

Siren Publishing

*LoveXtreme Forever*

Fatefully Yours 3

# FIRESTORM



GABRIELLE EVANS

*The*  
ManLove  
*Collection*

## **Fatefully Yours 3**

### **Firestorm**

The new moon creeps closer, bringing with it the threat of deadly fires. Their army is growing, more are joining their ranks, and Fiero struggles to hold on to some semblance of his former self.

Echo's becoming more confident in his powers, working harder each day to perfect his abilities. He knows if he can get Fiero to trust him—and if he can push past his fears and offer the same in return—they stand a better chance at success.

Giving up control is not easy for Fiero, but he would do anything to protect Echo. Hades's inferno doesn't concern him nearly as much as the fire that burns inside him for his mate, overwhelming and consuming his every thought. The answer is staring him right in the face, but will he have the courage to reach out and seize it?

NOTE! You are purchasing Siren's newest serialized imprint, the LoveXtreme Forever Series. This is Book 3 of 9 in the Fatefully Yours collection. These books are not stand alone. Each is a continuation of the previous book and must be read in the numbered order. Each book may end on a cliffhanger but usually with a happy-for-now for the beta hero and one or more men. The final book contains a happily forever after for the beta hero and all his men.

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

**Length:** 40,450 words

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**Gabrielle Evans**

**LOVEXTREME FOREVER  
MANLOVE**



**Siren Publishing, Inc.  
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**A SIREN PUBLISHING BOOK**

IMPRINT: LoveXtreme Forever ManLove

**FIRESTORM**

Copyright © 2011 by Gabrielle Evans

E-book ISBN: 1-61034-646-7

First E-book Publication: June 2011

Cover design by Jinger Heaston

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**PUBLISHER**

Siren Publishing, Inc.

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# **DEDICATION**

To all of my amazing readers for loving my characters as much as I do. You are the cheese to my macaroni. Without you, I'd be just another wet noodle.

# **FIRESTORM**

*Fatefully Yours 3*

**GABRIELLE EVANS**

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## **Chapter One**

“Why the hell are your eyes blue all of the sudden?” Onyx demanded.

Eyce smirked and shook his head. “I have a theory, but I’m not telling yet.”

Fiero frowned as a mile-wide, shit-eating grin stretched across Eyce’s face. Then the demon turned on his heels and began to strut from the room like a cock in a henhouse. Fiero bit the inside of his cheek to keep from growling in frustration. The least Eyce could do was share his secret with the rest of them. They were supposed to be a team, a family.

“Just a little hint,” Myst called.

Eyce looked over his shoulder, his smile stretching even wider if it were possible. “I got the first one.” Then he disappeared around the corner in the direction of the kitchen.

“Huh?” Myst’s eyebrows drew together as he looked around the room at the rest of them. “What the hell does that mean? He got the first what?”

Fiero knew exactly what the man was talking about, but it didn’t make much sense to him. Echo had told Eyce he loved him. Fiero wasn’t jealous, but he just didn’t get it. Echo had said he loved Fiero



as well. So, why hadn't his eyes changed? No, there had to be more to it.

"I guess I'll get started on the laundry," Onyx grumbled under his breath. He headed in the direction Eyce had gone, a deep scowl on his face. "I really hate fucking laundry."

Syx slapped Vapre in the back of the head. "Research, my dear."

Vapre rubbed the back of his head as he glared at the demon. "What the fuck was that for?"

"Gentlemen." Echo clucked his tongue at them. "Is it really necessary for you to use some variation of the word 'fuck' in every sentence?" His small hands fisted on his hips, and he arched an eyebrow in question.

"Sorry," Vapre mumbled.

Fiero bit the inside of his cheek again, but this time it was to hold in his laughter. Their little mate was quite the pistol. In just the couple of months since he'd arrived on their doorstep, Echo had insinuated himself right at the top of the chain of command. The warriors may be double his size and triple his strength, but they all fell in line when Echo spoke.

If anyone had told him that he'd be taking orders and bending over backward to please someone he could easily snap in half with one hand, Fiero would have laughed in their face. Yet, there he was, trying not to smile, and praying Echo didn't turn that sexy little smirk in his direction. Badass demon warrior or not, he was a complete sucker for his mate. He'd do anything to make the man smile.

Echo sucked his plump bottom lip into his mouth and bit it, the corners of his mouth twitching as he stared back at Vapre. "Better. Now, Syx is right, though I don't think there was a need to be quite so violent about it." He turned his sapphire blue gaze on Syx.

Syx hung his head and shuffled his feet. "Sorry," he mumbled.

Echo shrugged. "Okay, now go Google your Yahoo and find out about raining fire." He flicked his wrist, dismissing them as he turned on Myst.

Myst held his hands up in surrender. “You’re hungry. I’m going.” He turned without another word and disappeared out of the room.

Fiero knew what was coming and hurried to cut off Echo’s next order. “We’re on it.” He nudged Hex with his shoulder. “You want the upstairs or down?”

“I don’t want to clean,” Hex grumbled.

“And I don’t want the princess to get his panties in a bunch.”

“I heard that,” Echo said icily. Then his features softened, and he strolled over to them, rubbing up against Fiero like a cat before turning his attention on Hex. “How about we make it a race? The first one finished gets to come find me and do wicked, naughty things to me.” He licked his lips seductively then whirled around and headed for the stairs. “Don’t take too long.”

Fiero watched their mate bound up the stairs, then looked at Hex as a slow, devious grin spread over his face. “What are the odds he’ll let us skip the cleaning and jump right into the naughty part?”

Hex seemed to consider it for a moment, then shook his head slowly. “Slim to none, I’d guess.”

“Want to test that theory?”

Hex continued to shake his head. “You do remember what happened the last time I pissed him off, right? He just about handed me my ass on a silver platter. You do what you want. I’m going to clean.”

Fiero nodded reluctantly. “Yeah, you’re probably right.” Rubbing his palm over the growing erection behind his zipper, he sighed. It wasn’t like Echo would be up for doing all the things Fiero wanted anyway. The man had a distinct aversion to anything dealing with ropes or restraints. Not that Fiero could blame him after what his mate had been through in that lab, but it definitely put a damper on Fiero’s kinky nature.

Maybe with a little more time and trust, he’d be able to talk Echo into all the dirty things he wanted to do to the man. Echo’s smooth, creamy skin would look so beautiful against the black silk scarves

Fiero had in his dresser. His mate stretched out, tied to the bed, turning his pleasure over to Fiero—the mere thought left him struggling for breath.

Sighing again, he pushed the thoughts away and began moving around the room, straightening the couch pillows and picking up beer bottles from the coffee table. No sense in letting his thoughts linger on something he couldn't have. Maybe one day, but for now, he'd take what Echo could give him and be grateful for it.

\* \* \* \*

“What exactly are we supposed to be researching?” Vapre pushed a hand through his long, silver-blond hair and groaned. “Fire falling from the sky? Because I'm sure there is just a ton of information on that.”

Syx nodded sympathetically as he powered up his laptop. “I don't know either, but Fiero's going to need all the help he can get. We have to try.”

“I get that.” Vapre dropped down on the sofa in the office and stared out the window. “We're supposed to be getting another snowstorm at the end of the week.” He didn't know what that had to do with their current predicament, but it seemed important somehow.

Syx grunted in acknowledgement that he'd heard Vapre, but otherwise didn't comment. His fingers flew across the keyboard, his eyes narrowed as he stared at the screen. “Instead of worrying about how the fire will come about, maybe we should focus on figuring out how to combat something like that. Let's think worst-case scenario.”

Vapre turned the idea over in his mind, trying to come up with the worst possible outcome of fire raining down from the sky. “Forest fire?”

Syx bobbed his head in agreement. “There are certainly enough trees around here to make that an issue. Depending on how much humidity remains in the air after the storm, it could be dry enough to

burn for days. Then we have to worry about the fire spreading closer to town. Maybe we should see about evacuating people.”

“Yeah.” Vapre snorted and rolled his eyes. “And just how do you plan to accomplish that? Are you just going to stroll into the mayor’s office and demand that he evacuate the town because some lady in a dream told us that fire would fall from the sky? I see that going over well.”

Grimacing, Syx continued to pound away at the computer. “Yeah, okay, I see your point. We can’t just sit back and do nothing, though. People could die.”

“And they probably will,” Vapre said softly. He didn’t like it, but it was a fact that they needed to face. The longer it took them to figure out what was coming and how to stop it, the higher the probability that innocent people would lose their lives, the same as had happened with the kappas. Damn, he hated those little bastards, and yet Echo treated them like beloved family pets. Sometimes he wondered if their mate was running on all cylinders.

“He says they’ll be useful, and Eyce and Hex agree,” Syx said without looking up. “I happen to agree as well. You don’t have to like the little monsters, but you need to realize that they could be a big help in the war that’s coming.”

Okay, he understood that, but it didn’t mean he had to like it. “They’re fucking creepy, man.”

“They’re not so bad as long as you keep them supplied in cucumbers. Myst thinks they’re hilarious.” Syx clicked the mouse and paused, his eyebrows drawing together as his eyes scanned the computer screen. “Come look at this.”

With a loud groan, Vapre pushed up from the couch and hurried around the desk to peer over Syx’s shoulder. “What am I looking at?”

“Well, I seriously doubt that what’s coming is going to be a natural phenomenon. I think the kappas proved that we need to be ready for anything when it comes to Hades. So, I did a search on

mythological creatures associated with fire. I've got some pretty good results here. Now, we just need to narrow them down."

"Okay, so where do we start?"

"Well, here for instance." Syx clicked on a picture of a fiery bird. "I seriously doubt that we're going to have to face down a phoenix. So, we mark off creatures with benign natures, and look more closely at the ones that would be easily manipulated and used by Hades."

"So, the stupid ones," Vapre deduced.

Syx chuckled under his breath. "Not stupid. I was thinking more along the lines of...trainable."

"Got it." Vapre pushed away from the desk and headed for the door. "Let me grab my laptop. It'll go a lot faster with both of us looking. Divide up what you've got and make a list for me to research. I'll be back in a minute."

"Bring Echo with you," Syx responded before Vapre could slip out the door. "He might have some ideas. That little shit is smart as a whip."

Vapre nodded his agreement and hurried off to find his laptop and their mate. Echo may have spent his entire life inside some research facility, but he had a way of looking at things that astounded Vapre. While he and Syx tended to take the more complicated route when it came to solving problems, Echo cut straight to the heart of any issue with barely a blink of an eye. His simplistic way of looking at things was exactly what they needed. It would make their lives a hell of a lot easier if Echo could at least give them some direction.

He hurried up the stairs two at a time, then down the hall to his bedroom to retrieve his laptop before going to find his mate. Once he'd gathered what he needed, he went across the hall and lifted his hand to knock on Echo's closed door. Just before his knuckles met with the wood, Vapre pulled back and cocked his head to the side as he listened to the sounds coming from inside the room. Smirking and shaking his head, he placed his laptop on the carpeted floor and slowly eased open the door.

Sure enough, his eyes landed on three gloriously naked bodies, rolling around and moving together on the bed as pants, moans, and whimpers filled the bedroom. It seemed Hex and Fiero had finished with their cleaning and had come for a little afternoon snack.

As much as he'd love to join them, he had work to do, and not a lot of time to do it. There would always be later, and besides, he understood the need for a little one-on-one time with their mate. He hadn't had near enough of it lately, but he wouldn't begrudge Fiero and Hex. Hell, Vapre had been so busy helping Syx look for Echo's parents, that he hadn't really had any one-on-one time with any of his men. He saw each of them every single day, and yet he missed them like crazy. How messed up was that?

Slipping out of the room, he closed the door quietly, picked up his computer, and headed back down the staircase with a heavy heart. It felt like his lovers were slipping away from him, and he knew it was his own fault. Even when he was present, his mind was absent. There were just so many things to worry about, and his mind felt like it was being pulled in fifty different directions at once.

Pausing outside the office door, he scrubbed a hand over his face and growled quietly. It was no excuse. Everyone else in the house had the same worries he did, yet they weren't pushing him away. No, Vapre needed to pull his head out of his ass and make things right. He just had to figure out how to accomplish it.

"Would you quit thinking so loudly and get your ass in here?" Syx called from inside the office.

Vapre shook himself, a surprised chuckle escaping his parted lips. Pushing open the door, he smiled at Syx and went to plop down on the sofa and power up his laptop. "After all these years, I have no idea why it still surprises me when you do that. You'd think I'd be used to it by now."

"Used to someone listening in to your private thoughts?" Syx looked up at him skeptically. "Is that something you can get used to?"

Vapre just shrugged. “For the most part, I have. It’s just times like this when I have my mind on something else that it catches me off guard.”

“Yeah, and we’re going to talk about those thoughts in your head, but not right now.” Syx stared at him for another minute before returning his attention to his computer. “Just know that you’re wrong.”

Clearing his throat to remove any trace of emotion from his voice, Vapre brought up his search engine, never taking his eyes off the laptop. “What am I looking for?”

“Salamanders,” Syx answered distractedly.

“Huh? Like the little lizards?”

“Legendary salamanders.”

Vapre shrugged and began to type. He was a demon warrior from the Underworld, born from the Phlegethon River. Who was he to argue that something sounded too fantastical?

## Chapter Two

Echo stood on the outside of the gathered circle as a ring of fire erupted around them, cutting them off from the rest of the world.

He'd had this dream twice before. Watching the beautiful woman in the middle of their circle, he knew the words she would speak before her lips began to move. He knew the slow, harsh cadence she would use, the look on her face, the reaction of the men who stood watching her.

Ignoring the Oracle as she began to speak, he studied his men. Like the other times, they weren't looking at him, and he had the feeling they didn't even know he was there. The first time he'd had this dream, he had no idea who the huge men were, but he'd felt drawn to seek them out. When he'd dreamt of the Oracle the second time, he'd felt like he was drowning, that something was pulling him to the depths of some invisible lake and seeking to keep him there forever.

As he stood on the outskirts of the gathering, Echo waited, wondering what the Oracle was trying to tell him this time. Not that it really mattered. This dream always came in riddles, and even the more palpable elements of it were strange and confusing. All he could do was listen and feel, and hope he'd be able to interpret the meaning this time.

"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."

That was him. Echo hadn't understood it at first, and he still didn't know exactly what that meant, but he did know that he was the heart.



He was the one meant to unite them all in the war to come. Yeah, no pressure or anything.

He went back to ignoring the Oracle, watching and waiting for something to happen—some clue as to why he was having the dream again.

“Hades’ fire will rain upon the land. The sky shall split open, screaming in its fury.”

*Here we go*, Echo thought to himself. That was the part he’d been waiting for. The next task set before them. Technically, he supposed it was Fiero’s battle, his test, but Echo had sworn to do all he could to help his lovers. Now, if something would just happen, maybe he could figure out how to do that.

“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.”

They were almost to the end of the prophecy and still nothing had happened. Echo looked across the circle, staring directly at Fiero, but the demon didn’t seem to notice him. He wasn’t staring blankly at the Oracle as the others were, though, and the look on his face made Echo’s heart gallop inside his chest. Fiero appeared afraid, a look that was so out of place on the warrior’s face, it nearly sent Echo into a full panic. If the usually self-assured and fearless Fiero had reason to look like that, then it didn’t bode well for the rest of them.

He tried to move, to go to his lover, but as in all the other dreams, he was trapped on the outside of their circle, unable to move. He called out, knowing it would be useless, but needing to try something. His voice sounded muffled, as if wrapped in wet gauze and stuffed inside a satchel. No way would it carry over the roaring of the flames surrounding them.

The Oracle turned her head fractionally, and without knowing how he understood it, Echo realized she was speaking to Fiero. He couldn’t hear her words any longer, though. That had never happened before, and he didn’t like it. Why show him the dream if she was

going to keep things from him? Why bring him into this limbo when he could do nothing more than watch and listen?

Then her voice sounded inside his head, causing him to jump and his blood to run cold. “Be unafraid and turn away your doubts, or lose that which matters most.”

\* \* \* \*

Coming awake, Echo didn’t even have to wait for the usual disorientation to pass. He was immediately alert and frowning as he sat up in bed and found himself alone. The sun poured in through the window, and his ass ached pleasantly from his afternoon romp with Fiero and Hex. He knew they’d been there when he’d fallen asleep, so where the hell were they now?

He climbed out of bed and went to the door. He needed to find Fiero. Stepping out into the hallway, he traveled three doors down and rapped his knuckles against the door to Fiero’s room.

When he received no answer, he eased the door open and peeked inside, frowning again when he found the room empty. Closing the door, he continued to the stairs and hurried down them, the need to find his lover building and clawing inside him. The dream had left him thoroughly freaked out, and he had questions he needed answered.

He found the living room empty as well, but heard laughter and muffled voices coming from the direction of the kitchen. A wonderful smell wafted on the air, causing his stomach to gurgle and his mouth to water. Damn, he was famished.

Following his nose, he entered the kitchen, smiling softly when he found his men assembled around the table, all laughing and chattering as they dished up their plates.

“Good lord!” Syx exclaimed. “Don’t you own any clothes?”

Echo jerked around, biting his lip and blushing. He’d been in too big of a hurry to find Fiero to bother with getting dressed. “Oops.”

He expected everyone to chuckle, roll their eyes, or make some other kind of smart ass reply. What he didn't expect were the fierce growls that went around the table. That is until he met Mac's eyes.

*Fuck!* He'd completely forgotten about the guests they had staying with them. Mac and Sony were grinning impishly while their mate, Gage, looked like his eyes were going to bug out of his head. Sony elbowed him in the ribs, pulling a grunt from Gage's mouth and shaking him out of his stupor. "Sorry," he murmured to his mate, bending forward and kissing his forehead.

Fiero jumped up from the table and whipped his shirt over his head as he marched over to Echo and shoved it into his hands. "Put it on," he demanded. He stood between Echo and the other men in the room, shielding his body from view as Echo hurried to pull the shirt on over his head and slip his arms through the sleeves.

"Thanks."

Fiero sighed and rolled his eyes as he looped his fingers around the back of Echo's neck and pulled him into a soft kiss. "You need to be more careful. We like Gage, and I for one do not want to have to kill him. Got it?"

Grinning, Echo nodded. "You're cute when you're jealous."

Fiero snorted and brushed his lips over Echo's again. "And you're a brat."

Suddenly remembering the reason he'd showed up naked in the kitchen in the first place, Echo looked into Fiero's eyes and reached forward, placing his hands flat against the warrior's chest. "I need to talk to you," he whispered.

Fiero glanced over his shoulder, then back to Echo. "Just me? Or everyone but Gage and his mates?" he asked quietly.

"Just you," Echo responded. He knew they would eventually need to tell the others about his dream, but he needed to talk to Fiero first and find out what the man knew.

Nodding slowly, Fiero took Echo's hand and led him to the living room where he sat down on the couch, pulling Echo to the cushion beside him. "Okay, what's going on?"

"I had a dream."

This caught Fiero's attention immediately. His eyes narrowed and a scowl pulled at the corners of his lips. "About the Oracle, I'm guessing."

"Yeah, it was the prophecy dream we've all been having, but this one was different. I mean even more different than the other ones. Nothing really happened, but the Oracle spoke directly to me, and you...well you looked really afraid of something."

"I didn't have this dream," Fiero said slowly. "When you dreamed the last time, when it was about Eyce's test, he had the dream as well. Why didn't I have this dream?"

Echo shrugged. As much as he wished he had all the answers, he didn't understand it either. "I mean obviously you weren't sleeping. I just don't understand why I would have the dream without you. Does that make sense?"

"Not in the least." Fiero gave him a crooked smile. "I know what you're saying, but you have to admit that none of this makes much sense." He paused, and his eyes seemed to glaze over as if he were in deep thought. "What exactly did the Oracle say to you?"

The coldness seeped into his bones once more, and Echo shivered. "Something about turning away my doubts, or I would lose what matters most to me." He crawled into Fiero's lap and cuddled against his chest, seeking the man's warmth. "I know what matters most, and I definitely don't want to lose it."

"And what exactly is that, baby?"

"You," Echo whispered. "The others. All of you together are the most important thing in my life. I can't lose you, and I have no idea what she meant. How can I protect you if I don't know what to do?"

Fiero's arms wound around him, holding him tightly as the demon rested his chin on the top of Echo's head. "We'll figure it out, Echo.

No one is going anywhere, and you're not going to lose us. We just have to think."

Sighing heavily, Echo soaked up Fiero's comfort just a moment longer, then pushed himself into a sitting position so he could look into Fiero's eyes. "I guess we need to tell the others now."

"Yeah, we do, baby. I'm glad you trusted me with this, though. I just wish you trusted me like you do Eyce and Hex."

Echo's mouth fell open, and he began shaking his head. "I do trust you. How could you doubt that? I don't play favorites, Fiero. You are all equally important to me, and I know none of you would ever hurt me."

Fiero gave him a tiny half-smile, not looking convinced in the least. Then he patted Echo's hip and jerked his head in the direction of the kitchen. "We need to have a meeting. Syx and Vapre were just about to tell us what they found today."

"Why didn't anyone come get me?" Echo crawled down from Fiero's lap and stood with his hands on his hips. "Are you keeping things from me again?"

Groaning, Fiero pushed to his feet and cuffed Echo in the back of the head. "Stop it. You looked tired, so we decided to let you sleep. I know how rough the last few days have been. We weren't keeping anything from you. I was going to bring you a plate and go over what we talked about as soon as lunch was over."

Echo wrinkled his nose as he felt his cheeks heat. He really needed to stop jumping to conclusions and being such a drama queen. "All right, I'm sorry. I was tired, so thank you for letting me sleep." To his shock and confusion, Fiero thumped him in the back of the head again. "What the hell, Fiero?"

"You're still being a brat. Now, c'mon, we need to talk." He grabbed Echo's wrist and started pulling him toward the kitchen. Then he stopped so abruptly that Echo ran right into his back. It didn't even faze the big man. Fiero spun him around and pushed him toward the stairs again. "Go get dressed. I'll wait."

Echo plucked at the shirt he was wearing as he stared openly at Fiero's bare chest. Okay, he understood the man's point. He didn't want Gage, Mac, or Sony ogling his man either. Tugging the shirt off, he handed it back to Fiero. "You take that. I'll be right back."

Fiero growled, but it was more sexual this time, and Echo felt a shiver run down his spine as he raced out of the room before the man could lunge for him. He was more than happy to postpone their little discussion for another round of hot, sweaty monkey sex, but he knew this was important.

His very interested cock swelled and bobbed between his legs, screaming at him for being an idiot and demanding he drag Fiero back to his room for a little playtime. Shaking his head to clear the lusty thoughts, Echo dressed at top speed, eager to get their impromptu meeting over with so that he could give in to his racing libido.

Gods, he couldn't get enough of his men. They were in the early stages of their relationship when everything was new and exciting, but Echo had a feeling things would only get better with time. As his feelings grew, so did his desire, and he doubted he'd ever be able to tame the passion that burned between them.

Smiling to himself as he rushed back down the stairs to meet Fiero, he had to admit that he hoped that fire never dimmed.

"Ready," he announced, bouncing up beside his lover.

Fiero rolled his eyes and held out his hand. "Well, then let's not keep them waiting. You know how impatient Myst is. He's liable to wet himself wondering what we're doing in here."

Slapping at Fiero's shoulder, Echo giggled. "You're bad."

"Maybe, but it's true." Fiero stopped just inside the doorway and gestured to where Myst was practically vibrating in his seat as he stared at them intently. "See?"

"See what? What's going on? What were guys talking about? How come I don't get to know?"

Echo burst out laughing. Okay, so Fiero had a point. Out of all of his lovers, Myst had to be the most impatient of the lot. He made up

for it enthusiasm, though, so Echo figured that ought to count for something. The man just had a charismatic charm about him that Echo couldn't help but love.

Staring around the room, he met each man's eyes. This was his family. He loved them all, though in different ways, and he'd do whatever it took to keep them together and safe.

## Chapter Three

Fiero resumed his seat at the table and pulled Echo into his lap. He glanced over to where Sony perched in Gage's lap and shook his head. "We need to get more chairs."

"And a bigger table," Hex griped as he nudged Syx's elbow with his own.

"Screw the table and chairs, I wanna know what's going on," Myst demanded. "Echo waltzes in here butt naked, then he drags Fiero off into the other room. I can tell from looking at you two that nothing kinky was going on. Disappointing," Myst shrugged at this, "but it means you were talking about something serious."

"For once, he's right," Hex said around a sigh.

"Yeah, see?" Myst puffed out his chest, then deflated almost instantly. "What do you mean 'for once'?"

Chuckles went around the table, and Fiero joined in, smoothing his hand along Echo's spine to comfort his mate. He didn't know what Echo dreamed, or what it had to do with the prophecy, but he could still feel the tension in the muscles of the man's back and shoulders.

"Echo had a dream."

The laughter cut off immediately, and everyone's attention snapped to Echo. Fiero glared at his lovers when Echo wiggled uncomfortably in his lap from the intense scrutiny.

"Why are you looking at him like that?"

"Because we want to know what the dream was about," Syx said calmly. "We're not judging or placing blame, so calm down. You're overreacting."



Fiero knew it, but that didn't make it any easier to suppress. Damn, this mating thing was hard. Sometimes he worried that he didn't give Echo the attention he needed and deserved. He knew he didn't give off the warm, fuzzy vibes like the others, but he tried his damndest to be what Echo wanted. Then there were times when he felt he was smothering the man with his protective instincts. It was a fine line, and one he'd yet to figure out how to navigate.

Echo's head came to rest on his shoulder, and his small hand caressed Fiero's chest. "I'm fine, love, but thank you," he whispered.

Fiero melted at the endearment. So, maybe this warm, fuzzy thing wasn't so bad. That didn't mean he was going to start waxing poetry or come up with ridiculous nicknames for his lovers, but the cuddling wasn't so bad. He actually enjoyed having Echo wrapped up in his arms where he knew his mate was safe. Yeah, maybe he could do this.

"You're doing just fine," Syx said softly, his eyes shining as he smiled at Fiero. "You don't give yourself enough credit."

"Stay out of my head," Fiero returned, but without any real heat. He'd long ago come to terms with the fact that his thoughts would never be private in Syx's presence. Besides, Syx's praise made him feel pretty damn awesome.

"Okay, so can we get back on track here?" Vapre cleared his throat and sat up straighter in his chair. "Echo had a dream. I'm assuming it was similar to the ones we've all had with the Oracle. Otherwise, I don't see how it would be such a big deal."

Fiero felt Echo nod against his shoulder. "It was the same one with the prophecy, but different."

"Like the ones we had where it felt like we were drowning, and it smelled awful?" Eyce's eyebrows drew together as he spoke. "Is that what you mean?"

"Yes and no." Echo sighed as he sat up in Fiero's lap and leaned forward to rest his elbows on the table. "First of all, Fiero didn't have this dream with me, though he was the only one that seemed respondent. Everyone else was just staring blankly at the Oracle."

Eyce nodded. "That's how it was in my dream."

Echo shook his head. "But Fiero didn't have this dream," he repeated. "He looked scared, and you've all known him a lot longer than I have, but I just can't see him being afraid of anything."

Fiero didn't comment, but he knew Echo was wrong. True, he wasn't afraid of much, but there was one thing that terrified the hell out of him. He didn't know what he would do if something happened to any of his lovers. Not even the threat of returning to the Underworld scared him like the thought of losing one of his men.

"The Oracle said something else," Fiero said, changing the subject. He didn't want to travel any further into his morbid thoughts of death and heartbreak.

Every man in the room looked at Echo expectantly. "What did she tell you, baby?" Hex asked.

Fiero couldn't see Echo's face with the man's back to him, but he remembered the look of fear and desperation on his mate's face when he'd revealed the Oracle's words to him. A similar look must have covered his visage just then because Hex leaned over and cupped Echo's cheek.

"Whatever it is, we'll deal with it. Just tell us," he said quietly.

"She said that I needed to put away my doubts, or I would lose something important." Echo's voice trembled as he spoke, and Fiero had the urge to pull the man back into his arms and keep him there until this mess was over.

"What's important to you?" Eyce asked from the end of the table. His eyes held a knowing look, as though he knew exactly what Echo's answer would be, but needed to hear it spoken aloud.

"You. All of you." The words were whispered, but Echo's voice still cracked twice, and his small body quaked beneath Fiero's hand. "I don't know what she wants from me." He shook his head defiantly, his golden-blond hair swaying across his back. "I'll do it, though, whatever it is. I won't lose you guys."

“No one is going anywhere,” Syx said firmly. “Forget about that part and let’s focus on what it is you doubt.” He lifted an eyebrow in question as he leaned back in his chair and folded his hands over his chest. “So, what is it?”

“I don’t know. I have no idea what she’s talking about.”

“Do you doubt we’ll protect you?”

“No.” Echo shook his head again. “I know you’ll take care of me.”

“Do you doubt that we can win this war?” Eyce asked.

Echo was slower to respond this time, but eventually he shook his head once more. “No. I don’t think it will be easy, but I don’t doubt that we can win.”

Fiero leaned forward, pressing his chest to Echo’s back and whispered in his ear. “Do you doubt how we feel about you?”

Echo didn’t answer. Fiero waited several seconds, giving his mate a chance to think it over, but he still didn’t answer. His suspicions confirmed, Fiero eased back in his seat, his chest tight and his heart heavy. How could Echo not know how he felt about him?

“No,” Echo said, his voice loud and full of conviction, startling Fiero after the long silence. He didn’t say more, and several of the men looked at him in confusion. Everyone except Syx, who smiled a little as his eyes softened.

Fiero would have given anything in that moment to know what Echo was thinking. As it were, he knew he’d have to wait until his mate was ready to tell him. Good thing he was extremely patient.

Fiero snorted, drawing everyone’s attention. Good grief, he hadn’t even been able to *think* that with a straight face. Then Echo turned in his lap, leaning in to place a quick kiss on his lips. “You think too much.”

“What about you?” Onyx asked, drawing Fiero’s attention.

Mac’s eyes widened, and his face paled at being addressed directly by one of the warriors. “Me?” he squeaked. Fiero thought the

little runt was getting used to them. Maybe Onyx had just caught him by surprise.

Onyx softened his features and lowered his voice, speaking gently as he continued. "I meant have you seen anything? Do you know what Echo's dream means?"

Mac shook his head. "I told you it doesn't work that way. I haven't seen anything since The Collector came."

Maybe it was the way Mac's eyes darted around the table, or how the muscles in his forearms bunched as he fidgeted his hands in his lap, but Fiero didn't believe him. "You're lying."

If it were possible, Mac's face paled even further. He pressed his lips together in a thin line until they turned white at the edges and shook his head frantically.

"He doesn't know anything," Sony spoke up. "Leave him alone." He leaned over from Gage's lap and wrapped his arms around Mac's neck, hugging him protectively.

"He does know something," Fiero growled and eased Echo out of his lap. There was a good chance things were about to get ugly, and he didn't want this mate to end up in the crossfire. "Tell me."

"Leave him alone!" Sony shouted while Mac trembled in his arms. "It's not his fault!" He looked over his shoulder at Gage. "Do something."

"And what would you have me do?" Gage asked. "If Mac knows something, we all need to hear it. This is not the time for secrets." Reaching around Sony, Gage brushed his fingers through Mac's mousy brown hair. "Sweetheart, you need to tell us what you saw."

Mac disentangled himself from Sony and looked up at Gage. He stared at him for a long time then finally nodded his head slowly. Turning around, he locked eyes with Fiero, piercing him with his chocolate brown gaze. "Trust is earned, not given freely. You ask too much, and answer too little. Find the balance, or you will fail."

The room went unnaturally silent as everyone stared at Mac in shock. Fiero cleared his throat twice before he found his voice. "That doesn't sound like a vision."

"No." Mac shook his head, his eyebrows drawing together. "That's why I didn't say anything, and why I'm freaking the hell out right now. I just saw a picture of your face, like a photograph almost, then I heard this voice in my head." He took Sony's hand as he continued to stare at Fiero. "Nothing like that has ever happened before. I don't like it."

"Was it a woman's voice in your head?" Echo asked from his new perch on Hex's thigh.

Mac looked shocked, but bobbed his head in affirmation. "Who is she?"

"The Oracle," Fiero, Echo, and the other warriors replied in unison.

"What exactly does that mean?" Eyce asked a moment later.

No one seemed to have an answer. Hell, Fiero didn't even know what it meant. Well, he knew what the trust thing meant, but not how it applied to him. Or he assumed it applied to him. Why else would Mac have seen his image inside his head? Shrugging, he decided just to add it to the ever-growing list of shit to figure out later.

"I've been meaning to ask," Onyx said slowly, shifting in his seat to look at Sony, "what is your power? Or is that rude to ask?"

Sony, Mac, Gage, and Echo all laughed. "Should I show them?" Sony asked Echo.

Echo nodded, a wicked smile covering his face. "Oh, yeah, this is going to be good."

Sony rose from Gage's lap and moved around the table until he stood in the center of the kitchen. "Ready?"

Fiero nodded along with the rest of the men in the room. Then his eyes almost bugged out of his head as Sony began to grow right before his eyes. Within seconds the man towered over them, his head almost brushing the ceiling and his mass nearly tripling. His clothes

shredded, some scraps clinging to his enormous frame, while others fell to the floor in rags.

Fiero's eyes drifted to the impressive cock between the man's massive thighs. He couldn't help it. The thing was big enough to have its own fucking zip code. He suddenly felt very sorry for the man on the receiving end of that monster.

Shifting his eyes to Gage, Fiero frowned at the heated look on the werewolf's face. Everyone else wore similar looks as Fiero—like they'd all been clubbed over the head. Gage and Mac just looked like they wanted to devour Sony right there in the kitchen and damn anyone who wanted to watch.

Sony watched them all for a moment longer, then closed his eyes and groaned as his body slowly shifted back to his much smaller size. Gage stripped his shirt off and tossed it to his mate. "Cover up, babe."

Sony nodded, pulling the oversized shirt over his head, and grinned broadly. "So, that's my power."

"Well, fuck me sideways," Myst breathed.

"Good luck with that," Vapre said around his snicker. "I wouldn't want that beast he calls a dick anywhere near my ass, and especially not sideways."

Sony just smirked at them. "I'd tell you I'd be gentle with you..." he trailed off, his grin stretching wider, "...but I'd be lying."

## **Chapter Four**

Echo tiptoed into Fiero's room, grinning softly when he found the man alone. The moonlight ghosted through the window, dancing over Fiero's naked back, making his smooth skin almost glow. His usual spikey hair looked soft and limp without the customary gel, and Echo's fingers itched to trail through the golden locks.

Though he knew he wouldn't be turned away, Echo had no idea what he was doing here. He'd woken in the middle of the night, alone, cold, and shaking after another dream. Climbing out of bed, he'd eased into the hallway, not sure of where he was going until his feet had brought him right to Fiero's door.

Maybe it was the dream. Maybe it was what Mac had said during lunch. Echo really didn't know, but he felt the pull from Fiero, the need to be close to the warrior.

Moving quietly across the carpeted floor, he slid into bed, careful not to wake his tired lover. It had been well after midnight when Echo had finally admitted defeat and headed off to bed. He'd been the first to go and had no idea how long his men had stayed awake after that.

Easing down to the pillow, Echo barely got his feet under the blanket when Fiero rolled over and his big muscled arms wrapped around Echo, pulling him down to the mattress. Hugging him close, Fiero molded his chest to Echo's back and let out a long, happy sigh.

Echo melted into the embrace, resting his hands over Fiero's arms and smiling like a loon. It warmed him right down to his toes that even in sleep his lover sensed his nearness and was drawn to him like a magnet.

Pulling the blankets up to his chin, Echo snuggled closer, wiggling his ass as he tried to get comfortable. It wasn't an easy task considering Fiero's long, hard cock was currently digging into his back. He wiggled again, trying to maneuver so that the hot length would rest flat between them rather than jabbing him just above his hipbone.

Fiero groaned, his arms tightening around Echo to still him. "Be careful, baby. You're playing with fire." His words came slow and mumbled, heavy with sleep, and sexy as hell.

Echo bit his lips, trying to hold back his moan of pleasure when his cock began to swell, perking up at the sound of his lover's deep voice. He wiggled again, grinding his ass against Fiero's groin, begging without words for the man to touch him.

A breathy sigh escaped Fiero and his soft lips brushed lightly over the side of Echo's neck. "You need me," he whispered confidently. His fingertips skimmed along Echo's stomach, pausing in their downward trek to draw lazy circles around his belly button.

Echo arched into his lover's touch, dropping his head back to Fiero's shoulder and moaning softly. Reaching down to cover Fiero's hand with his own, Echo boldly pushed the warrior's hand lower, directing it where he needed it most. "Please," he breathed.

Instead of wrapping his fingers around Echo's throbbing cock, Fiero lightly brushed his knuckles along the pulsing length, then dipped lower, fondling Echo's balls with a barely-there touch. "Don't rush me," he murmured against the sensitive skin along Echo's shoulder. "Let me enjoy having you to myself."

Echo tried to turn, his lips seeking his lover's, but Fiero held him tight, keeping him immobile as he worked to stoke the flames inside Echo's belly with his hands and mouth. His lips roamed over Echo's shoulders and across his back, while his hand continued its languid exploration of Echo's cock and balls.

"More," Echo whimpered. He loved the things Fiero was doing to him, but he wanted more—craved it, needed it.



Fiero chuckled smugly as his hand ceased its ministrations and drifted up over Echo's hip, then down between their bodies to caress and grope Echo's ass. "So impatient." He rubbed and squeezed the rounded hills of Echo's butt cheek, then his hand moved away, and Echo felt sure the demon was going to spank him.

But nothing happened.

Fiero's lips paused in their assault on Echo's senses for just a heartbeat, then resumed as his hand returned to caress Echo's ass once more. All of his lovers were so careful with him, but Fiero even more so. Echo hadn't been on the receiving end of Fiero's wild side, but he'd heard stories. The idea of being restrained, tied, and bound scared the hell out of him, but maybe he could handle a little spanking.

"You can spank me," he whispered. "I know you want to."

Fiero's movements halted again, and an agonizing moan bubbled up from his chest. "You don't know what you're saying."

Struggling against Fiero's hold until he could turn and face the man, Echo reached up to palm the side of his mate's face. "I know exactly what I'm saying. I may not be ready for the whole whips and handcuffs business, but I want this. You've given me so much. Let me do this for you."

They were quiet for a long time while Fiero searched his eyes in the dim light of the room. Finally, Fiero swallowed loudly and nodded his head just a fraction. "If it's too much, I want you to tell me. I'll never hurt you, baby."

Echo smiled gently and placed a chaste kiss over Fiero's lips. "I know." Fiero pressed on his shoulder, urging to roll to his stomach, and Echo complied without hesitation. Pulling his knees under him, he rose so that he was on all fours, presenting his upturned ass to his lover. "Like this?"

Fiero moaned again, his hand drifting over Echo's ass as he moved to kneel behind him. "You have no idea what this does to me."

He kept up the gentle stroking, even skimming his fingers down Echo's crease while his other hand smoothed along Echo's spine.

Echo's body trembled, and he purred under the skillful touch of his mate. His heart pounded inside his chest, his breaths coming faster, more shallow, as he wiggled and squirmed, begging for what he knew was coming.

A soft swat landed on his left cheek, barely more than a love tap, and Echo frowned. Would Fiero always treat him as though he were made of crystal? Rocking on his knees, he pushed back against the warrior, silently begging for more.

Another swat landed on his ass, a little harder than before, but still nothing more than a light pat. "Fiero," he growled in frustration.

The next smack stole the breath from his lungs as stinging heat spread over the skin where Fiero's hand had landed. Tingles raced along Echo's spine, then back down to pool and burn in his aching balls.

Before he could even catch his breath, Fiero's hand connected with his ass again. Then again. Over and over, he spanked Echo, growling and moaning as he set a steady rhythm that left Echo panting and whimpering.

"You are fucking gorgeous," Fiero mumbled. "Your ass is so sexy right now, all red and scorching hot from my hands."

Echo could hear the possessiveness in Fiero's tone, the satisfaction that the marks on Echo's skin had come from his hands alone. He swatted Echo's ass a few more times, softer at first, then harder than any of the others. Echo cried out at the last one, bowing his back and shuddering from the intense pleasure coursing through his body. His dick ached and throbbed, pulsing between his legs and leaking generous amounts of pre-cum from the slit.

He shivered again, moaning loudly when his cheeks were parted and cool air brushed against his needing entrance. Then a slick finger caressed over his hole, ringing the muscles gently before pushing in to the second knuckle. So lost in his desire, in the overwhelming

sensations that bombarded him, Echo didn't even know when Fiero had moved to retrieve the lube. He didn't much care either. "Please," he whimpered, rocking back and forth as he fucked himself on the thick digit. "More."

Taking him at his word, Fiero inserted a second finger, scissoring them back and forth and twisting his wrist, loosening Echo's clenching hole to receive him. "So tight, so damn hot," Fiero murmured, sliding in a third finger beside the others. "So perfect."

Echo didn't know how much more he could take. Already his sac tightened, his balls pulling up close to his body, lightning bolts of pleasure zipping up his spine so fast it left his head dizzy. "Fuck me," he demanded hoarsely.

"Bossy." Fiero chuckled softly, smacking Echo's ass again and pulling a strangled moan from his parted lips. "Who's in charge here?"

Echo couldn't pull enough air into his lungs to answer, so he said nothing, burying his face into the mattress as he fought to stave off his orgasm. His lack of response earned him another swat, and then Fiero's finger disappeared from his needy ass, quickly replaced by the blunt head of his cock. "Who's in charge?" he repeated.

Still, Echo couldn't answer. His fingers fisted in the sheets, holding on for dear life, afraid he'd break into a thousand pieces when he finally found his release. He'd never been so turned on, so out of control in his life. His heart hammered against his sternum as his blood roared in his ears, and a fine sheen of sweat beaded across his skin.

Fiero spanked him again, a hard, reprimanding smack to his already blazing ass. Then his hand fisted in Echo's hair, pulling his head back on his shoulders as Fiero pushed into Echo's ass in one long, hard stroke. "Who. Is. In. Charge?" He growled as his hips retreated and snapped forward again until he bottomed out, grinding his groin over Echo's heated flesh.

“You!” Echo cried out, loving the rough treatment he was receiving. It wasn’t brutal or callous. Every movement Fiero made was deliberate, dominant, and aimed toward bringing Echo as much pleasure as possible. No one had ever treated him this way, and Echo gloried in the ability to let go and turn himself over to his lover.

Fiero growled in appreciation, pulling on Echo’s hair again while he continued to drive into his ass harder, faster, more demanding with every stroke. “Who do you belong to, Echo?”

“You!” Echo sobbed. He felt his orgasm barreling down on him, and prayed he’d last just another few minutes. He never wanted it to stop. “Harder!”

Releasing the grip on his hair, Fiero’s hands moved to grasp Echo’s hips in a bruising hold, pushing him forward, then jerking back roughly as his hips thrust forward, his thick cock plunging in and out of Echo’s greedy ass. “Who do you belong to?” Fiero asked again.

“You,” Echo choked as the next inward glide nailed his sweet spot and sent stars exploding behind his closed eyelids. “All of you!”

“That’s it, baby. Scream for me. Scream loud enough to wake everyone in the house. Let them know how I make you feel. Do you like how I make you feel, Echo?”

Just when Echo didn’t think he could take anymore, a long finger slid into his ass beside Fiero’s huge cock, stretching him further, and the head of Fiero’s prick pegged his prostate again. “Yes!”

“I know you do. Your ass is strangling my cock, baby. Sucking it right in like it never wants me to leave.” Fiero’s other hand wrapped around the back of Echo’s neck, pushing his face down into the sheets as he continued to ride his ass hard and fast. “Are you gonna come for me, baby? Gonna come on my cock?”

“Fuck!” Echo screamed, his body igniting in flames as pure white-hot pleasure spiked inside his balls, his release rushing up the throbbing length of his cock and bursting from the slit in long, creamy ropes of semen. “Fiero!”

“Love the way you scream my name. Again!” Fiero roared, the sound fierce and primal, loud enough to shake the windows as molten lava filled Echo’s hungry channel, coating his inner walls and causing him to yell out his lover’s name once more.

Echo slumped to the bed, hissing when Fiero’s prick slid from his hole. He curled there, gasping for air and willing his heartbeats to return to a less frantic pace. “Thank you,” he panted. He’d never experienced anything like what Fiero had shown him, but he hoped for a repeat performance, and often.

Fiero dropped beside him on the mattress, gathering Echo into his arms and peppering kisses over his face. “Are you okay? How do you feel?”

“Sleepy,” Echo answered around a yawn. “That was amazing. You wore me out.”

Fiero snorted, his hands touching Echo everywhere as if he couldn’t get close enough to him. “Thank you,” he breathed reverently. His breath caught in his throat, and Echo was sure he would say more, but when the seconds stretched into minutes without any further conversation, he sighed heavily, reaching up with both hands to cradle his mate’s face.

“I know it’s hard. As long as you continue to show me, I don’t need the words.” Then he claimed his lover’s mouth in a toe-curling kiss that left them both panting and moaning once more.

Fiero moved on top of him, never breaking the kiss as his still-hard cock pressed against Echo’s hole, and eased in slowly. Echo thought his heart would leap out of his chest at the tender way Fiero cradled his body, holding him close as he made slow, easy love to him.

He hadn’t lied. He didn’t need verbal acknowledgement of his mate’s feelings. The gentle glide of his lover’s hips, the way Fiero moved inside him, as though he were special and precious, spoke louder than any words ever could.

Echo couldn't hold back, though. He needed Fiero to know, to understand how much he meant to him. Breaking the kiss, Echo trailed his lips up Fiero's jawline to his ear and sucked the lobe into his mouth, nipping it lightly. "I love you," he whispered.

Fiero whimpered, an odd and strangely endearing sound coming from such a large man, and he stilled completely just before Echo felt his lover's seed fill him once again. Winding his arms around Fiero's neck, he pulled the warrior to him, caressing his back as Fiero shuddered in his embrace. "You don't have to say it back, but I needed you to know. I love you, Fiero. So much."

Rolling to his side, Fiero brought Echo with him, crushing him close as his choppy breath fanned over the top of Echo's head. They were quiet for a long time, just enjoying the feel of being wrapped in each other's arms.

Echo knew they needed to get up and shower, but he was too comfortable where he was, held close and surrounded by Fiero's heat. So comfortable in fact that he had almost drifted off to sleep when Fiero's lips pressed to his forehead, and a deep, contented sigh rose up from his lover's chest. "I love you, baby." The words were barely more than a breath on the air, but filled with so much emotion that Echo had to swallow around the lump in his throat.

"I love you, too, big guy. It'll get easier."

"I love you all," Fiero said, his voice still soft and a bit strained. "I just don't know how to tell the rest of them."

"The same way you told me, love. I think you'll be surprised by their response."

Fiero went quiet again, then patted Echo's hip a moment later and rolled from the bed. "Shower," he announced.

Echo groaned. "Too tired."

Chuckling, Fiero scooped him up and carried him from the room, down the hall to the bathroom. "You have cum leaking out of your ass, babe."

“Your fault,” Echo mumbled sleepily as he nuzzled his face into Fiero’s neck.

“Yeah, I know.”

Echo rolled his eyes. The man didn’t have to sound so damn smug about it.

## Chapter Five

“What the fuck happened to you?” Myst was up out of his seat before Fiero had even cleared the kitchen threshold.

Startled, he jerked back as the demon approached him and began patting his chest and stomach. “What? What are you talking about?”

Myst grabbed his face, staring right into his eyes with such intensity, Fiero almost felt the need to look away. One hand left his jaw, moving up to grip a handful of his blond hair and tugging it lightly. “Tell me,” he demanded.

Fiero growled, pushing the man away from him and striding to the cabinet to retrieve a coffee mug. “Tell you what? What the hell has gotten into you?”

“What’s all the growling about?” Vapre yawned as he padded into the kitchen wearing nothing but a pair of loose-fitting boxers. “It’s too early in the morning for this shit, so cut it out.”

Fiero couldn’t agree more. He was happier than he’d ever been, and he didn’t need Myst ruining his good mood. He poured a cup of coffee, inhaled the rich aroma, then tilted the mug to his lips, sighing at the smooth, bold taste.

“Where is everyone?” Vapre nudged Fiero out of the way, reaching into the cabinet for his own coffee mug. “Thank you for making the coffee by the way,” he tossed over his shoulder to Myst.

Myst didn’t answer. He sat back down at the table, snatched up a piece of toast and bit into it violently. Apparently he wasn’t over his little snit yet. Shrugging, Fiero started to move around Vapre in the search for something to eat, but the man stopped him with a hand to the middle of his chest. “How...”



Fiero's eyebrows drew together, and he batted the man's hand away from him. "What is wrong with everyone today?"

"Your eyes, man." Vapre removed his hand, but wouldn't let Fiero pass.

"What about them?" Fiero figured they were a little bloodshot considering his lack of sleep. Remembering the reason for his current state of exhaustion, he smiled softly, his body heating and his dick twitching inside his sweatpants.

"They're different."

Well, that was clear as mud. "Could you be a little less vague?" Fiero was running on fumes at the moment, and he didn't have the patience for this cryptic bullshit.

Ripping the cord from the outlet, Vapre snatched up the chrome toaster and shoved it in front of Fiero's face. "Look."

Fiero almost dropped his cup of coffee, his legs shaking and his knees going weak as he stared at his reflection. Reaching up hesitantly, he patted the skin around his eyes with his fingertips. No longer the swirling mass of infinite colors, his iris appeared to be a soft gold, a shade lighter than amber, and they practically glowed in the overhead light. "What happened to me?"

"That's what I want to know!" Myst threw his hands up in exasperation then crammed an entire piece of toast into his mouth. "First Eyce," he managed to mumble around his mouthful, "then you, and no one will tell me a damn thing." Crossing his arms over his chest, he slumped back in his chair, looking like an overgrown, sulking toddler.

"I think I might know," Fiero answered quietly.

"But you're not going to tell me are you?" Myst glared at him, and Fiero couldn't help but chuckle as he shook his head.

"Nope. You'll find out eventually." He didn't fully understand the significance of his and Eyce's sudden change of eye color, but he knew exactly what had brought about the change. It wasn't something he could explain to the warrior, though, just as Eyce couldn't explain

it to him. The lightness in his heart, the unadulterated joy that filled him couldn't be expressed in words. It was something each man would have to discover on his own.

Knowing their little mate, Fiero had no doubt that his lovers would be finding out soon enough. Echo just had a way of bringing out the best in all of them, and forcing them to examine things they'd rather keep locked away.

Fiero would forever be grateful to his mate. He'd never pictured himself as the kind and gentle sort, but he wanted to be those things for Echo—be everything the man desired and needed from a lover.

Looking back at his reflection in the toaster, he grinned hugely as he ran his fingertips under his eyes once more.

Love looked damn good on him.

\* \* \* \*

“Okay, gentlemen, gather 'round.” Vapre sat on the middle cushion of the sofa with his laptop propped open in front of him on the coffee table. “So, here's what we've found.”

“We've narrowed it down to about four possibilities,” Syx said, taking up where Vapre had left off. “And not a damn one of them make sense.”

Vapre nodded in agreement. They'd found several probable causes of fire, some natural, and some a bit more fantastical. Echo plopped down beside him, snuggling against his side, and Vapre wrapped an arm around his mate's shoulder, strangely calmed by the man's presence. Echo just seemed to have that effect on all of them.

“Okay, let's start with the most likely then work our way backward,” Echo suggested before leaning up to kiss the underside of Vapre's jaw.

“Well, I don't know how likely any of them are, but we'll start with the natural sources first.” It took everything in him not to pull his mate into his arms and kiss the breath out of him. Sharing a mate

between the seven of them left little time for one-on-one sessions with Echo, and Vapre cherished every second he got with the man.

Not that he was jealous. He cared about each of his lovers equally, and often wished he had more alone time with each of them as well. Maybe that's something they could work on when they'd gotten themselves out of this mess.

Syx cleared his throat, drawing Vapre out of his thoughts and smirked. "It's a great idea, but we need to focus here."

"Right." Vapre dipped his head in affirmation and used the wireless mouse to open one of the windows he'd pulled up in the Internet browser. "Okay, first we have volcano eruptions."

"Is that likely?" Mac piped up from his position on the floor where he was cuddled with his mates. "Are there even volcanoes in Montana?"

"No active ones," Vapre replied. "The last volcanic eruption happened sometime between thirty and a hundred million years ago. So, no, it's not very likely that it would happen now."

"But, this is Hades we're talking about," Hex added. "Anything is possible."

"True." Vapre nodded again as he opened the next window. "Next we have lightning-caused forest fires. This one seems the most logical, but it doesn't really fit."

"Why not?" Echo sat up a little straighter and tilted his head to the side. "That seems the most plausible."

"Exactly." Vapre chuckled at the confusion on Echo's face. His cute button nose wrinkled, and his blond eyebrows drew together. He looked adorable. "Remember who we're dealing with here. Put aside all aspects of logical and rational. Just because we're in the Top World, doesn't mean everything we face is going to have a scientific explanation. I think the kappas are proof of that, and if I was guessing, I'd say the other tests will come from similar occurrences."

“Okay.” Echo nodded slowly as he chewed on his bottom lip. “Just out of curiosity, though, why were you so quick to dismiss the lightning idea?”

“Zeus controls the sky, love,” Eyce answered from the love seat where he lounged against Fiero. “Hades and Ares aren’t the only gods, ya know.”

Echo’s mouth formed a little *O*, and his eyes rounded until it was almost comical. “I hadn’t thought of that. Do you think we need to worry about any of the other gods?”

Vapre shrugged. “I don’t think Zeus or Poseidon will get involved, and they’re the main ones we should be concerned about. There are a few lesser gods that aren’t exactly human-friendly, but we’ll worry about that if the problem presents itself.”

“Okay, so what’s next?” Myst asked.

“Well, after deciding that natural events were unlikely, we moved into mythological creatures of fire.”

“Make sense.” Myst nodded and looked at him expectantly, waiting for him to give them all the answers.

Vapre didn’t glory in being the center of attention. He didn’t know how Hex had done it all these years. They all turned to him for answers, just as everyone now looked to Vapre. His heart felt heavy and his chest tightened at the thought of letting them down.

“Well, the first I think would be obvious to everyone.”

“Dragons,” Echo said firmly.

Vapre beamed at him. “Exactly.” He leaned over and kissed Echo’s forehead. “Smart and sexy, I love it.”

“I see your point, but I don’t think Hades is going to unleash a dragon in the Top World. As much as we don’t want the other Olympians involved, I assume Hades will want the interference even less.” Hex crossed his arms over his chest and leaned back against the wall with a slight frown on his face. “Setting a dragon loose in Montana would cause widespread panic, and the other gods would be forced to take action.”

Vapre turned his wide smile on his leader and lover. “Two smart and sexy men, I’m diggin’ it.”

Hex snorted and rolled his eyes as he twirled his hand. “Go on.”

“Do you really need me to stroke your ego more?” Vapre teased with a wicked gleam in his eye.

Groping his flaccid cock through his jeans, Hex leered at him. “I have something you can stroke.”

“Guys!” Echo huffed and slapped at Vapre’s chest. “Can you put your dicks away for five minutes and focus, please?”

Vapre cleared his throat to hide his chuckle of amusement. “Right, so the next one we have is fire salamanders.”

“Lizards?” Echo laughed. “Seriously?”

“Not just lizards, baby.” Vapre opened the window on the computer and pointed at the screen. “They’re not the cute little lizards like you find under rotting logs and such. They’re much bigger, and bring fire with them wherever they venture.”

“I know it sounds completely ridiculous,” Syx began.

“Then it’s perfect,” Echo interrupted. “Find me more information on these salamanders. Whatever you can find on the web added to your personal knowledge of them.” He pushed up from the couch and stretched. “Well, what are you looking at? Make it snappy.”

Vapre smiled indulgently and shook his head. Damn, the little man was a pistol.

“Hey, just who the hell is in charge here?” Hex grumped as he stood straight and took a step forward.

Echo shared a look with Fiero that Vapre couldn’t decipher, then started laughing. Vapre scratched his head in confusion. What had that been about? Before he could ask, Echo turned to Hex and shrugged. “I’ll let you guys work that out amongst yourselves. Until you figure out, let’s just do what I say. It’ll make your lives easier, I promise.” He winked like the little imp he was and blew a kiss at Hex before he sashayed out of the room.

Vapre watched him leave, his eyes zeroing in on Echo's wiggling ass, then turned his attention to Fiero, raising an eyebrow in question.

Fiero just smirked and shook his head. "Not gonna happen. You'll get nothing from me."

Vapre looked at Eyce.

Eyce shook his head as well. "All in good time, man. All in good time."

## Chapter Six

“Someone’s coming,” Mac announced that night as they gathered in the living room to watch a movie.

Echo untangled himself from his mates where they were all piled on the floor together, and sat up to look at Mac. “Who’s coming?”

“I...I don’t know.” His eyebrows drew together, and he frowned. “I can’t see who it is. It’s like something is blocking it.”

“Is that normal?” Syx asked, rolling to his side to look up at Mac as well.

“No. Not at all.” Mac shrugged, but looked uncomfortable. “Nothing has been the same since I arrived here, though. I honestly don’t even know what constitutes as normal anymore.”

Syx nodded sympathetically and rose to his feet. “Fair enough.” He held a hand out for Echo, helping him up, then motioned for everyone to join them. “Can you at least tell us if it’s friend or foe?”

Mac seemed to think it over for a minute, his nose crinkling as he concentrated on whatever he was seeing in his mind. “Friend, I think, but I can’t be positive. I’m not getting any creepy vibes, though.”

“Fiero. Eyce. Take Echo upstairs just in case,” Hex commanded.

Echo rolled his eyes. When were they going to learn that he was stronger than all of them? “I’m not going anywhere, so just forget about it.”

“Echo,” Hex growled.

Yeah, Echo got it. He understood his mates’ need to keep him safe, but they needed to get over their superiority complex and let Echo help. “According to the Oracle, and *you*,” he waved a hand around to encompass all of his men, “I’m the secret weapon in this

war. It's going to be damn hard for me to fight if you keep me locked upstairs every time there is the slightest hint of danger."

"He's right."

Echo spun around and stared at Fiero in shock. Then a huge smile spread over his face, and he blew a kiss to his lover. "That's why I like you best."

Shouts of "Hey!" chorused around their little circle. Echo smirked and shook his head as he went to stand beside Fiero. "Until the rest of you start treating me as an equal, he's my favorite."

Oh, the pouts on his lovers' faces were adorable. Echo didn't really mean it. He loved them all, but if this would get them to pull their heads out of their asses, then he couldn't feel guilty about it. They needed him, but their protectiveness clouded their judgment.

"Okay, I see your point," Eyce mumbled. He came to stand on Echo's other side and reached down to take his hand. "I'm sorry I doubted you."

Echo smiled and squeezed his mate's hand. "Forgiven, and you get to be my favorite, too."

"Hey!" Myst raced over and stood in front of Echo. "I give. You rock, baby."

Giggling, Echo nodded his head. "Favorite."

Myst turned his head and stuck his tongue out at the others before moving to stand beside Fiero.

"Anyone else?" Echo asked with a raised eyebrows.

"I get it, and I'm sorry," Onyx mumbled, stepping forward to join their ranks.

"Same here," Vapre said with a nod and went to stand beside Eyce.

"Fuck!" Syx growled. "Fine!" And he, too, joined them.

"Well, that was shitty, but I'll take it." Echo winked and made kissy faces at the demon. "Favorite, favorite, favorite."

Everyone stared at Hex.



“No.” Hex crossed his arms over his chest and shook his head defiantly. “Your powers may be stronger than ours, but only when you syphon from us. I won’t risk it, and you’re not budging me on this.” He pointed toward the staircase. “Go.”

“Oh, fuck you,” Echo returned in exasperation. “I’m not a child or a goddamn dog. I’m not leaving, so deal with it.” Ignoring Hex’s growl, he turned to Mac. “How long?”

“Any minute,” his friend answered immediately. “There’s at least two, maybe three coming through the woods.” He pointed toward the front door, indicating from which direction their visitors would be arriving.

Everyone moved over to the front windows, Hex stalking past Echo without even glancing at him. Echo started to say something catty, but Fiero squeezed his hand and shook his head fractionally. He pulled Echo further away from the others and cupped his face in both hands.

“Don’t be too hard on him. He’s been making decisions, taking care of us, and thinking in terms of the worst possible outcome, for thousands of years. He can’t just change that overnight. He doesn’t mean it the way it sounds, and he’s only doing what he thinks is best for you. Just give him a little more time, okay? The others, too. They’ll come around.”

Echo stared into Fiero’s honey-gold gaze and felt the tears gather in the corner of his eyes. Blinking rapidly to dispel them, he nodded slowly. “You really do love them,” he whispered.

“I do,” Fiero agreed quietly. “And I love you.” Leaning down, he brushed his lips over Echo’s. “We have to stick together, baby. There can’t be any animosity between us. It’s literally us against the world.”

“I love you, too. I’ll try to be more patient with Hex, but I want to help. This is my fight as much as it is yours.”

“They’re here,” Myst called over his shoulder. “Two of them, and they look like they’ve been rode hard and put up wet, not to mention scared out of their minds.”

Echo hurried over to the window, squeezing in beside Vapre to peer out into the night. "I don't know them. I thought it might be some of the residents from the lab, but I've never seen those guys before."

"I can't hear anything," Syx said with a frown.

"Let them in!" Mac shouted as he jumped up from the sofa and sprinted toward the door. "Hurry!"

Everyone stared at him as though he'd grown a third eye and sprouted wings. "We don't know who they are," Hex argued. "It could be dangerous."

"Hex, look at them," Myst said quietly. "They're no bigger than Echo, Mac, or Sony. "What could they possibly do to us?"

"Open the door!" Mac screamed as he tried to push past Hex.

Echo didn't know what the hell Mac was seeing, but he trusted his friend. "Open the door."

Loud screams sounded from outside, and Echo whipped around, his heart seizing in his chest. The two men stood frozen in fear as a huge black wolf crept out from the tree line, his eyes glowing yellow in the moonlight, and his lips pulled back over gleaming, white fangs. "Hurry!" he yelled.

"Oh, shit," Vapre breathed as he shoved Hex out of the way and ripped open the door, bounding out into the night at a dead run. Eyce and Myst were quick on his heels, darting through the door after him and racing across the front lawn.

Echo looked up at Fiero, his eyes wide and pleading. "Please, let me help them."

To his surprise, Fiero didn't argue. Grabbing Echo's hand, he pulled him out onto the front porch and down the steps, never letting go of his hand as they ran toward the others.

Echo let Fiero lead him while he concentrated on pulling as much power from his mate as he could. Vapre, Eyce, and Myst had just reached the two terrified men when the wolf charged, flying across the frozen ground and growling viciously at them.

Stopping in his tracks, Echo jerked his hand out of Fiero's and gathered his power, working frantically to ignite the flames he could feel dancing inside his body. "Fuck!"

Eyce had one man in his arms, Vapre the other, running them toward the house as Myst stood his ground, facing down the snarling beast. Echo assumed he was trying to freeze the wolf in place, but it wasn't working. The animal continued toward him, bounding across the grass at full speed.

Instead of being terrified, Echo got pissed. No one, man or beast, threatened his man. Letting the rage consume him, he stoked the flames until fire erupted from his fingertips. Gathering and building, he formed the flames into a large ball, growling deep in his chest as he launched it at the wolf.

The fireball caught the beast in its right flank, eliciting a loud yelp and forcing him to stumble before falling to the ground and disappearing in a cloud of black smoke.

"What the..." Echo trailed off, his eyes widening as his heart galloped inside his chest. That wasn't supposed to happen. He didn't know exactly what he'd expected, but the damn thing just poofing out of existence sure as hell wasn't it!

"Echo, let's go." Fiero took his hand and tugged him toward the house.

Echo let the man drag him along, still looking over his shoulder at the empty space where the wolf had been. "What happened?" he asked when they'd climbed the steps to the front porch and stepped inside the living room. "What was that?"

"Ares," Hex growled, pulling Echo to him and crushing him against his chest. "You were amazing, baby. I'm sorry I doubted you."

Echo pushed against his lover's rock-hard chest until he could look up at him. "Did you just say that was Ares?"

"Yes," several voices answered him at the same time.

He started to ask another question until he noticed that Eyce still held the man he'd rescued cradled in his arms. The little guy curled against Eyce's chest, clinging to his shirt and looking up at him as though he'd hung the moon and stars.

A purely possessive growl burst from Echo's mouth, and his upper lip curled over his teeth. "Who the fuck are you?" he snarled.

The man jerked his head around, staring at Echo with shock and a little bit of fear. His lips moved soundlessly for a moment before he curled back against Eyce, burying his face in the warrior's neck.

*Mine!* Echo leapt for the stranger, but Hex's big arm caught him around the waist, lifting him off his feet as he chuckled.

"Whoa there, hellcat."

The man in Eyce's arm pressed closer to him, wrapping his arms around Eyce's neck and nuzzling and licking at his throat. Echo roared, kicking and flailing as he tried to claw his way out of Hex's embrace and get to the fucker that was feeling up his man. Then, Eyce would get his next for not putting a stop to it.

Realizing his attempts to free himself were fruitless, Echo threw his hands out in front of him, grinning evilly when flames erupted from his fingertips once more. "Mine," Echo said icily.

"Fiero!" Hex yelled.

Fiero was in front of Echo immediately, stroking his face and peppering kisses on his brow. "It's okay, baby. It's not what you think. Calm down and trust me. Okay? Just trust me. Have I ever lied to you?"

But Echo wasn't listening. His eyes were locked over Fiero's shoulder, glaring daggers at the bastard in Eyce's arms. "I won't kill him," he bargained. "I'll just maim him a lit—" His words cut off abruptly and blinding rage filled him as he watched the man open his mouth and sink his canines into Eyce's neck.

The son of a bitch dared to claim *his* mate? Heartache seeped into his fury, his chest aching that Eyce would allow such a thing to

happen. Why was no one stopping this? They didn't even look concerned!

Emotions swamped him and before he knew it, his entire body burst into flames. Hex cried out, dropping him to the floor, but Echo barely even noticed. His only thought, his only reason for breathing at that moment was to destroy the man who'd thought to take something from him.

"Echo!" Fiero shouted, grabbing Echo's upper arms and shaking him. "Baby, stop it! It's not what you think!"

"Eyce, enough. Put him down," Hex called tightly.

The brunette lifted his mouth from Eyce's neck and licked his lips. "Thank you," he whispered.

Echo screamed, a high pitched scream born of agony and boiling rage. "I lied," he hissed. "I'm going to kill him."

Eyce put the man on his feet immediately, and pushed past him without a word as he hurried over to Echo. He looked like he wanted to touch him, but with fire still dancing along his skin, there was no way he could without burning himself.

Echo didn't want the cheating bastard to touch him anyway. "I hate you," he whispered. "How could you do that to me?"

Eyce looked confused for a moment, and then his eyes rounded in comprehension. "Echo, baby, he didn't claim me. I'm not going anywhere."

This finally gave Echo pause. If the asshole hadn't claimed Eyce, then why had he been sucking on the demon's neck? "Tell me," he demanded.

"Can we put out the bonfire first?"

"No." Echo shook his head firmly. "Tell me, now."

Before anyone could speak, Fiero yanked him forward, covering his mouth with his own and thrusting his tongue through Echo's lips. The kiss was passionate, possessive, earth-shattering, and it rocked Echo right down to his core. When Fiero finally pulled away, Echo

panted for breath, glaring at his lover when he realized the flames had extinguished from his body.

He didn't even have time to catch his breath before he was lifted into Eyce's arms, and the warrior crushed their mouths together in a kiss that bordered on desperate. When Eyce broke the kiss, he buried his face in Echo's neck, his large frame shaking as his arms tightened around Echo's back like steel bands. "I love you. I love you," he chanted over and over.

Echo still didn't know what was going on, but most of his anger had drained away, and he suddenly felt ashamed at his behavior. "I love you, too," he whispered, combing his fingers through Eyce's hair. "I'm sorry. I didn't mean those hateful things I said." He kissed the side of Eyce's head and sighed. "Please tell me what just happened, because I still really want to hurt him."

The brunette that had been chewing at Eyce's throat rolled his eyes and snorted. "I just took a little nip. I don't know what the bloody big deal is. No pun intended."

"You're not helping," Vapre growled from beside him.

"A nip?" Echo's eyebrows disappeared into his hairline. "Like...I mean...you are..."

The guy nodded at him and smiled, showing off a set of pointy fangs. "A vampire."

## Chapter Seven

“Aren’t you kind of small for a vampire?” Echo asked from Eyce’s arms. So many strange and unbelievable things had happened to him in the past several weeks he didn’t even blink an eye at the fact that the man *was* a vampire. He just always pictured them bigger, more like his demons.

“Aren’t you kind of small for a human?” The vampire shot back.

Echo wrinkled his nose, but nodded. He hated that he found the guy’s English accent cute as hell. “Touché.”

“You’re really an honest to goodness vampire?” Sony asked the other stranger in the room as he stared at him in awe.

A bit taller than his companion, but leaner in the hips, the redhead smiled and nodded. “Sure are, mate.”

“Not to be rude, but who the hell are you?” Echo shrugged when Eyce lifted an eyebrow at him. Okay, so he meant to be a little rude. He was still pissed about the bloodsucker chomping away at his mate’s neck like it was a late-night snack.

“The name is Syn.” The dark-haired vampire gave a regal bow. “And this is Jinx,” he said as he waved a hand toward the other man.

“Wow, your parents really didn’t like you.” Myst snorted and shook his head.

“And that’s putting it mildly,” Jinx mumbled.

“So, you’re brothers?” Sony asked. He looked completely enraptured with the pair.

“No.” Jinx shook his head. “Our mums were best of friends, grew up together and all, but we’re not blood kin.”

“Grew up?” Vapre scoffed. “You look like babies.”

Echo glared at the demon. The vampires didn't look any younger than he did. Then again, compared to the thousands of years his warriors had lived, he supposed his own twenty-two years would seem fairly insignificant to them.

"We are over two hundred years old," Syn growled. Then he sighed and shook his head. "So, true, I guess we're not much more than babes."

"Can I see your fangs?" Mac blurted, then clamped his lips together and blushed to the tips of his ears.

Jinx chuckled and opened his mouth to show off his pointy canines. "Good?"

Mac nodded dazedly. "You really are a vampire," he breathed. "Are you allergic to the sun, and garlic, and holy water, and all that other stuff?"

"Holy water is just water," Syn answered. "I love garlic." He sighed and pushed a hand through his mousy hair. "The sun stuff is true, though, we don't burst into flames like the stories say." He rolled his eyes at this before continuing. "It's more like roasting a hotdog on a campfire, and it bloody hurts like hell."

"Okay, so what are you doing here, and why were you chomping on my mate's neck?" Echo wiggled out of Eyce's arms and held his hand out, his eyes never leaving Syn's.

It took Eyce a minute to catch on, but when he figured out what Echo was waiting for, he quickly stripped his shirt off and handed it to him. "There is a lot of fucking nakedness in this house."

"Well, how else are you supposed to fuck if you're not naked?" Myst waggled his eyebrows, then grunted when Onyx's elbow caught him in the ribs. "Right," he gasped, rubbing at his side. "Not the time."

Echo ignored them, pulling the cotton T-shirt over his head and remaining focused on Syn. "I'm waiting."

"Well, I honestly don't know why we're here." He looked over his shoulder at Jinx. "Why are we here?"



"I had a dream about some loony blond lady, surrounded by seven men and a wall of fire," Jinx answered. "There was a loud thudding noise throughout the dream, like the sound of a beating heart." He pointed at Echo and cocked his head to the side. "You told us to come."

"Me? I thought you said there were only seven guys in the dream?"

"No, I said the woman was surrounded by seven men." He looked around the room, meeting each of the demon's eyes. "These seven men. You," his eyes focused back on Echo, "were standing outside the circle, and you called to us for help."

"So, you just up and left in the middle of the night without even packing a bag because you had a dream?" Echo scoffed, but it sounded damn close to how he'd come to arrive at the warrior's home.

"Well, there was a bit of urgency considering we woke up to our house engulfed in flames. Didn't have anywhere else to go, did we? Why not seek you out?"

"But how did you know where to find us? How long have you been traveling?"

Jinx frowned, his brow forming a shallow V, and jerked his head toward the other vampire. "He led us."

"Well, I think it was the witchy woman in the dream that led us. I just followed." Syn shrugged as though they were making a big deal out of nothing. "We had the same dream at the same time, our house practically blew up, and I got a woman in my head telling me I need to go somewhere. Don't know about you, mate, but I'm going to listen. Besides," Syn dipped his head at Echo, "here you are."

Echo rubbed at the back of his neck and sighed. It made sense—well, as much sense as anything else. "So, snacking on my mate's neck?"

"Right sorry about that, I am, but it's been a long road to find you. We caught a few animals along the way, but it's damn cold here.

Most the beasties are in hiding for the winter, and their blood doesn't keep us for long anyway. Your mate was kind enough to allow me a little sip to sate the burn."

"And him?" Echo pointed to Jinx.

"I'm fine," Jinx responded immediately, waving away Echo's concern.

"You need to drink," Syn admonished his friend.

"Does it hurt?"

Jinx shrugged. "It's not unbearable."

"Oh, for the love of gods, someone feed the man." Echo huffed and crossed his arms over his chest. He didn't like it, but what was he going to do? Let the man starve to death? Jinx was a vampire. Vampires drank blood. One plus one equaled two.

"I'll do it." Gage rose from the sofa, kissing each of his mates on the forehead before walking over to Jinx and holding out his arm. "Wrist only."

Jinx hesitated, but Echo could see the longing in the man's eyes. Then he gently wrapped his fingers around Gage's forearm and brought the werewolf's wrist to his mouth, sinking his fangs through the flesh as easily as a hot knife through butter.

Echo watched Mac and Sony for their reactions, but the two looked pleased as punch that a vampire was biting their mate. Rolling his eyes, Echo waited for Jinx to finish and offer his thanks before addressing the newcomers. "We're going to have to figure something else out, because I really don't like you using my mates as chew toys. When will you need to feed again?"

"Tomorrow or the next day," Syn replied. "We didn't take much, not nearly what we needed."

"Syx. Vapre."

"We're on it," Syx responded immediately, leading the way down the hall toward the office with Vapre right behind him.

“You’re awful bossy, mate.” Syn smirked and lifted his eyebrows before pointing over Echo’s shoulder to Hex. “I thought he was the alpha.”

Hex groaned as he stepped forward and wrapped an arm around Echo’s waist. “I thought so, too, but my mate was kind enough to inform me of how wrong I was.” Echo felt the man’s massive shoulders lift in a shrug. “Now, I’m just here for my looks.”

Snorting, Echo bumped Hex with his hip. “Hex calls most of the shots, but if I feel strongly about something, I don’t have a problem speaking my mind. This handsome guy you were chewing on is Eyce.” Echo went around the room introducing his lovers. “The two that left were Syx and Vapre. They all belong to me,” he said firmly, then gestured toward the threesome on the sofa. “And these are our friends, Gage, Mac, and Sony.”

“The sun will be up in a couple of hours, so let’s get you guys fed, bathed, and set up in the basement. It’s a little drafty, but the only place you’ll be safe from the sunlight.”

“We’d appreciate that.” Jinx nodded respectfully. “Thank you.”

“Speaking of the sun.” Gage rose from the sofa again and fidgeted nervously. “We have another issue.”

“The full moon,” Hex muttered under his breath. “Tomorrow night?”

Gage nodded.

“We’ll deal with it.”

“There’s supposed to be a storm moving in tomorrow,” Fiero said, speaking for the first time since Echo’s little episode.

Hex groaned and rubbed at his temples. “Okay, okay, I’ll figure something out.”

“Wait!” Echo held his hands up. “Why is this a problem? Are you not sentient when you shift?” Granted, he didn’t know a damn thing about werewolves, but his demons still maintained their intelligence and memories when they shifted. They looked a lot different, a little creepy, but that was the only change.

“Yes and no,” Gage answered. “I have some sense of who I am, and I will recognize my mates. I can’t say the same for the rest of you. I’m sorry.”

“So, what do you normally do on the full moon?”

“I lock myself in the basement.”

“And now we have vampires in the basement.” Echo groaned. Why couldn’t things just be easy? “Maybe we could lock you in another room?”

Gage shook his head quickly. “No. I was always alone when I shifted. I won’t risk hurting anyone.”

“You said you’d recognize your mates, right?” The thread of an idea drifted through Echo’s head. “I think I have a plan.”

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“Are you sure about this? It seems kind of mean, not to mention dangerous.” Fiero rubbed the back of his neck as he address Hex.

“It’s the best plan we have. We’ll stand guard and make sure everything is okay before we leave them for the night.”

“I don’t like this,” Gage said as he climbed under the covers on the big king-size bed.

Fiero didn’t like it either. The idea of having a werewolf loose in the house with his mate during the full moon did not sit well with him. They had no guarantees Echo’s plan would work, but as Hex had pointed out, there weren’t any other options.

The snow had blown in sometime after lunch, dumping a foot of the white, fluffy mess on northern Montana within hours. As dusk approached, the storm raged, showing no signs of retreat. Their resident vampires were still sleeping soundly in the basement, and Fiero and Hex waited for the full moon to rise so they could subdue and bind a possessive werewolf...while his mates were in the room.

Yeah, it was a fucking peachy day.

“The sun has almost set,” Gage said tightly.

Fiero peered out the window, a look of skepticism covering his face. "How can you tell? It's been dark all damn day."

"I can feel it. Another couple of minutes or so." Gage's breathing was coming more rapidly, and he groaned in what sounded like pain as he threw his head back on his shoulders, the cords in his neck flexing and straining.

"Are you okay?" Sony whispered, crawling across the bed to kneel in front of his lover. "Does it hurt a lot?"

Gage looked like he wanted to answer, but couldn't. His body began to transform before their eyes, growing in mass and height and sprouting dark brown fur over the majority of his body. His nose and mouth elongated into a strange-looking muzzle, part human, part lupine, and his irises turned a vibrant yellow, bleeding out to the corners to cover the whites.

The change was complete within minutes, and the enormous werewolf stared back at Fiero, his upper lip curling over his canines as saliva dripped from his mouth and ran down his chest. The beast snarled, taking a threatening step toward him, but Fiero stood his ground. He'd faced much worse in his lifetime, but he didn't relish in the thought of hurting a friend.

"Gage?" Mac's little fingers wrapped around the monster's wrist and tugged lightly. "Hey big guy, you in there?"

Gage turned his attention to his smallest mate, and his entire body softened as he mewed softly.

"You're you, but not." Sony frowned at his convoluted statement, then crawled across the bed to pat Gage's chest. "You're really big."

Gage rumbled, his eyelids drifting closed as his mates lavished attention on him. Fiero understood how the man felt. He loved nothing more than when Echo petted and stroked him. While he craved the touch from each of his lovers, something about Echo soothed like nothing else could.

"Do you think it's safe to leave them?" Hex asked out of the corner of his mouth.

Gage's head snapped up, and he roared at them, prowling closer and gathering his mates behind him protectively.

"Go," Sony said, flicking his wrist to shoo them away. "We've got this." He wrapped both hands around Gage's hairy forearm and pulled him toward the bed. "C'mon, babe."

"Are you sure?" Fiero would never forgive himself if anything happened to the men.

Mac giggled and rolled his eyes. "He loves us. He's not going to hurt me or Sony." Shifting his eyes sideways, he smirked at his lover. "Isn't that right, big guy?"

Gage rumbled again, rubbing his cheek against the top of Mac's head. Mac giggled again and swatted at Gage's chest. "You can leave now," he called over his shoulder without even looking at them. "Besides, Sony can handle him."

Fiero hadn't even thought of that. Sony was bigger than any of them when he unleashed his power. "How long can you hold that form?"

Sony shrugged. "Not long. It's really draining, but I should be able to maintain long enough to subdue our big, bad wolf and call for help." He laughed when Gage picked him up and started rubbing his face all over Sony's chest. "I don't think we need to worry about that, though."

Fiero looked at Hex and shrugged. The little runts had Gage practically exposing his belly and panting to be petted. Hex shrugged as well, and jerked his head toward the exit. "Lock the door and call if you need us." Then he led the way out of the room, holding the door for Fiero before shutting it firmly behind them. "That was damn weird."

"Never a dull moment," Fiero agreed. He sighed and scrubbed a hand over his face. "Where's Eyce?"

"Still kissing Echo's ass, if I had to guess." Hex chuckled, but Fiero didn't find much humor in the situation.

“Good. I can’t believe he did that shit.” Anger and jealousy bubbled inside of him. He understood the vampires need to feed, but Eyce should have consulted the rest of them. They should have all made the decision together.

Instead, Eyce had just let some bloodsucker munch on his vein. If Fiero hadn’t been so busy trying to calm his mate, he would have punched the asshole right in his handsome face.

Growling, Fiero shoved both hands in his hair and pulled roughly. He didn’t understand these feelings, and it pissed him off. Not one time in his life had he remembered being so jealous. Not even when Ares came for Hex. Maybe that was because Hex hadn’t wanted to go with the arrogant god.

The look of Eyce’s face as he’d let the little leech suck at his neck had been enough to curdle Fiero’s stomach. He could only imagine what it had done to Echo. “Fuck it!” Fiero turned on his heels and marched down the hall toward the staircase.

“Where are you going?” Hex called after him.

“To punch Eyce in his stupid, handsome face!”

## Chapter Eight

“Would you stop it?” Echo growled in exasperation when Eyce apologized yet again.

He put his book aside and sat up on the sofa. “I get it, okay? I don’t like it, but I get it. You were just feeding the little snake. It was nothing sexual. You didn’t enjoy it, and you have no designs on running off and shacking up with him. I. Get. It!”

“But you’re still mad,” Eyce mumbled.

“Yes, I’m still mad. Did you even stop to think about what that would do to me? Not to mention the others. Did you even see the look on Myst’s face? Do you care? You keep spouting these apologies, but it’s not going to take away what you did. Why did you do it?”

Echo’s chest heaved, and he sucked in a huge lungful of air. Okay, so maybe he was more pissed off than he’d been letting on. He just still couldn’t figure out why the hell his lover had done that without even talking to the rest of them.

Before Eyce could answer, Fiero came storming down the stairs, marched right over to him, and punched him square in the face. “That’s for being a deceiving, lying, stupid bastard.” Then he hit him again. “That’s for pissing me off, upsetting Echo, and acting like you’re the only goddamn person in this relationship.” Before Eyce could move to defend himself, Fiero hit him again. “And that’s because I fucking felt like it!”

Echo’s eyes rounded and his heart thundered. This was wrong. Though Eyce deserved the things Fiero was saying to him, Echo couldn’t let them fight like this. “Fiero.” He meant to speak firmly,



but it came out more of a croak. He cleared his throat to try again, but it was too late.

Eyce came up off the sofa, flying over the back of it, and tackled Fiero to the ground. Fists flew, bones crunched, and loud growls emanated from the dueling pair as they rolled across the floor, kicking and punching as much of the other as they could reach.

“Stop it!” Echo hurried around the sofa and stood with his hands on his hips. “Stop right now!”

Neither man paid him any attention.

“You selfish asshole!” Fiero punctuated his insult with another blow to Eyce’s already battered nose. “Do you care about anyone but yourself?”

“You’re one to talk!” Eyce shouted back as he rolled them again until he was on top of Fiero. “Tell me one thing you’ve ever done that you didn’t expect payment for.” His huge fist plowed into Fiero’s mouth.

Echo couldn’t breathe. His stomach cramped painfully, and his heart felt like it was going to fall out of his butt. “Stop,” he whispered.

“Then maybe you should fucking leave!” Fiero jerked his head forward, catching Eyce in the chin and causing him to grunt in pain.

“Maybe you should leave. No one even wants you here anyway!” Eyce retaliated by driving his knee into Fiero’s gut.

Fear and panic ate at Echo’s insides at the mention of anyone leaving. They couldn’t leave him. They’d promised. “Please, stop.” His eyes filled with tears, and his throat burned with the effort to hold them back. Snapping his fingers again and again, he tried to pull up some of the waning power he’d syphoned from Fiero the day before. He hadn’t absorbed much, though, and no matter how he tried, he couldn’t call on it now.

“Fine!” Fiero jerked his head to the side to avoid another fist to the face. “If you hate me so much, maybe I should leave.”

“You stupid prick.” Eyce huffed and punched Fiero in the stomach. “I love you, dumbass. As much as I love Echo and all the others.”

Time seemed to stand still, and Echo held his breath, waiting for Fiero’s reaction. The demon stared up at Eyce for a long time, the effect ruined a little by his bruised and bleeding face. Then he slumped back to the floor with a groan and threw his arm over his eyes. “I love you, too, fucker,” he mumbled.

Not exactly sweet and charming, but at least they’d finally said the words. Echo wanted to pump his fist in the air and twirl around in a circle. Instead, he remained motionless, not saying a word, and continued to watch, eager to see how the scene would play out.

“Why are we fighting?” Eyce asked softly after a moment. Then he leaned down, pried Fiero’s arm from his face, and brushed their abused lips together gently. “I love you, Fiero. I always have.”

Fiero’s trembling fingers caressed down the side of Eyce’s cheek and pushed the hair back from his face. “Ditto,” he mumbled thickly. “Always loved you, Eyce.”

“Oh, my god!” Echo wailed as the dam opened, and tears began streaming down his face. He’d never witnessed a sweeter, more perfect moment.

Both men snapped around to look at him, concern covering both of their faces. Eyce scrambled off of Fiero and hurried over to kneel at Echo’s feet. Fiero followed quickly, kneeling just beside Eyce, and reached out to take Echo’s hand in both of his own.

“What’s wrong, baby? Why are you crying? Are you hurt?”

Eyce gasped and began running his hands over Echo as his eyes searched him frantically for signs of injury. “Did we hurt you? Oh, baby, I’m so sorry. Tell me where you’re hurt. I’ll go get ice, a bandage, something.”

“I’ll get Hex.” Fiero jumped to his feet and was halfway across the living room before Echo found his voice.

“Fiero, I’m fine.” He looked down at Eyce and smiled gently. “I’m not hurt. In fact, I’m very, very happy right now.” Fingering the swelling flesh around Eyce’s eye gently, he frowned. “You should still probably find Hex, though. You look like shit, love.”

“Sweet-talker.” Eyce grinned up at Echo and moved as though to stand. Before he could gain his feet, though, Vapre, Syx, and Onyx came running into the room, each looking mad enough to spit fire.

“You have some serious explaining to do,” Vapre spat.

Syx’s fingers wound in Eyce’s dark hair and jerked his head back on his shoulders. “Do you want to be with us or not?”

“It’s not right, what you did,” Onyx snarled.

“Get the fuck off him!” Fiero ran back over to the group, and just like that, the fight was on again.

Echo yelled and stumbled backward as a foot came flying toward his face, missing him by mere inches. What had gotten into everyone? They’d all been in the room the night before, and no one had tried to stop what had happened between Syn and Eyce. They hadn’t seemed concerned in the least.

Now, almost twenty-four hours later, they were ready to kill each other over it? It didn’t make a damn bit of sense. His lovers had lost their minds. It was the only explanation that fit.

Then Hex came thundering down the stairs, his hair flying out behind him, and his face mottled red with rage. He jumped right into the fray without a word, and Echo had seen enough. He spun around and headed toward the kitchen to find a frying pan. They’d stop this idiocy and listen to him, or he’d bash their fool heads in.

He’d taken no more than two steps when loud screams sounded from up the stairs, followed by an ear-piercing roar. Loud thuds, crashes, bangs, and more screams echoed around the house. Another vicious roar, though smaller, quieter, came from below, rising up from the basement.

Before Echo could figure out what to do, Myst came sprinting into the room, his eyes wide and his face pale. “What the fuck is going

on?” He took one look at their lovers where they were rolling and fighting on the floor, then hurried across the room and snatched Echo up into his arms. “We’re getting out of there.”

“We can’t just leave them.” Echo kicked and flailed, beating against Myst’s shoulders. “Something’s wrong!” Then an idea struck him, and he froze in his struggles. “Freeze them.”

Myst stumbled to a stop and looked into Echo’s eyes. “I can’t, baby. I don’t have enough power to freeze all of them.” He jumped and snapped his head around toward the stairs when another loud roar came from the second floor. “I’m getting you out of here, and then I’ll figure out what to do.”

“No!” Echo flicked his lover in the forehead with his fingers. “Let me help. I’m stronger than you, Myst. Just let me help!”

Myst sighed and dipped his head curtly. “But if you get hurt, I’m kicking your ass.”

Echo rolled his eyes. “That makes no sense, but I promise I won’t get into trouble. Now, shut up and let me concentrate.” Cupping the warrior’s face in both hands, he closed his eyes and cleared his mind, letting Myst’s power flow into him. Then his eyes popped open, and he grinned. “Let’s do this.”

“I’ll handle Gage.” Myst kissed the tip of Echo’s nose and set him on his feet. “You go kick our men’s asses. Gods know they deserve it.”

Echo shook his head. “I’m going for Gage. I might look weak and helpless, but we both know my powers are stronger.”

Myst just grunted like the testosterone-driven male he was and shrugged. “Fine. What about the leeches in the basement?”

Echo patted Myst’s shoulder as he eased past him and headed toward the stairs. “You’ll figure it out,” he called over his shoulder, sidestepping the grappling men on the floor. “I have faith in you, honey.” Then he hurried up the stairs before Myst could argue, snickering under his breath the entire way.

Following the sounds of the continued crashes and roars, Echo took a deep breath to calm his nerves. “Guys, I’m coming in,” he yelled. Then he pushed his hands out in front of him and watched in amazement as the heavy wooden door burst open, swinging back to bang against the wall.

Echo looked down at his hands, turning them one way, then the other. “Wicked cool.”

Snapping out of his awe, he turned his attention to the room beyond, and gasped. The place was completely destroyed—furniture ripped and torn, sheets shredded, holes in the wall. Mac huddled on the floor in the corner, sobbing into his hands. Sony had shifted into his gigantic form and stood in front of Mac protectively, shielding him from the beast that was tearing the room apart.

Gage lifted the nightstand and held it over his head as he threw his head back and howled. Then his head dropped, and his eyes landed on Echo a heartbeat before he sent the little table sailing across the room.

Echo tensed and threw his hands up to protect himself as best he could, but nothing happened. The nightstand hung suspended in midair, just feet from his face. Sighing in relief, he snapped his wrist, sending the piece of furniture to the floor. Then he waved his hand at Gage, freezing the werewolf in place.

“What happened?” he asked Sony as calmly as he could muster considering his heart was trying to crawl up his throat.

“I don’t know. We were sleeping, then all of the sudden Gage flew out of bed and started destroying the room.”

“Are you hurt?”

Sony shook his head as he moved out of the corner and held a hand out to help Mac to his feet. “No. He didn’t come anywhere near us. It was just scary as hell.” He took a deep breath and closed his eyes, his body shrinking back to its normal size. “Thank you,” he panted when he could speak again.

“Well, my men are downstairs beating the shit out of each other. Something is going on, and I damn sure intend to find out what it is.”

“I’ll help.” Sony began digging through the scraps of fabric on the floor, searching for something to wear. Once he’d found clothes for him and Mac, they dressed quickly and crossed the room to stand beside Echo.

Mac still hadn’t said a word.

“Can we just leave him? Will he still be frozen if you leave the room?”

Echo looked at Sony and shrugged. “I have no idea. If Myst had been the one to do it, I’d say no. Otherwise, they’d have frozen him for the night to begin with.” Smirking, he winked at his friend. “I’m way cooler than that, though.”

“And I bet it drives your demons crazy.” Sony covered his mouth to muffle his chuckle.

Echo laughed with him, not bothering to hide his amusement in the situation. The smallest man in the house, and he could kick all their asses at the same time if he wanted. “Oh yeah. They hate it.” The thought made him laugh even harder.

Backing out of the room, he kept his eyes on Gage, making sure the man stayed in place as Echo moved. Keeping one part of his mind firmly locked on demobilizing the beast, he set the other part of his brain to work, trying to figure out what was going on with everyone.

“Maybe I should stay with him,” Sony said quietly when they reached the top of the stairs.

Echo looked over to see Mac clinging to Sony, his arms locked around the man’s waist in a death grip. “No.” He motioned toward Mac. “He needs you more right now.”

They descended to the first floor, and Echo burst out laughing at the scene that met his gaze. Myst stood to the side of the scuffle, his hands on his hips as he glared down at their lovers. The other demons were locked in various positions of struggle and looked so utterly absurd, Echo couldn’t contain his mirth.

“Well, I’m glad you find it funny.” Myst growled and sent him a scathing look, which only served to make Echo laugh harder as he gasped for air. “I got them frozen, but it took a lot more to get their mouths to stop moving. I’m exhausted.”

Echo sauntered over to his pouty lover and placed his palms flat against Myst’s chest. “I’m sorry. Do you need me to kiss it and make it better?”

Myst’s bottom lips slid out further, and he nodded, giving Echo the biggest puppy dog eyes.

Smiling at his mate, Echo stretched up on his toes and offered his mouth for a kiss. Myst snorted, but bent and pressed their lips together in a short, but sweet, kiss. “So, what do we do now?”

“We find out what’s going on.” Echo crossed his arms over his chest and glared down at his frozen mates. “And we get everyone to pull their heads out of their asses and stop acting like a bunch of hyenas.” He glanced around the living room and frowned. “Where’s Syn and Jinx?”

Myst looked look down at the floor. “They never came out of the basement, and I left them there. I had enough to deal with, thank you very much.”

“We really need to work on your endurance.” Echo wiggled his eyebrows playfully, letting Myst know just how he planned to improve the man’s stamina. It earned him a chuckle, which was just what he’d been going for.

“What happened?” Mac asked quietly, his voice trembling as he spoke. “Everyone just went crazy. I don’t get it.”

“I think I can answer that.” Echo spun around to find Jinx standing in the entryway that led to the kitchen. Syn stood just behind him, looking down at the floor and fidgeting nervously. Jinx grabbed his upper arm and shoved him forward, then nodded once. “Tell them, Syn.”

“You did this?” Echo snarled and started across the room toward the vampire, but Myst snatched him before he’d even gone three steps.

“I’m sorry,” Syn mumbled, still looking down at the floor. “I can’t help it. I didn’t mean for any of this to happen.” His voice cracked, and Echo spotted a single tear slip down Syn’s soft cheek. “I’m so sorry. I’ll leave, and everything will go back to how it was.” He looked up at Echo, his eyes red-rimmed and puffy. “Please let Jinx stay,” he pleaded. “Take care of him.”

Echo sighed heavily, slumping in Myst’s arms. It wasn’t fair. He wanted to hate the guy, but how could he when Syn looked so completely miserable? “No one is leaving. There’s a reason you were led here—same as me, same as Gage. The same reason my mates risked their lives to rescue Sony and Mac. We need you here, but I have to know what’s going on.”

Syn bit his lip and averted his eyes once more.

Jinx huffed, hurrying forward to wrap his arms around his friend and kissed the top of his head. Hmm, maybe they were more than friends? Echo didn’t know, but it sure looked that way. Shifting his focus to Jinx, he arched an eyebrow in question.

“Syn is a projector.”



## Chapter Nine

Fiero didn't know what the hell a projector was, or why the hell it mattered. He just wanted Myst to release him so he could get out of the ridiculous position he was in with Eyce crouched over him, his fist just mere inches from Fiero's nose.

He may have been rendered immobile, but his body still hurt like a bitch. His muscles were sore, his face throbbed, and his knuckles ached and stung where he'd split them. He wanted his mate. He wanted answers. And he wanted to get the fuck up off the floor.

"Uh, okay," Echo said slowly. Then he wiggled down from Myst's arms and fisted his hands on his hips. "I'm sorry, what?"

Fiero grunted, pleased that he could actually make any type of sound. Myst was getting tired, and his hold on them was loosening. Fiero grunted again, trying to get his mate's attention. Echo looked over his shoulder at them, and rolled his eyes. "Let them go," he said offhandedly.

Myst sighed gratefully, and the next thing Fiero knew, Eyce's fist plowed into his battered nose. He groaned and rolled to his side, his hand coming up to cover his face. "Asshole," he grumbled.

Eyce winced and held out a hand to help Fiero to his feet. "Sorry about that," he murmured as he pulled Fiero's hand away and began inspecting the damage. Then he leaned forward and kissed Fiero's cheek softly. "I really am sorry, baby. It's broken, but we'll get Hex to fix it."

Fiero stood frozen as if Myst had zapped him again. He didn't know what to say, didn't know how to feel or react. No one had ever called him baby before. All these long years, the seven of them had

lived together in an easy understanding with mutual affection and respect. They'd never dared to utter the *L* word, and "asshole" was as close as they ever came to endearments. Then with one angrily shouted sentence, everything had changed.

Glancing from Eyce to Echo, Fiero deflated, his breath rushing out with a whoosh. That wasn't true. Things had been changing long before he and Eyce had admitted the feelings they had for one another. It had all started when the sweet little imp with golden-blond hair turned up in the middle of the night and rocked them all to their core.

Was it really so bad to be called baby? Fiero thought it over for a minute and shrugged to himself. If he were being honest, he actually kind of liked it. Not that he would ever say that aloud. He had a reputation to uphold after all. Still, to know that someone other than Echo loved and appreciated him made his outlook seem just a little brighter.

Returning his focus to Eyce, he gripped the back of the warrior's neck and pulled him into a soft kiss, careful of both their injuries. Echo said it would get easier with practice, and now seemed like a good a time as any. "I love you," he whispered softly so the others wouldn't hear.

He felt just as strongly for his other men, but Eyce was safe—the same as Echo. He knew how the two felt for him, so the risk of rejection was nonexistent. Eventually, he'd find the courage to tell the others, but for now, he figured this was a good start.

"I know," Eyce replied just as quietly. He brushed his lips over Fiero's again. "Ditto." He pulled away and cast his eyes to the side. "Don't look now, but I think Echo's face might split in two. I've never seen a bigger shit-eating grin in my life."

But, Fiero wasn't looking at Echo. His eyes were locked with Syx's over Eyce's shoulder. The big warrior smiled at him, but it didn't reach his eyes. In fact, he looked almost sad. Damn it! He'd

been so wrapped up in the moment, he'd completely forgotten about Syx.

"Don't worry," Syx mumbled. "You speak quietly, but your thoughts are screaming at me. I'm happy for you. We'll talk more when the time is right." That was Syx, always the logical one.

Fiero glanced around the room at the other men. Eyce was smiling like a fool. Echo looked much too satisfied with himself. Syx's eyes had lost a little of their haunted look. And everyone else just looked confused.

Wanting to redirect their attention, he released Eyce and turned to face Syn. "What the fuck is a projector?" Yep, that did it. The warriors shifted as one, crossing their arms over their chests and glaring at the little vampire.

"Don't be angry with him," Jinx said fiercely, keeping his arms locked around Syn. "He can't control it."

"Okay, everyone calm down." Echo stepped forward, smiling encouragingly at the pair. "Let's have a seat, and you can explain." He held his hand out, nodding kindly when Syn reached out hesitantly to take it. "I'll admit, you weren't my favorite person five minutes ago, but I see now that something more is going on here."

He pulled Syn over to the sofa and motioned for him to sit, before taking the seat beside him. Jinx sat on Syn's other side, hovering around him protectively. Syn took a deep breath, his eyes still shining with the tears that had yet to fall. "I'm sorry this happened. I didn't mean to cause trouble."

"I know." Echo still held the vamp's hand, stroking it like a wounded kitten. "Just tell us what happened."

"When we first arrived last night," Syn began, "I was so tired and hungry, not to mention terrified after that bloody beast began chasing us. It was an accident, but I'm sorry I didn't explain straight away."

"I don't understand." Fiero walked across the room and sat on the floor near Echo's feet. He sighed in contentment when his mate's fingers immediately started combing through his hair. "I didn't have a

problem with you biting Eyce last night, but today, I wanted to rip his throat out for it. Yours, too.”

“You probably would have last night as well,” Syn mumbled under his breath. “I was very happy that we’d finally made it here, and that it had all been real, not just some fanciful figment of my imagination. I also felt safe for the first time, in well, years, I suppose. Everything about this place just made me feel peaceful.”

“Go on,” Echo whispered.

“Then Eyce was holding me, after he’d just rescued me from that wolf, and I could smell his blood, almost feel it coursing through his body. I was so hungry, and I knew Jinx was as well, though he’d never admit, the sod.” Syn glanced at Jinx and smiled fondly. “We hadn’t fed in days, and only nips from animals before that, ya see. I finally had real blood, and I couldn’t help myself.”

“So, why did none of us react to you biting him?” Syx sat down on the floor facing the vampire, bending one knee and resting his chin on it. “Last night, it felt like the most natural thing in the world to watch you bite him. I felt almost happy to see you drink from his neck.”

“That was me.” Syn’s voice cracked and the tears welled up in his eyes again. “That’s what I do—what a projector is. You were feeling my mood, my emotions, and they influenced your own.”

“You didn’t do it on purpose?” Echo asked.

“No.” Syn shook his head frantically. “I’ve never been able to do it when I actually try. It always happens when my emotions are running high. I try to stop it, but I don’t always know when I’m doing it.”

“That explains a lot.” Eyce scrubbed a hand over his face and sighed. “I knew I shouldn’t let you drink from me, but like Syx said, it felt like the most natural thing at the time. Hell, I should have put you down the minute I walked in the door, but I couldn’t do it. It was almost like the world would crumble if I wasn’t touching you.”

“That was me, too,” Syn mumbled. He looked up at Echo pleadingly. “I’m so sorry. I know he belongs to you,” he waved a hand around the group, “all of you. I was so scared, and he made me feel safe. I just wanted to feel that for a bit longer, ya know? Then the whole bloody mess spiraled out of control from there.”

“And just now?” Fiero sat up a little straighter, looking at Syn intently. He was finally getting some answers, and there was a lot more he wanted to know.

“I was angry with Jinx.” Syn looked down at his hands where they were fumbling in his lap. “I was jealous because he was going on about how marvelous Gage tasted—like nothing he’d ever had before, he says. I was afraid he was going to leave me, so I lashed out at him.”

“Well, if he leaves you, it’s damn sure not going to be for *our* mate!” Sony growled, and Fiero couldn’t help but be impressed.

“Oh, shit, Gage,” Mac breathed. He tugged on Sony’s arm, dragging him toward the staircase. “We just left him.”

“Wait!” Echo held up his hand to stop them. “Gage will be fine for another minute. I want to hear the rest of Syn’s story, and you’re not going up there alone.”

“I’ll go,” Fiero offered. He didn’t look forward to being in the same room with an angry werewolf, but he’d do it for his mate.

“Thanks, love.” Echo stroked Fiero’s hair once more. “He’ll be fine, though.” Then he turned back to Syn and waited for him to continue.

Syn took a deep breath and let it out slowly. “So, I got right mad, I did. We began arguing, and everything just blew up before I could stop it. The next thing I knew, I heard Gage upstairs howling.” He paused and glared at Echo. “I didn’t know he was a werewolf, by the way.” Then he shook his head and sighed. “I heard the others fighting, and I knew what had happened, but I was too afraid to come up from the basement. I didn’t want to be sent away,” he finished quietly.

“But it doesn’t work on all of us,” Myst said as he cocked his head to the side in confusion. “I didn’t get angry or feel jealous.”

“Neither did me, Sony, or Mac,” Echo added.

Fiero looked back and forth between them all. He’d damn sure felt the jealous rage. At the time, he hadn’t even paused to think about it, but now that everyone was calm, he suddenly realized that the feelings had practically come out of nowhere. One minute he’d been worried about leaving the twerps alone in the room with Gage, and the next, all he could think about was finding Eyce and beating the shit out of him for his betrayal.

But why did it only affect some of them? Did it make him weak that he’d been susceptible to Syn’s influence? The thought didn’t set well with him.

“That’s not true,” Sony said from near the stairs. His face flushed, and he smiled sheepishly at Mac. “I was working myself up into a good mad before Gage freaked out on us. I was so jealous because he was cuddled around Mac, while I was kind of pushed off to the side.”

“It wasn’t like that!” Mac gasped and wrapped his arms around Sony’s waist, burying his face in the man’s chest. “I swear it’s not like that. Gage will tell you, too.”

Sony chuckled and kissed the top of Mac’s head. “I know, and I’m glad I understand where the feelings were coming from. I’ve never been jealous like that before. I know Gage loves us both equally.”

“I was jealous, too,” Mac admitted quietly. “I thought that you loved Gage more than you did me, and that’s why you were on his other side. It seems silly now.”

Fiero looked to Myst and Echo.

Echo just shook his head. “I was mad, but I don’t think it had anything to do with Syn. I mean, I sure as hell wasn’t feeling all go-with-the-flow last night.”

Fiero nodded and focused his eyes on Myst.

Myst shook his head as well. “I was definitely pissed last night, but it didn’t seem to bother anyone else, so I thought I was just overreacting. I had just stepped out of the shower and was dressing when I heard the yelling and howling. I was scared that Echo would get hurt, but I definitely wasn’t feeling pissed off or jealous.”

Then the entire room turned to look at Syn.

Syn just shrugged. “I don’t rightly understand how I do it, so I can’t answer you. I’m sorry.” He looked down at his hands again, and Fiero noticed his slim shoulders were shaking. “Do you want me to leave now?”

To Fiero’s surprise, Echo pulled the vampire into his arms and hugged him fiercely. “No. I don’t want you to leave. You’re needed here, and we’ll work on your powers—figure out a way to for you control them. It must be really hard for you.”

Syn broke down, throwing his arms around Echo’s back, and sobbed against his shoulder. “Why are you being so nice to me? I’ve done nothing but cause problems since I arrived.”

“But you didn’t mean them,” Echo said quietly. “I understand that now. We’ll figure everything out. Fate brought you here, the same way it brought me to my mates. We’re all family now, and family doesn’t quit on each other.”

Fiero’s eyes burned, and he blinked rapidly, damning himself for being weak. Clearing his throat, he reached out and stroked his hand down Echo’s spine. He’d never met a more giving, loving soul in his life. No wonder he had fallen so hard and so fast for his little mate. The man made it impossible *not* to love him.

Everyone gathered around them, all touching some part of Echo as they smiled goofily at one another. “Fate brought us together,” Syx whispered. “So, in essence, we are fatefully yours, little one.”

Echo sniffed, the tears streaming down his face as he looked up at Syx and smiled beautifully. “I like that. Fatefully yours.”

“I’m sorry to interrupt, but do you think we could go get our mate now?”

Fiero looked over his shoulder and chuckled at the impatient look on Sony's face.

Echo glanced over at Sony as well and blushed. "Oops."



## Chapter Ten

Echo woke to delicious heat and plump lips wrapped around his morning wood. He didn't know which of his demons was currently sucking his cock, and he didn't really care. He'd fallen asleep with Fiero, Vapre, and Myst, and judging by the enthusiasm in which his throbbing shaft was being adored, he guessed it was probably Myst.

Another set of lips moved along the column of his throat, while a warm, slippery tongue licked lazy circles around one of his nipples. "This beats the hell out of an alarm clock." He sighed happily, keeping his eyes closed, and just enjoying the attention.

Vapre chuckled, his voice thick and husky as his breath stuttered across Echo's erect nipple. "Good morning, baby."

Teeth nipped at Echo's earlobe. "Good morning," Fiero whispered.

Yep, he'd been right. The silky tongue gliding over his hard cock belonged to Myst. The warrior hummed his salutation as well, sending faint vibrations down Echo's length and straight to his already tightening sac.

Moaning softly, Echo tilted his head, giving Fiero more room to play, and arched his back, pressing his chest more firmly against Vapre's mouth. He gasped when two slick fingers pressed against his hole, caressing him gently then pushing inside so slowly, he wanted to growl in impatience.

He loved this. Loved these men and the things they did to him. Loved the way they made him lose control and forget himself and all his worries. He'd do anything to stay with them—anything to never lose this.

With that thought firmly in place, Echo relaxed his body and let the sensations wash over him, needing the closeness and intimacy. It wasn't just about the sex, though that was always mind-blowing. He just needed that connection with his lovers, that link that bound them together and made him feel like he could do anything.

A third finger slipped in beside the first two, and Myst pumped his hand, stretching Echo's tight opening as his mouth continued to do sinful things to Echo's cock. Vapre's and Fiero's hands roamed his body, stroking and caressing him until Echo was panting and moaning, begging wordlessly for more.

When Myst pushed in a fourth finger, Echo's eyes flew open and his head jerked up to look down at his lovers. They'd never needed to stretch him this much. Exactly what did they have planned for him?

"Relax," Fiero whispered against Echo's collarbone as he licked and nipped at it. "Trust us."

And Echo did. Whatever it was, he knew his warriors would never hurt him. So, he eased his head back to the pillow and closed his eyes again, anticipation of what was to come building until his body practically vibrated beneath their combined touch.

Then Myst's fingers eased from his twitching hole, and his mouth popped off of Echo's straining cock. Echo whimpered at the loss, but he didn't have long to mourn before he was flipped over to his stomach, and his knees were shoved under him, lifting his ass into the air.

Before he could even catch his breath, Vapre moved in behind him and thrust forcefully inside Echo's channel. Now, he knew why Myst had been so intent on stretching him. Vapre wasted no time with slow and gentle, but set a demanding pace, driving into Echo's ass punishingly.

Echo cried out in pleasure, clenching the sheets in fist and pushing back against the invasion. Gods, he loved it! "More," he demanded roughly.

Vapre's arm slid under his chest and jerked him upright so that his back rested against the warrior's chest. The arms locked him in place as Vapre growled behind him, continuing to pound into his needy hole.

Myst crawled to them, his ass hanging over the edge of the bed as he once again engulfed Echo's bouncing prick to the back of his throat. Echo almost closed his eyes as the sensations threatened to overwhelm him, but Fiero chose that moment to grip Myst's hips and slide his cock into the demon's waiting tunnel.

Myst moaned, swallowing around the head of Echo's cock, and Echo almost blew his load then and there. Vapre's hand smoothed up Echo's chest and began pinching and tugging at his nipples in turn, while his other arm held a death grip across Echo's hips.

Fiero growled and grunted, slamming into Myst's ass and driving the man forward so that every thrust caused the tip of Echo's dick to brush against the velvety lining of Myst's throat. The fullness in his ass, the wet heat wrapped around his shaft, the sights, sounds, and smell were too much.

Echo felt the electricity zip along his spine, his lower belly tightened, and his cock swelled and pulsed against Myst's tongue until he couldn't hold back any longer. "Gonna," he warned.

"Do it," Vapre whispered raggedly against the back of his neck. "Come for us, baby." He punctuated the command with a hard thrust into Echo's clenching hole. "Scream. I love it when you scream." Then he licked a slow path up the side of Echo's neck and sank his teeth into the sensitive flesh, claiming Echo all over again.

Echo screamed until his throat felt raw, and his voice sounded hoarse. His inner walls clamped down on Vapre's throbbing length as his orgasm ripped through him, rocketing up his shaft and spilling into Myst's hungry mouth.

Myst moaned happily, swallowing down Echo's cum like a pro, then licked him clean before letting the softening length slip from his mouth. A deep groan rolled up from his chest, and he reached down to

palm his flexing cock, stroking furiously as creamy ropes of semen erupted from the slit.

Fiero's low grunt followed quickly, and he buried his face in Myst's shoulder as his hips stilled, and his body shuddered.

Vapre's fangs retracted from Echo's skin, and he licked at the bite mark as his body tensed and he ground his groin against Echo's ass. Then molten lava filled Echo's convulsing passage, causing him to moan softly, and another few drops of seed dribbled from his flagging erection.

"Gods, I love mornings," he murmured, his eyelids drooping as he sagged back against Vapre's chest.

His men chuckled, and somehow they all ended up in a pile in the center of the bed, wrapped together in a tangle of arms and legs. Myst moved on top of him, grinning like a fool as his still hard cock slid into Echo's loosened hole. "Who said we were finished with you?"

Echo moaned, arching against his lover and wrapping his arms around Myst's neck. "I guess no one," he murmured. He locked his legs around Myst's hips as his warrior moved inside him slowly, gently. It was so different from Vapre's rough handling, but Echo loved it just as much.

Watching over Myst's shoulder, he smiled up at Vapre as the man lined up his thick cock with Myst's hole, and pressed in slowly. Myst hissed against Echo's neck, pausing in his movements while he adjusted to Vapre's invasion. "Hung like a fucking horse," he mumbled.

Echo chuckled breathlessly. "Tell me about it."

Then Myst began moving between them, groaning and panting when the pace increased, and Echo felt his release building inside him once more. Turning his head to the side, he found Fiero stretched out beside him, watching them with a heated gaze. Echo licked his lips, his eyes locked firmly on Fiero's mouth.

His lover got the hint, rolling forward to fist Echo's hair in his hand and claim his mouth in a scorching kiss. The kiss seemed to last

forever, and after a while, Echo began debating the need to breathe. Before he could make the decision between sucking in the much needed oxygen, or sucking Fiero's tongue down his throat, Myst's mouth latched on to Echo's throat, sinking his canines into the supple flesh there. Echo ripped his mouth away from Fiero's and cried out raggedly to the ceiling as his orgasm took him by surprise.

"Beautiful," Fiero mumbled, peppering kisses over Echo's forehead and cheeks.

More hot seed filled his tunnel, and loud growls went around the room. Then everyone was moving again. Echo stayed in place, sprawled limply on the bed, as Fiero covered his body, and Myst and Vapre stretched out beside them on the mattress.

"Are you too sore?" Fiero whispered as he brushed his lips over Echo's panting mouth. "I don't need this."

Dragging his eyelids open, Echo smiled up at his lover and reached up with trembling fingers to stroke Fiero's cheek. "I'm fine. Make love to me."

Taking him as his word, Fiero knelt between Echo's splayed thighs, pushing his knees up to his chest and sliding into him slowly. He thrust gently, making love to Echo's body in easy, sensuous strokes as his hands caressed every part of Echo's skin he could reach.

Myst and Vapre took turns devouring Echo's mouth while the other overloaded his senses by nipping and licking at his chest and belly. Though he didn't think he had another orgasm left in him, his body had no such doubts. His cock began to fill once more, his balls ached, and his skin broke out in sweat as lightning bolts of pure lust rocked his body.

Then Myst and Vapre moved off him, and Fiero slid an arm under Echo's lower back, lifting him higher as he leaned forward to cover Echo's body. Bracing himself on one hand, he urged Echo to move with him, his rhythm increasing, and he skimmed his nose along Echo's throat, inhaling deeply.

Echo shuddered, gripping on to Fiero's shoulders when he realized what was coming. Fiero's tongue snaked out, swirling over Echo's damp skin before his sharp teeth slid easily through the flesh.

Gasping softly, Echo's eyes rolled back in his head, and his fingers dug into Fiero's shoulders. His climax raced up his cock, spraying from the slit, and painting the space between them. Fiero's chest vibrated as he groaned and filled Echo's channel with his seed until it began leaking out, dribbling down Echo's crease.

Sated, content, and completely exhausted, Echo slumped back to the pillow with a happy sigh, and was asleep almost instantly.

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Vapre watched as Fiero pulled from Echo's body, then rolled off the bed, heading in the direction of the bathroom. "I like sleeping in Echo's room," he called over his shoulder. "It sucks when you have to parade naked down the hall with cum dripping out of your ass."

Chuckling, Vapre rolled to his back and crossed his arms behind his head. Glancing at Echo out the corner of his eye, he felt his smile slip. "Do you think three times was too much? I've never seen anyone just pass out like that before."

Myst sighed, curling closer to Echo's side and draping an arm over their mate's stomach. "He's fine. I'm sure he'll be awake soon."

Fiero came back with three damp cloths, tossing one at Vapre, and one to Myst. Then he knelt on the bed and began cleaning Echo lovingly. Vapre had never seen that particular look of Fiero's face before. Hell, he didn't think any of them had ever worn an expression like that. The demon looked more than happy. He looked peaceful, blissful even.

Looking back at Echo's angel face, Vapre felt the sappy grin spread over his lips. Then he moved his focus to Myst, then finally up to Fiero once more, and felt the smile grow even wider.

Okay, he got it. It was the look of someone hopelessly in love. He'd never seen any of them wear that look before, because they'd been missing something vital in their relationship. And that missing piece was snoring softly beside him in the bed. Vapre knew the seven of them had always cared for one another, but until Echo showed up, they'd never acknowledge it was anything more.

The thought of being in love with one man, letting one man become the center of his universe, scared the hell out of him. Being in love with seven men? That outright terrified him. If he was being honest, he'd always loved his warriors, though. It had just taken Echo to open his eyes and face those feelings. Did the others feel the same? He had no way of knowing without laying his heart on his sleeve, so maybe he'd just keep this new discovery to himself for a bit longer.

When everyone was clean, Fiero lifted Echo into his arms and settled in between Vapre and Myst, letting Echo sprawl over his chest. He kissed Myst as the demon snuggled up against him, then turned his head to offer the same to Vapre.

Vapre took the kiss willingly, pouring everything he couldn't say into it. Then he curled into Fiero's other side and placed his hand on the back of Echo's thigh. Burying his face in Fiero's neck, he closed his eyes and sighed. He'd have to tell them soon. No way could anyone hold that much emotion inside for long. Already, his heart felt full to bursting.

Closing his eyes, he kissed the side of Fiero's throat, and settled down to sleep, surrounded by the men he loved.

## Chapter Eleven

The remainder of the week passed without further incident, and Echo had almost forgotten about what was coming with the dawning of the new moon. With his men keeping him occupied in the most succulent ways, it was so easy to forget that anything existed beyond the doors to their home.

The weather had turned bitterly cold, and very little of the snow had melted after the storm. The wind remained harsh, roaring and howling as it swept in from the north. They kept logs burning in the fireplace around the clock, and Echo found it peaceful to sit in front of the hearth and watch the flames dancing merrily in the fireplace.

Still, it reminded him of the task set before them. A task they had done little to prepare for since Syn and Jinx had arrived. And though no one spoke of the coming danger, Echo could feel the tension, read the worry in the lines of every man's face as he passed them in the halls or watched them around the kitchen table.

When his warriors weren't distracting him in a number of inventive and delicious ways, Echo spent his time with Syn, working with the vampire and trying to help him hone his skill. He hadn't made the connection yet, but Echo felt sure that Syn's ability would be very useful when the war finally came. But if the man hoped to aid them in their fight, he needed to know how to control his powers.

"Okay, take a deep breath and close your eyes." Echo walked around Syn where he stood, tense and waiting, his feet frozen the concrete floor of the basement.

"It's cold down here." Echo frowned as he shivered once again. "How do you stand it?"



"It's not so bad," Syn mumbled, but Echo could see the vampire shivering as well.

Reaching out, he ran his hand down Syn's arm and shuddered. "You're freezing! Why didn't you say anything?"

"I'm only grateful for a place to sleep. After the things I've done, I see no right to complain."

Echo smacked him in the back of the head. "Oh, just can it. We've already discussed this, and everyone knows you didn't do it to cause problems. You and Jinx should have said something about how cold it is down here." He crossed his arms over his chest, standing directly in front of Syn and frowning. "I'll talk to Hex about it as soon as we're finished." His tone brooked no argument, and Syn smiled at him shyly.

"Thank you," he whispered.

"Okay, well I'm freezing my balls off down here, so we're going to take this little party upstairs." Echo grabbed Syn around the wrist and tugged him up the stairs, sighing in relief when he stepped through the door and the warmth of the kitchen surrounded him. "Much better."

"Echo!" Enthusiastic greetings went up around the room, and each of his men stood to their feet.

Echo just rolled his eyes. Sometimes he felt like freaking royalty when they did things like that. Waving his hand, he sent them his cheeriest smile. "Sit down, you big goofs. You act like you haven't seen me in weeks."

"You were gone when we woke up." Myst crossed his arms over his chest and pouted. Gods, he was so cute when he did that. Echo just wanted crawl up in his lap and kiss the petulance right out of him. "We missed you."

"Aww, you do care." Echo winked at the warrior as he laughed. Then the smile dropped off his face, and his tone became serious as he addressed Hex. "It's freezing down there."

Hex looked at him blankly. "So? Don't go down there."

Echo's mouth dropped open, and his eyes rounded in shock. "You insensitive asshole," he murmured.

Hex looked genuinely confused. "What? If you're cold, then don't go down there. It makes perfect sense to me. Why the hell are you looking at me like that?"

"Syn and Jinx sleep down there," Syx interjected quietly to their leader.

"Oh!" Hex's eyes widened, and he hurried forward to drop a quick kiss on Echo's forehead. "Shit, I didn't even think of that, baby. I swear I wasn't being a dick. We'll find a way to get some heat down there before the morning."

Smiling up at his lover, Echo felt his anger drain away, and he sighed happily. "I knew you would. Thank you, big guy."

Hex kissed him again, then turned to Syn as his brow creased. "Why didn't you just say something? You've been staying down there for almost a week."

Syn shrugged, but continued to look down at his feet. "It's not so bad."

Echo rolled his eyes, grasped Syn's wrist, and jerked his arm straight out in front of him. "Feel his skin."

Hex looked confused again, but did as Echo asked, running to fingers along the soft skin on Syn's forearm. "Fuck," he breathed. "You're like an ice cube. I don't know much about vampires, but are you always this temperature?"

Syn shrugged, and Echo wanted to smack him again. "No," he growled. "I've touched him before, and he's never been this cold." Releasing Syn's arm, Echo faced the vampire and fisted his hands on his hips. "Why are you acting this way?"

"What's going on?" Jinx asked as he entered the kitchen from the opposite side of the room.

Echo rounded on him, pointing a finger in the man's face. "You!"

Jinx stumbled back a step, his mouth forming a little *O*. "Me? What did I do?"

“Why didn’t you tell us it’s so damn cold down there?”

“Oh.” Jinx bit his lip and stared down at the floor, mirroring Syn’s pose. “It’s a soft bed and roof over our head. Who are we to complain?”

Another thought occurred to Echo, and he whirled around to look at Syx. “You never got the blood did you?”

Syx winced and shook his head. “The storm blew in, and we couldn’t get to town. They didn’t clear the roads out this far until just yesterday, and by then, I’d honestly forgotten about it.”

“When’s the last time you fed?” Echo asked the vampire without removing his narrowed gaze from Syx.

“We’re fine,” Jinx replied immediately.

“When is the last time you fed?” Echo asked again, his voice as hard as cold steel.

“The night we arrived,” Syn said with a sigh. “It’s not so bad, though.”

Echo studied the vampires, really looked at them, and felt his heart constrict inside his chest. They looked sallow and pinched, their faces drawn and hollow. Dark circles marred the skin under their eyes, and even their lips had lost color. As much as he wanted to be mad at Syx and Vapre and blame this entire mess on them, he knew he was just as at fault as anyone.

“Out,” he ordered.

Jinx and Syn turned to leave, and Echo huffed. “Not you two. Everyone else, get out.”

“What are you doing?” Fiero asked dangerously. Judging by the look on his face, he already knew the answer.

“I’m going to feed them.”

“Over my dead body,” Hex growled. “Look, I don’t have a problem with them, and they’re more than welcome here. I’m not about to let them snack on you, though.”

“Do you have a better idea?” Echo snapped. “They look like they’re about to fall over dead...re-dead...whatever.” He had no idea

about vampire physiology. He'd heard the legends of the undead, but Syn and Jinx looked as alive as anyone. "Are you dead?"

Syn snorted, and Jinx rolled his eyes. "No, we're not dead. Our hearts beat, we breathe, and we need food to eat. We're very much alive, just different from you."

"Okay." Echo shrugged. Well, at least that answered one of his questions. "Now, you know I adore you all, but get the fuck out."

"I'm not leaving." Fiero crossed his arms over his massive chest, looking mutinous.

"Why do we have to leave?" Myst asked. Echo guessed it was supposed to come out as casual, but the slight growl in his lover's voice kind of ruined it.

"Because I don't want you to hurt them." The *duh* was implied. "They need to feed. I'm not just going to let them fucking starve, but I don't want you guys freaking out."

"Then let one of us do it," Syx suggested. "We are..." He trailed off, his brow furrowing as he searched for the right word.

"Bigger? Stronger? Possess too much machismo for your own good?" Echo lifted both eyebrows and smirked. "Jinx," he said casually, "whose blood would give you the most strength?"

"Hex," Jinx whispered.

Echo's chin nearly hit the floor. "How?" He'd assumed that as a human, his blood would be the most alluring, the most powerful to a vampire. He didn't know why he'd thought that, but now, he guessed it made sense that another preternatural's blood would sustain them longer.

"He is a healer, yes?"

Echo nodded and smacked himself in the forehead. Wow, he was batting a thousand in the dumbass department. "That makes sense." He looked up at Hex pleadingly. Though the idea of watching other men lick and bite at his lover made his stomach churn, he understood the need. "Please, help them."

Hex seemed to regard him for a long time before he finally nodded and sat down in one of the chairs. He rolled his sleeves up to his elbows and rested his forearms on his knees, palms up. "You get my wrists," he said coldly. "You come anywhere near my throat, and I will kill you."

"Hex!" Echo didn't want the vampires sucking at Hex's neck either. The wrist seemed somehow less intimate to him. Still, Hex didn't have to be so violent about it.

The demon just shrugged, looking completely unapologetic. Jinx and Syn moved hesitantly, shuffling forward, then kneeling at Hex's feet. They wrapped their small hands around his forearms and took deep breaths. "Thank you," they whispered in unison.

"I can't watch this." Syx closed his eyes and shook his head. "We'll go into town now and get the blood." Opening his eyes, he looked at Vapre and jerked his head toward the front of the house. "Let's go."

Vapre looked a little sick as he watched the vampires suck greedily at Hex's wrist. "Yeah, let's go," he agreed thickly.

"I'm coming, too," Onyx called. Myst nodded and hurried after the trio, disappearing through the entryway that led to the living room.

Fiero and Eyce moved to stand beside Echo, each wrapping an arm around his shoulders and squeezing. "It makes my stomach burn to watch this," Eyce whispered. Then he sighed and hung his head. "I don't want them to starve either, though."

"Don't watch," Fiero said as he reached over Echo's head to grip Eyce's chin. "Look at me, right here at me."

Echo appreciated what Fiero was doing for their lover, but he couldn't look away. Watching the newcomers extract their fangs from Hex's wrist and lick the wounds clean, Echo felt nothing. Not anger or jealousy. Not relief that the ordeal was over. He felt only numbness.

Syn and Jinx licked their lips as they rose to their feet and took several hurried steps backward. Echo barely noticed them. His eyes

were locked with Hex's, and finally, some feeling returned to him, warming him right down to his toes.

Pride.

His fierce demon had taken charge of the situation and handled it with calm authority, proving why he was their leader. Disengaging himself from Fiero and Eyce, Echo drifted across the kitchen floor, almost as though he were in a trance, until he stood between Hex's parted thighs.

Reaching up, his movements felt heavy and sluggish, as though playing in slow motion on a movie reel. He cupped Hex's jaw in both hands, tilting the warrior's face up until they were nose to nose. "Thank you." He started to say more, to tell Hex how much he loved him, but his words were cut off when Hex jerked him into his lap and attacked his mouth with earth-shattering enthusiasm.

Relaxing into the kiss, Echo let his lover take over, giving Hex whatever he needed. Words could definitely wait.

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"What is that awful noise?" Fiero groaned as he stood straight and arched his back. He'd been bent over Vapre's shoulder for the better part of an hour as they pored through information on the Internet. Not a damn bit of it did he find useful.

Walking toward the office door, he pressed his ear against the wood and listened to the sounds drifting down the hallway. "Is that country music?" He shuddered at the very idea that someone would be playing that in the house. He despised the stuff.

Vapre laughed and shook his head. "Echo," they said in stereo.

Fiero's eyes lit up, and he motioned for Vapre to join him at the door. "Let's go see what our little mate is up to."

Vapre nodded eagerly as he rose from his chair, the biggest Cheshire grin on his face. They slipped out of the office, Fiero leading the way, and crept down the hall quietly. Keeping to the shadows,

they stopped before they reached the living room, and Fiero had to clamp a hand over his mouth to keep from laughing out loud.

Echo, Sony, and Mac were trying to teach Jinx and Syn how to do some ridiculous line dance. Fiero wasn't even sure you could call it a line dance, per say. There was a lot of wiggling and giggling going on, feet moving, and asses shaking, but that was about it. What they lacked in coordination, they certainly made up for in enthusiasm, though.

"No, no, no." Echo huffed as he went to place his hands on Syn's hips and shake him a bit. "You're too tight. Loosen up a little." He took a step back, and Fiero could practically see his body vibrate with what ever thought had snuck into that cute little head of his. "I'll be right back." Then he took off in a flash, disappearing out of sight in the direction of the stairs.

Fiero looked over his shoulder at Vapre with wide eyes. Vapre just shrugged and pressed a finger to his lips, then pointed to the living room. Within minutes, Echo was back, flinging white button-down shirts as his companions. "Put these on, and only these." He paused for a minute and shook his head. "Well, leave your underwear on. I don't want dicks flopping around everywhere."

Cramming his fist in his mouth, Fiero tried like hell not to laugh. Hearing movement behind him, he looked over his shoulder again, and motioned for Eyce and Myst to come closer, but remain quiet.

"What are they doing?" Eyce asked in a hushed voice.

"No clue," Fiero replied. "It's bound to be entertaining, though."

Once Echo had stripped out of his jeans and donned the shirt, he rushed across the room to the stereo and pushed a few buttons. An upbeat tune began playing, followed by a woman's voice as she sang about feeling like a woman. This had to be the strangest thing Fiero had ever witnessed.

Wide smiles spread over the five men's faces, and Echo started twirling around the room, shaking his ass and singing at the top of his

lungs. His friends joined in, dancing up a storm as some sang along with Echo, and the others just laughed and cheered.

Echo whipped his head in a circle, slinging his blond hair around his head as he cocked one hip to the side and slapped his cotton-covered ass. Then he giggled like a maniac and began strutting across the carpet, bobbing his head and wiggling his ass.

“Gods have mercy,” Myst breathed. “I love this song. I have no idea what it is, but I love it.”

Myst’s whispered words only pushed Fiero’s amusement higher until he felt like he would need to have his fist surgically removed from the inside of his mouth. He bit down on his knuckles and squeezed his eyes shut, trying desperately to hold in his mirth.

Vapre slumped against his side, his whole body shaking with the effort to hold in his own laughter. The demon’s face had turned the most magnificent shade of red, and he was making steady progress in shoving his own hand into his mouth.

Myst just looked completely enraptured...and a whole lot horny. Eyce actually had tears streaming down his face as he chewed on his lip so hard, Fiero just knew the warrior would draw blood. Eyce shook his head frantically when Fiero arched an eyebrow at him and pressed the heel of his hand against his mouth as little snorts escaped his nose.

“I know you’re watching,” Echo called. “Come dance with us.”

Fiero jumped at being caught, but didn’t move as he watched Echo dance over to their hiding place. The little mischief maker took his hand and pulled him into the living room, rubbing against him as he purred and gyrated. “Hey, handsome.”

He didn’t move—couldn’t move. Fiero stood immobile as his mate danced around him, running his hands all over him in feather-light touches. “Don’t you want to dance with me?” Echo asked seductively.

Fiero nodded his head slowly. Then shook it. Then nodded again.



Echo smiled up at him knowingly and clucked his tongue. “Don’t tell me you don’t know how to dance. It’s very easy, love.” His hands gripped Fiero’s hips from behind as he pressed up against him and began swaying his hips, forcing Fiero to move along with him. “See? Easy.”

His small hands drifted from Fiero’s hips, up his sides, then around to press flat against his chest. He nuzzled his face into Fiero’s back, rubbing against him like a kitten. “I like this,” Echo said quietly.

Glancing around the room, Fiero found that Syn, Jinx, and Sony had pulled the others from the hall and were instructing them on the proper way to dance. They looked like idiots, each and every one of them, but the smiles on their faces were priceless.

This is what it was all about. This is what they were fighting to keep.

Fiero placed his hands over Echo’s and squeezed gently as he continued to move with his lover. Their mate had made their house a home, and their little group of misfits a family. Fiero would die before he let anyone take this from him.

## Chapter Twelve

Echo watched Syn and Jinx sink their fangs into the bags of blood, and wrinkled his nose. He understood it was their reality, and was grateful they wouldn't need to drink from his men anymore, but it sure didn't look very appetizing to him.

"Thank you," he whispered to Syn and Vapre. "How exactly did you get it, though?" It wasn't as though blood banks just dished out their supply to any person that walked in off the street. His eyes narrowed and he pointed a finger in their faces. "You didn't steal it, did you?"

Syx laughed and shook his head. "No. It's amazing what you can buy for the right price."

"We're going to have to find alternate means soon, though," Vapre added in a whisper. "The banks can't really afford to part with much. We paid out the ass and were lucky to get the twelve bags they gave us."

"It'll last for a few weeks," Echo replied with more confidence than he felt. "We'll figure out something by then." The talk of money did bring up another issue he'd been wanting to discuss, however. "How do you have so much money? None of you work."

Syx pressed a hand to his chest and adopted a look of offense. "I work very hard, thank you very much. Do you think it's easy keeping all of these hooligans in line?"

Snorting, Echo rolled his eyes and waved a hand at the demon. "Please. You are just as bad as the rest of them. You know what I meant."

Vapre shrugged. “We’ve been around for a while, babe. Two thousand years is a lot of time for money to accumulate. We own a few companies around the world, are majority stockholders in others, and even have a few real estate investments. We don’t really have to do anything but watch the money roll in.”

“How do you keep people from finding out, though? I mean, how long have you own these companies?”

“Not long,” Syx answered. “Fifty or sixty years. They’re in my name, and in another ten years or so, I’ll sign them over to Vapre, and so on down the line.”

“Surely you don’t use your real names.” Echo could just imagine the looks on people’s faces.

“Of course not,” Syx scoffed. “Steven Sexton.” He offered a hand. “Please to meet you.”

“Vincent Sexton,” Vapre said with a smile and a nod.

“Wow,” Echo breathed. “So, I’m mated to seven insane, rich men.”

“Don’t you mean *insanely* rich?” Syx cocked an eyebrow at him.

“Nope.” Echo smiled and scrunched his nose. “I know what I said.” Then his mood sobered, and he rubbed a hand over his face. “The new moon is in two days. Have you found anything?”

Vapre shook his head slowly. “Nothing more than we already had. I’m sorry, baby. I just don’t know how to help him.”

Opening his mouth to respond, Echo clamped his lips shut again when Mac burst into the kitchen, his eyes wide, his face pale, and his lips trembling. Moving swiftly, Echo hurried over to his friend and grabbed him by the shoulders. “Mac, what’s wrong? What happened?”

Mac moved his lips, but made no sounds. He looked up at Echo, panic written in the lines of his face and the shining of his eyes. “Did you see something?” Echo tapped the man’s forehead right between his eyes to elaborate.

“Ares is here,” Syx growled.

Mac glanced at Syx and bobbed his head mutely. "He's not alone," he whispered.

Syx was on his feet instantly, barking orders for the vampires to go back to the basement, and Mac to round up the others. "And bring Gage," he added after a significant pause. He met Echo's eyes and shook his head. "I'm not even going to try."

Good to know they were finally beginning to accept his usefulness. Or maybe they were just tired of arguing with him. Either way, Echo took it as progress. He paused on his way out of the kitchen and looked back at Jinx and Syn. "You know how to work the space heaters? You'll be okay?"

Jinx rolled his eyes and snorted. "We're not stupid." Then he waved him away. "We're fine. Go be fierce."

Echo nodded and threw a wink at the vampire.

"Wait!" Syn called. "I want to help!"

Echo thought it over for a moment before jerking his head. "C'mon then."

"I'm coming, too," Jinx said vehemently as he took a protective stance in front of Syn.

"I really don't have time to argue. If you get yourself killed, it's on you, man." Echo hurried out of the kitchen, Syn and Jinx right behind him. "Do you even have a power?" He felt like an idiot for not asking before now.

"Jinx has photographic memory," Syn said proudly. "He can remember anything he's ever seen or heard like it's nothing."

"Hmm." Echo didn't know how that was going to be helpful in the war, but the Oracle apparently had a plan for them. Besides, it would be kind of neat to have his own living Rolodex.

The others were already gathered in the foyer, Gage arguing with his mates. "You're not going," he growled. "Go upstairs and stay out of trouble. I'll come get you soon."

"I can help," Sony protested. "Let me help!"

“But Mac can’t,” Gage said gently. “Take care of him.” He kissed Sony’s forehead and gave him a little nudge toward the stairs. Sony huffed, but took Mac’s hand and led him up to their room.

“You can’t keep him locked away forever, ya know?”

Gage turned to look at Echo and sighed. “I know, but I plan to for as long as possible.”

Fiero snorted. “Good luck with that. You see how well that worked with our mate.” He dipped his head at Echo and winked. “You might want to get over thinking you’re the boss. Things go much smoother that way.”

Echo punched his lover in the arm. “Shut up.”

“Yes, sir.” Fiero kissed Echo’s cheek, then jumped to the side, narrowly avoiding Echo’s elbow. “Brat.”

“Oh, just open the damn door.”

Hex looked over his shoulder, both eyebrows disappearing into his hairline. He looked like he wanted to say something. Instead, he smirked and shook his head in defeat. “Waste of breath,” he mumbled quietly.

Echo beamed. Finally, they were getting it! He made a “go on” gesture with his hand, his other fisted on his hip as he waited for Hex to open the door. There was no sense in prolonging the inevitable, so they might as well get on with it.

Syn and Jinx crowded his back, looking apprehensive but determined. Fiero and Eyce had moved together, their backs to Echo, blocking him from charging out the door. Okay, so they still needed to work on their overprotectiveness. At least they were trying.

They both reached back, holding their palms up, and Echo placed his hands inside his mates’. Squeezing gently, they urged him forward between them. “Do your thing, baby,” Fiero whispered to him.

*His thing?* Echo’s eyebrows drew together in puzzlement before comprehension dawned on him.

*Oh!*

Closing his eyes, he allowed his lovers to lead him out the door as he concentrated on drawing as much of their power as he could. It seemed a little silly for him to be absorbing both fire and water, but whatever. He'd never tried to syphon more than one power at a time before, and he found the task harder than he imagined.

He felt himself lifted and moved off of the porch, but still he kept his eyes closed and focused on feeling his mates' energies flowing into him.

"Ares," Hex said flatly. To say he didn't sound pleased to see the god would be a horrible understatement.

"Hex," Ares drawled. "Have you reconsidered my offer?"

That did it. Echo's rage boiled just under the surface and suddenly everything seemed very clear. It was like he could reach out and touch Eyce's and Fiero's gifts, pick out the pieces he wanted, and tuck them inside his pockets. Sometimes righteous anger really was a wonderful thing.

When he'd taken as much of their powers as he needed, Echo's eyes snapped open and he released their hands as he pushed through the other warriors to stand beside Hex. "Why won't you just go away?" He crossed his arms over his chest and glared at the god.

Though he felt sure Hex would be angry with him, try to silence him even, the leader just snorted. "Good question, babe."

"You insolent, little—"

"Oh, nice word usage!" Echo called sarcastically. "I think that's at least a triple word score."

Ares raised his hands, electricity crackling off the ends of his fingertips as he stared daggers at Echo. Smirking, Echo held up his own hand, trying to hide the shock as a swirling ball of firewater appeared in his palm. He could feel the wetness of the water, the heat of the fire, and watched as the orange flames leapt inside the liquid orb.

"Holy shit," he breathed.

Hex lifted his eyebrows at the phenomenon. "That's new."

Ares apparently didn't like being ignored, so Echo continued to do it. "It's kind of neat, right?" he asked Hex, watching the water rotate in his hand. "I wonder if it hurts?" Then without warning, he launched the ball at Ares.

As hoped for, the god was unprepared to fend off the attack, and the force of it caught him square in the chest, dousing his clothes in flames as though Echo had held kerosene instead of water. Unfortunately, it lasted only moments before the fire flickered away, leaving Ares looking more pissed off than ever.

"Oops." Echo shrugged innocently. He didn't fear Ares. For some reason the god wanted him, and Echo figured he wouldn't be much use to anyone if he were dead.

Movement to the left caught his attention, and he watched from the corner of his eyes as two men stepped from the tree line, both sporting large guns slung over their shoulders. He didn't recognize them, but figured if they needed weapons, that meant that lacked any type of supernatural ability. The knowledge did little to calm his racing heart.

"Are we done here?" Echo asked with more bravado than he felt. They overwhelmed their enemies in numbers and strength, but Ares still held the upper hand. All he had to do was threaten one of Echo's lovers, and he'd give the man anything he wanted—even turn over himself. His mates were fast, strong, and powerful, but even rogue demons were no match for automatic weapons.

A crunching noise snapped Echo's focus to the trees on his right. Darkness had claimed the forest, the moonlight no match for the shadows, and he could see nothing. Myst could easily subdue the two on the left, but they couldn't fight what they couldn't see. How many had Ares brought with him?

Ares laughed darkly as though he could read Echo thoughts. "Not so cocky now, are you?"

"If you're supposed to be some all-powerful god, why do you need backup anyway?" Echo heard several groans behind him, but he couldn't stop his mouth from running away with him.

*"Be unafraid and turn away your doubts,"* a feminine voice drifted into his mind.

"Or lose that which matters most," Echo recited under his breath. He mulled the words over for a moment, then snapped his head up to lock gazes with Ares. "I'll make you a deal," he said loudly.

"Echo," Hex growled in warning, but Echo ignored him.

Ares tilted his head to the side and surveyed him shrewdly. "Go on."

"Leave," Echo demanded, "and if Fiero fails in his task, I'll go with you willingly."

"No!" Fiero roared from behind him. He charged forward and grabbed Echo by the shoulder, spinning him around roughly. "I forbid it."

Echo peered up at his lover, pleading wordlessly for his trust. When Fiero looked like he would argue again, Echo turned his back on him and refocused on Ares. "Do we have a deal?"

"If any of your...*lovers*," he sneered the word, "fails in their task, you turn yourself over to me."

"And you'll leave us alone?" Echo questioned doubtfully.

"Until the equinox." Ares smiled evilly. "Then all bets are off."

"But we won't see you again until then," Echo continued to prod. He needed to cover all the loopholes.

"Oh, I'll be back." Ares sounded as though this was a given and Echo was very slow for not catching on to it. "But I give my word I will come alone and without hostility."

"No one will be hurt?"

Ares merely nodded his agreement.

Echo's mind worked frantically, the neurons in his brain snapping in rapid succession as he tried to think of something he'd missed. When he could find nothing, he dipped his head once. "Deal."



He watched as the men to his left drifted back into the trees, gone as though they'd been nothing more than figments of his imagination. The night sounded unnaturally quiet. No wind blew, no sound carried from the trees, not even the house made a groan or creak.

"Until next time," Ares said jovially. He bowed ceremoniously and simply vanished from sight.

"What the fuck were you thinking?" Fiero exploded. "Have you lost your goddamn mind?"

"No one will be hurt," Echo answered calmly. "That's all I care about."

Fiero threw his hands up in the air and growled. "Do you honestly think that cockroach has an honest bone in his body? Why didn't you just strip naked and bow down at his feet?"

"It's cold." Echo bit his lip and took a hurried step back when Fiero looked at him murderously. So the big demon wasn't in the mood for jokes. Good to know. "As long as you each complete your tests, there's no need to worry," he tried again.

"You really are that naïve." Fiero looked at him with a mix of pity and rage. "So, I guess you just get to make all the decisions now? Is that it? You're a one-man show and don't need any of us lower life forms?"

Echo didn't think that was fair at all. "I was trying to save our asses," he argued vehemently.

"No!" Fiero roared. "You were trying to run the fucking show, just like you always do! Did it ever occur to you that we've been around a hell of a lot longer than you have? We've seen things you can't imagine in your worst nightmares."

"I don't think that has anyth—"

"No," Fiero cut him off, his voice cold and hard. "You didn't think. You didn't think about a damn thing besides yourself." He looked as though he'd say more, but instead, shook his head, turned on his heels, and marched toward the house.

Echo looked around him, searching for support and solidarity.

He found none.

His lovers and his friends just stared at him, and not kindly either, before they all turned their backs and followed Fiero inside, leaving Echo alone in the cold.

Well, screw them. He'd done what he thought was right—the only thing he knew to do to protect the men he loved. If they couldn't see that, then they could all just go straight to hell.

Trudging toward the front door with a heavy heart, Echo realized that if he failed, if his plan backfired, that's exactly where they'd go.

And the fault would rest solely on his shoulders.

## Chapter Thirteen

“You ask too many questions, warrior.”

Fiero blinked against the blinding sun, not looking at the Oracle, but out over the vast field of lush green grass and new spring flowers. A gentle breeze played on the air, drifting over his face and ruffling his hair. The scent of honeysuckle and blueberries wafted to him, the smell intoxicating.

“I know,” he said softly, still not looking at the woman beside him. He’d never seen a place so beautiful before. “And I don’t give enough answers.”

“This is true.” Fiero could hear the smirk in her voice.

Finally turning to face his companion, he sighed heavily, his shoulders slumping in defeat. “I have no answers to give, Oracle. I don’t understand what you mean. How can I answer anyone’s questions, when I have so many of my own?”

“Ah, but who said that answers require inquiries?” Her lips curved softly, and she reached up to trail her fingertips across his cheek. “You worry too much.”

“Echo says the same thing.” The thought of his mate left a deep ache in his heart. He still couldn’t believe Echo had made a deal with the devil without even consulting them first.

“Do you not trust him?”

“Who? Ares?” Fiero shook his head. “Absolutely not.”

“You know who I speak of,” the Oracle said with more steel in her voice.

“I trust him.”

“Then why all of this anger? Why not prove your trust? His actions, however rash, could prove of great benefit to your ultimate goal.”

“He sold his soul,” Fiero growled. “How can I possibly overlook that? What if I fail? Echo will be taken from us, and I’ll never be able to forgive myself.”

The Oracle observed him, her lips pressed together, and her eyes stern. “Yet, you think he cares for naught but himself.”

Fiero wanted to slap the bitch in the face. How dare she presume to know him, to know his heart and his desires? His only concern was for Echo and the others. He’d do anything to keep them safe.

“Anything?” The Oracle spoke softly, thoughtfully.

“Anything,” Fiero answered immediately and firmly.

“Would you sacrifice yourself, warrior? Give yourself over to your enemies in order to keep safe the ones you love?”

“Yes,” Fiero returned confidently.

“Would you ask their permission before engaging in such deception?”

“No.” Fiero placed his hands on his hips and cocked his head to the side. His lovers would never allow him to do something so stupid, so why on earth would he ask them? No, he would do what he felt was best, what would protect his men, despite their wishes. Without them, he had no heart, no home, no life worth living.

“I believe you have found your first answer.” The Oracle stretched up on her toes and pressed her satiny lips against his cheek. “Rest your mind, and enlightenment will seek you,” she whispered.

“I don’t understand,” Fiero admitted, but it was too late. He stood alone in the quiet field, the grass tickling his bare toes, and the sun’s rays warming his face. Oddly, he felt he did understand, though. That some great knowledge lie just beyond his grasp, and if he could only stretch a bit further, then he could wrap his fingers around it and everything would make sense.

Plopping down in the grass, Fiero stretched out on his back and watched the pure white clouds float lazily across the crystal blue sky. He replayed the conversation over in his head, looking for some hint of what he may have missed the first time around.

For one, the Oracle had sounded angry with him, something he could never remember happening in any of his other dreams. She was weird and elusive, but never temperamental. She spoke in those damn riddles of hers, but that was nothing new. She'd touched him.

Reaching up to trail his fingers across his cheek where the Oracle had first touched him, and then kissed him, Fiero smiled. The skin still tingled warmly where her lips had brushed against his skin. It wasn't the kiss of a lover, but more of a mother or sister, comforting, accepting, without ridicule or judgment.

*"Would you ask their permission..."* The Oracle's words replayed over in his mind.

*"No one will be hurt. That's all I care about."* His mate's calmly spoken words came to him swiftly, and Fiero's heart began to pound in his chest, his head started spinning, and suddenly he couldn't get enough oxygen into his lungs.

*"I was trying to save our asses!"* Echo had screamed at him.

*"You didn't think of a damn thing besides yourself!"* Fiero closed his eyes and groaned as he remembered his harshly spoken words to his lover. Gods, he was a total prick. He'd been so angry, so hurt, he hadn't stopped to consider that placed in the same position he wouldn't have hesitated to take Ares's offer as well.

In his heart, he knew Echo would never hurt him, or any of them, purposely. He'd just been so...so scared.

A deep sigh rose up from his chest. He'd been terrified, an emotion he would never profess to harbor, but there it was. The slightest flicker of thought that something could happen to his mate sent him into panic mode, which apparently turned him into a fucking Neanderthal.

"Answers without inquiries," he mumbled under his breath.

\* \* \* \*

His bed felt cold and lonely with nothing to warm him but the blankets piled atop him. Echo tossed and turned, trying to clear his mind and snuggle into the welcoming embrace of sleep, but his attempts were futile.

The entire episode on the front lawn replayed in his mind over and over, spinning faster until he felt dizzy with it. Could he have done anything differently? He didn't think so. *Should* he have done something different? Again, he didn't see a way around the choices he'd made.

The Oracle had told him to turn away his doubts, and so he had. He'd let go of the fear that they would fail in their conquest. Thus far, the Oracle had not led them astray, and Echo saw no reason to doubt that the fates would smile favorably upon them if they followed the guided path.

Perhaps, in his irrational state, he had misinterpreted the Oracle's warning. Maybe there was something else he doubted, something else that required him to cast away his fears. He could think of nothing, though.

He didn't doubt his men's devotion, their loyalty to him. He didn't doubt their abilities or capableness to protect him. Though not all of them had been able to voice their feelings yet, he didn't even doubt the emotions that waited in their hearts. Only one thing was he truly terrified of, and that was losing the life he'd been slowly building for himself with the men he cherished surrounding him.

The last thought propelled him out from beneath the blankets. Slipping on a pair of boxers, he marched determinedly from the room and down the hall to Fiero's bedroom. Without bothering to knock, he threw the door open, stomped inside, and slammed it behind him with a loud bang.

"Now, you listen to me!"

“Echo,” Fiero said calmly. He was sitting up in bed, his back resting against the headboard as though he’d been waiting for this little intrusion. “Come here, baby.” Opening his arms, Fiero wiggled his fingers, beckoning Echo to him.

Echo stood frozen in place, a dozen different emotions playing over his face. He’d been prepared for a fight or a heated argument at least. He’d been ready to defend his actions or beat Fiero’s head in until the man understood. He certainly hadn’t expected to be greeted with open arms—literally.

Moving tentatively across the room, he stopped beside the bed and stared. He didn’t know what to do, what to say, and for once decided that might actually be better. His mouth and his hasty actions had caused enough trouble for one night.

“Come here,” Fiero whispered again. His fingers looped around Echo’s wrist and tugged gently, encouraging him onto the bed while ultimately leaving the decision up to him.

Echo didn’t hesitate this time, though. He dove over Fiero, crawling under the covers and molding himself to his warrior’s heated side. Mmm, Fiero was always so damn warm. Resting his head on the man’s chest, he draped an arm over his lover’s lean waist and sighed. “I’m sorry, Fiero. I’m sorry that you’re mad, but I wouldn’t take back what I did, even if I could.”

“I’m not mad.” Fiero spoke softly, soothingly, and his long fingers brushed through Echo’s long waves. “I understand why you did it now. I still don’t like it, but that’s mostly because I’m afraid.” He said the last word as though it were a foreign concept to him, and Echo couldn’t help but smile. “If the situations were reversed, I would have done the same.” He paused for a long time, and when he spoke again, his voice flowed thick and syrupy. “I would do anything to keep you safe.”

“That’s all I was trying to do. I’m sorry that I didn’t discuss it first, but it’s not like I could just call a time-out and gather everyone into a huddle.”

“Nice analogy.” Fiero continued stroking Echo’s hair lazily, his chest rising and falling evenly as his heart beat steadily beneath Echo’s ear. He appeared completely at ease, which only served to confuse Echo further.

“Why are you all of a sudden okay with this?” Rising up on his elbow, he looked in Fiero’s face, searching for answers.

His lover smiled crookedly and leaned in to place a kiss on his forehead. “I’m not okay with this. I know why you felt you needed to do it, though, and I respect that. You love me enough to sacrifice your life for mine. I feel the same, and though I’ve argued with myself, I don’t think I would have done anything differently.”

“Then I guess we need to work out a plan so that it doesn’t come to that. I would die for you, Fiero, but I don’t want it come to that.”

“No one is going to die.” Fiero didn’t growl or snarl the words. He spoke firmly, matter-of-factly, as though no other option was viable.

“So, we’re okay now?” Echo bit his lip and held his breath as he waited for his mate’s answer.

“Yeah,” Fiero whispered. “We’re okay now.”

Echo curled around Fiero once more, resting his head over the demon’s heart, and they were quiet for a long time. Soothed by his lover’s presence, Echo closed his eyes, sighing happily, as his body began to feel heavy, the call of sleep finally coming for him.

“The new moon is tomorrow.”

“I know,” Echo whispered back. “Are you ready?”

“I don’t think there’s a way to be ready for this. I don’t even know what’s going to happen, or what I’m facing.”

“I don’t think it will be a mystery like the waters,” Echo said thoughtfully. “I think we’re going to know right off the bat what’s causing the mayhem. Finding a way to fight it will be the problem.”

“I considered that as well. I don’t have as much time as Eyce. The fires will spread quickly, and many people will die if I can’t push back the flames.”



“You’ll let me help, right?” Echo didn’t want to start another argument, but he knew Fiero couldn’t do this on his own. He’d need all the help he could get, and with Echo’s power being substantially stronger, he could be a great asset to his warrior.

“As much as I want to keep you away from all of this, I don’t think I have a choice. No more stunts, though,” he added. “I respect your thoughts and opinions, but from now on, you listen to me. I can’t win if I’m worried about you and distracted from my task.” His fingers squeezed the back of Echo’s neck and he sighed. “Just let me be in charge this once, then we can go back to you calling the shots.”

Burying his face in his lover’s chest to muffle his laughter, Echo thought he’d never heard anything funnier. This big, strong, immortal demon was asking permission to be in charge. Oh, it didn’t get better than this.

“Fine, but just this once,” he finally replied. Lifting his head, he winked at his mate and grinned.

“You,” Fiero returned his smile and tapped the end of his nose, “are a brat, my love.” Palming the back of Echo’s head, he rolled them slowly until he hovered over Echo’s body, staring down at him with warmth and affection. His head dipped, his lips whispering across Echo’s. “And I wouldn’t have it any other way.”

Their lips met, their tongues dueled, and the world seemed to slip away, blurring at the edges until only the two of them remained. Echo felt Fiero’s fingers around his wrist, slowly stretching his arm over his head. So lost in the mating of their mouths, he didn’t question the intent, didn’t even think about it.

Then Fiero broke the kiss, panting against Echo’s neck as he nuzzled the damp skin with his nose. “Do you trust me?”

“Yes.”

Then without further comment, Fiero straddled Echo’s hips, pressing him firmly into the mattress, and leaned forward toward the headboard. Soft straps encircled Echo’s wrist, linking them to the metal slats and holding his arm in place.

Before he could panic, his other arm was stretched over his head and bound as well. Echo jerked on the restraints, his heart galloping inside his chest as he fought to suck in oxygen to his aching lungs. “Fiero,” he whispered. “No. I can’t do this.” He fought hard, flailing against his bonds and arching his back to dislodge the man on top of him. “Let me go! I can’t do this!”

Fiero covered his lips again, thrusting his tongue inside and licking at Echo’s mouth. “Trust me,” he pleaded. “Let go of your control and just feel.” His hands roamed Echo’s body, leaving a path of burning heat in their wake. “Just feel.”

Something satiny slid under his hips, and Echo’s eyes flew open wide as he stared up at his mate in apprehension. “I-I...”

“Shh, baby. Let me love you.” Fiero lifted what appeared to be long, velvety ropes, and Echo almost screamed. But instead of winding around him, Fiero stretched over Echo’s head once more, and Echo felt his lower half lifted from bed.

The soft sling supported him, cradling his hips and arching his ass into the air. His shoulders pressed more firmly into the bed, while his feet merely brushed against the cotton sheets. He felt completely helpless, totally powerless in his current position.

Echo’s stomach cramped, his heart continued to hammer against his sternum, and he swallowed hard, trying to push away the fear and hysteria. This was Fiero. His mate, his lover, one of the seven people he trusted more than anyone in Heaven or Earth. Latching on to that thread, he grasped it tightly, holding the knowledge close and letting it soothe some of his apprehension.

Another silky piece of material slid under his shoulders, lifting him from the bed until his entire body swung lazily above the mattress. He didn’t know where Fiero had hooked the other ends of the ropes, didn’t even know what you called his contraption, he didn’t know anything at the moment. His entire world centered on his breathing and trying not to hyperventilate.

Then Fiero was back, kneeling between his bent knees and running his hands along the inside of Echo's thighs. "Look at me," he demanded.

As though his body had been trained to obey the order, Echo lifted his head slightly and peered down his body at his lover. The second their eyes met, two slick fingers pushed inside his hole, pulling a strangled cry from Echo's lips.

"Watch me, Echo. Feel what I'm doing to you. Do you like this?"

Echo nodded slowly. Though he was still freaking about his restricted range of mobility, he definitely enjoyed the feeling of fullness and the small pinch of pain from Fiero's fingers filling his passage.

"Would I ever hurt you?"

Echo shook his head minutely.

"Say the words, Echo. I want to hear you say them. Would I ever hurt you?"

"No," Echo answered, strong and confident.

"Then why are you so afraid? Your body trembles, and I can hear your heart pounding." Fiero sawed his fingers in and out of Echo's opening as his other hand reached up to fondle Echo's limp cock. "This tells me you aren't enjoying this."

Old habits die hard, but Echo made a decision in that moment to shatter the hold his past held on him, and begin anew. "You would never hurt me." As though he'd recited some magic incantation, the moment the words escaped his lips, his cock began to swell and lengthen inside Fiero's grasp. "You would never hurt me," he repeated heatedly.

Fiero stroked Echo's hard cock lightly as he inserted a third digit, twisting his wrist and curling his fingers to brush over Echo's prostate. "Let go," he whispered.

And Echo did. He let go of the last niggling shreds of doubt in the back of his mind and surrendered himself to his mate. Dropping his

head back, he moaned loudly, no thoughts in his mind other than enjoying the extreme pleasure his lover brought to him.

“Please,” he whimpered. “Need you.”

Fiero didn’t make a sound, but gently slipped his fingers from Echo’s clenching hole, lined up his thick cock, and pushed forward in one powerful thrust.

Echo cried out, his arms tensing and pulling against his restraints. “More!”

It felt so strange, but not in a bad way. His body sailed through the air, swaying to and fro weightlessly. Every forward glide pushed Fiero’s throbbing cock deep inside his needy tunnel, and each backward pass would leave him feeling empty.

Fiero’s fingers wrapped around Echo’s hips in a bruising grip as he swung him back and forth, impaling him repeatedly on his long shaft. Growls, moans, and grunts filled the room as Fiero set a fast and demanding pace that left Echo’s head spinning with pleasure.

All too soon, the burn began in his belly, electricity sprinted up his spine, and his balls ached, drawing tight to his body in their need for release. “Fiero!” Echo screamed, his muscles tensing as his orgasm rippled over him, stealing his breath as creamy strings of cum sprayed from his slit to splash against his chest and abs.

“So beautiful,” Fiero whispered raggedly. Then he slammed home, burying himself balls-deep as Echo’s inner walls clenched and spasmed. A long, low groan reverberated off the walls, and Echo felt his lover’s hot release fill his waiting depths.

Echo sagged, weak and limp against his restraints. With a few strips of satin and silk, Fiero had left him helpless, completely dependent upon his lover to satisfy his needs. He’d relinquished the control he fought so hard to hold on to, and turned everything over to Fiero.

Not only had the demon bound Echo to the bed, but to himself as well. An unbreakable bond that would be reinforced each time he looked into his mate’s eyes and felt the love rebounded t—

Echo cut himself off mid-thought and jerked his head up to look at Fiero. “I have an idea.”

## Chapter Fourteen

“Are you sure about this?” Fiero didn’t doubt his mate’s abilities, but it wasn’t as though he had days or weeks to succeed at his test as Eyce had. No, he had a strange feeling that he’d only get one shot at defeating his enemy. He really needed to stop the fire before it began. Once the blaze started, it would be beyond his control to extinguish it.

Beaming brightly, Echo bobbed his head up and down. “No idea, big guy.”

Fiero rolled his eyes as he reached out to ruffle Echo’s hair. “Well, let’s do it anyway,” he said with more confidence than he felt. The sun slowly sank toward the horizon, and the new moon would be upon them within hours.

“Do we even know where this is going down?” Echo cocked his head to the side and worried his bottom lip between his teeth.

“I think it will be close. I can’t explain it, but I just have a feeling that we won’t need to look far.”

Echo shrugged adorably. “Works for me. So, are you ready?”

Instead of answering, Fiero held out both hands, palms up, and waited for his mate to grasp them. They stared into each other’s eyes as Echo did whatever it was he did. Fiero never felt any of his power leave him. He didn’t feel a tingling, heat, a draining sensation, or anything. He was simply holding hands with his lover in the middle of the field behind the house.

The wind seemed unnaturally still, like the calm before a storm, and the eeriness of it sent chills racing along Fiero’s spine. It was as though the entire forest held its breath, waiting for the destruction to come.

“Okay,” Echo’s voice interrupted his thoughts. “I’m going to try to recycle your power now and rebound it back to you. I can’t say if it will work or not. I’ve passed powers between people, but I’ve never tried to enhance anyone’s abilities before. Could be interesting.”

Fiero didn’t like the way his mate said the last part, but what choice did he have? None of them had been able to come up with a better solution. “Be gentle,” he said, only half teasing. Would it hurt? It wasn’t as though he couldn’t handle a little pain, but he had no idea what to expect.

Smiling sympathetically, Echo nodded, closed his eyes, and took a deep breath.

Fiero hissed, his finger curling reflexively and squeezing Echo’s. It was like holding a fucking lightning rod. He wanted to let go, but couldn’t. Though it didn’t hurt exactly, it sure as hell didn’t make his list of top favorite things either.

Liquid heat began in his fingertips, spreading up his arms and out to the rest of his body like wildfire. Sweat beaded across his skin. His breathing became short and shallow. His head swam, and his knees shook. Is this how Echo felt every time he syphoned power from one of them?

Fiero’s entire body felt like it had been lit on fire and rolled around in glass. He tried to unlock his fingers and release his hold on Echo’s hands, but his fingers wouldn’t work properly. The rest of his body followed suit, snapping straight and locking into place, and he had no choice but to hang on and wait for the sensations to pass.

When Echo finally opened his eyes and let his hands fall away, Fiero dropped to the ground, doubled over, and expelled the contents of his stomach. His mate was beside him instantly, stroking his back and petting his hair.

“Shit, I’m sorry, babe. I didn’t know it would be like that. Are you okay?” He pulled the sleeve of his sweater over his hand and wiped at Fiero’s damp forehead with it. “Shit, shit, shit! Okay, we’re not doing that again. We’ll find another way.”

Fiero rocked back on his heels, plopping ungracefully to his butt. “I’m fine,” he said hoarsely. “I’ve never thrown up before. That was gross.”

Echo’s eyes rounded and his mouth dropped open. “Never? Not even once?”

“Well, I don’t get sick.” Fiero shrugged. He didn’t have an explanation beyond that. He’d never vomited from pain, didn’t know that was even a possibility. “Let’s see if it worked.”

Keeping a firm hand on Fiero’s shoulder, Echo shook his head. “Just sit down and relax. You can play the big bad demon later. Does it still hurt?”

“It didn’t hurt, not like you’re thinking. Let’s just say that my insides know what a can of paint feels like when you put it through the mixer. I’m pretty sure my organs have been liquefied.” Ignoring his lover’s protest, Fiero pushed to his feet, dropping a hand on Echo’s shoulder to steady himself when his head spun.

Once he felt he could stand without toppling over, he took a careful step back and held his hands up in front of him. He pictured flames leaping across his fingertips, dancing along his skin, and bathing his hands in their orange glow. It took a lot of concentration and even more willpower, but eventually, the effort paid off.

Tiny flames flickered to life, leaping merrily in his palms before spreading out to engulf both hands. It felt no different than when he manipulated the fire from his Zippo. The only difference, was he’d *created* this fire, produced it from somewhere inside of him. Looking up at Echo, he smiled brightly as he began manipulating the flames into a small, baseball-sized orb.

“Wicked cool.” The smile fell from Fiero’s face, taking some of his enthusiasm with it. “I don’t understand how being able to create fire is going to help, though. We need to find a way to smother it.”

“That’s the next part.” Echo smiled that special smile he got when he had a secret, but wasn’t ready to share. He held his arms down to



his sides, his palms facing Fiero, and took a deep breath, his nose scrunching in concentration.

Before Fiero could ask what his mate was up to, the fireball in his hand zipped across the small space between them, splitting in two, and both egg-sized spheres landed in Echo's waiting palms. "Oh, it worked." Echo sounded as surprised as Fiero felt. "Okay, now take it back."

Take it back, indeed. Fiero didn't have a clue where to begin. The confusion and frustration must have shown on his face because Echo rolled his eyes and snorted. "It's just like the flames from your lighter, a candle, anything else. Stop focusing on the fact that it's in my hands and treat it like any other fire."

Fiero nodded once and focused on calling the glowing orbs back to his own hands. Once he'd removed Echo from the equation, everything clicked into place, and the fire moved back to him easily. Swirling the blaze together in midair, he reconstructed the fireball he'd created before catching it on his fingertips. "Easy," he said with a smile.

"Okay, put it out and let's try something else."

Fiero did as asked and stood with his hands on his hips, waiting to see what Echo would do next. His lover produced more flames to engulf his hands. "Now, kill it. Don't take it, just put it out."

This task proved a little more difficult. He'd never extinguished a fire without actually touching it first. "How?"

"You have more power now. Stop worrying so much and just do it." Echo's voice rolled hard and commanding. "You ask too many questions." The last statement came from Echo's lips, but it didn't sound like him. The cadence, the iteration, even the tone of his voice sounded different.

### *The Oracle.*

Sighing, Fiero pushed away his questions and doubts and focused on smothering the mini inferno in Echo's hands. Closing his eyes, he pictured holding the fireball in his hands, turning it, warping it, and

then snuffing it out as easily as he'd blow out a candle. The principle was the same, only he needed to do it from a distance.

Opening his eyes he stared at the flames until everything else blurred around the edges, even Echo. Then slowly, the fire began to recede, retreating to wherever it had come from until it vanished altogether. "Did you do that?" he asked.

Echo shook his head, a brilliant smile lifting the corners of his lips. "All you, big guy. Awesome."

"Awesome," Fiero repeated, but with less enthusiasm. "Now we just have to wait and see if I can do it when it really counts."

\* \* \* \*

"Why are we on the roof again?" Vapre leaned back on his hands, staring up at the clear night sky.

"Where better to see fire raining from the sky?" Echo winked as he curled into Vapre's side. The wind was calm, but the temperatures were still below freezing. Pushing up straighter, he wrapped an arm around his mate and rubbed his hand up and down Echo's arm, trying to warm him.

"Okay, Mr. Know-It-All, which direction should we be looking?"

"Whichever direction is on fire," Echo quipped.

Vapre snorted, cuffing his lover lightly in the back of the head. "You are trouble."

"So, are we okay now?" Echo whispered without meeting his eyes.

Sighing, Vapre bent and kissed the top of his lover's head. He still didn't feel comfortable with his mate putting his head on the chopping block, but after much discussion between the seven of them, he understood Echo's reasoning. Never having faced a similar situation, Vapre didn't know if he would have made the same decision, but he liked to think he'd do whatever it took to protect his men.

Even if that meant sacrificing himself.

"I don't like it," he said into Echo's silky strands, "but I get it. You are the most giving, if a bit foolish, person I know. So, yeah, we're okay now."

Echo finally met his gaze, his smile bright enough to light up the night sky. "Good. I don't like it when everyone's mad at me."

"We're not mad," Hex said from Echo's other side. "Concerned for your safety, and nervous about what your bargain with Ares will mean if we fail, but we're not angry with you."

The other demons gave their quiet murmurs of agreement, each gifting Echo with a small smile of understanding and acceptance.

"Good," Echo repeated on a sigh as he snuggled close to Vapre again.

Taking a deep breath to steady his resolve, Vapre opened his mouth to say the words on the tip of his tongue, the words his heart screamed at him to voice, but Fiero bumped his shoulder from the other side. Closing his eyes briefly, he glanced over, following Fiero's arm to where he was pointing toward the east. "Look," Fiero breathed.

Vapre was looking. He'd never have believed it if he hadn't seen it with his own eyes. Large balls of fire appeared out of thin air, falling in graceful arcs toward the tops of the trees. "What the hell is that?"

"The kappas!" Echo jumped to his feet so quickly, Vapre had to grab him to keep him from tumbling right over the edge of the roof. Once steady, Echo grabbed Vapre's hand and began tugging. "Hurry! That's too close to the pond where the kappas are. If the forest burns around the pond..." He trailed off, but Vapre didn't need for him to finish the thought.

The little water sprites wouldn't be a huge aide to them in the war, but they still counted in numbers. No way would Ares and Hades allow them to outnumber their army. Pushing to his feet, he held out a hand to help Fiero up, then looked around at the other warriors gathered on the roof. "Ready for this?"

Everyone nodded soberly and filed across the shingles to the ladder propped against the side of the house. One by one they shimmied down, waiting until Fiero landed on his feet beside them, then headed off in the direction of the falling fire.

“I guess this isn’t the best time to tell you, but salamanders don’t fly.”

Fiero groaned, but kept walking, looking straight ahead as he marched across the frozen ground. “Just as long as it isn’t dragons,” he muttered under his breath.

“Do you really think it could be dragons?” Echo whispered from Vapre’s other side.

Vapre shrugged. “At this point, I’m willing to believe anything.”

They continued on in silence, pushing through the low-hanging limbs and dried underbrush as they made their way to the kappas’ pond. “We really should bring them more cucumbers,” Vapre said out of the blue when the trees began to thin. His mind was so tangled and twisted, his thoughts jumping from one subject to the next in rapid succession, he couldn’t focus on any one idea.

“What the fuck is that?” Echo yelled when they stepped through the trees at last. He pointed toward the sky overhead, then dropped to the ground with a scream as one of the huge beasts flew over their heads. “That is not a goddamn lizard!” he shouted, his voice full of panic and fear.

Vapre watched as the four huge beasts glided through their air, plumes of smoke wafting from their nostrils and streams of fire pouring from their mouths to ignite the trees around them. Their enormous leathery wings sent the wind swirling with a soft roar as they flapped to stay airborne. “Not dragons either,” Vapre confirmed before Echo could ask. “They’re some kind of hybrids.”

One of the creatures roared, vibrating Vapre down to his bones. He watched the beast soar around the lake, spewing fire from its opened mouth. The trees ignited instantly, crackling and snapping as

they burned until they were surrounded in a wall of fire, similar to the one in his dreams of the Oracle.

Glancing over at Fiero, Vapre watched the blood drain from his lover's face. "I can't do this," Fiero whispered. "How am I supposed to stop this?"

Vapre wished he had an answer, but he was as helpless and clueless as Fiero. He didn't know how anyone could face down these beasts and live to tell about it. Still, they were in this together. Either they succeeded as one, or they failed as one.

There could be no division.

Then Echo stepped between them. Taking Vapre's hand in one of his, and Fiero's in the other. "I have a plan," he said confidently, his eyes never leaving the scaly beasts circling above them.

Fiero swallowed loudly as his gaze marked the creatures' trek as well. "I was hoping you'd say that. So, what do we do?"

"We're going to create a firestorm."

## Chapter Fifteen

Fiero didn't understand how creating more fire was going to help, but he trusted his mate implicitly. Still, he could help but ask, "Why?"

"During a firestorm, the blaze reaches such intensity that it creates its own wind system," Echo explained. "Once a fire has reached that point, it is virtually unstoppable."

"Okay, so again, why? How is that going to help? We're all going to roast alive." The trees were already burning at an alarming rate. Fiero could feel the sweat trickle down the back of his neck from the heat of the inferno.

"Because we can control it. We're going to create a firestorm around those...those...whatever they are." Echo waved a hand around vaguely. "Then we're going to snuff it out. If it works like I think it will...well, we'll get to that part." He looked at Fiero, then Vapre, then over to the others. "Everyone stand back," he called.

Only, they had nowhere to go. The fire encircled them completely, cutting off escape in all directions. Still, the warriors moved as far away as they dared.

Echo squeezed Fiero's hand and took a deep breath. "Hold on to your asses," he mumbled.

The words had no more than left his mouth when Fiero felt the electricity coursing through him, burning him from the inside out. He heard Vapre gasp and knew the man was feeling the effects of Echo's power for the first time.

When the buzzing finally stopped, Fiero struggled to stay upright as he watched Vapre fall to his knees, turn his head, and vomit.

Wincing in empathy, Fiero turned his attention to Echo with raised eyebrows.

“Give him a second,” Echo whispered as he knelt beside Vapre.

“I don’t really think we have a second.”

“I’m fine.” Vapre pushed to his feet, scrubbed a hand over his pale face, and shuddered. “Damn, that sucked.” Then he took a deep breath and looked skyward. “What do we do now?”

“Form a circle,” Echo demanded as he took their hands again. Once they’d done as ordered, Echo nodded. “Combine your powers and build us a storm. Don’t fight it. Just let it come to you.”

It wasn’t nearly as hard as Fiero imagined it to be. He could feel his own fire building inside him, but he caught tinges of Vapre’s power as well. Focusing on the burning trees, he imagined the flames growing larger, spinning in a fiery twister with a gaping vortex at the center.

Once the flames began to move, almost leaping from the trees to gather over the pond, Vapre seemed to catch on, and Fiero could feel little power surges pushing at him. Within minutes, they’d assembled a raging wildfire that hovered in midair over the dark waters of the lake.

Fiero didn’t know what to do from there, though. Fuck! He knew it had been too easy. Well, not exactly easy. The power exerted to keep the fire contained was already draining him, and he felt exhausted.

“Now expand it,” Echo called over the roar. “Fiero, push it outward. Vapre, increase the wind. Everyone!” Echo shouted. “Hit the ground!”

It never crossed Fiero’s mind to question or doubt. Gathering his waning energy, he concentrated on expanding the flames, moving them up and outward, forming a giant ring over their heads.

The beasts roared and screamed as the fire enveloped them. Fiero still had no idea what they were, but he doubted they were trainable

like the kappas. Their snouts and wings looked like dragons, while the rest of their bodies resembled giant scorpions.

Only the Lord of the Underworld could produce something so hideous.

Then one of the creatures broke free of the flames and dove straight for Echo. Fiero's eyes rounded, the blood drained from his face, and his concentration snapped. Tackling Echo to the ground, he braced himself over his mate, waiting for the impact that was sure to end his existence.

Strong jaws locked around his waist, jerking him away from his lover and lifting him into the air as sharp teeth penetrated the flesh on his sides. Fiero roared, the tendons in his neck straining as he fought to free himself from the monster.

Higher and higher they rose until they reached the center of the blazing circle. Fiero had no idea why the ring hadn't dissolved until he chanced a look at the ground and saw Echo on his feet, his hands in the air, and his eyes locked on the flames.

Some small part of him felt hurt and disappointed that Echo appeared more concerned about the fire than he did Fiero's safety. The larger, more logical part, however, understood the need to vanquish the beasts and control the fire.

*Fire!* If he could, Fiero would have smacked himself in the head. Instead, he reached deep inside, pushing away the agonizing pain, and stoked the remaining embers of his power. His entire body burst into flame, scorching the creature's mouth and causing it to screech in pain. Its massive jaws opened, releasing Fiero and sending him into free fall as he plummeted toward the pond below.

Squeezing his eyes closed, Fiero tried to work out the best way to hit the water to sustain as little injury as possible. He needn't have bothered though. He felt his momentum slow before he came to a complete halt, hovering over the lake.

Lifting his head wearily, Fiero sought out Myst and gave him a small smile of gratitude. A gust of wind caught him up, whisking him



over the dark waters, and Fiero crumpled to the ground on the bank near Echo.

“You can hurt later,” Echo said, his voice tense and strained. “Right now, I need your help.”

Fiero couldn’t stand, but he rolled to his back, limp and exhausted, and drudged up the last bit of his power. Molding the flames, he drew the ring inward, closing the hole in the middle.

Another gust of wind washed over him, pushing upward, and Fiero watched in amazement as the fire exploded, incinerating everything it touched.

The beasts wailed and screamed, rolling over in the air in a deadly dance. Then they shattered, literally breaking apart and disappearing in puffs of thick, black smoke.

“Let’s put it out,” Echo called. He sound tired and drained, much the same as Fiero felt. He didn’t even think he had the strength left to snuff out of the flames. Still, he concentrated, forcing his blurry eyes to focus as he pictured the fire growing smaller and smaller.

“Vapre, draw back the wind,” Echo continued. “Suck out as much oxygen as you can.”

It seemed to take an ungodly amount of time, but eventually they were able to extinguish the blaze, and Fiero dropped back to the ground in a heap. His vision dimmed, the pain on each flank searing his body. He heard footsteps running toward him, but they sounded distant and muffled.

“Fiero!” Echo’s hands touched his face, stroking over his cheeks and forehead. “Stay with me.”

He wanted to. He wanted to do anything to make his mate smile, but he just didn’t have the energy left. “Sorry,” he whispered, then closed his eyes and fell into the abyss.

\* \* \* \*

Echo plodded along by Vapre's side, his body aching and exhausted. He sucked his bottom lip into his mouth to keep it from trembling as the gathering tears in his eyes spilled over to wash down his sooty cheeks.

"He's going to be fine," Vapre said softly. His arm wound around Echo's shoulders, drawing him close as Vapre dropped a kiss on the top of his head. "He's had worse, and Hex can heal anything. He just needs a little rest. As drained as I feel, I can only imagine what his body's going through right now."

Nodding numbly, Echo let Vapre pull him along through the trees. The trek home passed in a haze, and before Echo knew it, they were climbing the steps that would lead them into the warm sanctuary of the kitchen.

Gage, Sony, Mac, Syn, and Jinx all jumped up from their places at the table as the seven of them entered the room. "Did you do it?" Mac asked immediately.

"What happened?" Syn gasped. He hurried forward, his hand outstretched as though to touch Fiero.

Echo stepped in front of the vampire and grabbed his wrist. "Don't touch him," he snarled.

Syn's eyes widened, and he bobbed his head as he stumbled backward.

His shoulders sagging, Echo rubbed at his eyes and sighed. "I'm sorry," he mumbled. "I know you're concerned. I just...I just..." He got no more out before the dam broke, and he began sobbing quietly into his hands.

Slender arms wound around him, pulling him close, and Syn patted his back. Echo leaned into the offered comfort, throwing his arms around the man's neck and sobbing into his shoulder. "This is all my fault," he wailed.

"Hush now," Syn soothed. "Everything is going to be fine." He gently unwound Echo's arms from his neck, and turned him, nudging him into Eyce's waiting arms.

Echo clung to his lover, fisting his hands in the man's shirt, and holding on as though Eyce would disappear if he didn't.

The demon's fingers combed through Echo's tangled hair, but he didn't say a word. He stood there, a safe harbor in the storm, and allowed Echo to soak his shirt with his tears.

When Echo was all cried out, and he didn't think he had another tear to shed, he finally looked up at his mate. "Thank you," he whispered hoarsely.

Eyce nodded, but still didn't speak. That's when Echo noticed the puffiness and redness of his lover's eyes. His man was hurting. Not physically, but he was just as concerned about Fiero. "He'll be fine," Eyce eventually managed, though his throat sounded clogged.

Making their way into the living room, they found Fiero stretched out on the sofa, Hex kneeling over him as he pressed his hands to the warrior's wounds. Hex stayed that way for a long time, his eyes never leaving Fiero's face, and Echo's worry began to claw at him. Why wasn't it working? It had always worked before. Hex had healed him, and he'd seen him heal the others. It never took this long!

Just as panic began to rear its ugly head, Fiero gave a sharp gasp, his chest heaving and his body shaking as he began to cough. Crying out in relief, Echo rushed to kneel by his lover's head, stroking the hair back from his face and grinning like a lunatic.

Fiero's slumped back to the cushions when his coughing fit ended, and his eyes fluttered open. He blinked several times before he finally focused on Echo, and a soft, tired smile ghosted over his lips. "Hey," he croaked.

Echo felt the tears pool in his eyes again, but he refused to let them fall. "Hush," he whispered. "Just rest."

"M'kay," Fiero slurred as his eyelids drooped. Then he was out again.

Echo didn't worry this time, though. Fiero needed the rest for his body to continue to heal. As long as he knew his lover would be okay,

Echo could breathe easy. Lifting his head, he looked around at the men gathered there and smiled. "We did it."

"We did," Vapre agreed. "I admit, I had my doubts there for a minute, but you pulled it off, baby. You were amazing."

Echo waved away the praise. "I really didn't do anything besides link the two of you." He nodded at Vapre, then down to Fiero. "You guys took care of the rest."

"So, now I guess we get ready for the next test," Eyce said around a sigh.

"At least we have longer to prepare," Onyx said. Then he shook his head and frowned. "Though that hasn't done us much good so far. I'm beginning to think all this research is a waste of time."

Echo caressed Fiero's cheek once more, then pushed to his feet. "Maybe, but if we find something that helps, it'll be worth it. I do think we need to focus more on honing your gifts, though." He turned to face Vapre full on. "You're up next, hotshot. We'll rest tomorrow, but then we need to get started. Four weeks really isn't such a long time."

He waited for Vapre to nod, then turned around to face Syx. "You and Eyce are going to be in charge of research while I'm working with Vapre."

"Bossy brat," Hex muttered under his breath.

Echo ignored him. "Not only are you looking for things that relate to the prophecy, but we need to find a way to feed these guys without depleting the blood banks." Echo motioned toward their resident vampires. "Onyx, Myst, you two figure out a way to create a light-tight room here on the main floor. Even with the space heaters, it's too damn cold down there."

"You sure are awfully demanding," Onyx grumbled.

"Fine, then they can have your room, and you can sleep in the basement." Echo crossed his arms over his chest and raised his eyebrows.

Onyx grimaced and dipped his head. "I'll get on it first thing in the morning."

Echo bit the inside of his cheek to keep from laughing. Onyx looked so cute when he pouted. He'd never spill their secrets, but his big tough warriors were nothing more than big teddy bears.

"Only with you," Syx said quietly. "Don't forget that."

Echo stuck his tongue out at the demon. "Stay out of my head."

## Chapter Sixteen

Three days later, Fiero woke to tight heat surrounding his aching cock. His eyes snapped open, immediately settling on the little imp riding his dick.

“Good morning.” Echo smiled at him as he wiggled his ass against Fiero’s groin.

Fiero moaned in reply, going to touch his mate, but his hands didn’t move. Looking toward the headboard, he frowned at the cuffs around his wrists, holding him securely to the slats. “Wanna touch you,” he mumbled.

“Too bad.” Echo’s smile turned to a smirk. “Now that you’re all healed, we decided you needed a reward for accomplishing your task.”

“We?” Fiero choked out as Echo rose over him, then dropped back down on his cock.

The bedroom door opened, and his other lovers filed into the room, wearing beaming smiles and nothing else. No one said a word as the all moved to the bed, converging on Fiero with hands and mouths.

“Oh, gods,” he groaned. Ten seconds into it, and he was already close to blowing his load. Echo’s inner walls squeezed around his pulsing cock in waves as his mate rode him slowly, rising and falling, lifting his hips until only the crown of Fiero’s dick remained inside his heated passage, then lowering to take him to the root.

Myst and Onyx licked and nibbled at his throat, working their way down over his collarbones, until they each latched on to a pebbled

nipple. Fiero growled and hissed, the pleasure overwhelming him as his balls drew close to his body.

Hex moved to kneel behind Echo, spreading Fiero's knees wide and pushing them back toward his chest. A slick finger found his opening without error, circling the quivering muscles twice before the warrior's thick digit pushed inside roughly.

Dropping his head back to the pillow, Fiero bit his lip to keep from crying out. Fingers gripped his chin, prying his lower lip from between his teeth. "Uh-uh," Echo mumbled. "Wanna hear you scream." Then he leaned forward, thrusting his tongue through Fiero's parted lips and licking inside his mouth. "Wanna hear how good we make you feel."

A second finger was added to his tight hole, and Fiero grunted, jerking on his restraints as he tried desperately to reach his mate. Gods, he wanted nothing more than to touch the man at that moment.

Myst and Onyx moved to kneel on either side of him, both stroking their thick lengths as they stared down at him with lust blazing in their eyes. To know he affected his men in such a way was a heady feeling, and it pushed Fiero's own desire to a fever pitch.

Hex inserted another finger, sawing all three in and out of Fiero's entrance as he caressed the inside of Fiero's channel. He didn't know how much more he could take, but he'd gladly accept anything his men wanted to do to him.

As though his leader had read his thoughts, Hex extracted his fingers from Fiero's needy hole, lined up the head of his cock, and thrust in forcefully. Fiero cried out, his muscles tensing and his inner walls clamping down on the invading length in a vise grip. He loved it. Love that bite of pain, the sting that eventually gave way to the ultimate pleasure.

Hex gave him only a moment to adjust before he began rocking his hips in short, quick jabs, fucking into Fiero's tunnel with wild abandon. Then Myst was hovering over him, his hand braced on one

side of Fiero's head as he slowly lowered his leaking cock to Fiero's mouth.

Fiero opened readily, sucking his lover in greedily to the back of his throat and moaning around the hot shaft. From the corner of his eye he saw Onyx stand on the bed, grip the back of Echo's head, and slip his dick through their mate's plump lips.

Moving his eyes to peer over Echo's shoulder, Fiero continued to lavish attention on Myst with his tongue and lips as he felt Hex still his motions when Vapre crawled up behind him. Hex groaned, his head falling back on his shoulders, and he bent forward slightly. Fiero watched as a look of pure bliss covered Vapre's face as he pushed into Hex's ass.

Casting his eyes around the group, Fiero searched for Eyce. He knew the man had entered the room with the others, so where was he? The answer came swiftly, when Myst pulled out his mouth and stretched out beside him. Eyce covered the demon's body, attacking his mouth as he shoved into Myst's entrance, burying himself to the hilt.

Fiero groaned, the sights, sounds, and smells too much. "Soon," he warned.

"Not yet," Hex growled, smacking the outside of Fiero's thigh.

The sting did nothing to cool Fiero's ardor, though. If anything, it only pushed him closer to the edge.

His eyes cut back to Eyce when he heard the deep groan issue from the demon's chest. Syx knelt behind Eyce, gripping his hips in a white knuckled grip as he slammed his cock into the warrior's waiting hole over and over.

Myst broke the kiss with Eyce, turning his head and claiming Fiero's mouth in a scalding kiss that left his balls aching and his dick throbbing as Echo continued to ride him hard and fast. Fiero attacked Myst's mouth, nibbling at his luscious lips, and laying siege to the warm depths within.



Hex's control snapped, and he roared loud enough to shake the windows as he began driving into Fiero's hungry hole hard enough to move him up the mattress. Wrapping his fingers around the slats in the headboard, Fiero braced himself, pushing back against Hex's demanding thrusts.

Jerking his head away from Myst, Fiero gasped for breath when lightning bolts of pleasure zapped through him, racing along his spine to pool and churn in his tightening sac. Echo swiveled his hips on the next downward thrust at the same time Hex rammed forward, nailing Fiero's prostate.

He couldn't hold back any longer. Hell, he was surprised he'd lasted this long under the combined attention of his lovers. "Fuck!"

"Scream, love," Echo whispered hoarsely, popping off of Onyx's jutting dick. "I want you to scream for me." He took Fiero's nipples between his fingers and pinched hard as he jackhammered his hips. "Come for me, Fiero. Come in my ass." Then he turned his head again and swallowed Onyx to the root.

Fiero had no choice but to obey. Throwing his head back on the pillow, he screamed out his release as white-hot pleasure burned inside him, exploding into a million pinpricks of erotic carnality. Echo's tight passage massaged his exploding cock, milking his orgasm as Fiero filled his mate's depths with reams of milky seed.

He heard Myst growl beside him. Eyce grunted, and Syx groaned as the trio found their own release, following each other over the cliff and into euphoria.

Echo moaned above him, his throat muscles working to swallow Onyx's seed, and sticky ropes of hot cum shot from his own cock to splatter against Fiero's chest. Vapre roared next, followed swiftly by Hex, who pumped wildly into Fiero's ass, filling his still fluttering hole with copious amounts of scorching semen.

"Holy shit, that was awesome."

Echo climbed off of his still hard cock and bent over him until their noses almost touched. “Who said we were finished with you?” He smirked, wiggling his eyebrows playfully.

Oh, hell. Fiero didn’t know if he could go again. They’d practically killed him, but what a way to go. Suddenly, there was a lot of movement, his lovers crawling over each other and changing positions until Eyce ended up sprawled over Fiero’s body.

“Hey, handsome,” he whispered as he eased into Fiero’s well-stretched entrance.

Fiero groaned, arching his hips up off the bed to meet Eyce’s gentle thrusts. No one had ever taken him like this, slow, easy, almost tender. He liked his fuckings hard and fast, bordering on animalistic, and his lovers knew it. The lazy glide of Eyce’s cock against his straining walls did strange things to his stomach.

For the first time in more than three thousand years, someone was making love to him. Eyce never looked away from his eyes, staring into them as though he could see right down to Fiero’s soul. Fiero felt compelled to look back, gazing into Eyce’s ice blue eyes until he found himself lost.

Vapre stretched out on one side of him, Echo on the other, molding themselves to his body as they licked and sucked at his neck. Hex lay behind Echo, his hand over their mate’s hip as he rocked his hips, thrust slowly into Echo’s body.

Turning his head, Fiero found Myst in a similar position behind Vapre, staring down at the place where their bodies met as he took the demon from behind. Syx and Onyx stood to the side of the bed, their mouths locked and their bodies twined around each other.

It was beautiful. The eight of them together, moving as one with no hurry or demand. Fiero’s throat burned and his nostrils flared. Damning himself for an emotional fool, he swallowed hard and closed his eyes to block his internal struggle from Eyce.

His lover was having none of it, though. A hand fisted in Fiero's hair, tugging just hard enough for him to open his eyes. "That's it, baby," Eyce whispered. "Look at me. Right here at me."

Echo's soft moan vibrated against his throat, and his plump lips moved up to Fiero's ear. "Love you," he breathed. "All of you."

Fiero's orgasm took him by surprise, racing through him like a locomotive. His moan of completion ended on a strangled sob, and Fiero couldn't bring himself to care. As the others found their own releases, Fiero listened to the sounds around him and knew the time had come.

He was ready to lay his cards on the table and see who would be man enough to pick them up. Not now, though. When he professed his feelings, he wanted them to mean something, and he felt saying the words while he still had a cock buried in his ass might detract from that just a bit.

He'd tell them tomorrow. Definitely tomorrow.

\* \* \* \*

"You have done well."

Echo smiled at the Oracle, but shook his head. "I didn't do anything. Fiero and Vapre are the heroes. They saved us all."

"Ah, but you are the one that brought them together. Not just through your power, but through your love as well. Eventually, you will unite them all."

"Why eventually?" Echo wanted to know. "They love each other. It's so obvious to everyone but them. Why can't they just say the words?"

The Oracle smiled her mystical smile, but didn't respond. "Each test grows more difficult," she said after a small pause. "You will need much courage in the days to come."

Echo knew better than to ask what it was they would face. The Oracle gave him straight answers sometimes, but never about

anything important. "In the dream, the one with the prophecy, why did Fiero look so afraid?" There, that wasn't so important now that the task had been completed.

"Do you not know?"

Echo swallowed back his growl of frustration. If he knew, he wouldn't have asked.

"What is that you fear, my dear Echo?"

"Losing the men I love," he answered immediately.

"Then you have your answer."

*Huh?* "Fiero was afraid..." Echo trailed off, his eyebrows drawing together as he tried to piece together the puzzle. "Ares!" he shouted, then bit his lip and blushed when the Oracle lifted her eyebrows at him. "Sorry," he said more quietly. "He was afraid he'd fail, and Ares would make good on the deal we bargained."

"Rash and foolish of you," the Oracle admonished. "I understand your reasoning, however." She turned and cupped Echo's face in her soft, dainty hands. "Do not make deals with the gods, little one. You cannot win, for their only purpose is self-serving."

"I don't understand." Echo eased away from her touch and shook his head. "I mean, I know what you're saying, but you spoke to me that night. I thought you wanted me to stop doubting that we could win, and strike a deal with Ares to get him out of our hair."

"You misinterpret my words," she answered vaguely. "But what's done, is done. You cannot go back on your word, or the consequences will be severe."

"This might have been nice to know before I offered my ass up to that arrogant prick." Echo's upper lip curled over his teeth, and he snarled at the woman standing before him.

His anger didn't faze the Oracle. She continued to smile, her face upturned toward the shining sun.

"Where are we anyway?" They always seemed to meet in the same place, and Echo had yet to learn where it was located. There was a peace here that calmed him and made him long to roam these fields

for the rest of his days. Greatness treaded these lands. He could feel it deep inside his soul.

“It is the place where only the heroic and virtuous come to rest their weary souls. A place of great tranquility, and perhaps one day, it shall be your home as well.” She gave him one last lingering smile over her shoulder, then faded away as per her style.

Echo closed his eyes against the glaring sun, and when he opened them again, he lay in bed, Fiero and Hex curled around him like living blankets.

“Elysium,” he gasped.

“Hmm?” Fiero pushed himself up on his elbow to look at Echo groggily. “What are you talking about?”

“Elysium,” he repeated as though that would make everything clear.

Hex groaned and blinked open his eyes. “You mean the section of the Underworld? What brought this up?” He grumbled under his breath and dropped back to his pillow. “Go back to sleep.”

“Echo, what happened?” Fiero asked, wide awake now. “Were you dreaming? Did you speak to the Oracle?”

“That’s what we’re fighting for,” Echo breathed, more to himself than to his lover.

Hex sat up once more, scrubbing a hand over his face. “Okay, I’m up. Now, what are you going on about? What are we fighting for exactly?”

Echo looked from Fiero to Hex, his eyes wide and a beaming smile stretching across his sleep-swollen lips. “For the right to pass into the Elysian Fields.”

# 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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