

KNIGHT DEVERAUX
IS THE NIGHTMARE
YOU CAN'T WAKE UP FROM.

Fate of a Royal

LORDS OF RATHE

USA TODAY AND WALL STREET JOURNAL BESTSELLING AUTHORS

MEAGAN AMO
BRANDY JONES

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Fate of a Royal

(Lords of Rathe #1)

by

Amo Jones and Meagan Brandy

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Dedication

*To the girls who fuck the villains.
Open your mouth wide and take it like a good girl.*

Dear Reader,

This book may contain scenes that can be considered triggering for some readers. Please be mindful of your own as you dive in...

And holy shit ... time to buckle up, turn the page, and enjoy the fucking ride!

XoXo,
Amo and Meagan.

One



L ondon

CAN THIS SHIT GO ANY FUCKING SLOWER?

My eyes dart to the game clock for what feels like the hundredth time, Trevor's never-ending mouth still running as it's been since the drop of the puck that started today's exhibition game.

Why I agreed to sit with my arrogant ex tonight, I have no idea. We'll just add it to the list of shit decisions I'm known to make.

If Ben didn't spend his entire paycheck on a season ticket so his "best friend can park her ass front and center and watch him whoop ass," I would have left in the first period because *goddamn*. Trevor spent the whole intermission whining. How many times can a girl listen to her bitch-boy-ex moan all the reasons I should "reconsider breaking up with him because girls want to date him, and he won't wait around forever."

Like, hel-fuucking-lo? Was my *bitch*, *you can have his deficient dick ass* and the rock through his passenger window—purely for good measure—too subtle?

Apparently, the answer to that is a big fat yes.

The man, if you can call him one, has been begging me to *come to my*

senses for two weeks now.

I didn't exactly want him before a girl in my dorm said she saw him in the parking lot with some other chick, so I sure as shit don't want him now. I was just waiting for someone to come take him off my hands and I knew his wandering eye would bring that to fruition.

Huh, maybe that's why the dorm girl, whose name I can't remember, looked at me like I was crazy when she rushed over to rat him out.

Pretty sure my response was a smile.

I might have even skipped out of the common room.

It's like I said, I didn't much care for him. He was fun to pass the time with at first, and that's about it. Maybe it's shitty I didn't break it off with him sooner, but I knew he was going to cheat, just like I knew he was going to come crawling back afterward.

My life may be chaotic, but my senses are on point and have never led me astray.

The question was never *will he*. It was *when* will he.

So, yeah, I like making other people the bad guy. Fucking sue me.

Better yet, shoot me. Right now. This guy is still talking.

"I'm serious, London. You have no idea how many girls have hit on me on campus. I'm trying to give you a chance here."

I look at the clock. Three minutes until Ben's dream of an undefeated season is smashed to shit. They're about to be served a hard loss from Rathe U, the other college we share this town with, officially making it painfully obvious that when they face them in the regular season...they have *zero* chance of winning.

But why does this feel like the longest game in the history of hockey?

The moment I ask myself that question, the universe has a laugh at my expense when the reason himself bitches a little more.

"Are you going to talk to me at all?" Trevor snaps angrily, crossing his arms like the man-child he is. *Ick.*

“What do you want me to say?” *That you smell like you bathed in your grandpa’s cologne, and you’re as basic and boring as pretty boys come?* “That it’s all good you fucked some chick in the back seat of your car in the parking lot outside my dorm?”

He sits forward swiftly, and in my peripheral, I catch his creamy-colored skin growing crimson when a few students around us don’t even attempt to hide their reactions. They’ve been sighing and shaking their heads the entire time, forced to listen to him cry right along with me. They’re laughing at his ass now.

I think I might owe the strangers a beer after this.

Three seconds left.

“You’re a real bitch, you know that?” he hisses in my ear.

I don’t care enough to roll my eyes.

Finally, the clock hits zero, and the opposite side of the arena shouts and cheers as ours rush to clear their seats, hoping to avoid getting stuck in shoulder-to-shoulder crowds on the walk back to campus.

Trevor hops up, offering me his hand, and I scoff, lifting my legs and stretching them over the now-empty seat in front of me.

His lip curls. “You can’t possibly plan to sit here and wait until Ben’s ready to leave? He’s not even off the ice yet!”

I ignore him, lifting my lemonade to my lips as I wrap my jacket tighter around me. How Ben gets so sweaty in a room filled with ice is beyond me.

The cheap vodka I poured in makes a poor excuse for a lemon drop, but it’s also the only thing that stopped me from tearing off Trevor’s head during the game. He waits until the aisles around us are empty, then huffs, throwing himself into the seat as if he can’t believe he has to stay here longer. It’s as if he’s convinced himself I invited him tonight or that I actually want him to stick around. Neither is true.

Little by little, the arena begins to clear, the teams making their way back into the locker room, one to be praised while the other gets their asses

reamed, and poor Ben is on the shit end of the stick. He did score a goal tonight though, even if he'll swear it doesn't count when I do my best friend duty and focus on this fact in my attempt at a post-drunken pep talk. He'll remind me nothing but the scoreboard matters, and no line I throw at him will make a difference.

Oh, but there's a positive that comes from this. Losing means we're getting fucked up tonight.

Being the rational, responsible one of the two of us, angry and "fuck it" Ben is few and far between, but also my favorite version. I live for the nights my number one is down to get good and trashed, and they've become more rare these days. His studies and position on the ice create an even more dedicated version of the best guy I know.

Dozens of ideas of the shenanigans we might get into tonight dance in my mind and a happy little sigh escapes as I drain the contents of my cup, the first initial buzz finally kicking in.

Of course, Trevor ruins it by opening his mouth, effectively ending the blissful silence.

"You know Ben's in love with you, right?" he huffs as he looks around, shaking his head as if the arena itself is offensive to him.

It probably is. Poor little rich boy. I don't even know why he's at this second-rate school.

The way he tells it, Mommy and Daddy could have gotten him into any school of his choice. He loves to share how rich they are, almost as if he uses it as a tactic to try to get laid, but he should put more thought into his storytelling because, again, why would he be a student at Daragan State when the nicer school in this town is the one that just whooped our asses for the last sixty minutes?

"London! Are you even listening to me?"

If it were possible to mute his voice, the answer would be a hard no. Alas, I cannot, so this time I do roll my eyes, purely so he can see how much he's

annoying me while internally hoping he takes the hint and goes the fuck away.

“Yes, I’m listening, and no, he isn’t.”

In three, two, one...

“You’re blind if you don’t think so, but I’m convinced you already know. Maybe that’s why you broke up with me? Maybe you just...”

I tune him out again, singing the chorus to “My Own Summer” in my head, when a sense of awareness trickles down my spine.

My eyes snap up and a little to the left, narrowing on the tunnel across the way. A group of guys stand there, one with his attention pointed this way...I think.

His hair is as dark as his hoodie, but he’s too far for me to notice anything else. It doesn’t matter, though, because I still can’t look away. My eyes travel the length of him, snapping to another dark-haired guy to his left when he joins, slinging an arm over the first one’s shoulder. There are equipment bags hanging from their hands.

So they play for Rathe U...but how did they get changed so quickly?

The guys take a few backward steps, and I swear they’re staring right at me. I can almost *feel* it; it’s as if the weight of their eyes is pressing against my neck, causing me to swallow.

If they’re not looking at me, then I’m going crazy and becoming too much of a lightweight, ’cause I only poured a couple shots into my cup.

“Are you serious right now?!” Trevor seethes.

Suddenly, my chin is gripped, my head snapped to the side, and I shoot to my feet so fast my vision blurs. Before he has time to process, I’m standing and shoving him so hard he nearly falls over the seats, but unfortunately, he doesn’t. He catches himself at the last second.

“Who the hell do you think you are?” I snap, storming into the aisle and taking the stairs two at a time.

Anger heats my skin, and my fingers begin to tremble the way they

always do when I'm pissed, so I shove them into my jeans pockets to hide them. Fuck, if I'll allow him to think I'm shaking in fear.

There's nothing about him that scares me.

"You're unbelievable, London! You've been ignoring me this entire time and you want to stare off at some stupid group of jocks from the other school while I'm still right beside you? What kind of shit is that?"

Jesus. This guy.

"I can stare at whoever I want, Trevor. I can fuck whoever I want, too—something you decided to do while we were still together." I use that word loosely. "So excuse me if the mere sight of you makes me want to vomit all over my shoes. And that's saying something because these are Jordan 4s and I just got them."

We reach the entrance to the tunnel, and he bumps his shoulder into mine as he stocks off with a muttered "bitch."

I wait until he rounds the corner, and then a smile breaks free.

Fucking finally!

I take a step in the same direction, fully intending on curving the opposite way as he did, even if it's the long way around to where Ben will be coming out of the locker room, but my feet lock in place.

A knot forms low in my stomach, and I wonder if the vodka isn't sitting well with the nachos I had during the second intermission, but then my feet lock in place as if invisible chains have broken through the cement to hold them there. My head whips over my shoulder, eyes called to the same place they were a few moments ago. To the tunnel where four of Rathe U's finest stood.

Only this time, there's no one there...

Two



K night

CREED PASSES ME ANOTHER CUP OF SHITTY STALE BEER, THE IRRITATION ON his face mirroring my own. If we knew the Giftless would be going cheap tonight, we would have found ourselves someone to play with at the game and headed straight to party with our own kind from there.

It takes a fuck ton of liquor for us to get a buzz on, let alone faded, which is exactly what I'm trying to do after the week I've had. Shit...after the month I've had.

My brothers and I spent most of summer at our family's estate up north before we had to report back for practice. Why we bother with pre-season preparations, I don't know.

We're superior to the Giftless in every way, but I guess that's the whole point. We're forced to live at this fucking school for four years, so of course they dumb down our sport for the useless sake of the humans surrounding us. We're not allowed to use our gifts in any way.

Reason number one-fucking-hundred forcing the graduated gifted to attend Rathe U is bullshit.

No motherfucker should be allowed to tell us when we can and can't use

the abilities we were born with, yet here we are, playing by their rules just so we can have some sort of time on the ice while we're stuck here.

Creed goes along with it, ever the fucking diplomat when others are looking, but Sinner feels the same way as me when it comes to rules and regulations—he fucking hates and ignores them.

Our youngest brother, Legend, feels the same , but he'll bend when he feels it's right.

Sin and me? Ask us when it's "right" not to stand superior to everyone else, and we'll tell you never. Not fucking ever.

To think differently is to spit on our kind and pretend you did so to polish it, when really, it's about control. We're not meant to be controlled. It's unnatural.

Of course, not everyone agrees, but the fuck do I care?

Sin and I get up to what some would call shady shit, and they might not be wrong if they're thinking with the humanity we all possess. So while we think they're fucking fools, we're not about to waste our time forcing them to see it. We leave that to our old man until the crown is passed down and we're forced to worry about that shit. And by we, I mean Creed.

Anyway, we've been back at Rathe U for a little over six weeks now, and since the day we portaled back into Daragan, this poor excuse of a town, my nerves have been shot. Last year was no more than the bullshit I expected it to be, not to mention a total waste of our time, but there's something about this semester that's got me on edge, and I don't fucking like it. It's got nothing to do with the trials we'll be forced to face soon; I know where I belong when it comes to Light and Dark magic.

Sin says we need to play a little harder, but we've tried that, and still I'm in a constant state of *I wanna rip your fucking head off*.

And if the pretty boy of Rathe U, Zeke Mortar, doesn't stop looking my way, I'm going to tear his teeth from his skull, including the ones that haven't shown themselves yet, and stab him in the eyes with them.

Gotta say, it's a compelling way to force our coaches to stop pretending Zeke's half as good as Legend and making them split time on the ice. That shit would never fly in Rathe, but with the human world comes human politics and a twisted type of daddy ball is the shit they're playing here.

Or mommy ball, since the coaches do it all to please the headmaster of Rathe U.

Pathetic.

"Boy wants his pretty white hair turned to ash, don't he?" My boy Silver walks up.

I scoff, loudly saying, "I'm starting to think he wants my cock."

Zeke looks off, bringing his bottle to his lips and I smirk at Silver.

He shakes his head with a grin, steps between our small circle, and plops down next to Creed. He elbows him lightly in the ribs.

"Easy win for us tonight, eh, captain?"

"When isn't it?" He finishes off his fourth cup, still stone-cold sober and growing more irritable by the second. "Even without using our gifts, the competition is weak. No stamina." His dark-blue eyes flick up to mine, narrowing. "You pick one yet?"

"Sin's on the prowl tonight. All I gotta do is wait for him to bring one back." I smirk, kicking my leg out.

"Well, find him," he snaps, his own need to get laid clouding that genius brain of his. "Tell him to stop being fucking picky. I'm ready to get to the Rathe U party."

I stare at my oldest brother for a minute. For no other reason than the pleasure that licks across my skin like a shot of toxic adrenaline when I refuse to follow an order. It's a sick satisfaction I get, one our parents have very vocally attested I do, but Creed and I both know he isn't giving me a fight right now. He just wants us to hurry the fuck up and steal some chick's mind so we can get to the real fun of the night.

Finally, my brother's low chuckle fills the air and he looks off. "Dick."

The corner of my mouth hooks higher and I pull out my phone to call Sin, but then the dozens of voices fade away, the music cuts out, and pure silence fills my ears as my senses double down. Like a wave, they burst out of me, strong and vast, an invisible force to the Giftless and Gifted alike.

Sharp pricks start at the base of my spine and snake their way up, the tendons in my neck stretching, and my head snaps left. My gift claws at my insides, fighting its way to the surface, but I hold it in, gaze laser-focused on the side gate of the yard where the house party is taking place.

A whirl of white whips through it, flying up into the air as the girl it belongs to spins on her heels, walking backward without bothering to look where she's going.

There could be a fucking cliff she's about to throw herself right over and she wouldn't know it until she was sailing through the air.

My lip curls, anger drawing heat to my skin.

Careless fucking Giftless.

She takes a few more steps, her profile now in full view, and my eyes narrow with recognition. It's the girl from the arena.

What a tiny little thing you are... kind of like a doll, cute to look at but won't bend. I wouldn't be above trying, though. No doubt, I've got a full foot and then some on her. She's maybe five-foot, max. Her blonde hair is so platinum in color it's nearly translucent. So much so, it wouldn't even rival the pale shade of my fist when wrapped around it.

She pivots, her little half-skirt pushing higher and revealing more silky pale skin. Her features tighten then, and she freezes in place. Her eyes dart around the space, searching, seeking out something. Mine do the same.

I log every inch of the space, wondering what the hell she's looking for, but then the gate flings open again, and in stumbles the dude she was with at the game.

The sound of his slurs snaps her out of her frozen state, and she darts off into the crowd. A shadow stirs inside my gut as a low growl leaves my

mouth.

“If our parents weren’t coming into town next week, I would,” Legend, our youngest brother, says, and my attention snaps his way.

“Wait, what?”

He nods.

“Why didn’t anyone tell me? Does Sin know?”

“I was supposed to tell you guys when we got back. I only found out before the game.”

“That seems random.” Silver frowns, looking at me. “They were just here for opening ceremonies. Didn’t think we’d see them on campus again anytime soon.”

“Exactly,” I snap, eyes narrowed at Legend. “You should have said something earlier.”

“And ruined the entire night?” He grins, shaking his head. “I know better than that.” Fucking Legend. The traits of every baby brother, only mine has teeth.

“If they’re coming, there’s a reason for it,” Creed cuts in, but I can’t think more into what they’re saying right now. Our parents coming isn’t just a red flag, it’s a whole fucking arena painted red. This isn’t good. We all know it.

A couple girls choose this moment to walk between us, as if we weren’t in the middle of a private fucking conversation.

Some redheaded chick steps right up to Creed, playing with the long straw between her lips. “You play for Rathe, right?” She smiles at him. The word sounds weird on the tongue of a mundane human.

I push against her back until she turns and looks up at me. Cutting a quick glance around the space, I lean closer. “You don’t want to be here,” I whisper.

Her pupils dilate, a small frown building along her brows. “I don’t...think I want to be here.”

“You should go.”

“I’m going to—to go,” she stutters, shrinking into herself as her features pull tight. Gripping her shoulders, I spin her around, and slowly, she walks off.

I focus back on Creed.

He watches the girl walk off, shaking his head at me. “You shouldn’t do that here.”

“Fuck off, like you don’t sit around doing worse. Why do you seem unfazed hearing Mom and Dad are coming next week? What do you know?”

“I don’t know shit. Why, what’d you do?” He raises a dark brow.

I flip him off and he chuckles.

Legend nudges my arm with his when I lower back into the chair. “Don’t stress on it,” he says. “If there’s something we need to worry about, they’ll tell us. They never leave us in the dark.”

That’s my youngest brother for you, always the optimist.

The conversation ends and we’re done here.

Time to call Sin back. If he didn’t pick a girl for the night by now, I’ll be doing the picking.

I pull his number up, but before I can hit send, my head is yanked left.

The white-haired girl is there, my brother’s shirt wrapped in her fist, and then her chest hits his.

My spine stiffens, eyes narrowing as her lips crush his.

Sinner responds instantly, wrapping his arms around her and pulling her in tight as he takes control of her mouth.

Heat washes over me from head to fucking toe.

It’s burning.

Fucking smoldering, and if I were gifted with the touch of fire, there’s no doubt in my mind flames would burst from my fingertips.

Need and something foreign prick along my skin, and my cock jumps in my jeans. I don’t realize I’m standing until Creed smacks my arm.

“Looks like Sin found that toy,” he says, and everyone rises with his

words.

I ignore them, my muscles flexing, tongue running along my lower lip as I stare at the pair. At the girl.

Yes. Her.

She's the one for tonight. *Mine*.

For tonight.

Sin starts to back her up, leading her toward the fence, and I take a single step forward.

Cool liquid splashes over my arm, soaking through my hoodie, and I growl, whipping around to glare at the stupid fuck who spilled it on me.

"Watch your-fucking-self," I snap.

The Giftless prick lifts his hands, the now empty cup still in one. "Whoa, bro, you bumped into me."

I dart toward him, my blood thrashing within my body, adrenaline peaked as a swift shadow of anger falls over me.

My hand flies out before I realize it, eyes trained on the weak fucker's throat, and I know I'm about to put him out, but suddenly Creed is between us, his fingers tight around my wrist as his eyes lock with mine.

My muscles in my neck stretch, my limbs shaking, but then I blink.

Creed's grip eases, his chin lowering as he studies me. "What the fuck is with you tonight?"

I yank from his hold, shrugging. "I'm good. Grab the girl and go—"

My words cut off when I look back, Sinner headed this way with a smirk, the girl nowhere to be found.

He reaches us, opening his mouth to speak.

"Where is she?"

Sin narrows. "Who?"

"The girl whose face you were eating."

"Oh, her." He grins, popping a single shoulder. "Running from some dude."

My frown builds, but he smacks me on the shoulder. “It’s all good, brother. I got us one.”

As if on cue, a girl in a short blue dress slides up wearing a shy smile. I can smell her desperation from here. Her hair is as brown as her eyes.

She’s too tall. Too basic.

But she’ll do.

Swallowing my annoyance, I step in front of her, pressing my knuckles beneath her chin and tipping her eyes up to mine. Her pupils dilate as I say, “You took shrooms tonight. The trip is going to be hard, but you’ll only do what you want to do.”

Slowly, she nods, taking Sin’s hand when he offers it to her, and then we’re cutting out on this poor excuse of a party, headed back toward Rathe U for a real one.

Three



K night

I DON'T GIVE ENOUGH FUCKS TO ASK FOR HER NAME. I DON'T KNOW IF IT'S because the white-haired Giftless burned through my mind like a fucking fiery tornado, turning everything I thought I wanted to ash, or because everything in this world is tasteless. Fucking dull. It leaves me bored. The Giftless parties are always shit. Chasing what we play with on a daily basis by consuming alcohol until we eventually give up.

I mean, it's cute. Until it's boring.

"Where are we going?" the girl asks, bouncing on top of my lap. I hold her still by squeezing her sharp hips, shifting her weight to Sin. "Is this another party?" Fuck, I can't be bothered with her. Every time she touches me, I want to cut her hands off. I mean, I could...

"Yeah, babe..." Sin plays with her, dragging his teeth over her shoulder blade. He flashes me a wicked smirk, one that I know says *thanks for the snack*. "I guess you could call it a party."

Creed pulls the G-Wagon up to the curb. The quiet suburban street is just like any other here. Mansions side-by-side, television lights flickering through the windows, a woman walking her little dog across the street, and a

man dressed in a suit, only just arriving home in his Tesla, straightening his tie as he makes his way up to his front door. I wonder if he's taken the time to check if there's lipstick still smudged on his cock before he got home. Whatever. I never did understand the Giftless and their pointless effort to keep their partner from fucking anyone else. Where I come from, we fuck who we want, when we want, and then we pass her on to the next looking to play. No harm, no foul, not enough fucks to give. That one pussy or one cock limitation shit? That's saved for when you find your mate, only then are the goods not to be handed out to any-fucking-one else. The way our kind tells it, you don't mind when that happens.

Pretty sure I'm gonna fucking mind.

"Knight!" someone calls out from across the road, and I slam the door closed, narrowing my eyes at the shadow on the field.

"Oh my god...this doesn't look like a fun time at all..." the little toy murmurs from beside me, her lower lip drooping. She has a point. To the *mundane* eye, it looks about as simple as its neighbor. Twin pillars, a picturesque swing on the porch, and a garden so fresh it almost looks like it came straight out of a *Home & Garden* magazine.

Her little hand grabs onto my arm. I don't bother to shake her off, desperate to get the fuck inside. As we step across the transparent threshold, the barrier splits open with a zap of electricity as trestles of purple, pink, and blue ignite through the air. The girl's grip around my arm loosens as she steps back slightly.

"Will she be a runner?" I turn toward Sin, smirking at him.

"I don't know..." Legend circles her like a lion would a lamb. "Kind of hope she is."

"She's not!" Her brown eyes come to mine. "Whatever—this is. Did you guys drug me?"

I roll my eyes. "Yeah, because we would waste a good vile of Fae dust on you." My hand finds her chin as I hold her stare. "The shrooms."

She gives a small nod, remembering.

The lawn's littered with people, all from school. Alexander Oliver has a girl on her knees in front of him, her little hand wrapped around his cock as her head bounces back and forth. Some old school D12 song plays loudly through the speakers as I jog up the steps to the front door. People separate for us as we move through the masses. If they aren't trying so desperately to be our friend, they are trying to fuck our regulars.

I push through the door, shoving away the two girls who were making out on the other side. Fog swirls around our feet and the ambient lighting offers just enough to show you what's happening. A complete contrast to what's going on outside. As soon as you step inside, it's like you've walked into an intimate club. Manipulated by magic, there are no separate areas. No kitchen, lounge, or bedrooms. Just one big ass room. The ceiling sparkles with rows of lights, and in every corner, there are oversized, round sofas tucked away. A loud crash sounds at the back, and two shifters stumble through, one in Lycan form and the other in human. Harrison Leviant smirks up at the Lycan, who I'm pretty sure is Justin Evok, since he's the only one who cheats any time there's a fight by shifting.

"Come on, you big hairy fuck!" Harrison shakes his long blond curls around the place. "Dyin' to kick your ass again!"

"Damn our Elders and their need to protect our own kind from us..." Legend comes up beside me, crossing his arms. "Could have been fun persuading these dumb fucks to do whatever we want." I brush off my little brother's reason to cause chaos, heading to the other side of the room where bottles of alcohol, specially made by our own distilleries to allow for double the strength, and Fae dust line the counter. If any of the Giftless we drag in here were to come looking for a party favor, they won't spot our stash, all of it only visible to the keen eye.

We don't want them whining and complaining the whole time, though, so we do stock some weak, standard options in the fridge for our toys to sip on.

The music is loud and rowdy as I swipe the dollar bill that's rolled up and shove it up my nostril.

Why the fuck am I so bothered?

I squeeze my eyes closed to shut out the raw memories. The way my lips turned to fire as soon as theirs touched. The way heat rushed through my body when her hand came to the back of his neck. I felt it. I felt it all. It was as though her touch burned me without even so much as meeting my skin.

A hand slides beneath the waistband of my jeans and my eyes fly open as I slam my glass of bourbon onto the counter, clearing my nostril.

"Hey," her familiar voice purrs from behind as she kisses a trail up the side of my arm. Her fingers inch farther beneath my jeans, and every second they're on me, I want to tear them off. *What the fuck is wrong with me?*

I lean down until our eyes collide. "Hey."

Alexandra Kova has been around my dick more times than she hasn't since we were old enough to want sex. When she's not with me, she's with Sin. And when she's not with Sin? I don't give a fuck where she is. There are many things that separate the Gifted and the Giftless, and this is one of them. We don't waste our time being faithful to every person we're fucking. We don't even do the whole girlfriend or boyfriend thing, not in the way others understand anyway. Do many of us have a preferred person to call on for occasions that require a body at our side? Sure, but that's pretty much where those paltry titles die.

We owe no one our loyalty until we meet our mate, and for me? I wanna stay way the fuck away from that. I don't need a weakness in my life, and people can talk that shit up as much as they want, but a mate is a fucking liability. A straight up weakness. It's a target for every enemy you have, and thanks to mine and my brothers' bloodline, we've got a lot of those.

Alex's blonde lashes fan out over her puffy cheeks. She's cute enough. With a heart-shaped face, green eyes, and an ass to grab on to, she's perfect for keeping my dick warm. "Shall we play?"

I find Sin instantly, and I'm not at all surprised that he's already watching our exchange from behind his glass of vodka. He wants it more than I do. I can see the hunger in his eyes, forever there and never quenched, but I've never *felt* it the way I had tonight. Like I was the one standing before the white-haired wonder.

I look back down at Alex. "Give us a good enough show, and yeah, maybe. But Sin brought a friend back."

She shrugs, wiggling her eyebrows suggestively. "The more the better, remember? I play to fuck, lover. Nothing more, and nothing less."

I stand straight. "Well, go on then...go show us why you're worth it."

When we were ten years old, Alex made it her mission to become a Master of Magic. She's an overachiever at heart.

She slowly plucks away her clothes, until she's standing in her bra and underwear, closing the distance between her and Sin. The music has shifted to a song by The Weeknd and I watch eagerly as her hips ride the beat. This will pull me out of my shit mood. It has to. It always has. I'm not just talking about Alex, I'm talking about sex. It's the greatest outlet for our kind, and we all harness it often. Stimulation does something to our blood, and it's a sensation we're wired to chase.

I shoot back the rest of my bourbon, and it's not until the alcohol burns down my throat that I realize I don't give a fuck about whatever she's doing, and if I grind my teeth anymore, I am going to have none left. Anger simmers beneath my skin like a volcano waiting to erupt.

I need to get the fuck out of here. The stench of magic is thick in the air, the music a mere backdrop to the slight moaning in the background. Alex falls backward slightly, until air separates her body from the ground. She pinches her nipples, arching her back before her other hand slowly dips beneath her underwear. The show is for Sin and me, but she's putting it on for everyone else, too. She loves the attention more than she loves anything else, and fucking not just one, but two royals? Well...it gets her whoever and

whatever she wants. Being a Power Bank, someone whose strongest source of power comes from sucking it out of others' energy sources, mostly from the Giftless being their energy, is particularly untapped compared to our kind. So yeah, she's a hell of a performer.

Tonight, I'm not interested.

I leave the way I came through. People move around me, afraid if they get too close I might snap. I might. Rage ripples through my veins the more I think about tonight, but the frustration of not knowing where it's coming from gets to me more.

Tossing the glass onto the balcony, I squeeze the wooden railing. I need to fuck or kill something. Maybe Silver is right. I'm getting worse with every passing day of this semester. Or maybe the full fucking moon has a direct line for all of my issues and it's deciding to force me into some type of shadow work.

I feel the coolness of the wind run its fingers through my hair and I breathe out a deep sigh, my muscles relaxing instantly. What the fuck?

Or maybe you just needed to touch grass, Knight. Fuck.

"I fucking hate walking, but you know that, you just never cared about what I hate. Did I say that, hmmm...wait—" The feminine voice penetrates my eardrums, and while I've only heard it once before, I recognize it instantly. It stabs at parts of me I can't name, slamming into my mind like it fucking belongs there. Like it was coming home. "—this is stupid. Why didn't you just go back to your dorm? Why are you making this so difficult?"

"I'm not!" A man's voice now.

And then I see them. The girl from tonight, the one Sinner kissed, stumbling down the street with some fucking dude. The hoodie covering his head means I can't tell from this angle if it's the same one she was arguing with tonight. Before I can think any more into it, the rage is back, burning away all logical thinking.

There's no way she can see us. The magic surrounding this house is the very same that covers our side of Daragan—the side the Giftless don't see. Just like now, they don't know we exist. And we prefer it that way.

I hover back, my eyes shifting with her movements as they slowly reach the house. He says something stupid, and she shoves him away. It isn't playful, it's sure as fuck giving a *she wants to run* vibe, but he hooks his arm around her little body, and the wooden rail I didn't realize I was gripping snaps in the palm of my hand. I can't take my fucking eyes off her. Like a hungry wolf, the anger only fuels my need for violence, the overwhelming desire to know what this Giftless girl's flesh feels like in the palm of my hand.

Her body slowly turns to get away from whomever she's with, when suddenly she stops, her head snapping in this direction until her line-of-sight locks with mine.

Instantly, my muscles ripple, clenching and flexing and stretching. Fucking straining.

She can't see me.

There's no fucking way.

Four



L ondon

“BABY...” TREVOR WHINES IN THE BACKGROUND LIKE A SQUEALING PIG, only he lacks the cuteness a piglet does. “Please, let’s just go! I thought there was a party down here, but clearly I was wrong.”

“What?” I don’t bother to turn to face him because I’m stuck in place staring at what’s happening in front of me. People are sprawled out over the grass in the front lawn, smoking and drinking, and I’m pretty sure there’s a fight happening directly out front, judging by the blood splatter that’s flying up in the air. The home is nothing like I’ve ever seen before. I mean, sure, it has the overall look of the burbs, but there are smaller details that seem... odd.

Like for one... *Is it fucking floating?*

I blink and blink again.

Okay, I must have drunk a fuck ton more than I remember because it is definitely floating.

Right?

“What the hell,” Trevor’s mumbling dies off in the background, like I

wish he would, and just as I squint to get a better look, my eyes are called to the patio, instantly locking on a familiar pair that's already staring back at me.

I feel it in my chest before anywhere else. My heart drops to my gut, creating a hollow sensation as I try to inhale beyond it, fighting for a deeper breath my lungs deny. It's as if the air I'm offering isn't what they're after, and the wind knows it, whirling at my back, almost like it's urging me forward. Closer.

Man, how fucked up am I?

With each ticking second that passes, I can feel him reaching across the road and squeezing tightly around my throat. His eyes, they're piercing. Even from here I can feel them. My mouth runs dry when he tilts his head, and that dark hair of his falls forward slightly, the messy strands begging me to run my fingers through it.

I recognized him instantly. It would be pretty sad if I didn't, considering my little stunt at the Daragan State party earlier, even if Operation Run My Irritating Ex Who is Clearly in Denial of the 'Ex' Part Away was a total failure. That and the solid eye-fuck from across the arena prior to that.

From what I overheard a group of girls saying, they're regulars at our school's parties. I would have known this, had I not been new here. Sometimes I wonder what my uncle is thinking, allowing me to go to college ten hours away, but I never questioned him. It took him a long time to loosen the leash he held on to me. I wasn't going to start questioning it now, and besides, I don't miss home. How could I when my best friend is here?

"Lon!" Ugh. Like a bucket of ice water, Trevor's voice knocks me out of my trance.

"Shut up, Trevor." My feet stay cemented to the ground. I want to get closer to what's happening, but maybe—maybe I'm just utterly fucked up. "And don't call me baby."

The dark-haired stranger's tongue slips out, dampening his bottom lip,

and I watch in slow motion as a girl's hands come to his chest from behind. Without breaking eye contact with me, he directs her to the front, bringing his mouth to hers. I recognize her from school. Elizabeth something? I can't remember her last name.

What the fuck is she doing in there? *Oh no, I'm definitely drunk.* There's no way she's at a party. Always desperate for attention, she could barely garner the interest of our bottom dollar guys.

He doesn't look like the type who enjoys the attention-seeking kind.

But I guess looks are as deceiving as they say, since he initiated the kiss. His mouth moves against hers, his hands now sliding down her bare back and over the swell of her ass. He squeezes her ass cheeks tightly as he lifts her from the ground as if she weighs nothing, and her legs wrap around his waist like a fucking Venus flytrap. He curls her hair around his fist and slowly lowers her to her knees in front of him.

Acid burns my tongue, a lump forming in my throat as time seems to slow down, and I watch, transfixed, in a greedy sort of torture. The rest of the party falls away and all I see is him and her, as she works on the zipper to his jeans. Her bright red hair bounces off the streetlight and I feel my stomach coil into a hot wire when his cock lands in the palm of her hand. She peers up at him innocently from below before her lips wrap around his girth.

My eyes fly back to his, and when I see them already on mine, a horde of rogue crows take flight in my gut as their talons try to scratch their way out. My toes curl when I feel a familiar kind of warmth pool between my thighs, my palms sweating—

“Lon!”

Everything shuts off and the party is gone. The house is just like every other house on this street. My mouth hangs open and a whirl of confusion sweeps me off my feet. “Get in the car!”

I spin around to see Ben in the passenger side of a Jeep, with Trevor already in the back. “What? How did you know where I was?”

“Huh?” Ben glares at me like I’ve ruined his whole night.

I probably have, but in five seconds he won’t be mad. He’s my ride or die like that. Plus, if I called anyone else, he would chew me out for days. It’s one of his ‘safety’ rules for me. When in need, rely solely on the man I trust. That’s him. Of course, that doesn’t mean he’s immune to getting pissy when my needy ass becomes the biggest cockblock known to man. A guy running to rescue a girl? He *must* be fucking her!

Ugh. Cue the eye roll.

“What the fuck do you mean, how did I know?” Ben frowns. “You texted me to come get you because...” His eyes fly over his shoulder.

“Right.” I did. That part I remember. I take another step closer to the car and the world tilts to the side. My stomach hurls and my hand flies to my mouth to stop the vomit from reaching up my throat. “I think I am really fucked up. Ben, I hate you and whatever you gave me tonight.” I don’t bother wasting time sliding into the back seat. Letty’s eyes meet mine in the rearview mirror. I already know what’s coming and the lecture she’s going to give us all the next morning.

Thankfully, Trevor interrupts when he starts off in the background again. I try to block him out best I can, but when his hand finds my upper thigh, I lean forward and hit the radio, glaring at Ben.

My upstanding best friend is far too good a man to leave a drunk dude, even if it is Trevor, on the side of the road alone at two in the morning. Would he beat his ass and throw him into a pond of piranhas if he hurt me for real? Definitely. Abandon him for simply getting on my nerves when I made the conscious choice to make the walk with the man? Not so much.

I could cry. If I cried, Ben would drag Trevor out by his balls, but that would be a whole thing, so I simply sharpen my glare for good measure and sit back.

And so it begins. Trevor putting his hand on my thigh, me shoving it off, rinse and repeat. I hate myself for dating him for so long and vow to never

allow myself to be around him alone again.

I met him at the very beginning of summer, literally four days after I moved here, and I've been annoyed by him nearly just as long.

Letty pulls the car up to the entrance to our dorm, which sits on the edge of campus.

"Will you be okay?" I ask Letty, after sliding out of the back seat.

She looks up at me from behind her slightly rolled-down window. "I'll be fine. I'll drop him off now and text you guys when I'm home."

Ben doesn't move from the passenger seat. "Nah, I'll go with her and bring some food back."

I smile at my best friend. He makes it hard hating him when he does cute things like making sure one of our exes doesn't murder us. "I'll be asleep." Making my way to our front door, I throw up deuces. "Night!"

Tossing my house keys into the small fruit bowl near the entrance, I kick off my shoes and bypass the kitchen, heading straight for the stairs and to my bedroom. Ben and I decided to room together the second we knew coed dorms existed. There are not many people I allow into my space, but Ben kind of forced his way into it and told me to go fuck myself. I love him for that.

I kick my bedroom door closed, skipping the shower or even changing, and belly flop onto the bed. I need sleep. I *need* something to get his face out of my head.

The sky is the villain to every story I've ever read. The wind is cold as it whisks over my skin and uncontrollable shivers break out over me.

Where the fuck am I?

I stare down at my feet, seeing them soiled with mud and dirt. I bring my hands up to my face to see grime stuck between the cracks of my nails. Panic grips me around my throat and I stumble backward, falling with a thud on my ass as gravel bites into the soft flesh of my palms.

I wince. Seriously, where the fuck am I? That's when I feel it.

The heat rises within the coolness of the wind and fire erupts through the sky, burning the stars to a crisp. Fog starts to blanket my legs and I quickly push myself back to my feet, when a large figure materializes in front of me. A bridge with massive metal carvings and a pathway made of gold. The fog thickens and the sky rumbles like a warning, just enough to feel the bite of its rage down my spine.

I take another step, desperate to see the bridge. How could something so light and crisp exist among such darkness and gloom? I want to reach out and touch it. Stabbing pain shoots through the soles of my feet as whatever it is that covers the ground crunches. I don't care. I want the bridge. I need the bridge. Happiness fills my insides as I get closer, but I fall to the ground with my hands out. So close. So close.

My palm slaps the cool gold and my brain erupts with a horrifying scream so intense my ears bleed.

Make it stop.

Make it stop.

Pain rips through me as I fly backward, a hooded figure lifting me from the ground and tossing me to the side. I scream again, this time it tears my vocal cords apart as I fall...and fall...

Five



L ondon

I'VE BEEN DRUNK A LOT IN MY DAYS. AND WHEN I SAY A LOT, I MEAN A—loooooottt. So much so that Ben has had to shower me, tits in his face, legs in the air, and then stay up all night to make sure I didn't die. Around that time was when I realized that he probably was a great friend and I had nothing to worry about. I've known him all of my life, and people try to say he has a crush on me, including Trevor, and even though I know deep in my bones he doesn't, those nights really drove it home for me that this man, after having my bits in places where they shouldn't be with your best friend, will not ever like me that way.

Sometimes I wonder if he wishes I was more modest, but since he has seen me naked, I find wearing clothes when I don't have to as an unnecessary evil. I just can't get behind it, especially when I know he'll love me either way.

Not that last night resulted in a drunken peep show, but I'm pretty damn sure I was one Solo cup away from living out some stripper fantasies. Again.

Now here I am, forced to function when the light feels like it has a personal vendetta against me.

It doesn't help that I don't care much for school. Ben would say that it has to do with the fact that I can't make up my mind on what I want to major in, but I'm not so sure. I mean, I know that is a big part, sure, but I can't help but feel like everything is pointless. Like in five years from now, I won't be using anything I've studied.

"So how is your head?" Ben asks, tossing a french fry at my lap from across the table. It's only mid-day and I'm ready to curl back under my bed covers for the week. My head feels like a balloon and it won't stop throbbing, and I'm pretty sure the muscles in my legs have seized up. The previous night is a blur. I remember the game. I remember dropping a Molly in the bathroom after Trevor and I had a massive fight.

"That guy you were making out with was hot!" Letty sucks ketchup off her finger. She can't hide the smirk if she tried, which she doesn't.

And I remember him.

"He was..." My tongue glides over my teeth when I think about how his felt inside my mouth. With an impulsive decision to piss off Trevor, I grabbed the poor dude for a quick tongue fuck. He was—*blue eyes flash in front of me, a single touch against my cheek, the way his mouth curved up in a smirk*—Jesus. "Yes. Very hot."

Ben chuckles at me from across the table. I know that later on, it's going to call for one thousand questions like always. For a straight guy, he sure as fuck is always interested in the dick I'm sucking. "You and I both know that you should have just walked away from Trevor. You can't fix that man."

Guilt wriggles its ugly claws inside of me and he knows he's hit a nerve. It's not that I try, or even want, to fix Trevor. It's that I still feel like I owe him. Ben calls it a trauma bond. I hate the word *bond* and don't think Trevor deserves it.

I have no fucking idea why I feel that way. It's not like I'm the one who cheated, but maybe it has something to do with the fact that I was purely with him out of boredom and my healthy, sadly insatiable appetite for solid

playtime.

Trevor , unfortunately, wasn't what I would call a prime dick option; in fact, I was left to the good graces of my trusting fingers more often than not, but he was fun when he wasn't a complete fucking annoyance, and he was always down for a quickie in the hidden corners of campus.

Huh, maybe that's why I can't get rid of the fucker. He's pussy-whipped, and when a man gets to that point? It takes some serious measures to cut the cord.

I pout, feeling bad for myself and the fact that my sexual needs match that of a man. We really need to cut the stigma somewhere, because fuck all that. Girls need this shit just as much.

I mean...right?

Bet Mr. I Like to Stare in the Eyes of One While Getting my Dick Sucked by Another would agree.

Wait. That was the Molly talking.

“What's with the sour face, baby girl?”

Shaking my head, I rub circles along my temple before looking to Ben, and then the clock that glares at me from above him.

A laugh pushes past his lips and he drags himself to his feet, offering me a hand, so I let him haul my ass up with a very obnoxious whine. “But, Daddy, do I have to?” I stick my bottom lip out.

Ben simply rolls his eyes, throwing his arm around my shoulder and lifting the tray of half-eaten food with the other hand. “Yes, you have to attend the classes that you're required to pass in order to keep your scholarship and keep being my favorite roommate ever.” Letty ignores us both as she rushes off to her next class.

He steers us toward the garbage and then out the double doors of the cafeteria, pressing a quick kiss to the top of my head as he releases me.

“Is this the part where you leave me, and I wait until you're gone before sneaking back to the dorm and sleeping the rest of the month away?”

He lifts a brow at me, and I flick my gaze to the sky, instantly regretting it as the pounding in my head comes back with a vengeance.

“Did you take more Ibuprofen like I told you to?” he asks, adjusting his backpack on his shoulders.

“I did.” I offer him a small smile, moving in for a hug. “Thank you for taking care of me all the time.”

“Someone’s got to,” he teases, squeezing me back briefly before stepping away. The two of us split, heading in opposite directions to finish out our day.

With a deep sigh, I make my way toward the lecture halls for some stupid history class I’m destined to fail, but I do my best to give my all. Even if my “all” is a sad C minus, for the sole reason I can’t be separated from my best friend again.

All my life, it was only my uncle Marcus and me...and Ben. I can’t blame Unc for allowing me here when I know damn well I only came for Ben.

I’ve never really been good at making friends. I’ve never really cared to try, to be honest. I’m more of a lone rider, happy to get lost in my imagination for hours on end, but with Ben our friendship is effortless. He’s my soulmate. The kind that I know would never run out on me.

The day he and his grandmother moved in across the street was, and continues to be, the best thing that ever happened to me. My uncle Marcus is great, kind, and attentive and the perfect father figure from what I know. He’s stern when he needs to be and does his best to understand the different stages of teenage rebellion, but being the only person running the household is taxing and time-consuming, so it left me alone a lot. I love him for it, appreciate everything he does for me, but it didn’t exactly help me in the social department to spend so much time alone at such a young age—the reason why I had the imagination of R. L. Stine when I was little, if you ask the mandated therapist my elementary school “recommended” I see after one

too many complaints from the teacher that I was too intrigued with the emotions people feel and why they feel them...how to draw certain ones out of them.

It became fascinating to me. A simple hobby of people-watching quickly turned into something else. I swear, there were times where I could *feel* what some were feeling. Obviously, that's atrocious, but there were times.... It was sort of the same for Ben, sans the *this child is fucked up* notion, being raised by his grandmother, a woman who busted her ass her entire life and raised her children, thrust back into the working world so late in life to do it all over again with the grandchild her daughter didn't want but had.

He was alone, I was alone, and then suddenly we had each other, and that's how it stayed over the years. At one point, I even lived with him and Grandma Betsy when my uncle Marcus was transferred for work, but it didn't take him long to quit that job and find another because, in all the ways that mattered, I was his daughter. Splitting us apart was the last thing he wanted.

I knew it would be hard for him when I left for college. He was pretty excited when I was forced to stay back for my first year when the only place I could get into was a junior college because my grades were as shit as my attendance.

That's probably where Ben and I differ the most. He has always been all about school and sports and overachieving academia. He knew at a young age he wanted more in life; he wanted the chance to give his grandma a more comfortable life after seeing how hard she worked and was forced to have the simplest things and sometimes not even those.

Originally, he was supposed to go to junior college with me, stay home and near his grandma, but then he got a call from the coaches here, and next thing you know he was accepted into Daragan State with a full ride.

I cried in happiness and absolute dread because I knew there was no way he could pass that up, not without a savings or penny to his name to help pay for college courses, even at a junior college. He would have had to work

endlessly just to cover a couple classes each semester, not to mention play hockey in an old, rundown arena that gets rented out for kids' birthday parties more often than not.

For a moment, as short-lived as it was, he considered turning it down, but then when Grandma Betsy passed in her sleep not long after our high school graduation, I knew. I was about to lose my best friend to a school halfway across the country.

I'd never worked so hard in school in my life, but I knew I had to get to where he was because I couldn't do this tiresome, mundane existence without him.

I'm not entirely emo, I'm just uninterested in the reality of day-to-day bullshit, and I may have a codependent bond with my best friend.

My Molly trips, when the outside world flips on its axis and my imagination takes over, make me believe I can see and hear and touch and feel things that don't exist. It's like a barrier in my brain breaks when I'm impaired, and suddenly I feel like I'm in my element. Like I'm most "me."

Fuck me, I'm a toxic train wreck. Why hasn't this shit worn off yet?

Dropping my chin into my palm, I stare blankly at the professor at the front of the room as he starts talking some bullshit I can't be bothered to tune in to.

I'm positive the day is about to drag on as boring and uneventful as every other, but then the double doors open at the front of the room and in walks a girl with fiery red hair.

I sit up in my chair, eyes narrowing on the freckle-faced, willowy chick with legs for days. Something sparks in my chest as her lips curve into a small smile, and as if they have a mind of their own, my eyes track her every step with rapt interest.

Suddenly, I want to know what she smells like, feels like. What she tastes like.

The last thought shakes me out of my stupor, but I'm unable to remove

the frown from my forehead, and then as if the universe is testing my brand of crazy, the redhead sits in the desk directly beside me.

Not sure how long I stare at her, but suddenly her head snaps toward mine, and she raises a perfectly shaped brow. “Can I help you?”

Now that I get a closer look, I can see the dark circles beneath her eyes from lack of sleep.

Did he keep her up all night?

Fuck her right there on the porch after I left? *Does he taste as good as he looks?*

Wait.

Wait, wait, wait.

That was a trip. I was trippin’.

I conjured up that entire scene in my head, because of the events of earlier that night.

But why would this chick, whom I have never actually spoken a word to, be a player in my twisted little fantasy rather than it be me on my knees before the drop-dead gorgeous guy?

“Are you seriously just going to stare at me?” she whines, self-consciously running her hands down her hair. It does nothing to hide the fact that she’s at least two days strong on dry shampoo.

“Did you have fun at the Rathe U party last night?” I hear myself ask before I give myself permission to do so and I kind of want to stop myself, especially when she looks at me like I’m crazy.

“What are you talking about? Do I even know you?”

“No.” I frown, facing forward. “You don’t.”

So there it is.

Molly for the win...

Six



K night

MY BODY IS SLAMMED AND LOCKED AGAINST A THICK LAYER OF RUBBER, AND then my feet are off the floor as I'm levitated, my back bowing as I'm hit with a power surge so strong, my every limb screams in pain, the move simulating the feeling of thousands of tiny needles penetrating my skin all at once. I grit my teeth, calling on my own gift, my hands shaking from pure concentration as I work to free it from his control.

The asshole stands twenty yards away, face set in stone, hands thrown out at his sides, as soft gray tethers weave in the air, thickening where his gift touches my skin.

I wiggle my right fingers, and like I knew it would, his attention shifts to the movement, for the shortest of seconds, but it's long enough for me to break through his concentration.

Throwing my arm out, I hit him in the chest with a gust of wind so hard it knocks the air from his lungs and sends him sliding across the room.

The levitation spell breaks, my body falling the twenty-five feet to the ground, but I land with the grace of a fucking panther and attack with little to no effort.

I jerk my chin left, sending him barreling into a rack of weights, ignoring the loud shouts that pierce the air as thousands of pounds of steel crash all around. I nod to the right, and he flies across the floor, his head bouncing off the giant mirror on impact, glass crashing all around him.

Still, he flies to his feet then, coming full force, and I wait, dodging his swing before spinning around him and knocking him back down.

He's up as fast as he goes down, and our eyes slam into one another, but before he knows it's happening, his left arm is outstretched, and the long, sharp shard of glass he unknowingly picked up punctures his skin. He yanks back, splitting himself clean open from his wrist to the fucking bend of his arm.

Blood pours from the giant gash like water from a pressurized pipe, spilling over our shoes and pooling around us.

"Enough!" the trainer booms, his voice supersonic and vibrating my eardrums until my concentration slips.

I blink, stepping back and Silver does the same, eyes snapping to his mangled arm that's already begun to heal itself. A choked laugh leaves him as my control over him evaporates into nothing, but I don't stick around for a conversation. We already had one this morning and it left a sour taste in my mouth, so I flip off our trainer when he demands for me to stay, going straight for the fucking showers.

What I really want to do is go the fuck home.

Nah, that's a lie.

I know what I *really* want to do, but I also know what I have to do, and that's attend all my classes like the good fucking boy my parentals demand I be. I fucking told them my head wasn't in it this semester when they called to check in two weeks after orientation. They told me to be a man about my shit and suck it the fuck up.

In less colorful words, of course.

The problem is, I am a fucking man about my shit. I don't bullshit, sugar

coat, or take the easy way out of anything. I work my ass off, just like the rest of my brothers, because, like them, I know our world could shift at any moment if tragedy struck our parents and we'd be called to the throne as its temporary guardian until one of us completed the mandatory steps required to reign. Outside of my own bloodline, there isn't a single person in this school who can overpower me, and that's including the people paid to fucking be here.

Do I know all there is to know about our kind and our world, and every little thing required of every single person within it? No. Who the fuck does?

I'm well aware there will forever be more to learn, within these walls and outside of them, but for some reason, these last handful of weeks those walls started to feel like a prison cell, so naturally all I want to do is burst out of them.

My aggression has doubled, my focus has slipped, and for someone in my position, that's some dangerous shit.

I'm an heir, a fucking Lord, son to the king of the Stygian people, of dark magic, and I'm over here manipulating suicide on my best fucking friend as a way to let out some anger and tension in hopes of feeding my twisted soul that's ravaged but won't share what it hungers for.

By the time I hear the gym doors leading into the locker room open, I'm already pushing through the front ones and out into the open air.

I make it five steps before Creed falls in line at my left, Sinner at my right, Legend having told us he would be late for lunch today.

"Heard what happened in training," Creed says, his eyes scanning the area as we make our way across campus.

Our college is as old as it looks. The architecture crafted by ancient artists, some who are no longer with us. The ceilings reach for the sky with pointed talons before coming down around stained-glass windows. From the outside, it doesn't look like much, but when you look closer, you notice small things. Like how the flowers that blossom from the gardens hold color

profiles that don't exist anywhere outside of Rathe, the realm and origin of the Gifted, and the grass blades are thicker. Even the black paint that has been licked over the walls just seems...more. Everything in our world is just like the ungifted world, only amplified. It's kind of like theirs is constructed in sepia, and ours in vivid color.

"Word always did travel fast around here, even for a bunch of Gifted pricks." I try not to let his words get to me as we continue our way down the path that leads to the main common room. The shine of gold ricochets off the pathway, hitting the lure purple, pinks, and blues that paint the sky. Our daylight is different to the human world too. In the way that ours is better. Saturn's shadow hovers in the backdrop of pastel colors, and at night... well...

"You need to let this go."

"You need to mind your own fuckin' business." I quicken my steps so I don't have to walk beside him and listen to more of his bullshit the entire way. My agitation is growing more as the day goes on. It's like I can hear a fucking ticking time bomb inside my head. The kind you don't know when the final second rolls over.

My eyes drift right as I think that, roaming over the giant stone wing statue, its gold glittering from top to bottom as names materialize in the center, each one fading in, all to fade out and into another. Hundreds of murdered Gifted names are in that thing. The memorial is suspended in the air, golden swirls winding around its bottom and resign to its top, protecting it like it's some kind of treasure.

Waste of magic if you asked me. They're fucking dead. What's a constant reminder of the long-ass list of murdered Gifted going to do other than be a constant reminder we're not all invincible? But then again, maybe that's what the council was going for, a way to keep the Gifted in line with a bit of low-key fear, making sure we never forget The Slasher, a Gifted male who slayed his own for sport, or so they claim.

I say someone fucked him over and his wrath knew no bounds. Sounds like some shit I might do if twisted the wrong way.

Bet that would get me out of this mandated bullshit of schooling.

Shaking my head, I look forward.

The sky-high class building materializes from the thick shrubs ahead, and as much as I try to count myself down from ten to calm my shit, I can feel my magic tingling down my spine and spreading through my fingertips. Before I can stop myself, I fling my hands out, the double doors bursting open with the gust of air I threw at them, and I don't care that they slam against the wall with a loud crack.

Creed's heavy huff sounds behind me, but I ignore him, as I ignore every person that tries to get in a quick hello as my brothers and I make our way toward our area of the cafeteria. A large round marble table is placed in the center of the room, pushed against the glass wall that overlooks the thick forest hidden behind, a safe spot barricaded within them for the shifters to roam free when feeling amped up. The backdrop of the pastel sky and vivid greenery spreads wide behind us, and every now and then I think about stripping fucking naked and shifting into a Lycan, just to run away from everything and everyone. I don't want to be here. Usually, my brothers calm any storm that runs rampant inside of me. They're not fucking strong enough for this one. I'm not even sure I am since I don't know where the fuck it's coming from.

My mind is playing games. Sometimes I feel like I've reached the tip of the mountain I was meant to climb, but when I get there, I look up, and the top is yet another hundred yards away. But I can't fucking turn around and go back. I can't stop and rest.

My body...no, my *being* demands I keep going. Reaching. Keep fucking searching.

A fucking clue to what I'm looking for would be nice.

No sooner than we sit down, do the servers appear from thin air, our

meals of choice being lowered before us.

I give a curt nod, and the little blonde girl who sets mine down flashes me a smirk, her tongue sneaking out to dampen her lower lip suggestively before a small puff of white smoke is left in her place.

I hate how all meals are required to take place in the communal eatery zone, even when we've got shit to discuss, others have no business tuning in . We could use our magic to conceal our conversations, since we're stronger than any other student here, but sometimes that's about as obvious as dropping breadcrumbs leading to where we are.

The professors can sniff out whenever we use our magic, the heady smell of heavy lead thick in the air anytime we use it. They'd only ask us why, and since we have to be on our best behavior while being here, none of us really want to give any of the professors a reason to check in on us. Or tell the Ministry we're "breaking the rules."

Give me a fucking break.

"You need to figure out what the fuck your problem is, Knight, and then you need to wonder if it's worth getting your dick all hard over it."

I bite into a leg of roast chicken before sucking the juice off my thumb. "Fuck you. How about that?" I toss it back onto my plate. I don't want to take it out on them, and I know it's not their fault, but right now, I don't care about logic. I care about ripping away the days that led to that moment I saw her, just to see her again. So I can tell her that I hate her.

I hate a lot of things.

Like how we're required to live on campus with the rest of the Gifted as if our parents don't sit on the throne back in Stygian. Rathe U, even if it's our temporary home, sits on its own at the edge of the clearing, protected from the eyes of the other Gifted via whirls of what we're forced to call "protective smoke," the true term forbidden here, a thick midnight gray sort of fog that conjures up your worst fears and uses them against you if you dare to approach it without permission.

The Ministry fought our parents on that one but lost. Like the royal family of Stygian, the dark, more superior world would put all their remaining heirs in one place as an easy fucking target without the protection of royal magic, spells created and bound in royal blood ensuring no other could ever attempt its use.

I also fucking hate when my oldest brother looks at me like I'm about to rip someone's head off who doesn't deserve it. I might. Have before.

We're stuck in a stare-off when Silver sits down beside me, his head swiveling from Creed to me.

"What'd I miss?" he asks, dismissing his server as quickly as his food arrives.

"Boy's lost it." Sin grins through a mouthful of saffron seasoned pork.

"Fuck you. If you'd have come when I called, you'd have seen for yourself."

"I was about to *come* when you called, you cock-blocking bitch." He chuckles, winking at Alexandra as she takes the seat to my left. "Ain't that right, babe?"

"There was no cock-blocking to speak of." She lays her napkin in her lap. "Whoever I had in my hands last night was well taken care of."

A round of laughter fills the table. The girl never did care which Lord she was lying with. I glare down at my food, hardly tasting the meal before me.

When I offer nothing in explanation to Silver's question, Creed does it for me. "He's dead set on some girl who saw us partying last night."

I don't have to look at Silver, even though his eyes are on me.

"Still?" he asks. "Even after we talked to Gabriel? He said his shield held strong, no penetration, no breaks. Not even a sign of anyone testing his strength for fun."

I say nothing.

The fuck can I say?

That I felt that shit? Felt her eyes on me?

That the wind gifted me her scent the moment I desired it, even from the other side of the street and without using elemental manipulation to call it to me?

How my ass was tense and pissy as fuck until a fusion of lavender, cinnamon, and cayenne hit my nostrils and spread through my bloodstream, calming and heating my blood until I was sure it would turn to lava and erupt from every orifice of my body?

How, while there were lips wrapped around my cock, the feeling of her eyes on mine was what brought me my finale, sending my cum squirting down a throat that was too shallow, too cold?

Fuck would they say to all that?

Maybe I need to lay off the Fae dust.

Sensing his gaze on me, I flick my eyes up at Creed.

He's watching me closely, and I feel his sneaky little gift probing, searching and poking at the edges of my blocking spell, looking for a way into my mind he won't find.

Like all the Gifted are required to do before enrolling here at Rathe U, I've mastered the basic prerequisites, but our parents weren't satisfied with the simplicity of the skills that those spells required because they knew, if there are people out there like us who have the same gifts as our family line, those measly little tricks will do nothing to keep others out.

You have to really hone in on your abilities to keep a Deveraux out of your head. It's too bad for my ever-prying brother, Creed, that Legend and I already have. Shit, we started learning those the minute we could talk.

Silver's still waiting for a response, but when he realizes he's not going to get one on that topic, he changes it, like a good friend would. "You got me good, my man." He grins good-heartedly. "I thought I had you for a minute there too."

I smirk at my food, jabbing the knife in the meat and sweeping it across the pile of blood that seeps from the center. At no point did he almost have

me, but instead of telling him that, I say, “When your eyes shift, your power is shifting with them. You need to find a way to keep yourself aware without breaking concentration.”

Creed nods, thinking over everything I just said before turning to Silver and going into a long explanation of how exactly he can try to accomplish that. Being the most technically trained of the four of us, Creed has placed the responsibility on his shoulders to make sure we are as prepared for any situation possible at the same caliber as he is. And because Silver is my closest friend and the one man I trust outside of my brothers, that extends to him as well.

Creed may only be one year older than me, but he’s always placed a heavier expectation on his shoulders, doing everything in his power to make sure we always have what we need, and when we don’t, he finds a way to get it for us. It’s a lot of pressure for him to want to solve all of our problems, but he’s just wired that way, so we let him do his thing, even if it is really fucking annoying sometimes.

Legend strolls in, a harem of girls surrounding him as per usual. Around here, he’s known as the softest Deveraux brother. The sweet, kind, gentle one of us four.

He is all those things, but he’s also a swordfish in a tank full of sharks, seemingly the underdog when he’s anything but. His ability to shut down the anger or panic or pain of others is highly underrated and he fucking loves it that way.

Rather than dropping into his usual seat, he steps up behind me with a grin so fucking smug I can only glare at his ass.

“What?”

“Found her.”

My fist tightens around my fork, and it takes real effort to keep my face blank. “Found who?”

That smirk on his face only spreads. “I’ll give you three guesses, but you

and I both know you only need one.”

My pulse fucking jumps, my cock right there with it.

’Cause he fucking found her.

She’s here, in this town.

And she’s got some fucking explaining to do.

Seven



L ondon

MY HAND GRAZES OVER THE COOL STONE AS I STEP BACK, TAKING IN MY work. Rose quartz. The stone of love, self-love, emotional calm, and healing.

Leaning down to come eye-level to the sphere, I look deep into the pastel pink swirls of the gem. I'm not a big fan of rose quartz. It has always seemed too pretty, too tame. Like it was trying too hard to be perfect.

I turn around to the other shelf, my muscles relaxing when I settle on the dark obsidian cluster. I like the masculinity of the stone. Protection—power. *Safety*. My hand grazes over the hard curves and I inhale when I feel the slight tickle of warmth rush down my back. I'm not sure what it is about the idea of safety and protection that speaks to me. It's not like I've been in any sort of danger. At least, not the real kind. In 'danger' of failing my classes? Always, but the kind that hurts or leaves you broken and bruised? Not so much. I smirk to myself. Maybe these bad boys are doing as they're intended.

I know a lot of people are skeptical about crystals and the properties they hold, but I don't know. I often think I feel it sometimes, especially with the darker stones. When I left home to join Ben here in Daragan, I was bummed I

wouldn't be able to visit my favorite shop anymore, so when he surprised me and brought me here on one of my quick day trips to visit him last year, I was juiced.

At first, they weren't keen on hiring me, but once I officially moved here this summer, I wore them down. Coming in twice a day every single day will do that.

"Lonny!"

"Yes?" I chuckle, bouncing to the front counter. I flip open the store Zippo and light the tip of an incense.

"Help!"

"Oh my god, Justice!" I leave the Zippo on the glass counter and make my way to the back of the room, pushing open the door and brushing away the dust particles from the previous century.

"Sorry..." Justice shrugs but flashes me a wide-tooth smile. His dark brown hair flops to the side of his head as he hands me the box from up above. Stepping down the ladder, his Vans land on the concrete floor. "To be fair, I did need help."

"Sure." I carry the box out to the front, placing it on the counter. "What is it?"

Justice pulls out a stool, clearly excited as he whips out a blade from his back pocket. He stabs the middle of the tape before placing it back down. "Check it out." He tosses a little bag at my chest and I catch it mid-air, bringing it up to my face to see what it is. Little moss-looking stones roll around the bag, and my stomach twists.

"Wait. Are these?"

His smile stretches wide. One that showcases his best asset. Veneer quality teeth. "Moldavite?"

"Damn, boy!" I pull the little stones out from the bag, rolling them around my palm. Moldavite has never caught my attention. I don't crave the chaos that this particular crystal can bring. I'm more of a black tourmaline, onyx,

obsidian type of girl. “Well, I gotta say...I’d never pay.”

“Pssshh!” He snickers, snatching the stones out of my palm when he sees my lack of interest. “One, we could never afford it.”

“True.” I lean down beneath the counter, brushing past all of the dust to find my wallet. “I can afford lunch, though.” I stand. “Joey’s?”

He rests his arm over my shoulder, directing me out of the store, but not before flicking the sign over to *Closed*. “You know, one of these days, I’m going to convince you to go on a proper date with me. One that doesn’t include greasy burgers and mid-day drunks.”

I stifle my laugh, turning to lock the door with my set of keys before grabbing his hand that’s resting on my shoulder and tucking farther into his grasp. “I tend to like mid-day drunks and greasy burgers.”

“Mmhmm...” He brushes me off before talking about what his mom, Melinda, and her girlfriend, Jessica, have started. Melinda has a hoarding problem, only hers involves collecting small businesses. It’s not always a bad thing, but considering she’s on her fifth this year, I don’t know.

We’re rounding the corner that leads onto the main stretch of downtown. Daragan isn’t small, but it isn’t large either. It somehow sits right in the middle. The township is quiet, yet modern, especially with all of the buildings they always seem to renovate along the roads. Joey’s sticks out at the end of the street. It’s a large building that curves around the corner, right at a busy set of traffic lights. The streets are extra crowded this morning, and the air a little colder than usual.

I zip up my jacket and follow Justice as he enters the diner. Heat crashes into me as soon as the door opens. Dammit. It’s always hot in here. The place is forever full, and the cooks are always busy. I would go as far as to say that Joey’s is in the heart of Daragan.

Justice leads the way to our usual spot and I slide into a booth, sitting comfortably at the edge of the red leather seat, shuffling out of my coat. “So, what do you think?”

Unzipping my pocket, I pull out my phone and ChapStick. “Hmmm?”

“You weren’t even listening, were you?” he sulks, his bottom lip drooping.

Girls are a sucker for that bottom lip. I don’t suck on anything unless it’s over six foot and has a red flag hovering over their head.

I wasn’t listening, though. “No...”

He rolls his eyes. “I was asking you if you guys have any plans this weekend?”

I love that he says “you guys,” already aware Ben and I are a duo that’s not to be fucked with. Letty comes *sometimes*, but for the most part, she’s the smart one. Sticks her head down and does her work. Where Ben goes, I go, and where I go, he better fucking come too. Call it codependent...because it is.

“Why?” I ask, picking up the menu and scanning through, even though I already know what I’m going to order.

“There’s a party happening—”

“Jus, no offense, but after the last party you took me to, I don’t know if I’m up for it.” I squash the memories of the massive rager Justice dragged us all to a month ago. I tried to blame it on his school friends, since he doesn’t go to the same college as us, but I can’t. Straight up, Justice is just trouble, and you put him and Ben together and it’s a catastrophe.

“Aw, come on! If that threesome would have happened, it would have been fun. At least for you, since I know Ben doesn’t swing his big dick this way.”

“Justice...” I tsk, shaking my head just as a waiter comes to our table with her little iPad. “I can’t take you anywhere.” I’m about to yap off what I want when I feel a wave of heat whip past my face. Like being kissed by a furnace, I swear I can feel warmth penetrate my skin much closer than I’ve ever felt.

In the background, I hear the doorbell sound as heavy footsteps pile in,

but I tuck my long platinum hair behind my ear and flash the waiter a smile. “Could I get the cheeseburger, please?”

“Girl...” Justice snatches the menu off me. “You always get that.”

The waiter leaves just as Justice sighs, running his hands through his hair. “Look, it’s—I’m throwing the party. But one, you can’t tell my moms, and two, *you seriously can’t tell my moms.*”

I stop drinking my water. “You’re in so much trouble.”

“Just tell me you’ll be there.”

“Fine!” I widen my eyes at him, smiling. “I’ll be there.” Movement catches my attention from behind him and I look to see what it is.

My stomach falls to my feet when I’m met with those sharp blue eyes I’ve been thinking about. He’s with a group of other guys. Whatever Justice is yapping about now turns into white noise because *holy shit*.

Why the fuck do I keep seeing him everywhere now? He looks different today. His hair looks scruffier, but somehow it only makes him more sexy . Rough around the edges. Like a jagged blade one would yield as a weapon. I look around the guys he’s with, and my cheeks flush when I realize how attractive they all are. Jesus. What the fuck? They all have darker hair except one, and I would probably go as far as to say that they could all be brothers.

That one, though. I’d bet he uses his dick like a weapon, serving up a raw, rugged ride. My favorite kind.

He rolls his bottom lip into his mouth quickly before his tongue slides over the base and I greedily wait for more.

“Good!” Justice hits my leg with his before shifting over his shoulder to see what I’m looking at. “Oh, god, Lon. Look, I’ll fuck you, okay? You can stop being so desperate. Ick,” he jokes, flicking his fingers out at me.

“You’re such an idiot.” I shake my head as the waiter places our plates down on the table. They’re anything but *ick*. Clearly, Jus has his beer goggles on already. “So this party...” I try to distract him. “Are you expecting hella people? And how do you actually propose you’re going to get away with

this? Literally your whole street is friends with your moms.”

“I know.” He finishes squeezing ketchup onto his plate before sliding it over to me. “Which is why we’re not having it at my house. We’re having it somewhere else.”

I’ve known Justice for about a year now, but we didn’t actually hang out together until I started working at his parents’ shop—my short visits here last year were fully dedicated to spending time with Ben. Jus isn’t as close in our friend group, but I’m one hundred percent sure that’s because he doesn’t go to our school. His is across the bridge and on the other side of the city. Why he refuses to attend ours is simple. It’s the lesser school. Although...I’ve not seen much of this school myself, but I haven’t been here long, so that’s no surprise.

“Where?”

He shrugs off my question. “At a friend’s.” His phone starts ringing in his pocket, and he reaches inside, his face paling. “I’ve got to get this. Give me a second?”

I watch as he shuffles out of his seat and moves towards the other side of the bar. His back is turned to me so I can’t make out what he’s saying, which is annoying. I need the distraction. Anything to keep me from perving on the guys opposite us.

I slip out from the booth and make my way to the bathroom. There is no way my eyes won’t stray. It’s like my body is refusing to listen to my command to ignore the hot boys and it wants—no—*needs* to do the opposite. I swear my muscles strain as if I’m forcing them to move, just to keep my neck from turning and feet from carrying me in their direction.

I literally rolled so hard on Molly I imagined one of them watching me while he got his dick, that I’m sure is *divine*, sucked in a floating fuckin’ house.

My hormones need to chill the fuck out.

The small hallway leading to the ladies’ room is empty when I reach it,

the lighting too dim for a restaurant in my opinion. I'm about to press on the door to enter when an arm is on mine, turning me around and forcing me up against a wall.

"What the fuck!" I try to whack the hand away, but a palm is pressed tight over my mouth to shut me up and I'm staring into a pair of angry blue eyes. The intensity of them resembles more of a turquoise color than anything else, like the shade of swirling waves off the coast of a tropical island, dark and light at the same time. And right now, they're a raging fucking tsunami and I'm the land it yearns to destroy.

He tilts his head to the side, his hand sliding down just enough to free my lips. This guy is pissing me off. *Is he stalking me?* "What's your name?"

I shove him off me again, ignoring the way my heart thrashes around in my chest the second my fingers brush against the bare skin of his arms. "This how you ask every girl her name?"

The corner of his mouth curves upward slightly as if my rage amuses him. "Not usually, no. Answer the question."

"I'd rather not."

He brings his hand back to the base of my throat, moving me gently up against the wall once more. I think I feel a slight tremble in his touch, but his tone makes me question my senses because it's calm and controlled. "Huh. Funny how you didn't play this hard to get with a tongue down your throat."

"Fuck you." I go to walk away from him, but he blocks my path.

My eyes flick over his shoulder, which is hard to do since he's literally a foot and some taller than me, towering and caging in my small frame like a beast would his next meal. His posse stands behind him, two with dark hair and unnaturally pale skin like his, and one with the oddest shade of silver I've ever seen. They almost feel unnatural. Their energy is unreadable.

My eyes catch on the broody looking one to his left for a moment. When he shifts closer, his darker blue eyes narrow accusingly, and a look of frustration draws his features tight the longer he stares into mine. When his

lip curls cruelly, I cave, bringing my attention back to the guy before me.

“What is it?” I pop a brow. “You guys want to gloat? Maybe rub it in that I, the female, was the desperate one? I was drunk, and if you want to get real here, the kiss was purely a game piece that I needed to get someone off my back.”

“Yeah, because that was it...” he answers blandly. “What’s your name?”

A scoffed laugh leaves me, but when his glare only sharpens, I clear my throat, and this time, when I try to shoulder past him, he lets me.

A little more rattled than I’d like to admit, I grab my phone and wallet, heading out the front door to wait for Justice. Fuck those guys. No matter how hot he is...

No matter how hot they *all* are.

The doors open again and I stand up straighter, expecting to see them walk out, but Justice is running his hand through his hair, the wrinkle lines between his eyes deep. “I’ve gotta go back to work. I’ll walk you back to campus if you want?”

“I can walk, Jus. Everything okay?”

He stays on his phone, the worry lines getting deeper. “Not really. Hey!” He shoves it into his pocket, his demeanor changing. Bringing me in closer, he presses his lips to my forehead. “I’ll call you, okay?”

“Sure!” I watch as he walks the opposite way, running across the road and looking over his shoulder every two seconds.

As if someone was chasing him.

Or stalking him...

Starved since we didn’t get to eat after all, I drag my cranky ass back to campus.

When I get home, I kick the front door closed, unbutton my jacket, and toss it onto the small table in the lounge when a small envelope falls out. Our room is one of the smaller ones offered here on campus, but it was the only one available in the coed dorms. We weren’t about to complain. There was

no way in hell Ben and I would be separated again, even if it was only by a few hundred feet or so. We're all each other has.

I lean down and pick up the envelope, tossing it onto the table and kicking off my shoes. I fall down onto the sofa, resting my head against the edge when my phone starts blaring in my pocket. I swipe to answer it when I see Ben's name flash over the screen and the first selfie we took with each other. His pierced tongue is out, his dimples sinking into each side of his cheeks, and his honey brown eyes glistening with mischief.

"Yes?"

"Did Justice tell you about his party?"

"He did." I stand, making my way to my bedroom to gather everything for a shower. Fatigue has long since poisoned my muscles, and as every second passes, I feel myself fading. Damn . "Are we going?"

"Definitely." That's code for he has found someone to get with while he's there.

"Mmmm. And what's her name?" I ask, picking up my belongings and making my way out our door to the showers. We could have lived off campus, but neither of us could really afford it right now, which is another reason we settled for a two-bedroom dorm. It's nice enough to call home.

"Ahhh, you will have to wait until the weekend because she's coming with us."

I drop my shit on the counter and shuffle out of my clothes. "Fine. Are you finished? I need to shower."

"No! What do you want for dinner? That's why I called. It's my turn to cook, but I can't be fucked."

"Anything. I'm not that hungry tonight. More tired."

"Oh?" he asks, and I know I'm not getting rid of him anytime soon, so I switch ears and make my way to the showers.

"It's no big...it's just—" Do I tell him? My best friend who can read me like the fucking alphabet? He's going to see my lies all over my face when he

digs, so maybe I can give him a ploy for now. I don't think I'm ready to admit that a certain someone is occupying all my damn time. "—nothing. I'm due for my period, so I'm being extra sensitive."

"Oh!" he brushes me off. "Need some tampons or some shit?"

"Ben..."

"Maybe some ice cream?"

My Ben, always trying to take care of me.

My smile softens. "Okay, I'm leaving you now."

"I know, vodka and ice—" I hang up on him, chuckling while tossing my phone onto the counter with my clothes. I rush through the shower, scrubbing up in half the time before stepping out and into my shower slippers. I scroll through Instagram on my way back, flipping through Ben's story. He's a ho. A different girl every week will have his attention, but does he ever talk about them with me? No. So who is this one and what makes her different? Maybe he'll finally settle down. God can only hope.

Kicking my door closed, I toss all of my things into my room and shuffle into one of Ben's oversized shirts I've officially claimed as my own that stops above my knee and some knitted socks. Ben won't be back for another hour, so I grab my laptop and open up my assignment.

School sucks. I'm here because I'm doing what every other person does at my age, but there's a lingering ache that continues to pound deep in my gut anytime I think about the future. I can never see it. I've tried, but all I see is nothing.

I see nothing.

DARK CLOUDS FALL AROUND THE BRIDGE LIKE A RAINFALL OF DESTRUCTION. A loud thumping sounds behind my ears, and anytime I try to look around to see where it's coming from, I'm met with an empty street shaded by fog. I can barely see three steps ahead of me.

I turn back to the bridge that's sticking out of the fat clouds, taking a careful step closer. The sound gets louder—so loud I feel the drum beating against my head. I just want to see what's over it. What's on the other side of this bridge? It has to be—a dark cloak falls from the sky in a rush and I stumble backward, falling on my back, a loud scream tearing from my lips. I barely finish screaming when I feel something force itself down my throat. My veins ripple from fire and my legs buzz like static.

I think I am dying. This is it. I'm dying...

I SHOOT UP FROM THE BED, SWEAT STICKING MY SHEETS TO MY CLAMMY BODY. My heart stammers in my chest as I try to catch my breath. *What the fuck is happening?* I've never had nightmares before, ever, and this marks two in one week. But that's not the strangest part. It's the realness of it. I *felt* the pain. The utter defeat that fell over me when the other side of that bridge grew farther from my grasp.

Squeezing my eyes closed, I rub them with the palm of my hand when the wind's gentle touch caresses me from around the nape of my neck. Goosebumps break out over my flesh when the sharpness of ice slides down the apex of my spine in the next breath. I shiver loudly but pause when a sense of wonder falls over me. It's...different. Puzzling. Almost as if it's *right there*. A heavy sense of hate and need twisting together into a suffocating tornado, but while I feel it, I also...don't. Like it's outside of me. Without touch.

Like it's not mine...

The thought is troubling, especially since I've always been keenly in tune with the emotions of others around me. Everyone has always called me an empath, and I believe it. I know when Ben is upset, sad, happy. It's never that I can see it and read him; it's that I *feel* it, but this? This is stronger, more, in every sense of the word.

With furrowed brows and trembling fingers, I grip the edges of Ben's shirt, pulling it up my body to wipe the sweat from my brow, and instantly, I'm slammed with a sense of soul-crushing possessiveness, so strong it makes me gasp. The shirt falls from my fingertips and the hairs at the base of my neck stand when I feel the weight of eyes on me.

I jump from my bed, a yelp leaving my mouth slightly as I reach for my bedside lamp, but I knock my phone off instead. Finally, I clamber for it enough to find the switch and light fills my room, blinding me in the process.

An empty spot in my room stares back at me, and for the first time ever, I think maybe I'm going crazy.

Eight



K_{night}

THERE HAVE BEEN THREE TIMES IN MY LIFE THAT I'VE KNOWN I DON'T WANT to be here. At Rathe U. The first time was when I was told I'd have to come. Naturally rebellious, I hated anyone telling me what to do. My beast hated it too...

The second time was when I was late to my first day. Royals aside, I didn't want any extra attention on me, and I got it that day.

The third time? Is now. Right the fuck now because I am one hundred percent certain that the seconds here feel like hours, and the hours like days, and the days like weeks, and well, catch my drift. Everything drags on.

My heavy boots slap across the long marble pathway. The front of the school is where the main entrance building and our sleeping quarters are, with the rest of the buildings separated and scattered around into sections. The monsters all stay in one area, as well as the vampires, the Lycan, the Ordinaries, and the Power Banks. All Power Banks, who fall into the Ordinary category, have no true power worthwhile yet. They're above the catacombs, where the bloodthirsty monsters all reside. Since the blood suckers can't feed off them, they're safest there.

The rest of us... on the other hand...

I drop down onto a chair, watching as groups of Gifted walk through. Same shit, different fucking day. Before Sin starts going off about whatever bullshit he's got on his mind, all of our phones vibrate, and we reach for them to see who it's from.

Father: Your mother and I will be in town at witching hour tomorrow. Make sure all of you are present.

I glare at my phone. There it is. Legend had warned us at the party they were coming, but tomorrow? That's earlier than even he expected, if the look of concern on his face tells me anything. Our parents haven't made a random drop-by at the school since—well, I can't remember the last time.

Actually, I can.

"What the fuck are we missin'?" Legend takes a bite of his apple. We all know what he wishes it was .

"Yeah, well, maybe something is happening that we don't know about yet and they're coming to tell us."

"Something they couldn't share over the phone?" Creed ponders, but his eyes remain on mine.

Since yesterday at the diner, he's been all over my shit like a fucking Bengal at an airport. Creed is naturally standoffish and moody, so it's not like it's uncommon for him to be this way. I just wish he'd finally fucking mate and put us all out of our misery.

"Obviously not." The fact that our parents are going out of their way to rise from the comfort of hell rings alarm bells. They don't shift weight for anything.

Creed still hasn't taken his eyes off mine, and I slide the can of O neg. across the table, dragging my finger over my upper lip. The last time Creed and I went head-to-head, it was a bloodbath. Literally. The fact that Creed is the oldest brother doesn't mean shit here. If you're weak, you get weeded. Creed isn't weak. I'm just hoping he mates first so he can take the fucking

throne he's so thirsty for. Aside from the obvious, it makes sense he takes it. He's smarter. Levelheaded and makes decisions that are right, but right now, he's balancing on my last nerve. I can't decide whether I'm pissed because he's obviously picking through my emotions like a fucking all-you-can-eat buffet, or because that last fight I just mentioned only happened a couple weeks ago.

I don't want the crown and I sure as fuck don't want a mate. I'm too impulsive for that too... obsessive. I'd likely kill her in a fit of jealous rage, and then my soul would eat me from the inside out. And nobody wants a dead royal.

Our family wouldn't survive that a second time.

"Stop."

My head pops up to find Creed glaring at me from across the table and I shrug my shoulders, sitting back.

"No one said you had to tune in." If he did find his mate, or at least a solid toy, he could spend his time obsessing about her instead of what the fuck is going on inside my head.

His eyes only narrow farther, so I flip him off, but then my attention is pulled to the right when Justice fucking "crystal boy" walks in.

He gets one look this way and tries to beeline it in the opposite direction, but I jump from my chair quicker than his steps can carry him, catching him by the collar right as he slips out the double door.

I yank him back, and then Sin is there, throwing his arm over Justice's shoulder. He tugs him in close, his arm locked more around his neck than anything else, and Justice's shoulders draw up as he fights to keep the frown from his face.

"How's it hanging, Jus my man?" Sinner grins, but it's one that promises foul play. "Your little Giftless shop treating you well?"

Justice frowns but doesn't fight Sin's hold. "It's not a Giftless shop. Plenty of Gifted believe in the way of the crystal, and it's not mine. I just

work there to help my parents.”

“If it’s not a Giftless shop, then why are Giftless working there?”

His eyes dart my way, narrowing. “That was you guys, today at the diner?” His eyes bounce between us, trying to figure out what everyone does when around us, and failing. “I smelled the use of power. The place reeked of lead,” he accuses.

Sin chuckles, patting his chest as he steps away, both of us standing before him.

“Who’s the girl, and why is she working at your store?” I need to fucking chill. Not with this particular piece of shit, more with my brothers. They can taste my bullshit before it even leaves my mouth.

He grows uneasy, his gaze snapping all around before settling on me. He shrugs. “She’s no one. Some chick who goes to Daragan State. She applied, and my moms hired her.”

“Do you tell every girl who applies at your moms’ shop that you’ll fuck her?” The words leave acid on my tongue. I hate the way it tastes going down. Like fucking Giftless blood. Bitter, desperate, and fucking vanilla.

“I was...” he trails off, swallowing.

Yeah, sit on it before you fucking lie.

Before I can think twice, the words fly out of my mouth as fast as they enter my mind. “Fire her.”

His head tugs back. “I can’t.”

I step into his space, raising a brow. “Excuse me?”

Unease grows within him, his heart rate spiking. All it does is fuel mine. Like being left on a crescent moon, hungry for blood. For murder. *For chaos.* My gift thunders within me, pressing against my flesh in a tingling wave.

“She’s ...” He pauses to think. Finally, a defeated sigh leaves him. “She won’t care if I tell her she’s fired. She’ll just keep coming back until we hire her all over again. She’s—” He chuckles lightly, and I don’t particularly like the way it fucking sounds. My hand comes to his throat and I watch the

contrast of my skin against his. Justice is an Ordinary. He's no one fucking special. His powers start at healing, and pretty much end at shielding. I mean, they aren't completely useless, but if you have a Mage, their powers are replicable. And I do...have a Mage. She's about five foot six and has legs that I've only ever really seen pressed behind her shoulders. "—persistent like that."

Fury drags its fingers down the apex of my spine, turning it to steel on its way down. He knows her. Not just her name, but *her*. *Fuck*. I could just kill him. Fuck the law. Neither my brothers nor I wanted to be here in the first fucking place.

This—*school*—was for the civilians of magic. The ones who didn't yield the power we have, or the bloodline. This school is for kids to be put into their respective power houses and to manipulate their gifts in hopes of being a quarter as powerful as us.

Fuck it. I could kill him and people wouldn't bat an eye because I am Knight fucking Deveraux, and everyone knows exactly who the fuck I am, and if they don't? They are about to.

But I fucking can't.

Because I *am* Knight Deveraux, and there is someone worse than me. We call him Dad. *And* Mom. Actually, they're both fucking terrifying.

But I knew this already, knew he was, at the very least, her 'friend'.

Why the fuck else would I be standing here, seconds away from losing control and frying his Fae dust-infused brain?

My mind doesn't seem to care. Apparently, knowing and hearing are two very different things 'cause I'm feeling fucking triggered.

I'm going to fuck with him. Hard. I'll humiliate him, make him hate me the way I hate her. I'm going to enjoy every second of it. It will be all her fault.

She's nothing. No one.

Nothing but a toy to be played with and we *will* play. The sooner it

happens, the sooner this shit can end and I'll have one less thing to worry about, going back to the moody motherfucker I've been since the term began, instead of this moody motherfucker with a hard cock. This past week has been fucking rough.

I'm yanked from my thoughts, realizing I'm still standing here glaring down at this Ordinary fuck when another low laugh leaves him. It's as if he's thinking of what he said, picturing her and what she'd do.

I push forward, my chest smashing to his and knocking him back two steps.

Justice stiffens, his hands rising.

"She's coming to my party this weekend," he says in a rush, cursing himself a second later.

My muscles stiffen and I want him to continue. I want him to continue because *I want* to see her again.

Jesus fucking Christ. What the fuck is happening?

"If you..." he has to force himself to keep talking. "If you want to see her again, London will be at my party."

London.

London.

Electricity sparks along my sides, up and over my chest before burying itself inside. It pulses there just beneath the skin like it's waiting for a sharp shock to set it free.

Her name is fucking London.

The snack-size girl with hair like frost and eyes like verglas. They're a freakish frozen shade of blue on the inside, with a thick ring of raven black on the out. Her head fit well under my chin, and if I would have pressed a little closer, her entire body would have been buried by mine. Not an inch left of her in sight.

I want her like that. At my mercy. Bare beneath me like a perfect little doll.

I must stand silent for too long as Sinner's arm folds over my shoulder, and he gives me a subtle shake.

He grins at Justice. "So, Ordinary, tell us more about this party."



MIDNIGHT MIGHT SEEM LIKE AN ODD TIME FOR A VISIT, BUT IT'S NOT FOR US. Our parents prefer not to be seen outside of their domain when it's not a pre-planned event with amped up security, and it's probably for the best. Just because we're the strongest of our kind, that doesn't mean the ignorant don't attempt an attack on my family every now and then. It's the same cycle. They try, they fail, and then they die. Mom would eat them, but she's off meat right now.

Like in the Giftless communities, there are dangers and crime in ours. You just don't hear about it as much because the Ministry keeps everything under wraps. They act as a council, making sure the peace remains settled between not just the different faculties of Gifted, but also back in our home, Rathe, where our world is split in two. Where there's Light magic, you'll find Dark magic, and since my father is the King of the Night, or as we call the dark, *Stygian*, that puts us directly on the firing line. The Light, or as we call *Argent*, have their fair share of drama too. They like to blame us for the thick of it, but the truth is, just because they're Light magic, that doesn't necessarily mean they're good. All that aside, The Ministry and the royal monarchy have gone back and forth for thousands of years to keep both sides safe, forming this bullshit Giftless style of a government after the King and Queen of the Argents were slaughtered by The Slasher, the one and only Gifted serial killer our world has ever known. The ins and outs of what followed their murders is a boring tale of one big fucking pissing contest where the worst man won.

And he is still winning.

My father is as savage as you would expect someone of his position, but he's reasonable too. He doesn't want to disrupt the dynamic between the Ministry, the Giftless, the Stygians, or even the Argents.

"They're here," Creed announces, pulling me from my thoughts. Fuck. What could possibly warrant them coming all the way to Rathe U? The last time they did, it was to give shit news. Hopefully, no one else has died.

The four of us climb to our feet, descending the spiral staircase that leads to the first floor of our condo. My bare feet pad along the thick red velvet carpet, and I know my lack of shoes won't go unnoticed by my mother. In all her years, the woman has never been spotted with a single black hair out of place. She's a firm believer in a pristine appearance and can't be bothered with those who aren't. She's not a terrible woman, just a judgmental, stuck-up one. She's a product of the job.

Legend opens the heavy iron door, revealing the thick cloud of protective smoke. We hear a gruff shout, followed by a low crackling sound, and then my father's laughter reaches our ears like talons of a monster that's on his one hundredth day fast.

Slowly, Father and his suited up guard break through the sable smoke, waving the scent of heavy metal away from my face.

Vicente snaps his head in my father's direction, but my dad only laughs, clamping a hand on his shoulder as he looks our way. "Told him the smoke wouldn't affect him if he entered with me. Fool believed it." He grins, stepping up to Creed for a handshake. "Son."

"Father." He nods, looking at Vicente, Silver's father. "Fear of fire, huh?"

The man confirms nothing, just straightens his tie and steps beyond us. Vicente is my father's oldest friend and loyal companion. I think even if he and Silver didn't live at the palace all their life, Silver would have still found us. He's the brother we all needed and helps balance out the toxicity.

My mother strides through the doorway with a walk that would put a Victoria's Secret model to shame. She pats down her silken crown of coal-

colored hair, flashing me a wicked smirk. Mother, if anything, knows how to make an entrance. Her black gown is rimmed with blood red rubies and flows behind her as she lifts her chin on entrance, her guard following her every move but avoiding eye contact with the lot of us.

Shifters, one of the many monsters of our world, are naturally on edge around us since we're at the top of the monster food chain. Of all the fucking chains really, but it's worse since they're linked to one of many others through a blood bond. Similar to my fuck-off brothers, or being mated, this allows them to telepathically communicate with other members of their pack. Basically, if someone were to say...peek into the mind of one—if powerful enough—they could essentially see into all.

Outside the door, the smoke swells, thickening until the cool charcoal color is nowhere to be seen, and a thunderous black cloud swirls before us, sealing us in tighter as its strength triples. Not even the Gifted's most powerful shields banned together can break through my father's prize creation.

"How many people did you bring?" I wonder, knowing we must be surrounded if the protective fog is feeling threatened.

"The usual. Two of each strength."

Sinner meets my eyes as he closes the door behind them, a silent thought passing between us.

That's not the usual. That's *twice* the usual, in fact.

Mother looks from me to Sin a couple times, and in the end, decides on a simple, "Hi, baby," as she presses her lips to our cheeks. She's not an overly affectionate woman, but she's not stone-cold either, just a little more numb than she once was. In some ways, we all are.

"Do we want to go into the royal lounge or ...?" Legend asks, eyes sliding toward the shifter acting as my mother's shadow. Knowing without the privacy the soundproof room provides, the woman is sure to hear our every word without even trying. Mother is a bitch, but that bitch is a feminist.

All of her guards are women.

We could use magic to protect our conversation, but our parents don't like it when we have to find ways to hide in our own home. We're forced to do that enough outside of it, so it's not surprising when our dad decides against it.

"The royal lounge will do." As always, he takes the lead, holding his arm out for my mother to take, and we wait for them to climb the stairs before following behind. His stature is wide and brute. He's built for war. A weapon in himself, you take one look at Dad and you ain't fucking with him. He doesn't need his royal title to hold the dominance in any room.

Vicente is the only person outside of my family who joins us in the lounge, choosing to position himself in front of the giant floor-to-ceiling window that overlooks the campus. The entire place is set slightly away from the rest of the university, but close enough for us to see everything that's going on.

Down below, all you see is tinted black glass, but from up here? You see everything. Ancient architecture and stone finishes crafted by the hand of only the finest artists. Our "private dorm" is more like a mansion. Six bedrooms, a gym, a private pool that stretches out onto the patio with water that flows down, evaporating before your eyes. It is definitely our home away from home.

It didn't take long for us to completely deck it out either. The view from our balcony is the best the campus has to offer, being our house is at the highest point of the hillside. The ample mountains behind the school are the home of the Lycans, and to the far right of them, the catacombs.

Of course, he can't see any of that at the moment, as the demonic smoke senses his eyes on its power and sparks, taunting the monster staring at it. My lips twitch, but I move closer, and the entity settles, slowly separating until a circle-shaped hole appears, allowing Vicente to keep watch.

When the clink of crystal sounds, I turn back, finding my father and

Creed at the bar, pouring each of us a finger of whiskey while Legend prepares my mother's cocktail just the way she likes it. A skill we learned early. Alcohol helps keep our thirst down, but it does jack-shit for hunger. It's a good distraction, even if it does nothing to get us drunk without some added party favors.

The sweet little Mage we've got in our back pocket provides it all. The Argents here at the school will do just about anything for a taste of darkness. Even if they'd never admit it out loud.

The royal lounge is exactly what it sounds like, a lounge built for royals. It's nearly identical to the one in our wing of the mansion back in Rathe. Like a battle of war and peace, it's a constant tug-of-war in Rathe between Argents and Stygians, even though we haven't had an incident in some time.

Since Creed was here on his own his first year, even if we did portal in nearly every weekend, Mother wanted him to walk into the comfort the Deveraux mansion provides. This is about as close as you'll ever get.

The royal lounge has walls the color of burning ember right before it turns to coal, and the windows are a satin shade of black. The rooms have their own level. Four levels are for the bedrooms, one for the main living and kitchen area, one for the gym and pool. From every room you have a three-hundred-and-sixty-degree view of the campus below. From the outside, the building looks like a black glass tower, with a sharp castle-like point that's reaching for the sky.

Legend lowers beside our mother on the sofa, and no sooner than the liquor warms her throat, does she speak.

"Something is wrong," she says, capturing all our attention with those three words.

I cut a quick glance at my father, but his eyes are on her.

"I've been nocto-purging." Mother takes another sip, her jewel-covered hand lifting to brush her hair behind her. "Going to sleep, but not sleeping, waking with odd items in my hands."

We listen intently as she shares what led her to making this impromptu visit. Her Principal Power, the gift you're born with and passed down from your mother's bloodline, is a tricky one. Her mother, our grandmother, was an Oracle, but my mother's gift is different. She's a Presage without clear vision. She knows when something is coming ... when that something is a threat to us or our world. It's the perfect gift for the Queen of Darkness, but one that causes more frustration than anything else.

Thank hell, my brother and I have a much clearer Principal Power than she does. How could it not with the blood that flows through our father's veins?

"The first night it was a feeling of confusion. Loneliness. The ache for a place but in a person. The second was blood. So much blood. Death...." Her eyes find my father's for a moment, and then she says, "The third was the head of a crow sitting in my left hand, its body still jerking in my right."

What she's saying means nothing to us, that's obvious by the mirrored confusion painted across all my brothers' faces.

Still, my father asks, his eyes focused on our temples rather than our eyes, "Have any of you felt a change within you in the last few weeks?"

My parents know I've been in full-on dick mode since I got back, so I shake my head no. Nothing they aren't already aware of.

My brothers do the same.

Next, it's Vicente who speaks. "What about with your power or within your mind? Anyone causing trouble outside of the normal?"

"Nothing we haven't dealt with ourselves and even then, just your normal angsty, teen bullshit. People trying to show off and having to be put in their place." Creed frowns, resting his forearms on his knees. "What else should we be looking for?" He focuses on my mother, who loses herself in the deep amber liquid inside her glass. "What signs might there be?"

Our mother thinks hard for a moment, but when she comes back with a simple smile, we know the conversation is done.

“If concerns rise, you will know.”

And now we know for certain there's more she isn't telling us.

With that, she finishes off her drink and rises from the single leather chair. My father takes her arm, and without a goodbye or glance back, they're gone.

The feeling of loneliness, death, and a decapitated crow...

None of that shit means a thing to us, but her purging items never do. Only her mind can connect the dots, and she will. If not now, eventually. Like a puzzle that refuses to be solved, my mother's mind is her best friend and her worst enemy.

Until then, this little trip will be wiped to the back of our minds.

Mine especially. I've got my own shit to deal with, starting with a white-haired doll that I'm looking forward to breaking. Maybe see what's inside of her. I want to rip her apart to get to know her better. See what makes her *tick*.

Watch out, Little London, 'cause I'm coming for you, and if you're a good girl, I might let you come for me too.

Nine



L ondon

I LOVE THE FEELING OF SWEAT SLIDING DOWN MY SKIN. THE WAY MY HEART thrums to a dangerous beat and my legs ache from fatigue the longer I go. I could continue for hours, my stamina unmatched. Well, I only have Ben to compare myself too, and yeah, I beat out the hockey stud every time.

Tapping the next song on my playlist, I suck in a deep breath as the dirt beneath my sneakers kicks up. The incline hits my calves in a way squats never can, and I push forward faster, desperate to get to a flat area. The Weeknd is singing about how he wants whoever his latest girl is to call out his name, and I am hundred percent sure that he is talking about Selena Gomez.

I skid to a halt, tearing my AirPods out of my ears and swiping the sweat from my forehead. The track is rugged terrain, but of all the places I could find around this small town, it's by far my favorite to run. After yet another day of feeling like I'm studying for no reason at all, I need the clarity that nature gives me, and since I promised Ben I would stop running at night—when I can really fucking breathe under the glow of the moon—this is as good as it gets.

Sighing, I push the loose hairs from my forehead.

Why can't my life ever be easy? Why can't I be like Ben, who knew what he wanted to do when he was four years old?

Fuck.

I go to put my foot down, but it slips over the edge and I'm falling backward, stumbling down a steep hill. A yelp escapes me and dirt fills my mouth as I hit the ground with a hard thud.

"Fucking ow!" I groan.

After all that, my AirPods are still snug in my ears and I reach up to pull them out, my hands falling to my sides when I finally catch my breath. I better not have broken anything. The last thing I need is a hospital bill I won't be able to pay—the crystal shop doesn't exactly pay top dollar.

I wince, attempting to push up from the ground while pulling twigs and leaves out of my hair. I've run this track a lot. Never once have I slipped or strayed from it, and I certainly have never fallen down a damn bank.

"You seem to find yourself in the worst positions."

I pause, the blood pulsing through my veins flowing a little faster now. I could recognize that voice anywhere, which is ridiculous since we haven't known each other long. I don't even know him now. "Well..." I brush the dirt off my leg but wince when I feel a sharp pain stab against my inner thigh. "Shit."

He chuckles, and I finally look up to where he stands, thinking I'd see him doing some weird shit, but he's not. A large boulder protrudes from the water and his body sits perched on top. It's like I finally notice everything that I didn't before. Like the sound of a waterfall crashing against a large bed of water or the manic flapping of birds' wings from above. I glance up, watching as they scatter from the trees as if a threat has revealed itself and instinct screamed *run*. A strange sense of adrenaline bursts behind my ribs, but I swallow beyond it.

He shifts around, the muscles in his back rippling with the movement.

Why is he here, and most importantly, why is he here *shirtless*? It isn't helping me at all. I don't even know his name.

"What's your name?" I ask, attempting to get to my feet again but retreating when the ache in my legs worsens.

"Knight. What's yours?" His tone is flat, but if my senses are on point, as they always are, he had to work really hard to get it that way. Or maybe it's the tic in his jaw that makes me think so. Or maybe he already knew my name. "Er...London." I finally manage to shuffle up against a tree trunk, unzipping my pocket to get my phone out. I'm going to need reinforcements to get the hell out of here. "Are you stalking me?" It's half a joke as I scroll through my contact list to find Ben. If anyone is going to steal a chopper and save me, it would be him.

"What the fuck?"

I jolt in shock, my phone slipping from my hands as I look up at the shadow that stands before me. Jesus. His naked chest gleams with either sweat or water, I don't know, but I have to crane my neck to see it. He's so damn tall and I'm half my already small size sitting on my ass. I look down at his ripped jeans and heavy boots as I attempt to lean around his body to see how far away the rock is that I just saw him perched on, but before I can move, his hand is on my chin and his face is level with mine.

I stop breathing. My stomach twists like someone has reached inside and squeezed it.

"Who said you could touch me?" I ask. In the back of my mind, annoyance pricks at the gentle whisper. I'm not gentle. *I'm nowhere near gentle.*

"I do what I want." His thumb grazes the rim of my bottom lip and my breath hitches when it leaves a trail of fire along the base of my spine. "You're bleeding." I lose myself in the depth of his eyes. As blue as an iris. Too bad I want to watch it wilt.

"No, I'm not." I move my face away from his touch, but he squeezes it

again, forcing my eyes back onto his. *God fucking dammit.*

The corner of his mouth kicks up in a slight smirk, showing a slither of his Colgate perfect teeth. Ridiculous. No one should ever be this attractive. Or have hands as roughly divine as his.

“What are you doing out here?” Irritation poisons my words as I try to tidy myself up more. The throbbing between my thighs only intensifies, and the more time that goes on, the more obvious it becomes.

He turns over his shoulder slightly, the gravel crunching beneath his boots. He pauses for a second as his eyes find the thick forest behind the waterfall, but he quickly collects himself when they rest back on me. Maybe he was busy, and that was why he was shirtless. I most likely messed up his kinky little fuck-a-thon.

I look in the direction of the water, the sensation of a thousand tiny thumbtacks pricking at my back as I wait for his woman of choice to show herself.

But then he clears his throat with a shrug. “Swimming.”

A little whirl starts low in my stomach, smothering the irrational irritation that was brewing there.

“Right...” I try to stand again, but the gravel bites into my palms and I wince again, bringing them up to my face. Cuts and grazes are all over the cushions of my hands when he snatches my wrist with his one.

His eyes slice to the small wounds, brows pulling so low it casts a shadow over his features. It’s as if he’s fighting against something I can’t name, his dark gaze flying up to my face, and then back down again, a tortured darkness blanketing him.

My breath runs shallow. “What are you—”

He leans in farther, and my words die in my throat. I watch, completely transfixed, as he drags his tongue over my hand, keeping his eyes on mine.

My body quivers at the connection, subconsciously called closer, but he brings his other hand to my throat, squeezing in warning. He doesn’t want me

to move, not a single centimeter. His face hardens, his pupils blown wide. So wide I swear his eyes almost look completely black for a moment, but I know I'm delirious from the heat ... or something, when a split second later they seem to flash white.

Too many emotions flicker across his face to name.

"Fuck," he forces past clenched teeth, his grip tightening on both my wrist and my neck.

Is he going to kiss me?

The warmth of his breath touches my lips and his eyes cross together when we're too close to see each other. My heart beats erratically in my chest, as if it's trying to warn me to run, to get the hell away as the birds did.

I've never been very good at listening.

My lips part slightly and Knight makes his decision.

He takes them with his own.

My stomach drops to the ground and my veins turn to fire as I deepen the kiss. His fingers trail around the curve of my throat and to the back of my neck, forcing me closer to him. Electricity burns over my flesh the longer we're connected and I reach aimlessly to the back of his head, fisting his hair and tugging on it. I need to get closer, so much closer. I need to know what his skin feels like beneath mine—*god. What the fuck.*

He shoves me away and I fall forward from his absence. My ears buzz with the comedown of adrenaline that's still racing around my body and crashing into every emotion on its way down. My head swims with fatigue as I try to blink past what just happened.

"Fuck..."


"Okay. Wait—" I shove up from the ground, finally able to make it to my feet, but by the time I'm at full height, Knight is gone.

He eradicated the last kiss frozen in my mind. That was different. Darker. *More.*

There were no butterflies in my belly from that kiss because he

slaughtered every single one of them with a flick of his tongue.

Ten



K_{night}

TWO YEARS AGO

Rathe

I sit in the chair and watch as our butler carries a long rectangular plate down to the end of the table. We all know why the fuck this meeting was called, I just wish I had more time. I don't *want* to go to the fucking human world, even if ours still merely exists in it. Creed doesn't mind being there, but we all knew he only said that to keep Ministry's ass nice and buttered. It's my turn. *Fuck*.

I can feel Legend's and Sinner's eyes on me, but I try to ignore them. Legend, the fucker in particular, can't wait for me to leave so he can use all my shit. Even though he has his own—and can have his own of everything I have—he still takes more joy in using what isn't his.

“What do you think?” my mother asks.

The table slowly melts away and turns from liquid gold to solid, with intricate carvings over the base. They tell a story, one that is just as lame as the one that's happening right now between Mother and Magdalena.

Magdalena is the leader of the Mages, representing them as a whole as part of the Ministry. Fucking annoying with an ego the size of a dragon's shit.

"*I think* you both signed a contract to state the boys—I'm sorry, the Lords—will attend Rathe U as they should, as all the gifted do upon high school graduation. It allows our kind to exist among humans and trains our kind to see the Giftless as something other than, well, pets. Aside from that, the Lords have been surrounded by Stygians all their life. They will need to learn how to, at the very least, tolerate Argents too, especially if they intend to take the crown." I want to know who *intended* for this whole thing to be a democracy.

"They won't be existing among a lot of them," my mother answers back with the kind of swagger only she can possess.

"Well, that's just not true and you and I both know that," Magdalena whispers around the wine glass in her hand. Pink liquid swirls around inside of it with glitter as pale as her white painted fingernails tapping against the top.

White nails, white dress, white fucking eyeliner winged along her lids—it's always white with these dark magic haters. So desperate to classify as pure, as if that's going to help them get to where they think they're going post-death.

What's funny is the lies and scheming don't come from the Stygian side. They come from the Argents. We, the dark of our kind, are what we are and we give no fucks what others have to say about it. Them? Psh, they hide within themselves, dumb things down, and sugarcoat as not to fuck with your feelings.

Such a pathetic, Giftless way of thinking.

"Do I get to say anything?" I pipe in from my side of the table. All night I've watched them go back and forth. Sinner and Legend have both zoned out of the conversation, Legend toying with a certain Mage. Thankfully, not the one at my table right now. Not that Magdalena isn't attractive. All Mages are.

They're able to cast Anointings that both freeze their aging and make them look however they like. It's fun, until you've got a Mage riding your dick and the Anointing runs out of juice and you find you've been balls deep in Janice from down the street. Fucking trickery.

Magdalena shifts her siren gaze on me. Her skin glitters the angrier she gets, and I have to bite down on the magic jokes. She could also turn me into Janice from down the street, and although I'd personally have nothing wrong with that, I know my mother would turn her ass to dust. Which would trigger Rathe War Two.

The last one still burns my brain so I would avoid that shit at all costs.

"Speak," Magdalena's tone snaps over my skin.

My mother calmly sets her glass down, and I know she's reciting the royal decree in her head to keep herself from sinking her teeth into this woman's neck. If she were anyone other than one of the four Ministry members, she wouldn't even hesitate. The conversation would already be over.

My mouth curves into a smirk. "Well, I just think it doesn't matter because we all know Creed will be the first to mate and unlock his Ethos, so why the fuss over me? It's bad enough I don't want to go, why are you teasing me?"

"Son..." Father floats through the doorway before it evaporates into thin air. The boardroom in the Stygian realm of Rathe is a movable room that drifts over the continent wherever they are. Whether it be here, in Stygian, or in Argent.

"What?" I shrug. "It's true."

"Mating has nothing to do with age," Magdalena argues. "Some go their whole lives without finding their soul keeper." Her gaze lingers a little too long on my father and mother.

"Such encouraging words, Mage." My father pins her with a look before settling his eyes on mine. "But she is right. You know this, son. Age has

nothing to do with the mating process, and even if it did, Creed is but a year older than you. Chances are you mate around the same time, Sinner and Legend as well.”

“Yes, and my son is the same age as you-”

“I’m well aware of who your son is,” I cut her off. “Not that I care to.” What’s a preppy prick who acts human and comes from light magic worth to me? Not a fucking thing, but I’m not interested in talking about her precious pussy of a hockey player son, Zeke, so I get us back on track.

“I don’t want to mate. Neither does Sin.”

MAGDALENA’S GLASS NEARLY SLIPS FROM HER HANDS, HORROR IN HER GAZE as she looks to me. “Blasphemy, Deveraux. We are created missing a part of ourselves with the purpose of finding what makes us whole. It is the way of our kind, both Light and Dark alike.”

“You should be happy to hear this.” My smirk deepens. “We all know the last thing you and your little light followers want are more Deverauxs. Between my three brothers and me, think of all the little *monsters* that would be running around wreaking havoc on the world you’re trying to ruin.”

“Knight,” my father snickers, but even the Mage can’t pretend not to read the humor in the man’s tone. It’s that fucking obvious.

Magdalena is getting more frustrated by the second, her skin damn near glowing now, probably at the thought of the boom in the Deveraux bloodline that’s arguably destined to come, not that she’d admit to it. If Creed were here, he would know which it was.

She swallows what’s left of her drink before pointing her eyes on me once more. “You can claim not to wish to mate, but you’ll never come into your Ethos if you reject what is meant to be yours when the time comes.” My mother’s head snaps her way, and the Mage corrects herself. “Should it come at all.”

She's not lying. That bullshit fate slaps on you is real. Like shackles dipped in a pool of shielders' blood, the chains around your Ethos are impenetrable, only cut free when the mating ritual is completed. When you're 'accepted'.

It's sorcery if you ask me. We're royals, Deverauxs, Lords of Darkness, for fuck's sake. That alone should give us access to the gift our father gave us. Our blood should set us apart from the rest of our world in all ways, but it doesn't.

When it comes to tapping into our strongest selves, we're just like the rest of our kind.

Fucked until fate catches up.

The Mage smirks in satisfaction. Smug and assuming that she chose the right words and knocked me off my feet. As if I've never thought about it.

Too bad for her, I'm not the fool she's making me out to be, so it's a communal sight when a dark chuckle rolls past my lips, the sound sparking uncertainty and drawing wrinkles to the edges of her eyes.

I lean forward in my seat, placing my forearms on the table as I cock my head at her. "There are many ways to get what you want in this world, Mage, and in Stygian, we do what we must to ensure we get it."

She holds my eyes for a long moment before pushing to her feet. "Well then, it's a good thing you will be spending the next four years in the human world among both Argents and Stygians then, isn't it? Perhaps you'll learn a thing or two about...restraint, or at the very least, diplomacy."

My monster digs its claws into the crux of my mind, my eyes flashing her favorite shade like a playful prick. "Don't count on it."

"What I'm counting on..." The Mage floats to a door that appears from nothing, turning to face me with her body hovering halfway through it. A smirk covers her face and she lifts her chin. "...is your prompt arrival on orientation day. See you then, Knight Deveraux. I look forward to...opening your eyes."

With that one last threat, the bitch disappears.

I look to my mother, who frowns at the space where the Argent was, facing me when she realizes I'm staring at her.

"Yes." She dips her chin, answering before I have a chance to ask the question. "The bitch is right. You must attend Rathe U. If you have to play dirty to pave your way there, so be it. You're a Deveraux, strong. Stygian pureblood. There is nothing that town or school could throw at you that you can't handle. You know this."

I jerk my head in response, accepting the fate I knew I would be forced to face even before this pointless little mandatory meeting.

My brothers and I push from the table at the same time and our parents give a small nod, excusing us. We turn toward the wall, and a door materializes, the three of us stepping through, the other side leading to our mansion.

Legend and Sin pop off with jokes about the Mage, slapping my back as they curve left, knowing I need a fucking minute.

I curve down the long, winding hall, passing the cursed trophies from battles won encased in the walls, and pausing at the room you have to pass on your way out when I find it pushed open.

This door is *never* open.

It hasn't been in over a decade.

I step up to the threshold, but something stops me, refusing to allow my feet to carry me inside. A gust of wind whirls this way, sweeping through the hall and slamming it shut in my face.

Of course, there's a protection spell to keep you out.

If only there was one back then.

Shaking my head, I turn, and I don't stop walking until I'm in the Phantom Gardens at the back of the estate. Why I come here when I need to feel grounded? I don't know.

I'm not much for flowers or plants if I'm not swallowing or snorting them

for the after-effect, but these aren't just any gardens.

They're grown with the blood and ash of my ancestors. Every Deveraux that's come to pass lives on in the soils beneath my feet.

The weeds whistle in the wind, urging me forward, and I bend as the Phantom Rose sprouts from the dirt, growing from nothing but dirt to a fully bloomed flower before my eyes. I reach out, cocking my head as I tug the deep, midnight purple petal free, watching as it turns from its deep eggplant color, to black, and then a small puddle of blood sits in the palm of my hand. Drawing it to my nose, I seek the warning of the unknown Deveraux, look to speak and scent a lighter one than I expected. Closing my eyes, I call on my senses, seeking its name. It comes almost instantly.

Lavender with a pinch of spice.

My nostrils twitch, and I frown, the scent not what I'd have expected.

It's too soft. Too...ordinary.

I suck air through my teeth when a sharp prick digs into my shin. My head snaps down as the crimson vine tethers itself around my leg. Wrapping it with my free hand, I tear it from its roots, tossing it to the side, and watching as it turns to ash, seeping down into the ground on contact, a new, fresh vine growing in its place.

As I look at my palm, the small puddle of blood begins to quake, tiny shards of glass biting from its edges, and I pull it even closer.

It's not glass, I realize. It's...frost. Ice.

Footsteps carry behind me, and I cut a quick glance over my shoulder, but no one is there. Slowly, I return my gaze to my palm, but all that's left is ash.

Pursing my lips, I blow it from my skin, but unlike the vine, the small gray and black flecks rise, disappearing into the night like the shadow of a reaper.

Sighing, I climb to my feet, looking up at the rotating galaxies above with a glare.

I will go to Rathe U without a fight, do what my mother says, because

she's right.

There is not a damn thing in this realm or the next that could bring me to my knees.

Abso-fucking-lutely *nothing*.

Eleven



L ondon

“TELL ME AGAIN WHY WE AGREED TO PLAY A PART IN JUSTICE’S LITTLE KINK fantasy?” I grip the ends of the satin sash, flipping it over from one side to the next to inspect it for any sign of prior use. I’m not about to put a blindfold over my eyes that’s crisp from someone’s messy fuck-fest.

Thankfully, the blindfold looks brand spanking new, or at the very least, well washed.

“Do not put me, Justice, and kink in the same sentence. I swear, sometimes that dude is whispering shit in my ear, but acts like nothing happened when I turn and look at him, and don’t say *we*.” Ben glares at the black sash in his hand as if it personally offended him. “This shit is all you.”

I shrug nonchalantly, tossing the gift we found outside our dorm door with instructions back into the bag, and drop on the couch, the two shots I took while bitching Ben out for stealing back my favorite night shirt, *that he’s lying and saying he didn’t take*, already having loosened my muscles. “Fuck it then, let’s watch reruns of *Forensic Files*.”

I reach for the remote, but Ben is quick, snatching and raising it in the air, so I jump up, throwing myself onto his back when he tries to escape.

He laughs, flopping backward and knocking the air from my lungs when his big ass athletic body falls on top of mine. I wrap my legs around his frame, locking my ankles against his stomach and pulling him into a playful chokehold.

“That’s what I thought, Benjamin. You want to go to this party more than I do ’cause you think you’re getting laid by this mystery girl tonight.”

“There’s no thinking about it, babe. This girl is riding my jock hard. I’m definitely sliding in tonight.”

I pretend to gag in his ear and his laughter continues, but a knock at the door ends our fun.

Together we stand, staring down at the sashes, our frowns matching this time around.

“ We really about to put these on and let him lead us out of the dorms for all to see us like that?”

Sighing, we pick up the fucking sashes and tie them on our heads.

We sure as fuck are.

It takes us a minute to get the stupid blindfolds in place, but oddly once the small knots are in the right position, the smooth material seems to somehow form to our faces, growing snug in all the loose places and less uncomfortable than they were at first . My muscles relax as my shoulders ease, erasing any of the reservations I had about trapezing through a dorm full of college students with a different male’s hand threaded into each of mine.

I can’t help but notice how neither feels quite right against my palm. Our fingers never line up, the difference in our skin making each other grow clammy and leaving me desperate to wipe them along my dress.

Luckily, we are in the elevator quickly, stepping out onto the bottom floor just as fast. The moment fresh air washes over my face, I smile, knowing we’re one step closer to the good part of the night—getting fucked up and potentially finding someone to fuck me up in all the best ways.

The devil knows I need a good dick-down right about now. Anything to replace the memory of Mr. Hot and Cold Fuck Boy's lips on mine. Shit. Anything to erase the memory of his skin touching mine. I swear, when I lay down last night and draped myself in the darkness of my space, I could feel his hands on me once again. The second I closed my eyes and felt myself drift off into a dream state, all I pictured was his mouth on mine.

At least my annoyingly in tune sense of touch kept the nightmares at bay for the first night since they began. I'm getting real sick of dying every night. Metaphorically, of course.

"Okay, bend a little and step in." Justice's tone tears through my memory. "And what's with the bandage on your hand?"

"Cut it on some rocks yesterday." I shrug, dipping into the car.

"You should be more careful," he chastises.

"You should let me worry about her and move to the driver seat, assuming you're the only one we're making fools of ourselves for," Ben claps back.

I smirk. I fucking love my best friend.

I hear a door close and then another, so I reach across the seat, finding Ben's arm to make sure he's there.

"It's me," he confirms, already knowing. "So how far is this party, Jus, and please tell me everyone is pulling up with a blindfold on?"

"Yeah, yeah, all the Giftless—I mean, all the people invited were, uh, Gifted with blindfolds, so yeah... yeah, they're all showing up like this," he stutters as he speaks and Ben squeezes my thigh. "But don't worry, you can take it off before we go inside. You just have to wear it on the drive over, but once we're through the shield, or I mean the, uh, shielded gate, you know, that hides the house from the street and stuff, you can take it off."

"Dude, did you pop some Adderall or something?" I laugh, and Ben chuckles with me. "You sound like you're on one."

Justice laughs, then clears his throat. "Sorry, it's been a long day."

I nod, dropping my head back on the seat and blowing air through my lips, making them vibrate. “Any party favors in here? I’m way too sober for it to be ten o’clock already.”

“Slow and steady wins the race, babe,” Ben whispers against my ear.

“Says the guy who ends up in second place, Benny, but don’t worry, this won’t be a blackout-and-wake-up-to-you-pulling-me-out-of-the-town-fountain-naked kind of night, promise. Jus?”

Justice scoffs, likely assuming I just popped off with some random shit I came up with, but nope. I’m the worst kind of hot mess, living with a sense of loss of purpose and in skin that doesn’t feel like it fits. That will do that to you. With the help of a handful of Jager bombs, of course.

“I have something, yeah...if you’re sure.”

Oooh, sounds like Justice came prepared with that good shit. “I’m sure.”

“Wait, what?” Ben snaps, and I can hear him shuffling, as if he’s looking back and forth between us even though he’s blindfolded. “What is it?”

Fingers tap my chin and I take the cue, opening my mouth. Something powdery, yet sweet, like a Pixie Stix, falls over my tongue, and when I swallow it, it leaves a coating of detergent at the back of my throat.

“Tell me what it is before you give it to her,” Ben demands angrily.

So damn bossy.

Feeling slightly guilty, I run my tongue all around my mouth, and my brows flicker when a tingly, heated sensation trickles along my veins, taking with it every thought and feeling outside of peace.

The stresses of moments ago wash away and I sigh, relaxing into my chair while leaning my head on Ben’s shoulder. “It’s okay, B.”

Ben tenses, and even to me, I hear the change in my voice, the airy, dreamy-like sound that’s now laced with whatever he just put in my mouth. I vaguely register the thought of how gross it sounds, but I’m just too damn alleviated to care.

“Fuck, you gave it to her already.” His shoulders fall with his heavy sigh.

“Give it to me too.”

“Are you sure?” Jus asks him carefully.

I want to rip this blindfold off. Do I trust Jus? Sure. I’ve known him since I got here and he hasn’t given me a reason to *not* trust him yet, but he needs to not question my best friend.

“You didn’t fucking ask her that, man,” Ben snaps. “And you gave it to her anyway, so yeah, I’m fucking sure.”

Silence, and then his heavy weight presses into my side.

My lips curve up. “Scoot over, big brute.”

“I can’t. My body feels like it does after a loss and Coach hands it to our ass on and off the ice.”

Weird.

The drug is affecting us differently. I feel nearly weightless, calm, and all those other giddy feelings you get when you’re in your happy place, like when the moon is at its highest and the owls come out to whisper their secrets into the night.

“Don’t worry. The powder wears off pretty quick,” Jus tells us, and my bottom lip drops a little. I’m Zenned the fuck out and loving it.

Just then, I’m jolted forward as a wave of energy slaps against my skin before softening, like the feathers of a bird tickling the tip of my nose as if to sniff me out and say hello, which sounds fucking crazy. In the next second, that welcoming kiss grows, and it’s like walking through a waterfall. All at once, it washes over me, minus the dowsing wet part. The sensation begins along my knees, bent over the edge of the seat, fanning out in perfect sync until my body is swallowed whole as if I’m the moving part and I’ve left the feeling behind me.

“You doing okay, London?” Justice worries, and I feel the car come to a stop.

“Perfect.” My smile is instant. “Why?”

“You jumped forward...”

I shrug, gripping the back of his seat. “Are we here?”

“We just pulled in.”

I don’t wait, yanking off my blindfold, my eyes bulging at the sight. “Holy ...”

I tap on Ben and he yanks his away, head snapping left to look out my window. “Dude, what was in that powder?”

“Whatever it was,” I find myself whispering as I blindly reach for the handle and climb out, my fingers folding over the frame, “I’m gonna need a bottle of it, ’cause this is fucking epic.”

The house is laid out in front of us, only fire and ice melt over each side, meeting at mid-point with sharp points and flickering flames.

Water sprays into the air, forming icicles in the night, just before they’re covered in a blaze, both evaporating into thin air.

“I didn’t think hallucinogens could make me see people turn into... what the fuck even is that? And is that chick sitting on a throne made of ... fire?”

Justice chuckles, leading us up the windy walkway, so we do the only thing that makes sense right now and follow behind.

A damp wetness slides up my thigh, and when I look down, a light laugh leaves me. A giant dog peers up at me from below and I tap its thick mane of fur with the tips of my fingers.

“Lon, don’t move,” Ben whispers, an adorable panic in his tone. “There’s a wolf about to eat you.”

Ooooh, a wolf! The term Lycan flashes in my mind and I smile wide.

Yes, that’s what it is. Not a dog.

I bend forward to run my hand along its back, when Jus attempts to direct me away, but the glorious beast growls low in its throat.

“Lycans don’t make good pets.” He tugs on my hair a bit, and if I wasn’t so distracted by the fire pulsing through my veins, I probably would have thought more into what he just said.

“Challenge accepted,” I tease, running my fingers through its thick fur. It

feels like silk against my hand, almost leaving a tingling sensation in its wake. The other Lycan he was chasing howls, and my new friend takes off, disappearing into the dark shadows beyond the house in a flash.

Sighing happily, I stand and shake my head.

“Okay, what the fuck.” I laugh. “This is some seriously game-changing shit you gave me, Jus. Did I just become a coke head? Consider me hooked.”

“It’s not just the drug. It’s ... so, this place is built from illusions. There are, uh, machines and mirrors and high-tech shit you can’t see that make you see things that aren’t there. Think of it like...” he trails off, searching for the right word. “Like a virtual reality ride or set of a movie where all the CGI shit is projected for you to see. Yeah, yeah, that’s what it is.” Justice runs a hand through his dark hair, nodding at someone as we enter. I don’t bother to turn to look, because I am way too busy lifting my arm as I notice glitter fall over it from the ceiling above.

Ben pulls me in closer, throwing his arm around my shoulders to steer me through the madness inside.

Glitter smoke hovers above the dance floor, and the walls are made up of glass, allowing direct view into every room in the house. I turn to the left. Two girls lie on a bed that’s levitating in the air. Smoke swarms between them and the floor, and one of the girls turns her body around to face us, her perfect tits bouncing from the motion. A male appears behind her then, grabbing her from the front of her throat, drawing her naked body flush against his as the other girl—her little brunette friend—shuffles beneath the girl. She leans up, sucking her pierced nipple into her mouth. The guy squeezes the girl’s neck tighter, and my pupils blow wide as I watch in awe as claws grow from his fingertips. He digs them into her throat, and her lips part as she surrenders all control to the man—beast—at her back. He doesn’t wait a single moment, but forces her onto his cock. Her back arches as her pretty mouth falls open farther, but her friend below catches her moans with her own before I hear the sound that leaves her.

A sheen of sweat slicks over my skin as my thighs clench together. Just as I'm about to reach for Ben, movement catches my eye from another room, and there are three guys in one capsule. One runs his hands over the other's abs, leaning down and sucking his cock into his mouth. Receiver guy buries his hands in his hair, tipping his head back as he allows the other to swallow him whole.

The third comes up behind the one doing the sucking, tipping out a bag of translucent white powder over his back, leaning down and snorting a line in one go while reaching behind his back, sliding his finger down the crack of his ass and massaging his heavy balls in the palm of his hand.

Shit.

So. Hot.

I almost feel like I shouldn't be watching, but I feel the heat rush to my cheeks from the familiar heaviness of someone watching me. A flash of silver catches my eye and my body freezes as my gaze tracks the figure from the kitchen.

It's one of the guys Knight was with at the diner. I haven't spoken to him directly, but the way he stares back at me always leaves a bitter taste in the back of my throat. And now he just caught me perving on the exhibitionism in the glass rooms. *I need to go back there.*

Ben tugs my arm as he starts walking us into the living room, where more people are gathered. I don't want to look too close, afraid of what I might find, so instead, I turn to Jus, desperate to change the subject to anything. Anything but the fact that *he* could be here.

"Hey, Jus, is everyone coming tonight from your school?"

"Mostly, yeah, but you might recognize a few people from yours. Usually every clique invites at least one...ah... outsider." There he goes again, with the humming and hawing. It would annoy me any other day, but tonight I don't care. Or at least I shouldn't. Where's that shit he gave me earlier? I think mine is wearing off.

I scoff. “Outsider? We literally live on opposite sides of a bridge. You’re being dramatic.”

Jus only chuckles. “Hey, I’m going to say hi to someone. Look around, have fun, but don’t leave with anyone, okay?” His eyes search mine, the depths the color of honey chocolate and cocoa flakes. *Fuck. I am fucked up.*

Ben and I nod enthusiastically, secretly squeezing each other because we are most definitely hoping to leave here with someone.

The moment he’s gone we start laughing.

I swiftly steer Ben toward the door a certain silver-haired boy slipped through, but before we make it halfway, we’re intercepted by a leggy blonde with green eyes and tits that would make Pamela Anderson weep.

In a flash, her hands are on Ben’s pecs and his body jolts slightly.

Frowning, I look up at him, but he’s smiling wide at the Playboy version of Barbie before him.

“Alex.” He smirks.

“Benjamin,” she purrs back and I kind of want to vomit because I know that tone. The sugary sweet tone of desperation.

Ben was right.

He’s getting laid tonight.

When I release his arm, he looks at me and only then does his mystery date *Alex* do the same.

She smiles at first, but then her head tips and she presses closer, her heels meeting my Chucks.

Wait. Is she about to kiss me?

I mean, I wouldn’t stop her if she were. Actually, maybe I would since she’s Ben’s happy ending tonight. I’m not about to join in on some kinky shit with my best friend. Love him, seen and appreciate the size of his cock, but I don’t want it anywhere near me.

Suddenly, one of her hands leaves Ben, her teeth sinking into her lower lip as she reaches up to cup my cheek, but before her palm can meet my skin,

her wrist is caught mid-air.

All our eyes snap up to the guy it belongs to and my mouth runs dry.
Crap.

It's the other guy from the diner. The angry one with a darker shade of blue eyes than Knight but the same color hair and skin. The similarities ... they can't be a coincidence.

They have to be related.

"Creed." Alex grins, and I swear little sparks burst in her eyes. "Want to play too?"

Ben and I catch each other's gaze a moment and he fights a grin as if to say *I found myself a freak, be jealous*. And you know what, I might be if I wasn't so interested in what this Creed, as she called him, has to say.

"Not this one." His tone is calm, a stark contrast to the harshness of his expression.

The guy is tall, maybe almost as tall as Knight, minus an inch or two, and I can't help but enjoy the way his black shirt stretches over his biceps. I've got the urge to lick across the bulging vein there, but the death glare he shoots me makes me think he wouldn't be into that.

But the way his tongue rolls across his lip has me questioning my whole life. Or maybe I'm still horny from the live action and I'm not thinking straight.

"Why not? She smells so...sweet. Different." She reaches for me again. "Almost like I can taste her already. And the boost..."

O-kay. She's a looney freak.

And what's this about a boost?

"Not. This. One." Creed's words are low, lethal even.

Alex doesn't push. She grabs on to Ben's hand and drags him into the swarm of sweaty bodies. He turns, flashing me a thumbs-up before he's gone. Poof. Disappeared and most likely about to have the best night of his life.

Lucky bastard.

Before I can face forward, Creed is in my space, backing me up until my heels meet the edge of something that prevents me from going any farther.

His eyes are an entrancing sort of blue, like the glare of the ocean on a stormy night. Even hard and narrowed on mine, there's something gentle about them. Something deeper than the anger his expression wants me to hold on to. Almost a sort of panicked desperation for...more. More of what? I couldn't pretend to guess, but I want to.

Apparently, I want to touch him too. Before I know what I'm doing, my hand has lifted, my fingers brushing over the tension lines of his eyes. When my skin meets his, warmth brushes my fingertips. The lines deepen, but he turns further into me. Not enough for it to be noticeable, but enough for him to cover more of my hand. He's so close that I can feel the muscles of his thighs against my hips and the length tucked in his jeans against my stomach. He's hard.

For a moment, he leans into my touch, his own darting up to grip my waist and a sharp breath hisses past my lips.

His hand is large, his grip strong.

Creed lowers his head, and I wonder if he's the second person in the span of five minutes who's about to kiss me and if I have any intentions of stopping him, which I'm pretty sure is a hard no. At the last second, his lips find my ear.

"Careful, Little London. The Lycan are the tamest of predators at this party. Wouldn't want you to stumble upon something much ... *darker*."

"What's wrong with that?" I egg him on, my breath fanning along his collarbone as he's still bent toward me. I smile when the muscles constrict. "There's something so enticing about all the trouble you can get into when the sun has burned to ash and all that's left is the hidden cloak of midnight." I lean farther into him. "Can I play?"

I swear I hear a small groan from deep within his throat and the fingers pressing my hip dig deeper into my skin, but he yanks himself away as quick

as it comes, stalking past without a word.

Dropping my head back against the wall, I take a moment to breathe, unable to deny the ache that's settled between my legs. This party is one massive pussy tease. I'll fuck the next thing that bumps into me. I need something. Or I'm going into one of those rooms. Preferably one that runs like a thirty-minute circuit.

Okay, yeah, I need to find myself a body for the night. It's only fair since Ben is clearly getting down that I get down too.

Dragging myself from the corner I finally make my way out of, I stumble toward the kitchen, shoving drunk bodies out of my way. If I have any chance of making it through, I'll need something. If I'm lucky, more of whatever Jus gave us earlier. I spot a small vile all the way against the back of a shelf, and my hands clasp around the bottle as I read the inscription: **Fae Dust, single shot.**

Huh. Must be a mythical themed party. Justice should have told me and I would have worn the black wings I bought for Halloween.

Bringing the tiny bottle up to my nose, I sniff it before dipping my pinkie inside and twirling the contents with it. Pulling it back out, I study the glittery concoction that's dusting my pinkie. Why is it so pretty? Bringing it to my mouth, I allow the Fae dust to dissolve on the base of my tongue as my eyes roll to the back of my head and the sugary taste of vanilla and freeze-dried berries slide down the back of my throat. Different from the last stuff. No chemical harshness left behind.

I pour half of it into my final shot and throw it back with a smile. Here's to hoping this shit's half as good as whatever Justice gave us. Judging by the fatigue that's slowly aching in my muscles, I'd say that has almost worn off.

Movement catches my eye to the side, and there's that silver blur again.

Placing the empty little black bottle onto the counter, I follow the flash of silver through the doors, but as I step through, I pause. In the backyard, the greenery is lit up from little fireflies that look like LED lights. They probably

are LED lights. The flowers in the bushes illuminate pink, yellow, and purple, and the small pathway that leads out to a lit up in-ground pool glows a brilliant shade of ivory. A naked girl starts walking toward me, her skin glistening like glitter. Her blonde hair falls down past her toned ass, and as she passes me, she flashes me a small smirk. I'd barely wrapped my mind around her, when I stop walking, my feet planted to the ground.

Wait.

Was I going to follow him in hopes of seeing Knight? But wouldn't following his brother, because I'm convinced Creed is his brother, have been more effective? Why am I following the silver-haired stranger?

I spin on my heels to make my way back inside, gasping when I come face-to-face with the silver-haired hottie.

Fuck me is he hot. If Mr. Freeze and Elsa, a grown-up version, had a baby, this guy would be it. His hair is almost polished silver, his eyes almost the same shade, and now on mine.

"Hi." My cheeks heat.

Okay. I really, truly do need to get laid. I've never blushed so much in my life. In fact, I don't fucking blush. I get what I want, and I leave. Sex is a transaction for me. It's enjoying those minutes—or hours—where all of their attention is on you. Just you. Probably my daddy issues talking, but if you ask me, sex is the closest feeling you'll get to magic. Real magic. Not this cooked up, drug-induced version of it.

"Hi." He smirks, taking a tentative step around my body. In this moment, I'm painfully aware of how similar it feels to being the prey. "Your name is London." He backs up slightly.

"It is." My feet decide to follow, as if he's placed a collar around my neck and is leading me with a leash. "And you are?"

Without looking, he maneuvers through the crowd that pays us no mind, and I walk the same path, stopping before a sphere of burning flames heats my cheek as it passes us. That's some seriously good CGI shit. It's even

projecting heat.

Movement beyond it catches my attention, and my eyes lock with yet another shade of blue.

The buff, teddy bear of a guy smirks, cocking his head at me, but then the other answers my question.

“My name is Silver.”

My gaze snaps back with my head. “Wait, seriously? Your name is Silver? What kind of Harry Potter shit is that?”

A low chuckle from behind the fire sounds, and I briefly meet those blue eyes again, but quickly pull them back to Silver.

Silver smiles, and it’s a nice smile, flirty and smoothe. “If Harry Potter had a ten-inch cock.”

I don’t bother to hide my grin. “It was Draco for me.”

“Fan of the twisted then?”

“What can I say?” My head tilts as I allow myself to take in what he’s wearing. Casual jeans, Jordans, and a clean white tee. “The dark is where I hide.”

Those lips stretch higher, and I reach up to tuck my hair behind my ears to keep myself from *reaching out* and touching him like I did Creed.

Jesus, I’m a needy bitch tonight.

Silver’s eyes zero in on the bandage around my palm and he frowns. “What’s this?”

I shrug, waving it in front of him. “Ah, that would be what happens when I get distracted. Couple small cuts from a rock yesterday. No biggie.”

Suddenly, he flashes forward, taking my wrist, and I wince at the heat that shoots through my palm when his flattens against it.

I yank from his grasp and he lifts his hands into the air in surrender.

“What the hell?” I glare. “I said I was cut.”

“Nah, I don’t think you are.”

My head tugs back. “Excuse me?”

Silver fights a grin, and I have no fucking clue why he and blue eyes share a laugh.

“I’m sorry, do you know me? Follow me around and watch my every move? Can you see through cloth and sports tape?” I snap. “I’m pretty fucking sure *I’m cut*.”

“Nah,” he says again, almost as if in challenge.

Growling, I shake my head and tear at my shitty bandage job. Poor Ben did his best with what we had at home, but his hands are big and mine small, so it’s a mess. “I don’t know why I’m entertaining you, but it must be because you’re stupid hot and that Fae shit I took—”

“What did you say?” He’s in my face again, eyes flicking between mine.

“You’re hot?”

He shakes his head.

“...that I drank some Fae shit?” I frown. “I mean, I can pay for it if it’s an issue. I don’t expect to ride for free, but it was sitting there so I figured it was fair game.” I already feel lighter on my feet, so I think it’s setting in. I’m not exactly sure what it’s supposed to do, but my skin feels warm and those beer goggles are coming out, not that I need them. Every person I’ve laid eyes on so far tonight is a rare kind of fine.

“Sitting where?” he whispers, his silver gaze gauging my every move.

“On the counter with the rest of the foreign bottles of alcohol. I thought it was a prop, you know, to go with the *Freaky Friday* theme going on.”

Silver’s brows snap together, his lips tightening, and I use this moment to lift my now exposed hand, wiggling my fingers in his face.

A hint of a grin twitches along the corner of his mouth before he strides off and I shake my head, wondering how I’m going to wrap my hand back up now that I tore the —

Wait.

I pull my palm closer, frowning at the skin there. The perfect intact, not even a scratch in sight skin.

Huh. I guess Ben did a better job than I thought.

Neosporin for the win!

Slowly, I step up to the fire, admiring the wicked flicker of the flames that flash from red to blue and hold my hands above it. I close my eyes, and before I realize I'm doing it, my hips begin to sway, the music suddenly matching the beat in my chest.

With my sight blocked, my skin grows warmer by the second and the sensual rhythm rolls through my ears. I lose myself, giving my body and mind over to whatever the hell flows through my system.

I'm a fucking victim of my own making, and I'm dying for someone to make me theirs for the night.

As if my naughty prayers reach beyond reason, a strong body presses at my back. Arms snake around my waist, tightening as I sink into their form, craving more.

I lift mine, wrapping them around the person's neck behind me, and I'm rewarded with a low groan that sends a shiver down my spine. I try to turn, but he holds me still, dipping his head into my neck. I gasp at the razor-sharp swipe of his tongue against my flesh.

"So fucking sweet," he rasps, nipping at my ear. "Not that I forgot..."

My muscles lock, my heart rate spiking, and finally, his hold eases enough for me to spin. How? How do I not care about anything but him at this moment? Probably because I want to get laid, and if I had to take a pick, I'd rather the hot stranger I find myself *wanting* to kiss. Men are allowed to be vocal about their sexual appetite. I have no shame in announcing mine. I know what I want and what I don't want, and I have no problem vocalizing that.

I nearly lose my balance when my eyes lock with my new favorite color.

"Knight," I whisper, struggling to catch my breath with every passing second.

His turquoise gaze glitters with mirth, yet it does nothing to hide the

savage swimming within them. “London.”

His left arm comes around me once more, his right coming up so he can tease me with his fingertips, drawing goose bumps on my flesh along the path he traces from my bicep to my neck. When the pad of his thumb brushes along my lower lip, my tongue flicks out for a tiny taste.

Knight groans and we begin to sway again.

“Like this dress, babe.” He bends a little until the hem is in his hands, and he bunches it, dragging it up higher and higher until the chilled air sweeps across my exposed ass, my thong doing nothing to hide me from anyone who cares to look. I like my body, so I don’t give a shit who sees. Besides, there’s a naked chick hanging in the air, spread eagle. I’m fine...and my pussy is prettier than hers anyway, so people can look all they want.

“I’d like it more on my bedroom floor, though.” Both of Knight’s hands find my ass now, and he squeezes, pulling me closer, grinding me against him. “I bet you look good splayed open on black satin. We would go all night.”

We.

He and I. *Since when?*

“Feel what you’ve done to me?” he rasps, grinding his hard cock against me.

I nod, unable to speak as I wrap my hands around his neck, dying to get closer. The room swirls into a bunch of colors as the ache in my belly intensifies. I need something. *Anything*. Well, not anything. Sexually driven doesn’t mean easy.

Knight hugs me back, his lips pressing to my temple. “Someone’s a cuddler, is she? I like to cuddle too. It makes it so easy to slide back in. Do you want me to *slide in* you? I could do it right here if you want.” I don’t even bother to catch his words, unable to hear them as I grind myself against him.

Suddenly, a second set of hands find my hips and my lungs expand as I

peek over my shoulder, finding we've rotated around the fire, and the blue-eyed boy who was behind it is still there, sitting, his hands larger than his brother's, fingers sprawling along my ribs.

"This is Legend," Knight whispers, urging me backward.

Legend's name is perfection. He is quite legendary, somehow even hotter up close, like a giant, muscular teddy bear I want to bury myself in. He leans back farther, his jean covered thighs falling open as he gently eases me down on his lap, the slight dip of his chin all the encouragement I need to allow him to put me where he wants me. His zipper scratches against my bare ass, but I drive myself deeper into it, desperate for the friction. My hands cling to Knight, though my eyes have yet to leave his brother's.

"Look at him," he demands, hands skating down my sides until they're framing my outer thighs. "Go on..."

I do as I'm told, facing Knight fully, right as that wicked tongue of his comes out to play along his lips.

A low whimper escapes me before I can stop it, and I rub my legs together, but Knight tsks his tongue at the move, and Legend's palms press lower, forcing me to stop.

"Patience, Little L. I have every intention of taking care of you." A devilish grin pulls at his lips, and it looks so good on him, different from the sneer he's pointed at me the last few times I've seen him. Whatever he has taken, he needs to more often. He's different tonight.

"I'm not a patient girl. I want what I want when I want it."

Legend's lips find my ear once more. "Don't go gettin' yourself punished, trouble."

I lean farther into his chest, my eyes closing without permission. "I like a good punishment now and then. It's good for my black soul."

Knight chuckles. "I like you."

"Could have fooled me."

At that, both boys laugh as if sharing some secret that I'm not privy to. I

don't have it in me to care as Legend's monstrous fingers widen, sliding deeper into the crease of my thighs and slowly stretching out to my inner knees. He lifts my legs, spreading them so they hang over his, the underside of my knees hooked over his own. I might as well be in a sitting sling, my thong-covered goods displayed in offering.

And fuck me, my lungs seize up when the object of last night's fantasy drops to his knees in front of me. He shuffles closer, and I dig my nails into Legend's thighs, unaware of when I moved them there, but his low rumble against my back tells me he doesn't mind. He likes the bite of my nails, proof is in the way he presses me closer to his chest, his tongue finding the lobe of my ear, flicking and teasing against it.

Knight's fingers skate along my skin, a knuckle the first part of him to meet my center, and the blue of his eyes deepens as he keeps them locked with mine. His teeth sink into his lower lip as one finger slips beyond the thin material, and I sigh in relief at the contact, bucking into his hand. He grins, a second finger joining in on the fun.

"So fucking ready for my cock, aren't you, Little L?" he speaks against my lips, evading the kiss at the last second. "You're already dripping wet."

I pout, and Legend's heady laugh sends shivers over my skin.

Knight doesn't press his lips to mine, but my bratty pout quickly grows into a moan as Knight sucks at the center of my throat, his tongue dragging across as teeth nip at the space there. My back arches as his fingers thrust inside me.

"Yes," I cry out, shamelessly riding his hand. We're tucked away in the corner of the party. My eyes come to the hot flames of the fire in front of us as my cheeks burn to life. Someone is likely watching. I can almost feel the wrath of their eyes skinning me alive as seconds pass, but I don't care. The fact that people around us are watching has my claws digging into Knight's shoulders, a sense of possessiveness falling over me. I want them to watch.

To see what he's doing to me.

“More,” I rasp.

Legend’s lips find the other side of my neck, skimming, but not kissing, teeth scraping, but not biting, and I wish he’d fucking bite already.

“Careful what you wish for, trouble. My bite isn’t at all what you’re used to,” he whispers darkly.

“Prove it,” I beg, completely gone to the moment.

Legend growls low in his throat, grips my chin and yanks my head toward his. He takes my lips, tasting the seam. His hot breath rolls over my sensitive flesh, and for the shortest of seconds, his velvet tongue slides against mine, almost as if he didn’t mean to but couldn’t help it. His eyes close then, and he sucks my lower lip between his own until I whimper from a shot of pain that only intensifies the ache between my legs.

I gasp as he pulls away, his smirk dark and daring as his hands slide up under my dress.

“Kiss her,” he commands, his tone more urgent than before. “He’s coming.”

I don’t know who ‘he’ is and I figure Knight would tell him to fuck off, but no. Shockingly, he listens like a good fucking boy, his pillowy lips smashing to mine as his fingers hook inside me. He curls them forward and forces my mouth open on a gasp. Knight takes full advantage of the opening, his tongue thrusting at the same speed as his fingers, drawing out every moan and whimper with satisfied groans of his own.

He licks and sucks and flicks me with his tongue, the kiss more playful than intense, but it’s still so good, a vast contrast to yesterday’s. When he starts circling my clit with his thumb, my legs turn to jelly. My head turns, as Legend offers me the space in his giant neck, so I bury my face, moaning into him as my orgasm crests, and just before it ripples through me, Knight yanks himself away abruptly.

I jerk, trying to look his way at the sound of Knight’s breathless chuckle, but Legend’s hand comes up, holding my head where it is. Exactly two

seconds later, I'm torn from him altogether, dragged onto wobbly legs. The air is forced from my lungs when I'm slammed into the side of the house. I barely have time to register Knight's deep sneer before his mouth is crushing against mine, his fingers jamming into my pussy with vicious intent and harsh strokes. He's ruthless and relentless and it's fucking perfect.

I don't know what just happened there, but it needs to happen again because *this is what I want*.

No, this is what I fucking *need*.

His rough touch is a complete contrast to what he was serving me moments before, yet somehow, it's as though it was created just for me. His kiss is demanding as his tongue takes mine like it owns it. I think he might.

So close, my body burns as my orgasm tears through me, sparking every nerve and stealing my vision. The party turns into a smudge of color as my heart pounds so hard in my chest my ribs rattle.

He slows his kiss, dragging his tongue over the edge of my lips. It's intoxicating. I'm like a greedy bitch taking everything he's giving me. I want this. Every single fucking night. Suddenly, a sharp pain sears through me and I jerk my head away with a low shriek.

My fingers fly to my lips, coming up with drops of blood. "You bit—"

My words die in my throat when an animalistic sound tears from deep within his chest and my fingers disappear between his lips.

My toes curl in my pumps, my body quaking all over again, and then his eyes flash up to mine and my lungs cease.

His eyes.... the blue is gone. Not a hint of it is left. No, they shine a stark, crystalline white, and as he releases me, he bares his teeth, pressing firmer into my body. It's fucking terrifying and beautiful and so strange I can't look away.

He dips, swiftly lifting me from the ground and my legs wrap around him.

He opens his mouth to speak, but a deafening explosion tears through the

air so loud my ears bleed.

Knight blinks, and the sharpened teeth and all white orbs are gone.

Anger washes over his face and he drops me where we stand as flames burn high into the dark sky and people begin to rush away.

Knight doesn't spare me another glance, taking off in the same direction. As soon as he's gone, I feel the absence of his touch. He's like a toxic concoction of every poison created, and I'm pretty sure I'd shoot that shit back happily. Straight into my fucking veins.

I want to be pissy that he's run off again, this time more annoying than the last because I let him have me. Not completely, but more than I'd given him the last time.

But I got what I wanted, the proof dripping down my thighs as we speak.

So fuck it. For the first time in my life, I feel slightly satisfied, and from nothing but three strong fingers working me into mush.

And because of that, I call tonight a win.

Twelve



K_{night}

I SHOVE THROUGH THE DOORS THAT LEAD TO THE BACKYARD, AGITATION SET deep in my bones. Fucking Fae and their dramatic bullshit. This was for sure going to land on us because the council just *loves* having shit to blame on my brothers and me, even though the school has had issues for generations before we came along.

“Aye!” I press my fingers into my mouth and let out a loud whistle. “Get the fuck back!” Two larger set Faeries are facing each other, with a younger girl on the ground, bleeding glitter down her face. The music is still playing loudly in the background, but the smoke from the fire one of these idiots directed at the house is thickening the more time passes.

The Fae near the girl swipes at his face and I watch as the flesh on his cheek melts away slightly. “She said no.”

My head swings back to the other, who has longer blonde hair that curls around the nape of his neck. “Can one of you idiots tell me why I should give a fuck, and why the fuck you would risk ruffling the Ministry’s feathers?”

“It’s fine,” the smaller girl says, pushing up from the ground and sliding her hands down her short skirt. She waves her palm up and an opal-colored

ring bursts in front of her, circling with soft pinks and baby blue hues. “I probably asked for it.”

I don’t know who the girl is, or the other two Fae, but right now, they’re on my fucking shit list. This could signal to the council that we’re fucking with high-capacity magic. All the boring shit—fine. But throwing around fucking electrokinesis, or any other mind and elemental fuckery, is bound to tip them all off.

Legend taps my shoulder with his and I bare my teeth slightly, anger rippling through my veins like vines of fire.

He steps back, hands up. “Whoa! What the fuck is with you?”

My mouth slams closed. I’m being obvious, and I don’t even know what is with me or why I’m on edge. “Nothing. Get this cleaned up before the Ministry smells smoke. Literally.” I turn back to see where the girl is, but she has already stepped through the portal, and before I can tell her to stop, it’s snapped closed and disappears.

I need to get the fuck out of here before I kill someone. Today’s practice and drills did nothing to settle my mind. If anything, I’m even more pent the fuck up.

It’s fucking annoying being a Lord sometimes. We’re always stuck cleaning up other people’s dumb decisions just to protect ourselves from bullshit we shouldn’t have to. It’s either rope in the fucking idiots around us or face the wrath of our parents after they’re forced to sit through a meeting with the Ministry, listening to them speak about the concerns they have for the ‘Deveraux Lords and their inability to acclimate to the human world’.

We’re not incapable of anything.

We just don’t fucking want to.

It’s all a bunch of bullshit. We should never have to hide or hold back our fucking gifts. Our parents agree, but we were told to stay under the radar, and our parents don’t give orders for the fuck of it. There is always a reason, one we trust in.

Snatching a discarded bottle of whiskey near the steps, I shove through the crowd and make my way to the front of the house, desperate to get the fuck away.

Away from my brothers.

Away from her.

I'm about to hit the footpath and pull up a portal to take me back to my room when someone catches my arm.

I pause, turning over my shoulder to see Alex blinking up at me with doe eyes. "Where are you going? The night is early."

"I'm bored." I glare at her, raising the bottle to my mouth and taking a long sip. I hiss through the burn in my throat. "And I fucking hate basic parties." I shove myself out of her touch.

"Then let's take it back to the lair." Her finger comes to my chest, dragging a perfect white fingernail down.

I look between her and the movement. "Alex, if you don't take your finger off me, I'm going to fucking cut it off."

Alex shrugs, just as movement catches my eyes over her shoulder and I raise my head up to see Creed, Legend, Silver, and Sinner standing there with their toys for the night. Basic. Every single one of them.

"I think the girl is right, Knight." Legend winks at me, clicking his fingers together as a large gold orb materializes in front of me. Mirror-like water stirs in the center and I feel the taste of magic in the back of my throat. "Think it's time." I watch as Legend and his toy are swallowed by the portal before the rest of them step through until it's Creed and I left standing.

"We can talk about this tomorrow," Creed murmurs, but I don't give a fuck what he's saying because I catch white hair shift out of the masses of people, with her little best friend. Cassandra Oakley is tucked under his arm, flashing a deep-set dimple smile.

Huh. Ben has game. Who would have thought? Not that Cassandra is a hard lay. She isn't.

“Don’t even think about it,” Creed warns, and I tilt my head to the side, watching as hers tips back as she catches her laughter.

“It could be fun. Playing with a little human, I mean,” I tease, sidestepping Creed. I hardly ever tease. I leave the games to Sinner and Legend since they’re always filling their time with boring shit. Sex and chaos are our kinds’ thing, unless you’re Sin and Legend, who like to dabble with other hobbies to keep them occupied.

His hand comes to my chest. “If you do this, you can’t take it back. How will you explain everything she’s going to see?”

“What? I’ll—” I wave my hand around the place. “—do all that magic shit.” I pin him with a glare. “You mean to tell me that you don’t think she’s one of the hottest human girls you’ve ever seen? And the way she came undone...”

Creed’s lip twitches, but he doesn’t give anything away. Less than what I thought he would.

“I’m not asking for permission.” I make that shit clear, watching as London takes a shot of Fae dust—that she shouldn’t have been able to see, but figuring out who gave it to her is an issue for another day—and hands it down the line to her friends. “And besides, the girl is fucking wasted.”

I shove Creed out of the way, and just as she and her little posse are about to walk the opposite direction down the road, I drop the seal that was hiding us and reach for her hand. On impact, my palm ignites into flames, and she turns slowly, her eyes coming to mine.

“Knight?”

I ignore the idiots she surrounds herself with. “You’re coming with me.”

“But my friends.” She gestures to them, and before I can give her time to say no, I pull her in closer. She can’t see the portal, she’s not made of magic, but if she did, I’d be able to blame it on the Fae juice she’s been sucking on like a fucking calf does its mother’s tit.

“Knight—” Her voice is cut short when I cover her mouth with my hand

and step us both through the murky water. She stops fighting when gravity gives way and our bodies turn upside down. An eruption of colors rains down around us as her little body goes limp. I hear the loud crack vibrate behind me as the portal closes and we continue to swim through time. Either Creed threw her crew in too—which knowing him he would—or he shut it down and is playing mind games with Ben.

A bright light mirrors back at us from deep in the tunnel, and as seconds fly past us, that same circle gets bigger and bigger. The landing is rough, especially if you don't know how to do it, which London won't. Aside from that too, she's also human. It will kill her on impact. *It should. I should just let her splatter and be done with it.*

A sharp pain stabs at my chest at the thought and I grit my teeth, ignoring that bitch.

I intensify my grip around her mouth and flip us around, so I land first to stop the blow. *Crack!* The back of my skull cracks on collision and death crawls its long fingers over the sides of my cheek for a second before receding.

London doesn't move in my grip, and when I see Creed jump through the portal and it slam shut behind him, I don't know if I'm relieved he didn't shove someone like Ben down with him, or panicked? Angry? I don't care. Having her beneath my grip is everything I want. I want to tear through her mind to see what goes on inside there. Maybe she could tell me why I'm so fucking obsessed with her. *Or maybe I should just punish her.*

I shove her off me and she rolls to the side, sucking in a deep breath.

The Weeknd sounds through the dark room, with little bubbles of light floating above our heads, giving just enough to show what you want to see.

Creed stares blankly at her before coming back to me. "I hope you know what you're doing."

Yeah, fuck. Me too.

He makes his way to the floating bar in the corner of the room, where

cobblestones unfold onto the back wall, displaying every poison you'd ever want. Fae dust, Cupid's capsules, dragon ash, and pixie plants grown from earth pixies. That shit will knock you right out, and all of this isn't allowed earthbound. If humans get their hands on this shit, it risks exposure. Not that the government doesn't already know. Pretty sure there's a whole file for us in the Pentagon—not that they would ever admit it. Humans like to hide behind their narcissism. There can't *possibly* be any other beings except for them. In our defense, and others that are living out there, it works. We love that they're fucking stupid. Makes it easy for us to hide.

“Jesus fuck!” London pushes herself up from the ground, her blonde hair falling over her slender back. “I feel sick.”

“Hey!” Kaia, an earth Pixie, kneels down to her level, looking between London and me. “I’m Kaia. Smoke this. It’ll help.”

London takes the rolled up blunt from her and brings it to her lips. “I think I’m tripping majorly. I have no idea what’s happening.”

Kaia’s eyes narrow on her before she gives her a hand to help her to her feet. “Smoke. It’ll level you out from all the...err...coke?”

I step backward and away from London, needing space. I don’t know what the fuck I was thinking bringing her through the portal. The fucking chick has me doing shit I would never do. The longer I think about it, the angrier I get. Something is off about this.

Wrong.

“Knight.” London’s voice stops me just as I’m about to step away from them both.

I swear, if she says my name one more time, I’m gonna strangle her.

Kaia looks between her and me, wide-eyed. I imagine she can’t figure out why I just threw a human down a portal, or why said human is even allowed to address me with the tone London is using when not even the Gifted get away with that.

“Shut up, London. Follow Kaia.” Her mouth opens, but before she can

say anything, I walk away from them both, moving to where Silver is perched on one of the leather sofas. The Dragon's Lair is just that—a dragon's lair. Run and owned by Stygian, this place isn't for the weak. Alex pretends like she can handle it on the best of times, but we all know she can't. She's the spawn of a Stygian and a fucking Argent, and while she hopes and pretends otherwise, I'm pretty fucking sure she'll test Argent when the trials begin. A strong one, but an Argent, nonetheless. Not that they're weak, because they're not. They have their strengths just like we do, but their weakness is always their weakness, and that's their heart. They care too much about everything. It's pathetic.

It's like my mother says, 'If you find something you can't cut at the throat at a moment's notice and take pleasure in the picture their blood paints at your feet, take some Devil's Drop and end yourself, 'cause you're fucked either way.'

"What are you doing with that?" Silver asks, toking on the rolled blunt.

I trace the black smoke as it leaves his mouth in rings as I take it from him, leaning back in the chair and spreading my legs wide.

"I don't know. Kind of making it up as I go along."

"Fucking idiot." He bangs on his chest to help his cough.

I hand the joint back to Silver and watch as London lowers herself down onto one of the stools near the bar. She isn't questioning the shit she's seeing, or maybe she is. It's hard not to in Dragon's Lair, especially when she's staring at the being behind the bar, his face nothing but a black mask, pupils as red as the scales of the beast who lurks in this lair.

"You bored?" I ask Silver, swiping my lower lip with my thumb. "Because I've got an idea."

"An idea, huh? " He raises a brow, too aware of what that line from me might mean.

I say nothing, and we stare her way for several silent seconds.

"What's your beef with this girl?" Silver asks quietly, almost like he's got

a read on her he's yet to share. I fucking doubt he has shit. Silver is good, but he ain't that good. Just because he was raised with us doesn't make him one of us—not any more than the superficial shit anyway.

He does come from a powerful family, a loyal one—we wouldn't have pulled him into our group if he wasn't—and I'm not talking about the pureness of his bloodline. I'm talking about the loyalty they've shown the kings of darkness.

He shifts forward to lean his elbows on his knees, both our attention locked on London and Kaia. They're talking, and Kaia is doing that thing she does when she's interested in someone. This doesn't happen often. Kaia hates everyone. Always the recluse of the class, she distances herself just enough away so she never has to deal with anyone's bullshit, but her plants? Nothing like I've smoked before.

“I don't have a beef.” *I have an annoying obsession.*

It's quieter tonight, with only those of us who slid through the portal and the regulars. The outcasts, I guess you could say. There's a dragon shifter dancing on the pole in the corner of the space, in human form except her eyes. They flash a brilliant gold when she finds me. Opposite her are three women and one Lycan in a split shift, leaving himself with the human body parts he needs to party, but his animal is right there with him. I watch as one of the girls bends in front of him when his half human paws grip her around her hair, forcing her head back. She screams in euphoria as he enters her from behind, running his claws down the center of her back. Her flesh splits open near the spine, and blood drips to the ground, turning to steam when it hits the hot rocks below. The other two women play with each other within arm's reach of him, enough to keep each other entertained.

He toys with her throat as he takes her roughly from behind, and when he leans down, he swiftly pulls out of her pussy. With one long stroke of his tongue, he licks her back clean, the fresh wound nowhere to be found.

Red stains his mouth, and he yanks her head, claiming her lips and

feeding her her own fuel as he slams back inside her.

My mouth waters and I reach for the drink on the table—finally a real fucking party.

Lava swims beneath our feet between the hot rocks, and if it wasn't for my protecting London, she would have burned to a crisp as soon as she landed here through the portal. I swallow the whole bottle in one go, and Silver chuckles, gesturing to an Ordinary to bring us another drink.

“Two more.”

My knee jiggles and a hand comes to my chest, sharp red nails in view. I'm agitated. I can feel myself build as seconds pass. It shouldn't bother me. She shouldn't bother me. But even as I watch her from across the room, her in *my* world, I don't want to send her back.

I kind of want to keep her, like I would a toy that I could play with anytime I wanted.

Still might. Haven't decided.

“I recognize that look,” the girl purrs from behind, and I know it's not Alex. Alex would have dipped out as soon as she saw the shifter fucking the Fae. Alex is prissy as fuck and pretends like she can handle shit on this side. It's Helena, a good fuck who likes the feel of fire over her body any time she's about to orgasm.

My hand flies out to stop Helena, as an idea flashes in my head.

“Not me tonight.” I press my finger into my mouth, blowing out a loud whistle. Like a good pet, London's whole body stills, her drink mid-air. Interesting that she knew it was me and that call was for her.

“London, c'mere.” The music continues and no one bats an eye. Using their own magic, they've all quite clearly blocked out whatever is happening around them so they can do what they came here to do.

Fuck and kill. The killing is, well, not the kind you'd find yourself hung for.

Slowly, her little body turns in her chair until her eyes are on mine. I

don't miss the way they flicker over my shoulder to Helena, but she collects herself and straightens her shoulders when she comes back to me.

My top lip curls. *It's cute, little one, that you think you can pretend with me.*

Her eyes widen, as if she's in shock, but she shakes her head and brushes whatever it is that bothered her off.

I nod to Kaia and she glares at me. Kaia hardly does as she's told, but she's learning.

She rolls her eyes and gestures over to where Silver and I are seated. Legend jumps over the sofa to the side, pulling Helena onto his lap instead. He clearly picks up my animosity. I don't bother asking where Creed and Sin are as London finally makes her way to us.

She stops in front of the sofa, looking between it and me. Tucking her hair behind her ear, she finally lowers herself down, her eyes blinking past whatever it is that's going on inside her head. Dammit. Where the fuck is Creed when you need him?

She spots Legend now. He gives her a small smirk, probably remembering what she felt like right before she came. The thought has my blood boiling so hot that my fucking fingers burn.

She gives me her full attention once more. "What, Knight? You gonna explain why this is the wildest dream I've ever had." *She thinks she's dreaming.*

Perfect.

I flash her a full-tooth smile. That's exactly what I plan to do, and it just so happens that oneirokinesis is my favorite fuck around. Let's see how far I can push her when her eyes close at night. The perfect way to fuck with someone is through dream manipulation. She's not going to know what's real and what isn't. I don't need to stalk her in real life, because I can step through the doorway to her dreams any. Time. I. Want.

But first...

I tilt my head, scanning her up and down. From her high cheekbones to the natural swell of her lips. There's just no way a human is this fucking hot.

"Helena," I call out, but keep my eyes on London's. Her ice blue to my turquoise. "Kiss London."

London's brows hit her hairline, her hands flying to the sides of her chair. I follow the sharp line of her jaw, all the way to the vein on her neck, and watch as it flutters against her smooth flesh. My mouth waters, and I hold down a growl, grinding my teeth. I don't just want to taste her; I want to own her. I'd eat her fucking whole and wouldn't bat an eye as I did it, but that isn't what this is. I want to savor her. I'm not fucking Creed. I don't enjoy the feast more than I *need* the hunt.

I inhale as Helena's heels slap against the stone when she moves to where London is seated. The heady scent of candy drifts up my nose. *Fear*. *Goosebumps* prickle over my skin. London's eyes flash with determination, the corner of her mouth twitching a little.

She's going to play?

Just like that, without a fight?

I lean back in my chair, allowing my bottle to dangle between my fingers as Helena's fingers wrap around London's pointed chin, forcing her face up. It does nothing to turn me on, it's merely a test to myself.

Helena lowers her blood orange lips to London's, and just as they touch, that same sizzling fire erupts through my veins. I grip the bottle tightly, forcing myself to watch. I've fucked a lot over the years. We all have. We hold no sentiment or possession over who we fuck. We're not human. There's no such thing as monogamous here, not at least until you find your mate. Which I'll never find because I'll never be looking.

I bring the bottle to my mouth to hide my scowl as London's lips open on Helena's. Helena's hands slide down the front of London's shirt. London parts her legs slightly, moving down farther in her chair as if to break the kiss with Helena, but Helena wasn't told to stop, so the mage lowers with her.

“Goddamn,” Legend whispers, kicking my foot. “You gonna join in on that, or am I? Because I’m dying to properly taste her.”

The taste of cinnamon fills my mouth as my teeth sink into my cheek, everything inside of me is fighting against what I’m seeing, but I am the one in control. Me.

So I clench my jaw to keep my mouth closed and I spread my knees wider. Helena spots the move from the corner of her eye.

She knows what to do without instruction, and eases London up, her heels hovering above the ground as she’s levitated, likely without her knowledge until she’s coming down on my lap. That she feels and her little gasp goes straight to my cock, so I flex it against her ass, and her fingers press into my jeans, freeing her lips from the stranger they were pressed to.

Her brows crinkle with confusion as she looks from my lap to her chair, and then me. “What—”

Without looking, I grip Silver by the collar, and he leans over, his palm sliding along London’s cheek. When a shiver runs through her, my eyes narrow, and I start to tug her back. To push him away.

My fingers ache, ready to sharpen and tear away what’s mine.

To play with, I mean.

No.

I love to share.

I’m sharing.

Her eyes meet Silver’s, and his swirl as his mouth hooks up, body pressing closer to hers as he shifts beside me.

Her long white hair teases the skin of my arm, so I wrap my fist around it, forcing myself to stare as my best friend’s mouth meets hers.

Her chest lifts, gaze secretly seeking mine from the side as if to make sure this is okay. That this is what I want.

Does she want it?

Anger floods my veins.

Fuck what she wants.

I am in charge here. Fuck do I care what this Giftless girl wants?

I don't.

Her lips meet his, their mouths opening and Silver's tongue slides—

A loud explosion shakes the foundation we stand on and flames ignite around the space.

I fall to the ground and move through the broken glass and smoke, crawling to where London landed near my feet. I find her ankles through the smoke and shove her down onto the floor as balls of fire fly through the space. Yelling and sounds of a dragon's screaming pierce my ears as London's eyes come to mine when I get her to the ground. She coughs, and seconds pass. None of the bullshit going on around us matters. I hear Creed yelling, Legend trying to pull me up from the ground, and Helena's screams, but I don't fucking care. Trapped in a trance with the girl below me, I ignore the chaos around us and the heavy scent of magic.

"Am I dead?" she whispers, snapping me out of my daze.

"Come on." I pull her up by her arm while keeping us low. The smoke is thick enough for us to cut ninety-five percent of our vision, but I click my fingers in a circle and a portal materializes. Without thinking twice, I step through with her before closing it instantly. The same happens again, only now she knows what to expect. Her little arms and legs wrap around my body. Almost like she trusts me. *But she fucking shouldn't.* The white light pops up, and this time, I grip her tightly around her back, holding her up with one hand and landing on my feet in her room. As soon as I've shut the portal, the chaos of whatever has erupted on our side is gone and the peace of mundane humanity takes its place. London's body is limp in my hands, but I can feel her organ that beats within her pulsing against my chest.

My own heart squeezes in my chest as I slowly lower her down onto her bed, pulling her covers back. She looks like shit, pale and freckled with soot. I drag the sheets up and cover her body, calling on Hydro to clean her and her

clothes from the night before. She'll wake up and think it was all a dream. That's what I wanted, right?

I step backward, watching as the blanket rises and falls as she takes every breath. The back of my legs hit a dresser and I turn, my eyes coming to a small jewelry box. The symbol engraved on the top catches me off guard. A triangle and a single line running vertically through it. *What?* Where have I seen this? Who—I flip it open, holding my breath. Nothing. It's empty.

Turning back around, I lower myself onto the chair pushed into the corner of the room, hidden in the shadows. I know I should leave, that my brothers could be hurt. *Everyone could be hurt.* But I can't move. Frozen in place, I can't move past this.

Her.

In this moment, nothing and no one else fucking matters.

Thirteen



L ondon

I CAN'T BREATHE. MY HANDS FLY TO MY THROAT. I NEED TO TEAR IT OPEN, puncture it. I try to suck in another deep breath, but the air is thick. My eyes pop open and I'm back on that same bridge, staring up at the dark night sky. This time feels different. This time I'm sure I'm going to die.

My eyes flutter closed, finally at peace. I'm ready to go... just take me... the hooded man can take me. I'll even wait for him right here, on my back, at his mercy. I squeeze my eyes closed, praying to the gods. Praying to whom? What gods? Frustrated, I open my eyes again, and this time snow falls from the sky, a flake touching the tip of my nose.

I push myself up from the ground, ignoring the gravel that punctures my palms. "What?"

Laughter cackles out from behind me, and I quickly spin around to find it, only being met with nothing but the thick green bush hidden behind the snowy paddock. Curls are twisted in the snow, so I force myself back up to shaky feet, ignoring the way the cold weather leaves a dusting of frost down my spine.

There, staring back at me, are a triangle and line, scribbled through the snow. I knew that—did I? I think...

Dark smoke puffs from the trees, and a loud scream tears from my throat as the hooded figure flies straight to me, his arms wide like a bat.

I shoot up from my bed, sweat rolling off my temples as I finally suck down oxygen I so desperately needed moments ago. “Jesus fucking Christ.” I reach for the bedside drawer, finding my phone on the charger . Well, at least through my drunken stupor, I managed to do that . It’s ten a.m. I never sleep past six, and if I was as wasted as I’m almost certain I was last night, why do I not feel hungover?

I open the first text from Ben.

Ben: I left to get breakfast without you since you didn’t wake. Tell me... how’d the dick down with Knight go?

I groan, falling back down. I remember everything from last night—up until we were leaving for the party. *Wait.* No.

I shoot up from my bed again. Yes. I try to search my memories. I remember the party and the fun, cosplay Fae shit...coke maybe, and Molly... and whatever else I took. I was popping and drinking and inhaling shit left and right, anything to wash away the boredom of day-to-day and offer me something new.

Massaging my temples, I start to pray. “God. I promise I will never drink again if you just tell me all the stupid things I did last night.” Kicking off my bed sheets, I quickly use the restroom, grab my shower caddy, and I hit dial on Ben’s contact.

“You did good, princess.” He answers on the first ring.

“Shut up.” I drag my feet, refusing to look at anyone as I make my way to the showers. “What happened with you last night? What was her name?”

“Cassandra, and I’m just fine, thank you.”

“Just fine as in you got your dick wet, or just fine you got your dick wet *and* got her number?”

“Option one. I’m not in need of a number at the moment.”

“Atta boy.” I chuckle, pushing into the girls’ shower, my shoulders falling in relief when the only other person inside is packing up as I’m setting my things down. “So you never did say what happened with you and the Barbie girl you went there to meet that led you to this *Cassandra*...or did you, and I was just too fucked up to remember?” I strip out of...what the hell am I wearing? I wedge the phone between my ear and my shoulder, pulling on the bottom of the black T-shirt to get a better view.

“What the fuck?” I mutter, confused by the foreign design on the front.

“I said she went for a drink and I lost her.”

Oh, right, Ben was talking. “Lost and then found Cassandra?”

“Pretty much, yeah.” He laughs.

I nod, only half listening as I quickly swap to speaker and set my phone on the sink, tearing the shirt over my head and holding it out in front of me. “Hey, do you have a black Philipp Plein shirt?”

“Huh?” Ben shuffles in the background, and I set the shirt down. “Hell no. I can’t fuck with that expensive shit.”

Maybe I grabbed it from someone last night? Maybe it is Ben’s and he just can’t remember right now among his bullshit.

“So how about you, has your dry spell since Trevor officially ended?”

Has it?

I must pause too long as Ben’s laugh echoes around the bathroom, giving me away. I have no idea if I had my favorite kind of fun last night or not.

“Asshole.” I smile, shaking my head. “I’m taking a shower, then I have a shift with the shop. By the way, did you see Jus at all after we got there? I sort of forgot he was the one who invited us and did my own thing.”

Visions flash before my eyes. Images of Knight and how he urged me onto another guy’s lap so he could use his hands to drive me mad.

How he was so playful and almost cutesy and then a switch flipped and suddenly he was...fucking broody. Uncontrollable and pure destruction. He

was a hungry wolf and I was his prey, the fucked-up kind who wanted to be caught.

He's like a fucking Harry Houdini popping up and disappearing at random. Even in my damn mind.

"Nope, but tell him when you see him, I might kick his ass for leaving us to walk our asses home."

"You walked home?" I gape.

"No, we called an Uber about a half mile down the road, but he doesn't know that."

"Love you, bye!" Shaking my head, I hang up with a smile on my face and turn on the water, feeling it to make sure it's warm enough before I step inside. Fucking boys.

Did I fuck any boy last night, and yeah...plural, 'cause hello, Legend?

I reach between my legs, but I'm not sore, and surely I would be if Knight were between them, right? Everything about him screams animal.

Bet he even growls like one too.

There's no doubt in my mind he would rival a god when he comes, that long corded neck and sharp angles of his jaw tensing and stretching. I can see it now, the way his face would draw tight, those full lips of his parting, if only so he could sink his teeth into his lower one.

At the thought, my fingers fly to my own bottom lip, and I wince at the tiny hint of broken skin there. That's right. He bit me, and I think he sucked the spot he pierced, lapping at the blood.

And his eyes! They...changed. Didn't they?

Fuck me, I need to lay off the sauce next time I see him so I can really get a feel for what he's about. My senses have yet to steer me wrong in life, but they've been clouded nearly every time I've been around him.

Not that I'll see him again for sure, and I most likely won't if we did get down and dirty last night. He seems like the pussy testing type. You know, the kind of guy who can have any shape and size he wants, so he gives them

all a good test drive until he finds the one who fits best.

I might pout if I find out we did fuck and I don't even remember it, but then again, if a guy like that is capable of being forgotten after few rounds in the sheets, then I don't want to remember it at all.

It will ruin the perfect perception I have of him, and that is that Knight, whatever his last name is, fucks like a demon. And I for one, am dying to take him by the horns.

I make quick work of getting ready, choosing a fresh pair of leggings and a long-sleeved black top that cuts off just below my bra line. Yes, it's still warm in late September, but the shop is fucking freezing and I'd rather not walk around with hard nipples all day.

I put my hair in two French braids, and after a quick wing and some pink tinted gloss, I'm out the door.

I'll never understand why people choose to spend time here. University. Even the most successful people aren't measured by the degree they hold. It's like a scam for our age group, with this false sense of accomplishment if you complete it. It's a load of bull. I think it has more to do with parents than it does with us.

I glare at the boring brick buildings, half faded from the sun and the rest splattered with pigeon shit just waiting for the winter rain to wash it away. The windows are standard with cream-colored drapes, some stained an ugly sort of yellow from too much exposure to the light. There *is* a pretty fountain in the center of the common area, but the water smells like chlorine and the flowers surrounding it died two weeks into the semester, so it's not all that nice to look at anymore.

If I didn't have my job at the crystal shop, I would lose my fucking mind. The only reason I tolerate school is so I can be with Ben. Last year was really rough without him and I don't want to do that again, so I'll suck it up and do my best not to tank all my classes and lose the scholarship I never should have gotten but somehow did...even when I didn't apply for it. The financial

aid lady said I have to keep a C average to hang in there, and even though I do try to pay attention, I'm barely making it right now. I'm just uninterested.

Maybe I'm meant to be one of those people who travels the country living in a chic little van with fairy lights and a giant beanbag for a bed, making a living off...whatever the hell those people do. I just can't see myself content with a future full of mandated meetings and strict schedules. I need more than a nine-to-five.

I need more in general.

Shoving the door to the mini café open, I slip into the line. It's not until I've placed my order and stopped to the side that I kick myself in the ass for not scoping out the place before walking in. The second the barista calls my name, he looks over and jumps from his seat to follow me out the door, all while I pretend I don't hear or see him.

"London!" he shouts. "Hey, Lon, wait up!"

I don't 'wait up,' but he does catch up and I have the sudden urge to bang my head against concrete.

His hand meets my arm and he jerks in front of me, a giant fake smile on his face. "Hey."

"Trevor. What's up?" I take a sip of my iced latte.

"I called a couple times this week. Didn't hear back from you." He shoves his hands into his pockets.

"Yeah, I..." I trail off and you know what, no. "Trevor, we broke up. I'm not really sure why you're calling me at all."

His brows snap together as he steps closer. "It's not like we're done forever, London. God, don't be such a bitch."

A scoffed laugh leaves me, and I tug my head back. "We're not on some sort of break. Just accept it and let it go already."

I go to step around him, but he blocks my way.

"Move," I snap. "I have to get to work and you're ruining my coffee."

Trevor slaps the plastic cup from my hands and it hits the ground with a

splat, sending a spray of shit up my legs.

I freeze, blinking at him, but he shoulders past, budging my body. I stumble slightly as he leaves, and when my gaze follows his retreating form, a shadow falls over me.

My skin prickles, a shiver starting at the base of my neck and running down the length of my spine. I quickly spin, eyes flying all around, but no one is there.

My cheeks heat, but I'm not sure why, so I force my eyes to close and pull in a lung full of air.

Feeling the slightest bit more settled, I shake my head and face forward.

I'm losing my fucking mind, I swear to god.

I look at my phone seeing it's too late to go back for another latte, so I kick the fucking cup and suck it up.

Every stupid step sucks more than the last.

I'm excited to spend my day surrounded by crystals and all the calming juju the shop brings me, but facing today without coffee might just make me cry like a bitch.

I'm fucking exhausted.

Hungover.

Confused as shit with the images floating around in my head and admittedly, a bit concerned with my growing boredom.

Sighing, I push through the door into the crystal shop and curve around the back counter to sign in for my shift.

Melinda breezes by in a flash of clinking bracelets and smiles at me, nodding her chin to the space behind me as she disappears around the corner again. "The moon is in slumber, sweet London. Time to shine," she singsongs her usual randomness before disappearing around another corner, adding, "and some agate beneath your coffee, my dear."

My brows pull as I shove my bag into the small drawer, and when I spin, my body jolts.

Sitting there on the top of the old wood...is an iced latte with my name on it.

Fourteen



K_{night}

MY FIST LANDS ON CREED'S CHEEK WITH A CRACK, AND I WATCH AS HIS SKIN splits open and blood sprays on me.

"I don't know," I say, swiping the sweat from my face. I don't like to train with magic or use it as a way to release energy. The energy I need to dump is the kind that involves human fucking feelings. Sometimes, I just need to punch shit. That's probably the main reason I joined the hockey team here at Rathe U last year.

Back home, we play with magic, all four of us have since we were old enough to lace up our own skates. Our kind of hockey—the right kind—is a fucking blood bath. Perfection.

Here, I'm lucky if I clock someone hard enough to send them after me for a quick couple punches of fun. But practices? Coach knows we need that relief and lets us beat the fuck out of each other when necessary.

And for me, that shit's always necessary.

Creed blocks my neck hook with a simple step, spinning around to put me in a sleeper hold, only I dip under his arm and shove him away, bouncing on

my toes. “You know what the fuck I’m talking about. Attack aside—”

“—what do you mean, attack aside?” I raise a brow, jabbing him in the chin. It’s light, meant as a warning.

“Motherfucker, you’re the one that dipped out.”

I stop bouncing, swiping the sweat from my hands down my basketball shorts. “Yeah.”

“What’s up with you?” he asks carefully. “I need to get you a pixie to feed off of or something?”

Feed on. My brows pinch, my nerve endings bursting in my chest at the memory of London’s blood on my tongue, but it doesn’t feel like a memory. I can literally taste her now, as if her blood is fresh, dripping and dancing across my tongue, awakening taste buds that never existed.

Human blood is bitter. It’s basic and a means to an end, an artless misfortune that helps when it has to or to dip into when you’re bored.

London’s blood is not like that.

It’s like a mature wine that sat barreled in a dark cellar for decades, growing sweeter with time. It’s thick and savory, like melted maple and a bit of chestnut. It’s sweet and spicy... and mine.

Heat explodes inside me the moment I think that last word, a deep growl trapped at the back of my throat, begging to be freed.

The monster inside me is waking. I can feel him simmering beneath the surface, just ... *waiting*.

“Your eyes are glowing.”

I snap my lids closed, and when they open again, I focus on Creed. I didn’t even realize my gift came to the surface, but then I feel his pressing against mine, and my lip curls. “Stay out of my head.”

He eyes me for a long moment, still attempting to get a read on me, but I keep him out.

“Mom and Dad asked if anything has changed.” His prying eyes pierce mine. “Has it?”

I don't know...*has it?*

I still don't want to be here, but I had resigned myself to the fact that I have no choice pretty quickly into my first semester last year, so why did the start of this one feel so fucking taxing?

I'm in a constant state of fucked up, angry, then normal and irritated every second of the fucking day. Mix those with a heavy sense of lacking something you can't put a name to, and yeah. It's no wonder the only people willing to spar with me now are my brothers and Silver. I've been beating everyone's face in, to the point the Healers have had to cart them out of the training room for nearly two months now.

It started a couple weeks before the school year began when we portaled back to campus to check on things, see what we wanted to add or change before it became our everyday home again, and it hasn't fucking left. Instead, it's grown, but that sense of lacking has simmered to a low boil now, and in its place is a sharp needle of need. A needle that pricks deeper when a certain white-haired doll crosses my mind, and lately, the little thing has lived in it. The moment I tasted her blood on the trail that day, something happened.

My veins inflamed, stretching and throbbing. I had to get the fuck away from her. Poison. That was my first thought, but then I felt this shadow roll over my shoulders at the party. It dug deep into my bones, tugging until I was standing before her. I've never been conflicted and confused in my fucking life, and that only pissed me off.

I tore her away, claimed what I wanted, and I had to know if I was going crazy or not, so I bit her ass.

It wasn't as bad as the first time, but the heat was still there, and that incessant stabbing of the needle? It was gone.

It was gone until I walked out of her house mere minutes before she woke.

Creed lifts a dark brow and I lift my hands. "No. Nothing has changed."

My brother doesn't say another word. He squares up and we go two more

rounds.



DEATH FEELS LIKE DARKNESS DRAGGING ITS TALONS DOWN MY SKIN. I CAN'T move. My limbs are paralyzed. My mind buzzes as my eyes fly open and I'm staring up at the inkiness of the sky. Pluto swirls closer, with Venus not far behind. There's no wind. Not a speck of nature flutters against my skin. I know what is happening. I'm trapped in a trance I have either created or fallen into unintentionally.

Fire ripples through my veins, leaving a shock wave of adrenaline in its wake, and I wiggle my fingers. Good. I can move them. Pushing up from the ground, I pause when I'm looking back at a snowstorm in front of me. Ice falls down from the dark sky, and I reach up to touch a falling flake, watching as it melts on the tip of my finger. No blizzard. No wind. But a snowstorm, silent and swirling around my body like a thief in the night.

I take a step forward, and ice snaps beneath my heavy boot. What the fuck is this? I've dreamed a lot in my years, most of it mundane bullshit that isn't important. But this? This feels like a message and I am pretty sure I'd cut myself open so they could use my blood as ink. The ice goes on and on for miles. I can't see anything but verglas. I turn from left to right, looking for any similarities that I may notice, but there's nothing. The snow at my feet. I take another step and blood seeps through the stark white snow until all I see ... is red.

Flicking the cushion of my thumb over the fang of my tooth, I suck down the droplet of blood. "What the fuck is happening and why do I think I know what it is?"



“SILENCE!” THE HEADMISTRESS CALLS THROUGH THE SPEAKER AS WE MOVE IN from the hall. The common room is where we all eat and listen for updates from our families. Circular tables line the space, where every group sits, based on their magic. It’s usually separated by Stygians and Argents, but lately, there has been a shift among the people of our generation. No one likes the separation anymore. We have light fucking with dark, and dark fucking with light. One hundred years ago that shit would never fly. I think over time, we all just gave up. “As I am sure that you have heard, there was an attack in one of the Dragon’s Lair last night.”

Whispers sound out as I reach forward and pick up the rolled blunt. Legend chuckles, his thigh hitting mine. “After you.”

I flick my index finger up slightly, calling on my pyrokinesis to spark the end. I bring it to my lips and inhale. Not that the headmistress will notice much. The common room is almost as big as two ice rinks, but of course we just so happen to be seated at the front. The walls are all licked rust red with ivory-colored trimmings. Oil paintings are encased by iron carved frames that almost fill every space, and the entire ceiling is made up of glass to showcase the planets orbiting above.

“The cause is under investigation and not something for you students to concern yourselves with. Do not allow this to distract you from your pre-trials this week. We are midway through the first term, so it’s important for you all to be focused. Your marks will be going against what classes you will fall into next year, and to all my second years, do not forget your designation trials begin next term. So again, I stress, do *not* allow this to distract you from your responsibilities here at Rathe U.”

Speak directly fucking to us Stygians, why the fuck don’t you? So much for “coexisting”.

We’ll always be set apart in the back of the minds of the Argents, no matter how much they pretend differently.

Creed sighs, leaning back in his chair as Sinner tosses a bottle of Fae dust

onto his lap.

“Deverauxs!” the headmistress snaps, and my brothers all shift to look up at her, except me. I study the blunt carefully, watching as the embers crackle against the paper. “You are needed in your quarters.”

I push up from my chair and we all make our way out and to the elevator that takes us to our quarters, which just so happens to be at the very top of the common room.

“What now, I wonder...” Legend muses as I hit the D and press my finger to the pad to read my print. “I swear to fucking god, coming here was a mistake. I’d give anything to be home. On our land. Hunting, playing...” Legend’s voice is cut short when the elevator doors part open and the first thing we see is— “Mother.”

Mom smiles at us all tightly. “I need you all to sit down.”

I should be asking why she’s back so soon. Our parents rarely ever leave Stygian, and it takes something fucking terrible to have them do it.

“What’s up?” I ask, lifting the hem of my shirt before lowering myself onto the small table in the middle of the lounge area.

Mom takes the sofa opposite, and although she’s talking to all of us, I can’t ignore the way her eyes keep drifting to me. “I need to ask you all something and it’s important.”

“Why is it important?” I know my mother. She’s a trickster and knows exactly how to weaponize her devil-given right. When in conversation with her, it’s important to note that. Especially when she’s popping in unannounced—and without our father.

“The Dragon’s Lair. I take it you were all there last night.”

“Yes,” Creed answers for all of us, standing behind the table I’m sitting on. “Why?”

“Did you notice anything?” Her amber-colored eyes fall on each of us for a moment, but oh, do they pick me to come to last. She lingers on me the longest.

“You mean other than the usual shit?” I arch a brow. “No, Mom. That was most likely dragon drama as usual.”

She tightens her red leather coat, dragging her hands down her raven-colored hair. “I’m sure. But none of you have noticed anything worth mentioning?”

“No. Why did you come all the way here to ask us this? Why not send us a message?”

Mom stands from her chair and my eyes narrow when I notice her limping to the bar cart near the floor-to-ceiling windows. Her heels slap against the marble floors and it feels like hours before she finally answers us.

“Because I’m just being careful.”

“Well!” Legend pushes up from the chair. “This was lame, but thanks for getting us out of headmistress talking shit. I’ve got to bounce, though. Got... err...tests to study for.” Legend is gone in a flash and it’s a second later that Creed and Sinner both dip out too, leaving my mother and me alone.

“Hmm. You know for immortals, all you boys are sure growing fast.” She pours herself a finger of whiskey before making her way back to me. “My Knight.”

My body tenses.

She slowly takes the spot on the sofa directly opposite, so our knees almost touch. “You have always been smart. Intuitive. Have *you* noticed anything?”

Why the fuck does she keep asking me?

“Why don’t you just step inside my head and see?” I ask, leaning back slightly. I need distance from her on the best of days, much less when I know she’s prying. I love my mother, but she’s a serpent.

“Well.” She waves me off, rolling her eyes. “You and I both know you boys are much stronger than me these days, and you all block me out.”

“What have you seen?” I growl, baiting her to spit out the real reason why she’s here. Not the disguise she’s using just to be around our energy in the

hopes that it'll sniff out her visions or trigger them.

"I'm not entirely sure yet." Her eyelashes flutter. "But it's not good, Knight." She tilts her head back to swallow her drink. "It's really not good. My gift, it's angry."

"That is nothing new." My mother's gift is a fucking nightmare, sometimes one that claims control over her. Though, I'm not entirely convinced she doesn't *allow it* to do just that when she wants to go on a fucking killing spree.

Her lips twitch, but the look on her face is far away. "This is different. Something's happening, young Lord. Something I can't see, and if I can't see it, I can't stop it."

I clench my jaw. "Any ice?"

Her eyes flick to mine. "What have you seen with ice?"

I shrug but make my way to the glass floor-to-ceiling windows, shoving my hands into my pockets as I take in the activity below. I could tell her the truth, that I've started seeing things in my dreams. I mean, they can't be as serious as I think. It's probably just me coming down from all of the Fae dust.

"Snow. Blood. That's all that I can think of at this moment." I watch as people move down below.

"If anything changes, you must let me know, son."

I nod, slowly turning back to her. "I will," I promise.

I'm not so sure if that's true...

Fifteen



K_{night}

THE LITTLE CLOCK ON HER BEDSIDE TABLE READS THREE A.M. THAT'S THREE hours until I have to report to the rink.

Three a.m.

Where I'm from, that time is a symbol for reckoning, and maybe it's true. Who the fuck knows? I keep my breathing quiet and labored as I watch the blanket on her body rise and fall each time she takes a breath. What is with you, Little London, and why the fuck do I want to feel you at my mercy?

She moans sleepily, kicking her leg out of the bedsheet. The full moon massages her skin, giving the perfect lighting as I shift forward slightly, moving the hoodie over my head. If she wakes up, what would she do?

Her skin is perfect. Not a single fucking flaw, and the worst part is, I know what she feels like beneath my touch. What she tastes like on the tip of my tongue. It's not enough, though. She's like a hit of Devil's Drop—addictive, consuming, and a definite way to die.

She shuffles again. This time the white sheet slides off her body and I'm staring back at her half-naked. She's wearing a small little bralette and tight

booty shorts that tighten around the crescent of her ass. I feel my cock swell against the zipper in my jeans and I shift back again, spreading my legs wide. The more I'm locked inside a trance, the more I find myself desperate to touch her. The need too great. Her ass too perfect.

I flick the button of my jeans off, my eyes never leaving her and pull down the zipper, wrapping my fingers around my thick cock and letting it rest in my palm the way I want her to. I play with it first, with the smoothness of my skin, rubbing the cushion of my thumb over the tip of my cock to dampen it with my pre-cum before sliding it down the base and cupping my balls.

She moans again and my dick twitches in my grip. I swear I can smell her from here. I inhale deeply, taking in the sweet scent of rose. Of lavender.

I need to fucking touch her. To break her open and feel her blood dripping down my skin, if only so I can taste it again.

I pump gently as my breathing hitches in my throat. I want to move her panties to the side and bury my face against her pussy. I jerk myself harder. Faster. Sweat drips down my temples as I keep myself fixated on her. Ripping her underwear away and forcing my cock so deep inside her that it leaves my mark for everyone else who tries to touch her after.

I want to fucking hurt her—lick her—suck her dry. My balls tighten as my toes curl and my throat closes around myself when I feel the explosion of my orgasm shoot out from my cock in jerking movements.

I release my dick slowly, allowing myself to lie still for a few seconds as I catch my breath. Leaning down to the ground, I pick up a discarded shirt. Bringing it to my nose, I inhale deeply and snarl at the scent I pick up. Desperation and cheap cologne. Her shitty friend Ben.

I clean my dick with it but catch some cum on my thumb, tossing it to the ground and putting myself away before standing to my full height. I don't even bother to hide my heavy footsteps, because at this point, I want her to wake up. To see me standing over her body before I fucking take hers for

myself.

Her blonde hair is spread over her pillows, her little face turned to the side and lips slightly parted to breathe. My mouth kicks up into a dark smirk as I bring my cum-covered thumb to her mouth, dipping it inside. “You taste that, baby girl? *Yours.*”

I swear my girl hums her approval, and the sound is too fucking tempting to stop, so I press a little further. Goddamn, if she doesn’t open up for me, both her lips and her legs.

I want to slide between them and fuck away Ben and his scent from her body. Maybe I should. Cover her mouth with my hand and force myself inside of her until she’s begging me for more.

“Hmmm,” I murmur, biting down on my lower lip until I draw blood.

No. Not yet.

For now, I’ll settle for oneirokinesis, and maybe a little bit of royal magic...



LONDON

I fly up in my bed, fingers clenched in the sheets, legs trembling and the ache between them a sweet sort of torture.

I’m soaked, both slick with sweat and arousal as I drag my hands to my neck, fighting for a solid breath as if I just got done with an epic fuckathon

when it was no more than the makings of a wet dream.

The images flash before me in warm waves, and I bite my lip.

Knight standing at the end of my bed.

Knight leaning over it, touching me. Tasting me.

Or I swear dreamland Knight was *about* to before my damn eyes flew open and ruined all the fun. I'd almost prefer another murderous nightmare over being teased but not taken care of.

Besides, me and the Grim Reaper-like fucker who keeps trying to kill me in my sleep should be on a first name basis by now. *Who the hell has the same nightmare over and over, anyway?*

Groaning, I rub my legs together in hopes of some relief, but at this point, I'm convinced not even my vibrator will get the job done. Knight's touch, or the memory of it that played in my dream, is *that* good.

Straight up, I want to fuck Knight, and if I had his number, I would beg for a booty call. I am not above a late-night ride.

Pouting, I roll onto my side, and my eyes find the clock, its red lights blinking back at me. Ten after four.

Jesus fuck, four o'clock?

I didn't make it to *bed* by four most nights last semester without Ben's supervision, let alone wake up before it. No, I haven't woken up this early since I was a little girl.

It's strange, for several years I would wake from a dead sleep at three a.m. like clockwork. I would just sit there and stare at the minutes ticking by with this heavy sense of anxiousness, as if I was just waiting for something to happen. For someone to come in and...I don't know, kill me...or so my uncle thought.

After he realized it was happening, Uncle Marcus would do his best to check on me, telling me things like 'it's okay,' 'all the doors are locked, 'there's nothing to be afraid of, little crow.'

The thing is it was never fear I felt. Not once.

It was excitement that raced through my veins, a strange stirring eagerness deep in my chest, like when a puppy wags its tail, or that was the only thing I could think to compare it to when I was a child. I tried to tell my uncle I wasn't scared, more than once, in fact, but he would just look at me with kind eyes and a small smile, and even as a little girl, I knew he thought I was trying to be tough. I wasn't.

My little late-night waiting party went on for years, until ever so slowly the feeling of anxiousness dropped into my stomach, creating a hollow void of despair. Of...loss. It made no sense. Eventually, I learned to block it out until one day, I no longer had to stop trying to.

It wasn't gone, somehow I knew that, but it was as if a deeper part of me knew what to do and protected me from the pain I didn't understand because it made no sense.

My uncle was a wholesome man. My best friend was the shit and his grandma treated me like I was one of her own. After I lost my parents, I had a whole support system around me. I didn't know another way.

With a heavy sigh, I climb from bed, making my way to the bathroom. I splash a little cold water onto my face, staring at my ratted hair in the mirror.

"Ugh." Brush in hand, I head back into my room, throw on a pair of sweats, and reach for the shirt I tossed off mid-sleep last night, but squeak when my fingers touch something sticky. "Damn."

I kick it to the side, and my eyes fall to the T-shirt folded neatly on the dresser—the black shirt I woke up in the other night. I tug it over my head, brush my mane of Daenerys, and tiptoe into the kitchen, careful not to wake Ben as I quickly pop in a pod to make a cup of coffee.

I snag a blanket off the back of the couch and throw it over my shoulders before moving back to dress up my drink. Only once the steaming beverage is drowning in cinnamon syrup do I leave the room and head down to the first floor, then out the dorm doors.

The campus is a dead zone, as I suspected, so I watch my surroundings as

I make my way toward the picnic tables about twenty feet away.

I climb on top of the one nearest my building, ignoring how my ass is instantly wet from the moisture built up on the chipping paint, and wrap the blanket tighter around me.

I look up at the sky and my mood sours a little more.

There's just something about the darkness fading that rubs me wrong. Everything is better at night.

"I should be surprised to find you here, but I'm not."

I jolt, my legs flying from where they're bent as hot coffee sloshes over the edge. My head snaps over my shoulder, seeking the voice out in the shadows of the trees.

My eyes crash with a pair of blue ones and I follow his every step as he circles me like prey, one foot in front of the other, hands buried deep in his pockets.

"Creed."

"Why are you here?" he wonders.

My head tugs back. "I live here. Why are *you* here?"

"I'm looking for my brother. He didn't come home." He eyes me suspiciously, closing the distance.

So they *are* brothers!

Wait. "You think he was with me?"

"I said I was looking for my brother, did I not?"

My brows jump. "Oh, you want to be a dick. Cool. You can fuck off."

"And you can watch your back."

"And you can back the fuck up before you get a face full of, what I'm sure, is a lukewarm coffee now."

His lip curls into a slow smirk and I scowl, slowly bringing my mug to my lips. Ass. Creed is hot in the same way the others are, but I don't know. Something about him doesn't sit right with me. I need to figure it out.

He watches me take a few small sips, as I lower the mug to the tabletop.

His deep blue eyes lift to mine as he takes another step toward me. I don't dare look away. This guy, he's like a mountain lion, tracking my every move with a territorial gleam in his glare.

"What is it about you that has him so twisted, hmm?" Slowly, he dips his head, a heated gaze rolling over me. "I can see the appeal, sure. Tight little curves, perfect fat tits, and those lips..." His eyes snap up to mine and then there he is. Right up on me.

My bent knees press against his chest as he leans over the bench my feet are perched on. He plants his palms at my sides, and I swallow past the thick swell in my throat. His eyes flash to the spot, his tongue rolling over his lower lip.

Jesus, these boys are walking wonder sticks, working some voodoo shit on me that has me prickling all over like a needy bitch.

Creed's eyes roll over my face, pausing for a long moment on my forehead, small creases forming along his own. "What am I missing, Little London?" he purrs. "What are you hiding up there?"

Suddenly, his head pops up, attention snapping behind me, so I turn to see, but no one is there, and when I glance back, Creed isn't either.

Sixteen



K night

“YOU FUCKING FOLLOWING ME NOW?!” I SHOVE CREED IN THE CHEST THE minute we step through the portal.

He comes right back, bumping his against mine. “Didn’t have to follow you, and I still knew exactly where you were.”

“Fuck, do you care who I’m fucking, Creed? If you want in on my shit, get in line behind Sin.” The words are bitter on my tongue, and I bite into my cheek to taste the sweet cinnamon flavor of my blood instead.

“Don’t act fucking stupid.” He glares. “You and I both know something has gotten into you, and I’m pretty sure we both know what it is.”

I stumble backward slightly, Mom’s voice replaying over and over in my head. “With everything going on right now, especially after the attack at the Dragon’s Lair, we have more important shit to worry about, Creed. This”—I point to the ground—“is nothing.”

He blinks back at me, and I keep walking because even though I’m cutting this conversation off, he can’t deny I have a point.

What’s happening with the impending war is just that. An impending war. The question is, from where? The Ministry has enemies on stacks, and that’s

without even looking at each other. It hasn't happened yet and is why a treaty was drawn up, but it doesn't cancel it out. They could very well be the fucking problem here and masking it with dragon drama.

"So if I didn't come interrupt your little stalking session and who knows what the fuck else you were planning," Creed keeps his shit up, "you'd have still showed to practice this morning...practice that starts in four fucking minutes?"

"I'm walking with you now, aren't I?" I snap.

Creed scoffs, and in my peripheral, the motherfucker shakes his head.

MY PHONE VIBRATES AGAINST MY THIGH, AND I PULL IT OUT, STARING BACK at an announcement from the school Instagram page. *In light of the attack and to reiterate from the conversation in the common room yesterday, students are urged not to partake in any rumor spreading. We are handling it.*

I stare back at Creed. "If it was student-related, why would they care about a bunch of shit-talking Gifted?"

Creed continues across the grass, and I follow a few steps behind. "They wouldn't. They don't give a fuck about rumors."

He is right. There have been multiple stories spun since we've been here, none of which the headmistress has ever felt the need to address so publicly.

We reach our campus, and as we pass the growing pixie plants that crawl up the cobblestone wall, they release an earthy scent into the air.

"That aside," Creed clears his throat as he shoves through the main doors that lead to the arena. "Do we need to be worried about you with this chick?" The chatter that was happening moments ago quiets as we make our way deeper into the room. The main entrance to the common room is glass walls and diamond chandeliers. It's the area students are allowed to be in if they don't want to be outside, or in their sanctions of magic. There's a grand piano

tucked away in the corner that plays continuous classical music, and I wonder every now and then what that would look like in Stygian. Pretty sure it'd be replaced with an electric guitar. This place is fucking biased toward the Argents. So much for balance.

We shove through the exit doors and follow down the stone path to the locker rooms, but before we step inside, I meet my oldest brother's blue gaze.

"You don't have to worry about anything. I told you it's just something that's keeping me entertained. No different to the bullshit I play with Alex."

I knew that was a lie and that Creed would pick up on it , but I said it anyway.

The mirrored doors part, and we both step inside. "Whatever you say."

The elevator creeps down and down and I watch as the numbers slowly drop until we're a few dozen feet underground, my mind running right back to its newest obsession. I hate that I can't get her out of my head. Especially after last night when all I wanted to do was tear her apart. Maybe I'll visit her again tonight.

...or maybe I'll just keep playing with her.

Creed elbows me and I blink, realizing the doors have opened and half of the team is staring at me standing stone-still in the center of the square. Fuck them.

I lift my chin and move toward our side of the lockers. Yes, the Deverauxs have their own section.

Guess the school heard about the bullshit some low-level punks tried to pull on us back in Rathe. It was Creed's senior year of high school and of the six dudes on the ice come the drop of the puck on game day, we made up four of them. Being gifted, we have no real reason to rotate players. We don't get tired and fighting is allowed back home.

Some guys didn't like a team of royals and decided to put a silver scale in Creed's locker, knowing the poisons it carries—there's a reason the silver snake is forbidden outside the castles of Rathe.

Unfortunately, for them, Creed's got senses that rival both the Lycans and the Vamps combined. He didn't know who put the scale in his shit, so he multiplied it and every single player on the team outside the four of us were stone stiff before the coach even set foot in the room.

The coach reamed our asses, the school attempted to scold us, and our parents were pissed we didn't deliver a fatal blow. Not that a silver scale can't be fatal. It can, but still. It wasn't enough retribution for the leaders of the Stygians.

Gotta love the king and queen of dark magic.

Legend and Sin are already here, half suited up, so Creed and I make quick work of getting changed.

"Zeke already headed out, got him some new blades." Sinner grins my way. "Boy went with a bigger bite."

"His bite's as threatening as a toothless Vamp," I joke even though the bite he's referring to has nothing to do with his mouth and everything to do with his skate.

A bigger bite means he's giving up some of his glide for a better grip so he can pick up speed quicker.

Legend scoffs. "So he thinks a deeper hollow is gonna, what, somehow hold his own against us?"

Creed tosses his shit in the locker, shaking his head. "He's already on the ice more than the others. He needs to watch himself or he'll have a gang of teammates after his ass," he mumbles.

Nodding, we finish up and hit the ice, running some small warm up drills before we work on defense based on the next team we're playing. Again, waste of fucking time when they're human.

No sooner than I'm skidding to a stop, is someone bumping into me from behind.

Whipping around, I come face to face with Zeke.

I tear my helmet off and let it fall to the ice with a harsh thwack.

Zeke rolls back with a smirk and his palms up. “My bad. Wasn’t watching where I was going.” The corner of his mouth hooks up and he shifts, skating past me.

I let him get four feet, far enough for him to think I let it slide, before I pounce, shooting forward and throwing a skate out. He is fucking gifted, so of course he hops over it in the last second ... but that’s exactly what I wanted.

When he jumps up, I use my speed to stand, and his neck presses right into my open and waiting palm.

Using cyrokinesis, I manipulate the ice, lifting myself and forming a glacier-made fist for fun and slam him down onto it. The ice cracks and breaks against his pretty fucking face, and red colors the icy blue floors.

Zeke pops up, blood pouring from his slipskin from forehead to chin. “You’re going to pay for that.”

My mouth hooks to the right and I glide closer, arms at my side and nothing but an opening straight to my jaw ... if only he wasn’t too much of a pussy to take the shot.

Or maybe he’s smarter than I thought.

To make an enemy of a Lord is to make an enemy of *four* Lords, and he already threatened me.

Zeke can't handle all the eyes on him and his busted face, and opens his mouth, seconds away from making a mistake.

Of course, the coaches sense it, fucking empaths. “Enough!” our head coach shouts. “Silver, get your ass over here and deal with Zeke. Zeke, just ... be fucking smarter.”

“Yeah, Zeke, be smarter,” someone taunts and then a water Fae cleans up the mess while we get into position.

Creed grins from me to Sin and I smirk from Legend and back.

This. This right here is about the only fucking enjoyable thing this place has to offer.

Time on the ice with my brothers.

And a little blue-eyed, white-haired—

No.

Abso-fucking-lutely *not*.

Seventeen



L ondon

“I’M GOING TO PRETEND LIKE YOU DIDN’T LEAVE US AT A PARTY THAT YOU made us go to on Saturday,” I say to Jus as I reach for the amethyst sphere on the top shelf. I’m glad I skipped out on Ben’s team kickback last night. With how hard I’ve been going lately, I don’t know how I would have gotten through work today.

“I promise you, I didn’t.” The worst part about Justice is that I believe him. I believe that he’s not a bad person and that he wouldn’t just leave his friends at a freaking party alone with people they don’t know. Not to mention we had no idea where we were since we rode in wearing fucking blindfolds.

“Well, anyway,” I finally reach the heavy ball and swipe a microfiber cloth on my way down, “I think I’m partied out.” Moving to the counter, I start on polishing the lavender-colored stone. I don’t think much of amethyst. It’s not as self-indulgent as rose quartz, but still not for me. I like the darker stones. The kind that offers protection as much as they tell you everything that’s bad with yourself so you can fix it. I got Ben to do shadow work meditation with me once, and although he’s a Christian boy at heart, he still tried it with me. For all of two minutes.

“Yeah, me too.” Jus starts counting the money in the till. “Sorry I dipped out. I honestly thought that you and Ben were fine. Ben seemed to have his little toy for the night and you seemed to be busy with the”—he waves his hands around the place—“whatever you had going on.”

He has a point, and the crimson creeping up his pale cheeks tells me he knows exactly what I was doing.

“True,” I say, placing the freshly polished crystal on its stand. “But honestly, whatever that powder was that you gave us that night, it fucked me up for a long time.” I make my way back to the shelf, leaning up on my tippy toes. “I swear I saw floating people.” I land back on my feet and huff out a deep breath. “I mean, I was seeing, like, animals and shit. I think I was tripping really bad. Whatever you gave me, I cannot have again.”

Justice chuckles darkly, and I watch as he disappears into the back room. I wasn’t kidding when I told him that I don’t want any of that ever again. Aside from all the random shit I saw while I was on it, it also seemed to heighten my dreams as well. As if my nightmares weren’t bad enough.

Justice emerges with a new box of whatever his mother unpacked this week. “I know, and I said I’m sorry.” He places the box on the counter, sifting through this week’s stock. “Maybe I can make it up to you?”

Not likely.

There’s a reason Ben is my only true friend—I only fuck with the ride or die type, and well, he’s the only one I’ve found so far.

Justice has several strikes against him already, so he’s officially in the you’re-all-right-and-we-can-hang-but-that’s-about-it category.

“How about dinner tonight?”

“Can’t.” I move to the ancient book behind the counter to “clock out” from my shift, which is just me writing my name with this fancy feathered pen that supposedly can sniff out a lie, as Justice’s moms claim. I’m dying to test it out, out of pure curiosity. Who knows, maybe it does.

I laugh at myself and scribble my name before shoving it back beneath

the counter.

“Why not?” Justice follows me to the door, holding it open for me as I sling my purse over my shoulder.

“I’m picking up food on the way home and staying in with Ben tonight. He has no practice for the first time in forever so we’re taking advantage of that.”

I could totally invite Justice over too, but I don’t want to, so I wave and head out the door.

Not thirty minutes later, I’m slipping into the elevator inside my dorm building.

Hands full, I use my elbow to turn the knob and slip inside. I kick the front door closed with my foot, balancing a pizza with one hand and my phone in the other. Placing the box on the counter, I flip it open and inhale the hot steam of fatty cheese. My stomach rumbles as I snatch a piece, dropping my keys onto the counter and moving into the lounge where Ben is seated watching hockey, always hockey.

I lean against the wall, biting into the greasy goodness. “I have an idea.” I chew slowly as he lowers his beer from his mouth, keeping his eyes on mine.

“And what’s that?” To be fair, in Ben’s eyes, this could mean anything. I’ve given him a trigger without even meaning to. One time when we were kids, I told him that I had an idea. That idea led to us cliff diving off steep mountains in the valley. He hasn’t quite forgiven me for that yet either.

“I’ve decided that I’m not doing any more parties. That last one was crazy. How were you on the coke that Justice gave you?”

Ben swipes the bottom of his lip with his thumb, placing his 808 onto the coffee table and spreading his knees wide. He looks between the TV and me dismissively, as if he’s not sure how to answer.

“I don’t know.” He shrugs, clearing his throat. “I guess it was just like any other strain. But yeah, you were fucked up.”

“Wait!” I raise my hand up to stop him. “So you didn’t see the things I

saw?”

“Like what? Drunk orgies?” Ben laughs, and I slap him.

“Of course that’s all you remember.”

“That’s all that is worth remembering.”

I glare and Ben’s head tilts as he chuckles. “I knew you were fucked up. I didn’t know you were *that* fucked up.”

Weird. I knew it was affecting him differently, making him sluggish and me lively and free, but outside of that, we were on the same level—I was sure of it.

“So you and that girl?” I change the subject, sinking my teeth into the last bite of pizza.

“Who? Cassandra?” He scoops up his beer again, taking a large swig. He snorts around the rim. “Told you, she was a good time, but she’s not a long time.”

My eyes roll as I head back into the kitchen to find another piece of pizza. “Never is with you, though, is it, Ben?” I snatch my phone from the counter and make my way to my bedroom down the hall. I love my best friend, but sometimes I wonder if he hears himself talk. “Movie in twenty?”

“Soon as I finish reading these chapters for socio.”

Ugh. Sociology. Gag me.

This is probably not the best time to tell him I got an F on my history paper.

As I cross the threshold of my bedroom, I pause.

I swear I can smell him.

The heady scent of freshly cut grass with the added spice of richness. It’s perfect for him, sort of like I picture his true personality to be. A little woodsy and wild, untamed with a hint of cinnamon. The scent is just enough to taste it on the tip of your tongue, but not enough to fucking choke on it.

Must be coming off of the clothes I wore Saturday night that are still sitting in the hamper in my closet.

I fall down on my bed and open up Instagram, scrolling through my home page. I hate that I don't remember much from the party. I hate that I don't know what I saw. But most of all, I'm so sure I remember someone from Saturday night. It's a blur of green hair. I've been doing all I can to try to clear the fog in my head the last few days, but that's all I remember. *Jesus fucking Christ.*

I keep scrolling through Instagram. Picture after picture, photo after photo. Maybe I posted something on my Insta story? No, of course not. I'm not that reckless.

Scoffing down my last slice, I put my phone on charge and peek in on Ben. He's on his second beer and still has his face tucked into his book, so I make a quick trip to the showers. I scrub swiftly, dry myself, and I'm back in our shared suite in no more than ten minutes, my shoulders sagging when I spot Ben knocked out cold, his book flat on his chest.

I drop a blanket over him but leave the book so he doesn't wake up, and head back to my room, movie night officially canceled.

I hit the light off before crawling into bed. Today was long and tiring, all the partying catching up to me, so maybe it's good Ben fell asleep so I can try to catch up on some too. Even as I think it, I know it won't come that easy, as there's still something that sits beneath my skin that I can't seem to scratch. I just know I'm missing ... something, and it feels like a lot more than nightmares.

It feels like an actual *piece*.

Sighing, I snuggle into my cool sheets and pull them up near my chin, reaching for the remote. I hit the power button and start scrolling through Netflix. I just need something normal. Something that's going to take my mind off of whatever I got myself into Saturday night.

I push play on reruns of *Gossip Girl*, hoping to find some sort of comfort from a show that I've already watched hundreds of times over the years. I must be on episode three when my phone vibrates on my mattress. I reach for

it aimlessly, opening the new text message. Unknown number. Maybe one that I've forgotten to save. *Maybe it's that fake mystery friend I made the other night.* Or maybe I really am losing my mind.

Unknown: Are you a good liar London?

I stare back at the words, confusion swimming through my brain. My fingers fly over the keypad, and I hit send.

Me: Who is this?

Unknown: I think you know.

I think back over the day. I saw Creed, and by the vibes that I got from him today, he doesn't like me very much. Maybe it's him.

Me: Creed?

Seconds pass when nothing comes through. I almost think that they've given up when the phone lights up in my hand and I'm once again distracted.

Unknown: Wrong brother.

My stomach drops to the floor as hot sweat breaks out over my skin. How did he get my number, and why am I not mad about it?

Me: Are you here to gloat?

I clutch my phone tightly. I hate that whatever Serena and Blair are going through in the background slowly sinks into nothingness as I wait for those little dots to pop up on my phone.

First off, how did he get my number, and why would he text me? Creed is obvious about his feelings for me, but Knight is someone I can't get a read on. It's like he's angry with me, but he also loves to play. *Am I his plaything?*

Would I mind if I were?

My thighs clench together as I try to think over anything that I might be able to remember from Saturday night. I feel him in my bones and inside my skin, so why do I not feel him in my mind? Why is he not present in my memories if I can feel his touch on my flesh? It doesn't make sense.

Unknown: Gloat about what?

My agitation slowly surfaces.

Me: You tell me.

Unknown: Sweet dreams, Lon.

Me: Whatever. I'm too tired for this shit.

I toss my phone down onto my bed and pick my remote up angrily, flicking over the angst between the two polar opposite besties on the screen. I need something placid like Chuck Bass and Blair. Yes. I need that. I hit play on whatever episode it is, snuggling back deep into my covers. My eyes turn heavy as I struggle to stay awake. Fatigue sets into my muscles as time passes, and before I know it, lights are out.

My body buzzes with energy as my eyes pop open. I'm back here again. Great. Why am I slowly getting the feeling that whatever is happening in this nightmare is a message? That whatever I'm seeing is some sort of sick handwritten note being sent to me from God knows who. God, maybe?

I had an easy childhood, no weird shit to speak of, so I couldn't even pretend to guess what that message would be. My life was as normal as normal goes, both before and after my parents' deaths, minus the whole missing them from time-to-time part, but that went away after a year or so. My uncle provided me with all the love a child needed, but this bridge? There's something about it other than the obvious heat coming from the other side, where stone and ice now lie at my feet.

I rack my brain trying to remember if I've ever seen it before in my hometown but come up empty.

Also, how the hell do I know I'm in dream-fucking-land right now?!

Goosebumps break out over me as the wind licks itself over my exposed flesh, and just like every other time, I feel it creep beneath my skin like the angst of the walking dead. Pins and needles of what it gives me is nothing compared to the shadowy figure that glides above me. My mouth closes and I can't move. Every single limb on my body is frozen in place. The hooded figure continues to hover above my body carefully. All of the other times, this

is when I would wake up. When his presence penetrated my mind so much that I couldn't take it anymore, or when he grabbed for me. But I am determined now. I'm determined to stay in as long as I can.

The shadowy figure draws his hand out from the cloak he's wearing, and I swear I hold my breath as his long fingers come to my chin, the skeletal shape a silent warning as he forces my eyes forward onto him.

Is he going to kill me?

Can he even kill me?

I mean, I'm dreaming, right? No one can touch me here.

Except he is.

His hands drag down the crux of my sternum, over and grazing my breasts. I shiver, sweat penetrating my skin. He doesn't speak, and the longer I'm here, the more I want to run. I don't want this. I don't want him touching me.

I try sitting up, tensing my abs to push off the ground, but a heavy weight slams down on my chest, holding me there. When I look down, I see the bone crackling contrast of his hand. That same skeletal creature forced me back down to the ground. I still can't see his face, nothing but a haunted figure.

He dips lower, and I hear him inhale deeply as he drags himself down my stomach and then farther down between my thighs. What is he doing? I need to push him away from me and get as far away from here as possible. He's going to touch me. I don't want it. No. I try to unclench my fists and reach for him, but there is no use. Merciless by my own mind, I'm hopeless to this nightmare.

It comes fast like a cool wave crashing over me and forcing me back down into its current. I once again try to slam my thighs closed, desperate to put distance between us, but it's no use. He has me captive, paralyzed, and at his mercy. Something damp presses against my inner thigh, trailing all the way over my pussy. The monster flicks his tongue over my clit, and before I can fight it, a tight moan escapes me. I hate that my body has betrayed me at

this moment because I'm afraid.

I'm not scared to admit when something is too much for me, and this is. I feel sticky and violated, and as every second passes, I want to run even more. His tongue dives inside me, and I yelp loudly, my back arching off the ground and my eyes rolling to the back of my head. I would give anything to grip on to something, to feel anything!

My hands finally slam onto the ground, and I try to squeeze whatever I can to help me roll through the confusion of pain and pleasure when the ground beneath me turns to silk. Wait a minute. Why is it silk?

My eyes slightly crack open as the hooded figure disappears, and as every second passes, the bridge turns into my TV and the hooded figure that was once flying up above me is now a real man. A hoodie covers half of his face, though, the outside moonlight barely showing the sharpness of his jaw.

“Did you sleep well, Lon?”

I go to scream, fear prickling down my neck, but he slams his hand over my mouth, forcing me back onto my bed. He turns his head to the side, inhaling deeply as he moves from the crook of my neck up to my temple.

“Damn,” he murmurs against my cheek, so close the warmth of his breath falls over the shell of my ear. “You taste about as good as I thought you would. Only one thing could make you taste better. Know what that is, my little doll?” His free hand buries itself in my white hair, and he gives a little tug. “My cum mixed with yours.” He groans into my neck. “I can fucking taste us now.”

I should bite into his hand to try to break free, but I don't.

I should shove against him, but I don't.

I should want him off me and away and demand to know how the hell he got into my room and who the fuck he thinks he is...*but I don't.*

A sense of verity washes through me, easing the tension in every muscle until I'm nothing but loose limbs and a needy cunt. It's twisted and all sorts of fucked up, but I want him right where he is, hovering above me with his

legs between mine. I've dreamed of this, literally, but I'm not dreaming now.

Knight is here in my room, and there's this deep, penetrating ache swimming inside me that screams *I need him to stay*.

My expression must give me away because Knight's lips lift into a small smirk and the hand pressed to my mouth slowly eases. He drags his fingertips across my lips as he frees me, but my body has a mind of its own, turning and chasing the contact of his skin on mine. Desperation has my mouth watering, and only once my tongue flicks along the tips of his fingers do my lungs allow me to breathe. It's a full breath and it's all Knight. His scent, his flavor. *Him*.

My head swims as a delicious need to be closer beats against my temples. It's as though there are torn tethers deep within me, revealing themselves for the first time as the strain and stretch of an invisible force reaches for him, *begging* for him, screaming sharply in the dark corners of my mind.

Mine, mine, mine, it cries and a sharp gasp whistles past my lips, my tongue rolling across them.

"So needy," he muses, offering his thumb, only to deny me at the last second.

I should be embarrassed at the whimper that escapes, but I'm not.

Knight's eyes are bright in the darkness of my room, and they only grow more vivid at the desperation leaking out of me.

"Does my little doll want to taste me as bad as I wanted to taste her?" he purrs, that hand trailing down my neck and across my collarbone. He lowers his lips there, licking the small divot with a deep groan. "I'm gonna mark you right fucking here ... gonna mark you all over in ways not even your nightmares could comprehend, my Little London."

A shaky breath pushes past my lips, and when my legs fall open farther, Knight's eyes slice right where I want him most. His tongue flicks along the tip of his teeth and I swear, they're sharper than I remember, but I don't have time to wonder if I'm right because in my next breath, his long fingers are

plunging inside me.

“Fuck,” I croak.

“Don’t worry. I’m about to.” He shoves deeper, twisting his wrist so his thumb is applying pressure to the ring of muscle no one has ever pushed past before, and I cry out.

Knight dips down, cutting off the sound with a crash of his lips on mine.

We moan together, and when my hips lift to wrap around him, he lowers his body, tearing his hand free and grinding his length against me, his zipper cutting into my soft skin. I welcome the sting, rolling my hips against his and he growls, tearing away. He shoves my legs from his body, lifting onto his knees.

“Up,” Knight snaps, hands working on his belt and jeans, allowing them to fall around his muscular thighs.

I scramble in the bed, staring as he slides backward a bit to make room for me, and when he reaches forward with those long arms, his palm locking tight around the back of my neck, I know what he wants.

I shift onto all fours and crawl the short distance to him, transfixed as his hands dip inside his briefs. He frees himself, squeezing around the base of his cock.

Like I knew he would be, he’s long and thick and with a perfect little curve from base to tip.

He jerks himself once, and my tongue presses at my top lip, rolling, eager to swipe along the glistening spot now staring back at me.

“Take me,” he demands, a roughness to his tone that has my nipples sharpening into painful peaks. “Show me how good you can be for me.”

He doesn’t wait for me to lower, but pushes my head down, and I open eagerly, sealing my lips around the tip, licking the pre-cum clean.

“Mmm,” he moans, fist tightening in my hair as he presses at my mouth, forcing himself deeper.

He slides inside and I relax, opening my throat further to take him deeper.

I gag around him, but I don't stop. I suck him hard, my tongue swirling around as I bob up and down, his cum touching the back of my throat.

My eyes roll back as another hint of his savory flavor coats my tongue and my pussy aches.

"Mouth made of satin," he groans, hips bumping slightly as he guides me by my hair. "Bet your pussy's soft as velvet."

His mouth sends another shot of desire down my spine, and I tremble, one hand diving between my legs to ease the ache there, but Knight growls, yanking my hair until my scalp stings. The pain morphs to a pulse and our eyes meet.

"Did I say you could touch yourself?" he growls.

"Did I say you could come into my room?" I counter, lifting a brow and licking him from my lips.

His eyes flash and then I'm in his arms, lifted and tossed back down.

He drops between my legs, and I think his tongue is going back to work on me, but then he tears off my panties. I look down and desire ripples through me.

He's gone straight carnal, pupils blown wide as he crawls up my body like a fucking tiger, slow and steady with his eyes on his next meal, my thong hanging from his teeth.

It's so fucking hot that I can feel the moisture build between my legs.

I'm dripping, so ready for him.

Only once he's right above me does he let the underwear fall from his teeth.

His cock finds my entrance without any guidance, and with our gazes locked, he shoves inside me.

Eighteen



K night

I WAS FUCKING RIGHT. SHE'S A FITTED GLOVE OF THE MOST EXQUISITE VELVET money can't buy. She's so fucking tight and soft and warm.

So fucking mine.

Tonight. She's mine tonight and tonight only because I like to share.

I will share.

Heat ripples down my spine at the thought, but I focus on the dick-dazed girl beneath me. She looks so good there, like a perfect fucking fit.

I swear, little reams of silver light up the edges of her eyes, but when I blink, they're gone and I pull back, slowly shoving inside her again, each time a little harder. A little deeper, and when her legs come up to lock around me, I take that as my cue to fuck her raw.

"I want you to bleed for me. I want you sore and aching." I pump in and out of her, my hips slapping against hers with loud *thwacks*. "I want you thinking of me with every step you take."

She pulls her knees back, throwing them over my shoulders with a Cheshire grin, and something rumbles deep in my chest.

I lean forward, gripping her headboard, and I don't hold back. I fuck her

until she's screaming, quickly throwing a barrier up around us to keep her little fucking friend from bursting in. Normally, I wouldn't care, I'd want him to hear, to walk in and watch my cock own her, but I'm burning up from the inside out, boiling with this internal need like never before to claim. To take.

To fucking own.

If someone interrupts, they'd be dead before their mouth opens. Period.

"I can feel you in my stomach," she gasps, clawing at the sheets beneath her, so I take her hands and put them where she wants. The heat of her palms slides beneath my shirt and a tingling sensation zips down my fucking spine. She tugs on the thick cotton, and I let her tear it over my head and toss it to the side. She smirks, nails grazing over my abs and leaving tiny trails on their way up to my shoulders.

She grabs hold, hauling herself up a little, that talented tongue sweeping along the center of my chest.

I hiss, my fingers digging into her ass cheeks. I shift and drop back, bring her down on top of me, her legs instantly weaving behind my back.

Her head falls back, eyes rolling as I sink even deeper. "Good fucking god, Knight."

"Monster."

"Hmm?" She grips my hair, tugging my face to her chest and I oblige, lowering to tear her tits free.

"I'm a monster, Little London. No god could challenge me." I grip her hips and she takes over, dancing on my dick like she's the prized dancer of the fucking Paris Opera Ballet. She rides smooth and effortless and like she was meant to sit right here for all eternity, right on my aching, angry cock.

"What kind of monster are you, Knight?"

The way the syllables of my name roll around her tongue has my head spinning.

My balls grow tight, my muscles flex, and I growl into her flesh, pulling her nipple between my lips and sucking hard.

I'm not her anything and she's my nothing, so why does my blood pump ten times fucking faster when those words work their way down my spine?

Her skin is flush and thick with sweat, and when she drops her head back, her neck teases me. It tempts me in the worst fucking way.

I want to let my teeth loose and watch as panic bleeds into her eyes and she scurries up the mattress, desperate to flee but with no escape. It would only take a little nudge; a tiny push to dip beneath that fear and find that fire I see in her. It's there, buried beneath the frost, iced over the parts of her from me. She would soon beg for my bite, and I would fucking give her what she wanted.

My anger spikes, boiling my blood. I grip her hair and force her to me, my lips pressing at her ear to answer the question, but she's so damn lost in her cresting orgasm.

"Think of the worst kind of monster you can imagine, and once you have it in mind, picture me ripping his heart out, 'cause I am ten times what you could ever imagine me to be."

My hands glide down her back and her rhythm picks up.

She rides me fast and hard, panting as she pulls back to look at me. Her big blue eyes stare into mine and she shocks me when she smiles and says, "What if I said I have always wanted to play with the devil, if only to see how bad it would burn?"

"Then I would say you're pretty fucking close to getting what you wished for. Now shut the fuck up and take this dick like you were made to."

London hums her approval, and when I flip her over, she goes with a happy little yelp. Widening her stance without being told, I shove into her from behind.

A deep groan pulls from me and she purrs to life.

"C'mere." I skate my hand up her spine, locking onto the back of her neck. Magic buzzes beneath my touch when I summon her, knowing damn well she's too out of it to notice. Just as she didn't notice the cryokinesis

trickery I was using, sending icy chills over her breasts to tease and pebble her nipples even more, to bite at her clit in a way that has her pussy squeezing me so fucking good.

I imagine what I want it to do, sending small swirls of cool air over her clit, and she gasps, head dropping to my shoulder.

I take her chin in my hand and smash my lips to hers.

She presses into me, and I drive into her and my body starts to shake, tension pulling at my every muscle and she does the same, her brows tightening.

My orgasm is right there, ready to erupt and she's right there with me.

Sweat beads at my brows and her eyes flash to mine, holding a sliver of panic that's working its way into her.

My limbs shake, my hands stiffening, locking around her without permission and she reaches back, gripping my face.

My dick flexes, strains, and her walls pulse around me.

Heat like I've never felt before spreads through my veins like fire.

"What—" she cuts off with a swallow.

And then we both come, at the same time, and the second our bodies let go, erupting in sync, we quake, but it's not like the heady tremble of a fuck well done.

It's more.

Electricity zings across my skin, zapping against her and she gasps, eyes blowing wide as she stares into mine.

A low growl starts deep in my chest, way the fuck down in there somewhere, as if coming from a pit I never knew existed, and when it reaches my throat, forcing its way out, it's a foreign sound.

My teeth elongate, pricking at my lower lip, and she clenches her eyes closed, a small, muffled cry leaving her as if she's pained.

Light sparks around us, flickering and popping, and what the actual fuck?!

Straining, I tug on my gift, and it takes everything I have to tear myself from her.

I stumble from the bed, falling onto my fucking ass. Drunk with fatigue. That has to be it.

I don't bother going for my clothes.

I flick my fingers, and a portal appears, my eyes toward her. She's fallen over, eyes still closed as she grips at her throat, the harsh acrid scent of her fear like flames in my nostrils.

Every part of me goes on high alert, demanding I go to her. That I eliminate the threat, help her, shield her.

To protect what's mine.

No.

NO.

I rage war with my mind, digging into it and clawing at the part of me that seems to be on some Mage fucking madness, a cocktail of twisted shit fucking me up from the inside out and warping reality, fucking with my mind and waking the deeper, dormant parts of me.

This girl? This little Giftless girl is not fucking mine.

She's nothing but a toy. A worthless plaything.

I'm a fucking royal. The strongest bloodline our kind has ever seen runs through my veins.

I grind my teeth until I feel one crack, and then I step through the fucking portal.

In less than a blink I'm back home, but the separation does nothing to help.

My lungs are closing in on me, caving deep within my chest to the point that it's a struggle to breathe. Shit, it's a struggle to fucking stand. It's like the first time I slipped through a portal, only ten times worse. I fling my arm out, using a simple summoning spell to call the couch to me, and with only seconds to spare, I collapse onto it, my fingers digging into the material.

Rolling onto my back, I strain against the never-ending tug threatening to tear my tendons in two.

A deep rumble stirs in my chest, fire like never before causing literal sweat to build along my hairline and I grit my teeth. “Goddammit!”

Squeezing my eyes shut, I fight for control of myself, shutting down everything raging inside me and focusing only on the tiny flicker of a flame I picture deep within my mind. I watch as the flame dances, changing from soft orange to reds and blues until finally, my eyes fly open.

My shoulders ease the slightest bit and my nostrils flare with a deep, full breath, but the instant the heavy inhale fills my airway, my heart starts beating triple time in my chest.

Her scent, it’s all fucking over me. Along my lips and chin, my fingers and my cock.

Growling, I shove myself to my feet, stomping my way to my room, and as I come around the corner, I’m flung to the side. Plaster explodes against my shoulder as I go through the wall and I bare my teeth, my head snapping left to find Sin.

His eyes blow wide as he takes me in, and instantly he jerks toward me, but with that single foot closer, his body stills. His chin lifts as he takes it deep, his lips fluttering closed as a slight shake works its way through him.

“You finally fucked her.” His grin is slow. “Goddamn, brother. Took you long enough.”

My hand shoots out, catching myself on the wall, and I shove past him, heading up the winding staircase to my room. Why the fuck didn’t I portal straight in there? It hadn’t been that long. London wasn’t an easy lay, but she was one I knew I’d get. At least once, I needed to taste her.

“Knight! Hold up—”

I put a wall between us, shutting him out and dragging my ass into the shower. I hold my breath until every inch of me is lathered and rinsed, and then I count to fucking ten.

Something's wrong.
Off.
And I think Creed was right.
I think I might know what it is.
And if I don't, best believe I'm going to find out.



LONDON

I WAKE TO THE MORNING LIGHT STREAMING THROUGH MY WINDOW, THE CLOCK blinking six a.m. Lifting my arms over my head, I begin to stretch, and when I feel the sharp sting of overused muscles, I tense, blinking at the nothingness of my room.

Last night comes back to me in a whirlwind, and I swear literal wind seems to roll over my skin, sending a chill throughout my body.

Holy shit! Knight was in my room last night and holy *fucking* shit, we fucked like animals.

He flipped me more ways than I could count, fucking me into a coma, or so it seems, as I have no recollection of him pulling out, leaving, or falling asleep.

His every touch was purposeful, driving me insane and leaving me fucked raw and red. I know it's cliché as hell, and I never really thought it was a thing, but rather a figure of speech. I was wrong because I swear to God, I saw stars. Weirdly blinking, wrongly shaped ones, but stars, nonetheless.

Smiling to myself, I roll onto my stomach, the soft sheets causing my nipples to pebble, my body still overstimulated. Apparently, my cunt is a needier bitch than I gave her credit for. And I gave her a lot of credit. The

bitch is maxed out of credit.

A heavy throb builds between my legs and I allow my hand to travel south.

My fingertips brush over my sensitive center, dipping between the sweet spot to see just how rough we played last night, and I moan at the memory.

“God, I could—” My voice is cut from another at the other side of the room.

He grips my ankles and forces me down the bed. “You could *what*, Little L?” His eyes pierce mine in a way that bleeds through my veins. A deep humming vibrates through the marrow of my bones the longer he holds my stare. I can’t pull my eyes away from him, afraid that if I do, I’ll wake up and this will be a dream.

“How the fuck did you get in?” I grip him by the strands of his hair, forcing his eyes up to mine. My heart rattles against my ribcage as he stares up at me from below.

The corner of his mouth curves upward slowly, and a flicker of silver flashes over his eyes. “Who said I left?”

I sink my top teeth into my lower lip, and before I can stop him, his mouth covers my pussy. Shivers rack through my body as I fall onto my back, arms spread wide. Warmth disappears and I lean up on my elbows and watch as he grabs himself through his thin basketball shorts. They’re doing nothing to hide the feeling of him. Not that I could forget how thick he is.

Before I can say another word, he crawls up like a hunter and I’m the prey.

My eyes find his and he bends, skating his lips along mine. “Do you want me?”

I nod.

“Say it. Say”—he leans to the side, his lips grazing the side of my neck—“*I want you.*”

A low whimper leaves me as I reach for him, but he blocks me, lifting a

brow. “Fuck me, how is that for saying I want you?”

His smirk is slow as he finally takes my lips with his.

The kiss is teasing and not what my body wants, the heat in my belly doubling, but it knots rather than spreads. I yank on his hair, tugging him away, but before I can say another word, he dives into my neck, kissing a trail down my body until his mouth is hovering over my clit.

Heat covers me at once as his tongue dives into my entrance. I grip the sheets once more, my back arching off the bed. His tongue flattens against my clit and I lift my hips to chase friction when I’m met with air.

I push up from the bed as I see a body crash into Knight’s. A dark hooded man, and any time I try to chase what he looks like, he shifts, tackling Knight to the ground. Flesh being pounded filters through the air and I quickly jump up, screaming.

Blood splatters over my face when I reach for the shoulder of the intruder, and his body stills beneath my grip. Knight peers up at me from below, blood that both is and isn’t his dripping over his face and split eye. Whoever this dude is, Knight got him good enough to make him bleed. *Just hopefully not the blood that’s in my mouth.*

He slowly turns, and my blood starts to run cold.

“Hey, asshole! Get the fuck out of my room before I”—my mouth falls open and my stomach twists like hot coil—“what the fuck?”

I look down to Knight, who’s now flashing me a wicked grin, before going back to the hooded creature, who is staring right at me now. A straight copy and paste of Knight. “I’m dreaming again.”

Stepping backward, I shake my head and tuck my hair behind my ear. *I am fucking dreaming again. Did I ever even wake up?!*

“You’re not dreaming, London.” Knight’s voice cuts through.

Knight?

I point toward the two of them, heart pounding in my chest as I subconsciously move farther and farther away. “Which one of you is

Knight?”

The hooded one slowly rolls back, turning to face me completely as Knight pushes himself off the floor, swiping the blood from his mouth. They stand side-by-side identical, and I squeeze my eyes closed to force them to focus. Only this time when I open them, they’re still standing in the same spot.

Knight picks up his shirt from the ground, throwing it over his shoulder and pulls out a fat looking cigar. He bites it into his mouth. “Damn. Now that doesn’t happen every day.”

Knight—wait—I turn to the left, *Knight*. The hooded Knight closes the distance between us before his hands are wrapped around my face and chin and he’s forcing me up against the wall, my head cracking against it. “You mean to tell me you didn’t know that wasn’t me?”

“How the fuck—” I force myself out of his grip. “—was I to know? You’re fucking twins! And you’re both here? Wait—” I swallow thickly. “Why the fuck are you both *here*?”

The corner of this Knight’s mouth curls and I swear I hear a deep growl vibrate off his chest.

“You ever—” A loud sound of wind swirls around the room and *Hoodie* Knight, who I’m guessing is *real* Knight, unless Knight is just some name they use to fuck with people, turns over his shoulder. Dust falls over my face and everything goes black.

Nineteen



K night

MY HAND CATCHES THE SKIN AROUND THE BACK OF HIS NECK JUST AS THE portal shuts behind us. I don't give him a second to stand before I'm throwing his body against the brick building behind him. The marble stones crack when his body falls back to the ground.

"What the fuck is your problem?" Sin shoves me in my chest, swiping his new blood splatters off his chin. "What the fuck do you care?" The streets in the city are quiet, but then I knew they would be. It's timeless here, but even the magic needs to refuel.

"Knight!" he shouts, but I give him no more than my fucking back as I barrel down the road.

If I don't get away from him now, I'll do something I'll regret. Show my cards, not that I didn't do that already.

I don't ask why he sent us here out of everywhere. Why does he portal us home? I let my feet take me to the only place where I'll find answers. The city is almost always alive, but tonight, on All Hallows' Eve, we don't have a chance. We don't celebrate the same way the Giftless do.

If only. Then maybe it would be over quicker.

I keep following the marble pathway down the street, passing all of the smaller shops. Convenience stores, bars. That's all we really need down here—or up. I stop walking when I hit the entrance to a dark alley. Trees curve over the pathway, with shadows dancing across the pavement. The trees whisper little notes.

That's a Royal...oh no...whatever will he do.

Someone giggles and then adds, *He will come and steal us. Only we hope he actually takes us to bed this time.* I roll my eyes. The squawking of the butterflies dying off into the distance.

The store catches my eyes instantly. Nestled between two over-the-top large buildings is a smaller one with two pointed cones reaching up to the sky from the ceiling. It kind of looks like a miniature dark castle. Blood red illuminates from the windows and I quickly pick up my pace to make it across the road. My hands come to the door handle, and I push it open. Fog swims around my ankles as the smell of burning sage and lavender drifts up my nostrils.

“Sit.” The Mage points to the chair opposite hers, and my hands come to the back. Zhara is the greatest Mage to ever speak, and that's saying something since they're so powerful already.

Her long fingers curve around the deck of cards as she shuffles them. “I know that you are not here for this, royal, so what is it that I can help you with?”

I lean forward, resting my elbows on the table. “I need help.”

“With what?” she asks, her soft pink eyes shifting up and down my body. She leans back in her chair, crossing one leg over the other until the split parts and exposes her lean, tanned thigh. “I mean...” She flicks the ash off her whatever it is she's smoking, bringing it back to her pastel pink lips. “I have a feeling you need me for something other than what I am most excited about.”

Usually, Zhara and I dance around the fact that we both fuck like animals.

But nothing. I've got nothing for her right now, and I ain't even fucking sorry.

"Tell me about being mated and what usually happens."

Zhara pauses, the cigarette short of her lips. She tilts her head slightly to the right, studying me closely.

"You know what happens. You're not here for that." She pauses and I hate the way a Mage can sniff out even your deepest and darkest secrets. I feel the heavy pull of breath being forced out of me, and my fists clench.

"Watch it, Mage," I warn as she uses her magic. She giggles, butting her joint out in the floating ashtray. "Oh, boy. The first royal to find his mate."

"I thought you couldn't mate with a Giftless?" I growl through clenched teeth.

Zhara raises her brow, her pierced tongue sliding over her lip. "You can't."

"Elaborate." I wave my hand out for her to continue, but instead, she studies me like she does her subjects. All of her subjects fall, but she has fun watching them splatter against the pavement before feasting on them.

"What I will tell you are the things you already know. The mating ritual requires several steps to seal the bond, each one making the connection between the pairing grow stronger and stronger until there is nothing between you and your fated. Until you are one." She watches me, likely trying to figure out what step I'm on. "The first, the exchange of blood. Both must drink of the other. Second, when you come together ... literally and figuratively." She smirks. "The third? Well—" Something flies against the window behind me and a splinter of a crack ripples through the room. "—you already know how to seal the mating process, Deveraux, so why are you here? Did you want me to tell you that she isn't your mate, that you're merely just an obsessed fool with a hard dick?" Her perfect brow arches. "You and I both know that isn't true, Knight." She pushes up from her chair, rounding the table and bringing her fingers to my chin. "And so the first one falls."



London

I stare back at the spot that just opened up like a vortex and pulled both of the Knights through. *What the fuck?* Maybe this is still the effects of whatever that shit was that was given to us at that party? Maybe it's truly fucking with my brain. Deep down, I know that's not true. Deep down, I know that what I just saw wasn't an illusion.

So yeah, what in the actual fuck?!

I throw on a pair of jeans and a small crop top, picking up my phone and bag. I fly out of my bedroom and pass Ben's door. Since he didn't burst in here when I don't even know what to call them were fighting, he must have slept through it, and there's no point waking him up now. I don't think he'll be able to help me anyway. Shit, the only help I might get here is a straitjacket. Especially if I tell the wrong person. Not that Ben is the wrong person, because he isn't. But even he has his boundaries.

On my way to the crystal shop, because it's literally the only place I can think to go right now, I replay everything I've had happen to me over the past month. The parties, the drugs, the men... all strange. All so strange.

The outside air slaps me in the face and I keep my eyes peeled to the ground as I try to seek answers from places I've never ventured to. Nothing makes sense. Magic? That doesn't exist, right? Magic simply doesn't exist.

I stop walking.

But how the fuck else do I explain what I just saw? How do I explain not just the fact that there are *two* Knights, but a damn weird little portal opening up in my bedroom and both of them stepping through? And why...*oh why...* did the pastel of blue and pink that swirled in the middle feel so damn familiar? Almost the same palette as the cotton candy I get at the town fair.

But not only that...something inside me ignited. I could feel the flames of whatever it was licking the insides of my stomach. That's really the only way I know how to describe it.

I'm about to round the corner to see if I can pick Jus's brain, when the door opens and a girl stops, her eyes on me. She has light blonde hair, blue eyes, and a small heart-shaped face. She has to be around the same age as me. Maybe Jus did get laid, and he's found someone. Finally. Only he's definitely punching.

"London, right?" she asks, her head tilting to the side.

My eyes fly behind her. "Yes?"

"I'm Halee! Jus is a friend of mine."

"Oh, is he in?"

She shakes her head. "No. He's out. I'm about to go see him, though. Do you want to join?" She seems friendly enough, and anyone close to Jus is a decent person.

I follow her back down the path I came, trying not to fill the silence with empty conversations.

"Hmmm, someone has left you with questions," she hints, and I shift my feet to face her.

"What?" I don't think she knows me enough to make that assumption, but I allow her to elaborate.

"I can smell it." Her nose crinkles as she folds her arms in front of herself, her Prada puffer jacket expanding further. "It's strong."

Smell. She can *smell* my confusion?

Can she smell how much more confused her little omission has me?

"What school do you go to?" Maybe she goes to the same one Knight and Jus go to, and I can pluck the answers I want out of her. She seems like a much easier target than Knight.

She side-eyes me, the corner of her cherry gloss lips turning upward in a smile. "The same as Justice..." She pauses. "...and Knight."

I stop walking, my hand reaching out to her arm. “Wait, you know him?”

She shrugs. “Yeah, we all do. Why?” She studies me closely, and I hate the way I find myself getting lost in her eyes. Almost like a form of déjà vu, where I’d seen her before, only I haven’t. “Look, I’m sure you’re a nice girl, but the Deveraux—well, anyone—are not what you’re looking for. I’d keep all of that to this side of the world.”

“What do you mean?” I blink up at her.

She flashes me a full-tooth smile. “Do you know what? How about I take you to a place where I know Knight will be?”

I follow her down the path, unease sliding into my veins. I don’t know who this girl is and she could be taking me anywhere. Reaching into my pocket, I pull out my phone and open a text to Jus.

Me: Where r u? I’m with your friend.

IT DOESN’T TAKE LONG BEFORE HE ANSWERS.

JUS: I’M AT WORK. WHAT FRIEND?

MY HEART TRIPS IN MY CHEST AS I REALIZE I’VE MOST LIKELY GOT MYSELF into some bullshit, and now I need to dig my way out.

“Hey, so I think I’m going to head back.”

“Don’t be silly.” She stops, holding my stare. “You want to come with me.” Her tone is forceful, her pupils dilating. I blink back slowly as everything around me turns to slo-mo.

I shake my head out of my daze. “No, I’m good. Nice meeting you!” I don’t bother to watch as she blinks past her shock. I turn and pick up the pace back to Jus. *Holy fuck, what is happening this morning?*

I think of going to see Jus, at the least to ask who the fuck that chick was, but instead, turn the other direction to make my way home. I shouldn't have left this morning. That's where I went wrong, and now I kind of just want my best friend.

My phone vibrates in my hand, and without looking, I swipe to answer the call.

"Hello?"

"Hey, Lo." At the sound of his voice, all of my muscles relax and I blow out a deep breath. Everything that's been going on around me lately, I almost forgot about him. *Not likely.*

"Hey, Unc!" I don't bother looking over my shoulder to see if the weird girl is following me. Cocooned in the safety of my uncle, I know I'm good here.

Happy.

Safe.

Protected.

"Just checking in on you, baby girl. How's college treating you? You find a major yet?"

I sigh, pushing the elevator button to take me to my level.

"Not yet. I hope so soon. How is everything back home?"

"Eh." I can imagine him shrugging his big shoulders. "Same old. Mr. Kent finally lost his license. The old fuck running too many red lights in town."

I giggle, stepping into the elevator and pushing our level. "Well, I guess that'll save a few lives." He goes off about work and how many people are moving away from Sunshine Valley. It's a small town nestled away in the mountains, and despite the name, it's always doom and gloom.

"What about you?" he asks, and I toss my handbag onto the kitchen counter, changing ears.

"Uneventful. Ben has been keeping me busy."

“So you’ve been partying?” he asks, and I smirk into my bottle of water.

“Something like that.”

“Alright, well, I better let you go. Don’t leave it too long this time, Lon.”

“I promise.” I hang up my phone and place it onto the counter. *Breathe in. Breathe out.* My uncle is my safe space and has been since my parents passed.

When people find out my mom and dad are dead, they pity me, assuming I didn’t have all I needed as a girl, but they’re wrong. Nobody needs parents. What they need is someone in their corner, always and no matter what. I had that. I *have* that.

My uncle Marcus has been there my whole life and he was more than enough. He loved me with the same volume any child would have with both of their parents. I never asked questions. I guess I didn’t want him to think that he wasn’t enough. I figured he would tell me more about my mom and dad eventually, when he was ready. All he had said about my parents’ death was it was *tragic*, and that one word was enough for me not to want to know more. I mean, for what? So I could think of all the ways it could have been avoided, if there are any?

Who does that help?

“You okay?” Ben asks, rounding the kitchen with nothing but a pair of briefs on. Tight enough to see the outline of his dick. That I have seen often.

“Like, can you stop walking around like a slut?” I gesture around his body.

He flashes me a full-tooth smile. “No?”

The sight of his smile, or maybe the sight of him in general, has parts of me relaxing when I feel anything but calm. The problem is, I have no idea what to say.

I can’t exactly pop off with, “Hey, so Knight broke into our dorm room, fucked me into a frenzy where I may or may not have seen literal stars exploding all around us, left, and then I woke up with him on top of me

again, only to find out, it wasn't actually him, but a twin brother I didn't even know he had...who I may or may not have been screwing around with this entire time, who also may not be his twin at all, but some weird freaky magical doppelgänger shit like in *The Vampire Diaries* when that brunette bitch pops out of nowhere and ruins everything. Oh, and speaking of good old *TVD*, I'm pretty sure I saw some sharp ass teeth come out to play, and I *definitely* saw a giant fucking glowing circle they just...walked on through!"

Oh my fucking god, I am crazy. Actually fucking crazy.

Technically, I could say all of that to Ben. He wouldn't fault me for it and he would never judge. Check my temperature and ask what I'm on, yes, but not judge.

And unless one of the Knights kissed me with some sort of acid on their tongues, I'm painfully sober and some freaky shit is going on here.

"Lon?"

I blink. "Hmm?"

Ben cocks his head. "I said you sure you're good? I was about to head to the shower, but I can stay."

"No, no. Go." I clear my throat. "I'm good."

"Yeah?"

No. "Yeah."

I'm pretty sure he doesn't believe me, but he nods anyway, tossing his towel over his shoulder and kissing my temple before he walks out the door.

I run to the couch and plop onto it, quickly searching the video app for a specific movie. I hit play, only to fast-forward through most of it until I get to the scene I'm looking for.

Storm's eyes glow a solid white as she calls on her X-Men shit and lightning flashes around her.

X-Men are fake, right? Just like bloodsucking beings?

My fingers fly to my lips, trailing over the small tough spot from where...
From where he bit me.

The day on the trail comes back to me, and I look to my palm.

My palm that mysteriously healed after Silver touched it, but that's not what has my pulse in my throat.

That day, Knight licked my palm clean, his tongue taking with it every drop of red that glittered it, gravel and all.

I'm a monster, Little London...

His heady whisper fills my head, and I shudder as fear buries itself in my belly.

Holy.

Fucking.

Shit.

Twenty



K night

I CAN SMELL HER EVERYWHERE I WALK. IT'S TORTURE. WITH EVERY STEP I take, I hold my breath. I need to see her. Pull her in closer. Even if I have to tear her open from the outside and remove all her parts to figure them out.

I will.

Over and over, I will.

"You need to chill the fuck out." Sin catches up to me, and I turn to blink at my twin brother, annoyed that he's in my face right now.

"Sin, beware...every time I see you right now, I want to knock your fucking teeth out."

"Chill!" He throws his hands up. "We get it. She's your mate."

Fuck. He said it.

They see it.

My brows dip low and I shake my head.

"Not possible," I say through clenched teeth.

Sinner's head tips. "Bro—"

"It's something else," I cut him off. *Has to be.*

Much to my disgust, he continues to follow me through the school and

out toward the catacombs. I need some fucking drugs to chill me out. Or just a full-blown blood party.

I like the latter better.

As if it wasn't bad enough facing Sin right now, Creed suddenly appears at our side.

"Okay, let's think..." Creed stops me before I can continue my venture.

My eyes flick between my two brothers. "This a fucking intervention?"

"Nah," Creed says, shifting to his other foot. "It's a party invite."

"The Dungeon blew up."

"Then it was fixed." Creed waves his hands in front of him. He knows that's not what I mean. He knows that I mean *someone blew the fucking thing up and we still don't know who*.

All of our phones ding in our pockets and we take them out. I open the latest message and my stomach falls to the fucking ground. Fuck. I miss the days where we would never hear from any of our parents. Coming to this school was clearly a fucking mistake.

Mother: There's been a breach.

"What is she fucking talking about?" Legend asks, bouncing a basketball with one hand and holding his phone with his other. The trail of girls behind him all stay their distance. "Maybe she's lying."

"Sure. About what?" I glare at him. "What could she possibly lie about just to get us on edge?"

Another message comes in.

Mother: We need all of you home. Something is happening and we need you safe.

Safe? Is she fucking insane? I hit call and bring my phone to my ear. "Mother?"

"Knight, please. You all must come back to Rathe immediately." I look to Legend and then to Creed.

Mother doesn't use the word please often, if ever.

“You saw something again?”

She pauses. “Yes. I did.”

Fuck.

When my brothers and I were a lot younger, a few hundred years ago, our mother once told us that she would never use her gift as a way to manipulate us. We believed her.

Until we were old enough to realize that Mother will always put Father first.

“I’ve gotta go.” I end the call and shove my phone back into my pocket.

“What’d she say?” Legend asks, watching me carefully while going back to bouncing the ball between his legs.

“She wants us home now.”

“The season’s in full fucking swing.” Creed frowns. “We can’t leave, Coach will lose his mind if he’s out one Lord, let alone all four. Why’s she freaking out?”

“Like always, she gave an order and nothing else. She’s hiding something. I can feel it.”

“Since when could you *feel* anything through a phone?” Sinner spits, still angry with me. “You a High Empath all of a sudden?”

I blink past Sin’s words. What the fuck is he talking about?

“We could fuck a Pixie? Take what we want and let her drown us in Fae dust?”

Legend nods in agreement, looking to me.

“Yeah.” My voice scratches and I swallow. “Let’s do that.”

I feel Creed poking at the block in my mind, but it’s lighter than normal, almost like the wind rolling over your cheeks in the city of Frost, featherlight and seemingly unthreatening even though you know there’s power in the air. I’ve been able to keep Creed out as long as I can remember. I’m sure he was stronger to penetrate my mind when I was little, but not now. Magic doesn’t wither with age; it grows like an unrelenting vine until eventually, it strangles

you to death. I glance his way to find him scowling at me, but he faces forward when our eyes meet.

So my older brother realizes it too, how much harder he has to work to even attempt to slip through. I can't let him in there now, not when I started the mating process without fucking realizing it.

As we reach the entrance to the catacombs, the blood suckers are already in party mode, Healers on standby while they prep their meals with persuasion and Mage-kissed elixirs.

The Pixie appears then, having wasted no time running to a royal's call.

She stands maybe fifteen feet ahead, at the edge of the blue flames barricading in the feeding party, and without so much as moving a finger, the tie to her robe begins to unravel, the deep green silk falling to her feet the moment my feet plant themselves before her.

She's completely naked with Sin circling her back. He whispers something in her ear and her head falls to the side.

My eyes slice to the creamy caramel slope of her neck, my tongue rolling across my lower lip as I trace her pulse, the thump, thump, thumping growing harsh the longer she waits for me to make a move. Or maybe it's the way Legend's hands have snuck their way between her thighs.

I'm fucking starved, aching for a fucking meal that will satisfy, knowing in the back of my mind nothing will.

Never again will I be satisfied by the taste of another, now that I've tasted what's meant to be mine.

A low growl stirs in my chest.

No.

I fight back. She can't be mine.

She's not Gifted.

She will grow old.

She will die.

The Pixie jumps and I look down to find long, sharp claws have torn

through my fingertips, shredding the skin there. Blood drips from the tips as the skin slowly heals itself around them, sealing them off into perfectly wrapped points.

I feel my brothers' gaze on me because yeah, this is fucking new.

"Deveraux," she breathes.

Deveraux. Not Knight or Sinner because she has no fucking clue whose chest her bare body is touching, no clue who she's offering herself to. She doesn't know and she doesn't fucking care.

Creed steps up then, wrapping his fist in the Pixie's short hair and giving it a little tug.

She moans and the sound has my lip curling.

Creed's eyes find mine as he lowers his mouth to the left side of her neck, silently telling me to do the same. To get lost in the free pass before me and out of my fucking head.

I jerk closer until the girl's naked body is flush against mine, dropping my lips to her neck. My teeth ache, so I press them into her artery and hot liquid erupts over my tongue.

My chest rumbles wildly and I fight a fucking scream when a sharp sting stabs into my fucking mind, like talons of a griffin digging into my skull, attempting to tear it from my body. I rip myself away with a gasp, stumbling from the group, from my brothers and the Pixie who tastes like rotten flesh. I trip over my own fucking feet, falling to my knees, and growl angrily as bile works its way up my throat.

I heave and spit and throw myself to my feet.

I hear my brothers coming, but I quickly snap my fingers and jump through the marbly haze, closing the portal before my brothers can jump through.

This is all her fucking fault.

I hate her.

I hate how fucking bad I need to see her.

Touch her.

Fucking taste her.

I'm not convinced the gods got it right, that they would gift me, a fucking Deveraux royal, with a weak little woman who will die some mundane death as humans do, but for now, that's where I am.

At the mercy of a partial bond and everyone knows partial bonds make you fucking mad with need. Every kind of it, but the worst of it all is this unspeakable determination to protect and un-fucking-natural desire to love and earn love right back.

I don't want to protect anyone but my blood.

I don't have to earn anyone, and I don't want to love.

I don't even know *how* to love.

I love my brothers, yes, but this is not the same.

Nothing will ever be the same again, my mind screams, and I tell that bitch to shut the fuck up.

I will get to the bottom of this.

Figure out where the gods and fate went wrong.

But first, I need to set eyes on her.

No, I *have* to set eyes on her, like a weak bitch the deeper part of me, the part that's almost clawed its way to the surface, has become.

That part of me is supposed to be demonic and cutthroat, painfully, unforgivingly fucking ruthless, yet it wants to crawl after a little nobody, and drop to its knees before her like she's the superior being. She isn't.

She's destroying me by existing and I fucking hate her for it.

If only I wasn't unequivocally obsessed with her, too...

Twenty-One



L ondon

I'M DEEP DOWN THE FUCKING RABBIT HOLE. LIKE...GONE.

I locked myself in my room and scoured the internet, but people there are crazier than I feel, so I shut that shit down quick and stuck to the basics.

Harry fucking Potter.

I can't believe I'm about to say this, but I'm pretty sure that giant glowy thing Knight and creeper Knight stepped through was a portal of some sort. As in magic. Real fucking magic!

Tingles break across my skin, my fingers shaking at the thought, but I steady my wrist and finish putting on my mascara.

When finished, I toss everything into my bag and shove it back under the sink before gripping on to its edges.

I stare at my reflection, as I do for a moment each morning, usually wondering and waiting for a sign of significance to show itself, for answers to unknown questions to pop up and for my life to suddenly make half the sense Ben's does to him.

Of course, that doesn't happen, but there is something...different.

That hollow place that lived inside me as a child, the one I blocked out

and pushed deep, deep down, it's back, but it's not the same. While it's just as eager to find whatever the hell it's been looking for, creating this knot of anxiousness behind my ribs, there's also this strange softness there, almost like silk wrapped around a sleeping child. It's almost as if my subconscious has been soothed; the overwhelming urgency I used to feel as a little girl gone, and in its place, patience. I don't understand it, but I don't understand a whole lot these days.

If I weren't fascinated with crystals and obsessed with the moon and the stars, and the light and darkness, and the way my mood shifts based on the weather and so many more elemental and earthly things, I would probably be strapped down in an insane asylum somewhere right about now.

But as I take a step back, looking over my sleek-straight hairstyle for the day, black strapless top, and leather pants to match, my eyes find their way up to the mirror once more.

It's not only the feelings within me that seem to have shifted.

My eyes are a little lighter blue, more the color of ice than water, but it has to be the lighting or the massive black wing I gave myself today.

My hair seems somehow lighter, the platinum nearly frost-white, but again, that must be the lighting.

But then, there's my skin.

It's clearer. Sort of flawless looking...but maybe that makeup tutorial I watched last week just finally paid off.

"Ready?" Ben calls from the other side of the door.

Sighing, I paint my lips the deepest purple I can find and then tear the door open.

Ben's brows lift, but he says nothing. He's well aware of what I like to call my mood montages. "Ready."

We walk in mostly silence, him checking shit on his phone, me half lost in my mind, and out in the fresh open air, things that wouldn't click when locked in my room fall together.

Witchy shit or not, the “Knights” are twins.

Identical twins, not some hallucination or mirrored X-Men power shit—jury is still out on the white eyes.

My senses have never led me astray, and if I were paying attention, I wouldn’t have been duped by Knight. The boys, they couldn’t be more different, kiss more differently. They even speak differently.

But, yes, the twisted two did both kiss and touch me, and the twin, that little shit, was really careful with his “tell me you want me”, but not so much so the night of the party. The twin finger-fucked me on his brother’s lap, admittedly driving me crazy with need, and then they pulled their little switch-hitter game without my having a clue. Legend tucked my head into his warm neck, allowing Knight to yank him off me, and then Knight tore me away to claim my orgasm as his own, but his twin did do all the lead-up work. Playful little deviant. Dare I say, he’s less scary than Knight.

He’s less everything...

A frown pulls at my brows and I rub my arms when they prickle with goose bumps, though I’m not sure what’s caused them, the thought of his gentle yet strong hands on my throat while he fucks me stupid or the thought of him possibly choking me out until I’m dead at his feet.

You’re a fucking mess, London, Jesus.

The hairs on the back of my neck stand then, and I whip around, feeling eyes on me, but no one is there, and when I face forward, Ben is before me.

“I’m meeting that Alex chick tonight, just FYI, so I’m not sure when I’ll be back.” He stuffs his phone into his pocket.

My pulse jumps at the name. Alex. She’s from their world, and those two worlds no longer mean *rich ass kids in a fancy fucking private college*.

“Sure you don’t want to blow her off?”

Ben smirks, kissing my temple, and heads toward the arena for hockey practice. “I’ll call you if plans change.”

“K,” I say, even though he’s already gone as I tug my bag higher on my

shoulder.

I curve through campus, making my way to the coffee shop since I have a few extra minutes, but with each turn I take or shortcut around the large cement buildings, my pulse jumps into my throat, my heart beating faster and my palms beginning to sweat.

My fist tightens around my bag and I jerk my head over my shoulder, but again no one is there.

I clench my teeth together and speed walk around the last corner, cutting back into the main quad area, jerking to a stop when I see Trevor walking this way.

He's yet to spot me, so I try to cut back the other way, but his head pops up before I can. His eyes narrow on my outfit before he forces a smile and starts jogging for me.

"Fuck," I hiss, picking up my pace.

"Lon, wait up!"

"Can't, sorry, running late!"

His footsteps grow nearer. "No, you're not. I know your schedule, remember? Can't lie to me, Lon." He chuckles, but it's fake. He's pissed that he's being dismissed. *Good.*

Pissed I've been ignoring him for weeks now, but my god, can a boy not take a hint?

"Okay, so how's this... I don't want to talk to you, Trevor. So, if you would, please kindly, fuck off."

"Hooking up with some rich kids going to your head, I see."

I jerk to a stop, spinning around and stepping into his space, which is annoying, as it's exactly what he wants. His smirk is all-telling, even if he is attempting to hide his anger.

"The only thing going to my head is a dick three times the size of yours, so if you want to sit here and throw childish fits and insults, I'm game. I'll go first. I was glad when I found out you cheated because that meant your

lackluster cock was now someone else's problem and I didn't have to be the one to tell you to invest in some Viagra and maybe a pump or two."

Trevor's hand wraps around my bicep. Something explodes behind my ribs, causing my chest to jerk, but I swallow beyond it, yanking against his hold.

He's relentless. His lip curls up. "Do you really think some trust fund kids think you're worth any more than an easy lay?"

"As long as they think I'm a good one." I manage to tear myself from his arm, shoving his chest slightly for messing around, and hurrying in the café doors.

A gust of wind comes out of nowhere, flows in behind me, blowing my hair in my face, and I swear it acts as a tornado, yet soft as it whirls around me once. The tension leaves my body instantly, and I spin around to see if Trevor's following, and my jaw drops at the sight.

Trevor is on his knees, blood pouring down his face, his nose busted and split open, but there's no one around.

Moments after I notice, others begin to as well, and people rush to his aid.

My brows pull and I step up to the glass door, pressing my hand against it as I stare, my mind reeling, and then heat presses back at my palm, warmth wrapping around my fingers and down my arm until it penetrates beyond my skin.

My stomach erupts with a million little lightning bugs, their wings tickling and teasing from within, and a small smile forms on my lips before I can stop it.

When I lower my hand, my print slowly fades from the glass, but as I take a step back, a larger one stares back at me.

I suck in a sharp breath, pressing my hand to my chest. My eyes flick beyond it, to find Trevor being carried away by a campus cart, and when I look back, the print is gone.

Suddenly, I'm hit with a crippling wave of loneliness.
It's irrational, yes, but it's real. Strong.
Unsettling.
I need my fucking coffee.



YOU WOULD THINK A BASIC PSYCHOLOGY CLASS WOULD, AT THE VERY LEAST, be entertaining, only it's nothing but lecture after lecture of an old man voicing his opinion rather than anything else, so to say I'm dreading the hour and fifty minutes of nonsense is an understatement.

I decide to down an extra shot of espresso at the café to help settle my nerves. So what I am looking forward to doing is slowly sipping on my extra-large, hot latte and getting lost in the nutty, sweet flavor, while ignoring every word spoken by the middle-aged man who needs to stop dying his hair by himself. At this rate, I'll be kicked out of the university before next semester. I'm going to have to suck it up and ask Ben for some hardcore tutoring if I want to have even the slimmest of chances in meeting the bare minimum allowed GPA required to keep the scholarship I somehow landed here. Honestly, that's probably the biggest accomplishment I'll ever reach, and that's pathetic.

Lowering onto my seat, I kick my boot out in hopes that no one will decide to sit in front of me; but even though I choose the very last row at the very top of the auditorium-style seating, nearly all the way against the wall, it doesn't work, and some guy drops into the chair. Why? I don't know. He's wearing glasses, and while my vision is damn good, even I can hardly make out the lines of a man sitting at the desk below.

It doesn't take long for all the students to arrive, and then the doors slam closed, our professor pushing to his feet with his nifty little headset that looks like it belonged to a telemarketer fifteen years ago.

“Today, we’ll be going over chapters fourteen to seventeen, so please pull out your notes and—”

He’s cut off when the door nearest him is thrown open, and I nearly choke on my drink at the man who walks inside.

I jerk upright, lowering my paper cup to the small tray beside me, my eyes flicking all around the room, searching every other entrance and snapping back up front, over and over again.

None other than what I guess is the oldest brother, Creed is his name, saunters over to the professor with an air of confidence no man, especially one as hot as him, should possess.

The professor looks annoyed, moving forward and with jerky steps, but then he holds his movements all at once. I watch Creed closely as his lips move, and the professor’s spine straightens.

Creed lowers his chin, and the professor walks around him...straight out the door.

I sit back slowly, sinking lower and lower into my seat, hoping maybe if I make myself small or hit the ground completely, he won’t see me, but then his eyes slice up, locking with mine.

My throat runs dry, but I try to hide the way my limbs begin to shake by lifting my coffee and sitting firm in my seat.

On the outside, I hope I look completely unaffected, almost annoyed by his presence. If the way his lips curl to one side tells me anything, I’m not fooling anyone.

Well, not fooling the guy who may or may not be a mythical being of some sort.

If they are magic, what could they be?

“Welcome,” Creed’s deep voice booms across the lecture hall, despite his lack of a microphone. “I will be leading the class today.”

Unease wraps around me, but I can’t deny the way I perk up. I guess since there is no hiding, I’m all for this little visit, even if I’m *almost* sure it

has a fuck ton to do with little old me.

“Everyone face forward. I want your eyes on mine.” He walks closer toward the rows of students, very slowly looking from one seat to the next. He doesn’t skip a single soul, and when his eyes reach me, he winks.

My throat runs dry and I wait until he turns away to swallow.

“I am not here,” he says. “You’re in Psychology 101, which is a pathetic excuse for a class, in my opinion, but we won’t get into that.” My jaw drops, and I look around, but no one else seems to be reacting to his shitty words, so I focus on him once again.

His dark hair is combed and styled, but intending to look a little messy. I can’t see his scar from here, but I know he has one just over his eye. His jeans fit him well, as does the dark hoodie he wears, the sleeves pushed up almost to his elbows, and I remember the way his veins are pronounced on his long forearms from when he cornered me at the party.

The party with floating fucking people, and floating fires and—

Wait.

Fae dust.

Holy fucking shit! FAE DUST?!

Like, actually Fae??

I’m instantly picturing these beautiful beings with colorful makeup and wings, and I’m probably so far off it’s insane. But I mean, is it really far off when two days ago I would have sworn they were nothing but a fairy-tale creature from *FernGully*, or are fairies and Fae not the same?

Jesus fucking Christ, am I seriously searching for logic here?

The friend, Silver, he seemed odd when he saw me with it, almost shocked it was in my hands.

Was I not supposed to touch it?

Was it supposed to be hidden?

“Hold your left arm up,” Creed demands and every hand in the room lifts into the air. “If you are in an even numbered row, turn around and face the

person behind you.”

All at once, bodies twist in their seats, hands still lifted in the air like a bunch of fucking weirdos.

The kid in front of me spins, and my eyes narrow on him as his are blown wide, unblinking.

“Slap them,” Creed instructs.

My head jerks up. “What the fuck?”

A cold hand comes down across my cheek and I jolt to my feet, my gaze flying around as the sound of flesh smacking against flesh rings out in unison, catching heads whipping to the side as these people do exactly as they are told.

I press my fingers to my cheek, vaguely aware my thigh is burning from hot coffee as I stumble through bodies, scanning the room.

No one is freaking out. They just sit there deathly fucking still.

I’m literally the only one not stuck on stupid.

Creed’s laughter rings out and I freeze, looking to him.

He shakes his head. “Immune to my control, Little London,” he says.

I blink when he appears directly in front of me.

My heart leaps into my throat as his eyes begin to change, growing cloudy like his brother’s had, until there is nothing left but a marbly white, the pupils nowhere to be seen.

He cocks his head. “What are you hiding?”

I inch backward and he keeps coming up the stairs, the entire room oblivious to the two of us, still spun in their seats, staring at one another.

“What am I hiding?” A humorless, panicky laugh leaves me. “What the fuck are you people hiding?” I run a few feet, almost at the door, but I whip around when I feel the heat of his body, my legs locking once again when suddenly he’s right fucking there. “What the hell are you?!”

A shiver runs down my spine a mere second before heated lips press to my ear.

My entire body shivers, my muscles growing lax without permission as I fall against the man at my back.

“I told you what I am, my *plaything*.”

“Knight,” I breathe, frowning when my words create a fog before me, like speaking into the winter’s night when your every breath leaves you as if releasing smoke into the air. “What the fuck is happening to me?” I ask out loud.

A steady arm wraps around me, and I cling to it without meaning to.

The chest against me rumbles the second I accept his support, and my eyes travel down. His large hand presses to my stomach, fingers spreading wide, and then blood seeps from the beds of his fingernails, and panic wraps around my every organ, squeezing.

A bloodcurdling scream tears from me, and suddenly, voices fill the air, people look around, and the brothers curse.

I shove away, running down the hall, tripping over people and squeezing my way through. I don’t stop.

I fucking run until I can’t breathe and am safely in my dorm. I take the stairs all the way up, tearing into my room and slamming the door closed.

“Please be home, please be home...” Dashing for Ben’s room, I throw the door open.

I jerk when I find the back of a girl’s head, her naked body riding my best friend, her blonde hair flowing down her back.

She looks over her shoulder, smiling at me, eyes glowing before she blinks.

“Hey.” She smiles. “Wanna join?”

My heart beats erratically, my body shaking as I plaster it to the wall, slowly sliding into the room until I can get a view of Ben’s face.

My brows snap together and I dart for the bed. “Oh my god!” I scream, looking at her. “What did you do?!” I shout, shaking Ben’s pale form, his eyes glued to the ceiling and wide open.

Tears prick my eyes as I shake him and Alex sighs.

“Why are humans so dramatic?” she mutters to herself.

“Are you fucking kidding me?!” I scream, staring as she unscrews her necklace, the only thing she has on, her tits on full display, not that she cares.

“This will be but a memory in a moment, sweet London, and who knows, maybe you’ll want to play with us once you’re nice and dosed.”

“I’m right fucking here.” I jerk forward, shoving at her, but she bends like the fucking exorcist and blows glitter in my face.

I choke as it lands in my mouth and then Ben starts gurgling.

I spin but then I freeze. He’s not gurgling, he’s...moaning and thrusting up into her, her own sounds of pleasure following.

“What in the actual fuck?”

Ben blinks, his head jerking toward me and his eyes widen. “Shit, Lon, what are you doing?”

“I...” My mind races. “I...” I shake my head.

A spark flickers in the air and I stare, wide-eyed, as that same fucking vortex appears, and in he steps.

Ben jolts upright in the bed. “What the fu—”

The blue-eyed bastard flings a hand out, and suddenly Ben is a statue, Alex still on his dick.

All four brothers file into Ben’s room and I start to shake.

Alex laughs and I snap.

“Get the fuck off him!” I scream so loud I feel a blood vessel pop in my neck.

“Get the fuck away from him,” Knight growls.

I jerk closer, gripping Ben’s arm as if to protect him, and Knight nearly flies over the bed, his brothers holding him back as his limbs shake.

Fear swallows me whole and I feel around, coming up with the award Ben got for his top-notch performance on the ice last year.

They all shift closer and I slam it against the dresser, my hand bleeding as

it shatters into pieces.

A growl rips from Knight's throat and he tears free, leaping over the bed as I fall to my knees, scrambling back to pick up the largest piece.

He's in my face as I push to my feet, cornering me.

His lip curls and he presses closer; they all do. Alex suddenly nowhere to be seen.

"Please," I whisper, tears falling from my eyes.

Without thought, I swipe at my cheeks, my blood-smeared hand streaking across my face, small shards of glass cutting my skin. I wince and Knight's eyes flash white as sharp points appear below his upper lip, stabbing straight into his bottom lip.

I scream and he jerks toward me. Throwing my hand out, I shove the sharp glass straight into his neck, pressing it deeper with all my might. I feel the bones in his neck crunch as I plunge deeper and deeper.

Blood spills from his wound, pouring over my fingers, and he makes a gurgling sound, choking on his own blood as it seeps from his mouth.

He falls to his knees, his eyes wide on mine as his hands try desperately to close the cut. *Oh my god. What have I done?*

His brothers panic as they take his side. "No!" one screams.

"Knight!" another shouts.

"Someone help!" the last yells. "She fucking killed him!"

I begin to shake, bellowing cries escaping me as I stare down at the man.

They scream and shout and lift his limp body in their arms, barking orders at one another, all while Ben is frozen in place.

"I... I'm so—"

I cut off when not one, but *all* of the brothers begin to laugh, the sounds sending chills down my spine.

Confused and sick with a feeling I can't describe, I search their expression, but mine freezes on my face when Knight's dead body is no longer dead.

Slowly, he pushes to stand, facing me as he tips his head, pulling the long, sharp glass from his artery. He tosses it at my feet, and I jolt, my palms planting on the wall because there is nowhere else to go. No escape to be made.

“Nice try,” he speaks in a tone so deep I swear even my organs shrivel at the sound. He steps closer, blood all over him as he gets in my face. He grips my chin, tilting my head all the way up so I’m forced to face him. “You can’t kill me, but be very fucking careful, *mate*, because I *can*...kill you.”

I gasp in fear, and then everything goes black.

Twenty-Two



L ondon

COLD. THE INCISIVE BITES OF ICE SNAP OVER MY SKIN AS MY EYES FLY OPEN AND I'm staring up at a sky so dark the stars almost blind me. I push myself up from the ground, facing the familiar bridge. Sharp metal waves up to the sky like serrated talons before joining to braided wire that propagates over the road. I lift my foot to take another step when a loud squawk pierces from behind me.

I turn to see a crow with its head tilted to the side, his eyes on me and his beak slightly open.

"Hey." I open my mouth to talk, but nothing comes out. I don't want to be here. What if I'm here and that same shadow visits me? Does things to me? Things I don't want...

I try to run, lifting my leg from the ground to direct off to a sprint, when rain touches the tip of my nose and the snow that's pinched between my toes turns to sand...and I'm falling.

Quicksand.

I open my mouth to call for help when granules fill it up and the little light where I came from turns black.

So black...

MY EYES FEEL LEADEN, BUT I SLOWLY OPEN, BLINKING AWAY THE OBSCURITY. The rotten egg smell of sulfur is strong, and I twist my body to the side, swinging my legs over the bed to climb out. What happened last night? What...everything flashes back through my mind at one hundred miles an hour. I killed Knight, *or I didn't?*

Scrubbing my hands over my eyes, I shake my head, curling my toes into the plush carpet beneath.

Wait.

I blink, noticing the black rug made of the softest texture I've ever felt in my life...nothing like the cheap carpet in my dorm bedroom.

Where the fuck am I?

The air is humid and sticky. So hot that sweat bubbles on my flesh. I tiptoe around the four-post bed, bringing my hand to a post and squeezing. The walls are licked with deep purple and white trimmings, yet everything feels outdated. As though I've stepped right through a time portal and into another century, maybe one that doesn't exist yet.

This could be possible, after everything that I've witnessed lately. I move across the room and to the windows, shifting the curtains out of the way while bringing my hand to rest on my belly. Silk meets my palm and I look down to see a little camisole dress, the same color as the walls. I release my hand from the curtain as I spin around to find a mirror. Blinking through the shock, I take everything in.

A small sofa is tucked in the corner of the room, the two small doors to the left, and a stairwell that leads down, instead of up. I move toward it and see the curl go around and around as it falls right to the bottom of the room below. A single light flickers on and I lean farther over to see what it is down there when a loud crash sounds from outside. I shuffle back toward the

window, moving the curtain out of the way and my stomach drops to the ground.

The sky is dark, the color of midnight on a full moon, and the planets that orbit around the moon don't look like anything I've ever seen. The fact that I can fucking see the galaxy around us as if it is within literal reach is about as terrifying as it is mind-blowing.

I blink back the shock and try not to lose myself on the astral side of things, when I notice movement down below, where a large stretch of grass spreads out. What the fuck have I been forced into, and why do I get the feeling it has only just begun?

The door opens from behind me and I jump, spinning around to see who it is. A tall woman stares back at me through oval eyes. She has long black hair, a tight, lean body, and nails that look sharp enough to kill.

Her eyes flash the color of crystal and she throws her hand out.

A sharp ache starts in my throat and works its way down. She closes her fists and my lungs squeeze, the pain crippling and sending me to my knees.

I fight for air, but nothing.

Panic sets in and I grip at my throat, climbing to my feet as water pricks at my eyes.

The woman cocks her head, and the moment her hand falls to her side, I collapse, gasping and choking in place.

“What—” She pauses when she scans over my body. “—has he done.”

My mouth opens and then closes. Fear drags its talons down every nerve in my body when she takes another step closer to me. My fight-or-flight kicks in and I stumble backward slightly.

“Who are you?” I rush. “Where am I?”

Her eyes narrow, and while it's clear she's hostile and confused, there's also something else about her. Her aura is strong. The woman reads almost... haunted, but what or whom, I don't know.

Where the fuck am I?

“Hmmm.” She shimmies farther into the room, lowering herself down onto the single sofa tucked in the corner. She pins me with her stare. “I’m the mother, and I’m guessing you’re the Giftless toy my son has taken a liking to.”

“The what?” I bat my lashes so hard they fan out over my cheeks.

She stares back at me as if she’s not going to bother repeating herself. She doesn’t look like the type of person to repeat herself. “Interesting...”

I step backward farther until my back crashes with the curtain. “What is?”

“You.” Her eyes swirl as she slowly lifts herself up from the sofa. I should run. I know I should run. Everything inside of my body is screaming at me to do one thing. “You should not be in this room.”

Run.

The door bursts open again, and he stands on the threshold. “Get out, Mother.”

The two of them hold eye contact for a tense moment before she slowly sashays out of the room, not a second glance over her shoulder, and then the door is closed.

“WHAT AM I DOING HERE, KNIGHT?” I STARE UP AT HIM AND HE SLOWLY leans back against the door.

“Not leaving.”

Unease scrapes across my spine, and I clench my teeth a moment so I don’t lose my shit.

“What are you?” I ask the question that has been sitting on my mind since the day he and his brother exposed themselves.

“You ask that like I’m going to tell you.” He moves across the room, his arm brushing mine when he meets the curtain, moving it out of the way. An air of comfort washes over me and it makes no sense, so I do my best to

block it out. I'm really good at blocking things out.

"Get comfortable," he says, tossing a bag onto the bed. "You'll be staying here until I say."

"I'll run away," I whisper, inching around to get closer to the door. The corner of his mouth tilts up in a smirk.

"Yeah?" He slowly turns to face me, pinning me with a stare. "Go on then. Make my day and run."

I swallow, but it only feels like sand. "I don't understand, Knight! You can't just...keep me here. I have an uncle—friends! I need to go back to them or they'll think I'm dead."

He shrugs. "They still could be right. The night is young and my patience is yet to be tested." He closes the distance between us, bringing his hand to my chin and forcing my face up to his. "They know you're fine, London. Sit the fuck down and wait this out."

My fingers flex at my sides. "Where are we?"

His eyes bore into mine for a long moment, and I almost think he's going to soften. That I'm not imagining the tenderness buried deep behind those brilliant blues, but then he blinks, and just like that, I'm staring into the eyes of a psycho. An angry one.

"You're in my world now." Knight roughly releases my chin. "Welcome to Rathe."

Before I can ask him another question, he's gone.

Blowing out a breath, I think over my current options.

I don't have any.

Quickly tearing into the bag he set down, I pull on leggings and a matching cropped hoodie, sliding my feet into the simple runners as well, ignoring how everything is exactly the right size.

I rush to the other side of the room, my hand coming to the handle. Twisting it, I feel it slip as I pull it open. In a matter of a month, my world has completely shifted. I don't know what is right and what is left. Up or

down.

Real or not real...

What's crazy? I scoff a laugh.

God, everything is fucking crazy at the moment, but what feels the strangest is the fact that all this? Doesn't feel so strange or crazy at all. It's intriguing.

I look around, from the ceiling with roaring thunder and bright lightning, to the fountain in the center of the room, the water gently spurting upward, but then curling into a beautiful swan. Its head shifts, looking from right to left, its wings spanning wide and stealing my breath. I move closer, reaching out to touch the water droplets, but just before my fingers reach it, a harsh spray of water rises from the stone below, taking the shape of a snake. My heart beats a little faster as it shows its fangs. The swan sees it coming and flails, but it's too slow, and the snake sinks its teeth into its neck.

I gasp, and then the water crashes back into the stone circle, slowly rising once more.

I blink and blink again, pressing my hand to my chest.

Get a fucking grip, London. It's *water*, for fuck's sake!

"Bad ass, right?"

I jerk around at the intruding voice, afraid of being caught wandering by the wrong person. But this is not the wrong person.

I glare.

Dark hair and blue eyes shine back at me. "Thought I told you to get comfortable."

"I'm not very good at doing what I'm told." I push closer until my chest is pressed to his abs, my head tipping all the way back to keep my eyes on his.

He sinks his teeth into his bottom lip, his thumb coming up to run along mine. "Such a pretty human, you are...do you want me to kiss you, little toy?" he rasps. "Take you back to your room and fuck you 'til you can't

walk?”

I push up on my toes, stretching my neck, and he understands, giving me his ear. “I think it’s exactly what I need to relax.”

He groans, his hands finding my hips.

“It’s just...” I pause. “I’m not really interested in fucking someone whose name I don’t know, especially when I’ve already fucked his twin.”

Fake Knight tenses then flies back, eyes narrowed but mouth hung open.

I cross my arms, popping my hip out. “Don’t look so shocked.”

“Nah, baby girl...I’m fucking shocked!” He looks me over like I’m the fucking crazy one. “No one, and I mean *no fucking one*, can tell us apart. Not even our parents. That’s what these are for.” He lifts his shirt, flashing me his abs where a burn mark flashes opal. “It’s these or dipping into our heads when we allow it.”

A frown builds over my brow. First, because of what he’s trying to tell me, and second, *dip inside their heads?!*

“Oh my god, can you read my mind?”

His smirk is instant. “I could tell you, but I think it will be more fun for you to figure all this shit out on your own. You know, before we wipe it all from your mind.”

A strange sense of dread slithers down my spine, and I fold my toes in my shoes. “You can do that?”

“Don’t look so sad about it.” He chuckles and then cocks his head. “You know, this is kind of fun, having a Giftless here. It’s not like what I thought it would be.”

There’s that word again.

“Thought about kidnapping lots of people, have you?”

“Yes.” He smiles wider. “And I always imagined the way they’d run and scream, cry and beg for mercy. Done it a couple times.” He shrugs. “It’s always pretty entertaining, but your world is boring and illusions are nothing compared to the shit in Rathe.”

“Wait, so it’s normal for you guys to just kidnap girls?”

“We always put them back,” he says as if it’s totally normal and nothing more than a game they play when they’re bored.

But hold up...

“So—”

“No.” He chuckles, cutting me off. “We will not be putting you back. Or honestly, I don’t know what we’ll be doing with you. You’re kind of a freak of nature to us at the moment, but I know my brother enough to know your pretty little ass isn’t going anywhere until he does. You’re his favorite toy right now, his little doll, so where he goes, you’ll go.”

Favorite toy as in he has more than one? Do I care?

The heat in my chest says I do.

What a fucking fool you are, London. Falling for a possible literal monster. Uncle Marcus will be so proud.

I could roll my eyes at myself so hard right now.

“If I tried to walk past you, are you going to stop me?”

“Did Knight erase your door?” He lifts a brow, clearly already knowing the answer.

I ignore the ‘erase’ comment and shake my head. “Obviously not.”

“Then he doesn’t care where you go. It’s not like you can escape. He’ll find you no matter what.”

“I’m a hide-and-seek champ.”

“And he is made of dark magic.”

Not just magic. *Dark* magic.

Fuck my life.

Swallowing, I move past him and the hall widens, the wall at the end blurring before a door appears. I pause, looking over my shoulder.

The twin winks at me. “Figured I’d save you from the fate of walking down to find Mother having her afternoon drink. No telling what she might do.”

“Thanks, I guess.” I face forward again.

“Sin.”

“What?” I turn once more.

“My name.” He watches me closely. “It’s Sinner.”

I don’t know why, but I find myself fighting a smile. “Well, isn’t that fitting.”

His grin is devilish, and this time a low laugh leaves me.

Just as I reach the door, he shouts, “Careful, London. You can walk our streets, but don’t forget you don’t know our realm. Everyone here, even the Ordinaries, are superior to you in every way. You are the mouse. Everyone else is the snake.”

I don’t turn to face him.

I walk out the door.

Twenty-Three



K_{night}

MY PHONE VIBRATES IN MY POCKET THE SECOND I SLAM THE FRONT DOOR closed, needing to put distance between London and me. *I think*. Did I want distance? Fuck knows what I want lately. Only... even as that thought passes through my mind, I know the answer to that question. I don't want distance. I want her.

Her.

I want her.

I stare down at the news alert on my phone from *Rathe Daily*. *Explosions have been reported from outside of a downtown nightclub. Unconfirmed reports are that it was a Deveraux Club and that there have been multiple fatalities.*

"Fuck." I shove my phone into my pocket as a portal splits the space in front of me and Legend steps out, nudging his head back in.

"Now. We gotta go now."

I follow him through as we're transported to city central, right outside Blood and Sugar. The city is crawling with bystanders, all watching the

flames burn through the air and up to the dark night sky.

I don't need to shove people out of the way because they part when they see me walking toward one of the chief officers. Can't remember his name. Law enforcement are here to make everyone feel safe. They don't mean shit to us and our family.

"Son, not a good idea. You know we'll contact you when we find anything." He shoves his stubby finger into his pocket. Gremlins really are fucking ugly. Even from here. His long nose, large wart, and beady black eyes. As weird as they look on the outside, and oddly dark, they make the best officers.

I stare up at the old castle-like building, before coming back to him. "Fine. But I need answers by tomorrow." Leaving London at the house was probably the dumbest shit I could have done in regard to my mother prowling through the bedrooms like a fucking starved lioness, but I needed to handle whatever the fuck was going on here. I step backward, reaching into my pocket for my phone and hit dial on my father's contact. The streets of Rath are nothing like the human world. The path is paved by marble so black, it almost mirrors the sky, and the buildings are all constructed either by glass or aged brick. The thousand-year-old designs were created and protected by ancient magic.

Each building was constructed with the bones of a primal kind, be it a Stygian monster, Mage, or any other beasts that come knocking at night. Death is to be recycled.

He answers on the third ring. "Son."

"We have an issue."

Silence. "I've heard. Fill me in."

Movement catches my eye in the corner. "Explosion. Another one. Don't know much yet."

"Hmm."

"You think this has to do with the Ministry?" I start moving toward the

alley that's tucked between the shop for magic, and the Elves Getaway. Last time I set foot in the Elves Getaway, I lost two days and don't remember a fucking thing. Freaked me the fuck out.

I will be the darkest and most depraved being in existence with a fucking smile and anticipation, but fuck with my senses? They're lucky I didn't fall into a fit of rage and erase their existence.

"It's been thousands of years that this council has stayed together," my father says. "I don't think they'd risk me losing my shit by measly little explosions. No. This is reckless and immature. It's the doing of someone who lacks basic knowledge on murder." I snicker. "Have you pissed anyone off lately?"

"No." I squeeze my phone, picking up my pace down the alley. "Not that I'm aware of."

"Meet me in the Royal Room in a few. We need to call a meeting."

I hang up on him and pick up my pace, shoving past everyone. I hit the end and pause, looking from left to right, seeing no one there. "What the fuck."

"What is it?" Legend asks from behind, coming up beside me.

"Someone was watching."

Legend frowns, looking at me from the corner of his eye after a moment. "You let her go, didn't you? Now you're on edge?"

I point my glare his way. "Who?"

"London."

I shake off his question, waving a portal open and stepping through. It closes behind me as we both enter the Grand Royal Room. "No. She's at home."

"Home?" Legend asks as I dip my hand into the Blood of a Sinner Cauldron, ridding myself of retribution and revenge and entering with a level head and loyalty of a Stygian—

or so the *Book of Death* claims—and drag my thumb over my forehead

into an upside-down cross.

“Home.” Legend follows the same movement, dragging the blood over his forehead. “As in where our mother is?”

“She’ll be fine. It’s safest there with all this bullshit going on. No one can get anywhere near the palace without waking the dragon.” The walls in the Royal Room are stark white, with a gold and rose chandelier that hangs from the ceiling in the middle of a sparse rectangular table where silk black chairs surround. The chandelier swirls to life as both Legend and I take the chairs at the end of the table. Father sits at the head, his eyes on both Legend and me.

“Where are your brothers?” he asks, straightening his shoulders. His arm rests on the table, his muscles rippling with angry veins.

“I came straight here. Legend was with me when I heard. Didn’t take the time to tell them yet.”

Another portal opens, and three more Elders walk through.

I lean back against the chair, running my finger over my upper lip without taking my eyes off him. I don’t bother with the Elders. I don’t fucking like them, so I’m not going to pretend. I’ll leave that for my parents since they’re the ones who actually signed the fucking treaty.

Me? I’d just kill them all and make everyone fall in line. Fear. It’s what almost everyone uses when our family name comes up, with good reason, only I don’t give a fuck. Fear is a weapon, one that I have no problem utilizing. My father doesn’t either, but he’s either hiding shit or growing weak. I don’t know which it is.

I don’t know which is worse either.

What I do know is my bloodline could flip this world right back where it needs to be before dinner even gets cold if we wanted.

And I want.

My parents, well...they just don’t want the Argents in our business, and this has proved to be the best way to keep them out. Outside of straight-up domination, that is.

My father knows what I'm thinking, his eyes dancing, but only for me to see, before it's gone.

"Sit." He gestures to the chairs on his end of the table. It's not until the table is full, with my brothers included, that I realize I took the spot at the other, directly opposite father.

I shuffle back slightly, reaching for the rolled blunt on the tabletop.

Father looks between the joint and me before finally opening his mouth. "We have an issue."

"We know." His voice is familiar, but I don't know enough about him. Odin Finn is the youngest of the Elders as far as appearances go, but his age outlives almost all. All except my father.

Odin tosses the packet of cigars onto the table, scratching the back of his neck. His blond hair grazes against his hands, and I catch the tattoos on the side of his neck. "We suspect these explosions have something to do with you and your family since none of us have any issues."

"Who would even try, if not for the people sitting in this room right now?" Creed asks the question we're all sitting here asking. Silently. Creed isn't about the bullshit. He will speak his mind when most won't, and we love him for it. Mostly for the amount of control the man has.

My dad, Sin, and me? We skip to the bloody parts. Legend has yet to be seen, but I'm betting there's just as ruthless a being buried in him as me.

"No one is stupid enough to try, and if they are, they aren't smart enough to be able to do it more than once." Creed leans forward, and the door opens behind us as a waiter walks in, a long silver platter hovering over one hand and the other holding a cocktail tray.

She dips beside me, her blue eyes connecting with mine and her young skin blushing beneath my stare. Any other time, I probably would let her know that I planned to end the night fucking her. Hell, I probably have fucked her. Fed off her and threw her ass out of my window the second I was done.

“Would you like anything else, Mr. Deveraux?” Her voice drips with sugar. Too fucking sweet. She’s like that one girl who always needs to be seen because no one ever notices her.

“Nah. I’m good.” I dismiss her by staring back at my old man at the head of the table. I light the end of my joint and let the sweet smoke roll beneath my tongue before blowing out rings. She disappears from the corner of my eye. I can see Legend glaring at me from the side as Creed hits my leg under the table. The chat continues between my father, Odin, and the other Elders. They go back and forth like always. It’s like a continuous battle any time we’re in this room. I don’t know how the fuck none of them have killed one another yet. For one, this treaty is fucking bullshit. Written up thousands of years ago to protect the balance between both Argent and Stygian magic. Of course, my father being the Lord of the Underworld, he *was* the drama. I’m sure the story has been chopped and changed throughout the years, but the same one has stuck within us.

Dad had lost his ever-loving shit. Flew right out the fucking cuckoo’s nest after he and his brother had a massive fuck-off fight. Don’t know who won, all we know is Dad was booted from his family, and instead of healing, he rebelled and went full-fledged dark. He ran humans like cattle and destroyed their world. They blame it on climate change. Nah. That was just the devil with a chip on his shoulder.

“Knight!” Father snaps from the front of the table, forcing me out of my thoughts. “What do you think?”

Why is he asking me? I turn to Creed, who stares between him and me. Confusion is etched all over his face. Same. What the fuck?

“Ah...about what?” Why the fuck is he calling me out right now? Creed is the older brother. He’s the one who will eventually take the throne after Dad finally dies. The man is ninety-nine percent muscle. He isn’t going anywhere, anytime soon, but still I counted on the fact that I don’t have to do shit. Now he’s asking me questions that I wasn’t listening to answer, when

I'm certain my older brother could recite the entire conversation word-for-fucking-word.

“What do you think about this having something to do with you all attending Rathe U? Anyone there you suspect?”

My eyes fly around the room, between all of the Elders. “What, you mean more than usual? Or are you asking if we have any enemies?” I pause, sucking down more smoke and handing the joint to Legend. “Because I'll show you the list.”

Father pushes back in his chair as the young girl sashays to his end of the table. I watch as she slowly lowers herself down, placing a glass in front of him. Father holds her stare, his eyes slowly dropping down her partly exposed body. I watch as his fangs sharpen as he bares his teeth at the girl.

She blushes again, tucking her hair behind her ear. “Would you like anything else, my lord?”

“No.” He waves his hand behind himself. “But stay until I've finished. I'm not done with you.”

I roll my eyes. He says that he and Mom were mated, but that he wore it off over the years. I call bullshit. Legend goes that a mated bond is never worn off. I have a cousin who lives in the icy mountains of Black Snow and he and his mate went off for fifty years to fuck. They came back and were still as crazy about each other as when they left. Maybe that's just how they mated. Every person is different, but I'd never seen either of my parents affectionate at all toward one another. I call bullshit on being able to fuck anyone else other than your mate.

Wait. How the fuck would I know?

“I need your boys' input.” Odin stands from his chair, buttoning up his suit jacket. He speaks to all of us, but I feel his eyes burn into mine. He reaches into his jacket pocket before tossing down a gold card. “Call me if there are any developments. As you know, I can handle this quietly so it doesn't evolve into an even bigger mess.” He clicks his fingers together, a

black galaxy popping up beside him. He steps through as it swallows him whole. One by one the Elders leave, and I wait until everyone is gone but us when I bring my eyes to the girl behind Father.

“You can leave.”

“Knight,” Dad warns, reaching behind himself to grab her by the hand.

“I’m serious. Leave, or I’ll make you leave.”

Father stares at me blankly before he opens his mouth. “Everyone out except Knight.” Chairs scrape against the floor as my brothers slowly disappear the same way we came. Father pushes back on his chair.

“Your mating process has started, so I’m giving you the benefit of the doubt—”

“—it can’t have. She’s a Giftless. How the fuck can it be her?”

Father’s eyes flash for a second as if he’s trying to add it up in his head. “You can’t mate with a Giftless.”

I shrug. “Well, if you’re saying I have, then—”

“—Knight,” he growls. “I’m saying you have because you have. I can smell her all over you.”

I blink. Swallowing past the rock in my throat, I try to shake myself out of the daze. I mean, it’s not that I didn’t suspect, because of fucking course I did. I was obsessed with her. Am. I’m obsessed with her. But that sure—no. It can’t be.

I don’t bother shaking my head because sometimes Father just likes hearing himself talk, even when he’s arguing. There’s no fucking way. I’ll prove to everyone that she isn’t. That she’s nothing but a pointless little fucking human. A plaything.

“You better watch your mother around her. You know how she gets.”

I push up from my chair.

“Knight!” he calls, just as my hand comes to the door handle. “If it is you, I don’t care if you’re taking the throne today or in one hundred years. You talk to me that way again and try to choose my company, and I’ll feed you to

the dragons for a week, you hear?” I push the door open and slam it behind me, throwing up a portal and stepping through.

Yeah. We will fucking see about that.

Twenty-Four



L ondon

SIN LOOKS BETWEEN THE CAR AND ME, A WIDE SMILE ON HIS FACE. “DO YOU like it?”

“Are you proud?” I ask, a raised brow. I hate to admit it, but I think I like Sinner. Or *Sin*. Well, I like him enough to follow him out the front of the house to see his new surprise. Which just so happens to be a—“You... magic’d up a Ferrari?”

His mouth falls. “You want it pink?” He snaps his fingers and the color changes to pink.

“Err, I don’t really care.” I snatch the keys from the palm of his hand, jogging to the driver’s side. “So long as I get to drive.”

He watches me curiously, tucking his hand into his jean pocket.

He and Knight are one-hundred-percent identical. It’s almost eerie. Yet somehow, I can differentiate between the two with ease, something no one else can do...or so Sinner claims.

Or maybe it’s just that Knight is always moody, and Sinner is somehow lighter. No. Lighter isn’t the right word. I get the feeling he’s equally as fucked up as Knight. Maybe he just hides his internal shit better where

Knight lets his shit roar.

“You want me to come with you?” It comes out a whisper, almost like he’s asking himself the question more than he’s actually asking me.

“Why would I not?” I tilt my head to the side. “I need a trouble buddy.”

“I’m not your buddy,” he warns, only his mouth crinkling slightly in a gentle smirk.

“Fine.” I roll my eyes. “Then I need a bodyguard. I’m guessing there’s a reason why your brother dragged me—no—*stole* me. And I’m guessing you want to honor that.”

His smile turns into a wide-tooth smirk. “Bingo.”

I pull open the driver’s door and carefully close it. Running my hand over the leather steering wheel, I chuckle. “I would have never thought I’d ever so much as *be* in something like this, much less drive one!”

Sinner snorts, shoving his seat belt over his chest and clicking it in.

I glare at him. “Are you for fucking real? You’re *immortal*, yet you put your seat belt on?”

“Girl.” He lifts his hips to grab out a small tin from his back pocket. “No offense, but I don’t care how many lives I got. I ain’t about to put shit past the only girl my brother has ever acted like a feral inmate over. For him to turn into a possessive asshole? You’ve either got a magic pussy—that I’m a little sad I didn’t get to dip into before you figured out there were two of us—or you’re a crazy bitch on the inside. It’s without a doubt, one or the other.”

“You know what?” I tap the gear into drive and slowly press my foot to the accelerator. “Turn the music on.”

Sin doesn’t get offended, but merely shrugs. I want to ask him if we can portal this baby back to my world, but I get the feeling it just simply won’t exist. Maybe this doesn’t exist and it’s all a dream. One of the many nightmares I have.

I follow the road even though I don’t know where I’m going, dragging the sharp edge of my thumbnail across my other thumb. If it’s a dream, that

should wake me up.

Only I'm still here. Driving a half-a-million-dollar car in a world I didn't know could exist much less actually exist.

"You know where you're going, baby girl?" Sinner asks amusingly from the passenger seat.

"I don't know, but I want to say yes?"

"A'ight." He chuckles, his finger tapping against his jean-clad thigh to the beat of Metallica.

"You guys listen to our music?" I figure wherever I'm going is going to be a long-ish trip. If only portals didn't make me queasy.

If only I knew where I was fucking going.

What if I end up in front of another witch, or oh my god! What if I get to meet a fairy?!

Wait. No.

I should not be excited about the things this world might offer.

Fear. Anger. Hope of going back home. Those are the things I need to focus on.

"Your music?" Sin leans his head to the side, and I blink when the dark sky slowly transforms to a soft pastel hue of colors. Saturn hovers right above us, with its ring sparkling a brilliant gold. I've never seen anything like it. It's the stuff that dreams are made of. "You do know that James Hetfield is a regular over here?"

"No." I focus back on the road. "But I don't know anything about your world. In fact, just days before, I didn't know any other world existed except for my own."

He snickers, turning his head out the window. "Figures. Humans. Always so fucking narcissistic, thinking they're the only kind to ever exist."

I open my mouth to argue, but close it when I realize he's right. *Well goddamn.*

"So." I take the turn off the single road that looks to be a highway, only

no cars. “Am I the only one who drives here?”

“Nah. If there are humans here, they usually do drive. Portaling makes you all feel the same way, so after getting here, y’all can’t take much else without a fuck ton of practice, and you’ll be here long enough for that.”

“But humans do come here, then?”

“The Haunt happens here, so they come for that and a few other games we like to play, but a lot of people enjoy pets.” He shrugs. “Fuck ’em good and feed for a few days before using compulsion to make it all better and send them back.”

So...blasé.

“Feed as in?” I ask, assuming I know the answer, realizing fast I do not.

“Their blood or their energy. Giftless blood is like a vitamin to our kind, and for Power Banks, they’re a quick dose of coke. Leaves them feeling on top of the world after a quick fuck. Like Alex with your little buddy, Benjamin.”

My heart falls to my feet. Oh my god, Ben!

I slam on the brakes, my pulse thumping wildly, urging me forward for some unknown reason, but the ache in my chest keeps me frozen. I open my mouth, but Sinner cuts me off.

“He’s fine. Back in his cute little skates pretending he knows how to play hockey.”

“Fuck you. Don’t talk about Ben.”

Sinner laughs, and for some reason, I decide I believe him and hit the gas again. Almost like a wave of certainty washing over me, which makes no sense since I trust this motherfucker about as far as I can throw him. And I’m not very strong.

I take two more left turns once off the highway, pulling to a slow stop in front of a large clearing. Deep red flowers scatter through the blades of grass. It’s an explosion of green and burgundy, and when I open the driver’s side door, the smell hits me at once. Sugar and cinnamon with a faint spice of

masculinity.

“Ahh, now it makes sense,” Sinner murmurs, following me out of the car.

I walk a few feet forward as tingles erupt over my skin. Like a magnetic field, I draw my eyes to the left. I strain my sight, looking beyond the thick tree with cherry blossoms dangling off, only these blossoms glow. Literally *glow*.

I find what I must have been subconsciously looking for.

Knight appears, his shirt long gone and jeans unbuttoned. Body dripping wet as if he just climbed from a body of water that I can't see, but the droplets rolling over his hard muscles I can. He shakes his dark hair out, and I bite into my cheek, watching as he pulls a small towel from a pile. He lifts it high, wiping at his face, and every inch of him ripples.

“Holy shit,” I breathe.

Knight's head snaps my way and I suck in a sharp breath. The moment his eyes meet mine, his shoulders fall as if eased by the sight of me. I find myself eager—no, desperate to get to him. To just...be near him.

His eyes travel over me, almost satisfied that I'm wrapped in clothes he gave me, and then his gaze meets mine.

A shiver runs through me, my attention following the line of sweat that rolls between his pecs and doesn't stop until it disappears into the dark trail leading to his jeans. How I missed the marking on his abdomen that day on the trails, I don't know, but there it is. A burn in the shape of some sort of crest, but instead of the flashing opal as Sinner's has, Knight's swirls a crystal blue.

His abs constrict under my attention, and my thighs clench at the sight, the need to get closer almost too much to handle.

A hard chest presses to my back, and mine rises with a full breath.

“You know, Little L,” Sinner whispers into my ear. “We're *completely* identical?”

His meaning is as clear as it can be.

Knight's teeth sink into his lower lip and he drags a towel over the back of his hair, gaze burning over every inch of me.

"Every bit of us." His breath fans across my neck. "Every fucking *inch* of us is *exactly* the same."

Knight dips his chin and wind whirls around my torso.

"Yeah." I nod, my eyes locked on Knight's, not really conscious of what I'm saying but driven to say it either way. "But you're not him."

Sinner groans lightly, swapping sides. "That right there, baby girl," he murmurs, his tongue sliding across my collarbone and rising until his lips meet my ear. "Was a good fucking answer." His hands squeeze my hips. "Go to him. Take what he gives you."

My tongue slips out to lick my lips. "But—"

"No buts. Take, London. Let him give what he needs to give. You can do that for my brother, can't you, sweet girl?"

My mouth opens, but I close it, nodding instead.

"Good. Now go."

I relent, and the moment I do, the air whirling around me like a timid tornado, strengthens, tugging me across the yard. The toes of my shoes tease the tips of the grass as I'm weightlessly carried like controlled weather to the man waiting for me.

Knight stares down at me, his knuckles coming up to glide along my throat, tipping my chin up. His nostrils flare as he inhales deeply, abruptly dipping until his face is in my neck, my hair in his hand. He tugs slightly, a small rumble leaving him.

"You smell like him," he says, but I detect no anger.

And then his tongue follows the exact path his brother's just did, a satisfied moan leaving him, and I grip his forearm, needing closer.

Knight dips, swooping me from under the legs until my ass is in his hands, my feet locked behind his back on instinct. He squeezes my ass

cheeks, pupils blown wide.

“Leave,” Knight says, eyes on mine.

“I want to watch her. Let me.”

Knight’s eyes graze over my face, settling on my lips. “No one deserves to see her,” he says so low, I’m not sure if his twin hears. “Leave,” he says louder. “I’ll show you how good she is another time.”

Silence, and then, “She is good, isn’t she? I knew she would be.”

Knight nods, and my core is officially on fucking fire.

He lowers his head, his lips skating along mine. “She’s so fucking good, brother. So good.”

And then his mouth is on mine, and he isn’t soft about it. He fucking devours me. Owning me more and more with each swipe of his tongue along mine.

His hands and lips are fused to me, taking and demanding. Almost too much. He’s almost too much.

He carries me backward, laying me over the hood of the hot pink Ferrari and pressing my knees back until they’re damn near flat against the hood. He pushes closer, revealing how hard he is. He grinds against me, and I feel everything through the thin layer of clothing I have on.

Tearing away, I gasp. “You kidnapped me.”

“You can’t kidnap what belongs to you.” His lips capture my own again.

“I don’t belong to you,” I say between kisses.

Knight flicks my lips, his hand pushing past the waist of my leggings without warning and straight between my legs. My back arches off the car and he shoves me back down with his palm. “Yes. You do,” he confirms. “For now, anyway, so shut the fuck up. You’re distracting me, and I kinda want to make my little toy scream.”

Sinner’s words come back and I decide I can be pissy about being taken from my home later.

So, I close my lips, lie back, and lift my hips in challenge. “Well, go on

then. Take what's yours."

Knight wastes no time.

He growls, shredding my pants from my body before burying his face between my legs, his tongue swiping from back to front before his teeth clamp over my clit and he plays me like a fucking fiddle.

I thrash and moan, hands digging into his hair and it spurs him further.

His fingers bite into my thighs as he holds me open wide, his tongue plunging into my pussy before swirling back to my clit. He sucks hard, growling against my skin as one of his hands disappears, and I crack an eye open to watch as it dips inside his now-open jeans.

I watch as he pulls his swollen cock free, the tip purple and angry as it stretches, and when he begins to tug at himself, my lips part.

He works himself, rolling his tongue over my clit and I imagine him inside me again, fucking me until I can't see and filling me completely.

I need him inside me now.

God, I'm so fucking empty.

"Yes. You are. You're so fucking empty, and you will stay that way until you admit you feel it," he growls against my thigh, teeth marks indented against my flesh. "Tell me I'm not fucking crazy."

"I don't understand."

"Tell me I'm in your fucking head, like you're in mine." The head of his cock expands, and I picture taking it between my lips, pre-cum now gleaming along his tip.

He tugs harder, sucking me like his favorite lollipop, and I moan into the air.

"Tell me, London."

"I..." My legs start to shake. "You're ..."

He groans, his body jerking, and I'm so fucking close.

I grind against his face and he growls into me. I jerk when I feel his teeth...no, his fangs come out to play, fear mixed with heat washes over me

and I don't know what I want to happen next.

"London."

I swallow. "Feel what? You're making no sense to me, I—"

His fingers bite into the flesh of my thighs as he stands to his full height, forcing me down the hood of the car and resting between my legs. He pumps himself slowly, his eyes staying on mine as his lip curls upward. "You wanna play that game?" The hand he's using on himself flies to my throat and all air around me is cut. "'Cause I can play that game."

I try to shake my head, tapping at his hand, but he doesn't let up. Using his other hand, he directs the tip of his cock over my slit, slapping my pussy with his girth.

"Kni—"

He intensifies his grip, tilting his head to the side to study me closely.

"Such a fucking pointless little Giftless, huh?"

He lets up a little and I suck in a deep breath, hungry for oxygen but not enough to get myself out of this situation. He's fucking crazy! He squeezes again just as his cock hits my entrance and my body tenses. *No*. I want to scream no! You're not fucking having sex with me and all thoughts I had moments before don't mean shit right now, but then he forces himself inside of me and my eyes roll to the back of my head. I feel myself tighten around his size, and then he retracts and a moan slips from my mouth. *Goddammit*.

"You're worthless." He thrusts inside of me again. Lowering himself to my mouth, he catches my bottom lip between his teeth. "I fucking hate you."

"I hate you, too." The hand that was on my throat comes to my jaw and he squeezes so hard my lips pop.

"Yeah? Then why the fuck am I here right now?" Thrust. "Fucking you." Thrust. "Owning you." He lowers his mouth and captures my tongue, his nose brushing against the bridge of my own. "Who do you belong to?"

My mouth slams closed as I lift my hips to meet his, desperate to be closer to him. I feel my heart pulse to a steady beat the longer the seconds go

on. I need him. Everywhere. Right now. Sweat spills over my flesh, and nothing can be heard but the slow slapping of our bodies meeting.

He rests his forehead on mine, his lips grazing mine ever so softly, a breath, minimal break in his anger, but it comes right back.

“Gonna break you, Little London. Rip your fucking heart out and run my talons through the middle. Wanna know why?”

I feel myself treading close, so close to that dangerous cliff of euphoria. My body buzzes as heat rushes through my fingers, right down to my toes. His pelvis hits my clit and I lose it. My body explodes from beneath his grip as little colorful dots dance behind my eyes.

“Because. It’s. Fucking. *Mine*.” He pulls himself out as my body trembles from the orgasm tearing through me. He yanks me down so hard that I fall on my knees in front of him as he jerks his cock over my face. “Open.”

Shit. My mouth parts as I look up at him from damp lashes and hot cum shoots out onto my face.

Well shit.

With his head tilted back, I slowly rise to my feet, running my finger over my cheek and bringing my eyes to his as I suck my finger into my mouth. “You have the story twisted, lover. It seems I’m the one who lives in your head, not the other way around.”

His hand flies to my jaw again, and I watch as the anger that was just there slowly transforms into a dark smirk. It’s wicked. The kind you’d imagine the devil to give you right after you sign your soul away and he prepares to take his first bite.

He shoves me backward, and I land against the hood of the car. “Now every time I see you, I can picture my cum on your face.”

Then he’s gone. Poof. Disappears into wherever the fuck he came from and there’s nothing but me, this field, and my pink Ferrari.

I shove my clothes back on, wiping the rest of his cum off my cheek with the back of my hand and ignoring the way it sets fire against my flesh. Fuck

my life.

I land in the driver's seat, staring off into the distance. How is it not bothering me that I'm in a completely different world, surrounded by strangers who don't *feel* like strangers?

I hate Knight.

I hate that I can't hate him when he's naked in front of me with his monster cock in his hands, but I hate him.

I tap the button to start and put the car into reverse. I need to get out of here. Away. As away as I can, anyway.

I remember when I was a little girl, and my uncle took me to a carnival. It wasn't the traditional kind, it had rides, sure, but it had all kinds of other shit. Like animals that would chase you, people who knew how to make everything homemade, and small kids who could recite books like they'd read them thousands of times over. I thought that was weird.

Next to this? It's nothing. I sit in the car staring at the empty road in front of me. Completely empty. What is the point of having a damn road if there are no cars, anyway?

People—I think—are walking down the streets, going about their day as normal. The buildings are all large, over-the-top. I can't see past the little shop in front of me, though. Nestled between two larger buildings, the small castle-like structure is lined with neon purple lights with a sign that reads *Majick*.

I drive the car into an empty parking spot right in front of the town square, shutting the door behind myself. A chapel is built into the middle of the gardens, only if I squint my eyes and look closer, the cross is upside down. Chills spread over my skin as I bring the key fob against my chest, swallowing past my fears.

He stole me.

Brought me here.

I have to keep believing there is a reason, and that reason needs me alive.

I rush across the road and pass the small lantern lights that pave the way through the tiny shops. I stop outside the purple one, staring in through the windows. Someone brushes past me, but I don't move, unable to look away. My hand comes to the handle and warmth fills my fingertips.

Crap. Okay.

I pull the door open and a rush of warm air washes over me with the sweet scent of burning sage. I let out a deep breath, finally able to relax for the first time since waking here, before stepping inside and allowing the door to close. Little crystals hang from the ceiling, with clouds of smoke drifting around the space. Tarot cards hang on the walls, with small silver paintings lined over the onyx-colored walls. It's artistic and different, yet I feel completely at home.

"I wondered how long it would take for you to find me," a voice says from behind me, and my hand pauses an inch away from the dark tektite rock in front of me. Created when an asteroid strikes Earth, I can't help but feel drawn to the old stone. How did it get here? I know we aren't on Earth, or at least that's my understanding of Knight's not at all helpful "my realm" comment. Do they have crystals the same way we do? Where even are we?

I slowly turn to see where the voice is coming from, when I'm met with a pair of the softest pink eyes I've ever seen. She has deep lilac-black hair that flows down to her tiny waist, pale yet flawless skin, and her lips have the perfect cushion that girls back home pay for.

She moves around the room, a slight smirk on her mouth. "I often wonder just how this could happen."

"How what?" I ask. I didn't mean for it to come out so soft and gentle, but when the words leave my mouth, I almost choke on them. "How did you know I was coming? What did you mean by that?"

She stifles a slight chuckle. "So many questions. You want answers. I wonder why he hasn't given you the ones he knows." She releases the tektite I was about to touch, her eyes now coming to mine. She's a step away from

me, so close that if she wanted me dead, I'd be just that. Dead. "I'm not going to hurt you." She rolls her eyes, drifting back to where she came from while gesturing to the small leather sofa opposite hers. "Sit."

She leans against the back, one hand resting over the edge. The corner of her eyes crinkles and I falter. She is stunning. Beautiful. The kind of beauty that can never exist within the human realm. Kind of like Knight and his brothers.

I find myself walking toward the chair, then I slowly lower myself down. "Why do I feel safe here?"

She pinches a lit skinny cigar between her fingers, crossing one leg over the other and making the silk robe she's wearing slip over her thigh, exposing long, lean legs. She brings the cigarette to her lips and sucks on it gently. I watch as the ember burns on the end before she slowly lowers it back down, blowing out a cloud of smoke. "I guess that's a valid question, but unfortunately it's not one that I can answer for you, London from Earth."

I clear my throat slightly as she offers me the cigar. I shake my head. "I don't smoke."

"It's not filled with the shit you guys smoke over there. Here—" She urges it forward once more. "Try it. You know I'm not going to hurt you."

I do. And just like the connection with Knight, I can't understand why I feel that way in the presence of this woman. This woman who, admittedly, looks deadly. No matter how beautiful she is. It's the kind of beauty you know the devil would use to lure dumb souls like me into the pit of hell without even realizing.

She chuckles lightly. "So sweet." Pause. "And accurate."

"How do you know what I'm thinking?"

She searches my eyes, still not letting up on me not taking the smoke. I lean forward and put it between my fingers, watching as the smoke on the end turns purple.

"I don't. You're just easy to read."

I don't buy it. Bringing the end to my lips, the taste hits me instantly. A sweet yet deathly spicy taste touches my tongue. I inhale a little, afraid that it's some kind of weed and I'm about to cough my lungs up. Only my lungs expand easily, leaving the sweet taste of rose in the back of my throat, before I blow out a steady cloud of smoke. My head feels light as my muscles relax, and suddenly, I don't care anymore.

I don't give a fuck about Knight.

I don't care if I ever go back to Earth. In fact, a laugh bubbles up my throat and my hand flies to my mouth to stop it from coming out. Nope. I failed. Because it comes out.

"Holy crap."

"Careful, little one." The woman giggles, taking the smoke from me. "You can't be saying the H word down here."

Down here.

"So I'm down?" I ask, narrowing my eyes and relaxing into the chair.

"Oh, let me guess," she starts, sucking on the blunt. I'm pretty sure it's a blunt. Like for magical creatures. "Deveraux didn't tell you anything."

"Nope. The asshole just stole me away from Earth and threw me down a portal without a word."

"Mmm," she murmurs, swiping her lips with the back of her thumb before handing me the trunk again.

I take it. Because I'm me. I take another hit, this time more than the last. It goes down the same, almost like air. Damn. This is the best weed ever.

"Stole you, you say." She clucks her tongue against her upper mouth as if that is not the case. "Well, I guess we can rest in one fact."

I don't bother to ask what she means because everything just seems lighter. The stress I felt moments before, the ache in my stomach when I'd think about Ben and how much I missed him. It is all gone. Poof. Up in a cloud of smoke.

"I don't know what is happening," I whisper, the most honest words I've

said in a long time. “Just when I think I have it figured out, I get whisked away to another world. One I never thought existed.”

“I need to ask you something,” the woman says. “And my name is Zhara.”

Zhara. Even her name is all...mystical-like.

“Okay, ask.” I wave to the spot between us.

“What do you know about your childhood?”

I sigh, shrugging my shoulders. “As much as any other person. Birthday parties, a few camping trips.”

“Be more specific.”

Jesus, um. “My uncle raised me after my parents died. We...liked taco Tuesday like most people and I preferred recess over class time, again, like most did.” I shake my head, knowing this isn’t what she’s looking for, but my childhood, aside from being raised by my uncle and not my parents, was literally that normal. “I had a basic life. Why?”

The Mage stares at me blankly.

“Huh. No reason.” Her eyes shift to my hands. “Can I read your palms?”

My hands are meeting hers before I can decide. I watch as she studies the lines, humming and whispering under her breath.

She drops them like they caught on fire, her face paling slightly. “I think you should go.”

“What?” I don’t quite catch the seriousness in her tone.

“Now!” She stands to her feet, pointing one long manicured finger to the door. “Leave. Please, Little Crow. Don’t come back here. Don’t cross the bridge, and if you can run,” she urges, “do it.”

I stand, picking up the keys to my car and rushing out the door. The outside slaps me across the face like a cool bag of ice, and the magnetic draw I had toward the store is replaced with an aching emptiness resting in my gut.

I want to go home now. I want my bed, my best friend, and normalcy.

But unlikely for me, since it seems I can't have anything I want so long as he wants me.

What's most troubling, though, is that deep down, in places I can't reach or name, there's a dark whisper that leaves a trail of goosebumps in its wake, and it's saying something like... *I want the obsessive, possessive bastard just as much.*

Fuck.

Twenty-Five



K night

HUNGER CRAWLS ITS WAY UP MY SPINE THE FARTHER AND FARTHER I WALK away from her. Desperate to see her fight, run, or do anything against me. Why the fuck isn't she freaking out? Demanding, the little it would do, to know why I just snatched her pretty little self from her world and dumped her into the corruption of mine?

I mean, she asked, but that's it.

No fucking fight. No shoving or clawing.

It's irritating and weak of her.

Maybe she knows she's safe with me? What the fuck?!

I shake the thought off.

She is not safe with me. I'm the last fucking person in the realm and the next she's 'safe' with. Not that I fucking care. I brought her here so I could keep an eye on her and make sure she's not giving away what is mine—as temporary as it might be—that's it.

I hit the main lobby just as the door opens and closes and Creed walks through. His jaw bounces when he clenches his teeth, and I don't have to be a descendant of a telepath to know that something has recently crawled up his

ass and has no intention of coming back out.

“Why would you bring her here?” He frowns.

“You’re asking like you don’t know, brother.” I go to step around him when he counters it and moves into my space.

“I don’t trust her.”

“I don’t need you to.”

“You shouldn’t trust her.”

“You don’t know what you’re talking about,” I growl, shoving him out of the way. I fucking hate that I left her there. Maybe I should have portaled us both home, to fucking hell with her sickness every time she goes through it. No one will touch her in Rathe. They can all smell me on her.

“Knight!” Creed calls out just as my foot hits the bottom stair. “You and I both know this isn’t going to end well. She’s a fucking human. Do what you need and then let her go.”

I ignore my brother, pounding up the stairs to our family home and making my way into my bedroom, kicking the door closed behind me. I wave my hand over the TV screen, and it pulls up a video of London. She’s in her car with tears falling down her cheeks. Sobs break out from between her lips, and I hate that anger swirls inside of me at the scene.

I click a portal and step through the swirls, taking the first step out and directly to the passenger door of the Ferrari Sinner gave her. Fucking idiot. He can pretend that he wants to fuck with her all he wants, but I’ve seen him with her.

She jumps when I slide into the passenger seat and slam the door closed, turning to face her. “Who did it?”

“What?” She glares at me through the tears in her eyes, her cheeks red and her scowl deep. I hate that even now, with ugly fucking tears littered all over her face, that one of her gets my dick hard more than one thousand dragon sluts ever could. “You, you fucking asshole! Take me home.”

My mouth slams closed, and I clench my teeth. “What?”

“Take me!” she screams. “Home! I want my best friend.”

“Your what?” I ask calmly, raising a brow at her. At this point, I’m toying with her, but it’s amusing to see her angry. Mad. Bet she fucks like a weapon when she’s this worked up.

“I want Ben.” As soon as the words leave her mouth, all of the anger I felt moments ago topples over like lava.

Pull your head in, Knight. Fuck.

“Drive.” I point to the road. “Now, London!”

“Will you let me go home?”

“Not yet. Drive!”

She jumps as I bark at her, hitting the reverse gear and flooring it.

“You keep up with that shit, London, and just remember, you’re the only mortal in this car.”

She puts it in drive and hits the stereo, swiping the final tears from her eyes and keeping them on the road. The Weeknd comes through the speakers, and she turns it up higher. I can feel her anxiety, not that she knows this. The only reason that song is going up is to stop me from talking. She doesn’t have to worry about that shit. Like I fucking like whatever is happening between us both. I can’t fucking stand being in the same car as her, yet I have this animalistic need to protect her.

It’s fucked.

I hate it.

I don’t fucking want it. Especially not with someone as weak as her. Even as the thoughts enter my mind, I hate the way my monster stirs to life inside of me, feral and angry. How dare I talk about her in that way.

Praise Satan. He’s still there, lurking. Pacing back and forth, just waiting to be accepted.

To be freed.

But the Ethos can’t be freed until the mating ritual is complete. Not that she’s my real mate.

No, this is some warped shifting of the stars or some shit, something a blood moon will reset.

London pulls us up the long driveway and doesn't take a second to quickly climb out and slam the door behind her. She jogs up the marble stairs and through the twin doors, shoving past Creed and running up the grand stairs to the room I put her in.

Creed shuts the door after me.

"Anything you want to say, Creed, save it. I don't want to fucking hear it."

"You sure? I mean, are you sure that you don't want to hear it?"

I ignore him. Tired and fatigued over all the drama that's happened today, I just want to sink my teeth into something—preferably the stubborn bitch down the hall—and sleep for nine hundred years. Before I can make it five fucking feet, Mother appears, black crown sitting high on her head.

My fists flex, aware of what that means.

She dips her chin, telling me I'm right. "We've been called to a meeting. Fetch your brothers." She doesn't bother saying which ones since she isn't sure which "son" I am. "Meet us in the Royal Room. We will arrive six strong."

I give a curt nod and head off, but before I make it down the hall, she calls, "And be sure to lock the stray up before we leave or feed her to the dragon and be done with it."

If it were that simple, I'd have done that the first day.

Twenty-Six



L ondon

I BELLY FLOP ONTO THE MATTRESS, MY FACE LANDING ON THE PILLOW. I scream loudly into the cushion before rolling onto my back. Shoving the blanket over my body, I curl into a ball and squeeze my eyes closed.

I just want to go home.

I don't care why Knight brought me here or that my, I don't know, subconscious or something has the hots for the asshole. He is an asshole and I'm over his shit.

He appeared from thin air today looking all kinds of angry, ready to tear the limbs from someone's body, then probably fucking eat them, for simply making me cry.

Little did he know it was all his fault.

He was the reason. He is the reason.

And honestly, he probably knows that. The man is either in denial or doesn't care enough to realize it...not that he would care if he did realize it. He was pissed off and prepared to kill—probably literally, if I've learned anything the last few days—when he thought someone else was at fault. When I told him he was the culprit, he was nothing but annoyed.

Well, welcome to the club, asshole. I'm the one who was kidnapped and forced through some creepy *Guardians of the Galaxy* type shit, only not at all the same because those are aliens, and this is freaking magic!

The lady from the purple shop today, she was a Mage. I'm not really sure how I know that for certain, but I do. The way she looked at me, spoke to me, it was as if she knew me in ways I didn't know myself, and then she took my hand and flipped the fuck out.

But something tells me it wasn't me she was afraid of, and more me she was afraid *for*.

To be honest, I'm not even sure fear is the correct emotion, but there was something that switched inside her. She said she was wondering when I would come.

Does that mean she knows me?

That she had a vision of a stranger coming to see her?

Is anyone a stranger to anyone in this realm?

Dammit!

So many questions and no one to answer them. It's irritating and unfair. The least Knight could do if he insists on keeping me here is give me a little bit of insight as to why.

I'm pretty sure Knight believes the least he could do is absolutely nothing, because why would he do anything at all if he doesn't choose to? He doesn't strike me as a man who does what he's told, if it's not something he already intended to do.

Frustrated, I climb out from under the covers, pulling a hoodie that was left on the bed over the tiny little shorts and cami set Knight must have picked up for me and head for the door. I'm not sure I would have come back right away if Knight hadn't shown up and demanded me to. Like with the shops clustered in that dark alleyway, I have no idea how I found my way back to this maze of the castle, but maybe if I knew my way back, then I could figure out my way around it. Maybe it's something that triggers here in

Rathe, an internal compass of sorts.

Or maybe Knight put some sort of freaky spell on me that embedded a map inside my brain that'll explode and blow me to pieces if I don't follow it.

Okay, that's dramatic, but seriously. Anything is possible at this point, right?

My lip twitches at the ridiculous thoughts, and I turn the handle, pushing the door open and step into the hall, where I come to a halt.

The bed that looks like it was created for Wednesday Addams as a child stares back at me, my shoes at the foot of it where I left them, the window at its side wide, curtains blowing with the midnight breeze. *Is it always dark here? Because I can vibe with this.*

I blink and blink again, spinning back for the door.

Gripping the handle, I turn it, easing it open as I tip my head to look out.

The hallway greets me with flickering lights and a red velvet carpet, just as before. Slowly, I step out, and the door slams at my back, making me jump. I take a step, my foot freezing mid-air when the fucking bed, yet again, sits in front of me.

I spin to the door, throwing it open this time so hard it rattles against the wall, and the image outside it shakes. "What the fu—"

"He's locked you in."

A small yelp escapes me because, well, I'm in another fucking world. No telling what's lurking around the corner.

When I turn, I see a girl in a black and purple maid's uniform, a skimpy kind you'd find in department stores in October.

"You can't get out, no matter how many times you try." She lifts a shoulder, blue eyes sparkling as she tips her head. A mischievous smile plays at her lips. "You're the first Giftless they've ever brought home. I wonder why."

"Any guess you want to share?" I ask, looking her over. Her ears are clipped around the lobe, and while her face is sort of angelic-like, I can't

guess what she is.

“No.” She smiles, stepping closer. She looks inside the room, her head shaking. “Shame this is empty. Didn’t used to be.”

A frown builds at my brows, and when I look back, the maid is gone.

Sighing, I slam the door and lean against it, closing my eyes for a long moment.

Well, at least he didn’t ‘erase’ the door, like Sinner said. I might panic then.

Maybe throw myself out the window and see if some sort of magical, invisible pillow catches me on the way down. Maybe some sort of Aladdin magic carpet shit will appear.

Maybe I’d just splat all over the cement, all Knight’s problems would be solved, and Ben would be all alone in the world.

I need to go home. He’s probably worried, and I miss him.

My eyes fall to the empty space on the wall. It’s purple and large with nothing in the center, black candle holders with screaming skulls on the ends and flickering fire floating in them.

I move closer, hovering my hand over the flame to see if it’s warm to the touch or some sort of trickery, but not only is it hot, but it bursts as if threatened by my nearness, the fire rolling across my palm and wrapping around it, exploding and engulfing, and all I can do is stare.

I yank away, looking from my hand to the candlestick. My eyes fly wide, and I squeal when I see the fire burning away the sleeve of the hoodie.

“Oh fuck!” I scream, pulling it over my head and stomping it out.

“Don’t freak out, don’t freak out...” I peek out of one eye, and instantly, my shoulders fall. Oh, thank fuck. My skin didn’t melt off.

In fact...

I look closer, running my fingers over the soft flesh.

“Not even a red spot.” I glance at the burned hoodie, the soot smell of smoke still so fresh in the air it burns my nose. “But how?”

I wave my hand in front of the candlestick, and this time, it only glows brighter, illuminating the room more and the empty space between the hanging candle burns. The perfect spot for a portrait, I can't help but think.

But of whom?

Turning, my eyes travel the space for the first time since I arrived, picking up on more now that I'm a little less sure Knight brought me here as some sort of human sacrifice when I wouldn't have sworn so not that long ago.

If he wanted me dead, he didn't have to bring me here to do it, right?

Dragging my fingers along the dresser, I pull the drawers open, but they're empty. The giant walk-in closet is too, but the black marble vanity in the corner with burgundy bulbs, golden fangs of a python wrapped around them, isn't.

A golden brush sits inside, its handle just barely long enough to fit in my palm. I pull the few strands of hair still wrapped in its bristles, the long curly thread as black as the carpet beneath my feet. Flipping it over, the blood in my veins runs cold, and I drop it to the floor.

It lands bristle side down, the crest glaring up at me.

A triangle with a single vertical line running through it.

My jewelry box flashes in my mind, as well as the little doll that dances inside it. I remember always thinking how odd it was for a little girl's toy to have a dancing Medusa draped in black velvet, with eyes that glow green when you stare into them, but I love that stupid thing. Loved it enough to bring it across the country to college with me.

Honestly, I'm not sure where I got it, but this symbol, I bend, staring at the sharp lines along the brush's back, is the same.

My pulse beats a little hard, and I swipe it off the floor, quickly shoving it into the drawer.

I spin around, spotting a remote on the bedside table for the first time, but as I look around, there's no TV. Picking it up, I press the power button and

slowly drop onto the bed when a black cloud rolls down the ceiling, spinning and whirling before me.

Unsure of what to do, or if this shit will eat me like the flame wanted to burn me but couldn't, I simply stare at it.

After a moment, it sparks, making me jump.

I hold still, and it does it again.

Confused, I shake my head. "Look, not sure what to do here...and I'm talking to a ball of smoke." I run my hand over my face. I'm fucking losing it. "Where the hell is Knight?" I groan.

Suddenly, the smoke spreads out, thinning until it's nearly translucent, and then there he is.

Knight's sharp jaw stares back at me, his eyes pointed and hard, face set with a death glare—his usual expression.

He's bouncing slightly, and my brows pull, realizing he's walking, the soft click of heels heard in the distance.

Oh my shit, the smoke listened to me.

Afraid to spook, well, one of us...assuming it's a living thing, I slowly ease my legs up, folding beneath me. Might as well test this baby out.

"Show me *all* of Knight."

Like adjusting the lens on a camera, the image zooms out, revealing Knight and Sinner walking side-by-side in matching, dapper solid black suits, their expressions matching and eyes brilliantly blue against the raven shade. Legend and Creed are beside them, and as the smoky screen moves farther away, his mother, and who is without a doubt his father, appear.

A black crown sits atop his mother's head, her long black hair silky straight down her back, lips painted a deep blood-red as she stares straight ahead, black fingernails as sharp as diamonds.

Behind them, another portal opens as a few girls step through, each in full glam with stilettos and dresses I couldn't afford if I saved every penny over my entire lifetime.

My eyes snap left as the girl grows closer, and instantly a frown pulls.

Alex sashays forward, planting her hand on Knight's arm.

I wait for him to shove her off, but he doesn't. He swings his arm over, wrapping it around her back and using it to guide her forward.

Heat crawls up my spine, tension settling behind my ribs as he leans toward her, whispering in her ear.

"Silence," he demands.

My lip curls when she looks up at him with hungry eyes, using her finger to pretend to zip her lips.

They descend several stairs, the giant room seeming to shift and spin with each step they take, making it hard for me to find anything that might clue me in to where they are. This is live, right? Like, I'm watching him right now? Not some old film that's tricking me because my mind is a fragile being at the moment?

"Where is she?" Alex asks then, and I sit up straighter.

Okay, live it is.

"What part of silence do you not understand?" he deadpans.

"Maybe if my mouth had something else to do, I wouldn't be speaking."

My jaw drops. "Brazen little bitch." Irritation itches along my skin and I fling my hand out, sick of her, and...holy shit. The image moves.

It shifts until Legend and Creed are in view, a girl our age at each of their sides as well, and then there's Silver. He stands beside an older man who must be his father, with Knight at his side.

I stare at the man responsible for the devilishly divine men who have been ruining my life lately, and yeah. I can see where they get it.

Their father looks cold, harsh, and aged in ways they aren't yet, but not old. His eyes snap up then, and I hold my breath as they seem to stare directly into mine. His gaze narrows, and he shakes his head.

A knot forms in my throat and I don't dare move, but then he clears his throat, lifting his chin to speak.

“Why have you called us from our lands when we are but hours from the Midnight Mating ceremony?”

“You really plan to continue with your night of reckless debauchery considering what’s happened?” a silvery voice says.

“What’s happened?” I whisper to myself, leaning forward.

“What’s reckless is keeping your gifts on leashes. We’re stronger than you for many reasons, one of which is we don’t hold our gifts back. We *are* our gifts. Not some humanized version of it.”

The way he spits the word *human* has the hairs on my neck standing.

Speaking so low I can hardly hear myself, just in case the sound travels, I test this smoky surface shit again. “What does Knight see?”

The picture disappears and I gasp, but then it swirls, and slowly, I gape at the scene.

“Holy shit.”

In the back of my mind, I recall the Mage’s warning about the use of such a word here, but I can’t focus. My eyes are eating up every inch of this space. A giant room, spinning in orbit with diamonds hanging from the ceiling. There’s a long, marble-style table that separates each person, and the closer I look, the more I notice there aren’t any doors. One materializes, and a waiter walks through before it disappears again.

Ah. Right. I mean, who needs a door when you have fucking magic?

“Enough,” the voice I recognize as Knight’s mom commands, her tone bored but indefinite. “You have concerns about the attacks on the Deveraux domains.”

“We’ve heard there has been—”

“Heard from who?” Creed speaks, and suddenly he’s in my view, as if Knight has turned to face him before looking forward once more. “Who would speak of the Stygian business to an Argent?”

By the way he says it, he means *they wouldn’t*.

So he thinks they must know more than they’re saying?

The next words spoken go right over my head as all I can hear is Alex's voice as if in my ear.

"Can we play after? I've missed you." Her hand brushes his chest, and he stares at it, attention rising to her.

"Who have you missed, Alexandra?" he whispers, and my claws sink into my heart, restricting it as his hand lifts, tipping her until his mouth is at her ear.

"Fuck this." I push to my feet, stepping right through the smoke and it dispels around me. "Fuck. This." I begin to pace. "He's out at some boujee cult leader shit with that bitch who was doing some freaky shit to my best friend! Ugh, I will kill the bitch if she hurt him, and if she puts one fucking hand on Knight, I'll..."

Fuck me, I'll what? Pretty sure a knee to the pussy and a fist to the face wouldn't faze a—whatever the hell she is—but I bet it could make her bleed.

Damn, he's totally going to fuck her, and I kind of want to vomit at the thought.

Annoyed and a little dizzy, I push a harsh sigh past my lips, tossing myself back on the bed. I stare up at the ceiling for too long to count, and the burning sensation in my gut only grows hotter. Deeper. Until everything turns blurry...

Images flash behind my eyes as laughter claps out from somewhere in the distance.

I sit up at the sound and suddenly I'm somewhere new.

I swear to god, or shit! Maybe I should swear to the damn devil here, but if that man doesn't stop portaling me into new places without my permission I'm going to chop his balls off and feed them to those monsters he keeps talking about.

Disoriented, I have to blink several times as the flashing strobe lights flicker in the giant space. People ... if you can call them that, dance and party all around, and I'm talking all around... there's bitches on the fucking ceiling

even!

At least they seem to be having fun when all I feel like I'm doing is drowning, and it's Knight's hands pushing below the water's surface and holding me there. With a smile.

Huffing, I swipe a red Solo cup, desperate for anything to numb the pain. I tip my head back and swallow the bitter beer, swiping my hand with the back of my mouth.

Bodies dance against each other as someone comes up behind me, rubbing themselves against my back. I feel his dick brush my ass and I shove backward, stumbling to the side as my mind tilts sideways.

Everyone disappears when I see Knight on the sofa in front of me. His legs are spread, his arms sitting above the couch, and his head is tipped to the side. A full head of blonde hair is on his lap as his head tips back and his other hand finds her mane of Barbie doll locks. No.

That's not Knight.

That's Sinner. It has to be. Only even as the thought comes, it's quickly squashed. For whatever reason, I know it's not.

That's Knight.

The girl that's sucking him off slowly raises from his lap, hoisting her skirt and spreading her legs wide on each side. He doesn't bother to look my way as she directs herself down over his cock. My stomach aches as betrayal climbs up my throat and all of the beer I just drank threatens to come out.

Fuck him.

Fuck this.

I am so done.

I push backward, the jealousy so thick in my throat that I'm certain I'm going to choke.

I fly off the bed, sweat slicked over my skin and my heart thrashing against my ribcage.

Laughter sounds out from the corner of the room. "Just as I thought. So

you done fighting with me?”

I fall back onto the mattress, my panic now drained. I can't keep fighting with this idiot, as much as I want to. “You don't know what I was dreaming about.”

He leans forward just enough for the full moon outside to catch the shadows of his jaw. I hate the way my head spins anytime he's near. I can pretend like it's me coming down from whatever that weed was that the Mage gave me, but it's not. It has been hours. “What Mage?”

My eyes snap back up to Knight. “How do you do that?”

“Answer the question.” He stands to his full height.

I shuffle back farther against the headboard, drawing my knees up to my chest.

“Fuck off. Where's Alex? Hmm, waiting in your room?”

Knight stares at me, his expression a perfect mask, giving nothing away.

He walks toward me until I'm cornered, his palm pressing to my stomach and driving me back against the wall. He tips my head back and I can't help but think how he was about to do that to her. I jerk in his hold, and he grips my chin, keeping me still.

“You missed me, little doll. You sought me out.”

“I didn't miss you. I was pissed you stuck me in this loop of a room. Pissed I can't go home to be with my best friend.”

“Stop calling him that,” he growls. “And say *be with* him again. I fucking dare you.”

“Why did you lock me up tonight?! I was allowed to leave earlier. Why not tonight?” I fight to get free, but his hold is unrelenting. “Didn't want me to walk in on some freaky tag-team shit with Sinner?” The thought alone draws heat to my skin, and I shove at him.

Knight only grins, but it's nasty. “You think I'd care to hide me fucking someone else from you, 'cause I wouldn't. If I wanted to put my dick in every bitch in this realm, I would. I might even force you to watch as

punishment for denying me.”

“You fucked me in a field hours ago. How was that for *denying*?” I spit, trying to knee him, but he only pushes closer, smashing me with his body.

“I’m not talking about here.” He cups me roughly between the legs, and my head falls to the wall, teeth sinking into my lower lip to hide the whimper that wants to escape.

God, his hands are divine. Big and strong. Rough.

Mine.

A frown pulls at my brows at the thought, but I don’t have time to think on it as he continues.

“I’m talking here.” He taps his finger against my temple, slowly dragging it to my chest, pressing above my left breast. “And here...way the fuck back in there where your soul sits, buried behind weak Giftless organs.” A frown mars his face as he stares at the spot he touches, as if searching for something. “I can feel it,” he whispers, his eyes closing, scowl doubling as he concentrates. “It’s there...something dark, and it’s reaching for me, but I can’t fucking...” A low rumble begins in his chest and something knocks behind mine, a sharp sting zinging down my spine. “The shadow of the phantom,” he murmurs to himself. “It walks alone, buried...bruised?”

Suddenly, his eyes fly open, and I stare at the stark whiteness of them, the blue completely gone. Days ago, when I thought I was going crazy, they terrified me.

Today? Not so much.

I want to know what makes them shift when he focuses on me like this. I want to know what’s inside him.

I want to know what all these hands on me can do.

“Tell me you feel this,” he roughly demands. “Tell me I’m inside you. That you’re not what you seem.” His entire body engulfs mine until I don’t exist. It’s just his body, just him, that does. “Tell me that you’re worthy, my little mate.”

His last line leaves him on a plea, almost as if he not only needs, but is secretly desperate for me to be ‘worthy’ of...whatever this is.

It shouldn’t appeal to me.

I should knee him in the nuts for insinuating I’m not.

But he wants me to be.

Even if he didn’t mean for me to sense it, I did. I do.

Knight hates me, but he’s not one hundred percent sure he wants to anymore.

Why does that make my insides burn for him?

I know it’s not what he means by the words, but I’m overcome with using them the way I want right now.

“Let me show you how worthy I can be.” I reach inside his suit jacket, gripping the latch of his belt.

Knight isn’t patient. He doesn’t wait, but understands, his palms falling on my shoulders and urging me to my knees. He snatches my chin once again. Pretty sure I’m going to have bruises on my body from him one of these days. “So show me. Suck my cock like my good little slut would.”

I whack his hands away but before I realize it, he hooks his arm around my waist and spins me so fast that I crash against the shelf behind me. “Try again.”

“Even if you were the last person on Earth...” I challenge, even though I know deep down it’s not true. It falls from my tongue effortlessly. Like a well-seasoned lie that I had recited all my life.

My eyes fall to the curve of his mouth. “Done.” He pulls me into his body and before I can catch my breath, colors melt around me and explosions of dust fall from above. My stomach flips upside down as he shoves me out of the archway and the portal snaps shut behind us.

I shiver, rubbing my hands over my upper arms as ice touches my feet. The lights are dim, but it’s obvious where we are. “Why’d you bring me to the rink?” I turn to face him, searching the shadows that have fallen over his

face. The way his cheeks sink in slightly only eventuate the hard edges of his chiseled jaw.

“You said even if I was the last person on Earth...” he stretches his arms out wide, almost matching his smirk. “Have at it, girl...”

I pause, ignoring the fact that ice is melting beneath the soles of my feet.

I take another step closer to him, reaching up to touch the side of his cheek. For so long, it has been a constant back and forth with him, and maybe I liked it. No—I definitely liked it. I can’t imagine anything else ever being enough for me now that I’ve felt the fire of Knight’s wrath run circles over my inner thighs. *What if it was just us?*

For right now. For just this second, or hour, it is. Is this why he swept me away from everything else?

I am a fool.

I snatch my hands back before I can allow myself the possibility to explore whatever it is that he’s implying, but I’m not fast enough because my hand is wrapped in his just as quickly, as he shoves me closer against his chest. “Do whatever you want to me, Little London.” I hold my breath at his words, desperate for them to not feel so good. I hate that I can’t fight him, and any time I do it only makes it taste that much sweeter once he has me under his thumb.

He places his finger beneath my chin, tilting my face up until my eyes meet his. I feel my stomach implode when our eyes collide, and I’d give anything. Anything at all to allow myself to be lost in this moment forever. With him. Nothing else and with no outside noise. “Anything.”

I chew on my bottom lip. I’d never had an issue being confident amongst men—and women—alike. I’d walk into any room and fucking own it, because everything is yours if you believe it is. This is different. With him, it’s always so fucking different.

Stubbornly, I don’t allow him to see beneath my veil of lies. My hand comes to his bare chest as I trace each muscle, right down to the line that

curves the middle of his abs. My skin burns hotter as time goes on, and any time I think I'm going to run, I'm reminded why I don't want to.

I stop above his belt buckle and think over my options.

One, I could just do as he says and take whatever I want from him. Get him out of my system and fuck him until I'm done with him.

Or two, I could stop this whole thing and tell him to take me home. Whether he listens or not is another story, but I could demand it. But then what? Then I just obsess over this moment—over him—even more than I already do?

Fuck that.

I yank his belt buckle off and bat my lashes up at him as my cheeks heat. “Or you could do whatever you want to me?”

His hand covers mine as the muscles on each side of his jaw bounce. He pulls the belt out from the loops and before I can even register what he's doing, it's around the back of my neck and he tugs hard until I'm even closer to him.

“I like that better.”

It's not until the air tightens around me that I realize he's fastened it around my neck. With the long part of the belt, he tugs playfully. “Mmmm. I could get used to this. Maybe I do need to get you a collar...”

“A what now?” I stare blankly up at him but before I can ask another question, his lips find mine. Everything that happened before has evaporated into thin air, and anything that happens after is simply irrelevant. My body finds him instantly and his hand leaves my hip, lowering to my ass. He squeezes roughly as his tongue plays a tune with mine.

His teeth sink into my bottom lip and he finally drops the belt to bring his other hand to my other ass cheek, lifting me from the freezing ground. My legs wrap around his waist as my hands find themselves buried in the mane of his hair. Right now, he's not Knight Deveraux, the bane of my existence. He's Knight Deveraux, the man I want to fuck.

Again.

He steps us backward, tearing my cami off until his fingers find my nipple. He releases my mouth from his, staring up at me. I hate when he does this because I swear I can feel my heart thrash a little harder in my chest. Probably trying to warn me to run.

“Let go...” he whispers against my mouth, his brows pulling together when he focuses on my lips.

“What? I’ll fall.”

His mouth curves upward in a wicked smirk. “Will you?”

I unlatch my fingers from around the back of his neck, holding my breath. He’s a douchebag, I know that—but there’s a part of me that wants to test everything he gives me. I want to edge him near just as much as he does to me. It’s probably a toxic trait—yet another to add to my lengthy list.

I go to fall backwards but grab onto his shoulders at the last minute. He doesn’t flinch, holding my stare. It’s almost in challenge. “I can’t figure you out.”

“Not your job to do that, Little London.” His head tilts to the side as he finally breaks eye contact and his fall to my chest. His thumbs run circles over my upper thighs. “What do you think’s gonna happen?”

“You’ll drop me.” The words leave me beneath a breath.

He chuckles. “Let’s find out.”

Before I can figure out what’s happening, my hands are forced apart and I’m falling backward. I want to scream, to yelp, but my pride chokes it all down and when I don’t hit the ground, I slowly peel my eyes open. “Holy shit.”

“Say that fucking name one more time and see what the fuck happens.”

I go to reach forward, when the sound of cracking snaps through the air and I tilt my head backwards to see a rope of ice growing from the ground. It breaks off into two before knotting around my wrists.

I growl softly, tugging on them. “Knight...”

A deep snicker leaves his chest from somewhere in the room. I don't know where because now I can't even push myself up to see where he is. Wind floats over my spine from below, and I think over all the dumb situations I've managed to get myself into where Knight is concerned.

My fingers wrap around the iced rope and before I can say anything else, the warmth of his hands are on my upper thighs and he spreads my legs wide, stepping between them.

I arch my back. "Unleash me."

"No." His hand covers my lower belly. "You've got a bad habit of being a controlling little bitch, and I just so happen to like breaking said habits." He presses his thumb against my clit and my body burns to life.

"Knight..." I warn, even though I have no idea what I'm warning against.

He clicks his fingers and just like that... the ceiling I was staring up at turns black. My eyes are wide open but I can't see. "Fuck."

"Shut up, London." He drags his finger down my slit and I suck in a breath when he stops right at my entrance. With both hands, he pulls me closer and warmth covers my pussy. I sink my teeth into my lip as his tongue finds its way around my clit slowly. He doesn't rush. Almost like he knows that every second that passes I'm about to lose it. My toes curl as I tug on the rope again, desperate to feel anything. To feel him.

Then he stops. That warmth gone.

"Agh! Knight!" My body convulses slightly, not enough to shake off from an orgasm, but enough for it to be a tantrum that it didn't get one.

He laughs darkly and I swear it leaves bite marks all over my exposed flesh. "You're too fucking easy."

My jaw tightens. I hate that I'm at his mercy and he's enjoying it, but at the same time heat swims deep in my chest at the thought of him being here. With me. Doing stupid shit that we shouldn't be doing.

The belt around my throat tightens again and my smile falls. His cock rests against my pussy and my body reaches for him slightly, even though I

don't want it to. Fuck my life. He must wrap the belt around his wrist before tugging on it roughly just as the brightness from the room burns the retinas in my eyes. I blink a few times, allowing myself to adjust back to the ambient lighting when I see him above me, his hair falling over his forehead slightly and his lips swollen and glistening from my pleasure.

Damn. He looks really hot right now.

He looks down between our naked bodies, leaving his hand on the grip of that damn belt. "Kind of wanna record this to save it in my memory bank."

"Don't you fucking dare."

He doesn't look back up at me but I see the corner of his mouth curl up in a grin just as the tip of his cock presses against my entrance. My body tightens around him as he forces himself deeper and deeper inside.

"Oh—"

He tugs on the belt roughly as his other hand slams over my mouth right as his pelvis slams against my ass as he buries himself inside. "Fuck, London. I swear to fucking Satan that I'm going to fucking tear you apart and put you back together exactly as I want you to be. Without mentioning his name."

My body pulses around him as he withdraws slightly, moving his hand from my mouth. He looks down over me, brushing his lips over mine before running the tip of his nose over the side of my jaw. "Kind of wanna bite you."

"Do it," I moan, riding against his movements.

The crowns of his teeth find the side of my throat as he slowly sinks them into my skin.

"Release my hands."

"No." He growls against the wound on my neck. His tongue slides over the dampness as he continues to move inside of me.

"Please?"

He smiles against my skin. "Good girl."

The cool ropes release my wrists and I finally bring my hands to his back,

scraping my nails down his shoulders. A deep growl vibrates from his chest and I draw closer, like a moth to a flame. I wince when I feel the size of him continue to stretch me out, but the tingles burn through my fingertips and heat me from the inside out. My nipples tighten as he picks up speed.

His hand that was on the buckle of the belt comes to my jaw, where he bit into me. He forces my face up to his, resting his forehead on mine. "I fucking hate you."

"Ditto!" I mean for it to come out harsh, but it leaves my mouth breathlessly.

He squeezes tightly around my jaw until I'm sure it's about to crack. Just as I'm about to pull away, afraid he may take it too far, I stumble over the cliff I ran up to chase my orgasm and my body jerks through the burning sensation that rips through me.

He pulls out just in time, until hot liquid spits over my belly. I don't even bother to ask him to put me back down onto the ground from whatever levitation he has me floating, when he swipes his hand through his cum and brings his thumb to my lips. "Mmm. Taste familiar to you?"

I wrap my lips around his thumb and suck him off. "I don't know. Maybe I should go taste someone else to double-check?" The air between me and the ground disappears and my back hits the hard ice in an instant. "Ouch!" I laugh through the pain, rolling to the side and reaching for my discarded clothes. He's too quick when he swipes them away from me and tosses me his shirt instead.

"Aw. You're so mad at me that you give me your shirt?" I bat my lashes up at him even though I know he's seconds away from fucking my shit all the way up.

Forcing me into his arms with the belt that's still around my neck, he laughs against my lips. "Would you rather not have one at all? Because I mean, we can do that?" I don't even see the portal when he shoves us both through.

Asshole.

Twenty-Seven



K night

SHE'S SPENT, LYING NAKED ON HER BACK IN THE CENTER OF THE BED. MY bed.

Why I brought her in here, I don't know.

Nah, that's a lie. I wanted to see her frosty hair spread along my black sheets to decide if I liked the way it looks or not. Turns out I do.

Like the way she looks in my room, period.

No one's ever been in here, but I'm not about to tell her that. Girls like to throw that shit in your face when things go to shit, and they always go to shit. I've seen it more times than I can count with my father and his many mistresses.

Reason number one we stick to the primal part of being Gifted. Fuck and forget. Don't pretend I'm interested in more than the velvet between a woman's legs. Not that I can even stomach the thought of fucking anyone else right now.

Alex offered. When her words didn't work, she stripped down in the foyer, my brothers and parents right there to witness, but no part of me was intrigued in the free feast I was offered.

In fact, when I pushed closer to her to tell her so, bile rose in my throat, then came anger, and I had to get the fuck out.

Get back to my girl.

To my pussy.

Mate.

My brows furrow and I stare at her chest as it rises and falls, her nipples hard and pebbled as she sleeps, looking like a dark angel I want to climb on, clip her wings, and run my claws through them, if only to keep her from flying away.

It's fucking annoying.

I shouldn't want her to stay, but I'm not sure I hate the idea of her being mine anymore. She's feisty.

Fiery, and our bodies fit like the moon and midnight.

Now that I recognize the feeling, I've sensed it since day one.

Since that first game back on Earth.

Maybe before that.

But she's weak.

Giftless.

"I thought you couldn't mate with a Giftless?" I growl, teeth clenched.

Zhara raises her brow, her pierced tongue sliding over her lip. "You can't."

My conversation with the Mage comes back with a vengeance, and when I feel warm liquid roll down my chest, I look down.

Claws. Large, black, sharp claws escaped my fingertips, and this time I didn't even feel them. My Ethos is like a beacon within my chest, calling to the girl beside us. The girl who cannot be what she seems.

Our gifts don't reach for those without one.

Our gods don't give us broken fates.

The Deveraux descendants who have turned to ash and seeped into the soils of this ground wouldn't allow her within these walls without ripping

into her mind if they didn't know something I don't. If they couldn't see beyond the veil I'm blocked by when I try to dig inside her.

Blood rolls down my ribs from where my claws sank into my flesh, and London stirs, her nose lifting into the air. Her eyelids flutter slightly and my pulse pounds heavy in my chest.

She's scenting me, like she knows I'm hers.

So why won't she admit it? Claim her right?

Slowly, her eyelids open, big blue eyes meeting mine before dropping to the cuts on my stomach.

She doesn't jump or panic. She yawns, frowning at the spot. "You're bleeding."

I wait for more.

For her to freak out and try to help me. To lick my wounds 'cause the sight of her injured mate makes her feel sick inside, overcome with anger and fury like I felt when I saw her cry. Saw her bleed when it wasn't the result of my bite.

But she doesn't do any of that.

London stands, and when she does, she hides herself from me, wrapping a blanket around her body as she slips from the bed.

I push up, pissed off as I watch her toe into her shorts and pull the cami back on like it's the most annoying thing. She doesn't want to wear restricting clothing.

She wants a T-shirt, like the half dozen I took from her room that belonged to another man. A lesser, fucking, worthless, Giftless man.

She faces me, and I scoot to the edge of the bed, my legs falling open, waiting for her to come to me.

London looks to the door. "When do I get to go home, Knight?"

My lip curls and I fly off the bed. She's thinking about leaving me while I'm thinking about keeping her?

Fuck her.

Fuck this.

“How about never.”

Her head snaps back this way.

Good. I have her attention. “Maybe I’ll keep you locked up here until your worthless, Giftless body grows old and gives up on you.”

“That’s not funny.”

“Am I laughing?” My brows lift. “You think I have to send you back? Because I don’t. Humans can be pets here. Maybe I’ll put a collar around your neck and force you to eat off the fucking floor.”

Fear creeps into her blue eyes, and I punch the wall beside her head.

I fucking hate to see it.

“Why are you doing this?” she shouts. “If you don’t like me, why am I here? Why did you take me from my home?!”

“I am your fucking home!” I scream, feeling my gift rise to the surface. “That’s the fucking problem!”

Her head tugs back, confusion heavy in her gaze. “I don’t understand. You kidnapped me.”

“I didn’t take you. I was *given* you,” I force past clenched teeth. “Fate made you *for* me.”

“I am not yours.”

“You are!” I boom. “Why are you fighting me?!”

“What are you talking about, Knight?” she screams, tears in her eyes. “I’ve done my best not to freak out, and considering, I think I’ve done a good job. You’re being unfair.”

“Unfair is feeling like my insides are fucking bleeding out and the only person who can fucking fix them refuses to!”

“I don’t even know what that means because you keep talking in riddles and you tell me nothing!”

“Because you should know!” My body vibrates with anger, my eyes changing as my power takes over. As my monster hovers beneath my skin,

his teeth sink deep into my flesh as he tries to eat himself free. To get to her.

He wants her, and he wants her now.

He's tired of waiting.

London shakes before me, her tiny little body fragile and vulnerable as she looks up at me with pleading eyes, but she chooses the wrong words at the wrong moment. "I want to see Ben and—"

I snap. Taking her throat in my hand, I squeeze, pressing my body against hers when she starts to fight.

"My seed has been buried inside you. You've swallowed my blood."

She claws at my hands, tears leaking down her cheeks, but I tighten my grip, my entire body shaking, my being demanding I stop this.

That I release her.

Protect her.

But it's like I said.

I'm done waiting.

"I need to know, little doll. I need you to feel what I feel. To ache like I ache." Her face turns purple, her hands falling to her sides. "I need to know it's you I was created for."

Focusing, I follow the shallow thump of her beating heart, closing my eyes and envisioning the arteries connected to it, waiting, watching as it stutters.

And finally...it stops.

Silence.

I release her, catching her lifeless body in my grip and carrying her back to...her room.

I lay her down on the bed, licking tears from her cheeks before running my lips along hers, jolting back when the touch shocks me.

I step away, staring, waiting for the moment her heart recharges.

For it to call out to mine and beat as one.

But she doesn't stir.

She doesn't wake.

Panic like I've never felt flares in my chest, and my hands fly out at my sides, palms facing forward as the claws I was just starting to get used to grow into talons, and before I know what's happening, they're dragging across my own chest.

Groaning, I drop to my knees and they dig deeper. They don't stop until the razor ends scrape against my bone. A growl rattles from my lips as my teeth descend into sharp points and I pant, my back bowing when I feel the points digging beyond the tough tissue of my heart, forcing its way beyond it.

"Knight!" Sinner shouts from somewhere behind me. "Creed, get the fuck in here, he's—he fucking stabbed himself!"

He drops to my side, Creed rushing in and falling before me.

"He's...holy fuck, I think he's changing. The bonding." He looks closer. "I think his bonding is almost complete. Knight?" He grips my face, trying to look into my eyes, but all I see is London.

Dead in the center of the bed.

The Mage was wrong.

The fates were fucking wrong.

She's not Gifted. She didn't come back to life.

And now, my gift wants to claim mine.

Twenty-Eight



L ondon

THE NURSERY RHYME PLAYS ON A LOOP IN THE BACKGROUND. I ONCE READ THAT Ring Around the Rosie had a dark background. I don't need to read more about it to feel it right now. It's one of my favorites, next to London Bridge is Falling Down, of course. That's the best one.

When no one's watching, I like to walk the path between Argent and Stygian, the path from light to dark and pretend the bridge is crumbling beneath my feet. I laugh at the users of Light Magic when they scream and run. At least, that's what they do when I picture them in my head.

My feet dangle back and forth to the tune as the teacher at the front of the class moves her glasses up the bridge of her nose. Words leave her mouth, but I can't see past the girl in front of me. She isn't just any girl. She is my best friend. I reach forward to touch her shoulder as her long, silky, ink-colored hair falls over her shoulder. She is lifting her hand above the small garden on her table, reciting a spell the teacher has had us working on all week.

"Terra aqua indiget sicut venae sanguine. Imple hanc humum et medullis et sanguine." The Latin words roll off her tongue with ease. Earth needs

water like veins need blood. Fill this soil up with both marrow and blood.

I hold in my laugh as I reach for her shoulder finally. She turns, her eyes meeting mine, when a blood-curdling scream pierces my ears. Ice grows over her face like poisonous vines would a perfectly flowered tree and I watch in horror as my best friend's eyes turn a pale shade of white.

Hands come from behind, wrapping around my eyes.

"It's okay, Villaina." Her soft voice calms me instantly, and I swallow. "It's just an illusion. Remember the spell I taught you?"

Nodding, I close my eyes and square my shoulders, reciting the words in my head.

The hands leave my face, and when I open my eyes, my best friend's blue eyes stare into mine. "Got ya."

Launching off the bed, I can still feel the frost particles stuck in the back of my throat when everything comes back into view. The room.

The bed.

The dresser.

*The distinct smell of spice and soap. I turn to the side, seeing Knight asleep beside me. I reach to touch the smudges of blood all over his chest as my throat clogs with emotion I'm not ready to touch right now. His skin is warm, and I close my eyes and inhale, laying my palm over his chest. *Thud. Thud.* His heart beats against my hand, and for whatever reason, I breathe out a sigh of relief as my shoulders sag forward and tears prick the corners of my eyes.*

What happened? Why do I remember weird things but don't remember it being me? I slowly shuffle off the bed, careful not to wake the sleeping monster. Tiptoeing around the room, I look at it from a different light. When I got here, I didn't ask myself the smaller questions that I probably should have.

Like, why did I feel a connection to Knight, and was it possible that everything he has been saying has some truth to it? Not that he's said much

more than “I’m his”.

“Fuck,” Knight whispers from behind me, and I fold my arms in front of my chest, slowly turning to face him. He blows out a deep breath and falls backward, his arms spread wide.

“What is happening to me?” My throat swells again, and I hate that I have to force myself to not cry. I don’t fucking cry. I’m the one who makes people cry, so why the fuck do I feel all twisted up right now? My stomach coils together, and the more time goes on, the more it tightens.

“Shit, London.” He shifts up the bed, the sheet resting just below where his abs cut down into a V. He runs his hand through his dark hair, his eyes finding mine, and if it wasn’t for the low ambiance of the red LED lighting around the bed, I probably would have missed the wild look in his eyes.

Like a deranged animal being starved of his favorite meal, his cheeks are sharper than usual with a tint of pink, and the bloodstains all over his chest lead a trail up his neck and to his face. No wounds, from what I can see.

“Your heart beats.” His tone is scratchy, the sheer awe in it tugging something deep inside me. “You’re...the fates got it right. You were made to be mine.”

“Knight.” I choke on his name, and he shoots up from the bed and is in front of me in a flash. He braids his hands into my hair ever so gently, and I lean up to look at him from below. “I don’t understand.”

The urgency I craved to be home, to the comfort of Ben, has dwindled out like a candle on its final little burn of wick. I shiver in Knight’s hold but lean closer into him, needing his touch on me. Like it’s the only thing I ever want again.

I don’t want to go anywhere; I want to stay right here. I need to.

Please don’t make me leave.

“Are you hungry?” he asks lazily.

My stomach rumbles and I blink up at him. “Yes. Weird.”

He chuckles but tucks me beneath his arm and directs me to the door.

“Actually, hunger is the least weird thing that’s happened and about to happen to you, baby, but let’s get you fed.”

I let him walk me down the long hallway, bypassing the family portraits. I never asked him how many siblings he has. I mean, the room belonged to someone, or so the maid insinuated, but chances are she was telling the truth. There were personal items scattered throughout. Yet another thing I didn’t ask myself upon waking here.

We hit the bottom of the stairs and he leads me down to where I can hear laughter and chatting. Shit. My feet stop and he pauses, turning back to look at me.

“What’s the matter?”

Bats fly around my belly as I think about going in there and seeing everyone. “Your brother and mother don’t necessarily like me, Knight.” I don’t mention his father, unsure I want to know what to expect from the head of the Deveraux house.

“Pssh...” He waves me off. “They don’t like anyone. It’s nothing personal.” A sense of calm washes over me like I’ve just taken a hit of weed and I find his eyes on mine. “I promise. I would never put you in danger of someone else. Only me.” All of the panic I felt moments ago is replaced by one bit of certainty that I still don’t understand.

I trust him. The why isn’t even a question my mind will allow. I just...do.

Tucking myself back beneath his heavy arm, I let him walk me farther down the hall. When we round the corner, I wish I hadn’t come down here. Shit. Everyone is here.

His mother’s back is turned to me at this end of the table, his father directly opposite. His father is clearly where they all get their size from. I’ve never seen muscles—hell—even limbs as large as I do right now. He shifts an arm, and all of the veins swollen beneath his flesh ripple up his neck as his eyes snap up to mine. He has deep black eyes, dark hair, and pale skin. Fear stirs beneath my skin when he settles on me, and for the sixteenth time since

waking, I'm once again wondering why the fuck I'm so quick to trust the man at my side.

He's a powerful being of some sort, and I'm just London.

I don't look around the table at the brothers because I can't take my eyes off his father. I almost don't want to in case he kills me before I can blink.

"Interesting," he murmurs, leaning back in his chair. His eyes fly between Knight and me before he gestures to the table. "Sit. I'm sure we can get someone to bring you something you eat, London."

His mother's back stills, but Knight is already directing us both around the table, pulling out a chair beside Legend and gesturing for me to sit.

I don't ask how he knows my name. He probably knows everything about me.

I slowly lower myself down as Knight takes the other side. Creed is directly opposite me, with Sinner beside him. It isn't Knight's hostile mother or shady father that has the hairs on the back of my neck standing up.

It's Creed, the moment his eyes meet mine.

At first, they're the normal hard I'm used to when pointed at me, but then they change. Darken and narrow. His muscles grow stiff and I watch his knuckles grow white around his fork.

His lip curls up in disgust, and he doesn't hide it. I'm desperate to ask what the fuck I did to him to warrant such a fucking cold-ass reception. This isn't new. He has always hated me, but it's somehow intensified as time has gone on. Tonight? That shit is overflowing.

My fingertips tingle in a way they never have before, almost as if in preparation of a fight I could never win, so I hide them beneath the table, locking them together.

"Creed," Knight snaps, but he doesn't break. "Brother or not, I'll kill you if you come near her."

In my peripheral, their mother's chest rises at Knight's statement, but I don't look her way, and I don't need to know she doesn't like the shift in

Knight's loyalty.

Honestly, I'm not so sure I understand it, but I don't doubt his threat. I feel its certainty deep in my bones, like a wicked whisper across my soul, petting and soothing my beating heart.

Creed slowly backs up, stabbing his fork into the slab of meat on his plate as he brings it up to his mouth. His fangs slide out as he bites into the animal and chews slowly, blood dripping down the corner of his mouth.

Knight's hand comes to my thigh and a bolt of electricity ripples through me. My eyes roll to the back of my head as images flick through my brain.

"We're going to be best friends forever!"

I hold my pinkie out to her. "Forever, Temperance."

I panic, stumbling back from the table, and the chair falls to the ground in a crash. Colors blur in the corner of my eye as Knight and his father shoot up from their chairs. *"No, Villaina! You—no!"* A loud scream pierces my ears and I fall to the ground, covering my ears and face. When Knight's hand comes to my arm, my eyes pop open and all of the tears I held in explode over my cheeks.

Horror slams into me, and I cling to Knight's arm like a lifeline. Maybe if I hold on to him, he won't leave me. He can't leave me. I'm his. He said that and he's mine. Nothing changes fate.

Fate is never wrong.

"I..." I swallow, the words like sharp spikes slicing up my throat. "I remember." My voice comes out so low, a Giftless would never hear it. But there are no Giftless here.

Not even me...

I'm a fucking—

Creed barks out a laugh, the sound of his chair scratching the marble floor as he stands to his full height, making me jolt. I bring my knees to my chest, squeezing tightly.

Everything was a lie. A lie told to conceal what I had done.

I'm going to be sick.

"It's amusing to me that none of you questioned this infatuation Knight had with a Giftless." Creed shoots back whatever was in his glass, his eyes resting on me. "Clearly she's not one. And she's not London either."

"What the fuck, Creed!" Knight snaps, his voice low. So low I felt the vibration of his tone over my bones. "I've warned you."

"Creed, what the hell are you talking about?" their mother demands, and the whole room falls silent, waiting for him to say the words.

I know once it's out that I'm dead. That whoever has put the cloak over my memories, their magic wasn't strong enough to withhold the mating process. That when they did it, they *never* expected me to find my way back to Rathe, or more importantly, to him.

How did I?

Creed holds my stare, his fangs descending, glistening under the flicker of the floating candlelight. "Before she became London Crow, she was Villaina Lacroix." The room falls deathly silent. A swirl of cold air wraps around my body as my heart slows in my chest.

Their mother flies to her feet. "Impossible!"

"Lacroix?" Knight growls, he and his other brothers looking around the table with confusion.

Legend slowly stands. "As in Acheros *Lacroix*?"

Sinner shouts to his feet, "The fucking *Slasher*?"

Knight shakes his head. "What the fuck?"

Knight's chest jerks, his eyes rolling back, and at first I don't understand why, but then he stills. And I know.

It wasn't only my memories that were wiped.

His were too.

All of ours must have been.

Mine were the first to return now that the lock on my gift has been broken.

Knight's are the second, and if the images that flashed through his mind were as vivid and haunting as mine, we might just obliterate Rathe right here and now.

An angry Deveraux is deadly.

But a threatened Lacroix can be just as bad.

There's a reason my father is the first story in the *Book of Nightmares*.

I don't know why, but I call out to my mate, to the man created to love and protect me with all he has, is, and will be. My soul cries in despair.

Knight doesn't look at me, but deep within my chest, I feel the tear as the past catches up with the present, revealing all the secrets I didn't know I had. The pull that's been there for weeks that I didn't understand, only this time, it isn't drawing me toward my mate.

It's my mate pulling away. He's trying to sever the bond we've only just created.

The bond that is still not yet complete.

I gasp, my lungs robbed of air as a portal shoots up in front of Knight.

He spins, falling backward, his hard, dead eyes locked on mine. He disappears through the marble colors as I stumble my way to my feet.

After all this time, I finally feel a connection to Knight, and he'll hate me now. No longer want me. *Does it matter to me?* I know who this family is now.

Deveraux, the God of Hell and his mistress of Sin.

The Lords of Darkness.

The royal family of Stygian.

These boys aren't what I thought—oh no—they are worse. The demonic monsters that hide behind their human form are the opposite of what they are now.

The woman who was once my queen, stares at me with dead eyes, mumbling quietly to herself as she pieces parts of the puzzle I'm still missing together. "The nursery rhyme you used to sing..."

London's Bridges.

London...

Oh shit, someone—

The queen lifts her chin and my thoughts die with the murderous look that washes over her pale face.

"Please..." I plead. "I didn't—"

"Kill. Her," their mother wails, and I watch as fire rolls around their father in a tornado of ash. Panic grips my throat as I look to any of them for help. Legend. He's always been the kind one, but even he steps backward, disappearing through the dark cloud of smoke.

I squeeze my eyes closed, succumbing to my fate. *In Rathe, we Bleed.* I whisper the words of death to plead with the gods to give me a direct pass-through when an arm hooks around my waist.

"Focus on your gift!" the female hisses, and briefly, I catch the blue eyes of the maid before I'm being sucked through a fusion of colors.

My stomach rolls as my body floats through the air, but by the time I figure out I've been thrown through a portal, my feet land on the carpet and the familiar space hits me.

Home.

A piece of paper is the first thing I notice on top of the carpet, and I drop to my knees to grab it, opening the folds.

LONDON,

Despite my efforts, you find yourself closer than you should ever be, so listen to me, young Crow, as it may be your only hope.

You must never go near Rathe U. See this as a warning. Everyone you've ever loved will die.

Your G.

I READ OVER THE WORDS. AND THEN REREAD THEM AGAIN. IS THIS THE letter I found all those weeks ago? Why the fuck didn't I open it?

Who would warn me away?

Who knew I wasn't really London Crow but Villaina Lacroix?

Flipping it backward, I try to find any other details when his voice catches my attention.

"London?"

I whip around, a different kind of relief washing over me.

"Ben!" I cry out, rushing to where he's standing, his eyes wide on me. "Oh my god, I've missed you!"

I throw my arms out as I run to him, and my best friend smiles wide, ready to accept me in his warm embrace, but then his face falls, the flesh on his throat splitting wide open.

Blood fills the wound before a sharp dagger materializes in front of him. His body falls to the ground and everything moves in slow motion.

Knight appears, his eyes slicing to mine as he swipes the end of his blade along the base of his tongue.

"No..." My legs turn to jelly as I drop to the ground near Ben. "It can't be real," I whisper, knowing this is as real as it gets. With shaky hands, I lift his head, gently placing it on my lap. I push my hand over the incision, but blood only slides between my fingers. "Please. No." Tears fall from my eyes as pain stabs me through the chest and takes hold of my heart, tearing it straight out.

"You took from me. I take from you," Knight announces, but I can't. I can't even fucking look at him.

"Ben!" I shake his body, forcing his eyes to mine. I watch as the hazel eyes I found comfort in, that I felt most at peace and at home, slowly dilate. His pulse weakens against his neck as his body turns limp in my grip. "Ben." A wail so loud tears through my vocal cords and I taste the faint metallic liquid at the back of my throat. I ease him down, shooting to my feet.

A scream ripples through my body, the sound so loud the earth shakes beneath my feet, and then silence.

My eyes snap up to meet cool, cold-blue ones.

“You killed my best friend.”

Knight lifts his chin. “You killed my sister.”

His words are sharp and true, and if I weren’t so fucking numb, they’d be painful, too.

Because, yes.

I was the daughter of the boogeyman Argent mothers warned their children about, expected to be a monster as he came to be, but the king and queen of my people, of the Stygians, saw me as an innocent little girl.

And then I killed theirs.

I murdered Temperance Deveraux, the princess of Dark Magic.

My then best friend.

My mate’s very own...triplet.

Too many emotions swirl within me, but my brain has shut down, blocking them all out until all that is left...is rage.

Burning, *boiling* rage.

I get it now, why my father turned on his kind.

It’s too much, cuts too deep, like a blade forged from the bone of a dragon.

That’s when I feel it, my Ethos, born of my bond. As weak and incomplete as it may be, it’s tearing its way to the surface.

Ready for a fight, though it doesn’t yet know our fated is the target.

Knight’s eyes narrow and my mouth curves at the edges.

I don’t call on my new gift.

I become it.

Tears roll down my cheeks in steady streams, but I hardly feel them as a flash of that last day with Temperance slips into my mind, Ben’s lifeless body following.

My head tips to the side, every inch of me tingling with rage and it bleeds into my warning of a whisper. “London’s bridge is falling down...”

And then everything goes black.

Twenty-Nine



To be continued ...

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Sign up to be notified when book two
releases here (which is happening very soon):

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Thank You

Thank you so much for going on this ride with us! We hope you loved your first taste of this new world because we are only getting started!! Book two will be darker, dirtier, and so much more than you could ever expect...

See you soon.
REALLY SOON!

XoXo,

Amo and Meagan

Acknowledgments

Oh man! The work that went into this baby.

We want to give a huge shout out to our editing team!
Paige, Ellie, Sarah P., Becca, Geissa, and Sarah S.! This would not have been possible without each and every one of you! So thank you so much!

To our personal teams, thank you girls for supporting us on this new adventure...
even if we didn't share all the details right away!

To the early readers who helped shout Fate of a Royal to the rooftops.
We appreciate you and all you do!

Lastly, to each and every reader who picks this up along the way, thank you.
Thank you for trusting us and taking the time to read our words. It means more than you know.

I'm pretty sure this was our best kept secret ever.
It's funny, the fear that comes with sharing your mind and art in its rarest form with another artist, but the way it disappeared after the very first line was written...

We hope you loved every word as much as we do.
If you thought book one was addicting... just wait until book two.