



Kisses at the Crossroads

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Description: Lark has the worst luck. After stumbling through a thin spot in the veil between realms, he's been stuck in the human world for a decade and forced to perform parlor tricks for the witch that captured him. Luckily, the witch's power wanes and Lark hopes to run for his freedom during the next full moon. But he needs help. What could it hurt to summon a crossroad demon to get him back home to the Faelands?

When Pike gets summoned for the first time in decades, he's sure it's for something ridiculous. Humans never think of consequences. However, the moment he lays eyes on the pretty Fae, he's determined to help the ethereal one, no matter the cost, even if it's his own heart.

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Chapter 1

Lark

There is exactly one strip club in Hex, Indiana, and I'm the headliner. Not of my own free will, mind you. If it were up to me, I'd be home in the Fae realm. Probably entertaining or sleeping with whatever noble Fae wanted a courtesan in his bed for the night. But no. I'm scantily dressed in a pair of glittery white booty shorts and go-go boots for a crowd of people, not all human.

My long pink hair cascades down my back and I'm thankful every day my captor doesn't force me to cut it. It takes everything in me not to scratch at the layer of body glitter making my skin itch. Not that my blunt nails are much help to begin with.

Every night, the group of witches that show up sip on mugs of spells. Who knows what they conjure as they look upon me? I sure as shit don't. The stench of sulfur sometimes gets so bad we have to evacuate the club. Apparently not tonight, though. I can't smell it backstage at all. And we can't always attribute the sulfur to the witches. Sometimes it's the various demons. Or even just a problem in one of the bathrooms.

My wings flutter in their freedom from the dreaded binder. I roll my shoulders and stretch. Music thumps on the main stage beyond the silvery curtain I stand behind.

Do you know how sacred the job of courtesan is in the Winter Court of the Fae? Very. I was trained from the age of three until the day I fell through the stupid veil between worlds. I could play seven different instruments, speak five Fae languages,

talk confidently on politics, and engage in at least twelve games of entertainment all before the age of fifteen. But now I'm reduced to barely dressing and entertaining with my body rather than my wits.

"Trick, baby, you never get enough glitter on." Ava, Drake's other captive, turns me to face her. I never gave my true name to anyone in the human realm, so everyone calls me Trick. As in tricky Fae.

"That's because it itches." I reach back to scratch a shoulder blade.

"But Drake likes you sparkly." Ava dusts glitter powder along my cheeks and nose while she scrunches her brows in concentration. Then she dusts my hair from mid-length to the ends that stop right at the swell of my ass. "Perfect."

Ava's green eyes sparkle with silver eyeliner. Her cropped brunette hair has more glitter than mine. Her smile reveals small fangs. Ava's a cursed werewolf rather than a born one. Drake captured her during a full moon before I was stolen and promised to help her. Ava doesn't dance, but she helps the other performers and cleans up the place.

"Don't look so sad, Tricky." She squeezes my arm with her own sadness coming through loud and clear. "No one wants a sad performer. Get out there, do your thing, and remember to..." Ava waits for me to finish.

"Smile." I give her a big fake grin. We both laugh out of the ridiculousness.

Ava sighs as she pets my shoulder. "I hope they don't want to see your light tonight." She spins me back around again and I press my hands to the wall so she can examine my wings. "Drake hasn't let you have enough sun."

"It's my big mouth. I can't keep it shut lately." I shake my head and glitter rains into

my lashes.

“Yes, but he knows you need it. You’re a cute little houseplant. You require food, water, and sunlight.”

I snort. “I rather not be compared to a plant.”

She’s grinning when I face her again. She cups my cheeks in her hands. They’re rough and I always wonder if in the past they were soft. My mother had—has—soft hands. She was the beloved courtesan of the Autumn Court until she had my older brother and me, then she moved us all to the Winter Court.

She always wore a jasmine and rose perfume that smelled divine. Sometimes I get a whiff of one scent or the other and my heart aches for the home I barely remember now. I long for marble columns and elaborate tapestries, not stale air stenching of old magic. I wish for the silk bedsheets promised to me. I miss my mother’s voice when she sang for court. Or the music when my brother and I danced for the Winter king. Not this type of dance. Something akin to the human’s ballet. Elegant. Beautiful.

“You’re lost in the past again. Come back. This is your life. Drake has us both good and stuck.” Ava’s words sting and I have to push away the desire to snap back. But Ava’s my one true friend. The one person who knows what it’s like to be Drake’s pet. The other dancers look down their noses at me. I may have been a brat when I was forced to start dancing here, but over the years, I’ve tried to apologize.

I take in a breath and nod. I know Ava is right, but I’ll never give up hope that I can go home one day.

The jingle of twinkling bells marks my time for the stage. I bounce on my toes and drop my wings. I have to tease their reveal.

“Break a leg, Trick.” Ava boops my nose, our little good luck charm, and I walk through the curtain to my crowd.

My boots clip on the dazzling floor of the stage. There are faint lights along the edges, so I know where to step.

It’s always the scent of magic that hits me first. Something like the mix of ozone and citrus. The lights are dim, which means one thing: Drake wants me to share my light. My stomach twists. Maybe I can stall everyone with a raunchy performance. While I don’t strip naked, I’m still required to dance, and when I can, use Fae illusions.

I saunter to the pole in the middle of the stage. It’s gold clashing with the silver of the rest of the decor, but Drake doesn’t care as long as my performance satisfies him and his guests. I undulate against the pole, making sure every witness sees the definition of my cock as I rub against it. The scent of arousal fills the air and I thank the powers that be that Drake never thought to sell me to the highest bidder. Sure, my career had I stayed in the Fae realm would have been a courtesan, but it’s nothing like what people in the human realm do to each other. It’s a respected profession.

The music speeds up, and I continue on with my dance. A few in the crowd murmur that they want to see my wings. Want to see my light.

My heart pounds. Light is impossible when I haven’t been in the sun for the last week. Another few days and I won’t be mobile. Sweat slicks my palms and I slide down the pole, causing the crowd to turn on me.

“Either get naked or show us your wings!” someone calls out.

“I want to see him light up!” Another yells.

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I've never gotten naked on stage before. Drake's never made me. Even in the Fae realm I'd never be forced to be naked in front of a room of people unless it was my choice and a contract was drawn up on the event's expectations and requirements.

"Stop toying with us, Trick," Drake says. "Show us the light."

Trembling, I turn to show the crowd my back where my wings lay limp. The music starts again, something soft and gentle. I can't allow myself to fall into the trap of fear and I tune out of my own thoughts, searching for a conversation behind me to latch onto. There's always always a private conversation that shouldn't be held in a venue such as this.

"...summoned a crossroads demon."

And there it is. Hope. Real hope.

I lift one set of my double dragonfly wings, letting them flutter and wave at the guests. The patrons calm down as soon as they realize they get to see my wings. I look behind me and blow a kiss before taking the pole in hand again. I sway as I take in the conversation. I don't recognize the voices of the speakers, so I have to wonder if they're new around here.

"He was a small one. I thought he'd be big as a house, but the demon was barely bigger than the Hellcat he brought with him." The person snorts.

"What'd you bargain for?" The other one asks.

“I wanted a first edition of Haggley’s Dark Spell Book. No one’s seen one in decades and I know there are at least five in existence.”

“What’d you give up for it?”

“My sense of taste.” The person’s words sound bitter.

“But Bet’s cooking?!”

“I know. I know. But I got the book. It’ll be worth it.”

The lights dim until the only thing I can see is the pole in front of me and the floor lights. That’s my sign. My wings shake in time with the beat of my heart. I squeeze my eyes shut and will my light to fill the veins of my wings. Something hits me in the leg and falls into my boot. It’s hard and cold and I can’t pay attention to the uncomfortable sensation.

“Trick,” Drake says my name as a warning. If I don’t get glowing, I’ll get whipped. That always produces my light.

I shake my hands out and bounce on my toes again. Another deep breath and I try once again. This time the tale tell warmth of magic flows down my shoulders and into my back before spreading through my wings. A cry of relief escapes my lips before I can stop it. I don’t know where the strength comes from, but it takes everything in me not to fall to my knees in gratitude.

I continue on with my set as usual until the lights come on little by little again and the last of my music stops. Spinning toward the crowd, I take my bow. The patrons throw money from all the realms on stage and I have to keep from sliding on it. Ava rushes out to help me clear the dollars and start the cleanup for the night. She squeezes my arm as we pass each other.

“You had more spark in you than I realized,” she whispers. “I’m so glad.” So am I. I don’t relish a beating when it’s Drake’s fault I don’t have enough sunlight to begin with.

I make my way to the dressing area and sit at my designated vanity. Ava had my mirror personalized years ago. Frosted into the mirror, TRICK stares back at me. Trick. Not my name. And I won’t ever claim to be Trick. He’s not the real me. No. The real me, Lark, has hope to get back home again and I think I have a way to do it now.

Remembering the strange object that fell into my boot, I yank off the left one to reveal a gold coin.

I suck in a breath as I examine the faces. One raven and the other a dragon. This isn’t just any gold coin, it’s a legend. Probably the reason my light came today. It’s a Fae luck coin. I look around, making sure there’s no one here with me. I’m clear, so I strip and put on my usual bland baggy jeans and too tight t-shirt Drake dresses me in. I shove the coin in my pocket just as Drake stomps into the room.

“What the fuck was that, Trick?” He grabs a handful of my hair and makes me face him.

I hold the hair at my scalp to keep the pressure off. “I was mixing things up. Trying to give you a better show.”

“It looked more like you were stalling.” He releases me as he pushes me away.

“I was building anticipation.”

“Your glow was dull tonight. Make sure you’re brighter tomorrow.” He ushers me to follow him like every night.

“To do that, I need sunlight.” And not just twenty minutes. I need a rejuvenating few hours.

“I don’t have time to set you out in the sun tomorrow.”

“Then I can’t guarantee a showier performance.” I cross my arms over my chest and cock out a hip, daring him to defy my need.

“I’m sure you’ll figure out something. Come on.”

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“Please. I need the sun.” My voice warbles and I swallow, hoping it helps keep me strong.

“Fine, I’ll see if I can get someone to let you out on your leash in the morning.” He waves me in front of him. I’m not ready to be sent to bed yet, but I can’t risk his wrath when he agreed to get me sun tomorrow.

Tonight I follow without a fuss. Tonight I plan.

My nest of blankets and pillows suffocates me. Of course I can’t sleep. Because why sleep when I can scheme? I push to sit against the wall and knuckle roll the luck coin as I think.

The biggest problem is I can’t run alone. I have to take Ava with me or come back for her. Both are risky, but I can not leave her with Drake. I know she’s been with him longer than I have, but he treats her like dirt. Just because she doesn’t have the body of a model, he forces her to be a maid. I’ve tried helping her with her duties, but then we both get in trouble, so she insists I just watch and let her work. We’re the only two bound to Drake, so I don’t feel the need to help free the dancers or servers from their contracts with him. They’re allowed to come and go of their own free will.

“A Tuesday will be the easiest. Drake is never here on Tuesdays. Thursday is another good bet. He’s out in the mornings.”

I continue rolling the coin between my fingers, faster and faster. “But how will I get out?” I sigh and drop my head back on the wall. My hand falls to my lap and I look at the coin. “Any suggestions?” A laugh rumbles from me because now I’m talking to a

coin.

The raven face shimmers and I squeeze my eyes shut. I have to be making this up. When I open my eyes, the raven's gone and etched in its spot are words.

Tuesday, be ready.

“Ready? When? How?”

Trust me. You'll know when.

Just because it's a luck coin doesn't mean it's good luck. The coin could be leading me into a trap. It is Fae, after all, and we're notorious for being tricky.

TRUST ME!

“Okay, okay. I'll trust you.”

The coin face turns to a smile.

I don't know that I should trust the coin, but right now, a little bit of luck and hope is all I have.

Chapter 2

Pike

Being a crossroads demon has perks. But the cons far outweigh the pros. It's not like I chose to be a crossroads demon. If I could have picked my demon type, it'd be incubus, because can you imagine fucking for sustenance? Yes, please. But no, I was born and cursed to be bound to a crossroads my entire life and I'm not a fan. Okay,

that's not entirely true, but I still hate it.

Cold water hits my chest as I turn on the shower. Luckily, it doesn't take too long to get hot as hellfire.

"This is what I get for helping Van with a bargain." I scrub the blood and guts from my body the best I can. Of course, I enjoyed the bloodbath, but perhaps next time I won't rip people apart and go for a good old-fashioned stabbing instead. Who am I kidding? I love watching a murderer realize I'm going to pull their head off. Mmmmm. Sweet justice.

Dorris, the mother that bargained for the death of her daughter's murderers, offered two dozen homemade cookies every month for the rest of her life as long as she's able. It's outside of the sacrifice requirements, but what crossroads demon can resist that divinity? Not Van and certainly not me. He said I can have five cookies a month and I'll make sure he keeps his word.

The stench of death washes off relatively easily and I stand under the shower spray, savoring the heat. What can it hurt to rub one out while I'm here? It's only been a few hours.

I slide a hand down my stomach. My tail shivers as I do, adding to the experience. My eyes shut and I moan as my cock hardens in my grip.

I'm several strokes in when a shrill whistle I haven't heard in decades echos in my ears. It takes me too long to realize what it is before I open my eyes to find my skin shimmer.

In a blink, I'm not in my shower anymore. No, I'm naked, cock in hand, inside a summoning circle at my crossroads. The crossroads I haven't seen in twenty years, but it's all too familiar. The crisp autumn air hints at burning leaves not too far away.

Wind blows dust and I'm already ready to get the hell out of Hex.

"It worked!" A Fae with the prettiest pink hair dances in front of me as if they're playing in a meadow. The fluttering of their wings under their shirt and their body language is pure happiness. I hate to be the one to squash it, but no one disturbs my happy shower fun time and gets a welcoming reaction.

"What do you want?" I'm gruffer than I probably should be, but we need to get this bargain done so I can get back to my shower. And if I'm honest with myself, I'm a bit hangry and planned to cook up a steak real soon.

The Fae turns to me and I suck in a breath. Beautiful blue-gray eyes stare up at me before giving me a once over. I follow suit and do the same, taking in their lithe form. The jeans are too big, and the shirt is almost too small and full of holes. And there's magic wrapped around them that's concerning.

The Fae squeaks as their gaze falls to my still hard cock. "I... I didn't think you'd be ready so soon. I thought we'd set a date." They wrap their arms around themselves and hunch over. "I don't know that I'm ready."

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“What are you talking about?” I release my cock because why the hell am I holding it?

“My virginity. That’s my offer. Is that why you’re naked?” The Fae looks away from me and waves towards my cock.

In this day and age, who the fuck tries to sacrifice their virginity? “Sacrifice denied.”

“What?! You—You can’t deny my offer!” They hug themselves harder. “That’s all I have.”

“But you’re Fae. You don’t hold virginity on a pedestal like humans do. Unless something’s changed?”

They shake their head.

“So you offer me an empty sacrifice? No, you’re denied. The sacrifice must hold meaning. It must be something you don’t think you can live without.” Unless it’s homemade food, but I won’t tell them that. This is the easiest way to let them down rather than tell them I really can’t do much for them because of the magic holding them hostage.

The Fae nods. “I... I understand.” They drop to their bottom on the gravel road and pull their knees to them. “You were my only hope of getting home. I wasn’t trained on cutting the veils between realms. I was just a simple courtesan-in-training.”

“You want to go back to the Fae realm?” To all the boring stuffy courts and

procedures. Bleh!

“Yes. That’s all I’ve wanted for a decade. I caught a bit of luck and got away from my captor, but?—”

I sigh as I pinch my nose. “You don’t know, do you?”

“Know what?”

“You can’t go home. Even if I could accept your virginity, but I can’t, you can’t go home.”

“Why not? Is the Fae realm no more? What’s going on? Tell me!” The little Fae pushes to their feet and steps closer with each word until we’re toe to toe with my dick pressing against them. They don’t seem to notice. I can’t help but love their passion.

“Sweetheart, if you don’t back off, you might get me too excited and then you’ll have to change your shirt.”

Oh, the pink their cheeks go as their eyes widen and they back away. “Sorry.”

“Name, pronouns,” I ask since it looks like we’re having a whole ass conversation, anyway.

“You can call me Trick. He him.”

I tip my head. “Pike, also he him. Now. You can’t go home because you have a soul tether to...”

“What the hell is a soul tether?” He backs all the way out of the circle.

I wave for him to come back. “Sweetheart, I need you closer to examine the tether.”

Trick, probably not his true name, steps right back into the summoning circle. Not exactly the smartest move if he was anyone else, but the soul tether disqualifies him from striking a bargain to begin with, at least until it’s gone.

“You did a good job creating the circle.” I find the tether wrapped around his throat and tug. No reaction.

“I didn’t know what I was doing. I didn’t even know if Fae words would work.” He’s being so good for me, not even flinching when my nail accidentally grazes his throat.

“Oh, yes, any language works as long as there’s a circle of salt and a drop of blood. Everything else comes in negotiations.” My tail has a life of its own and wraps around Trick’s waist, pulling him closer still. “Please excuse the wily tail. He gets excited with fresh meat.”

Trick nods as he looks away with an even pinker face than before.

“This tether is old and there are several spells woven into it.” The placement concerns me. Had I not noticed and accepted his offer, Trick would have been beheaded as soon as we left the human realm. He’s far too pretty to lose his head.

“It’s probably Drake’s doing. He stole me from the Fae realm. For what? Entertainment? He’s kept me locked in a cage or the basement of Flutter for a decade. What the hell?—”

I press a finger to his lips. “I see.” I pinch a few strands between my thumb and forefinger to test the connection. “The soul tether connects you to this Drake. He’ll live as long as you do while this tether is in place. And he’s made it so you can’t leave Hex.” I squint at Drake’s handiwork. “You’re lucky. Had you gone a mile more

down the road, you would have been toast.”

“All this time and I still can’t go home.” He steps away from me and trips on his own feet, but my tail keeps him upright.

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“Shhh. I’m intrigued by this entire situation. I can’t destroy a soul tether outright, even with the right sacrifice. It’s complicated magic. But perhaps we can release you together.”

“How?” Trick already sounds defeated and we can’t have that.

“There are ways. He’ll know the second the tethers break, so we’ll need to move slowly and have a plan. This isn’t a weekend project, babe.” One thread shimmers. I tip my head as I exam it. “But knowledge doesn’t come for free, little Fae.”

“No, of course not! What is the price? I can’t thank you enough.”

“A kiss.” I can’t help it.

“A kiss?” He licks his lips. “I’ve never kissed anyone before.”

“Your first kiss is valuable, then.”

“To me it is.” His cheeks turn pink again. “It’s silly, I know.”

He reaches for my naked chest, but I grab his hand and press a kiss to his knuckles. The magic shimmers with another warning. “Take a breath, Trick, and let the magic take you. I’ll find you and we can negotiate a proper offering for transport back to the Fae lands at a later time.”

Trick’s eyes go wide as I unwrap my tail from around him and push him out of the circle. Drake’s magic reaches for him like a giant fist squeezing around him. In a

blink, he's gone and so am I, but his scream will haunt me until I find him again.

The water of my shower's gone cold and I curse at the temperature change. I don't know what it is about Trick, but I'll do anything to see him free.

Chapter 3

Lark

My throat burns as if I swallowed fire ants. Drake's magic wraps around me so thoroughly I can't move, let alone breathe. I squeeze my eyes closed against the grit flying in the air as the magic brings me back to Flutter, where a red-faced Drake stands on stage with Ava.

Drake is annoyingly handsome in an older guy kind of way. He always wears tailored suits. His dark hair has silver at the temples and he has a sexy, strong jawline. But the best part is his expressive face. We always know what Drake is thinking. Right now, the smug look pisses me off.

As soon as I'm released, I rush to Ava's side. One of her hands cups her mouth. Blood spills between her fingers.

"What did you do to her?" I pull Ava into my arms as I glare at Drake.

Drake throws something at me. Two of what look to be long white beads bounce off the hard floor. "The next time you ever try to escape, it won't just be her fangs."

My stomach twists and tumbles. Bile rises in my throat, but I push it back.

"I'm so sorry, Ava." I hadn't thought things through. The luck coin heats in my pocket. For days, the coin urged me to freedom. Drake must have been tired, because

he had somehow forgotten to lock the basement. Then the back door was open for fucks sake. I took the opportunity and ran. I should have questioned the container of salt on the table by the back door. It was too suspicious, but the little voice in the back of my head said it was a sign. A sign I deserved freedom and to find myself a crossroads demon to get home. But it was all for nothing. I'm back in Drake's clutches and now Ava is hurt because of me.

She squeezes me close. "Shhh. This isn't the first time I've lost my fangs. Won't be the last."

"I'm sorry."

"Enough of this," Drake snarls as he grabs my hair.

"Let me go! I can walk."

Drake drags me behind him while I try to keep up with his stride and the awkward walk. It's still dark out, just past midnight. Call me a romantic, but summoning a demon at midnight sounded like the perfect plan.

Drake hauls me through the back hallway. We stop in front of the basement door where he unlocks it, then pushes me in. I catch myself on the banister as he locks the door behind me. At least I got a few days of sun in me because I'm sure I'll be stuck here for who knows how long. I lean my head against the door, not ready to take the trek into the creepy dungeon like basement I've called home the better part of ten years. Sometimes Drake has me on display in a golden cage in his dining room at his house, but those instances have become more rare over the years.

I smooth my hand over my pocket where the luck coin stays safe and sound. How Drake hasn't detected it yet, I still don't know, but I'm grateful for. I swear it pulses beneath my fingers.

“I don’t know if I should be angry at you or happy. I did find a crossroads demon. But I got sucked back. On the other hand I now know that had I tried to go home I’d be dead.” I rub my throat, unable to feel the magic Drake wrapped around me.

Tears sting my eyes. Everything is fine. I’ve survived this far with Drake. All I have to do is to be better. Don’t incite his wrath for my and Ava’s sake. But do I really put my faith in an unknown demon, of all people? They’re as tricky as Fae are.

I know one thing, I can’t give up hope. It’s time to go back to planning. Hopefully, the luck coin has better ideas this time. I pull it from my pocket and grin at the words etched into its face.

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The last idea was perfect.

You got a crossroads demon.

And information.

Be grateful.

“I am grateful.”

Sure doesn't sound like it.

“We need to do better.”

Yes, we. It's been a one coin show so far.

I scoff. “Excuse me. I'm the muscle here. And I've been the only one trying for a long time. My brain is fried. Give me a break.”

A stick person with their tongue sticking out replaces the words.

Get rest. We'll have fun in a few more days.

“I don't think I like the sound of that,” I mumble.

Trust me!

“That’s what you said last time.”

Sighhhhh.

I roll my eyes as a yawn escapes. “Thanks, coin, but I think you’re right. It is time for bed.” My blanket and pillow nest looks cozier than usual and I strip down to my underwear as I walk. I settle the coin on one of the pillows and snuggle in. “Night. Night.”

Sleep tight.

My eyes shutter closed and thankfully my mind doesn’t race.

Chapter 4

Pike

One nice thing about a small country town is the sky at night. Stars twinkle in the dark sky and I hide in the shadows as I lurk.

For the last several days and nights, I staked out the parking lot and surrounding area of this Flutter place in the human realm. I’m not sure what the appeal is. The building is a boring warehouse type. I’m baffled why Hex needs a strip club, or is this a nightclub? Like the rest of Hex, there’s a large number of born witches, other demon types, shifters of all sorts, and a few rare vampires that frequent Flutter. With the vampires, I have to wonder why this Drake guy tied himself to Trick if he was looking for immortality. He could have just paid someone to change him and be done with it.

So far, Trick is always listed as the headliner on the sign out front. My imagination goes wild on what they have him wear. But that’s not why I’m here. The first person

to summon me in two decades needs help, and I'll be damned if I can't. The thought makes me chuckle. I'm already damned. As long as my crossroads exists, I'm bound to it. Not that it's been too bad, but I'm only thirty-five. I can't imagine doing this for hundreds or even thousands of years. I doubt Hex will exist in thousands of years, though.

Flutter's parking lot is at least nicely paved. Tonight, I plan on infiltrating the place to scope out the inside, but I don't want to go alone. I teleport back home, where Frankie, my hellhound, greets me with a lick, burning my chin with her lava like saliva.

I rub her flaming ears. "I missed you too, girl." Even though it was less than an hour this time.

Frankie looks like a Doberman from the human realm. Well, a giant Doberman. Real Dobermans aren't as big as Frankie. She comes to at least my chest, and I'm damn tall is all I'll say. Blue flames lick at her curled tail and pointed ears. We don't dock our dogs, but she was born with the signature cropped ears of the human realm's Dobermans. She wears a bright pink harness that she picked out herself. And because I don't like scratching up the hardwood of my house, she has pink nail caps. Again, her choice.

"Come on, let's bother Van." I wave my hand in the air with Van in mind to open a communication portal. The air in front of me shimmers. I turn away for the bright flash so I'm not blinded and when I face the portal, there's Van pumping away into whoever took him up on the offer to fuck today.

I'm not surprised when the slaps of flesh hit my ears before Van's primal grunts. "Kinda in the middle of something." He doesn't stop. He never stops, which I don't mind the show. "Unless you wanna join?" Van looks down to his partner of the moment and they moan out a yes.

“Not today. Can you pop over when you’re done?”

“Sure will!” Van gives me a grin and I release the portal.

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“Well, just you and me for a little while.” I rub Frankie’s head and plop on my couch.

I never joined Van in his sexcapades. While I have a high sex drive, I don’t have this primal need. Van is on a whole other level of need. He gets desperate and finds as many partners as he can in a night sometimes. Though if I think about it, something always happens with Poe, the king of crossroads demons, and that’s what sets Van off. I don’t judge my best friend.

Bookshelves line my walls, but nothing sounds good, so I stare into nothingness as I pet Frankie.

Trick said he’s been Drake’s prisoner for a decade. I can’t imagine being sucked away from everyone you know without a way back. While my existence is lonely compared to other crossroads demons, I otherwise enjoy my life in the demon realm. I have Frankie and Van. Van doesn’t treat me differently because my one and only crossroads deal came with a soul. The first soul for a demon of any type in over two centuries. Poe basically told me I can retire in a way. Of course, I still have my crossroads. That won’t change unless someone destroys it and takes away my curse. But I don’t have a quota of deals to meet every month. I don’t get punished for not drawing people to my crossroads. I’m practically crossroads royalty. Which means everyone hates me in the demon realm. Everyone but Van, his brother Warwick, Frankie, and I guess Poe.

“Why so glum, sugarplum?” Van’s voice pulls me out of my thoughts.

“Just thinking.”

“That’s dangerous, you know.” He pats Frankie’s bottom to get her to move, then plops on the side opposite of me.

Where I have tanned skin with red that gets progressively darker, like from my forearms to my fingertips, Van is blue. His horns are shiny black, like his eyes. He glamors away his wings. Sometimes I’m jealous he has wings, but then I realize how much of a pain they must be. His tail has a barb on the end, meaning he can’t have fun times with it like I can, but it doesn’t seem to stop him from getting freaky with it, anyway.

“Want to come to a strip club with me?” I ask.

“What kind of strip club? You know I’m not into tits.” He crosses his arms and leans back. His grin tells me he’s already interested.

“Honestly, I don’t know.” I wipe my hand down my face, still haven’t told him about Trick. “I got summoned the other day.”

Van sits up and Frankie’s ears perk at the same time.

“I didn’t want to say anything yet.”

“What was the deal for?” Van practically drools, waiting for my answer.

“There wasn’t one.”

Frankie tips her head at the same time Van scrunches his face.

“What do you mean there wasn’t any deal? What the?—”

I raise a hand. “When I teleported into the circle, there was a Fae. He wanted me to

take him back home to the Fae realm, but he has a soul tether. Besides, he wanted to exchange his virginity for a ride home. I couldn't."

Van pushes to his feet and paces in front of me. "Why the fuck not? You could have fucked him, sent him home, and not worried about the consequences because you'd done exactly as he'd bargained."

"Fae don't hold value in virginity. It would have been empty."

"You can afford empty bargains. You have a soul." Van's black eyes flick over me. "You really didn't just take the job?"

"Seems my morals are a little different from yours." I lean back and Frankie puts her head in my lap. "I told him I'd find him and help him break the soul tether, then send him home. That we'd negotiate a proper sacrifice later."

"You are a fool, Pike. This little Fae is going to trick you into something. Don't trust him."

I shake my head. "I don't think he has it in him for tricks." A little smile pulls at my lips. "He said to call him Trick."

"See! He's already told you that you can't trust him. His name is Trick, of all things!"

"I don't think that's his real name. He's Fae."

Van rolls his eyes. "I guess this Trick is at the strip club?"

"Yeah, that's where he's held captive. Drake?—"

"Oh, fuck. He's with Drake Speller? That's bad news. Bad bad news."

“I haven’t heard.”

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“That’s because you venture into the human realm less than I do. Everyone knows Drake runs Hex with an iron fist. Sure, it’s mostly peaceful for everyone involved, but if something or someone pisses him off, you don’t hear from them again. Demon kind included.”

Frankie and I both swallow as she nuzzles closer. “Don’t worry, my sweet girl, nothing is going to happen to me.” I look up at Van. “But you’re in, right?”

Van snorts as he drops back onto the couch. “Of course I’m in. I need to see this Fae you’ve decided to help. And if I get to see some jockstraps, who am I to complain?”

“Thought so. If you’re ready, so am I.” I push to my feet.

“Mind if we invite Warwick? He’s still...” Van scratches the back of his neck. “I’m worried about him. Ethan’s been gone for years, but Wick refuses to believe the boy ran away scared when things came down to the wire.”

“You ever meet Ethan?”

“Once. Thought he was a figment of Wicky’s imagination for years. I’m half convinced the born witch put a spell on my brother.” Van’s tail wiggles as he fists his hand. “If I ever see that boy?—”

“He’ll be an adult now.”

“Right, which means wanting to break his neck for breaking my brother’s heart more acceptable.”

I snort as I clip the leash to Frankie's harness. "Invite him, could be a fun family outing. Haven't seen Wick in a while."

"That's because he's all mopey and won't move the fuck on." Van waves his hand in front of him. We both brace ourselves for the flash before the communication portal opens.

Warwick sits at a bar with a half-empty glass of flaming HellFire in front of him. He looks a lot like Van, but not exactly. For one, Warwick is about ten years younger and much cuter. They both share the same dark blue against tanned human skin. Horns and tails are the same shape, but I know Van's wings are more batlike while Wick's are more avian with blue feathers. There's speculation Warwick's dad is an angel, but his mother has never confirmed the rumor. Not that anyone in the demon realm gives two fucks.

"What?" Warwick huffs out, but he seems to perk up when he notices Frankie. "Aw, hi, girl. How are you today?"

Frankie's tail wags so hard and she tries to jump into the portal for pets.

"Hey, Wick," I say. "Wanna come to a strip club with us?"

Warwick cocks a brow. "I'll pass," he says in such a dead tone.

Van's shoulders drop. "I'm sure they'll have HellFire there. What if Ethan's there? He could have been here the whole time and you never would have known it because you just go to that bar." Van throws his hand toward the portal as if to point to the bar itself.

"It's good HellFire."

“Pleaaaassseeee. For Frankie?” I’m not above begging.

“Okay, for Frankie.” Wick grabs his glass and slams it back. Before the glass even hits the counter, he’s in my living room with his hands already rubbing Frankie down. “You’re a good girl, yes you are.” He looks at me. “Where are we going? Why are we going?”

Van clamps a hand on his brother’s shoulder. “Let me tell you what this dumb fuck did.”

When we get to Flutter, there’s a bouncer at the door that smells vaguely of wolf, but I can’t tell if it’s shifter or were. They both have the tangy natural scent of earth and magic, and I never mastered the difference. Frankie doesn’t growl, so there’s nothing weird about them. They give us an up down, then tip their chin toward the door.

“Mmmm would not mind giving them a fun time later tonight,” Van says, because of course he does. There’s a snort behind us, then the door snicks closed.

“Thank fuck,” Warwick breathes out. “I was afraid I’d have to take tiny breaths all night long.” The air is blissfully unperfumed. Thank fuck in deed. Even Frankie huffs out some appreciation.

In front of us spans a room I still can’t determine whether it’s a nightclub or strip joint. There’s a wide dancefloor, a stage, DJ booth, and enough table and chairs to allow a coven worth of witches to gather as their eyes glue to the stage. Of course, to the far left there’s a buffet for some reason, which adds to my confusion. What does this place even want to be?

Frankie tries to go to the buffet, but I keep her by my side.

We must be early because the lights are still bright, but smoke bellows up from the

floors as the DJ starts a heart thumping beat.

“I’m confused,” Warwick says with a frown as he looks around, same as me.

Van has his eyes on someone. “See you two later.” And he saunters away.

“I’m going to the bar,” Wick says as he cocks his head towards the long bar counter on the left back wall.

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“I’ll grab us a table.” The house lights dim. Spotlights bounce over the stage as I find one of the few open tables.

“Get ready to loosen your belts and unzip your pants,” the DJ starts just as Frankie and I snag a table. She plops, then leans against me. The DJ continues his spiel. “Because Kristy is on the dance floor to take all your cares away. She’s ready to rock your socks.”

I look around as everyone seems to ignore the announcement and continue on with their chatting. The curtain of glitter in the back of the stage opens and Kristy strolls out, rolling her hips. Her dark brown skin looks beautiful against the deep purple, glittering string bikini. Her hair is relaxed and loose in a cascade of waves over her shoulder. A tail whips behind her as she takes to the stripper pole on the center stage. When she spins, she lets out a pair of bat wings that look about half the size they should be to be full demon. She’s at least part succubus. The witches finally take notice, leaving business on the table. Kristy gives a sly grin and meets my eyes. She winks at me as if to say watch this newbie, then continues on with her show.

If I wasn’t wholly fully into the male form, I’d be drooling just like the witches. I can’t deny she knows how to move her body. Her tail keeps me on edge as if it were its on performer. Frankie’s as entranced as I am. Her tail thumps against my chair.

Wick settles across from me and hands me a shot from his tray. I shoot the flaming HellFire.

Kristy dances for a few songs before she’s sweeping up her spoils and heading out. Wick and I don’t talk. His head’s on a swivel every time the door opens.

“I don’t think Ethan comes here,” he mumbles before taking another shot of HellFire.

“He could be a performer.”

Wick snorts. “Yeah, no.”

I shrug. “I mean...”

“He wouldn’t do that to me. No matter what Van says.” Another shot. “How long do we have to wait for this Trick guy?”

“Dunno. Never been here before, but seems like a nice place.” The chairs are nice. There’s a VIP section that I’m going to investigate sometime. I can see myself coming to relax with Frankie at my side. There are a few others that have pets with them, though no more Hellhounds. Probably familiars. Frankie doesn’t seem interested, so I don’t worry.

The DJ announces the next dancer, this one Sparkle, a male, and cat shifter by the ears and tail he shows. He moves elegantly like a cat and gives a good show, but he can’t bring in the crowd as well as a succubus no matter how hard he tries.

Another three dancers of varying skills of seduction come and go before the DJ goes on a break. More patrons flood in and the chatter gets louder. Thankfully, Frankie seems content to people watch and drink the water in the bowl I ordered for her. She’s gotten plenty of head scratches, which makes her preen.

Two more dancers, then the announcement I’ve been waiting for. “We have a packed house tonight, and it’s no surprise why. Trick is back on stage again!”

Back on stage? That makes my heart race. Why hasn’t he been on stage these last few nights? His name has been on the sign as the headliner.

The glittery curtain opens once more and my jaw drops. Trick, in all his dancer glory, is magnificent. I'm not sure what I expected, but hot pink booty shorts, a black mesh shirt, and black go-go boots weren't it. He sparkles on stage with glitter covering his body and hair. There's a hint of color on his lips, too.

There's a whistle from the other side of the club, no doubt from Van.

Wick lifts a shot glass in cheers. "He is hot. I'll give you that."

Trick scans the room, giving eye contact and little mischievous grins to whoever catches his fancy. When his gaze falls on mine, his breath hitches and eyes go wide. He catches himself in time and blows me a kiss with a finger wave. I can't help myself from playing along and "catch" the kiss. Trick turns on his heel and marches right up to the pole, giving his ass a little shake as he takes the pole in hand. What is this little Fae doing to me?

Chapter 5

Lark

Pike is here. My heart pounds so hard in my chest I'm sure everyone can tell. Usually, I don't get so worked up during a set. I just come out, do my thing, and go back. But tonight, with my demon in the audience, I have to put on the performance of my life. What if he changes his mind about helping me?

The only problem is I'm low on sunshine reserves again and I'm not sure how I'll be able to glow for the crowd tonight. But I have to try. Hopefully, I don't get beaten in front of Pike.

I thought Drake would get bored and let me out of the basement so I can shine for him, but he continued the punishment until about an hour ago where he told me to

shower and get ready.

Sweat beads on my forehead. I swipe it away with the back of my hand before it can drip into my eyes.

“Trick,” Drake bellows out my name from his corner. He’s surrounded by some of his coven members. I know all of their faces, but not their names. They always watch.

I spin and shake my ass. My wings may cover my bottom, but it’s the tease of the action that gets people excited.

There’s a whistle I don’t recognize, spurring me on. I lift the left wing, revealing one covered butt cheek. My wing gives a little wave hello and I flitter it completely open. Then it’s time for the other wing to rise. It takes so much concentration to move my wings separately; it wasn’t a skill I learned at home. At court we didn’t dance to arouse, just entertain. Or perhaps I was naïve to think that?

I continue my movements. Shaking my ass, fluttering my wings. But Drake’s irritation is palpable. My coin isn’t with me and I wish I slid it down my boot, but it’s too late now. I take a deep breath and push my magic, but nothing happens. No warmth, no fizz or pop. My heart pounds harder as I grip the pole in front of me until my knuckles go white. This can’t be happening.

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Drake pushes to his feet.

“I can do it. Let me do it!” I squeeze my eyes shut and concentrate. Not even a tingle of magic. I’m drained completely from lack of sunlight. No, no no no no! “Glow damn it,” I chant to myself.

The creak of the stage stairs as Drake climbs them sends me into panic. Glow glow glow!

He walks to the back of the stage, where he keeps a few of his whipping supplies attached to the wall. “I’m sorry folks, seems Trick isn’t able to perform tonight. We’ll have to give him a little incentive.” He cracks a whip and I jump. The Hellhound with Pike growls.

“What if...” I cringe as Pike speaks up. “You let me give it a go? I usually get what I want. And I want to see the pretty little Fae light up.”

Drake chuckles. “Be my guest, but he’s stubborn.” Thankfully, he slides the whip back into place.

I cling to the pole as Pike ascends the steps.

“Darling.” Pike’s tail tips my chin up to look him in the eyes. Before, I hadn’t taken him in. I noticed he was handsome, but I didn’t really look. He’s tall, with a strong jawline, two horns, that tail. His coloring is anywhere from tan to deep blood red, depending on where I look. And his eyes, they’re so kind. Deep brown, almost human. “Darling, can you glow for us?”

“I can’t.” I shake my head. “Impossible.”

He tips my chin up again. “Look at me.” His voice softens until I’m probably the only one that can hear him. “I know you think that, sweetheart, but I know you have it in you. There’s still enough to give us a show, isn’t there? You can do it.”

My cheeks heat. Maybe I can do this. I nod and shut my eyes to concentrate. A few deep breaths lets me calm and ground myself better than before. I push my magic, forcing as much as I can tap into towards my wings. My legs shake. It’s so much effort.

“That’s it, keep going, little Fae. Glow for me.”

Gasps and murmurs sound out behind me. My vision goes fuzzy. I can’t tell how bright I glow, but magic thrums through my wing veins. “Sorry,” I whisper as my knees buckle. Pike’s tail wraps around my waist, saving me from crumpling. “Sorry.” I try to step away, but my brain fogs. Pike catches me just as I lose consciousness.

Chapter 6

Pike

I’ve never seen a Fae glow, but it’s brilliant. Now Trick is in my arms and he’s freezing cold. It takes everything in me not to charge at Drake to demand he free Trick of the soul tether. Drake can’t know we know. Can’t know I have a plan.

I chuckle. “Seems we’ve exhausted the poor boy.”

“That’s because he’s weak,” Drake says.

“How unfortunate.” My tail twitches behind me. I’m sure Trick isn’t weak. What he

is, is exhausted, and hasn't had enough sunlight. Everyone knows Fae need the sun every day. It's part of their magic. I'd ask for a sunlamp, but they don't work for Fae. Trick needs real sunlight and soon. "When was the last time he had sun?"

The entire crowd looks at Drake. I'd already forgotten I was on stage. He fists a hand as he stomps towards me. "He gets enough sun."

"Not if you have him perform nightly. Don't you know how to take care of your pet Fae?"

Drake snarls. We're toe to toe and he's not my type. Frankie growls.

"Don't get too close. Frankie will think you're trying to flirt with me. She gets jealous."

"Who the fuck do you think you are?" Drake demands.

I gently place Trick on the floor of the stage and gesture for Frankie to join me. Drake backs off until he realizes I want Frankie's body heat for Trick. "Be a good girl and keep our new Fae friend warm." I rub her ears and give her a few pats.

Drake's eyes nearly bug out of their sockets when I face him again. Probably because red flames lick at my horns and the tip of my tail. "Ever heard of the Soul Catcher?" I ask.

He stumbles back a few feet. That name always scares people that don't understand the truth. A few of our audience gasps. More push to their feet to scurry away like scared mice. My fellow demons stay put. They know I'm not actually the threat everyone else thinks I am.

One soul and I get a whole ridiculous nickname, but it does the trick. We're down to

an audience of my two friends and about a handful of various other demons.

“What do you want?” Drake crosses his arms, no doubt in an effort to look less terrified, but his fear clouds the air. I breathe it in, savoring the taste.

“To talk.” I shrug as if it’s no big deal. “I’m in the market to invest in a business, and I’ve been watching you.” I drag my eyes over him. “I think we can be good business partners.” I glance around as if contemplating ideas. “We can change up a few things to make this place actually a full house every night, and it won’t depend on forcing a single pathetic Fae to glow.” Not that I think Trick is pathetic in any way, but I’m trying to sell myself to Drake.

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He strokes his chin. “Come back at noon tomorrow and we’ll talk. Bring bank statements.”

“Perfect. Now, direct me where to dump the boy and I’ll be on my way.”

“Leave him,” Drake says.

“It’s no trouble.” I bend to pick Trick up again. He’s still freezing, which concerns me. Frankie whines and noses at Trick’s hand. “He’ll be okay, girl.” I’ll make sure of it.

“Ava!” Drake bellows out and Frankie growls again.

The person who helped clear the stage between performers rushes from behind the glitter curtain. “Yes, Drake.”

“Show... I never got your name,” Drake says.

“You can call me Pike.”

“Show Pike where to dump Trick, then get Trick cleaned up.”

“Is he okay?” Ava asks as they smooth the hair from Trick’s face.

“He will be,” I answer. “He needs?—”

“Sunlight,” Ava says.

I nod as Ava glares at Drake.

“Get!” Drake bellows as he shoos Ava away.

Frankie comes with me as I follow Ava through the curtain and down a back hall. Ava’s fast, but they have the knowledge of where they’re going. It’s dim and dank and I hate leaving Trick.

Ava unlocks a door and I’m glad the stairs are concrete. The further we get into the basement, the less I want Trick to stay. He doesn’t deserve it, no one does.

“Lay him down here.” Ava pulls a blanket from atop what appears to be a nest of dozens of pillows and thin blankets.

“You’re kidding, right?” I look around, hoping there’s some place more comfortable, but the space is bare. Frankie doesn’t care and climbs right into the nest and snuggles in.

Ava gives me a dull glare. “Sorry, this isn’t a fancy hotel. This is our prison.”

I swallow. “You’re his captive, too?”

“I made the mistake of trusting Drake when I was a young woman.”

“Are there more of you captives?”

“No, the other performers and workers are all paid and have no idea what Trick and I go through. They all, however, have made different deals with Drake. I don’t know the half of them, most of them aren’t allowed to talk about the deals per the stipulations of the agreement.”

“Curious. A witch acting like he’s a demon.”

Ava nods. “He’s been doing very well for himself for the last decade.”

Curious indeed. “Can you keep a secret?” I whisper. I probably shouldn’t trust this woman, but now I can’t bear to have them both as Drake’s captives.

“I’d be dead by now if I couldn’t.” She grins and motions for me to put Trick down. “Trick actually likes the nest. Drake tried a bed, but Trick never slept in it, taking all the sheets and pillows to make a nest.”

“If you’re sure?”

“Very sure. And see, the Hellhound likes it, so it must be comfortable.”

“Frankie. And she’ll sleep anywhere.” But I settle Trick into the nest where Frankie snuggles close to him again. “How often does Trick pass out?”

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Ava sighs. “I don’t know if you saved him or not. Usually, Drake flogs or whips him until he glows. But this... he already didn’t have enough sun to perform properly, and he over exerted himself now.”

“Drake won’t let him die.”

“Are you sure? Because Drake keeps pushing Trick too far. I’m afraid for him.” Ava’s voice wobbles before she wipes at her eyes.

“Drake needs him. He’s tethered Trick’s soul to his.”

“No.” Ava’s hands fly to her mouth as she shakes her head. “Oh, Trick.”

The gravity of the situation hits me. Drake has been using Trick’s magic for more than just longevity. “Fuck. It’s more than that.” I swipe a hand through my hair as I look at the Fae in front of me. He’s not absorbing the sunlight he needs when he’s in the sun because Drake is leeching Trick’s magic off him. “Shit. Shit.”

Frankie’s tail thumps against the wall as she watches me. She knows I’m upset, but now she’s torn between Trick and me. When she moves to leave the nest, I stop her. “Stay with Trick a little longer. You can do that for me, right?” I squat to scratch her head as she practically wraps herself around Trick again.

“What do we do?” Ava asks.

We’re both pacing, as I think. “I have a plan.” I can’t tell her my original plan didn’t include her, but now how can it not? I’m sure she’s the reason Trick is still

functioning. “Trust me.”

“I...”

“Please. Hex is supposed to be a utopia for people like us. That was the entire point of the place when it started, but Drake... he destroyed the ideals of the town.” And his coven just let him. Hex is supposed to be perfect for witches and demons and shifters and anyone not plain ol human to live in harmony. Anyone tired of their own realm. Anyone ready to live with and study others not of their own. “Demons and witches created the veils of Hex to keep outsiders away. I have claim to this town just as much as Drake does, and I want to help. Will you trust me?”

Slowly, Ava nods. “If you’ll help Trick, I’ll do whatever you need me to.”

“Perfect.” I don’t promise her freedom, but if everything goes according to plan, Trick won’t be the only one free from Drake.

Chapter 7

Lark

The sun shines brightly when I open my eyes. I have no idea how long I’ve been latched to the pole on Flutter’s roof. Could be since sunrise could be for the last three days.

“You’re awake,” Ava says from the bistro table across from me. “Thank goodness.” She pours water into a glass and sets it down on the open spot beside her. “You had me really worried, Tricksy.”

I push to stretch from the makeshift nest. There aren’t as many pillows as I like, but it’s comfortable. “Sorry. I didn’t mean...”

“I know. It’s not your fault. Drake needs to take better care of you. He can’t keep pushing you to the brink and expecting you to bounce back.” She waves to the glass of water. “Drink. Slowly.”

“Thank you.”

“I have some strawberries for you, too.” She leans in close to me. “That demon, Pike, has his eyes set on you.”

I swallow and nod. “Weird, right?” I can’t tell her I summoned a crossroads demon, and it was him.

“Very, but I wouldn’t mind being in his sights. He’s a looker.”

I snort into my glass as I take another drink. “He’s stunning.”

“Understatement of the decade. He’s coming back today at noon. He wants to work with Drake.” Ava shakes her head as she opens the cooler at her feet. “I don’t get it, but I’m not questioning him.” She passes me a container of strawberries and my mouth waters. “Slow, Trick.”

“You’re the best, Ava.”

“I know, sweetie.” She pats my hand as she watches me eat. I offer her the container. “I already ate my fill earlier. Eat up. I don’t know what Drake has planned for you today.”

The idea has my stomach churning.

“I don’t think it’ll be too grueling, not if he wants you back in tiptop shape quickly. I think you passing out scared him, too.”

“Because he can’t use me as entertainment if I’m unconscious.”

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“True. Don’t worry too much. Just eat for now. Eat and bask in the sun.” Ava turns her face to the light. There are a few clouds, but otherwise it’s a blue sky morning. Perfect, if only I weren’t bound to the roof with an iron chain and my wings weren’t pressed against me in the binder.

“I brought blankets incase you want to lie out.”

“I think I’d like that.” I shove the last strawberry in my mouth.

Thank goodness there isn’t too much wind on the roof. We get the blankets laid out quickly. I reach for her hand and she lets me have it.

“You’re very sweet, you know that, Trick?”

“That’s not what Drake says.”

“Drake is a fool that doesn’t know what he has in you. Or maybe he does.” She squeezes my hand. “Don’t let him turn you bitter. Not ever. You’re going to get away from him and when you do...” She goes so quiet, I have to wonder if she lost her train of thought. When I look at her, tears trail down the side of her face.

“I can’t leave without you, Ava. I won’t.”

“That’s sweet to say, but?—”

“No buts. If I’m free, so are you. We’ll get out of this together.”

Another squeeze and we're silent in our own thoughts. My own head runs so fast I almost miss the crunch of gravel beneath us. I already know from past experience that my iron chain is too short to let me to the edge, so I hold my breath as Pike's voice lifts on the wind when he tells Harold, the doorman, he's here to see Drake.

Ava grins and whispers, "told you so."

Maybe, just maybe, Pike can be trusted.

Chapter 8

Pike

The place smells like strong cleaner when Frankie and I enter. She's on guard more than usual and I have to wonder if it's because of last night.

Drake's dressed in a suit as he greets me with a handshake. Frankie growls, and Drake pulls his hand back.

"She doesn't like me," Drake laughs.

"No. But that doesn't matter. Let's get down to business." It actually matters a great deal what Frankie does or doesn't like, but I've explained her role in all this and she's agreeable to be a part of the plan.

"Of course, follow me." Drake leads me down a hallway to an office suite and has me sit in the leather chair across from his desk. The place is immaculate, not what I expected from Drake. The decorations are tasteful flower bouquet paintings and complementary wallpaper. Not something I would have picked, but lovely all the same. Frankie sits at my feet, relaxed to the untrained eye, yet alert.

I hand Drake my financials, which makes his eyes widen. They're fake, but he doesn't need to know that, not yet anyway. "I'd like to invest in making Flutter more profitable. You have a decent start, but it's all the same people every night as far as I can tell. How are you marketing to others?"

Drake frowns as he sets the papers back on his desk. He steeples his fingers and leans forward. "I haven't. Flutter has been profitable for the five years it's been open. I never saw fit to expand the audience."

"So you're leaving money on the table."

"Trick has been a good draw. Everyone wants to see a Fae glow. Fae are so rare in the human realm."

"They are, but so are other shifter types. And the succubus you have, she's amazing."

"No one is here to see her."

"Are you sure? Have you tried selling a sex demon's lust experience? It's intoxicating." I know that just from playing with a few incubi in my lifetime.

Drake thinks for a moment. "I'll consider it."

"Get the succubus on the phone."

"What?" Drake squawks.

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“I want to get her consent before setting her up as the headliner.”

Drake opens his mouth, but I cut him off with a look before he can say anything. He pulls his cellphone from his pocket, sets it on the desk, and calls the succubus.

After two rings, the performer answers. “Hey Drake, what’s up?”

“Kristy, I have a new investor with me. Pike. He’d like to ask you a few questions.”

“Shoot. I’m all ears,” Kristy answers.

“Good to hear,” I say. “How do you feel about being the headliner this week?”

Kristy sucks in a breath. “Really?” Her reaction has me grinning.

“Absolutely, darling. Would you be comfortable doing a lust experience for the audience?”

“Heck yes! I’ve been wanting to for a while, but Drake keeps shooting me down.”

“Is that right?” I cock a brow at Drake. He’s grinding his teeth and refusing to look at me.

“Yeah, I ask almost monthly. Figured I’ll wear him down, eventually. We need more people and I think I can be a better draw than a glow worm of a Fae.”

“I agree. Will you be ready tonight, or do you need time?”

“I’m always ready, Pike.”

“Perfect. I’ll get the word out and you do your thing tonight.”

Kristy squeals on the other end. “Thank you!”

Drake ends the call.

“That’s settled. We’ll see if Kristy has what it takes. If not, we’ll go back to Trick. But trust me, we need variety.”

Drake nods as he slides the phone back into his pocket. “How many businesses have you invested in before?”

“A few here and there. We always triple the profit at least.” Drake doesn’t need to know it’s all lies. My sole purpose is to get Trick and Ava out from under him, and what better way than to get him to trust me? “There’s one more thing. Since Trick isn’t performing this week. I want him.”

“What?!” Drake pushes to his feet.

“Three million dollars for twenty-four hours with the Fae. Noon to noon. Whatever I want.”

“Three million dollars?”

“You heard me. Trick might be better used as a plaything. I want to test him out.” Of course, it’s another lie. I just want to spend time with Trick. I have a theory on what will help sever the soul tether, but I need to talk to Poe first. The king will have a better idea.

“I don’t offer prostitution. Just lap dances and bottle service and?—”

“We might be investing in what Kristy can offer privately and the novelty of having a Fae sex worker. I’ll discuss with Kristy if I’m happy with Trick’s performance. Have him washed up and ready for me tomorrow. Noon.”

“Trick won’t like it. It’s the one promise I’ve kept all these years and intended to keep, but...”

“Three million dollars.”

Drake swallows and scratches his short beard. “Exactly.” He nods. “I’ll have him ready for you in the VIP suite. There’s a bed and other amenities.”

“Perfect. No perfume.”

“Got it.” Drake waves me off and I push to my feet. Frankie joins me.

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“I’ll wire the money to you. We’ll discuss other changes later.”

“Right.” Drake seems dazed as Frankie and I leave the office. I take Frankie’s harness and we’re back at my house in seconds.

“That went according to plan. Probably too easy.”

Frankie hops up on our couch, but I have too much energy to burn, plus I need to talk to Poe. I wave my hand in front of me and close my eyes to the flash. Through the communication portal, Poe paces his office and his head snaps towards me.

“Pike? What can I do for you?” His red eyes search mine.

“What do you know about breaking a soul tether?”

He tips his head. “Not a lot. Why?” I explain the situation, and he starts laughing. “You always have been a hopeless romantic.”

“What?” I can’t help but laugh. I’m a love ‘em and leave ‘em kind of guy.

“You followed Crawford around like a lost puppy until he told you to scram. You wrote him poetry, Pike. Poetry.”

“I was a dumb kid.” And Crawford was a hot older demon.

“You cried when you picked out Frankie.”

“That’s because she was the cutest Hellhound I had ever seen. Who wouldn’t have cried?”

“Most demons don’t cry picking out a Hellhound.” Poe shakes his head as he laughs. “You’re a riot, Pike. I always do love when you call.”

“Back to soul tethers.” I try to get him on track. I need a better plan.

“Sure. There are a few ways to cut a witch created soul tether. Create a new soul tether, a genuine one that’s stronger than the spell. But I have no idea what that really entails. And find the anchor that houses the spell and destroy it.” He taps his fingers on the desk. “I’ll have to check the archives to see if there are any other ways. Give me a few weeks.”

“Thanks. I appreciate it.”

Poe tips his head and the communication portal shimmers out. I plop next to Frankie on the couch. “I have no idea where to start looking for the anchor or how to create a genuine soul tether.”

Frankie snorts and nuzzles her snout in my hand.

“We’ll figure it out.” But first I need to gather some supplies for Trick.

Flutter is packed. My instincts were right. People would rather experience what a succubus has to offer rather than watch a Fae’s wings glow. Van and Warwick sit with me and Frankie. Surprisingly, Warwick doesn’t have a flaming tray of HellFire in front of him.

“Who are you and what have you done to Wicky?” Van jokes, but that just puts a frown on Wick’s face.

“Don’t make fun.” Warwick crosses his arms. “I have a lead on Ethan and want to be level headed when I find the courage to test it out.”

“Probably for the best,” I say.

The lights dim as the DJ announces the house rules for the night. “You can fuck each other all you want, but don’t touch the dancers.”

Van lifts a brow. “Seriously?”

“Yep.”

Wick shivers as he sticks out his tongue. “I don’t wanna be the person to clean up after tonight.”

“I did not think about that,” I say. Hopefully, it won’t be all on Ava, the poor woman.

The first dancer comes out, Sparkle, the cat shifter from before, with purple ribbons around his cat ears. He plays up being cat like. We told all the performers to step up and lean into what they are. He even wears a collar with a bell. Each move has a soft twinkle. I never did ask his name. He’s trying to catch my attention because he knows I’m the money now. I can smell the desperation on him and I’m not here for it. Even Trick didn’t smell so desperate when he summoned me.

A few more dancers come out, then it’s Kristy’s time to shine. She’s in a black latex outfit with her tail and small wings out. She’s dressed like a dominatrix and several of the audience howl. Her hair is in fresh Bantu knots with what appears to be red tinsel woven into her black hair. Her lips pop a bright red against her dark brown skin. She’s lined her gray eyes in black. Kristy is stunning, but I only have eyes for Trick.

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Kristy has a whip in hand that I'm curious about how she'll incorporate that into her performance. She cracks it and several patrons moan.

"On your knees. Worship me." She offers a boot to those closest. Men scramble to lick the leather.

Oh, she'll work out nicely.

As the night continues on, she has men with their shirts off, parading around the stage as if they were ponies. Me, Van, and Wick cackle, as do a few others not quite hypnotized by Kristy's lust experience. Several people have paired up to fuck wherever they please. The sounds alone make me hard, but I keep watch on the act.

"I'm gonna go find a hole," Van says as he slinks away.

Wick swallows. "I think I'm going to head out." He tips his head toward the door. I nod in acknowledgement.

While I'm not sexually attracted to Kristy, even as she's pouring out all her succubus talents, I know she's an excellent performer.

The last call for alcohol goes out. I'd gotten lost in the show. When the stragglers leave, Drake turns on the house lights. The scent of arousal and cum and lube and everything else that comes with a night of fucking fills my head now that I'm not distracted.

"Ava's going to have a fun morning," Drake says.

“Let me get a clean-up crew in here. She doesn’t need to deal with this.”

“Fine.” Drake hands me a key. “I’m going home to bed. See you at noon.”

I nod and call in the best crew of brownies I know of. They’re in and out almost as fast as I called them in. All for a box of cereal each. I lock up, then I’m back home with Frankie.

Chapter 9

Lark

“Get up and get in the shower. You have an appointment.” Drake’s voice takes me out of my pleasant dream of playing in the meadows back home.

“Appointment?” I wipe the sleep from my eyes. Drake stands at the stairs leading up to Flutter. There’s a plastic bag in his hand.

“We don’t have all day. You need to be ready by noon. And put this on.” He lifts the bag.

I push to my feet and stagger towards him. I’m not usually up so early. When I make my way to him, he whips me around and unlaces the binder. I suck in a deep breath and let my wings flap behind me as I take the stairs behind Drake. I always breathe easier with the binder off.

“What’s the occasion?” I ask at the top of the stairs.

“Don’t ask questions. Just get washed up. And put on glitter. Make yourself sparkle.”

My stomach tumbles. “What’s going on, Drake?” I cling to the bag.

“Nothing. Just do as I ask.” He threads a hand through his hair, then opens the bathroom door and shoves me inside.

“Please, what’s going on?”

“Wash up.” Drake locks the door behind me and I hear him slide down to add another barrier to me getting out. I may have tried to escape in the past. He got rid of the one tiny window the bathroom used to have years ago.

I can either refuse to do what Drake asked or follow directions. It’s always easier to do what I’m told. I’m not interested in a beating today, so I strip down and shower. There’s actually hot water and I almost cry because of it. But I push my emotions away to finish my task. It doesn’t take too long to wash up, hair and all. I dry off and wrap my hair in my towel to investigate what’s in the bag.

No. No, no no no no. What even is this contraption? I dig around looking for more, but there’s just five pairs of... this? I imagine it’s underwear. Each item has a strip of cloth, then straps. I’ve always performed in what Ava called booty shorts since they’re so form fitting and, well, short. It’s what Sparkle performs in too, and the other guys. I’ve never seen anything like this.

“I think you gave me the wrong bag, Drake.” I call out.

“No, it’s right.” Drake unlocks the door. I cover myself as he peeks in just before entering. He pulls one of the things from the bag. “It’s called a jockstrap. The cloth goes over your front and the straps keep it in place. Pick one and put it on.” He throws the glittering pink pair at me and I let it fall to the floor.

“No.” I don’t wish to expose myself to him, so I stomp my foot instead of cross my arms. My wings flutter behind me. I can’t keep them still. “Get me something else. I won’t parade around in...” I wave a free hand at the jockstrap. “No.” My cheeks heat

and the mirror shows the flush goes down my chest.

“Once. Just once, I’d love it if you wouldn’t fight me.” Drake pinches the bridge of his nose. “Ava! Grab one of Trick’s shorts, will ya?”

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Soon, Drake throws my plain yellow booty shorts at me. “Get dressed.” He slams the door behind him.

“At least I have full coverage,” I mumble as I slide the shorts up. The blow dryer is loud as I work on my hair. I have no idea what time it is, but Drake can deal with whatever consequences there are if I’m late for this appointment. So much hair takes a long time to dry and I ache for my magic from back home. In the Fae lands, just a thought would have my hair dry. Drake keeps me so low on sunshine it’s impossible to use my magic outside of the glow most day. Not to mention the spells he has wrapped around me. Finally, I brush glitter across my cheeks before opening the door to Drake pacing the floor.

“Finally. Now come on.” He grabs my arm and pulls me with him.

“I can walk on my own.” I dig my heels into nothing, but it stops him from continuing.

“Fine.”

I follow Drake. There’s too much pep in my step, but I’m relatively free for now. No binder. So far, it’s a great day.

Until we get to a door I’ve been told is off-limits. Drake turns to me and drops his hands on my shoulders. “I’ve gone back on my word before. I’ve never felt bad about it, not one bit. But this time...”

My heart pounds in my chest. “What have you done, Drake?”

“Three million dollars. Who could pass that up? Three million for twenty-four hours with you.”

I try to pull away. “You promised. I trusted you on this one thing.”

“Never trust a witch, Trick. Never.” Drake opens the door and pulls me inside. My legs threaten to buckle. “Trick, as you requested. Noon to noon.”

There’s a growl over my head. The Hellhound. I suck in a breath when I notice Pike frowning at Drake.

“I didn’t say traumatize the boy. What the fuck did you tell him?” Pike smooths his hand down the Hellhound’s back, stopping the growls. “You know what? Never mind, get out.” He waves a hand toward the door. Drake finally lets me go and leaves.

Pike looks me over. “You poor thing. I can’t imagine what’s going through your head right now.” He steps over to a small table where there’s a box. “I have something for you. I think you’ll be more comfortable.” He pulls out a shirt. Not just any shirt.

“How?” I whisper. The shirt is silk, green, and Fae with a back that can accommodate wings.

“I visited the Fae lands.” Pike holds up the shirt and I walk right into it. He spins me to button up the back. “The queen of the Summer Court was very nice. She wanted to help.”

My cheeks burn as I take in the pattern of the shirt with its tiny yellow flowers. “Thank you.” The sleeves are a little long, but Pike rolls them up for me as I watch him.

“That’s not all.” He grabs something else from the box. “I tried my best to get clothes that should fit. I compared your size to one of the Fae running around the throne room, and the queen had someone bring these out.” He presents me with soft cotton pants.

“I don’t know how to thank you.” I pull them up and on. “Perfect fit.” I haven’t worn Fae clothes since mine became threadbare and Drake took them away from me. I hug myself and squeeze my eyes closed as I savor the sensation of how light the cloth is. “Thank you.”

Pike gives me a half smile. “I want to put you at ease. I didn’t pay to sleep with you. Even though that’s what I made Drake think.”

“He promised he’d never do that to me.” I tremble and cling to the table. The Hellhound boops my shoulder with her nose.

“Ah, this is Frankie, and I’m very glad you’re not terrified of her.”

“I think I remember snuggling with her.” I hold out my hand and she rubs her nose along my palm.

“You did. She won’t lick you. Her saliva is a bit like lava, and I know she doesn’t want to hurt you.”

I nod and reach up to give her head scratches.

“Frankie is going to keep a watch out for us. I already swept the room for bugs.”

My nose scrunches. “Drake does very good pest control.”

Pike’s lips twitch, but he laughs anyway. “Not bug bugs.” He taps a finger to his

bottom lip. “Electronic surveillance devices.”

“Oh. Did you check for spells, too?”

“Everything and we’re alone. So I’m going to set Frankie right outside the door to keep Drake out.” Pike grabs her harness and leads her to the door. He opens and helps get her settled. “I’ve calmed the boy down,” Pike says to Drake, who must be somewhere I can’t see. “Next time you really need to work on not scaring him. I want a willing partner, not someone that’s going to fight me.”

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I can't hear Drake's response, but there's a thud of a glass on the bar top.

Pike's back in the room. It's just the two of us, and I'm glad I have more clothes on than just a pair of shorts. Pike's in a dark gray suit that looks immaculate on him. His horns shine in the bright lights. His tail sways from side to side.

"Come, have a seat." He gestures towards the couch on the opposite wall. There's a huge bed in the back of the room, and I have to wonder if Drake has been making anyone sleep with patrons or not.

I take a few hesitant steps towards the couch before Pike stops me. "Where are my manners? Have you eaten today? Probably not. Give me a second."

Before I can even answer, Pike disappears and I'm in the room all alone.

"What is going on today?" I whisper as I drag my hands down the silk shirt. "Presents and food?" I don't understand.

"Miss me?" Pike says with his arms full of pizza boxes. He's close enough that his tail wraps around me. "It's nice outside. Let's eat on the roof."

Before I can say anything, we're on the roof and he sets the pizza on the small bistro table we keep up here.

"Eat. We have much to discuss."

Chapter 10

Pike

It takes a few slices for Trick to realize I'm not here to do unspeakable things to him. He keeps side-eyeing me as he wanders the roof. I let him do as he pleases since I'm not sure how often he gets the freedom.

"Drake will be mad if I fly away," Trick says as he sits in the seat beside me. His big blue-gray eyes look up at me as if to challenge him.

"As long as you're still tethered to him, he'll always find you. And you can't leave town if you want to live."

"I can hide in the woods. Drake hates the outdoors."

"He may hate the outdoors, but he doesn't need to go searching for you. He just needs to tug on the tether and you'll be back in his clutches like the other night."

Trick slumps and takes another slice of pizza. "He wasn't so bad in the beginning. But I don't know what happened. I did everything he asked me to. Then he started hitting me. And..." Trick squeezes his eyes shut. "He started hurting Ava because of me. I don't know how to make it up to her."

The knowledge breaks my heart. "I'm so sorry, Trick. Some people are just rotten."

"Drake's rotten to the core." Trick finishes his slice and tips his face to the sun. His wings glitter in the light. His hair rides softly on the wind.

I want to put him at ease, so I chose to tell him my story. "We're alike, you and I."

His brows scrunch. "I don't understand. You're a crossroads demon with freedom."

I snort as I swallow my last bite. “How wrong you are. I have more freedom than you do, yes. But I’m bound to a crossroads. And unlike the rest of my brethren, I was bound at fifteen instead of twenty.”

“Why?”

“I was a dumb kid and pranked the king of the crossroads demons. Which may have resulted in a part of his tail needing to be amputated. I swear the prank never should have gotten as out of hand as it did, but it did. Poe punished me by binding me to a crossroads at fifteen instead of twenty, like everyone else. Fifteen-year-olds, demons or not, aren’t mature or wise enough to take on the burden of a crossroads.”

“I’m sorry.” Trick holds out his hand and I take it.

“It’s okay. Poe and I are on great terms now. It probably has more to do with the fact that my first deal I snagged a soul. No demon of any type has been able to bargain for a soul in at least two centuries. Poe gave me a house and let me pick a Hellhound, and he’s been friendly ever since. But the problem is I haven’t had a deal since that first one. No one has summoned me until you.”

“And I can’t even make a deal. Will my soul work? When it’s free, I mean.” Trick’s voice is soft. He’s nibbling on his bottom lip and staring off into space when I look at him.

I rub my thumb along his. “We’ll come to that later. Right now, we need to focus on getting rid of the tether so you can make a deal.”

“How do we do that?”

I explain what Poe told me and watch as Trick’s shoulders slump and his wings droop.

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“I have no idea what the anchor might be or how to create a new tether.”

“Neither do I.” My tail slithers and wraps around Trick’s waist. “Sorry about that.”

The most joyous laugh bubbles from Trick. “No problem.” His grin is infectious. “At the Winter Court, there was a demon guard that used to pick me up with his tail. I was a kid, and it was like a ride.”

“So you grew up in the Winter Court?”

Trick nods. “I was born in the Autumn Court, but mother moved us to the Winter Court when my brother and I started getting older. She never was too sure who our fathers are, and she didn’t want us to commit accidental incest should our tastes lean towards men. Like I said before, I was a courtesan-in-training.” His smile drops. “The day I fell through the veil, my brother was introduced to the Winter Court as a courtesan. I ran off with a boy my age during the party. We... had plans. But?—”

“You fell through the veil and couldn’t get back.”

“It sealed behind me.” Trick pushes to his feet and paces in front of me. “I thought I just tripped, but everything was so different when I got to my feet. The other boy wasn’t there. Drake was. He had iron shackles and I don’t know. I couldn’t understand him and he talked so softly I thought he was a good guy. He said something and nodded, so I nodded, too. He put the shackles on me, pricked my finger, and made me drink some weird concoction.”

My heart drops. “Fuck.” I pace next to him. “He must have asked you something that

needed consent.”

“But I didn’t understand him. That’s not consent.”

“No, it’s not.” I stop and Trick bumps into me. I face him and get lost in his eyes. “We’ll figure it out.”

“Is there a way for you to be unbound from your crossroads?” Trick’s question throws me off and I take a few steps back. “I’m sorry.” He holds his hands up. “I didn’t mean to offend you.”

“No. Noone has ever asked me that. I don’t think anyone has ever asked a crossroads demon that question. Everyone assumes we’re happy as we are. But we’re cursed. We’re not supposed to be crossroads demons. Every one of us comes from a line of demons that pissed off the king of the realm. We’re cursed to a crossroads until?”

My lips seal shut and I forget to take a deep breath before magic steals my mouth and nose. Trick gasps and stumbles back. I always forget we’re not allowed to tell how to free us. I hold up my hands. Hopefully, Trick understands everything is okay. Don’t be afraid, I try to tell him with my eyes.

“You can’t tell me, can you?”

I shake my head. Trick watches as my nose and mouth slowly come back. I take a breath, trying to keep from sucking it in harshly. Trick grabs a water bottle from a cooler I hadn’t noticed and passes it to me.

“What if that’s our bargain? You get me home and I free you, too?”

I swallow a too big mouthful of water and choke. Trying to imagine Trick destroying my crossroads is comical, but if he’s free from Drake’s influence, his magic will be

stronger.

“It’s not a ridiculous idea,” Trick says.

“Went down wrong,” I wheeze out.

“Oh. Okay. I’m not a weakling.” He crosses his arms and I can’t help the grin. If I don’t watch it, he’ll steal my heart.

“Never thought you were weak.”

“Good. Because I’m not.” Trick nods and plops back into the seat by the table.

We talk for hours until the sun goes down and Trick starts to yawn. I have no idea how long we’ve been outside, but he seems brighter for all the sun he’s gotten.

I teleport us back to our designated room and immediately hate the idea of leaving him at noon. But what can I do? I let Frankie back in. She promptly lopes over to the bed and crawls in. Trick laughs and follows suit, then pets the bed beside him. “There’s plenty of room for all three of us.”

Trick cuddles up to Frankie, and she licks my cheek as I lay next to her. What would life be like if this is what I had to look forward to every day?

Chapter 11

Lark

There’s a huge arm around my waist, and it takes me a few minutes to remember yesterday. Pike’s cock presses against my back while his tail pets my hip. I don’t think he’s awake, but his tail sure is. I take comfort in his arms and snuggle deeper

against him, despite his cock being in the way. His arm tightens around me as he pulls me closer. I miss touch and affection more than I can ever say.

Frankie chews at something by our feet and I realize Pike must have brought her toys and treats, too. She yips when she notices I'm watching her. Then she pounces between us.

“Oaf, Frankie, love, what have I said about letting me sleep?” Pike says as she licks him awake.

I can't help the laugh.

"Sorry 'bout the morning wood, darling," Pike says.

My cheeks heat. "Nothing to be sorry about. It happens."

"It does." Pike grins back. "Tell me about your training."

"What's there to tell?" I shrug. "I was trained to entertain. Tell stories, play games, create distractions, play instruments?—"

"Nothing sexy?" Pike asks.

"No. I hadn't gotten to that part of the training. Courtesans aren't trained in sex until their wings glow, which is anywhere between seventeen and twenty-one for most of us."

"How old were you?" Pike's tail continues caressing my side.

I shrug again. "Twenty, I think?"

"I can't imagine not being able to go home. Demons can come and go as they please between the realms as it is. But if I were stuck in the human realm, I don't know what I'd do."

"You'd survive," I whisper. "What hurts the most is no one came looking for me."

“Look at me, Trick.”

I bury my face in Frankie’s short fur.

“Trick.” Pike slides the back of his hand down my cheek. “Drake has you hidden behind so much magic. Even if your brother or mother were inside Flutter, they wouldn’t be able to see you.”

“What?” I rub at my eyes, willing the trapped tears to dry up.

“I’m so sorry, Trick. You didn’t deserve any of this. Neither did Ava.”

“How much time do we have left together?” I whisper.

“It’s early morning. Want to go back to the roof for breakfast?”

I nod. Hopefully, food will help clear my thoughts. “What if they really never came looking for me?”

“I don’t believe that. You seem close to your family. Someone came looking for you.” Pike leans in and presses a kiss to my forehead. “I know it.”

When he turns to climb out of the bed, I dab at the kiss with my fingertips. So gentle. So perfect. But why is he so nice to me? “Will you investigate?” I ask. “My mother’s name is—” I cut myself off. Who am I to give away her true name? “She has pink hair, like I do. At the time, her and I were the only ones with this color. My brother’s hair is white and he at least used to be a courtesan, too. Mother was the highest ranking courtesan in the Winter Court. I don’t know if she still is. But plea?—”

Pike’s tail presses against my lips like a finger. “I’ll look into it.”

“Thank you.” I pull his tail away, but before releasing, I kiss the tip gently. My cheeks heat. Why the heck did I do that? I could have charmed this demon to do anything I wanted over the course of our time together, but I’ve given up my training. Now I just want to go home and lick my wounds before reassessing my life. I’m not too old to be a courtesan, not that age matters with the Fae. But is that what I want to do with my life? I’ve been away from court so long I can’t remember what it’s like. I can’t remember the dances, the faces, the politics.

“Where’d you go?” Pike asks as I shake my head, trying to get out of my thoughts.

“The past. The present. I don’t know.”

He tips my chin up. “How about we eat breakfast and not think about anything else?” He grabs Frankie’s harness and his tail wraps around my waist. We’re on the roof again before I can blink. “Sit and pet Frankie while I grab some food. Any requests?”

“Strawberries?”

“Strawberries it is.” Pike blinks out. It’s just me and Frankie on the roof. Another beautiful blue sky day that I hope we can stay out until the last second.

I tip my head to the sun, soaking up as much as I can. Frankie noses my hand and I go back to petting her. “I could get used to this, you know,” I say.

Pike is back with a basket of what smells like fresh bread. “I got a variety of things. I hope you like something.” Then he starts unloading the basket. There are biscuits and strawberry butter and scrambled eggs and ham and apples. Pike puts a bowl of food down for Frankie and I’m immediately forgotten as she eats.

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“This is amazing.” I pile a plate high with scrambled eggs and ham. I shove a piece of biscuit in my mouth as I butter the rest of it. A moan escapes my lips.

“Mmmm, this is good. I got everything from a place down the street. I’ll have to remember them.”

I nod as I shovel eggs in my mouth. “Sorry. I’m house trained, but this is too good to remember proper etiquette.”

Pike snorts and waves towards Frankie. “I’m used to it.” He leans in and wipes a bit of butter from my cheek. His finger lingers and I lick off the offered butter, but get too embarrassed to suck his finger.

How did I ever think I could be a courtesan? I was never as outgoing as my brother. I stuck to the rules. I just wanted to belong. A snuffle escapes, and I slap a hand to my mouth.

“It’s okay, sweetheart. You can cry if you need to.”

“No. I’m fine.” I dab a napkin at my face and go back to eating.

“I have more clothes for you. I’m going to tell Drake they’re your reward for satisfying me.”

I nod and smooth out my napkin in my lap. “Will I ever need to satisfy you?”

Pike’s head snaps toward me. “You never have to do anything you don’t want to.”

“Thank you.”

The sun rises higher and I try not to notice. I like listening to Pike talk about being a crossroads demon and how it’s different from being a different demon type. We’re laying in a pile of blankets in a makeshift nest with Frankie between us.

“That one looks like a castle,” Pike says pointing to the blob of clouds.

“I sorta see it. This one looks like a dragon.”

“A fire-breathing dragon.” Pike takes a breath and blows, sending flames into the air.

I contain a gasp while Frankie chuffs beside me, as if she knew it’d startle me.

“Impressive,” I say.

“Parlor trick.” An alarm goes off from Pike and he frowns. “Two minutes till noon. I gotta get you downstairs.” He takes my hand and Frankie’s harness.

I blink a few times to adjust to the dimmer light of the room. Pike tugs me to the table and Frankie settles at our feet. He waves his hand over the table and we each have playing cards in our hands as the door creaks open.

Drake enters, making Frankie growl.

“Hush, girl.” Pike strokes Frankie’s head. “Would you like to join us? It’s a delightful Fae game Trick taught me.”

“No, your time is up. I’m here to take Trick back to his room.”

“Oh, do come and play,” Pike pouts.

“No. I think you and I have a few things to discuss with your investment.”

“Fine.” Pike fists a hand and everything except the box of clothes disappears. “I’ve gifted Trick clothes I expect him to keep. He’s an exceptional lover.”

My face blazes hot. We both push to our feet. His tail wraps around my waist one last time and pulls me closer.

“Sure. Sure. I won’t take them away.” Drake seems oblivious to the heat between Pike and me.

“Darling, I’ll see you soon.”

“Kiss me,” I whisper. “We have to sell it to Drake.”

Pike cocks a brow, but he dips down. I grab his horns, making him moan and his tail coil tighter around me.

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“Those are very sensitive,” Pike says as he nips at my ear, then my jaw. When he connects with my lips, I melt against him. I seek more, pressing closer. I need more. But the kiss is over too soon and I have no idea if Pike realizes I gave him my first. Realizes how gigantic the moment is for me. Slowly, his tail releases me. He nips at my lips softly before taking a step back, as if he’s dazed. Frankie looks from Pike to me and back, confused. My hand hovers over my lips, feeling the heat he left.

“Come on, Trick. Back to your hole.” Drake grabs my arm, but Pike slaps his tail over Drake’s hand.

“Do not hurt him.” Pike growls out the words as he hands me my box of new clothes.

“I’m okay,” I say, though my arm hurts where Drake squeezes.

“Meet me in my office, Pike.” Drake lets me walk on my own back to the basement.

“Please let me stay out. I’ll be good. I can help Ava,” I say hopefully.

“No. Get down there and shut up.” Drake smacks the bottom of my box, making my gifts fly down the stairs. Beautiful silk Fae shirts drift to the floor as Drake shuts the door behind me.

I push back the anger and gather the shirts back into the box and place them in my nest. I haven’t talked to the Fae luck coin in the last day, but when I search for it, it’s missing. “Oh, no.”

Pike

After going over everything Drake wanted to talk about, I'm mentally exhausted. Who knew business was so demanding? I grab Frankie's harness and something brushes my fingertips. As soon as we're home, something metal falls to the floor.

"A coin? Where'd you pick this up at?" One side has a raven, the other a dragon.

Frankie's already on the couch, curling into her favorite spot with her tail wagging. I shove the coin in my pocket, not giving it another thought. Frankie always finds weird treasures. I never know how or where she picks them up.

"We can't sit around too long. You need a proper walk after a day of us being so lazy."

Her ears perk up. Not that I found being with Trick all day lazy. I got a lot of good information from him, even if I'm no closer to figuring out how to free him of the soul tether.

I grab Frankie's leash from the hook by the door and clip it to her harness. If I were a smaller demon, she'd drag me in her enthusiasm to get outside. The demon realm isn't all that different from the others. Not to the naked eye. The grass is still green, the sky still blue.

The one major difference is the threads of magic throughout. This is what gives us demons our power. We feed the magic with our bargains, otherwise the magic would have run out eons ago with how much we use it. I get to live by one of the most prominent threads of magic because I snatched a soul and that soul will fuel the magic thread for eternity.

As Frankie sniffs at the rosebush by our front door, the magic thread shimmers milky

white in the field across from us like it has since that fateful day. My house isn't the biggest on the block, but it's impressive. Two stories with lovely gothic revival architecture. Sue me, I was into the look as a kid and still am, if I'm being honest. Every house on the block is different, right down to a modern day mansion.

Frankie always likes to walk right up to the magic. It smells a little like steak the closer you get, so I can understand the appeal.

I let Frankie do her thing as we stroll along. I've always loved home, even if I am lonely. Even if no one waves when I try to be friendly.

Frankie licks at my hand and whines. My next step, someone drops on my back. Their arm wraps around my neck with a dagger pressed to my throat.

"Where is my brother?"

Chapter 13

Pike

I'm rusty in Fae languages, but it's undeniably a dialect from the Winter Court.

"Darling, how about you face me so we can have a conversation?"

The assumed Fae perched on my back tightens their grip around my neck. "Where is he? I haven't been able to sense his life force in a decade and when I do, it's here. Where. Is. He?"

With a sigh, I release Frankie's leash and spin the Fae around to make them face me and set them on their feet. I can't help the gasp, and apparently neither can Frankie. This Fae looks so much like Trick, though, this Fae is more muscular. The other

noticeable differences are the hair, where Trick's is pretty bubblegum pink, this Fae has stark white. Then the eyes. Trick's are blue gray, this one has deep jeweled green. They flutter their wings indignantly.

“Who are you, little Fae, and why are you bothering me?”

Their lips twitch and their cheeks go pink, just like Trick's do. “I think I've been clear about why I'm bothering you. Where is my brother?” They stab their dagger at my throat again and I smack it away. “For a decade I've been searching, and he's never shown up in my scrying. I learned how to cut the veils and nothing. But a few days ago I sensed him again. Now his scent and life force are all over you. Did you eat him?” The Fae staggers back and looks at Frankie. “Did your Hellhound eat him?”

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The laugh comes without my permission. “I’m trying to help your brother, so I’d appreciate it if you backed off.”

“Take me to him!”

“Can’t.”

“Why not? You know where he is. We’ve been worried sick about him since the day—” They cut themselves off.

“Since the day you were introduced as a courtesan.”

Their eyes go wide. “You do know him.”

“I do, but not well. There’s something you should know. But first?—”

“Don’t try to bargain with me, demon.” They lift their dagger again.

I roll my eyes. “Name, pronouns.” Since once more I find myself having a whole ass conversation with a Fae instead of getting right to the point.

Their mouth drops open. “Wren he him.”

“Pike, also he him.”

His eyes go wide again and his hand flies to his mouth. “What trickery is this? How did you get my true name from me?”

“That’s all you, buddy.” I pat his shoulder as he looks at me, dazed. “But there’s nothing to worry from me. I have no desire to use it against you.”

He shakes his head. “My brother. Take me to him.”

“See, that could be a problem. I can tell you he’s in Hex, Indiana?—”

Immediately Wren poofs out.

I sigh and look to Frankie, who just huffs out a breath.

“Three. Two. O?—”

“You lied!” Wren glares at me with his arms crossed. It takes everything in me not to laugh in his face at how much he and Trick pout alike.

“If you had let me finish, I would have told you he has not only a soul tether to an asshole born witch but also said witch has him behind so many magic walls to keep out people looking for him you won’t be able to detect him.”

What strength Wren has drains from him as his knees buckle. I catch him with my tail so he doesn’t hit the ground too hard.

“A soul tether? How?” Wren pushes my tail away. “And how do you know my brother to begin with?”

“Funny story, that.” I wave a hand in front of us. “Mind if we walk and talk? Frankie hasn’t had a proper walk in a day.”

The question must throw Wren off because he nods and we continue down the block.

“Your brother, he goes by Trick in the human realm, summoned me the other day to

get him home.”

“But you didn’t help him?”

“I am helping him. Unless you rather I took his virginity then dropped him headless in the Fae lands? Because the soul tether would have beheaded him the moment we left the human realm.” I shrug. “Plus, the sacrifice would have been empty, so I denied him.”

“You denied him?”

“Temporarily. I’m working on a solution to dissolve the soul tether, but there isn’t much information on it. I told him we’d come up with a bargain later. After we get rid of the soul tether.”

“I’m here now, so he doesn’t need you to bargain a way home.”

“You can’t even sense him in the human realm. You need me to do more than get rid of the soul tether.”

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Wren's jaw twitches, and he stops walking. His gaze lands on the swirling thread of magic. "What can I do to help?"

"I think it's a matter of research and getting rid of the tether before anything else. I'll work on the other magic too. But the witch is powerful." Though I don't think it's entirely his own magic. I don't tell Wren that.

"Tell him we never stopped looking." In this moment, Wren looks like a lost child.

"Want a hug? We slept together last night and?—"

"I thought?—"

"Sleep. Just sleep. Nothing more. You might be able to feel him still?"

Wren looks around and plows into me when I open my arms. I let him soak in Trick's energy as long as he wants. I know I want to swim in it myself. Trick is... well, Trick.

"Tell him we love him." Wren says as he pulls away. "We never stopped looking."

"I'll tell him. Once I know more, I'll come to the Winter Court to update you. Or..." I point out my house. "Come any time. If I'm not here, leave a message on the fridge."

"Thank you, Pike." And Wren blinks out as if he was never here.

"Well, that was good luck. I don't have to go looking for Trick's family because they

came to me.” I’m not sure why I pat my pocket where the coin sits, but it feels right.

Chapter 14

Lark

There isn’t much to do in the basement Drake keeps me locked in. I can refigure my nest for the thousandth time, but instead I chose to stare at the ceiling. The basement spans the entire building, but I only occupy a corner of it, where I have my nest against two walls. I feel safe and secure in the corner in my nest. It makes me think of home. Of course Fae have beds, if you want one, but I always loved nests. Back home, I had better pillows and blankets and whatever else I desired to stuff in the nest. Here I only have yellowed flat pillows, thin blankets, and clothes.

The beautiful Fae shirts Pike gifted me stay in their box. They’re safer that way. I don’t want to accidentally drool on them as I sleep.

If the basement was taller, I could fly, but as it is, I don’t have enough clearance for a good flight. I’m glad Drake didn’t think to put the binder on before he shoved me down the stairs. Even if I can’t fly, I can at least breathe easily and I take advantage of the fact.

Some days I envy Ava. She has work to do while I’m stuck in the basement until Drake deems me worthy. I’m a flight risk in every sense of the word, though I have calmed down. Especially knowing had I gone only a mile more down the road, I would have died the day I summoned Pike.

I rub my throat. Not a fan of the thought of being beheaded. I don’t know that I’ve allowed myself much thought on anything that’s happened in the last week. Less than a week. I may not know Pike all that well, but I trust him more than Drake. There’s just something about the demon that I’m drawn to. Not to mention Frankie. Who

would have thought a Hellhound can be so sweet?

Red flames shoot up right in front of me, and I jump.

“Darling.”

It takes me a few heartbeats to realize it’s Pike squatting in front of me.

“Don’t just drop in like that without warning,” I whisper hiss as I clutch my chest.

“That was terrifying.”

“Sorry, sweetheart, I got too excited. I have news.” There’s a glow coming from his pocket.

“Why are you glowing?” I wave towards him.

“It’s my good luck charm.” He laughs as he digs out the Fae luck coin and shows it to me. “I found it on Frankie, then your brother Wren found me.”

I push to my feet and take back the missing coin. “I thought I lost it.” It takes my brain a moment to process what else he said. “My brother found you? How is he? Is he okay?”

“Apparently, he sensed your life force on me in the demon realm. He says they love you and miss you and never stopped looking for you.”

Tears fill my eyes and threaten to fall.

“I thought you’d be happy.” Pike pushed a strand of hair from my face. His touch gives me just the slightest hint of my brother’s energy. Something I haven’t had for ten years.

“I am. Seems you’ve gotten better luck from the coin than I have.”

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“Oh, darling. Come here. I hugged your brother, maybe?—”

I launch myself at him and breathe in my brother’s scent lingering on Pike. “It really is him.” There’s even a hint of my mother’s perfume beneath my brother’s masculine scent. I let the tears free as a sob rips from me. “It’s been so long. Can this nightmare really almost be over?”

Pike wraps me closer, even his tail coils around my ankle. “I don’t know how long it’s going to take, but you’ll be free.”

“I’ll do my best not to anger Drake. No guarantees, though,” I mumble the last part. Sometimes I just can’t help it.

“You do what you can and I’ll do my part. Hopefully, we’ll have you free by the new year.”

“That’s only a few months away.” I nibble my bottom lip. It’s already early October.

“I’m confident we can do it.” Pike scoots us to my nest. “Right now, let’s just rest because in the coming days, we’ll have to fight.”

Just the thought of being in his arms all night again makes my heart flutter. “What about Frankie?”

“She’s with Van. If she gets bored, she’ll join us.”

“Sounds perfect.” I cuddle closer as Pike gets comfortable. My eyes droop. Pike’s

soft breathing lulls me to sleep.

Chapter 15

Pike

Drake glares at me and puffs out his chest. “I’m not doing karaoke night. This is a strip club.”

I shrug. “But can you imagine karaoke with the dancers? And drag night?”

Drake’s eyes seem to bug out of his face. I keep throwing out ideas he thinks are ridiculous. It’s been a week of antagonizing him, then spending the night with Trick in my arms in that dank basement. Just sleeping. Barely even talking, but we both take comfort in being in each other’s arms.

“Trick needs sun today and if you don’t have anyone else to put him on his leash, I’ll do it.” One thing I can do is make sure Trick gets the sun he needs.

“Fine. Ava’s busy, anyway.” Drake throws Trick’s leash at me.

I’m in the basement at a thought. Trick is exactly where I left him, curled up against Frankie.

“Come on, my loves, it’s time to sun our pretty Fae.”

Trick snorts as he rolls over to face me. His eyes are so bright, his wings flutter in the binder. I wish I could take the damned thing off, but it’s spelled so only Drake can do the removing.

“What if I got Drake to let me bring you something to do? Like hobby supplies? You

have to be bored.”

“Before, I was skilled in many things. I don’t think I’d pursue any of them now if I had the choice.” Trick stays in bed and trails a finger along the edge of his next. “Ava sews though, and I’d love to learn how, but I don’t think Drake will let me have needles.”

“Why does Ava get more privileges than you?”

Trick shrugs. “I used to try to run every day. Haven’t done that in years, but still...” He wiggles his shoulders, probably to get comfortable with the binder.

“I’ll see what I can do. I think I’m working my way to getting you out of the basement all day.”

“You know, I used to have time out at night, but I’m not the headliner anymore. I don’t have anything to do.” He dramatically puffs out a breath and falls back.

“Oh, hadn’t thought about that. Sorry.” I swipe a hand through my short hair. My tail wiggles and Trick tracks the movement.

“It’s fine. At least I’m not getting beaten for not glowing.” He pushes to his feet and the top of his t-shirt slides down over his shoulder.

I swallow back a moan. “Ready to go to the roof?” I hold out my hand. He takes it and we’re on the roof.

Wind whips around, sending his hair into a mess, but he laughs as he jumps around with his arms out beside him. He spins and the joy on his face etches into my heart.

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“I wish I could give you something in return for all your kindness.” Trick stops in front of me and gasps. “Wait. I do,” the words are a whisper as if he just only thought of something.

“Darling, I don’t need anything.”

“Then I’ll hold on to it until the right time. It’ll feel special that way.” He spins again. I love how carefree he seems to be around me compared to when we met. His brother is still apprehensive when we meet or leave notes to each other, but that’s understandable. “What did Wren say from his research into soul tethers? Or Poe?”

I laugh. “Your brother is not that good at research, despite his mastery of realm hopping.”

“It’s a wonder he mastered that. He never was one for study outside of what was needed to be a courtesan. He loved learning how to pleasure. Even before his wings glowed, he was making boys melt. So it doesn’t surprise me that his head isn’t in research now that he knows where I am.” Trick throws his hands in the air and spins again and again.

“Poe found something helpful.”

Trick stops and holds his breath, waiting for my words.

“It’s very interesting.” I thread my hand through Trick’s hair and he leans into my palm. “If we can’t find the spell anchor, we can create a new soul tether.”

“Right, but how?”

“True love dissolves the magic that keeps you from the one your heart desires. Apparently, love is stronger than magic. Who knew?” I chuckle a little as he staggers back. “What’s wrong?”

“I’ve never been in love. I don’t know what romantic love even feels like. How will I know?”

“You’ll know.”

“I know what family love is. Friend love. Wouldn’t those count as true love? They’re true to me.” Trick paces as he wrings his hands and his wing tips flutter under the binder.

“Trick, look at me.”

Those big blue-gray eyes search mine.

“Your tether is already thinning.” Just the slightest, but it’s a start.

“How?” His cheeks go pink.

“Obviously, your heart has found someone.”

“Maybe.” He gives me the biggest grin. “Sparkle has been nicer to me since you showed up.” The laugh fills my heart with so much happiness. I pull him in my arms.

“Brat.” I tip his chin with my tail. “What if it’s a demon you’re still not sure about?” I lean in and barely brush his lips with mine.

“Pike! There you are!” Ava bursts through the door in the floor of the ceiling. “Drake is raving about something. You better see if you can calm him down. He’s trying to fire Kristy.”

“Fuck.” I press my forehead to Trick’s. “I’ll be back.” He takes a few dazed steps a way from me as he nods.

I hand Ava the leash I’d forgotten about and blink down into Drake’s office, where he and Kristy scream at each other.

“You no good son of a?—”

“What’s going on?” I ask, letting my voice rumble through the room.

“Drake just told me I’m fired after tonight.”

“What?” I glare at Drake, who sits smugly behind his desk.

“Her performance is lacking and?—”

“Absolutely not. Kristy stays. She’s the biggest draw you’ve had since she started.”

“I want Trick back in. With as much sunlight as he’s getting, he’ll be brighter than before.”

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“Can you believe this?” Kristy turns to me. “I bring in a fuck ton more than that brat and?—”

“Hey, now. Let’s not call Trick names when you don’t know his circumstances.”

Kristy rolls her eyes. “Sure, fine.”

“Actually, I think having Trick back in the rotation is a good idea, but he’s not headliner material for glowing. He needs to earn it just like everyone else.”

Kristy tips her head. “Exactly, which is what I’ve been saying all along. I like the kid, but he’s not more special than the rest of us.”

I don’t exactly agree, but I’m biased when it comes to Trick. “Right. So Kristy stays, as do the other dancers, and Trick comes out as one of the regulars until further notice. He’ll glow, but that won’t be his main attraction to headlining anymore.”

“Why,” Drake starts. “Do you think you have so much say in what happens in Flutter?”

My eyebrow has a mind of its own. I swear I don’t cock it on purpose. “You realize I’ve invested more in Flutter than you’ve made in five years of business. Flutter would be mine if not for the paperwork. So I’d watch it if I were you.”

I don’t trust the slimy look on his face. Drake leans back. “Fine. But if patrons hate the new lineup, we do things my way again.”

Kristy laughs. “No problem. Everyone loves all the changes so far.”

I pinch the bridge of my nose. Drake can be so damn frustrating some days and easy others. “Alright, so that’s resolved. Kristy stays as our headliner. Trick gets back on stage.” I turn to Kristy. “If you’re agreeable to that?”

“Absolutely.” She nods and turns on her heel.

Drake pushes to his feet and stomps toward me. “You need to stop undermining?—”

I hold up a hand. “I’m going to need you to stop. Before you took my money, I investigated Flutter’s financials, and you were drowning. You should thank me and stop fighting my ideas.”

“This wasn’t my vision.”

“And what was?” He looks away from me instead of answering. He can’t know I know about Trick, how he’s using him for his own power.

“Nothing. I’ll play by your rules, Pike. For now.”

“That’s what I thought. Also, Trick isn’t going to be confined in the basement all the time anymore. He wants to learn how to sew with Ava.”

Drake grinds his teeth but waves me off. When I’m on the roof again, Trick and Ava are dancing. Ava laughs as Trick spins her around.

“Join us, Pike.” Trick says. He and Ava release one pair of their hands to let me in.

Before, it’d always only been Van and Warwick accepting me. Now I have Trick and Ava. Kristy trusts me, as do the other dancers. While I love my home in the demon

realm, I find myself falling a little more in love with Hex and her people every day.

Chapter 16

Lark

I'm back in a pair of booty shorts and while I don't relish the idea of going back on stage, at least it gives me a purpose. Pike looks at me as if he could eat me and I give my ass a little unnecessary wiggle. Kristy wears a purple latex dress and purple pumps. Ava flitters around, making sure we all have glitter. So much glitter!

Sparkle preens in front of his vanity, letting his tail sway free. His collar makes me shiver. I'm glad Drake never put one on me. Only cuffs and anklets. I can't imagine a collar, but it's part of his costume and he flicks the little bell with a smile. "I'm glad you're back with us, Trick. It was getting lonely being the only twink out here."

I snort because I remember the first time he used that word and I had no idea what it meant.

"What happened to Eric, Sparkle? I thought you and him were a thing," Kristy says.

Sparkle pouts. "We were, but that meat head cheated on me with my cousin. So we broke up."

"Sorry," I say.

"It's fine." Sparkle shrugs. "Just means I'm back in the dating pool." The lights flash a few times. "Gotta meet my fans." He swishes his tail and marches up to the curtain.

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Kristy sighs. “He’s a handful. Where the hell are Jude and Fran?”

The back door opens. “Speak of the devils,” Ava says as she rushes over to help get them ready.

“Ah, Trick!” Fran squeals as she runs towards me.

Pike growls, and my stomach swoops at his protectiveness. Has he always been like this?

Fran ignores my demon, though, and picks me up in a bear hug. “I was getting worried.”

“I told you he was fine,” Jude calls out while he undresses from his street clothes. He’s muscular and only wears tiny underwear on stage, leaving nothing to the imagination.

“Missed you, too,” I say, though I’m confused. Everyone always kept their distance from me. Oh... but Drake isn’t exactly in charge anymore. Maybe I can make friends now. I give her a grin and take in the dressing room like I’ve never seen it before. Half a dozen people get ready, chatting, helping each other. It’s family.

Tris and Goldie saunter in together deep in some kind of conspiracy theory conversation. I immediately tune them out.

“Sorry we’re late, got turned around on our way here,” Tris says as she pulls back her blonde hair.

Goldie's already dressed and ready as soon as Sparkle slinks off stage.

Pike tugs my hand and pulls me into a corner where there's a tiny bit of privacy behind a vanity. "Are you okay with this? I should have asked first."

"More than okay. I feel like I have a purpose again. I may not be the best in the room or the most interesting." I give Kristy a quick look. "But I can offer something."

"You don't have to glow if you don't want to. Just do what you're comfortable doing, okay?"

"Thank you."

"And Ava said she'd love to teach you how to sew. I told Drake you weren't confined in the basement all the time, either. I want to take you out."

I cock a brow. "Out? As in?"

"Will you do me the honor of going on a date with me?"

My cheeks burn hot as I nod. "I'm no one special."

"You're special to me."

"Trick? You're on," Ava says.

Pike disappears and I'm left to process what he just said. You're special to me.

It's almost as good as his soft kisses.

"Trick?" Ava says again, and I give her a little wave of thanks as I rush through the

curtain to the stage.

I'm not special. Not in the least. Not in the human realm, and certainly not in the Fae lands. I'm just Lark. Plain simple Lark.

Instead of grabbing the pole like I usually would, I walk right up to the edge of the stage and plop on my bottom. My wings fan out behind me and I push my magic to make them glow faintly.

The audience is all mine.

Some days when I'm bored in the basement, I use my illusions to act out the stories in my head. Stories where a brave Fae soldier comes and saves me, but ultimately I get to save myself.

Tonight, though, I build a huge dragon with wings that span the entire room. My magic sings through me. Illusions are easy. They take less effort than glowing, but still require sunshine.

The witches drinking their steaming brews watch with twinkling eyes, no doubt wondering at the power it takes to create a dragon illusion and make it move. I sway my hands over the floor, making the dragon fly through the room. One of the witch familiars hisses before the dragon flies right through it. I set the dragon to fly without my influence and push to my feet. I can feel the stares on my ass as I walk to the pole and start the next part of my performance. My wings shine brighter and brighter with each practiced movement.

I show every person here what's possible when I get what I need. My music slows and I wind down the pole before it ends. The crowd throws money as my dragon illusion fades out. I may not be a courtesan, but I can still enthrall a crowd like I've been trained.

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I gather the money from the stage before running back to the dressing room, where I'm greeted with a standing ovation.

"Didn't know you had that in you," Kristy said. "Maybe you do deserve to be the headliner."

I groan. "No, thank you. I'm tired of carrying the entire club on my back." I grin and hope she takes it as the joke, I mean it as.

"Brat." She pulls me in for a hug. "Hit the shower."

"Gladly." I take the water bottle Ava offers and make my way to the bathroom.

As soon as I have the door shut and locked, I meet Pike's hungry gaze in the mirror.

"Did you like what you saw?" I ask. My heart flutters as I wait for his answer. My wings lift and drop with my breaths.

"Trick. You're magnificent." He spins me to face him, then lifts me to the counter. His tail comes up to wrap around my waist as if he claims me and no one else can have me.

"I'll be mad if you don't kiss me soon." I grab one of his horns and pull him down. The moan as my hand slides down the shaft sends a shiver through me. "Sorry, forgot they were sensitive." I start to remove my hand, but he presses his to me.

"Don't let go."

I squeeze, pulling another moan. “Kiss me, then. Please.”

“Patience, little Fae.”

My cock takes notice of the nickname. One I’ve loved since the beginning. He rocks against me, making me harder.

I lift my face and tug at his horn. “Kiss me.”

He cups my cheeks so gently and I melt into him. My free hand clutches his shirt. My eyes shutter closed the moment his mouth meets mine. He steals my breath with a bruising kiss. I wrap my legs around his hips, trying to get closer. His cock rubs against me, making me shudder and moan.

“More,” I whisper.

His hands roll down my body to lay on my thighs. “How far have you gone?”

“You were my first kiss.”

Pike’s breath hitches. “How?”

I shake my head. “I had plans, but Drake spoiled them all before any of them could be executed. That night I was snatched I’d planned to get my first kiss with the Winter prince.”

“The boy you ran off with was a prince?”

“The third one, yes.” Toren was—is—only a few months older than me. We were a perfect match and had I been allowed to live my life as mapped out, I more than likely would have been his courtesan. We’d talked about it. He was a jealous boy and

I probably would have been miserable.

“I think Drake saved me, in a way.” I drop my hand from Pike’s horn. “Not that I’m happy about his treatment. But the more I get to know you, the more I realize I would have been miserable in court. I need... freedom. True freedom.”

“How does knowing me help you realize that?”

I tap my bottom lip as I think. “You let me decide things. I don’t have to deal with procedures and etiquette. I don’t have to entertain you.”

“Funny, since your performance got me all hot and bothered.”

I laugh as I pull him by his collar. “True, but you let me just exist. No hoops to jump just to get sunlight or food. I can be a brat and you don’t punish me for being me.” I run my finger over his collarbone. “At court I’d have to dress a certain way, act a certain way, and sleep with whoever the king wanted me to. I’d have a contract and rewards for everything, but would it be living?”

Pike kisses the top of my head, but it’s not enough, and I lean in for another kiss to my lips.

“I still want to go home,” I whisper. “I miss my mother and Wren. I miss the meadows. The magic. The music. The dancing. Being Fae.”

“I’ll get you home.” Pike brushes a tear from my cheek.

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“I’ve messed up the moment.” My shoulders drop, but Pike tips my chin up to look at him.

“You’re allowed to feel everything you’re feeling, Trick.”

“Lark,” I whisper. “My true name.”

He brushes the hair from my face. “Lark.” He smiles so wide his fangs show. “Suits you.”

My face heats again as I try to bury myself in his chest. “That wasn’t very special, was it? It’s all I can give you. All I?—”

“Lark,” Pike whispers my name and it’s everything. “I don’t need anything.”

“We had an agreement. It’s not fair to you?—”

He presses a kiss to my lips over and over. “I don’t need anything, Lark.” He kisses me again. “Just keep being you and I’ll do everything I can to free you.”

“I’m nobody, Pike. Just a Fae that got caught up in some witch’s scheme.”

“Give yourself more credit than that.” He kisses down my jaw, down my throat.

I’m lost in his little nips along my naked flesh. My cock strains in the tiny shorts. I can’t ask him to touch me, to do more. He’s already done everything.

“Let me take care of you, Lark.”

I nod and reach for him the moment he kneads my thighs. My heart pounds. No one has ever touched me. I’ve never touched anyone else and hope I’m not a bumbling fool that Pike regrets helping.

“Relax, little Fae,” Pike says as he drops to his knees. He hooks the waistband of my shorts. “Lift.” I’m in a daze as I follow his directions. “Good boy.”

Pre-cum leaks from my cock. Pike kisses one knee, then the other as his hands slide up and down my thighs. “So pretty. So needy.”

A whine escapes me as I lean into the mirror. “Don’t tease me too much. You have an untouched virgin on your hands. I’m not going to last.”

He grins up at me while his tail slides me closer to the edge of the counter. “I love your scent.” He presses his face to me, minding his horns, and breathes in.

Pike’s tongue darts out to lick my tip and I grip his horns. “Fuck.”

“Darling, that’s just a taste.” He swirls his tongue around the crown of my cock and I hold on tighter. He takes his time, slurping, tasting, acting like it’s the best treat he’s ever had. The sensation is almost overwhelming and I have to take a few deep breaths to keep from blowing too soon. My hips move of their own accord, his head bobs as he takes more of me in his mouth. I’m not impressive, not like Pike. Whose dick is as big as my forearm and I don’t want to think about how he’ll spread me open one day.

“Sweetheart, I don’t know what you’re thinking about, but?—”

“You have a giant dick,” I blurt out, then slam my hands over my mouth and look to the door.

Pike laughs and goes back to slurping. “I do if you’re comparing dicks in the human realm.”

“Obviously, I am. And the Fae realm. I’ve seen a few in my lifetime, just never touched any.” Still haven’t touched one.

“Maybe we should remedy that.” Pike pushes back to his feet. His erection strains through his pants.

“Can I?” At least playing with him takes the focus off my need and lets me give him something for once. He yanks his belt through the loops and I damn near come from the sound alone.

I slide from the countertop and work the button of his jeans open, then the zipper. He helps me push them down his thighs. “You wear those weird jockstrap thingys.” Not that the strips of elastic and cloth do anything to contain him. It’s like a sling for his dick he’s so hard.

“I like them. You’d look good in one.” The end of his cock glistens. My heart pounds as I reach for him. “You are so red, Lark.” Pike grabs my face and kisses me over and over, taking me out of my haze. One of his hands takes mine and guides me to him. “Tell me to stop if you don’t want this.”

“I want this,” I whisper against him.

We both moan out at the contact. He’s huge and my hand barely goes around him.

“We need lube to make this better. Spit in your hand.”

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I do as he asks, and the slide is much smoother as I test my strokes. It's so awkward at this angle, but... I'm touching a dick that's not my own. I laugh as I drool over his tip. Both hands work his shaft until he's thrusting into my offering.

"I do love a good fumbling virgin." Pike kisses my neck. "It's so endearing." Another kiss and another.

His hand finds my cock, and I moan into him. My legs threaten to buckle at the pleasure of it all. I love the feel of his cock beneath my hands and the scent of his arousal. I love the taste of his lips.

Pike slides to the floor and pats his thighs. "Sit in my lap."

I eye him before doing as he asks. He takes our cocks together in his big hand and pumps a few times. I have to grip his shoulders to keep from collapsing. My hips thrust. "Don't stop," I breathe out. "Don't stop."

His tail slithers up my back, driving sensation along my wings.

"Not gonna last," I pant. I thrust faster, wanting, needing more. My wings snap open and my head goes back as my orgasm tears through me.

Pike's tail squeezes me as he shouts his release. Cum shoots to my chest.

We're both breathing heavy and I blink up at the lights in the ceiling. "That was incredible." It takes me time to gain composure. What do I do now? Heat seeps into my cheeks as I sit in Pike's lap in our mess. I should know what comes next.

Pike's head goes back as he leans against the wall. "Fuck, darling. I already wanna go again." He drags his finger through our mixed cum and sucks it off. "So good. You're like honeyed cream." He scoops more off his chest and offers it to me. "Wanna taste?"

Of course, my curiosity gets the better of me. I've tasted my own release before, but together the flavor lights up my taste buds.

Someone pounds on the door. "How long are you going to be in there? I gotta pee!" Goldie yells.

I can't help the laugh. "We should let the others in. I'll shower later."

"You stink so good." Pike snuffles along my neck as he pulls me to my feet. We dress quickly. Only a little bit of heat fills my cheeks as we leave. I don't think I like others knowing we got up to something in the bathroom with everyone right in the dressing room.

"I'll see you tonight, Lark," Pike whispers as he drops a kiss to my cheek and poofs out.

Ava's smile takes up her face.

"What?"

"You're happy. Really happy."

Damned cheeks burn now. "I am."

She wraps me in a hug, but her nose scrunches. "You really need a shower."

“That was the plan, but Pike got to me first.”

“Well, get washed up, and get excited because tomorrow is your first sewing lesson. I’ll have you making your own costumes in no time.” She grins up at me.

“You’re the best, you know that, Ava?”

“I know, Tricksy.” She boops me on the nose.

Music still thumps on stage, but it’s just the two of us right now while Kristy wraps up the night. Pike hired in a team of brownies to clean up after Kristy’s lust experience so Ava doesn’t have to deal with the mess of cum and other questionable fluids.

“We’re almost free,” I whisper. “Almost.”

She gives me a sad smile, like she doesn’t believe me.

“Just a little longer, Ava.” I squeeze her hand before I take over the bathroom again, this time for my originally intended purpose.

Chapter 17

Pike

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“You need better snacks,” Wren says as he walks out of my kitchen with a bag of baby carrots. “Oh, wow.” He waves a hand in front of his face. “That scent is strong. I did not need to know you just fucked my brother.”

“Bathroom quickie. And it was wonderful.”

Wren shoves his fingers in his ears. “La la la la la. Don’t wanna know.”

“Then don’t make commentary on it? Did you have more information or just wanted to criticize my snack options?”

“I brought a letter for my brother from mother.”

“Lark told me his true name.”

Wren drops his bag of carrots and Frankie snatches them up, bag and all. “Didn’t see that coming.”

Neither did I, to be honest. Not that I ever would have asked him for his true name if he wasn’t ready to tell me.

“Do you love my brother?” Wren wipes his hands down his shirt without looking at me. Frankie chomps loudly on the carrots, happy as can be.

“I think I fell in love the moment I laid eyes on him, but those feelings solidified the more I get to know him.” I sound like such a cliché. Some fairytale prince. “He’s extraordinary and has no idea.”

Wren's chuckle is light. "He never has. He always tries to make everyone else happy. Every morning he'd run wild in one of the meadows and gather flowers for mother's breakfast table. Even when he wasn't allowed to join her. He just wanted to bring a smile to her face. I don't think he ever really embraced following in her footsteps. He's always been too free-spirited to be stomped down by all the rules of court. But he insisted on going through the training. I don't know if I should be glad or not that he never glowed while he was here."

"I think he's embarrassed by his lack of experience, but it doesn't matter to me. I can't bear the thought of bringing him home to lose him to pleasure training for others."

Wren shakes his head. "His heart obviously belongs to you. He'd never be accepted now. Courtesans need to be unattached of the heart."

"Are you still a courtesan?"

Wren shrugs. "Yes, but I asked for a few leaves of absences to learn how to work with the veils and realm hop. Everyone loved Lark. His smile lights up the room. And his laugh always puts even the grumpiest person in a good mood. The king included."

"And the third prince?"

His grin drops. "The prince is a problem when Lark goes home. He still wants my brother. He's part of the reason I have such privileges, even though I'm an official courtesan."

"He can't have Lark."

"No, I don't want him to have Lark either. He's a cruel asshole that his own father, the king, has reprimanded over and over about how he's treated the other courtesans."

“But not you?”

“We’ve never coupled together.” Wren looks at his nails. “He likes men that, well, look like Lark.” He drops a hand over himself. “I’m bigger than him.”

“It’s not like you’re a bodybuilder, but you are definitely twunk material.”

He blinks back at me. “Is that a made up word?”

“Just means you have a pretty face and a muscle body.” A smile twitches at my lips.

“Humans are so weird with their words.”

“Don’t get me started. I just don’t get it.” I plop on my couch and Frankie joins me. I wave for Wren to join. “I was going to go shower.”

“Ah, right! The letter.” He digs in his side pocket and pulls out a small pink envelope. “Mother says it’s for Lark’s eyes only. So no peeking. We can trust you, right?”

The question hurts, but I nod. “Only Lark. I’ll get it to him tonight.”

“I bid you good day, kind demon.” He bows, then disappears.

“Oh, Frankie. What have I gotten myself into?” I rub her head and her tail wags. “You’re my best girl, you know that, right?”

She growls.

“Sorry, my only girl.” Her tail wags harder and I can’t help laughing.

My life is so full and it’s all thanks to a naked summoning.

Chapter 18

Lark

“My brother gave this to you for me?” I press the pink envelope to my nose and breathe. Jasmine and roses. “Mother.”

“He said it was for your eyes only. I promised not to peek.” Pike settles in my nest and I sit in his lap with Frankie pressed against his side.

“Surely you can look?”

“I won’t. I take pride in keeping my promises, and this seemed important to Wren. I like him, by the way. But I wish he’d stop eating my snacks,” he adds the last part with a mumble.

“That’s Wren. Always shoving something in his mouth.” I gently remove mother’s wax seal. It’s the same as always, an imprint of her wings.

Pike kisses the side of my head, and I push to my feet to read the note.

Mother's sprawling handwriting fills the page with swirls and elegance. I haven't seen the Fae language written by anyone other than myself in a decade, and my eyes fill with tears.

My Dearest Boy,

My heart is full of joy at knowing you're alive and well. I know one day soon you'll be home and in our arms again. We never gave up hope that you'd be home again. Your dearest brother tells me a crossroads demon is helping you. The demon can not tell you what will set him free, but I can. Destroy his crossroads. Destroy it and he'll be bound no longer. Once you're free of your soul tether, your magic is yours again. Use it wisely and the task will be easy.

Love,

Mother

I blink and the tears fall. Luckily I save my letter from ruin. She gave me what I needed to free Pike. I press the letter to my chest. I'm not worthless. I can give Pike something that will help him.

"Are you okay?" Pike asks at my sniffles.

"I'm perfect." I lift the letter. "Thank you." I shove the note under my nest for safekeeping, then crawl back into his lap. His strong arms wrap around me, his tail coils around my calf. "It does make me homesick even more, though. We're so close." And my heart aches because I know once I'm home I won't feel complete unless I can see Pike every day.

"So close." He kisses the top of my head. "But right now, rest. Rest and dream of gathering flowers and dancing and being free."

“He told you about that?”

“That you gathered flowers for your mom’s breakfast table every morning? Yes. And I think it’s adorable. I would have loved to see you running around being all cute in your Fae clothes in one of the meadows.”

“Did he tell you about the hats?”

“The hats?” Pike’s brow cocks. “No, he didn’t tell me about the hats.”

“Oh, well, then he didn’t tell you the whole story. I had a collection of hats that I wore only when I gathered flowers because I didn’t want to burn. They were big and floppy and I tied a ribbon under my chin to keep them in place. They also had lots of flowers and ribbons on them. Very flashy.” I wonder if mother kept them all or sent them away to storage. “I also had a collection of baskets, so I wouldn’t crush the flowers in my enthusiasm.”

“Why did the flowers appeal to you so much?”

“It was the meadows. They’re covered in Fae wildflowers and the scent is pure ecstasy. Some of the flowers are musical, so there’s always a faint chime. I could run round for hours and never get bored. Anytime a class got out, I’d fly to the closest meadow and?—”

“Frolic.”

“Exactly. I liked to run around, but mother didn’t like that I got pollen everywhere. She wanted me to sit in the gardens and enjoy myself that way. But they didn’t have the musical wildflowers, and the scents weren’t as strong and deer never came out to play. The gardens were boring.”

“And my poor darling has been stuck here for a decade.” Pike pulls me closer. “I’m taking you out on the town tomorrow. Drake is going to have to deal with it. I won’t take no for an answer.”

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I shake my head. “Drake is powerful. If he wants to?—”

“Sweetheart, Drake has been using your power through the soul tether. He’s powerful because of you.”

My blood runs cold. That’s why I’m always exhausted. Always out of sorts. Not truly myself. My hands fist and it takes everything in me not to scream. Drake has been using me so intimately. My life force and magic, through the tether. He makes me perform for a crowd. I have no say in how I live my life. All because some human wanted power.

Pike continues to pet my head, soothing me. “I’m sorry Lark. You don’t deserve any of this.”

“I’ll survive,” I mumble. Fae are resilient and I’ll get through this.

“Let me take your mind off of everything. If for a few minutes.” Pike kisses my neck and I sigh into him. His hands drag down my body, making every nerve ending sing.

“Yes, please.” I wiggle into him, begging with my body.

“Just relax and let me do all the work.” Pike sinks his hand into my underwear and slides it over my throbbing cock. How does it feel so much better when it’s someone else touching me? “You’re so hard for me, darling.” I thrust into his circled fingers, but he stills my hips. “Let me help you, Lark.” He kisses my shoulder and I melt into him, wanting to be a part of him. Every touch sizzles against my heated skin. Every kiss fuels my desire. I moan into his mouth when he turns me toward him.

Thankfully, Frankie leaves to wander the basement.

I thrust against Pike and his hardness trapped inside his pajama bottoms. Pre-cum leaks from my tip and I know I'm not going to last long. Pike presses me to my back. "I want to taste you again." Plus, if he swallows, that means there's less clean up. At least that's my theory. One hand finds my balls as he takes me in his mouth. He hollows out his cheeks as he sucks and I'm done for. I clamp a hand over my mouth, trying to keep my shout contained. My back arches as I suck in deep breaths. Pike drinks down my release and keeps going until I'm almost too sensitive. But he pulls away before I can beg him to stop.

I rub my hand against his still hard cock, but he stops me from doing anything more.

"Rest and dream of musical meadows." Pike kisses the top of my head. He's so warm and safe. My mind whirls, but my body relaxes and I find myself asleep before I know it.

Chapter 19

Pike

I wake to a shivering Lark, which should be impossible. Frankie and I generate a lot of heat. If anything, Lark should be sweating.

"Darling, are you okay?" I smooth pink hair from his face only to notice the color is too pale. "Sweetheart?" He wheezes when he breathes and my heart races. Something is wrong. I pull him up with me when I sit against the wall, but he's floppy.

Frankie whines and noses at Lark's shoulder.

"Darling, can you wake up for me?" I rub his sternum with no response.

Frankie whines louder and I can't think. Drake wouldn't kill Lark because he needs him. Unless?—

The door to the basement slams open, and Drake marches downstairs. "I knew you were getting in. Trick seemed too happy lately."

"What have you done to him?" I push to my feet, bringing Lark with me in a bridal carry. Frankie growls, showing Drake her teeth. Her flames growing brighter by the second.

"Nothing that'll hurt him too long. Just needed a little boost. The coven's been complaining my brews aren't as strong as they used to be. Can't have them knowing?—"

"That your power is really Trick's and you're weak?"

Drake's eyes glow golden. "Exactly." He snaps, and it takes me a blink to realize Lark's gone.

Frankie howls when she notices Lark's not in my arms anymore.

Drake lifts a hand. "I let you three play long enough, but he's mine. You can't have him."

"Dissolve the soul tether and I'll make whatever deal you want."

"No, thank you. I'd rather not make a deal with a devil." Drake spits, and I keep my mouth shut about being a demon, not a devil. "I don't owe you anything. The little Fae agreed to be my servant for eternity, and I'll use him how I want."

"He didn't understand your language."

“Magic doesn’t care, he agreed. He’s mine. And I thank you for making me realize that letting him have sun makes him more powerful. Maybe I’ll give him a rooftop cage. Who knows?”

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My stomach churns. “He needs freedom.”

“He needs to know his place. Like you.” Drake turns to go back up the stairs. “You’re no longer welcome here.”

I have to grab Frankie’s harness when she lunges for him. I’m sure she doesn’t understand why I don’t immediately go after Drake, but we have to bide our time. If Drake doesn’t know his tether is weak, we can use that to our advantage.

I follow Drake’s lead up the stairs, if only to keep him afraid of Frankie. Her warning growls keep rumbling from her and I pet her side.

“Get the dog out of here and never step foot in Flutter again.”

“It’s not that easy. You insisted on lawyers. I’m a partial owner, so you have to buy me out.” I pat his shoulder. “Should I call up my attorney?”

Drake’s face turns red, and he purses his lips. “Perhaps.”

“Things could get messy. Are you sure you want to do that?”

“I’m sure I want you out of my place,” Drake grumbles.

“I’ll let you cool down. Expect me back in a few days.” And with that, Frankie and I stand in my living room. “We have to come up with a plan.” I start to pace. “Lark is probably at Drake’s house, and Drake probably expects me to just show up.” That’s what I want too, but I have to be strategic about this.

I wave my hand in front of me and cover my face for the pop of light when I open the communication portal to talk to Van. He and Warwick sit in Van's kitchen and both look up to the portal.

"Drake took Trick." I use his fake name because he trusts me not to share his true name.

"What do you mean, Drake took my brother?"

I whip around to find Wren with a tomato halfway to his mouth.

"One minute he's in my arms, the next Drake finds us together and poof, he's not there anymore."

"Who is this delightful morsel?" Van purrs as he pops into my living room with Wick. "He looks a lot like your Trick."

I grab Van's arm as he steps closer to Wren. "Don't get all flirty. We need a plan." I introduce everyone quickly and explain the gravity of the situation.

"This Drake is using my brother to power up his magic." Wren paces the floor, alternating between squeezing the tomato and passing it between his hands.

"Yes." I take the tomato and put it on the end table beside the couch. "And I have no idea what he has planned or why he took Trick in the first place all those years ago."

"I hate that name for him," Wren says. "Trick. That's not my brother."

I squeeze Wren's shoulder. "We'll get him back."

He nods and snatches up the tomato again. He opens his mouth wide and chomps on

the juicy red skin.

“What can we do to help?” Wick asks. If I’m a romantic, he’s a super romantic holding out for Ethan to show up again. They fell in love as young teens when Ethan summoned Wick for the first time at twelve. Poor Wick started at fifteen as a punishment for Van.

“Brainstorm with me. Drake is more clever than I give him credit for. I thought he was clueless to my sleeping over every night, but seems we weren’t good at hiding it.”

Van shrugs as he plops down onto my couch. “That’s because your little Fae always has a smile on his face now compared to that first night I saw him at Flutter.”

“Yeah,” Wick says. “He’s glowing from the inside out instead of forcing his wings to shine.”

Wren stops eating. “They’re forcing him to glow?”

We all nod.

“That’s...” Wren paces again. “That’s barbaric. And disgusting. Our light is... ours. It’s not a parlor trick. It’s sacred.” He clutches a fist to his chest. “Poor Lar—Trick. I can’t imagine living through that.”

“It’s worse,” Wick says as he picks at the hem of his shirt.

Wren meets his eyes. “Tell me.”

I wipe a hand down my face as Frankie noses me towards the couch. “I wasn’t going to say anything because I never witnessed it. But in the past, Drake has beaten him if he doesn’t glow.”

“No.” Wren fists his hands. “We have to do something. Now.” His wings flutter harshly behind him.

“We need a plan. We can’t just show up and snatch him. That’s what Drake expects, so I’m sure he’s powered up whatever wards he has. Plus, we have Ava to factor in. She’s a prisoner, just like Trick. We need to make sure whatever we do for Trick doesn’t give Ava a punishment. That’s what happened the last time he got free. Drake ripped out her fangs.”

My friends’s eyes go wide. Van and Wick slap their hands to their mouths as if to make sure they still have fangs. Wren grits his teeth.

“So you see how this is a delicate operation? We have two people to save.”

Wren nods. “Of course we need to help her, too. But my brother is a priority.”

Frankie whines and paces.

“I know, girl. I know.” I hold out my hand to pet her. “So, do I have anyone here that’s not interested in taking down a witch that’s gotten too big for his britches?”

“I’m in,” Van says.

“Me, too,” Wick answers.

“Whatever it takes to free my brother, I’m doing it.” Wren cracks his knuckles.

“Alrighty, let’s get to it!” I say.

Chapter 20

Lark

Something hard drops on my forehead and I wake with a start. Rain pours through the bars of my gilded cage. This time I’m on the roof of Drake’s house instead of in his dining room or the basement in Flutter. I groan as I rub my forehead, only to find the luck coin in my possession again.

I have a plan.

“I don’t know that I should trust you.”

Fair point. But...

I groan again. Why the hell does my head pound? I push to sit, keeping my limbs as close to my body as possible. If I touch a bar, I’ll get shocked which I’m not a fan of.

I can see across Hex from the roof. Flutter is the furthest away, along with a grocery store. There are a few fast food options. Drake fed me from one of them a couple of times, and I always got sick.

Rain runs down my hair and I’m soaked through. My body won’t stop shivering and I

clutch my legs to my chest. As long as it doesn't start?—

A clap of thunder rings out just as a bolt of lightning flashes across the sky. My heart sinks. There are few things that can actually kill Fae. Beheading is by far the most known. Next to destroying our hearts, which getting hit by lightning could do.

The wind howls through the trees and causes my cage to swing.

“Okay, I'm ready for your plan,” I mumble to the coin.

Bend cage with shirt. Escape.

I glare at the coin. “Something that won't shock me, please.”

He forgot to set the shocking spell. Test it.

I swallow and push back the bit of fear that's trying to scream in the back of my head. I shut my eyes and press my hand to the bars. Nothing.

Told ya. Now get naked!

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“I don’t need to get naked.” I stripe off the silk shirt. It’s soaked through which should help. I wrap it around two bars and use all my strength to twist. “I’m not strong enough.”

The wind whips wilder, bringing a thick stick the length of my forearm clattering against the outside of my cage. I snatch the wood and wind it into my shirt. This gives me the leverage I need to get the bars to move. “Keep going. Almost there.” I grit my teeth and work the wood and silk until the cage moans and bends. “Maybe you aren’t so mean to me,” I say to the coin. “But I am curious how I’m going to get down without breaking anything.” Not to mention what if Drake’s home and knows I’m on the move? Just the thought of his punishment sends a shiver down my spine.

Ladder down the side of the house.

—>

I look at where the coin points and, sure enough, the top of a ladder peeks over the roof. I squint through the rain. “If you could do something about the rain, that’d be great.” Water pours like a tsunami over me. “Not like that!”

When I have the hole wide enough, I drop my stick and grab my shirt to wrap around my waist. I don’t want to lose a gift from Pike, though I think he’ll understand. I push one leg out of the opening, then the other, and shimmy myself until I’m free. Fear runs through me as I grip the cage while I gain my freedom. What if Drake does something to Ava she can’t recover from? Her fangs were bad enough, but what if he escalates his punishment?

You have to move.

The coin is right. All I can do is take care of Ava if Drake hurts her.

I turn to face the right direction to the ladder, but I can hardly see. “Seriously, if the rain was lighter, I can get to the other side better.”

It’s your cover. Now scramble.

I drop to my hands and knees to make it across the roof easier. Plus, less chance of lightning hitting me, hopefully. Thunder rumbles louder and I scurry as fast as I can while keeping my balance. I have to get out. Get away. Save myself. No one else can do it for me. My hand with the coin heats. It’s as if the coin is telling me it’s helping. That I’m not alone.

Of course I’m not alone. I have Ava, Pike, Frankie Wren, Van, Wick, all the dancers and servers. We can overthrow Drake and make him pay. We just have to get the coven to realize what he’s done. What he’s stolen from me.

When I get to the ladder, I slide over the roof and onto the metal rungs. They’re slippery with rain and moss. It takes all my strength not to fall with each step. On the final rung, I hop to the ground and my knees buckle. I kiss the wet earth beneath me.

Part one done.

Good job.

Get ready for part two.

I curse under my breath because, of course, the coin is right again. That was probably the easy part.

Three. Two. RUN!

I push to my feet at the sound of snarling behind me. I have no idea what chases me, but I hope it's a sound illusion. My feet pound the wet earth, splashing water and cut grass around me. My wing binder makes it hard to breathe as I run. If only I could fly!

I run toward the street instead of the woods. If I can get to Pike's crossroads, I can summon him. But I'm all turned around.

My next step, something snaps and hits me in the face. Another snap. The binder warms against me, and the remaining laces fall away. I shuck the evil contraption from my body and my wings flutter out. I run a few more steps preparing for flight.

But as I try to lift, I trip and fall to my knees. "Fuck. The rain." Makes me too heavy. It's just fine. I push back to my feet and continue my run. My heart pounds. I just need someone, anyone, to believe me. To listen.

I blink, and red flames appear in front of me. Then a pair of blue flames. And Wren. I push myself harder until Pike's muscular form comes into view.

"Darling," Pike drawls out as I leap into his open arms. He swings me around, laughing. "We were just coming to rescue you, but I sensed you moving."

"Is he here?" Wren asks, watching Pike and me.

"I'm here," I say.

"He's here," Pike answers, softly petting my hair. "Wren's blocked out. He can't sense you."

I rush to my brother's side, but when I try to touch him to prove I'm here, it's like we're two magnets pushing each other away. He looks the same as I remember. Tall, muscular. Long white hair. Same plush lips as me. We've always been told we look alike and I can see it.

"I wish I could sense you," Wren says as he reaches out.

"Soon," I say and Pike relays it to Wren.

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“But first,” Pike starts. “We need—Shit.” He grabs for me just as the magic pull starts.

I dig my feet into the gravel street. “He can’t have me.” I squeeze my eyes shut. I know the magic is still too strong to resist, but I’ll fight it as long as I can.

“Let him go,” Wren says. “We’ll find him again.”

“No. Please. I can fight it!”

“Let him go!” Van yells.

“You’re hurting him!” Wick says.

“I’ll find you again,” I say through sobs.

Pike looks broken the moment he lets me go. Drake’s magic sucks me back, back, back. This time, his front door opens and I’m slung right into the dreaded cage in the living room. With the grandfather clock that never stops.

Chapter 21

Pike

“We had him. He was right here.” I howl into the rainy night.

“He fought the magic,” Van points out. “That has to mean it’s not as strong as it was

before.”

“It’s not.” I fist my hands. “What the fuck can I do?”

Wick stops short from his own pacing. “Call a tribunal against Drake. Ethan told me about one he went to as a kid. His uncle ran the coven at the time and pissed them off.”

“We’re not part of the coven.”

Wick shrugs. “I don’t know how it works, but I think if there’s someone with beef against the coven and they have proof it goes against the coven rules they can call the tribunal.”

Rain sizzles around me, burning off my overheated skin. “Coven of Hex, I summon thee!” I bellow the words and they echo off every building. There’s no doubt every resident heard the call. “I demand a tribunal for Drake Speller. On account of him siphoning magic from his captive Fae.”

A huge fiery blue ring circles us, blocking out the rain as witches appear all around us. The circle grows until it’s large enough to contain spectator stands where witches find a seat and gossip with their friends. A long table forms in front of the stands and a half a dozen judge’s seats settle into a half circle in the very front.

The four of us stand waiting for the coven and their judges. Drake still hasn’t arrived by the time the final judge bangs their gavel.

“Who are you and why do you call a tribunal?” They stare down at me with hard dark eyes and it takes everything in me not to growl.

“I’m Pike, a crossroads demon.”

“Yes, but why do you call a tribunal? You are demon not witch.”

And I remember. “True, but I am partial owner of Flutter, and I have a major grievance against Drake Speller.” I smile to myself, because this has to be my in.

“We can proceed,” the judge calls. They snap and Drake stumbles in.

“What is the meaning of this?” Drake screams. “I am the leader of this coven. No one has the right to call me in for judgement.”

“Demon. State your grievance.”

I’d already stated it during the summoning, but I start again. “As you know, I’m part owner of Flutter. Over the last few weeks, Drake and I have gotten close as business partners, and the business has expanded. I knew Drake had a soul tether on his pet Fae.”

The audience gasps.

“Impossible,” the judge says. “Drake would never.”

My tail wiggles as if it’s a shaking fist and I have to take a hold of it. “You can’t see the tether because of all the other clever spells Drake has it hidden beneath. But it’s there.”

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“Bring the Fae here. Let us see for ourselves.” The judge points to Drake.

Drake grinds his teeth. His shoulders drop, but he nods and does as the judge asks.

I suck in a breath when a cage containing Lark enters the circle with us. He’s soaked to the bone still and gasping for breath. “A little warning next time.”

I have to hide my smile. My Lark hasn’t lost his spark.

Murmurs rise all around.

“As you can see,” I start. “There are several layers of spells. The Fae’s brother can’t even see him, can you?”

“He’s here again?” Wren asks, looking around. I take his hand and squeeze.

“He is.” I glare at Drake. “I thought Drake just attached his lifespan to the Fae’s, but that’s not the entirety of it.”

“Shut up,” Drake growls. “Or you’ll regret it.”

“Pssh.” I wave him off and continue to address the judges. “Drake also siphons life force from the Fae, stealing his magic. Drake is not this powerful. He can’t work his magic to make all those brews you love so much without the Fae.”

More mumbles and murmurs.

“And they’ve been getting weaker, haven’t they?”

“They have!” someone yells from the stands. “They don’t buzz any more. There’s hardly any magic at all in them. Not worth the money, if you ask me.”

Drake’s lips twitch. “New recipe.”

“Bullshit.” I slam my hand on the nearest table. “The Fae has found a way to counteract the siphon making you weaker.”

“Impossible.” Drake crosses his arms over his chest. “Trick isn’t smart enough to figure it out.”

“Let’s not insult the intelligence of the boy, Drake,” the judge says.

I pace as I think. “Your honor, familiars are allowed by the coven, however, slaves are not, correct?”

“You are correct. Our familiars help us, but we do not use their magic for our own gain without their explicit permission. We use our born talents. If the witch isn’t as strong as they wish to be, they are to educate themselves. We take pride in the fact that only we use our born talents.” They write a few notes. “That is, of course, not counting the help of our demon brethren in the creation of the veil to hide Hex from prying human eyes. Sometimes one does need help, but that’s not to say we should create a permanent tap of magic from another being. That is despicable.”

The crowd agrees, making the noise level rise until the judge raises their hand. “Hush. Hush. We will bring justice down on Drake’s head.”

“The Fae agreed to be my servant!”

I snort.

Lark yelps when he grabs the bars of his cage. “I didn’t know the language! You can’t say I agreed if I didn’t know what you were saying!”

Again, the judge raises their hand for silence. “Fae, tell me exactly what happened.”

Lark settles on his bottom and pulls his knees to his chest. “Everything?”

“From the beginning of your enslavement, yes.”

Lark nods. “Very well. On the day I was captured, my brother just got initiated as a courtesan in the Winter court. I ran off with a boy once the celebration party started. We wanted to...” He nibbles his bottom lip and goes pink all the way down to his chest. “We’ll I wanted my first kiss and maybe more. I was fifteen.” He starts to rock as he continues. “We flew to my favorite meadow. As we touched down, we got tangled in each other and laughed as we rolled down a hill.

“I tried to get to my feet, but tripped. When I finally got up, I was in an unknown cornfield. Drake stood there, smiling. He said something in a language I didn’t know at the time and it sounded so nice I nodded. I thought he was asking if I needed help. But he wasn’t. He had shackles I hadn’t noticed and snapped them on me. As soon as he did, he pricked my finger and squeezed a drop of blood into a goblet. He stirred the liquid with something, drank half, then forced me to drink the other. The rest... well, I’ve lived in the basement of Flutter the last five years while performing on stage while being forced to glow. The five years before that, I lived in the dining room of his house with the insistent ticking of the grandfather clock. Tick. Tock. Tick. Tock. Tick?—”

“Okay,” the judge says the word gently, but Lark jerks like he’s been slapped. “What do you say to all this, Drake?”

“Lies. What?—”

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“No!” Lark screeches. “I’m Fae, I can not lie!”

My heart breaks for Lark. I wish I could open the door and set him free, but Drake could snap at any moment.

The judge sighs. “We have a complicated situation, and I’m sorry, dear Fae, but we can not order Drake to sever the soul tether.”

Lark goes back to rocking. “I don’t understand.”

“You’re integrated into each other’s souls, whether you like it or not. At least until the new tether is complete, or the anchor is destroyed.”

“I really have a new tether?” Lark’s head lifts.

“Both are clear as day now that I’ve untangled the spells wrapped around you.”

The layers of spells shimmer and fade. All but the soul tethers. Wren gasps beside me and rushes to the cage. “Brother,” he whispers as he sticks a hand through the bars. Lark presses his cheek into Wren’s palm. It’s a sweet portrait of brotherly affection.

The judge turns to Drake. “While we can not force you to sever the soul tether, we remove you as the owner of Flutter. All assets are now Pike’s as your business partner. He can chose to keep the business or sell to another in the coven.”

“You can’t do that!” Drake bellows. “I?—”

“You haven’t paid your latest debt to the coven in months. We’re also removing you from leadership and we will hold a vote at a later time for who takes your place. We strip you of any enhancements you may have purchased.”

“You’ll regret this!” Drake sucks in a deep breath and lifts his hands, rising dirt and grit from the ground.

Lark moans and drops to his side. His hair is so pale it rivals the white of his brother’s. Wren stumbles back.

“Release him,” I shout as I lunge for Drake. But he’s gone and so is Lark before I can get to him.

My knees threaten to buckle.

I’ve failed.

Chapter 22

Lark

Tick.

Tock.

Tick.

Tock.

Tick.

Tock.

The grandfather clock across from my gilded cage chants the irritating noise all day, every day. It's seven or so feet of gorgeous cherry wood and I want to burn it and the mansion to the ground.

I've been here for three days now. Drake taunts me. He's put up a perimeter spell using my magic that keeps out demons and other Fae. I hold out hope that the tether to him snaps soon.

Tick.

Tock.

Tick.

Tock.

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Tick.

Tock.

I glare at the clock, willing it to cease its annoying sounds. I knuckle roll the luck coin. it's my only companion for now.

Look closer.

I squint at the clockface. "Don't see anything."

Nothing looks familiar? What did Drake stir your binding concoction with?

I think back, trying to remember the strange design of the stick. "The hour hand. Or maybe the minute hand? It's been staring at me the whole time." I shiver in the cold. I'm without a shirt or the wing binder, and Drake keeps his house drafty. At least he keeps his dining room drafty. I've been without sunshine for three days, which means I'm weaker than usual too. "Any ideas on how to get free this time?"

I press a hand to the door and gasp when it swings open. "What the hell?" I whisper as I climb out.

It's good to have me around sometimes.

Drake's magic is so weak without you, he can't sustain most of his old spells.

"Good to know," I whisper as I tiptoe closer to the grandfather clock. I check for

surveillance as I go.

He's wallowing in his room.

"Okay, but how do I do this? I need to destroy the clock, correct?"

Yes. Burn it with fire.

"I don't have any matches or a lighter." Everything will be easier once the tether's gone and I have access to all of my magic again.

Before I can make it halfway through the room, Drake stomps through the door. "You little brat."

"You don't own me anymore." I stand taller. "I'm my own person again."

"Our tether still stands. You're too weak and pathetic. The demon just wants to fuck you and leave you."

"No! Pike is a good person. He's shown me so much kindness and he loves me."

Drake rolls his eyes. "He loves the idea of having a pretty little Fae at his side to take his orders. What makes you think he won't take you to the demon realm to turn you into a slave there? He's just buttering you up."

"That's not Pike! Pike loves me. I know it." I know it in the way he treats me. In the way he talks to me. In the way he wants to help. "What turned you into such a sour person, Drake? Who hurt you? I could see the man you were before in the beginning. You weren't cruel. What happened?"

"We're not talking about me." Drake growls.

“Why not? We used to talk. But then...” But then Drake turned into the nasty, evil man he is now.

“Get back into the cage and I’ll let you have sun tomorrow.”

I shake my head. “Tonight I gain my freedom. I know my soul aches for Pike, but I also don’t want the possibility of your tether ever controlling me again. So the anchor has to go.”

Drake’s head goes back when he laughs. “How do you think you’ll get that done?” He puts a hand on his hip and waits for my answer.

There’s a slight pull from my chest and something snaps. We both drop to our knees, gasping for air.

“No. No!” Drake’s back to his feet first and lunges at me, but I have the advantage.

I swipe his legs, taking him down again. Drake isn’t draining my magic any longer, so while I haven’t had the sun in days, I’m stronger than I’ve been since I stumbled into this realm. When he tries to fight me, I elbow him in the diaphragm, sending him down again. He coughs and chokes.

“You know something fun about Fae?” I lift a hand, and summon fire as if I never stopped using the elements. “We can tap into the elements when we’re not hindered.”

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I throw the fireball at the grandfather clock and watch as the flames consume it and the magic contained within.

Drake lifts his head as he's still gasping for breath. "You son of a?—"

"You have no hold over me any longer." I walk around his heaving form, giving him a wide berth. "Do better, Drake. You were kind once. You can be that way again."

He ignores me to gasp for breath.

Burn it all down.

"Tempted. But that's not my style." I hunt down every one of the perimeter spells and destroy them. As soon as the last one's gone, Pike manifests in front of me.

"Lark," he whispers my name as he cups my cheek.

"Lark!" Wren calls my name as he comes into view. We run to each other until he's swinging me in his arms. Tears spring to my eyes. It's taken so long to get here.

"Is Drake dead?" Pike asks.

"No," I say. "He's in there and he's miserable. I don't know what he'll do if the coven doesn't take more measures to keep him contained. But the anchor exists no more, and I felt his tether break."

Pike rubs his chest. "I felt ours solidify."

“We need to celebrate!” Wren says. Van and Wick materialize and agree.

“Pike owns Flutter now, and it’s even more amazing,” Van says. “We should celebrate your freedom there.”

I shake my head. “I want to summon the coven first. See if?—”

We all stumble back. Drake’s house lifts in the air, raining dirt and grass and gravel all around. Then it disappears, leaving a giant hole where the house once stood.

Van laughs. “It looks like the trash took itself out.”

I’m not so sure it’s that easy, but I want to hope it is. I cling to Pike and reach for Wren’s hand. I don’t want to let go of either of them. My heart is so needy right now.

“I redecorated Flutter.” Pike kisses the top of my head and in two seconds, we’re on Flutter’s stage. But it doesn’t have stripper poles any longer. There are cozy couches everywhere. Frankie chews on something in a soft-looking dog bed. The house lights are bright and there are so many neon colors.

“What is this?”

“More of a meeting place. We’ll have karaoke, and concerts, among other things. But I want this to be a meeting of the people. Someplace we can learn about each other and teach each other. The coven gives me their blessing and has it booked every full and new moon for ritual work on the roof.” Drake’s tail wraps around me. “Plus, I may have renamed it. Flutter and Fang. With your approval. Ava helped. I?—”

“Is she okay?” I pull away to search for her, but she comes out from Drake’s former office.

“Trick.” Ava smiles wide and I rush to her.

“Lark. My true name is Lark.” I say it loud enough that everyone can hear. I trust these people with my life and my heart. They’re all part of my family.

“Lark. Suits you much better than Trick.” She grins and smooths hair from my eyes.

“You’re okay, then?”

“Perfect. Once the coven gave Pike full ownership, I was his problem, and he set me free.”

“And I asked her to stay on as manager if she was comfortable with the idea.”

“I said absolutely yes. Now that you’re free, let’s party!” Ava claps and music starts. I can’t help the laugh as Pike grinds into me.

“I’m so glad you’re here, Lark.” Pike nuzzles at my neck. I’m afraid to jinx things, but I join in the celebration.

Chapter 23

Pike

Lark can dance for hours, and he's beautiful when he's allowed to be himself. I had glimpses of the real Lark, whatever he gave me before. But this is true Lark. Uninhibited Lark and I love him more and more each second.

Flutter and Fangs fills in with our friends from the coven and when it was Flutter. I haven't completely gotten rid of the party atmosphere and right now, the more the merrier.

Ava's on stage singing Hungry Like the Wolf by Duran Duran. She's embracing her curse as she calls it. Most of us here would call it a blessing, but I can see why she wouldn't. Several of us have vowed to truly help her during her change rather than chain her up in a concrete room for three days until she's human again.

Lark's dancing with his brother. The two have been practically inseparable, and I don't blame them. While I want to be with Lark right now, Wren deserves to be with Lark after all these years.

Frankie is content to watch. Her keen eyes take in everyone, but she keeps special watch on Lark.

I sent a message to the coven at Lark's insistence. We're still waiting for their reply about what the plan for Drake is, but we feel safe with everyone around.

It's been a hairy few weeks, and I'm ready for a long rest. Perhaps Lark will let me take him to the demon realm. But my heart sinks. He'll probably want to go home

now and he doesn't need me for transport anymore.

As if he knows my thoughts have soured, Lark turns my way and gives me the brightest smile. He waves me over and I wrap my arms around his waist.

"You beckon, darling." I kiss his jaw as I wait for him to tell me his thoughts.

"Wren and I have been chatting. I'm not ready to go home yet," his voice is so quiet. "I want to explore us some more. Then introduce you to mother. Wren says he'll see when we can schedule a time with her."

"If you're sure?"

Wren nods and stuffs a piece of cheese in his mouth. "Mother really is incredibly busy right now with all our celebrations in winter. I'll be busy as well." He wiggles his white brows, but I remember what he said about the third prince. "Maybe I'll land myself a patron."

Lark snorts. "As long as it's not?—"

"Oh gods, never him."

It's like they have their own brotherly language.

"Want anything to drink?" I ask them.

"Water?" Lark says. Wren shakes his head.

"Be back soon."

"Already miss you," Lark says with a grin.

I turn my back for maybe ten seconds when alarm bells ring out from our spells to keep Drake out, Frankie growls, and a scream echoes through the building.

Lark's scream.

When I face the crowd, Drake has his teeth, now pointed, sunk into Lark's throat.

It's like my feet move of their own accord. I'm not thinking when I rip Drake from Lark. My beloved crumples into my arms, eyes wide as his hands clasp to his bleeding throat.

"It won't kill him," Wren says as he pats my shoulder. "He'll heal quickly, but he does need sun."

I have no idea where Drake is. I just want to keep Lark safe and I can't. Again, he's hurt. A flash of blue flames comes and goes and I assume it's Van taking Drake somewhere. Perhaps killing him, but who knows? I don't care what happens to Drake as long as he can't touch Lark ever again.

"I'm taking him to my place," I tell Wren. Without waiting for his answer, I'm in my bathroom in the demon realm. The sun isn't out yet, but maybe the threads of magic will do Lark good. "I got you, sweetheart. I got you." Lark clings to me.

"He... I don't know where he came from."

"I don't either, but I hope whatever Van does is permanent."

Lark lets me tug off his clothes and get him in the shower. "Why me? I'm not special."

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“You’re special to me, darling.” I grab a washcloth from under the sink. “I think you’ve stopped bleeding, but I want to clean you up.”

He nods as he moves his hand and sure enough, there’s not even a scar. I strip down and join him in the shower. My tail keeps him upright as I fuss with the temperature. I don’t want to burn him.

Lark’s fingers dance along the length of my tail. Perhaps to keep himself occupied. He shivers in my hold. “I don’t understand. Why would Drake trade his life as a witch for being a vampire? If he was seeking power, he just gave it all away.”

“I don’t know,” I say as I wet Lark’s hair, which is thankfully gaining color again. He hums when I lather it up and massage his scalp. “He doesn’t exactly make sense.”

“He doesn’t have many friends that I know of. Why would someone want to live forever if they don’t have people to enjoy it with?” Lark turns to face me.

“Well,” Van says as he materializes in my bathroom. “Drake’s dead, and I have to go into hiding.”

“What did you do?” I ask, pausing in washing Lark.

“I may have taken him to the coven and when they refused to do anything because he was no longer a witch, I may have ripped his head off and thrown it at the judge.”

“Van.” I move the shower curtain to look my best friend in the eye.

“I know. But fuck the rules. Drake broke them all, and he kept getting passes. I was tired of it.” Van shrugs. “Plus, I’ve always wanted to do that outside of a deal.”

“Thank you,” Lark says as he clings to me. He peeks around the curtain. “I wouldn’t have wished death for Drake, but he wasn’t going to stop.”

“He ranted and raved until I severed his head.”

It’s now I notice Van’s drenched in blood. His jeans stained. Red splashed across his t-shirt and face.

“Wicky may be the romantic of our group, but I’ll do anything to keep my friends safe. Violence is all I’m good at.”

“Not all,” Lark says.

Van tips his head. “I’ll leave the two of you alone now. You probably want peace.” And he’s gone.

“I really am free.” Lark’s big blue-gray eyes widen as he looks up at me.

I hug him as close as possible when sobs rip from his throat. He clings to me, nails digging in, claiming me.

“Kiss me.” His eyes shutter closed. How can I deny him?

My mouth brushes his in the gentlest touch, but we both need more and I cup his face and deepen the kiss. He moans beneath me. The end of my tail caresses his back. I want to touch every inch of Lark, but the tub is slippery.

“Let’s finish washing up, then we can enjoy ourselves if you want.”

“I want,” Lark says, breathless.

We’re washed in quick order and I’m patting him dry when Frankie makes her happy bark. Obviously, we have another visitor. I teleport Lark and I into my bedroom where his head is on a swivel as he looks around.

My bed is huge, maybe bigger than the human realm’s king sized. I have a giant closet. A comfy recliner in the corner. A window seat. It’s comfort everywhere. I grab one of the Fae shirts I’ve stocked in my closet and help him in it. His wings flutter in their freedom.

I plant more kisses, and he grabs for me, but I still his hands.

“Darling, I think Wren is out there.”

His eyes go wide and he looks to the door.

“Go. We have all the time in the world.” I kiss the side of his face and he runs to meet his brother.

They’re hugging when I join them. I lean against the doorjamb, watching as they chatter in Fae. They both start yawning and I notice the dark circles under both their eyes.

“Hit the shower, Wren, then come join us in bed.”

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His mouth drops open, and he steps back until he bumps into the wall. “I can’t. Lark’s my brother.”

“Sleep.” I laugh because now that I think about it, of course, that’s what he thought. “Just sleep. I have a huge bed and I’m sure Lark could use the both of us tonight.”

Lark nods when he loops his arms around my waist. “Like old times?” he whispers.

“Like old times.” Wren tips his head and goes to the shower.

“Let’s get you into bed.” I pat Lark’s bottom and lift him in my arms to carry him to my room. He yawn’s over and over. I have to wonder if he got any sleep at Drake’s. Then we made him party. He got bitten. So much has happened. My sweet Lark. I press a kiss to his temple and lay him on the bed. I crawl in beside him and he lets me arrange him how I want without a fuss. He wraps around me as he sighs.

“I missed you. Your touch,” he whispers as he snuggles as close as possible.

“Missed you too, sweetheart.” I rub his back and he’s asleep before Wren crawls in.

“Don’t mind me,” Wren says as he cuddles his brother. Lark turns in his sleep and he’s pressed to Wren’s chest with his head under his brother’s chin. They look so damn sweet. I never want to ruin this moment.

Chapter 24

Lark

Sunlight streams through the window, and Wren yawns awake.

“I need to get going. Mother will worry and I promised her an update,” Wren says as he stretches. He swipes hair from my face and presses a kiss to my cheek.

“Do you really have to go?” I ask.

“Don’t worry. I’ll be back soon.” One last gentle caress to my cheek and Wren’s gone.

“Good morning, darling,” Pike says as he squeezes me closer.

“I’m really, really free.” It’s so hard to understand. No more Drake, no more being forced to do things I don’t want to. Just free.

“You are.” He nuzzles my hair.

“Can we go on that date you promised me?”

“Absolutely.” Pike transports us to the shower for a quick wash. Then he’s blindfolding me. “It’s a surprise, but I think you’ll love it.” We’re teleporting again, and the scent of flowers fills the air the moment I find my footing.

When he tugs off the blindfold, I’m surrounded by flowers of all types.

“It’s a floral shop. Not as good as a Fae meadow, but?—”

I plow into him. “I love it. Thank you.” My wings ripple behind me as I turn, taking in the entire shop. I don’t know the names of most of the flower, just roses, but everything is gorgeous. “What’s this?” I grab at a blue puff ball looking flower.

“Hydrangea, I believe,” Pike answers as he hands me a basket.

“I need a half dozen of these in all the colors.” I pull several for the basket.

“You can have whatever you want.”

“Oh! And whatever these ones are. And these!” I point out some pink roses and something that’s bright yellow.

Pike follows me around, filling basket after basket. When finally I think I’ve seen it all, he leans in and whispers, “There’s another room. We should investigate it too.”

I suck in a breath when we enter another room, and a harpist starts playing. The gentle music adds to the experience. It’s also calming. I’m offered a glass of water and some chocolate and gladly take it. Pike takes my hand as I take in all the flowers.

“You’re amazing,” I say. “This is perfect.” I squeeze his hand and vow to be the best partner this demon could ever ask for, but first... I need to destroy his crossroads so he can be as free as me. I just need to figure out how to do it.

Chapter 25

Pike

Two weeks into being with Lark and Wren comes back.

Lark paces my kitchen with Frankie in tow. She watches the brothers, probably hoping Wren will drop a bit of his cheese for her like he normally does.

“So soon?” Lark asks.

“She’s free the next few days and after that, it’ll be another three weeks.”

Lark looks to me, which causes Wren and Frankie to stare me down too.

“I’m ready to meet your mother. If you are.” I shrug. She seems like a great woman that loves her boys and I want to meet her.

“I’m scared. For a decade all I wanted was to go home, now...” He looks up at me. “I feel like I am home as long as I have Pike.”

“It’s settled then. Get ready and we’ll head out.” Wren takes another bite of his slice of cheese, then offers Frankie the rest. Of course she scarfs it down.

Lark follows me to the bedroom where we change into clothes more appropriate to meet a high standing woman of the Winter Court. I help him close the back of his shirt with his wings gloriously free. He shimmies on a pair of Fae pants that hug his beautiful form, then watches as I change into a dark blue suit. Hunger fills his eyes, but we can’t get distracted. I grab his hand and join Wren before either of us can get

frisky.

Lark grips my hand so hard his nails dig into my skin. I don't mind though, and wrap my tail around him. I let Wren lead and take his offered hand. His teleportation is a little rougher than I'm used to, but we're in a room scented like jasmine and roses in no time.

"Mother, we're home," Wren singsongs out.

Fabric rustles from behind me and soon a petite Fae woman comes flying at Lark. She knocks him over in her effort to hug him.

"My dearest boy." She squishes his cheeks and moves his head this way and that. "My, how you've grown." She drops to her feet, and she's a good few inches shorter than Lark. Her hair is pink just like his, but her eyes are the same jewel green as Wren's.

The woman turns to me, her eyes widen. "Dearest Pike, thank you for bringing my boy back to me." She opens her arms and I hug her. She's soft and smells as good as Lark said she did. "Where are my manors? You can call me Sparrow."

"You must like birds," I say with a grin.

"It's family tradition." Sparrow shrugs. "But yes." She takes my hand, and it's so light I have to make sure I'm even holding anything.

The room's stone walls is decorated in tapestries with flowers and birds. There appears to be a water fall in the far wall.

"Come. Come. There's much to do while you're here." She takes Lark's hand as well, and he chuckles when Sparrow takes flight, pulling me along with her. "Please

forgive me.” She lands and shakes out her dress.

“Why...” How do I ask this delicately? “Why does the castle and your clothing look like it’s stuck in the human medieval times?”

The little family giggles, and Sparrow waves for them to stop.

“Sorry, it’s such a silly answer. The Winter king likes the esthetics of it all. So he keeps it like this. Eventually he’ll get bored, I’m sure, and then we can wear modern clothes by any realm’s standard.” She twirls in her jewel green dress. “But I must admit, I also love the esthetics.”

This woman is delightful, just like Lark. And I must admit, Wren is fun too and Frankie likes him, so it’s a win.

“Forgive the mess, please. It’s party after party and I have to entertain the court all winter long.” She whips around. “Speaking of. What about a show for the court?” She bounces on her toes as she pleads with her eyes. “I haven’t seen my boys dance together in so long.”

Lark holds up his hands and backs away. “I can’t even remember the steps. I wasn’t allowed much space and my wing strength is lacking to the point I need to build up my muscles properly again.”

“My poor boy. Wren told me some of what you’ve gone through, but I want to hear about it from you.”

Lark goes pale. “Can we speak of it at another time? Right now, I’d like nothing more than to enjoy being back home.”

“Yes. Yes. And if you never want to share with me, that’s fine too. I wish we could

have found you sooner. We owe a great deal to Pike.”

I shake my head. “It’s really all Lark. He summoned me, and the rest is history. He’s so damn strong.” I don’t know that I could have lasted as long as he did under a man like Drake.

“My sweet boy. I wish I could have seen you grow up. Seen your first glow. Been there for you.” Sparrow rushes Lark and pulls him to her chest to pet his head. She’s a little chaotic, but loveable for sure.

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“I’m okay,” Lark whispers from the confines of her hug. “But I can’t breathe.”

“Yes. Yes. I’m just so ecstatic to have you back home.”

“Mother,” Wren says softly. “Lark probably isn’t staying, you know that, right?”

Her lip quivers, but she nods. “Of course I know that. He’s a grown man and he’ll live where he chooses. I just hope he visits once in a while.”

“I’ll be here so much you’ll get sick of me.” Lark grins and I nod because if that’s what he wants, I’ll make it happen.

“Perfect.” Sparrow claps and waves to a table by a fireplace. “Let’s have some sweets. I have some of Lark’s favorites from his childhood.”

“Not to be an ass,” I start. “But... will I be able to leave the Fae lands if I eat the food?”

Sparrow covers her mouth as she giggles. “Yes. You’re a demon, so you’re safe. If you were human, that’d be a different story.” She pops what looks to be candy into her mouth. “Come, sit. Tell me about yourself, Pike.”

For the next three hours, the four of us talk. Sparrow shares stories of adorable baby Lark and Wren and unfortunately for them, she has pictures.

“Mom,” Lark whines when she pulls out the seventh photo album, but he grins as he does it.

“Please, keep the pictures coming, because these are epic.” I flip to a page with Lark doing a handstand and his tongue sticking out. Another flip and I suck in a breath. He’s dressed in formal wear, standing next to a gorgeous boy with pretty purple hair cut short and a circlet on his head. “Is this...”

“The prince, yes,” Lark says. His cheeks go pink and he looks away.

“Eh, Pike’s hotter, especially now,” Wren says.

In that moment, someone pounds on the door.

Sparrow tips her head. “Wasn’t expecting anyone else today.”

Before she can answer the door, it slams open.

“Where is he?” That same purple haired Fae storms in the room.

Lark scrambles out of his chair and trips on his own feet. I stand, towering over the Fae demanding to see Lark.

“Who are you?” I ask, blocking the prince from Lark.

“Get out of the way.” The prince tries to push me and fails.

“I suggest—” I start.

“You will let me see Lark. I demand it.”

“No,” Lark says from behind me. “I won’t be anyone’s prisoner again. I’m not a courtesan you can’t?”

The prince staggers back. “A prisoner? I only wish to see you for myself. Make sure you’re truly alive and well.”

“Don’t lie to us,” I say.

“Fae can’t lie,” Sparrow says as she reaches for the prince. “I’m so sorry. I didn’t realize you were hurting as well.”

“No,” Lark says again. “I need to process this so called new version of you when Wren says you still treat courtesans badly.”

“I’ve changed.”

“How do I know Fae can’t lie?” I ask, not trusting the prince at all.

“My name is Lark,” the prince says, and he cries as he falls to his knees. His wings crinkle from the tops all the way to the tips and the very ends turn black before fading again.

“Fuck.”

“Exactly,” the prince says. “No one lies if they can help it and if they can’t they get by with half truths and omissions.”

Wren chomps on a piece of what looks like a cookie. “I may have misjudged you lately.”

“We’re all stressed around here. But I’m glad to know Lark is safe.” The prince bows, then turns on his heel and leaves.

“Darling.” I hold out my hand to help Lark up, but he’s still shaking. “Sweetheart. Have something to drink.” I pull him into my lap.

Concern etches across Sparrow’s face as she hands me a glass of water. I tip liquid into Lark’s mouth, glad he trusts me with this. “Now have something to eat.” I offer a cookie with powder sugar and he takes a nibble.

“Thank you and sorry.” Lark leans into me, laying his head on my shoulder.

“My dearest boy, you’ve been through so much. Don’t be sorry.”

“Exactly. And the prince probably just did that as a power trip. Don’t let him get to you.” Wren rubs a hand down Lark’s back.

“You’re probably right,” Lark says and straightens up. “I can’t let him get to me. He’s... he’s no one to me anymore.”

“Exactly,” Wren says. “That’s the spirit.”

Lark grins and grabs a cookie covered in powdered sugar. It might take a while for Lark to heal, but I know he’ll succeed in everything he puts his mind to.

We spend a delightful three days in the Winter Court and a Fae doctor gives Lark exercises to help him build up wing strength again. When it’s time to leave, Sparrow gives us a basket of homemade cookies that make my mouth water. We give our hugs, then it’s back to the demon realm to love on Frankie for a bit, before the three of us go back to the human realm.

Chapter 26

Lark

Pike’s asleep next to me in our bed at Flutter and Fangs. After a few days with mother, I wanted to talk to Ava again, I consider her my second mother. I also may have had ulterior motives for wanting to be back in Hex. Where Pike’s crossroads is. I dug into a bit of research when I could and found how to destroy the crossroads. I thought to ask where Van’s and Warwick’s crossroads are, but Pike mentioned how much Van wants to be the king of the crossroads demons someday, so he needs to stay a crossroads demon. And, well, apparently, I’m only allowed to destroy one, anyway. According to legend.

I have my box of salt and slide out of bed, hoping not to wake Pike. Frankie opens an eye and goes right back to sleep. The luck coin is in my pocket. I’m hoping it helps instead of hinders, though with how my luck is with it, I’m tempted to leave it behind, but it gives me strength to follow through with my promise.

The crisp morning air steals my breath and I grab a coat before getting too far. It may not kill me, but I hate being too cold for long. Drake used to chain me up on the roof

in the snow. A few times I actually froze, and he had to thaw me out. Not something I wish to repeat.

It's a few minutes' walk to Pike's crossroads. I'm thankful the coin gave me the courage to run that day. I'm not sure I would have had it not egged me on.

When finally I make it to the crossroads, the wind picks up. It's like the universe knows my intentions and hates it. I walk stooped to circle the salt, so it doesn't blow away. I grab the sewing needle from my pocket and jab my finger with it to produce a drop of blood, which I let fall on the salt.

"I summon the demon of this crossroads." And I wait.

There's a flash and a sleepy Pike rubs at his eyes. "Who disturbs— oh!" He looks around. "What's going on?"

"I'm completing our bargain."

Pike tips his head as he takes me in. "But we never officially had one."

"I promised myself I'd set you as free as I am." I kick at the salt and break the circle. "Come here and kiss me."

Pike doesn't hesitate and I'm in his arms, and he's spinning us. I can't help the laugh.

"Little Fae, you're always full of surprises." He lets me down and presses his lips to mine, kissing me so thoroughly I swear he's sucked my soul from my body. My legs wobble when we come up for air.

"It's time to free you," I say.

“How?” Pike frowns as he looks down at me. We can’t have that.

“Just watch.” I don’t have to destroy the entire crossroads, just a marker of it. Something no one would have thought of. That means I have a few options. I can scratch out the painted street lines that have been magically enhanced to never fade, tear down or mark up the signage. I also have the option to overhaul the entire place, rendering it fully destroyed.

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I already know what I'm going to do and walk up to the street sign. I take my needle and scratch in a heart with L & P Forever. As soon as I scratch in the r the ground shakes beneath us.

"Lark!" Pike shouts for me, but I wave for him to get out of the danger zone.

I hold on to the signpost for dear life as the street below me destroys itself. Gravel and pavement churns until it's a mess that looks like a giant took a giant spoon and stirred the earth until it was chunky.

I yelp when a beam of light that looks like those threads of magic in the demon realm shoots up from the ground and reaches for the sky.

"Pike!" I leap from the signpost just as he gets sucked into the thread. It seals around him. The coin flies from my pocket. It hovers in front of my face with a short message before it gets sucked into the thread, too.

It's been fun. Bye bye now.

"Pike!" The magic tosses and turns him and I wish it'd let me inside.

I swear all of eternity passes before the thread of magic sucks back into the earth and releases Pike. He drops to the ground with a sickening thud.

My heart drop and my stomach tumbles. Did I just kill him? Is that what really happens when someone destroys the curse? It takes all my strength to run to him. There's some strange goo all over him, and he's naked now like he's reborn into a

Pike.

“Pike?” I press my ear to his chest, hoping for his heartbeat. “Pike, are you okay?” Wake up. Please wake up. Tears sting my eyes and I brush them away. “I can’t lose you, I just found you.”

I press my lips to his forehead, his nose, his lips, his chest. When he gasps for breath, he reaches for me, pulling out a cry of relief.

“Are you okay, little Fae?”

“I am now. Are you? Do you feel any different?” I cup his cheeks and look into his eyes. They’re the same pretty brown as before, but brighter.

“My back hurts, like really hurts.”

I scramble off him, and when he stands, he’s even taller than he was before. He reaches back and groans. One leathery wing fans out, then another.

“Fuck.” He drops to his knees and I run to him.

“How can I help?”

Pike drops his head on my shoulder. “Just hold me right now.”

“Whatever you need. I’m here. Forever. Whatever you need.”

“You say that.” He grins and his eyes flash a deep red. “But I think I might be an incubus now.” He laughs. “What luck.”

“Just what you always wanted,” I chuckle as I take him in. He’s a bit thicker

everywhere, even his cock that I was still getting used to the idea of riding. We've been going slow, but I think we'll have to go even slower.

"You're incredible, Lark." He presses kiss after kiss to my lips and I drown in his love. Whatever Pike needs from me, it's his.

"Way to go!" Wren pulls me out of our little ball of happy.

"Damn," Van says as he materializes with Wick. "I didn't think you had it in you."

"We should celebrate," Wren says.

"I don't know how I feel about celebrating too many things in Hex." I rub my throat where Drake bit me. I still don't understand his obsession with me and I guess I never will. He probably wasn't obsessed with me, just the power I gave him as a Fae.

Pike hugs me close. "I'm tired. After the whole rebirth thing. I think I can sleep for a hundred years." He yawns, but pinches my bottom.

"Yeah, I'm sleepy, too."

Wren eyes us. "I guess it is still late. We can celebrate some other time."

Warwick looks at us with such a longing it almost breaks my heart. If his Ethan ever shows up again, I'll be sure to tell him exactly how to set Wick free. Van may not want to be released from the curse, but I know Wick does.

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“I can’t stay long, anyway,” Van says as he looks around. “Still on the run.” He squeezes Wick’s arm, then poofs out.

“I’m happy for you,” Wick says. “But I need to go,” he adds in a whisper just as he disappears.

“Mother will be pleased to learn you’re curse free,” Wren says as he leaves us.

“All alone.” Pike grins as he hauls me over his shoulder and takes us home.

Chapter 27

Coin

And it’s time to go again. Sigh. Lark and Pike were so fun. Both a little grumpy when I flipped their luck. But it’s soooo boring when there’s only good luck. Time to go bother Damian and Cassander now. Catch them in Smoke and Mirrors. Toodles!

Epilogue

ONE YEAR LATER

Lark

I press my hand to my hat as I run. The wildflowers chime all around me and I laugh as I plop right in the middle of a cluster. Pike comes in beside me, gingerly trying to find a space that won’t crush any of the flowers, even after all this time, and it makes

me love him even more.

“Join me!” I hold up my hand.

Pike hesitates still. His tail whips around and I grab it before it can get too far.

“They’ll recover.” Just like me, though it’s a hard journey after ten years as a captive. Pike, my brother, Ava, the rest of Flutter and Fang all help. Not to mention my therapist. I have a support system that allows me to heal and grow. Ava, too.

Pike and I live between three realms, and I think it helps. I no longer have to hope I’m treated like a person. Pike never asks for me to glow, but most days I can’t help it. My wings glow because of him. Because I’m happy.

The breeze blows, making the chime flowers play a lovely little song, and I shut my eyes. This is life. Perfect. Wonderful.

Pike finally settles in beside me and pulls me close. “That looks a little like a flower.” He points to the clouds in the sky.

“It does. And that one looks like a mountain.”

“They all sort of look like mountains,” Pike snorts as he rolls over to grab me. We tumble through the flowers until we land at the bottom of the short hill with me on top of him. The chime flowers clang as we run into them, but they stand strong again once we’ve moved past.

Pike’s still getting used to his new demon type. His eyes flash with lust as his tail slithers up my side, then dips into the waistband of my pants. He knows how much I like the tease and he presses against my hole.

“You know something we haven’t tried since I got wings?” He asks.

“What?” I flash him a grin, knowing exactly where this is going.

“Fucking in the air.”

“Mmmm, that could be fun.” I trail a hand down his chest, finding a nipple through his shirt.

“You’re interested?” Pike nibbles at my jaw as I slide across his erection.

“Of course, I’m interested.” I shimmy my shirt off and throw it. Pike’s hands roam up my sides. “At least I’m interested, if you remembered lube.”

“I remembered.” Pike pulls a bottle from his pocket. He flips me to my back and mouths kisses down my stomach until he reaches my belly button. His fingers work the button off my pants and yanks them off me.

I love being naked with Pike, and the meadow is clear of others right now, so I don’t hold back my sounds of pleasure.

The flowers seem to echo my noises, chiming with each moan I make. Pike kisses a path to my cock before taking me in his mouth. His tail wraps around one of my thighs and lifts it, making me laugh. Pike sinks a lubed finger into my hole. I sigh at the sensation of him inside me, even just a finger fills me with joy.

I rock under him, begging, and he adds another finger to my hole.

“Please, more.”

Pike’s eyes glow as he feeds on my pleasure. Lust demons need pleasure, like Fae need the sun. It doesn’t have to be sexual, though it’s the quickest way some days. But others, he says, just being in my life and experiencing my joy is enough.

“Pike,” I whisper and grasp his horns, drawing a moan from him. I’m not sure what his plan is, but I want his cock inside me sooner rather than later. “Naked. Now.”

He must have forgotten he’s the only one wearing clothes. He pulls the shirt off in record time and tosses it over his shoulder. I push to my knees to help him with his pants. Mostly so I can kiss his beautiful cock before he fills me with it. I dip my tongue in the slit, drawing a moan from him.

“Fuck me, Pike.” I massage his thighs. They’re so thick. His tail wraps around one of my wrists and hauls me up. My wings flutter as my heart races. He looks like he’d devour me in a second if he could.

Without warning, he grabs me by the armpits, and we’re in the air. My wings help keep me stable as he takes us higher and higher. I wrap my arms around his neck and legs around his hips, hovering right above his cock. When we kiss, he’s stealing every breath I take. I want and need more of him.

He takes my hips in his hands, and slowly I drop down on his cock, impaling myself. “So good,” I moan as I rock. It took us so long for me to get to this point and now I can’t imagine any other cock or toy that’s not Pike’s cock or tail. He plays my body so perfectly.

When I look down, we're much higher in the air than I expect and I cling to Pike's neck, forgetting I have wings of my own. After a decade of being confined, it's still so strange to have the freedom.

"So good for me, darling. Such a perfect hole taking me in."

I moan as he thrusts again. We have to take it slow in the air so we both don't go crashing down. I've heard of Fae that fuck in the air and get tangled when they come and don't pay attention to where they are. I don't want that to be us.

Pike's hands roam my body, hitting every spot he knows makes me practically purr.

His cock hits me right in the spot that makes my toes curl. I hold his shoulders to give me better leverage to ride him. I'm lost in the feel of him. His touches. His kisses. His taste. He strokes my cock in time with my hips.

"Not gonna last." It takes a lot of effort to fly and fuck. But fuck me, is the experience so different. The wind whips through my hair and bites at my skin, but I don't care. All I know is bliss in Pike's arms.

"Gonna come," I pant as cum shoots from my cock all over both our chests.

"Fuck. Fuck." Pike pumps into me a few more times before he holds my hips still and fills me with his load. "You're going to be raining cum from your ass if we stay up here too long."

The image alone sends me into a fit of giggles. "I don't think my wings will hold up after that."

"Same here. That was a lot of effort I didn't expect." He keeps me plugged with his cock as he gently spirals us toward the ground.

Once we're on our feet again, Pike tugs me back to him. "Thank you for rescuing me. I didn't know I needed it too. I was in denial, but I can truly live now and it's all because of you and your determination to keep your promise."

I tug him down and kiss him again. "Everyone deserves to live a life unhindered by expectations put on them for whatever reason. You had a curse, I had a soul tether. Now we're free from all of it and I can't wait to see what our lives have in store now."

Can't wait to see what our love can do.

The end.