And, that thing is horrible looking.”

Knox slammed the door closed before approaching them. Once he reached her, he gave her a curious look. “If you don’t mind me asking, how often do you hear these higher ranking demons voices?”

She tried to step out of Griffin’s arms, but he didn’t allow that. He pulled her back in close. “It’s only ever one voice at a time, and once it comes into my mind, it slowly grows in strength. At first, it speaks only once a day, then it progresses to hourly. By the end, it’s every minute until it up and vanishes.”

Knox gave Griffin a knowing look. “Not vanishes...destroyed.”

Griffin spun her around, rested his hands on her shoulders, and leaned down a bit to be at eye contact with her. He looked pained. “No wonder they needed to sedate you. Without knowing or understanding what you were hearing, there was no way to cope. The evil that would pour from the mouth of a high ranking demon would be crippling.” He gave a quirky little smile. “This may sound odd, but I’m really quite proud of you. You’ve endured something when most would have met their demise.”

Her only response was to melt a little. *Pride*. That was one thing

she'd never received from someone before, and seeing it in his eyes made warm feelings spread throughout her body. Man, she could get used to this.

Griffin studied her for a moment, then his expression turned equivocal. "We've discovered then that you are only able to hear higher ranking demons, which explains why you don't hear them every day." His head cocked. "Would you mind sharing what it is you hear exactly?"

"Good question," Paxtyn remarked. "I was wondering that myself."

"It's just words," she replied as Griffin lowered his hands off her shoulders. Immediately though, he latched onto her hand to hold it tight. "But evil words."

Knox's brow arched up, clearly in curiosity. "This language, it is not our spoken language?"

"No, it's not English, but it's like English."

Paxtyn face scrunched together. She looked far beyond baffled, leading right into utterly mystified. "Huh?"

"You know if you went to England or something, they speak English, but it's different?" They all nodded. "It's just like that. It's as if I should know what they're saying, but the words are wrong, different."

"It's a familiar language to you then?" Griffin asked.

She nodded. "Exactly. When I hear it, it's as if I should know it, but when I try and make sense of the words, I get nowhere."

Knox's eyes widened. "You can speak demon dialect?"

"I could, yes, but I have no idea what I'm actually saying."

"Say something then," Paxtyn said.

Nayeli looked to Griffin, needing the reassurance that it was all right for her to do this.

He nodded. "You will have to get used to speaking this language. It's your talent. There's nothing to fear by using it. No harm will come to you."

"Okay." She took a long deep breath before looking back to Paxtyn.

"Ando lasharh malium."

Paxtyn fought against her grin, but failed miserably as it spread

across her face. "You just sounded like something out of a Harry Potter movie, like that serpent talk. All drawn out and slow."

Nayeli shrugged. "That's how they talk."

"Oh, I know," Paxtyn retorted. "I've heard them spit out words when Elysia banishes them. It's just quite different when it comes out of a woman with a pretty face."

Nayeli blushed. Twice now she'd been told she was pretty. Never had she been told that before, and the compliment made her uneasy. Was she pretty? She'd never thought of herself that way. Wanting to move on, she changed the subject. "I guess since I could hear him that means I passed?"

Griffin squeezed his hand tight around hers and looked down to her. "You do not have to prove yourself here. You do what you can, and whatever that is, we use it to help us."

She smiled in a gentle way. He was almost too good to be true. He always seemed to know the right thing to say to ease her. For the first time, when she spoke of these voices, people actually listened and didn't call her crazy. Acceptance was something she'd searched a long time for and now found it in the faces around her. She thought she'd feel all lit up inside, but why didn't she? So far, she believed everything they told her, only because accepting it meant she didn't have to go back to the hospital and her old life. But her soul just couldn't comprehend that these people actually needed her and that she had any sort of worth here.

"What do we do now?" Paxtyn asked. "I mean with my abilities we just waited until someone died to train me in my powers. With hers, it's very different. How can we help her?"

Knox put his arm over her shoulder and pulled her against his side. "First thing first." He looked to Nayeli. "You need to read and learn the language."

She looked to Griffin in hopes that he'd disagree. All she found was a man smiling reassuringly at her.

Oh no, this didn't sound good at all.

Chapter Eight

Griffin stepped into the library. The room was filled with thousands of books all lining the walls with a thick oak table resting in the center. A strong smell of dust came heavily through his nose. More than that though, coldness hung in the air around this room. These books were filled with pages of history, and the lives lost in the battles they fought.

At the table, Daleyn and Zane had their heads buried in books, but at the creak of Griffin's foot against the floor, Daleyn's head shot up. When her gaze connected with his, she smiled. "Just the people we wanted to see."

He wasn't surprised in the least. Elysia's doing, he was sure of that. She wasn't a physic, but she did carry a natural gift for knowing the outcome. Why she couldn't save them the trouble and just tell them to come here first was beyond him. As always, she had reasons for it all. He suspected Nayeli needed to face the demons before she could truly comprehend the language. More so, it was possibly to ensure she believed in it.

"What are all these books?" Nayeli asked, glancing around a few times over.

"Our history," Griffin replied, pulling out a chair for her to sit in. "It has every demon we've encountered since the archangels began this war."

Her eyes went wide as she grazed across the books once again. "That many?" She looked back to Griffin.

He gestured toward the chair, not that he was worried about her losing her footing hearing all this, or going deeper into this language. "That many. Take a seat." So far, she'd proven herself quite strong. Nothing seemed to throw her off her axis. And he had to wonder why.

Even Paxtyn had a rough go of things for the first little while. Their gifts had been thought of as disabilities, therefore facing them did cause some fright. Yes, seeing the demons had startled her, but she'd handled it with grace. As much as that should please him, it only unsettled him. Something was off about all this, and he was going to find out what it was.

Just as Nayeli sat, Daleyn handed her a bag of potato chips. "These are for you."

"Thanks, but I'm not really hungry," Nayeli said.

Paxtyn took the bag of chips from her hand, opened them and handed them back to her. "Of course you're not 'cause you've been starved." She gave her a firm unwavering look. "Eat."

Nayeli sighed, but did reach in, grabbed a chip and ate it.

Griffin chuckled. He assumed for the next while all his Watcher would do was eat if everyone here had anything to say about it, which pleased him. She needed some meat on her bones. He was also happy to see the other Watchers looking out for her. He gave them both an appreciative nod, which they returned with wide smiles.

Daleyn spun the book she was reading around. It was a big thick book, leather-bound with thick cream pages. "I've been nosing around in here, and this one so far is the best one."

"The best one, what?" Nayeli asked as she leaned forward and put another chip into her mouth.

Zane answered, "At the time of the archangels, Gabriel held the ability to understand the language. From reading this one, it looks like this was his," he paused, "dictionary."

"His what?" Paxtyn exclaimed, and leaned forward on the table.

Daleyn laughed. "Oh, Paxtyn, you'd think by now, nothing would surprise you." She pointed down to the paper. "See? Look."

Griffin leaned down over Nayeli's shoulder. Her scent filled his

nose, and a low groan came from his mouth. No wonder this woman was destined to him; her scent was simply divine. He couldn't quite place it—roses, summer wind. It sat somewhere in the middle and drove him wild.

Nayeli glanced up at him, finished chewing, and swallowed. "Are you okay?"

He laughed it off. "Yes, sorry, please continue, Daleyn." Low laughs surrounded him. Of course, his brothers would understand his overwhelmed state since they all suffered from it.

"Anyway," Daleyn continued, "from what Zane and I have read, it looks like this book is the language Gabriel heard from the demons. He was kind enough to translate it all."

Nayeli placed her hands on the book and pulled it forward. "This book is huge. How am I going to read it all or remember it for that matter?"

"Well, I kinda thought about that and got you this." Daleyn raised up a small leather pocket book. "I figured you could write down the most important ones in here, then you could just keep this in case something new came up."

Nayeli placed the chips on the table, took the pocket book and opened it, flipping through the blank pages. "Okay, well, that's a good idea, I think."

"See if it works," Paxtyn said.

Nayeli looked to her. Griffin could see the confusion in her eyes. "Sorry, see if what works?"

Paxtyn rolled her eyes and pointed to the thick book. "The translation. See if you recognize any of the words."

"Oh, sorry, I get ya, now." Nayeli gave a smile that showed her humiliation, and even her cheeks flushed slightly. "Well, what should I translate?"

Griffin ground his teeth together. He didn't want to lash out at Paxtyn for causing her to feel uncomfortable. He knew it wasn't her intention, but Nayeli was new to all this, and to life in general. She would need things explained to her in detail so she understood.

Whispers of Evil by Stacey Kennedy

Paxtyn answered her. "What you told us before, *Indi lamish malisim*"

Nayeli chuckled, and the sound eased Griffin's tension. With a tone that showed she was glad to not be the only one confused, she said properly, "*Ando lasharh malium.*"

Paxtyn rolled her eyes again, sighing. "Yes, that—look that up."

She brought the book closer toward her and began at the beginning with the letter A. Griffin read the book over her shoulder. There was no order, and only the first letter was alphabetized, which made things difficult.

After scrolling through three pages of words, *Ando* appeared. "Blood," she said.

"Not a big shocker there," Paxtyn noted.

Nayeli continued through the book until she came to the last word, *malium*. She looked up from the book, to Griffin first. "The words mean—blood is life."

"Shit." Daleyn visibly shuddered. "I mean, wow, that sounds a lot worse when you hear it in English."

Paxtyn nodded and sank into Knox's embrace. He wrapped his arm around her tight. "Fucking right about that."

Griffin watched Nayeli for her reaction, but again, there was nothing, just a blank stare at the book in front of her. It unsettled him. The other two women here were shaken by the words, yet Nayeli had no reaction whatsoever. He reached up and rubbed his finger up her arm. "You all right there?"

She looked up to him and nodded with no emotion on her face. "Yeah, figured it was going to be something like that. It sounded evil enough. I'm not sure the words make it any worse."

Paxtyn shook her head and let out a long deep breath. "I think I have to disagree with you there."

And so would Griffin, but now wasn't the time to deal with it, especially in front of the others. He would find out what was going on with her. Right now, his first priority was to see her well, and her last glance at him was with tired eyes. "Let's take this book back to the dorm."

You can have a rest, and we'll make some notes."

"Good idea," Knox agreed. "Before we met up with you tonight, Roger Mairs contacted us regarding a few men killed in west Louisiana. I sent Tate and Shep along so we could spend this time with Nayeli to get to know her better."

Her gift was what he meant to say, but Nayeli cut in before he could correct him. "Who is Roger Mairs?" she asked.

"Admiral Roger Mairs is the Director of National Intelligence, CIA," Griffin answered her. "He's the link that connects us with the murders that have taken place. When we are sent, we join him and his team on these investigations." His answer must have appeased her since she said nothing more and looked back to the book. Glancing back to Knox, he felt tension ripple through his body. He did not want to go on this battle and leave Nayeli alone. His mouth parted to speak.

Knox held up his hand. "Take some time to get Nayeli settled. We can do without you. If anything comes up that's urgent, we'll return for you."

"Shouldn't we go with you?" Nayeli interjected. "Maybe I can just bring the book along."

Knox gave her an incredulous look. "Daleyn is right. Go through the book and find out key points that you can assist with. Besides, we want you to be at full strength."

"But..." she started.

Paxtyn laughed. "I'll give you some advice. Don't be too eager. Trust me, the scenes aren't pretty to look at it."

"I've been brought here to help though," Nayeli retorted. "I want to help."

Again, Griffin felt unsettled by her acceptance of this all. Paxtyn was point-blank telling her to be afraid about what she would face, and instead of showing an ounce of worry, she wanted to join them. "Nayeli," he said softly, and she looked to him. "We have time here, and you are tired. We'll make some notes, and if they need us, we can join them tomorrow."

She gave him an unhappy look. "But I don't need to rest."

Now, she'd begun to test his patience. Something was incredibly wrong here, and he was going to get to the bottom of it. He took her by the arm and pulled her up. "This is not up for discussion." He glanced back to Knox. "I appreciate the time." He hoped his words really showed how grateful he was. The last thing he wanted to do was throw Nayeli right into the midst of their war. He needed time to understand her, to ensure he could support her as she needed. Now, he wasn't sure he'd be any help, and he suspected she'd continued to hide behind this wall of strength.

He needed to break that wall. The question was how?

* * * * *

Nayeli pulled the warm duvet up to her stomach and placed the thick book on her lap with a plentiful amount of pillows resting behind her. The bed she lay in was Heaven itself. She'd never experienced anything so comfortable in her life. Hospital beds just didn't come so plush.

She ran her hands across the cover of the book, lost in thought, wondering who all had touched it. She held a piece of history in her hands that Gabriel, an archangel, had written himself. An odd connection to him coursed through her. There was a wonderful kinship in knowing someone else had heard what she heard.

Just then, Griffin came into the room. He gave a kind smile as he sat next to her on the bed, holding a mug in his hand. "I've made you some camomile tea; it should help relax you."

She would have objected that she didn't need to relax if the tea's scent hadn't filled her nose with such a delicious aroma. She took the mug from his hand, drew it to her mouth, and blew on it before she took a sip. The warm liquid slid down her throat and warmed her body. She placed the cup on the table next to the bed. "Thank you." When he handed her a raspberry muffin, she groaned. "Really, I'm stuffed."

He nodded toward the muffin and gave a stern look. "Eat."

Knowing he wouldn't let it go, she picked up the muffin and took a

bite. Then, she flipped open the book. "I guess we should get started."

Griffin grabbed her hand to stop her, and she glanced up to him. "Nayeli, why are you behaving this way?"

She gave him a curious glance. "Which way?"

He took her hand in his and held it tight. "Why are you not frightened by what you have heard and what you have seen thus far?"

She laughed. "You want me to be frightened?"

"No, of course not, but I worry why you are taking all of this so easily. Why you haven't shown a moment of disbelief with what you've been shown and why you have yet to show a single reaction."

She looked away from him, not wanting to really answer this. "I'm just okay with it all."

He raised his hand, placed a finger under her chin, and brought her gaze back to him. "Tell me why."

Sadness clenched her heart, her stomach tightened, and as much as she wanted to not go here, not tell him the truth, she felt like she owed it to him. Without warning, her eyes rimmed with tears. "Because I don't ever want to go back."

His eyes flashed with understanding like he finally had an answer to a question he'd long sought. "To the hospital?"

She nodded, and a tear escaped her eye, which he wiped away with his thumb. "Anything, no matter how strange it all is, is better than what happened there." Demons, Hell, believing in both concepts was better than living in a state of death but not being allowed to die completely.

"I can understand that." He continued to brush away her tears. "But closing yourself off and not sharing what you are feeling will do you no good." He leaned forward, coming closer toward her, and cupped her cheek in his hand. "You will never go back there, not on my watch. This is your home now and will always be. But you don't have to hide yourself away and accept it all because you are afraid if you speak your mind you will be sent away."

Her tears began to grow, and her chin quivered. "I'm grateful, so grateful to not be there anymore, to be here now, and I don't want to do something or say something that will change your minds about me being

here."

He gave her a chastising glance. "No one will fault you for being afraid." He pulled her toward him and wrapped his arms around her tight. "Everyone, especially the Watchers, understand what you are going through. You do not have to worry that you are looking weak to the others."

She felt safe here, and because of it, the barrier she'd put up years before began to crumple in around her. "But, they seem all okay with it."

"They weren't always."

Her breath came out heavy, and she cradled her head against his warm chest. "I just keep thinking I'm going to wake up and be back there, strapped to the bed. That none of this is real."

"I won't ever let you go."

His tight squeeze around her made her believe he meant what he said. She sniffed, relished the way it felt to be cradled in his arms like this. "Even though I believe that, there is still a part of me that is afraid you won't have a choice."

He pulled her away from him, his gaze so intent it commanded her to see what he was telling her was the truth. "I will fight for you till my death. You've no idea what it means to me that you are here, but to see you like this causes me pain."

"I'm not quite sure I understand why."

His breath came loudly through his nose as he examined her. "You're here, in my arms, I can feel you, but you're not really alive. You're caged behind this haze of blind acceptance. You just push on, go through the motions, but feel nothing because of it." He gave her a firm look. "You deserve more than what you are giving to yourself."

"But...but..." She drew in a deep breath. It came out shaking then she cried, sobbing in his arms. She cried for all the wrong things that had been done to her, cried for all the horrible, evil things she'd heard, for the years she spent in limbo.

He continued to hold her close, never letting go for a moment, which only reinforced his claim that he would protect her at all costs.

Finally, after some time, her tears lessened, and she looked back to

him. "I think for so long I've hidden away to get through my days, to feel nothing, to not die in that hospital..." She paused in an attempt to get through this. "I'm scared what will happen if I open myself up."

He sighed and brushed away the rest of her tears. "You aren't alone. We are all here to guide you through this. But you need, for yourself, to stop closing yourself off and blocking any emotion from coming through." His brows furrowed in worry. "It is not good for you."

She looked away from him a moment, considering what he said. This instinct to feel nothing, to play dead so nothing could hurt her, was put in a place when she was so young. It was one thing to expose herself to Griffin, to tell him how she felt, but to let the demons in, to let herself really believe that this was happening? She needed time to get there. "I'm not sure I can do that."

"In time," he said so quietly. "In time, you will remove all these barriers you have built around yourself."

She didn't know if he said that for her benefit or his. He may have been sure that one day she'd let herself become exposed and break the walls built up around her, but right now, only action led her. But she owed this to Griffin. He'd been nothing but truthful with her, and she would do her best to do right by him. "I'll try and be open with you."

"And that is all I can ask for." He smiled. "Now then, tell me what you have been hearing."

His words caused the rest of her tears to evaporate. "Pardon?"

"Earlier when we were back here and I saw you tense, I thought it was just your reaction to some of what you were being told." He took a long steady breath. "It took me some time to realize it, but I saw you have the same reaction in the training room. A demon has been speaking to you. Hasn't it?"

Her chin quivered all over again, but she forced it to stop. "Yes."

"Nayeli." He shook his head in frustration. "I will not repeat what I said before about you needing to open up. *Do not* bear this burden alone." His look turned firm. "Besides, this is what we need to hear. You said to Knox you wanted to help, then why would you not say anything about this?"

Okay, now that he said it like that, she felt foolish. Why hadn't she said anything? She wanted to help—she owed them all that—yet, she kept it to herself. "Habit I think."

"You realize it was wrong then?"

She nodded. Stupid really. This was the whole point of it all. Maybe this was what he was talking about. She hid herself without really knowing she was doing it. Now, out in the open, it seemed so ridiculous, but instinct made her act that way. She took a final sniff and backed away from him. "We need to get started. You're right. I'm here for a reason and want to help however I can."

Griffin let her move away from him, his expression filled with unhappiness. "We don't need to do this tonight."

She wiped the remaining tears off her face. "Yes, we do." She handed him the little pocket book and a pen. "I'll read them out, you write them down."

He steeled her with a serious look, his jaw clenched, but he did take the pen and opened the book. "Keep it simple. For now, just stick to important words that would lead us to find out what the demon is and any information to help us find it. Start with the words that you have heard only recently."

She nodded, glanced back to the thick book on her lap, and opened it, flipping through until she discovered the words and translated them. Her gaze slowly met Griffin's as her heart pounded against her chest. "With this language, I don't think anything is ever simple. It said, "I am here, darkness invades."

Chapter Nine

Griffin hadn't lied to Nayeli; he'd protect her with his life, at all costs. But he wouldn't leave her defensiveness either. And that was what brought them back to the training room in the morning.

She'd slept well in his arms, and as much as he wished he could have stayed there longer with her, his world didn't pause for such niceties. He needed her ready for what her life had become.

Now, with her belly full of eggs, toast, bacon and fruit, he stepped in behind her and held onto her shoulders as she faced the target—a typical archery stand that both he and Knox practised on. “The mechanics of throwing a dagger are simple.”

She gave him a look that said she'd argue that point. He ignored the look and turned her face with his hands to focus on the floor beneath them. “You need to imagine a line being drawn on the floor.” He stepped around her and dragged his foot across the ground to give her a place to focus her mind on. “Place both feet on the line, one foot in front of the other.”

“Like this?” she said, doing as he asked, but happened to stand on the line so her feet were side by side.

“Close.” He knelt down, shifted her left foot forward, then moved her right foot back, putting a couple feet in between the two but keeping it directly behind the front. “This stance gives you a solid base to aim at the target and not miss.”

She sighed, a very annoyed sound. “First off, this position is

entirely uncomfortable, and honestly, do I have to really learn this?"

Griffin glanced up to her and nodded. "Recently, as you heard, Paxtyn and Daleyn were both put in a position that endangered them." He stood up, came back behind her, and squared her shoulders. "I won't leave you unable to defend yourself if the situation presents itself." Which he doubted she'd ever encounter. Any demon that came within a yard of her would pay with its life. "Daggers are my weapon of choice, and they are extremely efficient against demons." He would not send her out to face demons having no clue how to disable one if she needed to. "You must learn this."

Her brows furrowed as she considered what he said, then her face relaxed before she glanced back to the target, resolved. "What's next?"

He stepped back in behind her, raising his hands to her arms. Her flowery scent filled the air around him. He cleared his throat at the arousal that sneaked its way into his soul. In truth, his arousal had never left. While she lay cradled in his arms during the night, his body ached to have her. She needed the rest though so his wants would have to wait. Even now, he knew he shouldn't indulge in such thoughts. Now, if only his cock would listen. In response, he shifted on his feet to ease the tension in his shorts.

"Looks like you've got something else on your mind." She wiggled her ass against him playfully.

He groaned and angled his hips away from her bottom. He didn't need her making it worse for him. In the tight shorts he wore, it was impossible to hide his reaction to her, and she had made note of it now several times through the course of the morning. "Focus," he growled.

She glanced over her shoulder and winked. "I'm not the one you need to tell that to."

"It wasn't only meant for you," he groaned.

She laughed flirtingly, but then that smile vanished in a second and her body stiffened. Griffin gripped her shoulders tight, knowing exactly what was talking place. The whispers of evil had invaded her mind.

Only a second later, she gasped. Her eyes blinked as she came back to the present. Without a word, she took out her book and began flipping

through the pages. Griffin had to restrain his laughter. She looked so cute and determined as she tried to translate what she heard.

After a few flips of the pages, she looked up him. "I didn't get all of it," she blushed, "because not all the words are in here, but it said something along the lines of "Blood flows, power come to thee."

Griffin sighed. "I'd suspect it is saying that the demon is growing in strength."

Her brows drew together as she frowned. "Why do you say that?"

"When a higher demon crosses over into our realm, it loses some of its power. To restore it—"

She interrupted him. "It has to kill."

"That's right." He gave a firm nod. "The more it kills, the more power is returned to it." Her face paled before his eyes. "Not to worry, we have fought many demons just like this one. Let's keep focused on the matter at hand here. Hmm?"

"Okay." She drew in an unstable breath.

Nothing about what she had just translated pleased him. Those words seemed a clear indicator that Knox had a powerful demon on his hands, and he knew what that meant. Trouble. Focusing back on his lessons, he placed his hands on Nayeli's arms. He turned her back to the target and raised both of her arms up so they pointed toward the target, one hand wrapped tightly around his dagger. "The key here is to be determined. Do not hesitate. Focus on the spot you want to hit—which is always the heart area—and stay glued on that target."

"Then, what, just whip it at them?" She laughed.

He chuckled behind her and leaned down to kiss the top of her shoulder. "I'm not sure whipping the knife at a demon would get you anywhere, although maybe you'd get lucky and hit it in the head."

"Okay, so what then?" Her voice came out with a tinge of impatience.

He wondered if maybe she had other things on her mind, things that made her want to get this over with so quickly. He hoped it had something to do with his body being so close to hers. *And that I'm not the only one raging with arousal.*

Just as his thoughts began to run wild, he shook his head, clenched his teeth, and reminded himself to focus. "Raise the knife in a circular movement to bring it back behind your head, but continue to keep this arm out," he shook her left arm in his hand, "pointing toward the target."

He assisted her in a slow movement to teach her the move. With the knife up high behind her head, he continued, "Now, when you have your target locked in and are ready to release the blade..." He brought her hand with the knife back around in a fluid motion and slowly began to lower it past her head. "Shift your weight onto your front foot, and when your dagger comes back in line with your other hand pointed at the target, let it go." Her hands were now side by side with the dagger facing out. "But remember, when you release it, snap your fingers back in quick and follow through with the movement. If you stop your arm, you could throw off your aim."

She let out a long deep breath, then looked over her shoulder back to him. "Well, that doesn't seem all that hard."

He laughed at her blasé attitude. "Have a go then." He stepped away from her to give her some space while she shook her arms, which he suspected was a move to prepare herself.

Nayeli raised her left arm, pointed to the target, then repeated the move with her other arm, dagger in hand. Her face held an expression of pure concentration. The sight of it sent a wave of heat through Griffin's body that settled in his groin. Her focus, her intense stare, her perfect position while she held his knife—Damn, his Watcher was going to cripple him to his knees and have him salivating at her feet.

In a swift fluid movement, she drew in a deep breath, raised her right arm and brought the dagger up to position. Then, she blew out the breath and threw the knife.

Griffin watched it soar in the air, expecting it to miss or hit the edge of the target. The knife hit with a loud bang, sending the target to wobble on its stand. He blinked once to insure what he saw was correct. But after a moment, he realized his eyes hadn't lied. She'd made a perfect shot.

Nayeli jumped up and down, squealing with excitement. "Look at that! I hit it!"

Griffin walked over to the target, stunned. He hadn't expected her to do so well on her first try, which was why he had laughed at her earlier words. "Nice shot." He turned around to find her beaming.

She gave him a royally proud nod that lit up her face in a way he'd never seen before, but liked. As he approached her, she said, "So, we're all done here then?"

"Not likely." He chuckled.

Her face turned into a pout. "What else is there? You wanted me to throw a dagger, I did. Training over."

He shook his head and stopped in front of her. "Do you really think a demon is going to stand still and wait for you to kill it?"

"Oh," she replied, understanding dawning. "I never thought of that."

"Hitting a target that is stationary is one thing. Doing it while the target is on the run is something entirely different." He turned away from her and began to walk to the other side of the room where the demons were caged.

She gasped, ran forward, and grabbed his arm, forcing him to stop. "You aren't going to open that, are you?"

Griffin glanced over his shoulder and nodded. Then, he walked forward again, dragging her along with him, her little feet scuffling on the floor.

"Wait!" she shouted. He stopped dead in his tracks and turned to face her. "I...hold on a sec...let me practice more."

"You don't need it," he answered her. "Your aim is fine, position good. You just proved that. There is no better practice than a demon himself."

"Maybe it was just a lucky shot. Let me do it again to make sure that I can actually hit something." Her voice came out panicky, and her wide eyes declared she was frightened beyond belief.

He would have agreed with her and let her practice more if he thought she needed it. However, he suspected that if he let her aim at the target again she would miss on purpose. The worry on her face stated that. She had made a perfect hit; it wasn't a lucky shot, and prolonging

this would only make it worse for her.

"You are safe here, Nayeli. I'm only going to release a lesser demon, one that is quite quick on his feet. He won't be able to harm you. I will make sure of that, but it's important you learn this." He didn't like the worry on her face, but part of him was glad to see it. The conversation from the night before seemed to have had an effect on her. At least with him, she showed some emotion.

As much as he needed her to do this, he also needed to ease her. "Would you like to see me have a go at it first so you can watch the movements?"

She let out a long deep breath that he suspected she'd been holding in with fear. "Yes, please, you go first." Her nod came almost frantically. "Yes, that's much better."

Griffin nodded, kissed her cheek then left her in the center of the room to walk toward the door that held the demon. He didn't mind having a little practice himself. It had been a long time since he'd played with a demon. In truth, he liked the idea of showing his Watcher just what he was capable of.

* * * * *

Nayeli's cheek tingled from where Griffin had kissed her. She attempted to shake the effects away in hopes she could keep her focus. Kisses shouldn't be on her mind while a demon was about to be unleashed in front of her, although she wouldn't mind kisses on some part of her later.

All of this seemed somewhat off kilter even if he thought her capable already. Of course, she'd hit the target, but she suspected that was just good form from Griffin's teaching. She really doubted she'd make that hit again.

Griffin was at the first door without hesitation and slammed his fist against the button. The warthog-bear creature ran from its cage. Remembering what Griffin had told her about fear giving them strength, she forced herself to take deep breaths and remain calm. Not that it really

worked. Her heart still thumped in her chest.

“Now, Nayeli,” Griffin called out, and the demon turned to him, “these lesser demons,” the demon snarled at him, “don’t use strength or power to overtake you, but they are quick and nimble.”

The demon growled, lunged forward, but stopped before it attacked him, almost taunting him. Griffin stood with hands out to the side, one dagger in his right hand, the two almost playing a game with each other.

And by the looks of it, Griffin enjoyed it.

Her, not so much.

Griffin began to circle the demon, keeping his arms out wide as it followed his movements, continuing to snarl and growl at him. “I’m going to aim at a leg,” he called out, before throwing the blade, which landed directly in the demon’s hind thigh.

It howled, or roared, in pain, Nayeli wasn’t quite sure what the sound was. The demon shot up snarling, spit flying everywhere with the dagger still lodged into its thigh.

“You won’t disable it unless you hit its life force. Be sure to remember that.” Griffin began to circle the demon again as it lunged to its feet, black blood dripping along the floor. “When you’re aiming at a moving object, it takes a little practice is all. Focus on their movement. You need to anticipate where they will go next so you can send the knife a little ahead of your intended target, so when they move, you don’t miss.”

Nayeli listened to what he said, trying to be a good student, but soon her thoughts began to drift along to another nature. Here stood a man wearing only black shorts that were tight against his body, his longish hair pulled back into a pony tail, and every muscle flexed while he moved his way around in front of the demon. He showed no fear, no hesitation, and it made Nayeli’s stomach flutter with butterflies.

“Nayeli,” Griffin called out.

She gave her head a shake and looked away from his abs that rippled gloriously along his body. “Sorry, what?”

“Pay attention,” he chastised, but she caught a hint of smile that hovered around his mouth and eyes.

The demon moved closer. Griffin raised his dagger just as he had taught her, up behind his head just as the demon shot forward. When it was only a few feet away, Griffin shouted, "Head!" A second later, the knife was lodged between the demon's eyes.

She expected that shot would kill it, but it didn't. The demon seemed dazed for a moment, then stood again and looked ready to attack, teeth exposed, saliva dripping onto the floor.

Griffin continued. "You have to remember to keep ahead of it, always be aware of its body position. If it's turned in toward you, it'll likely come at you from the front..."

His words began to drift away as Nayeli glanced over his arms, which flexed. The veins that bulged out were nothing less than pure strength, a strength she marvelled at. She licked her lips and let her eyes travel along his wide shoulders. Heat began to form from the top of her head right to her toes, and it finally settled in between her thighs.

Griffin turned slightly, his legs tightening, exposing long lean muscles. The splendid curve of his ass, so tight in his shorts, urged her to reach out and stroke him. He turned back, the bulge in his shorts subdued, but no less appetizing. She knew what hid beneath that thin layer of fabric and knew just how it could make her feel. Tingles between her thighs made her clit throb, and she squeezed her legs tight to ease the want. Instead, the motion sent a shudder through her.

She might be new to all this lovemaking stuff, she might not even know him all that well yet, but one thing was sure—she wanted his body and she wanted it now.

"Nayeli?" Griffin's voice sounded stern.

She looked to his face, but his focus was on the demon running toward him. He raised his arms to throw the blade, but she wanted this over with, and she wanted it over now. Before he could throw the dagger, she picked up the one at her feet, steadied herself and threw it.

The dagger flew toward the demon, cutting through the air with a whoosh. A split second later, it thumped into the demon's chest. With it running toward Griffin, it knocked the demon sideways to land hard on the ground and slide along the floor until it stopped at Griffin's feet.

A look of surprise crossed his face as he looked down to the demon. She neither cared, nor bothered to say a word about it. Passion was all that mattered to her now.

In a few short strides, she reached him, and just as he raised his head to hers, she slammed into his body. He wrapped his arms around her as they went tumbling to the ground with her resting on his chest.

Griffin's breath gasped out in a deep moan as his back smacked hard against the ground. Nayeli didn't wait a minute. She grabbed onto his face and took his mouth with all the desire that flowed through her. He reciprocated by grabbing onto her ass with his hands and grinding her against him.

Her arousal made her brave. Before, she'd let him lead the way with their kisses, not now. Now, she needed to kiss him the way she wanted—hard. Her tongue thrust into his mouth and swirled with his as her lips pressed against his with pure determination to devour this sexy beast of a man.

He continued to grind her body against him. Her clit connected with his shaft, and it sent little flares of wildfire through her body. Each circle of her hips made her moan with a need for more. She considered ripping his shorts off his body so he could slam himself inside of her, but this felt too good, and she didn't want it to stop. And besides, she still hurt—on the inside that is. She wanted to feel pleasure, and she doubted if he entered her she would, but this didn't hurt. In fact, it felt wonderful.

With her lips still working his, she straddled his waist, needing to get closer to him. She shifted her hips so her clit pushed against the hardness in his shorts, but each circle of her hips only made her yearn for a deeper sensation.

Griffin tightened his arms around her and sat up with her still straddling his lap. He tore his mouth from hers and trailed hungry kisses down her neck, nibbling and licking his way along her skin. With a final kiss on her chin, he captured her mouth again, and the burn inside her grew. But the more she ground against him, the more aroused she became.

Her breath came out in needy pants. Her hands came up to his

shoulders where she dug her fingernails into his skin. His groan echoed in the room. She continued to work her hips, grinding against him, but when the sensation only left her hanging on the edge, she whimpered.

Clearly sensing her needs, Griffin's hands came to her hips where he latched onto her tight. She drew away from his mouth, and her hands came up to his face where she cupped both cheeks in her hands. His eyes burned with the same intensity she felt coursing through her blood.

Then, he rocked her hips against him, hard and forceful. The building sensation within her tore a moan from deep in her throat. It didn't matter that a demon lay immobilized so close to them, nor did it matter that they were in a public area. She needed to end the torment her body suffered.

Again, he rocked her, short quick movements that brought her body up the length of his shaft and then back down again. He gazed intently at her, his jaw clenched and his eyes molten. She could only assume her expression mirrored his.

Within the front and back movements, he began to swirl her hips to grind her against him. A series of endless moves gave a rise to the sensations capturing her, and all she could feel was the pleasure building inside of her.

She wanted nothing more than to close her eyes and let this sensation take her away to euphoria. But, she was sure his gaze played a factor in their seduction. She suspected if she closed her eyes the intense sensations would fade. Searching for her release, she stared at him while he worked her body splendidly across his.

His breathing became erratic, as did hers. He sped up the movements with her body, and her eyes watered as waves of pleasure coursed through her body. He groaned deeply, and his eyes narrowed as he approached his own impending release. She reached hers first, erupting with tingles of glorious sensations. As she lost herself in her climax and let out a final moan of satisfaction she felt Griffin shudder around her.

Just as she took a breath in to settle herself, a loud, "Ahem" came from the doorway.

She glanced over her shoulder to see Tate, smiling from ear-to-ear. "Sorry to interrupt your dry humping fuck fest, but Knox sent me back to get you two."

Nayeli blushed, glancing back to Griffin, who wore a grin. He leaned forward and kissed her lips before he said, "You've got one hell of a shot."

She gave him a curious look, not knowing what he meant, then realized he was talking about her taking out the demon. She let out a soft whisper of a laugh. "I had more important things to attend to."

He chuckled and arched a brow. "Clearly." Then, he sighed and glanced down between their bodies. "Before we go anywhere, I have to change."

"And I've got to get my demon-ictionary." She grinned.

Chapter Ten

Changed into clothing more appropriate for the outside world—a pair of jeans and pale blue T-shirt—Griffin held Nayeli’s hand as they followed Tate out of the compound. He had mixed feelings about this. Of course, he wanted to join his brothers, but if Knox had sent for them, it meant trouble. And, he still wasn’t sure if Nayeli was ready. He did feel he’d gotten her to open up a little when she wept with him. But Elysia’s warning to him sat heavy in his heart. Could Nayeli handle this?

Drawing him away from his thoughts, Nayeli gave his hand a squeeze, and he looked down to her. “Is Elysia not coming with us?”

“It’s not safe for her to leave our compound. She’s the last female Fallen Angel here on Earth, the only one who can give the Seekers their power. If she was lost, our kind would cease to exist.”

Nayeli shrugged. “Guess that makes sense.”

Of course, it made sense. Everything made sense to her, which only made him uncomfortable. Everything and anything should overwhelm her, yet it didn’t. He cleared the door, and it slammed behind him. To answer her remark, he gave her a nod, then glanced over his shoulder, looking out the back window. She had yet to notice something. “Might want to take a look at your new home.”

Nayeli glanced back, and her eyes grew wide. Her response didn’t surprise him. At least, now, she gave an appropriate reaction. The outside of the compound definitely didn’t match the inside with its luxurious tapestry, rich furniture, expensive trimmings. On the outside of the

building, however, it appeared to be a typical poured cement government building.

Nayeli looked back to him, and shock filled those sparkling green eyes. "It's not at all what I expected."

"It never is," Griffin exhaled.

Within minutes, they were at the airstrip, which rested just behind the compound. Quick travel time was of the utmost importance when dealing with demons. The plane's engines were already powered up, and he could see the pilots sitting in the cabin. He put his hand on Nayeli's lower back and motioned for her to enter, then followed in behind her. He still had not gotten specifics on the trouble and needed a better understanding of what they were up against.

The plane was luxury tenfold with its cream leather seats. He'd always marvelled at the CIA's way of travel. Nayeli sat in the first seat. Griffin sat next to her with Tate across from them. He buckled up his seat belt and glanced over to Nayeli, who fumbled with hers. Her hands trembled. He mentally chastised himself for not thinking this might be an issue. He leaned over her and assisted with her seatbelt, pulling it snug against her body. "You've got nothing to fear here. The pilots are well trained, and Louisiana isn't far. We'll be on the ground before you know it."

She gave him a grateful smile.

Tate leaned forward and handed her a package of peanuts. "Not a great snack, but it'll do."

She sighed so heavily, Griffin laughed. "Honestly, I am so full. I don't think I've even had a chance to digest anything. Here you can eat them."

Both he and Tate shook their heads.

She frowned, opened the peanuts and put one in her mouth as the plane started down the runway. "Where are we going in Louisiana?"

Good question. Griffin looked to Tate for the answer.

"Leesville." Tate ran his hands over his face, a very tired move. "Knox wanted me to fill you in on the happenings there."

"Please do so," Griffin encouraged him.

Nayeli groaned as the plane began its takeoff, the engines thrust at full speed down the runway. Griffin reached over to her and placed his hand on her thigh as the plane left the ground and hit air.

"It's a fucking mess," Tate began. "Basically murders are happening at rapid speeds. Just as we find one, another one pops up."

Griffin didn't like the sound of that, but he'd already gotten the gist from what Nayeli had told him from the words she'd translated. Disregarding that line of thinking, he asked, "Killed in what manner?"

"Devoured." Tate gave a knowing look. "In different ways."

Nayeli's eyes went wide. "What do you mean, completely?" Then, she placed a couple more peanuts in her mouth and chewed quickly.

"Some have their innards missing. Others have the blood completely drained from the body with nothing left inside," Tate answered her.

Griffin ground his teeth together. Why couldn't their first mission out with Nayeli be something easier? Just a simple dead body would have been better. This kind of cruelty was not how he wanted to introduce her into their world. "What did Paxtyn and Daleyn discover?"

"Not much of anything. At the last scene, Pax talked to the spirit, but she didn't gather any information that could help here. The demon spoke of nothing that the ghost could understand, and I guess, it happened so quickly..."

"Quickly?" Nayeli interrupted.

"Seconds, quickly," Tate answered. "He doesn't hold his victims like others and play with them a while. He pounces and kills them within seconds of the attack."

A blank look flashed across Nayeli's face before she met Griffin's gaze. "I'm trying to imagine what that would look like...but can't."

Griffin wanted to tell her it was something made from nightmares, and that imagining it couldn't really depict how terrible it was. Instead, he reassured her. "It's a loss of life. No matter how it's done, it's always horrible."

"Anyway," Tate continued, stretching out his legs, "Knox wanted to use," he gestured to Nayeli with a nod, "her abilities." He ran his hands

over his face again. "Fuck, it's bad, man, and we can't waste time here. If we don't stop this soon, Leesville will have no people left."

"I've heard him," Nayeli added as she put a couple more peanuts into her mouth.

Tate's eyes went wider than Griffin had ever seen. "You don't say?" He leaned forward, resting his arms on his knees. "What's he been saying?"

"Oh, this and that," Nayeli said, chewing before she swallowed. "Mainly that he is gaining power by killing, stuff like that."

Griffin groaned. "He's a powerful one."

"I don't doubt that for a fucking moment," Tate exhaled. "He killed three before we got there, two more since we've been."

"But it's only be a day since you left," Nayeli exclaimed.

"Yes, point made," Tate retorted. "It's fucking bad, like I said."

Griffin closed his eyes for a moment and let out a long deep breath. Any demon with the need to kill this often was something to take notice of, and the manner of death only proved how much strength this demon held. "Did he kill them so viciously right away?"

"Nah," Tate responded. "At first, it was..." he looked to Nayeli a moment, paused, then, finished, "not as bad. "

Griffin gave Tate a nod, appreciative of his tact around Nayeli, which was usually Tate's way. But concern for Nayeli stole his thoughts. The scenes were going to be horrific. He glanced at her. "If you are not ready for this, you must say it now."

She glanced away from him and looked to his hand, which rested on her lap, and she stayed quiet a moment. Then, without a word, she put her peanuts beside her on the chair, reached into her back pocket, and pulled out her book.

Griffin felt confused a moment. Why had she not answered him? He looked to Tate, and he simply shrugged. So, he glanced back to her. "Nayeli, you need to answer the question."

"Shh," she said, opening the book. "I have to study. The more I know before we get there the better."

Tate laughed.

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Griffin settled back into his seat, but unhappiness moved through him. Her answer should please him, but it didn't. She'd avoided his question. He suspected what that meant was she wasn't ready, not nearly so, but again, she felt this duty to prove herself. If only he had the words to tell her she already had—in his eyes.

* * * * *

The flight had been short as Griffin promised. Not that Nayeli minded it after she got over her initial fear. She'd never flown, and the power of it all felt invigorating. Now, they drove through the rural part of Leesville, a quaint town where everyone waved and knew your name—that kind of thing.

The limo pulled up to a Colonial Revival style house with a wraparound porch and pine front door. It even had the American flag on the front lawn. When Nayeli stepped out of the car, a sign that read *Booker-Lewis House* stood in front, leaving her with the assumption this was an inn of some sort.

Griffin took her hand, strode toward the door, and just as they met the wooden porch stairs, Knox exited the house. "Trouble is stirring, I hear," Griffin said to him.

Knox gave a grim nod. "That might be an understatement, brother." He turned on his heels and went into the house.

Nayeli trotted up the stairs behind Griffin and followed him in. The home was exquisite. Nothing looked modern, and she could only assume all the wood trimming that decorated the house was original, maybe even some of the furniture too.

"Nayeli," Paxtyn called out. She rushed toward her and gave her a hug. "I'm so glad you're here."

"Um, thanks," Nayeli responded, not quite sure if she felt the same. The past couple hours, she'd read her demon-ictionary and tried as hard as she could to memorize the words in hopes to be of use here. Griffin may have said that she didn't need to prove herself, but she still felt otherwise. She wanted—no, needed—to help and give back to these

people who saved her from a lifetime of horror.

"Tate caught you up?" Knox asked, drawing her away from his thoughts.

Griffin nodded. "The basics, yes."

The basics, yes, they'd certainly been told that, and Nayeli felt unsettled by it all. What was she going to see here? From the sounds of it, a whole yucky bit of disgusting.

"They know what they have to do," Tate said, striding past her. "Have there been any new developments?"

Nayeli followed Tate and saw that a group of men on telephones and computers sat in the kitchen. The inn had been transformed into police headquarters, and she couldn't deny she felt a little excited about being part of this. Once a mental patient, now part of the highest levels of the CIA's classified, top-secret stuff—exhilarating!

Before Knox could answer Tate, a man began to approach Nayeli from the kitchen. "Ahh, our new Watcher is here."

He was a proper man with military bearing, but soft and kind in appearance. From the conversation earlier, it wasn't hard to place who he was. "Roger Mairs, I take it?"

"Director of National Intelligence, CIA." He offered his hand to her. "It's a pleasure to meet you."

"You too," she said, shaking his hand. "I'm Nayeli."

Roger smiled, only adding to his kind features. "Yes, I know, dear. We appreciate you joining us here and are hoping you will shed some light on this." He nodded back to the dining room, which sat just off the living room.

Griffin gave her a little nudge on the elbow, then followed Roger. Nayeli stepped into stride with them. Sitting at the large oak table, Shep, Daleyn and Zane all huddled around the most gruesome pictures. Nayeli sucked her breath back into her body as fear rocked through her. The thrill she felt earlier was now gone. There was a reason stuff was classified. Most couldn't handle this, and she wasn't quite sure she could.

"You all right?" Griffin asked in haste.

She nodded, lying to him. No, this wasn't all right. In the photos,

bodies were spread along the ground, gaping wounds in their bodies, arms missing, legs bent in improper ways. Resolved to look no more, she glanced up to him. Concern weighed heavy on his face. "Really, it's all right. What do I have to do?"

He frowned.

Knox interrupted the question Nayeli saw on Griffin's face. "We have to wait for another kill. As horrible as that is, we need you to be able to see the demon in action to understand his words."

Had she heard him right? "Wait, what?"

Knox glanced around to the others, apparently searching for a reason for her hesitation, then looked back to her. "I'm sorry, have I said something you don't understand?"

"Ah yes," Nayeli retorted. "I just have to hear them. I don't have to watch them...you know."

Griffin wrapped an arm around her waist and pulled her close to his body. "Your gifts as a Watcher allow you to witness the death." He gave her a curious look. "Did you not know this?"

No, she did not. "I...I'm not sure what I thought. I just hadn't pieced it all together." She hadn't even given it a second thought that she might actually have to witness this with her own eyes. "I...I'm..." she stuttered in fear.

Griffin's frown grew deeper. "I'm sorry, Nayeli, it hadn't occurred to me that I did not tell you that you would have to witness this. Of course, it helps us that you hear the demons as they are building strength, but when they kill is when you will get the most information from them."

"So I will be able to see the ghost?" Nayeli asked.

Paxtyn nodded. "Yeah, you can see it, but I'm the only one lucky enough to talk to it." Her voice filled with sarcasm.

Griffin sighed long and deep, and a very unhappy look came across his face. He stayed quiet a moment, as did the others. "I will cover your eyes," he finally said.

"What?" Nayeli exclaimed.

"What?" the others said in unison.

"You don't need to witness this. You only need to hear the words

spoken," Griffin replied. "I'll cover your eyes so you don't have to see it."

"Hey," Paxtyn exclaimed, and she glared at Knox. "You never offered to do that to me."

Knox gave her an annoyed glance. "You need to see the vision to speak to them. Nayeli only needs to listen."

"I think that's a really good idea," Daleyn interjected. "It's not necessary for her to witness it, and if she doesn't have to, why make her?"

Nayeli began to feel like a child, covering her eyes when they all had to witness it. Yes, the pictures were gruesome. Of course, they were. But she didn't need her hand held. No one else did. "No," she nearly shouted. All eyes turned to her, Griffin's being the most concerned. "If you all have to witness this, then so will I."

"No," Griffin responded, then looked away from her as if the conversation was over.

Nayeli blushed, with either embarrassment or anger, she hadn't quite decided. Everyone was witness to this, and he was making her feel like the mental patient she had been. She could handle it. She'd react, heck, he wanted her to react, so why was he making her feel like she was incapable of doing this? She decided to set him straight. "Yes, I am."

He gave a hard shake of his head, and his jaw clenched. "No."

Anger rose within her. This was enough! For years, everyone had told her what to do, how to be, and maybe now that she was free from it all, strength gave her a bit of a backbone. "I...you...listen..." Her words came out in a stumble as her blood boiled.

Paxtyn laughed, grabbed Knox and Tate's arms, and began to pull them from the room. The others immediately sprung up and darted out. "He's about to have his balls handed to him." She continued to laugh as they exited.

Griffin's gaze stayed glued on hers, unwavering. "This is best for you."

She took a long deep breath to settle herself before she lashed out at him and regretted it. He'd been acting like this, all careful with her, and as much as she may have appreciated it before, she didn't want to be thought of as any different. "Stop treating me like I'm so fragile I could break at

any second.”

A knowing look came across his face, and he didn’t need to admit that he thought just that. “Nayeli, it’s—”

“No,” she shouted. “I can’t have it, Griffin. Yes, this is hard for me. Okay, I’m not going to lie. The idea of seeing a person gutted will not be easy. And I’m not sure it ever will, but I’m capable.”

He reached out to her, his eyes soft. “I know you are.”

“Do you?” She pulled her arm away from him. “Then, why do you look at me like that? You treat me how everyone has treated me, like I’m crazy. If you’re concerned for me, then be concerned. Support me, be there for me, but don’t try and hide me away. I’ve been hidden for so long...” Her voice wavered.

Griffin immediately hugged her, wrapping his arms around her tight. “That was not my intention.” He looked down to her, studied her a moment, then a slow grin appeared on his face, and she wasn’t quite sure what he was grinning at, her bravery or her boldness. “My only wish is to see you well, Nayeli. If this is how you want things, then that’s how it shall be.” He brushed his finger across her cheek gently. “I’m pleased to see you speaking out for yourself.”

She chuckled, but it still sounded uneven. “I’m happy you listened.”

He leaned down and kissed her lips, a soft apology and one she accepted. She felt strong, a feeling she hadn’t felt very often. She’d won the argument. She didn’t know if he’d let her, or if he truly agreed with her, but either way, she felt all warm inside.

When he backed away, he brushed his hand along her cheek again. “What you will see is going to upset you. Promise me you won’t hold it in like you do. Promise me that you’ll do what you just did and share your thoughts with me.”

She leaned in against his hand. “I promise.”

“Good,” Griffin exhaled. “Now, we wait then.”

“No,” Knox interjected from the living room. “Now, we go.”

Nayeli tensed. *Another death so soon? Oh goodness.* She could only hope her memory would hold up while she watched an act she suspected

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was going to destroy her sense of good in the world.

Chapter Eleven

Griffin kept a close eye on Nayeli as they stood outside the old abandoned house in Whispering Pines, a classic suburb with houses built in the late '50s and early '60s. They were all bungalows with well-trimmed gardens. It was a neighbourhood well cared for, and one he suspected was typically quiet, until now.

Police had roped off the house with crime tape, and Roger shuffled the group into the house quickly as he always did. The world knew nothing of what went on around them, and they wanted it kept that way. Griffin could only assume there'd be some ridiculous vigilante group ready to battle against demons if they ever knew of such an existence.

Paxtyn reached out to Nayeli. "Here, take my hand. It builds our bond together, and trust me, you'll need the contact."

Nayeli took her hand, and Griffin grabbed the other in his. Paxtyn was correct that it did connect the Watchers together, giving them all strength, and fueling their powers. But he would stand strong beside Nayeli while she suffered this. He had no idea what she was about to see. Seekers weren't granted the right to see past events, only given the strength to fight against the demons that walked this Earth.

Just through the main hall, they entered the kitchen, a simple room, one not full of lavish things, just bare necessities. Resting on the floor next to the kitchen table was a skeleton, completely stripped of its meaty flesh.

Paxtyn sucked in her breath. "Oh shit."

Daleyn gasped.

Nayeli squeezed Griffin's hand. He glanced to her, focused on her alone. Not that the other Watchers didn't hold his concern, they did, but they'd seen enough to be fine here. Nayeli hadn't.

Her eyes were wide, her mouth in a tight firm line as the color drained from her face. He tightened his hand around hers and placed his other overtop of hers to hold her in his grip and give her his strength.

"Listen, Nayeli," Paxtyn said quickly.

Nayeli shook her head as if she was stuck in a daze, and her expression became one of the concentration. But her eyes lingered on the horror that met them.

Within minutes, Paxtyn cleared her throat. "Look at me," she told thin air, but Griffin knew she was conversing with the spirit of the man who'd lost his life. "We're here to help you, but you have to tell us what you know. Did the demon say anything to you?" She paused. "But you couldn't understand it?" She paused again to await the response. "What word could you make out?" Only a second passed before her face filled with fright. "Fuck." She visibly shuddered, then quickly snapped out of it. "Go in peace, may you find happiness wherever you go."

Suddenly, each of the women stumbled back into the arms of their Watchers. Knox spun Paxtyn around. "What was said?"

She looked up to Knox, and even Griffin knew something was terribly wrong. "Balan."

Knox met Griffin's gaze, and his expression mirrored just how Griffin felt—unsettled. What was any demon doing mentioning Balan? He looked down to Nayeli as she pulled away from his arms, ready to soothe her, surprised to find her reaching into her back pocket. "What are you doing?"

"Translating," she said, sounding exasperated.

Griffin put his hands over the book to stop her. "Do you not wish to discuss what you just saw?" He gave her a look, demanding she keep good on her promise.

She sighed and shook his hand off the book. "There's not much to say about. It's gruesome, not just the demon, but also the way he ate the man in a giant slurp."

"You did not just say that," Paxtyn exclaimed.

Nayeli glanced around. Griffin followed her gaze to see everyone in the room had equally astonished expressions on their faces. And he understood it. Again, she showed nothing. No emotion whatsoever. Even Daleyn, who'd seen many of these sights, kept tight against Zane. Paxtyn sank into Knox as if she needed his warmth to get the cold out of her blood. But his Watcher acted as if she just witnessed something of no significance. "Nayeli." His voice came out sharp and curt.

"Yes?" she replied absently as she looked through her book.

Griffin ground his teeth together. Enough was enough. His patience was wearing thin trying to get her to feel anything. Now, he recognized that earlier when she'd opened up it was because they were alone, and though that touched him that she trusted him, it was imperative that she not keep hiding from others. He latched onto her arm and yanked her toward him.

She gasped and looked up at him with angry eyes. "What are you doing?"

"These people," he looked around the room, "are your family, which means we are all here to support each other. When you shelter yourself from feeling anything, it's a betrayal to them. We're all here to help you through this."

Nayeli glanced around. Griffin gave a sideways glance to see that one by one they nodded and gave her a reassured smile. "That's very nice, thank you."

By God, Griffin could shake her to get the sense into her mind. "Do not hold this in." He did give her a little shake. "It will destroy your soul."

The smile that found its way on her face slowly began to fade. Her eyes ran across each face again, then settled back on Griffin's. He witnessed pain in her eyes.

"It's a horrible thing," Paxtyn said softly, coming up beside them and placing a hand on Nayeli's shoulder. "I've never gotten used to it, and I hope I don't. It's okay that if what happened here frightens you."

Nayeli hadn't removed her gaze from Griffin's. "It doesn't frighten me. It..." She paused for a long moment, and her lip quivered. "It makes

me sad." Tears filled in her eyes.

"Of course it does," Griffin whispered. Her pain became his, and his heart ached. "A life has been lost here."

Nayeli shook her head as if she disagreed with him. She glanced from face to face again. "That's not what I mean, well, not really. Before the pictures scared me, yes, I didn't like seeing that. But this...was different. When I looked at that spirit, that emptiness in his soul, the sight of hopelessness, that was me. Those were my eyes looking back at me in the mirror for the past twenty-four years."

Griffin's heart clenched, and he groaned with the feel of it. Here, this was truth. She held back nothing, not in her voice, in her eyes, or what came out of her mouth. Yet, he couldn't see where she was going with this. "And..."

"Anything, anything at all, is better than that." She looked to Paxtyn and Daleyn. "You saw his eyes, you felt his despair that there was nothing left, no dreams." Both women nodded. "Well, for me, now...I've been given back life. Don't you all understand that? I had nothing, not even hope left when you all came for me." She nodded toward the skeleton. "Yes, this is horrible, and I could cry at the sight of it. My heart breaks for this poor man who has lost his life. The demon is awful in every sense. But what do I have to compare it with? I have never had happiness." She cupped Griffin's cheek. "Until now."

Griffin clenched his jaw in order to keep his tears at bay. He would not cry in front of his brothers, nor would he show less strength in front of Nayeli, but his Watcher touched him in ways nothing could ever compare.

"I will take this life, no matter how much evil, death, or anything else, without grumbling or tears, because it's still a better life than I've ever had." She firmed up her expression. "So you can all stop waiting for me to having a breakdown. I'm not going to have one. All right?"

The room stayed silent a moment. Paxtyn and Daleyn both wiped tears from their eyes. Then, they stepped forward and hugged her. "Okay, Nayeli...okay," Daleyn said, sniffing a few times.

The women backed away, and Griffin took her face in his hands. "And there it is."

"There what is?" Nayeli asked, his mouth so close to hers.

"I've never said you should feel one way or the other. I've never said that you should act as the other women do. What I've said is that you need to feel something, and there, right then, you told us all exactly what you felt," he placed his hand over her heart, "in here."

Nayeli laughed. "That's what you wanted all along?"

Griffin took her lips in a soft enduring kiss that spoke of how happy he was with her, how her shared pain made her stronger. She'd done the one thing he'd waited for her to do—share her heart with the people around her, her new family.

"You're brave and strong. And happiness," he gripped his arms around her tight, "is right here in my arms."

"I know it is." She sighed, then shoved at him a little to move him away. "Now, let me get to these translations, would you?"

Griffin released her, but kept his hand on her hip, needing the contact.

"Hrmpf," Paxtyn grumbled. "Now, I just look like the big baby out of the group who gets scared out of her wits."

"No—" Knox began.

Tate interrupted him. "Didn't we already all think that of you?"

Paxtyn scowled at him, lunged forward, and punched him in the gut. The group laughed.

Nayeli glanced up away from her book and scowled. "Do you all mind? I'm trying to concentrate."

Griffin grinned. *She's mine*. A whole little package of sweetness that slowly was coming out of her shell, and he felt nothing less than totally enamoured with her.

* * * * *

Nayeli sifted through her notes, one by one, translating the words. By the end, the faces around her had shifted to astonishment. Trying to figure out what shocked them so much, she replayed what she told them in her mind.

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Balan cast out from the House of Princes. I, Dagon, member of the House of Princes, come to deliver his retribution. An exchange for one life taken. The new one who owns the language will be my reward. My power has been revived, and I will kill every hour until you arrive for the exchange. A soul for a soul. Protect yours around you. This is only the beginning of our war.

"So..." she finally said. "What does that mean exactly?" Her thoughts became a little lost in the silence of the others. Obviously, it was bad. She just didn't understand the underlying message behind it.

Knox shook his head, his brows drawn together, and began to pace the room. "Dagon, a member of the House of Princes, this cannot be true."

"What's not true?" Paxtyn asked.

At least, Nayeli wasn't the only one lost in this conversation. Griffin tightened his arms around her, and she looked up at him to see his expression a mask of concern. Enough wonderment. She needed answers. "What's wrong?"

"You," he exhaled.

Her eyes went wide. It was definitely not the answer she was expecting to receive. "Me what?"

"Yes, her what?" Daleyn exclaimed.

Knox paced again, exchanged a worried look with Griffin, then with the other brothers. "This is not good."

"I'd say not," Griffin added.

Zane gave a slow grave nod. "Not good at all."

The tension in the air made breathing difficult. Nayeli's patience began to leave her. "What's not good?" Her voice came out in a loud demanding shout.

"Yes, answer her," Paxtyn retorted.

Knox stopped and looked right at Nayeli. "Balan was banished to walk the Earth because he was being punished, but as you know from what we've told you, Elysia sent him back to Hell. From the sounds of it, Balan has been destroyed."

"We expected that to happen," Shep interjected.

"Yes, we did," Knox replied in a solemn tone. "It looks as though the other Princes of Hell are displeased about the matter and are coming

here to deliver his revenge for his death.”

“Fucking Hell,” Tate groaned.

Paxtyn nodded. “Yes—fucking Hell.”

“But there’s more?” Nayeli said, glanced up to Griffin. Tension filled his entire body, and a protectiveness had flared about him. He didn’t need to speak. His very bearing declared that this was not the worst of it.

Griffin brushed his fingers along her cheek, his eyes soft, yet confused. “Did you not hear what you told us?”

She thought back and replayed the words in her mind again. Slowly, as each word played out, the words started to morph together into something that made sense, especially when combined with what Griffin had said—*you*. A realization came into her mind that she wished she could deny, but after a few moments of trying, she couldn’t. *An exchange for one life taken. The new one who owns the language will be my reward.* “He wants me?”

“He may want you, luv, but he will not have you.”

She sucked her breath back into her mouth. It was one thing to accept all this, one thing to do her part to prove herself to the others, but this sent fear straight down to her very toes. She gripped Griffin’s arms as a warm flush of terror coursed through her blood. “Why me?”

“The threat of you, I’d imagine,” Knox interjected. “You’re a very powerful Watcher. Your abilities are a definite threat to them. I’d imagine it’s why Dagon was allowed to cross over into this realm. Only lesser demons travel here to give back to their leaders. He would have had to ask permission. I suspect he used you as a means to get here. Expose your power, entice Satan to want you destroyed, then set his plan in motion. Many lives will be lost if we do not act soon,” Knox told Griffin. “His warning came clear. There is a way.”

Griffin’s entire body stiffened, his gaze steely on Knox. “Your suggestion has been noted and denied.”

Nayeli glanced around the room. Everyone looked as confused as she felt. Daleyn finally broke the silence. “What suggestion?”

“Use Nayeli to draw him out,” Knox replied in an unemotional

voice.

Time slowed. He couldn't be possibly suggesting that she wait for a demon to find her? She looked to Knox. He didn't appear to hold any determination, which settled her slightly. "You want to—"

"Not fucking likely!" Griffin roared.

Nayeli stammered, not quite sure she could completely understand what was going on here or get a real sense of what needed to happen here. "But...I...but...but..."

"No!" Griffin shouted. "The demon will expose himself again, and if it comes within ten feet of you, it'll wish he never stepped one foot into this realm."

Nayeli sighed. This had all gotten out of control. Because of her, lives were going to be taken until this demon had her. Whoever this Balan was, he had friends in hot places, ones that wanted to see his death vindicated. Resolved to discover answers, she asked, "So, what will happen then? How will we find him?"

Griffin's angry gaze left Knox and settled back on hers. "We will do what we always do—follow his trail of kills. The more Paxtyn speaks to the spirits, the quicker we will find out his location."

"But that means people will die?" Nayeli couldn't believe his logic. It seemed all wrong.

"It is bothersome, yes," Griffin responded, the heat in his eyes beginning to fade. "But it's the only choice. Putting you in the path of danger is not an option."

"That's—"

Griffin placed a finger on her mouth to hush her words. "This is our life, Nayeli. We see death—many deaths—that we cannot stop."

"There have been some complaints of a sulphur smell in the area," Knox said. When he saw Nayeli's question flicker on her face, he continued, "It is one sure way to locate a demon. Their scent layers through the air when they are close. Most dismiss it as bacteria, but we know better—a demon lingers near."

Griffin's tense posture eased slightly. "Let's head out to the neighbourhood and sniff it out for ourselves."

Whispers of Evil by Stacey Kennedy

Nayeli might have objected if the others hadn't already started leaving the room. The conversation was over. But why did she feel so unsettled still? Not for herself, but for the people who lived in Leesville, those who didn't deserve the fate that awaited them. Something about all this felt wrong, and she just couldn't begin to accept this as the only option. *Me, he is after me.* She had no control over anything here, and she needed to find the answer to get it back.

Chapter Twelve

Piled into the SUV, Nayeli sat on Griffin's lap, while Tate and Shep sat in the back seat on either side of him. Knox and Paxtyn sat in the front while they drove around the area. Daleyn, Zane and Roger followed in behind, driving in another truck. Griffin's window was down, as were the others, and he inhaled deeply, trying to catch any scent of Dagon.

"How can you be so sure you'll smell him?" Nayeli asked after she took a long sniff through her nose.

The others laughed, so did Griffin. "Have you ever smelled sulphur before?"

"No," she replied.

The truth of her answer sent a little ping of pain to his heart. All the things she'd missed out in her life. He was only too happy she was now immortal. If she were still human, he'd have to move fast to get in all the things she missed. "Sulphur has a very pungent smell."

"Smells like rotten eggs," Paxtyn said, glancing back from the front seat. "It's disgusting. Trust me, you can't miss the stinky hellions."

Nayeli took in a deep breath again, and her brows furrowed in confusion. "Well, I don't smell anything like that in this area."

"Nor do I," Griffin agreed. He looked at Knox in the rearview mirror. "He must have moved on."

Knox nodded. "Apparently."

"So, what do we do now?" Paxtyn asked, shifting in her seat to face Knox better.

Griffin had the mind to tell her they were shit out of ideas and he hadn't a clue what to do except wait. As always, it took a while to discover the location of the demon, but with Dagon's warning, there was more of an urgent need to find him. Not that he was worried that Nayeli was in any sort of real danger. Nothing would touch her. Still though, the sooner this was over, the better.

Right then, Knox's phone beeped. Paxtyn grabbed it from the console and read it quickly. "It's Roger. Dagon's hit again. Twenty-seven Knapp Street." She leaned forward and typed the address into the GPS on the dash. After a beep of acknowledgment, it loaded the directions and she sat back against her seat.

Knox sighed. "At least it might give us some more to go on." He stopped the SUV, turned it around, and headed back down the road the direction they'd come. "Dagon is not here."

Griffin was about to agree with him when Nayeli's whisper came through. "It's killed again so soon?"

"It's making good on its promise." Griffin ran his hand along her thigh, hoping it reassured her. The truth of the matter was this was the only break they were going to get. He could see just how much it bothered her, but what could he say to her? The control of this situation was not in his hands.

"Just to warn you," Paxtyn said, looking back to Nayeli. "The man has been gutted."

Her eyes seemed so troubled, and concern weighed heavy in her features. Clearly, she was trying to picture just what that would look like. She finally gave her head a little shake and met Griffin's gaze. "How long will it take for you to find Dagon?"

If only he could tell her this would end now to ease these worries around her, but he wouldn't lie to her. They had yet to really discover anything about Dagon, except for what she'd told him. A Prince of Hell, on a mission of revenge, it wasn't likely to make a stupid mistake to give himself up. "We have nothing to go on. Usually, Paxtyn and Daleyn can gather what they need about it so we can use it to our advantage. But as you know, the scenes so far have led us nowhere at this point. Fighting

higher ranking demons comes harder, always has. They're not as easy to find. They're also smarter and do their best to avoid us."

She sighed, only adding to the strain on her face. "I wish there was something more I could do."

"You're doing enough." He smiled. This sense to prove herself made her eager, and he enjoyed seeing her rise to the challenge of a Prince of Hell. Yet, something about the way she said it, her tone, the sadness in her eyes... he got the distinct feeling she wanted to hunt him for the wrong reasons. It wasn't about stopping Dagon; it was about her fulfilling something within herself. Not a good idea. "This is all we can do; take it one step at a time. We can only do so much, and we all have to accept that. But the stronger we become, and the more we learn, the faster we will capture it. Don't fret. Dagon will be in our grips in no time."

"And the fucker will pay," Tate growled.

Griffin studied Nayeli. His words didn't seem to ease her. He brushed his finger across her cheek. "What's troubling you?"

Her mouth parted, but instead of responding, she sucked in a deep breath. He suspected she was about to give her usual brush it off answer. It pleased him to see she caught herself. "This is all about me. He's here, killing, all because of me."

First, his heart warmed seeing her express herself with the others. This wasn't easy for her, and if anyone in this car said a word to make her feel uncomfortable and retreat back into herself, daggers would fly. Before he could answer her, Paxtyn cut in. "Oh, don't be so silly. This is about Balan."

"Paxtyn is right," Griffin added, relieved she didn't say some sassy remark and stuck to the point. "Dagon might have chosen you to use as an excuse, but it really is about the fact that we destroyed Balan."

"You say that, but maybe Knox is right."

Griffin scowled. "Even if you were not my Watcher, I wouldn't suggest that we use you as bait to lure Dagon. It's not necessary."

Knox snorted.

Griffin tore his gaze from Nayeli and glanced to Knox in the rearview mirror. "Something to add?"

"You know bloody well if she was not your Watcher you'd suggest the very same plan. The only reason Dagon has not attacked her yet is because we are around her." Knox took a hard right, heading down one of the main highways in Leesville. "It'd be an end to this."

"It could be an end to her," Griffin growled.

"I think it's a good idea," Nayeli quipped. "Really, what do we have to lose?"

Griffin steeled her with a look that told her full well what she had just said was foolish. "Your life. That is what we have to lose. What if we didn't get there in time? He could take your soul and bind you to Hell."

"Not a way to spend entirety," Shep exhaled.

"You know, I was kinda wondering about that. What does that mean exactly?" Her expression turned curious. "Would I die?"

Griffin did not like these types of questions. Not one bit. Her curiosity to know unsettled him. She should have no interest in it whatsoever. But he'd not keep anything from her either. If she had questions, he'd answer them. "From what Dagon said, he wants you as his servant, a soul for a soul. He'll take you, bind you to him..." He had a hard time getting through this next part. "And who knows what he'd do with you."

"So, I'd still be me?"

Paxtyn laughed. "I know, right? Really hard to wrap your head around it? From what they've told me," she waved her hand out to indicate the Seekers, "it's not how we think it is. It's an actual place—another realm. They live much like we do," she shrugged, "just differently."

"Differently how?" Nayeli asked.

"They don't eat, like food, you know. That's why they need the whole soul-taking thing, to feed their realm, make it strong," Paxtyn replied. "But they have a whole world there, just like we have here."

Nayeli's brows furrowed, and her sweet face looked so perplexed. "So, it's just like our world? Do they have cars?"

Laughter filtered through the car. Griffin chuckled with them. "It's an interesting thought, but somehow, I doubt they have the need to drive

considering they are all beast like.”

“Has anyone ever been there?”

Paxtyn’s eyes went wide, and she spun around in her seat to fully face Nayeli. “Why? You up for a vacation?”

Nayeli chortled. “No, I’m just wondering is all.”

Griffin tensed, and he wasn’t quite sure why. Her questions unsettled him. They seemed simple enough, just curious questions about what existed in the world, so why did it feel more like prodding for an answer? “No one who enters ever returns. Elysia has explained it as another realm—just as Heaven is one—a place where the creatures within it live, some peacefully, others not.”

Nayeli went quiet a moment as she appeared to ponder this. “Okay, so explain this... How can Dagon take me there without killing me?”

“It’s a power they hold,” Griffin answered her. Again, this wave of unease captured him. He needed to get off this subject and now. “But enough talk of this. Hell is not a place anyone would want to go. To spend eternity surrounded by evil is the gravest of all states and would not be an enjoyable state.”

“You’ve got that right.” Paxtyn shuddered.

Nayeli said nothing, only sighed as she glanced out the window. Griffin had a horrible feeling in his gut; something was off with her. Dammit, he’d yet to really figure her out and what she needed. He thought being honest with her would ease her, but if anything, she looked more torn. His worry that she wasn’t handling this well just multiplied, and a question weighed heavy in his mind—what was she up to?

* * * * *

The home on Knapp Street was nothing unusual from what Nayeli had seen in Leesville. An old home, built with red brick and simple beige trimming along the front, but the police cars around it along with the yellow tape declared this home was now anything but usual. Of course, the home was cleared now. All the police took to the front lawn while

Roger led the way into the house. CIA got privacy apparently. But she could understand it. They'd all wonder why the group was standing in a room staring at a body, while one of the women talked to thin air.

She took a long deep breath to steady herself. Her thoughts drifted all over the place, never really settling. They all said this had nothing to do with her, but why did she keep feeling like it did? That she was the one responsible. Sure, Dagon's reason for coming here was all due to Balan, however, the demon didn't want the others—it only wanted her.

"Guess y'all didn't smell anything either?" Daleyn asked, stepping out of the truck behind theirs with Zane right on her heels.

Nayeli shook her head, forcing herself out of her mind to deal with the present and to prepare herself for what she was about to witness. As she followed in behind Griffin, a loud cry came around her. A woman, no a woman and a young girl, were sobbing in the arms of police officers. Nayeli's heart clenched. "Is that the family?"

"Yeah, daughter and his wife." Daleyn's voice filled with sympathy. "Roger said on the way that the wife found him and called it in."

Nayeli's throat tightened at the sound of the cries and the pain that echoed across the sky. She swallowed hard and forced her voice to work as an obvious question came into her mind. "What will they tell her? I mean, his insides are gone, right?"

Daleyn nodded to indicate her assumption was right. "People can be cruel, very cruel. They'll likely just tell the family it was a serial killer."

Nayeli could understand the cruel nature of the human race—that wasn't hard to take. But what she couldn't handle was the pain this poor woman suffered. Seeing her husband, wide open, she shook her head, not even able to imagine it. No one deserved to witness their loved one in that state.

"All right, ladies," Paxtyn said as she stood at the front doorway. "Let's get something this time, anything that can lead us to Dagon's location."

"I'm in," Daleyn placed her hand in Paxtyn's. Both looked back to Nayeli.

She reached out, put on her brave face, took Daleyn's hand, and gave it a firm squeeze. "Me too." Then, they stepped through the door.

Up ahead, Griffin and the other Seekers were already in the living room standing over the body. Nayeli clenched her jaw and forced her stomach to not heave at the sight before her. The man's face was normal enough, but his mouth was wide open as were his eyes. He lay on the soft brown carpet, arms out to his sides, and his stomach had a huge hole in it. He was ripped open.

"Nayeli." Griffin's soft voice came around her.

"Yes," she said, not looking away from the body. Maybe this one was harder for her because he had a family. She'd seen the pain of his death on the face of that little girl, and nothing about any of this seemed right.

A finger under her chin lifted her face. Griffin's eyes held concern. "You need to listen."

His words came as a smack to her face. She'd been so lost in her thoughts she hadn't realized that the vision had come upon them, the sight of it quite horrific. Not Dagon himself, even though he looked exactly the same and sent fear to steal her breath. But it was more, and so vivid. Maybe now since she'd shared more of herself, been more open, the world looked different to her now. The last vision hadn't seemed this horrible.

And not something she could watch.

Ignoring her need to prove herself, to remain strong, she closed her eyes. All she could think of was the little girl screaming out that her Daddy was gone. Tears filled her eyes, and a few escaped down her cheek.

The sound of Dagon eating at the man's innards was more than she could bear. She let out a little whimper and raised her hands to her ears. No, she couldn't hear this. But just as she did, firm hands came on hers and removed them.

"You must hear him," Griffin said firmly. His hands were gentle though, there more in a way to support her. He took them away from her head and wrapped his arms around her waist. The tremble in his body

said he fought against himself as he did this.

With her eyes closed, she pushed herself to ignore the sounds of his feast and focused only on his words. They came quick, but with pauses as he swallowed. She tried to remember each one, hoped she remembered every word. She couldn't forget.

But the sound of his devouring the body only got worse, and Nayeli couldn't draw herself away from it. Her body not only shuddered, it shook with the weight of what this devastation caused—complete terror.

Then, suddenly it went quiet.

Nayeli's eyes snapped open to the ghost of the man—a kind-hearted soul, an everyday hard-working man with a pleasant face. His mouth moved quickly, but she couldn't hear the words he said, only see him.

"Answer my questions quickly. We don't have much time," Paxtyn told the ghost. "Did it take you anywhere else or did the demon attack you here?"

The ghost mouthed a few more words.

Paxtyn nodded. "Did it mention anything you understood or is there anything you can tell us to help find it?"

Again, he answered her, his face so sad, so lost. Nayeli's kept her eyes glued on him. What had this man done to deserve this? Nothing! Now, because of a demon, his daughter was going to grow up without a dad, his wife a widow... It broke her heart into a million pieces.

The ghost replied, then his eyes and his features filled with a despair she never wanted to see again. He said a few words, which Paxtyn didn't respond to. Instead, she began crying. The ghost disappeared.

Immediately, Knox came to her side. "What is it?"

"He said..." She drew in a deep shaky breath. "Tell my family I loved them."

Nayeli took a long deep breath, then broke down, sobbing for what had happened here, for all the lives that would be forever altered by this single event. Griffin spun her in his arms and held her to him. Her head settled against his chest, her eyes closed as her tears came plentiful.

“Shh now,” Griffin said, running his hand along her back. “You’re going to be all right.”

“I know I am. It’s them I worry about.” Nayeli opened her eyes, staring at the wall of pictures that showed happy memories of a family. The woman and the daughter looked out at her, and her entire soul crumpled in the knowledge that those happy faces would be no more.

After some time, she steadied her emotions, but sadness still sat in every part of her. All of this was wrong. No one deserved this, especially not a man with a family. This was a life she’d always dream of. They had this, and more. The pictures scattered around the house declared this was a happy family, and they had it stolen from them.

Griffin leaned her back a little and looked down to her with pained eyes. “Better?”

She nodded, sniffing. “I’m better.” It eased her a little to see that both Paxtyn and Daleyn had been crying too. At least, she wasn’t alone. And it did give her a moment’s peace to know this didn’t happen often, and they seemed shaken up. “Why would it attack him?”

“Good question,” Griffin responded with a firm tone. “It’s unusual for them to go after anyone in such a public place, during the day. They are normally not so bold.”

“We all know what that means then,” Zane interjected.

Nayeli hadn’t a clue. “I don’t. What does it mean?”

“It’s toying with us,” Knox responded, brushing away the hair on Paxtyn’s face and wiping off her tears. “It’s boasting to show us how powerful it is.”

She didn’t doubt Dagon was doing exactly that. “This can’t keep happening.” No, she couldn’t see this again. What would happen next, a child? She couldn’t let that happen. This needed to end, and it needed to end now.

“What did you hear?” Daleyn asked in a shaky voice.

“Oh...um...” Nayeli paused, trying to think back, going over the words he said in her mind. Filtering through the sounds, the feelings that crippled her, the image of seeing the girl’s face. To her horror, she drew a blank. “Oh no... I can’t remember.”

Griffin shook his head. "Do not chastise yourself. This was an unusual case, and with the child and the mother outside, it's hard to keep your wits about you."

"No, I have to remember..." Her brows furrowed as she pleaded with her memory to come back to her. "No, please, God, please I have to remember."

Knox released Paxtyn, stepped forward, and placed a hand on Nayeli's shoulder. "Griffin is right. I'm doubtful Dagon would have said anything anyway to help us along."

Before she could respond, state how wrong they all were, that she had made a grave mistake and failed them, Griffin pulled her back into his arms and hugged her. Guilt roared through her. She had fucked up.

"Tell us what the ghost told you, Pax," Tate said.

Nayeli heard none of the conversation, and her entire body trembled as she gripped Griffin's T-shirt in her hands. She looked back to the family photo as her head rested against his chest. Fall leaves spread out on the ground, and the couple sat behind their daughter as they hugged her, a smile on each face that showed they lived a life they loved. Now, because of Nayeli, in only a short time, she could be looking at an entirely different set of people.

This was her fault. Any lives lost after this was her doing. She had failed this family, her family, and most of all, herself.

Chapter Thirteen

Back at the *Booker-Lewis House*, Nayeli turned the hot water on in the bathtub on full and let the steam come into the room to warm her. Her entire body trembled. Yet, she hadn't gotten in. She sat on the closed toilet, hoping to process her thoughts. She'd come to take a shower to get warm, because her whole body felt chilled to the bone. On the drive home, her memory began to slowly return, little pieces of what Dagon said came back to her. One statement in particular, *"It's you I want, you alone. Come to me at Hodges Gardens State Park. I wait for you there."*

Dagon's words were clear, and she understood them. If she traded her soul, the demon wouldn't kill anyone else, and because he wasn't going to kill her, Griffin would live. Sure, she could have told the others his whereabouts, and she knew they could disable him. But it wouldn't be the end of this war he spoke of. As Dagon said, this is only the beginning. It didn't stop here unless she acted.

The idea of being bound to Hell sent an ice cold wave of terror through her. From what she'd heard, there was reason to be afraid. The truth of it all was what did it matter? In the bigger picture, her life compared to so many others that Dagon could take before, and if, the Seekers captured him, seemed minimal. What was her life worth? What had it amounted to? Not much of anything. Yes, the past days had been the happiest she'd ever had. Griffin had given her a life, and leaving him, this new beginning, was hard. But compared to the lives that could be taken, the choice was an easy one to make.

What she told Griffin was the truth—she owed them. Her life had been nothing, meaningless. For this first time ever, she felt the weight of having to do what was right. She had failed them all. She needed to rectify that.

Resolved, she reached back into her pocket and took out her book. After ripping out a piece of paper, she wrote quickly.

Dagon wants me and only me. You've given me a life that I'm not sure I ever really deserved. You've given me love, and I'll always be grateful for that. And I failed you all. Now, I'm going to fix it.

Forgive me, Nayeli

She folded the piece of paper and gripped it in her hands. Standing from the toilet, she opened the bathroom door, and the steam followed her out. "Paxtyn, can you come here?" she called out.

A little shuffling came down below. "Are you all right, Nayeli?" Griffin called out from downstairs.

Her heart clenched. Panic raced through her. She hoped her voice didn't waver. "Yes, I'm fine. I just need Paxtyn for a minute."

More shuffling came before Paxtyn trotted up the stairs. She stopped at the doorway and gave her a curious glance. "You okay?"

"I'm fine." Nayeli forced a smile. "I'm going to take my bath now. Listen, I have a note here for Griffin."

Paxtyn took the note from Nayeli's hand, examined it a moment then quirked an eyebrow at her. "What is it, a love letter?"

Not much love in that letter, but she wasn't about to tell her that. "Well, you know how I am—not sharing and all—I thought it a good way to express myself. So, don't give it to him yet, okay. Wait, um...I don't know, like ten minutes."

Suspicion flashed across her face, and her brows furrowed. "Why?"

"Well, I'm sure after he reads it...he'll want to...you know."

"Oh." Paxtyn laughed. "You think he's going go all *I need you now, woman*?" Nayeli nodded as her reply. "Not a problem, I'll give you ten minutes to freshen up, will that do?"

"Yes, thanks." Nayeli let out the breath she'd held.

With that, Paxtyn headed back down the stairs with note in hand.

Nayeli hurried back into the bathroom, not wasting a second. She approached the window, opened it, and climbed through. On the roof, she manoeuvred her way down carefully until she came to the eaves trough. There, she gripped it and slid down until she felt the ground at her feet then rushed toward the street.

Standing by the limo was the driver. She reached for the door handle, about ready to jump in. "You need to drive me somewhere—now."

"Excuse me?" The man in a black hat gave her a baffled look.

"No questions, government business," she exclaimed. She gave a firm look, which apparently worked since he didn't question her further. He got into the front seat by the time she'd already sat down and closed the door. "Hurry, be fast."

He responded immediately and slammed on the gas. "Where am I taking you?"

"Hodges Gardens State Park." Her voice was hurried and breathless. "Is it far?"

"No."

Without another word said, not even a thank you, Nayeli's thoughts stayed centered on her journey ahead, to what she wasn't quite sure. But what she did know was she owed her *family*, owed them for saving her from the life that wasn't a life at all. They'd never ask this of her, never risk her, but she was taking this into her own hands. No more lives would be lost here. And from the sounds of what Knox said earlier, if she didn't end this, they were on the brink of war, a war she wanted to keep these people who had been so kind to her away from. This was her gift to them.

Miles swept beneath the tires before the limo pulled into the main entrance of Hodges Gardens State Park. "Where to, ma'am?" the limo driver called out.

"Stop here." She opened the door before he could even stop. She looked around quickly and spotted a sign that read, *Walking Trail*. Hurriedly, she called back to the limo driver. "Now, get out of here."

"Ma'am?"

“Just go,” she ordered. She slammed the door closed and then ran toward the trail heading to things unknown. One thing she believed. The demon would find her. Maybe it had been following her the entire way here. Maybe it even knew she’d come to this very spot in the park. Her knowledge of demons was lacking. She didn’t really know what powers they possessed and what they were capable of. But that wouldn’t stop her. Her soul rejoiced even through the fear because this was the right thing to do.

At the trail’s entrance, she said a little prayer and ran into the dark forest. The trail was well tended so the run was an easy one. Just past a large grouping of cedar trees, the forest opened to a beach and in the middle of the dark waters sat a lighthouse. She glanced around a few times and saw no one around. The campsites were far away from this area, but she could see their campfires burning from here. The lighthouse looked so pretty and the view spectacular. If only she had the time to enjoy it.

“The one who hears,” something said in demon dialect, yet this time it wasn’t in her mind, it was out loud. “I am Dagon.”

Startled, Nayeli spun around and squealed. The demon was an image of hell itself, and the smell made her want to retch—completely wrong. Bat-like wings came from his back, and his face was almost non-existent through the flames and big horns that surrounded his head. His body was dark green flecked with blackness that swirled along his body. She wanted to scream, roar against the evil, but she had to be brave in the face of it.

But she couldn’t. Instead, she took a few steps back and water soaked her feet. Fear shook her, but she straightened her spine. She had come here to do this; she couldn’t back out now. She reached into her pocket and took out the dagger that Griffin had given her. She steadied herself, then threw it.

The knife lodged into the demon’s chest, exactly where she wanted it to go, close to his life force but not close enough to disable him. “Do you see that I could have killed you?” The demon snarled at her. “This is your warning to make good of our word. I’ve got no reason to trust you, but I

will come with you if you vow to end this, call off this war you speak of.”

Dagon grabbed the knife from his chest and threw it to the ground. “Your soul for Balan’s—that is the exchange. You yield, so will I.”

Nayeli swallowed deep and, took a step toward him, thoughts of Griffin in her mind as her heart thumped against her chest. “Then, you can have me.”

The demon cackled, flames shot from his mouth, then he lunged forward, wrapped his hand around her throat, and raised her up to see burning crimson eyes that screamed of stolen souls. She let out a little scream that only escaped as a whisper right before darkness consumed her.

* * * * *

Griffin held the note in his fisted palm as he sat in the back seat of the SUV with his family around him. His mind travelled to when Paxtyn had handed him the note. The smile on her face declared it was something sweet, romantic even. When he opened the letter and read it, his world stopped.

It took a minute to process it all, trying to understand what would lead Nayeli to this choice. Still, he couldn’t even begin to fathom what had been going on her mind. When they made it through this, he would see the end of her insecurity. Elysia said he needed to be gentle with her as he eased her broken heart, and he had been. Now, he disagreed with her. His patience had only prolonged this. She needed some sense smacked into her.

What had Nayeli done? And why? He couldn’t comprehend what thoughts would lead her to this decision. A crazed part of himself wanted to find her and throttle her for the choice she’d made. He was only too glad the limo driver came back just as they were leaving; it gave him a bit of a heads-up. But still, he didn’t doubt he would have located her anyway. The connection between them was deep enough that her energy would call out to him. It pulsed around him now

“It was here,” the limo driver said as he slammed on the breaks.

Griffin didn't wait for the car to be put in park before he exited, nor did anyone else. "Fucking woman." He didn't waste a second. He punched forward and ran as hard and as fast as he could to get to her. His mind tried to reassure him with the knowledge she lived for while his heart still beat, so did hers. And because he still felt her around him, it meant she still was present on Earth. Dagon had not taken her yet.

By God above, his entire body tensed as he even thought of a world without her in it. No, he couldn't imagine that. The world—and he—needed her.

The forest floor swept under his feet as he raced toward her, unknowing if she stood alone or if Dagon had a hold of her. The others stayed close on his heels, their breathing loud as his brothers used all their strength to race and save her.

Just as he reached the edge of the forest, a beach appeared in front of him. The night was dark, but the moon provided enough light for him to see ahead of him. And what he saw gripped his stomach in a way that created a roar in him he'd never known.

Dagon had just grabbed Nayeli by the throat. The sight of the monstrous being from Hell dangling her above the ground chilled him.

"Dagon!" Griffin roared with the anger burning within him. "Release her now."

Dagon snarled and dropped Nayeli to the ground. She fell like a stone and lay still. Griffin drew daggers from his belt and threw them, hearing Knox's arrows soar through the air next to him. Yet, none hit the intended target of his life force. A moment later, Dagon lunged forward.

"Get Nayeli," Griffin shouted to Paxtyn and Daleyn as he charged forward. This demon had picked the wrong Watcher to mess with. Not that he wouldn't do the same for any of his family, but this was personal, and Dagon would pay for it.

As he sprang forward, a battle roar escaped his mouth. Tate and Shep were at his side with swords raised and ready. Dagon let out a loud roar and said words that he didn't understand. He suspected they were a challenge.

One he was ready to meet.

His daggers hit, both Dagon's side and thigh. Had he planned to do that? Did he plan to make this slow and painful for Dagon? He hadn't thought that was the case, but when Knox's arrows hit in his shoulder, he suspected they all felt the need to see Dagon wrench in pain a while.

One by one, each Seeker took a shot at Dagon. Tate and Shep swiped their swords to create deep cuts within its disgusting body, and Knox continued to throw arrows, landing each in places to cause pain but did not immobilize it.

Griffin stood in front of it. The demon towered over him as it used its arms to try to attack him, but Tate and Shep did their thing to keep him at bay, cutting tendons and forcing it to the ground.

Within only a few minutes, the demon began to falter, unable to stand from its calves being cut, its legs littered with daggers and arrows. Then, it fell, screaming words that only his Watcher would know.

"Move away," Griffin ordered the others. With laboured breaths, they did as he asked. He closed in on Dagon, its face a mask of pure evil. Its eyes burned with a rage to devour every soul here, yet, his want wouldn't be met. His body needed time to heal from the wounds it received. It was powerless.

And Griffin wasn't about to show it mercy.

With the dagger in his hands, he raised it high above his head and slammed it down into Dagon's life-force. The demon snarled, his roar echoed through the sky, then he went quiet.

A small whimper caught his attention. He glanced sideways. Paxtyn had just helped Nayeli sit up. Her eyes fluttered open. "Girl, you are in serious trouble," Paxtyn said to her. "I would so *not* want to be you right now."

"What...what happened?" Nayeli asked, blinking a few times.

Griffin glanced back to Knox. "Call in Roger to come and get Dagon to take back to Elysia." Then, he began to walk toward Nayeli. When she caught his gaze, her breath retreated into her body, and her eyes went wide. Good, she recognized how angry he was at her. Now, however, was not the time to discuss this. Once, he got her home he'd deal with this matter.

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As he drew near, he noticed bruises already forming on her neck, and unhappiness coursed through him. Paxtyn backed away as he leaned down to Nayeli. Not saying a word to her, he picked her up in his arms and began carrying her to the car.

He didn't want to lash out at her now, not with her just waking from being knocked out, but a serious lashing was coming her way.

"Griffin..." Nayeli started.

One firm glance shut her mouth tight. She leaned her head against his chest, and he suspected she was fighting to get words through her sore throat. He was angry with her, beyond words, but this—having her in his arms safe—felt good, a moment he'd relish because once he got her alone, he'd not let her see an ounce of the happy feelings he felt.

Chapter Fourteen

No words were spoken for the entire flight back to the compound. Griffin had only looked at Nayeli once, and when he did, rage flared in his eyes. After a while, Nayeli looked out the window and never looked back. She didn't have to. She could feel Griffin's hard stare along her skin, feel the rage pouring out of his body.

Paxtyn offered a smile now and again, even Knox did, showing they were not angry at her. She even recognized a little pride in both their eyes. But proud was not how she felt

She'd acted without really understanding the consequences, but at the time, it seemed like the right thing to do. Now, she could hardly believe she had nearly offered her life to a demon. What had come over her? Yes, it was true, lives would be spared, but her life would have been lost. The whole event stunned sense into her. Shame set in hard. Not only for the danger that she'd put herself in, but for not trusting in the others, especially Griffin.

Her throat burned from where Dagon had gripped her. It took her ten minutes to come to, or at least that was what Paxtyn said. By the time she did, Dagon was handled, and Griffin glared at her.

He'd yet to say a single word to her.

The plane skidded along the runaway. When the door opened, the others hurried out, leaving Nayeli alone with Griffin. She didn't dare look at him as she stood. Nor did she glance his way as she passed by his seat.

Suddenly, his hand gripped around her forearm, forcing her to

stop. Slowly, she glanced at him, and her breath sucked in. His anger had apparently grown since the last time she looked. But it was a calm angry, one that showed only in his eyes. He stood, towered over her, and for the first time, she appreciated the sheer size of him. She felt like a kid about to be scolded by a parent.

She couldn't let this continue. "Okay, I made a bad decision."

He arched a brow. "I'm glad you realize that." With his hand still tight around her arm, he led her out of the plane and toward the compound. The others gave her a small smile as they walked by. Clearly, they were staying out of Griffin's way. Shep and Tate were pulling the steel case that held Dagon out of the luggage compartment of the plane, and she assumed they were going to take it to Elysia. She wished she was going there too, and not dealing with the very pissed off Griffin.

At the compound, he led her through the door, down the hallway, then pushed her into their dorm, closing the door behind her.

As she turned around now in the middle of the living room, she found him leaning against the door studying her. Still, he said nothing. The silence began to eat at her. She couldn't take it anymore. "Will you yell at me, say some curse words, anything? This silence is horrible."

Griffin pushed away from the door and came to stand in front of her. His eyes burned with fury. "Do you have any idea what you put me through? Knowing that I was not there to protect you?" He took her by the arms and shook her. "By the Heavens above, woman, do you have no sense at all?" He let go and began pacing the room, but he kept looking at her. "Do you not value your life?"

If he'd asked her this question a couple hours ago, she'd answer differently. But things had changed. Facing death sure made things a lot clearer. "Of course I do."

"Really then, tell me, if a woman valued her life, why would she run into the arms of a demon?"

She really didn't want to explain her emotions and the confusion she had as to her value. Instead, she stuck to another reason that made her go. "Because I owed you all. Because Dagon would stop killing, and the war it spoke of would end."

His steps froze, and the rage only built on his face. A second later, he had her by the arms again. "You owe us nothing. You give us something greater than obviously you can understand. His words are nothing new to us. Demons have threatened wars throughout the centuries. Yet, we still stand. Our purpose is to stop evil, and because of you, we'll do it faster and be stronger. Yes, lives will be lost, but why would you chose willingly to give up your own life? What do I have to do to get you to see reason?"

Tears welled up in her eyes, her bottom lip quivered, and it was difficult to find her voice. "Tonight, I just thought—"

"You thought," Griffin interrupted, his brow arched. "No, you didn't think, you acted, and foolishly so."

So, he had her there. "Okay, well, what do you want me to say? You know I'm sorry. I realize I made a mistake, that I shouldn't have just thrown my life away, that I should have counted on you—on all of you."

He huffed and began pacing again while he stared at her. "Do you realize your own worth? That you are important to our family?" He closed the distance between them and brought his body so close to hers. "That you're important to me?"

She sighed, and those tears continued to fall from her cheeks. In all this, his anger was for her safety, not only physically but mentally too. She could understand that now. "Yes, I see that now."

"Good." Griffin let out a long deep breath, and the rage dissipated, but the firmness in his eyes never wavered. "Now, take off your pants."

Huh? "What?" She had to have heard him wrong. Not that she was opposed to some make-up sex, but the way he asked it, so forcefully, she began to think that was not what he had in mind.

Griffin went into the kitchen, grabbed a chair, then brought it over to her. "We were born from different times, you and I." He gave her a knowing look. "From my era when we acted foolishly, we were punished. I listened to Elysia about being gentle with you to help you through this foolish cage of unworthiness you have woven around yourself. But I have had enough! Now, drop your pants and get over here."

She laughed, a nervous sound, understanding completely where

this was going. "You can't honestly be suggesting what I think you are?"

No emotion showed on his face. "Either you will come here willingly and receive your punishment for such foolish behaviour or I will assist you."

Okay, wait, hold up...what's going on here? "What am I being punished for?"

"I have tolerated and supported you, trying to work out these issues with you softly, worried if I made a sudden move, you would be startled. But your actions tonight say you are much stronger than you let on. This strength hidden by this scared part of you, this continuous act to not love yourself, is a part I am going to rid you of tonight."

"By spanking me?"

"My words have no effect on you. I say them, and you choose to either not listen or to outright defy me. Either one displeases me. This behaviour will stop now. And I'm going to spank your ass so hard that every time your mind travels to these thoughts you will think of your sore arse and stop yourself."

She stood, waiting him out. He had to be kidding. After a good two minutes, nothing changed in his demeanour. Normally, if any man had threatened to smack her, she'd deliver him his own injuries. But part of her felt she deserved this. What happened tonight was stupid. If she hadn't been so wrapped up in her guilt, her own means to make herself stronger, better, to prove her worth, she wouldn't have been in that predicament.

If she thought he'd hurt her, she would have stormed out of this room. But he wouldn't, not really anyway. And more than anything, she wanted his forgiveness. Having him angry at her felt wrong in every regard. If this freed him, got his anger out, then so be it. She deserved worse than this anyway. Maybe it was a lesson she needed to learn, and maybe it'd stick this time.

Without a word said, she slowly unbuttoned her pants, tucked her fingers into the rim of her panties and slid them down her hips. Once dropped down, she stepped out of them and approached him.

He straightened up, widened his legs, and still no emotion showed

on his face. Reaching out, he grabbed her arm, pulled her to him so she stood between his legs and turned her around. "Do not move."

Then, he smacked her ass—hard. She gasped, clenched her fists, and let out a little whimper, not really knowing if it was pain that caused her reaction or just surprise. A second later, she concluded it was the surprise as his hand came again sharp across her flesh.

"Never again will you act as you did tonight." His voice became harsh as he moved over to her other cheek and slapped it. The sound echoed in the room, mirrored by Nayeli's deep intake of breath.

"I won't..."

"No talking." He amplified his warning by an ever harder spank across her bottom.

She groaned, but said nothing more. The anger that poured from his mouth was enough to keep her quiet, but the clear indicator was, that if she defied him now, the hits would only come harder.

His hand came up around her hip to hold her still, while he continued to deliver his punishment to her. And she took it. Deserved it.

Six smacks later, her bottom flamed with heat. The hits were hard enough for her to heed his warning, yet, gentle at the same time. She couldn't deny the effect didn't work. This she'd never forget, but not for the reasons he thought. No, this force, the sound against her skin, the warmth it created, stirred something in her that had nothing to do with a punishment. With each slap, her whimper began to sound more like a moan of pleasure. It was a revelation even to her.

Her bottom rose back toward his hand, almost as an offering for more. Was this a need to be punished that drove her or the want for him to ravish her body? That she couldn't answer. What she did know was she wanted—craved—more.

Just as his hand delivered another hard slap, she wiggled back against him, and instead of removing his hand from her bottom, he gave her cheek a hard squeeze and groaned.

She smiled. Who was really being punished here?

He slid his hand from her hip to reach her other cheek as he began to squeeze them tightly in his hands. "Your ass is so red." His tone

rumbled, deep and hungry. "So...very red." The squeeze of his hands was not in any way gentle. No, this was meant as an equal punishment. Each grip of his fingers dug into her skin, but it only heated her body more, stirred her desires.

"Is my punishment over?" Her voice didn't even sound like her own. It was almost as if she purred the words.

Griffin pushed her forward slightly, causing her to take a step out to brace herself. He spun her around and looked down to her. The glorious presence of her Seeker sent a warm tingle straight to her core. He still looked angry, yet somehow more intense than wanting to lash out at her. He grabbed her face in his hands. His eyes bore into hers with sheer unadulterated need. "Your punishment has only begun."

Then, he closed the distance and devoured her mouth in a long open-mouthed kiss that left no misunderstanding she was not the only one utterly aroused by the punishment. She'd never thought such an act would bring her mind to such naughty places, but maybe it was just that Griffin did it. His harsh touch, forcing her to see reason, demanding she get out of her head and really see the world as it was, brought new feelings into her heart.

He tore his mouth from hers and rid himself of his shorts. His needy erection stood out from his body, already hard. "On your knees." He pointed to the ground below him, a stern look in his eyes.

She couldn't help the smile that rose to her face. Paxtyn had told her this very thing would happen, a demand for her to please him with her mouth. With his body so firm just standing there waiting for her attention, she immediately complied with his request.

Kneeling beneath him, she took him in her hand and squeezed, which earned her a groan from Griffin's mouth. A little hesitation coursed through her. She had no idea what to do with his body, and hadn't thought to ask the other Watchers. But just as those insecure feelings ran through her, she remembered Griffin's warning: *Rid yourself of the fear in your heart.*

With that in mind, she leaned forward and licked the droplet of moisture around the head of his erection. She drew the fluid back into her

mouth and let the flavour sit on her tongue. He tasted so good, so salty—so Griffin.

Moving back toward him, she opened her mouth and took the tip of him into her mouth, sucking her cheeks in around him. He moaned. She looked up to him to find his head had fallen back with his fists tight at his sides. *I must be doing this right.*

She opened her mouth wider and took more of him into her mouth until he hit the back of her throat. Not able to consume him all, she swirled her tongue along his shaft as she began to move him in and out of her mouth.

Her hands ran along his thighs as he trembled around her. When she met his shaft again, she removed her mouth, gripped him and began to pump her hand, which was now wet from her saliva.

His groan rumbled straight through her as he looked back to her. "Suck on here." He cupped his hand under his testicles.

Having his instruction didn't upset her in the least. She hadn't a clue what to do and needed a bit of guidance. She continued to pump him as she lowered her mouth to one of his testicles and took it into her mouth.

His hips shot forward. "Yes, luv, just like that. That's it."

She released the one testicle to grab the other and repeat the move as she continued to pump his shaft. When her saliva dried up and the friction began to be troubled, she brought her mouth back up to the tip of him, took him into her mouth and devoured it. He grasped onto her head. "You're good at this, luv. Very, very..." A loud moan cut off his words as she licked from the base of his shaft to the tip, along the sides, anywhere she could get her tongue.

His hands petted her head as she continued to feast on his delicious skin. She could have played for hours, just like this, teasing him, touching him to arouse him, but she wanted to hear him groan with delight from her intentions.

With a final swirl around the head, she released more saliva from her mouth and ran her hand along the shaft right to the base. She brought him into her mouth, but only the tip, drew in his cheeks and began to bob

her head in the same rhythm she used at the base of his erection as she pumped it.

Griffin gripped her face even tighter and groaned so deeply. His hips worked in unison with her movements, and she was in a very happy place. He had shown her pleasure, now she was returning the favour. And the control over him, the way of doing whatever she liked with his body, filled her with a sense of power she'd never known.

His body tensed even further, the tremble of his legs now quaked, and suddenly, he pulled away with a loud gasp of breath. She glanced up to him. "Come here," he growled at her in a voice she'd never heard come from him. He reached out, latching under her arms and brought her close to his body.

Then, he removed her skirt and her bra and sat down on the chair with her straddling his legs. He held onto her hips and raised her up, moving her body until he found her entrance. At the sweet moment of contact with her dampened skin, he slammed her down on him, and she screamed out, part in pain, part in pleasure. Without the chance to recover, he lifted her body then brought her back down against him.

Her hands came up to rest on his shoulders as she reveled in his control over her body. He could move her, that was an undeniable truth, but she wanted to do this herself. She gripped onto his shoulders, fought against his movement, and began to work her body in a rhythm that suited her. Rising to the very end of him, she quickly sank back down to devour him up.

His load groan filled her ears and only inflamed her need to take him harder. She began to move quicker, more forcefully as she kept her gaze focused on his powerful eyes, and took his body in a way that was all her own.

But he had plans of his own. While she rose above him ready to send herself back down, he thrust up to meet her body. The move surprised her, and it sent a wave of pleasure coursing through her blood. He placed his hands under her bottom, raised her a little away from his body, held her weight in his strong arms, and delivered rounds of hard fast thrusts.

And her mind was immediately lost to her. "Ahhh...oooo..." Nothing but sounds of a woman being pleased to immeasurable amounts poured from her mouth. The sensations built to extreme limits in her body. Her head fell back as her body began to tense with the need to release.

Yet, it wasn't enough. She needed more. Drawing her head back upright, she looked down her body, lowered her hand and found her little nub. Circling it, pushing hard against it, her body delighted in the new sensations it brought. Her moans shouted from her throat almost as trembling cries, a desperate plea for the hold on her body to release her from its current state.

Griffin must have acknowledged her need since he increased his power. He held her higher, lifted his hips off the chair and pounded his entire weight into her. Her breath froze, and her fingers on her nub felt the vibrations of her pleasure sweeping through her.

Without even the chance to feel the comedown, Griffin had her up in his arms, steadied her feet against the ground, then flipped her over so her chest was now laying sideways across the seat of the chair. She gripped the outer edges of the seat as Griffin kicked open her legs, moved in behind her then seated himself fully into her body. His fingers gripped her hips as he issued her the punishment she believed she was due.

Hard thrusts that she could feel right to her very core. Loud smacks against skin, wet noises that only increased the harder he went. His groans were a mirror image to her screams.

"You will not forget your worth again." Griffin growled, slamming against her. "Am I understood?"

"I...won't..." Nayeli screamed out after he altered angles and it sent a wave of pleasure within her. "Forget."

Suddenly, he withdrew from her body, pulled her up so she stood before him. He lifted one of her legs up and placed her foot on the chair. Stepping in front of her, he lowered down a little, and she reciprocated by going on her tippytoes with her other foot to get her more height. Her arm went around his neck as he entered her in a quick move. His hands came to her face where he kept her eye level with him. "You will never leave me

like that again?"

Her eyes fluttered closed a moment with the sensation of his body now slamming into hers at this position. Oh, the pleasure he created in her body.

"Tell me now." His voice came out strained.

She opened her eyes, met his gaze, and her breath gasped out in pants. "Never again." Her body began to warm again, and flutters danced in her belly, indicating to her that her release was imminent.

Griffin groaned as her body contracted around him, squeezing him and begging him to give her what she needed.

"Promise that you will never act without me again."

Words were nearly impossible now. His one hand stayed on her face, while the other travelled down to her bottom, giving himself further strength. His thrusts came harder than she thought was even possible. His length moved so quickly, so forcefully within her, body strength was beginning to become a problem.

Her inner walls contracted around him again, this time, however, it didn't let up. She gripped him as pleasure rose in her body. "Answer me!" he roared.

"Yes...yes...I promise." Then, her world shattered. Nothing existed but the intensity of a thousand nerve endings brought to euphoria. Vaguely, she could feel Griffin's body pumping in her with his own release, his shouts of pleasure, but so lost was she in her own climax, she wasn't really aware of anything.

When the pleasure left her and let sense come back into her mind, Griffin had both hands on her face again. His face gazed upon her softly, his emotions exposed. "Nayeli." His voice came out breathless. "You've given me something I've never had, luv. If anyone owes anything, I owe you for what you bring to my life."

Shame began to settle in, maybe shame at herself for not realizing what he was trying to tell her all along. Life was hers to make, her path to carve, and she deserved it like anyone else did. She didn't have to prove anything, or be anymore than what she was, because Griffin only saw the truth. Past the pain, past the guilt, and it was the first time she saw herself.

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Truly saw who she was, witnessing it through how Griffin loved her.

He smiled, brushed away her tears with his thumbs and sighed, a very long relieved breath. "And there it is..."

"There what is?" she whispered, a little breathless herself.

He brushed a soft kiss across her lips. "Your heart—bare and exposed, and ready for me to love forever."

The End

Author Bio

Stacey Kennedy is an avid lover of the paranormal romance and urban fantasy genres. If she isn't plugging away at her next novel, tending to her two little ones, she's got her nose deep in a good book. She lives in Ontario, Canada with her husband. Be sure to drop her a line at www.staceykennedy.com, she loves to hear from her readers.