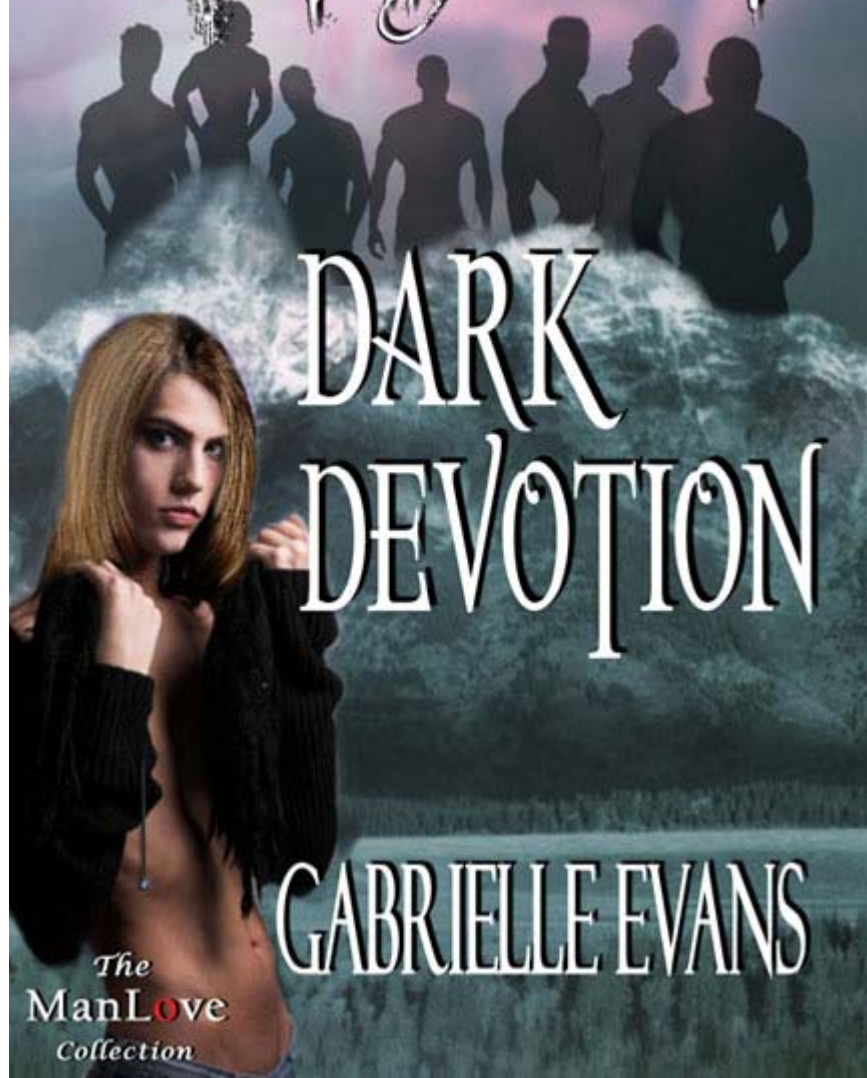


Siren Publishing

*LoveXtreme Forever*

*Fatefully Yours 1*



*The*  
**ManLove**  
*Collection*

## Fatefully Yours 1

### Dark Devotion

Hex and his six demon warriors escaped the depths of Tartarus under Hades's watchful eye to live among the mortals in the Top World. The Oracle has prophesized an epic battle to come—a war between good and evil that will test the warriors as never before.

When Echo arrives on their doorstep, cold, naked, and hungry, they immediately realize he is their mate, and the prophesized “heart” that beats between them. Echo may be the ultimate weapon in the war, but he’s also a spitfire, and he instantly turns their world upside down.

If fighting an angry god weren’t enough, the warriors learn Echo has escaped from a secret lab hidden away in the mountains, and it isn’t long before trouble comes looking for them. Can the demons keep their new mate safe when it seems the entire world—and the Underworld—is against them?

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**Genre:** Alternative (M/M or F/F), Fantasy, Ménage a Trois/Quatre

**Length:** 40,447 words

# **DARK DEVOTION**

*Fatefully Yours 1*

**Gabrielle Evans**

**LOVEXTREME FOREVER  
MANLOVE**



**Siren Publishing, Inc.  
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# **DEDICATION**

To my brilliant cover artist, Jinger, for making my characters come to life through her amazing art. Thank you!

# **DARK DEVOTION**

*Fatefully Yours 1*

**GABRIELLE EVANS**

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## **Prologue**

They gathered in a large circle, each watching the Oracle intently. Her silver-blond hair cascaded down around her, brushing softly against her ankles as she tilted her head back and stretched her arms wide. A ring of fire erupted around them, the flames reaching toward the skies to form a cocoon of fiery heat.

Casting a look about the circle, Hex met each man's eyes, holding their gaze for just a moment before moving on to the next. Only twice before had they shared their dreams, and never did the act bring good tidings.

"The gates of Tartarus will burst open wide, releasing its evil upon the world," the Oracle began speaking in her robotic monotone. "Those who have escaped the flames must stand together and fight or return to the bowels of whence they crawled."

Closing his eyes, Hex felt the heat wash over him, a reminder of the prison from which he and his lovers had escaped. Two thousand years had passed, and still he remembered the treacherous journey across the river Acheron as though it were yesterday.

Nothing could make him return to the Underworld.



“Each gift must be united, sealed together in eternal bond. The heart that beats between you will be your salvation, bringing you together in ways you have never known.”

Now they were getting into the mystical riddles he hated so much. Why couldn't the Oracle just give it to them straight?

“The Earth's retreat marks the beginning. With the passing of each shadowed moon, a new wickedness shall be brought to those who dwell upon her soils. The waters shall run red with misery and woe. Hades' fire will rain upon the land. The sky shall split open, screaming in its fury.”

Well, that all sounded just peachy. Hex scrubbed a hand over his face, his heart heavy with the task that lay before them.

“Crops will shrivel, and beasts shall scatter their worries. The sun will fall, and the moon will bleed.”

Okay, he didn't even know what half of that meant. He just hoped he woke up soon.

“Your enemies shall seek out the heart, laying waste to the ones born of the first. Nurture and protect your sacred bond with your very lives.” Then the Oracle lifted her head, and though she didn't look his way, still managed to pierce Hex with her gaze, right down to his hard-won soul. “The heart is coming with whispered echoes.”

## Chapter One

“I really hate that bitch. I mean, why can’t she just say, ‘Here’s your enemy. Here’s how you kick his ass,’ and be done with it? What’s with all the mystical crap?”

Hex rested his elbows on his knees and dropped his head forward into his hands, burying his fingers in his long dark locks. “I agree, Eyce, but there’s nothing we can do about it.”

“We could ignore her,” Syx offered.

“And be dragged back to Tartarus? I don’t think so.” Hex pushed to his feet, unfolding his six-foot-eight frame from the leather sofa, and began to pace. “You heard her. Either we fight, or we belong to Hades again.”

“So, you’re saying that we should stop bitching and get with the planning?” Myst smirked as he rose from his seat and stood in front of Hex to stop his pacing. Wrapping a hand around his neck, he pulled him down, covering his mouth in a soft kiss. “We’ll face whatever comes together. Yeah?”

“Yes,” Hex whispered. “We stick together no matter what.”

“Agreed,” Vapre said as he sat cross-legged, floating in midair as the wind swirled beneath him.

“Show off.” Hex snorted before becoming serious again. “So, does anyone have any ideas?” Looking to each of the six warriors in the room, he watched them frown in concentration. “Let’s take it one step at a time.”

“Well, we know our enemies are coming from the Underworld,” Onyx mumbled, pulling at his short blue-black hair. “Why, though?”

It's been two thousand years since we escaped. Why are they coming now?"

"The Oracle told us in our first dreams of her that we would need to go to war to earn our freedom." Everyone nodded at Hex, staring at him intently as they waited for him to continue. He absolutely hated when they looked at him that way. As their alpha and commander, they looked to him for answers. He didn't always have them. "The war has come. I don't think the 'why' is important."

"So, how long do we have?" Fiero asked, with his usual scowl. "She said when the Earth retreats. Retreats from what?"

"The sun, of course," Vapre answered as he slowly lowered to sit on the floor. He pushed his fingers through his silver-blond hair and sighed. "The winter solstice occurs when the Earth's axial tilt is farthest away from the sun."

"How the hell do you know that?" Myst demanded, his dark eyebrows disappearing beneath his shaggy hair.

"I read." Vapre smiled widely.

Myst flipped him off and chuckled. "Okay, so everything begins on the winter solstice. A new attack will begin with each new moon."

"Very nice," Vapre congratulated. "See, I knew we kept you around for more than your good looks." A pillow sailed across the room, smacking him in the face and pulling a grunt from him. "Asshole."

Hex cuffed Myst in the back of the head. "Children, can we focus, please?"

"Okay," Onyx broke in, "what the hell is this business about our hearts?"

"Just one. One heart." Hex nudged Myst out of the way and resumed his pacing. "I don't have the slightest idea what that means, though. She said it would come to us. So I guess we wait."

"Well, whatever it is, it better hurry the fuck up," Fiero grouched. "The winter solstice is in six weeks, and the first new moon only two weeks later."

“Everyone go back to bed. We’ll talk again in the morning after we’ve slept on it.”

Fiero rose first, stomping out of the room without a word.

“I’m on it,” Eyce mumbled as he rose to follow the man.

Hex sighed. If anyone could calm Fiero, it would be Eyce. As different as night and day, the two suited each other. No one understood or could get through to the fire demon like Eyce.

Vapre, Syx, and Onyx rose as a unit, yawning and stretching before heading off down the hall together.

“Mmm, everyone has been claimed for the night except us,” Myst purred as he pressed his chest against Hex’s and licked a slow path up the column of his throat. “Wanna play?”

“Not tonight.” Hex smiled crookedly and caressed Myst’s cheek softly to ease the sting of the rejection. “I’ve got a lot on my mind, Myst.”

“Do you want to be alone?” Myst nuzzled into his palm, understanding shining in his eyes.

Chuckling, Hex leaned forward and brushed their lips together in a chaste kiss. At six-foot-two, and over two hundred and forty pounds of rippling muscles, Myst was one of the fiercest warriors Hex had ever known. The man’s fondness for cuddling never failed to amuse him. “I wouldn’t say no to the company.”

“What about a blow job? What would you say to that?”

Rolling his eyes, Hex gave Myst a nudge to get him going. “Persistent bastard,” he muttered under his breath.

“It would help you relax,” Myst suggested over his shoulder with a wicked smile as he started out of the room.

“Where are you going?”

Myst paused and turned slowly, tilting his head to the side in confusion. “I thought we were going to bed?”

Hex slipped his thumbs into the waistband of his sleep pants and pushed them down his hips and over his thighs. Keeping his eyes on

Myst, he palmed his already half-hard cock and began stroking it slowly. “And I thought you mentioned something about a blow job?”

Without speaking, Myst took two long strides and fell to his knees, wrapping his plump lips around the spongy crown of Hex’s cock. His wet tongue flickered over the slit as his big hand cradled Hex’s balls, rolling them between his long fingers.

Fisting his hand in Myst’s hair, Hex tugged him forward, thrusting his hips to push his rapidly filling cock to the back of the warrior’s throat. Though they all shared each other equally, Hex would take Myst’s mouth over any of the others given the chance. He knew the other men in the house would agree.

They each had their talents and their kinks. Myst liked to suck cock. Eyce was into rimming. If Hex wanted a little pain to his pleasure, Onyx had no problem playing rough with him. Fiero enjoyed a little bondage. Vapre liked to be spanked. Syx liked to talk dirty and could scorch your ears at forty paces.

“Fuck yes,” he hissed as Myst swallowed, constricting his throat muscles around the leaking head of Hex’s cock. They’d only just begun and already Hex felt the tingle in his balls, the electricity racing along his spine, and the burn in his lower belly.

Jerking hard on Myst’s hair, he pulled his dick from the man’s mouth and growled. “I want your ass.”

“Thank the gods,” Myst breathed as he rose to his feet and quickly stripped off his boxers. His long, thick cock jutted proudly from its nest of closely cropped black curls, straining toward Hex and begging for attention. He dove for the sofa, reaching under the cushion and pulling a small bottle of lube from one of their customary hiding places.

Hex knelt down behind him, taking the lube from his hand and pushing roughly so his chest pressed against the cushions. Placing his palm in the small of his lover’s back, he pressed firmly, forcing the man to bow his back and lift his ass.

“How do you want it?” Hex fumbled with the little bottle, snapping open the cap and drizzling the liquid into his palm. He quickly coated his cock then dripped more lube over his fingers. “Tell me,” he demanded.

“Hard and fast,” Myst panted, pushing back into him. “I was in Vapre’s room when the dream started. I’m ready.”

Images of Vapre pounding his gorgeous cock in Myst’s tight ass sent Hex’s blood boiling, and his desire reached explosive levels. Parting the demon’s muscled globes, he circled the fluttering ring of muscle twice before pushing in with two well-slicked fingers.

Myst moaned, dropping his head to the sofa and rocking back on Hex’s digits. “Feels good,” he muttered.

Hex sawed in and out, pumping his fingers in and out, growling as Myst’s inner walls clamped around his digits and squeezed. Adding a third finger, he leaned over Myst, covering his back and scraping his teeth along the sensitive flesh at the back of his neck. “Ready?”

“Gods, yes! Fuck me, Hex.”

Extracting his fingers, Hex gripped the base of his demanding prick, sliding the crown over Myst’s hole, teasing him for just a moment before he pushed in to the hilt in one forceful thrust.

Myst cried out, his back muscles straining and his hands fisting. Hex stilled, giving his lover time to adjust to his size. “Tell me when,” he murmured. Though he may not love his men in the traditional sense of the word, he did care for them deeply. Any pain in their sexual relationships was based purely on mutual pleasure. He’d never do anything to hurt them.

“Good,” Myst breathed. “I like the burn.” He pushed back forcefully, taking Hex deeper inside him then retreating just to do it all over again. Back and forth, he fucked himself on Hex’s cock, his breaths coming in shallow pants as perspiration dampened his dark olive skin.

Hex remained motionless, allowing his lover to set the pace and take his pleasure. “That’s it,” he whispered. “Take what you need.”

His hands settled lightly on Myst's hips, encouraging rather than demanding. "Damn, you're gorgeous."

"More," Myst grunted. "Fuck me, Hex."

Tightening his grip on the demon's hips, Hex stilled him, pulling his throbbing cock from Myst's ass until only the flared head remained. He paused, building the suspense, then slammed in forcefully, lifting Myst's ass higher and changing the angle.

Myst moaned loudly, moving with him as Hex sank and retreated, riding his lover hard. "Gonna come," Hex warned. He'd been hovering on the edge since they began, and he couldn't hold back anymore.

"Do it," Myst panted. "Come in my ass."

Moving his hold to Myst's shoulders, Hex jerked him down on his cock with every deep, jarring thrust. "Touch yourself," he ground out. "Want you to come first. Come on my cock, Myst."

Bracing himself with one hand, Myst's other hand disappeared toward his groin, and he hissed, his inner walls tightening almost painfully as they gripped Hex's prick in a vise grip. "Hex!"

Hex moved even faster, driving into his lover's silky channel as the heat spread out to his limbs, and his balls drew close to his body. He wrapped his arms around Myst's lean waist, covering his slightly smaller body and burying his face into the man's hair as he froze, groaning his release and filling Myst's hungry ass with his seed.

His orgasm robbed his breath, and he slumped over his lover, panting heavily against the back of his neck. "Thank you," he whispered.

"You know you never have to thank me," Myst replied. "I enjoyed it just as much as you did."

"I know." Moving slowly, Hex sat back, gently easing his still half-hard erection from Myst's body. "You always know what I need, though."

Myst chuckled as he sagged to the floor, turning to look up at Hex. "It wasn't exactly rocket science, man."

“You know what I meant.”

Myst’s grin softened, and he nodded slowly. “Yeah, I do. I just like it when you’re happy.”

Before Hex could answer, a soft tapping came from the front door, so low he almost thought he imagined it until he saw Myst turn to look in the direction as well. “What the hell?”

“Who the fuck comes knocking at three o’clock in the morning?” Myst pushed to his feet and started toward the door.

“Dude, could you at least put some clothes on maybe?” Hex snatched his cotton sleep pants off the floor and pulled them on, grimacing as he tugged them over his sticky cock.

Myst shrugged. “Fine. You get the door. I’m going to take a shower.” Then he changed directions and headed off down the hallway.

“Make it quick and wake the others,” Hex called. He didn’t know who waited on the other side of the big wooden door, but he wanted everyone to be on their guard just in case.

Taking Myst’s grunt as compliance, Hex hurried to the door, wrapping his fingers around the knob, and waited. Another soft tap sounded, followed by muffled whimpers. “Please,” the small voice sobbed. “Please let someone open the door.”

Electricity thrummed throughout Hex’s body at the sound of the voice. Without thought, he wrenched open the door, towering in the doorframe, and stared in shock at the small body crumpled on the ground.

Dirty, bleeding, and obviously in need of a few good meals, the man peered up at him with fear and desperation. “Help,” he whispered before his eyes closed, and he fell limply to his side.

Dropping to his knees, Hex skimmed his palms over the man’s naked body, checking for signs of serious injury. Letting the power wash through him, he closed his eyes, pressing his hand to the little guy’s stomach, checking for internal bleeding or anything else that



might require his attention. Gifted with the power of healing, he couldn't just stand by and watch someone suffer when he could help.

Sighing in relief when he found the man to be simply dehydrated and exhausted, Hex carefully gathered him in his arms and carried him through the open door, kicking it closed behind him.

"Who is that?" Vapre asked as he stumbled to a stop just inside the common room.

"I don't know," Hex answered, easing his bundle down to the sofa and grabbing a blanket off the back to cover him. "He needs help, though."

"From the looks of him, I'd say he needs a lot of it, too." Eyce leaned over the back of the couch, softly stroking the stranger's pale cheek. "Should we clean him up?"

"Let's wait until he wakes up," Vapre answered softly as he sat down gently by the man's feet. "We don't want to scare him."

Hex smiled fondly. "For a bunch of badass warrior demons, you guys are the biggest bunch of saps."

Eyce didn't even look at him. He continued stroking the newcomer's face, his eyes soft and gentle as a small smile played over his lips. "There's something about him," he whispered.

Hex felt it, too. He didn't know exactly what it was, but the little man called to him on a deep primal level, tugging at every one of his long-buried protective instincts.

"Even dirty and bruised, he's really pretty," Myst said as he stepped up beside Eyce and peered over the back of the sofa.

"Who's pretty?" Fiero sauntered into the room, scrubbing his hand over his short spikes while the other scratched at his naked chest. "What the fuck's going on? Don't any of you sleep?"

"We have a visitor," Vapre whispered as he settled back on the sofa, lifting the man's tiny feet into his lap and tucking the blanket around him.

“Kind of a runt, huh?” Fiero spoke gruffly as usual, but Hex saw the slight softening of his eyes as he came around the furniture to stand beside Hex. “What do we do with him?”

“Well, we keep him, of course.” Onyx rested his elbows on the back of the couch and starred down at their guest with the goofiest smile on his face.

“He’s not a puppy,” Myst admonished and reached out to pop Onyx in the back of the head. “I guess we wait until he wakes up and find out where he came from.”

“I feel weird,” Syx grumbled, perching on the arm of the sofa beside Vapre. “I don’t even know this guy, and I already want to rip everyone apart that has ever hurt him or would even *think* about hurting him.”

Everyone nodded slowly as their brows drew together in confusion. “Me, too,” Myst answered hesitantly. “What the fuck is going on?”

“Does anyone else feel like they just got pumped full of electricity?” Fiero rubbed his hands over his chest again. “I’m so fucking jittery. I feel like I drank a gallon of coffee then attached myself to a car battery.”

“Yeah, I feel it, too,” Hex answered. He hoped the little man woke up soon because he definitely needed some answers.

## Chapter Two

Waking slowly, he kept his eyes closed and listened to the voices murmuring softly around him. He didn't know where he was—but he did remember how he'd gotten there. For three days, he'd trekked through the forests, sleeping on the ground and freezing his naked balls off as something pulled him toward the west. When he'd stumbled through the tree line, he'd almost wept in relief. He didn't understand how, but he knew the huge stone house was his final destination.

He would be safe here, protected from the men who currently hunted him. They'd be coming soon.

"He's awake," a deep masculine voice murmured from somewhere near his feet. "Someone's coming for him."

His eyes snapped open, and he blinked several times to focus his bleary eyes. Turning his head slowly, fear crept into his heart as he took in the seven enormous men gathered around him. No, this couldn't be right. He was supposed to be safe here. The voice had told him he'd be protected.

"Shh, calm down, little one," the man sitting at the end of the couch murmured. "No one is going to hurt you. What's your name?"

"My name?" he whispered.

"Where did you come from?" another man asked.

"Come from?" Crap, why couldn't he make his brain work? Everything felt mushy and scrambled.

"Who hurt you?" the first man asked.

"Hurt me?"

“Are you only going to speak in echoes?” One of the men standing scowled at him, his bright blond hair poking out in disarray as he crossed his arms over his chest and waited for a response.

“Echoes?”

“Oh, for fuck’s sake!” The man threw his hands in the air and growled. “Can’t you just answer a question? Just one?”

“Echoes,” the biggest man in the room answered, looking at the floor as his long black hair cascaded around his face. “The heart is coming with whispered echoes.”

“Son of a bitch,” one of the men behind the sofa breathed. He pushed his raven hair behind one ear and smiled. “What is your name, little one?”

“I don’t have one.” He watched them all exchange looks, but no one commented.

“Then I guess we need to give you one,” the man holding his feet said kindly. “You’re kind of special. I know you don’t understand yet, but we’ll explain everything to you soon. Someone told us to expect you. She said you would come, whispering echoes to us. So, how about Echo?”

Thinking it over for a few minutes, he finally nodded his head and smiled just a little. “I like that.”

“Good. I’m Vapre.” He squeezed Echo’s foot through the blanket as he motioned to the man perched next to him on the arm of the couch. “This is Syx.”

Echo nodded, repeating the names in his head so he wouldn’t forget them.

“The mountain of a man over there is Hex. He’s the one in charge around here.”

Hex dipped his head and winked. Echo smiled at him before glancing over to the man beside him. “You don’t like me much, do you?”

“That’s Fiero,” Vapre answered before the other man could speak. “He doesn’t really like anyone, so don’t take it personally.” He waved

a hand toward the three men standing behind them. “And here we have Myst, Onyx, and Eyce.”

“You said someone is coming for you,” Syx interrupted.

Echo frowned. He didn’t remember saying that out loud. “Yes. They should be here soon.”

“Who will be here soon?” Vapre asked.

“The men from the facility. I escaped three days ago and came straight here. I didn’t know where I was going, or even why. I just knew I needed to find you.”

“Whoa, slow down.” Eyce chuckled. “What facility?”

“There’s a lab, hidden in the mountains east of here. I don’t really know what they do there. I stayed inside a black capsule most of the time.” Cold seeped into his bones, and he shivered violently. “I don’t like the dark,” he whispered.

“Sensory deprivation,” Myst mumbled, and he actually looked sad as he stared at Echo. “How long have you been at that lab?”

“I was born there. I don’t remember ever being anywhere else.”

Eyce reached down slowly, cautiously, and palmed Echo’s cheek. “How old are you, little one?”

“Twenty-three.”

“So young,” Eyce murmured as his thumb caressed Echo’s jawline. “Just a baby, really.”

“None of you can be much older than me.” Echo crossed his arms over his thin, pale chest. “I’m not a baby.”

Several snorts and a few soft chuckles went around the room. “You’re cute when you pout.” Myst ruffled Echo’s hair and tapped him on the end of his nose with a fingertip. “Trust me, we’re a lot older than we look.”

Echo shrugged. “If you say so.” He rubbed his belly as it snarled angrily, reminding him it had been several days since he’d last eaten. He didn’t really feel comfortable asking the men to feed him, though. They didn’t know him. He’d just showed up and invaded their home. Maybe they didn’t even want him to stay.

“You’re more than welcome to stay,” Syx whispered. “Don’t be afraid to ask for anything. I’ll go start breakfast.” Then he rose from his seat and left the room without a backward glance.

“Okay, I know I didn’t say that aloud. How did he do that?”

“How about a bath?” Eyce asked, changing the subject. “No offense, but you kind of smell.”

Lifting the ends of his long, matted hair, Echo nodded thoughtfully. “I was inside the capsule for several days before I escaped. I’ve been running through the woods and sleeping in the mud. I guess I am a little rank.”

“I’ll start the water.” Vapre winked and eased out from under Echo’s feet. He stood tall, stretching his arms over his head, his creamy skin stretching tight over his toned abs. Then he gave a little wave to the room and disappeared down the long corridor to the left.

“I’ll help Syx,” Fiero mumbled and left as well.

“C’mon, let’s get you up.” Eyce moved around to stand in front of Echo and held a hand out to him. “You can bring the blanket if you like.”

“I’m fine.” Echo pushed the blanket off his body and took Echo’s hand as he struggled to his feet. His legs felt like rubber, and his head swam, making him dizzy and rolling his stomach. He swayed a little before his legs gave out completely, and he began to fall.

Strong arms caught him, scooping him up and holding him tight to a warm, muscled chest. “I got you,” Eyce murmured.

“Thank you.” Echo rested his head against the man’s shoulder and sighed. He knew nothing about these men, but he felt so safe with them. It had been worth the suffering he’d endured to find them. They would take care of him. He had no doubts.

“I’ll find something for him to wear,” Onyx announced and hurried in the direction Vapre had disappeared.

“I’ll help with the bath.” Myst smirked and wiggled his eyebrows, drawing a small giggle from Echo. “Aww, he’s cute. I just want to put him in my pocket.”

“Idiot,” Hex snorted and rolled his eyes. He walked over and pushed the hair back from Echo’s face. “If they give you any problems, you let me know. I promise, you’re in good hands, though.”

Echo nodded firmly. “I know. She said you would protect me.”

“Who said that, baby?”

Echo brightened at the softly spoken endearment from Hex’s luscious lips. He’d never been called anything but a number before. “The glowing lady with the long hair and harsh voice. She said you would keep me safe, and that you needed me as much as I needed you.”

Hex looked a little shocked, but he recovered quickly, giving Echo a tender smile, and nodded. “Get cleaned up, and we’ll talk while we eat.”

\* \* \* \*

Echo moaned loudly, the warm water surrounding him as Eyce slowly lowered him into the huge claw-foot tub in the middle of the enormous bathroom. “I love this place.”

The three men chuckled lightly as they all sat around the edge of the tub and watched him. “Do you need help?” Vapre asked.

“My arms are really sore,” Echo admitted sheepishly. He yawned, his eyelids growing heavy as the water eased the ache in his sore muscles.

“Just relax. We’ll take good care of you.” Myst stood and stripped off his loose-fitting boxers, then moved to join Echo in the tub. He paused, looking at Echo in question. “Is this okay with you? It will be easier for me to clean you this way.”

Echo bobbed his head, opening his mouth to speak, but no words would come. Myst was gorgeous. Hell, they were all gorgeous. Myst’s dark, flawless skin stretched over his well-defined muscles as he stepped into the tub and maneuvered until Echo lounged between his rock-hard thighs with his back to the man’s chest.

Eyce knelt on one side, while Vapre slid to the floor on the other. The three men worked together, Eyce and Vapre gently scrubbing the dirt from his body as Myst worked his strong fingers through Echo's hair, lathering the shampoo and massaging his scalp.

Echo moaned, squirming under their combined touch as his prick began to swell and fill quite inappropriately. Closing his eyes, he felt the heat infuse his cheeks as he quickly covered his jutting cock with his hands. *Yeah, like they weren't going to notice.*

No one commented, however, but simply continued cleaning and rinsing him, washing away several days' worth of dirt and grime. When they'd finally finished, Eyce snatched up a big fluffy towel and held it open as Myst and Vapre helped him to his feet and out of the tub. Eyce wrapped him up immediately, lifting Echo into his arms and kissing his forehead.

His eyes widened, and he looked shocked at his actions. "You make me feel funny," he whispered.

"Good funny or bad funny?"

"Not bad," Eyce admitted. "I'm not sure if it's good either, though. Just different."

"This is the best I could do," Onyx said as he walked into the bathroom holding up a black T-shirt. "I mean, look at the guy. We'd have to tie a rope around his waist twice to hold up a pair of our sweats on him."

"No rope," Echo whispered, wiggling in Eyce's arms as he struggled to free himself. The man's hold tightened around him, squeezing him, and Echo panicked, kicking his legs out as he redoubled his efforts to free himself. The towel wrapped around him suddenly felt suffocating rather than comforting, and he jerked his arms trying to pull them from the fluffy cotton.

"Echo, calm down," Eyce commanded.

"No!" Echo screamed, twisting his body violently until he wrenched himself from Eyce's grasp and tumbled to the floor. With



his arms still confined inside the towel, he had no way to brace his fall and landed heavily on his side.

A loud snap and sickening pain lanced through his arm, just before his head connected solidly with the tiled floor and darkness swallowed him.

\* \* \* \*

“Echo!” Eyce dropped to his knees, his heart seizing inside his chest when he saw the blood oozing from Echo’s head and pooling beneath him. “Oh, shit,” he whispered. “Get Hex!”

His hands fluttered around Echo helplessly as Onyx raced from the room, unsure of where to touch him, or if he should move him at all. Myst and Vapre knelt on either side of the small man, Myst lifting his head gently as Vapre placed a rolled towel beneath his neck then pressed another to his wound on the side of his head.

“I didn’t mean to drop him,” Eyce whispered. The Oracle had told them to protect their heart with their very lives. Ten minutes after meeting the man, and he’d probably just killed him. Not exactly his finest hour.

“He’ll be fine,” Myst said with conviction. “He’s breathing, and his pulse is steady. He’s just unconscious.”

“Head wounds bleed a lot,” Vapre continued. He slowly lifted the towel away from Echo’s body and grimaced. “I’d be more concerned about that.”

Eyce gasped, his chest tightening as he stared at the blood covering Echo’s thin arm. The jagged bone poked through the skin of his forearm as the crimson liquid flowed out around it. “I’m sorry,” he mumbled.

“Not your fault, man,” Vapre assured him. “He just kind of freaked when Onyx mentioned the rope.”

“There’s a lot we don’t know about him,” Myst added. “I think we need to find out in a hurry, though, so we don’t have any repeats like this.”

“What happened?” Hex demanded as he rushed into the room. His eyes fell on Echo, and his face mottled in anger. “Who did this?”

“I did,” Eyce answered firmly.

Hex took a menacing step toward him, but Onyx stepped in front of him, blocking his way and pressing him back. “It was an accident, Hex. Echo went nuts and started flailing around like crazy. You know Eyce wouldn’t hurt him on purpose.”

Hex nodded, but he still looked angry as he pushed Onyx out of the way and dropped to his knees beside Echo. Closing his eyes, he wrapped his fingers around the little man’s arm, and within seconds the bleeding stopped, the bone retreated back to where it belonged, and the skin began to mend itself.

Eyce stroked the top of Echo’s foot with his fingertips, his eyes never leaving the man’s delicate face. Echo was so small—probably no more than five and half feet on his tiptoes. He looked thin, but not overly so, soft and pliable with beautifully smooth skin. He appeared so fragile, curled on his side with his eyes closed, his long golden lashes resting against his rosy cheeks.

Watching Hex move his fingers over Echo’s scalp, Eyce berated himself the entire time. He should have held on tighter or put Echo on his feet before he fell. He shouldn’t have snapped at him—should have been more understanding. If he’d only known what caused Echo’s reaction in the first place, then maybe he could have done something to prevent this. Never would he purposely put the little guy in danger.

“Shoulda, coulda, woulda,” Syx murmured from behind him as he stepped into the bathroom. “Stop beating yourself up.” He crouched down beside Eyce and kissed him on the top of his head.

Fiero entered the room next and walked over to kneel on Eyce's other side, clapping him on the back. "Shit happens. It's no one's fault, so just let it go."

"Easy for you to say. You're not the one who dropped him." Eyce slumped against Syx, taking comfort from the arm the warrior wrapped around his shoulders. "I'm really not cut out for this nurturing thing."

"I don't think any of us are," Hex said when he'd finally finished closing the wound on Echo's head. "We'll learn. We'll get better, and hopefully, everything will turn out for the best. He's important. I don't know if it's because of the prophecy, or the war, or whatever, but I know we need him."

"Maybe we should get some books," Onyx suggested. "They have those baby books and stuff."

Everyone blinked at him for a minute before bursting into laughter. "He's not a fucking puppy," Myst grumbled under his breath.

## Chapter Three

Hex took the clean towel Myst handed to him and carefully wrapped it around Echo before lifting the man into his arms and carrying him from the bathroom. They needed to get some liquids in him, a little food, and find him something to wear. All that gloriously bare skin would drive him mad within the week. Already his cock strained, tenting his sleep pants and begging for a chance to play with the beauty.

He had never been so instantly attracted to anyone. It went deeper than physical appeal, though. Anger clawed inside him, turning his vision red at the thought of another man touching their mate in any way, shape, or form.

*Their mate?* The thought of Echo being his mate caused his steps to falter, but realizing that the man belonged to each of them had him freezing in his tracks halfway down the hall. He felt the conviction, knew it was true, and surprisingly, the idea made him smile rather than want to punch something.

They already shared each other without jealousy or spite, each bringing something unique and amazing to their relationship. Why couldn't they add another? If Echo truly was their mate, he'd seal them all together, strengthening their bond. Damn, the Oracle was a tricky wench.

"You figured it out, too," Syx said quietly as he stepped up beside Hex and smiled down at the bundle in his arms. "That's why we're all feeling so strange. The instinct to claim our mate is strong. We won't be able to fight it for long."

"I know," Hex whispered. "We need to tell him everything, though. The decision has to be his. We can't force it on him."

"What the hell are you two whispering about?" Myst demanded. He pushed on Hex's shoulder to get him moving. "Does this have anything to do with the runt being our mate?"

Hex glanced over his shoulder and frowned. "How did you know?"

"Umm, because I'm not stupid?" Myst arched an eyebrow and crossed his arms over his bare chest.

"Why are you naked?"

"Well, I'm glad you finally noticed."

Hex rolled his eyes and snorted. "Sorry, I was kind of busy trying to save our mate's life. You can flog me for it later."

"Hey!" Fiero called from the back of the group. "That's my job!"

Everyone laughed as they continued down the hallway and into the kitchen. Hex pulled a chair out from the table and sat, settling Echo more securely in his lap as he combed his fingers through the man's damp hair.

Echo groaned, rolling his head against Hex's shoulder to nuzzle against his throat. "No rope," he mumbled. "Please don't tie me up. I'll do whatever you want."

Hex swallowed down the lump in his throat at the pain that filled Echo's voice. He looked at the demons gathered around the table for help. What was he supposed to say? What did he do?

"Just hold him and reassure him we won't hurt him," Syx whispered in his ear. "He's scared, but he doesn't want to leave. He's thinking that he feels safe in your arms right now."

Hex nodded slowly. He had never been more thankful for Syx's telepathic abilities than in that moment. Cradling the back of Echo's head, he brushed his lips against his temple. "No one's going to hurt you, baby. We just want to take care of you."

"Don't tie me up," Echo repeated softly.

“Not going to happen.” Hex lifted his head, glaring at Fiero in silent warning.

Fiero rolled his eyes. “I’m not stupid, Hex. Nor am I that big of a bastard.”

Moving his face out of its hiding place in Hex’s neck, Echo pierced Fiero with his bright blue eyes. “Why do you want to tie me up?”

“I don’t,” Fiero answered shortly. When Echo continued to stare at him, he finally sighed and pinched the bridge of his nose between thumb and forefinger. “It’s a sex thing. I don’t do it in anger or to hurt anyone.”

“You want to have sex with me?”

Hex bit his tongue to keep from laughing at the completely dumbfounded look on Fiero’s face. “Well, answer the man.”

“Oh, fuck you, Hex.” Then Fiero turned on his heels and stormed out of the room.

“Wow. He’s awfully cheery.”

“Fiero is a good man,” Vapre defended the warrior. “He has a big heart, even if he chooses not to show it.” He moved around the table to kiss Echo’s forehead. “Just give him a chance, okay?”

“Does that mean I can stay?”

“Of course you can stay,” Hex answered immediately.

“Does that mean I have to have sex with him?” Echo spoke quietly, his face heating right to the tips of his ears. “Or all of you?”

Though the need to claim his mate boiled inside him, Hex shook his head. “You don’t have to do anything you don’t want to do.” His dick screamed at him in protest, demanding to know why such idiotic words had just come out of his mouth. Pushing away his desire, he closed his eyes and took a deep breath, letting it out slowly. “Gods, you smell good,” he groaned.

*Shit!* Opening his eyes, he looked down at Echo in apology. “I won’t lie. I want you. We all do.” He waved a hand around the room

to indicate the remaining men. “We will never force you, though. The decision will always be yours.”

Echo frowned at him, his brow wrinkling and his bottom lip protruding. “I think I’m missing something. Why do you all want me? You just met me.” He huffed in apparent frustration. “I want you, too, but I don’t even know you. Does this have something to do with me being kind of special?”

“I wanted to wait, but I guess we need to have that talk now.” Hex felt the headache building behind his eyes. How did he explain to this human that they were demons with special powers who had crawled from the Underworld?

“Well, I wouldn’t say it like that,” Syx said around his chuckle.

“Shut up, asshole.”

“And why does he keep doing that?” Echo demanded. “I know you didn’t say anything. I’m sitting right here, and I didn’t hear a word from your lips.” He looked around Hex and pointed to Syx. “Tell me.”

“Feisty little shit,” Syx mumbled. “I can hear other people’s thoughts.”

“You’re telepathic.” Echo nodded his head. “That’s kind of cool. Now, stay out of my head.” He turned and pointed to Eyce. “You did something freaky with the bath water.”

Hex turned to glare at Eyce. “How the hell were we supposed to rinse his hair? Do you see how long it is?” the warrior defended himself. “He had his eyes closed. I didn’t think he’d notice.”

Hex closed his eyes and groaned as his head began to throb in earnest. Did not one of them value discretion? The least they could do was behave themselves until they’d explained everything to Echo.

“You healed me,” Echo accused as he poked Hex in the chest. “I know my arm was broken, but it’s fine now.” He lifted the appendage and turned it one way and then the other as if to prove his point.

*Fuck!* He was totally busted. In his defense, his actions had been necessary. “Would you rather I had left it broken?”

“Nope.” Echo shook his head. “I just want to know what’s going on. I’ve spent my entire life doing what people tell me without question. I feel weird. My neck tingles. I’m hard as nails right now.” He lifted the towel to show off his impressive erection.

Soft moans went around the group, and Hex almost swallowed his tongue. Then Echo covered himself again and sighed. “Thank you for healing me,” he whispered, then increased his volume to address the room. “I appreciate everything you’ve done for me since I arrived. I’m just really confused.”

Hex realized he now had one more person looking to him for answers he didn’t have.

\* \* \* \*

Syx sat a large coffee mug in front of him with some kind of yellowish liquid inside. It smelled okay, but it looked gross. Echo wrinkled his nose as he looked up in question. “What is it?”

“Chicken broth,” Syx replied. “It will be easier on your stomach for now, plus you need liquids. So drink up. It’s good.”

Echo pulled the oversized T-shirt down around his knees as he wiggled in his seat. He hadn’t worn clothes in a while, and even the baggy cotton felt restricting. Wrapping both hands around the mug, he brought it to his lips and took a tentative sip. “Ooh, that is good.” He took a bigger swallow, and his eyes watered as the hot broth scorched his tongue, throat, and chest.

“Easy.” Hex pushed a glass of water toward him, and Echo took it gratefully, sighing as the cold liquid soothed the burn.

“So, who goes first?” Echo blew into his cup before taking another sip. “Should we start with the dream lady?”

“The Oracle,” Eyce said as he nodded. “We’ve dreamed of her three times—once when we met, once when we escaped, and last night before you arrived. She always speaks in riddles.”



“Escaped from where?” Echo sat his mug on the table and crossed his hands in his lap. “Were you in a lab like me because you have special abilities?”

All seven men shared a look before focusing on Echo again. “No, we weren’t in a lab,” Syx whispered. “It was somewhere much worse.”

“Were you in prison?” Echo gasped.

“That would be more accurate.”

Echo fidgeted nervously. They all seemed very nice. What could they have done to land themselves behind bars? Maybe this hadn’t been such a great idea. “What did you do?”

“We didn’t do anything,” Hex growled.

“Oh.” Echo didn’t know what else to say. He fidgeted nervously in his seat, waiting for someone to start making sense.

“We were warriors,” Syx continued the story. “We were born to guard the damned.”

“So you were prison guards?” Echo sighed in relief. That didn’t sound so bad.

“I think you just need to spit it out,” Myst interrupted from across the table. “There’s really no easy way to say it.” He stretched his arm out, his palm facing upward and waited for Echo to take it. “Do you promise to listen? Just listen and then we will answer any questions you have.” He squeezed Echo’s fingers gently as he waited for a reply.

Thinking it over quickly, Echo decided it was a reasonable request and nodded his assent.

“How much do you know about Greek mythology?” Hex asked.

“Quite a bit. When I wasn’t in the capsule, they were shoving as much knowledge into my head as they could. I may not be worldly, but I know a lot about the world. Does that make sense?”

Hex smiled and leaned over to kiss Echo’s temple. “You know the Titans were imprisoned in Tartarus beneath Hades and guarded by the Hecatonchires.”

“The Hecatonchires were the monster offspring of Uranus and Gaia, with fifty heads and one hundred hands.” Echo nodded as he mentally flipped through his knowledge of mythology.

“Gaia also produced another son, Typhon, the father of all monsters.”

“Zeus defeated Typhon, casting him into the pit of Tartarus with the Titans,” Echo finished with a frown. This was all very interesting, but he didn’t understand what it had to do with anything.

“We’re getting there.” Syx smiled and winked.

“Stay out of my head,” Echo grumbled, but his lips twitched at the corners, ruining his glower. “Continue.”

“Before Zeus defeated the monster, Typhon slayed his half-brothers, leaving Tartarus unguarded.”

“I don’t remember that.” Echo scratched the back of his neck as he tilted his head to the side to look at Hex.

“Seven warriors were born from the fires of the Phlegathon River to guard Tartarus and battle those who sought to free the Titans.” Hex continued as though Echo hadn’t spoken—his voice slow and monotonous as though reciting a story. “Demons of the Underworld, they served Hades for a thousand years, enduring his punishments for imaginary crimes before seeking a means of escape.”

Echo still didn’t know where Hex was going with his story, but he found himself enthralled in the tale, fascinated almost against his will. He rested his elbow on the table, propping his chin in his palm, and listened intently.

“The journey from Tartarus and up through Hades was long and treacherous, and the warriors faced many obstacles, slaying many foes along the way. Once they reached Hades, they had to cross the river Phlegathon, wading through the flames from which they were born. Finally, they slipped past the ferryman, Charon, across the river Acheron, and crawled on their bellies like serpents through the labyrinth of tunnels to reach the upper world.”

“Each demon possessed powers, granted to him by Hades, to aide in their duties.” Onyx picked up the story, and Echo turned to face him across the table. “Four were granted the ability to manipulate the elements—earth, wind, fire, and water.”

“Two were given powers of the mind,” Syx continued. “One had the ability to hear others’ thoughts as well as alter their memories. The other could use the energy within his mind to move physical objects.”

“The last was given the power to heal, so that the warriors would always be in top fighting condition.” Hex finished the story, drawing Echo’s attention back to him.

Taking a deep breath, Echo shook his head. “Was I supposed to get something out of that? I mean, it was a great story, but I don’t see how it relates to our current situation.”

“I healed you,” Hex reminded him.

“I can read your mind,” Syx said next.

Eyce didn’t say anything, but took his water glass, dipped his finger in it, and froze the contents solid. Myst leaned forward next, staring at the glass until it began to rise from the wooden tabletop right before Echo’s eyes.

Before he could do more than gasp, Vapre waved his hand, and a gush of wind whipped through the room, sending the glass of ice sailing around in circles. Fiero took a small silver lighter from his pocket and flicked it. He waved his hand over the orange flame, catching the fire in his hand, and snapped his wrist, tossing it toward the glass and shattering it upon impact.

“Fiero!” the rest of the men yelled.

“What? I thought it was show-and-tell!”

Echo ignored them, his attention on Onyx, waiting to see what the man would do. Onyx pointed to the small potted plant near the back door, and Echo watched the flower grow to three times its original height within seconds.

“So, the demon warriors...” he trailed off in question.

“That would be us,” Hex confirmed.

“And that makes me?”

“Our mate.”

## Chapter Four

“Do you need anything?” Eyce asked as he led Echo down the long corridor on the second floor and into a lavishly furnished room.

“A Prozac and a brain scan,” Echo mumbled under his breath.

Eyce chuckled, though without much humor. “It’s a lot to absorb, and I know it sounds completely insane.” He walked over to the huge bed and turned down the covers. “Get some rest, and we’ll talk more when you’re feeling better.”

“What does being your mate entail?” Echo stripped the shirt off over his head and climbed into bed, snuggling down against the pillow as Eyce pulled the blankets up around his shoulders.

“We’ll talk more when you wake up.” Eyce leaned over him and kissed his forehead, lingering for a moment before standing straight and sighing. “We’re right down the hall if you need anything.”

Echo yawned and nodded as his eyes drifted closed, and his breathing became deep and heavy. He heard Eyce’s muffled footsteps retreat from the bed, the slight creak of the door, and the soft click as it closed.

Popping open his eyes, Echo sprang out of bed and began pacing, waving his hands around in the air like a madman as he argued with himself. The Oracle, or whoever the hell she was, told him he would be safe here. She had led him to this house and these men.

Okay, so his first mistake had been to listen to the crazy lady in his head. It had felt so right, though. The conviction and certainty that this is where he belonged still coursed through him. He hadn’t had a clue where he was going or what he sought when he escaped the facility and began his journey. He’d just walked blindly through the

trees, following some invisible rope that tugged him forward, reeling him in like a fish on a hook.

Now, here he stood, butt-naked in a house full of gigantic men who believed they were demons from the Underworld, thousands of years old, and he was their mate—belonging to all seven of them.

*“They do not lie,”* the Oracle’s voice spoke inside his head.

“Oh, shut up.” That stupid voice had gotten him into this mess in first place. Hex and the others were obviously a few cards short of a full deck. Did that make them dangerous, though? What a stupid question. Anyone that mentally unstable had to be bad for his health.

*“They will give their very lives to protect you.”*

“Shut up!” Echo hissed as he pressed his palms over his ears and shook his head. Maybe the capsule had finally cracked him. He’d gone insane. It was the only logical explanation. People didn’t just hear voices in their head and decide that the voice had pretty good ideas.

Well, they did, but those people ended up in a cell for hacking up hitchhikers.

*“Give yourself freely, and you will be rewarded by their devotion.”*

Yes, because he *so* wanted the undying devotion of seven demon warriors. “You are dark and twisted,” he said to the voice in his head. *Great. Now I’m talking back to her.*

*“Dark devotion shall win the war to come.”*

“Shut the fuck up!” Echo screamed as he pounded his fist against the side of his head.

Footsteps thundered toward his door, growing louder as they approached. The door burst open, and Syx rushed inside, completely naked and holding a wickedly pointed dagger in his hand.

“What is it? What’s going on? Who’s here?”

Echo gulped, taking several steps in retreat as Myst and Fiero hurried into the room, each taking up similar defensive postures. “What happened?” Fiero demanded.

Shaking his head frantically, Echo continued his backward trek until he bumped into the nightstand. “Nothing,” he squeaked, still eyeing the blade in Syx’s hand. “I’m sorry I woke you. Bad dream.” He couldn’t get enough air into his lungs, and his mouth went desert dry, causing his tongue to stick to the roof of his mouth.

The three men looked at each other, slowly relaxing and rising out of their menacing crouches. “Are you okay?” Myst took a step forward, but stopped in his tracks when Echo whimpered, scrambling backward as he turned his face away from them and almost fell over the small table in his haste to get away.

“Echo?” Syx put a hand on Myst’s shoulder and urged him back. “We’re not going to hurt you.”

Echo kept his mind purposefully blank, knowing Syx would be able to see inside his head. Whatever else they thought they were, they definitely had some freaky powers. “I’m fine. Bad dream,” he repeated.

“Do you want one of us to stay?”

“No!” Echo shouted. Then he bit his lip and tried to look apologetic. “I’ll be okay. I just need some sleep. Go back to bed.”

“Do you want me to get Hex?” Fiero asked. He looked a little sad as he spoke, which just confused Echo even more.

“No. Please, just go back to bed. I didn’t mean to wake you.” Echo inched closer to the bed and crawled in, burrowing under the covers.

“Okay,” Myst whispered. “Sleep well.” Then the trio shuffled out of the room, closing the door behind them.

Echo waited several hours, lying in bed and staring at the ceiling as he plotted and planned. He didn’t know where he would go, but he couldn’t stay and just wait around for one of the men to carve him up in his sleep.

Just as the sun peeked over the eastern horizon, and the sky began to lighten, Echo climbed from the bed and slipped on the borrowed T-shirt. He doubted anyone would miss it. Creeping from the room, he

tiptoed down the hallway, eased his way down the staircase, then sprinted to the front door, throwing it wide and darting off into the dawn.

\* \* \* \*

Hearing muttered voices as he hurried through the trees, Echo slowed his pace, hunching lower to the ground as he crept closer to the sound. Pressing his back flat against the bark, he peeked around the enormous tree trunk and gasped.

Pushing his knuckles to his lips, he tried to control his shaking as fear overwhelmed him, rendering him immobile. Four men from the facility gathered in a small circle, each with a pack on their backs and guns in their hands.

“There’s a house just beyond the field.” One of the men pointed in the direction Echo had just come from. “There’s footprints through the mud that lead right up to the door.”

Echo slid down the tree, crouching on the frozen ground. His feet ached. His toes were frozen and stinging. He shivered against the harsh winds that whistled through the bare limbs of the trees as he closed his eyes and listened.

“Who lives there? Do we know how many?” another man asked.

“I saw three through the window. Big fuckers, so make sure you’re locked and loaded.”

“Couldn’t we just knock on the door and ask for the kid?” The third man sounded nervous, his voice tight and strained.

“You know the rules. We can’t leave witnesses. It’s more than our jobs if we fuck this up,” the fourth man said harshly. “The sun’s coming up now. We need to hurry.”

*Shit, shit, shit!* Echo chewed on his bottom lip as indecision plagued him. It was none of his concern. He’d escaped the insanity of that house and planned to keep running and never look back.



No one deserved to be shot down in cold blood, especially when they didn't know the threat was coming. Crazy or not, the men had taken him in, bathed and fed him, and been nothing but kind. They pampered and catered to him, and had vowed to protect him.

Which danger did he need the most protection from, though? The nut jobs that believed they'd been born from the fires of the Underworld, or the assholes that wanted Echo for their experiments?

He also couldn't overlook the fact that he had brought this on the warriors—or whatever they were. If not for him, the men from the facility wouldn't be there, loading their guns and preparing to ambush the house that had been his shelter for a few short hours.

*"Go to them. You must hurry."* The Oracle's voice whispered in his mind, softer, more musical than he'd ever heard it. *"Hurry."*

Shoving away from the tree, his decision firmly made, Echo moved as silently as possible as he tiptoed back toward the clearing. When he'd traveled far enough that he could no longer hear the muffled voices, he took off at a run, his feet flying over the cold earth and his arms pumping as clouds of smoke poured from his panting mouth.

*"Faster,"* the Oracle whispered. *"They're coming."*

Digging deep into his last reserves of energy, Echo turned on a burst of speed just as he broke the tree line and the house came into view. Two men stood on the front steps, the door still open behind them, peering out over the field with their hands on their hips. Too far away to determine who was who, Echo decided it didn't matter. He just had to get to them—had to warn them.

"Echo!" Both men vaulted off of the porch, shouting his name as they sprinted toward him.

Echo kept running, the muscles in his legs screaming in protest, and his lungs aching with each gulp of cold air he sucked in through his mouth. Vapre reached him first, scooping Echo up in his arms and crushing him against his broad chest. "Where have you been?"

“They’re...coming.” Echo spoke through his gasps for much-needed oxygen.

“Who’s coming?” Onyx asked, running his hands over every inch of Echo he could reach. “Are you okay? Why did you leave?”

“No time. Tell the others.” Echo still couldn’t get enough air to speak more than a few words at a time. “Men from the lab.”

Vapre and Onyx exchanged looks, and Onyx nodded. “I’ll get the others.”

“Wake Fiero first,” Vapre demanded.

Onyx took off at a dead run, while Vapre jogged at a slower pace, still clutching Echo to his chest. “You scared the hell out of me,” he whispered. “I went to check on you and found an empty bed.” He slowed to a walk as they neared the front steps and pressed his lips hard to Echo’s forehead. “You’re frozen solid.”

“Well, it’s cold.” Echo sighed as he nuzzled into Vapre’s warm neck. If these guys were such lunatics, why did he feel so safe with them?

Vapre walked them into the house, passing him almost immediately to Fiero as the warrior rushed into the room. “Holy damn, you’re cold.”

Echo rolled his eyes. It was winter in Montana, and he was half-naked. What did they expect? “Are you going to use your freaky voodoo to warm me up then?”

“If I have to,” Fiero said with a dramatic sigh then gave him a quick wink. He hurried them over to the sofa and sat, settling Echo in his lap. “This might feel kind of funny at first, but it shouldn’t hurt.”

“You won’t hurt me.” With a sense of awe, he realized the words were true. Whatever these guys were, he was safe with them. He didn’t understand where the conviction came from, but it settled into his heart, calming and relaxing him.

“I won’t,” Fiero agreed as he pulled Echo’s shirt over his head and tossed it aside.

His big hands began roaming Echo's body, the rough calluses causing him to shiver as his prick twitched in interest, seeking the same attention. A tingling heat followed the path of Fiero's hands, thawing Echo and warming him.

"Your lips are freakin' blue." Fiero brushed his thumb over Echo's bottom lip, staring at it intently as his other hand continued down Echo's ribcage, over his hip, and began massaging his thigh.

The overwhelming urge to press his lips to the big warrior's couldn't be ignored. Sitting up straight, Echo arched his neck, straining toward Fiero until their lips met, and he moaned softly.

Fiero growled, his hand fisting in Echo's long hair, and dragged him closer until he straddled the man's hips. Rocking against him, Echo opened willingly, sighing as their tongues met and dueled, twining around each other in an intimate dance. His mind blurred, everything retreating except the man beneath him and the fire that burned in his belly.

A sharp pinch and slight ache began in his neck, and he had the strangest urge to beg Fiero to bite him. Depictions of the man's razor-sharp fangs sinking into his flesh flashed behind his closed eyelids, and Echo moaned louder, humping his hips against Fiero's midsection as pleasure swamped him.

"Gentlemen." Hex cleared his throat from behind them, snapping Echo out of his lusty haze.

He wrenched his mouth from Fiero's, sucking in as much air as he could as he looked up at Hex with wide eyes. What the fuck had just happened?

"Not to interrupt, but we have company." Hex smiled at Echo then leaned forward to brush a soft kiss over his swollen lips. "When we've dealt with our uninvited visitors, I want some of that," he whispered huskily.

"Okay," Echo responded dazedly. Good grief, he needed to get a grip. These men may not be the bad guys exactly, but that didn't make them good guys either. Or did it? Fuck, he was so confused.

"I got the first one." Fiero smirked up at Hex, earning him a quick smack to the back of his head.

"How many?" Syx asked as he entered the room, pulling a black sweater over his head. He turned to look at Echo and smiled hugely. "Hello, sunshine."

"Hey," Echo returned with a smile of his own. Why did they have to make it so easy to like them?

"Four." Eyce snorted from the windows as he pushed the curtain an inch to the side and peered out. "Aww, and they brought guns. How cute."

"They're going to kill you," Echo whispered. "I heard them talking in the woods. They said they couldn't leave any witnesses. They plan to kill you and take me back to the lab."

"Not to worry," Myst said brightly as he sauntered into the room. "We're pretty tough." He held his arms up, flexing his muscles and kissing his bicep.

Echo clapped a hand over his mouth to stifle his amusement. For big, badass demon warriors, they were all a big bunch of goofs. Maybe he'd overreacted when he fled. Syx bursting into his room with that dagger had scared the shit out of him, but none of Syx's anger had been directed his way. The man had thought Echo was in danger and had rushed to his rescue.

"One thing at a time," Syx whispered, leaning over the back of the sofa to kiss Echo's cheek. "Let's take care of our guests first, okay?"

Echo sighed. "Please, be careful. I'll feel really guilty if you end up dead. I don't need that kind of pressure right now."

## Chapter Five

Eyce snorted again as he let the curtain fall into place and turned to face the room. “Well, we wouldn’t want to put any undue pressure on you.”

“That would be much appreciated,” Echo said casually as he climbed off Fiero’s lap and pulled a blanket around him. “Shouldn’t you maybe hide or something? Calling the police could be a good idea.”

“What the hell do we want with the police?” Onyx entered from the hallway and crossed the room to stand beside Eyce. “It’s just four little humans.”

“You’re not going to kill them, are you?” Echo squeaked, pushing back into the corner of the sofa.

“Do you want us to let them live?” Eyce’s eyebrows drew together, and he frowned in confusion. These men hunted their mate. They had held him prisoner for years and done Hades only knew what to him, yet Echo wanted them to live.

“Well, I mean, if it’s self-defense, I get that, but I don’t want you to just slaughter them. That would be wrong.”

Sighing, Eyce nodded his understanding. “You take all the fun out of being a demon, but if that’s what you want...” He trailed off in question, hoping Echo would change his mind.

“Yes, that’s what I want,” Echo replied firmly. He looked up at Syx, studying him for a long time, then shook his head and snorted. “Never mind.”

Eyce looked to Syx as well, curious as to what the warrior had heard inside Echo’s head. “He thought I could erase their memories

and send them back to the lab,” Syx said, his eyes locked with Echo’s. “Then he decided he’d gone crazy for thinking that I could do something like that. He still doesn’t believe us.”

Eyce opened his mouth to respond, but a loud rapping on the door interrupted him. “Hello,” one of the men outside called. “We’re looking for someone. Has there been anyone through here?”

“Onyx, take Echo upstairs. Keep him there until I call for you.” Eyce shivered a little at Hex’s deep, commanding voice.

“I don’t want to go upstairs,” Echo argued. “Why can’t I stay here? You said you would protect me.”

“And we will,” Hex said gently, but Eyce could hear the underlying frustration in his voice. “If things turn ugly, I don’t want you to end up in the crossfire. You will be safer upstairs.”

Onyx started toward Echo, his arms outstretched, but Echo held up a hand stopping him. “I’m perfectly capable of walking.” He scrambled to his feet, tripped over the blanket trailing around him twice, then stomped over to the staircase and disappeared up the steps.

“What the hell just happened?” Onyx looked like someone had slapped him in the face, and Eyce couldn’t help but chuckle.

“I think you just got dissed, man.” Myst craned his neck to look up the staircase and shook his head. “He’s got kind of a temper, huh?”

Another loud banging sounded from the front door. “We know you’re in there. We just want the kid, and we’ll leave. We are prepared to use force if you do not comply, however.”

“Please comply,” Fiero grumbled from the sofa where he still lounged as if nothing more exciting than a news report was happening. “I haven’t had coffee yet, and they’re getting kind of annoying.”

“Onyx, go,” Hex commanded. He waited for Onyx to nod and hurry up the stairs before turning to the rest of them. “I’m going to make breakfast. I expect this garbage cleared off of our property by the time the pancakes are finished.”

“You’re making pancakes?” Vapre’s eyes lit up, and he grinned like a little boy. “Hell yeah!” Then he calmed himself and cleared his throat, taking on a respectful expression. “We’ll take care of it, boss.” He tossed a little wink at Hex then grunted as Eyce elbowed him in the ribs.

“Stop being a suck-up.”

“Hmm, but you like it so much when I suck—” More pounding cut off the rest of Vapre’s sentence. Not that Eyce needed a map to point him to where that thought had been leading.

“Last warning,” another man called from the other side of the wood.

“I so can’t deal with this shit before noon,” Hex grumbled as he marched out of the room and toward the kitchen.

Fiero pushed himself up from the sofa and cracked his neck. “Let’s do this.”

Eyce nodded once and took a step to the door, wrapping his fingers around the knob and turning it slowly. He eased open the door just a crack and peered around the edge. “Can I help you, gentlemen?”

“Give us the kid,” the man growled as he pointed a handgun in Eyce’s face.

“And what kid would that be?”

“Don’t bullshit me. I will blow your fucking brains out before you can blink. Just give us the goddamn kid!”

“Fine,” Eyce snarled. He threw the door open wide and dove to the side as a huge fireball sped past him, catching the first man full in the chest. The man screamed and tumbled off the porch to sprawl on the icy ground below.

“What the hell?” another man shouted, lifting his gun to take aim.

A huge gust of wind caught him up, lifting him into the air and turning him several times before dropping him back to the earth beside his comrade. The remaining two didn’t even blink as they

began unloading their clips into the room, pushing forward until they'd breached the threshold.

Eyce heard Echo scream from upstairs and just hoped that Onyx could keep him calm until the danger had passed. The coffee table stood up on its end, sailing across the room and smashing into the men, driving them back through the open door and landing heavily on top of them.

Everything went quiet and the five warriors gathered around the door, smirking down at the four unconscious humans. "Should we wipe their memories?" Eyce asked, nudging Syx with his shoulder.

"No," Syx answered immediately. "They'll only send more after Echo. Let these four return and tell them what they saw. Hopefully, it will discourage further attacks."

"Makes sense." Eyce stepped out into the chilly morning air and bent to grab one of the human's legs. "Let's dump them on the other side of the river. I'm starving, and Hex said we're not getting pancakes until this mess is cleaned up."

The warriors grumbled their agreement and stepped forward to help. Eyce smiled to himself. Hex's pancakes were definitely worth it.

\* \* \* \*

"Let me go!" Echo yelled as he kicked and flailed, trying to shake loose of Onyx's hold. "Someone could be hurt!"

"Everyone's fine." Onyx grunted when Echo's foot connected with his shin. "Would you stop that shit?"

"Everything is quiet now. I just want to go make sure everyone is okay. Please?" Echo ceased fighting and sagged back against Onyx's broad chest. "Please?"

Sighing into Echo's hair, Onyx tightened his hold, squeezing him gently. "Hex said to wait for the all clear. I promise no one is hurt."

"How can you promise that?" Echo squirmed until he turned in Onyx's embrace. "I don't have any idea what's going on, who you



guys are, or what the hell I'm even doing here." He reached up and cupped Onyx's cheek. The man was so handsome, the same as the others, but different. Echo couldn't explain it if he tried, but he knew they were all connected. "My chest hurts just thinking about something happening to one of you."

Onyx closed his eyes for just a moment, and when they fluttered open, Echo could see the indecision and pounced on it. "I'll do everything you tell me, and I won't get myself hurt. I just need to make sure everyone is okay."

"Hex is going to kill me," Onyx groaned. "Stay behind me, and if I tell you to run, I don't want any argument. Understood?"

Echo nodded quickly and stretched up on his tiptoes to kiss the man's jawline. "Thank you."

Onyx looked dazed for a moment, rubbing his face where Echo's kiss had landed. Then he shook his head like a dog shaking off water and wrapped his long fingers around Echo's wrist. "Stay behind me," he repeated.

"Which one is yours?" Echo asked as Onyx led him to the top of the stairs.

The man paused and looked over his shoulder with his eyebrows raised. "What do you mean?"

"Well, I can tell that you're all lovers." Echo tilted his head to the side. "I just don't know how you're paired."

Onyx's gaze softened, and he turned around to pull Echo into his arms. "We're not paired like that." He dropped a quick kiss on the top of Echo's head and eased him away to look into his eyes. "We share mutually between the seven of us. I wouldn't call it love exactly, but we care for one another equally. I would give my life for any one of them, and I know they would do the same for me."

Echo played the information over in his mind and nodded slowly. "You're a family," he said softly. "It's like one big marriage."

Onyx chuckled and pressed a finger to Echo's lips. "Don't let the others here you say that. They might break out into hives. It's not so

complicated as that.” He lifted his finger from Echo’s lips and brushed the hair back from his face. “If Hex takes Fiero to his bed for the night, no one will be jealous or hurt. Sometimes we just need something special that only a certain man can give us. That doesn’t mean that we care for one more than the others, though.”

“I get it.” Echo smiled softly. He did kind of get it, but he still had so many questions. Right now, he just wanted to get down those stairs and make sure everyone was safe and unharmed.

No matter how hard he tried to shake the feeling, the certainty that this is where he belonged wouldn’t stop niggling at him. He just didn’t know how he fit into this odd group.

*“You are the core. Without you there can be no love.”*

Echo grimaced, thankful that Onyx had returned his attention to navigating the staircase. He didn’t want anyone to know about the voice inside his head. Though the men had told him the Oracle also spoke to them, it had been in a dream, and only a few times. In the last several months, there hadn’t been a day where she hadn’t drifted into Echo’s mind. They’d probably think he was a complete whackjob.

Sometimes she gave him the answers he needed. Sometimes she spoke in those damn annoying riddles. Often her voice was soft and musical, but other times it would be harsh and monotone. Hell, maybe he was insane.

They reached the foot of the stairs, and Echo gasped as he wrenched his arm away from Onyx’s grasp and stared around in shock. The door stood wide open, the frame singed and covered in black soot. He could see the coffee table, broken and splintered where it rested at the bottom of the front steps.

Bullet holes littered the walls and the furniture. The glass in the curio across the room had been shattered, as well as two windows, and the black suede sofa looked like Swiss cheese. “Oh, crap.”

“Hey!” Myst called as he jogged up the front steps and into the house. He smiled brightly and held his arms out to his sides. “I’m okay. You worry too much.”

Echo moved to him slowly, eyeing him critically. “The others?”

“Perfectly fine,” Fiero announced as he strutted in through the doorway. The other three followed in behind him.

Echo walked around each of them slowly, looking them over to assure himself they were as healthy as they proclaimed. Once satisfied, he gave a curt nod of his head. “The men from the lab?”

“Knocked out, but alive. We dropped them off on the other side of the stream.” Syx shrugged. “They’ll have a killer headache, but no lasting effects.”

“I need a shower,” Eyce grumbled, staring down at his dirty feet. Then he looked up and grinned wickedly. “Anyone want to scrub my back?”

“Move your ass.” Syx smacked Eyce on his rump and laughed as he followed him through the disheveled living room and down the hall.

“I’m coming, too!” Myst took off at a run.

“Eyce in the shower?” Vapre looked like Christmas had come early. “No way am I passing this up.”

“Yeah, I’m in.” Fiero grabbed Vapre’s arm and dragged him out of the room.

Onyx laughed, bumping Echo with his hip. “Told you.”

Echo barely heard him. His naked cock grew beneath the new T-shirt Onyx had insisted he wear, straining and aching at the mental images of all five gorgeous men, wet and slippery, undulating together beneath the steamy spray of the showerhead.

“You know you can join them,” Onyx whispered in his ear. “No one would turn you away.”

Echo jumped, shaking his head quickly. “I’m fine,” he said hurriedly.

Onyx moved behind him, his strong hands drifting up Echo's slim thighs to move under the cotton shirt. Echo shivered at the touch, his body igniting and his heart rate accelerating. A soft groan escaped his lips when Onyx grasped his leaking cock and began stroking him slowly.

"This doesn't feel like you're fine," he whispered against the back of Echo's neck. His tongue snaked along the sensitive skin, leaving a trail of heat that coursed through Echo's body and straight to his balls.

"I'm not one of you," Echo panted, thrusting his hips into Onyx's fist.

"You belong to us. All of us." Onyx moved his hand faster, jerking Echo more quickly as his teeth scraped over the side of his neck. "You can't possibly understand how much we want you."

"You don't even know me."

"Doesn't matter," came a husky reply from across the room.

Echo's eyes snapped open, and he saw Hex enter the room and come toward them, lust blazing in his eyes as he watched Onyx's hand moving over Echo's length. "You're our mate. Everything about you calls to us." Hex dropped to his knees, his hands resting on Echo's hips as he stared up at him. "You belong to us," he growled, repeating Onyx's words.

A tiny voice in the back of his head warned that he should be afraid. At the very least he should be concerned that he was acting like such a slut, but Echo couldn't fight the overwhelming need. It had been so long since someone had touched him like this, and never before had it felt so incredible.

Then all thought fled when Hex leaned forward, wrapping his lips around the spongy head of Echo's cock, and flicked his tongue across the slit to catch the oozing drops of pre-cum there. Onyx continued to work the base, grinding the hard bulge in his jeans against the small of Echo's back.

Echo whimpered and moaned, dropping his head back to Onyx's shoulder as the two men continued to stroke and suck him, driving

him out of his mind with pleasure. Onyx's other hand slipped under his shirt, roaming over his chest until he pinched one of Echo's nipples, rolling it between his fingers.

"You like that, don't you? Feels good," Onyx whispered raggedly between wet kisses along the side of Echo's neck.

Echo could only nod, his brain short-circuiting as sensation after sensation bombarded him, robbing his breath and leaving him a writhing pile of goo.

"Imagine all of us loving your body, worshipping it, until you scream in ecstasy."

"Oh, fuck," Echo breathed as he rocked his hips faster, pushing further into Hex's warm mouth. "Can we?"

"Anything you want, baby," Onyx assured him. "I want you so much." His hand released Echo's swollen nipple and moved around to squeeze his ass almost roughly. "I want to bury my cock in this sweet ass and pound inside of you until you pass out. Then when you wake up, I want to watch Eyce do the same. Over and over until you beg us to stop."

Echo had no problem imagining the erotic picture Onyx painted for him. His desire kicked into overdrive as lightning zapped through his body, his belly tightened, and his balls ached with the need to unload.

"Can't...fuck...aaahhh!" Echo cried out, his entire body stiffening as his orgasm rocketed through him, spilling into Hex's eager mouth. Hex swallowed everything Echo gave him, licked him clean, and sat back on his heels with a smile.

"You taste amazing."

"Feel better, baby?" Onyx asked as Echo slumped against him, sated and exhausted.

"I could sleep for a week," he said around a goofy grin.

Hex chuckled, pushed to his feet, and stepped forward. He gripped Echo's chin in his hand and leaned down to place a toe-curling kiss on his still-panting mouth. Echo's flaccid cock twitched in renewed

interest, and he groaned loudly, slipping his tongue into Hex's mouth, exploring the depths that awaited him.

"Holy shit!" Myst exclaimed.

Echo eased out of the kiss, pecking Hex's lips once, and turned to face Myst. "Good morning," he said slyly. "Nice shower?"

"Always," Myst said with a smile. "Looks like I missed quite the show in here, though."

"Encore after breakfast," Echo quipped then snapped his lips together. Where the hell had that come from? Damn, he was such a slut. They were just all so gorgeous, and he couldn't think straight when they turned those sappy smiles his way.

"I'll hold you to it."

"Breakfast, a nap, and then we talk," Hex said firmly.

"Spoilsport," Onyx grumbled under his breath as he helped Echo stand straight and pulled the T-shirt down around him. He sighed and wrapped an arm around Echo's shoulders, nudging him toward the kitchen. "He's right as usual, though." He leaned closer and whispered conspiratorially, "Just don't tell him I said that."

## Chapter Six

Hex sat across from Echo at the kitchen table and watched him like a hawk as he shoveled pancakes into his mouth. The man was much too thin for his liking. He needed to make sure they got several meals a day into their little mate.

“Would you stop it,” Echo mumbled around another mouthful. “I’m eating. You don’t think I starve myself on purpose, do you? I love food. It’s just in short supply where I come from.”

“Hex is a little overprotective,” Syx whispered to Echo loud enough for everyone to hear. “He does the same to all of us. He just worries.”

“He can be a pain in the ass,” Fiero continued, not bothering to keep his voice down, “but he means well.”

“Oh, shut it, all of you.” Hex didn’t see the problem in wanting to make sure that the men he cared about were safe and happy. Besides, as their leader, it was his job to provide for them and protect them—even if they were capable of protecting themselves.

“You know we appreciate you,” Syx said quietly. “Any of us would do the same for you.”

Hex dipped his head and swallowed around the lump in his throat. It wasn’t often that they ventured into the emotional stuff, but each time the subject was broached it left him feeling weak and vulnerable. He hated it.

“How do you live with him?” Echo demanded as he wiped his mouth on a napkin. “Doesn’t it get annoying with him crawling around inside your head all the time?”

“We’ve been together for a long time. You get used to it. Besides, there are no secrets here. We depend on each other and have to be able to fully trust each man in this house. Secrets and trust are not good bedfellows.”

Echo nodded thoughtfully. “Yeah, I can see that. I guess it’s kind of cute once you get used to it.” He pointed a finger in Syx’s sputtering face. “Just remember, you may not always like what you hear. Now close your mouth, honey. You’re being rude.”

Snorts and sniggers went around the table. “He’s an ornery little shit,” Myst mused. “I like it.”

“Okay, so someone tell me about this dream lady, why I’m here, how you knew I was coming, and what I’m supposed to be doing. Oh, and can you please tell me who you really are, because this demon shit is hurting my head.”

Just like that, the room went quiet, and the atmosphere sobered. “Are you sure you want it all in one go? It’s a lot.” Hex scrubbed his palm over his jean-covered thigh as he spoke. He knew they needed to have the discussion, and Echo had a right to know everything, but he’d been hoping to put it off for at least another day.

The little man had already run once. What would he do when he learned the full severity of the situation? Maybe he should arrange for them to take turns guarding Echo until they were sure he was not going to sneak off again.

“I think we need to show him,” Onyx interjected, interrupting Hex’s thoughts. “I’ll do it.”

Sighing in resignation, Hex nodded his head. “Syx.”

“Got it.” Syx took Echo’s hand and tugged gently, urging him into his lap where he wrapped his arms around the man’s chest and held him tight.

“What’s going on?” Echo’s voice cracked, and he wiggled in Syx’s embrace.



“Watch and don’t be scared.” Onyx rose from the table and moved to stand a few feet away. He closed his eyes and bowed his head, breathing deeply as a deep rumbling growl built inside his chest.

Hex watched Echo keenly, taking in his wide eyes and his trembling hands that rested on the Syx’s forearms. He hoped he’d made the right decision.

Onyx’s pale skin lightened further to a soft gray, his fingers lengthened as he flexed them, and three-inch, black, lethal talons grew from the tips. He lifted his head slowly, opening his mouth to show off the two rows of razor-sharp fangs. Black bled out to the corners of his eyes, completely swallowing the whites until only the endless void of darkness remained.

Echo’s mouth fell open in astonishment then a bloodcurdling scream poured from his parted lips, filling the room and reverberating off the walls. Syx clapped a hand over his mouth, muffling the sound but not stopping it. Echo thrashed against the warriors hold, kicking his feet and wiggling his body as his eyes bugged from his head and endless screams continued against Syx’s palm.

Hex closed his eyes and waved a hand at Onyx. “Enough,” he whispered. He kept his eyes closed, unwilling to look at Echo and see the hatred and fear in his brilliant blue eyes. Their mate thought them monsters, and the knowledge left a painful ache in Hex’s chest.

Then the screams stopped, and Hex looked up to see Syx whispering into Echo’s ear. Echo’s eyes glazed over before they closed, and he sagged limply in the demon’s lap. “He’ll sleep for a while,” Syx mumbled sadly.

“Well, that went well,” Fiero called from the end of the table. “Any other bright ideas?”

“What the hell did you want me to do? He deserves to know the truth!” Hex slammed his massive fist down on the table as he growled at the warrior.

“The truth doesn’t always set you free,” Eyce intervened. The man looked like someone had just kicked his puppy. “I’m going back to bed and try to pretend today didn’t happen.”

The others followed suit, rising to their feet and plodding out of the room. “Do you want me to watch him?” Syx asked once they were alone.

“No. It’s my mess. I’ll clean it up.” Hex figured he might need to find a pretty big mop, though.

\* \* \* \*

“Why are you afraid?”

Echo stood in the middle of a vast field, the springy grass tickling his toes as the sun’s rays warmed his face. The Oracle stood before him, even more beautiful in the daylight and a strange little smile on her pink lips.

“Did you see him? They really are demons from Hell, or Hades, or whatever.”

“Yes,” the Oracle answered simply. “I told you they do not lie.”

“Well, how am I not supposed to be afraid of that? It was bad enough when I thought they were just crazy, but this is so much worse.”

“They will not harm you.”

“You keep saying that. How do you know? They could be plotting my demise right now.”

The Oracle gave a soft tinkling laugh. “You are afraid of the unknown, the unfamiliar. They do not seek to harm you. Let them in, and no one shall be more cherished than you.”

“Why do I trust you? You’re just some figment of my imagination, yet I believe you when you tell me they won’t hurt me.”

“A figment, I am not. However, if I were, perhaps you should trust your instincts. Look past your mind’s inability to understand and tell me what your heart knows.”

“I’m safe here,” Echo said with certainty. “They would never hurt me, and more, they would rip apart anyone else who tried.”

“Then follow your heart,” the Oracle whispered as she faded away, leaving Echo alone in the green field.

\* \* \* \*

Echo blinked open his eyes, tensing a little before relaxing when he saw Syx’s face mere inches from his own. The demon’s arm rested under his head, his other hand on Echo’s hip. A heavily muscled arm draped over Echo’s waist, and a long, warm body molded against his back. Peeking over his shoulder, he smiled softly at Hex’s sleeping form.

To follow his heart would mean breaking down barriers he had spent years constructing. He’d had little choice if he hoped to maintain his sanity at the lab. Once, for just a moment inside the cold, sterile facility, he’d thought he’d found love and acceptance, but it had all been a lie. So, he allowed others to use his body, taking pleasure from their attentions, but closing off his heart to any kind of emotional engagement. If he didn’t feel, he couldn’t hurt, and life would be easier to navigate within the walls of the compound.

But though his brain still screamed for him to run and never look back, his heart thundered loudly, drowning out the voice and begging him to stay. He didn’t know the first thing about love or relationships, but he wanted to try.

If the warriors had meant him harm, surely it would have happened by now. Yet, they had done nothing but cater to him and pamper him since he’d arrived. Even after he’d fled into the dawn, they welcomed him back without question and protected him from the men who hunted him. They’d risked their lives to keep him safe.

“You’re thinking too loud,” Syx mumbled sleepily.

Echo looked up and bit his lip, his cheeks heating as he stared into Syx’s eyes. Strange, but none of them seemed to have a definitive eye

color. It was as though he could see the colors, but not identify them. *Strange.*

"I'm sorry I had to put you to sleep. I was afraid you were going to hurt yourself." Syx moved his hand from Echo's hip and brushed the hair back from his face. His fingers lingered, trailing down Echo's cheek in a tender caress. "Are you okay?"

"I will be," Echo whispered. "Sorry I freaked out on you."

"Understandable. I'm not sure how I would have reacted in your position, but I'm sure it would have been similar."

"Will you kiss me?" Echo blurted. His cheek tinted further, the blush working its way down his neck. "Please."

"You never have to ask." Syx leaned in close, rubbing their lips together gently.

Echo sighed, reaching up to wrap his fingers around the man's neck and drag him closer. He hoped this was okay. Onyx said they shared. He said they all wanted him, and no one would be jealous or hurt. He couldn't choose just one when he wanted them all so much.

"This is more than okay," Syx whispered against his lips then tickled the seam with his tongue, seeking entrance.

Echo opened for him eagerly, darting his tongue out and twining it with Syx's. Gods, he tasted so good—more mellow than the others, but still exhilarating. Electricity raced along his skin, sizzling his nerve endings and leaving him wanting more. His cock swelled between his thighs, jutting out from his groin as he lost himself in the kiss and began grinding against Syx's thigh like a bitch in heat.

Soft lips nibbled at the back of his neck, and a rough palm smoothed over his hip and down to squeeze his bare ass. "Mmm, I could get used to waking up like this," Hex muttered against his shoulder.

Pulling out of the kiss, Echo turned his head, seeking Hex's mouth. He didn't have to wait long before the warrior crushed their lips together, taking possession of his mouth and dominating him. So

different from the kiss he'd just shared with Syx. Not better or worse—just different, and he couldn't get enough.

Rolling to his back, his heavy cock slapped against his lower belly as he arched his hips, seeking his lovers' touch. Syx didn't disappoint. He palmed Echo's shaft, stroking him quickly as his mouth descended, his tongue tangling with Echo's and Hex's in the three-way kiss. Echo had never experienced anything like it, and he wanted more.

"Need more," he breathed as his heart hammered inside his chest, beating heavily against his sternum. "Need you."

Syx began to move on top of him immediately, but Hex's hand to his chest stopped him. "We can't yet." His voice sounded strained and tight as though he begrudged the words he spoke. He looked into Echo's eyes, begging forgiveness without words. "I can't control myself," he explained. "The urge to claim you gets stronger the longer I'm near you."

Syx groaned as he slumped back to the mattress and stared up at the ceiling. "Same here." He turned his head to look at Echo and tried for a smile, but it looked horribly fake. "I'm sorry."

"I don't understand." All the blood that should have been in his brain had rushed to pool inside his engorged shaft, and thinking had become near impossible. "Claim me?"

"As our mate," Hex expanded.

"Right. I knew that." Fuck, why wouldn't his brain work? "So, can you just go ahead and do that? I'm pretty sure my dick is going to explode if I don't get to come soon."

Syx pushed up on his elbows and shook his head. "You don't understand what that means. Once you agree, you can't take it back."

Echo looked down at his straining cock, watching the pre-cum leak freely from the slit. His balls ached, his dick jerked with every beat of his heart, and his lower belly tightened almost painfully. "You guys suck," he moaned pathetically.

Syx's fingers wrapped around his shaft again, and Hex's hand disappeared between his legs to cradle his heavy sac. "You didn't think we'd just leave you hanging?"

Echo groaned in response, his eyes rolling back in his head as his hips arched up off the mattress. Syx jerked him quickly, twisting his wrist to add extra friction just under the head, and bent to claim Echo's mouth once more.

A slippery tongue laved his balls, sucking them into Hex's warm mouth and rolling them around until Echo didn't think he'd ever be able to breathe right again. "Are you gonna come for us, baby?" Syx whispered in his ear before sucking the lobe in his mouth and biting it lightly. "I bet you're so beautiful when you come. I want to see how gorgeous you are."

Hex pushed Echo's legs wider and one slippery finger pressed between Echo's cheeks, swirling around his hole and pushing inside.

Echo tensed, crying out at the intense pleasure. "Don't stop," he begged.

Syx's teeth scraped over his neck, leaving a trail of heat and a tingling ache. "You like that finger in your ass. You want more, though. You want Hex's huge cock, ramming into you, nailing your sweet spot, and making lights dance behind your eyes. You want it all, don't you, baby?"

"Yes," Echo hissed, pushing back against Hex's hand and riding the thick digit as it pumped inside his fluttering channel.

"We'll give you anything you want. We'll fuck you seven different ways in one round and have you still begging for more. No one else will ever have your body," Syx growled.

"No one," Echo agreed as his orgasm barreled down on him. In that moment, he would have agreed to just about anything.

"Then come for us," Syx demanded. "Scream, baby. I want to hear you scream. I want the gods on Olympus to know who you belong to." His thumb dipped into Echo's slit just as Hex slipped a second finger into Echo's ass, and it was all over.

Echo threw his head back and screamed until his throat felt raw. His muscles tensed, his joints locked, and his inner walls squeezed the digits inside his hole as jets of creamy cum erupted from his cock to paint his chest and abs.

Falling back to the bed, limp, sweaty, and completely content, Echo moaned hoarsely as Syx and Hex began licking the semen from his stomach. They may not hack him into little pieces and serve him for dinner, but with an orgasm like that, they were still going to kill him.

## Chapter Seven

“I don’t know. Just whatever, I guess.” Eyce watched Echo fidget, his cheeks tinting the most adorable shade of red as he stared at the items in Eyce’s hands.

Glancing around the department store, Eyce sighed and handed the jeans and shirts off to Onyx. Pulling Echo away from the group, he leaned close so no one could hear them. “What’s going on? You need clothes. As hot as I find your sexy little ass, you can’t run around naked all the time.”

“I don’t have any money,” Echo whispered as he clutched at his borrowed sweats. They’d foregone the rope at Echo’s refusal, and the baggy cotton pants swallowed the little man. “I can’t pay for any of this.”

“Well, luckily, you’re practically engaged to seven insanely rich and handsome demons who insist that their little mate have the best of everything.” He winked and wiggled his eyebrows, pulling the cutest little giggle from Echo. Who knew he liked giggling?

“Thank you.”

“Hey, cut it out.” Eyce lifted Echo’s downturned head with a knuckle under his chin. “Give me a smile.” Echo complied with the sweetest, most beautiful smile Eyce had ever seen, and it melted him right down to his toes. “Much better. Now, between you and me, Myst is the biggest fashionista I’ve ever met. He loves to shop. Do you really want to deny him his fun?”

Echo peeked around him, eyeing Myst and snorting. “You’ve got to be kidding.”



“Not at all. Watch this.” Eyce returned to the group, pushing Echo in front of Myst. “They’re having a sale on boots in the men’s department.”

Myst’s head popped up and manic gleam glinted in his eyes. He snatched Echo up in his arms and ran through the store, dodging racks of clothes and other shoppers like a professional running back.

Syx, Onyx, and Vapre all laughed, doubling over and falling against each other. “Are they really having a sale?” Vapre gasped around his chuckles.

Eyce shrugged unconcernedly. “Not a clue.”

The warriors just laughed harder as they made their way through the department store to find Myst and Echo. Eyce couldn’t remember the last time he’d had so much fun doing something as mundane as shopping. Normally, he hated the chore, but this was different. Echo just made everything seem new and adventurous. If he didn’t watch himself, he’d be wrapped around the little imp’s finger in no time.

They found their men in the shoe department, Echo standing off to the side, holding up his sweats and shaking his head as he watched Myst grab box after box of boots from the shelf. He looked up as they approached and pinned Eyce with a mock glare. “That wasn’t nice.”

“As you can see, he doesn’t really care that they aren’t on sale.” Eyce waved a hand toward Myst as he dropped his burden on a nearby bench and began looking around for...something.

His gaze landed on Vapre, and he motioned the man over, pointing at one of the high shelves and gesturing wildly. “What’s he doing?” Echo whispered, moving closer to Eyce’s side and snuggling against him.

Eyce wrapped his arm around the little guy and sighed happily. He guessed he didn’t need to worry about Echo wrapping him around those tiny little fingers. Only four days since he’d arrived on their doorstep, and Eyce would already give him anything he asked for, and smile as he did it.

Vapre nodded once and turned to scan the area for passersby as the box began to jiggle before lifting into the air and floating down to Myst's waiting hands.

"Oh, Hex is not going to like that," Echo mumbled as he nodded knowingly. Tilting his head back to look up at Eyce, he gave him a mischievous grin and wrinkled his cute little button nose. "I'm telling."

"You can't do that." Eyce dropped a quick peck on the top of his mate's head.

"Why not?"

"Not if I tell him first." Eyce gave Echo a playful shove, sending him stumbling into Onyx's arms as he jogged backward and laughed. "I'll bet you a blow job that I can find him first."

Echo narrowed his eyes and pursed his lips. "Two blow jobs," he countered.

Eyce continued backing away slowly as he grinned and nodded. "You're on. You'll never be able to keep up."

"He's right." Syx snatched a pair of small jogging pants from a nearby rack and shoved them into Echo's hands. "You won't be able to run if you have to keep holding your pants up. Get these on, and I'll say go." He smirked at Eyce. "We wouldn't want any cheating."

Eyce stopped, his eyes bugging out of his head as Echo stripped out of his sweats right in the middle of the damn store and donned the smaller pants. "Ah, much better," Echo sighed as he wiggled his ass. He ripped the tag off the side and handed it over to Syx. "Make sure you pay for these."

Syx nodded and leaned closer, whispering something in Echo's ear that Eyce couldn't hear. "Hey, no fraternizing with the enemy!" he called.

Echo nodded, an impish smile covering his lips as he peeked over his shoulder at Myst. The warrior sauntered up behind him, laying a hand on his shoulder and staring at Eyce. In the split second it took

Eyce to realize their intentions, he'd been frozen in place, held immobile by Myst's power. "Not fair," he pouted.

"Go," Syx said around a snigger.

Echo took off, zipping past Eyce, giggling the entire way. It wasn't until the little brat's footsteps had died away that Myst finally released him. Eyce glared at his lovers for a minute before rolling his eyes and taking off through the store to find Hex.

He darted through the aisles, finally finding the exit to the store and hurrying through it into the bustling mall. *Crap!* He had no idea where Hex and Fiero were. They'd mentioned something about a surprise for Echo, but Eyce didn't know much more than that. Jogging through the throngs of shoppers, he scanned the area quickly, looking for Echo.

He spotted his little mate four stores ahead, dipping and dodging the people as he made his way to the escalators. Whipping his head one way and then the other, Eyce found a set of stairs to his left and sprinted to them, taking them two at a time to the second floor of the mall. Echo reached the top of the escalator at the same time and took off in the opposite direction of Eyce.

Following Echo at a fast walk, Eyce pulled his cell phone from his pocket and dialed quickly.

"I'm not telling you where I am," Hex said by way of greeting. "Syx already called, and you're cheating." Echo could hear the laughter in his voice and smiled in return.

"They gave him a head start. So they already cheated. C'mon!"

"They also told him where I am," Hex replied with a chuckle. "Oh, wait. I see him now. Okay, we're at the mobile phone kiosk near Macy's."

"Shit!" Eyce flipped his phone closed and shoved it in his pocket as he sprinted through the mall, his eyes locked on the back of Echo's head. Echo turned to look over his shoulder, sticking his tongue out at Eyce before turning back, ducking his head, and turning on another burst of speed.

Eyce lengthened his strides, gaining on the little runt as people gasped and cursed, jumping out of his way as he sped past them. Running full out, he finally caught up to his mate, running just a step behind him as the kiosk and Hex came into view. Their leader leaned against Fiero, both of them laughing like a couple of loons.

Eyce pushed past Echo, smirking down at him as he gained the lead. Then Echo fell, rolling across the carpeted floor and crying out in pain. Eyce stumbled to a stop, guilt settling in his heart as he hurried back to Echo and dropped down beside him. He rolled the man to his side and winced at the tears streaming down Echo's rosy cheeks.

"Oh, baby. I'm so sorry."

"A kiss would make it better," Echo suggested as he sniffled.

"Anything." Eyce's chest tightened as he leaned down, placing a gentle kiss on Echo's trembling lips. "Better?"

"One more."

Smiling indulgently, Eyce bent again, groaning when Echo's arm snaked around his neck, pulling him into a scorching kiss. His head swam, his blood boiled, and his dick began to swell rapidly. He needed to stop this, or he was going to take the guy right there in the middle of the mall and to hell with anyone who wanted to watch.

Then suddenly Echo's lips were gone, leaving Eyce feeling disoriented and a bit disappointed. Echo jumped to his feet and ran straight to Hex, throwing himself into the man's arms. Hex laughed with him, lifting him as Echo locked his legs around the warrior's hips and turned to wink at Eyce. "I win."

"You little shit," Eyce growled. On the inside, he couldn't stop smiling, though. He'd never had so much fun losing before. Echo's pretty lips wrapped around his throbbing cock, or Echo's long prick sliding over his tongue—it didn't really matter.

He pushed to his feet and sauntered over to the trio with his arms crossed over his chest. "How did you know where they were?"

“Syx told me.” Echo sounded as though this should have been obvious. “He also told me that if you started winning, then I should fake an injury.”

Eyce blinked several times before throwing his head back and roaring with laughter, garnering him a few strained looks from passing shoppers. “He is so dead when we get home.”

“Nope.” Echo wagged a finger in Eyce’s face as he continued to cling to Hex’s neck with the other hand. “You can kill him after you suck my cock.”

\* \* \* \*

The remainder of November flew by in a blur of happiness, marred only by his sexual frustration. Eyce had made good on the bet, and Echo had received two of the best blow jobs of his life. Other than that, no one would touch him, though. Oh, they still loved to cuddle him, hold him on their laps, and give him little kisses.

Echo wanted more, though.

The warriors showered him in gifts and as much attention as he could stand. His aching cock felt neglected, however, with only his own hand for company. He’d even taken to parading around the huge house naked, surprising the men in the shower, and even stroking off in front of them.

Still, no one would touch him. It confused him and left him feeling like he had some kind of communicable disease. He spent most nights alone in his bed, listening to the sounds of the men who had professed to desire him make love to one another while he remained on the outside looking in.

“Why the long face?” Vapre asked as he plopped down beside him on the sofa and squeezed Echo’s thigh.

“Nothing,” Echo mumbled. “Just pouting, I guess.”

“And you do it so well, but why don’t you tell me what’s going on. Maybe we can figure it out together.”

"Doubt it," Echo snorted. "You'd actually have to touch me for that. Wouldn't want to infect you or anything." Even he could hear the bitterness in his voice, and it only served to depress him further. Vapre didn't deserve his pissy attitude. The demon couldn't help it if he didn't desire Echo like he did the other men in the house.

Vapre sighed heavily and pushed both hands through his silver-blond hair, pulling it back from his face. "Why didn't you say something before now?"

"What was I supposed to say?" Echo turned a little to face the warrior and tucked his feet up under him. "You can't help it if you don't want me. You guys have been so incredible to me, and I feel a little ungrateful by asking for more."

Taking a chance, Echo pushed closer to Vapre, crawling into the man's lap when Vapre didn't push him away. Straddling his powerful thighs, Echo stroked his fingers over Vapre's cheeks and tried to smile. "Please touch me," he begged. "Or at least explain why you won't. Did I do something wrong? Is that why everyone is treating me like I have the plague?"

"Oh, baby," Vapre breathed. "You didn't do anything wrong. You're perfect."

"Then why won't anyone touch me?" Echo felt the tears prickle the corners of his eyes, but pushed them back, unwilling to show that level of emotion. "I don't know what I did wrong, but it's obviously something. I can't fix it if no one will tell me!"

He pulled Vapre to him roughly, crushing their mouths together as he rocked against him, pleading for a response. Vapre growled, his canines bursting through his gums and piercing Echo's bottom lip. With a gasp of surprise, Echo pulled away, gliding his tongue over his swollen lip and grimacing when he tasted blood.

Vapre didn't exactly look apologetic. His eyes watched Echo's tongue as soft growls poured continuously from his open mouth. His breath increased, his chest heaving beneath Echo's hand. "Mine," Vapre snarled.

“Vapre?” Echo began easing away slowly, but the demon’s arms locked around him, holding him in place with an iron grip.

“Mine,” he growled again.

“Yeah, I’m yours, big guy.” Echo stroked Vapre’s face and chest, unsure of what was going on, but trying to soothe the man nonetheless. “Hey, look at me.”

Vapre tilted his head up obediently, blinking several times and snapping his lips closed to cut off the growling. Then his eyes rounded, and he released his hold on Echo as though he’d be electrocuted. Gently moving Echo from his lap, he sprang to his feet, mumbling apologies as he fled the room.

*That went well.* Alone again, and completely miserable, Echo curled into a ball, wrapping himself around a pillow, and finally allowed the tears to flow. Several long minutes passed before he heard the sounds of Vapre’s moans floating down the stairs, accompanied by Eyce’s growls and Myst’s cries of pleasure.

Pushing to his feet and swiping roughly at his tears, Echo marched determinedly up the staircase and down the hallway to bang on Hex’s door. Without waiting for a response, he threw the door open and stomped inside, narrowing his eyes at the man. He hadn’t seen or heard from Hex in three days. Hell, he didn’t even think the man had left his room in all that time.

“I want to know what’s going on, and I want to know now.”

Hex lowered the book he’d been reading to his lap and looked at Echo with lifted brows. “What exactly do you want to know?”

“I want to know why everyone is treating me like I have rabies. I want to know why no one will touch me. Why the hell have you been hiding from me?” Echo broke down, and the tears streamed down his face again. “Why doesn’t anyone want me?”

Hex was out of bed in a flash, lifting Echo into his arms and cuddling him close. “Don’t, baby. Please, don’t. I’ll explain everything, okay? This is all my fault. I ordered the guys to keep their distance.”

“You what?” Echo gasped, hurt, betrayal and confusion warring inside him. “Why would you do that?”

“It’s getting worse,” Hex whispered as he moved to sit on the end of the bed and repositioned Echo in his lap. “Every time I’m close to you, all I can think about is claiming you. You’re our mate, Echo. We’re going crazy with wanting you.”

“Then why don’t you just claim me and get it over with? I already told you I’m okay with it.”

“You need to know everything before you make your decision. I won’t lie, and I won’t trick you. We just wanted you to get to know us...as men, not as demons. Then I planned to tell you, and let you make your decision.”

Echo stared into Hex’s eyes, searching for the truth. Satisfied with what he found there, he nodded his head and climbed down from the warrior’s lap, held out a hand, and smirked. “I think you need to tell me now. I’m calling a meeting.”



## Chapter Eight

Everyone gathered in the living room—some taking seats on the sofa or love seat, others lounging on the floor. Echo sat in the recliner alone. His men looked disappointed at his chosen perch, but they had important things to discuss, and he wasn't about to let them distract him.

"So, what's up?" Fiero asked as he leaned back against the sofa between Eyce's legs. "Why the powwow?"

"I want to know about the prophecy," Echo said slowly, thinking through the words. "I want to know what my part in all of this is, why I'm here, why the thought of leaving makes my stomach cramp." He paused and took a deep breath, looking around the group and meeting each man's eyes. "And I want to know why none of you will touch me."

"We touch you all the time," Onyx argued from his place on the love seat. He bumped Syx with his shoulder and waved a hand toward Echo. "Tell him we touch him."

"I don't think that's what he means." Syx shook his head, his eyes sad. "I'm sorry," he whispered.

"So am I," Hex added. He sat on the edge of the other recliner next to Echo and reached over to take his hand. "We should have explained. I'm sorry that you felt like we didn't want you."

"What?" Myst looked like someone had slapped him. "How could you think we didn't want you?"

"Considering everyone acts like I'm contagious, I thought it would be obvious." Echo extracted his hand from Hex's grip, crossed his arms over his chest, and leaned back in his seat. "I don't want to

leave, but I don't want to feel like an outsider either. You said you all shared equally, but I'm getting pushed to the side."

"I guess I didn't help earlier, did I?" Vapre had the decency to look properly chastised. "I didn't mean to make you feel that way. I just...I couldn't control it."

"Ah, fuck," Fiero groaned. "Why didn't you just say something?"

Echo snorted. "Vapre asked the same thing, and the answer doesn't matter. I'm asking now." He arched an eyebrow, daring the warrior to argue with him.

"I would say we need to discuss the prophecy first, but I think this needs to be addressed." Hex rose from his seat and began pacing between Echo and the rest of the demons. "You know you're our mate. I told you that it's getting harder every day to be near you and not claim you."

"Right. I understand that. What I don't understand is why you won't just go ahead and claim me."

"It's forever, Echo," Syx said softly.

"Well, it's not like I'm going anywhere."

"If we claim you, then you will become immortal."

"I still fail to see the problem."

"We have to bite you," Fiero said with a trace of sarcasm. "We will claim you with a bite, and the marks will forever be etched into your skin. Seven of them."

"Will it hurt?"

"I don't know." Fiero shook his head. "I've never had a mate before."

Echo tilted his head to the side in confusion. "You mean the seven of you aren't mated?" Each demon shook his head. "That seems a little silly. You're all mated to me. You're already lovers. Why can't you be mated to each other?"

No one seemed to have an answer. In fact, they all looked like Echo was speaking in tongues. Giving that line of questioning up, Echo turned to other matters. "Okay, so I'll be immortal, I'll have

seven mating marks, and it's a binding contract that I can't break." He ticked each off on his fingers as he spoke. "I'm in."

"There's one more thing." Hex stopped his pacing to stand in front of Echo. "If we lose this war, then we will be dragged back to the Underworld." Hex dropped to his knees and placed his hands on Echo's thighs. "If you allow us to claim you, there will never be anyone else for you. No one will ever excite you again. Another's touch will be unbearable, even painful."

"An eternity of no sex?"

"That's if Hades doesn't decide to drag you to the depths of Tartarus with us," Syx added quietly. "We don't want that for you."

"So, you can see it's a huge decision. We didn't want to lose control and claim you by accident before you had a chance to think it over." Echo could see the tension of Hex's shoulders, hear the strain in his deep voice.

"Will you be mad if I said I need a little time?" He finally understood the magnitude of what they were asking from him. If they didn't have this stupid war to worry about, then none of that would be of consequence. He didn't want to be forced into Hades, though, and living forever without the touch of another just seemed cruel.

"No one will be mad, baby. Just please understand why we have to be careful around you."

"I understand." Echo gave Hex a small smile. He really did understand, but it didn't make it any less frustrating. He decided they needed to move on to less depressing topics. Unfortunately, that only left the prophecy and the war. Not exactly rainbows and butterflies.

"Okay, so I'm guessing that because I'm your mate, I feel just as drawn to you as you do to me." He waited for everyone to nod their agreement. "So that explains why I feel like hurling at the thought of leaving."

"Is it wrong that I'm not sorry you feel that way?" Myst bit his lip, but Echo could see the smile in his eyes.

"I'm going to ignore you for time's sake." He blew Myst a little kiss, though, so the man knew he was only teasing. "Okay, so what do I have to do with this prophecy and the war?"

"The Oracle said you would come to us and bond us in ways we couldn't imagine. She said you would be the key to winning this war. Well, she said it in riddles, but that's what I got from it," Syx said.

"We just don't know what that means." Hex growled under his breath as he rose to his feet and began pacing again. "I mean, I guess she's talking about you being our mate. That would strengthen the bond we have with each other, but I don't know how that will help us in battle."

"I think I know what it means," Echo whispered. He'd been hoping this wouldn't come up. He was so tired of everyone looking at him and treating him like some kind of freak. This was life and death, though.

Everyone froze and turned to look at him as one. Taking a deep breath and fisting his hands in his lap, Echo couldn't meet their eyes. Instead, he stared at his knees and tried to swallow down the burn in his throat so he could speak. "I'm a syphon."

\* \* \* \*

"Excuse me?" Hex frowned, his brow wrinkling to form a shallow V. "What exactly is that?"

"I wasn't the only one at that facility. There's all kind of people with special abilities like yours."

"So, that's why you didn't freak too much when we showed you our powers." Myst nodded in understanding. "You've seen this kind of stuff before. The demon thing was a little much, though."

"At first," Echo agreed as he shrugged. "I'm okay with it now. It's part of you, but not who you are. I get that."

"Okay, so explain what a syphon is," Hex demanded. The big guy looked confused, and he didn't seem to like it one bit.

"I absorb other people's abilities. I am able to imitate those gifts and make those powers even stronger."

"Show me."

Echo sighed as he rose from his chair and walked over to Syx. His power would be the easiest for the demonstration. He climbed into Syx's lap, resting his back against the warrior's huge chest, and gripped his hand, squeezing it gently.

"Don't worry. I don't actually drain your powers. I just absorb a bit of them to use as my own."

"I'm not worried," Syx whispered. "Show us what you can do, little one."

Echo closed his eyes and squeezed Syx's hand again, feeling the tingling heat spread through his body as the demon's power flowed into him. The voices started softly—just mumbled whispers inside his head, but growing louder the longer he concentrated.

*"He's so gorgeous. I hope he doesn't run again."* Myst's voice floated into his head.

*"They look so sexy together. I wish I could watch Syx fuck him over the side the couch."* That was Vapre.

*"I don't know what I'll do if he doesn't let us claim him. I need him so much already."* Hex's thoughts brought the burn back to Echo's eyes as he fought to hold on to his emotions.

"See, Echo, we do want you. Do you understand now?" Syx slipped into his head, and Echo nodded with his eyes still closed.

*"I just need more time to think. I'm sorry I didn't tell you guys about the syphon thing before. I didn't want you to look at me like I'm a freak."*

*"We're demons from the Underworld with special powers of our own. Yes, I can see how you'd believe we'd think you were a freak."* Echo could practically hear Syx's eyes roll.

*"I wonder if he can hear us."* Onyx's voice drifted into his mind. *"If he can really absorb our powers, why hasn't he done it before?"*

“It’s not automatic,” Echo answered out loud. “I have to concentrate to do it. I didn’t do it before because I didn’t want you guys to know. I’ve spent enough of my life being treated like a science experiment.”

“Fuck,” Fiero groaned. “Now there are two busybodies digging around in my head.”

Echo opened his eyes and released Syx’s hand. “The power only lasts for a few hours if I don’t maintain contact with the person. Your thoughts are safe.”

“Okay, but that doesn’t explain how you’re supposed to bond us all together.” Hex spoke from the recliner Echo had just vacated. “It’s awesome that you can absorb some of our powers, but how does that make us stronger?”

“I’ll show you.” Echo held out a hand to Fiero, waiting patiently for the man to take it. Then he held Syx’s hand in his other and closed his eyes once more, allowing the powers to flow through him and bridge the gap between them.

“What the fuck?” Fiero shouted. He jerked his hand away from Echo’s and scrambled to his feet. “I heard you in my head! All of you!” He spun around and tugged on his flannel shirt, pointing a finger in Vapre’s face. “This shirt does not make me look like a hillbilly!”

Everyone laughed, and Echo rolled his eyes as he giggled quietly. “It kind of does. Plaid does absolutely nothing for you, man.”

“Here, here,” the group chorused.

“Oh, screw you all. It’s comfortable.” Fiero slouched back to the floor, insinuating himself between Eyce’s legs again.

Echo turned to look at the warrior, suddenly realizing Eyce had been unusually quiet throughout the conversation. “Are you okay?”

“I’m fine. Just worried about you is all. Does it hurt when you do that? Or make you tired?”

Echo shook his head. “It used to, but I’ve gotten used to it over the years. Now it just kind of feels funny.”

“You’ve been in that lab all of your life?”

“Yep.”

“Can I hold you?” Eyce looked so sad as he spoke. “I just want to hold you for a minute.”

Echo moved from Syx’s lap over to Eyce’s and snuggled in against his big demon. “Don’t pity me. I have you guys now, and I don’t have to ever go back there.” He looked up into Eyce’s eyes pleadingly. “Right?”

“Right,” Eyce whispered as he bent to brush their lips together. “No one can take you from us.”

The seven warriors gathered around him, each one of them touching him somewhere as they looked at him like he was the most precious gift on earth. “No one will hurt you again,” Hex whispered. “Never again.”

Each man made similar vows, and Echo couldn’t fight back the tears any longer. He’d never been so happy or felt so special. They didn’t think he was a freak or want to use him for their own gain. Maybe being mated to seven demon warriors wouldn’t be so bad.

“Okay, enough of this mushy crap.” Fiero stood and stretched his arms over his head. “I’m going to bed.”

The men mumbled their agreement, some pairing off and others heading off to bed alone. Echo didn’t want to be alone, but he didn’t want to sound needy either. Luckily, Eyce seemed to know exactly what he needed.

“You can sleep with me tonight, but I need you to behave yourself. Can you do that?” Eyce smirked at him.

“Please,” Echo whispered.

“C’mon, baby. Time for bed.”

“My bed is bigger,” Hex offered hopefully.

“What do you say?” Eyce looked from Hex to Echo. “Looks like you’re not the only one who doesn’t want to be alone tonight.”

“Hmm, two big, warm, naked bodies pressed against me, surrounding me and keeping me safe through the night.” Echo tapped

his chin as he pretended to debate the benefits. “I suppose I can live with that.” He squealed when Eyce tickled him, slapping at the man’s chest as he wiggled in his lap.

“Let’s go, you two.” Hex chuckled and offered a hand to help Echo to his feet. “I’m exhausted.”

“Can we have pancakes in the morning?” Echo bit his lips, linking his hands behind his back and shifting from foot to foot. “I really like pancakes.”

Hex’s entire body seemed to soften, and he kissed Echo on the forehead. “You can have anything you want, baby.”



## **Chapter Nine**

“I don’t get it. What does the bridge have to do with anything?” Echo snuggled in between Hex and Myst a week later as he watched some headless guy race toward a bridge on a black horse and then just stop.

“Just watch the movie,” Hex chuckled. “You’re worse than Onyx. The guy has to ask a million questions during every movie.”

“Do not,” Onyx pouted from his place on the floor where he cuddled with Fiero and Eyce.

“Do so,” Syx called from the other sofa where he had his head resting in Vapre’s lap.

“It’s like living with a bunch of toddlers, huh?” Hex whispered in Echo’s ear.

Echo laughed and snuggled in closer to his men. “It’s nice. Makes it feel like a home.”

“The things you say,” Myst said tightly.

Echo looked up at him, afraid he’d said something to offend the man, but the look in Myst’s eyes said he was fighting hard to rein in his emotions. Soft moans from the floor drew Echo’s attention, and he watched with a deep longing as Fiero, Eyce, and Onyx shared a passionate kiss, full of need and desire.

All week he’d been arguing with himself over the pros and cons of allowing the men to claim him. If not for this damn war the Oracle said was coming, he’d have no qualms. The more time he spent with the men, the more he got to know them, the more he found himself falling.

They were each so different and brought something unique and amazing to their relationship. Myst was the jokester of the group and always kept everyone laughing. Hex kept everyone in line, but Syx was the mediator of the group. Eyce was the sensitive one, and Onyx was the helper. Fiero acted tough and fierce, but he was just as big of a teddy bear as the rest of them. Still, he added the little extra excitement to their lives. Vapre was the brains. He and Syx always seemed to have the answer before the questions had even been asked.

Not a one of them would admit it, but Echo knew they loved each other. They all used words like “caring” and “respect,” but he knew the truth. He just had to look at them, watch them together, to see the love they shared. Hell, he barely knew them, but he knew he was halfway there already. They just made it so easy for him to fall for them. *The bastards.*

“Then what’s the problem?” Syx asked, interrupting his thoughts.

“Damn it! I forgot you could do that.” Echo blushed and bit his lip. He didn’t understand his feelings, didn’t really know what they were yet, and he definitely wasn’t ready to share them with his men.

“I won’t tell.” Syx winked at him and chuckled.

“Yeah, but now you know.”

“It’s not a bad thing.”

“What the hell are you two talking about?” Fiero demanded from the floor.

“I’m sworn to secrecy.” Syx made a show of locking his lips and throwing away an invisible key.

“Maybe you can give us a hint.” Hex pressed his lips to Echo’s temple. “Just a little one?”

“I want you to claim me,” Echo blurted. There. That was as close as he could come to proclaiming his feelings for the time being.

The room went silent but for the voices on the television. Everyone stared at him, frozen in place. “Someone please say something,” Echo whispered.

“Mine,” Hex growled.

“Ours,” Myst echoed in the same guttural tone as he hugged Echo close.

“So, how does this work? You just bite me, or what?”

“Yes and no.” Hex looked a little uncomfortable. “We bite you during sex.”

Electricity raced through Echo’s body, pooling in his balls and causing his cock to swell rapidly. “Please,” he begged. It had been weeks since anyone had touched him sexually. He couldn’t even count the number of cold showers taken or marathon jack-off sessions alone in his room. Another thought occurred to him, and he arched his back, panting at the idea. “Can I watch, too?”

Groans went around the circle, and clothes began flying as the warriors stripped quickly. Bottles of lube were pulled from the strangest places—couch cushions, behind the television, and even one from the beneath the coffee table.

Hex and Myst worked together, quickly removing Echo’s pajama pants before Hex lifted him into his lap so that Echo’s back pressed against his chest. Myst moved to the floor between Hex’s legs, spreading Echo’s thighs so that his knees rested on the outside of Hex’s.

“How many times can you come, baby?” Hex whispered in his ear as his hand roamed over Echo’s chest.

Echo gulped audibly. “I—I don’t know.”

“Let’s go with four. Can you come four times for us?”

Echo didn’t know, but he’d sure as hell try. In answer, he lifted his arms over his head, tangling his fingers in Hex’s hair as he turned to pull the man into a devouring kiss. He heard the snick of a bottle cap, and then slick fingers found his hungry opening, caressing the fluttering muscles before one thick finger pushed inside.

Moaning into Hex’s mouth, Echo rocked against the digit, loving the slight burn and the fullness inside his ass. “More,” he mumbled around Hex’s lips.

Myst complied, slipping another finger into his eager hole, pumping in and out as he worked quickly to stretch him. “How much experience do you have?”

“I’m not a virgin,” Echo answered. That’s as far as he was willing to travel into the conversation just then.

Myst seemed to get it because he nodded once and pushed another finger into Echo’s ass, rising up on his knees to claim Echo’s mouth. Hex growled, his chest vibrating beneath Echo’s back. “Need you now.”

“Yes,” Echo breathed as Hex lifted him, lining up the head of his thick cock, then slowly lowered him over it. Echo breathed through the slight pinch of pain, relaxing his body until he was fully seated.

“Fuck,” Hex hissed. “Damn, you’re tight, baby.”

“Been a while,” Echo mumbled distractedly. Myst nibbled up the inside of his thigh as his long fingers massaged Echo’s tight sac.

Hex palmed his aching cock, stroking him firmly as his teeth grazed along the side of Echo’s neck. “Watch them, baby. See how beautiful they are together.” His other hand gripped Echo’s hip, encouraging him to rock back and forth on the huge prick buried inside his ass.

From the corner of his eye, he saw Syx and Vapre move to the floor to join the others, all five kissing, touching, licking, and biting.

Myst’s mouth replaced his fingers, and he laved and sucked at Echo’s balls, rolling them around in his mouth and moaning. Echo groaned and panted, the sensations overwhelming him as he watched the five men move together on the floor.

Fiero had Onyx on his knees, driving into him from behind as his fingers dug into the man’s hips. Syx kneeled in front of them, thrusting his cock into Onyx’s mouth as Eyce bent Vapre over the arm of the love seat and pounded into his hole with wild abandon.

Grunts, groans, growls, and moans filled the room, and Echo couldn’t hold back any longer. Hex was right. They were gorgeous together. He’d never seen anything so erotic in his life. Hex gave a

hard thrust just as Myst wrapped his lips around Echo's pulsing shaft, pushing his prick to the back of Myst's throat.

With a loud cry, Echo's body shuddered as he poured semen into Myst's eager mouth. Before his orgasm had even passed, Myst replaced his mouth with his hand, stroking Echo quickly as his tongue traced over the skin on his thigh and his long canines sank into the tender flesh.

Echo screamed, but not from pain. Lightning bolts of pure pleasure coursed through him, and he cradled the back of Hex's head, pulling the man's mouth to his neck as he tilted his head to the side. "Please," he whispered.

Hex wasted no time biting into his neck and sucking lightly as ropes of semen continued to shoot from the slit of Echo's cock. It had to be the longest orgasm in history, and he never wanted it to stop.

Hex's muffled groan signaled his own climax as he pushed deep into Echo's clenching ass and painted his inner walls with the scorching lava of his release. The two sets of teeth gently extracted from his neck and thigh, and Myst moved to lean over them, claiming Echo's mouth in a kiss that left him dizzy.

"My turn." He smiled wickedly, lifting Echo up slowly as Hex's still half-hard prick slid from his hole. Myst turned him, draping him over Hex's chest, and rubbed the tip of his cock up and down Echo's crease. "Are you ready, baby?"

Echo nodded dazedly. He'd do anything, say anything, to keep the pleasure going. "Take me."

Myst pushed in slowly, never stopping until his heavy sac brushed against Echo's rounded cheeks. Bracing himself on the back of the sofa, Myst moved in and out of Echo gently as he leaned over him to tangle his tongue with Hex's.

Echo's cock rubbed against the leader's rippled abs, filling again and throbbing with renewed interest. "Harder," Hex commanded. "Fuck him harder."

“Yes!” Echo cried when Myst began a demanding pace, pulling out until only the crown remained then slamming back into him.

It took only three more thrusts before Myst stilled, growling out his release as he filled Echo’s channel with spurt after spurt of sticky cum. He rested his forehead against Echo’s shoulder, panting heavily as he gently eased out of his hole. “Thank you,” he whispered.

He didn’t even have time to wonder why the man thanked him before Syx plopped down beside Hex on the sofa, and Vapre lifted him from Hex’s lap, lowering him to the floor between Syx’s spread thighs.

He vaguely wondered what Eyce and Fiero were doing, feeling a little disappointed that he couldn’t see them. Then, Onyx wiggled his head in between him and the couch, engulfing Echo’s cock to the back of throat as Vapre slowly pushed into his well-loosened entrance, and all thoughts fled. Echo growled, diving forward and wrapping his lips around Syx’s jutting shaft.

Vapre began a fast and hard pace, as Onyx worked to suck Echo’s brains out through his dick. Echo passed the favor on to Syx, clamping his lips tightly around the man’s length as Syx thrust up into his mouth, working his spit-slicked shaft in and out of Echo’s welcoming mouth.

It took only minutes for his orgasm to come barreling down on him, tightening his belly and spreading fire through his body. Vapre found his climax first, roaring out as he filled Echo’s channel to overflowing then bending over him and sinking his fangs into Echo’s shoulder.

Echo groaned around the turgid flesh in his mouth, swallowing as quickly as he could as Syx erupted, splashing the back of Echo’s throat with his seed. Once he’d swallowed everything the man had to give, Echo pulled off with a naughty slurp and cried out his release, pushing as far as he could into Onyx’s talented mouth. Syx pushed him back against Vapre’s chest, converging on him swiftly and biting into his neck just above Hex’s mark.

“That’s two,” Vapre whispered as he slipped from Echo’s body.

Syx lifted his head, licking Echo’s blood from his lips, and grinned. “Thank you.”

Why the hell did everyone keep thanking him?

Eyce moved in behind him as Onyx took Syx’s place on the sofa. “Are you too sore, baby?” Eyce licked over Vapre’s mating mark. “I want you so much, but I can wait.”

Fiero leaned over Eyce’s shoulder and placed a small kiss on Echo’s neck. “Me, too,” he murmured.

Onyx leaned forward, capturing Echo’s swollen lips and licking across the seam. “We can all wait,” he whispered.

He was a bit sore, but Echo wanted them all to claim him. He felt a hole inside his heart, and knew instinctively he needed them all to claim him to fill it. “Just go slow,” he said over his shoulder. “You still owe me two orgasms.”

Eyce didn’t look convinced. “We don’t have to, baby.”

“I want this,” Echo said firmly. “Please.”

Eyce nodded slowly, taking the lube that Myst passed to him, and coated his cock liberally. “If it hurts, Syx will tell me. Then I’m going to paddle your ass for letting me hurt you.”

Echo bent his head to hide his smile. A spanking sounded appealing. Maybe he could plant the idea in Syx’s head. Before he could flesh out the thought, Eyce pushed into him, pulling a hiss from his lips at the aching burn.

Eyce froze immediately then pulled out gently. “I can’t do this.” He rose to his feet and disappeared from the room before Echo could even get his bearings.

“He’s right,” Fiero muttered. “This is wrong.” Then he, too, rose to his feet and left the room.

“I’m sorry,” Onyx mumbled. “I won’t hurt you like that.” Echo could hear the strain in his voice, but the man just shook his head, hurdled the back of the couch, and took off toward the stairs, leaving Echo kneeling on the floor, confused and embarrassed.

“It didn’t really hurt,” he whispered.

“C’mere, baby.” Hex gathered Echo into his arms and cuddled him close, peppering kisses over his face. “It’s going to be fine. Eyce is right. It’s too much. It doesn’t mean they don’t want you.”

Echo buried his face in Hex’s neck and sighed. “I feel funny—like something is missing.”

“It’s going to be fine,” Hex repeated as he stroked Echo’s hair. Myst moved to sit on one side of Hex, Syx on the other. They both stroked Echo’s back, trailing kisses over his shoulders. Vapre knelt on the floor, kissing along Echo’s spine.

Echo shook his head and scrambled out of Hex’s lap. “It is going to be fine right now.” He marched from the room, right up the stairs to Eyce’s door, and threw it open. How he knew they’d be there, he didn’t know, but it didn’t exactly matter either.

“Claim me,” he demanded.

Eyce sat at the foot of the bed, his face buried in his hands as Fiero and Onyx sat on the floor at his feet. “I won’t hurt you,” Eyce growled. “Now leave.”

Echo stomped across the room, shoved Eyce back on the bed and crawled up to straddle his hips. “Claim me,” he repeated.

“No.”

“You won’t hurt me.” Echo leaned closer, whispering in Eyce’s ear. “You’re just a little bigger than the others. I wasn’t expecting it. I need you to claim me.”

Eyce let out a shuddery breath, and his arms wound around Echo like steel bands. “Please don’t do this to me.”

“You need me just as much as I need you. I can hear it in your voice. Stop being such a control freak and listen to what I want for a change.”

“I have an idea if anyone cares to hear it.” Fiero crawled up on the bed as he spoke.

Eyce’s arms loosened, and he turned to face the warrior expectantly.



Fiero didn't say anything else, but lifted Echo from Eyce's chest, sitting him in the middle of the mattress. Then he knelt in front of him, gripping the base of his cock and brushing the tip of Echo's lips. "Suck me," he whispered.

Echo could definitely get behind that plan. He pushed his knees under him and leaned forward, wrapping his swollen lips around Fiero's hot length. The others seemed to catch on, moving to either side of Fiero as they jerked their leaking cocks quickly.

Echo relaxed his throat muscles, allowing Fiero to thrust inside his mouth as he reached out to palm Eyce's shaft and began stroking him quickly. They alternated like musical chairs, Onyx taking Fiero's place and fucking Echo's mouth as Echo jerked Fiero's prick. Then Eyce took his turn, and over and over again until Echo's cock swelled to the point of pain as his throbbed between his legs.

"Please," he gasped when Eyce pulled out of his mouth. "It won't hurt, I swear. Please fuck me!"

Eyce looked torn, but he nodded slowly, moving up to rest against the headboard and pulling Echo into his lap. Fiero moved behind him, coating his hole with lube and spreading it around, pushing two fingers in to make sure he was still stretched.

Echo rose up as Fiero held Eyce's cock in place, then slowly impaled himself on the enormous shaft. Fuck, Eyce was big. He didn't stop moving, though, and was careful to keep his face impassive as he slowly sank over the man, taking him all the way to the root. Then he wiggled just a little, clenching his muscles, and grinned. "Fuck me."

Eyce growled, gripping his hips and grinding up against his ass. Fiero and Onyx moved to either side of him, and Echo took them in turn, jerking one while he sucked the other, then switching as he rode Eyce, rocking against him as the warrior thrust up into his needy channel.

Then a strong hand wrapped around his bouncing prick and squeezed him hard. "Come for us," Eyce moaned. "Come on my

stomach, baby.” He squeezed Echo’s cock again, giving a twist of his wrist beneath the head, and Echo erupted like a geyser.

He threw his head back on his shoulders, screaming out to the ceiling as a firestorm raced through him, heating his skin and tightening his lower belly. Fiero and Onyx knelt beside him, milking their shafts and painting Echo’s groin with their seed as their fangs sank into either side of his neck.

Echo screamed again, more ropes of creamy cum shooting from his slit to cover Eyce’s chest and abs. Damn, he felt so tired. He still had one last thing to do, though. Opening his eyes, he looked into Eyce’s face and whispered, “Claim me.”

Eyce roared, pulling Echo to him and piercing his shoulder with his canines as his hips jerked, and he filled Echo’s hole with his release.

Smiling serenely, Echo closed his eyes, sagged against Eyce’s chest, and let the exhaustion claim him. Just before he drifted off, he swore he heard three whispered voices thanking him.

## Chapter Ten

Echo awoke the next morning, sore and achy in all the right places, as well as all the wrong ones. His head pounded, his muscles protested any movement, and his stomach cramped painfully.

Groaning softly, he gingerly climbed over Fiero and stood beside the bed, gripping his head as a wave of dizziness threatened to drop him. When he finally felt he could move without falling on his face, he shuffled to the door, easing it open quietly before gripping the wall to steady himself once again.

What the hell was wrong with him? He felt like he had the flu, but worse. Using the wall for support, he made his way down the stairs to the living room, crossing it slowly and finally entering the kitchen. Myst sat at the kitchen table, and Hex and Vapre laughed together as they stood over the stove preparing breakfast.

“Good morning,” Myst called cheerily.

Vapre and Hex turned, giving him bright smiles and hurrying across the room to kneel at his feet. Hex took one hand, Vapre took the other, and they each placed a kiss inside his palms. “Thank you,” they said in stereo.

“Why does everyone keep thanking me?” Echo’s voice sounded raw and scratchy, and his throat burned as he spoke.

Hex looked up at him with concern, the hand not holding Echo’s moved over Echo’s naked chest as he frowned. “You’re burning up, baby. Are you sick?”

“I don’t know.” Echo shook his head and groaned as the pounding increased inside his skull. “I feel like I got hit by a train.”

“Get him some clothes,” Hex said to Vapre. He waited until the man nodded, then turned to look at Myst. “Juice.”

Myst rose from his seat and moved around the kitchen, pulling a glass from the cabinet and orange juice from the refrigerator. Hex closed his eyes, both hands roaming over Echo’s midsection. After several minutes, he opened his eyes, and his frown deepened. “I can’t find anything wrong with you.”

“Maybe it’s just a virus or something.” Echo winced, his throat feeling like he’d gargled glass.

“Maybe,” Hex mumbled, but he didn’t look convinced. “I should be able to heal a virus, though.”

Echo shrugged, hissing as his muscles screamed in agony at the movement. “I’m sure I’ll be fine in a day or two.”

Hex nodded reluctantly as he stood and crossed his arms over his chest. “You’re going back to bed until you’re better.”

Echo didn’t even have the energy to argue. “Whatever you want.”

Vapre came back into the room, handing a pair of pajama pants to Hex before pulling a shirt down over Echo’s head. The men helped him dress, handling him as though he was made from spun glass. Just then, he felt like he’d shatter at the slightest touch, so he appreciated their care.

“Juice first,” Myst said as he pushed the glass into Echo’s hand. “Drink a little, and we’ll get you back to bed.”

Echo nodded, wrapping his fingers around the cup and lifting it to his mouth. He made it halfway before blinding pain ripped through his skull. He dropped the juice to the floor, doubling over as his stomach heaved.

He heard the men shout his name, but he couldn’t respond. Dropping to all fours, he cried out as his body began to shudder and agony pierced him from every direction. He felt himself lifted, cradled in strong arms, but he didn’t know who held him. He screamed over and over, begging for the pain to stop.

Then all at once, it felt like something exploded inside his chest, and Echo coughed and sputtered as the coppery taste of blood filled his mouth. He had just enough time to turn his head to the side before his stomach convulsed and foulness poured from his mouth.

Finally, the pain began to ebb, and Echo welcomed the abyss that beckoned him. Closing his eyes, he sagged limply in the arms that carried him, falling gratefully into the void.

\* \* \* \*

Hex watched his men pace around the bedroom, each mumbling under his breath and weary looks in their eyes. He sat on the bed, absently caressing Echo's hair as he struggled to figure out what was wrong with their mate and why he couldn't heal him.

"Maybe we should call a human doctor," Onyx suggested.

"If I can't heal him, I don't see what a doctor can do for him," Hex responded sadly. His touch could heal anything from a gunshot wound to cancer, but he couldn't heal Echo. Frustration bubbled inside of him until he growled out at the injustice of it.

Syx stopped in his pacing and cocked his head to the side. Moving across the room, he knelt beside the bed and placed his palm against Echo's forehead. "Everyone quiet," he whispered. "Clear your minds."

Hex didn't know what the hell was going on, but he did as the warrior asked, clearing his mind and picturing only a blank canvas. He didn't know how long he sat in his stupor before Syx's voice called him back. "He's dreaming."

Shaking his head, he looked down at their mate, disappointment settling in his heart when he saw the man was still unconscious.

"It's been three days," Myst murmured. "Do you think he's coming back?"

"He'll be fine," Hex said curtly. He'd walk into the fires of Hades to bring the man back. Echo would not leave them.

“He’s dreaming of the Oracle,” Syx whispered. “She’s actually kind of nice in his dreams. She has a really musical voice, and she even laughs.”

“You can hear that?” Fiero crossed his arms over his chest and grimaced. “I didn’t realize you could hear our dreams as well. That might have been nice to know.”

“I can’t.” Syx didn’t take his eyes from Echo’s face as he spoke. “I’ve never been able to before. I can hear his, though.”

“What are they talking about?” Hex stretched out beside Echo, placing a hand over the man’s heart and letting the steady beat calm him.

Syx chuckled softly. “He’s telling her about our mating. He even showed her his marks. He’s very excited about it.”

“What else?” Vapre asked as he came over to kneel beside Syx. The other demons surrounded the bed as well, all touching some part of Echo. “What’s the Oracle saying?”

“She says he wears the marks well.” Syx smiled softly though his eyes were vacant as he listened in on Echo’s dream. “Echo is telling her about getting sick.” Syx paused, presumably listening to the Oracle’s response. “She says he needs to wake up now. The change is over.”

“Change?” Eyce asked. “What change?”

Syx burst into laughter. “Echo wants to know the same thing. He wasn’t quite as nice about it, though.”

“Well, what did she say?” Onyx demanded.

“Nothing,” Syx sighed. “She said he’d know when the time was right.” Syx’s eyes widened, and his mouth dropped open in a little *O*. “She knows I’m listening.” Then he snorted and shook his head. “She actually giggled.”

“Are you sure we’re talking about the same Oracle?” Hex scratched the back of his head as he stared at his lover. The Oracle didn’t give straight answers. She didn’t have a soft musical voice. And she certainly didn’t giggle.

“It’s her.” Syx’s eyes cleared, and he shook his head. “He’s waking up.”

Hex stared down at Echo, a smile threatening at the corners of his lips as he watched the man’s eyelids flutter, his soft golden lashes batting against his cheeks. “That’s it, baby. Open your eyes,” he whispered.

“We’ve missed you,” Vapre said just as quietly. “C’mon, Echo. Open your eyes.”

They all kept up a constant stream on encouragement and were finally rewarded when Echo’s eyelids slid open, showing off his beautiful blue eyes. He blinked several times then a slow grin stretched across his face. “Hey.”

“I’m going to paddle your ass for scaring the hell out of me.” Hex pointed his finger in Echo’s face and glared. “Don’t do that shit again.”

Eyce took Echo’s hand in his own and caressed the knuckles with his thumb. “Ignore him.” He spoke thickly, and his eyes shimmered with unshed tears. “Welcome back, sweetheart.”

\* \* \* \*

Eyce couldn’t breathe. He couldn’t move. The only thought in his head was that Echo had come back to them. For three days, he’d berated himself over and over for agreeing to claim the man when his instincts screamed at him to stay away. It didn’t exactly make sense, and he didn’t know how claiming his mate could have made him sick, but he still figured it was his fault.

His heart thundered inside his chest, his palms slicked with sweat, and his nose burned with the effort to keep his tears at bay. Continuing to stroke Echo’s hand, he stared into his mate’s eyes and tried his best to conjure up a smile.

“You are a horrible liar, and that smile is just scary.” Echo winked at him and lifted his other hand, crooking a finger. “Come here.”

Eyce wasted no time, jumping to his feet and crawling up on the bed to stretch out on Echo's other side. He touched his lover's hair, his face, his shoulders, everywhere he could reach, assuring himself the little brat was really okay.

"Not your fault," Echo whispered. He reached up to palm Eyce's cheek and urge him down to press their lips together. "I'm a lot stronger now. Giving your mate what he needs is never wrong. Now stop feeling guilty, or you can suck your own cock from now on."

Eyce chuckled, mashing his mouth to Echo's again and moaning like a whore as his lover's sweet taste burst over his taste buds. When he felt he'd kissed Echo to the best of his ability, he eased away and tapped him on the end of his nose. "You scared us."

"Well, it's not like I planned it. I wasn't exactly dancing to show tunes and spouting limerick. That shit hurt."

"Do you know what happened?" Myst crawled up on the bed as well, kneeling between Echo's thighs. "It was like you were dead, but your heart still beat, and you were breathing." He frowned and shook his head. "I didn't like it. Don't do it again."

"Oh, for pity's sake!" Echo growled loudly as he pushed into a sitting position. "I'm sorry I worried everyone, but it's not like I meant to get sick. Stop acting like I did it because I'm some kind of attention-skank."

Eyce bit his lip to keep from laughing, sure it wouldn't win him any points with the irate little imp. Still, Echo's temper tantrums were kind of cute. "So, what happened?"

Echo shrugged. "The Oracle said I'm stronger. Something about passing the test and gaining eternity. Whatever the hell that means."

"Well, I don't know what the test means." Syx rested his chin on the mattress at the foot of the bed from his position on the floor. "I think the other part means you're immortal now. That no one can take you from us."



“Yeah, I kind of figured that’s what it meant.” Echo rubbed a hand over his face and sighed. “I think the test means that I had to prove I was strong enough to be your mate. I lived, so I passed.”

“Wait!” Hex shot up from the bed and started waving his hands around like a lunatic. “You could have died?” he yelled.

“Well, I don’t know for sure, but I think so, yes. I didn’t though, so can you stop acting like a freakin’ psycho. Sit down and just look pretty.”

Eyce couldn’t hold it in any longer. The look on Hex’s face after being cut down to size by a man no bigger than his thigh was priceless. Eyce laughed a deep belly-rumbling laugh, clutching at his sides as he fell off bed and rolled on the floor, still howling like a fool.

His lovers looked at him as though he were crazy until they also noticed the look on their leader’s face. All six of them rolled around on the floor, sagged against each other or the furniture, as tears beaded in their eyes, and the room filled with roaring laughter.

“Are you finished?” Hex fisted his hands on his hips and glared down at them like a principal on recess who’d caught them all bullying the new kid.

The look only caused Eyce to laugh harder as he struggled to pull air into his aching lungs. He was pretty sure his face had actually turned blue from lack of oxygen.

“Lighten up,” Echo called to Hex, then gave a loud whoop and dove off the bed, landing in the middle of the pile and giggling loudly. He poked Eyce in the ribs, his eyes lighting up when Eyce laughed even harder. “Oh, you’re ticklish!” He looked around at the other men and grinned devilishly. “Get him!”

Eyce screamed, actually fucking screamed, as his lovers converged on him, tickling his ribs, his bare feet, his thighs, and the back of his neck. Echo tried to wiggle out of the squirming bodies, but Eyce caught his ankle, pulling him back into the fray. He’d started this mess, and payback was a bitch.

He flicked his fingers over the sole of Echo's foot, pulling a high-pitched squeal from the runt's mouth. The sound had everyone pausing in their assault on Eyce and turned to look at their little mate.

Echo shook his head frantically, jerking his foot in an effort to free himself from Eyce's hold and get away. "No. No, really. C'mon, guys. I was just sick. You thought I was going to die. You don't want to do thi—eeeeeeek!" Echo rolled into a ball, laughing and giggling as the demons swarmed him. "Hex!" he gasped through his shrieks. "Help me!"

"I'm pretty sure I was told to lighten up." Hex lifted his eyebrows as he moved casually to sit at the end of the bed. "I think I'll just sit back and watch the show."

"Blow jobs!" Echo screamed. "Anytime you want."

"You'd do that anyway." Hex yawned ostentatiously as he patted his mouth with his hand.

Echo grunted and turned his attention to Eyce. "Please," he gasped.

"You started this, little one."

Echo looked right into Eyce's eyes, holding him immobile with his gaze. "Please," he mouthed.

Oh, it just wasn't fair. The pipsqueak deserved everything he was getting, but Eyce was a sucker for those big puppy-dog eyes. Frowning, he tried to remember exactly when it was that Echo had wrapped him around his tiny fingers. Probably the day he'd arrived if Eyce was being honest.

Sighing in resignation, he shoved Onyx off of Echo, scooped him up, and slung him over his shoulder. "Last one to the kitchen makes breakfast *and* does the dishes." Heads whipped around and everyone began pushing and pulling, scrambling over one another as they bolted for the door.

"Oh, you play dirty." Hex shook his head solemnly, but Eyce could see the corners of his mouth twitch. "You know we don't have any food in the kitchen."

“But, I’m hungry,” Echo whined.

Eyce reached up and smacked him on his upturned rear. “Your ass is getting big anyway.”

“Eyce I’ll-make-up-a-middle-name-later, I am not fat!”

Eyce just chuckled, throwing a wink at Hex, and sauntered out of the room with Echo still slung over his shoulder. He vaguely wondered if his mate was serious about making up a middle name for him. Other than the fake names they used for business dealings, none of them had middle names. Hell, they didn’t even have surnames.

“Am I forgiven?”

“I’m thinking about it,” Echo pouted.

“I’ll go get you something to eat. Anything you want.”

“Anything?”

“Whatever your little heart desires.”

“Okay, you’re forgiven, and I want pizza.”

“It’ll make yo—”

“Don’t you dare say it will make my ass fat!”

## Chapter Eleven

“Why are we doing this again?” Onyx huffed as he waved his hand, and several stones rolled over on the ground. “It just seems silly.”

“We don’t know what’s coming, right?” Echo rolled his eyes inwardly. They were all being a bunch of overgrown toddlers about the entire thing. “But, the Oracle said that I would help you strengthen your powers and win the war.” He smacked Onyx in the elbow. “That’s what I’m trying to do.”

“This is so not fun, though,” Vapre whined as the wind whipped around them, lifting Echo into the air. “Okay, this is kind of fun.”

“Put me down,” Echo demanded. “This is not practicing. This is you being a dick and not getting my ass for the next six weeks.”

Vapre gaped at him but slowly let the wind die away as he lowered Echo to his feet. “Sorry,” he mumbled.

“That’s what I thought. Now, can we please focus? The winter solstice is in three days. The first new moon is riding quickly on its heels. You need to be ready.”

“We don’t even know what’s coming,” Eyce argued. “How can we prepare if we don’t know what we’re facing?”

*Yep. Just a bunch of oversized children.*

“The point is to be ready for anything. Are you sure you’re really demon warriors? Granted, I’ve never met any before, but I never imagined they would whine as much as you three.”

Eyce smirked at him, and Echo backed away slowly. He didn’t trust that look. Water trickled over the stones in the stream behind him, and Echo whirled around, finally catching on to what the warrior

had up his sleeve. Cold, murky water rose up from the creek bed, splashing him in the face and soaking his hair and clothes. "Eyce!" Echo pushed his wet hair back from his face as he turned to glare at his lover.

Eyce looked at him innocently and shrugged. "You said to practice. I was practicing."

"Okay." Echo smiled sweetly as he sashayed over to Vapre and wrapped his fingers around the demon's wrist. It took only seconds for the power to flow through him, and for him to swirl the air around Eyce, lifting him into the air and spinning him like a top.

"I get it. I get it," Eyce yelled. "Put me down."

"If you insist." Echo reined in his power, and the wind died away immediately, dropping Eyce the few feet to the ground where he landed heavily on his backside. "Want to play again?"

Eyce glared at him and shook his head curtly as he rubbed his abused backside. "You win."

Vapre and Onyx had the good sense to keep their mouths closed. Not even a chuckle escaped their lips, but from the look on their faces, it was a close thing. Echo rolled his eyes and sighed. "Go ahead and get it out."

Vapre and Onyx shook their heads, their lips pressed together and their eyes opened wide. The crackling of leaves drew his attention, and Echo whipped around, peering into the trees across from the small creek. He couldn't see anything, but he distinctly heard the snap of a twig and more leaves rustling.

He supposed it could be an animal, but it would have to be a big one. "Guys," he whispered. "Come here."

All three men moved instantly, pushing him back and forming a barricade in front of him. Crouching defensively, they prowled slowly toward the water, keeping between Echo and the presumed danger. Sweet of them, but not exactly what he had in mind. If someone lurked in the trees, his men had surely scared them off with their little show of aggression.

As one, they rose to their full heights and fanned out, Vapre taking point, while Eyce and Onyx flanked him. The distinct sound of running footsteps reached Echo's ears just as the tree limbs parted and a wall of water rose up out of the stream. The wind howled furiously, catching the water and sending it crashing over the trees like a tidal wave.

It was totally uncalled for, but at least they were finally working together as a team. Three separate voices yelled from the forest, the sound hollow and distant over the roar of the wind. Before Echo could even blink, Eyce had him lifted over one massive shoulder while Onyx and Vapre sprinted across the creek and disappeared into the tree line.

"No!" Echo screamed, beating against Eyce's back as the man darted through the trees in the opposite direction. "Where are we going? We have to go back. Go help them!"

"Vapre and Onyx can handle themselves. I'm taking you home where it's safe. It was stupid to bring you out here in the first place."

Eyce slowed to a walk as they cleared the last of the brush, and the house came into view. Easing Echo off his shoulder, he cradled him in his arms and kissed the top of his head. "Please don't argue. This has nothing to do with you being weak. It's our natural instinct to protect you, and besides, you have to admit you're not as strong as we are."

"I admit nothing, and I'm perfectly capable of walking."

"Fine." Eyce dropped him to his feet almost roughly, and Echo staggered a few steps before gaining his balance. "Walk."

"Why are you so mad?"

"Because the men I lo—care about are out there risking their lives to keep you safe, and you're acting like an ungrateful fucking brat!" Eyce's chest heaved, and his upper lip curled over his teeth as his fangs elongated. "Why do you have to question everything to death?" His pupils bled out to the corners of his eyes. "Just because we pamper and spoil you, don't forget what we really are."

Echo took several steps back, his legs trembling at the animalistic quality of Eyce's voice. The demon stalked him, Eyce's skin paling to a sickly gray, and his lips pulled back to show off his razor-sharp teeth.

"We are not pets or playthings for you to order around and show affection to only when the mood strikes you."

Echo glanced over his shoulder as he continued his slow trek backward, calculating his chances of reaching the front door before Eyce caught him.

"You belong to us. You are our mate. Mine," he snarled.

"Yes," Echo agreed quickly. If he couldn't make it to the house for help, his only option was to try and talk Eyce down from his rage. "Yours. I belong to you—all of you."

"Yes," Eyce hissed. He reached out, his long, clawed fingers stretching toward Echo's face. "Mine."

Echo turned on his heels and bolted for the house, screaming the entire way. "Hex! Syx! Someone!"

He could hear Eyce's heavy breathing, his loud, thundering footsteps closing in on him. He didn't dare take the time to look over his shoulder, just ducked his head and tucked his arms close as he raced for the safety of the house.

The front door banged open, and Hex leapt down the steps, flying over the grass and launching himself into the air, catching Eyce around the waist and tackling him to the ground. Syx came out of the house next, meeting Echo halfway and scooping him up in his arms.

"It's fine. You're fine."

"I don't know what happened." Echo wrapped himself around Syx as he panted heavily against the warm skin of his throat. "I don't know what I did."

"You didn't do anything." Syx stroked Echo's hair, clutching him close. "Hex is going to take care of it, and Eyce will be fine. He's going to feel like a real shit when he snaps out of it, though."

"He can't control it, can he?"

“The shift? He can. It’s just harder when our emotions are running high. What happened?” Syx walked them back to the house, and Echo kept his eyes hidden in the man’s neck. He could hear the growling and snarling, flesh slapping against flesh, and he didn’t want to see any of it.

“We were down by the creek. Oh, shit! Onyx and Vapre! They heard someone in the woods and went in after them. We have to go back!” Echo started to struggle, squirming in Syx’s arm.

“Wait. Slow down. There’s someone in the woods? Baby, if you haven’t noticed, we’re pretty isolated out here. No one comes out this far. Not even the hunters.”

“I heard them scream. Onyx and Vapre charged in after them like the fucking cavalry. Please.” Echo stopped fighting and looked right into Syx’s eyes. “Please.”

Syx looked at him for a long time before he finally nodded and set Echo to his feet. “I’ll go. You stay here.”

“I’ll get the others.”

“Fiero and Myst went into town to get supplies.” He looked over his shoulder, and Echo only then noticed it had gone quiet.

Peeking around Syx’s huge body, he saw Hex sitting on the cold ground beside Eyce, his arms wrapped around the man’s shoulders, and their heads bent together. He could see Hex’s lips moving, watched Eyce bob his head sadly, but he couldn’t hear what they were saying.

“I’ve made a big enough mess.” Echo shook his head. He’d been a selfish brat, and he knew it. He’s purposely poked and prodded Eyce until the man finally snapped. “Just tell me what to do, and I’ll do it.”

“I don’t know what happened, but I doubt you did this.” Syx sighed and pinched the bridge of his nose. “On the outside, Eyce is the most mellow, easygoing person you’ll ever meet. But he bottles shit up. It eats at him until he finally just explodes. This isn’t the first time this has happened.”



“He was scared for me,” Echo whispered. “He was scared for Onyx and Vapre. I should have just listened.”

“No. That’s one of the things we adore about you. No matter how much bigger or stronger we are, you never back down or take shit from us. Eyce lost it, plain and simple. Whatever his reasons, it doesn’t justify what he did, but he would never hurt you. Never.”

“I know that. Even when I was scared and running, I knew he wouldn’t really hurt me.”

“I’m going to find the others. Why don’t you go talk to Eyce? I think it will make you both feel better.” Syx bowed his head, and Echo could see the slight tremble of his body. “He’s talking to Hex about leaving.”

“What? No!” Echo pushed past Syx and marched straight over to Eyce, smacking him in the back of the head. “You’re not going anywhere, so get that stupid idea out of your head right now.”

Eyce looked up at him in astonishment before he bit his lip and turned away. “I’m sorry,” he mumbled. “I didn’t mean to scare you.”

Echo crawled into the man’s lap, ignoring his gasp of surprise as he snuggled in close, flicking his wrist to shoo Hex away. “You did scare me, but that doesn’t mean I want you to leave.”

“Why would you even want to look at me after what I did? I honestly have no idea what you’re doing in my lap right now.”

Instead of answering his question, Echo asked one of his own. “What did I do?”

“You didn’t do anything.”

“Then why did you get so angry? I’ve never even seen you grumpy, then all the sudden you just snapped.”

Eyce took a deep breath and let it out slowly as he bent his head, resting his brow against Echo’s. “It was just a whole bunch of things. While we were laughing and joking, someone was out in the trees watching us. It scared the hell out of me. I shouldn’t be that careless with you.”

“Okay, I’m going to pretend you didn’t say that last part.” Echo glared at his lover sternly. “Next.”

“No one comes out this far.”

“Yeah, Syx said the same thing. So, that makes me think you have an idea of who was in those woods.”

“I think it was the men from the lab.”

Echo froze, his breath catching in his throat as his heart fell to the pit of his stomach. “I–I don’t...no...they...no!”

“Shh, baby.” Eyce stroked his cheeks, pressing a tender kiss to his lips. “I got a little territorial and a whole lot possessive. I was worried about Onyx and Vapre. I was worried about getting you home. Then...” He trailed off and shook his head.

“Then I started arguing with you,” Echo finished for him. “Your protective instincts were already on overdrive, and then I demanded to go back to where the danger was. I get it.”

“You are the most amazing person I have ever met.” Eyce smiled and pecked Echo’s lips again. “It astounds me that you are so intuitive. You see straight to the problem and work out the solution before any of us even realize there *is* a problem.”

Echo sighed in contentment as he rested his head on Eyce’s shoulder. “Then I guess you better keep me around, huh?”

“Yep, baby. I guess we should.”

“Hey, can I ask you something?”

“You can ask me anything.”

“Why did everyone keep thanking me the other night?”

Eyce sat back and looked at him in confusion.

“Before I got sick,” Echo clarified.

The wrinkles in Eyce’s brow slowly smoothed away, and Echo could almost see the light click on inside the man’s head. “You agreed to be our mate and let us claim you.”

Echo nodded. “Yeah, so what’s up with that?”

“I just told you.” Eyce chuckled lightly as he eased Echo out of his lap and stood before holding a hand out to pull Echo to his feet as

well. “You agreed to be ours forever. You gave us a gift. We were merely showing our appreciation.”

“So, are we good now?”

“I could ask you the same thing.” Eyce arched an eyebrow as he climbed the front steps. “I’m the one that fucked everything up. Can you forgive me?”

“Already done, but if you really want to make it up to me...”

“Yes?”

Echo stretched up on his tiptoes and pulled Eyce into a searing kiss. “Then you’ll have to catch me,” he whispered. Then he backed away a few steps, smirking the whole way before turning and running for Eyce’s bedroom.

## Chapter Twelve

“Something doesn’t add up.” Hex spoke quietly as he stood with Syx on the banks of the forest stream. “Okay, a whole lot of things don’t add up.”

“Such as?” Syx crossed his arms over his chest and surveyed the land around them. “Vapre and Onyx are coming.”

“Okay, then we’ll wait for them to get here. We need to figure this shit out before we talk to Echo.”

“Echo?” Syx turned to look at him with his head tilted to the side. “What does this have to do with Echo?” He pushed his sandy blond hair back from his face as he stared intently.

Hex didn’t try to hide anything, but left his thoughts open for his lover’s perusal. A bunch of little things had been worrying at him since Echo’s arrival, and they needed to get to the bottom of them.

Syx gaped at him stupidly. “You think he’s lying?”

“Not lying exactly.” Hex waved a hand in welcome as Onyx and Vapre stomped through the trees and into view. “I don’t think he’s telling us everything, though.” He turned to the approaching men and sighed. “Did you find anything?”

“No.” Vapre shook his head and snorted in disgust. “We almost had them, but they had a Jeep waiting on Marsdale Road. They fucking sped off like the demons of Hell were chasing them.”

Onyx chuckled. “Close enough.”

“We need to talk.” Everyone sobered and looked at Hex, forming a small half-circle around him. “It’s about Echo.”

“What happened to him?” Vapre grabbed Hex’s arm and shook him roughly. “Is he okay? Did something happen? Tell me!”

Hex placed his hand over Vapre's and squeezed it gently. "He's fine. He's with Eyce back at the house. There was a little incident where Eyce kind of lost it, but we'll talk about that later."

Vapre calmed a little and dropped his hand away, moving back to take his original place between Onyx and Syx. "Okay, so what's going on?"

"Hex thinks Echo is lying." Syx didn't even bother to disguise the accusation in his voice.

"I'm not saying he is or he isn't, and it doesn't mean I want him to leave."

"Leave?" Onyx growled. "You're sending him away?"

"Would you all just calm down and listen to me?" Hex yelled. "No one is going anywhere. Look, we don't know anything about him other than what he's told us—which isn't much."

"Syx would know if he was lying," Vapre said firmly.

"I can't always hear his thoughts," Syx murmured. "He blocks them sometimes."

Hex let everyone digest that for a second before he spoke again. "He says he spent his entire life in that lab, right?"

Everyone nodded their agreement.

"He knows quite a bit about the world for someone who's lived in isolation his entire life."

"He said they taught him things," Onyx said quickly, hopefully.

"There are some things you can't teach." Hex fisted his hands on his hips and stared down at the ground. "If you'd been locked away from people your entire life, don't you think a place like the mall would freak you out a little? Or at least be new and exciting?"

No one had an answer for him, so Hex continued. "He knows quite a bit about sex. You can teach that, but not from a book." He watched his men's brows furrow as they considered his words. "He doesn't talk like someone who has been sheltered all of his life. He's feisty as hell. I love it, but it doesn't fit. None of it does."

“He’s so little,” Vapre said slowly as he looked up to meet Hex’s gaze. “How did he escape on his own?”

“Another good question,” Hex growled. Damn, he hated not having the answers.

“Then let’s go ask him. Maybe he was just scared to tell us the truth.”

“That’s just it.” Hex began pacing—something he seemed to be doing a lot of lately. “I don’t think he’s lying exactly. I just think there’s more to his story.”

“Come on.” Syx jerked his head in the direction of the house. “We need to go check on Eyce anyway.”

“What happened with Eyce?” Onyx asked as they began the trek back home.

“He lost it, changed, and scared the hell out of Echo.”

“And you just left him there with Eyce like that?” Vapre managed to sound appalled, angry, and amused all at the same time. “That’s messed up.”

“Eyce is fine now. I don’t really know the whole story, so I’ll let him explain.” Hex pressed his fingers to his aching temple. “I need a fucking drink.”

\* \* \* \*

“Mm, this is nice.” Echo molded his naked body to Eyce’s, inhaling the clean scent of the man’s skin from their recent shower.

Eyce squeezed him and sighed. “It is, but we need to get up. I heard Fiero and Myst come in, and the others should be back by now. I want to know what they found.”

“Yeah, I guess you’re right.” Echo huffed in disappointment as he rolled out of bed and headed for the door. “I’m going to grab some clothes. I’ll meet you in the kitchen in five. I hope Fiero remembered to get those little chocolate cupcakes.”

“Well, since the two of you fight over them constantly, I’m guessing he remembered to get more than one box this time.” Eyce stood from the bed and stretched as he spoke.

Echo paused at the door, momentarily forgetting what he was supposed to be doing. The man was so gorgeous it almost hurt to look at him. Shaking his head to clear his lusty thoughts, Echo hurried out of the room before he jumped the warrior and begged him to stay in bed for the rest of the day.

He’d spent a lot of time thinking over the last couple of days, and he knew it was time to come clean. Not that he’d been lying exactly, but he’d purposely left out parts of his story.

Entering his designated bedroom, Echo hurried to get dressed, his mind spinning through how he would tell them his secrets. It would have been so much easier if he’d just spilled everything from the start. Would they understand? He prayed so, but he wouldn’t argue if they sent his ass packing. It would be less than he deserved.

Padding into the kitchen, he froze as every man in the room turned to stare at him as one. They didn’t exactly look happy to see him either. There were no easy smiles or cheery quips that normally greeted him when he entered a room. The demons didn’t look angry, just thoughtful.

“Come here, Echo.” The look on Hex’s face, the tone of his voice let Echo know it wasn’t a request.

Swallowing loudly, he moved slowly, hesitantly, until he stood in front of Hex near the island in the middle of the kitchen. Hex lifted him easily, placing him on the counter as everyone gathered in front of him. “We have some questions for you,” Hex said, and he crossed his arms over his chest.

Somehow, Echo didn’t think the inquiries had anything to do with whether he wanted pizza or spaghetti for dinner. “I’ll tell you anything.”

“Well, that’s good to know, because I think there’s a lot of things you *haven’t* been telling us. Let’s start with an easy one.” Hex

stepped closer, and it took every ounce of willpower Echo possessed not to shrink away from the advance. “How did you escape the lab?”

*Great.* The first question they asked him, and he didn’t have an answer for it. “I honestly don’t know. I woke up in the middle of the night, and a voice in my head told me to go. I don’t know why I did it, but it was almost like I was in a trance. I literally walked right out the front door. I don’t remember anything else until I woke up naked in the forest the next morning.”

“The Oracle,” Syx murmured under his breath. “I can buy that. You were meant to be with us. It was fated. Plus, we’ve all seen what kind of power the Oracle has.”

Echo slumped in relief. “What else do you want to know?”

“How you know so much about the world if you’ve been locked up in a dark capsule all of your life?” Hex spoke again, his voice growing deeper, angrier with each word.

“I never said I was always kept in the dark. I said I spent the majority of my time there, and that’s true for the most part.” Here came the hard part. “When I was younger, they would take me places, buy me things. I was just a kid. I didn’t understand that they were just keeping me happy so I did what they wanted.”

“What did they want?” Myst asked.

“At first they just wanted me to practice my powers. I’d work for hours, going through different drills and syphoning powers from other kids and stuff. Then they’d let me watch television, or play on the computer, and sometimes we’d go to the zoo or the mall.”

“Then something happened,” Hex deduced.

“Yeah.” Echo closed his eyes, battling back the tears he could feel forming there. “I got stronger. It didn’t happen until a few years ago. I think I was probably around nineteen or twenty. That’s when they discovered that not only could I absorb powers, but I could transfer them.”

“What happened?” Eyce asked quietly.



Echo kept his eyes closed. It was much easier to talk if he didn't have to see the pity on their faces. "They got scared. If I could absorb more than one power at a time, and then transfer those powers..." He trailed off, finally blinking open his eyes to stare at them blearily.

"Then you could incite a rebellion," Eyce whispered, nodding his head. "If you could all share powers, then they wouldn't be able to control you anymore."

"Right. So they kept me separated from the others, and I started spending more and more time in the isolation capsule. At first it was supposed to be to help clear my mind and relax me so I could focus my energy. Once they discovered the extent of my powers, it became a punishment and means to control me."

"You said you weren't a virgin. Did they...Did the guards..." Syx seemed to choke on his words, and he didn't finish his question, but Echo understood all the same.

"Sometimes. It wasn't what you think, though." Echo fidgeted on the counter, his fingers twirling in his lap. "I never told them no. I was lonely," he whispered. "I just didn't like when they tied me up."

"Wait." Fiero stepped forward from the group. "Who tied you up? The guards? You just said they never forced you."

"It wasn't sexual. They just tied me to the bed and touched me. They thought that since I could transfer powers between the other residents, that I could transfer powers to them as well. It doesn't work that way."

"Why didn't you just tell us all of this in the beginning?" Hex insinuated himself between Echo's spread thighs and cradled his face in both hands. "You made me think I couldn't trust you. I didn't like feeling that way. You can't keep things from us."

"I'm sorry." Echo nuzzled his cheek against Hex's palm. "I don't know what they're doing in that lab, but it's nothing good. I didn't want you to think badly of me because I willingly helped them."

"No one thinks badly of you." Eyce came forward and brushed Echo's hair back from his face. "You were just a kid."

"I still helped them when I realized something shady was going on." Echo looked down at his lap. "It was just easier on me if I did what they said. I hated that damn capsule. They'd leave me in there for days sometimes. I don't like the dark."

"You did what you had to do to survive. We've all been there." Fiero stepped up on Hex's other side and slipped his fingers under Echo's chin to tilt his face up. "No one will fault you for that. We thought the worst, and I'm not proud of it. You have to be honest with us from now on."

"I promise."

"Great!" Myst called. "Now that we've gotten this settled, I'm hungry. Who wants spaghetti?"

Echo couldn't help but giggle. "When you said you had questions, I was thinking to myself that it wouldn't be a choice between pizza and spaghetti. Kind of ironic, huh?"

Myst just looked confused. "Do you want pizza instead?"

Rolling his eyes, Echo pushed Hex back so that he could slip down from the counter. "No, spaghetti is fine. Can I help? I don't know anything about cooking, but I want to learn."

"I think that's a great idea. We hate cooking. We'll teach you, and that can be your job." Myst rubbed his hands together excitedly.

"Whoa! I didn't say anything about it being my job. We can still alternate. I don't want to cook every day."

Myst's face fell, and he stuck his bottom lip out and pouted. "I'll do the dishes."

"I'll sweep and mop," Fiero offered.

"I'll wipe down the counters and defrost the fridge once a month," Vapre piped up.

"I'll do the laundry," Eyce pledged.

"I'll do windows," Onyx added.

"Me and Hex will take care of the rest of the cleaning," Syx bargained as they all gathered around Echo with hopeful smiles.

“Wow, that’s a lot of cleaning. Are you sure you’re up for it? I mean, what if I suck at cooking?” Echo pressed his lips together and raised his eyebrows.

“Believe me, we’ve eaten worse.” Hex grimaced and gave a mock shudder. “Anything is better than suffering Fiero’s cooking.”

“Hey!” Fiero punched the leader in the shoulder. “I’m not nearly as bad as Eyce. The man can’t boil water without burning it, and that’s just sad.”

“You set the damn kitchen on fire!” Eyce yelled back. “And since when does crumbled ground beef with ketchup equal an entire meal?”

“Since you decided it would be a good idea to take turns cooking.” Fiero smirked.

“Fine, I’ll do the cooking.” Echo laughed as he pushed past them and sauntered over to the stove. He looked it over for a minute then turned back to his men with a frown. “Now, how do I turn this on?”

## Chapter Thirteen

Eyce nearly jumped out of his skin when a loud scream pierced the air, jerking him out of his doze on the sofa. Jumping to his feet, he growled deeply, spinning around as he searched for the threat.

“Asshole!” Echo yelled. “Look what you did!”

“What? It looks good on you,” Myst argued.

“I look like I’m bleeding to death.”

Eyce rose from his defensive posture and scratched the back of his neck in confusion. Echo didn’t sound hurt. He sounded pissed.

“Here, maybe this will help,” Myst said around a snicker.

Echo screamed again, but it sounded half growl this time. “That’s it! You’re dead.”

Deciding he should probably go break up the little squabble before all hell broke loose, Eyce hurried across the living room and into the kitchen, stumbling to a stop and his mouth falling open when he found Myst and Echo.

His sweet little mate was covered from head to toe in red sauce, and tiny, broken spaghetti noodles clung to his hair and clothes. Little growls rolled from his snarling lips as he stalked Myst across the kitchen. Eyce didn’t know what had happened, but it looked like they’d deviated a bit from their little cooking lesson.

Then Echo screeched, diving through the air and tackling Myst to the tiled floor. He landed on top of the warrior, squirming all over him as he wrung tomato sauce from his hair onto Myst’s upturned face. “See, it looks much better on you. Red really isn’t my color.”

“You little shit!” Myst wrapped his arms around Echo’s waist and flipped him over to straddle his tiny waist.

Eyce watched them stare at each other for a long time before they each burst out laughing, falling together and clinging to each other like a couple of mental patients. “Did you actually manage to get any of that into the pot?”

Myst and Echo snapped their heads up, biting their lips like little boys caught with their hands in the cookie jar. “We were getting to it,” Myst mumbled.

Eyce crossed his arms over his chest as he moved to stand over them. “And what part of the recipe called for you dumping tomato sauce on Echo’s head?”

“Yeah!” Echo stuck his tongue out at Myst.

“Well, we didn’t have any sugar,” Myst said as though that explained everything. Eyce didn’t get it. What the hell did the guy need sugar for if he was making spaghetti?

“I don’t get it either.” Echo sighed and shook his head. “Now I need a shower.”

“I think I can help with that.” Eyce took Echo’s hand and helped him to his feet. “Uh, wait here.” He hurried into the laundry room and snatched a dirty towel from the hamper. Coming back into the kitchen, he slipped on the thick sauce covering the floor and skidded several feet before he could grab the counter to steady himself.

Pointing a finger in Myst’s laughing face, Eyce glared at him. “Clean this up.”

“Fiero said he’d mop.” Myst gave him an innocent look. “I need a shower, too.”

Using the towel to clean as much of the goop from Echo’s hair as possible, Eyce looked at Myst. “You planned this?” he mouthed.

Myst nodded enthusiastically. “Oh, yeah.”

Rolling his eyes at the man’s antics, Eyce shooed him away. “Go start the water in my bathroom. We’ll be right there.”

“He did this on purpose, huh?” Echo asked as Myst hurried out of the room. “He’s so dead.”

“He just wants to play in the shower.”

Echo brightened at that. “Really? Well, he could have just said so. Then I wouldn’t be covered in yuck.”

“Then he wouldn’t have an excuse to scrub your back.”

“Well, what are we waiting for?” Echo grabbed Eyce’s wrists and practically dragged him from the room in his eagerness to get to the shower.

“I’m not sure that I was invited.” Eyce chuckled as he allowed Echo to lead him up the stairs.

“Myst, do you want Eyce to fuck you?” Echo called as they entered Eyce’s bedroom.

“Hell yeah!” Myst called back through the sounds of the shower spray. “Get his sexy ass in here.”

Echo looked up at Eyce and wiggled his eyebrows. “Good enough?”

Eyce stripped at top speed then began ripping Echo’s clothes from him as his little mate giggled. “Consider this my RSVP.”

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Echo trembled as Eyce knelt in front him, his hands roaming over Echo’s naked body, and his lips following suit. “Want you,” he panted. “Shower.”

“In a minute.” Eyce continued licking at his stomach while his hands caressed down Echo’s hips and reached around to squeeze his ass, pulling him closer. “I think I just found a way to stomach Myst’s spaghetti.”

Echo’s cock jerked between his legs, filling rapidly and pressing against the side of Eyce’s throat. “Please,” he whimpered. His balls ached, his skin tingled, and his legs wobbled from the onslaught of sensations coursing through him. “Please.”

“Okay, baby, okay.” Eyce rose to his feet and turned Echo, swatting his ass to get him going.

Echo ran to the bathroom, ripped back the curtain, and jumped into the shower. Myst stood under the warm spray, his head tilted back, as the water cascaded over his chiseled body. Echo groaned deeply, gripping the base of his cock to keep from unloading then and there. Damn, his men were hot.

He stepped closer to the demon, rubbing against him as he pushed his hands through his hair, trying to remove as much of the goopy sauce as he could. He watched the water swirl around his feet, running red like something from a cheap slasher flick before disappearing down the drain. He should probably be pissed at Myst, but right then all he could think about was getting the man's lips wrapped around his aching cock as quickly as possible.

Myst groaned, looping an arm around Echo's waist and thrusting against him, sliding his impressive length over Echo's abs. The curtain parted again, and Eyce stepped into the shower behind him, molding himself to Echo's back and grinding his hot, steel-hard erection against the top of his ass. His long fingers trailed down Echo's stomach to brush across the nest of curls just above his jutting prick.

Echo panted and moaned, humping between them as they worked together, soaping his hair and massaging his scalp, then running their hands over his body as they cleaned him thoroughly. As much as he loved the attention, Echo wanted to get to the good part. "Please," he whimpered when Myst dropped a kiss on his forehead.

His lover leaned back and smiled mischievously. "Who gets the middle?"

"Me," Echo answered and immediately heard the snap of a bottle cap.

"I was hoping you'd say that." Myst dropped to his knees and engulfed Echo's pulsing cock to the back of his throat in one smooth movement.

Echo moaned loudly, pushing his hips forward and nudging the back of the warrior's throat with his prick, causing him to swallow

convulsively. “Oh, damn,” he breathed. Man, he loved Myst’s blow jobs, and the man seemed to love giving them just as much if the happy little whimpers were any indication.

Then Eyce’s fingers slipped through his crease, ringing his hungry hole twice before pushing in with two fingers. “I must have done something right,” Eyce whispered against Echo’s neck and as he pumped his fingers.

“Huh?” Okay, not exactly an intelligent response, but Echo’s capacity for conversation had taken a temporary vacation.

“Getting your sweet ass twice in one day,” Eyce elaborated as he added a third finger and brushed over Echo’s sweet spot.

Echo cried out, dropping his head back to Eyce’s shoulder as he fought to stave off his orgasm. “Hurry. Not gonna last.”

Taking Echo’s hands, Eyce pressed them flat against the shower wall as he nudged him forward. “Right there, baby.”

Echo nodded, looking down to watch his slick shaft slide in and out of Myst’s heated mouth. He closed his eyes quickly when the sight threatened to push him over the edge. Eyce’s fingers slipped out of his entrance, replaced by the thick head of his cock.

“Ahh!” Echo cried out as Eyce breached him, pushing into his needy tunnel until he’d bottomed out.

“Ready, baby?”

“Yes,” Echo hissed. “Fuck me.”

“Demanding, aren’t you?” Eyce’s chuckle turned to a strangled groan when Echo clenched his inner walls around the invading length. “We still owe you one.”

Echo didn’t know what the hell that meant, and he didn’t give a damn just then. Bracing himself against the tiles, he began rocking back and forth, pulling partially from Myst’s mouth as he impaled himself on Eyce’s throbbing cock. The man was huge, and Echo swore he could feel Eyce’s cock swell and pulse with each beat of the guy’s heart.



Gripping Echo's hip, Eyce lifted him to his toes as he began slamming into him, changing the angle and nailing Echo's prostate on every thrust.

"Come for us, Echo," Eyce growled. "I want you to scream for me." He drove forward, punctuating his words. "I fucking love it when you scream."

Light exploded behind his closed eyelids, and Echo cried out, electricity sizzling his body as his skin heated, and cum erupted from his slit to fill Myst's waiting mouth.

Myst popped off his still-hard shaft, and Eyce eased out of his backdoor. The men held him up as his trembling legs threatened to give way. "Wow," Echo breathed.

"Oh, we're not done with you." Eyce bent over him and licked at his lips. "You didn't scream."

Myst's tongue joined theirs, tangling and sliding before he captured Echo's lips with his own. "Besides, we still owe you one."

"One what?"

"Orgasm. We promised you four when we claimed you. I seem to recall you only coming three times." Eyce stroked his long, thick cock seductively. "You ready for round two?"

"Oh, gods yes."

Myst reached behind him and turned off the water, then lifted Echo into his arms and stepped out of the shower. "Let's move this to a more stable surface."

"Hurry."

They didn't waste time with such mundane things as drying off. Myst just hurried him into the bedroom and laid him on the mattress, tugging his hips until his ass hung off the edge of the bed. His heavy cock slipped between Echo's rounded globes, teasing against his opening, before Myst pushed in to the hilt in one long stroke.

Growling like an animal, he covered Echo's body and crushed their mouths together, forcing Echo's lips apart so he could lay siege

to the warm depths within. Echo had no choice but to grip the man's shoulders and hold on for the ride.

Then Myst wrenched away from him, dropping his head back on his shoulders as he stilled inside Echo and groaned. Looking over his lover's shoulder, Echo smiled up at Eyce, receiving a quick wink in return.

It took only seconds before Eyce had Myst stretched enough to receive him and began feeding his cock to Myst's hole. Echo couldn't see what they were doing, but his brain had no problem conjuring all kinds of delectably naughty images.

Myst braced himself on the mattress, his dark, shaggy hair falling around his face as he began to move, thrusting into Echo's greedy ass in slow, deliberate strokes. It took a little doing, but eventually they found a rhythm, and their pace increased until Eyce was slamming into Myst's body, driving him deeper into Echo's clenching channel.

The fire burned in his belly, his balls drew tight to his body, and Echo looked up into Myst's eyes, begging for release. Without a word, Myst's fingers wrapped around Echo's bouncing prick, jerking him in time with their movements. "Come for me, baby," he whispered. "Scream for me."

Then he bent slowly, licking his lips the entire way, before sinking his long canines into the sensitive flesh where Echo's shoulder met his neck. Flames engulfed him, the heat spreading all the way down to his toes, and Echo went off like a Roman candle, screaming loud enough to rattle the windows.

Eyce roared above him, and Myst followed swiftly, burying himself in Echo's body and growling around the flesh in his mouth as scorching lava splashed against Echo's inner walls.

Echo squeaked as Myst's arms gave out and over four hundred pounds of sweaty men fell on top of him, crushing him into the mattress. His lovers moved quickly, gently parting from each other, and collapsed on the bed beside Echo, panting heavily as they stared up at the ceiling.

“Sorry, baby,” Myst mumbled sleepily. “Man, I need a nap.”

“You have to make dinner,” Eyce slurred around a yawn.

“I’m good with grilled cheese sandwiches.” Echo turned to curl around Eyce’s side, reaching behind him to grip Myst’s arm and pull it around him.

“Dinner can wait,” Eyce whispered as he wrapped his arm around Echo, resting his hand on Myst’s hip. “I can’t move, and I’m too tired to argue.”

“If they get hungry, they’ll find something.” Myst nuzzled into Echo’s hair and kissed the side of his neck. “Thank you,” he breathed.

Eyce kissed his forehead as he cuddled closer. “Sleep.”

“But, I have cum dripping out of my ass,” Echo whined halfheartedly.

“Me, too,” Myst whispered. “We’ll live.”

“But it tickles,” Echo complained.

“Spoiled brat,” Myst grumped under his breath as he pushed out of bed and plodded to the bathroom.

Echo heard water running, and a minute later Myst returned carrying two warm, wet cloths. He tossed one to Eyce and used the other to gently clean Echo before tossing it over his shoulder in the direction of the bathroom.

Then he crawled back into bed, curving around Echo and reaching an arm over him to rest his hand on Eyce’s hip. “Better, princess?”

Echo didn’t answer, but grinned and sighed happily, letting the warm embrace of his lovers soothe him as he drifted into a peaceful sleep.

## Chapter Fourteen

A gloom settled over the house as the morning of the winter solstice dawned cold and dreary. A misty drizzle fell from the sky, and gray clouds blocked the sun, throwing their little valley into shadow.

Hex sipped his coffee as the tension in the house settled over him like a physical force until he wanted to scream. No one spoke. No one smiled. No one was even eating. His men simply sat around the kitchen table, staring into their mugs or peeking glimpses at each other through the corners of their eyes.

Even Echo seemed more subdued than normal. Hex's little mate used his fork to push the remainder of his waffle around on his plate as he sighed wearily. "So, I guess this means it's starting."

"I guess," Hex agreed. He didn't want to scare Echo, but he wouldn't lie to the man either. "Are you prepared for what might happen?"

"Not at all." Echo gave him a sweet little half-smile. "But I'll deal with it. I'm more worried about you guys than I am about myself."

Hex's heart melted and his eyes softened. He opened his mouth to reassure his mate when something cold and sticky hit him in the side of the face. Lifting his hand, he wiped away the soggy waffle, holding it between his fingers and glaring at the other men around the table. "Who did it?"

No one said a word. They all looked down at their plates, their faces sober, bordering on depressed. Hex narrowed his eyes at Myst, watching for the slightest signs of guilt, but found nothing. "Someone better fess up, or I'm go—"

Another glob smacked him in side of the neck from the opposite direction. Whipping his head around, he stared at Echo in shock as the man looked back at him innocently. “Yes?”

Wiping the cold waffle from his neck, Hex grimaced as the syrup stuck to his skin. “Did you just throw this at me?”

“Why would I do something like that?”

Quiet chortles went around the table, and Hex turned back to scowl at his men. They were ganging up on him, and he didn’t know whether to be amused or paddle their asses for it. As the biggest and strongest of their group, he was more than up to the challenge. Besides, it could be kind of fun.

Everyone schooled their features quickly, still not daring to meet his eyes. “So, that’s how you want to play it?”

An entire waffle landed on top of his head, dripping the warm, sticky syrup down his hair and over his face and ears before falling to the floor with a wet plop. Using his napkin to blot away the syrup before it could run into his eyes, he slowly stood from his chair, and turned calmly to face his little mate.

“I suggest you run,” Syx whispered from beside Echo.

Echo looked at Syx, then back up to Hex, then sprang out of his seat like a jack-in-the-box, giggling like mad as he hightailed it out of the kitchen. Hex pointed a finger at each of his lovers in turn. “You’re next.” Then he darted from the room, following the sound of Echo’s squeals as the room erupted into raucous laughter behind him.

Bounding up the stairs, he found Echo in his bedroom, sitting on the end of the bed and looking up at him with an adoring smile. “Hey.”

He’d fought some of the nastiest creatures to ever enter the Underworld, but one smile, one softly spoken word from those luscious lips, and he was nothing more than a sappy, sentimental fool. “Hey.”

“Waffle looks really good on you. You should wear it more often.”

“If you wanted to talk to me alone, you could have just asked.” Hex eased down to the mattress beside his mate and slipped an arm around his shoulders. “What’s going on?”

“The guys from the lab?”

“What about them?” Anger and fear roiled in Hex’s gut. “We won’t let them hurt you.”

“I know,” Echo whispered. “I’m not thinking about me. They saw what Eyce, Onyx, and Vapre can do. They’re going to piece together that the rest of you have powers as well.” He looked into Hex’s eyes as his little hand reached up to push the sticky hair back from his face. “They’re going to come for you.”

“Is that what you’re worried about?” Hex chuckled softly and kissed the tip of Echo’s nose. “I think we can handle a couple of humans.”

“A couple, yes.” Echo didn’t return his smile. “They’ll come prepared, Hex. It won’t be just four guys with a couple of guns. I need you to be careful.”

“Baby, they don’t scare me. If they come, we’ll deal with them.” Echo looked so scared, and Hex had no clue how to reassure and comfort him, so he went to his fallback. “Everything will be fine.”

“I really hate it when you say that.” Echo shook his head and stood from the bed, pacing back and forth in front of Hex. “You can’t know that. You can’t know that everything will be fine. None of us can. We can hope, do our best to prepare, but nothing is certain.”

“Echo.”

“I’m just asking for you to be on your guard and treat this as a real threat.”

“Echo.”

“You can’t just dismiss them because they’re human. They’ll bring others. Others with powers like yours.”

“Echo!” Hex shouted the words, finally gaining his lover’s attention. “Come here.”

Echo's bottom lip poked out as he moved to stand between Hex's thighs. "What?"

"You worry too much. You talk too damn much as well." Hex wrapped his fingers around the back of Echo's slender neck and pulled him forward. "Let me take care of it, okay?" He brushed their lips together gently. "That's my job. You just be adorable and don't do anything stupid. That's all you have to worry about." Then he crushed their mouths together before Echo could argue.

This kiss seemed to go on forever as Hex licked inside his mate's mouth, controlling the kiss and dominating the smaller man in his arms. He loved the way Echo tasted, the sounds he made, the slight trembling of desire in his lean body anytime one of them touched him. He adored the way Echo smelled, the musical sound of his voice, and his sassy little attitude.

Pulling away when the kisses threatened to become too heated, Hex smiled at the dazed look on his lover's face. "We don't have time to play right now, but I'll make it up to you later."

Echo pouted a little, but it didn't last long before he graced Hex with his gorgeous smile and nodded. "I want to ride you, though. Is that okay?"

Hex growled, jerking Echo into his lap and claiming his mouth in another earth-shattering kiss. Then he pulled away, resting his forehead against Echo's as they both gasped for breath. "I guess I have my answer," Echo panted.

Hex turned and pushed his mate back into the mattress as he crawled up his body to hover over him.

"I thought you said we didn't have time?" Echo lifted his eyebrows in question.

Hex brushed their lips together as his hands began to roam Echo's tight body. "I'll make time."

\* \* \* \*

Echo wandered around the big house, lonely and bored. His men had gone out to cut firewood to stockpile for the snowstorm predicted to hit the next day. He didn't know why the hell it took six of them, but he'd promised to remain inside the house until they returned.

Glancing at the clock for what felt like the millionth time, he sighed when he realized only twenty minutes had passed. Fiero had told him it would probably take a couple of hours for them to cut and gather enough logs.

Syx was down the hall in the office, tapping away at his keyboard, and had already yelled at Echo twice for interrupting him. Hell, Echo had even sashayed into the room, butt-naked and hard as stone. Syx wasn't having any of it. Echo didn't know what the guy was doing that was so important. In the four weeks he'd been there, none of them had left to go to a job. Eyce told him they were insanely rich, but he didn't know how they made their money.

Realizing that he didn't know much about them at all, Echo managed to depress himself, and finally left Syx alone. He did decide, however, to make a determined effort to get to know everything he could about his lovers.

He tried watching a movie, but gave up quickly. He felt nervous and jittery, and he couldn't sit still long enough to watch it. Maybe some fresh air would help clear his head and calm him. Though it made him feel like a little kid, he figured he better tell Syx where he was going.

Plodding down the hall to the office, he eased the door open and stuck his head in. "I'm going for a walk," he announced.

Syx looked up as his fingers stilled on the keyboard. "I'm not sure that's a good idea. If you wait just a little bit, I'll go with you."

"Syx, I'm a grown man." Echo resisted the urge to roll his eyes. "I'll be fine. I promise I won't go far. Just a walk around the field in the back to clear my head."



Syx stared at him for a moment then nodded his head briskly. “Don’t go far and stay out of the woods.” He pointed to the window beside the desk. “I’ll be watching.”

Echo did roll his eyes then. They’d been treating him like this all day—ever since he confessed his fears to Hex. Though it annoyed the hell out of him, he understood their concern, so he had been lenient. He just hoped they eased up on him soon.

“I’ll stay in the back field you call a yard,” he finally agreed. “You’re welcome to join me if you can pry yourself away for a few minutes.”

“I’m sorry, baby. I really need to get this done.” Syx had already gone back to staring at the computer screen.

“What exactly are you doing?”

Syx sighed and looked up at him again. “Can I explain it later?”

Echo nodded curtly. God forbid he ask a question and receive a straight answer. “I’ll see you later then.”

Pushing the door closed, he traveled back down the hallway, grabbed his jacket from the hook in the mudroom, and slipped out the back door. The brisk December air whipped around him, stinging his face and stealing his breath. Rounding his shoulders and digging his hands into his coat pockets, he set out across the field.

He’d only taken a few steps when a soft whimpering from the tree line drew his attention. Pausing in his trek across the yard, Echo took a few steps in the direction of the trees and stopped. He’d promised not to venture into the woods.

“Help me,” the voice called, coming to him muffled against the wind.

Indecision warred inside him, and Echo looked between the trees and the house several times. Should he go get Syx? Whoever was in those woods needed help, but Syx would be better equipped to help if the person was injured. If he went traipsing into the brush and found whoever it was hurt, he’d just have to turn right around and go get Syx anyway.

His decision made, he turned toward the house when the voice called to him again. "Eighty-one, help me."

Echo froze, and pure fear set his heart racing inside his chest. Only the people from the lab knew him as his designated number.

"Please," the voice called to him, closer this time, louder, and Echo finally recognized it.

Spinning around, he gaped as One-seventeen stepped through the trees. His face was battered and bruised, a line of dried blood running from temple to jaw. He limped forward, favoring his right leg, as his nude body shuddered violently against the freezing wind. "I got out." He smiled widely. "Please help me."

One-seventeen had been his first lover and one of his only friends at the facility. Echo couldn't just leave him to suffer. Besides, they would soon know he was missing, and they would come for him.

Glancing one last time at the office window, Echo hurried over to his friend, stripping his coat off and slinging it around the man's shoulders. "You're freezing. Let's get you inside."

"Thank you," One-seventeen whispered.

"How the hell did you get out?"

"Some of the other residents caused a diversion." He continued to smile, leaning on Echo heavily as they trudged across the grassy field. "I've been running for a few days, hiding out in the woods. I knew you'd help me if I could just get here."

Echo stopped in his tracks, slowly moving away from his friend. "How did you know where I was?"

One-seventeen looked him in the eyes, all traces of his former smile vanishing. "I'm sorry," he murmured. Then his hand shot out, wrapping around Echo's wrist like a steel vise.

"No!" Echo's eyes went wide, and he shook his head in disbelief as he struggled to free his arm.

Three men burst from the tree line, running straight at him as they kept low, surveying the land around them. Not knowing what else to

do, Echo screamed. "Syx!" He called for the man over and over, hoping his voice would travel over the wind and through the window.

The men reached them swiftly, one grabbing One-seventeen, another wrapping an arm around Echo while the other hand covered his mouth. Echo kicked and screamed, jerking his body as he tried to free himself. He would not go back to that place.

"Sedate him," the man holding Echo's old friend yelled. The third man rushed forward, pulling a needle from his coat pocket and popping the cap off.

Echo went wild, shaking his head as much as he could as he kicked his feet out, trying to damage any part of the man he could reach. The other man released One-seventeen, commanding him to stay put, then hurried over to grab Echo's flailing feet, holding them immobile.

The man with the needle pushed Echo's sleeve up past his elbow then tapped the needle as he squirted just a little of the clear liquid from the tip. Echo watched in horror as the sharp point neared the crook of his arm. *Crap, he was so screwed.*

A loud bang, followed by an even louder roar, rent the air, and the man jerked his head up, pulling the needle away from Echo's arm. "Fuck!" he yelled. He dropped the needle to the ground and turned to grab One-seventeen. "Go, go, go!"

The man holding him spun around, releasing Echo's mouth for just a moment before the hand tangled in his hair, and cold steel pressed against his throat. "I'll fucking slit his throat," the man yelled.

Echo watched Syx prowl toward him, his fingers already elongating as his snarling lips pulled back over his fangs. "Mine," he growled.

"Oh, shit," Echo breathed. If the men knew what was good for them, they'd let him go and run. Maybe, just maybe, they'd escape with their lives.

The loud revving of a truck engine came from the front of the house before it cut off, and Echo heard the car doors slam. "Hex!" he

screamed earning him a hard jerk to his hair. He pushed away the pain, and yelled again. “Eyce! Fiero!” The blade pressed more insistently against his throat, and Echo winced as it nicked the skin just above his Adam’s apple.

His warriors came sprinting around the side of the house, growling and snarling, fanning out to take up ranks beside Syx as they stalked the man currently holding him. Echo sighed in relief and ceased his struggles. “You are so fucked, dude.”

\* \* \* \*

Fury unlike any he’d ever felt before descended over Hex, and he roared out his rage as his claws lengthened and his fangs elongated. The asshole would die for daring to lay a finger on his mate. The thin line of blood trickling down Echo’s throat had already sealed his fate.

“They’re here,” the douche bag called over his shoulder. “Get the hell out here!”

Movement from the bushes drew Hex’s notice, and he watched as eight men stepped from the trees with guns drawn. “Stand down,” one of them called.

The trees swayed in the wind, their limbs reaching toward the two men in the back of the group. Hex cut his eyes toward Onyx, unsurprised to see the man’s gaze locked on the same men. Returning his attention to the trees, Hex smirked as the limbs grew and twisted, twining around the fuckers and hoisting them into the air.

They screamed, wiggling and struggling uselessly against their bonds. A vicious wind screamed across the clearing, catching three of the men and swatting them away like flies. They landed on their backs, their guns several feet away, and didn’t move.

Hex heard a metal click behind him and stepped aside, just as a huge fireball roared past him, flying through the air toward the remainder of the group. The three men ducked, throwing themselves

to the ground and yelling as the fire soared over their heads, hitting the trees behind them and immediately engulfing them in flames.

Syx, Eyce, and Fiero flew over the frozen ground, launching themselves through the air and landing on the cowering men. With the other men contained, Hex focused on the bastard still holding the knife to Echo's throat. He may be merciful to the others, but this one would pay.

He watched the man's eyes widen and his mouth drop open as he began to tremble in fear. "I'll k-kill h-him," he stuttered.

"And I will rip your insides out and feed them to you before he hits the ground," Hex returned, his voice cold and guttural.

The man took a couple of unsteady steps backward, dragging Echo along with him, before he froze completely. Hex could read the terror in his eyes, and smiled wickedly as he prowled toward the man.

His amazing little mate didn't look afraid in the least. His lips stretched into a wide smile as Hex approached, and he practically vibrated where he stood. "Hey," he whispered. "Glad you could make it."

Hex wrapped his fingers around the man's hand and wrenched the blade away from Echo's neck. Then he shoved roughly, sending the guy toppling over to land on the ground, still frozen in place. Turning just in time to catch Echo as his mate jumped into his arms, Hex crushed him close, careful of his lethal talons as he stroked his lover's hair.

"Thank you," Echo breathed into his neck. "Thank you."

Though it had taken mere seconds to subdue their enemy and rescue their mate, it felt like an eternity. Hex breathed deeply, inhaling the warm, sweet scent of his lover before gently easing him to his feet and urging him back. "Go stand by Vapre," he ordered.

To his complete surprise, Echo did as asked without argument, hurrying across the yard and wrapping his arms around Vapre's waist. The warrior held him close, peppering kisses over his blond head as

he whispered words Hex couldn't hear. Satisfied that their mate was safe, Hex turned back to the prone figure on the ground and snarled.

"Release him."

The man instantly slumped to the ground. Before he could do more than gasp for breath, Hex was on him, pressing his knee into the man's chest as he leaned over him. "I would love to kill you. I really would." He glanced over his shoulder at Echo before turning back to peer into the man's fearful eyes. "But, that would upset our mate, and I don't like upsetting him."

"Mate?" The man squeaked as he squirmed beneath Hex's knee.

Hex ignored him. "You owe him your life."

The man nodded rapidly.

Looking out across the field, Hex watched as the men in the trees dropped unceremoniously to the earth, then grabbed the man beneath him by the hair and yanked him to his feet. He dragged the guy across the grass, smirking the entire way as the man yelled and stumbled behind him.

Onyx and Myst marched behind him, Vapre staying back with Echo. Hex stopped when they reached the tree line, throwing the man to the ground beside the other felled assholes. He started to speak, but noticed a small man, not much bigger than Echo, cowering near a tree with his eyes wide and his nude body trembling.

"What do we do with them?" Syx asked.

"Erase their memories, put them to sleep, and dump them near Marsdale Road," Hex answered grudgingly. "Killing them while they're unarmed would be murder. We're better than that."

"Because of Echo," Myst whispered.

Hex agreed wholeheartedly.

"What about that one?" Syx asked, pointing to small naked man beside the tree.

Part of Hex felt sorry for the young man—wanted to help him. The demon in him argued that his very presence proved he'd help these men in their attempt to hurt his mate. "The same."

“Should we take them further to the east? I don’t want them accidentally wandering back this way.” Onyx crossed his arms over his muscled chest and glared.

“We don’t want them found by passing motorists either,” Eyce added. “Let them spend the night in the cold.”

Hex fixed his gaze on the man he assumed was a prisoner at the facility. “Why are you here?”

“They brought me to help,” he answered in a quiet voice. “What are you?”

“Help with what?” Hex asked, ignoring the man’s question.

“They wanted me to trick Eighty-one.”

“Eighty-one?” Fiero cocked his head to the side in confusion. Since he was still in his demon form, it just kind of looked like he was deciding which part of the young man to eat first. Hex found it rather amusing.

“Him.” He pointed across the clearing to Echo.

“Did they threaten to hurt you if you didn’t help them?” Hex tried to give the man the benefit of the doubt, but his instincts screamed foul play.

“No.”

Hex looked to Syx, disappointed but unsurprised when the demon nodded. “He’s telling the truth.”

“Where’s this lab?” Hex demanded.

“I don’t know.”

“Are there more coming?”

“I don’t know.”

“What exactly do you know?” Myst growled impatiently.

“Nothing important,” the man responded.

“I’ve heard enough.” Hex shook his head and glanced over his shoulder at Echo and Vapre. “Wipe them clean.”

## Chapter Fifteen

“Do you want us to help him?”

Echo stared across the field at his former friend for a long time before he looked up at Vapre and shook his head. “If he doesn’t go back with them, they’ll send more to look for him.”

“They’re probably going to send more anyway, baby.” Vapre trailed his fingers down Echo’s throat and frowned. “They’re not going to stop.”

Echo nodded slowly. “One-seventeen is like Syx. He can see inside people’s minds. He can project his own thoughts to people as well. He showed me things.”

“What kind of things?”

“They want me, but that’s not really why they’re here. They don’t know what you are, but they know what you can do. They came for the seven of you.”

“He was your friend.”

Echo nodded again. “He was until he tried to hurt my family.”

“Do you think he wanted to be out here in the cold, naked and afraid, hurting someone he cares about?” Vapre arched a brow at him.

“Yes,” Echo spat. “He did it for fucking chocolate bars and video games. A friend wouldn’t do that. I would have never tried to hurt him for something like that.”

Vapre stared at him in shock, then he frowned, and a small growl escaped his lips. “I’m sorry he betrayed your trust.”

“It doesn’t matter.” Echo cuddled closer to Vapre’s warm body. “I have everything I need right here.” Watching the others, his brow



creased as they began to lift the unconscious men one by one. “What are they going to do with them?”

“Syx just put them to sleep. Probably wiped their memories as well. I’m guessing they’re just going to dump them somewhere away from our property.”

“But they’re not hurt?”

“No, baby, they’ll be fine. I don’t know if I will understand how you can care so much for people who have hurt you for so long.”

“They need to be stopped, but I don’t think it’s right to kill them.”

Vapre sighed and rested his chin on top of Echo’s head. “We’ll figure out a way to stop them.”

“I think that can go on the back burner for now. Don’t get me wrong. There are good people in that lab who don’t deserve how they’re treated. I think we have more important things to worry about right now, though.”

“Such as?”

“The new moon is only two weeks away.”

Vapre groaned. “Don’t remind me.”

Echo didn’t look forward to it either, but they needed to face reality. Whether they wanted it to or not, the battle was coming. “It won’t go away just because you ignore it.”

“I know, but I just don’t want to think about it right now. One crisis at a time, okay?”

Echo snorted. “I seriously doubt this counts a crisis. You took them down in seconds flat.”

“Trust me, baby. Anytime our mate is threatened, it is definitely a crisis. I’m thousands of years old, and I’ve only known you for a few weeks, but I already can’t remember what my life was like without you.”

Echo melted into a big ole pile of sappy goo right there at the man’s feet. He still had a hard time reconciling the big, kick-ass demons with his kind and gentle lovers. There were so many layers to these guys he didn’t know if he’d ever figure out what made them tick

at their core. Still, he had an eternity to search out the answers and would enjoy every moment of it.

\* \* \* \*

“Why is it so damn cold in here? I thought you guys went out into the woods to do the frontiersman thing and bring back logs.”

“It doesn’t take six of us to cut firewood,” Onyx mumbled distractedly.

“Then what did you do for all that time?”

“Picked out your Christmas present.”

“I got a present?” Echo wanted to clap his hands together like a little boy. He’d never gotten a present on Christmas before.

“Hex and the guys went to pick it up. They’ll be back soon enough. Now, shush and watch the movie.” Onyx patted Echo’s foot where it rested in his lap, his eyes never leaving the screen.

Echo pouted for a second, but quickly gave it up and snuggled down on the sofa between Onyx and Fiero. Pulling the blanket up around his bare shoulders, he rested his head on Fiero’s chest and sighed. The warrior was always so damn warm. He didn’t often cuddle Echo like this either, so he soaked up the attention for as long as it lasted.

Not that Fiero pushed him away or ignored him. He just wasn’t the snuggling type. Echo needed the closeness, though. With only ten days until the new moon, the date raced toward them with alarming speed, and he spent his days tense and uneasy as he waited for the unknown.

They discussed the prophecy a hundred times in the last few days, trying to work through the Oracle’s riddle. Still, all they knew was something would happen with the river and streams. That didn’t exactly narrow it down or give them a plan of attack.

He suddenly understood how Hex felt. He didn’t like not having the answers or being able to help the men he cared about.

“You’re doing it again,” Fiero grumbled.

“Doing what?”

“Thinking too hard. I can practically hear the gears turning in your head. Just relax and watch the movie.”

Echo didn’t want to watch the movie, though. Gliding his fingertips down Fiero’s nude chest, he dipped his hand under the blanket to fondle the man’s flaccid cock. “I’d rather play,” he whispered seductively.

Fiero groaned and arched his hips as the flesh in Echo’s hand began to fill and swell, becoming rock hard and throbbing in a matter of seconds. “You’re asking for trouble,” Fiero warned him.

“No.” Echo shook his head as he smirked up at his demon. “I’m asking for your cock in my ass.”

Growling, Fiero pushed him back to the cushions, Echo’s head landing in Onyx’s lap, and covered his body, licking down his neck and chest.

Onyx moaned softly from above him, and Echo held his hand up, crooking one finger. Sliding out from under Echo’s head, Onyx knelt to the floor and began licking and sucking at the other side of Echo’s neck.

The flames built quickly, starting as mere embers, but quickly building until a raging wildfire burned inside his belly. “Please,” he whimpered. “Need you.” One hand fisted in Fiero’s short blond spikes, his other tangling in Onyx’s equally short but dark hair, and jerked roughly. “Now,” he demanded.

“You heard the man,” Syx said hoarsely as he entered the room and began stripping off his clothes at top speed.

Echo smiled up at him, licking his lips at the leaking erection jutting from Syx’s groin. “Wanna taste you.”

“Who am I to say no?” Syx crawled up on the sofa to straddle Echo’s face, one foot on the floor and the other one sinking into the cushions beside Echo’s head. He leaned over him, bracing his hand on

the arm of the couch as his other wrapped around the base of his cock and guided it to Echo's waiting mouth.

Echo wrapped his lips around the turgid length, flicking his tongue over the slit before swirling it around the spongy head and moaning like a twenty-dollar whore.

Syx growled, his body jerking, and he began humping into Echo's greedy mouth.

Lost in the taste of his lover, Echo tensed when a slick finger parted his cheeks and began ringing the tight muscles of his opening. Moaning around Syx's hard shaft, Echo relaxed, spreading his legs wider and pushing back against the thick digit until it pushed inside his needy hole.

Fiero stretched him quickly, adding a second finger and then a third, sawing in and out until Echo wanted to shout at the man to just fuck him already. Onyx moved to stand behind the arm of the sofa, and Echo's eyes almost rolled back in his head as he watched Onyx push his veiny cock through Syx's lips and begin thrusting wildly.

Then Fiero's fingers retreated from his entrance, swiftly replaced by the blunt tip of his dick. He pushed in slowly, feeding the steel-hard length to Echo's hungry ass inch by torturous inch until he bottomed out.

The room filled with muffled moans and loud growls as Fiero began slamming into Echo's ass while Syx fucked Echo's willing mouth. Onyx grabbed the back of Syx's head, shoving the man's mouth down on his cock as he roared out to the ceiling. He stilled completely, his muscles bunching and flexing, and Echo watched Syx's throat muscles work to swallow the man's release.

Syx followed suit, pushing to the back of Echo's throat as he grunted once, his body shuddered, and he poured his seed into Echo's mouth. The taste, the smells, the huge cock pounding into his ass sent Echo flying over the edge, and he cried out as Syx's cock pulled from his mouth. Long ropes of sticky cum burst from his slit, to cover his chest and stomach as he writhed beneath his men.

“Oh, fuck!” Fiero yelled, holding Echo’s thighs in a bruising grip. He delivered two more quick jabs to Echo’s aching ass and froze. His loud roar signaled his completion, and Echo moaned again at the feel of his lover’s seed coating his inner walls and filling him to overflowing.

“You’re going to kill us,” Onyx panted from above him as Fiero gently eased from his hole. “I don’t think I can move.” He slumped to the floor, sprawling out on his back and panting heavily.

Syx rolled off of Echo, moving to floor as well, where he took up a similar position. “Agreed.”

“There are seven of you and only one of me.” Echo sighed. “If anything, you guys are going to kill *me*.”

Fiero slouched back on the couch, tugging at Echo’s ankle until he finally got the hint. Moving quickly, he scrambled into Fiero’s lap, draping himself over the man’s chest and smiling in contentment.

“You’re so damn feisty, though,” Fiero mumbled sleepily. “You’re like this enormous ball of energy in a tight little package.”

Echo sat up and smirked, then bent forward and licked at his lover’s lips. “Flattery will get you everywhere.”

Fiero’s tongue snaked out, twining with Echo’s as he pressed their mouths together in a heated kiss. Echo couldn’t get enough of these men—his men. Luckily, they seemed to feel the same way about him. He didn’t know if he loved them yet, but he knew he was heading in that direction, and quickly.

The front door banged open, bringing with it the cold wind and his four missing warriors. “We got it!” Myst announced to the room.

“Damn, looks like we missed a hell of a party,” Eyce said as he surveyed the scene before him.

Echo looked at the two men on the floor, then back to Fiero, and chuckled. Yeah, they all looked well-fucked and in need of a nap. “What did you get exactly?” he asked as he eased off Fiero’s chest and wrapped the blanket around himself again.

Hex hurried across the room and plopped down beside him on the cushions. He shoved a long, rectangular box into Echo's hand and beamed like a fool. Everyone gathered around him, watching with fascination as Echo's brows drew together, and he slowly pried open the red velvet box.

His eyes rounded, and he gasped, his shaking hand going to his mouth as tears welled up in his eyes. Nestled against the black satin lining was the most gorgeous necklace he'd ever seen. A small sapphire teardrop, framed in sterling silver, dangled from a simple black leather braid.

"For every tear you've ever cried," Hex whispered from beside him.

"And for all the ones you'll shed in the future," Eyce added with a smile.

"You'll always have a shoulder for them to fall on," Myst finished.

"Merry Christmas, baby." Syx rose up on his knees and placed a tender kiss on Echo's lips.

Each of his lovers murmured the words, kissing his lips, his cheeks, his temple, and his jaw. Echo didn't know what to say. He didn't have the words to express what the gift meant to him. He looked up at Hex, the tears spilling over his cheeks, and gave him a wobbly smile.

Hex's arm wrapped around his shoulders, and he chuckled lightly. "You're welcome, Echo. You're more than worth it."

Peace settled into Echo's heart as he sat there surrounded by his family. He didn't know what the future would bring. He didn't know what battle they faced, or if they would win. But he did know that whatever waited for them...they would face it together.

**THE END**

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## ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Gabrielle Evans grew up in a small town in southern Oklahoma. We are talking one red light that may or may not work depending on the day of the week. She married her high school sweetheart and the rest is pretty much history. They have two very active boys and one high-strung wiener dog that keeps her constantly on the go. For now, she parks her car in north-central Texas, but who knows what tomorrow will bring.

Gabrielle believes in love at first sight, falling hard and fast, taking chances, and grabbing your happy-ever-after with both hands. She also believes that a great cup of coffee can cure anything.

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