



# The Reaper's Christmas Miracle

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**Category:** Romance, New Adult, Paranormal, Vampires

**Description:** Death was never supposed to fall in love...

Fenn had long given up on knowing the warmth of another by the day he met her.

Sienna Jacobsen.

A woman who was somehow immune to the touch of Death.

Christmas was just around the corner and Sienna desperately needed a date she could bring home for the weekend.

Thank goodness she'd finally found the very literal man of her dreams.

He's supposed to be investigating Sienna's death-touch immunity, but the only touch on either of their minds is the kind he's so long been denied. And he can't keep his hands off.

Her sisters have their reservations about Fenn, but it's his personal stalker that threatens to ruin the holiday...

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## The Touch

Siennadrewadeepbreath of the sweet seasonal coffee concoction in her hand before sweeping her gaze around the shop. Serendipity was her favorite coffee shop, bar none. She had been so happy when the small chain had finally expanded into her fairly sizable city. Her smile broadened when she spotted her long-time best friend, who'd promised to meet her for a drink to catch up that afternoon. Right on schedule. Clutching her freshly brewed mocha close, Sienna navigated around the bundled-up guy at the counter and made her way to a small, available table against the far window.

"Sorry I was a bit late," Sherri said with a guilty smile as she reached the table. "Toddlers are no joke."

Sienna shrugged after dropping into her seat. "You're fine. I barely grabbed my coffee."

Sherri, Sienna's best friend since their pre-teen years, eyed the cup skeptically. "I know this is practically blasphemous," she said, "but how can you call that coffee?"

"Bite your tongue!" Sienna said. She pulled her cup up to her chest in dramatic fashion but failed entirely to wipe the laughing grin from her face. "There are so many different seasonal flavors I can barely keep up. This one is Cherry Chocolate Bark." Sherri only laughed as Sienna promptly paused for an indulgent gulp of the still piping hot liquid.

"So, how's the holiday dating scene going?" Sherri asked. "Any action?"

Sienna groaned and sat back in her chair. “Seriously, Sher, you are so lucky you’re married. Dating is ugly business.”

Sherri made a face, her naturally pale brows curving high on her forehead. “What happened to that new app you were talking about? The one that just felt right? Love - N- Shenanigans, wasn’t it?”

Sienna glanced around on reflex, though her friend hadn’t said anything dangerous, then pulled her smartphone from her sweatshirt pocket as she nodded. “Oh, I joined. I joined that day.” She held up her fingers. “I’ve been on three dates already, too.”

Sherri shifted her weight and settled her chin into the heel of her palm. “Sounds like it’s working to me. What’s his name, have your sisters met him, and why haven’t I heard about him?”

An unladylike snort escaped her as Sienna attempted to visualize introducing her prim-and-proper eldest sister to the latest guy she’d met up with. She quickly covered her mouth with a hand and shook her head, composing herself before they drew unnecessary attention. “You’ve got it wrong, Sher,” Sienna said. “I haven’t been on three dates with one guy. I’ve been on three first dates.”

A second passed before Sherri’s eyes widened. “In a month?”

Sienna glanced at the date on her lock-screen. “Closer to two weeks, if you wanna be technical.” She really wanted a date for Christmas and, if she was super lucky, maybe they’d get along all the way through New Year’s Eve. A girl could dream.

Sherri sat forward until the dyed green tips of her hair teased the small table between them. “You couldn’t possibly know them well enough to agree to meet three different men in person after being on that new app for two weeks!” It was impressive she wasn’t shouting. Her voice was a sharp hiss. Motherhood really had improved her

self-control.

“It’s not like I was messaging only one guy at a time,” Sienna said with another shrug. “There’s no rule that says you can’t talk to multiple people while you’re looking for one that lines up with you. And Monday’s date was a total disaster. We didn’t even make it through our first drink.” She should have known. Who opted for a first date on a Monday night? “Anyway, I’ve got one more lined up for tomorrow, so I still have a chance to meet someone before Christmas.”

Sherri stared at her as if she’d sprouted a second head or started babbling in some dead language. The latter of which seemed a little too close to a real possibility for Sienna’s comfort, but since no one else was sliding funny looks their way, Sienna refrained from asking if she’d said anything weird.

“Honey,” Sherri said. It was the way she started every conversation when she felt she had to say something Sienna wasn’t going to like. “It’s the twentieth. Christmas is in five days.”

“Uh-huh. That’s why I’m pinning my hopes on tomorrow’s date.” She would really need to remember his name before their late dinner meeting, though.

Sherri shook her head. “No, Sienna, I mean that’s not realistic. Maybe you should just ... slow down? Take your time talking to some people and hope you can get a really nice date for Valentine’s Day.”

Sienna gulped nearly half of her chocolatey-cherry coffee drink that was, admittedly, a tad sweeter than she preferred, before voicing her response. “You don’t understand. I’m spending all weekend at Piper’s, and I love my sisters, but it would be so much better if I had a buffer. Like, some way to show them I’m making steps forward with my life. You know, in a way they recognize.”

Sherri sighed. “I’m sorry you’re still dealing with that,” she said. Her tone was sincere. “You shouldn’t need to feel like you have to bring a date to impress them—are either of them even attached yet? It’s been a while since Maya’s breakup, hasn’t it?”

“It totally has,” Sienna said. “But you know, I’m the one with the ‘play’ job.” She rolled her eyes. Her sisters were her life, but somehow they managed to be under forty and still not comprehend the effort and value in influencing. It kept her busy, let her travel, and paid well as long as she stayed relevant. She didn’t see how that was any less worthwhile than a desk job.

Sherri stood. “All right. I’m going to get myself a real coffee, and then you’re going to tell me more about these dates. Like, what was so wrong with one and two? Now that the shock’s worn off, I’m curious.” She strode away without waiting for a response.

Sienna let her gaze drift around the shop and out the window, watching people scurry by in layers of soft, cold-resistant things. Young adults with shopping bags dodged couples walking side-by-side. Why was it always this time of year she felt the loneliest? And why was it so hard to just say that instead of making some lame excuse about familial pressure? What’s my date’s name again? She honestly had hoped she’d be able to cancel on this one, she remembered that. She’d agreed to the Thursday night date as a safe-guard ... and because an instinct deep inside had told her to, if she were honest with herself.

Sienna pulled up the app on her phone while she waited for her friend and sipped at her cooling coffee. Eddie. Something about his picture made her scrunch her lips. She could still cancel.

“Ew. Is that Mr. Thursday?” Sherri’s question came from over Sienna’s shoulder, startling her enough to make her fumble her phone. And her coffee. “Sorry!” Sherri

exclaimed as Sienna scrambled to keep from dumping the remainder of her drink or breaking her overpriced phone.

Both objects successfully saved—if barely—Sienna restored them to the table and closed her phone. “Yes, that’s Mr. Thursday,” Sienna said, lips twitching. She frowned at the splatter droplets on the side of her cup before chugging the rest of the drink down.

“He doesn’t exactly look like your type,” Sherri said as she reclaimed her seat. She set her own cup on the table and popped off the lid, releasing a wave of steam that smelled like freshly roasted coffee beans.

“He’s definitely not,” Sienna admitted. “He’s been nice when we’ve been chatting, and he’s not much older.” He was Piper’s age, almost exactly, but that didn’t really matter. She sat forward and dropped her chin into her hands. “He was sort of my fallback.”

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“Your what?”

“You know,” Sienna said, “my last resort.”

Sherri took a moment to gulp down a surely scalding swallow of her coffee and said, “That wraps me around to dates One and Two. What was so wrong with them that they didn’t work for a fling? You couldn’t try that fake relationship thing you pulled in college?”

Sienna laughed briefly. “Do you remember how mad Maya was?”

Sherri grinned. “Livid. I’ve never been so scared of her.”

That was precisely why Sienna would never go for the fake relationship stunt again. But an agreed temporary fling? That was on the table. With the right guy. She drew a breath and launched into explaining why her first date, who had been so outwardly her type, was so immediately not in person. And how her second date had been a really comfortable emotional match despite not being her idea of attractive—but that had become the problem. He very quickly felt brotherly, which she could not tolerate for a boyfriend. This wrapped them back to Monday’s date. Good looking, said all the right things, and not an ounce of chemistry.

“Wow,” Sherri said when Sienna was done. Both their cups had been depleted and subsequently removed by a passing employee, giving them more room to lean over the table and talk quieter. Sherri’s gape seemed permanent. “Okay, I understand, but ... maybe this really isn’t the time? You know, to look for something you can actually work with.”

That was what Sienna was afraid of. “I’m not giving up,” she said instead. She straightened and tapped her phone a heartbeat after it lit up with the alarm she’d set to remind herself of her outstanding responsibilities. “At least, not until Friday.” She couldn’t say she was enthusiastic about Eddie.

“Well, call me on Friday,” Sherri said. She straightened as well and reached for her large bag-style purse. “Tell me everything. We’ll make another coffee date if we have to, since you’re such an addict.”

“Uh-huh.” Sienna rolled her eyes. “Says the sleep-deprived mom.”

Sherri flashed her a grin and offered no denial. They stood together and made their way toward the exit, deftly navigating other patrons and displays. “At least you’re making good use of that free trial,” she said.

Sienna laughed. “Oh, you know it!”

They parted ways in the parking lot and Sienna aimed herself toward the bus station. It was fun to live a little recklessly, and for her, public transportation was pretty reckless. She made her way to the back of the bus, unsurprised when no one bothered to look up at her as she walked by, and settled in the back corner. Despite that it was mid-afternoon and late in the holiday season, the bus was sparsely occupied. Probably for the best.

She leaned back in her seat and her gaze snagged on a split in the material of the bench backing in front of her. From the worn edges and brownish stain on the once white stuffing within, she suspected it’d been split for a while. Or at least a couple of days.

The middle-aged man, two rows up on the opposite side of the bus, coughed roughly, the raspy sound reverberating through the bus. A couple of heads turned briefly in his



direction and he kept his head deliberately down.

Sienna frowned. That hadn't sounded pleasant. Like a smoker's cough with pneumonia or something. This time of year everyone could be heard saying how they "couldn't afford to get sick," so she wasn't surprised that the woman nearest the man shifted a bit away. She sort of felt bad.

Too late she registered the tension that coiled at the base of her neck, like a muscle she just couldn't stretch.

She sucked in a breath and locked her hands over her sweatshirt pocket, deliberately leaning herself into the window at her shoulder as her vision began to cloud. Her heart danced erratically against her ribcage for a drawn-out second before everything faded. The road noise. The chatter from the pair in the front bench. The drone of old Christmas music on the radio. Then she was again looking through a keyhole, her vision narrowed to only what the powers that be wanted her to see.

The middle-aged man with the bad cough. He was still on the bus, it even looked like the same seat. But the light behind him was wrong. It was negative—no, it was dark. As if it were nighttime.

His clothing's the same...

He didn't look homeless, and try as she might, Sienna couldn't turn her gaze left or right. She couldn't wind the celestial clock back to find out if she was seeing that very night or another night where he happened to be wearing the same outfit. He broke into another coughing fit, this one louder and longer. Something garbled and angry sounding echoed in from beyond her scope, something she knew meant someone was speaking to him. Or shouting at him.

The man clapped a gloved hand to his face in an effort to muffle himself and pushed

to his feet. His movements were shaky. He had to balance himself on the bench seat, and the moment he took a step forward he toppled to his knees. Blood dotted the floor from his immediate resulting cough. It sounded more like a choke.

Something blurred in front of him. Another noise, still indistinct, but sharper. One long note. Someone's screaming.

Then another figure stepped into Sienna's line of sight, as clear as the man on the bus floor in every way except that she couldn't see his face. He was dark, dressed in black on black. Something about this man screamed danger and power.

Her throat choked as she watched the newcomer peel a glove off his right hand, revealing pale skin, and stretch out his fingers toward the back of the unsuspecting coughing man's head. No! She didn't want to watch anymore, but she was in too deep. She couldn't make it stop. The middle-aged man never saw the other man coming. The one in black pressed his fingers to the other's neck and immediately the middle-aged man went slack.

That scream-like sound went off again as soon as the middle-aged man's body collapsed on the bus floor.

The one in black withdrew his hand, slipped his glove back into place, and turned away as if he could disappear into the back of the bus. But with the movement Sienna caught another glimpse of him, and her surprise jolted her so sharply the entire vision shattered.

She jerked upright, breathing hard, her chest heaving and her heart racing. "No way," she whispered to herself. She'd seen some weird shit in her visions over the years, but was it possible the guy she'd been fantasizing about since she hit puberty ... was some kind of magic serial killer? She lifted a hand to her chest and clutched at her sweatshirt. That'd be way too cruel.

Her gaze slid sideways, lingering over the middle-aged man currently huddling in his apparently preferred seat. She wanted to go to him and suggest he get off the bus for the day. Maybe find a shelter that offered warm soup, or go to a walk-in clinic to get that cough checked out. Really anything to get him off the bus.

But she knew what would happen if she did.

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Sienna tore her gaze away and spotted a stop approaching. Without thinking twice she signaled the driver to pull over. It hadn't been her intended stop, but she couldn't sit idle knowing the poor and possibly sick man so close to her was quite literally on death's door. And there was nothing she could do to stop it.

Fenn hated the holiday season. He always had. There were so many people, everywhere. It would have been impossible not to rub shoulders with someone just by trying to walk across a street if it weren't for his magic. There was something about this time of year that brought people out in droves. The commercializing of every conceivable religious occasion didn't help, but it was more than that. Like there was something in the damn air.

A saccharine giggle drifted his way, preceding swinging white-blonde hair obscuring his vision and eyes as blue as a spring sky that sparkled up at him. Florence was beautiful, by nearly every standard, yet the sight of her filled Fenn with nothing but annoyance. Of course, she remained willfully oblivious to his disdain. "You don't really have to mingle with them, do you?"

"This is hardly mingling."

"Hmm." She straightened and plopped herself next to him, just shy of touching. He fought not to flinch. "What do you call this, then?"

Temptation. He was never more tempted to abuse his power—the one he'd been born with or the supernatural one he'd been gifted upon his death—than he was when she planted herself beside him. For so long he'd craved companionship that wouldn't run away or despise him. Perhaps Florence was the universe's way of laughing at him for

daring to even dream.

Fenn let the urge roll over him and released a breath. “I’m working. What do you want?” Maybe if he just engaged her a bit in conversation now, she would disappear that much faster.

Florence swung her legs out, like a child, careless of the people she nearly kicked in the process. She only laughed airily at the glares and cut-off curse sent back at her in response. “I was feeling lonely, so I thought I’d come find you. Maybe we can keep each other company for a while.” She turned, tucking her half-exposed legs beneath the bench, and leaned forward almost like she’d forgotten not to touch him. “Wouldn’t that be fun, Fenn?”

He clenched his hands into fists. Control. If death had taught him anything, it was that. But damn if this beast in the shape of a woman didn’t challenge him in the worst way. “I’m better by myself.” Would it be irresponsible to cause a small, tragic car accident just for an excuse to escape her? Yes. Not that there was anyone to hold him accountable.

Florence pouted and reached up, pulling her hair over her shoulder as if trying to make herself more alluring. “Why do you always push me away? I just want to be closer to you. I’ve never met anyone so mysterious.” She looked him over blatantly. “You’re so much more handsome than—“

Fenn shoved to his feet. “Find someone else, Florence. I have no interest in your company.” He didn’t wait to hear the latest rendition of her opposites attract speech before striding into the crowd, letting the magic of the void help him slip between passersby. His priority remained as it had always been. Distance.

Only when he could no longer taste the unpleasant burn of her healing energy on the back of his tongue did Fenn slow his pace and allow himself to take stock.

Something had drawn him to this city. He'd been there for nearly two days already, plucking the dead and dying from their mortal cages as he moved through the urban overgrowth in search of the answer. He didn't see or sense any clear sign of something categorically ominous, something that might call to the spirit of Death. That made him think it had to be something else.

He sincerely hoped it didn't have anything to do with that damn coffee shop. If she was meddling again.... Well, supposedly it was against the rules for him to intervene there, so he'd just have to be satisfied with pissing her off.

Fenn put the nagging concern out of his head when he spotted his next victim.

A man in his mid-forties, wearing a wrinkled button-up under an older winter coat. He looked healthy enough on the outside, by all accounts, but his heart was struggling. From what Fenn could see, the man's arm had been bothering him a while, and like so many others, he'd popped some pills and dismissed the sign. Too bad. Treatment at the onset might have gotten him through the holiday.

Fenn watched the man disappear into a restaurant, released a breath, and followed. By default, he was invisible and otherwise undetectable to the humans around him, so it was no effort to slip through the nearest wall and take the short way to his target. The patrons of this middle-class steakhouse were about to have a dramatic evening.

Fenn watched from a small distance as his target claimed a seat at a moderately sized table, already occupied by a lone female. He couldn't hear their words over the restaurant's din, but visually, the two were a complete mismatch. Whereas the soon-to-be-dead man was somewhat ruffled, already sweating, and pudgy around the middle, his date was ... captivating.

She sat back in her chair, the stiffness in her shoulders and furrow in her brow screaming discomfort even before she shook her head. Her head full of thick, dark

brown hair that was highlighted with festive shades of red and green. She was visibly younger than the man she appeared to have been waiting on, and he easily confirmed as much. The woman was a youthful twenty-nine, compared to the man's forty-three. Fenn couldn't see her eyes from his position, but he watched her purse her lips and drum her fingers over the table. Her companion said something glaringly desperate and she responded by pushing to her feet and reaching for the coat draped over the chair beside her.

The man made to stand, simultaneously reaching out for her, and his heart stuttered.

Fenn snapped his focus back into place. Unexpectedly attractive woman or not, it was time to work. He moved forward, waiting until he was past any obtrusions before allowing himself to become visible. Most would only notice him in their periphery, but it didn't matter.

Already the man had grabbed at his chest, finally acknowledging the pain, and dropped to his knees. Surely Fenn had been drawn to this city to do more than personally transition a few heart attack victims, but once again, that was the task before him. He reached out, ignored someone's shout about emergency services, and laid his fingertips over the back of the man's hand.

The forty-three-year-old looked up at him with fading eyes.

"Rest now," Fenn said as the soul slipped free. As it was designed to, the void immediately engulfed it, absorbing the individual soul to reintegrate it into the life cycle. Fenn stepped back, allowing the corpse to fall to the side, with the intention of vanishing from the restaurant entirely.

He realized too late he shouldn't have been ignoring the panicked shuffling around him when something closed around his forearm at the moment he started to move. Lithe fingers slid down his sleeve until something warm and utterly foreign rested on

the sliver of skin at his wrist, between glove and sleeve. Something like skin.

Fenn froze, staring into the wide, startled hazel eyes of the woman who'd enthralled him moments before. Her skin rested directly on his and yet she hadn't died. Hadn't even recoiled in agony.

Her grip tightened, her expression becoming desperate. "Who are you?"

## Visions of Death

Maybe it was because she hadn't been excited about Mr. Thursday, but the fact that Eddie was more than ten minutes late had Sienna uncharacteristically agitated. Everyone had told her to cancel this date. Maybe she should have listened. She glanced again at her phone, checking the time, and sighed heavily. Nearly fifteen minutes. She was done as soon as it hit twenty.

The thought was barely finished when a middle-aged man rushed up to her table, sweating and pasty looking, sputtering apologies. He had a receding hairline, a dad bod pudge, his button-up was wrinkled, and yet his face was vaguely familiar. She put it together in an instant and had to literally bite her tongue. He was clearly not the way he portrayed himself in his profile. Still, she waited until he'd fully settled in the seat opposite her before frowning at him and asking, "Eddie?"



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He cleared his throat and shrugged out of his worn coat. “Ah, yes, that’s me. It’s so good to finally meet you, Sienna.” He leaned forward and held out his hand. As if nothing was wrong.

Sienna sat back. “What the hell? Did you catfish me? You told me you werethirty-five.” No way was the man in front of her under forty. “And what about your photos? Did you photoshop your face onto stock photos or something?” She wouldn’t have refused to date a guy who didn’t have a six-pack, but she had an issue with a man who misrepresented himself to the degree Eddie had clearly gone to.

Somehow, he paled. “Th-that’s actually an older photo, but it’s me. I swear.” He drew a breath and rubbed at his arm. “Please, hear me out. I’m so sorry I was late, and I know I exaggerated a couple of things—”

“Lied,” Sienna said. “The word is lied.” She shook her head. “Everyone told me I was being an idiot trying to find a guy in time for the holiday, but I honestly thought I could do it. Instead I’m sitting here in front of the most cliché online dating trap in modern history.” She drummed her fingers on the table, not really paying him any attention, just seeking to release a fraction of her frustrated energy.

“Our conversations were still good, though,” Eddie said.

She pushed out a sigh, too irritated to even think about food, let alone civil conversation. “No. The truth is, they were awkward, and now I’m done. Happy Holidays, Eddie.” She probably sounded like a bitch, but she was tired of this game already. Sherri had been right, three dates in two weeks was too much. She grabbed up her coat and turned from the table, wholly prepared to march home and gorge on

greasy delivery until she felt better.

“Wait, Sien—” Eddie’s choked off call urged her to turn back even though a voice in her head said she should keep going. She regretted not listening to that voice immediately.

It was so much like the vision she’d had on the bus the day before, except this was real-time, and the man was different. But he was on his knees, clutching his chest, and ghostly pale. His whole face was strained.

Then, like a creature from a nightmare, the same man in black from her bus vision stepped into focus and strode straight up to Eddie. He brushed his unnaturally white fingers over the back of Eddie’s hand and Sienna watched, breath stalled in her chest and eyes wide, as Eddie toppled over. She didn’t process the screams or crashing cutlery in the background. Barely noticed the blurry movement of other people rushing by, even when one bumped into her.

I was such a bitch...

The black figure turned, not even looking around, clearly intending to leave. It was his movement that spurred Sienna into action. Because this time, unlike in her previous vision, she’d gotten a better look at him and she was sure she recognized him. She needed to know from where.

Sienna moved on instinct, leaping forward before the enigma of a man could disappear again and snatching the nearest part of him—his wrist. His skin was cool beneath hers, but not strikingly so. It was an odd, momentarily distracting, thought that left her staring into his obviously startled eyes. Chilling, yet mesmerizing gray-blue eyes that were immediately familiar to her. She had definitely seen him before.

Knowing she needed to say something, Sienna pushed out the first question that made

any sense. “Who are you?” She saw clearly when his Adam’s apple bobbed with a hard swallow, as if she’d asked a difficult question. He finally attempted to pull his arm free, so she held tighter. She couldn’t let him flee.

“Excuse me,” a voice over her shoulder said at the same time as the gray-blue eyes snapped past her. “I’m going to need you both to wait here. The police are on their way.”

Crap.

A low male sigh drew Sienna’s attention back to the man whose wrist she hadn’t yet released. He took a single step forward, into her, and suddenly his arm was around her waist, hand settled over her hip. For a man with cooler skin, the way he held her shot heat through her system like he’d set her on fire.

“Forget about us,” he said, speaking to the restaurant employee who’d approached them. “I’ll be taking her.”

The strange heat he’d spiked only doubled at his choice of phrase. She should have wrenched away and demanded what he meant by such a statement, but all she really wanted to do was plaster herself against him. Had she finally lost her always-tentative grip on her sanity? Her parents had worried about that.

Even as the restaurant guy sputtered a nonsensical response, something like darkness lifted around them and everything faded. Color and shape drained from her line of sight, until she was effectively blind. Bound only by the steady pressure curled around her. It was frightening and freeing simultaneously.

Then it all came rushing back, though it was all wrong. There was no restaurant, there were no crying or panicking diners. Rather, they stood somewhere familiar—familiar enough to be a little jarring. They suddenly stood in her living room.

His arm fell away as Sienna finally jerked away, stumbling until she had to catch herself on the back of her sofa. “H-how did you do that? How did you get here, or know where here is?”

He stared at her, studying her. Eyes faintly narrowed and dark brow furrowed. “What’s your name?”

Sienna straightened. “I asked first.”

His eyes seemed to darken. “Tell me how you touched me.”

She had a very weird reaction to his question. His demand was rude and she wanted to say something snarky right back at him, but the tone of his voice affected her in a way she couldn’t handle. It wasn’t the sharp, commanding part. It was the gravelly timbre and the way that sound rolled through her. It was unfair.

It took her a long minute to drag in a breath and cross her arms stubbornly over her chest, perhaps deliberately in a way that gave a little lift to her cleavage. She’d dressed nice enough for Mr. Thursday, but she hadn’t exactly put the greatest effort in. At least she hadn’t worn the turtleneck dress. “That seems like an odd question to be asked by a man whose name I don’t know, let alone for me to bother answering.”

His jaw tightened. She followed the line of it with her gaze, until it disappeared behind the sweep of hair he’d pulled back. She couldn’t help but wonder how long that hair truly was. “Fenn,” he said after several seconds. “My name is Fenn.”

Sienna stared at him. For a split-second, her irritation spiked at the uninformative response. Then one answer slammed into her hard enough to knock the air from her lungs. She actually did know a Fenn. Sort of.

She’d seen him, in her visions. She’d seen him for years.

It wasn't like they had psychic meet-ups. It wasn't like they chatted. She didn't have control of any of it. But Fenn had become her constant. Her blood-soaked companion in the dark, the one recurring moment in time she couldn't stop seeing. It was him, this man standing in front of her. That was why his haunting eyes had enthralled her.

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“You’re ...him,” Sienna gasped, finally orienting herself. She didn’t remember dropping to the ground, but at least she had hold of the sofa still.

The hand he’d apparently partially stretched toward her fell back to his side and curled into a fist. “I don’t know what you’re talking about. You and I have never met.”

The vision of him before her blurred with her long-standing memory of him. Surrounded by a smokey cloud of black, face sometimes contorted in pain, sometimes in grief, sometimes even in anger. Hands always, always, dripping crimson with blood. It wasn’t a pleasant visual. The first few times she’d seen it she’d come-to screaming or shaking, but over time, it had become familiar. Predictable. And in that way, comforting.

The version of him in her living room now was not surrounded by any sort of black cloud and the expression on his face was notably muted.

Sienna pulled herself to her feet, uncertain if she was on to something or about to sound like a moron. “You don’t like to touch people, right? That’s why you’re freaked out that I touched you.”

His brow furrowed again. “You don’t know me,” he said. “Don’t pretend otherwise.”

Sienna stepped closer, maintaining eye-contact as she did. She half expected him to back up, but he held still. He was the perfect height. Six-foot probably exactly, a thrilling compliment to her five-foot-eight-inches. What was it about being up close to him that scrambled her brain so bad? “You’re right, I don’t know you. Not really.”

She reached out, slowly this time, and curled her hand around his gloved fist. “But I want to. I’ve wanted to for a very long time, Fenn.”

His chest rose with a heavy breath, then he jerked his hand away and finally stepped back. “Forget about me,” he said. He almost seemed to blur around the edges as he spoke. “The only knowledge I can bring you is death.”

She opened her mouth to call out to him, to beg him to stop, but it was already too late. He’d vanished.

Fenn stared down at his right hand as strange, foreign emotions rocked through him. The second time she’d touched him had been over his leather glove and technically that was safe. He still preferred to avoid it. He couldn’t actually remember the last time anyone had touched him so casually. Sulien, probably. The man had a habit of clapping people on the back when he was in good spirits. Though he’d learned to resist in Fenn’s case, so that would have been decades past.

Decades. He didn’t allow himself to think about it. About how the only time he made physical contact with another body of flesh was in the process of taking their life.

Fenn drew a deep breath and curled his hand into a tight fist, letting his arm fall again to his side. He couldn’t get past the question of how that woman—Sienna, she’d said—had managed to make direct contact with his flesh and survive. She was mortal, she had no magic shielding her, so it made no sense.

“I don’t know you. Not really. But I want to.” Her words reverberated through him and he snorted into the open night air. He doubted he’d get anywhere looking for sense.

The way he saw it, there were only two options. Either there was something protecting her, and he’d somehow missed it in his observance of her, or his power was faltering.

The latter was a dangerous possibility. In the grand scheme of things, it hadn't been so long since he'd inherited his mantle. Supposedly the previous Death had reigned for quite a while, and if the rest of the Four knew how he'd died, they weren't talking. Fenn had had the impression his predecessor's erasure had been caused by an external source. Their version of unnatural causes. If he was wrong—if the very power that made him what he'd become was already beginning to end him—then the fragile balance of reality could be in jeopardy.

There was one person he could call to hopefully verify, or eliminate, that theory. Much as he didn't love talking to the man.

Fenn dug his phone from the inner pocket of his coat and moved himself to an empty train car. He didn't really need to worry about privacy, but transitioning into the embodiment of the most ancient of concepts hadn't eliminated his tendency to seek out more isolated areas. It had just made finding them easier.

He hesitated for a moment with his thumb over the screen. Cassian would want to know why he was asking. But it was too critical to let lie, so he pressed the mockingly bright button and lifted the device to his ear.

Cassian answered after two rings, his old Roman accent biting through the line. "Do you have any idea what time it is?"

Fenn rolled his eyes. "I don't even know what time-zone you're in, Famine."

Cassian sighed heavily. "Why are you calling me, then? It's unlike you to reach out to me."

He'd made this decision for valid reasons, and still Fenn felt something in his chest pinch. He wished he could at least have called one of the others with this question. "I have a concern," Fenn said. "Can you tell if there's an imbalance in my magic?"



Silence greeted him for long seconds, followed by faint ruffling, like shifting fabric. “I don’t sense anything of that sort,” Cassian finally said. “Why? You’ve had the mantle long enough to know how to use your power. Did you do something stupid?”

Fenn locked his jaw to let the agitation wash over him. His gaze shifted toward the group of males a few yards over who seemed to have chosen to meet in the area purposefully. Two of the four were more heavily armed than the third, and the fourth had no weapon at all. They spoke amongst themselves, gesturing sharply. Violent energy swirled from them, but none were on the path to die that night.

“Are you listening?”

“I was reflecting,” Fenn lied. “I can’t think of anything I’ve done to cause my power to behave out of the ordinary.”

“Then what makes you think it is?”

Sienna’s wide, imploring eyes swam before his mind’s eye for a long second and Fenn swallowed an uncomfortable lump in his throat. “Someone touched me,” he said.

“So?”

“And didn’t die.”

Again, silence followed his words for a long minute.

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The quartet moved closer to the train, shoving at each other the way younger boys so often did. One of them stumbled and the others laughed, but it wasn't a good-natured laugh. They were playing at friendship. Theirs was a rivalry. Two of them were connected by the shared secret of a violent crime in their recent past. One of those and a different one would ultimately be connected by hatred that would culminate in both their deaths. The colors they all so proudly wore that evening were little more than a temporary truce.

Fenn could see all of it, because all of it connected to their deaths. Such was his own fate.

"I suppose I can understand your concern, then," Cassian said at length. "I'll keep my eyes open, but at this moment, nothing seems off-kilter. Perhaps that person's survival is best explained by their own story. What do you know of them?"

Fenn clutched tighter to his defenseless phone. "Not much."

Cassian made a sound somewhere between a sigh and a scoff. "Well fix that. You are Death. If they survived contact with you, it's somewhat important we know how."

When he said it so directly Fenn was hard-pressed to ignore the logic. He wondered, for a moment, if he should explain the bit he did know.

"If necessary, one of the others can eliminate them," Cassian said before Fenn could respond.

The added explanation died in the back of Fenn's throat. Cassian was looking at the

situation purely from the perspective of the Four. He saw only that someone—presumably not an ancient god—had survived the touch of Death. Maybe he thought that meant Fenn had tried to kill her, even. From that perspective, the person in question could well be a threat. But Fenn couldn't pretend to consider her assassination. He doubted the others would strike without solid reason, but the sudden concern filled him with an odd urgency and Fenn straightened.

It was all he could do to keep his voice level. "I'll look into it, then." He disconnected before he could say anything else. Or lose his temper at his eternal colleague. He was going to have to put himself in Sienna's company again ... no matter how dangerous he feared that would prove to be.

Sienna dropped onto her couch after doing everything else she could think of to distract herself. She'd showered, edited and scheduled all her prepped content for the holiday weekend, and called her best friend. Of course, by the time she'd tried that, Sherri had been passed out in bed. Gossip wasn't worth waking her so she'd told Sherri's husband not to worry and hung up. But none of it had worked.

She still couldn't stop thinking about Fenn.

With a sigh, she picked up her phone and called the only person she knew would still be up and therefore forgiving of a non-emergency call so late at night. Her workaholic oldest sister, Piper.

"Please don't tell me you've been staring at a computer screen until now," Piper said by way of greeting.

Sienna rolled her eyes. "I did have some projects to touch up," she said, "but that didn't even take two hours. And is totally not why I'm calling."

"Well I assume there's a reason," Piper said. "Most things could probably wait until

Saturday.”

“I know, I know, I’m being dramatic, okay?” Sienna twisted around on her couch and let her legs hang off the stuffed armrest. “I don’t think even you will believe how bad my date tonight went, but technically that’s not why I’m calling.” She drew a nervous breath. Why had she opted to call her strait-laced sister? “You know the guy I’ve had those recurring visions of?”

Piper was quiet for a second. “I remember the description, if that’s what you mean.”

“I met him tonight,” Sienna blurted before she could chicken out.

“You what?” Piper drew an audible breath. “Was he your Mr. Thursday?”

Sienna cringed. “Ugh, no. Eddie was—” Guilt sparked for a moment in her stomach and she paused to swallow it down. “That’s a different story. The guy from my recurring visions is Fenn. I met Fenn at the restaurant tonight, and there’s something ... I don’t know how to explain it. Something different about him.”

Piper sighed. “The dark, mysterious, anguished figure who always appeared with bloody hands? Of course there’s something different about him. Sienna, I know you’ve been curious about him, but bloodstained hands is aglaringmetaphor. Please stay away from him. I don’t want to see you hurt.”

“Gods, Piper, I’m not a child,” Sienna said. “Haven’t you considered that maybe my vision doesn’t mean what it looks like?”

“Your visions are usually pretty literal.”

“Okay, fine. Then at some point in his near future, since he looked like he does now, he’s going to come across a terribly bloody scene and try to save someone’s life,

hence the bloody hands and anguished expressions. Totally possible.”

Piper hesitated. “Yes,” she said, slowly.

“You’re the one who just pointed out my visions aren’t prone to metaphor.”

Piper groaned the way she often did when her head was starting to hurt. “I did say that. Fine. Maybe there’s an explanation. That doesn’t mean you aren’t safer away from him.”

Sienna thumped her head against the cushions of her sofa. “No way can I basically dream about a man I’ve never met for over a decade, run into him by pure coincidence, and then just let go. Have you met me?”

“Sienna Jacobsen,” Piper said, sharpening her tone. She was going to be a terrifying mother if she ever let a guy close enough. “I’m asking you to seriously consider that those dreams have been a warning. Maybe that was the best your clairvoyance could offer in terms of showing you your own future.”

Sienna pursed her lips. She honestly didn’t know why she ever tried to gossip with Piper. Ever since their parents had died, Piper had become the firm, no-nonsense sibling. “Yeah, maybe,” she said. “But I’ve never been able to change the outcomes of what I see, either. So I might as well live it up.” She swung herself upright and jabbed at the phone before her sister could retort. The movement left her dizzy, but all she had to do was drop the phone at her side before she could lower her head into her hands. I’m an idiot.

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An idiot who wished, more than anything, that she had a way of reaching out to the man who'd never been far from her thoughts since she hit puberty. A man she'd honestly never thought she'd meet.

### Stories & Secrets

Sienna decided to treat herself to one final holiday coffee before she became consumed with travel prep. Because it was freaking cold, as evidenced by the occasional tufts of white drifting down from the sky, and also because she was a grown up with her own bank account and she wanted to. She didn't need a better reason than that. There was a Peppermint Wonderland Mocha calling her name and Serendipity was there to answer that call, thank the gods.

She almost didn't want to leave the roasted coffee-scented warmth of the shop after getting her hands on the disposable cup. But most of the tables were taken, many by couples, and both lines were long enough that there wasn't a lot of standing room. It was cold out, but it was also the Friday before Christmas. Shopping was more important than keeping warm, apparently. So she smiled her thanks at the familiar barista—who smiled wide in return—and ducked around the other coffee seekers. Almost.

In her attempt to avoid two chattering late-teens who'd just barreled in, she didn't see the woman at the bar-style seat swing around to stand. The woman's knees collided with Sienna's and Sienna jolted, hot coffee spilling from the imperfect seal of the lid despite the little stick obscuring the drinking hole. The impact made her lurch, the burn made her fumble, and the way the woman jerked her legs aside only further threw off her balance.

“Watch where you’re going!” the woman snapped.

“Hey!” someone shouted from behind her.

Everything was a blur and all Sienna could think was that she hadn’t even gotten a sip of her drink yet, but she was definitely going down. The only surface she could reach to theoretically catch herself was the very woman who’d tripped her, and that required dropping the coffee. She’d managed to catch it, dammit, even at the cost of her own balance.

Then an arm shrouded in black swept beneath her and hauled her upright, locking around her torso and partially flattening her breasts. Her back pressed into a firm, blood-igniting chest and the breath rushed from her lungs. He released her just as quickly and stepped into her line of sight, as if sliding right through the very woman whose careless movement had tripped her up.

Sienna stared up into the gray-blue eyes of the man who’d haunted her dreams the night before. The man she honestly hadn’t thought she’d see again in her moments of consciousness. “Hi.”Hi? Really?

“It’s crowded here,” he said.

The woman cleared her throat pointedly. “Could you both get out of my way?”

Sienna turned, opening her mouth to snap back, but Fenn was faster.

“Shut up.”

The woman’s eyes widened for a moment before she slumped in her seat and dropped her gaze. As if suddenly unhurried.

Sienna blinked, confused and intrigued, and looked up again at Fenn.

His expression remained patient. “If you still want to talk,” he said, “I’d prefer we did so elsewhere.”

Her heart leapt. He was willing to talk! She grinned. “I was just leaving, anyway.” She stepped forward, switched her mostly salvaged coffee to the other hand, and hooked her arm through his before he could protest. “We can talk as we walk, or I suppose we can talk back at my house. Since you’ve already been there.” Inviting a man she’d technically barely met, who hadn’t exactly been forthcoming, back to her home was not something she would ordinarily be proud of. But he clearly knew where she lived, so she saw no point in holding to that unwritten rule.

Fenn required a moment of encouragement to walk with her, but allowed her to lead him out of the coffee shop. “Does your hand hurt?”

“Hm?” Sienna looked down, realizing she still had a couple of splattered mocha droplets on her skin. “Ah, not anymore.” She held the cup up. “It is fresh, you know.” Her eyes widened and she brought them abruptly to a stop barely two blocks from the café. “You probably wanted a cup! I can totally go back with you and wait. I’m not busy. Worst thing that could happen is I’ll drink my mocha before yours is ready.”

He scrunched his face in brief, but visible, disgust. “I rarely drink coffee, and never those.” He motioned to her cup with his opposite hand. “I don’t know how anyone stomachs all that sugar.”

Sienna laughed. It wasn’t like she’d never heard criticism of her preferred caffeinated concoctions. “Sure, but you did just enter a coffee house. Why else would you be there? The snacks aren’t exactly filling, and most of them are sweet this time of year.”



“I was looking for you.”

She stilled. He'd been looking for her? She dragged in a breath and tightened her grip on her drink. “I thought you wanted me to forget you.”

His expression smoothed. “Clearly you didn't.”

She rolled her eyes. “Do you think I'm that absent-minded?”

“Fenn?” The shocked feminine tone interrupted whatever he might have said in response and drew both their attentions toward the nearest intersection and a woman who was rapidly approaching them. She was model-gorgeous, petite yet curvy with long, billowy hair that had to be dyed to get that soft-yellow shade. She would have drawn attention even if she weren't dressed for weather in a different hemisphere with her thigh-length skirt, and midriff flashing, V-neck top. She aimed a glare at Sienna for a lingering second, switched her focus to Fenn and swept a gesturing hand in Sienna's direction. “What in the world is this? Have you been lying to me? Who is she?”

Sienna's mouth fell open before she could catch herself. Holy shitballs. Had she just been caught in some kind of lovers' quarrel? Yeah, that wasn't going to work for her. “Um, excuse me. Sorry.” She attempted a polite smile despite the raging female's returned glare, then moved her focus to Fenn. “Maybe you could've mentioned you had a person?” Was it just not her year? She slid her arm from his, doing her best to ignore the stab of pain in her heart. Attraction or no, she was no one's mistress.

Fenn shot out his hand and snatched hers almost before it was free again. His gloved hand curled tightly around her bare one and he frowned. “I don't. There was nothing to mention.” He faced the blonde again as she made an inarticulate noise. “This is the last time I'll tolerate you making a scene, Florence. Find someone else to stalk.”

“No,” the woman, Florence, said firmly. She stomped forward in her heeled boots, as if she were going to attack Sienna. “I won’t lose to this random, mortal, trash.” At the last second she twisted around and threw herself bodily into Fenn, even reaching up to wrap her arms around his neck.

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Sienna had a surreal moment of finding herself insulted in the strangest way. Trash was one thing—if Florence thought she had any kind of claim, rational or not, at least that much Sienna understood—but how was mortality an insult? Then she registered the way Fenn immediately jerked back, releasing her hand in the interest of shoving Florence off him even as the other woman let out a scream of agony.

Florence stumbled back, mindless of anyone around them, arms folding around herself and spitting up blood. Her chest heaved and tears leaked from her blue eyes.

“Dammit, Florence,” Fenn said with a growl. “I’ve told you—”

“Wh-why,” she gasped, her voice choked. “Why canshet-touch you?” She coughed again and spat blood and mucus onto the snow-dotted concrete.

Confusion flooded Sienna as she watched Florence shove her own hand beneath her short top and wrap the other around her throat. A strange breeze swirled around the blonde, ruffling her loose hair, and Florence squeezed her eyes shut for a long second.

“Get out of here, Florence,” Fenn said. “There’s nothing I can do for you here, and if you pull that stunt again I might not stop you.”

An older woman with mostly silver hair stepped closer to them, looking between Fenn and Florence hesitantly. Her gaze lingered on the blood that stained the ground. “Ma’am, do you need any help?”

The dark cloud of energy Sienna had previously associated with Fenn swirled up into

view and when he spoke, his voice was more snarl than human. “Leave us.”

Sienna’s eyes widened as the woman immediately straightened, shook her head faintly, and turned away. Not even an argument. Another person, a man, abruptly turned away as well. Was it possible he had some kind of persuasion power in addition to the teleportation thing? And how did any of that explain what had happened to Florence when she’d touched him? Another possibility dawned on Sienna without warning. Maybeshewas the oddity in the equation.

“Tell me how you touched me.”

Was it possible he had three overlapping powersets? Or one larger thing that somehow explained the weird triple combination?

And she’d always thought her family was weird.

Fenn took her hand in his again and lowered his voice as the swirling black closed around them. “We’re leaving.”

Florence opened her eyes and leveled a dark glare at Sienna moments before the black energy sucked all color and shape from Sienna’s vision once more. It left a brief negative type image of Florence imprinted in Sienna’s mind. An image that forced a hard breath from her lungs the second the world returned to her, again settling them in her living room.

Sienna jerked away from Fenn, nearly dropping her coffee with the sharp movement, and spun to face him. “What the hell was that? What the actualhell just happened?”

Fenn bit out a sigh, the sound undeniably agitated. “That was Florence Dossit. She developed an unfathomable obsession with me some time ago and takes great joy in popping into my life without notice or permission.”

“Fantastic,” Sienna said. Her tone was probably snippier than it needed to be. She was rattled and she felt like she’d been dragged into something she shouldn’t have been. She popped the stopper from her coffee and gulped at least half the drink down, further frustrated to learn it had cooled more than she liked. She turned toward her kitchen, found a light switch in the process, and began peeling her heavy coat and scarf from her body once her hands were free. “So that woman hates me because I was flirting with the guy she’s stalking. And she’s clearly a raving psycho. All awesome, but not really what I meant.”

“You want to know why she nearly died.”

Sienna twisted to face him again. “Duh.” She dragged in a breath and attempted to calm herself. “This is connected to why you were weirded out about me touching you last night, right? Which I also presume is why you were looking for me?”

Fenn nodded.

The flicker of disappointment in her chest sobered her much better than her forgotten breathing techniques. Sienna folded her arms across her chest. “I’m gonna need an explanation,” she said. “But to answer the question you asked me last night, or the version I think you meant, I don’t know. I just grabbed you. I didn’t do anything special.”

His lips dipped into a frown and he stepped closer at a slow pace, as if to give her the opportunity to tell him to back off. She felt rather conflicted about that. When he was within arm’s reach, he said, “The answer to everything you’re asking is all the same, but it might be hard to process.”

She huffed out an awkward laugh. “Guess I haven’t done the best at demonstrating my amazing capacity for handling difficult things, huh?” She lifted a hand to rub at the back of her neck and only as she did so did she realize that the muscle had tensed.

Responding to her unusual spike of panic. Oh no. “Crap.” Why hadn’t she recognized the sensation sooner? Spots already dotted the edges of her vision, blurring the handsome figure of a man standing before her.

It looked like he was frowning again. “Sienna?”

The white built quickly and she reached out, the unsteadiness rushing over her. She felt so stupid. Her fingers twisted sloppily into some portion of Fenn’s shirt as her consciousness slipped entirely out of the moment.

Her line of sight narrowed sharply, obscuring everything but snow and two forward-marching figures. Both muscular and male, one slightly ahead of the other. There were only two of them, but they were an imposing sight. Yet they didn’t fill her with trepidation as they drew nearer. Nor did their broad-shouldered figures fill her with yearning.

Suddenly a light was shining overhead from her perspective, out of sight, but intruding enough to catch her attention. As if it were a homing beacon for the two figures that continued to draw closer, cutting their way through the snow. Sienna was barely able to look away enough to take in what little else she could see. She barely noticed the speckled pattern of blood dotting the snow practically at her feet before something snapped her free.

Her consciousness slammed back into the present and Sienna shot upright, breathing hard.

She was home, not out in the snow. She wasn’t nearly cold enough to be in the snow. And she was laid out on her sofa as if she’d had all the warning in the world.

“Looks like you have your own story to tell.”

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Fenn's rumbling voice from her immediate left settled her in the moment and shame rushed over her as Sienna turned her gaze his way. It had been an impressively long time since she'd so blatantly lost herself like that. My sisters are gonna kill me. She did what she could to push the thought down and adjusted herself to sit so that there was space beside her. If he was willing. "I, um, I'm sorry about that."

His brow furrowed faintly and he reached out, gently curling his gloved fingers around her bare ones. "You aren't sick," he said, "but that doesn't seem healthy."

His statement was more than a little odd and she chuckled. "Oh, you could say that again." She patted the cushion next to hers. "C'mon, it's story time. Tell me yours, I'll tell you mine?" It was only fair at this point. He wasn't exactly the first person she'd had to out herself to because of her intrusive visions.

He hesitated, but to Sienna's surprise, complied enough to sit beside her. With about a half foot of space between them. For some reason, she hated that small, stupid distance immediately.

Sienna drew a breath and dragged her focus to his unyielding stare. She was sure curiosity flickered beneath the calm, cool gaze of his gray-blue eyes. Though it was probably silly to think she could read him so well. "I should insist you go first," she said, "but I'll take the lead if it makes you more comfortable." She grinned a little. "I am a lady, after all." She'd never been called one in her life.

The corners of his eyes crinkled with something like amusement. "Ladies first, then."

She rolled her hands in her lap for a moment, briefly reliving her sisters' initial

reactions to learning that she'd had to tell Sherri. Sherri wasn't actually the only one she'd told, but her sisters had managed to work together to make the others forget somehow. She'd have to make sure Fenn was educated not just on her secret, but on the secrecy of it. One thing at a time. "So, ordinarily I'd say this will probably sound crazy, but I'm thinking it might not be the craziest thing you've ever heard." She'd completely forgotten how nerve-wracking it was to reveal this part of herself.

Fenn reached out when she paused and laid his hand lightly over the tops of hers, stilling them. "I guarantee it won't," he said.

Sienna offered him a genuine smile. "I'm clairvoyant." His eyes widened dramatically. "I don't want to make assumptions about your life experiences, so I'll explain," she said. "That means technically I see the future. But not in any chronological, sensible, order. I don't have great control over it." She rolled her eyes. "Though it's been a while since I've been as blindsided by a vision as what you saw a few minutes ago. That was super embarrassing."

Fenn composed himself, his expression settling back into neutral. "So when you said you'd seen me before, that was what you meant?"

Her heart rate spiked. It was a totally logical question. She let out an awkward half-laugh. "Um, kind of?"

His lips dipped into a frown that in no way marred his appeal. "What other answer is there?"

"My visions are usually—" Sienna trailed as she sought an explanation. Finally she lifted her hands and boxed them together, creating a small window that gave a general idea of her viewpoint. "What I see is really compacted, usually short-lived, and the portion I see plays out like a scene. Like a play or something." She let her hands drop back to her lap. "I have seen you in a vision, but that vision is different in



a few ways.” Heat rushed to her cheeks as she began ticking off her points on her fingers. “The weird keyhole viewpoint isn’t there when I see you. It doesn’t play out like a scene, it’s not a glimpse of something happening, it’s just a lingering image.” She swallowed. “And it’s the only vision I’ve ever had that’s repeated. Several times.”

He let out a low, thoughtful hum when she stopped and she looked back at him to find he’d leaned back and caught his chin between thumb and forefinger. “That is interesting.”

She licked her lips, her mouth suddenly dry. “You never speak,” she said. “There’s no one else around. But I realized, after the second or third time, somehow I knew your name. Like I just woke up with the knowledge ingrained in me.” One more nervous breath and she squared her shoulders. “And, you might not know because it might totally be circumstantial, but is there any reason my vision would depict you with bloodstained hands?”

He regarded her quietly.

“My visions are almost always literal,” Sienna said. “But the bloody hands thing feels more like a metaphor.” Except as the words fell from her rambling lips, a possibility occurred to her. There was the thing with Florence—the thing she didn’t understand. Maybe that was connected? After all, as she had literally just explained, the vision she’d repeatedly had of him was different from any other.

Fenn let out a near silent sigh. “I suppose it’s my turn, then.”

Sienna blinked. She didn’t really feel like they’d finished the other track of conversation, but she also wanted to know. About the odd incident with Florence, and him, in general.

He locked his stare on her. “I am Death.”

She waited a moment for him to say more, to elaborate, but he seemed done. “I’m sorry,” she said. “Capital D Death? How can you be a concept?”

His brow pinched slightly. “You’re familiar with the idea of the Four Horsemen?”

Her mouth opened, but it was a second before she was able to articulate a response. As intelligent as it was. “You mean like ‘The Four Horsemen of the Apocalypse’ Four Horsemen?”

He tipped his head. “That is the general phrase.”

Sienna twisted to face him. “Are you trying to tell me you are the Death? The Pale Rider, the Grim Reaper, the Angel of Death—that Death?” She barely even processed the words coming out of her mouth. And she’d thought her story would be hard to swallow.

“Colloquially, yes,” Fenn said. “I’m not an angel, and only the original Four actually rode creatures resembling horses.”

She dragged in another breath, forcing herself to think about his words and what she’d witnessed. How they correlated. Asking herself if it was even possible. She’d always said she believed in everything. A part of her had even secretly hoped that her grandmother’s fairytale of their family line having been blessed by a goddess sometime in the past—an explanation for the strange powers the women in their family were born with—was true. Despite all that, Fenn’s statement made her doubt, just for a minute.

“Okay,” Sienna finally said. “So you’re like the God of Death. Do you just never turn it off? Or does Florence bring out the worst in you?” Another thought, another

memory, immediately followed. “And shouldn’t you be too busy to sit here chatting with some random girl? I mean, it seems weird that you’d be personally ... whatevering every single heart attack victim, but that’s gotta be more important, right?” She snapped her mouth shut as soon as she realized she’d started rambling.

Fenn stared at her for a beat, as if she’d overwhelmed him. She probably had. Then he gave a short shake of his head and said, “I’m just Death, and so long as I exist, the cycle functions without my active intervention. I rarely need to take part.” He made a sort of grunting sound and looked away briefly. “Though you aren’t wrong about Florence. But put simply, my power is always active. Skin contact is enough to end any life.” His gaze returned to hers with a renewed intensity. “Except, it seems, yours.”

A chill of excitement shot down her spine. Sienna barely held herself in place. “It didn’t look like she was dead when we left.”

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“She’ll survive,” Fenn said. He paused for only a heartbeat. “She, like us, was born with a rare power. Hers is a form of healing she’s learned to use to extend her natural lifespan.”

“Holy shit,” Sienna said. She gave herself a shake. “But I think you buried an interesting story. What’s this ‘us’ you mentioned? Weren’t you born ... you know, undead or whatever?”

He huffed and sank back into the cushion of her sofa. “Human, actually,” he said. Before Sienna could point out how confusing that was, or how distracting he looked finally relaxing into her couch, he continued. “Everything that exists will cease, in some way or form, eventually. But we are necessary, so when one of the Four is extinguished, their unique magic is automatically drawn to whichever soul has the most potential. Candidate souls can be living humans or anyone recently deceased. In my case, I was alive in the biological sense when the void found me.”

Something about the way he phrased the final sentence gave Sienna pause. A dreadful thought occurred to her and her question came out in a whisper. “Did you already ... have a dangerous power?”

Fenn turned his head enough to let her see the wry tip of his lips. “My touch has always been lethal.”

Understanding jolted through her like an electric shock. And she could only think of one thing to do. She pushed herself forward, grabbed his head in her hands, and brought her face up to his until their noses nearly touched. “Not to me,” she said softly. She didn’t wait for his response before leaning in and pressing her lips to his.

## First Kiss

It was as though his world exploded when Sienna's lips melded to his. Her warm, bare hands slid back along his jaw until her fingers were digging into his scalp. Everywhere her flesh touched his sent sparks of flame and something possibly warmer shooting into him. He couldn't help but groan at the sensation, and the moment the sound left him, Sienna swept her tongue past his faintly parted lips.

He had only ever imagined what it was like to kiss another. That was one thing he could never manage to accomplish without exposing the other party to direct contact that would surely have killed them. Now, as Sienna's tongue swirled around his and she tightened her hold to let her breasts press against his chest, Fenn was glad he'd never tried. He didn't want another memory competing with this sweet, addictive taste.

He wrapped his arms around her back, letting one hand slide up her spine until his fingers were tangled in her hair. She hadn't been entirely wrong that he probably had other things he should be doing. Nor had he lied when he'd told her that he wasn't strictly obligated to be present. And for the first time in as long as he could remember, certainly since before his mortal death, he didn't want to isolate himself.

He wanted every taste of this unique, fascinating woman he could possibly get his hands on.

Their tongues danced from one mouth to the other, her fingers playing over the back of his neck and pulling at his hair, until she could no longer breathe. By the time she pulled from his lips she was sideways in his lap, sitting on his raging erection, and both of them were breathing hard. Her cheeks were flushed a beautiful rosy color that complimented her hazel eyes and her lips were a bit swollen, but that was it. There was nothing wrong with her.

Even after all that contact, she hadn't so much as developed a rash.

As if reading his mind, Sienna grinned and tapped the exposed skin at the base of his throat deliberately. "See?" she said. "I'm totally fine."

Fenn exhaled, attempting to remain rational despite the burn racing through him. "You had no guarantee," he said. "That was reckless."

She laughed faintly and shifted forward, her fingertips playing across the side of his face. "I have been accused of that in the past, it's true." She pressed her lips to the underside of his jaw in a brief, chaste kiss that did something strange to his chest. Then her breath washed over his ear. "I'd say it all worked out, though."

Fenn swallowed. He wanted her, indisputably, but he wasn't sure in this moment what he actually wanted more—to relieve his aching dick in her hot core, or to simply experience the ecstasy of her touch along the expanse of his body. Both sounded amazing.

Both options were unequivocally off the table.

Drawing on his lifetime's worth of hard-learned restraint, Fenn lifted her up and off his lap. He set her back in her spot on the sofa and stood, putting himself out of easy reach.

"Hey! What was that? Don't try to tell me you weren't into it."

Fenn shoved his hands into coat pockets. "That's irrelevant. You've proven your immunity to my touch, but we still need to establish how." Did they? He didn't feel like he was thinking clearly.

Sienna huffed. "Seriously? Come on." She stood and stepped closer to him, reaching

out for him. He moved back and she stopped, her arm hanging in the air. “I thought we were getting past this.” The hurt on her face sliced through him and Fenn averted his gaze.

“What did you think was happening, Sienna?”

“I-I don’t know, okay?” Sienna threw her hands into the air. “But I know I’m drawn to you, and I know there has to be something between us if I’m immune to your death touch. Not to mention those visions I’ve had of you. So you can’t just ghost me.”

She did have a point. He hated that as much as he hated that he knew he needed to stop giving in to her. Fenn hardened his expression and faced Sienna again, half of living room between them. “I am the immortal embodiment of death itself,” he said. “My human life ended nearly eighty years ago, and when I was alive, I was responsible for the deaths of countless innocents. You don’t want to get involved with me, Sienna. That only ends one way.”

Sienna drew a deep breath, her chest puffing out and her shoulders arching back. Almost as if she were squaring herself for a fight. Then she planted her hands on her hips, never breaking eye-contact, and said, “I don’t give a damn who you are. You don’t get to haunt my dreams, give me nightmares, then somehow turn into my source of comfort and secret fantasy for most of my life, just to prove to be real and tell me I’m not worth your time. Newsflash, Mr. Grim Reaper, I’ve seen more death than the average person. Turns out I’ve seen other visions of you that I didn’t realize were you until after the other night. I know what you do. I know we’re incompatible, okay? But I’m not normal, either. And if I’m gonna keep seeing you, I’d rather do it in person.”

Her shoulders dropped with what remained of her breath when she finally trailed off, a tear rolling down her cheek. She looked away, then, and her cheeks flamed again.

Fenn closed his eyes, attempting to sort out his unusually confused emotions. He wasn't used to giving a shit about the people around him. He'd worked hard not to, because sympathy for even one human could quickly become detrimental.

"Christmas," Sienna said, her tone a little weaker.

Fenn opened his eyes and frowned at her. "What about it?"



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This time when she met his gaze, her expression was searching. Pleading. “You said yourself the magic thing still works without you actually doing stuff. So spend the holiday weekend with me. Be my Christmas date. We don’t have to tell my sisters the truth about you, I’ll make something else up to explain your touch aversion. Maybe if you meet my family you’ll learn something to explain our connection and make it worth your time.”

That suggestion seemed like a stretch, just as her request was clearly ridiculous. At least it should have been, if not for the haunting memory of Cassian’s words.

“If necessary, one of the others can eliminate them.”

Fenn had been opposed to that suggestion from the onset, but even the idea of it now, just a handful of hours later, sparked a genuine rage inside him. He actually had to remind himself that Cassian hadn’t said anything unreasonable, given the information he had. And if Fenn was going to look Cassian in the eye later and honestly say he’d thoroughly investigated the situation and determined it not to be a threat, he was going to need more information. Familial information would be useful for that.

He unlocked his jaw carefully. “I’m not the sociable type.”

Sienna blinked at him slowly.

Fenn released a breath and moved forward, stepping into her space. He tipped her chin up. “I don’t have people skills.”

A slow smile lifted her lips. “You’re in luck. My sisters are just as awkward as I am,

and hypocritically single. No spouses or kids to deal with.”

Fenn leaned in and brushed his lips across hers in a light caress. His body ignited at the teasing contact and his heart thrilled at the way she responded, a soft gasp escaping her. “Then from now, until you return from your Christmas trip, I’ll stay with you.”

She pushed up on her toes to steal a wet, distracting kiss. Her hands latched onto the open lapels of his coat. “I don’t suppose you’d be willing to extend that through New Year’s weekend?”

Fenn frowned and moved his hands to her hips. “Christmas.”

She pouted. “Scrooge.”

He grunted and slammed his lips to hers, pulling her flush against him. If they were going to agree to be together for the next few days, he was going to get every drop of ecstasy available from her before that damn day ended. He wanted to touch more of her and to feel her touch travel across his skin. As their tongues reunited in a wet, hungry dance, Fenn’s hands slid down and sank into her ass until he’d hauled her off her feet. Her legs curled around him, hooking on his hips, and he growled into her kiss. Which earned him a sultry giggle.

He’d taken a single step toward her sofa, nothing else on his mind but the feel of the sweet woman in his arms, when the doorbell rang.

Sienna was sure her face was still unusually flushed when she pulled the door open, a smile plastered on her face. She’d never been so easily riled up. There was a hunger in Fenn’s kiss that not only consumed her but seeped in and spread through her, until the attraction she’d felt for him from the onset became the only thing that mattered. At least as far as her hormones were concerned.

“Hey,” Sherri said. She offered Sienna a tired smile and held out one of the two coffees in her hands. “Sorry for dropping in. I know you’re probably last-minute packing for your drive, but I needed a sanity break. Peace offering?”

Sienna let out a short laugh, accepted the drink they both knew she was addicted to, and moved aside enough for her best friend to enter the house. “Well, since you brought a present,” she said, teasing. She turned with the intention to plow through surely awkward introductions and her breath caught in her throat.

Fenn was gone.

Disappointment twisted in her gut and Sienna busied herself with closing and locking the door. Maybe he’d only left to avoid Sherri. Or maybe he took a breath and changed his mind. It wasn’t like they’d made some sacred pact. No contracts had been signed or money exchanged. He had been resistant to the whole idea from the onset. She wasn’t stupid, recent actions aside. She knew she’d been pushy. Who wouldn’t be pushy when what could be their only chance at seizing their literal dreams was pulling away?

“One day I really am going to convince you to decorate for Christmas,” Sherri said as she moved deeper into the space. Then she made a sound. “Oh, I’m sorry, did you already have a cup?”

Sienna did her best to tamp down her spiraling thoughts. She could obsess about Fenn later. For one thing, Sherri was right, she had a sizable drive ahead of her that she’d have to be leaving for shortly. A timeline she would definitely have screwed up if Sherri hadn’t stopped by. “Huh?” She gave her head a shake, spotting the abandoned cup with her cold morning’s coffee on the table a little in front of her friend. “Oh, no. That’s from earlier. It— There was a thing, and it got cold. So I kinda forgot about it.”

“A thing?” Sherri sipped at her drink. “What happened? Are you okay?”

Sienna waved a hand, gulped down the still warm liquid in her new coffee, and plopped herself down on the sofa. “Totally fine.” She didn’t really feel fine, and in turn that made her feel stupid. “Anyway, what about you? Not that you’re not welcome anytime, but usually you at least text first.” Granted, Sienna hadn’t been paying any attention to her phone. She liked to think she’d have still heard it.

Sherri lowered to her preferred seat and tucked her partially dyed hair behind an ear. “We’re leaving for my in-laws’ place in the morning, right? Well, I just found out my mother-in-law threw a royal fit when she heard we’d booked a hotel for the stay.” She gestured with her free hand. “I mean, screaming that Christmas was ruined because she wouldn’t get to see her grandbabies and we were sabotaging all her plans for the holiday, the whole shebang.” Sherri turned a strained smile over to her. “So do you know what my wonderful husband did?”

That tone was never good and it made Sienna a little afraid to ask. Her lips twitched. “I think I’m glad I don’t.”

Sherri snorted, rolled her eyes, and said, “He cancelled our hotel reservation, even though we booked it at the cheaper price by choosing to waive the cancellation option. Because we were definitely going, and we’d agreed beforehand not to let her pressure us.”

“Oh no.”

“Oh, yes.” Sherri chugged whatever was left of her drink, probably tea, and set the cup on Sienna’s end table. “So we’re stuck paying a minimum one night’s fee, more if they can’t re-book, and the four of us are sleeping together in his childhood room. All weekend.”

Sienna blew out a breath. “He’s totally lucky he’s not married to me. I’d call the hotel back to see if I could keep the reservation, and use it for myself. And the baby, because obviously mama gets to make that call, not grandma. I’d probably let him share with the toddler and call it a compromise.”

Sherri started laughing, the sound somehow sarcastic and tired, and wiped at an eye. “That actually sounds genius. I wish I’d called you when I first heard about this fiasco, instead of wasting time yelling at him and then driving around trying to cool off. It’s probably too late now.”

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“Yeah, probably.” Sienna scooted over and slung an arm around her friend in a companionable, hopefully comforting, hug. “Let’s be honest, we both knew he was the weak one, right? So take notes. If he doesn’t learn this year, then next year, he gets a choice—the cancellation fee comes out of his paycheck, or you get the hotel and a peaceful night’s sleep.”

Sherri leaned her head on Sienna’s shoulder. “Oh, I’m taking so many notes.” She laughed again, briefly, and this time the sound was more genuine. “I do feel bad for the guy you finally choose. Unless he’s some kind of god, he’s so screwed. And that’s not even factoring in your sisters.”

Sienna attempted a laugh, because she knew it was expected, even as her heart clenched. For most of her life she’d believed that if she ever got to meet the mysterious, anguished man in her recurring visions, he’d either kill her or become someone crucial to her. She never saw visions of her own future, or things she could prove directly impacted her future, but that one had always been different. So she’d always wondered if it was an exception. And she certainly couldn’t say she was in love with Fenn after such little contact with him ... but something inside of her felt invested. More than made sense.

Sherri sat up and turned a frown on her. “Hey, you okay?”

Sienna blinked, swallowing hard. “Um, why?” Okay, not the best deflection.

Sherri’s frown deepened. “‘Cause you seem off and that laugh was all wrong. I’m sorry, I needed to rant and I wasn’t paying attention. What’s going on? Did you see something upsetting?”

Crap. She didn't usually make a habit of hiding things from Sherri, but Fenn and the whole actual-Death thing? Yeah. She was keeping that to herself ... especially if he really had bailed already. So she scrambled for something else she could say that Sherri would accept and blurted, "You were right about Mr. Thursday. Way more of a creep than his picture showed."

Sherri's eyes widened. "Did he try anything? Do we need to call the police?"

Sienna barked out an awkward laugh. "Gods, no. The police were already called." Speaking of ... shouldn't they have come looking for her? Or maybe they didn't care?

"I'm sorry, what?"

Sienna took a moment to finish her own coffee, the sweet chocolaty taste offering a momentary comfort. "He totally lied on his profile," she said. "But the worst part was that like right after I got up to leave ... he had some kind of heart attack, I guess." Sherri's eyes nearly bulged out of her head. Sienna stood and indicated for Sherri's cup, suddenly unable to sit still. With both in hand, she headed toward the garbage in the kitchen. "It was like five kinds of cliché and yes, I feel like an ass for talking bad about him, but he did what he did. Not that I'm saying he deserved to die or anything."

"Ohmygod," Sherri gasped. "He died? Right there in the restaurant?"

Sienna dropped the cups, then snatched up her older one and drained the remaining contents down the sink before adding it to the garbage she needed to get to emptying. "Yeah." She did feel bad about that, though she mostly felt guilty for using the story as a conversational distraction.

"That's horrible. My gosh, Sienna, that's the kind of thing people need therapy for."

How are you so casual? It's okay to be freaked out." Sherri sounded a little freaked out.

Sienna bit her lip for a moment. Her friend meant well and she had basically just dumped a rather dramatic story on her. She clenched her hands at her sides, trying to work out her response, and nearly screamed when what felt like a larger hand curled around hers. The unexpected touch came with a presence pressed up behind her and a murmured voice in her ear.

"There was nothing you could have done."

Her breath caught in her throat. She didn't dare move. A solid five seconds passed before she was brave enough to whisper, "Fenn?"

Soft, faintly cooler lips pressed briefly against the skin beneath her ear as the hand over hers gave a squeeze. "Right here."

He's invisible! That was both awesome and somewhat intimidating, but nevertheless it sent a thrill spiraling through her and Sienna relaxed. She gave a faint nod, since she couldn't catch his hand to hold it or squeeze it back, and forced herself to turn back toward Sherri. "Sorry," she said. "I shouldn't have just blurted that. I just ... didn't know how to tell you."

Sherri stood and stepped up to her, pulling Sienna's hands into hers. "I'm worried about you," she said. "It's bad enough you have to see God only knows what in your visions, but to see something like that in person? That's traumatic, Sienna."

She probably had a valid point. Still, Sienna shrugged. "I know this'll sound callous, but the truth is ... it's not like I haven't seen kind of a lot of death." She barely managed not to giggle at her very dumb double-meaning. "I went through a phase when violent visions were all I had, and a lot of those ended in death." A lot of them



had involved smoky, ambiguous figures on the peripheral that she only now realized had likely been the very same man lurking invisibly in her kitchen. And thinking it that way made her wonder what kind of very indecent things he could get away with with that trick. What is wrong with me?

Sherri let out a sad sigh, pulling Sienna's focus forward for at least another moment. "I never considered that. I feel like a terrible friend for not being more involved with your visions somehow. Maybe I should've been asking questions or—"

"Gods, no!" Sienna held tightly to Sherri's hands. "Listen to me, Sher. It's been such a relief to have a normal person in my life who still accepts me, craziness and all. My sisters ask enough questions about things I've seen. And yeah, you're totally right, I probably need a crap-ton of therapy. But most people would commit me before they'd believe I can actually see glimpses of the future. So I deal, and I have my sisters and you to help keep me grounded. You're definitely helping, okay?"

Several seconds passed before Sherri dragged in a breath and nodded, as if talking herself into accepting Sienna's words. "All right, if you're sure. But are you okay traveling alone? Even if you've seen things like that before, it could still just be too raw..."

A whole new type of guilt surged up inside Sienna and she nearly declared that she would not, in fact, be traveling alone. She opened her mouth, even, to say so before her brain engaged and she stuttered inelegantly. Finally, she collected herself enough to laugh and say, "Shit. I really do need to finish packing and get on the road, don't I? Yeah, I'll totally be fine. I'll crank up my music and pump myself so full of caffeine the car won't even need fuel."

Sherri laughed and stepped back. "Well, I can't argue with you when you're that determined. So I should get home and finish my own preparations. Thanks for letting me vent."

Sienna followed her to the door. “What’re friends for?”

They hugged in the doorway and Sherri walked herself to the curb, where her sensible SUV was parked. Sienna waved one more time after her friend was tucked inside, then backed into her entryway and shut the door. She let out a breath as the deadbolt flipped and turned, telling herself not to be too hopeful.

He could still have disappeared.

He hadn’t.

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She smiled at the again-visible man in layers of black, standing on the edge of her kitchen. “So, you can make yourself invisible, huh?”

His lips twitched. “That’s one way to put it,” he said. “I move between dimensions.” He stepped forward and extended an arm, swinging it on a collision course with the solid back of her sofa. Except the faintest trace of his smoke-like energy swirled up his arm and his arm swept right through her couch as he continued forward. Unhindered.

Sienna let out a whistle. “That’s awesome. Freaky, but awesome.” It also reminded her of another question she’d had. “So, you can move between this physical world and some other shadowy one—” He nodded when she paused and she continued. “You can teleport, and of course there’s the death touch thing. What about mind control? Is that why you thought I’d forget you after last time?”

Fenn chuckled, the sound low and rumbly. “The only part of death I do not control is the ability to reverse it,” he said. “Which means I possess many abilities, designed to make me better at eliminating my target. That includes the ability to push a susceptible human consciousness a certain way.”

Sienna mulled that over. “Like a bad influence?”

“Precisely.”

Somehow she was standing inside his personal space again. “My sisters are going to freak out so bad.”

His gloved hands lifted to settle on her hips. “When are they expecting you?”

Sienna groaned at the reminder and dropped her head to his chest. “I really do have to get everything into the car and get going. It’ll take most of the day to get there.”

Fenn bent down and pulled her lips up to his in a long, slow kiss that had her knees threatening to buckle. “Don’t worry about the drive, Sienna. What time do you need to be there?”

### Bare Skin

This was a thousand times better than driving by herself through a burgeoning winter storm, trying to force the holiday spirit by mixing her favorite alt rock bands with popular Christmas covers. Fenn had offered to transport her, and her things, in the moments before her anticipated arrival time. If they did the transportation in the car she could drive up to her sister’s house as expected and leave them none-the-wiser. It felt a little deceptive, but it was harmless. Frankly, it sounded exciting.

Almost as exciting as the pleasurable groans Fenn couldn’t seem to contain as she explored his subtly sculpted muscles. Each low, rumbling vibration sent a thrill through her and encouraged her to continue teasing his skin with her lips, her tongue, and her wandering fingers. She’d never met a man so appreciative of every light touch. It tore at her heart a little to consider the reason behind that reaction, and in turn, she vowed to touch as much of him as he allowed.

She was somewhere between amazed and frustrated that currently that was only everything above the waist. At least based on the clothing he still wore.

All of him was pale, of course. She’d expected that, just as she’d expected him to be cooler to the touch. But she’d been honestly a bit surprised by the definition to his arms and his abdomen. It only made her want to touch and lick him that much more.

She trailed a hand slowly down his arm, making sure to put some weight behind it so that her fingers rolled over every muscle, and angled her head to kiss along his collar bone. His hand came up, dragging over her side and up to her shoulder. His touch raised goosebumps of anticipation she'd never experienced before.

Fenn sucked in a breath when she teased his skin with her teeth and she smiled.

She took hold of his arm, pulled his hand to her face, and pressed a kiss to his palm. Even his fingers were smooth, unblemished, as if he hadn't worked a single day in his human life. She couldn't bring herself to wonder about that in the moment, however, and proceeded to slide her tongue around his fingers at a slow pace. She teased it between the digits, swirled it around the length of one, then moved on to another, before opening her mouth a bit more and swallowing two of his fingers past her lips. She rubbed her tongue along them and sucked intermittently, and her body pulsed in response to his long, low groan. He hooked his fingers into her cheek and tugged until she craned her neck enough to look up at him.

The heat and hunger in his formerly cool eyes had her squirming and she released his fingers with a wet pop. He was breathing hard and his other hand was glued to her backside. When he'd shoved that hand beneath the waistline of her pants for a better grip she'd made her own sounds of happiness, as much for the contact as for the display of desire. But even that didn't compare to the pure want in his eyes.

Sienna trailed her thumb over his wrist bone, her gaze slipping from his to take him in as his fingers stretched to brush across her bare shoulder. That was when she saw it. The one debatable blemish on his otherwise unmarked flesh. A tattoo.

Captivated, Sienna pulled his arm up for a better inspection.

The tattoo took up most of the back of his right forearm. It looked like a gray, maybe silver, scythe swinging out and downward from a cloud of off-white, almost

yellowish-green, mist. The blade of the scythe curved around just enough that the top portion actually curled over his wrist, covering the major vein there. The faintest trace of red lined the edge of the scythe's blade, barely visible, even up close as she was. It was beautiful, but haunting.

"The mark of Death," Fenn said, his voice thicker than usual. He rolled his wrist so the bulk of the tattoo was visible again. "Each member of the Four is identified by his mark. This is mine, and so long as the magic of the void resides inside me, it remains."

Sienna traced her fingers lightly along the length of the scythe, noting the way Fenn's flesh pebbled and he suppressed a shiver. She looked up and met his gaze again. "Well at least you got some cool ink out of it."

Fenn snorted and crawled the fingers of his other hand past the edge of her panties until he was digging into her flesh. "Come up here and kiss me."

Her body clenched with a fresh wave of desire at his demand. Sienna released his arm and deliberately shimmied her way up his torso, letting her lacey bra drag across his chest and her pelvis rub against his. She'd intended to be teasing him, but the plan backfired, as each shift and wiggle only exacerbated her desire.

Still, she reached his face and danced her fingers along his jawbone. "Am I supposed to say 'yes, sir'?"

Fenn grunted, latched a hand to the nape of her neck, and pulled her lips to his. He held her tightly against him, taking her full weight as their tongues danced between mouths. She could feel his desire pressing into her, could feel his passion from his grip and the way he kissed her.

She squirmed a little more, reached behind her as her movements caused the kiss to

break, and distracted his inevitable question by dropping open-mouthed kisses to his neck and shoulder. Her fingers worked quickly and when the bra came free she sat up, adjusting so she was straddling him, and shrugged it off. “I know we only have a few hours,” she said, “but I want you, Fenn. And if we’re really doing this, then let’s do it all.”

Fenn growled low and finally released her ass in favor of dragging both hands up her torso. He studied her for a moment as he touched her, trailing his fingers over the swell of her breasts and thumbing her nipples. Sienna let her responding groan fall free and grabbed his wrists, holding them to her chest. He didn’t require encouragement before his light, explorative touch became heavier.

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Sienna let her hands trail down his arms before falling to his chest, nails digging into his skin as he pinched at her nipples.

Suddenly Fenn sat up, his arms folding around her and hands tangled in her hair, his clothed erection grinding against her center. He licked at her lips, teased her lower lip with his teeth, and locked his ravenous stare on hers. “If you’re sure this is what you want,” he said, “then I want you to sit on my face.”

Her jaw dropped and she was absolutely certain that if her panties hadn’t been ruined before, they were a moment after his words rushed through her. “You ... areyou sure?”

He angled his head and rained kisses along her jaw. “I want to taste you,” he said, his voice a low, rumbling murmur. “Every bit of you.” He paused to latch his lips to her neck in a wet kiss that would definitely leave a mark. “And I want to know what makes you feel good.”

Sienna took a breath. That statement reminded her of a thought she’d had, around the time they’d first tumbled onto her bed and after his jacket had hit the floor. There really was no good time to ask, so she did the best to gentle her voice. “I assume you’ve never ... done any of this?” She honestly had never thought an inexperienced guy could be so appealing, either.

He chuckled, but the sound was faintly bitter. “None of what we’ve done so far,” he said. “It’s fair to say I’m sexually inexperienced. When I was human I did give in to my urges once, so I’m also not a virgin.”



Her eyes bulged. “You did what?”

He lifted his head enough to meet her gaze again. “She lived. I figured out I could keep my clothes on and went so far as to double-layer the condoms.”

She barely turned her head in time to keep from snorting in his face. She couldn’t imagine how awkward that must have been for the woman. “Who—no, I mean how did she even agree to that?”

Fenn shrugged and pressed a kiss to her shoulder. “I’m not sure she believed me. At the time, I considered it a success. I’d had sex, and no one died.”

She arched a brow and threaded her hands into his hair. “But?”

“Time eventually enlightened me as to my youthful stupidity.”

Sienna released a soft breath. “So that was your only ... experience? With anything like this?”

Fenn held her stare. “Yes. And it was a very long time ago.”

Sienna grinned. “I am gonnareallyenjoy corrupting you, then. Now, if you want to eat me out, you’re going to have to lie back down.”

He groaned low, kissed her hard, and released her in order to return to his horizontal position. Something like a smirk tipped his lips. “You are a vision in yourself, Sienna Jacobsen.”

Her heart thundered and she swallowed hard in search of her strength. She had to get up in order to shed her pants and underwear, after all. It took her a few seconds to accomplish that, and she did her best to make the show something close to flirty or

seductive for his sake, before she climbed back over him. “Go ahead and take your time exploring me,” she said. She paused to press a kiss to the underside of his jaw. “The better you make me feel, the more inclined I’ll be to return the favor.”

“Sienna,” he said on a groan.

She laughed softly and continued climbing up, pushing to her knees as she straddled his shoulders. His hands landed on her hips and before she could ask if he was ready he growled and tugged her down on him. She gasped sharply at the first probing lick of his tongue and her head fell back. Oh, gods!

Sienna quickly found herself undulating on his face and grasping desperately at the headboard. The intensity of the way his lips and tongue worked in her most private place, sliding and massaging and stroking, probing and swirling, in addition to the sporadic vibration of his deep-throated growls had already brought her to the brink. She’d honestly expected he’d need guidance. Then he found her clit, stretched a hand up to grab hold of one of her breasts, and sucked as he pinched at a nipple.

Her orgasm exploded inside her and Sienna let out a shriek of pleasure. She’d never actually come from a man going down on her and Fenn had just blown them all out of the water.

She was barely cognizant of sliding off him, or of him rolling her around to stretch out on the bed at his side. He was holding her, hands stroking along her skin and lips running a trail over her shoulder to her neck, when her awareness returned. It wasn’t at all like having a vision. It was so much better.

Sienna reached up and curled a hand around his shoulder, catching his attention. “You ... have a deadly tongue, sir.”

He huffed and brought his face over hers. “Your pussy is delicious. I look forward to

feasting on it again.” He leaned in and nibbled on her earlobe. “Repeatedly.”

A shiver rolled through her and Sienna dug her fingers into his muscles. “What if I want you to do something else to it? Like, right now?”

Fenn reached down wordlessly and stroked his fingers between her folds. “You might need a little more prepping.”

Sienna lowered her arm, caught his, and pressed his hand more firmly against her. “Put them inside. Touch me inside. And kiss me.” She licked her lips. “Or let me return that favor.”

He groaned and dropped his head to her shoulder. Two fingers pumped into her without preamble, making her back arch. “You feel amazing,” he said, the words a thick groan. He didn’t waste any time picking up a rhythm, his fingers fucking into her.

“Oh, gods,” she said between gasps. Her fingers dug into his muscles and curled into the sheet. “F-Fenn, kiss me.”

The words were barely off her tongue before he leaned forward and sealed his lips to hers. He kissed her hard, his tongue plundering her mouth as his fingers worked her into a frenzy. Her arms curved around his shoulders, holding their upper bodies together, and she moaned into his mouth when he extended his thumb to massage her clit.

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Then he broke the kiss, leaving her panting on the bed, and pulled his hand from her body. She might have attempted to formulate a protest, but he held her hooded gaze as he licked his fingers clean and simultaneously popped the button on his jeans. With swift movements he shed the remainder of his clothes and returned to her, sliding his hands along her legs and spreading them wide for him.

Sienna offered no resistance. He'd worked her into desperation, so much so that as he knelt above her, her mouth salivated for him. At the sight of him. At the feel of his smooth, cool hands as they stroked along her skin. He grabbed hold of her hips in a firm, almost bruising, grip and ran his impressive length over her slit. She dragged in a breath and lifted her gaze back to his. "Fenn, fuck me. Fuck my aching pussy with your hard, raw dick. Feel all of me with all of you."

He made a low, growly sound and removed one hand from her skin in order to position himself properly. Her body pulsed when she felt the head of his shaft notch in her opening. Then both hands were anchored again on her hips and he drove his entire length deep inside her in one blissful motion.

Sienna threw her head back as he filled her, her body singing.

Fenn seemed to choke on a curse and slumped over her, his arms landing on the mattress beside her shoulders. His chest heaved.

Realization dawned in the back of her mind. With his limited, and very distant, experience, this may as well have been his first time. She grinned, an extra thrill shooting through her at the prospect, and slid her hands over his back. "Keep moving, baby," she whispered. "Don't be shy. Show me how much you like it."

A rush of air over her skin preceded a touch of tongue above the swell of her breast. “Don’t tempt me. At this point I’m more liable to kidnap you for the weekend than take you to your sisters.”

Sienna barked out a laugh and curled her legs over the backs of his. “We’ll have like half the top floor to ourselves,” she said. Her breath hitched a little when he shifted and his lips and tongue lingered properly over her nearest boob. “Definitely more opportunities to—” He lowered enough to suck her nipple into his mouth and finally started rocking his hips, their bodies mostly plastered together. “Mm, fuck. Yeah. Like that.” Her fingers slipped up into his hair and she let herself settle into his rhythm.

Fenn lifted off her chest with a final lick. “Sienna,” he said on a groan. “You feel too good.” His thrusts became harder even as one hand moved to slip beneath her and dig into her ass again. Somehow holding her closer and shifting the angle of her hips ever-so-slightly. “I won’t last.”

She dug her own fingers into his skin closer to his shoulders. “Give me all you got, baby,” she said. Frankly, he fit her so well all he’d had to do was fill her to hit every single one of her spots. She couldn’t remember a time she’d been so wound up, so easily. When he tangled the fingers of his weight-bearing arm in her hair and pulled, the sharp, pin-prick sensations only heightened her rapidly mounting pleasure.

He licked at her lips, tongue slipping into her mouth and coaxing hers to dance sloppily with his, then he snapped his hips into hers one more time. His dick sank deep inside her as a tremor wracked Fenn’s body and he groaned long and low.

The whole-bodied feel of Fenn’s release triggered Sienna’s and her hips jerked as her second orgasm of the evening crashed into her. Their kiss barely broke before the strangled scream of ecstasy escaped her lips. Delicious, white-hot relief overtook her and she clung tighter to her lover as their bodies continued to rock together for

several more seconds.

Slowly, as their chests heaved for breath, Fenn slipped from her and released his grip on her hair.

Sienna rubbed her hands over his back as her legs fell to the mattress. “How was that for your first bareback?”

Fenn scoffed, the sound half-choke, and dragged his haunting stare up to hers. “Would you like me to demonstrate my appreciation by fucking you again right now—” He paused and let his pelvis press into hers, the weight of his re-hardened cock undeniable. “Or would you prefer I help you clean up?”

Her breath lodged in the back of her throat for a moment. She was irrationally tempted, even if she knew better. She brushed a bit of his loose, shoulder-length hair away from his face and leaned in enough to tease his lips with hers. “I don’t know how you’re hard again already, but let’s save the marathon sex for later, okay?”

The next thing she knew he’d hauled them both to their knees, chest to chest. He had a hand at the center of her back and another in the hair behind her head, holding her face close to his. “Are you uncomfortable with what we’ve done? Or continuing forward?”

Her heart stumbled, or fluttered, in her chest. Sienna offered him an easy smile. “I was a little afraid I’d come on too strong,” she admitted, “but I don’t regret anything otherwise.” She pressed a chaste kiss to his lips. “I’ve just been in a dry spell, and I don’t have any sort of magical rejuvenation ability like you seem to. And also we have somewhere to be in like an hour. So it’s best to work up to the night you’ll never forget.” She threw in a wink for good measure, then twisted from his embrace before she could let herself get too comfortable. “Now come on, shower’s this way.”

In all his existence Fenn had never felt such a resentment for his layers of protective clothing as he did once he and Sienna were re-dressed that evening. She looked as radiant as she always did, even under a heavy winter coat, scarf, and her own gloves. He felt trapped. More so than at any point in his mortal youth, when he'd thought everything about his life was in some way restrictive. For the first time, he'd experienced the touch of another without it costing their life. All he wanted was to indulge in that once-forbidden delight while it was available to him.

Sienna Jacobsen was dangerous, in ways he never could have imagined.

"As annoying as it is, it's definitely best if I still drive up to Piper's house," Sienna said once they'd piled into her eco-friendly hybrid car. "So how does it work?"

"Tell me the address," Fenn said. "I'll find us a nearby destination it's safe to transport a running vehicle to, and you can drive from there." An empty parking lot or deserted side-street would do fine, and given that it was just a few days before Christmas, there was always the chance for one of those. His magic would help make sure no wayward soul or security camera caught evidence of the cheat.

Sienna rolled the engine over and flexed her hands on the steering wheel. "This is going to be so cool." She drew in a breath and rattled off an address.

Fenn lifted his eyebrows high, warning bells blaring in his head. "Did you say Fort Veyelsa?"

Sienna arched one brow as if mimicking him. "Yeah." She shrugged. "We grew up there, and Piper inherited Mom and Dad's house after they died. It's on the edge of town in a more reclusive neighborhood." A grin tipped her lips. "Which had its perks, if I'm being honest."

Fenn bit back a sigh. He should have known. He'd been worried that busy-body was

involved in his pull to this city, but his encounter with Sienna had distracted him.

“Do you ...knowFort Veyelsa?” Sienna asked carefully. “Consciously, I mean.”

This time a portion of the sigh slipped free. “It’s on my radar,” he said, “but it’s not worth getting into.” He motioned for her to put the car in gear and simultaneously called up his magic. Given the time of year, that town would be covered in snow and ice at this point. He watched Sienna brace herself as the world shifted around them, wondering for a fleeting moment how the transition looked to her mortal eyes, and then they were settled once more.

“Whoa,” Sienna mumbled.

“Tell me about your sisters. Who am I meeting? What should I be prepared for?” They seemed like valid questions, to which he had a vague interest in the answers. Mostly, he needed a distraction that might help him focus on the point. The reason he was playing human and stepping foot in that nauseating town.



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Sienna let out a quiet breath and angled the car out of the turnout, easing them quickly up to speed. “Piper’s my oldest sister,” she said. “She’s the responsible one, and she’s probably the one who will ask you the awkward questions. She’s a traditional working professional and she thinks I’m wasting my life playing online. Really she hasn’t put a lot of effort into social media since Facebook’s early days, so she doesn’t get it. Don’t ask me how.” Sienna switched on the heater as she talked and slid into the fast lane when the road opened up.

Fenn offered a low hum of acknowledgment, picturing an older version of Sienna in a skirt suit and without the dyed hair.

“Maya will definitely be there by now, because she moved back to town like forever ago after a bad break-up,” Sienna continued. “Maya’s the middle sister. She’s moodier, so you want to be careful with her. She might take to you right away or she might decide you’re a terrible influence and make it her mission to scare you off. They’re both protective of me, but Maya’s ... more direct about it.” Sienna’s lips kicked up in a grin but she kept her eyes on the road. “I feel like I should warn you about one other thing, but you can’t let on that you know it, okay? Because they’ll flip and the whole weekend be horrible.”

Well now he was a little curious. “I’m listening.”

Sienna paused to navigate a left turn at a four-way stop and the road became almost immediately darker as she put the heart of the small town in her rearview. “I’m not the only one in my family with power,” she said. “My sisters each have a thing, but we all have different abilities. And honestly, mine’s the lousiest. At least they can use theirs, you know?”

He had definitely wondered about that. “Were you all born with these gifts?”

Sienna hummed. “Kinda. They didn’t kick in while we were babies, but they’re definitely genetic. Grandma always said our family was blessed by a goddess a long time ago and that’s why the women are born with special gifts.” She slowed and angled the car onto a large driveway at the end of a long residential road.

The homes were far enough apart that only the loudest of noises would be likely to carry, and all of the properties bordered with fences of wood or stone. She’d been right when she’d said the neighborhood was reclusive. Just as he’d been right to assume there was another energy at work—he could feel it almost hovering in the air.

Sienna stopped the car at the end of the wide drive, beside a Lexus hatchback, and cut the engine. “Brace yourself, Grim Reaper. You’re about to meet the family.”

## The Sisters

Classical Christmas music wafted out from the house in time with the cinnamon-apple scent of homemade cider as the front door opened and two women ushered Sienna and her unannounced guest inside. Nerves twisted her stomach, causing her to tighten her grip on the armload of presents she’d hauled from the trunk of her car. The last time she’d spoken to Piper she’d been instructed to stay away from Fenn. That was pretty much the opposite of ‘bring him home for the holiday weekend.’

“Gods, Sienna, learn to make multiple trips,” Maya said as she shoved her hands into Sienna’s armload and took some for herself. “You’re lucky you didn’t slip on the ice!”

Piper cleared her throat. “Sienna. I think you forgot to call.”

“Nope!” Sienna indicated for Fenn to follow Maya, then trailed behind him. Keeping

herself between him and Piper for the time being. “Let us put these things down and I’ll do intros.”

No one argued with that, at least, and a few minutes later the presents she’d brought were scattered beneath the Christmas tree. Like usual, Piper had gotten a tall tree to take advantage of the tall ceilings. It was fully decorated with ornaments, shiny garland, and strings of multi-colored lights wrapping around its bushy length from bottom to star-topped tip. The tree was beautiful, of course. It always was, and like always, the sight of it reminded Sienna of what she’d given up when she had chosen to move away. She never bothered with decorating for major holidays, because she always traveled home to spend them here.

“I brought hot cider for everyone,” Maya said, jerking Sienna from her thoughts.

Sienna turned to see Maya setting a tray of four steaming mugs of delicious-smelling liquid on the coffee table across from the fireplace. Her lips lifted in a smile of gratitude before her gaze shifted to acknowledge the three modest stockings hanging above the crackling fire, each emblazoned with a single initial. She looked away before the sight depressed her again, in time to see Fenn handing her one of the ciders.

She offered him a quick smile, brought the drink up for a deep inhale, and looked out to her impatiently awaiting siblings. Here we go. “Piper, Maya—” Each sister inclined her head in turn. “This is Fenn.”

Piper’s brows nearly disappeared behind her side-swept bangs. “The same Fenn we spoke about last night?”

So much for hoping that conversation had somehow slipped her elder sister’s mind.

Sienna kept her smile firmly in place. “Yep! We ran into each other again at

Serendipity, and if that's not the definition of a sign, I don't know what it is." Aside from years of repeated visions, oh and being maybe the only person on the planet who can physically touch him. Her latest sip of cider slid down her throat like a lead weight. How had the enormity of that not processed earlier?

It wasn't just that it had been a while since he'd known some kind of touch. It'd been a lifetime. A really damn long lifetime, because he was immortal. And in all those years—decades, at least, though she had no idea the true number—no one had ever ... held his hand?

Tears immediately burned behind her eyes.

Piper pushed to her feet again. "Sienna." Her sharp tone cut through Sienna's briefly tumultuous emotions as she stared pointedly at Sienna for a long second before turning. "Come with me."

Sienna leaned bodily backward, into the cushioned support of the sofa. "Nope. I'm not doing the thing where we go into another room and whisper-yell at each other about someone who's sitting in the living room. None of us are in high school anymore, Piper. You said it was okay if I brought someone, I brought someone. Quit being so judgmental and maybe give him a chance."

Piper frowned at her.

Maya chuckled from the seat closest to the fireplace, still holding her own cider. "All other opinions aside for the moment, you never really bothered with the whisper part in that scenario, Sienna."

Okay, that was fair.

Piper let out an aggravated breath but resettled in her seat, which better faced Sienna

and Fenn than Maya. “Yes, I said you could bring someone. But I didn’t expect you to bring someone you haven’t even known fortwelve hours. Let alone—”

“Let alone the guy I’ve been literally dreaming about for half my life? Yeah, that came up, by the way. So when it also came up that Fenn had no plans for Christmas, I invited him.” There, she’d even been something near honest about the situation.

Maya's eyebrows rose high on her forehead.

Piper narrowed her eyes in visible displeasure. "Sienna, how could you be so irresponsible—"

"Is it her power?" Fenn asked, cutting off whatever Piper was building to. "Or yours?" Even Sienna shifted a startled stare to him, but he kept his focus on Piper. His expression was calm, almost neutral, yet Sienna had the distinct impression it was a façade. "She's an adult. By all other standards she seems to have been deemed capable of living on her own and caring for herself. Why should someone who resides so many hours away, and does not bear the burden of these physically incapacitating visions, have any say in when or to whom she reveals the truth of her gift?"

Sienna's eyes bulged, but at the same time, she wanted to grab him to her and kiss him senseless for that. She loved her sisters dearly. That didn't mean they never overstepped. No one had ever snapped back like that for her when it came to them.

Maya slowly set her mug on the table beside her chair.

"How dare you," Piper said, anger flaring in her eyes. "How dare you come into our family home, on a holiday weekend, and criticize me for how I treat my baby sister. You don't know her, or us, you have no right to judge."

"Exactly," Sienna said quickly. She leaned into Fenn's side and deliberately pressed her hand to his chest. "You don't know him, either. No one should be judging. Fenn and I have done a lot of talking and getting to know each other, and if he'd stood up

for me against anyone else trying to control me you'd be impressed, whether you'll ever admit it or not. Now it's your turn. Take a breath and stop picturing bloody hands for gods' sakes."

This time it was Maya who spoke, her tone guarded. "Fenn. Why should we trust you to protect our sister's secret?"

Fenn turned his focus to her. "What do I have to gain from telling anyone?"

Maya didn't flinch. "You could sell the story just to make a few bucks. Throw our lives into chaos from reporters or conspiracy theorists all trying to figure out if there's any truth to it, and walk away. We're the ones who would suffer. Sienna would suffer. Sienna is our baby sister. Both Piper and I would die for her. Can you possibly understand how we feel?"

Sienna rolled her eyes with a deliberately audible groan. "Give me a break, Maya. I'm twenty-nine, notten."

"I don't personally believe that anyone can perfectly understand the feelings of another," Fenn replied. "Even if I replied to each detail of your argument, would it assuage your fears? Would you feel better if I told you I have three older brothers of my own? Or that Sienna had to ask me repeatedly to join her for this weekend because I've yet to find any reason to enjoy Christmas, and I generally prefer to be alone?"

"The two of you are doing a fantastic job of creating that happy holiday atmosphere, by the way," Sienna added when Fenn paused. Not that she hadn't fully expected push-back. It still irritated her.

Piper spoke up again, a note of more genuine curiosity in her voice. "You have brothers? Why aren't you spending the holiday with them?"

Sienna opened her mouth to lecture her sister's choice of invasive question, but she wasn't fast enough.

"They're in other time-zones right now. Two of them are on other continents, I believe."

She knew, logically, he had to be referring to the remaining three Horsemen. Which she needed to remind herself to stop calling them, because apparently they didn't like that term. He'd told her they preferred to call themselves The Four. Still, terminology aside, it was a bit strange to think she had some even abstract concept of where the freaking Four Horsemen were in real time. Her gaze dropped down to the hand she'd lowered to his forearm, just above the edge of his sleeve. Realistically, the most surreal and ridiculous of all would have to be that she was semi-clinging to Death. In a very literal, non-threatening way.

"Everything else aside," Maya said after a moment, "Sienna told you about her vision of you. Surely you can comprehend why we would be concerned. Her visions are never wrong."

"Maya!" Sienna snapped, straightening.

Fenn caught her hand before it could fully retreat from him and pulled into his gloved one, lacing their fingers. "You're worried the bloodstained hands in her recurring vision mean something ominous for her." He said it as a statement as he looked briefly between her sisters. "That's a non-issue. Sienna has proven to be somehow immune to my unfortunate ability."

Both her sisters reacted at once to those words, resulting in clamor of competing noise, accentuated by one swinging arm. It would have been comical in any other situation.



Sienna sighed heavily and turned her attention to Fenn instead. She didn't want to say the wrong thing, after all. "You don't owe them that explanation. Seriously."

He glanced over at her and his lips twitched up, as if to let her know not to worry. The expression made her breathing falter.

"I'm sorry—" Maya started.

"—did you say you also have an ability?" Piper asked.

Fenn inclined his head. "I do, though I prefer not to discuss it. It's the reason I keep myself covered at all times—because those who make contact with my flesh become terribly ill. Sometimes even to the point of death."

Both her sisters fell silent for a long moment. Giving Sienna a few seconds to contemplate how surprised she also was, at the realization that he'd told them even that bit of truth. She wanted to ask him about that choice, but she knew this wasn't the time.

Piper drew an audible breath, her lips a thin line. "What you've described is terrible, Fenn. If that's true, then I'm sorry for the suffering I can only imagine you've endured up to now." Her eyes narrowed again. "I am also horrendously curious how you discovered Sienna's so-called immunity to such a curse."

Sienna lifted her free hand, belatedly remembering she still held her cup of cider, and waved it for emphasis. "That'd be my fault. I saw him on Thursday night and basically chased after him, and I grabbed him by the arm. Because I have no sense of manners. I think I gave him a minor heart attack."

Piper gave her a horrified look. "Sienna!"

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“What?” Sienna shrugged. “He looked like the guy from my one and only recurring vision. Since when did I have to worry about touching people?”

“In some cultures,” Maya said, “that would be incredibly rude.”

Sienna rolled her eyes. “In some cultures, your lack of hospitality would be incredibly rude.”

Piper pinched the bridge of her nose. “All right. Fine. I’ll concede there might be another interpretation.” She heaved a breath and locked her stare again on Fenn. “I apologize, Fenn. I look forward to better getting to know you this weekend.”

“I’m curious,” Maya said when Piper was done. “I’m sure finding someone who might be immune to such a restrictive ability is shocking, even overwhelming, but it still seems like a leap to suddenly agree to spend the entirety of a holiday weekend with strangers. What made you agree?”

“He’s too used to being alone,” Sienna said. “I badgered him into submission.” There was enough truth in that simple statement to be believable, especially for people who knew her well.

Fenn lifted his cider from his knee. “Please continue your holiday celebration as you normally would. It’s not my intent to be intrusive.”

Her sisters fell quiet and nearly the entirety of Johnny Mathis’s “Winter Wonderland” filled the air between them as they finished off their hot ciders. Sienna found herself tapping her shortly trimmed nails against the mug of her cup to the rhythm of the

classic song, the fading scent of spiced apples and cinnamon seeping into her soul.

She always felt so nervous about the idea of coming back to her hometown, and yet as soon as she allowed herself a moment to breathe, she was always grateful for it. For as much as she enjoyed the big city and its surplus of opportunity, Fort Veyelsa was home. The place that held all of her best memories. The place where her sisters lived and worked. The place she always returned to, and probably someday would choose to stay. Once she felt like she'd seen enough of the rest of the world.

Finally, Maya stood. "It's late. Why don't we all get some rest." She smiled toward Fenn. "We always do a big breakfast on Sienna's first day home, so be sure to wake up early with the rest of us if you want to put in your order."

Sienna slipped her hand free of Fenn's and hopped to her feet. "At least give me a proper hug first, sis."

They embraced, squeezing tight, then Piper edged her way in for her turn. Everyone's mugs were scooped up, the way the music was silenced, and Sienna held a hand out for Fenn once more. "C'mon, I'll show you the way." Since Piper was still in the kitchen, probably finishing cleaning up an afternoon's worth of baking, she kept her grin small.

Sienna led him quietly up the wide staircase to the second floor, across to the narrower second set of stairs, and up to the third floor that was essentially hers when she visited. It boasted one of the two primary suites, the smallest guest room, and an absolutely fantastic office of sorts that allowed her to make the best lit videos when the sun was out. All of which worked out well, since Piper preferred the main floor suite, anyway.

Sienna motioned to the half-open door that led to the guest room. "That's the bedroom my sister is definitely hoping to pretend I'm guiding you to, and if she asks,

you are also aware of the jack-and-jill bathroom that connects it to the office space down the hall.” She motioned with her free hand as she talked. Then she tugged him through the open doorway nearest her and said, quieter, “And here we have Sienna’s Suite.”

Fenn rumbled, his lips twitching. “What exactly makes it sweet?”

She rolled her eyes at his pun but played along anyway. “Me, of course.”

He leaned in and brushed his lips over her ear. “Sweet is too tame a word for what you are.”

Anticipatory shivers danced down her spine and Sienna lost a beat catching her breath before she managed to tilt her head enough to bat her lashes up at him. “Aw, then what am I?”

He locked his stare on hers, his gray-blue eyes burning. “Delicious.”

Heat flashed through her system. Her pussy ached with want at the memory of his mouth on her earlier. It was downright unfair how immediately aroused she’d become.

Fenn stepped closer, pulling his hand from her loose grip in order to take hold of her hips and tug her forward. Up against his chest. “Let me touch you again, Sienna.”

Her breath faltered in her chest, but she tried to play it cool. “It’s a mutual exploration, baby. Go sit on the edge of the bed and spread your legs for me.” She had no idea where the take-charge impulse had come from, but she opted to roll with it. She gave him her best sultry look, knowing full-well her usual attempts at seduction involved alcohol and impulse.

But this one seemed to work, because Fenn hesitated only a moment before releasing

her and stepping toward her king-sized mattress. A swirl of darkness lifted around him as he moved and by the time he'd accomplished his task he was gloriously nude, his dark hair loose and hanging around his pale shoulders. The contrast of his hair against his skin made it seem like his eyes glowed at her as he watched her, waiting.

Sienna licked her lips, took two seconds to turn the deadbolt on her door, and kicked off her shoes. Her cold weather layers had already been discarded, so peeling her long sleeved shirt over her head and shimmying out of her pants was easy enough. She let it all pile onto the floor and, for the time being, left herself in her bra and panties. It was a flirty set, she didn't mind letting him see her in it. In fact, she quite appreciated the way his erection seemed to twitch as she approached.

Her hands landed on his shoulders and she teased her lips along his jaw and down his throat, grinning at the low groan that vibrated his chest. He trailed a hand up her spine until it was tangled in her hair and growled her name.

"Patience, baby," she murmured into his skin. She let one hand travel lower and gently swept her fingertips along his length. "You've earned a reward, I think." She ran her tongue across his collar bone just to hear the way his breath would catch, then dropped completely to her knees.

Every time she touched him it was like fireworks exploding under his skin, warming him in an almost searingly hot way he wasn't used to. It was an instant addiction. But the sensation of her feminine hands stroking his dick? He couldn't have imagined the pleasure that would bring. The tightness with which she gripped him, the pace with which she pumped the length of him, over and over. She rolled her thumb over his head and he groaned again.

He wasn't prepared for her to replace her hands with her mouth. She swept her tongue in wet strokes across his length as she leaned forward, slowly working the entirety of him inside. In seconds she was bobbing her head on his shaft. He let out

another long, low groan, feeling the pressure within him building.

“Sienna.” It was the only warning he could offer. He wanted nothing more than to tighten his grip of her hair and bury his aching dick deep in her throat.

She moved her hands to his thighs, fingers splayed, holding him tightly as her lips and tongue worked him up. She retreated enough to tease his head with a dance of her tongue, swallowed him again in an almost swooping motion, and then she sucked. Her cheeks hollowed. Her nails dug into his thighs.

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Fenn's entire body spasmed the orgasm shot through him, white hot and all-encompassing. He was breathing hard by the time he felt her retreat, her hair sliding through his fingers as she dropped back to her haunches.

Sienna trailed her fingers across his thigh, drawing his focus outward to where she still sat, between his knees. She grinned at him. "I hope you haven't lost that magical rejuvenative trick," she said quietly. "Because now I'm all worked up—" She raised herself up, her hands skimming along his skin, across his chest and over his shoulders. "And I have ideas."

Fenn raked his gaze over the shreds of dark blue lace just barely concealing her nipples and the veritable ribbon that ran between her legs. He almost didn't recognize the thick rasp to his own voice when he spoke again. "I've got a few ideas, myself."

Sienna grinned wide and cupped his jaw, tilting his head up to meet her gaze as she stood. "Yeah? Do those ideas involve your face being buried in my tits while I climb onto your lap and ride you into oblivion?" She was already straddling him by the time she finished speaking, her words slurred by the tongue she kept sliding into his mouth.

He anchored a hand over her ass. "Fuck, yes." She was absolutely an addiction.

It was a problem.

Sienna was tired and sore when Fenn dragged her awake the following morning, but she knew it was for the best. If one of her sisters had to come fetch her and found the two of them naked and passed out, very bad things would have happened. And that

was presuming they remembered not to touch him. Granted, he had already been dressed when he'd woken her.

Does he even sleep? And if he didn't, what had he done while she had?

She shook the thought from her head and pulled in a deep breath. The rich, enticing aroma of fresh-brewed coffee mixed with still-sizzling bacon reached her nose as they descended the second staircase and Sienna's stomach rumbled. She'd certainly worked up an appetite helping her touch-starved lover explore his sensual side.

Fenn stepped up beside her as the staircase widened. He'd chosen a simple turtleneck to go with crisp jeans, all black, and of course he wore his usual sleek black gloves. His coat had been hung in the foyer when they'd arrived, at her sisters' insistence, but the evening before had been so hectic that it felt as if this were the first decent look Sienna was getting. Not that she hadn't had plenty of up-close-and-wickedly-personal views. There was just something about the put-together version that made her mouth water.

As their feet almost simultaneously reached the landing, Sienna angled over and pecked him quickly on the cheek.

Fenn arched a brow at her.

She smiled back. "Just appreciating your company." It was a dorky thing to say, but she refused to be embarrassed about it. As difficult as her sisters had been the night before, she couldn't imagine a pair of overprotective mortal women were enough to scare off Death Himself when he'd made a decision about something. And while she personally doubted that spending the next two and a half days in her hometown would enlighten either of them as to the secret of her death-touch-immunity, she believed he would honor his promise.



The trick was going to be in remembering that that was what it was, because the faint softening in the line of his lips at her response made her insides all warm and fuzzy. Like a brainless idiot.

The chime of the doorbell dragged Sienna's attention promptly back to the moment and her brow furrowed. Yeah, Fort Veyelsa was a small town and her sisters were fairly well connected with the community, but it was early on a Saturday. The Saturday before Christmas, to be specific. Her stomach churned, the once-delicious smell of breakfast in the air suddenly making her nauseous. Was it some kind of emergency?

Maya bustled to the foyer as Sienna's thoughts spiraled and Sienna cut a glance toward the kitchen, seeing Piper twisting knobs on the stovetop. She continued letting her gaze sweep around, as they had already been angled toward the dining area, and spotted places set for four. As there should have been.

Fenn exhaled harshly, as if he had suddenly become angered.

Sienna looked up at him. "What's wrong?" She barely thought to speak in a whisper.

His brow was furrowed and his lips had narrowed into a thin line of discontent. "I'm going to kill her."

Revelations

Sienna had barely opened her mouth to ask Fenn what he meant—surely he hadn't meant Maya—when her sister's uncertain voice called out to her from the foyer.

"Sienna, could you come here real quick?"

Pursing her lips, Sienna adjusted course for the main entrance. Maybe it was possible

Fenn's powerset allowed him to see the future in some way, and he hadn't wanted to be left alone with Piper? But that was equally ridiculous, and then she realized he had adjusted direction with her, as if to join her in greeting whichever townspeople had come to the door.

Sienna paused and laid her fingers over his arm. "It's probably better if you hang back. I'm sure this'll be fast."

Fenn's frown only deepened. "It's not for you."

That threw her completely for a loop.

"Just let me in, it's cold out here!" The irritated, but distinctly feminine, voice coming from the entryway drew Sienna's attention. She wanted to label it as unfamiliar, but there was something about it that made her hesitate.

Sienna hurried to continue forward as Maya's quieter response drifted around the corner.

"Then maybe you should be wearing pants."

For a split-second, Sienna found the response incredibly odd. She'd glanced out a window that morning. She knew it was snowing. She could already feel the cold draft coming in through the open door. Then she stepped into the foyer, Fenn half a foot behind, and came to an abrupt stop.

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Her sister stood in the doorway, holding the door open and simultaneously physically barring entrance to their unannounced visitor.

The crazy stalker lady who'd nearly suicided herself on a public sidewalk the previous morning, and yet already looked completely fine. Or as fine as any woman wearing a dress designed for sex appeal, with the heels to match, on a snowy December morning could look. But that was impossible. There was no way this woman even knew Sienna's full name, let alone the address of her childhood home and whether or not she happened to be there.

"Florence," Fenn said, the name coming out in a displeased growl.

Both women at the door swung their gazes around. Confusion was plastered across Maya's face, understandably, but Florence's eyes lit up with something like gratification. Just for an instant.

Florence pinched her brows together and planted her hands on her hips, emphasizing the stupidity of her party dress. "I knew I'd find you here," she said. "Now either let me in or come out here with me. This game you're playing is pointless."

Maya frowned as Florence spoke and focused her own stare on Sienna. "Sienna, what's going on? If you've gotten into trouble—"

Sienna held up a hand and marched forward as fury licked through her. "Whatever this bitch told you, Maya, I promise you she's full of shit." She stomped up to the door, practically shouldering her sister aside in order to glare properly at the woman who'd had the audacity to show up on her family's doorstep. "And you," she said, "I

don't even know how you found this place, and I don't care. Get off our property, get out of this town, and get lost. Like forever. Go flaunt yourself somewhere you'd be appreciated. Like in another hemisphere."

Florence's lips pulled into a thin line for a beat and her subtly tanned skin flushed unnaturally red. "Howdareyou speak to me like that, you ugly little whore!" She curled one hand as if her polished nails were actually vicious claws and swung at Sienna with her exclamation.

Maya shouted from over Sienna's shoulder.

For a split-second, Sienna watched the red-painted nails descend in a surreal daze, her brain not fully processing that her face was their target.

Fenn caught Florence's wrist in a firm grip and everything seemed to snap back into place. He'd reached around Sienna, taking advantage of his greater height, and anger wafted off him so powerfully she was surprised she couldn't see the swirling darkness of his magic.

"H-hey, Fenn!" Florence said, shock and discomfort in her voice.

Fenn didn't budge. His voice was dark and more dangerous than Sienna had yet heard it when he spoke. "I told you I would not tolerate any more of your stunts. Nowleave, before—"

Florence jerked on her arm in an attempt to free it and snapped, "I'm not leaving unless you're coming with me!"

Sienna drew a deep breath and reminded herself that she'd promised, years ago, never to throw the first punch. Unless she was genuinely defending a life. The only lifereallyin jeopardy at the moment was Florence's.

Maya laid a hand on Sienna's shoulder and tugged her a step backward. It was an almost nostalgic motion, triggering memories of times when her sister would physically intervene to protect her in her youth. "Excuse me," she said, her voice projected to catch attention, "Florence, was it?"

Fenn glanced back at her, and slowly lowered his arm as if in deference to his audience.

Maya continued. "I don't care who you are or why you're here. My sister told you to leave."

Oh no.

"So leave." The familiar echo had overtaken her sister's voice, confirming Sienna's fear. "Get off this property, forget you were here. Stay away from my family."

Sienna let out a breath. Those had been strong words. She hoped Maya wasn't low on her migraine medicine.

Florence took a large step back, away from the door, all emotion drained from her face. Her body began to turn but she paused and gave her head a shake, a harsh, grating huff escaping her. Then she turned back, facing them again, her expression twisted with incredulous amusement and outrage. "Some kind of hypnosis, really? That was cute. It even almost worked for a minute. But I'm so out of your league, honey. You'd need god-tier hypnosis to override my automatic mental healing."

Sienna's eyes bulged, despite that she remembered Fenn had warned her Florence was stronger than she looked. And older.

Maya reared back, shock rippling visibly through her posture. It was understandable. Sienna had certainly never heard of anyone resisting her sister's hypnosis before,

except maybe Piper.

Fenn's lips tipped up in a smirk. "Now there's an idea." He pulled a glove off of one hand and, staring directly at Florence, bit into his own thumb. Blood pooled on the surface of his thumb as he released it and Florence's eyes widened with some flicker of recognition, and fear. Fenn angled his hand to let the blood drip onto the doorstep, still between them. Once. Twice.

Florence began shaking her head, her blonde hair swinging with the increasing movement. "Wait, Fenn, don't—"

"Florence Dossit," Fenn said, his tone sharp and cold, "I forbid you. From this threshold, from the boundaries of this territory, for the duration of the bloodline which possesses it. Leave, and live, or remain ... and perish." The two little spots of blood on the snow-flecked doorstep flared with an instant, intangible black energy before vanishing from sight in a momentary gust of air.

Florence let out a shriek as if she were enraged, twisted on her heel, and sprinted from the door without another word.

From the kitchen, Piper shouted, "What on Earth is going on?"

Maya turned wide eyes to Sienna, her expression echoing their sister's question.

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Sienna bit back a nervous laugh. Whoops.

Fenn slipped the glove back over his hand and calmly clicked the door closed, finally cutting off the bone-chilling early morning December air. “I apologize for all of that,” he said when he faced them again.

Before Sienna could reply, Maya found her voice. “I think we’re beyond the apology stage. Who are you, really? What the hell was that? Was that some kind of ... blood magic?” She asked the question with the faintest trace of hesitancy, but not near the incredulity such a question would demand from most people.

Sienna fought not to roll her eyes at herself. At no point in their lives had her family fit in with most people. She angled herself to stand partially between them, facing her sister. “Um, can we talk about this over breakfast? I’m still starving.”

“Perfect timing,” Piper said from the foyer opening. “If we don’t sit down now it’ll all be cold and wasted, anyway.”

Sienna latched onto Maya’s nearest arm, seeing the resistance on Maya’s face. “Seriously, let’s eat. It’s fine. Don’t freak out.” She felt a small twinge of guilt as those words escaped her. Her sisters considered themselves more aware than most, despite that they had no real connections of the preternatural sort. But Sienna doubted they were even cumulatively as enlightened as she had become, in no small part thanks to her undesirable visions. Seeing everything she had seen had helped her accept the strange world they lived in, and her bizarre place in it.

She feared it would prove unfortunately fair to say her sisters were less than open-

minded, at least in this instance. Or was it unfair to ask someone to be chill about inviting Death for Christmas? Yeah, let's not phrase it that way out loud.

Piper sighed heavily even as Maya allowed Sienna to guide her from the foyer. "Sienna," Piper said, "every time you tell us not to freak out, something happens that would send most people to a psych ward."

Sienna opened her mouth to defend herself against that—accurate—criticism, but cut herself off at the sensation of tightness gathering rapidly behind her neck. Already her hand itched to reach up in an always vain attempt to massage the spot. Probably should've seen this coming. Instead she reached out, knowing she had mere seconds before she became incapable of standing upright. "Fenn..." His name left her on a gasp and she barely felt his arm curl around her before her focus was ripped elsewhere.

He couldn't help but wonder how she had survived to adulthood, being plagued with visions that incapacitated her so thoroughly. It was no wonder her sisters hovered. But there wasn't anything Fenn could do about that particular problem, so he scooped Sienna into his arms and pretended like he was listening when her eldest sister ordered him to take her to the living room. It was the nearest room with space enough to lay her down, so he'd already been aimed that way. Though the temptation to position himself so that Sienna's head remained resting in his lap was alarmingly strong.

"Will one of you tell me what happened back there?" Piper demanded once Sienna was settled. "I heard arguing at the door and then all of a sudden some weird black energy washed over the house. It raised the hairs on my arms."

Fenn kept his back to them for a moment longer, his gaze trained on Sienna. Her eyes were closed and dancing behind her eyelids. He remembered that from the last time, too.



“Some crazy woman dressed like she was going to a nightclub showed up demanding she be let in to see Fenn,” Maya said. “She tried to attack Sienna and I—” She cut herself off and sighed, as if only then realizing what she’d done.

“She did what?”

Fenn turned, adjusting so that he could keep an eye on Sienna as well. Just in case. “Florence never laid a hand on Sienna,” he said for Piper’s benefit. “After her failed attack, Maya used some form of mental manipulation in an attempt to force Florence to leave.”

Maya looked away, lips pursed in a thin line, as if she were ashamed of her behavior.

“Maya!” Piper let out an aggravated sigh and dropped into the chair nearest her. “You’re as bad as Sienna sometimes.” Her brow furrowed and she shifted her focus to Fenn. “Wait, what do you mean, ‘attempt’?”

“He means I failed,” Maya said. She crossed her arms. “And Sienna’s probably already told him about us, anyway.”

Fenn was careful not to let the grin show. At least they knew their sister.

Maya narrowed her eyes at Fenn. “Explain the rest. How did my hypnosis fail? It’s only ever failed on Piper. And then that ... thing you did. Tell us the truth about you. Have you been lying to Sienna? Are you using her for something?”

Piper looked between them, clearly realizing there was more she didn’t understand, and settled her frown on Fenn as well. Waiting.

Fenn swallowed his sigh and hooked his thumbs into his jeans pockets for lack of anything more satisfying to do with his hands. “Sienna knows my truth.” He let those

words linger for a moment, though it was up to the women in front of him whether or not to believe them. “As for Florence, your hypnosis failed because she was born with a natural healing ability on par with the gods, and she has honed that skill to keep herself alive and unscathed. As a result, she’s developed what you might call automatic self-healing, on a subconscious level.”

Maya gaped at him.

Piper scoffed. “You expect us to believe that? That this woman who showed up at our door this morning—I would like an answer to that, also, by the way—just miraculously has some divine healing power?”

This time Fenn did sigh, quietly, as his gaze slid to Sienna’s unchanged face. “Florence has made herself immortal,” he said. He looked between the two obviously skeptical sisters. “I actually have no idea how old she should be. She’s learned to use her unmatched healing ability to cheat death. She could be traveling the world as a living Saint, saving lives by the hundreds every single day. Instead she lives purely for her own pleasure and she’s developed an ironic obsession with the one thing she cannot have.”

“And that’s supposed to be you?” Piper asked, one brow high on her forehead.

Maya moved her hands to her hips. “What’s so great about you? The truth this time.”

His lips twitched before dropping into a familiar frown. “Nothing,” he said. His arms fell to his sides and his hands curled into fists. “I am a monster, both outside and in.”

Sienna’s hand dropped heavily against his arm, her grip a little uncoordinated but obviously intentional, and she let out a groan. “I pass out for five seconds and you get all morose on me.”

Fenn pulled her hand into his and squeezed. “Four minutes and twenty-seven seconds, actually.”

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She blinked at him. “You did not count.” Her voice was clearer already. She pushed up, her hand sliding from his by necessity, until she was sitting properly. “So, um, sorry? What’d I miss?”

Maya angled around him and leaned in to wrap her sister in a hug. “Are you okay? Did you see anything jarring?” She knelt down on Sienna’s opposite side. “Anything you want to talk about?”

Fenn watched as Sienna stared at that sister, then looked across at her other, and finally turned her gaze up to him. She seemed to be searching for something, but he couldn’t imagine she lacked for a sense of security. He arched a brow at her.

Sienna sighed heavily. “Gods above! This is not the first time I’ve had a vision. Would you all please stop freaking out?”

Fenn was perfectly angled to see Maya’s immediate responding stubborn pout.

“The weird guy you brought for Christmas did some kind of blood magic in the doorway—” Maya started.

“He didwhat?” Piper asked.

“—wants us to believe the crazy bimbo who tried to assault you is actually some living anti-saint, and he openly admitted to being a monster. His word. So yes, I’m worried you may have seen something concerning, but I’m mostly worried about how you’re feeling.” Maya pulled Sienna’s hand into both of hers and lowered her voice, though how she thought Fenn wouldn’t hear her he had no idea. “If you’re in trouble,

just say the word, okay?”

“I think the two of you left out a very important detail about that altercation before,” Piper said as she drummed her fingers over the armrest of her chair.

Sienna launched to her feet, yanking her hand free from her sister in the process, and started shouting. “Will the two of you calm down? I’m fine! What happened was not supposed to happen, okay? And while I’m sorry it did, it’s not exactly my fault—or Fenn’s—that some crazy bitch is stalking him. Also, she’s not an ‘anti-saint,’ she’s more like a mid-tier comic book villain. She has a power she could totally be using to save people and make a positive change in the world, but she’s selfish as shit and is using it all for herself, and at the same time thinks her power makes her superior to everyone else.”

Both Piper and Maya were wide-eyed when Sienna finally drew a breath.

Fenn suspected he might also have looked a little startled.

Then Sienna rounded on him, one hand raised and pointing. “And you, mister, are not a monster, do you hear me? I don’t care what your power is. I don’t care what your title is. I don’t care if you wear black all the time and live in shadows and all the awesome shit you do is arguably creepy by conventional standards. I am not a conventional-standards kind of person, anyway. Do you know what a monster is? A monster is someone who goes out of their way to hurt people. A monster is someone who enjoys inflicting pain on people. A monster is someone like Florence who thinks she can do whatever she wants because she has a power most people don’t, that somehow makes her better.”

Silence settled for long seconds after Sienna finished. Fenn noticed her sisters exchange a long look.

Something like guilt settled heavily at the bottom of his stomach and Fenn frowned. “There are many types of monsters in this world, Sienna,” he said. “And none of them are worse than me.” She opened her mouth, but he didn’t let her speak. “How many innocents have to die before the one who ended their lives qualifies as a monster? Does it matter their age, race, or gender? Does it matter if it was intentional?”

Sienna drew a breath, frowned at him, and more quietly said, “A person doesn’t become a monster simply for the fact that they exist.”

Piper laid a hand on Sienna’s shoulder. “I’m sorry. I have to draw a line somewhere.” She met Fenn’s gaze with a firm stare. “Just to be clear, you’re saying you’ve killed people? Were you military, perhaps?”

“Not by any stretch.”

“Fenn,” Sienna said, nearly talking over him. “How many. Tell me how many.”

Old memories flashed rapidly through his mind, in no logical sequence. Faces so long lost he couldn’t put names to them. Faces whose names he’d chosen to forget. Faces whose names were etched into his soul. And somewhere mixed in, the sound of children laughing. The blare of older-model sirens. The explosive echoes of gunfire and the remembered stench of smoke from a very different fire.

He explained none of that, and said instead, “I couldn’t answer that if I wanted to.” It wasn’t as though he’d had someone to guide him, to teach him about his curse. A curse he’d been born with, that had only grown stronger as his body had matured.

Horror filled Piper’s eyes—eyes that were nearly the exact same shade as Sienna’s.

Sienna stepped forward, out from her sister’s grip, and latched onto his sweater. “No.

Not how many died before you understood. How many did you intentionally end. There's a difference, Fenn. Just because your power is extreme doesn't mean any child burdened with it should automatically be responsible for the weight of it before any of the other things society thinks they deserve help in learning. So, I'll ask again. How many did you kill on purpose, before you became who you are now?"

Fenn stared at her, her seemingly stunned sisters falling away from his focus as his brain scrambled to keep up with her logic. It was true he didn't generally spend his waking hours actively berating himself for the deaths of his early years. It was more true he typically tried only to think about the present, and not the past, because thinking about the past brought with it a heap of guilt that had more than once had him wishing his curse applied equally to himself. But he had always been ironically—infuriatingly—immune.

Immune...Like Sienna. Who hadn't even blinked as she stared up at him, waiting determinedly for an answer to her ridiculous, oversimplified question.

He let out a quiet breath. "Three."

One of her sisters had an audible reaction to that statement, but he barely heard the sharp gasp.

Sienna's expression softened and she smoothed her hand over the portion of the sweater she'd rumped in her grip. "Why?"

"Sienna!" Maya, it sounded like, said in something like a hiss.

Fenn closed his hands into fists again as that particular memory returned, whispering through him. Screams and rapid-fire explosions resounded in his ears. The memory of pain when he himself had been shot down in the chaos. He released a breath. "I had managed to find a job," he said. "I hadn't been working there more than a month, but

my coworkers were friendly. I deluded myself into thinking I could feel human among them. Until three men burst in and opened fire.” Sienna’s eyes widened and he swallowed, shoving the memory and the associated anger down. “I only survived because of my own regenerative nature. When I saw the bodies, I fell into a rage and embraced the power I had spent my life cursing.” He held her still-wide stare. “I killed each of them, and I made sure they suffered. I decimated their bodies from the inside out, I filled their minds with a terror so strong it paralyzed them. And of all the things I’ve regretted from my life, ending those three has never been one of them.”



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A sad smile tipped Sienna's lips after a brief moment. "That doesn't sound like a monster to me."

Piper took hold of her arm and jerked her back. "I'm very sorry for whatever you might have been through, Fenn," she said as Sienna launched a protest. "However, I think I'm uncomfortable continuing to have you in my home or my sister's life. I have to ask you to—ow!" She released Sienna as Sienna's foot came off her own.

"When did you get so judgey?" Sienna snapped as she moved away from Piper.

Maya projected her voice over whatever Piper might have tried to say in response, her frown aimed straight at Fenn. "I thought you had some kind of poisonous touch. So you have two abilities? Or is the poison in your blood and it seeps through your pores, and that's how you did the other thing earlier?"

Fenn had to give her credit, she was trying valiantly to make sense of a situation she'd had no way to prepare for. That theory was much more reasonable than most, from her perspective.

Sienna adjusted to face both of her sisters, effectively putting her back to Fenn. "I feel like we hashed all this out last night, this is ridiculous."

"That was before he admitted to killing people," Piper said.

"And before the blood magic thing," Maya said.

Piper slid a side-long look toward the sister standing beside her. "I still don't know

anything about that.”

Sienna made an inarticulate sound of frustration.

Fenn laid his fingers over her nearest shoulder and spoke to her sisters. There was no reason to continue the circular argument, even if it jeopardized his plans. “What I told you last night was an old truth that no longer applies. What I did in the foyer was ... not quite the same as the usual concept of blood magic.” Although it did require blood and was rooted in magic, so at that point the differences were debatable.

Both sisters snapped suspicious stares back to him.

“When I was young, and still alive, the story I told you last night was effectively true,” Fenn said. He watched fresh horror build in their expressions. “I am no longer either.”

Sienna groaned. “Let’s not get overdramatic,” she said. “You’re way more alive than plenty of people. Probably even Piper.” The last was said with a grin he could hear in her voice.

Piper startled at the jibe and Fenn guessed it had landed about how Sienna had intended.

“The black energy you saw earlier is my signature now,” Fenn continued, summoning up a visual of the energy in question until it undulated around his shins. “For I have become Death.”

Maya paled and Piper stared in wide-eyed, speechless shock.

Sienna clapped her hands together. “Okay! So now that everything’s out in the open, can we please eat? I haven’t been fed yet and it’s starting to make me grumpy.” She

scooped Fenn's hand into hers, leaving no doubts that he was to be included. "I'm really not in the mood for cold eggs, and you kinda owe someone an apology, Piper, so could you do us a Christmas favor and make breakfast warm again? Pretty please with I-promise-everything's-fine on top?"

They made it entirely out of the living room before the sisters broke into a flurry of questions and criticisms all rolled together. Yet somehow Fenn found himself seated at the table as he'd once been anticipating, staring in the most amount of shock he'd felt since ... well, before Sienna, at plates of freshly cooked food and steaming mugs of coffee. Because somewhere in the onslaught of interrogation Piper had begrudgingly revealed her own ability—acquiescing to her sister, perhaps—and rewound the progression of time around their meals with little more effort than an outstretched hand.

He understood now why Sienna felt her sisters had more functional powers than she did. It was hard to take action against an enemy with a vision she couldn't summon, let alone aim.

"Hey, Fenn," Sienna said as she swallowed a bite of her breakfast, "I wanted to ask. Do you know a guy who's kinda lanky, a little taller than me, with curly brown hair and brown eyes?" She tilted her head, as if attempting to remember more. "And grumpy, maybe..."

Fenn lowered his coffee carefully. "Why?"

She shrugged and looked away. "That vision I had," she said, quieter. "He was there. With Florence." Her face scrunched up with adorable irritation at the name, but the distraction was brief.

Fenn sat back in his seat. "I do, actually."

## Old Wounds

“Let’s try this again,” Piper said as she lowered her emptied coffee mug. “Everyone’s cards are on the table now.” She gestured between each of her sisters in turn. “Clairvoyance, mind control, chronokinesis. And you are Death, of the Four Horsemen. Can we talk openly from this point forward?”

Sienna stared at her sister in surprise. They’d barely finished breakfast, but already her straightforward sibling seemed to have made some respectable progress processing the news Sienna had honestly expected would overwhelm her. Maybe she’d underestimated Piper.

Across the table from Sienna, Maya grumbled, “You know I prefer the term hypnosis.”

Sienna grinned. “At least you’ve stopped calling it seduction.”

Maya glowered at her.

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Fenn leaned back in his seat, the subtle movement seeming to capture everyone's attention. "Yes," he said. "Though none of us are fond of the Horsemen reference, if you don't mind."

Tamping down on her flash of humor, Sienna said, "I'm sorry for lying. That was honestly my idea, I didn't think either of you would handle 'hey, I brought the Grim Reaper home for Christmas!' all that well." She offered each sister an honest, shameful smile.

Maya snorted into her coffee.

Piper inclined her head. "That's fair." She looked between them and Sienna recognized the crinkle in her brow that meant a hard question was coming. "But I also think it's fair if I ask a couple of questions. First, is it still true your touch is lethal? I can't think of any other reason you'd go to the trouble of warning us away."

"Every living thing I touch dies," Fenn replied. "Within seconds." He let the words hang heavily in the air. "There are two drastically different exceptions. Florence, if the contact is brief enough, can heal herself given time."

Piper frowned. "And Sienna. That bit was true, I presume."

Sienna let out an awkward laugh. "Yeah, pretty much that whole story of me just grabbing him and unknowingly taking my life into my hands was true."

Maya leaned forward. "How—why—would Sienna be immune to something like that?"

“That’s why I’m here,” Fenn said. “If there’s an explanation, my goal is to find it.”

Sienna propped her elbow on the table, angled to look up at him. “Yeah ... how is hanging out with me and my sisters for the next two or three days going to help with that, actually? I mean, you promised you would, and I’m totally holding you to that, but I don’t get it exactly.”

Fenn was silent a moment, his gaze downcast and brow pinched. “Originally,” he finally said, “I had hoped that learning more of your family story would provide the answer.”

A memory popped into Sienna’s head and she sat up straight, snapping her fingers in excitement. “I figured it out!” She swung her gaze around the table to be sure she had everyone’s attention. “It’s the goddess that Gran always said blessed our family like forever ago. Supposedly that’s why the females in our family line have weird powers, like we do, and it’s the most obvious explanation for why I can touch you!”

Fenn stared at her, one brow arched sharply on his forehead. He looked less than convinced.

Piper groaned. “That’s an old fairytale, Sienna. Something Gran told us to help us feel special instead of like freaks.”

“But Mom could—”

“It doesn’t matter what Mom could do,” Maya said. “Even if it was true that some goddess from the past once influenced our bloodline, that has to do with our abilities. How does that tie in with your immunity?”

Sienna looked between her sisters for a minute, frowning. “We’d have to test it.”

Both her sisters gaped at her.

“Sienna.” Fenn said only her name, but it was clear he was equally unimpressed with this idea.

“Obviously I don’t want anyone to die,” Sienna said quickly. “So we’d have to be smart about it.” She began gesturing as she explained the plan unfolding in her mind. “It would have to be Maya who took the risk—”

“Wow, do you hate me?”

Sienna ignored her. “That way, if it went bad, Piper could do her thing and rewind time to back before Maya came into contact with Fenn. And then we’d know if it’s a familial thing or a me thing.”

Maya propped her chin on the heel of her palm. “I only might have to die first.”

“And you know full well I’ve never used my ability to restore a life,” Piper said.

“But you could,” Sienna insisted. “As long as you were ready.” She didn’t point out that Piper herself had theorized as much when their parents had died years before. There was no need to tear open that wound.

“There’s a gaping flaw in that plan,” Fenn said flatly.

Sienna twisted to face him. “What do you mean? I thought it sounded pretty good, actually.”

“Under ordinary circumstances, Piper might have the ability to reverse a recent death.” He wouldn’t know for certain unless she tried and gave him the opportunity to analyze her power. “But if the life lost is actively ended by me, that becomes their

irreversible point of death.”

A cold silence fell over the table and Sienna swallowed. Quietly, she asked, “What does that mean?”

Uninterested in explaining the concept and functions of the Fates, Fenn instead said, “Think of death as a destiny. Currently, Maya has many years ahead. But if my power ends her life, whether I consciously wish it or not, that moment becomes her altered death destiny. So even if Piper reverses time, when that precise moment inevitably returns, Maya will die. It will be, as the saying goes, her time.”



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Sienna worked on a hard swallow. She'd really thought Piper's power was the solution, but obviously she wasn't trying to kill Maya. She wasn't trying to kill anyone. "Okay. Scratch that plan, then." But if they couldn't test the bloodline theory, how did they get any answers?

Fenn laid a hand on Sienna's shoulder. "For now, I'd rather hear about the vision you had earlier."

The change of topic threw Sienna long enough for Piper to speak up. "Can we move to the kitchen while you tell us about it? I still need to finish packaging up the cookies."

Maya cursed. "I completely forgot about that."

Sienna obliged her sisters and trailed behind them into the adjoining kitchen, where she and Fenn positioned themselves on the stool seats at the island. She watched Maya get to work rinsing dishes while Piper laid out four identical boxes and began carefully sliding homemade cookies into each. From the way the cookies were separated, and their coloring, Sienna deduced she'd made three flavors. "There better be some of those left for me this year," she said, mostly teasing.

Without even looking up, Piper said, "Only well-behaved girls get cookies. You owe us a story."

Sienna rolled her eyes and thought back to the vision she'd had before breakfast. In light of the confrontation she'd woken up in the middle of, and the strange conversation that had followed, she'd nearly forgotten it. "There's not much to tell,"

she finally said. “It was mostly Florence, maybe later today or another day in a similar dress, sitting at what looked like a low-traffic bar. She had a drink in her hand and a man’s coat over her shoulders and she was bitching about how she deserved better.”

Maya made a distinct sound of disgust.

Sienna grinned a little, but kept her focus on the lingering memory of the vision. “Some guy I didn’t recognize, but could see clearly, moved into my line of sight after a minute. I figure he was who she was talking to. He was up real close next to her, but looking out, like he was scanning the room or something, so I got a good look at him.” She shrugged. “Mostly he just let her rant, so I had the impression he was into her, but she was definitely pissed. The last thing I remember hearing her say was ‘how dare he’.”

Maya had turned around, dishes done, to lean against the counter and face them by the time Sienna finished. She looked at Fenn. “I would guess she’s mad at you, then.”

Fenn grunted acknowledgment, but his words were for Sienna. “You’re sure about the man’s description?”

Sienna blinked up at him. “Yeah,” she said. “I mean, the lighting was kinda dim, but it was almost like he looked right at me.” It always creeped her out when that happened.

His brow furrowed. It was not a happy expression.

Warning bells went off in Sienna’s head and she straightened in her seat. “What?”

Fenn leaned forward, cupped her jaw, and pressed a kiss to her forehead. “I have to make a call.” His words were a low murmur, vibrating through her as much as

registering in her ears, and then he'd vanished from the room.

Maya cleared her throat pointedly. "Little sister," she said, stepping forward. "Please tell me you aren't dating Death."

He could have made the call from the kitchen, but instinct told him to have this conversation alone. Or maybe it was paranoia.

Cassian answered after the first ring. "Have you figured it out?"

Fenn felt his frown deepen. "We need to talk about Florence."

Cassian was quiet long enough for Fenn to register the sounds of something like engine noise in the background. "Florence Dossit? The immortal healer who's obsessed with you?"

"Yes."

Cassian let out a huff. "She's not part of the natural balance. If you've finally killed her, I doubt it will upset anything critical, at least for long."

Fenn flexed his jaw for a moment. "I'll keep that in mind for the next opportunity," he said. "In the meantime, I need you to tell me—what's your relationship with her?"

At least thirty seconds passed before Cassian spoke again. "I beg your pardon?"

"Are you conspiring with her in some way?"

Cassian growled into the phone. "You have some nerve, boy. Accusing me—"

"What was that suggestion you spouted off at the turn of the millennium? That we

should ‘flip the script’ and set the world on fire?” Fenn was well aware his words were disrespectful and argumentative. He also knew Cassian was a hard man to read. Provoking the Roman would be, if not the easiest, at least the fastest, way to get to an answer.

“You’re right,” Cassian said, his tone sharp. “I can’t stand those ancient bastards who’ve tasked us with an eternity of keeping their playground in balance. That has nothing to do with that narcissistic wench. If you can’t understand the difference, maybe you’re greener than I gave you credit for.” He disconnected before Fenn could respond.

Fenn let out a breath.

Maybe he should have called someone else. He couldn’t say he knew Cassian well enough to interpret his angry responses any better than his neutral ones, at least over the phone. But it was a mystery he needed to solve, and he couldn’t exactly be straightforward with his information. Just in case his fears were right. Just in case the man Sienna had seen with Florence in that vision was, in fact, the longest-reigning of them all.

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Fenn tipped his head up to the sky, brow furrowed. How well did he even know Cassian? What were the chances the grumpy Roman immortal had taken a liking to that woman, so much so that he'd lie about associating with her?

There was only one other person he could ask. Though his thumb did hesitate over the name in his contacts. It's important.

He put the phone to his ear and listened to half a ring before the line connected. "What do you need, baby brother?"

Fenn fought the urge to roll his eyes, despite that he was alone. "Your insight, if you have a minute. And for you to stop calling me that."

There was a grin in the Celtic warrior's voice when he said, "Someday you'll understand, Fenn. There's more than one kind of blood brotherhood." The heavy sound of something shutting, like a swinging door, thudded in the background. "I was just about to kick my feet up, 'cause I'm bored out of my mind. Give me somethin' to think about, or better yet, tell me you need someone broken in a survivable kind of way."

"You really are bored if you're offering to help with my work." Not that he didn't generally get along with most of his colleagues. He was the anti-social one. "Sorry to disappoint you, Sulien, but I'm calling about Cassian."

A beat of silence followed and Sulien blew out a heavy breath. Though the worst of it was long past, Fenn had heard there had been some rather thick tension and unpleasant blow-ups between Famine and War in Sulien's earlier years.

Understandably so, considering the tumultuous history between their respective peoples and the role Sulien himself had once played—the role that had earned him his enduring title.

“What’d that stringent asshole do now?” Sulien finally asked, his tone harsher than before.

Fenn moved a couple of steps and put his back to a wall, letting himself lean against it. “That’s what I’m trying to figure out,” he said. And then he hesitated. He trusted Sulien more than Cassian, especially in light of Sienna’s vision, but was he comfortable divulging the secret of her? He ground his teeth for a moment. If he gave nothing, he would never get the answer he needed. “I’ve met a woman who—”

Sulien barked out a laugh that surely shook the room surrounding him. “What was that? I must have mud in my ears. I would’ve sworn our lonely baby Death just said he’d met a woman!”

This time it was Fenn who let out a breath of agitation. “Are you spending this commercialized Christian holiday with Rajan?”

“Of course not. Now tell me about her.”

“Then who are you talking to when you say that nonsense?”

Sulien laughed as if he’d been told a good joke. “Fine, fine, you caught me off-guard. Glad it was just over the phone!”

Fenn let his head fall back into the wall. He should definitely have found a different lead-in. “Can you focus, please?” He would hang up and spare himself his more exuberant colleague’s overwhelming personality, but he needed information no one else was likely to have.

“Yes, fine, tell me what this woman you’ve met has to do with the Roman.”

Fenn felt himself tense, for a moment, over Sulien’s phrasing. He fought the irrational reaction down and said, “She’s clairvoyant. She has no means of controlling what she sees, but to the best of her knowledge her visions have always been accurate.”

Sulien was calmer when he spoke again. “That is interesting.”

“She recently had a vision of Florence Dossit commiserating with a man who fits Cassian’s description,” Fenn said evenly. “I called Cassian and asked about his association with Florence, but all I managed to do was piss him off.”

Sulien chuckled. “Did you tell him about this vision?”

“No.” Fenn debated elaborating on what Cassian thought he knew about the woman who’d had the vision, but he was still hesitant to share that information with his colleagues.

“And when you say commiserating, did your little clairvoyant give you any details? What they were doing, where they were, specific words?” Sulien’s tone was thoughtful, curious, but otherwise unreadable.

Fenn reiterated Sienna’s description of the vision. The bar, the one-sided whining—all of it, as well as he could recall.

When he finished, Sulien chuckled low and said, “Well now I’m also gonna need to know what you did to tick off your long-running stalker.” He took a breath and composed himself. “But we’ll get to that. I take it Cas didn’t approve of whatever speculation you threw at him?”

“I provoked him.” In hindsight, it had been a very Sulien-inspired tactic. “He’s either

distracting by tossing insults at her or genuinely not the guy, but I can't read him enough to know."

"Not used to having to strategize, are you?"

Fenn glared at the motionless street ahead. "No. That's your job, and Rajan's. I'm just supposed to kill things."

That earned him another brief chuckle, but instead of falling into more distracted banter, Sulien said, "The thing about Cas is that he's grumpy. But he's a straightforward asshole most of the time. If he is involved with that crazy woman, and not copping to it, then we definitely have a problem."

Fenn mulled that over. Was he reading too much into something? Overreacting? An old question whispered through his mind and he couldn't stop himself from asking it once more. "Do you know how my predecessor died?"

Sienna found Fenn on the far end of the front deck, leaning against the wall beneath the eave with his arms crossed and frowning out at the world. There was no phone attached to his ear so she figured it was safe to approach. "Hey, lover," she said with a small grin as she bounced into his personal space.



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He blinked and turned his whole head to face her, then straightened, arms lowering to his sides. “Did I just see your sisters leave?”

Sienna glanced reflexively toward the driveway, and the road beyond, where her sisters had just disappeared. “They’ve got a couple quick holiday errands to run. Maya wants to check on her store and grab up any last-minute donations that might’ve been dropped off, and then she has to take everything to the event coordinator’s office so it can get picked up on time. And Piper needs to get her cookies all handed out.” She smiled and offered a shrug. “We’ll meet up later to walk the streets and gawk at the lights like little kids because it’s something we love to do, and sometimes we catch a group of carolers while we’re out.” It was a silly, small-town-y celebration, but that was the life she’d always known growing up. So those were the habits she still craved.

Fenn’s expression softened. “You enjoy it.”

Sienna bobbed her head. No sense lying to the man with supernatural powers. Instead, she held out her hand. “My sisters will be busy for a few hours. I can show you the town if you want? If we stall long enough, I can show you Maya’s bookstore without actually running into Maya.” She grinned at her own ridiculousness. Maya was always happy to show off her inherited brick-and-mortar, but after the brief argument they’d had while Fenn was outside making his calls, Sienna was grateful for this afternoon reprieve from her sisters. It gave them all a chance to calm down and hopefully cool their heads.

Fenn took her hand and pulled her closer, into his chest. “I didn’t realize your sister owned a store.” He leaned in. “You can show me whatever you’d like. Soon.”

A giggle bubbled up inside her, but he smothered it with his lips and chased it away with a sweep of his tongue through her mouth. Sienna moaned and clung to his shoulders, breathless and all worked up by the time he pulled away. It was downright rude, really. She swallowed hard and searched for words that didn't involve sex. "How'd your call go?"

The edges of his lips dropped into a frown and she immediately wished she'd just pulled him inside instead. "It's a work in progress," he said.

Sienna gave herself a mental shake and smoothed a palm over Fenn's chest. "Should I be worried about who that guy is? Or about Florence, for that matter?" Florence was a psycho as far as she could tell, but that could easily make her dangerous.

Fenn's frown deepened and he stared into her eyes. "Florence will never harm you. You have my word on that." His words were resolute and it sent a pleasant chill running down her spine. "As for the man you saw, I can't be absolutely certain I know who it is," he said. "But if I'm right ... then yes, that's something to worry about." He lifted one hand and cupped her jaw, holding her in place. "If it comes to that, I will protect you, Sienna."

Her heart fluttered and she leaned up until she could press her lips over his again. It was an effort to keep the kiss short, especially with the way his fingers dug into her hip, but she managed to break the kiss after barely a touch of tongue. "You should really be careful," she whispered, her voice heavy and slightly unsteady. "I might fall for you if you keep talking like that, and then maybe I'll wind up being your next Florence."

Fenn snorted.

Sienna grinned and looped her arms around his torso. "It could totally happen. I'm still young by most standards, so I could theoretically still learn to control my visions.

Maybe use them to stalk you.”

A dark and delightful smirk lifted his lips and Fenn walked her backward, into the wall, until he’d caged her with his body. “Stalk me all you want, Sienna. If it’s you, maybe I’ll like it.”

Crap. It was really, really unfair. He was supposed to be the inexperienced one, yet she was completely helpless against him. If he ripped off her clothes right there on the front porch and fucked her for anyone to walk up and see, she wouldn’t have stopped him.

Fenn bowed his head and trailed his lip along her jaw. “We should get going, otherwise I’m liable to forget myself.”

She moaned and twisted her fingers in his sweater. She wanted him to forget himself. Wait. No. I wanted to do something else. It didn’t seem nearly as important in the moment, but she had had a plan of sorts. She’d wanted to get him out of his head a little, while they had the time, and maybe get to know him. Not Death, but Fenn, the man he was—or had been—beneath the mantle. Because it had occurred to her during one of their recent conversations that the figure she’d been dreaming of most of her life had probably not had any real friends in his lifetime. Almost certainly not before he’d been tasked with holding humanity together from the shadows.

It was a thought that made her heart hurt.

Sienna composed herself enough to bring a hand to his chest and give a light push, the gesture all he needed to ease back. She smiled. “You’ll get me all to yourself later,” she said. “For now, let’s head out and play human.”

Fenn let out a breath. “At no point in my existence have I known how to do that,” he said. “But it’s your holiday, and I have no intention of depriving you of it.” He angled

toward the driveway and offered his arm, like an old-fashioned gentleman. “If you’re ready?”

## Memory Lane

Walking casually around town, with Sienna’s arm looped through his and the carefree lilt of her voice in the air as she talked, was possibly the simplest, most grounding thing Fenn had ever experienced. He would have expected to hate it and yet ... instead, he felt calm. Even amidst the unavoidable bustle of people finishing their holiday shopping.

Mostly he listened as she saw things that sparked memories of her childhood and regaled him with stories of how she’d tormented her family in her wild youth. Familiar neighborhoods, an old park, and of course, the original Serendipity. Fenn suspected she’d have dragged him inside if it hadn’t been so crammed with people.

“And here we have the family bookstore,” Sienna said, gesturing out to the building nearest her. “My grandparents bought it when they were newlyweds, like a joint venture thing or something, and ran it together for a long time. Eventually Mom inherited it, and since Maya’s always been the most interested in books and things, she set it up so the store went to Maya when she passed.”

Fenn swept his gaze over the storefront obligingly. It was clean and decently maintained despite its obvious age. The front was mostly literal brick and window panes, and someone had designed the door to resemble a book cover. The store’s name, Turn A Page, was displayed in distinct frosted lettering across the top of the window display, as well as up higher, on the building itself. It was quaint, in a true, small-town-shop sense.

Sienna moved up to the window, cupping her hands around her face in an attempt to see inside the darkened building. “Looks like we missed Maya, though, so I can’t

show you around inside.”

Fenn let a brief chuckle rumble past his lips. “I have seen bookstores before.”

She faced him with a grin. “But have you ever gotten a personal tour?”

He slipped his hand over her hip and lowered his voice. “I could always slip us inside, if you had something particular you wanted to show me.”

She laughed, bright and honest, and swiftly pulled him away from the building as if it were a natural thing. “Nice try, handsome. Maya’s come forward with the times. She has security cameras in there. No way am I playing that game.”

He couldn’t help the smirk that tipped his lips, though he allowed her to drag him along. That was very responsible of her. It was less so of him that he was so tempted to point out that he had ways around that sort of thing.

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“I feel like I’ve been talking about myself for hours,” Sienna said a minute or so later. “I wanna know more about you. Tell me something other than how you’ve been repressed for so long you’re basically a walking pile of hormones.” She flashed him a grin as she spoke, as if to make sure her joke was clear.

Fenn choked. “I am not—” He cut himself off and laced his fingers with hers.

When he’d been a mostly ordinary human, bearing the weight of a terrible power, of course he’d had hormones. He’d had desires, the same as any boy. Most of the time, it had been fear and hard-learned sadness that held him back. To the point that by the time the magic of the void had come for him as an adult, he’d learned to shut down those thoughts. He’d felt as dead on the inside as the corpses he now left in his wake. Because he had to.

Except Sienna was different. He didn’t yet understand how, but he could simply bewitch her.

He cleared his throat roughly. “I didn’t mind hearing your stories,” he said instead.

She blinked at him, a moment of confusion on her face, before a smile lifted her lips. “Are you sure you were even listening?”

He returned her smile with a grin. “When you found out the first boy you ever liked was a bully, you pushed him out of his swing so hard he broke his leg. And when his friends tried to gang up on you for it, your sister convinced them all to go back to the school and confess their sins.” It was a summary of one of the stories she’d told him, but he’d reiterated the gist. Then his grin darkened. “If you still feel unsatisfied, I

could track that boy down and give him a nightmare he'll never forget."

Her lips twitched and Sienna burst into a fit of laughter, her shoulders shaking. She practically collapsed against him before eventually composing herself, then adjusted to press a kiss to his jaw, and straightened. "I'm sure you could be the worst nightmare ever if you wanted." Her expression belied her words. "But I'm totally over it, thank you, Mr. Big Bad Grim Reaper." She poked him lightly in the chest. "And I appreciate your point, you did listen. Now it's my turn. Test my ears."

He had the strongest urge to lean down and lick one, maybe nibble on the edge of her pierced lobe, in response to that request. Fuck. She was right. He really was a walking pile of hormones where she was concerned.

Fenn dragged in a breath and cast his gaze around in an effort to at least think up a story worth telling. This wasn't his hometown, it wasn't full of memories for him—and that was a good thing. None of his old stories were cheerful or funny. But in its own way he supposed his story still held value. "Everyone around me inevitably dies."

Sienna sighed. "Fenn."

He met her gaze again. "I'm not talking about the unavoidable cessation of life. I'm talking about unnatural death caused by some form of exposure to unnatural life."

Her brow furrowed. "Your life is not unnatural."

He offered her a wry grin. "Is that why I was raised in orphanages and bounced between foster homes that never seemed able to rid themselves of me fast enough? Why my only memories of my biological family are ridiculing remarks about how they all died and abandoned me, and I deserved it?"

Sadness pinched her eyes but Sienna held her tongue. Watching. Listening.

“They all died,” he repeated. “Not just whatever family I was born with, but nearly everyone who crossed my path growing up. Technically I could make skin contact before puberty set in, but prolonged exposure was still lethal.” He huffed out a breath. “There is nothing but death in my world, Sienna. This mantle I now bear ... only provides an explanation for that.”

A tear rolled down her cheek and Sienna reached out, laying her palm over his chest. “You survived. At least until this immortality magic stuff came for you, and that counts.”

He lifted her hand and pressed a gentle kiss to her knuckles. “This curse I was born with had a strange side-effect,” he said. “I never got sick. Never had heatstroke or migraines or caught the flu.” He held her stare. “And even when I hung myself, I couldn’t die.”

Her eyes flew wide. “You—” Another tear slipped free, staining her cheek, and she swallowed visibly. Then she stepped into him and wrapped her arms around his torso, holding him tightly. “I wish I’d been there,” she whispered.

Something inside him constricted and Fenn folded his arms around her. “You may not have been immune to my mortal touch. Knowing me a century ago would only have sealed your fate.”

She shook her head against his shoulder. “We don’t know that!”

He held her a little tighter. She was certainly right that she would have been a bright spot in his lonely, dreary life. But if their present circumstances were any indication, he wouldn’t have been able to keep away from her. It was best, then, that they’d met well after he’d mastered the magic of the void that had changed him. Whether or not



that had anything to do with her immunity he could only guess, and if a guess was all it ever remained, he would be satisfied with that.

Sienna eased back, just enough to look up at him. “Do you ... do you still want to...?”

Fenn leaned in and ghosted his lips over hers. “I am where I want to be right now. The life I led in my human years was harsh, but it prepared me for the existence that followed.”

She released a quiet breath and smiled. “Why don’t we go back—“ The ringing of the phone in her pocket silenced the rest of the suggestion Fenn was sure he would have liked to take advantage of. She blinked in obvious surprise and stepped back enough to pull the device free, a curious frown dipping her lips.

Fenn adjusted to scoop her free hand in his, giving her some freedom without abandoning her on the sidewalk. An apology shone in her eyes as she put the phone to her ear.

“Hey, Sherri, what’s up?”

“I’m sorry, I know you’re busy with your sisters.” Sherri’s voice was all wrong and Sienna’s chest immediately tightened. They’d been best friends since before high school, when Sherri’s family had moved to town looking for a slower and all-around safer pace to raise a teenager. Which was ironic, since they’d moved in just down the street from Sienna and her superpowered sisters, but that had always been a tightly held secret. And since the girls had bonded quickly, Sienna knew her bestie’s voice pretty damn well. She knew when Sherri had been crying recently enough that she probably still had tears in her eyes.

“They’re running errands, actually,” Sienna said. “What’s wrong?”

Sherri took a shuddering breath, not even trying to deny it. “So much.” She sniffled.  
“Have you ... have you had any visions recently about Brandon?”

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Sienna frowned. For as close as she was with Sherri, both Sherri and her husband qualified as people who were basically part of her own future in her mind—and that was a subject she wasn't prone to seeing. Still, she supposed she had had a vision of him that one time, back when the couple had been only dating. But Sherri asked about recent visions. "Of course not," she said. "If I'd seen anything, I'd have told you. Even if it was just so we could laugh about it together."

Sherri exhaled heavily. "Right. I guess I knew that. It's just ... I just wanted..."

Fear gripped her heart and Sienna looked up at Fenn as Sherri's voice trailed. She could only think of one reason Sherri would be asking something like that.

Fenn wore what she suspected was his natural frown, but when their gazes met he gave a short shake of his head.

Somehow, that only worried Sienna more. "Sherri, what happened? Is he okay? Are the kids—"

Sherri snorted so harshly it nearly made Sienna jump. "Oh, he's fine. He's great, even. What he is is a cheating, lying, cowardly scumbag!" Her voice broke on the last word and several seconds of sobs followed. Because twenty-four hours earlier Brandon had also been her future.

Sienna drew a deep breath as a surge of emotions rushed through her. Pain lanced her chest in sympathy, immediately followed by rage, all on behalf of her dearest friend. In some ways she was more protective of Sherri than her actual sisters. Her sisters could defend themselves. Sherri was the truest kind of human, the most vulnerable.

Sherri sucked in an audible breath, gasping, and said, “He kicked me out of his mother’s house after breakfast. Said he’ll be filing for divorce on Tuesday.”

Sienna nearly tripped over her feet as she came to an abrupt stop. “Hewhat? You haven’t even been there a full day!” No, by breakfast, it wouldn’t have even been twelve hours. What had been the point of even going? Her head spun and for a moment she thought she’d made herself dizzy, or worse, that her sudden onset of emotion had sent her tumbling into another vision. Then she was seated on a suspiciously snow-free bench and the hand that had been holding onto hers was settled like an anchor over her thigh.

She turned her head to look up at the man now sitting beside her. She hadn’t even seen the darkness that always came with his magic, but this bench hadn’t been anywhere near the sidewalk they’d been on previously.

He only smiled in silent reassurance.

It shouldn’t have been so heartwarming.

“Apparently,” Sherri said, oblivious of course to Sienna’s distraction, “Bran’s been having an affair formonths. He swears he’s in love. That she’s everything he supposedly gave up when hesettledfor me. His mother knew all about it. He didn’t cancel our reservations because she talked him out of it, he just promised her one more night with her grandbabies because—get this—he doesn’t even want his children. He said if I just let the divorce happen, he won’t push for custody. He’s talked his mother into letting go of them and everything.”

Sienna’s mouth dropped open as the horrifying words assailed her ears. For the first time in longer than she could remember, she had no idea what to even say. But she had to say something. “Where are you now?” Maybe she could talk Sherri into coming their way for Christmas, instead of being alone with a toddler who wouldn’t

understand and a baby who wasn't capable. She'd give up her third-floor privacy suite for Sherri and the kids.

Sherri sniffled again. "Heading home." She made a sound like she'd tried to laugh but her voice was far too watery for that. "Back to the house, I mean. That he wants, but he wants us out by the end of the year."

"That son of a bitch." Sienna dragged in a breath. "He's threatening to leave you all homeless? He really doesn't care about his own children?" She inadvertently latched her free hand onto the back of Fenn's, needing something to squeeze or claw at. Apparently. "They're with you, then?"

"Sleeping, finally." This time she definitely attempted a laugh. "I can't—I can't afford city living on my own, Sienna. The only place I have that I can afford is that house."

Somehow, the words eased a little of Sienna's tension. It wasn't an ideal answer, but it was the beginning of a solution. The beginning of moving forward, from her perspective. "That's really not so bad," she said. "The neighborhood's still nice. And I'm sure you could get a local job. Small towns were basically designed for this kind of thing, right?" The house in question was the one Sherri herself had spent her teenage years in, that still stood down the street from the Jacobsen residence. Sherri's parents had chosen to move to a warmer climate a handful of years earlier, but they'd held onto it as a sort of vacation home for family. Or inheritance.

"You make it sound almost reasonable."

Sienna did her best to put a small smile into her voice. "I'm just trying to be the most supportive best friend I can be, given the circumstances." Circumstances that likely meant Sherri couldn't spare the time to detour to Fort Veyelsa for what remained of the holiday weekend, either. "Do you want me to come back and—"

“No.” Sherri’s briefly raised voice lowered again and she cleared her throat. “Stay, celebrate, enjoy your weekend. I might call again to cry in your ear, but do not derail your entire Christmas to accommodate my cheating husband. I will pack what I can to be out before he gets back, and my first stop will be to whatever bank branch is still open so I can pull out money for a babysitter next week. I’ll figure it out.”

Sienna grinned a little at that. Sherri had a side job she ran from home. She didn’t bring in a lot of money. So pulling money out of the bank meant forcing Brandon to pay for his own children’s childcare, like he should. But she said none of that. “You still have my spare? You can totally crash at my place. Don’t waste money on a hotel or anything like that.”

Sherri’s voice hitched again and for a second Sienna regretted her words. “Oh my god, Sienna, I appreciate that so much. That I think I will do. Thank you.” She hiccupped. “Anyway, I should let you go for now. Talk later?”

Sienna swallowed hard. “Drive safe, okay?” They disconnected and Sienna had to fight the urge to throw her phone into the street with a pointless shout.

Fenn moved his hand from her thigh and curled his arm around her shoulders, pulling her into his side. “For what it’s worth,” he said quietly, “your friend isn’t slated for reaping this holiday.”

That ... actually did help her feel a little better.

Sienna adjusted to press her face into him. “What about her asshole husband?” She hated not adding ex to his title, but technically they were still wholly married. Emotions and legalities were complicated.

Fenn hummed. “I could speed his timeline up if you wanted.”

She choked on an inappropriate laugh. If he were anyone else, she would be mortified at her lack of immediate repulsion over what she suspected was a serious offer. Instead, she allowed herself a moment and finally said, “Just ... promise me he won’t be responsible somehow for killing them. That would be too terrible.”

Fenn pressed a kiss into her hair. “Then you have my word.”

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Sienna lifted her head, blinking up at him, concern dancing through her. “W-was that going to happen?” Had she just unknowingly saved one or all of their lives?

He pulled her hand into his with the one not anchored around her and squeezed firmly. “I don’t have that sort of omniscience, Sienna. I can’t tell you whether or not one person was at some point in their lives going to directly or otherwise cause the deaths of others—not without looking. Just as I took a purposeful moment to check the scheduled fate of your friend.” His thumb rubbed along her knuckles. “What I am promising you is simply to not allow it to happen. I am Death. That means I have the final say of who dies when, and how, with only one exception.”

A breath rushed from her, part relief in understanding and part dreadful weight. “You.”

“Yes. Me.”

“Spilling all your secrets to your little mortal fuck-toy?”

Fenn tensed and twisted to face Florence as her hateful question washed over Sienna. His hands fell away, curling into fists, and he stood in a fluid motion. “I’ve lost my patience with your jealousy, Florence.”

Sienna remained rooted to the bench, barely able to see the flowing blonde of Florence’s hair from the way Fenn had moved to stand between them. Her emotions were still raw from her conversation with Sherri. It felt like she was experiencing some kind of emotional whiplash going from that call to another confrontation.



“What are you really going to do?” Florence said, the challenge clear in her voice. “You can’t banish me from all of Fort Veyelsa. It’s not yours.” She leaned sideways to angle a dark smirk at Sienna. “Nothing to say for yourself this time, whore?”

Swirls of black lifted up from the ground. “Florence.”

Sienna clutched her hands into fists over her lap and drew a long, stabilizing breath. In through the nose, out through the mouth. Then she shoved to her feet and stomped up to Fenn’s side. If all Florence had going for her was that she healed well, then she really wasn’t so scary. And whoever it was Sienna had seen with her in that vision, he wasn’t standing next to her now. It was hard to see the petite blonde as anything other than a sore loser.

Florence arched a brow, as if she were surprised that Sienna dared to face her.

“You don’t want to mess with me today,” Sienna said. “I’m really pissed off and I don’t like you anyway. Maybe you’ve misread this whole thing and I’m the next War in training. Did you ever think about that? Could you handle that, you petty bitch?”

Both of her brows disappeared beneath her swooping bangs. “You can’t expect me to believe—“

Sienna took a step forward. “I don’t care what you believe. Just leave. Us. Alone. Do you understand?”

Something flashed in Florence’s blue eyes and she lunged forward with a snarl. “You are no one!”

Before Sienna could react, Fenn reached between them and latched his still-gloved hand around Florence’s throat. Florence came to a dead stop, her arms hanging awkwardly in the air for a prolonged moment before dropping to her sides as her

widened gaze shifted to him.

“You will be no one,” Fenn said, his voice a dark growl, “if you don’t knock this shit off immediately.”

Florence reached up, her fingers dancing backward up the length of his sleeve. “You don’t want to do that.” She managed a smile. “Or, she might not want you to, anyway.”

Sienna opened her mouth to tell the bitch just how thoroughly she did not care when her phone rang again. It was Piper’s ringtone. Her first instinct was to let it go, but something about the expression on Florence’s face compelled Sienna to answer the call. “Piper?”

“Not quite,” an unfamiliar male voice said. His voice was calm and smooth and the sound of it—combined with the awareness that he was calling from Piper’s phone—made Sienna’s blood turn cold. He continued before she could catch her breath. “Your sister can’t come to the phone right now, but I have a message for you. Listen closely.”

Blood rushed through her ears, the rapid-fire pounding of her heart nearly deafening her. “Piper ... what did you do to Piper?” She swallowed hard. “Who are you?”

Fenn turned his head in her direction, but Sienna couldn’t focus enough to register his expression.

The man on the phone sked at her. “I told you to listen, little seer.”

Her head spun. “What...? How did you—“

“I have my ways,” he said, a little sharper. “And if you want your sister to survive,

you're going to convince your new lover to let Florence go. Alive. Do that, and you'll hear from me again." The line clicked.

Numbness washed over Sienna as she turned her gaze outward.

Florence's expression was smug, despite the hand gripping her throat. Like she'd won something.

The burning of tears behind her eyes was the only thing Sienna felt for a long minute. "You're a disgusting, deplorable, manipulative affront to humanity." She drew a shaky breath but could barely speak above a whisper. "Fenn ... let her go."

Seconds passed before Fenn stepped away from Florence and the intangible darkness at his feet receded.

Florence giggled like a child playing a game. "I'll leave you two alone for now, then." She looked between them and her smile widened. "Enjoy your time together." She offered a finger-wave and turned, took three steps, and called over her shoulder, "But just so you know, I plan on having a veryhappyChristmas."

### Too Far

Sienna sprinted from the foyer as soon as Fenn's magic faded away. "Piper! Maya!" She needed to hear her sisters' voices, needed the lecture that she would once surely have received for racing around corners without any regard for where she was. Please let them be all right. She would personally break the face of that nameless jackass who'd threatened Piper in order to bail Florence out minutes earlier, but that was preferable. "Piper!"

Fenn settled a hand on her shoulder as her feet skidded into the eerily empty sitting room, the touch somehow just as jarring as the sight of the unlit Christmas tree and scattered decorations. The stockings, perfectly spaced on the mantle. The miniature village sets carefully placed on shelves. The draping garland. All of it looked somehow quieter and duller than it should have and Sienna didn't need to hear his words to know what he would say.

"No one's here but us."

She dragged in a shaky breath and tried to remind herself that it wasn't like she'd called anyone. It wasn't like she'd arranged to meet anyone back at the house ahead of schedule. But what was she supposed to do? If nothing else, that nameless man had Piper's phone somehow, so it stood to reason the threat was real. She needed to speak to her sisters, to see her sisters, to reassure herself of their well-being.

Fenn pulled her bodily around to face him. "Look at me. Everything will be fine. We can still go find them."

She stared into his face, studying the way the corners of his lips were dipped into a frown and his brow was furrowed in the middle. The way his hauntingly beautiful eyes were narrowed, not in anger, but in something closer to frustration. The way his jaw was tight with tension, adding a visual strength to his facial structure. And she noticed a flicker of what she could only describe as concern dance through those eyes she could scarcely look away from—concern for her? Or the situation?

Sienna pulled herself together and nodded slowly. “I’m sorry,” she said, calmer. “It’s just ... I can’t let anything happen to them. I can’t be thereasonsomething happens to them. My whole life, they’ve protected me. It was annoying when I was a teenager but secretly I’ve always appreciated it and I—” She cut herself off and reached up, curling her fingers into his shirt. “How do we find them? If you could just magically know where Piper is, couldn’t we also know who the guy that called me is?”

Fenn’s expression softened, subtly, and he lifted her hands into his. “It’s not as simple as closing my eyes and becoming aware,” he said. “But if Piper’s life is, in fact, being threatened—that falls under my purview. That I could find.”

Sienna took a moment to reflect on the conversation they’d been having before Florence had interrupted them again and everything had spiraled out of control. It had been along these same lines, she recalled. And whether Fenn’s statement meant he couldn’t otherwise specifically locate her sisters, or only that it would be harder, either way that would actually be a good thing ... right?

She didn’t have time to contemplate that answer, because in the moment of silence that followed the distinct sound of a vehicle pulling into the drive penetrated her focus. The sound of the engine was vaguely familiar and she turned to look toward the doorway as Fenn released her hands. She was pretty sure, in fact, that that was Maya’s car.

“Shit,” Fenn said with an irritated growl.

Sienna blinked up at him, letting her confusion show.

“It’s Maya,” he said. He met her gaze. “But she’s hurt.”

Immediately her heart jumped to her throat again and Sienna didn’t hesitate to rush back to the foyer. He hadn’t said how badly, and he hadn’t said she was dying, but Maya was hurt badly enough that he’d reacted. That seemed like cause for concern on its own. Sienna barely had the door hauled open again before Maya reached it, and the strain on Maya’s face almost distracted Sienna’s focus from the sight of the crimson staining her clothes and trailing in splotches behind her.

Maya clutched her left arm and offered Sienna a grimace. “H-help me ... inside...”

Sienna held back the vomit that bubbled up in her throat and forced herself forward, for the first time in her life unsure of where or how to handle her sibling. But she got Maya inside and they met Fenn in the kitchen, where he was already filling a bowl with water and extracting ice from the freezer.

Maya seemed to recognize what he was doing as her head moved, slowly, between them. “Where’s P-Piper?”

Sienna’s jaw tensed and she pushed them both forward, to the nearest island stool. Probably not an ideal seat for her condition, but the table seemed so far away, and nearest bathroom was a ways down the hall. “Let’s focus on you right now, Maya. How bad is it? What happened? Give me one good reason not to call for an ambulance.” She was pretty sure she had one already, but hell, if that asshole was going to leave her sister bleeding, she’d sic whoever she could on him. She’d even make a video about it and put her followers on alert—the internet could be a real bitch sometimes.

Maya winced as she settled and more blood dripped to the floor. It wasn’t just coming

from her arm, but also from her leg. It looked like her clothes had been slashed, or torn, but the arm wounds were definitely worse than whatever had happened to her leg. Or at least continued to bleed worse. Maya drew an unsteady breath and said, “I ... ran into that ... woman, from this morning.” She swallowed visibly as Fenn set the filled bowl and a stack of towels on the island. “She was with s-some guy, kinda looked like you described earlier....”

Sienna held her breath as she helped her sister out of the ruined sweater, giving her better access to treat the wounds. Her heart ached when Maya’s breathing hitched and her eyes squeezed shut in pain. The blood had soaked through, of course, and even Maya’s bra was stained on the left side. But Sienna had no trouble spotting the slashes as they pooled up again.

It looked like Maya had just been slashed away at, like her attacker had targeted the left arm for whatever reason and reveled in slicing into it.

Sienna plunged the first towel into the bowl, letting it soak the heated water up and wringing it out enough to prevent unnecessary waste. “Florence did this to you?” She saw Maya’s jaw tense and hurried to press the towel over her sister’s arm. This was surely not the best way to treat the wound, but she could only think about stopping the bleeding.

Maya grunted, her breathing becoming increasingly labored. “Th-they both did,” she said. “But it was ... mostly her.”

Tears burned behind Sienna’s eyes and she looked across the island to meet Fenn’s gaze. This confirmed it for her. Piper was surely in grave danger, and she couldn’t even focus on that.

“I hear you’ve got an interesting situation going on, Fenn,” Rajan said when the line connected. “Sulien says you’ve found a clairvoyant and we might have a problem

with Cassian.”

Fenn grunted, the image of Sienna’s tear-stained face twisting something up inside him. “If it is Cassian, I’m going to kill him.” He didn’t even feel bad for saying it. “Him and Florence. But I think this might be something else.”

“I think I might be missing some information,” Rajan said. His tone was patient, but the calmness was calculated. Fenn knew Rajan best of all the Four, because Rajan had been the one to take him in and teach him what he needed to know about the life he’d been dragged into. Which also meant Rajan knew him best.

Fenn took a moment to verify that Sienna was still down the hall with her sister, tediously working to clean and bandage the ghastly but not life-threatening slashes that had been left on her arm and thigh. Her attackers had toyed with her, inflicting enough damage to be scarring but not endanger her life prematurely, all the while assuring their victim they could have if they’d chosen to. Even if he had no bond to the victim, it would have infuriated him. They weren’t just picking on Sienna, they were challenging him.

They were fools.



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Quietly, Fenn explained everything to Rajan. From encountering a woman who survived his touch and Cassian's advice to investigate up through Maya's assault and Piper's probable abduction. He kept the story succinct, for expediency as much as modesty, and registered something like nerves flickering in his gut when he finished. He did his best to ignore them. "I could handle this," he said after a beat, "but that only ends one way." And there was nothing he could do for Maya.

"You're right," Rajan said after a long minute, "that doesn't sound very like Cassian. Unless he's had some sort of break." He let out a breath. "Well, I know how to figure that out and give you what you're asking for, but you have to promise to play nice."

Fenn felt his eye twitch. "Just assure me this doesn't endanger Sienna." The words were past his lips before he could stop them.

This time he heard a smile in Rajan's voice. "She doesn't sound like she's easily intimidated," he said, "so she should be fine. I certainly have no inclination at this stage to do anything other than meet her."

The aggravation left him in a sigh. "You're coming, then."

"It sounds like that's the only way to assure you don't trigger the apocalypse." Something rustled, faintly, in the background. "Considering the circumstance, I'll make it an order. We should be there within the hour."

Fenn's eyes flew wide. "We?" But the question was met with silence, because Rajan had already disconnected. He was their leader only if they were pressed to say they had one, after all, so his idea of an official order was still likely to meet with

resistance. Especially since Fenn had gone and deliberately pissed off Cassian that very morning.

Guilt gnawed at his stomach and Fenn tucked away his phone. If the man with Florence was Cassian, was it possible Sienna's sisters' current situations were his fault? A result of Fenn's choice of tactic? His hands curled into fists at his sides. He didn't see any other explanation in that circumstance, and it only fueled his anger. At himself, for being so sloppy, and at Cassian for being so heartless.

Fenn pushed away from the wall and headed for the sitting room. He wanted to give the sisters some semblance of privacy since they'd migrated to the bathroom. He'd done what he could to clean up the kitchen, to spare Sienna from feeling obligated to do it herself later, and now he was left with waiting. Probably he should consider that Maya would ask him to leave in light of this development, and though he disliked the idea, he couldn't say he wouldn't understand. It looked very much like he'd brought danger to their home, however unwittingly. Which made him wonder ... how long would it be until Sienna blamed him, too?

"Hey, Fenn," Sienna said, stepping into the room. She had blood on her hands, smeared across her cheeks, and staining her clothes. She'd thrown her beautiful, colored hair up into a messy ponytail and her eyes were red and puffy. She swallowed and glanced down the hall. "Can you help me ... get Maya upstairs? She needs to rest, and she refuses to let me take her for actual help."

Fenn did his best to offer her a reassuring smile. "Of course. But she'll feel better if you're with us, I imagine." He would tell her about their self-invited guests once Maya was tucked into bed.

Sienna nodded and led him down the hall to the powder room where she'd finished cleaning up and attempting to bandage her sister's wounds. Many of them would be fine with ordinary band-aids, it was true, but some were deep enough to benefit from

stitches. Which, of course, they didn't keep in the house.

Maya herself held a large bath towel up over her chest and was leaning into the wall from her seat on the counter. Her eyelids were heavy with exhaustion and she was paler than she was supposed to be. But they'd done a good job of stopping the bleeding for the time being.

"Okay, sis," Sienna said gently, "Fenn's gonna help with this next part, all right? Just to make it easier."

Maya hummed, her eyes shifting toward him. "'kay."

Fenn rematerialized his long coat and carefully draped it around her, enabling himself to lift the injured and minimally dressed woman without touching her directly. She tensed at first, showing some awareness, but didn't fight.

Sienna stepped closer and adjusted the towel a little, making sure it covered everything it could for her sister's sake. "Don't freak out," she said quietly.

Fenn took that as his cue and called up his magic, transporting the three of them up to the second floor. He wasn't especially familiar with the second floor, but he didn't need to be. His void magic enabled him to slide them into what he was sure was the appropriate room before fully settling them into the space. It wasn't often he used the technique to transport another living being, let alone two, but it was efficient.

"Whoa," Maya mumbled.

"Yeah, it's freaky the first time," Sienna said. She had plastered a grin onto her face that didn't match her voice.

Fenn carried Maya up to the perfectly made bed and Sienna rushed up to pull the

comforter down. Then she squeezed in front of him, tugging it up and over her sister's chest, tucking her into bed with the coat and the towel still covering her. Although he could technically just dissolve the coat if he chose.

“Hopefully those pain pills will kick in real soon,” Sienna said. “I’ll run out to the car and grab your purse, so you can have your phone, and just text or call me with anything you need. But you should sleep. You’re completely safe in the house, so you have nothing to worry about.”

Fenn laid a hand on Sienna's shoulder. “I’ll get the purse. Wait here.” He could do it faster, and safer. He didn't wait for a response before taking himself out to the car.

The blood was still plainly visible, but blood itself didn't bother him. He let himself into the car, grabbed up the purse on the passenger seat, and frowned. The inside of the car was, of course, much worse. He would have to be sure not to let Sienna see that. But it had to wait. He made sure to lock up before returning to the house and the room where he'd left the women.

“Okay, here you go,” Sienna said, extracting the phone and setting it on the nightstand. She set the purse on the floor in front of the small dresser-like piece of furniture. “You’re sure you don’t want any water or soup or something?”

Maya gave a small shake of her head. “Tired,” she said. “I’ll try to eat ... later.”

Sienna nodded and allowed Fenn to guide her from the room. They left the door ajar and Fenn hauled Sienna upstairs without a word. She was visibly startled to reappear in the bathroom and turned to say something to him, but no articulate words escaped her. Instead, her shoulders sagged and she tugged her phone from her pocket, setting it on the counter. “Do I wanna look in the mirror right now?”

A strange kind of sadness gripped him. “Probably not.” Fenn set his own phone

beside hers and moved forward to turn on the shower. “Just trust me. Let me help you.”

Her breath hitched as the water poured free, filling the room with background noise. “I-it’s my fault,” she said on a whisper. Her arms curled around herself. “My sisters ... they’re hurting because of my choices ... aren’t they?”

Fenn pulled her into him, sliding his hands beneath the hem of her shirt and simultaneously dismissing his gloves. “No, Sienna. What happened to Maya, and whatever’s happening to Piper, is because someone else can’t accept reality.” He dragged his hands up, managing to get her to adjust her arms and allow him to lift the shirt over her head. It landed on the floor, and he made sure to aim the bra for the counter to keep it separate from the bloodied pile.

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She faced him, her eyes still sad, her expression searching. “Even if that’s true, I knew she was crazy. When she showed up at the door, I should have—”

Fenn ripped her pants and socks from her legs with a growl, then let his hands glide up to her hips. “No. I should have ripped out her intestines and watched her unnaturally immortal bones crumble to dust. If this is anyone else’s fault, it’s mine.”

Her eyes widened and Sienna shook her head. “That’s not true! You’ve told her to leave you alone. You didn’t know about whoever that asshole she’s got with her is, not until my vision.”

Fenn worked his fingers through her hair, freeing it, and peeled away her panties. “If it’s not my fault, and it certainly isn’t yours, who does that leave?”

She huffed out a breath into the steamy air and sank into his chest. “It just feels like ... I should be doing something...”

“Right now,” Fenn said, “you need to give yourself a moment to breathe.” He pulled her with him into the shower, using his magic to remove his own clothing as he stepped inside. The water was almost too heated, but as soon as it hit her Sienna let out a soft sigh so he chose not to adjust it. Instead, he positioned them so the water might wash them both—but mostly her—and reached for her soap. “Try to relax, and let me take care of you.”

Sienna finally managed a smile. “This is not my usual idea of aftercare,” she said, “but I really appreciate it, Fenn.”

He let himself grin at her attempt at a joke. “It’s just care, Sienna. There’s no after or before involved.” With his free hand he gently swept her hair from her face, glad to see the tear-smeared bloodied streaks had washed away already. She’d obviously wiped at her face with her hands while she’d worked, either not considering or not caring that Maya’s blood had covered her hands.

Sienna moaned quietly when Fenn set to work running her soaped up loofa over her skin. “I might like care,” she said. Already her tone was improving.

He wanted to smile at that. Wanted to appreciate the way she responded to him, the way his body was responding to their physical situation, but he knew there was another reason he’d chosen this over suggesting a relaxing soak. And that reason did not allow for persuading his lover into distracting shower sex.

Still, he waited until he’d lathered her up and had her rinsing beneath the overhead showerhead. Because he also wanted to be sure she got what she truly needed from this moment. If his only purpose was a conversation he could have talked to her through a closed door.

Sienna trailed her fingertips over the muscles on his chest. It was an absent motion, as if she were in a thoughtful daze, but it felt absolutely fantastic.

Fenn caught one of her hands by the wrist and brought her fingers up to his lips, pressing light kisses to the tips, then down to the palm. He stopped only after she giggled and released her wrist in order to settle his hands on her hips again. “There is something I need to tell you.”

Her smile seemed easier as she leaned into him. “Is that why you haven’t kissed me?”

His fingers flexed into her skin. “If I kiss you right now,” he said, “I’ll forget myself.” As it was he was struggling. The way the water sluiced over her skin, sliding

over and between her breasts and down her abdomen, rolling between her perfect thighs, felt like a tease. Taunting him.

Her smile broadened. “So I shouldn’t kiss you, then?”

Fenn groaned. “Sienna.” He pressed his lips to her forehead in some lame attempt to pacify himself. Her arms wound around his torso and her fingers pressed into his back, bringing them closer. Close enough he could feel the whispering brush of her against his erection. He swallowed hard and forced out the words that needed to be said. “They’re coming.”

Her head tipped to the side. “Um, who?” She tensed, then immediately attempted to pull away. “Florence is coming? I thought—”

He gaped at her assumption long enough to nearly lose his slippery grip of her, then tugged her wholly up against him as he folded his arms around her again. In some ways, it was a mistake, but it was better than letting her back away. “No,” he said firmly. “She cannot set foot on this property unless I perish or it changes biological ownership.” He curved a hand around the nape of her neck as she released a breath, settling into his embrace again.

“Okay,” Sienna said, slowly. “But then, who did you mean?”

He met her gaze. “The Four.”

Her eyes widened dramatically. “All of them?”

“Today.”

She dragged in a breath and dropped her forehead to his chest. After a long second, she said, “You’re right. This is probably a conversation we shouldn’t have had.”



She did have a point, even if that wasn't technically what he'd said. But he was satisfied that she at least wasn't immediately panicking, so Fenn eased his grip of her. "We should dry up, then." He would be able to sense if they were close, so they weren't yet in danger of embarrassment, but they could travel as he could. Which meant that could change in a second.

Sienna stopped him as he reached for the shower faucet, her hand on his outstretched arm. "Wait." She stared into his eyes for a long second, a small, soft smile lifting her lips. "First, thank you, Fenn."

He stared at her.

She didn't give him time to ask what she meant before pushing to her toes and pressing her lips to his in a proper kiss.

Fenn groaned and curled his arms around her again, greeting her tongue with his. Her whole body leaned into him and he wanted nothing more than to lift her up and impale her on his aching cock.

It was probably for the best when she eased back, her hands sliding over his chest as she licked her lips. "I ... really appreciate you being here today, and taking care of me, and letting me take care of my sister."

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He willed the lust down to simmering and brushed a bit of hair from the side of her face. “There is nowhere I would rather be, Sienna.”

Her smile brightened.

Recognizing his limitations, Fenn reached out and shut off the shower. “Now, let’s towel off and I’ll tell you what you need to know.”

The Cavalry

Mayaseemedtohavefallen asleep, which gave Sienna a small glimmer of relief, but Sienna was sure to keep her phone easily accessible and the volume up. She wanted to sit nearby, close enough to hear if Maya called for her, but Fenn said their visitors were coming. So she did her best to pretend she wasn’t nervous as hell and more emotional than usual and planted herself in the living room. In an attempt to lighten her psychological atmosphere, and maybe keep from having to focus on her therapeutic breathing techniques, she switched the tree lights on.

She’d managed to walk herself back from a stress-triggered vision twice in the time since she’d put fresh clothes on before Fenn stood again. He nodded at her before starting toward the foyer, and her mind danced back to that too-short time in the shower. With his arms around her, his hands gently stroking along her body and covering her in soothing sudsy soap. The way he’d been careful to keep it out of her eyes while he cleaned whatever she’d gotten on her face.

He was entirely too kind to be the incarnation and embodiment of the cessation of life.

Sienna shoved the reflection, and her automatically spiked heartrate, down when the first unfamiliar voice carried from the main entrance. It was male, and sounded rough, but even as it projected she caught the more familiar rumble of Fenn's voice and the one she didn't recognize lowered again. She imagined Fenn had told him to speak quieter, and a smile teased her lips.

The faintest sound of footsteps on hardwood forewarned her that she was about to be face-to-face with literally all four of them and she pushed to her feet. The Four freaking Horsemen. She'd be more geekishly excited about that under different circumstances.

Fenn stepped into the room first, moving closer to her and angled to face the room. "This is Sienna Jacobsen," he said.

She was fairly sure she went a little bug-eyed, anyway, at the impressive sight of the three men crowding the usually wide entryway of the room. They hadn't stopped by the closet, so all of them still wore coats and boots, but what really struck her was that they actually did all look somewhat familiar. It was a vague sense, closer to déjà vu than that of seeing an old friend. Still, her brain scrambled and all she managed was an awkward half-wave as her stare trailed from the forwardmost—and shortest—to the one in the back.

The forwardmost man stood on the far side of the semi-circle, dressed in dark neutrals of gray, brown, and black. He was the leanest of the three, with brown, slightly curly hair that hung over the tops of his ears and forehead. He had golden brown eyes that almost glowed against his darker look, grim expression included.

Closer to Fenn stood another man, who might have been the tallest and was easily over six-foot. He had a thick head full of copper-colored hair that hung loose past his shoulders and a day's growth of stubble on his jaw. He was without doubt the most muscley of all of them, and coupled with his height his overall size made him the

most physically intimidating. A fact Sienna doubted he hid from, given his vibrantly red overcoat. He didn't shy from her appraising stare, a twitch of amusement lifting his lips and sparking in his striking green eyes.

The third man stood almost perfectly in between the other two, half a step behind and nearly the same height as the one in red. He wore a sleek black coat, but Sienna spied a white scarf tucked around his throat. He was impressively built, too, though standing side-by-side with the other guy made it clear that he wasn't quite as muscular. There was a calm, patient confidence in his dark brown eyes that peeked out beneath the sweep of his equally dark hair, which he kept cut shorter.

Sienna swallowed against a lump of nerves in her throat and drew a breath. She was pretty sure she could guess who was who just from looking at them. It was surreal.

The one in the middle stepped forward, a sympathetic smile lifting the corners of his lips, and held out his hand. "It's a pleasure to meet you, Sienna. I am Rajan."

Sienna reached out to take his hand, noticing the one in red who she assumed was War shift his weight in her peripheral vision, and it struck her. The reason these giants of men were familiar to her. She barely remembered to shake properly as Rajan's strong fingers curled around her smaller hand, and something must have shown on her face because his expression faltered.

"Is something the matter?"

Fenn laid a hand on her shoulder. "Sienna?"

She looked between Rajan and War again, blinking quickly, then up at Fenn. "Do you remember ... that first vision I had in front of you?" Had that only been recently? It felt like it'd been weeks since she'd recognized him in that restaurant.

Fenn frowned. “Of course.”

Her breath came faster as the details rushed back to her. The blood in the snow. The barely identifiable figures, clearly approaching. The light overhead, out of sight—perhaps the closest thing to a metaphor her visions ever offered. “This was it,” she said.

Rajan’s brows lifted on his forehead.

The leaner man with the circles under his eyes scoffed. “And you just conveniently forgot until now?”

Rajan moved back and turned a narrow-eyed stare on the man. “When was the last time you had a vision, Cassian? Perhaps you can enlighten us as to how it ordinarily works?”

Sienna shook her head before the leaner man—Cassian, apparently—could do more than grunt in irritation. “No,” she said, “not meeting like this. I mean ... you, coming here. I think I saw it, kind of, but it was ... vague. Different.”

The one she had pegged as War, whose name she didn’t yet know, propped his hands on his hips and grinned too wide. “Your woman’s dreaming about us, Fenn.”

Sienna felt a rush of heat run through her unexpectedly, but strangely, it helped to sharpen her focus.

“Shut up,” Fenn snapped. His hand did not move from her shoulder.

“It was you two,” Sienna said, indicating Rajan and War. “You were dressed like you are now, as near as I can remember, and walking toward wherever I was watching from. The driveway, or the porch, maybe. It was dark around you, so all I could see

was you and the snow beneath your feet, but that could have just been because of the way my sight narrows.” She drew a breath. “There was blood in the snow. I didn’t see it at first, but it was there, closer to the light you were walking toward. I never saw you arrive.” And that had been Maya’s blood, she realized, if she was right about her vision.

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Bile threatened again for a moment and she pulled her phone from her pocket, just to be sure Maya hadn't tried to call or text. She had nothing—nothing important, anyway—and so she dismissed the social media notifications and tucked it away again. Maya was just upstairs. Fenn wouldn't let her die. Not that she was in real danger of dying.

“Interesting,” Rajan said. He crossed his arms, immediately making himself look larger, and took his chin between thumb and forefinger in a classically thoughtful pose. “You didn't see Cassian?”

The amusement drained from War's expression. “I think that's actually the million-dollar question, as they say.”

Cassian bit out another sound of displeasure. “I wish you idiots had come to me with that theory before deciding we'd descend on this place. I would have told you, as I have, it wasn't me.”

“Of course you'd say that.” The skepticism in War's voice was hard to miss.

Sienna frowned, looking between them. She was clearly missing something. “Um ... this might totally be not my business, but I feel like there's something I'm supposed to understand here and definitely don't.”

Fenn finally released her shoulder, his touch sliding down her spine to settle at the small of her back. “Sien—”

He was interrupted by the ringing of her phone. Her heart leapt into her throat again

at the recognition of Piper's ringtone and Sienna didn't even apologize before scrambling to get it to her ear in time. Belatedly, she realized she probably should have put it on speaker, but she'd already connected. "Yes...?"

"Wise of you not to assume I've chosen to release your sister," the unnamed man who apparently still had Piper's phone—and maybe Piper herself—said. He sounded completely calm and confident in his position over her. "I assume by now you've received my warning."

The question reminded her of what Maya had said when she'd been strong enough to speak and anger bolstered her. Sienna tapped the speaker button as her response poured out. "You call what you did to Maya a warning? You piece of shit bastard! What do you even want with us? Who are you? No, I don't care who you are, just tell me where Piper is or let her come home and then leave us the hell alone!"

He had the audacity to chuckle. "Do you feel better now?"

Sienna gripped the phone so tightly her hand shook.

Then a voice, distinctly not Fenn's, whispered in the ear opposite where Fenn stood, "Keep him talking. Back down if he starts getting upset." The voice was War's, she was almost sure of it, and for just a moment she thought it looked like he'd blinked in place when she glanced his way.

But there was no time to linger in shock. Sienna dragged in a breath and forced herself to soften her tone. Slightly. "No," she said. "Yelling at you doesn't take away my sister's pain. Please, just tell me what you want." How was she supposed to keep this guy talking? What was even the point, it wasn't as if they were tracing the call?

"Is he trying to track me?"



Her mouth fell open a little. “What?”

“Your lover,” the nameless man said unnecessarily. “Is he hoping to use my distraction to hone in on my location? Is that why you put me on speaker?”

Shit!

Rajan held out his hand in a clear, wordless request.

For a split-second, Sienna hesitated. But she had no other bargaining chips, no other means with which to win this fight, so she handed over her phone. If nothing else, she had faith that Fenn would protect Piper’s life—and if it came to that, they could find her that way, no matter how horrible the process.

“I do not yet know your name,” Rajan said, an authority and power filling his voice that hadn’t been there before, “but I will caution you once to release Ms. Jacobsen and abandon whatever quest you’ve embarked on against this family.”

There was a stretch of silence where Sienna wondered if he’d hung up, and then the man with Piper’s phone spoke again. “You don’t sound like Death.”

Rajan’s expression hardened. “I am Conquest.”

The man immediately let out a laugh. For a moment it seemed nervous, but then it built, a tone of incredulity lacing the jarring sound. “I would say I was honored,” he finally said, “but frankly I find all four of you overrated. I will live and die independently of any gods, their precious puppets included.” The laughter vanished from his voice. “Can you hear me, Sienna Jacobsen?”

“Yes,” Sienna said before anyone could tell her not to speak.

“If you have not found your sister by sunrise, you will never find her.” The line clicked.

Rajan held the phone out for Sienna. “His confidence is misplaced,” he said. “And he has given us too much time.”

“Not necessarily,” Cassian said.

War held up a hand. “Hold on. I need clarification.” He pointed to his grumpy colleague but held Sienna’s stare. “Cassian is not the man you saw in that vision with Florence? The one Fenn told us about?”

Sienna was so thrown by the question she actually remembered to breathe again. She obligingly turned her gaze back to Cassian, who glowered at her as if displeased that she’d even looked, then returned her focus to War. “I suppose they look similar,” she said. “They’re about the same height and build, with similar hair, but Cassian’s face is more tired. And his eyes are more glowy.” But they did look similar, she realized. It was startling.

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“Huh.” War dropped his arm and glanced toward Cassian. “Guess I owe you an apology.”

“I’ll put it on the list.”

Sienna looked up at Fenn. “Is that why you said the other guy could be a problem? Because you thought it might be one of you?” As she asked the question she realized how actually horrifying that prospect would be. Especially if she was right and Cassian was Famine.

Fenn inclined his head. “From your description, it could have been.”

“Except for the entire part about commiserating with Florence Dossit, you mean?” Cassian asked sharply.

Rajan hummed. “I suppose this is the risk we take when we make such a habit of working independently.”

Guilt joined the swirling feelings in Sienna’s stomach and she crossed the room without thought, moving to stand in front of Cassian. His sharp, golden-brown gaze snapped to her and narrowed with suspicion. She offered him a smile. “I’m sorry for casting any suspicion on you, even inadvertently.” She held out her hand. “My name is Sienna, I have weird visions that don’t exactly come with a manual, and I’d love it if we could be friends.”

Silence filled the room and Sienna suspected that if she looked behind her she’d find everyone staring, waiting for Cassian’s response. But she held still.

Cassian's jaw ticked. "So you're also the one who's immune to Death's Touch?"

Someone—War, possibly—made a sound of stammering surprise.

Sienna let her smile broaden. "I'm lucky like that."

Cassian broke from her stare, blatantly looking her up and down as if he were examining her. Only when he was done did he finally wrap his hand around hers. His fingers were long and slender and calloused. "I am Famine," he said. He made her no promises of friendship, nor did he refuse her offer. It seemed like a decent start.

War cleared his throat roughly as Sienna stepped back toward her spot beside Fenn. "I think you buried an important detail, Fenn. What's this about immunity?"

"He told me," Rajan said, still calm.

Sienna looked over at Fenn and fought to keep a grin from her lips. He looked like he was struggling to project his calm exterior, but not in an angry way. It reminded her of when he'd told her sisters he had brothers—maybe that hadn't been such a stretch, after all. But the reminder of her sisters sucked away the amusement she'd managed to find and Sienna curled her fingers into the sleeve of his shirt.

The man whose name they still didn't know had threatened to kill Piper. He'd even spoken like he had some reason to believe he could exist outside the reach of the Four.

Fenn curled his arm around her, letting her head land on his shoulder. "I've changed my mind," he said, his voice drifting over her as her head spun. "I'm sorry I wasted your time."

"What nonsense are you spouting?" Cassian asked.

“Sounds like you have a difficult one on your hands,” War said.

“He’s not so difficult,” Fenn said. His voice lowered, going firm and cold. “He lives. I will take that from him.”

“I can’t advise that,” Rajan said. “We know too little about him. Something about his attitude concerns me.”

“Then I’ll deal with that, too,” Fenn replied.

Cassian huffed. “Boy, this is the last place you should be thinking about shirking the system.”

Sienna twisted her hands tighter in Fenn’s shirt. “Why...?” When she realized the question had passed her lips, she tilted her head enough to glimpse at least some of the room and asked, “Why us? Why now?” She sniffled against her tears. “I get that Florence is crazy and can’t contain her jealousy. As stupid as that is. But this guy makes no sense. I don’t even know his name, I’ve never seen him as far as he knows, and he’s hurt both of my sisters now. Why?”

She saw War’s brow crease with a deep frown. Saw Rajan’s own lips thin in a displeased expression.

It was Cassian who answered her, almost as if realizing the answer himself. “Balance.”

War muttered something that sounded like a curse, in a language Sienna didn’t recognize.

Rajan crossed his arms again and hummed. “That would beg the question, then, of how he achieved such enlightenment.”

Sienna drew a steadying breath and straightened. “I’m so confused. Would someone enlighten me?” She looked across the room to meet War’s stare. “And we still haven’t been introduced. Obviously you’re War, but what’s your name?”

The large man grinned. “Sulien, and it’s an honor to meet such a fine seer as yourself.”

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She definitely blushed that time. “I’m not, like, some oracle from mythological stories or something. Just an awkward clairvoyant.”

For some reason, that really seemed to amuse him.

“Remember to keep your voice down, Sulien,” Fenn said when the laughter grew too loud.

Sulien sucked in a breath and promptly sobered himself. “Right, right, sorry.”

“To answer your question,” Cassian said, “balance is, put simply, our purpose. Each of us has a role to play in maintaining the balance of the world. Should one of us overstep, or disappear, that balance would be disturbed.”

Sienna blinked at him, attempting to process his meaning. His words made sense, but she was certain there was a deeper point that she wasn’t quite grasping.

“In other words,” Fenn said, “if I go and slaughter a couple of people whose lives were supposed to have an impact on the future, that could throw off the balance of life. For just two people, it would hardly be enough for a full-scale apocalypse, but it would cause a little unpleasantness.”

Sienna gawked at him. “What kind of unpleasantness?” That was probably the wrong question. She should, surely, have insisted he not even consider it. But they were talking about protecting her only family. One of whom was still being held captive. She wasn’t so sweet as to take such an option off the table.

Fenn opened his mouth, but an entirely different and unfamiliar voice spoke over him.

“Knock knock.” The feminine voice was a little wispy, or perhaps her tone was light and casual. It was hard to tell.

Sienna jumped in place, her heart stuttering against her ribcage.

The men all twisted in place, adjusting slightly to reveal their visitor who stood in the hall. But none of them did more than cross their arms or shift their weight otherwise, which only confused Sienna more.

Standing across from her, almost directly, was a woman she’d never seen before but who was somehow also vaguely familiar. She couldn’t have been, however, because Sienna was damn sure she didn’t know anyone who wore bell-bottom jeans with bright, multi-colored sunflower patterns stitched into the denim, let alone a very poofy actual-tie-dye sweater. The woman wore so many colors it was hard to focus on her appearance.

Sienna gave herself a shake. She didn’t care why this woman was familiar. “Um, who the hell are you? This is private property.” Fort Veyelsa was a small town, but even her neighbors had learned to knock!

The woman smiled. “I know,” she said. She looked around the room, smiling like she was bursting with things she wanted to say. “You boys aren’t planning to burn down Christmas, are you? I don’t think that’s on the schedule this year.”

Fenn made a sound like a low growl and took a step forward. “If you’re not here to help, then leave. I’m not in the mood for your—”

“You should be a little nicer to me, don’t you think?” She tipped her head and



threaded her hands over her chest. “I did you a favor, poor sad, gloomy Fenn.” Her eyes lit up—they may actually have sparkled—and she pointed suddenly to Cassian. “He’s on to something, this one. Consider today’s problem a trial, and if the right person perseveres, there could be a wonderful reward!”

Confusion overwhelmed Sienna as she tried to follow the conversation. She opened her mouth to ask what the woman meant, or who the woman was, but she was talked over.

“In the meantime, no apocalypses, understand? I won’t have you breaking my favorite town.” She met Sienna’s gaze again. “Oh, and thanks for your loyalty! I put a little freebie on your account, in exchange for putting up with these guys. Toodles!” She turned even as she waved and simply vanished from sight. No lightshow, no pop of sound or gust of wind or anything like Sienna might have expected. She was just ... gone.

No one said anything for several seconds.

Sulien sighed heavily. “She gives me a headache.”

“Trials give me a headache,” Cassian said as he slumped against the wall.

Fenn’s hands curled into fists.

“Well. That settles that argument, I suppose,” Rajan said. He stepped closer and clapped Fenn on the shoulder. “We’ll find another solution. Calm yourself.”

No one was confused. They seemed agitated, unsettled, but not confused. Not like the last few minutes hadn’t been pure, undefinable chaos. Sienna watched them all as Rajan and Sulien turned toward the sofa as if intending to settle in. No one seemed about to offer an explanation and she couldn’t contain herself any longer. “I am so lost.

Who was that woman who just broke into my sister's house, lectured you, talked like she knew me, and disappeared into thin air?" Come to think of it, it was possible these four had forgotten normal people couldn't do that.

"Destiny Truegood," Fenn said.

Sienna drew up short. She recognized that name. Destiny Truegood was the founder of Serendripity, which had originated right there in Fort Veyelsa. That made no sense at all.

"She's a Fate," Cassian said.

Sienna stared at him. "I'm sorry. You mean like—"

"Capital 'F' Fate," Fenn said, mimicking her original reaction to his revelation. He settled a hand at the small of her back to guide her toward the sofa. "Yes, they're real. It's not as amazing as you want it to be. That particular one ... likes to be involved."

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Sienna allowed him to tug her down beside him. “I’m thinking you should tell me what’s real and what’s not.” She should, arguably, have guessed that godly beings were real.

Fenn hummed, the sound low, rumbly, and oddly comforting. “That might be a good idea. But later, this isn’t the time.”

Sienna sobered at his point and looked again around the room. She had the Four in her living room. Surely, they could rescue her sister.

Turn A Page

“You left a few things out of that first call, Fenn,” Cassian said after Sienna disappeared up the stairs.

Sulien chuckled. “It’s true. I’ve never seen you so human.”

Fenn squeezed his eyes shut for a second before facing his colleagues again. This wasn’t exactly a situation he’d prepared for. “I didn’t know any of you when I was human.” He tucked his hands into the pockets of the coat he’d regenerated and glanced toward Cassian. “The only thing I left out when I called you before was her identity.” And the unexplainable feeling in his chest that continued to insist he had no desire for Sienna’s death.

“All of us have been guilty of keeping things to ourselves over the decades,” Rajan said. He stood smoothly. “In this instance, it’s most important that we are all on the same page now. We know what we need to do.”

Fenn inclined his head.

The amused sparkle faded from Sulien's eyes. "Time to play a little hunt and destroy."

He wasn't wrong. The sun had already fallen below the horizon, leaving the snow-laden town lit with sporadic streetlights and strands of multi-colored seasonal lights. They could see fine in the darkness, but it would make their search more dangerous regardless. If Piper were in the same condition as Maya while the temperatures plummeted, they might yet find her the way none of them wanted to.

"You're sure you want to bring her?" Sulien asked, his tone serious. He didn't address Fenn specifically, but the meaning of his question was obvious all the same.

Fenn flicked a glance toward the ceiling. Sienna had gone to check on her sister, but she wouldn't be long. "She would never accept sitting back and waiting."

Even as Sulien and Rajan both grinned, to varying degrees, at this answer, Cassian said, "Even if she would, she has to come."

That drew Fenn's attention and he frowned. It hadn't sounded like a threat, but even the possibility that Cassian was on-board with including an outsider was a surprise. "What does that mean?"

"The trial," Cassian said. "It wasn't likely for any of us. We've endured ours."

Fenn held his breath, his mind spinning. He'd briefly forgotten that ominous word-drop from Destiny's impromptu visit. But it made sense that whatever trial lay ahead was Sienna's, considering the circumstances. The real question was ... what did that mean?

Sulien grumbled, the inarticulate sound full of irritation. “So we’re supposed to sit on our asses?”

Cassian shrugged. “Without knowing the purpose of the trial, my guess is as good as yours.”

“There are only four of us,” Sulien said. “Is someone about to die? Who’s she replacing?”

“No one.” The words escaped from him without direction, his voice little more than a snarl. But he’d spoken loudly enough to earn their focus again, so Fenn made an effort not to growl at the men he would know for centuries more. “She’s not replacing any of us. She’s not becoming one of us.”

Rajan rubbed his chin thoughtfully. “That would be a possible explanation for her immunity to you.” He said the words slowly, eyes faintly narrowed, as if they displeased him.

Fenn met his former mentor’s stare. “It’s not happening.”

“What’s not happening?” Sienna asked as she entered the room. She looked between them searchingly. “Did I miss something?”

Fenn softened his expression, and his voice, and faced her. “How’s Maya?”

“Thirsty, at least,” Sienna said. “Also tired and in a fair amount of pain, because ibuprofen is not a cure-all, but calmer than she was before. I didn’t tell her about Piper, though.”

Rajan stepped up and rested a hand on Sienna’s shoulder. “I will keep watch over your home and your sister while you search,” he said. “Your job now is to focus on

what comes next.”

Sienna offered him a faintly strained smile. “I mean, I appreciate that, but I still don’t understand why you don’t wanna come out with us.” Her face scrunched up. “Not that I like the idea of leaving Maya alone. I’m very conflicted on everything, is all.”

Rajan moved out of her space. “It would be unwise to leave your sister vulnerable, and Fenn cannot banish someone from a property without knowing their identity. Likewise, I could lay claim to this entire territory, but that transition of power would break the protective spell Fenn has already erected. However, if I simply stay and maintain a physical presence, my magic can protect the space I occupy and any within.”

Fenn watched Sienna’s expression as her eyes widened, then lit with comprehension and she gave a slow nod.

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“The rest of us should get going,” Sulien said. “We’re losing our advantage every second we linger.”

Not having the first clue who their real enemy was was proving to be a true pain in the ass, apparently. Sienna’s insides were all twisted up with unnecessary nerves after they left the house, even despite Rajan’s promise to protect Maya. Despite Fenn’s reassurance that they would find the man tormenting her sisters and make him pay. Part of her had thought having all four of them together would make it super easy to accomplish their goals—that they could snap their collective fingers and poof, Piper would be home, safe and sound.

That had been naïve, she realized.

Cassian and Sulien split from them as soon as they stepped off the driveway, both fading away into the evening darkness. Slipping into whatever magical dimensions they had that allowed them to travel invisibly and utterly undetectably across spaces.

Fenn stayed beside her, though she suspected they also cheated, because it took no time at all to go from the driveway in front of her childhood home to a darkened business street. Only a few sporadic loops of Christmas lights, mostly sparkling white or nearly violet blue, decorated the buildings here. It was the street Piper’s office was on, in fact.

Sienna swallowed against another rush of unhelpful emotion. “You think they’re here?”

“I wish I knew where they were,” he said. He spoke quietly and curled his hand

around hers. “I only doubt she’s being held in the heart of downtown, where the people seem to be gathering to celebrate the holiday.”

Her chest tightened and Sienna slipped her fingers between his, gripping almost desperately to his hand. He was surely referring to the event Maya had been helping collect donations for. Had she at least gotten to turn them in first? Or were they still sitting in a pile somewhere within the empty walls of Turn A Page?

She licked her lips and pushed out the first reasonable question she could think of, needing a distraction. “How will we know ... if we’re close?”

Fenn hummed low. “If Florence is there, even if she manages to control herself, I’ll sense her. The healing power she possesses operates on what you might call a different frequency than the magic of my void. When we’re within a certain proximity of each other, I can feel it, like a constant aggravation at the back of my mind.”

“She’s basically life, you’re Death, that makes as much sense as anything I suppose...” She said the words, but barely heard the conversation. Maya’s bookstore wasn’t on this street, but for some reason Sienna couldn’t describe, she suddenly wanted to go there. Was she just stupidly obsessing about the donation books?

“If Florence isn’t with him,” Fenn continued, unaware of Sienna’s wandering mind, “it could be trickier. We’re essentially looking for a being with some amount of divinity in his blood, or something that might be on par, and someone who most likely doesn’t belong. It’s vague, which makes it complicated. He’s helping us by keeping hold of Piper, unfortunately.”

They were nearly parallel with the law firm where Piper worked as a secretary. Sienna recalled, all of a sudden, arguing about stupid things like jobs and work status with her sister. Probably not even that long ago. Piper was good at what she did. She



saw value in the old-fashioned concept of paperwork and desk jobs. She had once aspired to work in some big Fortune 500 company, but when their lives had been turned upside down after their parents' passing, Piper had downsized her expectations.

It had always bothered Sienna. So Sienna had made a point to get the most "new school" job she could handle, to do what her generation was expected to do and find a way to make money on her terms. They'd never seen eye-to-eye on the subject of work, with one exception. They were both so proud of Maya for keeping the family bookstore running, even in the digital era.

Sienna came to a full stop and tugged on Fenn's hand. "The bookstore," she whispered. "I need to go to the bookstore." She couldn't explain it. She wasn't sure there was any justification for it. She just couldn't get the damn thing out of her head.

Fenn's brow furrowed, but he didn't argue. He stepped up to her side and the swirls of his power lifted off the ground, presumably to do as she'd requested.

Sienna was prepared for the visual adjustment when his power receded a moment later, allowing color and life to bleed back into her senses, but she was briefly startled at realizing he'd transported them inside. They stood directly past the main door, so the entire store opened up to them.

The two registers remained seemingly untouched just ahead and off to one side. Ambient street light filtered in through the main front window around the edges of the simple privacy shade. Unlit holiday decorations, including a sign encouraging donations, celebrated the season all across the front of the space.

For a moment, Sienna felt relief. The table that was clearly labeled as designated for donations was empty, so they'd been picked up. She took a step forward, still compelled to look around, and came up short when Fenn tightened his grip of her

hand.

“Don’t let go of me,” he said. His eyes were narrowed and glowing in a haunting way every clichéd creature of the night would envy. “Something’s ... wrong.”

She immediately tensed again and swiveled her head back and forth, attempting to spot the wrongness in the dim lighting. Of course, she couldn’t. Not from the entryway, at least. “What do you mean? Is Piper—”

“No.” He guided her forward, deeper into the store, at a slow pace. He wasn’t looking down aisles or reading section labels, he was watching the floor. “But something did die here, very recently.” He pointed outward. “Can you see that?”

Her stomach twisted and Sienna found herself hesitant to follow his extended arm with her gaze, but she complied. She had to squint to see it.

Blood. Streaked as if something had been dragged down the center aisle.

She sucked in a breath. “Holy crap!” She twisted toward Fenn, breathless and admittedly more freaked out than she ought to be at the sight of blood. “Is that— Tell me that’s not Piper?”

Fenn brushed his thumb across her cheek. “That blood came from something which was never human,” he said. “There’s an owl in the back. The life was drained from it less than an hour ago.”

His words steadied her and anger, and disbelief, sparked in her chest. “An owl?” The question came out of her in a hiss, as if she had some need to keep her voice down.

He nodded.

Sienna glared down at the streaked blood on the floor for a moment. “Take me.”

Fenn didn't say another word before guiding her through the bookstore, keeping her out of the trail of blood, until they came to the partially open space Maya had painstakingly decorated for her customers. It was furnished with high-backed chairs, a loveseat, and two different tables, creating a sort of mini relaxation point. Shoppers could rest their feet, or curl up and read their latest purchase. The sisters had once claimed this space as a playroom when their mother had been responsible for the store.

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This time, a massacred owl lay unceremoniously discarded in the center of the loveseat. Blood was splattered all over, as if the bird had actually only been wounded when it had been dragged into the space, and brutally slain on-site. It was horrible. In some ways, even if only psychologically, the sight was so much worse than any of the unpleasant visions Sienna could remember.

Her stomach rolled and she turned her head, needing a few seconds to get herself under control.

Fenn rested a hand on her back and rubbed gently. "I can clean this up," he said. "But is there any significance here beyond the space itself?"

Her brain was spinning in too many directions. She latched on to the first thing she could and quietly asked, "You ... can?"

He pulled her head into his shoulder, allowing her to lean on him. "It's a death scene," he said. "That which is directly relevant, until it becomes contaminated, I can manipulate."

A thought popped into her head, followed quickly by another. "You could totally create zombies."

This time he chuckled, briefly. "I probably could."

Sienna eased back enough to blink up at him. "You don't know?"

He offered her a twitch of his lips. "Never tried."

She supposed she appreciated that, from the perspective of a living human being. And somehow the moment of banter had cleared her head, she realized. “Piper,” she said, “her favorite birds are owls.” She nearly turned to look at the corpse of the poor creature before she caught herself. She swallowed hard. “Is there ... anything else? Here, I mean?”

Fenn shook his head. “Nothing of note. I believe the bird itself was the message.”

He didn’t have to spell it out. Their enemy was taunting them. Making it clear that they knew more than they should, and could get in and out of places they shouldn’t be able. Which in turn made Sienna all the more grateful for having left Rajan at the house with Maya. Something about the man inspired her trust.

Another thought rushed in on the heels of that reflection. Maya had working security cameras in her store. Not throughout, but over the register area and over the reading area—just to make sure no one thought to walk off with a book or three in their purse. It was a problem their mother had had sporadically, because even cutesy small towns had their crime.

Sienna looked up at Fenn again. “Can you deal with—” She gestured as bile briefly bubbled up her throat. “I happen to know how to access Maya’s security system. I want to see if this asshole’s on camera.” She’d practically set the system up for her sister, so she could definitely get back into it.

Fenn’s brow furrowed. “This will only take me a few seconds.”

She knew he was trying to gently disagree with the idea of her leaving his side, but she didn’t have to leave the building and she had no interest in lingering around the massacre. “Then I’ll barely have time to miss you.” She threw in a wink in an effort to lighten the mood and extracted herself from his grip.

The side-room that housed the security system, and some other things, was not off the main aisle, so Sienna didn't have to worry about walking through a blood trail she could hardly see. She thought about pulling out her phone to use as a flashlight, but reminded herself she was a grown woman who knew that store as well as she knew any other building, and she had no need to be afraid of the dark. If there was any so-called creature of darkness to fear, most people would say it was the one she'd spent the majority of the previous night wrapped around.

The man she was going to reward thoroughly just as soon as her sisters were both safely home. And she'd maybe had like five hours' sleep.

There it is. She grabbed hold of the pocket door that hid the closet-sized space at the same time as she felt the air around her stir.

Cool lips grazed her ear as a presence came into existence literally up against her. "You're a hard woman to get alone."

Her heart slammed in her chest and Sienna opened her mouth to scream even before she registered the hands that latched on to her. In her peripheral vision, she thought she saw the darkness move. But then the air ripped past her, drying out her eyes as if she were moving too fast through open space.

It was over as fast as it began and the firm grip that had hauled her up tossed her away, letting her land hard on her knees and elbows. Cold, unforgiving concrete caught her, nearly breaking her nose from her landing.

She couldn't make sense of it. What had just happened?

The breath rushed from him as Sienna disappeared in the arms of a man he didn't know. He barely caught a clear enough glimpse to identify brown hair on his foe before the pair were gone in a sudden gust of wind.

What the hell had just happened?

Fenn growled, letting his anger out in rippling waves. The owl hadn't been a warning. It'd been bait. He never should have allowed her to step from his reach. That bastard wouldn't have dared come for her if Fenn had kept hold of her. Because despite what he'd said on the phone, his actions proved at least one thing—this stranger still feared Death.

As well he should.

As attuned to Sienna as Fenn was, however, he couldn't immediately pinpoint her. It seemed unlikely that their unnamed enemy, or even Florence, had set up some sort of barrier. And in turn that forced Fenn to wonder how far she could already have been taken? Even among the gods, true teleportation was not a common feat.

His mind replayed that last moment, when Sienna's mouth had opened as if to scream, her eyes already wide in shock. Another man's hands on her body. The way they'd promptly vanished, as if sucked away by a gale that should not have been. No. The wind hadn't taken them, it was a byproduct of their movement.

Fenn slipped from the store and took himself to the roof of the tallest building in town. Walking the streets would only end in unnecessary bloodshed.

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His phone went off moments later. Cassian's name on the screen was not unexpected, but not what he wanted to see. He answered anyway. "Do you have something?"

"You're leaking. Again."

Fenn locked his jaw for a moment. "I don't care. He took her."

Cassian was silent for a beat. "I beg your pardon? Who, boy?"

Fenn closed his eyes, searching for that strange magnetic pull that had drawn him to Sienna before. "Some fool with divine speed."

Cassian let out an irritated grunt. "Let me call War. We'll come to you." He disconnected without waiting for a response.

Fenn nearly dropped his phone away, not in the mood to care about waiting or even the chiding they'd already received from Fate, when another thought echoed in his mind. It was probably unnecessary, but for Sienna's sake, he'd make the call.

Rajan answered immediately. "Tell me what's wrong." He swore he'd never actually been a King in his mortal life, but there were times Fenn wondered how truthful that was.

Fenn repeated himself out of necessity, then added, "Your ability may make this irrelevant, but I thought you might want to put a more concentrated effort into Maya's defense."



“I see. Of course.” Rajan paused, but no sound drifted through the line. “Fenn, I owe you an apology. I feared something like this might happen, if only because it’s hardly a trial for Sienna if you’re protecting her and fighting for her at every turn. I tell you that now so you will remember there is still hope.”

Fenn felt his lip curl. “I don’t give a fuck about that nonsense. I’m going to find her, alive, and then I’m going to finish this.” He hung up before Rajan could try to talk him down. It seemed like he was consistently being held back on some sort of leash lately, but he was done putting up with that. The mysterious, possibly divine, speedster had knowingly provoked Death.

Now Death awaited him.

## Blind Rage

She felt groggy, as if she had been unnaturally roused from the grip of a deep sleep. Her body was heavy and she couldn’t blink the fog from her eyes. Even her lungs barely drew breath. Movement ahead caught her attention and Sienna did her best to focus, hoping to will away the blurriness.

The center of her vision cleared as her best friend, Sherri, burst into view. A wide smile lifted her face, still familiar despite that it looked oddly older—more tired—than Sienna remembered. Her once-dyed hair had even been washed back to its natural hue. She appeared thrilled, her eyes lit with an excited energy that radiated from her smile.

Apprehension filled Sienna’s chest as she watched her closest friend rush almost completely through her limited field of vision. She was fairly certain this was a terrible time to be blacking out and she didn’t even remember it hitting. The last thing she remembered was hitting cold concrete after being abducted. Yeah, on top of a crap day. That’d do it.

Another voice, muffled and distorted, drifted in from wherever Sherri's arms stretched out of sight. The tone was pleasant, light, possibly even laughing.

Then Sherri pulled a woman Sienna did not recognize into view, the stranger's back to Sienna, and they wrapped their arms around each other in an affectionate hug. A hug that soon turned intimate when the women eased back and met in a warm kiss.

Sienna's eyes widened. She hated looking in on other people's intimate moments. It was so much worse when she knew them, and worse still when her vision told her something about that person the person in question hadn't chosen to confide. It felt like spying.

"Welcome home," Sherri said, her quiet words carrying to Sienna's ears despite obviously being meant for the woman whose forehead was now pressed to hers.

Sienna could just slightly see the upward angle of the woman's lips, and the woman's murmured response was still muffled to her ears. It looked tender, from the way she kissed Sherri's jaw and the way Sherri released a soft sigh. They were cute, heartwarming. And as the vision finally began to fade, Sienna understood.

It didn't matter who the mystery woman was or how much time and stress had passed between Sienna's present and the moment she'd witnessed. Eventually, this would be. This new woman would come into her friend's life and offer something Sherri had only just learned she'd lost in real-time.

A misplaced sense of relief flickered through Sienna's heart. She would have to play dumb for a while, but she looked forward to the day Sherri introduced her to this person. She looked forward to the relief and happiness this stranger would bring her friend.

A shock of cold dropped onto her face, jerking her sharply back to the moment. The

reason she couldn't be afford to be lingering in her relief for her friend.

"Oh, she deigns to rejoin us."

Sienna groaned, barely processing the words that dripped with disdain from the voice somewhere above her. She was on her back, so she pushed to a sitting position and reached up, wiping at her face before she consciously knew what she was doing. Pain lanced through her from the action and something gave way beneath the swipe of her hand. She winced, finally bringing her mind to full focus, and looked down as she pulled her hand away.

Snow tumbled through her splayed fingers and slowly began to melt in her lap. More snow had started to melt over the shoulder of her sweater. The concrete she remembered being dropped onto previously was still beneath her, hard under her butt. And she couldn't breathe right. That sensation had apparently carried through into her vision, albeit not accurately. Her nose hurt like hell and some of the snow was tinted red. "Wha—"

A sharp scoff, in that same tone, pulled her attention outward. This time she identified Florence's voice as the woman said, "Have you never seen your own blood before, you poor little infant?"

Sienna frowned and flicked a cluster of icy snow from her thigh. "You dropped a snowball on me? While I wasunconscious? And you call me a child." She was pretty sure she'd avoided falling on her face when she'd been unceremoniously dropped wherever they were, so she must have crashed face-down when the vision struck. It was the most likely scenario she could think of.

She thought she actually saw Florence's nostrils flare as indignation flared in her eyes. "I don't have to listen to this!"

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Okay, second most likely scenario. Sienna moved slowly, making sure that the throbbing in her knees was an aching soreness and not a sign of more serious damage, before pushing to her feet. “You’re the one who woke me up.”

“I really don’t have the patience for your bickering.” The voice of the unnamed man who’d possibly—probably—abducted Piper, and apparently now abducted her, snapped Sienna’s focus to the side. And there he was, leaning against a stool seat as if he had all the time in the world, half-hidden by the natural shadows of the barely illuminated space around them.

“You...” Her stomach clenched uncomfortably. “You seriously kidnapped me?” She wanted to know how, and how he had the gall to do something like that mere feet from Death, but the latter seemed irrelevant since he’d obviously succeeded. She swallowed both back for a question that mattered more. “Where’s Piper?”

“Ugh.” Florence made a sweeping gesture in Sienna’s direction but returned her attention to the male. “Why did you bother with this one? I never said I wanted to keep her company. Why can’t we just cut her up and be done with her?”

Maya’s bloodied body flashed through Sienna’s memory and anger surged inside her. She knew both had participated, just as she knew Florence had been the worst offender. She let out a raspy, gasping scream and threw herself at the blonde bitch who’d hurt her sister and caused Fenn so much grief. She may have attempted to articulate actual words, but nothing so coherent reached her ears.

Florence let out a shriek as they tumbled to the hard concrete slab. “—off! Get off, you animal!” She was screeching and shoving, her fingers curled in an effort to

scratch and stab with her pretty manicured nails.

The nails bit into Sienna's face and got caught in Sienna's ruined sweater, but Sienna didn't care. She forgot most all of her self-defense training as she jammed a knee into Florence's ribcage and alternated between trying to choke and punch the flailing woman beneath her. She saw nothing but the red of her sister's blood, her ears full of Maya's muffled tears.

Maya had always protected her. Maya had been a problem child in her own right when she was younger, but for her sister, she would have moved mountains. She feared no one. She wasn't afraid to use her gift to her family's benefit.

And this woman—this jealous, self-absorbed monster—had attacked her for no reason other than her relation to Sienna.

Sienna didn't think she'd ever known hatred so strong or all-consuming.

Florence's voice reached new levels of ear-splitting as Sienna felt something break beneath the knee she was shamelessly putting her full weight into.

The next thing she knew, Sienna was jerked backward and crashing on her ass on the concrete. The air she'd managed to keep semi-steadied in her lungs rushed out of her from the impact and she barely heard the unnamed man's clicking tongue over the immediate rush of realization and humiliation.

Yes, she hated Florence. Yes, she thought Florence was a horrible excuse of a woman, who had without a doubt surrendered any claim to her humanity. And yes, she believed Florence deserved some kind of punishment—not just for what she'd done to Maya, or even for her years of tormenting Fenn, but for all the pain and psychological torture she'd undoubtedly inflicted on others. But none of those feelings made Sienna's own actions any more acceptable.

She almost felt the need to apologize to the bitch.

“While I’m impressed with your ferocity,” the man who’d kidnapped her and subsequently pulled her off of Florence said, taking a step forward as if to stay between them, “I can’t have you forcing me to kill you just yet.”

“H-hey!” Florence gasped, sitting upright on the floor behind him. Her skimpy outfit was torn and stained with bits of blood—nothing like Maya’s had been, but enough to be visible. She was not, however, struggling to breathe. She held an arm around her midsection and only anger radiated from her eyes. “Didn’t you see what she just did to me? Why are we not ripping off her head with old, rusty pliers or something?”

Sienna balked, and she’d probably have barked back if she hadn’t promptly choked on her still unsteady breath.

The man sighed as if unfairly burdened. “Because I’m curious, Florence,” he said. “Don’t you want to know how she’s able to touch him?”

The anger and shame heating her blood ran cold and Sienna gaped back at them.

He met her gaze again, finally squarely in the little pocket of light overhead. And for the moment before he spoke, Sienna realized why her description had caused Fenn to investigate his own colleague. Seeing him in person, and having met Cassian, she couldn’t help but wonder if they were related in some way.

Hands tucked into his pockets as if they were having a casual conversation, he said, “Now that I have your attention, Miss Jacobsen. I am Lycus. And if you want your sister to be returned to her home unharmed, you will cooperate with us.”

Florence rose to her feet and brushed her hands down her damaged dress. “Obviously she’s already blown that. What can you really learn from someone like that?” If it

weren't for the traces of blood still soaked into her clothing, there would be no trace of Sienna's attack.

Again, an image of Maya flashed through Sienna's mind. This time of lying in her bed, wrapped in sloppy bandages and crying in her sleep.

A thought popped into Sienna's head and she swallowed, envisioning a lump labeled *pride* dropping down where she could stomp on it. "Make her heal Maya, too," she said. She'd never hated the sound of her own voice so much as she did now that she couldn't breathe through it and it was physically misshapen. She hated the idea of what she looked like, or would look like once the blood was cleaned up.

Florence gaped at her. "I beg your—"

Lycus held up an arm, physically barring her. "I already have your eldest sister in my grasp," he said. "Yet you think you can negotiate?"

Sienna stood carefully, keeping herself in place. "I only want my sisters to be okay. You've fucked that up pretty good tonight. So set it right, and I'll cooperate. Whatever you want." The words were hard to spit off her tongue, but she had no power to fight back with. Her ineffective, frankly pointless, assault on Florence only drove that home.

"Give me what I want," Lycus said, "and I'll see your sisters safe and well."

"Well I won't." Florence said with a huff.

"Exactly," Sienna said before he could do more than open his mouth. "If I give first, there's nothing compelling you to do your part. And honestly? Neither of you has proven to have that kind of honor." Insulting them was likely a stupid strategy, but she supposed the worst thing they could do was kill her or her sister—and then Fenn

would find them. Undesirable, but not truly the worst-case scenario.



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Lycus's lips lifted in a slow, dark smirk. "You're thinking that if I kill one of you, your precious lover will come to your rescue. But have you wondered how he'll keep you alive? He is death—not life. I doubt you'll persuade Florence here to revive you."

Florence released a fake-sweet laugh and said, "Never."

Sienna grinned back, telling herself it was a poker game and she could match their bluff. "Then I'll be the coolest damn zombie." She snapped her jaw for emphasis, because what else was a girl supposed to do in that situation?

Florence screwed up her face. "Ew. You're repulsive. What does he even see in you?"

Lycus chuckled. "An open hole, I imagine."

Sienna held his unblinking stare. "Don't assume Fenn is anything like you."

The twitch of his lips told her he understood her insult.

The sharp intake of breath from the blonde behind him told him it hit its mark with her, too.

In the space of a heartbeat Lycus's expression fell to neutral again. "Now, I'm a reasonable man. But I've already issued my ultimatum. This isn't an open negotiation. Your sister Maya was an example, proof if you will, that we will follow through. If you want the other one to survive, you will comply. It's a yes or no decision, and it's time for your answer."

Sienna barely resisted the urge to wrap her arms around herself. They weren't going to budge on healing Maya, then. She wanted to push for it, but she couldn't risk Piper's life. And her neck was starting to feel stiff again already. Not now! She did her best to steady her breathing despite not being able to use her preferred technique and deliberately flexed her hands. Trying to distract her mind.

There was no give in Lycus's expression. He was cold and firm like a statue.

She knew better than to even glance toward Florence.

"Will you tell me what you want with me?" It was the only tactic she had left to her now.

His brow furrowed slightly. "I have already."

Sienna scoffed. "Then sure. But I expect to walk out of here and never see either of you after. It's a real easy answer—I don't know."

Florence rolled her eyes with a dramatic scoff. "We're supposed to believe that?"

"Perhaps I've been unclear," Lycus said, his voice lower. "You are the key." He took a step forward and suddenly had her pinned against the wall that had been somewhere behind her, one hand tight around her throat. He added pressure and lifted until only her toes made contact with the floor, squeezing enough to almost completely block her air supply. "You will tell me your secret."

Sienna tried to gasp, immediately clawing at his forearm. She'd barely been able to breathe before, hadn't really had her breath, and her body wasn't prepared for a sudden and complete lack of oxygen. She couldn't speak, couldn't even squeak, as spots popped over her eyes. Her neck tightened, the cramping sensation threatening to take over.

She didn't have the strength to struggle, doing nothing more than clinging to the very arm choking her, as blackness rose and swallowed her line of sight. Obscured only by the ever-popping spots of white from the lack of oxygen to her lungs. She wondered if that would carry over to the next vision, wondered if she would suffer sensory damage, and it was a moment before she processed the sound of commotion.

The pressure at her throat disappeared when Lycus jerked back sharply. Florence made a sound of shock that was almost elation even before Sienna began to fall, already coughing.

She didn't hit the ground again, instead finding herself scooped up into an embrace that was immediately familiar and reassuring. Two arms curled around her, holding her securely without restricting her already limited ability to breathe. The darkness she'd seen rising was still there, hovering in her peripheral vision, even as the spots finally faded. And realization dawned.Fenn.

Tears rushed up behind her eyes with instant relief. Fenn had found her.

"Well. This might actually be fun." That wasn't Fenn's voice, and it definitely didn't belong to her torturers.Sulien.

Fenn had brought the others.

Her heart pounded and Sienna heard an embarrassingly weak sound escape from her as she tilted in toward Fenn's shoulder, her fingers curling into his coat. The Four had come to rescue her, and her sister. And all she'd done for herself was what, start a catfight with her lover's stalker? The shame she'd felt before rushed back in full force. She wasn't worthy of this. Not with how she'd behaved.

But she was in no position to turn it away.

Fenn had thought he was angry when Sienna had been taken in front of him. He'd thought his temper had snapped when his first sweep of the town failed to locate the unique signature he'd come to associate with her. But then he'd felt a flicker—a sense he was familiar with, though never before connected to her.

She was on the precipice of death, or in a situation which could all too easily tip her beyond salvation. It wasn't her natural fate, but she also wasn't actively dying—he'd only sensed it because he was looking.

It was still too much.

He hadn't hesitated to follow the whispered connection, appearing at her side almost before he registered the sight of the man he didn't know holding her by the throat. The man had moved with unnatural speed out of Fenn's easy reach, obviously recognizing him, but hadn't fled.

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Fenn took stock of Sienna as he scooped her up and felt a fire licking through him he doubted he'd ever known. It made a mockery of the rage he'd experienced the first time he'd purposely used his power, back when he'd been human. If his skin could burn, his body would have been engulfed in the flames of his anger.

She had blood caked beneath her nose and smeared around her lips, undoubtedly from the nasty break in her nose. Lesser scrapes and scratches across her face, loosened threads along her sweater, her neck would bruise, and contusions forming that were hidden beneath her clothes.

He barely heard Sulien's declaration as War and Famine arrived in his wake.

Sienna seemed to hear it, though, because she turned more into his embrace and made a pained whining sound, as if she wanted to speak and cry at the same time but was incapable of either. The sound of her suffering only fed the beast inside him. He had no way to ease her pain, to heal her wounds or even safely numb the afflicted areas. He could only offer her vengeance.

"Don't coddle that freak, Fenn," Florence said, her tone sharp. Offended.

Sulien let out a whistle. "Gotten a little cocky there, haven't we?"

"I did expect the young one," the man who'd put his hands on Sienna said, "but does this little rescue really require all three of you? And what happened to Conquest? I thought he was going to put me in my place."

Fenn looked up, studying the man who looked so strangely similar to Cassian. "What

are you after?” It wouldn’t change the outcome, but just in case it was something another might pursue, he should probably ask.

Florence bounced forward, her sickening energy pushing against the tangible swirl of his temper as if she thought she could walk right through it. She pouted at him and folded her arms beneath her breasts. “Fenn, you have to let me kill her so I can absorb her power!”

Sienna stiffened in his arms.

Fenn narrowed his eyes at the woman he sincerely regretted not killing the first time she’d popped into his afterlife.

Cassian found his tongue first. “I beg your pardon?”

The man who wasn’t Cassian, but may well have similar ancestry, took hold of Florence’s nearest arm and tugged her back from the tendrils of Fenn’s magic. “Now look what you’ve done, fool,” he said sharply. “Do you expect they’re going to cooperate with that plan?”

“No,” Fenn said. The darkness rippled with the sound of his voice. “You’ve done enough. Where is Piper Jacobsen?”

Florence rolled her eyes. “Which one of those stupid sisters are you really hung up on, exactly?”

Sulien tapped his foot on the slab floor, almost as if he were impatient.

“I’ll return the elder sister to you,” the man said, holding Fenn’s stare. “If you’ll return the youngest to me.”

Fenn tightened his arms around Sienna as if either foe could wade into the pool of his void and take her from him. “Never.”

Florence planted her hands on her hips with a huff. “You’re not thinking clearly. You don’t even like humans!”

“Are you sure you want to refuse,” the man beside her said, “without consulting your little toy first?”

“This is ludicrous,” Cassian interrupted. He stepped as near to Fenn’s side as the undulating swirl of power allowed. “What you’re proposing is impossible for her—” He pointed crudely toward Florence. “Or the power I sense in you. Unless you’re hiding who you really are and think playing this sort of game, in this town, is a wise choice.”

The other man smiled coldly. “I don’t believe I’ve attempted to explain who I am.”

Sienna’s body shuddered in Fenn’s arms, drawing his focus from the irritating back-and-forth. He glanced down at her just in time for her to flatten her palms against his chest and, with a trembling inhale, push herself away.

Bloodstained Hands

Her sister’s life still hung in the balance.

How could she, for a single moment, have allowed herself to forget that?

Sienna was safe and protected in Fenn’s arms, surrounded by his magic she didn’t fully understand, and even more-so with two of his allies standing nearby. She could remain as she was, keep her pounding head bowed, and make it home alive. Bloodied, but alive. She could see Maya again and thank Rajan for guarding her

sister. But she could do none of that if she wanted to do what she'd set out to do and rescue Piper.

She vaguely heard Florence's obnoxious voice in the background, pleading with Fenn to forgive her. Even now. The woman was a true lunatic.

Fenn's arms tightened around Sienna and his firm, almost growling, voice reverberated through her with a single word. "Never."

Tears rushed her eyes again and Sienna couldn't really distinguish anything that was said after as her heart thundered in her ears. She hadn't clearly heard the question, but Fenn's response felt like the kind of statement she ought to take note of. The kind she might have been giddy over, even ... under different circumstances.



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But it didn't change what she had to do. Her own reaction to it, or the idea of it, didn't change what she had to do.

Sienna sucked in the best breath she could, well aware he'd feel her shaking, and pushed herself back from him. It took most of her strength just to get his lock on her to ease, and she hated losing the solidity of his embrace every bit as much as she enjoyed the way his palms slid along her sides.

She was a little afraid to look up, into his eyes. She didn't want him to see her tears. She didn't want to see if what she was about to do would hurt him somehow.

Piper needs me.

Her struggling breath caught in her throat at the sight of the concerned frown on his lips and the unguarded worry in his haunting eyes. She wanted to kiss him—knew this might be her last chance—but she also knew she was a mess. She could feel the blood crusted to her lips. So she held herself still. “Thank you,” she managed to say without wheezing. Speaking with a shattered nose was hard. “And I know nothing’s reallyokayright now, but ... Piper needs me.” She had to stop to make a horrendous gasping sound that made her want to punch her kidnappers in the face again.

Fenn took advantage of her pause to interrupt, frown deepening. “I’m not letting you—”

She reached up and cupped his jaw in her hands. “I won’t be your burden.” A smaller gasp made it easier to quickly articulate her point. “My sister, my responsibility.” She did her best to smile, feeling the dried-on blood cracking and splitting and knowing

the expression was probably more reminiscent of some monstrous grimace. There was a surprising amount of emotion bubbling in her chest. It felt like she still had a lot she should say, a lot she would have liked to say if there was time.

She refrained, for Piper's sake, and stepped away. Turned her back completely on the visibly unhappy man who'd come to her rescue and faced the pair who'd caused all the upset. She still couldn't stand Florence, let alone the idea of giving that spoiled, self-absorbed witch what she wanted. But she was done stooping to her enemy's level.

Lycus smirked at her. "I see one of you has some sense."

Sienna didn't bother restraining her glare. "Let Piper go."

He didn't blink. "Call off your hounds first."

Sienna started to snap back, but a distracting flicker of scarlet in her peripheral vision caught her attention and she couldn't help but glance to the side instead. Her words died in her throat.

Wisps of vibrant red smoke were fading around Sulien's legs as he stood several feet away from where he'd been moments earlier. And he held a very unconscious Piper in his arms, her head lolled against his shoulder. Sulien looked past Sienna and the grin that tipped his lips was smug. "Looks like you lost your leverage, Roman."

Florence made a clicking, scoffing sound as if she were annoyed.

Lycus chuckled. "Or I could just take what I want."

Sienna swallowed hard, immediately remembering the way he'd appeared out of thin air to grab her. Simply having Piper in their arms didn't mean she was safe, or that

the threat was dealt with. She cut a sidelong glare at Lycus before looking at Sulien again and projecting her messed up voice for him. “Please, take Piper home.” Hopefully Rajan’s barrier would be enough. Hopefully Lycus really was more interested in her.

Sulien inclined his head, but looked past her and said, “There’s some kinda altar-looking thing in the other room.” Then he and Piper faded away, disappearing from sight in a matter of seconds.

Sienna’s eyes widened and she turned to face Lycus, barely in time to see him lurching into her personal space again. His lips were contorted in a sneer. Her heart slammed against her ribs.

“Cute,” Lycus snarled at her as his fingers grazed her sleeve a heartbeat before a solid ebony scythe curved around his neck from behind. His eyes blew wide and he froze in place, for the first time letting his confident façade slip.

Florence made a sound of discomfort somewhere beyond Sienna’s line of sight.

“Wait, Fenn,” Cassian said before the magical blade could do more than press into Lycus’s flesh. “I want to know about that altar.”

Sienna moved away from the man who’d abducted both her and her sister and glanced over in Cassian’s direction. She saw Fenn had stepped closer and he held one arm partially outstretched, fingers splayed. She also saw an identical scythe had curved around Florence.

Fenn didn’t take his glare from Lycus. “Make it quick.”

Lycus scoffed despite the weapon at his throat. The fear was gone from his expression, as if his momentary reprieve had calmed his mind. “You think I’ll reveal

anything to you two? You think you have the advantage?”

Sienna could only watch, so far out of her league it was laughable, as Cassian curled his fingers in front of himself and an old-fashioned scale appeared in his grasp. She watched as Florence’s bright blue eyes went wide, the glare falling from her face, while Lycus betrayed nothing more than a glimmer of frustration.

“You rely too much on your divine heritage,” Cassian said. Tendrils of energy, dark like the negative of a photograph, began seeping from Lycus and gathering above the plates on Cassian’s scale. Whatever backlighting gave the energy its glowy-edged effect was filtered out, separating from the rest to pile onto the second plate. Creating an imbalance.

“Wh-what do you think you’re doing?” Florence demanded as the opposing spheres expanded.

Cassian never blinked. “Teaching this demi-god some humility.”

If her mouth hadn’t already been open due to necessity, Sienna was sure she would have gaped. Demi-god? That was a thing? If that was a thing, how was she not screwed?

Lycus barked out a laugh, though the sound was marginally strained. “Are you really so desperate to see my plan?”

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A cold chill shot down Sienna's spine and she turned, intending to call out a warning she couldn't fully articulate. "Fenn—" His name was barely past her lips before everything seemed to explode.

Pain.

Blood.

Searing heat.

Nothing made sense.

Whatever power Florence's ally wielded, it enabled the man to move despite being held at blade-point by Death's scythe. The demi-god had been stock-still, mocking Cassian, and then he'd vanished from sight. In Fenn's mind's eye he could sense a backward leaning motion that had to have happened in a split-second. When he'd reappeared in Fenn's line of sight a wild grin had split his face and he plunged one hand into Sienna's torso.

Blood spurted everywhere and her eyes went wide. There was no way she'd seen it coming. She didn't even scream.

"You idiot!" Florence shrieked. "I need her alive!"

Fenn barely heard the words, his gaze transfixed as the demi-god stepped back and Sienna hit her knees before toppling to the side. Fenn moved without thought, catching her in his arms. One hand landed on her abdomen, below her chest, and even

through his glove he felt the heat of her blood.

A roar ripped up from somewhere deep inside him as he felt her time rapidly running to a close.

Behind him, his enemy let out a laugh.

“Hey—what—” Florence grumbled, suddenly shoved to her knees across from Fenn. Sienna’s limp body between them.

Cassian kept a firm grip on her shoulder. “It’s not too late. You can’t get what you want from her if she’s dead, and even you know you won’t survive tonight if you let her die. So this is your chance, princess. Do something selfless for once.” He spoke with a sneer, but every word he spoke was true.

Florence’s eyes widened and she looked at Sienna in disgust, but then her gaze flicked up to Fenn and she dragged in a ragged breath. “Fine. Sure.” She attempted a smile, but it fell far short of sweet before she reached out and folded her palms over Sienna’s chest. Above the worst of the blood.

Fenn looked past her and met Cassian’s stare. For maybe the first time, he felt truly united with the other man.

“Revive her,” the demi-god said from somewhere behind Fenn, “and I’ll just have more opportunities to torture her. And her sisters.”

Fenn stood, knowing Florence wouldn’t be done so soon, and turned in place. He felt the anger contorting his face, but he didn’t care. He didn’t care if his emotions were plain for everyone in the room to read. Seeing him coming changed nothing.

The demi-god with Sienna’s blood on his hands smirked cruelly. “Got something

you'd like to say to me,Death?"

Fenn glanced down at the blood staining his gloves and a harsh reality slammed into him.

Sienna's vision. The one she'd had of him for so many years. The one she'd described as him with bloodstained hands and an agonized expression, surrounded by darkness. This was it.

She'd seen his reaction to what might still prove to be her own last moments.

The void churned inside him, responding to his turmoil, and Fenn clenched his fists. He met the male's smug gaze and let the magic settle over his eyes, illuminating everything he could need to see. Every way to kill the overconfident fool. Every way to break him.

All of it was tempting. He wanted to make the man hurt. Suffer, the way Fenn knew he would if Sienna was lost. When Sienna was lost.

Allowing this demi-god to live was unacceptable. Fenn could see now that the man had caused his fair share of death—not something Fenn was hypocrite enough to hold against a person on its own.

His voice whispered around the room like an unnatural breeze when Fenn finally spoke. "Good riddance ... son of Mercury."

The demi-god who'd never introduced himself finally realized the threat facing him and made to run again, but it was too little, too late. Six scythes swooped in on him, all from different angles, swinging in ruthless arcs. There was no direction for the divine speedster to flee in.

Fenn watched, unblinking, as each blade sliced through its target. Extinguishing the life and the magic—everything but the basest components of the target’s soul—in the space of a heartbeat. But he didn’t have it in him this time to offer personal guidance to the deceased, so instead he gave the lingering, shapeless soul a push with his own magic, making sure it passed into the beyond and re-entered the cycle.

Then he turned his back on the scene, his scythes dismissed again, and found himself staring into Florence’s horrified eyes.

She still had her hands pressed over Sienna’s chest and Sienna had stopped bleeding. But where Cassian’s expression was approving, Florence’s was the opposite. “What did you justdo?” Her question came out in a breathless screech that was almost shockingly unlike her usual saccharine voice.

Fenn scowled. “Exactly what I said I would. Focus on your job.”



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“Do you not realize who he was? Lycus was the son of—”

“Does it seem like we care?” Cassian snapped. “There are no ancients here. If Mercury wanted to protect his misbehaving son from our wrath, he should have kept him on a tighter leash.” He swung his still materialized scale, no longer occupied by the demi-god’s power, into Florence’s peripheral vision. “Work, before I lose my patience with you.”

Florence drew her shoulders up. Her fingers tensed and pressed visibly into Sienna’s chest. “Ididn’t kill her, or let her get gutted. Why am I being punished like I did?”

Fenn dropped into a crouch across from her, at Sienna’s side once more, and glared straight at Florence. “Would you prefer I hauled you back to that house and forced you to heal the sister youdidcut up? If you make me do that, I will see to it you live every day of the rest of your life with recurring wounds to match. You will never have a single day of peace, free of pain or blood, again. Do you understand?” Florence stared at him, pale and obviously shaken by his threat. Or perhaps the venom even he could hear in his voice when he’d spoken. Seconds passed before she dropped her gaze down to Sienna and quietly said, “Th-this will take a while ... I’m not used to healing other people, and she was mostly dead when I started...”

Fenn lowered to his knees. “I have all the time in the world.”

Florence’s jaw went taut, but she said nothing more.

She registered the heat first, surrounding her, quickly followed by the blinding white. It was as if she were floating in the light and no matter how she squinted, she couldn’t

see past it. She wasn't even sure she was on her feet or hanging sideways. Something pressed uncomfortably on her collarbone and Sienna reached up to rub at it, wishing she could make it stop. Whatever it was.

Finally, something with color and shading flickered ahead, catching her attention. Drawing her focus away from the encompassing heat and consistent pressure. Sienna urged herself closer, desperate to see what it was, to reach it if she could. Then suddenly it was right in front of her and she found herself looking through a keyhole, but this time the periphery was blinding light instead of darkness. It was disorienting, yet the familiar offered comfort.

A few seconds passed before Sienna realized she was looking at mirrors. Several mirrors, almost like a Halloween funhouse. The light around her practically reflected off the glass of them before someone walked into view, sideways and then entirely facing away from her. But the mirrors helped her see the woman's features somewhat and Sienna was even more confused. "Piper?"

Her sister—or the woman who certainly looked like her sister—turned toward her, looking right through the keyhole viewpoint.

And then it was gone, leaving Sienna suddenly floating once more in blinding light.

She frowned, frustrated, and yelled at the universe. "What's even the point of this? Let me out of here!" Immediately it felt as though something punched her in the gut, and then she remembered.

Lycus had literally shoved his hand inside her. Guttled her. Or maybe all he'd done was rip a hole in her torso, but the human body wasn't meant to survive that, so it amounted to the same thing. The breath rushed from her lungs and she rubbed at the pressure on her collarbone again.

“Holy shitballs...” Did that mean she was dead? What about Fenn? What about Piper, and Maya?

Tears rushed her eyes, hot and fast, and Sienna found it hard to breathe. Only then remembering her nose had been broken, too. Was this death? Was this the afterlife? Or the in-between? Was she passing over, or whatever happened after Fenn transitioned the deceased? She had so many questions, and she didn’t want the answers to half of them.

Urgency filled her as her memories tumbled back in no particular order, bringing emotions with them. She spun herself around, looking for anything. Even another keyhole.

“Hello?” Of course, no one answered. “Hey! Fenn! Someone!” Her tears choked her and she gulped down a lump of terror and desperation. She wasn’t ready to be dead. She had so much to live for and so many people who would cry if she didn’t come home. “This isn’t right! It’s not my time!”

Her throat was raw and she’d surely have fallen to her knees if she were capable. But up and down didn’t seem to be part of her repertoire anymore. What she definitely had plenty of, apparently, were tears. She couldn’t make them stop.

The pressure at her collar was becoming more intrusive, too. Sienna continued to rub at it, all but digging at her own skin to make it go away. It felt almost like someone was pushing down on her.

The thought finally gave her pause and she sucked in a ragged breath, hand still hovering over her chest. She remembered, now, the sensations of Lycus’s final strike. The pain and heat and the sight of her blood going everywhere. But that heat had been the instantly explosive kind caused by injury. The heat she felt now was ... more of an overall warming. Almost soothing. And if she focused, she realized she

was sure it was emanating from the pressure at her collarbone.

What...?

Sienna closed her eyes, bringing herself only a small reprieve from the glaring brightness, and moved her hand awkwardly around her collarbone region. She imagined it like a thread, like the cord of a heating blanket, and that line was her link to life. Maybe she was in a hospital somewhere, and she had literally fallen into the light. Or maybe it was something else. She didn't know, but instinct was all she had to go on, so she embraced it.

I'm not dead. Do you hear me, Fenn? I am not dead!

Her groping fingers closed around something solid, something that definitely wasn't part of herself, and she sucked in a breath. She felt the solid thing jolt, as if in shock, and held tighter.

The keyhole image returned, flickering like a bad connection and discolored like negative film, in her mind's eye. It reminded her of seeing the tendrils of energy being siphoned off of Lycus by Cassian's scale, but she wasn't sure what the connection meant, or if it meant anything. She only knew that she couldn't let go of whatever it was she'd grabbed.

Strength suddenly poured through her, shattering the keyhole image completely and forcing a deep, cleansing breath into Sienna's lungs. The surge was so intense that her back arched and her eyes popped open, and she realized the brightness was gone.

She was back in the warehouse where she'd nearly died, with Fenn leaning over her, his always beautiful and haunting eyes seeming particularly tortured. She could hear her own heart thundering in her ears and feel that soothing warmth from earlier still spreading through her, and though the sensation was strange, Sienna managed a

smile. “Hey, lover.”

## Life

Siennasatup, realizing as she did that it was no longer hard to breathe. There was no pain at all, in fact. She reached up, feeling the blood that had caked on her face crack and crumble away beneath her probing fingers. More blood stained her sweater, mostly over her abdomen and surrounding what proved to be a ragged tear in the fabric. All of it was evidence of the series of injuries she remembered taking. Injuries she could no longer feel, or see.

Fenn reached over, interrupting her perusal of herself as his bare fingers grazed over her jaw, pulling her focus back to him. He curved an arm around her back simultaneously and then she was up against his chest, his lips on hers, his hand in her hair. The desperation in this kiss was so much different from the raw hunger they’d shared before, but it burned through her all the same.

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A sharply cleared throat from far too close reminded Sienna it wasn't the most appropriate time to be losing herself.

But it was Florence, of course, who spoke first. Her voice started as a horror-filled, breathless gasp and quickly rose to a shrill, incredulous shriek. "Wh-what ... what have you done to me?"

Sienna looked over, Fenn's arm still low on her waist, and saw Florence just an arm's reach away. She was on her ass, legs twisted awkwardly to the side and bloody palms splayed on the concrete supporting her weight as she fixed a stare on Sienna that was something between a glare and absolute shock.

Cassian stood only a couple of feet to the side, angled to face them all, a scowl carved into his face.

It was clear she was the one Florence was accusing of whatever had upset her this time, but Sienna couldn't fathom what that could be. Let alone why it would be her fault. She blinked at the woman she suspected had saved her life and twisted her gaze up to Fenn, who for once, had the least grumpy expression of the group. "Um. What is it she thinks I did?"

Fenn's arm tightened, as if afraid she'd pull away, and guilt speared her. He did arguably have grounds for that fear.

"You can't," Florence said disbelievingly. She sucked in a breath and launched forward, reaching again for Sienna. "It's mine! I was supposed to take your—"

Cassian caught her by a flailing arm and jerked her back, away from Fenn and the still-bare hand he'd already lifted to block the assault. Instead of releasing her, however, Cassian dragged Florence closer and held her awkwardly in front of him. "You did lose something, didn't you, witch?"

She knew it was petty, but Sienna's opinion of Cassian spiked with his choice of phrasing. A thought she decided to keep to herself, for whatever dignity that would spare.

Fenn silently helped Sienna to her feet as Florence struggled in Cassian's grip.

Then, all at once, Florence let out a groan and went limp.

Cassian's eyebrows lifted, but probably not as high as Sienna's. Sienna clenched her fists, bizarrely torn as she stared at the woman hanging from his grip. Florence was a terrible person, but she had most likely just saved Sienna's life—surely to spare her own—and Sienna felt a twinge of obligation.

That turned rapidly into concerning apprehension when Florence began to twitch and jerk unnaturally, her head rolling and her free arm snapping without direction. Her back bowed and one of her legs kicked sideways, almost like she was having a seizure. Or ... a vision. Because Sienna's visions often involved involuntary movement, and the more worked up she was when they hit—or the less prepared—the more prone she was to hurt herself.

Sienna took a cautionary step forward. "What's happening to her...?" She hated that part of her cared. This woman would have let her bleed out without even blinking if Fenn hadn't been there to force her to take action. The gods only knew how many people she'd allowed to die right before her eyes, simply for her own vanity. But none of that meant Sienna wanted to see her suffer.

Cassian blew out a breath, sounding distinctly irritated, and maneuvered Florence to the ground. He swept a hand over her as her body settled back into something resembling calm, a silver-gray mist trailing in the wake of his movement.

Sienna looked back to Fenn questioningly.

Fenn tipped her chin up and stared intently into her eyes, as if searching for something. His expression betrayed no opinions as to whether or not it was a good thing, or how he felt about whatever it was.

Sienna swallowed nervously and it struck her how silent the space had become. She couldn't break from his intense stare or retreat from his touch, but her mouth still seemed to work just fine. Of course. "What, uh, what happened to that asshole? Lycus?" A terrible idea occurred to her and urgency rushed through her. "Is he going after my sisters again?"

Fenn's expression softened and his hand slid along her jaw, settling at the back of her neck. "No," he said. "He's dead. He will never hurt you, or anyone, again."

Relief rushed through her and Sienna nearly stumbled into him.

"Can you sense it, Fenn?" Cassian asked before the feeling could fully settle inside her.

Fenn looked toward his colleague, his frown hardening again. "Yes."

Silence ticked by for several seconds as Cassian stood again.

Sienna pursed her lips and counted to five. The echo of Florence's groan seemed to underscore her own impatience and she planted her hands on her hips. "Will one of you fill me in, please? Sense what? What's going on?" She focused on Fenn. "Is



something wrong with me?”

“What—“ Florence’s voice was weak, the most vulnerable Sienna had ever heard it, as she pushed upright. “What was that...?”

Cassian’s expression was impassive as he stared down at her. “You had a vision.”

Sienna froze. The air in her lungs froze. She might even have lost consciousness for a moment.

Florence, on the other hand, threw herself to her feet as if she were an acrobat. “I had a what? Don’t be ridiculous! I’ve never—“ She twisted, facing Sienna and Fenn again, and her glare settled on Sienna. It was oddly reassuring in its familiarity. “You.” Her blonde hair nearly smoked with her visible fury. “This is what you gave me? You couldn’t at least give me what I wanted? I was supposed to get your immunity!”

Sienna stared at the woman who would surely have rushed her if not for the hand once again restraining her. Feeling as if she were still learning the language being spoken around her, only understanding every few words and entirely missing the context. Finally, she shook her head. “I don’t understand ... I couldn’t have given you visions if I’d tried. They’re not contagious.” That had to be the most ridiculous thing she’d ever been persuaded to say.

Fenn finally spoke up, addressing Cassian. “I can handle this for a minute. You would be better to investigate that altar.”

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Cassian only inclined his head before releasing Florence and vanishing entirely.

Florence sprang forward without hesitation, a wild roar ripping from her. “Give me back my power!”

Sienna had taken a single step backward before Florence’s words reached her brain, startling her into freezing again. “Huh?”

Fenn wrapped manacles of energy around Florence, dropping her to the concrete floor before the blonde could make contact. “You’re the one who wanted to change powers with her in the first place,” he said. “Congratulations. You accomplished your goal.”

Sienna sucked in a breath and reached out, latching a hand onto his nearest arm for stability. “H-hold up,” she said. “You’re saying I ... I’m not ... clairvoyant anymore?” That was impossible, right? She couldn’t lose the power she’d been born with. Even in this wide and crazy world, that just didn’t happen.

Fenn met her gaze again. “Not only that,” he said. “The power of life now flows through you.”

Her mouth fell open and her stomach bottomed out, leaving her head spinning. She’d have hit the floor, possibly fallen half on top of Florence’s seething form, if Fenn hadn’t caught her. So many questions blazed through her mind she couldn’t hold on to a single one.

“The altar’s been dismantled,” Cassian declared, his words slipping through Sienna’s

spiraling fog. She had no idea she'd simply been clinging to Fenn and barely holding back the need to vomit. No idea how long Florence had been sobbing practically at their feet.

She suspected it had been a few minutes.

Fenn adjusted to look toward his colleague without releasing her. "Was it responsible?"

"Most likely," Cassian replied. He held up a piece of carved stone that looked like it belonged in a museum and definitely would not fit in his coat pocket. "This had been embedded into the structure. It was probably pre-programmed to trigger with Florence's power, so when she poured it into Sienna, it activated. The altar itself was just a frame in the middle of the room, on top of the same floor that's out here."

Fenn frowned again. "A direct conduit."

"Sh-she took it," Florence said, her voice barely a whisper. "I was supposed to get everything, but the bitch latched on to me like some nasty leech and took it all!"

Sienna swallowed hard. She did vaguely remember grabbing hold of something and clinging to it in desperation. But she most definitely hadn't known anything like this situation was possible.

Cassian tucked the stone under his arm. "So it would only have been fine if you ended up with all the power?"

Fenn's grip tightened. "If it was designed the way Cassian thinks," he said, "then it would always have gone this way."

Florence's head snapped up. Her eyes were wide, red-rimmed, and tears dripped from

her chin. “We had a plan! I would have taken her immunity and you—“

“She would always have fought.” Fenn spoke with such certainty that his words quelled some of the unease twisting Sienna’s stomach. “Without even knowing the stakes, she overpowered you. You never would have defeated her if she’d understood the cost.”

Florence’s jaw trembled and fresh tears spilled over.

But Sienna felt better. His faith in her somehow offered her a sense of peace. She had often lamented having the least useful gift out of all her sisters, hadn’t she? She’d certainly always detested the way her visions overwhelmed her. If she’d suddenly come into even half the power Florence had possessed before, she could maybe do some good.

She drew in a stabilizing breath and looked across at Cassian. “Thanks for figuring all that out.”

His sharp gaze snapped to hers and he nodded, but said nothing.

She turned her focus to Fenn. “Can you take me home? There’s something I need to do.” Not that she had a single clue how, but that was a temporary problem. She’d figure it out.

“Y-you’re just going to leave me here?” Florence asked, her voice trembling.

Sienna saw Fenn’s expression darken, but she had ideas of her own. It was arguably meaner, but it felt ... karmic. “You’re mortal now, and those visions are pretty damn debilitating. Plus I imagine you haven’t built up any kind of immunity to, well, anything. So I think making you live as you are now is way worse than letting Fenn kill you.”

Florence stared up at her in horror.

Sienna made a point of wrapping her arms around Fenn's torso, because she was still a petty bitch herself, and smiled at the woman on the floor as Fenn's shackles released her. "Bye now." She thought for sure she heard Cassian's chuckle carrying across the distance between them moments before Fenn's familiar energy spiraled up to take them away.

He didn't need to ask to know what it was Sienna wanted to do. He was conflicted as to whether or not he felt like it was the best idea as far as first uses went, but he refrained from voicing his hesitation. Her loyalty to her sisters was admirable. So he settled her beside Maya's restlessly sleeping form, quietly promised not to be far, and let himself out of the room. It wasn't as if he knew how the healing power that had once been exclusively Florence's worked. He couldn't give her tips on how to access it, let alone use it.

But Sienna was strong, and nothing if not determined.

In the meantime, Fenn took himself down to the first level, where his colleagues had gathered. Apparently alongside Sienna's eldest sister.

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Piper shot to her feet the moment he materialized in the room. “Where’s Sienna?” Her eyes were tired and she still wore the dirtied clothes she’d been abducted in, but there was no trace of the exhaustion she had to be feeling in her voice.

Fenn made a vague motion toward the hall and the main staircase beyond. “Upstairs, with Maya.”

Piper’s eyes widened and she paled. “She’s hurt, too?”

Behind her, Rajan and Sulien exchanged a silent look.

Fenn shook his head. “She’s fine.” There was no need to tell her the details. Sienna would if she decided it was necessary. Instead, he motioned to the seat Piper had vacated. “You may want to sit down—“

“If she’s fine, why isn’t she with you? What happened to my sister?” Piper marched into his space. “What did you get us dragged into, Fenn?” This close, Fenn could see something swirling in her eyes that was deeper than the simple hazel all three sisters shared.

Sulien stepped up and eased her back, just enough to keep her from reaching out and touching Fenn impulsively. “Easy, sweetheart—“

“I am not your sweetheart,” Piper snapped. She shrugged off his hand but held her position.

Sulien lifted his hands as if in surrender and moved away with a shake of his head.

Fenn bit back a sigh. “I am sorry for everything that’s happened,” he said. He’d had no way to know it would unfold as it had, but he felt responsible regardless. Everything had ultimately happened because Florence was obsessed with him. “The people who attacked you are no longer a threat.”

Rajan finally spoke up when Fenn paused. “I heard the kidnapper was a demi-god. Did you kill him? Both of them?”

Fenn glanced over at Rajan. “The demi-god is dead,” he said. “Florence is ... suffering the slow death of mortality.” It was actually quite poetic, and though Sienna’s choice had surprised him for a moment, he personally approved.

Piper made a disapproving face.

Both Sulien’s and Rajan’s brows arched high on their foreheads.

Cassian slipped past Fenn and lowered onto one of the sofas, tossing the stone fragment to Rajan in the process. “That was adhered to the altar Sulien found.” He repeated his theory of the preset spell, and concrete circuit, and calmly drawled, “Florence basically destroyed herself.”

The room was silent for nearly thirty seconds before Piper said, “I don’t understand.”

Fenn kept his voice even and quiet as he explained it in simple terms. “Florence and Sienna switched powersets. Sienna is upstairs using her new healing abilities on Maya.” And he could tell she’d finally figured it out, too, from the pulse of life-restoring energy overhead.

On Florence that same power had physically sickened him. As if their natures were so oppositional that his body couldn’t stand her presence. The realization that Sienna had absorbed that power had had Fenn more than a little disappointed, thinking the

time was coming when he wouldn't be able to stomach the new side of her, even if he wanted to. But she had clearly unlocked it, and he didn't feel a single twinge of that revulsion. He felt as drawn to her as he ever had, to the point that maintaining a conversation in another room while she was so close—busy or not—hardly seemed worth it.

Piper stumbled back in shock, nearly falling onto Sulien as she dropped onto the sofa and not seeming to realize it. “Sienna ... what?”

Sulien, who'd rematerialized closer to Rajan, ran a hand through his hair and exhaled harshly. “That does seem a little crazy. You know, for most people.”

Fenn inclined his head. “Florence apparently had hoped to steal Sienna's immunity to me, thinking that was Sienna's power. She wasn't counting on Sienna's stronger will.”

Piper dragged in an audible breath.

Sulien let out a loud, vibrating laugh. “So you're telling me this means the bearer of healing and life energy is now immune to Death?”

Cassian let out a groan.

Rajan smiled.

Fenn found himself biting back a smile as well and instead faced his colleagues. “Thank you for your assistance. I suppose this means I owe you one.”

Sulien found his feet first, grinning wide. “Damn right it does.” He flicked a glance upstairs before meeting Fenn's stare. “Don't be an idiot.” He disappeared in a rising swirl of scarlet fog.



Cassian was standing again before Sulien's magic faded. "I'll keep an ear open in case that demi-god had connections we should be worried about. Though I doubt that will be an issue." He paused and tucked his hands into his pockets. "You know I hate to agree with Sulien on anything, but when he's right..." He let the words trail and faded from sight.

Rajan released a deep-throated chuckle, stood, and stepped up to Fenn. He clapped a hand on Fenn's shoulder, a smile lifting his lips. "You're settling into yourself, Fenn," he said. "You know I'm not keeping count of who owes what. I just want to see you become the best you can be." He took a single step back. "I look forward to getting to know Sienna better in calmer circumstances." His gaze switched to Piper, who had watched their exits in wide-eyed silence. "Thank you for opening your home to us, Ms. Jacobsen. Until next time." And then he was gone in a spiraling flash of white.

"That was—" Piper drew a shaky breath. "So the four of you—those three and you—are really the Four Horsemen." She said it like a statement, as if finally coming to terms with the concept.

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Fenn reflexively tucked his gloved hands into his coat pockets. “The Four,” he corrected. “And yes, that’s us.” Pounding steps coming from the hallway drew his attention before more could be said, then Sienna’s urgent and startlingly excited voice carried through the house to his ears.

“Fenn! I did it!” She burst into the room, nearly toppling over herself when she spotted Piper also in the living room. She was grinning wide, sweating, her heart beating too hard.

Piper frowned. “Did what?”

Sienna swung her gaze between them. “I healed Maya!” Tears pooled in front of her eyes. “She’s awake and all healed up and ... everything ....”

Fenn caught her before she could hit the ground, her final words slurring as the adrenaline she’d likely worked up finally hit. Her new powers meant she wouldn’t be out long, but given that her body hadn’t yet fully adjusted to them, using them at all so soon would have been too taxing. She needed her own rest and some food to help her recoup the energy she’d lost.

“Is she going to be okay?” Piper asked as Fenn lifted Sienna into his arms properly.

“Yes,” Fenn said. He met the eldest sister’s still tired gaze. “She just overexerted herself a little. Do you think you can explain things to Maya while I get her to bed?” It was well past midnight, and after the day they’d had, he wanted to recommend Piper get some sleep, too. Maya was probably—quite suddenly—the most energized of the three of them. But that sort of statement felt like overstepping, so Fenn bit the

words back.

Piper stared at Sienna's unconscious form, seeming to study her for a long moment. Then she drew a breath and nodded. "Of course." She lifted her gaze back to him and a tired smile tipped her lips. "Thank you, Fenn."

He doubted he could say anything to that, so he inclined his head before teleporting himself and Sienna up to the third floor. Sienna's room was exactly as they'd left it before his colleagues' arrival, of course, and he made sure to be gentle as he laid her on the bed.

She let out a quiet sigh and rolled a little toward him. Several strands of dyed hair fell over her face with the movement. Fenn dissolved the gloves from his hands and carefully brushed it back. He couldn't look away from her.

It was Christmas Eve.

When he'd agreed to accompany Sienna home for the holiday, he'd been expressly clear that their arrangement ended after Christmas. It had only been a short while since he'd uttered those words, but already the idea of following through on that agreement brought a pain to his chest like he'd never known. He would much prefer abolishing the entire label of temporary that they'd attached to each other, but at the same time, a part of him was afraid. It wouldn't be unreasonable for Sienna to blame him for everything that had happened to her sisters that day. To her. Her life was forever changed, essentially because of him. Because he'd never eliminated the woman who'd become like a barnacle to him so many decades earlier.

Sienna's eyes cracked open while his head spun. "Fenn..." She stretched out her fingers and caught his nearest wrist. "'M tired. Come hold me."

He smiled before he realized it, lifted her fingers to his lips for a kiss, then finally

rounded the bed. It took barely a thought for his clothes to fall from his body and he climbed in beside the woman who'd since started squirming. She somehow wiggled herself under the covers, her replacement sweater dropped to the floor as she toed off her shoes. She'd entirely rolled over in the process, so that she was facing him when he settled against the pillows.

Fenn smoothed a hand down her hair, still marveling at the warmth of her skin as she curled up to him and laid her arm half across his chest.

She blinked up at him, an impish smile on her lips. "Help me out of these jeans?"

He arched a brow at her.

"Feels weird to sleep half-dressed," she said.

He grunted, bent down, and kissed her forehead. "All right." He rolled her onto her back and scooted down, ghosting his lips over the swell of her breasts where they threatened to spill from her bra. His hands found the denim in question and he shifted his focus accordingly, releasing the button and lowering the zipper before sliding everything down her legs. He pressed more kisses to her feet as her socks joined the pile on the floor and grinned at her soft giggle.

Then he leaned over her, one hand skimming up her side and dipping beneath her. "Might as well get rid of this," he said as he flicked open the clasp for her bra.

She laughed again and obligingly pulled it free. "Cheater."

Fenn grinned wider and bowed his head while she was distracted, drawing in a lungful of her heady scent before he buried his face in her sweet pussy. She did need rest, but he wasn't going to shirk this opportunity to express how grateful he was for her survival. So he maneuvered her thighs to his shoulders and worked a couple of

fingers deep inside her while he licked and sucked until she came apart under him, his name a breathless gasp on her lips.

## Confessions

Somehow, it was only Christmas Eve when Sienna made it downstairs in the morning. And despite a less than full night's sleep, she was wide-awake and weirdly energized. Fenn said that was likely a result of her new gift. Sienna figured time would tell on that front, because two bone-melting orgasms and a few hours' hard sleep followed by waking up all warm and snuggly in the arms of the man she might already have fallen in love with was a pretty good re-energizer, too.

And, yeah, she'd definitely realized she had a problem. Because she'd sure as hell never felt anything like this with the guys she'd dated or otherwise hooked up with in the past. Serious, long-term feelings had always been things to shy away from. Until now.

Her mind replayed the moment she'd opened her eyes that morning, naked and chest-to-chest with her personal hero. The man she'd dreamed of for forever. The man who'd saved her life, maybe twice, the night before—and arguably her sister's, too. That warm, fluttery feeling hadn't made her want to do anything more than burrow deeper into him and hide away from the world.

Maya slung an arm around Sienna's shoulder, jarring her from her reflection. She held a steaming cup of hot cider in her other hand and the spiced apple and cinnamon scents wafted up, making Sienna's mouth water. "Okay, I'll admit, Fenn's not so bad. That whole 'Death' thing is a little off-putting, but you were right to trust him."

Sienna couldn't help but grin and bumped her elbow into her sister's side. "Sorry, what was that last part? I must have snow in my ears or something."

Maya rolled her eyes and lifted her cider to her lips. “You were right, Sienna. Yes, I said it.” She sipped at her drink. “Where is he, anyway?”

Her amusement faded and Sienna’s gaze roamed the half-fenced backyard as if it held the answers. It was cold outside, she could tell by the slowly sprinkling snow and puffs of breath that heralded each exhale, but she could barely feel it chilling her skin. “He’s double-checking to make sure there aren’t any ... loose ends.” That was probably the most tactful way to say it.

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Maya stilled for a moment. “Loose ends?”

Sienna offered her sister a smile in an effort to reassure her. Frankly, she would have preferred to go with him, but Fenn had insisted on handling this particular conversation alone. She wasn’t sure if he was being secretive or trying to protect her. But she said none of that. “That guy who kidnapped Piper and me was apparently some kind of demi-god.”

Maya’s eyes widened.

Sienna could only shrug. “Fenn wants to make sure we won’t see any blowback.” That wasn’t untrue in itself. And she supposed that was a good enough reason to be leaving the little mortal out of the conversation.

“I swear,” Maya muttered into her cider, “this world keeps getting crazier.”

Sienna started to laugh, but her own thoughts echoed back at her and she sucked in a breath. She had essentially inherited all of Florence’s power—but Florence had been immortal. Did that mean she was immortal now, too? Or had the potential to be?

Did she want that?

She watched her sister down the already cooled drink and finally processed the sound of familiar music drifting through the window. If she was—or became—immortal, she would lose this eventually. In a much worse way than however it might slowly shift as they grew.

A dark figure stepped out of the shadows of the eaves and approached them calmly. He was dressed as he usually was with his high-collared coat, dress shirt and slacks, sleek gloves and polished loafers—all black. His hair was pulled back and low, mostly obscuring his ears and emphasizing the structure of his face as well as those eyes she loved so much.

Maya said something in greeting that Sienna didn't really hear.

Sienna pulled her lip between her teeth. If she let herself stay mortal—if that was even an option—she absolutely would lose him. No unrequited feelings necessary.

“Sienna?” Fenn asked, standing in front of her now, one dark brow arched.

She blinked and plastered a smile on her face. “How'd it go?”

His expression smoothed out and she was positive she hadn't fooled him. “You don't have to worry about anyone coming looking for revenge. Apparently Lycus was too radical even for his own family.”

Sienna nodded and her smile became easier.

“And?” Piper asked, suddenly leaning out the doorway. “What about that trial stuff? You asked about that, too, right?”

Maya made a show of pulling her arms tight around herself. “Come on, let's at least take this conversation inside where the more fragile of us don't get frostbite.” She pushed their eldest sister in ahead of her without a backward glance.

That was all it took for Sienna's throat to constrict with nerves. Alone with Fenn. It had quickly—perhaps immediately—become one of her favorite things, but for once the idea filled her with a strange kind of anxiety. The realization of which only made



her want to smack herself. Since when was she afraid of talking to him?

Fenn hadn't moved an inch when she turned to face him again, as if sensing her struggle, but his frown was prominent.

She offered him an honest, guilty smile. "Sorry. I guess I'm still figuring some things out."

As if her words had given him permission, Fenn stepped closer and reached up, his glove falling away as his fingers caressed her cheek. "I know it's overwhelming, but remember, you have time. You don't have to understand every nuance immediately."

She huffed, pouting without meaning to, and pulled his hand into hers. "But that's part of what I don't get," she said. She rolled her lip between her teeth for a moment in an effort to figure out the words without tipping her hand. "How much time do I have, exactly?"

He offered her a subtle, patient smile. "As much as you need. As much as you want."

Feeling entirely dissatisfied with that answer, Sienna let out a very dramatic sigh and removed one hand from his in order to make a broad-sweeping, vague gesture. "That doesn't tell me anything! Don't be romantic about it. What situation am I in? Do I have to make a decision, is there a deadline? Is it already done?"

Fenn arched a brow. "There's no deadline for understanding your new abilities," he said, slower. "That is what you were referring to, isn't it?"

She deflated. He wasn't a mind-reader, after all. Then again, she supposed that was preferable. Something about that concept seemed very invasive.

Fenn brought the hand he still held to his lips and kissed her knuckles, drawing her

focus quietly. He held her stare, unblinking. “Ask me what you need to know, Sienna.”

Why did her heart beat faster when he asked something so simple? There was nothing simple about the emotions and accompanying thoughts spinning around inside her. She was afraid and excited and sad all at once. She felt like she was already bracing for heartbreak—like heartbreak itself was inevitable, it was only a matter of which type and when. Would it really be better to know so soon the answer to even a piece of that?

It’s better than being blindsided. The sudden, devastating tragedy of her parents’ deaths had taught her that.

Sienna held tighter to Fenn’s hand and did her best to articulate the question in its generic form—one difficult subject at a time. “Florence was immortal, right?”

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Understanding flickered in his eyes. “She became that way, yes,” he said. “As I heard it, she turned the might of her power inward and healed away her body’s aging process until it stopped entirely.”

That lined up with what Sienna thought she’d known about the other woman, so she nodded.

Fenn squeezed her hand. “You are under no obligation to do that to yourself, Sienna,” he said, his voice firm. “No one would judge you less if you chose to live out your originally destined life.”

She stared at him. Studied his expression. Repeated his words in her head and probably overanalyzed his tone, and the grip he had on her hand. His words were what they arguably should have been—it was her power now, so it was her choice—but everything else told a different story.

His jaw was tight, the vein in his throat more pronounced than usual. There was a struggle in his gaze she couldn’t define. His tone had been firm, but too tight, like he was biting out words he found distasteful somehow. More than any of that, though, was the way his fingers curled into her skin and pressed her own harder into his palm. It was the grip of a man who did not want to let go.

Or, at least, that was how Sienna really hoped she was supposed to interpret it.

She let out a breath and stepped into his personal space, not quite up against his chest. “You’re still staying for Christmas, right?”

His Adam's apple bobbed and she had the strongest urge to lick it. "That was the deal."

Right. The deal. The deal that had him exiting her life in two days' time. If he was holding to their original arrangement, then ... that was her answer, she supposed. The answer to all of the things she hadn't figured out. There was no reason to immortalize herself just so she could be alone, forever watching people die, knowing it would only hurt to get close to them.

Fenn stroked both thumbs across her cheeks, and it was then that Sienna realized she had cried. That her gaze had fallen from his as the cruelty of her new reality had set in. "Tell me what else is upsetting you."

She tried to quietly draw in a breath, like the delicate heroine she was not, but the sound was wet and raspy and grating to her own ears. She drank in the closeness of him, the haunting beauty, and felt that first crack deep inside. I still have two days! But how could she honestly enjoy them, knowing she would likely not see him again until her very last breath—if he deigned her worthy. If he was even still the one carrying the mantle.

It was too much to think about. Too hard to consider. And the pain confirmed what she had already started to fear. She absolutely loved this man. This man who would be leaving her behind as soon as Christmas passed.

Fenn let out a growl as more tears rolled down her cheeks and bent his head, kissing her. He licked his way past her lips until his tongue was tangled with hers, removed one hand from her face in order to wrap it around her waist and tug her flush to him. His other hand slid into her hair and he kissed her, hard and demanding, hot and sensual, until she could no longer breathe. Then he retreated, only enough to let her gasp for air, their noses still touching. "Tell me, Sienna, so I can kill it."

Her head was foggy, her fingers twisted in his shirt, and she blinked at him. “What?”

His lips twitched in a smile. “Tell me what’s upset you so much,” he repeated, “so I can kill it.”

A watery, helpless laugh bubbled up from her chest. “You shouldn’t ask questions you don’t want the answers to.” Despite herself, despite her words, Sienna lifted her arms until she had his jaw cupped in her hands. Suddenly she had so many things she wanted to say, so many things she wanted to tell him. And most of it she knew would need to stay forever unsaid. But she was selfish, too, and she couldn’t not tell him the most critical part. No matter how it would almost certainly change their deal. “I’ve fallen in love with you, Fenn.” She did her best to smile as his eyes widened. “How am I supposed to be okay with goodbye in just a couple of days?”

He stared at her in perhaps the most blatant shock she’d seen on his face since the night they’d met, when she hadn’t had a clue as to the significance of him or her fingers on his skin. His chest inflated with breath, he opened his mouth to respond, and Sienna braced herself for what she expected him to say.

“Listen, you two are weirdly cute, but we’re ready for the movie and I won’t hold it forever.” Piper’s intrusion hit Sienna like a popped balloon and she jumped, right there in Fenn’s arms. Which her sister seemed to think was funny, because she laughed. “Come inside, pretend you care what temperature it is, and don’t forget to tell us if you got an update on that trial thing.”

A fresh round of frustrated tears rushed her, but Sienna didn’t resist when Fenn obligingly shifted his hold to guide her inside. She should have been curious about the trial situation, too, and she knew it. But whatever was going on with that, it didn’t feel as important as finishing the conversation Piper had interrupted.

“This is the movie you watch every year?” Fenn asked, speaking to one of her sisters.

His voice reverberated through her head as if she were listening through a filter. As if they were already separated.

Sienna barely stopped herself from pressing a hand to her chest in an effort to ease the pain. Did it really matter if they formally finished that conversation? Did she really need to hear the words she knew he'd say?

Piper passed Sienna a fresh cup of cocoa as Maya explained that the film had been their mother's favorite, and how their father had never failed to make sure they gathered as a family on Christmas Eve to watch it. It was a tradition the girls had carried on to keep their parents' memories with them during the holiday.

All of a sudden, as Fenn settled beside Sienna in the corner seat of the sofa, his gloves restored to cover his hands, everything about that tradition screamed of loss. Of pain and heartbreak and sadness.

Sienna brought her steaming drink to her lips with trembling hands. She didn't need her former power, or a response to her stupid confession, to know that this was going to be the worst Christmas of her life. In the same way that it would be her best.

"Now," Piper said, the authoritative tone of her voice drawing Sienna's focus again. Piper had sat in her favorite armchair, leaving the other for Maya. "I want an update on this whole trial thing my sister has supposedly been assigned. Did you learn anything about that? Is it over?"

Maya angled toward them with blatant curiosity. "I have more than a few questions about that, too." She would, being the family mythology buff. Maya had already made it clear she was more than a little devastated to have been unconscious for the duration of the Four's visit.

Sienna's throat went dry and she held a little tighter to her mug. She sort of wished it

would burn, even just to distract her, but the sear of the heat barely registered before it faded away again. Convenient, to be sure, but also not.

“Fates never give details,” Fenn said, “but she did confirm that Sienna’s trial isn’t entirely over yet.” There was an edge to his voice that had immediately piqued her interest, as if he were also less than thrilled at discussing the subject.

Then his actual words penetrated Sienna’s rattled, emotionally hazy brain, and she found herself agreeing with Piper’s instant outrage. She lowered her cup to her lap and cut her ranting sibling off with a forced question of her own. “So dying and switching power sets wasn’t enough, huh?” She tried to make it sound sarcastic, like a quip that might ordinarily be expected of her, but even she recognized her failure.

Fenn laid a hand on her thigh and squeezed. The gesture was simultaneously comforting and intimate, and in that same way it made her heart ache. “She did call that your ‘biggest hurdle,’ for what that’s worth.”

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Piper made a sound of disgust. “Gee, how reassuring.”

“I don’t know, Piper,” Maya said. “We’re talking about actual gods and living incarnations of power. There’s probably a reason basically every religion and culture has some kind of story about overcoming death.”

“Meaning?” Piper asked.

Sienna watched their exchange with wide eyes. She had no clue how to express all the things circling inside her. Listening to her sisters voice their thoughts on her situation seemed much easier than actually listening to her own.

Maya shrugged at Piper’s question. “Just that ‘death’ probably wouldn’t mean to an ancient immortal being the same thing that it does to a human who statistically isn’t likely to live past a single century.”

Piper scrunched up her face and looked over at Fenn. “You have no idea what else she has to do, or overcome?”

“I would have already told her if I’d heard anything that specific.”

Sienna stared into her hot chocolate. She’d already survived death, because apparently she’d been pretty much lost before Florence really put effort into saving her. How was that not significant enough? Because Maya was right, most likely.

Her heart slammed in her chest. How many times had she, unexpectedly, found her focus spiraling around the subject of immortality and herself? Her, dying. Her, living.



Her, overcoming. The answer had to be in there, didn't it?

"Can we just watch the movie?" Maya asked, her question dancing through Sienna's mind like dandelion puffs on a windy day.

Her mom's face, faded and blurry, flickered across Sienna's mind's eye. Her throat tightened as it blinked out and her gaze fell from the cooling cocoa to the gloved hand still resting over her thigh.

She felt like a child stretching for the last treat resting at the back of the counter, half in sight but just the slightest bit out of reach no matter how hard she tried. The answer was right there. Right in front of her. But she couldn't find the angle she needed to grasp it.

The familiar sounds of an old Christmas classic vibrated in her ears, drawing up memories both warm and emotional. Memories that faded a little more every year, making room for newer and stronger ones. That's life, right? She lifted her gaze to the screen, but couldn't really see it through the film of frustrating tears that had gathered in her eyes again.

That was life. An endless cycle. Happiness and sadness in equal measure. Old memories faded as new memories were made, and while some pains tore too deep to ever truly disappear, those new experiences became a balm. Grief from loss theoretically led to moving on, moving forward. For her and her sisters, part of that process had been taking time every year to pay this homage to their parents—lost too soon in a stupid, tragic accident.

Sienna understood all of that. Yet it felt like a strange kind of revelation.

If it's a trial ... then there has to be a choice. She hadn't chosen to switch powers. She'd chosen to fight to live, but she hadn't really known she was as good as dead, so

it was arguable that that didn't count. What definitely counted, however, was the choice that had been ripping at her heart most of the day.

Her sisters, or Fenn.

Not that she thought she had to leave them, but eventually ... eventually she would lose them, and not in the natural way. If she chose to stay with him. There was an obvious problem with that, though. She couldn't make that choice without his answer.

Sienna dragged in a breath, felt Fenn's hand shift subtly along her leg, and leaned forward to sit her abandoned drink on the coffee table. "Sorry," she said, speaking only as loud as she needed to to be heard over the movie. "Can you watch without me today?" She didn't wait for her sisters' response, didn't want to fall into an argument or hear all their well-meaning concern. Instead she stood and quickly stepped from the den, walking with purpose down the hall despite not having an intended destination. Back outside? The kitchen? The living room with its sparkly Christmas tree and still unopened presents? All the way upstairs to her borrowed room?

Fenn's arm slid around her waist before she could come to any decision and he pulled her back against his chest. They came to a full stop in the hall between the living room and the stairs, his back to the wall and hers to his chest, his arms folded around her. His breath was warm on her ear when he bent forward to speak, his voice low and vibrating through her. "Am I the one causing you this pain, Sienna?"

Her chest tightened and a flush of emotion flooded her. How was she supposed to answer that? Her hands latched onto his arms, sheathed only in the single layer of his turtleneck sleeves because he'd discarded his coat when they'd come inside. Out of some ingrained decency she had no clue where or why he'd learned. She swallowed hard. "It's not ... that simple."

He rumbled, the sound a strange mix of thoughtful and strained, and his lips pressed into her temple. Then his murmured voice was whispering into her ear again, hot and confusing and thrilling all at once. “I have never, in my life, known love. Not before you.” His fingers dug into her sides, almost crushing. “But I am Death. I cannot be so greedy as to ask you to abandon everything merely to keep you in my arms.”

A chill went through her at his words and their possible implications.

He brushed another kiss to her temple, almost as if he were stalling. “You are strong, Sienna. Stronger than Florence was. If you wanted, you could heal away your aging process and still have ample healing abilities to offer to those you love. Even to those you only meet in passing.” His voice dropped until she could barely hear it, even up against her ear. “I can’t take that opportunity from you, or this world.”

She understood then. He was saying goodbye. He was telling her he returned her feelings, as best as he knew how, and intended to leave, anyway.

Her heart shattered, scattering what breath she’d gathered, and Sienna surged from his arms in order to twist around and face him. The emotions inside her were so turbulent she didn’t even falter at the sight of the anguish on his face. Instead, she pushed him harder into the wall he’d already been leaning against and practically hissed her response. “How dare you decide what I should do with my life!”

His brows pinched together, a sign of confusion and confliction.

She didn’t stop. “If I go out and start healing all the people I come across I’ll be scooped up by the government in a blink, taken to some lab in Area 51 or some place, and never let out into the light of day again. I’ll be a lab rat, experimented on until the day I allow myself to die. So yeah, this power is great, but I have to be careful about it, idiot!” Her voice cracked and she leaned unintentionally into him. “I was—I’ve been—” She felt like a fool for even considering saying what she was about to say,

but the words were there. They just needed to be untangled.

She forced herself to stare straight into his beautiful, pained eyes. “I just don’t know how to choose,” she finally said, the words leaving her in a gasp.

“Choose?”

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“If I become immortal,” she said, a wry smile threatening her lips, “I thought I could have you. I thought it was possible.” But he had already decided it wasn’t. She was just being stupid now. Tears rolled free down her cheeks. “It just means ... watching my sisters grow old, and die, while I don’t. That seemed too hard. And I thought I had to figure it out before you leave.” I’m so stupid. Why would he make any other choice than severing ties while their relationship was young? If he did care, like he’d said, then her eventual death would hurt him, too. The separation of them would hurt him, too. And here she was, snapping at him as if he’d pushed her away with the intention of causing her pain.

Her new power was a curse.

Merry Christmas

Fenn’s lips pressed against hers suddenly, his hands burying in her hair as his tongue swirled along hers. The kiss was every bit as hungry as usual, but there was a note of desperation beneath it that shot straight to Sienna’s soul. Prompting her to respond before she could fully process what was happening. Her hands latched onto his shirt, the material twisting in her grip as she pushed up on her toes to kiss him back. To kiss him harder.

Was this their last kiss? Was this goodbye?

The thought was barely a whisper in the back of her mind before Fenn pulled back, slightly, and adjusted to press his forehead to hers. He didn’t release his hold on her head and she clung to the tightness of his grip. “Fenn...?”

“I don’t know how to ask you to choose me,” he said. “I do know that I will never be the same as I was before I met you. I know that the day you let yourself leave this world, and force me to take your soul, will be the day I learn how Death dies.”

With their faces so close, and the unblinking intensity of his stare, there was no way she could doubt his sincerity. Pain of some kind wasn’t uncommon in his eyes, but what she saw when he spoke was different this time. And the yearning ... it was as if what she saw in his eyes mirrored the feelings in her heart. He was absolutely serious.

But...“You were going to leave,” she whispered, her voice weak.

His thumbs rubbed along her scalp and he attempted to offer her a smile. “I thought it would be easier for you.”

Sienna shoved her arms up, around his neck, and tilted her head in order to bite at his lower lip. She stroked her tongue over the skin and brokenly murmured, “I want you, Fenn. I need you.” She curled her fingers into the collar of his turtleneck. “You’re the only one who could teach me how to immortalize myself, and the only one who could help me survive losing my family.” She was sure now, somehow. The threat of losing him, of him stepping away and vanishing forever, had made it crystal clear. So she retreated enough to meet his gaze again. “I’ll choose you, and an eternity with you, if you’ll let me.”

Fenn dragged in a breath so hard it shook them both, then hauled her thighs up to his hips and spun them around until it was her back pressed into the wall. “You understand what I am. What I do. The things I see and deal with every damn day.” Darkness rippled around them, shrouding them until she could see nothing but him, and he tore off her sweater as he spoke. His voice was rough, little more than a growl. “You want that life?” With the assistance of his sharpened void magic, her pants fell next.

Sienna tightened her legs around him as his own clothes melted away at the mere force of his will. It was cheating, and it was sexy as hell. She licked her lips. “Yes,” she breathed. “Because I want to be there with you. For you.” She threaded her fingers into his hair and tugged his face closer. “Let me be your sanctuary, Fenn.”

His lips sealed over hers and he caught one of her breasts in his palm. All she could do was hold him tighter as he ravished her mouth and kneaded her breast, his other hand sweeping along her thigh up to her hip and back again. She crossed her ankles at his back and mewled against him as he pinched her nipple, making her arch into his chest.

The kiss broke and she gasped, “Fenn, my sisters, they’ll—”

He trailed wet kisses along her throat. “They’re preoccupied with the movie.” He released her boob in favor of gliding that hand also toward her hip. “Downstairs.”

“D-downstairs?” He’d transported them? She belatedly remembered the rising blackness, and not giving it any further thought.

He hummed against her skin and slipped two fingers past her folds, sliding them easily inside her. Shattering her ability to think about anything beyond him. He pushed his fingers as deep as they could go and she squirmed against him as he dragged them out again. His erection was heavy on her belly, his lips and tongue hot and wet on her skin, and she wanted more. So much more.

“Fenn,” she gasped, her fingers digging into his back. “Please, fuck me.”

He rolled his thumb over her clit and she nearly came as almost searing pleasure shot through her, too brief to send her flying but still so damn good. Then his hand retreated and she felt him line himself up as he took hold of her hips. His forehead suddenly pressed against hers, drawing her focus for a beat. Their gazes met and he

smiled warmly, disarmingly, right before driving his cock inside her to the hilt.

Sienna cried out, holding him tighter, her back arching, and Fenn started raining kisses along her jaw and the neglected side of her throat. He gave her only a few seconds to adjust to him before he started moving, thrusting in and out of her pussy with a surprising ferocity. Several seconds passed before she realized he was also speaking, sort of.

“Sienna,” he murmured against her skin between wet, toothy kisses. Kisses that would leave marks if she let them. “Love you.” He angled his hands around to take hold of her ass as he pounded into her. “Never letting you go.”

She could barely breathe and her body trembled, and for as amazing as the sex felt, she suspected half the pleasure coursing through her was actually a result of his frenzied words. All she could do was keep her legs locked around him, keep her hands roaming across his back and occasionally digging into the muscle there. She made no effort to contain her moans and didn’t care at all about the pricks of fresh tears stinging her eyes. “Yes,” she said, panting. She managed to catch his hair in a brief grip. “Please, Fenn!” He was, apparently, more articulate than her in this moment.

He straightened enough to slide his tongue into her mouth, stepped away from the wall, and used his hold on her to help her bounce on his length. The adjusted angle was perfect and seconds later a screaming orgasm ripped from the depths of her soul, so blindingly bright and hot she nearly fainted right there in his arms. It would have been embarrassing if it hadn’t felt so good.

Fenn shuddered against her with a long, low groan before she had fully recovered, his arms locking tight around her. “Fuck,” he finally said, unusually breathless.

Sienna grinned and pressed a kiss to the skin of his shoulder. “Pretty sure we just did.



I'm definitely all sticky again."

He chuckled. "Shower?"

She did love showering with him. Who would've known? Still, she made a point to straighten a little and find his gaze again. "Is this real? Are you really going to let me stay with you?"

He moved a hand to cup her cheek. "Are you really choosing me?"

She swallowed hard, remembering her own words, and pushed out an emotional exhale. "Yes."

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He smiled, the expression one part sympathy and one part joy. “Then, yes.”

Christmas had never been his favorite holiday. He’d never had a reason to celebrate, let alone anyone to celebrate it with. Not once. So he’d expected to feel a little awkward as he sat back and watched the sisters exchange gifts after a lively breakfast, the house once again humming with songs of mixed generations. A recently popular pop icon belted out some altered version of a classic holiday song about yearning and hope and Fenn found himself fighting a smile.

He watched the sisters laugh over some joke connected to a gift Sienna had purchased for Maya. He shared Sienna’s pride when Piper teared up and ducked her head minutes later. That swell of pride shifted to satisfied happiness—his best guess—when it was Sienna’s turn to gush over something she’d been gifted.

They didn’t exchange piles of presents. Just a few each, and it seemed they tried hard to make each present matter in some way. It was sweet, and he recognized that this specific morning would be hitting Sienna harder than usual in her own way. Because she’d decided to focus her energy on tackling the task of immortalizing herself starting the next day.

“One more Christmas.”

Some would have argued it was silly, even ridiculous, but if it mattered to her then he would make it happen. Living out their original plan for one more day was no hardship, not when he knew he would get more. More of her, more of everything she made him feel that he’d never known how to tap into until that night they’d met. He’d meant what he’d said. He would never let her go, not so long as she was choosing

him.

His jaw tightened, just for a moment, as something she'd said the day before flitted through his mind. She was probably right that some would want to tie her down and experiment on her if or when they found out about her healing abilities. It was the only thing he'd ever understood about Florence's long-standing decision to keep her gift to herself. But Sienna had nothing to worry about. He knew what her life-giving power tasted like now, he would never lose her—and he would never let her be hurt.

He kept the words to himself, but seared the vow into his soul all the same.

“Come on, Fenn,” Sienna said suddenly, holding her hand out to him. The sisters had gotten up and were gathered in front of the tree. Her phone was anchored onto her selfie stick, held in her other hand. “We’re taking a picture.”

He arched a brow, but stood obligingly. “What do you need from me?”

Her sisters laughed.

Sienna wiggled her fingers impatiently. “It’s a family photo. We take one every year. You’re family now. Come stand with me.”

On Sienna’s other side, Maya smiled. “I don’t need any special powers to know you’re sticking around. So you have to get used to us.”

“We’ll be better prepared to include you next year, Fenn,” Piper said. “I’m sorry you had to sit and watch today.”

He shook his head and stepped up to Sienna’s side. “I already have more from this weekend than I expected to get.”

Sienna giggled and pressed a kiss to his cheek. “Look who’s suddenly romantic. Everyone gather close!” She kept herself between him and the next person, and he kept his arm low around her waist. He even smiled a little for the camera.

It was mid-afternoon when Piper asked the question Fenn doubted Sienna expected any more than he did. “Sienna, what are you going to do about your media exposure?”

Both his eyebrows rose and he turned to the woman at his side.

Sienna was staring blankly across the table at her sister. “Um, what?”

Piper set down her cards. “You post at least three videos a week, right? How are you going to keep up with that if you become immortal? You need a plan.”

Maya nodded calmly, still arranging her refreshed set of cards. “She’s right. You’re too public.”

Sienna’s mouth fell open for a beat before she blurted, “You follow me?”

Amusement lit Piper’s eyes. “Of course I do. I don’t catch every video, but I try to keep up with your life, you know.”

Sienna shook her head, then finally looked over at Fenn.

He shook his head at the question in her eyes. She hadn’t known how to break the news to her sisters, and he certainly wouldn’t have taken that from her without cause.

Sienna swallowed visibly, drew a breath, and asked quietly, “So you ... knew?”

Piper smiled. “We’re your older sisters, it’s our job to know these things.”

“And you barely made it down for dinner yesterday,” Maya added, lips twitching.

Sienna laughed weakly and set her cards down as well. “I’m sorry,” she said. “I ... I didn’t know how to tell you.”

The sisters smiled easily and Piper asked, “Are you sure?”

Sienna nodded.

“Then you have nothing to apologize for.”

“But,” Maya said, “you need to figure out the social media thing.”

Piper’s expression became serious. “Within the next five years, I would say.”

Sienna laughed. “Yes, mom.” As her sisters laughed again, she turned a smile to Fenn and he saw relief in her eyes. She’d made her choice, but their support and approval still meant a lot to her.

He lifted her hand to his lips and pressed a kiss to her knuckles.

“Do you actually have a plan?” Maya asked.

“I’m going to start tomorrow,” Sienna said, looping her fingers around his. “I don’t know how hard or easy it will be, so today could potentially be my last day as a mere mortal.” She grinned at her own words. She tensed for a brief second, then, and wiggled in her seat until she’d pulled her phone from her pocket with her free hand. “That’s odd...”

Fenn couldn’t stop himself from tilting his head to read the screen over her shoulder. The logo for that coffee shop she loved so much was the first thing that caught his eye.

“Everything okay?” Maya asked cautiously.

“Um, yeah,” Sienna said, still staring at her phone. “It’s just a weird notification from Serendripity.”

“What does it say?” Fenn asked. He probably should tell her who owned that burgeoning franchise.

She glanced up at him, then back at her phone. “It says, ‘keep it up, you’re almost there’.”

Fenn laced his fingers with hers. “Destiny owns Serendripity. That’s a message from her.” He made no effort to stop the upward twitch of his lips. “You’ve made a right choice for clearing your trial, then. It’s just a matter of following through.”

“I’m sorry,” Maya said. “TheFateowns a coffee shop?”

“She’s meddlesome.”

Sienna burst out laughing and slumped into his arm, holding tighter to his hand. “We really need to talk about what’s what. But I guess it’s fair if that waits until after I’m immortal.” She locked her phone and tucked it away again, seemingly satisfied.

Piper reached for her eggnog and lifted it up. “Well, whether you’re mortal or not, I’m much more concerned with the fact that my baby sister survived an attempt at her life and fell in love.” She smiled at Fenn, then back to Sienna. “That’s a Merry Christmas to me.”

Maya raised her own eggnog. “Absolutely. Merry Christmas, to all three of you.”

Sienna straightened, gave Fenn’s hand a squeeze, and with her free hand she followed suit and raised her eggnog. “To the best damn Christmas ever.”

Fenn, who hadn’t yet sipped at his drink, lifted his as well. “Merry Christmas.” His

new favorite holiday.

The End