



A Demon's Resolve (Demonic Tales and Adventures #3)

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Category: Fantasy

Description: As Alec felt the cold steel of a knife puncture his hand, his mind erupted into chaos. His soul screamed in protest, yearning to turn back the hands of time and prevent the unthinkable. His mate, Kian, had thrown himself into the jaws of danger, offering himself sacrificially for demons. The question that echoed the loudest in his mind: Would Kian even survive the ordeal?

When Kian felt Alecs warm blood mix with his own, a searing inferno ignited within his veins. The pain was beyond comprehension. He found himself teetering on the razors edge between sanity and delirium, questioning whether he could bear it or if it would claim his life. The shockwaves of Kians sacrifice resonated among both humans and demons. None had envisioned a scenario where Kian would risk everything for demonkind. Yet, as he did, even those who were skeptical of a human's place amongst them found themselves applauding his audacity.

The looming uncertainty of what this meant for demons was cast aside for now. As worry devoured Alec—having lost control over his supernatural abilities with his mate on the brink—the only thing that mattered was Kians survival.

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CHAPTER 1

There was nothing as sweet as Kian's lips. They were soft and sweet, entrancing him in their velvety depths. At first, Alec barely registered the sting coming from his hand. It was the searing pain that radiated from Kian that slammed into him, alerting him to what his mate had just done.

"No," he screamed, even as he looked down to find Kian's hand on the hilt of a small knife that pinned Alec's hand into the side of his mate's body as proof of his sacrifice. He ripped his hand away, pulling the knife along with it to stop his blood from mixing with Kian's, but he knew it was already too late.

He flung the offending weapon across the room, needing it as far from Kian as possible. But he knew it wouldn't do any good. Their blood had mixed. He could feel it flowing through his mate's veins.

Gently, he lifted Kian into his arms, willing him not to die. The pain radiating off his mate in crashing waves as Alec's blood fused with his human blood was scaring the hell out of him.

Grief tore through his chest as his roar could be heard through all Tuklati. Kian's eyelids fluttered open as he felt his mate's hand caress his cheek. Looking down into those tortured blue eyes, Alec's lips tilted up a fraction. "Trust me."

Suddenly, the pain that tore through Kian's body was consuming even Alec's roar of anguish.

“We need to get him into isolation as soon as possible.” Gaius said.

Alec was barely understanding what was being said around him as the others talked about where they could put Kian that would be safe but close by. Alec just stood there waiting, praying for Kian to reappear. It felt like days, although it was probably only minutes before his body slumped against Alec for a moment before dissolving into water at his feet.

Jumping back so he wouldn't get in Kian's way, Alec kept waiting. A hand touched his arm tentatively, but he barely recognized the action, as all his focus was on Kian. Hearing someone call his name, he ignored it, refusing to take his eyes off that puddle of water.

“Alec!” Tarak's hard voice finally snapped Alec out of his stupor. “Listen, son,” his father demanded. “As soon as Kian gets back into his skin, we need you to grab him.”

Confused, Alec was having trouble understanding the words. “What?”

“Eventually Kian will change to fire. With all the books in here he could inadvertently start a fire, then he'd be trapped when he changes form again.” Tarak's grasp tightened as he shook Alec, trying to make him understand.

“We need to get Kian out of the archives.” The words Tarak said were understandable, but Alec was having a difficult time comprehending what he was actually saying. “We're hoping if you grab him, it will shock his system enough to hold off the change until we can get him into the walkway.”

Nodding his understanding—mostly—Alec stared hard at the water on the floor while praying that his mate would survive this. He watched the water form into a shape as it solidified again.

He didn't hesitate. The instant Kian was human again, Alec picked him up and dashed out of the building and into the main walkway. He'd barely gotten there before Kian changed into an inferno of flames.

Not taking his gaze off Kian for an instant, Alec asked to those around him, "How long?" He didn't care what form Kian was in, but he needed to know how long his mate would endure it.

It was his grandfather who answered. "We do not know. The journals never really said for sure." Gaius's voice was filled with sorrow.

Alec wanted to scream at fate, at Danara, at Kian, for allowing this to happen. It wasn't fair. Alec would have done anything to spare him the agony of each of the changes.

None of it made sense. Why would fate force someone as fragile as a human to be put through hell? The only mistake Kian had ever made was loving him. Alec didn't deserve him.

If Kian died, Alec would burn the world down.

Slowly, Kian became aware of things. More importantly, he no longer felt as if his body were breaking apart one particle at a time. If Danara were there, he would punch the first queen for not warning him how much that would hurt.

It felt as if all Kian had done was pray for death just to stop the agony that tore him apart time and time again. Nor had he understood the need for any of it. From what he'd been told, demons didn't have to endure the process, so why was he, a human, forced to endure the constant transformations?

Not that it mattered. All he could hope was that it was over, for Kian was certain he

wouldn't be able to withstand any more torture.

It was a good sign that he didn't feel the pull of his molecules, as if they were trying to separate once more. In fact, all he felt now was the softness of the mattress beneath him and the warmth of a hand holding his. That was what he concentrated on, that touch, soaking in the comfort as he struggled to open his eyes.

When they finally opened a crack, happiness enveloped him at the sight of Alec lying next to him with his arms wrapped around him. The love that shone in those emerald eyes made it all worth it.

"Are you alright?" he asked as the worry and fear came through in his voice.

As much as he wanted to reassure him, exhaustion pulled Kian back into sleep's embrace.

Voices woke Kian. Annoyed to be pulled from a sound sleep, Kian opened his eyes to find Alec and Tarak in a heated discussion. Kian's gaze went to where Alec held his hand and smiled. He let the comfort that simple touch created wash over him as he listened to them.

"I told you we have looked everywhere." Tarak looked haggard, as if he hadn't slept in days. "He has vanished."

Alec's expression was furious, his grip getting tighter the angrier he got. "There's no way he can hide that well. As soon as Kian wakes up, I'll go find him myself, since you obviously can't do it."

Hurt flashed across Tarak's face. "Son, we are doing the best we can."

Before Alec said something else he'd regret, Kian intervened. "I don't mean to

interrupt.”

Both heads whipped to where he was lying. Alec’s expression changed. His icy eyes melted when they met his. “How are you feeling?”

Smiling at him, Kian squeezed his hand. “I’m good. I take it you still haven’t found Brant?”

A flash of anger swiftly crossed Alec’s features. But it was Tarak who answered. “I’m sorry, Kian, but he has evaded us.”

Even though he was disappointed the man responsible for his mother’s death was still out there, he knew he couldn’t blame Tarak. “You’ll find him,” he reassured.

But he didn’t want to talk about his mother’s killer. He had more important things on his mind. “It worked, right?” Kian didn’t know why he’d asked. He already knew the answer. He could feel it in every cell of his body.

Alec sat on the bed as if he needed to be as close as possible to Kian. “You definitely went through the change described by Drakarn. What do you remember?”

That wasn’t something he really wanted to tell Alec. At the same time, he didn’t want to start out his life as a demon by lying to him. “Pain. Lots and lots of pain. It was as if every atom in my body was yanked apart, rearranged, and put back together again every few minutes.”

Fear flashed in Alec’s gaze. Kian sat up and hugged him, loving the feel of his strength, yet at the same time, sensing he also could feel power he’d never known inside of him. “It’s over, Alec.”

His mate held Kian tightly for several more moments but then put his hands on his

upper arms and held Kian away from him. “You had no right to make that decision without me.”

Even though he knew Alec would never have agreed to Kian’s plan, Alec wasn’t wrong. Nor could Kian blame him for being angry. But he wouldn’t apologize for doing what he’d done.

“I think I am going to go,” Tarak said. He gave Kian a grateful smile. “I am glad you are okay.”

Kian read between the lines and knew Tarak was letting him know he appreciated the sacrifice. “Thanks, Tarak.”

Once he was gone, Kian glanced back to find Alec’s green eyes as icy as a glacier. He got off the bed as if needing to put distance between them. “What you did was underhanded and selfish.”

“Selfish?” The word had been so unexpected that when he heard it, Kian practically yelled it back. Maybe he’d been underhanded and possibly stupid, but selfish? “How is what I did selfish?”

“Did you even once think about what would have happened if you’d died?,” Alec yelled. “What it would have done to me?” Not stopping for Kian to answer, he just kept up his tirade.

“Of course not, you just went ahead and did whatever you wanted.” He started to furiously pace back and forth across the room. “Selfish! Maybe there was more to it than simply mixing my blood with yours but you couldn’t wait for us to find that out, you just went ahead. When I think about what could have happened...”

Alec stopped in his tracks and dropped to his knees. Tears rolled down his cheeks as

he looked at Kian. “Don’t you know I can’t live without you?”

Tears of his own fell from Kian’s eyes as he got off the bed and knelt down in front of him. “I had to, Alec. You heard Danara.”

That only seemed to infuriate Alec. He grabbed Kian and shook him slightly. “You expect me to accept the ramblings of a dead woman as fact?”

Then he surged to his feet as if he couldn’t be near Kian any longer and headed for the door.

Before he knew what happened, Kian was no longer kneeling on the floor, but stood before Alec with his back to the door, barring him from leaving. How had he moved that quickly?

Not that it mattered. He’d gone through hell. The least Alec could do was stick around long enough to discuss it. “You will not walk away from me,” he told him in no uncertain terms.

Alec blinked at him when Kian suddenly appeared in front of him, stopping him from taking off. He was a demon now. Speed was apparently one of his new abilities.

He’d expected Alec to yell some more so Kian was shocked when strong arms went around his waist like steel bands. Alec’s mouth savagely took complete possession of his lips giving Kian no choice but to participate. Not that he would have refused.

Kian wanted him too much to deny Alec anything he needed. Alec gave a rumbling groan as Kian’s arms and legs wrapped around his body, drawing them even closer together.

There was a hard noise that Kian couldn’t place but also knew wasn’t coming from

either of them. He tried to ignore it, as Alec did, but when they heard Aira's smug voice, they both groaned in dismay.

"As much as I don't want to interrupt, the Council wants to see you now." Aira's words struck them both like a blow.

It felt like a part of his body had been ripped off when Alec put Kian back on his feet and took a step back. Shaking his head to try and clear the desire that still was coursing through him, Kian blinked up at the man he loved more than he'd ever imagined. Alec wasn't doing much better as his fingers dug into the wall as if bracing himself from grabbing Kian again.

Aira giggled a little. "I've heard of a love trance before but this is ridiculous."

Not amused, Kian gave Aira an annoyed look.

Aira rolled her eyes. "Aw, come on, I was just joking. Anyway the Council heard you were awake." Her expression turned grim. "They want to see both of you right away."

Kian's gut tightened instinctively. The Council. What could they want? Maybe they were mad at Kian for what he'd done. Were they going to order his death? Turning several shades paler, Kian felt himself starting to faint.

Strong arms picked him up effortlessly before placing him back in bed. "Tell the Council he isn't well enough to leave."

"That won't work, brother. They said either you come to them or they come to you." Shrugging, Aira sat on the bed next to Kian. "Personally, I wouldn't want the Council in my house but it's up to you."

It was as if he was in some sort of dream - dream? - more like a nightmare. Alec said something more to Aira but Kian didn't pay attention to the words. Was this it? Was he going to die?

The thoughts swirled around in his head until his brain started revolting from the suggestions. How dare they interfere in Kian's life after all they'd put him through? Haven't they done enough? First they forced him to move away from everything he knew to live in an alien world. Sure it was still Earth, but nothing down here had made any sense to Kian, especially in the beginning. They had no one to blame but themselves for causing all of this.

Fury burned through him as Kian pushed Alec away in order to head out the door. He was tired of being pushed around and nothing was going to stop him from letting them know it.

Arms suddenly wrapped around him, stopping him in his tracks. He turned it was to find Alec holding him close. "Let me go."

Throwing his hands up in the air, Alec did just that. Satisfied that even Alec knew better than to take Kian on at that moment, he turned on his heel.

"I was just thinking you might want to get dressed first." Cursing under his breath at the amusement he heard in Alec's tone, Kian headed to the closet. Facing the Council in nothing but one of Alec's shirts might comfort Kian but it most likely wouldn't help his cause.

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CHAPTER 2

When they arrived at the Council's chambers, Kian had managed to appear calm and serene. Alec wasn't fooled. Not only could he read the emotions his mate was trying to hide, he could feel them. Kian was ready to explode. If the Council members were smart, they would thank Kian for the sacrifice he'd made and wish them well. Otherwise, they might end up wishing for a quick death.

He had been a little surprised when his mate had worn one of Alec's shirts, even if it was way too big for him. Still, he had to admit seeing his mate wearing it was a turn on for Alec.

It wasn't easy but Alec forced his desire for Kian down when he opened the door to the Council's chambers. This was not the time to be distracted. The set of Kian's jaw and the determination he saw in those blue eyes meant trouble. Alec needed to be alert if he had any hope of stopping their governing body from ordering his mate's death.

A huge part of him was terrified of what Kian would say, but Alec was equally proud of him for not cowering. Knots might have formed in his stomach over the possibility of what was about to happen, but he loved Kian's courage. He was amazing.

That didn't mean Alec was just going to stand by and not try to reason with his mate. He leaned down until his lips were barely an inch from Kian's ear. Keeping his voice low enough for only him to hear him, Alec said, "I appreciate what you are planning to do but I beg you to be careful."

Kian's gasp of surprise made him smile. They'd always had a connection that was stronger than either of them understood. But the moment his blood entered Kian's body, that bond only grew. It didn't hurt that his mate was so damn easy to read.

Cerulean blue eyes glanced his way. "How?"

His hand brushed a stray strand of hair away from Kian's cheek. Pleasure filled him as he leaned into the touch. The desire to kiss him was overwhelming. Only the knowledge that it wouldn't help their case stopped Alec.

"Because I love you." The softness that entered Kian's gaze at his words broke Alec's resolve not to kiss him. Their lips briefly touched as he poured all of his love for his mate in that single touch before he straightened to await the Council.

"I love you, too," Kian whispered. The slight squeeze of Kian's hand on his reassured him that his mate had a plan instead of going off half-cocked. He'd hoped. As usual, he was wrong. "But don't think you telling me that is going to stop me from giving these idiots a piece of my mind."

He couldn't help but laugh at Kian's unbreakable strength. Alec should have known better than believe he would do anything else but what he felt was right. "Not to worry, Kian. I wouldn't dare think for even a moment that anything I said would deter you from doing exactly as you see fit."

Just as he had to do the same by trying to protect his mate. He brought Kian's delicate hand up to his mouth, letting his lips linger against his palm for several seconds. It wasn't until his mate leaned into him, that Alec said, "Just try to remember you can catch more flies with honey."

Kian gave a scoff along with a roll of his eyes. "Who the hell wants to catch flies?" Then, he sobered just enough to let Alec know he'd heard him. "But I will try to be

nice.”

If Kian had stopped there, Alec would have felt better, but Kian being Kian couldn't let his promise stand.

“Until it's time not to be nice,” he muttered under his breath, sending a shiver of fear down Alec's spine.

No way this meeting wasn't going to come to blows. If Alec was lucky, it would be Kyden who shot off his mouth first. He might be their oldest member, but he deserved, more than any other demon Alec knew, to be taken down a peg or two. That it would be Kian doing it, a human recently turned demon, would serve to add to Kyden's humiliation.

Unfortunately, there was no way Alec could ask Kian to be any less than who he was. All he could do was protect Kian with his life.

Leaning in, Alec kissed those soft lips once more. “I will be right here by your side, the whole time,” he assured.

“Thank you,” Kian whispered back.

“They are on their way in,” Tarak told them as he took position right behind them along with four other Sentinels.

A glance around the room showed the Sentinels were in defensive positions all around the room. It was their silent way of letting Alec know if Kian's life was threatened, they would open a path to get him out of there quickly.

That his fellow Sentinels were still willing to protect Kian, let Alec breathe a little easier. He just hoped it didn't come to that.

Kian hadn't known what to expect walking into the Council's Chambers. The gothic décor that reminded him of a medieval nightmare wasn't exactly a surprise, but it also didn't help to calm the nerves that were running amok throughout his body.

It was hard enough to cope with the changes he could feel within him now that he was a demon, but to have to face the Council too? It put his system on overload, leaving him somewhere between the need to shake apart as fear took hold and wanting to strangle anyone who dared to challenge his right to be the demon he now was.

That in and of itself scared the crap out of him. It wasn't that he hadn't felt anger before, but to know he now had the urge to punch anyone who got in his way was unnerving.

It helped that Alec was there. But it was more than that. It sounded weird but Kian could feel Alec's need to protect him. For the first time, he could sense the way Alec felt about him. It warmed him from the inside out.

His strength and love helped Kian to block out the more intimidating décor he was sure the Council had installed to ingrain fear into those that stood before them. It was effective. Gruesome stone gargoyles stood as if poised to attack at each of the doorways. The Council table, if it could be called that, was a mammoth stone structure that rose out of the ground at least seven feet high, so that no matter how tall you were you would have to stare up at the Council members.

Large swords and axes were displayed on the walls. Every inch of the place screamed this room was meant to intimidate. It worked.

A door behind the high table opened. Kian watched as seven men and women filed in and took their seats. Just as he thought, the impact of the colossal stone slab gave the appearance of them peering down upon any group from up high. It was as if they

were trying to make themselves gods.

Aticus sat in the center. Kian's anxiety rose at the pinched expression on his face. If he had to guess, Aticus was pissed. Not a good sign since he was the one person Kian assumed was on his side.

The sound of the gavel slamming down upon the table echoed through the room. Silence descended.

Alec's hand squeezed Kian's a little tighter. That small gesture helped to calm down the tumultuous emotions coursing through Kian. The butterflies that flapped wildly within his stomach lessened as did the rage that was causing his blood to boil. The dual sensations were wreaking havoc on Kian's ability to remain calm.

Alec leaned down to brush his ear with his lips before whispering, "Please do me a favor and think before you speak. Remember, we are all behind you."

Squeezing his hand back, Kian hoped it was enough to convey his appreciation. From the moment they'd met, Alec had been with him every step of the way. Kian needed to keep that in mind when the Council pissed him off, which he had little doubt they would do.

Kian smiled up at him. He could do this if for no other reason than to ease the stark terror in those green eyes. If only the proceedings hadn't started with their most vindictive member opening his mouth, Kian might have been able to hold back.

Hearing a small groan from Alec alerted Kian that the man who'd started talking wasn't a good sign. That he had been close to death caused Kian to debate whether or not he should respond to his rude rhetoric. He was so much paler than the other demons, his hair completely white, what hair there was anyway. "I hate to say I told you so but I feel in this case it is warranted."

His thin, pale, papery skin gave his face a hollowed look. One of his thin arms lifted up to point a finger at Kian. Kian had to admit to being surprised at the strength behind his next words.

“Again this...” He paused as if trying to find the right insult. Kian was fairly certain it was staged for he seemed to take glee in spitting out, “Human.” It was as if the man actually thought that would in some way offend him, despite the fact that Kian was technically a demon now. This idiot had a lot to learn if he thought Kian would consider being called human as some sort of weakness.

“He has shown a total disregard of our ways putting us in danger once again.” A triumphant look appeared on his features. What Kian didn’t understand was why?

Kian had saved their sorry asses, not put them in danger. The fury he’d been doing his best to control for Alec’s sake started to surface. Alec’s grip tightened around his hand. For his sake, Kian did his best to keep his mouth shut - for now.

“Now I know it is not what we hoped for but I think it is time to consider the possibility that he is too much of a danger to our kind.” The deranged Councilman had the nerve to appear distraught that he’d had to speak the condemning words.

Like anyone would believe such a blatant performance. Kian didn’t even know the guy, but he was pretty sure the man would sell his own grandchildren if it helped him. Jerk.

Only the feel of Alec’s hand on his stopped Kian from yelling at the idiot. But he wasn’t sure how much longer that would last before he let loose. Turning to Alec to tell him just that, Kian saw the fury burning in those green eyes.

Mollified slightly that he wasn’t the only one having a difficult time allowing this farce to continue, Kian took a deep breath and tried to once more listen to the

proceedings without interrupting. It helped that the woman who spoke next had enough manners to introduce herself.

When the old man finished, a woman with skin the color of midnight argued for Kian. Instantly liking her, Kian glanced over at the other man, seeing he wasn't even paying any attention to the woman.

"First of all," the woman said. "For the sake of Kian, my name is Safara."

Kian instantly liked the woman. She was truly beautiful. Her curly hair cascaded down her back and was held away from her face with a large silver clip in the shape of a bird.

Safara pointed to the old man who was intent on getting Kian killed. "That is Kyden. I think since this session involves Kian, we need to introduce ourselves when we speak."

The others nodded in agreement. Kyden was the only one who didn't respond. He didn't even seem to be listening to anything Safara had to say.

"The reason we called you before the Council is we are concerned about your actions regarding the sharing of blood with Alec." Safara's tone was pleasant, yet uneasy at the same time.

When Kian open his mouth to explain, Safara raised her hand to stop him. "We are not saying what you did was wrong, but we have concerns."

This time, Kyden couldn't act like he didn't hear what was being said. For as frail as the man appeared, he still managed to jump up from his seat and slam his fist on the hard stone surface. "Not only were his actions wrong, he committed a crime. The human had no right to interfere with demon ways without our approval."

This time, Kian wasn't about to keep quiet. Not even when Alec tried to give him another warning squeeze. "No right?" he yelled in disbelief. "If you didn't want me to have any rights in your world, you should have left me in mine." Kian's body hummed with rage as he faced the men and women who thought it perfectly acceptable to play God. "What gave you the right to force me here? You act as if you are God but you are no better than I am."

Kyden's face was a mask of righteous indignation. "See?" Turning to the other Council members to make sure they'd heard his every word. "I told you we should have killed him from the start."

Kian stood there rooted to the spot at hearing the words spoken out loud. Even as disbelief descended to his very core, Kian could feel the rage rolling off Alec. The Sentinels that surrounded them went instantly on high alert with their hands going to the hilt of their swords.

Kyden was oblivious to all of this as he kept up his ranting. "It is not too late. I vote we kill this human." He'd curled his lips with disgust as he said the word human.

It was as if Mt. Vesuvius blew next to him. Alec roared his outrage. "Over my dead body," he told the Council in no uncertain terms.

Kian wasn't sure how he knew, but he could feel Alec was about to attack Kyden for suggesting killing his mate. Was this their connection at work? If so, he could understand why Alec had no trouble reading him. It was as if his thoughts were there, inside Kian's head.

But there was no time to understand it. If he didn't act, Alec would end up killing Kyden. Not good if they hoped to make it out of there alive.

Twisting, Kian stood before Alec with both hands holding onto him. The tick along

his jaw pulsed with rage. There was no doubt Kian had to do something quickly. So he did the only thing he could. Kian rose up on his tiptoes and kissed Alec.

Around them, all hell was breaking loose as the Sentinels moved to protect Kyden, not because they didn't want the old bastard to die but because they knew if Alec succeeded, they would be forced to execute one of their own for his crime.

Kyden started ranting about this all being Kian's fault. "See? Look how out of control Alec is because of this human. As I see it, they both need to be killed."

Ignoring it all, Kian's entire focus was on Alec. Their lips melted against each other the moment they touched. There was nothing but Alec for him in that moment. The rest of the world faded as his arms went around Kian as Alec pulled him tight against his hard body.

"Sentinels," Kyden yelled. "I order you to kill them both."

A growl erupted from Kian, low, deep, fierce. He hadn't known how he'd made the noise but when he turned to face Kyden, Kian felt satisfied as the old demon's eyes widened in fear. He was finally beginning to realize the danger Kian presented.

When Kyden abruptly sat back down without another word, Kian hadn't held back the grin of gratification that arced through him. But, as much as he approved of winning the battles of wills, Kian knew the war was far from over. The Council could still decide to vote with Kyden.

For several moments, silence descended throughout the room. It seemed they had reached some sort of stalemate. Until he heard Aticus chuckle. Kian scowled at him for making light of Kyden wanting to kill him.

Aticus didn't seem to care as he folded his hands in front of him and smiled. "Hello,

Kian. It is good to see you again.” The rest of the council turned questioning glances at him. “As I’ve already mentioned previously, I am what you might call the President of the demons.”

Kyden gave his own scowl and looked as if he wanted to argue that point but held his tongue. The other Council members nodded in agreement, although Kian noticed one or two others as unhappy about that fact as Kyden was.

“As such,” Aticus said as he glanced up and down the line of fellow members, daring them to argue. “I declare Kian not a threat. In fact, based on what I have seen, I would say Alec’s demon blood is starting to take hold.” Before any of the Council could disagree, Aticus added, “I declare you a demon.”

The moment Aticus slammed the gavel down, ending the ridiculous session, relief washed through Kian. His knees buckled, but as always, Alec’s arms were already around him holding Kian up. Even though Alec held him so tight he could hardly breathe, Kian didn’t care. It was over.

CHAPTER 3

“Kian and Alec.” Aticus stood, beckoning them to follow him. “I would like to see you in my chambers.”

All Kian wanted to do was go home and hold onto Alec. Hadn’t they been through enough? Then again, they owed Aticus. He’d been on their side from the beginning.

While they walked to his office, their friends were preparing a celebration for Kian and Alec. Touched at their thoughtfulness, he dreaded having to partake in a party. Was it wrong for him to just want to hide away with Alec for a day or two?

Aticus gestured to two chairs for them to sit on when they entered his office. He sat behind his desk opposite them. His office was very different from what Kian expected. He’d assumed the room would be opulent as was typical for a leader. Instead, the furniture was simple and functional.

The desk was made from stone, as was everything else in Tuklati. It was clean but smaller than the massive furniture in the main chamber; the chairs were comfortable, even cozy.

“I have to say I am very impressed with your courage,” Aticus admitted. A small frown pulled down on the corners of his mouth. “Although, I must apologize for all we have put you through since meeting Alec.” Aticus shrugged slightly. “Unfortunately, it had to be done.”

Turning his gaze on Alec for a moment, Aticus said regretfully, “To you, my boy, I

also apologize. As much as I wish you could have known Kian was chosen for you, it was important you not know.”

Understanding started to dawn on Kian. Aticus had known all along, but how? Turning back to him, Aticus smiled. “You were not the only one to be visited by our first Danara.”

Surprise rippled through the room at his statement. “You never were in any danger of being killed by our hands, my dear. Danara told me the importance you brought to our kind but warned me not to tell anyone. You two had to do it on your own.”

“But you let the Council debate Kian’s death.” Alec practically vibrated with rage.

There was no apology in Aticus’ gaze. “As I said. I had to let things play out. I assure you, Kian was never in any real danger from the Council. I would not have allowed it.”

Kian wasn’t so sure that was true. Not to mention, the Council hadn’t been the only danger he’d face since coming to live in Tuklati.

Aticus opened the top drawer of his desk and pulled out two books. Kian instantly recognized the covers. Danara’s other missing journals.

“How?” Kian was on alert. Danara had told him those journals were hidden by someone who wanted demons to return to the old ways. If Aticus had them did that mean... Kian looked up at Aticus, trying to judge if he was capable of what Danara had claimed.

Aticus actually smiled at Alec. “You know, he is as brave as our first Danara and Drakarn ever were.”

It was more of a statement than a question but Alec answered anyway, pride filling his voice. “Yes, I know.”

“Of course, it means he will be a handful.”

How dare he?

Alec chuckled a little. “You don’t have to tell me, sir.”

Whirling on Alec, Kian opened his mouth to tell Alec off but Aticus stopped him. “It was not meant as an insult so please do not take it as one.”

That was when he held out the journals for Kian to take. His hands shook as he reached out to take them. The moment his fingers closed over the leather, Kian felt a deep sense of peace flow through him. Clutching them close, Kian closed his eyes, knowing he’d done the right thing by becoming a demon.

“When I found out what you were up to in the archives, I had a search done of certain members of the Council.” Aticus held up his hand to stop Kian from asking the most obvious question. “Do not ask. I will not tell which member had them. Suffice it to say, the matter has been dealt with,” he assured.

“How did you know to look at one of the Council?” Alec asked.

The man seemed to always have a smile on his features as if he held the secret to happiness. “When one is in my position, it is important to know everything that goes on. Do you not agree?”

“So now what?” Kian was anxious to know how becoming a demon was supposed to change everything.

“Well, that is up to you. As I said, you are now a demon, so you will be allowed to live as we do, with a certain amount of freedom,” Aticus informed them.

“Danara said I would be the key to saving demons.” Kian didn’t really ask a question because he wasn’t sure what question to ask.

Standing, Aticus came around the desk, leaning back against it as he folded his arms across his chest. “Yes. That part is true. Knowing demons cannot live without humans will change everything.”

Sadness crept into Aticus’ expression and Kian went to him, hugging him as if that might make things better. When he pulled back, Aticus appeared grateful for the kindness.

“Each generation has been losing its humanity,” Aticus admitted. “Brant is the closest we have seen of our true demon selves. You have saved us, Kian. Without your sacrifice, we might never have known.”

The grief of what Brant had done was felt by them all. They would find Brant one day. But if things didn’t change, Brant was just the beginning.

As if shedding the depressing thoughts, Aticus pushed away from the desk and went to the door. With a broad smile and a twinkle in his eye, he opened it. “Now I understand there is to be a party in your honor and I, for one, do not want to miss it.”

Even though he wanted to go home with Alec instead of going to a party, Kian graciously went along. That didn’t mean he was going to forgo the desire to be held by his mate. Thankfully, even though there was lively music playing, Alec seemed just as content as Kian to move slowly. Their friends could gyrate to the beat but Kian was exactly where he belonged, in Alec’s arms. Even with all the noise, he would swear it was just the two of them there holding each other close.

“I don’t think I’ve ever been happier in my entire life,” Kian told him. He couldn’t help but smile when Alec’s lips brushed against the top of Kian’s head and tucked him in even tighter.

“Me too.” There was truth in his words, but Kian could still hear the hitch in his voice.

He pulled back enough to look up into those emerald eyes. “What’s wrong?”

“We still haven’t found Brant.” Worry filled Alec’s gaze with a healthy dose of stark fear.

Kian couldn’t blame him for his feelings. But he’d learned a lot about himself since meeting Alec, moving to a strange place, and going through hell to become a demon. Kian was strong. Much stronger than he’d ever imagined. Yes, Brant could try to kill him, but he wasn’t about to make it easy for the bully.

Kian placed a hand around the back of Alec’s neck and pulled him down until their lips just touched. “I know. But I’ve been to hell and back so I could love you, Alec. I’m not about to let Brant take that away from me.”

There was a flash of frustration in his eyes. “That’s just it, Kian.” Alec pressed their forehead’s together as he closed his eyes and let out a sigh. “Did you even once think what it would have done to me if you had died?”

There was so much misery in his voice that Kian felt guilty. He’d put Alec through a lot on a chance. It had to have killed him to know Kian might not survive as he went through the change.

Gently, Kian pressed their lips together. “Danara told me we were out of time. I’m not sure what she meant but the panic in her voice was real.” His voice pleaded with

Alec to understand. "I did what I thought I had to do."

Alec's grip on him tightened, plastering Kian to him. Their mouths met in a heated kiss.

"Ah-em."

They both groaned in dismay at the sound. They both turned to find Aticus standing next to them, his eyes on Kian.

A part of Kian wanted to smack the smug look he wore as he offered his hand. "Would you do me the honor?"

It was the last thing Kian had wanted to do at the moment, but he took it and gave Alec a look of regret. It took effort, but he finally managed to tear his gaze away from Alec. Annoyed at being interrupted, Kian glared at Aticus, who was grinning from ear to ear. "I do apologize for taking you away."

Kian didn't believe him for a moment. He might not know Aticus that well but Kian was learning he was an instigator. Resigned to his fate, he said, "I'm happy to dance with you, Aticus."

"Liar." Aticus chuckled. "There has been something about that boy since his birth. It is very unusual for a Sentinel to take in one of the children they find. That it had been Tarak, their leader, made it even more unusual."

"Why?" Kian wasn't sure why Aticus was saying any of this but he had to admit he was curious.

Shrugging slightly, Aticus said, "Honestly, I have no idea. I assumed it was difficult for them to choose one over the other." When Aticus' gaze landed on Tarak, who had

gone to talk with Alec, he said, “But not for Tarak. He came back with Alec and demanded the right to take him in.”

Kian had no clue what Aticus was trying to say. “So why did Tarak want Alec?”

There was a twinkle in Aticus’ eyes. “He never said. It was as if fate put Alec in the care of a Sentinel. Not just any Sentinel but the one that would be able to stand beside him.”

Kian’s steps faltered but Aticus kept him moving to the soft beat. “You think fate put Alec with Tarak so when he fell in love with me, Tarak would refuse to kill him or me.”

Nodding, Aticus was silent for several moments. The song ended and he placed Kian’s hand in the crook of his arm leading him back to Alec. Leaning down slightly, he whispered, “What you have done for us was courageous, but what you have done for Alec is so much more.”

They were nearly to Alec’s side. Feeling happy at his words, he said, “Maybe, but he has done so much more for me.”

Aticus slowed down his steps causing Kian to look up at him. His expression was solemn and full of regret. “For all you have sacrificed, you deserve to have your happily ever after but...” His eyes flicked from Kian to Alec and back again.

Waiting for the words he knew Aticus would say but didn’t want to, Kian held his breath. “You are the key, the chosen one. You have saved us from losing our humanity but more is to come sooner than you think.”

Bowing over Kian’s hand, Aticus kissed the back of it before handing him over to Alec. Seeing his expression, Alec was concerned. “Kian, what’s wrong?”

He shook his head, refusing to give into the fear that Aticus's words had caused. Kian gave Alec a brilliant smile. "Nothing. Aticus was just regaling me with some of your childhood exploits."

That launched Tarak into a series of stories from when Alec was growing up. Kian felt a twinge of guilt at lying to Alec but whatever was to transpire would happen whether they worried about it or not. Right now, he was determined to enjoy the time they had together.

The future could wait. Right now, Kian was right where he wanted to be. In Alec's arms. That was all that mattered.

CHAPTER 4

Strings of lights twinkled throughout the eleventh level of Tuklati giving the faux twilight setting a festive atmosphere. This was Kian's favorite place in the city. The one floor that mimicked the outdoors.

It wasn't perfect, as the lights that were used didn't feel the same as the sun. But between astroturf, trees and flowers, they helped to give the area a sense of being outdoors instead of inside a mountain. Kian gave a small shake of his head that this had become his life. It was difficult to imagine life before meeting Alec.

Not once had Kian considered he'd meet a man, fall in love, and end up forced to live in a hidden city that could rival any big city with one tiny exception, it was under a mountain. Then again, not in a million years would Kian have imagined Tuklati was exactly where he was supposed to be, or that he was meant to become something other than human.

Until he'd met Alec, he didn't even know there were other beings. Now, Kian was one. A demon. No matter how hard he tried to wrap his mind around that he was no longer an ordinary human, Kian felt he was in some sort of dream. Or maybe nightmare, considering he'd just come from a Council meeting to discuss killing him for daring to save the demon race.

"Kian." A beautiful dark skinned woman who had become his best friend since arriving in this strange city, raced up to Kian and threw her slim, yet strong arms around him. "Congratulations."

Kian couldn't contain the sarcasm that bubbled up. "Are you congratulating me for risking my life to save the demon race or for beating the death sentence the Council wanted to impose for daring to become a demon?"

Bitter? Yep.

Alec's arm went around Kian's waist, pulling him back against his chest as if the mention of his near death had triggered his constant need to protect Kian. Instantly, he found his body relaxing into that loving embrace.

"You know I never would have allowed the Council to kill you," Alec murmured reassuringly but Kian didn't miss the slight tremble in his voice that said he wasn't so sure he would have been able to stop them.

Oh, Kian had no doubt, Alec would have killed anyone who had tried, but as good as Alec was, there were only so many men he could face and still win. Then again, now that Kian was a demon, he gladly would have fought by Alec's side.

Aira gave an exasperated sigh. "You know, we really need to work on your negativity."

Kian barked out a laugh. "Really? Because I was thinking not having all of Tuklati out to kill me would solve the problem, but you know, sure, we can try your way."

"You are such a drama queen." Aira grabbed his hand and started pulling Kian toward a small group of people a few feet away. "Now come on. There are some people who are dying to meet you."

"Said the spider to the fly." That might have been a bit unfair, but Kian hadn't been able to stop the words from spilling out.

Alec chuckled, sending Kian's pulse to racing. "Not to worry, my heart, I'll always be there to save you." Alec had pitched his voice low so only he would hear those words.

"If that were true we would be home, having our own celebration instead of here with all these people." Kian said pointedly.

"Alec," Tarak called as he walked through the crowd towards them.

Both of them groaned.

"Ten minutes," Alec growled in his ear. "Then we leave, no matter what."

Kian could definitely get on board with that. He barely managed to nod before Aira had once more grabbed his hand to propel Kian into the small crowd that had gathered to meet him.

Even though he appreciated the support of those who had joined the celebration, Kian only wanted time alone with Alec. Why couldn't the others understand that?

As if sensing Kian's thoughts, Alec's eyes found his across the room. Disengaging himself from the group Tarak and Alec were talking with, he started to make his way toward Kian. The fluttering in Kian's stomach intensified by the smoldering look in those emerald eyes. But before he could get to Kian, he was swallowed up by another group wanting to congratulate Alec. Damn it.

Resigned to not getting his wish, Kian kept a smile plastered on his face as more and more people came up to him. It was becoming overwhelming as they were all introducing themselves. Kian was terrible with names. There was no way he'd ever be able to remember all of them.

He appreciated their kindness, but to be honest, he just wanted to be alone with Alec. Kian was beginning to lose patience and was about to tell them all to leave him alone, when he felt someone tap his shoulder.

Visola stood there looking as if she'd rather be anywhere else. Great, what did she want?

The only thing that stopped Kian from telling her to get lost was the pleading in her gaze. "Um, Kian, I just wanted to say I'm sorry for the way I treated you. There is no excuse except that I was afraid of what you might do."

Kian didn't want to believe the apology. To be honest, after nearly being killed by Visola – twice – he would have been perfectly happy to never talk with her again. If only there weren't at least a hundred pair of eyes on him waiting to see what Kian would do.

Keeping his stance rigid, Kian prayed his dislike of Visola didn't show. Visola might have appeared sincere but that didn't erase what she'd done. The woman had tried to push Kian down a flight of stairs. When that hadn't worked, Visola challenged Kian to a fight where Visola cheated, nearly succeeding in finishing Kian off.

Once more, Kian had been saved when the Sentinels stopped Visola from killing him. Kian had no reason to trust her but also didn't want those watching them, which seemed to be all of Tuklati, to think he was vindictive.

Rushing to get everything out, Visola continued to apologize. "See my parents truly believed you were a witch and they convinced me you were out to destroy us." Shrugging a little, she faltered. "Well, I guess, maybe that doesn't – I mean..." Visola took a deep breath to steady her nerves. "I don't expect you to forgive me but I just wanted you to know I'm sorry."

Standing there waiting for Kian's response, Visola glanced around at the crowd that wasn't even trying to hide that they were listening to them. There was no way Kian couldn't forgive her and still keep the respect of those watching.

Kian resigned himself to forgiving this woman who tried to hurt him, at least publicly. "I forgive you, Visola." He wasn't giving anything more than that.

Kian was startled when Visola clapped her hands together as if she were actually happy. "Great. Thank you so much." When she threw her arms around Kian, it took every bit of control Kian had not to push her away. "You have no idea how bad I felt about how mean I was, especially when you risked your life to become a demon."

As much as he hated to admit it, Visola's happiness was infectious and Kian found his resolve to hate the girl melting away. He even managed a smile, although he still wasn't sure how sincere Visola truly was.

Grabbing Kian's arm, Visola asked, "Would you mind meeting my fiancé? He's been wanting to meet you but because of me, he's too afraid of what Alec would say. But now that you've forgiven me..." She didn't finish her thought as she started dragging Kian through the crowd.

Not really wanting to go with her but not seeing other options at this point, Kian let himself be pulled along. Glancing over his shoulder, Kian looked for Alec. Not seeing him, Kian reluctantly followed Visola.

"My fiancé is going to be so happy to see you again. He has been trying to get you alone for quite some time now, but you were always surrounded by Sentinels or those silly friends of Alec." Chatting along, Visola never slowed down as she lead Kian to an area removed from celebration.

Wait a minute, what did Visola just say? Confused, Kian replayed the words, sure

there was a reason for the sudden fear that snaked its way into his body. It wasn't until Visola came to an abrupt stop that Kian understood his mistake in thinking, even for a moment, that Visola meant him no harm.

"Kian, meet my fiancé, Brant," Visola said way too gleefully.

"Hello, Kian. It was nice of you to make this easy for me." Brant's sneer froze the blood in Kian's veins.

Glancing at Visola in disbelief, Kian wasn't surprised to see she wore a triumphant smile. "Yeah, tell me about it," she cackled. "I should win one of those silly awards you humans give for acting." Turning to Brant, Visola smiled smugly. "I told you I could fool him."

The gleam in his eye was dangerous. "Yes, you did, my pet. But now you are nothing more than a liability."

Confusion shone on Visola's face even as Brant's sword severed her head. Bone chilling fear encompassed Kian as he watched. The need to run had his body starting to shift into molecules in order to get out of there quickly.

"No, you don't." Brant stuck a needle in Kian's arm before he'd been able to disappear.

He tried to scream, but nothing came out of Kian's mouth. Nor would his body obey the need to get away. Darkness descended as Brant lifted Kian into his arms.

Kian's mind reached out to touch Alec's but even that didn't work. Just as blackness took him under, he heard Brant's voice explain, "I don't normally drug my victims, but a little birdie told me Alec can feel your fear and I'm just not ready for him to come find you."

That was scary enough to hear. But it was Brant's final word that had true terror taking hold.

“Yet.”

CHAPTER 5

Alec stood there accepting congratulations from well-wishers, impatiently waiting to get Kian alone. Too much had happened in the past week, and his need to touch his mate was growing inside him as he searched the room for him.

Spotting him heading around corner of the elementary school with Visola alarmed Alec greatly, but he sensed Kian wasn't concerned. Still, what was Visola up to? Deciding to follow them, he excused himself from the current group, not stopping for anyone else.

This day couldn't have gone any better considering Kian was now like him, a demon. The demon leaders, Aticus and Gaius, Alec's grandfather, would start going through the rest of the first demon queen, Danara's, journals to see what this would mean for them.

It had been one of those journals that told them Kian was the Chosen One, the one human of all people Alec was destined to find to save the demon race. It hadn't been easy to reach this point but Alec was finally ready to marry Kian and have some peace and quiet.

Smiling as he rounded the same corner he saw Kian and Visola take, Alec decided this would be a good time to make their escape from the party. He had every intention of asking his mate to marry him but he wanted to get Kian alone when he did it.

His heart raced as all his senses came to the forefront as the feeling of something not being right slammed into him. Icy cold fingers spread through him for a brief

moment. He would swear he'd heard Kian try to scream his name, but it was cut off.

Kian!

His senses reached out to his mate trying to understand what was happening, but he felt nothing. Running down the side of the school, he turned the corner only to freeze in his tracks. A body lay at his feet, with Visola's severed head nearby.

Dread sank into every cell of his body as he looked around for Kian. A glint of metal caught his eye on the ground. His heart stopped when he bent over to see a piece of gold ribbon from Kian's shirt tied to his mother's necklace. The one Brant had kept as a trophy.

Tarak must have followed him into the alley for he was suddenly there staring in disbelief at Visola's decapitated body. Then his father's gaze lifted to find Alec holding a ribbon. He had no idea what had happened, but the confusion and anger on Alec's face was enough to alert Tarak he wasn't going to like Alec's answer to his question. "Alec, what is that?"

Alec's voice was hollow as his brain tried to process what all this meant. His instincts were screaming at him even as his heart tried to deny what he was seeing. "It's part of Kian's shirt on his mother's necklace." Saying it opened the gates of hell for him.

The rage came on swiftly and completely unexpectedly. Even if Alec had been able to control the fury that swept through him, it had come on too suddenly to have any shot of stopping it. The ground started shaking as fire erupted all around them. Tarak jumped back from the flames even as he gripped the wall of the school in an attempt to stay upright.

Too engrossed in his own pain, Alec could barely make out the screams coming from within the city when stones started to crack along the buildings. Tarak begged him to

stop but Alec was lost to the hole that had formed when his heart had been ripped from his chest.

His whole being was reaching out trying to feel Kian but there was nothing. Nothing. The trembling ground intensified, the wind whipped the fire all around him. No one was safe from his wrath. Not in Tuklati, nor miles away, as he forced his will upon the elements to find Kian.

Vaguely, he knew the man who'd raised him was stumbling in an effort to reach Alec. Aira, who'd come running at the first trembling, was no longer able to stand. Not even her cries as she lay in a heap on the ground got through to Alec.

All around them Tuklati was coming apart – stones started to fall, eventually whole buildings collapsed, fire raged throughout, debris flew everywhere as the wind tore through the streets.

Above them the mountains shook, the earthquake would be said to be a 9.0. The strongest earthquake ever felt in the Appalachian Mountains shook cities and towns as far east as the Atlantic Ocean and as far west as Nashville, Tennessee. A fire ravaged thousands of acres of forest while winds whipping from the east coast swept into the Midwest tearing apart homes, uprooting trees as far away as Kansas.

The United States looked like a war zone before Alec fell to his knees in despair. His hand was tightly wrapped around the ribbon from Kian's shirt as he desperately tried to connect to his mate.

Without needing to be told, the Sentinels went into action with little hope of repairing the damage Alec had created. Tarak reached out to Alec tentatively. "Son, you have to stay in control."

"Don't tell me what I have to do," Alec spat out. "Brant took the love of my life."

The grief that was consuming Alec could be heard in his voice. “Do you have any idea what he is going to do to Kian?”

Tarak was trying to find the words to help his son. “You do not know what -.”

Fury erupted within Alec once more. The ground started to quake again in response. “I saw what he did to Kian’s mother.” Pain devoured Alec as the elements reacted by tearing another path through Tuklati before terrorizing the United States another time. “Brant is going to take him somewhere I can’t get to in time. Then he’s going to tear Kian apart, making sure I feel every minute of it.”

Those words stopped Tarak. Tarak may have wished to deny what Alec said, but there was no denying he was likely correct. “Maybe,” Tarak conceded. “But if you continue to destroy the world, it will make it that much harder to stay hidden from humans.”

Laughing cruelly, Alec asked, “What do I care about the humans?”

“Because the last thing we need are the humans after us while we’re trying to find Kian.” Tarak was right, of course, but Alec wasn’t sure he was capable of reason at the moment. At least his father hadn’t tried to lecture him about remaining hidden from the humans. For if Alec lost Kian, he would destroy every living thing on earth to ensure Brant died for his sins.

As hard as it was to admit, if Alec had any hope of finding Kian, he needed to figure out a way to get control of the turbulent emotions coursing through him. His body tensed as he fought the consuming need to destroy everything in his path until the wind died down and the ground no longer shuddered beneath his feet.

Tarak let out a harsh, relieved breath. “We need to get the other Sentinels together to come up with a plan for finding them both.”

Glad to have someone there with a clear head, Alec nodded in agreement. Guilt swamped him when his gaze fell on Aira, who was still huddled on the ground as if afraid to try and stand once more.

Alec rushed to her side. "I'm sorry..." he started but Aira held up her hand to stop him.

"Don't apologize." She placed a hand on his arm in comfort. "Kian's a demon now. He won't be easy for Brant to kill," his sister assured him. Then her grey eyes pinned his with determination. "Just promise me you'll find Kian."

That was easy. "There is nothing that will stop me from finding Kian and killing Brant," Alec vowed. He would find his mate if he had to tear apart this Earth to do it.

He might have told Kian about wanting to burn down the world if Alec lost him, but he'd never been certain that was even possible. Now, thanks to Brant, it was something he knew he was more than capable of doing and Alec would gladly destroy a world that had been trying to hurt his mate since Kian had been born.

CHAPTER 6

“Kavi, it’s been weeks. Don’t you think it’s time to stop obsessing over Kian? He did assure us it had been his choice to leave.” Jace was usually pretty good about keeping the frustration from his voice, but Kavi could hear it clearly this time. “Why can’t you just accept it?” Jace asked for the hundredth time since Kian had visited them.

That was just one of the many differences between Kavi and his roommates. Kavi didn’t have a problem showing his annoyance. “Don’t you think it’s strange they moved to some remote place in Alaska where we have no way to get in contact with him?” Kavi spoke to Jace and Lynwood as if he were talking to children, slow with a large dose of ‘duh’ in his tone.

The three of them were at the cafeteria Kian used to work at in the Presidential Complex on the grounds of the University of Tennessee where they all went to school. Kavi had heard from the private detective he’d hired to find Kian or Alec, the man he’d run off with. As usual, the private detective hadn’t found a thing.

“No,” Jace told him emphatically, ignoring the way Kavi was treating him and Lynwood.

Throwing his arms in the air, Kavi was beginning to wonder why he’d bothered to talk to them about it. Who was he kidding? They were all he had. His boyfriend, Brandon, was not only tired of his constantly obsessing about Kian, but he was starting to train for the NFL combine in hopes of being drafted.

That left his only other friends. Two people who couldn’t ignore him since they lived

in the house Kavi's parents had bought and allowed them to live rent free. Not that they didn't try to avoid him any chance they got, but sooner or later, they always returned to the house.

If he wasn't careful, Kavi would find himself with no boyfriend and no friends. He just couldn't ignore the feeling in his gut and it was telling Kavi something was wrong with Kian and Alec's story. If only he could find proof.

"Look, sugga, I get that you miss Kian." Lynwood waved a finger between himself and Jace. "We miss him too, but that doesn't mean he didn't want to leave."

Kavi knew that. He did. But there had been something in Kian's stiff posture that screamed at Kavi he wasn't as happy as he claimed. Plus, he'd spent more time with Kian and Kavi didn't believe for a second that one day his friend decided to give up on his dreams.

"No." Kavi voice had been loud enough to attract onlookers from the surrounding tables. Taking a deep breath, he got control of his emotions. "There is no way Kian would have left school on his own. He'd been too determined to get that degree so he wouldn't have to depend on anyone ever again."

Jace quirked an eyebrow. "Love makes us do crazy things and Kian was head over heels in love with Alec."

As much as Kavi hated to admit it, Jace was right. When it came to Alec, nothing Kian did made a lot of sense, especially after he'd left him devastated just before winter break. "That's another thing. Why did Alec leave only to come back?"

A dreamy smile lifted Jace's lips. "Because he was in love with Kian."

Lynwood snorted and gave a dramatic eye roll. "Oh please. If he loved Kian so much,

why did he leave in the first place? Face it, sugga, Kavi has a point.” Before Kavi could get too smug, Lynwood pointed a finger at Kavi and said, “But that doesn’t mean Kian didn’t leave of his own free will. You need to drop this before it drives you even more crazy, sugga.”

That wasn’t what Kavi wanted to hear. Then again, anything but the location of where Kian was, wouldn’t satisfy him.

Crumbling the wrapper around his half-eaten sandwich, Kavi stood up from the table. “I have to get to class. You two coming?”

Lynwood stood up and picked up his food tray. “Yeah, I’m late for a study group. Physics is kicking my butt and I need all the help I can get.”

Jace remained seated. “I’m meeting some friends here in a few minutes. I’ll see you both later.”

Kavi and Lynwood made their way to one of the trashcans near the door to dump their wrappers.

“Do you really think Kian is okay?” Kavi needed to hear Lynwood confirm Kian was fine, especially since Kavi had spent a ton of money and time to find Kian, only to come up with nothing.

After a terrible winter break at home with Kavi’s parents basically ignoring him, he had been devastated to come back to school to find Kian had disappeared. He’d done everything possible to try and find his best friend.

First, he’d gone to the cops, but they’d given him some bullshit excuse about how many freshmen dropped out of school. It had taken persistence and a little browbeating but he’d managed to finally get the police to file a missing person’s

report, not that it had done any good.

So Kavi had hired a private investigator to find Kian. He'd even given the guy Alec's name since Kian claimed he was with his boyfriend.

That was when Kavi knew something was wrong. The P.I., Kenny Black, couldn't find anything on Alec Stone. Sure, there was paperwork from the high school he'd attended and the address where he'd grown up, but when Kenny visited those places, no one had ever heard of the guy. The P.I. had even looked through the yearbooks for the past ten years but hadn't found anything on an Alec Stone.

When Alec had shown up to let Kavi know Kian had moved with him to the wilds of Alaska, he refused to believe him. Kavi had even confronted Alec about what Kenny had found, or rather hadn't found.

Even with the information Kavi had given Kenny about Alaska, there was still nothing. He'd found the remote village Alec claimed to have taken Kian but nothing more. The place was so remote and small they didn't have the internet or any way for Kenny to see if Alec and Kian really lived there, short of going there himself. He'd told Kavi there wasn't enough money in the world to make him do that as the trip would take weeks, since the only way to get there was dog sled that time of year.

Then out of the blue, Alec showed up with Kian in tow. Kavi hadn't been fooled by his best friend's act. He could tell Kian was lying but nothing Kavi said would convince Kian to stay.

Not one to give up, he found someone willing to go to Alaska and find out if Kian was really there. This morning, the man confirmed he wasn't there.

When they'd stepped out into still cool April air, Lynwood answered the question. "Honestly? Yeah, I think he's fine. Kian is strong. A fighter. No way would he ever

let anyone force into something he didn't want to do."

Kavi wasn't so sure of that considering how often Kian had done exactly that when Kavi got it into his head to do something his best friend had been reluctant to participate in. Then again, when he truly thought about it, if Kian really couldn't go because of an upcoming test, nothing Kavi said or did changed his mind.

Maybe Kian had secretly wanted to be a part of the crowd but hadn't been sure how to go about doing it without Kavi dragging him along.

"I know you and I don't always see eye to eye." That was the understatement of the year, but Kavi didn't comment as Lynwood continued. "But I know how concerned you are for Kian."

Lynwood placed a hand on Kavi's arm, stopping him as they stood in the middle of the open quad. "Just know, both Jace and I are here for you. We just want to make sure you don't become consumed with finding Kian. You're our friend, too, and we want to make sure you're okay."

Kavi was surprised by Lynwood's statement. He hadn't been kidding about them not seeing eye to eye, so it was nice to know Lynwood had his back. Touched, Kavi found himself doing the one thing he'd never imagined he'd ever do, he hugged Lynwood.

"Thanks," Kavi whispered fiercely.

The ground beneath their feet trembled. Shocked, they jerked apart to stare at the sidewalk as if it would offer up a reason for what happened. Within seconds, the trembling turned violent and Kavi grabbed Lynwood in hopes of staying upright.

He felt Lynwood hold on just as tightly, but it did little good. They hadn't managed to

stay on their feet for more than a minute before they both went down just like about everyone else in the quad.

In the distance, Kavi heard someone yell, “Earthquake,” but that didn’t make sense. This was Tennessee, not California. It wasn’t unheard of to have an earthquake in the area, but as several cracks formed in the ground and a light pole came crashing to the ground, Kavi didn’t think they typically were that strong.

Too bad it hadn’t stopped there. For what happened next could have come straight out of one of those earth disaster movies.

What had started out as trembling had become violent shaking but that was nothing compared to watching the ground literally roll in crashing waves before Kavi’s eyes. He curled up into a ball with his hands clasped over his head, pressed up against Lynwood.

It was the first time in his life that he welcomed the prayers Lynwood rattled off, one after another. Kavi wasn’t exactly religious, but this seemed as good as any time to start praying and no one was more qualified than Lynwood.

All too soon, Lynwood’s voice was lost in the screams and loud cracks as fissures appeared in the buildings surrounding them. But all of that was drowned out as one building after another came crashing down. Some were nothing more than rubble, while others only partially lay in ruins.

Still, the ground didn’t stop its jarring quaking.

Kavi had never been so scared in all his life. That was until the wind started to blow, turning the pieces of the destruction into projectiles that slammed into those out in the open.

Horror filled Kavi as he watched a steel pipe from one of the lamp posts get picked up by a strong gust of wind and head right for them. There was nothing he could do. Movement had been impossible since they'd fallen under the constant onslaught of the earth undulating beneath them, causing everyone around them to be practically pinned in place.

Pain and relief exploded within him when the length of steel twisted just enough to hit Kavi but not impale him. It hurt like a bitch but if the sharp ragged steel had skewered his body, Kavi would have been dead.

Both he and Lynwood did their best to curl into each other and make themselves even smaller. Then Lynwood let out a hoarse shout of pain. Kavi tried to make sure her friend wasn't too seriously hurt, but he couldn't lift his head to see what happened.

Lynwood squeezed his hand in reassurance, giving Kavi a moment of relief. It didn't mean Lynwood wasn't hurt, but at least he was alive.

Never before had Kavi been so terrified, especially since the nightmare didn't seem to want to end. Screeching could be heard as metal and glass came apart and more buildings fell.

There was no relief from the pounding wind and debris hitting them. All they could do was huddle together and protect their bodies as much as possible.

With the wind as fierce as it was, Kavi kept his eyes closed. Although, if he were completely honest, he was kind of glad it was impossible to keep them open for he didn't want to see the death and destruction occurring all around them.

The only thing that mattered was getting out of this alive.

If only he could close his ears too, for the screams that came on the gusts of winds

tore at his heart. There would be many who wouldn't survive. At that point, Kavi wasn't so sure he wouldn't be one of them.

After what felt like hours, the wind abated and the ground dulled back to the trembling that had started their nightmare. All around him, the sounds of crying, screams, and groans of pain could be heard, making him sick. The last thing Kavi wanted to do was open his eyes but he'd prided himself of being a strong, resilient man and Kavi wasn't about to start hiding anytime soon.

"Lynwood?" He might not know a lot about first aid, but Kavi knew moving someone who'd been injured could be detrimental. It wasn't more than a whimper, but at least Lynwood made a sound to indicate he was still alive.

Slowly sitting up, which wasn't easy since the shaking hadn't stopped, just lessened, Kavi did his best to exam Lynwood without moving him. There was a large bump forming on Lynwood's forehead along with several cuts on his arms and back.

Lynwood's lashes blinked a few times before fully opening his eyes. "What happened?" he croaked out.

Kavi glanced around. The images that greeted him would be burned in his brain forever. Bodies littered the quad with only a few moving. The Presidential Complex they'd just come out of was only half standing. A large portion, including the cafeteria they'd been eating in, was nothing more than rubble.

"Jace," Kavi screamed as he tried to get to his feet to find their friend. But, as if to prove how foolish he'd been to think that it was almost over, the ground once more rolled beneath them and the nightmare started once more.

"Please, let me survive," he prayed over and over again as Kavi inched his way back to Lynwood, covering his friend as much as possible from any more harm.

CHAPTER 7

“Sir, we’re getting reports of a devastating earth...” Chief of Staff Jackson Pierce had burst into the Oval Office without knocking with panic in his eyes. But he never finished what he was saying as the ground beneath their feet rolled, pitching those in the room to the floor in a heap.

Daniel Burrows was the most powerful man in the world. Sometimes he forgot that was a political distinction, not a physical one. It was moments like these that life humbled him by reminding him just how little power he really had. For as hard as he and the others in the room tried, getting back up on their feet was an impossibility, even when a crack raced along the length of the room and up the outside wall.

National Security Advisor, Charles Lutz, shouted, “What’s going on?”

The doors slammed open from two directions as Daniel’s secret service detail barged in, stumbling as they somehow forced themselves to remain mostly upright to swarm around the President. “We have to get you out of here, Mr. President,” Lukas Hunt, the head of his security detail, shouted.

Daniel glared at Lukas for daring to stand on his feet no matter how dramatically the ground bucked beneath them. “How are you still standing?” Even the other men who made up his detail were stumbling around as they desperately tried to maintain remaining on their feet, which often ended with them having to take a knee to regain their balance before pushing forward once again.

Lukas grinned at him. “Not sure what you’re talking about, sir.”

“Bastard,” Daniel grumbled even as Lukas lifted him up and threw him over his shoulder in a fireman’s carry. “Is this really necessary?” he shouted at Lukas as they ran out the doors leading to the portico. “I’m the President of the United States, not a sack of fucking potatoes.”

Lukas snorted, which Daniel only just barely heard over the winds that were whipping around them. “Sir, if I thought for a moment you had any chance of standing, or that my men could help to keep you upright without falling themselves, I would gladly have kept you on your feet. Unfortunately, we only have minutes before our window to get you out of here closes.”

Daniel had no idea what Lukas meant by that, but he trusted Lukas. There was nothing more important to Lukas than protecting the President of the United States. He took his job seriously and would do whatever it took to ensure Daniel survived whatever was happening.

From his vantage point over Lukas’s shoulder, Daniel saw his Chief of Staff and Security Advisor being ushered as well as those the rest of the security detail could manage. They headed straight to the lawn where Marine One was just landing.

The moment the helicopter landed, Lukas tossed him inside. “Buckle up, Mr. President. This is going to be a bumpy ride.” Lukas climbed in behind him and gave the order to lift off, even as a second helicopter hovered nearby to land for the others.

Daniel had just managed to click the seatbelt in place when Marine One lifted off, pitching wildly by the strong winds that buffeted the aircraft.

“Hold on, sir,” the pilot called over the headphones that Daniel slipped on. “The winds are picking up speed.”

Daniel turned to Lukas, who was watching the ground, most likely to see if the others

made it to the second helicopter. “Why are we flying in this instead of going to the bunker?”

“The entrance to the bunker was crushed within seconds of the first tremble.” Lukas shook his head as if he couldn’t believe it either. “Even if we could have gotten you there, we couldn’t be sure it would have held.”

That was impossible. “But it was built to withstand a bomb.”

Lukas’s steady gaze held his for a moment before he said. “That might be true, but from the reports coming in, this earthquake is the strongest the world has ever known. There was no way to know if the bunker could withstand the pressure of what’s happening underground.”

Daniel had a million questions but a strong gust of wind tilted the helicopter, nearly turning it over. Bells and alarms were blaring from the controls as the pilot and copilot fought to keep it upright.

Twenty minutes later, they had made it past the worst of the winds and were heading west. “Sir, I have General McKnight from Pacific Command on the line,” the copilot said.

“Mr. President, are you okay?” General McKnight asked.

The helicopter pitched to the right as another strong wind blasted them, but the pilot was able to get things under control relatively quickly. Daniel had never been so scared. They might have gotten through the worst of the weather, but they weren’t out of the woods yet.

But as terrified as he was, he had a country to run. With the same determination that had won him the election, he forced his fears down and said, “Yes, General. We

aren't completely out of the bad weather, but my pilots are the best in the world and I have every confidence they will overcome all that Mother Nature has to throw at us."

"That's just it, sir." There was a hesitation in the General's voice as if he were afraid to tell Daniel whatever was on his mind.

"Spit it out, General."

There was a pause before General McKnight sighed and said, "We're not sure this has anything to do with Mother Nature, sir."

"What is that supposed to mean?" There were reports of technology that could create weather. Hell, the United States had dabbled in it on more than one occasion, but this went way beyond anything they'd ever been able to generate.

"Nothing about the earthquake is making sense and the winds and fires that are spreading across the county don't correlate with an earthquake." As if to prove the General was right, the winds suddenly disappeared almost as if someone had flipped a switch and turned them off.

The tension that had taken hold of Daniel from the moment he'd tumbled to the floor in the Oval Office, seeped from his body as that fear of not surviving eased. "What's going on, General McKnight?"

"Sir, we don't know. The earthquakes stopped for the most part, although there are still some residual tremors. The wind has stopped altogether and the fires that were scorching a path from the Smoky Mountains west toward the Mississippi have also diminished. There are still a few flames, but it's like someone put the majority of them out just as suddenly as they had begun."

The general was right. Nothing about what happened could possibly be natural. "Any

ideas on who might have caused this?”

“Shit. Sorry, sir,” the general apologized for swearing.

Daniel ignored the apology. He didn’t have time for niceties, not if he was going to reassure the country. Something he wasn’t sure they could do if they had been attacked by a country with the power to control Mother Nature. “Spill it, General.”

“That quake spurred a tsunami in the Atlantic. We need to put out warnings, not just to our coast, but the European coast.”

Daniel closed his eyes as he damn well knew there was no way they’d be able to evacuate the major cities along the East Coast. “How long do we have?”

“Twenty minutes,” General McKnight told him.

“Get the warnings out. As soon as we land, I want a sit rep.” General McKnight assured Daniel he would be ready.

Daniel then spoke to the pilot. “How long before we land?”

It was Lukas who answered. “About thirty minutes, sir. Air Force One was able to take off just before a fissure opened up along the runway at Andrews. They were lucky to get out when they did. Unfortunately, many airports Air Force One could land at suffered the same type of damage or are being forced to take planes that had been diverted from those damaged airports.”

It wasn’t what Daniel wanted to hear, but he also wasn’t surprised.

“We’ll head to Wright Patterson Air Force Base in Ohio before taking you to a safe location,” Lukas informed him.

Daniel knew that meant the bunker within the Rocky Mountains. It was one of the safest places on earth if they were under attack. Then again, if Lukas had been right about the bunker under the White House possibly not holding during the massive earthquakes, Daniel wasn't sure there was such a thing as a safe location.

"Fine." Not that it was. He needed to be with his security council to deal with this disaster, but there was no point in worrying about it. He'd have to settle for video conferences or using a phone when video wasn't possible.

He reached over and turned on the monitor to contact his Chief of Staff and National Security Advisor in the helicopter that was now flying close enough for Daniel to see out the window. While he waited for someone to pick up, he also flipped the switch to start the onboard screen that streamed three of the major networks.

The U.S. government may be great at gathering information, but they tended to keep things they couldn't corroborate to themselves. The news didn't have that problem. They would say just about anything in order to be the first to report.

Usually, it was nothing more than conjecture, but in his years of politics, Daniel had found there was often a nugget of truth in their far-fetched theories. All three screens were currently showing the devastation as vans from local stations drove through the areas hardest hit.

"Sir, I'm glad to see you made it." Jackson Pierce's features looked tense as he stared into the computer screen. "We are getting reports that this wasn't natural."

He didn't have time to repeat what he already knew. "I've already been told that. What do we know about the tsunami headed for the coast?"

There was a long pause as Jackson glanced to the side, most likely to read another update being sent to him. When his gaze returned, there was fear in their depths. "The

data being sent indicates the wave that will hit the coast is catastrophic.”

Daniel’s patience wasn’t with him at the moment as he barked out, “Numbers, Jackson. What kind of damage, how far will it extend and more important, what are we looking at for casualties?”

Charles Lutz appeared on the screen. “I’m patching in several of the others, sir.”

The bank of screens in front of Daniel lit up to show eight men and women who led the FBI, NSA, CIA, along with one general from the Pentagon, who stood next to a lieutenant, the name of whom Daniel couldn’t remember. There was also his Vice President, Secretary of State and Homeland Security.

“General Rose, what can you tell me about the tsunami?” There was no time for niceties, so he didn’t bother with them. He needed answers and quickly if they were going to save as many people as possible.

Somber eyes stared back at him from the screen. “Sir, the news isn’t good.” A satellite image replaced all the faces that had been on the screens before him. The scene was that of the ocean with what appeared to be two bumps of water, which Daniel assumed was the tsunami. One headed for the East Coast of North America and parts of Central America, while the other headed for Europe.

Except, instead of two colored lines appearing where those bumps were, eight lines appeared on the screen. Two slashed along the area Daniel had been staring at, but six other lines also cut across the screen. Two were horizontal, while the others were all vertical.

It was the Lieutenant who spoke as he pointed to the line along the bottom of the screen. “This one, we aren’t too concerned about as it is heading south and will hit Antarctica.”

Then he pointed to the horizontal line at the top. “This one will impact Iceland, Greenland, and parts of Canada. Again, we have put out warnings and since they have a decent timeline before it gets to them, there shouldn’t be much loss of life.”

All six vertical lines were then circled together. “It is these that will cause the most damage. Europe has more time and already started evacuations, so their casualties will be much lower, but the United States just doesn’t have enough time.”

“What are you talking about?” Daniel shouted. “I was told there was a twenty minute warning. We should be able to evacuate a large number of citizens in that amount of time.”

“If the earthquake hadn’t been so strong, that might have been true, Mr. President.” In red, a line was drawn from Maine, down to Florida. The line cut through the middle of most of the eastern states, but with Florida the line went into the Gulf of Mexico. “But the sheer strength that caused this tsunami is bigger than anything humanity has ever known.”

Daniel stared in horror at the map before him. “Lieutenant, what exactly are you saying?”

A heavy sigh could be heard before the lieutenant answered. “Mr. President, I’m saying the entire east coast will be completely lost. There isn’t time to evacuate, especially in areas that received damage from the quake, and I’m afraid anyone in its path will die.”

CHAPTER 8

Kian winced as his mind fought through the cloud that surrounded it, trying to pull him back from the blackness just below the surface. Something in his gut told him to fight it but the battle to do so quickly drained his already weakened state.

Concentrating, Kian's mind paid attention to each part of his body for injury. What he did notice was he was lying down on something hard, rough, and cold. With Herculean effort, he finally forced his lids to crack open. At first, he might have imagined opening them as darkness greeted him.

Slowly, breathing in and out, he lay there just listening for any sounds. Still nothing.

Letting out a small groan, he decided sleep was much easier to deal with than this. A part laugh and moan spilled softly from his lips, for all Kian knew, he was already sleeping. Possibly a new twist on the usual nightmares. It was so easy to let the lure of unconsciousness pull him in.

No. You have to wake up.

He jerked awake again as Kian recognized that voice. It had been pushing him the past couple of weeks to do things Kian had never imagined possible.

Danara?

Nothing. Typical. Stupid queen only talked when it suited her. Kian's mind struggled to remember what had happened. It was because of Danara he'd stabbed Alec's hand

into Kian's side – forcing their blood to mix. Is that what happened? Was he just waking up from that debilitating experience?

Wait. No .

Memories flooded his mind from the horrors Kian had endured as his body had basically exploded into its tiniest component, individual atoms. The sensation of his body being ripped apart and dispersed into nothingness had been bad enough, but to go through each elemental state had Kian praying for death.

Anything would have been better than what he'd been forced to bear. It was the fire that had been the worst. The heat had consumed until he was sure there would be nothing more than ash. But it had worked. Kian had survived to become just like Alec – a demon.

Stupidly, Kian assumed once he'd come out the other side the problems with the Demon Council would be over. Boy, had he been wrong. They'd had the nerve to demand his presence the moment he'd woken from the ordeal to face them with the intent of having him executed.

That Kian done it to help save the demon's humanity didn't seem to matter to certain members of the Council. Thankfully, with a little help from Aticus, their leader, Kian's life had been spared.

Those who had supported Kian and Alec, threw a party to celebrate. Both them had been touched but if only wanting to be alone with Alec, Kian resented it. In fact, they'd made a plan to leave, so how had...

Visola .

Kian's eyes flew open. It was still pitch dark but Kian knew he was very much

awake.

Visola had begged Kian to meet her fiancé behind the elementary school. Kian remembered not trusting the woman but...

That's when it hit him. Brant. He'd been there...waiting.

Leaning up onto an elbow, Kian looked around. Not able to see anything, he rolled over, which was when he caught sight of a sliver of light along the ground. Kian squinted, concentrating on that light. A door, the light came through the bottom but nowhere else. It took several minutes for his eyes adjust to it enough to see the room...no, not a room but a...Was it a cave? It appeared to be completely bare and made of stone, which would explain the hard, rough, cold floor.

Sitting up, Kian almost dropped back down as a woozy feeling washed over him. Oh God, I'm going to be sick. Taking deep breaths, he bent his head down willing the feeling to go away.

How had Brant gotten Kian there? More importantly, where was this place? Knowing Alec could read Kian's feelings, he let himself feel the fear that was creeping inside, crashing through his entire being.

The door slammed open, flooding the room with light.

"Don't bother," Brant sneered triumphantly. "Until I want him to feel you, he can't." Brant stood towering in the door with a wicked gleam in his eyes that sent fear snaking through his veins at what Brant planned to do. "Although the fear is very justified." His words dripped with the relish of causing panic.

"Where am I?" Kian might not be able to control the feelings but he'd be damned if he would give into them and let Brant see them. There was no doubt what he was

going to do so he wasn't going to roll over and take it.

“Tibet.”

That one word made him more afraid than anything else. If Brant didn't care Kian knew where they were, he knew Alec couldn't find him. As far as Brant was concerned, there was no way Kian was going to be rescued. Was there a chance of never seeing Alec again? Despite all he'd been through, Kian despaired of ever getting his happy ending.

“Why?” It didn't really matter but Kian would stand his ground against the monster until his last breath.

Brant's laugh was spine chilling. The evil demon stepped in the room, not stopping until they were a foot apart. Leaning down with his face just inches from Kian's, Brant grinned maniacally. His eyes could only be described as dead, chilling Kian to the core. As if knowing his thoughts, Brant maliciously said, “Because I can.”

Without another word, he straightened and strode to the door. “I have a few more barriers to put up so you will be given a small respite. The fun will start shortly though.” He slammed the door closed before Kian heard a bolt being thrown into place.

Tears came unbidden to fall down his cheeks leaving streaks.

Stop it - you have to fight him.

Kian ignored Danara, especially when the former queen of the demons was only speaking to him when it suited her, instead of explaining what it all meant.

Hadn't he been through enough? Kian was tired of fighting only to be put into

another impossible situation. No. There was just no strength to keep battling for the right to live. Instead, he lay back down on the hard rock and gave in to the despair.

Really? Danara yelled with a growl in her voice. You're just going to give up on being with Alec after all you've been through?

Was he?

Kian didn't have an answer. Then again, what was the point? No matter what he did, nothing ever turned out as planned. Life always seemed to find glee in kicking him down whenever he managed to stand on his own. It was time to admit he wasn't capable of finding that elusive happily ever after.

You must stop this. Danara's voice was harsh in Kian's head.

Leave me alone, he bemoaned in his head. Kian just wanted to curl up in a ball and cry.

I will not leave you alone. Are you really this weak? I thought you were tough enough to handle being a demon, but maybe I was wrong. Danara's voice was harsh, but it did the trick.

Sitting back up resolutely, Kian knew one thing, he'd never backed down from a challenge and there was no way he would start now.

Right. You are stronger than that, Danara encouraged.

The pep talk was helping, although Kian didn't see how it was going to help him out of this mess. No matter what Kian did, Brant was going to kill him. Not just kill him but beating him until Kian begged for death, all the while letting Alec feel the pain Brant was intent on inflicting.

Stop it. Danara's tone was like a slap in the face and Kian didn't appreciate it.

Would you shut up? He was scared, something the unfeeling queen probably never knew a day in her life. Why should I listen to you, anyway?

Because I am the one who warned you to change into a demon before this happened. The voice sounded exasperated, kind of like an 'I told you so'.

You knew he was going to kidnap me and you didn't tell me that? Pissed, Kian wanted nothing more than to kick the first queen's ass.

Like you could. The voice in his head taunted.

Frustration built until Kian had to move or scream. Pacing the length of the room, he started to feel a little bit better. Trying to stay calm, he asked, So why didn't you tell me I was about to be kidnapped?

Because it was necessary for it to happen in order for Brant to be stopped. The tone Danara was using gave Kian the impression the queen didn't think Kian was very smart, which only ticked him off more.

"Stopped?" he screeched out loud. "In case you missed it, he did kidnap me." God, it was maddening talking with someone he couldn't see.

This is not about you. Danara sounded pissed at Kian. This is about demon kind. Brant must be killed and you must do your part.

My part? If that meant dying, he was going to kick the queen's ass in the afterlife. The bitch let Kian be kidnapped to die. He was a fool to have believed her just because she was the first queen.

Quit being so melodramatic. You are not going to die as long as you fight.

Fight? Right - like he could fight a 200 pound demon with the power of the elements. What was Kian supposed to do, kick him in the shin? He would laugh at the feeble attempts to fight him off.

That might be true if you were human.

Kian abruptly stopped pacing.

I'm a demon. This time, he was talking to himself instead of Danara. Hope flickered within him like a small flame in the breeze; alive, but barely. Soon, that flame grew as hope bloomed even brighter. It was going to take strength to get through this but Kian would find a way to win in the end.

CHAPTER 9

Daniel sat staring at that damn map, feeling, not for the first time since being elected President, the full weight of the world on his shoulders. It was never easy to give orders that would end up with people dying, but this...

He shook his head. This went beyond anything he'd ever imagined. Millions would die if they didn't find a way to stop it.

"I need solutions, people," he demanded. "Considering the situation, I don't think I need to say, nothing is off the table."

No one said a word.

"Speak," he barked out.

The map disappeared and the faces of his team returned. Still, no one spoke.

"Are all of you willing to doom millions of people to death?" he shouted at them.

It was the lieutenant who was the only one brave enough to stare right at Daniel and say, "Sir, I can't speak for anyone other than the General and myself, but considering we will most likely die in the next," his eyes glanced down, as if he were looking at his watch, "ten minutes, if we had any ideas we'd already be implementing them."

"Mr. President, please excuse the unnecessary bluntness of Lieutenant Bishop, but he's right, sir," General Rose said. "There is no way of stopping this tsunami and we

don't have the time to set up an effective evacuation.”

“The Cabinet has already been helicoptered out. We are doing our best to get out as many of the Senate and House as we can, but with so much chaos and loss of phones in many areas, it hasn’t been an easy task,” his Chief of Staff added.

“All command has been transferred to Western Command,” the General informed him. “Unfortunately, without a miracle, there isn’t anything else we can do.”

Daniel glanced at the clock on the screen. Five minutes. “When will the tsunami be seen by those on the East Coast?”

“In another couple of minutes, sir,” the general responded.

“Oh, my God,” Daniel’s attention was captured by several startled reporters. “Did you see that? He just appeared out of the air.”

Daniel watched the three stations and they were all showing the same image. It was a bit out of focus, as if someone had been walking along the beach, filming the relief efforts of rescuers helping those that had been hurt by the earthquake, when a man, who had to be at least six and half feet tall, just appeared.

“Are any of you watching the news?” Daniel asked, never taking his eyes off the image.

“Yes,” Charles said in disbelief. “Did he seriously just materialize?”

“If you think it was a trick, viewers, there are more where that came from,” one of the newscasters announced.

Each station started to play different versions of the same kind of video, although

several of them were better quality and close enough that no one could doubt what they were seeing. Not that it was easy to believe, at least for Daniel.

“Folks, we are going to WTKR in Virginia Beach to a reporter who is on the beach where two of these men have just...well, emerged from thin air.” The picture on one of the screens changed to a wide shot of two men standing on the beach, facing the water.

It was the strangest thing Daniel had ever seen. They seemed to be staring at the water as if they were waiting for something. The water had receded, heralding the tsunami was nearly there, but the appearance of these men must have prevented anyone from noticing, for no one commented on it.

Daniel didn't know if he was relieved or not. It wouldn't help for everyone on that beach to start panicking, especially since there was no hope of them surviving at this point.

Then, the cameraman must have noticed something change in the distance, for his shot went from wide enough to pick up both men, who stood at least fifty yards apart, to zooming in on just one man along with what was far out in the ocean.

The reporter who stood out of the shot could be heard saying, “Fuck me.”

Clearly, he'd forgotten he was live, not that Daniel could blame him. It was just visible, but the rise of the water as a wave approached with the speed of a freight train could now be seen. The sight was both awe inspiring and terrifying.

“We've got to get out of here,” the reporter said, still not remembering his microphone was active.

He must have been standing next to the cameraman for another voice said, “Too late.

We wouldn't even make it to the van before that wave gets here. If I'm going to die, I might as well be known for getting this on film."

His words must have resonated with the reporter for he suddenly was there, in the shot, but off to the side so as not to block the strange man on the beach or the wave that was growing with every second.

"This is Chet Williams of WTKR. As you can see behind me, a massive tsunami is heading for the coast. We will stay with you, filming until..." he faltered for a moment before saying, "Well, until we can't."

The cameraman must have said something, for the reporter suddenly glanced over his shoulder before stepping to the side and off the picture. "I'm not entirely sure what is happening, but these men just suddenly appeared out of nowhere several minutes ago."

"There are reports of both men and women materializing up and down the East Coast of the United States. We're not sure who they are or where they came from. Rick, would you mind getting a tighter shot on one of them?" Chet asked.

Rick must have known what Chet was expecting for he didn't just get a closer angle, he zeroed in on the man's bicep. Daniel squinted at the unusual sight.

"Is that tattoo moving?" he asked of the other men and women who were still on video conference with him.

"It has to be a trick of light, right?" Charles asked shakily.

"He could be flexing his bicep, making it appear as if the tattoo is moving," Sandra Leighton, Head of Homeland Security, suggested.

There were a few others who made plausible possibilities but somehow Daniel knew it wasn't fake. That tattoo was moving. As if to prove it, the cameraman panned to the other man standing further down the beach. He had a nearly matching tattoo that was undulating just as the other one was.

"What are they doing?" Daniel asked, even though he knew damn well no one had a clue.

Once again, it seemed the cameraman was the first to notice a change. The water that had been gaining in height and speed, appeared to stall. Not completely, but its rate at which it had grown in size, if Daniel wasn't imagining it, was decreasing.

"Sir, I have no idea how, but our sensors indicate the tsunami that we predicted its pinnacle to reach nearly fifty feet, has changed to thirty feet." There was a pause and a slight waver of relief in General Rose's voice as he said, "Sensors are now indicating ten feet."

It was mind-blowing to watch as the incoming water not only sank back into the ocean but to witness its momentum actually slowing down. How? Daniel had no clue, but he suspected these strangers on the beach had something to do with it.

"Are their tattoos glowing?" Daniel couldn't ever remember hearing Paul Finch's voice sound as dumbstruck as it was at the moment. The man was the Director of the CIA, nothing usually fazed him. Then again, in all his years as a Marine and then serving in public service, Daniel had to admit this was the strangest event he'd ever beheld.

Oh, he'd heard strange stories from others, but this? This went beyond strange, straight to freaky with a healthy dose of petrifying. That wasn't a comfortable feeling for Daniel. He was the leader of the free world.

Fear was one thing. He'd have been an idiot not to feel that emotion from time to time, especially as the entire country depended on him to keep them safe. But this was something entirely different.

For the first time in his life, he was afraid he might be ill-equipped to deal with whatever was happening. Then again, he wasn't sure there was anyone who was.

"General, report," he barked out. First thing first. He needed to know if the tsunami was still a threat.

"All major cities have been saved with marginal water washing up onto the beaches. There were a few structures still struck by the waves but damage is at a minimum, Mr. President. Unfortunately, not all areas were unaffected," the general said.

"Wherever these unknown men and women showed up, they basically stopped the effects of the tsunami that would have otherwise destroyed the coast and miles inland." The general put up a map highlighting several rural areas. "The places they didn't cover weren't so lucky."

Satellite images of several smaller coastal towns and marshlands were thrown up on the screen. The devastation was heartbreaking, but Daniel knew they'd gotten lucky. For that could have been major cities too. New York City alone would have suffered millions of deaths, if things had gone differently.

"I'm declaring a state of emergency for all areas affected by the earthquakes, fires, winds and tsunami. Send in the National Guard and any other armed forces that can help." Since they still had no idea who or what caused all this, Daniel wasn't keen on using the military when they may have a war on their hands.

"Just be sure all military personnel only work near bases. Until we know who caused this, we need to be prepared for another attack and that means keeping all military

close to their home base for possible deployment.” Daniel stared once more at the screens with so much devastation. “Jackson, I want to speak to the country as soon as possible.”

“Yes, Mr. President.” Jackson came back on the screen. “We can do it from Air Force One.”

“We’ll be landing in three minutes, Mr. President,” Lukas informed him.

Daniel nodded at Lukas. “As soon as I’m aboard Air Force One, I want answers as to who did this and who in the hell those men and women on the beaches were. You have five minutes.”

Daniel reached over and turned the monitors off before turning to Lukas. “What do you think?”

His head of his security detail was a man who’d been all over the world with contacts in places most people in the government didn’t have. “I wish I knew, sir,” Lukas said glumly.

That wasn’t a good sign.

CHAPTER 10

“Alec, stop,” Tarak yelled as his hands grabbed Alec’s shoulders and shook him.

Everywhere they went in search of Kian, Alec had left a path of destruction unlike anything the world had ever seen. Earthquakes, floods, fires and storms with wind speeds of over 200 mph devastated America, much of Europe, and now Eastern and Central Asia.

Alec knew it wasn’t helping for him to lose control but each disappointment over not finding Kian left him grief stricken. His control, barely restrained as it was, would be gone if he didn’t find his mate soon - his rage dominating him. As the Earth felt his wrath, demons were being put in a dangerous position, for it was only a matter of time before they were discovered.

If Alec didn’t find a way to restrain his rampant emotions soon, there would be no hope of staying hidden. Worse, other beings were threatening to go to war with them before humans discovered just how many other races there were. The council, mainly Aticus, was trying to make peace with the other races but if they didn’t do something quickly, war would break out.

The last thing Tarak had told Aticus before leaving to search for Kian was the Sentinels would fight for Alec against anyone who tried to get in their way. He knew the other Sentinels were behind him and if it came down to it, they would have his back.

Still, his actions were going to kill every living thing on this planet. Not even Tarak

was going to allow Alec to continue on this path before doing something to stop him.

Not that Alec could blame him. His father had to know if Brant managed to murder Kian, there would be no other choice but to kill Alec too, for Alec would destroy everything on Earth to ensure Brant's destruction.

Since Brant fled and hid from the Sentinels when it was discovered he'd killed Kian's mother, no one had been able to figure out how Brant had managed to conceal himself from detection. It was only now, as he had done the same with Kian, they were beginning to realize Brant had somehow tapped into the magic the elders had lost centuries ago.

Tarak had put a call into Gaius and Aticus to research back at home. So far, neither man had discovered how Brant had been able to use the old magic. Not that it mattered. It still left Alec helpless in his ability to find Kian. All Alec had to go on was his connection with Kian.

It was his scent that had led them to Tibet, but no further. Alec was sure Kian was near, but no matter what he did, he couldn't get any closer to discovering where Brant was hiding him.

It was the emptiness inside without Kian near that was driving Alec crazy. He hadn't realized just how much he depended on feeling his mate with him at all times to give him peace. Now that it was gone, Alec feared he'd lose his damn mind.

A hand landed on Alec's shoulder. Alec glanced over at his father. He had to admit he was glad Tarak was there. Tarak was probably the only reason Alec had the little control he'd been able to maintain.

"I know this is hard but he has to be here somewhere." Tarak's reassurance helped. Alec needed to believe Kian was still alive. "If you lose control, your actions may

cause his death,” Tarak warned. It was the kind of thing Alec needed to hear to rein his emotions in.

“I’m trying.” If Tarak had any clue just how on edge Alec was, he probably would kill him. It would be the right thing to do. No one demon was worth the humans finding out about them, especially if the lineage of witches who had nearly wiped out their kind were still alive.

It wouldn’t take much for their home in the Appalachian Mountains to be found considering the damage that Alec had caused in the area. If the witches did still exist, it would only be a matter of time before they would come after all demons. That wasn’t something they could hide from the rest of the human population.

Alec knew it was only because Tarak was his father that he was alive. Well, that and because he was a Sentinel. That bond wasn’t something Alec had given much thought to until his brethren had stood by him instead of obeying the Council and killing Kian when Alec couldn’t stay away.

Trey and Samson, two Sentinels who Alec considered friends, were traveling with Alec and Tarak in hopes of counteracting the damage Alec continued to cause each time he lost Kian’s trail.

“Okay,” Samson said, as he came back from a scouting mission in the surrounding area. “We have talked to some of the locals in a village not too far away and they said something has been living nearby.”

“Something?” Tarak’s eyebrows went up at that description.

Trey nodded. “Yeah. They said whatever it is has attacked several of the village’s women, ripping them apart, leaving their remains scattered nearby.”

A shiver of dread ran down Alec's spine. All three men placed hands on Alec trying to stop him before he reacted with his powers. He stood there trying not to picture his mate ripped apart but the image of Brant standing over Kian's mother flashed before him. The wind started whipping around them with a fierceness the others were now prepared for.

Tarak stood in front of his son, his large hand slapped Alec's face with a resounding clap. Stunned, Alec slowly took in a deep breath harnessing his rage. The wind died down before it could do any damage.

No one said a word until they felt Alec was in reasonable control again. Samson spoke up next. "The villagers don't know where the thing lives but they know it's close."

"How?" Alec finally joined the discussion, sensing this was important in finding Kian.

"They had a hard time describing how they knew but an older woman came forward." Trey hesitated a moment, rubbing his hand over the back of his neck before informing Alec, "She wants to speak to you."

"What do you mean she wants to talk to Alec?" Tarak demanded, clearly not liking the request any more than Alec did. "How does she even know about Alec?"

Trey shook his head. "Honestly? I don't know, but she asked for him by name."

That didn't bode well, but if it meant finding Kian, Alec would do whatever it took. "Where is she?"

Tarak stood in Alec's way not letting him go. "Wait a minute, son. What if this is a trap?"

Alec stared hard at his father, trying not to take his frustration out on the one person who had always had his back. “I don’t care. If she has any idea where Brant is holding Kian, I don’t have a choice but to speak with her.” Stepping around his father, he turned to Trey and Samson. “Take me to her.”

CHAPTER 11

Taking a deep breath, Gaius raised his hand to knock when the door flew open. Aticus stood on the other side with a huge grin. “Gaius, I am so happy you finally decided to accept my invitation.” Standing to the side, he gestured for Gaius to enter. “Come in. We have much to do.”

The last time Gaius had been in Aticus’ council office was to hand in his resignation over a hundred years ago. His hands shook slightly at coming back here. Still, it was good to see his old friend. “Aticus, thank you for inviting me.”

Gaius had stayed away from his old friends since he’d discovered his son had gotten several humans pregnant a hundred years ago. Who was he kidding? Gaius had stayed as far from anyone as he could. He’d been too ashamed to be seen.

Instead of owning up to his mistakes in raising his son, Gaius had hidden in the archives. He’d been determined to discover the reason his son hadn’t been able to stay away from the humans.

A part of Gaius had feared he’d been the one to pass on his inhumanity. After all, how does a man, a father, shun his son just to spite the mother? He knew it was the start of the disease, for that is how he thought of it. The loss of their humanity was a disease of their very existence.

If he had just shown his son the love he deserved, maybe he wouldn’t have done the things he had. Maybe then, Brant wouldn’t have taken it even further and gone out with the intent of raping and beating human women for the sheer pleasure of it.

“True, but then Alec would not have been born and without him there would be no Kian. Without him, we would certainly be lost, for we still wouldn’t know about the connection we need with humans.” Aticus placed a reassuring hand on Gaius shoulder. “This was foretold during Danara’s time.” Kind eyes offered solace. “Nothing you could have done could change fate.”

It was eerie how Aticus always knew what others were thinking. It was one of the reasons he’d made such a good leader.

Nodding slightly, Gaius shrugged off Aticus’s hand walking further into the room. “So where do we start?”

“I have managed to locate two more of Danara’s journals.” Aticus pointed to the opened books on his desk that he’d been studying.

Stunned, Gaius went to them seeing the same scrawling handwriting that had been in the previous journals. Looking up he asked. “How?”

“That, my friend, I cannot tell you. Rest assured the one who had them will no longer be a problem.” Sitting back into his chair, he closed the books, handing them to his old friend. “But I am afraid there is still more we are missing.”

Gaius held the books carefully, afraid they would disintegrate before his eyes. He hoped the key to fixing all their problems were in her journals. They may not hold all the answers but these would put them that much closer.

Still, the rest had to be found, and soon, if they were going to be any help to demonkind. “How do we find the others?”

Defeat lined Aticus’s body as his shoulders drooped. He looked like he held the weight of the world on his shoulders without the strength to hold it any longer. “I

wish I knew.”

The fact was, Aticus did have the weight of the world on his shoulders. If they didn't find Brant and save Kian, Alec would surely come as close as any demon to destroying the earth. As it was, humans were becoming suspicious of what was happening. They were not accepting these events were made from nature. The only positive was, each government believed it was something created through technology. An act of war.

It would only be a matter of time before that theory would be discovered false. But it bought them a little time.

Regardless, because the disaster had started there in the Appalachians, the mountains were crawling with scientists and soldiers as they searched for how it had happened. With their own home, Tuklati, in near ruins, they were forced to leave it that way for fear of drawing more attention to themselves if they tried to fix it.

The best they could do was shore up each level and hope the government assumed it was aftershocks. Just to be sure, they had sent demons miles away to coordinate shockwaves to confuse sensors and keep officials from discovering their home.

“You look like you haven't been sleeping.” Gaius was concerned. Demons needed Aticus. He was the one keeping their kind together as factions wanted to go back to the old ways, before they'd discovered their humanity.

Aticus gazed at him for a moment. “I will not deny it has been a challenge keeping things together the past few days.”

“I understand you sent out Sentinels to help the humans clean up.” It was a daring move, considering there were videos and pictures of certain Sentinels stopping the tsunamis from destroying even more.

Aticus frowned but nodded. “I only sent out the ones who hadn’t been on the beaches, so they wouldn’t be recognized. They were warned to never show their tattoos, but I still worry they will be discovered.”

Gaius didn’t envy Aticus’s position. It was one of their own who caused so much destruction, so logically, they should be the ones to help put things back together, but it also left them vulnerable. Not just to humans uncovering their existence, but it left the city open to a revolt by those who want Aticus gone.

When Alec took off after Kian, Tarak had followed, but Aticus sent others to ensure any more damage Alec did was kept to a minimum. Not that it was working. Alec was stronger than any of them had known.

“What about Alec? Has he been able to find any signs of Kian?” Gaius hoped so. Not only for his grandson’s sake, but for all of them. If Brant did the unthinkable and killed Kian, there was no doubt in Gaius’s mind, Alec would destroy the world in his rage.

No one, not even Tarak, the man who’d raised Alec, would be able to stop him.

Aticus stared at the journals on the table. “You know, it makes sense that Danara had written that final journal to Alec. That she communicates with Kian. They were meant to lead us into a new era.”

Gaius felt that too. But that didn’t mean it would happen. “If Brant kills Kian...” Gaius couldn’t complete that thought. He didn’t even want to think about it.

Aticus sighed. “The premise would still be the same. Either they take us into an era of peace and prosperity or the end the world as we know it.”

A shudder went through Gaius at the thought. It pained him to know if the world

were to end, ultimately, it would have been his fault. For it would be one of his sons who killed Kian, while his grandson would destroy the world.

He could only pray that would not come to pass. Of course, by doing so, he was condemning Brant to death, for the only way the world would survive was if his son were dead.

Desperate to take his mind off the inevitable, Gaius turned to the matter at hand. “So what do you believe you found in the missing journals?”

Aticus hedged before admitting the truth. “That is not the reason I asked you here. Tarak sent word that they believe Brant is using magic to shield himself and Kian.”

“Not possible.” Even as he denied it, Gaius knew it was a lie. Hell, he’d been practicing ancient magic from an early age. It was one of those secrets his family had handed down through the generations.

Gaius hadn’t taught his son, or his grandson, but that didn’t mean someone else in their family hadn’t. Even if they had, there were still limitations. “I won’t deny some of that magic is out there, but there is no possibility anyone is strong enough to shield two people.” At least, Gaius didn’t think anyone could.

“Then how do you explain that Alec followed Kian to Tibet and then nothing? He has not been able to feel his mate since Brant took him, despite the connection the two have.” Aticus leaned forward to be sure his old friend knew the truth of it.

“Yes, but he obviously knocked Kian out severing the link. As long as he doesn’t feel, Alec cannot sense his mate.” Gaius didn’t even believe his words. Demons are undeniably the best trackers of any race. For Alec to have lost the one he considers his mate is unheard of.

Magic could explain it, but that didn't explain how Brant could do it. Gaius had practiced for centuries and he had no doubt he could mask two signatures for a short time; but with a connection as strong as Alec and Kian's, it wouldn't last long.

Even without their bond, Kian's will was strong. Masking him would take more magic than their kind still had. Unless...

Dread formed in the pit of his stomach. It couldn't be. Glancing over at Aticus, he saw the man had already come to the same conclusion and was just waiting for Gaius to catch up.

Standing, Aticus touched his fingertips to the top of the desk as he leaned toward Gaius. "You see why I asked you here?"

Unfortunately, Gaius not only understood. Alec would be the least of their problems if Brant had done the unthinkable. Gaius wasn't even sure it was possible. "Would we not feel the change ourselves?"

Aticus shook his head. "Would we even know if we did?" Then he posed the one question that hadn't even crossed Gaius's mind. "After what Alec had managed to do without even trying, do we not need to consider it has already started?"

Gaius closed his eyes, unwilling to imagine the hell that would have been unleashed on the world if Brant had managed to break the seal the ancients put upon demonkind to bind their powers. If he had, it wouldn't matter if Alec saved Kian, for a war would break out, and demons, unused to having the kinds of power they had in ancient times, would destroy the world anyway.

CHAPTER 12

The village Trey and Samson led Alec to lay nestled in a small valley high in the mountains. It held no more than 50 huts in various stages of decay. The people themselves looked weary, hungry and afraid. Alec wasn't sure they understood what was out there hunting them but he was fairly sure they could feel the evil that clung to everything around them.

As they made their way to the heart of the village, Alec saw the distrust of their presence there in the eyes watching them. Several of the older ones shrank back when they glanced his way. He couldn't blame them. Alec could only imagine his need to destroy - that was currently a part of his every cell - poured out of his body like a rotten stench.

A woman stood at the center of village motioning them to follow her. When the women opened the flap and gestured them to enter, Tarak and Alec squeezed into a too small tent. Samson and Trey waited outside guarding them.

An old woman sat on the opposite side of the tent. She waved to the blanket on the ground and he and Tarak knelt down.

When she took the time to pour them a drink, Alec opened his mouth to insist she tell him what she knew, but before he could speak, she pinned him with a look. It made no sense that Alec closed his mouth and took the cup she handed to him.

She didn't speak for some time as she sipped her bitter liquid while staring at him. Alec didn't understand any of what was happening. The woman couldn't have been

more than five feet tall and probably weighed less than a hundred pounds, yet he found himself intimidated.

It didn't help that her crystal blue eyes seemed to see straight into his soul, measuring the kind of man he was. Alec feared his actions since losing Kian would leave him unworthy. What he couldn't figure out was why he cared.

He wasn't even sure he had a soul. It wasn't something he liked to contemplate. He wasn't a human after all, he was demon. Their roots were born of evil. Could they have a soul? Since his mother was human, did that mean he too had a soul?

Not that it mattered if he didn't save Kian. Without him, any soul he might have would be gone with him.

Finally, the woman seemed satisfied with whatever she saw and started speaking. Her language was a local dialect but Sentinels spent years studying all languages in order to help humans so he easily understood her. "I am sorry your mate was taken."

Both Alec and Tarak gasped in surprise. Trey and Samson had only told the village they were looking for a man traveling with another man, not that one of them had been kidnapped. How had she known?

Her gaze pierced his, holding him still as she continued. "I know more than you can imagine. The answer to your earlier question is yes, you have a soul."

Shaken to the core, Alec would have loved to know how she could possibly know that, but in the end he asked the only question that mattered. "Do you know where my mate is?"

Her eyes dropped to the ground as if she weren't able to look at him as she told him. "No."

It felt like he'd been punched in the gut. He wanted to believe she knew. He'd let his hopes get up. The pain blanketed him again, his control slipping as the fire pit that had been cold when they entered, now blazed to life.

He heard her say a few words and a calming wave flowed through him drowning the anger. Their eyes met across the tent. "How?" he whispered.

A smile formed on her wrinkled face. "You aren't the only one with powers."

Tarak tensed next to Alec, clearly not liking what had just happened. The only way she could have done that is if she was a...

"Witch." She finished his thought for him. "Yes, I am a witch. One of the descendants who lived among demons before you were chased into hiding."

Tarak quickly stood. "Alec, we need to get out of here quickly."

Her eyes never left Alec's. She conveyed not only a deep well of strength, but more importantly knowledge. Shaking his head, Alec said, "No. I want to hear what she has to say."

Tarak reluctantly sat back down as he was unwilling to let his son face her alone. The tension never left his father's body as if ready to spring into action. Not that he could do much against a witch's spells. None of them could.

Well, that wasn't entirely true. Demons had learned an important lesson. Witches might be able to strip them of their powers to wield the elements but that only caused the Sentinels to train harder. Even without their abilities, both Alec and Tarak could take on a horde of witches with their bare hands.

None of that mattered at the moment. Alec had no idea why, but he sensed this

woman didn't plan to harm him. Even if she had, Alec wasn't leaving without knowing what she did. "Continue."

"To alleviate your father's concern, I will tell you that my clan was not part of the group to hunt you. Just as you were hunted and killed, we suffered the same fate. Not all of us believed you were evil." Seeing that Tarak wasn't any more comfortable knowing this, the old woman pushed on.

"It was for this reason we were forced to flee and hide here. Because of the insidiousness of magic, we are very careful in training each generation. Only a few ever learn it and only to protect ourselves from those who mean us harm."

Not caring whether she was a threat or not as long as she helped him find Kian, Alec asked, "What do you know?"

"I do not know how to find the demon who is attacking our village. He is using ancient magic to shield himself from detection."

"Then how do you know there is a demon?" Alec wasn't sure if he believed her but at this point there were no other leads and his gut was telling him to listen.

A tremor escaped her, shaking her whole body. "There is no doubt there is evil nearby but hard as I try, I cannot find it."

"Okay, let's say I believe this. How does this help me?" Alec's frustration was starting to build again. So far this woman only confirmed Brant was somewhere in these mountains but without a location it didn't do him much good, especially if he was using magic.

"I have been asked to give you a message." She clasped her hands on her lap in front of her. Her eyes closed. Her body relaxed.

Not sure what to do, Alec waited. Had the woman fallen asleep? Part of him feared she died but he could see her chest rising and falling very slowly. Suddenly, she spoke again but something very different.

“Lor ta drana.” His whole body froze as he heard the same words Kian had spoken when Danara had invaded his sleep before Kian had taken things into his own hands and become a demon. “Listen to my words as they are important.” It was still the woman in front of him, but Alec knew it was his first queen who was speaking to him. “You must find your mate, it requires both of you to kill the evil one.”

He was stunned as he heard the words. How was Kian supposed to fight Brant? He would kill Alec’s mate without having to lift a finger. How can this be happening?

“Stop,” the old woman opened her eyes but instead of the crystal clear blue of before, they were red as a ruby. “You did not trust before. Now you must believe.” Fire blazed in those red orbs.

Alec didn’t hesitate to declare, “Kian is the one person in the world who I believe in with every fiber of my being.”

A smile lifted the old woman’s lips in triumph. “If only that were true.” Before Alec could argue with the queen, she held up a hand to stop him. “He was chosen for a reason,” Danara said. “Try to remember that when you decide you know what is best for your mate.”

Alec had no idea what the queen meant, nor did he care. He just needed to find Kian. “Where is he?” he demanded.

Those ruby red eyes flashed a warning at him for his impertinence but Alec no longer cared. Kian was all that mattered. “You really need to learn to listen. If you believe in the chosen one as you claim, you will trust in him and in your bond.”

The old woman slumped and Alec knew Danara was gone. The frustration threatened to explode from him as he quickly left the tent in an effort to not destroy another village.

Pacing furiously, Alec did everything he could to tamp down on the powers threatening to consume him. He wanted to kill. No, he needed it like a living breathing thing. But it wasn't these villagers who deserved to suffer. It was Brant.

How was he supposed to find him if Brant was using magic? All demons knew some magic, but most of it was low level stuff in order to hide from humans. It was unheard of to conceal themselves from other demons.

That Brant was able to shroud himself and Kian didn't seem possible. His steps were quickly eating up the path around the village. Alec had no idea how many times he'd circled around before the old woman suddenly stepped up, blocking him from continuing.

"I am sorry she did not tell you where to find your mate." The old woman held out her hand, her fingers clutched around something small enough to hold in her palm.

Alec took what it was she offered and gasped. For she'd been holding a small red ruby, the same color her eyes had been when the queen had been talking. In the center, a flame flickered for an instant before disappearing.

"Let me tell you the rest of my story." The old woman didn't wait for him as she turned back to the tent.

She'd known he would follow.

It wasn't until he sat back onto the blanket that she said, "When the magic of the first Danara and Drakarn was formed, they found it imperative to find other humans who

could mate with demons. You took great risk changing your mate to a demon without knowing.” She pointed to the ruby in Alec’s hand. “The flame will flicker only when a match is found.”

Alec just stared silently at the ruby he held for several long moments before he’d found his voice again. “How?”

The old woman shrugged. “How does one find love?”

“Huh?” Alec was confused, something he’d pretty much experienced since meeting this woman.

There was a sparkle of mischief in her blue eyes as she said, “Magic, my dear boy. There is no reason when it comes to love.” When he stared at her like she’d lost her mind, the woman chuckled. “When two souls belong to each other, a spark forms.” She nodded to the ruby. “That flame burns too brightly to be concealed.”

Alec had no words.

The old woman stood and motioned him to do the same. Tarak, Trey and Samson stood just outside the tent when they stepped out. She walked them to the edge of the village and bid them goodbye.

She started to turn back to her tent, when she stopped and placed her hand on Alec’s arm. “I feel you have a strong connection to your mate.”

Alec nodded.

“There is one magic that can circumvent what the evil one is using.” She stood there watching him, waiting for something. She sighed when he remained silent. “Lord save us from the stupidity of youth.”

Alec scowled at her. He would bet everything he had he was older than she was.

Finally, she spoke one last word before returning to her tent. “Love.”

CHAPTER 13

Kian sat in the freezing cold cell trying to concentrate on Danara's words which were starting to creep him out. Having two voices warring in his mind, one of which was his own, was driving him to the edge of insanity.

This just couldn't be real. Less than a year ago, he was excited about his senior year of college. Somehow that had turned into being kidnapped by a demented demon bent on torturing Kian and Alec. Oh yeah, and the best part was the first Danara of demonkind, who was dead by the way, was talking in his head like she was right there next to Kian.

You are absolutely hopeless. Danara's wasn't exactly pleasant at that point.

Maybe if you would get out of my head I would be able to concentrate. Danara had been trying to teach Kian how to control the elements with the powers he'd recently gained. The easiest element to control, fire - actually, water was the easiest but there was no water so they had to go for the next one. So far, Kian hadn't even managed a spark.

Fine, I will leave but keep practicing.

No problem there. Not only didn't he want to die at Brant's hands but there wasn't anything else to do but sleep. A shiver rolled down his body as thoughts about that six-year-old boy watching Brant beat Kian's mother came forth. Suddenly, a spark arched between his fingers.

Oh my God. Could that have been real? Maybe he'd just imagined it. He tried again to concentrate on the electricity he'd felt flow through him. Nothing. This was hopeless. No. You can do this .

Mentally shaking himself, Kian thought about what happened before to cause the spark. His mother. The picture through the closet slats flashed before Kian's mind. Another spark of energy raced between his fingers. Focusing on the picture, each blow as well as the fear he'd felt as a child, had the spark quickly flickering into a flame.

Letting the terror from that time and anger wrap itself around him like a coat, Kian let the flame blaze, lighting the entire room. I did it. Excitement coursed through his veins, extinguishing the light.

For a whole ten seconds. Somehow I do not think that is going to defeat Brant. For someone who had been dead for thousands of years, Danara sure had mastered sarcasm quickly.

Kian may not have been able to hold the flame for long but he'd at least done it. Danara could go to hell if she didn't like it. Hey, when I want criticism from the peanut gallery I'll ask for it.

The what?

Never mind. I thought I told you to go away. Kian used his irritation at Danara to create that spark once again. That little bit of power wasn't going to defeat Brant. However, now that he knew how to make it work, Kian might be able to increase those abilities.

I cannot, Danara insisted. You must succeed or all is lost. But I will stay quiet for you to concentrate .

Kian didn't bother saying anything more, choosing instead to keep practicing. It came much easier the next time. It was so strange to see a flame leaping from his hand yet not getting burned. Oh it was definitely making his palm and fingertips warm but it wasn't uncomfortable. Uncertain how long it had taken, soon Kian had managed to sustain the light long enough to search the entire cell.

There was nothing useful inside the tiny enclosure. Actually, other than a door and stone, with a few patches of dirt, there was nothing at all. Brant clearly didn't care to provide any kind of comfort, like a blanket, or even a bucket to pee in.

After carefully examined every inch of the confinement without allowing the light to go out, Kian felt confident enough of his fire skills to start the next phase of training.

Kian cocked a hip, holding the flame up as if were some sort of trophy. Calling out to Danara, Kian said, "Okay, what's next?"

Danara laughed. You think that paltry flame means you've mastered it? A slight breeze blew it out like the candles on a birthday cake. Danara's laughter turned into a cackle. Whoops, looks like someone put out your fire .

Kian scowled and cursed the queen under his breath. But he lit the flame again; this time he forced it stronger and brighter. Smiling at the success, it once more went out and doused Kian back into the darkness.

Kian sighed. This was going to get old, fast.

"Mr. President, we have not been able to find a natural cause for the destruction." Jackson Pierce updated him the moment Daniel entered the bunker deep within the Rocky Mountains.

It was not the news he'd been hoping to hear but deep down had doubted one would

be found. Mother Nature may be a force that man had no hope of competing with, but nothing about what had happened had been natural.

Everyone in the room collectively held their breath as they waited for Daniel to react. Some were even visibly shaking. Daniel had a reputation for expecting the best from those who worked for him. To be fair, he gave the same kind of dedication to serving his country. It wasn't his fault not everyone could handle the pressure.

Daniel Burrows was imposing to most men. It was one of the reasons he'd been elected as the President. After a simpering President pandered to the weak for eight years, this country demanded in overwhelming numbers, someone strong. A leader who would do whatever it took to keep this country safe.

Daniel had never even considered running for President until he'd watched men and women die day after day by terrorists the people of America didn't seem to think were a real threat. Daniel knew differently. His wife and child had died by the hands who hid behind religion.

He'd never expected to find the American people were in more danger from their own government than any terrorist. All his illusions of his country had been shattered within months of taking office. Not that it had changed Daniel's resolve to fix the mess America was in.

No. He'd only become more determined to do his job and get things back on track. It had taken bashing many heads together, but he'd been making progress. Not that he'd let the need to eradicate terrorism take a back seat, but it also hadn't been his only focus. He stared at the satellite images of the destruction along the entire east coast all the way to the plains.

As much as he hated to admit it, Daniel had made a mistake. He'd taken his eye off outside threats and now America was suffering because of it.

Studying the faces of those in the room, he knew whatever the news was he wasn't going to like it. Not showing any emotion, his expression like a stone slab he asked, "Then what is causing it?"

"S-s-sir I d-don't know." Kurt, one of the many analysts, cringed as if waiting for Daniel to explode. Daniel had a reputation for his infamous temper, which was highly exaggerated, yet still valid.

Daniel didn't like mistakes. People died when things weren't done correctly and he refused to accept that possibility.

Annoyed at the man, Daniel didn't have time to waste on him. "You may go." After the door shut, the President's steel gray eyes turned to the rest of the men and women in the room. "So, what do we know?"

The room was silent for several moments, no one wanting to be the first to talk. Finally, Secretary of Defense, Albert Grish stood. "Mr. President, the truth is we don't know. A few fringe groups have tried to claim responsibility, but they just don't have the ability to do..."

Albert waved a hand to all three screens before them, each showing a section of the world that had been affected by everything from earthquakes, to fires, and tornados. There were even unusual sandstorms in the Middle East, suggesting it wasn't a group from that region, as so much of the area had been buried under sand.

"Albert's right, sir," Jackson Pierce said. "To be honest, we'd suspect the Chinese but they've been hit too. Although not to the degree that America and Europe have."

"What about Russia?" Daniel asked. From what he could tell, they hadn't been hit at all.

Secretary of State, Sandra Dickson shook her head. “Anything is possible, sir, but I don’t believe its them. They appear to be just as confused as everyone else.”

Daniel didn’t speak, just stood staring at the brave woman waiting for her to elaborate.

Putting her reading glasses on the table, Sandra sighed. She’d known the President wasn’t going to like her answers but it was the truth. “Sir, obviously, we are still looking, but there is no evidence of anyone having a way to cause this phenomenon.”

Slamming his hand against the table, he roared, “Do we know anything? Have you figured out who those men and women were?”

No one answered, mainly because they just couldn’t explain it. Across the world, speculation of witches and aliens abounded but no one really knew.

Daniel placed his hands on the table, palms flat against the cool surface as he stood. His eyes pinned each member in the room with a look so ruthless they all shivered. “That is not acceptable. You are not to sleep until you figure out what is going on. Is that clear?”

Every person in that room froze, but nodded as if willing to do whatever Daniel demanded. All except one.

His gaze landed on the only person not appearing to pay him much attention as she read from a file. He shouldn’t be surprised.

Jennifer Lanning was an analyst to the Secretary of Defense, a damn good one, which is the only reason she was in this room now. She excelled at reading through reports and finding the bottom line. Still, her ignoring him was not something he would tolerate.

“Ms. Lanning, do you have something better to do?” The ice that formed his words was felt by everyone in the room, yet all she did to acknowledge him was hold up a finger as she kept reading.

Stunned, he said, “Everyone out of the room except Ms. Lanning - Now .”

No one would disobey him but Albert must have felt the need to at least try to help his analyst. “Um, Mr. President, if I may...”

The look Daniel shot his Secretary of Defense cut off the rest of the words. Instead, Albert grabbed his folders and rushed out of the room with the others. Still, Jennifer didn't seem to understand the danger she was in. Daniel was fairly certain she hadn't noticed the others leaving as she kept reading the report in front of her.

Since she was so engrossed, Daniel took the opportunity to study her. Even though she was wearing a pant suit, she still had that look of rumpled casual. He didn't know how she always managed to look so unkempt but she seemed to make it an art form. Her auburn hair was pulled back in a messy bun but as usual several strands had come loose to frame her face.

Chewing on her bottom lip as she concentrated, he couldn't help but be taken aback by her beauty. There had been something about her from the first time he'd met her. Since his wife had been killed, Daniel had been with many women. Never more than once or twice as he refused to enter into another relationship.

Jennifer had been one woman he'd refused to approach. Deep down, he feared he would never get enough once he tasted her.

When she closed the file, she lifted her head. Her chocolate brown eyes met his across the room with a look of disbelief. “Mr. President, I think I might know what is causing the destruction.”

A tingling sensation crawled through him as he waited for her to tell him. Something in her voice made him want to stop her from speaking, yet he'd never run from trouble, which only made him dread what she was about to say more.

Looking around the room, she saw they were the only two there. "Where are the others?"

Moving to a chair next to hers, he turned it so he'd be facing her. "I sent them away. What did you find?"

Daniel was an expert at reading others and Jennifer was obviously beginning to chastise herself for giving voice to her initial thoughts to him. What he didn't know was why. There was a flash of fear in her gaze before she glanced away from him to study the floor as if it was the most interesting thing in the world.

"Jennifer, what is it?" Daniel hadn't meant to sound so harsh, but his patience was nearly nonexistent at the moment.

Daniel saw the indecision on her face, along with the lie she was considering telling him. If this had been anyone else, he would have threatened her with imprisonment for even thinking about lying, but it was Jennifer, and try as he might, Daniel couldn't find it within him to treat her that way.

Leaning forward, he took Jennifer's small, cold hand within his. He held her gaze and reassured her. "I promise I will keep you safe, but I need to know what you've discovered."

For several moments, Jennifer stared at Daniel as if measuring the truth of his words. Never had Daniel known such a profound relief as when she gave a slight nod. He told himself it had to do with finding out what she knew, but Daniel was having a difficult time fooling himself. At that moment, it had nothing to do with what she

knew and everything to do with her trusting him.

“I understand you want to know the bottom line but I need to explain before I can do that.” Jennifer’s voice shook slightly before pushing on. “This isn’t something you are just going to believe.”

She gave a harsh laugh. “You will probably lock me away for what I’m about to tell you, but I am willing to trust you.”

Daniel’s heart swelled before he could stop it. They were in the middle of a crisis. This wasn’t the time for him to let his feelings take over. He had better control than that.

Jennifer pinned him with those chocolate brown eyes. The seriousness in their depths caused him to sit up straighter. She shook her head and sighed. “The fact is, there’s nothing you can do to stop this.”

“The hell there isn’t.” Daniel was a man of action. If there was one thing he’d learned as a Marine, there was always a way. “Make no mistake, I will stop whoever is trying to destroy us.”

Jennifer stood and went to stand behind her chair, as if she needed to put something physical between them. There was such fear and sadness in her eyes as she said, “That’s just it, no one is trying to destroy America.”

“Really?” Daniel practically shouted. He pointed up to the screens at the front of the room showing just how much of their country had been leveled. “Those images say otherwise.”

He was currently residing in a bunker in the Rocky Mountains. Considering the damage to the Appalachians, Daniel wasn’t certain he was all that safe but there

weren't any other options.

His voice quickly turned furious. "Hell, the entire Eastern Seaboard was almost wiped off the map. If that doesn't say someone is trying to destroy us, then tell me what does it say?"

Jennifer took a fortifying breath. Her knuckles were white with the force she currently placing on the back of the chair she was standing behind.

Daniel thought he'd been ready for whatever she'd been able to tell him. He couldn't have been more wrong.

CHAPTER 14

The wind whipped Kian's hair all around his face, stinging his cheeks as it slapped against them. The heavy wooden door started to rattle slightly.

Stop , Danara screamed as if Kian were stupid. He cannot know what you are doing.

Kian rolled his eyes. Not that Danara could see the action, but he lessened the force with which he wielded the new ability to control the air currents. Slowly, his hair floated down to settle around his shoulders in a mess of tangles.

Kian automatically combed the strands with his fingers. It wouldn't take long for Brant to figure out what he'd been doing while he'd left Kian to starve in this hovel if he came in to find his hair a windblown mess.

Based on the minimal amount of light that came through the crack in the door, Kian guessed it had been two days since Brant had left him there. Then again, he had no idea how long he'd been knocked unconscious, so it could have been longer.

His stomach grumbled by the lack of food. But it was not having access to water that left Kian feeling weak. Something that wasn't going to help whenever Brant returned.

Still, progress had been made. It was satisfying to feel the power that flowed through him. Kian wasn't naïve enough to believe it was a match against Brant - yet. Realistically, all Kian could hope for was the advantage of surprise to help get him out of this mess before Brant kept his promise and killed Kian.

Not that Kian planned to go down meekly. His mother had been a victim and there was no way Kian planned to become one. No. He was a fighter and he wouldn't die without doing as much harm as possible.

There was also the knowledge that Alec was likely tearing up the world looking for Kian. Knowing Brant, he was biding his time to complete his plan to ensure that Alec felt every minute of torture he planned to inflict on Kian. That would mean he had to allow them to connect again. How he'd blocked them in the first place, Kian had no clue, but he only had to survive long enough for Alec to find him.

There was a dramatic sigh in his head. I have already told you, Alec cannot save you. The voice was little more than a whisper.

Danara's quiet tone did more to scare Kian than the words. He could feel the queen's anxiety, which was odd since she wasn't actually real.

If you know he is looking for me, why don't you just tell him where I am? There had to be a way for Danara to speak with Alec just as she had Kian. Right?

I do not know where you are. There was a level of frustration in Danara's words. Kian wasn't sure if it was directed at him or the situation, not that it mattered. It wouldn't change anything. I am only here spiritually, not physically. I cannot see you.

Great. What the hell good does that do? Kian took a deep, calming breath. If Kian had to defeat Brant, he needed to get to work to learn everything possible about the powers. What next?

Earth, the queen told him. You must be careful. One tremble and Brant will know what you are up to.

“Then how the hell am I supposed to practice?” His voice startled him as he’d grown so accustomed to talking in his mind.

The floor is made of dirt and rock. You must work to move it. Hurry, there is not much time left. The queen’s voice sounded different to Kian, more afraid.

What’s wrong? He couldn’t put his finger on it but Kian was sure Danara knew something she wasn’t sharing.

Nothing. Just practice. I will be back.

For the first time since waking, Kian was left alone with his thoughts. The silence was deafening. Refusing to dwell on it, he got to work on moving the dirt and small pebbles on the floor.

Sweat dripped down Kian’s face. Having no idea how much time had passed since Danara had left, Kian was beyond frustrated that he hadn’t been able to move a speck of dirt. Admittedly, part of it had to do with worry about why the queen had left so abruptly and hadn’t returned. Rubbing his temples in frustration, Kian tried to clear his mind of everything.

Alec’s face filtered in his head. Alec, please find me. Sitting up straight, Kian could swear he heard him answer. It was faint, so faint it might have all been in his imagination but something deep inside said it was real.

Renewed energy coursed through him as Kian held onto that small sliver of hope it provided. As if drawing from Alec’s strength, a handful of dirt rose up, leaving a small indentation before floating across the room to drop into a pile. Okay, it wasn’t exactly a pile as it was only a handful; still, it was a start.

The knowledge of what needed to be done helped him practice until a large hole

appeared in the floor. A grin tugged at his lips in excitement. It still wouldn't be enough to go against Brant, but Kian was once more making headway.

Not knowing when Brant would return, Kian reversed the process and quickly moved the dirt back in place, even packing it down so nothing appeared out of place. Tempted to jump up and shout with glee, Kian refrained in case Brant was close enough to hear him.

Plus, Kian wasn't so sure he could have stood. If he didn't get water and food soon, there was a good chance he'd be too weak to put up any kind of fight.

Was that Brant's plan? If it was, there was little Kian would be able to do about it. Not about to give up, he tried to find a way to get food and water before becoming too weak to help himself.

Kian wiped the sweat off his forehead and forced the morbid thoughts away. Instead, they were replaced with the desire to take down Brant. There may not have been much of a chance, but if there was a way for him to kill that son of a bitch, Kian would find it.

A noise startled on the other side of the door causing him to jump. Stealing himself for what was to come, Kian scrambled to sit against the far wall and purposefully looked defeated. The door swung open and light poured through the now open space, temporarily blinding him.

"Not to worry, I haven't forgotten about you, human," Brant sneered. "Just thought you'd want to know Alec is close by, causing all sorts of destruction." His cruel laughter filled the cell. "By the looks of things, he is much more dangerous than I ever was. I only killed a few women; he, on the other hand, has killed thousands."

His words filled him with dread. There was no doubt it was because of Kian that Alec

was hurting others. Somehow, he had to get out of here to help. “You may manage to kill me before Alec finds me but I will have the ultimate satisfaction of knowing he will kill you in the end.”

“As if the brat could.” Brant spat on the floor in disgust.

Not able to cower any longer, Kian pushed to his feet with his spine ramrod straight, hands clenched at his sides. “Really? Then why didn’t you fight him?”

Brant sneered. “Because this is so much more fun.”

With one eyebrow indicating Kian didn’t believe him, he said, “Or you are too scared to fight him?”

Prepared for the blow that followed, Kian used the pain to push out to reach Alec, hoping with the door open he might feel Kian.

“I know what you are trying to do but it won’t work. You can’t call out to him.” Bending down, Brant reached out to grip Kian’s chin cruelly in his hands. “But don’t worry, soon he will hear your screams.”

He threw down a bottle of water and a protein bar of some sort. “Eat,” he ordered. The evil grin Brant wore sent a shiver through Kian’s body. “I wouldn’t want you to die too quickly, after all.

Then, he slammed the door. Kian heard the lock slide into place but he didn’t care. A smile of triumph forced a smile as he opened the bottle of water and took a sip. Brant just made a big mistake underestimating him.

With more energy than he had, Kian ripped open the wrapper of the protein bar. He took a bite savoring the knowledge that he was going to kill the smug son of a bitch if

it was the last thing he did.

CHAPTER 15

Alec wanted to roar out as he tried once more to reach out to Kian with no success. He'd felt his mate for the briefest of moments, he was sure of it. But it not only didn't last, Alec feared Tarak had been right, it had only been his imagination.

No.

He refused to believe that. He'd felt Kian's mind brush against his like the softest caress. More determined to reach out to him, Alec forced himself to relax and let the peace that Kian instilled in him since the moment they'd met to infuse him. Then he opened up his senses, stretching them out in all directions in search of his mate.

Nothing.

It was hard, but he refused to allow his frustration and anger take control. Instead, Alec remained where he was, letting his love for Kian push its way from deep within him and out into his surroundings.

He wasn't sure how, but he knew what the village woman said was right. Love was the key. If he could channel his feelings for Kian, maybe Alec would be able to find him. Danara's words came back to him, 'You have to believe in him.'

That was easy. Kian was the strongest person he'd ever met. He had a will made of steel, though Alec knew his mate had never really thought so.

From the beginning, Kian had never backed down in his search for the truth. Even

when Alec tried to intimidate his mate, Kian had stood toe-to-toe with him, refusing to give up.

There was never a doubt in his mind that if Kian was determined to kill Brant and come back to Alec, he would. What he didn't know was how. Kian might have had the will of a warrior but he didn't have the muscle or the knowledge of demon ways.

A hand clamped down on his shoulder. "We will find him," Tarak vowed at his side.

Alek only nodded as he was too afraid to speak. He had to remain strong for Kian. He would find his mate. When he did, Brant would die. Alec believed that with all his heart.

For a brief moment, Alec had felt Kian. It didn't last long but he knew what direction to begin looking and that would have to be a start for now. The four Sentinels headed further into the mountains, keeping an eye out for any sign of Brant.

"Alec." Tarak's voice low so the others wouldn't hear him. "Calm down."

It wasn't easy to keep his abilities in check when his too vivid imagination wouldn't give him a moment's reprieve from what Brant might be doing to Kian. It was a living hell to not know if his mate was hurt or even alive.

Defeat caused his body to fold in on itself. "I'm not sure I can," he told his father honestly.

Trey and Samson moved quickly to set up a perimeter in hopes of containing any damage Alec might unleash. No words were even needed. It was something they'd had to do at least a dozen times since leaving Tuklati seventy-two hours ago.

Refusing to let Brant win – again – Alec sank to his knees and breathed deeply. His

short fingernails bit into the skin of his palms as he struggled to find his center. Without Kian alongside of him, Alec found it nearly impossible. It was as if there were a hole inside of him.

Small pebbles dug into his knees but he ignored the discomfort trying to feed from the earth instead of destroying it. The earth's force is what gave the demons their strength and right now he knew he needed to find the peace the planet could give him.

Laying his palms flat against the surface, Alec called out to the planet to help him. A river of energy snaked up his arms - his tattoo pulsed with the power he drew upon. Closing his eyes, Alec poured all his love for Kian into the ground beneath him.

The flow of power exchanged between him and the element causing his heart to slow, his breathing to even out. Each time he inhaled, he drew more of the earth's force within him. With every exhale, he let all his emotions leave his body to be absorbed by the surrounding terrain.

How long he sat there, Alec couldn't be sure, for time no longer mattered as his soul eased. His limbs, torso, and thankfully, his heart, shed the heavy weight that had been dragging him into a pit of despair. He welcomed the blackness that enveloped him, letting himself sink further into the will of the planet.

Something shifted and Alec opened his eyes, blinking as he stared into the prettiest blue eyes he'd ever known. "Kian," Alec whispered, afraid he would disappear.

His mate hadn't heard him when he spoke. Kian's body shook as sobs choked him. Reaching out to touch him, Alec's hand passed right through him. Stunned, he stared at his hand, unable to believe what he just saw. "Kian," he said louder this time.

Still, his mate hadn't moved but his sobs quieted slightly. Lifting his head, Kian

stared right at him, but Alec could tell he wasn't actually seeing him. What the hell?

Wiping his eyes, Kian struggled to stand. Fire lit those blue orbs as his mate looked past him. Turning to see what he was looking at, Alec saw...A door.

Alec's heart raced. This is where he is.

He didn't know how this happened, nor did he care. Determined to figure out where his mate was, Alec walked to the door. He reached out to open it, but his hand went right through the latch.

What was going on? Alec no idea. But if he could pass through the door, that door, he might just find Kian. He stepped into the door only to end up walking right back into the room.

His gaze went to Kian. He had no idea how, but somehow he was being granted a reprieve from the agony of not knowing if Kian was hurt, or worse – dead. Alec might not be able talk to him or discover his location, but at least he knew his mate was alive.

He drank in every inch of that lithe body he'd come to love more than life itself. Alec willed his mate to hear him. "I will find you, Kian. I need you stay strong."

As if Kian heard him, even though Alec knew he hadn't, Kian lifted his hand and fire burst from the tips of his fingers, growing with every second. Alec's heart skipped a beat with pride. He should have known his mate would never sit there cowering. Kian been practicing to use his powers.

Drinking him in one last time, Alec knew he had to get back to the others to tell them what happened. Before he left, Kian had extinguished the flames and he stared once more at the door.

His gaze flicked to the same piece of wood and his jaw dropped. Right in front of the door, dirt lifted from the ground to settle in the far corner of the room. What had been a sliver of light shining from under the door, now was beacon. Kian had created a hole in seconds.

He was learning how to wield his powers quickly, but Alec knew if he didn't find his mate soon, it wouldn't be enough. 'Believe in him.' It's what Danara had said to him and Alec did. He also knew Brant was a vicious killer.

A dangerous grin appeared on Kian's face. Just as quickly as Kian had created the hole, he replaced it, covering what he'd done. "I will be ready for you, Brant," Kian vowed.

Pride filled Alec as the blackness returned. Disoriented, he found himself lying on the ground surrounded by Tarak, Trey and Samson. He hated leaving Kian, but Alec found himself smiling as he stared at the trio.

"Brant is going down." There was no doubt in his mind any longer. He would find Kian and together they would kill Brant.

He just needed to locate his mate first.

CHAPTER 16

I promise I will tell no one else.

It wasn't what Daniel had said that had hurt Jennifer so deeply, it was the way he said it. She shouldn't have been surprised by his reaction when no one else had ever believed her either.

So why did she feel as if she'd been punched in the gut when he'd gotten that same look in his eyes as everyone else had since her nightmares had begun? She wasn't crazy. Sure, her story was hard to swallow but she'd actually believed Daniel was better than the others. That he would just dismiss her out of hand was heart wrenching.

It wasn't as if the things that had been happening over the past few days were normal. Shouldn't he have at least considered Jennifer might be right?

She dropped onto one of the chairs in her small living space in defeat. She was an idiot. Stupidly, she'd done the one thing she swore she'd never do again and Daniel didn't have the courtesy to consider, even for a moment, that she might be right. Instead, he assumed she was crazy.

Although, to be fair, after all she'd been through, Jennifer wasn't exactly sane. That would have been impossible after what she'd witnessed.

A shiver wracked her body as the images of her youth forced their way past the lock she normally kept on those memories.

At the age of fourteen, Jennifer and her best friend, Angela Ruiz, were inseparable. Residing next door to each other, they practically lived with one another by spending all their time together, even spending many nights at each other's homes. Angela's mom was single and didn't stand on formality, insisting Jennifer have a key and could come and go whenever she wanted.

It had been summer and Angela was at her dad's for the weekend but was due home soon. Missing her friend that was more like a sister, Jennifer went over to wait for her. As she entered the house, she'd stopped dead in her tracks. Too young to understand, her instincts were screaming at her to get the hell out. Jennifer shook off the unease she'd felt and headed inside.

Her only saving grace was whatever had caused her to hesitate going into the house, had managed to keep her mouth shut instead of calling out to Angela's mom. There had been something in the air that made her nose wrinkle as she tiptoed from the backdoor, through the kitchen, and peeked around the corner to the living room.

Her stomach dropped as she stared in disbelief. There, on the couch was Angela's mom, someone Jennifer considered a second mom, with blood and bruises covering her too still body. A part of Jennifer saw the blood that splattered the walls and floor, but she couldn't tear her gaze from the sightless soft brown eyes that had always been so kind when Jennifer had needed a friendly ear.

Her stomach rolled. She slapped her hand over her mouth, fighting off the need to throw up and call attention to herself, for there, standing over Ms. Ruiz, was a man. He was covered in blood, but it was the look of manic glee in his eyes that had scared the crap out of Jennifer.

She started to take a step back, to run as far from this hell as possible, when Jennifer saw him turn to stare right at her. His eyes glowed an eerie red and Jennifer couldn't stop the scream being ripped from her throat. No matter how much her mind yelled

for her to run, her legs wouldn't cooperate as she froze.

There was a noise behind her, but Jennifer couldn't turn away from that malevolent grin that was directed at her. It was as if she could see her death in the man's face.

Her body suddenly jolted as it was shoved out of the way. She tumbled to the floor. A part of her wanted to curl into a ball and hide from the world, but try as she might, Jennifer couldn't stop from lifting her head to watch with morbid curiosity as another man faced the killer.

In hindsight, she should have run, maybe then her life wouldn't have turned upside down. Jennifer hadn't known it at the time, but that would be a fault of hers, that need to know, that would follow her through her whole life.

To this day, the image of those two men fighting sent shivers of fear through Jennifer. She wasn't sure if that was a good or bad thing. What she saw wiped out most of the horror of finding her best friend's mom ripped apart. Not that she didn't have her fair share of nightmares about that, but the fighting was something she'd never been able to forget.

The man, not that he had been human, who pushed her out of the room, threw fire at the one who'd just killed her best friend's mom. Before the flame had touched the murderer, he'd just disappeared.

Jennifer blinked. When that didn't change what was happening before her, she shook her head, fearing she was what many would end up calling her, crazy. Wind whipped through the small home as papers, books, and even picture frames, flew in all directions.

It was surreal as the one who had thrown a ball of fire put his hand out with flames erupting from the tips of his fingers. The hand seemed to punch through the swirling

air. The wind stopped as the killer was knocked to the ground.

Jennifer blinked again. Where in the hell had he come from?

This time, the need to puke couldn't be stopped when the stranger who had pushed her out of the way, shoved his hand into the murderer's chest and yanked his heart out. The next thing she heard was screaming. She had no idea it was her until the man, with blood dripping from his fingers, turned to her.

He strode towards Jennifer and she screamed even louder. He knelt before her, placing his non-bloody hand on her shoulder.

For the second time since she walked into her best friend's house, Jennifer was sure she was about to die. But the man just started speaking. His voice was calm, even though Jennifer hadn't heard a word he said over her screams.

"I am sorry you had to see this, little one. It would be best if you forgot everything you saw. Do you understand me?" he said when she started coughing as her throat hurt from overuse.

Jennifer didn't understand but at that point she was willing to say anything if he would just let her live. Unable to speak, she nodded.

Hindsight was wonderful. Jennifer had wished more than once she'd listened to him. He'd only been trying to help her. He had known no one would believe her, but she hadn't grasped that. Instead, she told just about everyone she knew what she'd seen that day.

Within a week, her parents felt they didn't have a choice but to send her to a psychiatric hospital. Even then, she refused to recant her words. Someone had to believe her. Right?

Wrong.

Within a month, she'd found herself in a long-term mental institution often deeply drugged. She just couldn't understand why no one considered she might be telling the truth. Stubborn by nature, Jennifer had refused to change her story, no matter what they did to her.

It had been nearly six months after that fateful day, that the man who had saved her, appeared in her locked room. Maybe it was all the drugs they were giving her, but Jennifer hadn't been afraid of him.

He'd sat down next to her and told her all about his world. He'd visited her every day for a week and Jennifer had been grateful. His name was Tarak and when he'd told her he was a demon, Jennifer had been relieved. For one, it proved she wasn't crazy as others claimed. Secondly, he was the one who made her understand no one would ever believe her. Humans tended to rationalize what they couldn't explain.

He convinced her to change her story and she did. Why she trusted him, she wasn't sure, but he seemed so honest. Over the years, he'd visited her from time to time. He treated her like a daughter, and since her own father didn't want anything to do with her after her supposed breakdown, she looked forward to his visits.

He'd never lied to her or talked down to her like she was a babbling idiot. More than anything, she appreciated that, especially when everyone seemed to have abandoned her.

She had known the moment the reports came in of just about every natural disaster happening at once that it had been the demons. She'd studied all the data that had been collected but the one thing she couldn't figure out was why did it appear demons were trying to destroy the Earth?

She needed to speak with Tarak but she had no way to get a hold of him. That had been the only reason she'd been stupid enough to take a chance and tell Daniel. Now, he thought she was crazy.

Maybe she was - after all, why else would she tell the story again when experience told her what the results would be?

CHAPTER 17

“I found it.” Gaius’ excited voice startled everyone in the archives. When Aticus had asked for Gaius’s help, his old friend hadn’t been able to refuse. But Gaius had insisted Alec’s and Kian’s friends be allowed to help as they had become quite good at research.

Aticus had been reluctant bringing others in on what was happening, but it seemed as if they already knew, so he’d reluctantly agreed. If they were to find what Aticus was looking for, they would need all the help they could get.

Aticus got up from where he’d been reading in one of the rooms and went to the center room, where Gaius had been reading. “So, is there a way to counter the spell?”

They had been searching for ways to stop Brant from hiding Kian, or himself, for that matter. Aticus was hoping they would find a way to bind the old magic once more. There was a reason it had been taken away from them in the first place and Aticus was more than willing to trust that their ancestors had known what they were doing at the time.

Gaius held up a finger as he kept reading.

The magic the demons possessed was strong as they drew their powers from the earth. They weren’t the only race to use it, but their ability to manipulate the elements strengthened the magic, making them more powerful than most.

When that old magic had perverted the humans, the Demon Council had decided the

only way to protect demons was to bind the magic. They did not allow demons to use anything but the most basic spells, such as the one to hide themselves from humans.

The last time the old ways were used was to create the line of Sentinels. Most books were then sealed away, except not all the books had been hidden. Gaius had admitted he'd found many books in his own private collection.

It wasn't until he'd discovered what his own son had done, that Gaius had taken action and locked all references to their old ways in a safe at the archives. How Brant managed to find it Gaius hadn't known, not that it had mattered.

Gaius had admitted that Brant had occasionally seen him practice some of the spells. It wouldn't have been a stretch for Brant to figure out where Gaius had hidden the books. There had only been one problem with that theory. Gaius swore none of the material he'd locked away contained anything strong enough for Brant to hide himself and Kian from other demons.

That meant he'd found his information elsewhere. Aticus just wished Gaius knew where. For he had a bad feeling the answer would end up leading to their downfall.

Everyone in the room sat there waiting for Gaius to finish reading. The silence was a bit unnerving. Gaius's shoulders sagged in defeat. "It is gone," he whispered in disbelief. "Someone tore out the counter spell."

"But I thought you said the books had been locked up." Kendria said, her voice quivering as she grasped the implications.

Gaius didn't bother answering her as he sat there clearly uncertain what to do.

"We can't give up." Calder stood as if trying to convince the others by his actions. "Alec will move heaven and earth to find Kian and we have to help him. Admittedly,

this is definitely a setback but there has to be another way.”

“It is possible by studying the spell I could come up with something to counter it,” Gaius suggested. He didn’t sound hopeful but it was their only chance.

In the meantime, he had a meeting with the Council. He wasn’t going to be able hold them off much longer from demanding action be taken, but Aticus was determined to save their kind.

All eyes were on Aticus as he strode into the Council Chamber. The other members were agitated with so much on the line. The other races were clamoring for the demons to fix the problem or they would be more than happy to step in and do it for them.

Even though they were no match for the demons, the fact was, if all the races rose up against them, it would be a war unlike the planet had seen since the beginning of time. Worry etched their faces. Many appearing haggard from lack of sleep.

“Well, what have you found?” Nodin, one of the younger members of the Council, and as such, its most impatient, asked.

There were seven members that formed the Council, each appointed to the position but only after they faced the trials set before them. The trials were put into place by the first Danara and Drakarn to be sure no one rose to power who was corrupt. Not that these were a guarantee but deceit was usually discovered during that time.

Except for Kyden. He’d managed to get through the trials even though he’d obviously gotten into the position in order to destroy their current way of life. Aticus found the missing Danara journals in Kyden’s rooms.

As he’d stood there choking the life out of the old man, Aticus had gotten Kyden to

admit to his plan. Except, he hadn't managed to find out who else was in on the plan before Kyden had died. It was most distressing to know that there were those that wanted demons to return to their evil beginnings.

Kyden's obvious murder had the Councilors even more on edge. Not willing to share with them the need for Kyden's death, Aticus had let them believe Brant must have done it. He hadn't told them the truth because Aticus couldn't trust another member hadn't been in on the plot.

Looking at the empty spot at the table that hadn't been filled since Kyden's death, Aticus shook his head at the question asked of him. "The counter spell was stolen. Gaius is going to try and come up with one but the chances of him figuring it out in time to help is not good."

"The situation is becoming worse with the other races. We either have to get Alec to control himself or they will." Safara looked positively ill saying this as she was one of the more vocal members to advocate for Alec and Kian since it had been decided to bring Kian to Tuklati.

No one at the table had been willing to meet Aticus's gaze since he'd entered the room. They wouldn't dare as he might consider it a challenge since they were banding together to suggest Aticus have Alec killed.

Emboldened by Safara's statement, Kuval, as usual, defended her. "Aticus, none of us wants to eliminate Alec, but if we don't do something soon, we will find ourselves at war with the other races."

Jax, the second youngest member of the Council, who usually voted with Aticus, spoke up. "If that happens, there will be no way to stay hidden from the humans."

It wasn't the other races the demons feared. Sure, war would mean demons would die

but there was never any doubt who would remain the victor. But if the humans found out, it would be impossible for them to survive. Humans were just too prevalent and the magic was still out there to stop demons from using their powers.

Alec had wiped out entire cities, Aticus wasn't sure the humans wouldn't figure it out anyway. Then, where would they hide? Especially when they now knew they needed humans to keep their humanity or risk returning to the evil creatures they'd been before.

Not showing an ounce of defeat, even though it was what he felt, Aticus turned his cold, hard eyes on the rest of the Council. "Understand me. We will not harm Alec or Kian. They are the key to our survival. If anyone of you goes against me, you will end up like Kyden."

With that, he swept out of the room, leaving the others stunned by his insinuation that he'd killed Kyden and not Brant as they'd assumed. Fear filled all five remaining members of the council.

CHAPTER 18

After Jennifer's far-fetched story, President Burrows sent her to her rooms for some much needed sleep. He had no idea how someone as clearly crazy as she was managed to get a job that put her in the same room as the President of the United States, but Daniel had more important things to worry about at the moment.

Exhausted, he rubbed his eyes with the heels of his hands, trying not to explode in front of his advisors. He wished he'd had the luxury of a few hours of sleep.

Instead, he had to listen to more reasons as to why there were no theories for how nearly half of the United States was hit by some sort of natural disaster. His Secretary of Defense was currently giving one such excuse. "Sir, the fact is, more than just the United States was affected by the phenomenon."

"Phenomenon?" he shouted as he slammed his fist onto the table before him. "You act like this hadn't been done on purpose." Daniel Burrows knew in his gut this hadn't been some freak of nature. As capricious as Mother Nature could be, she wasn't this chaotic.

Frustration had him clamping his jaw shut. Years of training in the military taught him that losing his cool wasn't going to get the results this country needed. He went to the screen at the front of the room and stared at the various maps.

Each one showed different areas of the world that had suffered from some sort of unusual natural disaster. The majority of the time, it was earthquakes, winds strong enough to spin tornados, and fire that scorched everything in its path. Whoever was

doing this had started in the United States before moving across Europe to head into parts of Asia.

They'd sent drones to fly over the area hit last but found nothing. "So what you're saying, Mr. Grish, is that you still have no information for me?"

Flushing bright red, Albert opened his mouth, then closed it. After several moments, he opened it again. "Yes, sir.

The four-star general once so proud, stood there with his shoulders slumped. "We've been scrambling for more intel but so many of our resources were lost. Power is out in most areas of the 30 states affected, as well as our European allies."

Incredulous at the man's ability to lay blame for his shortcomings, Daniel Burrows wasn't having it. "I don't care what the reason is, I want an answer, not excuses."

Lukas Hunt stepped forward. "Sir, if I may?"

Nodding, Daniel said, "If you have anything to add, please, do so."

"Sir, as you know I have ties to Special Forces." He hesitated a moment as he glanced up to the map before returning to Daniel. "Several teams have been sent to follow the path of destruction, but so far they haven't been able to find concrete proof as to what is happening."

Pink rose up from Lukas's neck and into his face. For a moment, his gaze went to the floor before once more landing on Daniel with determination and resignation. "The rumors are circulating that whatever caused this was supernatural."

Daniel's piercing blue eyes pinned the man who had been with him more than any other person since he'd become President. During that time, Daniel had gotten to

know his head of security pretty well and trusted the man's instincts. "So you think someone intentionally did this?"

"That I can't answer." This time his gaze went to the maps and stayed there. "I can only tell you there is no way this was natural. At the same time, I have to agree with my counterparts in the field. There is no technology known to man that could cause this much damage, especially without our sensors picking it up."

Daniel turned back to the others in the room. His tone turned downright frigid. "Ladies and gentleman, I want answers as to how anyone could have accomplished this. Whether it was an attack on the United States or not, I agree with Lukas, someone or something is responsible and I want to know who and how."

Everyone stood there for a moment before jumping into action as if they couldn't obey the order fast enough. Daniel wasn't sure they would discover anything, but he sure as hell hoped they would. Anything was better than the alternative he was beginning to fear may be true.

He wouldn't blame Jennifer if she never spoke to him again after the way he treated her the last time they met, but Daniel had to try. If, as impossible as it seemed, she'd actually been telling the truth...

Daniel honestly wasn't sure how to finish that thought. There just couldn't be demons that walked the earth. The consequences of that reality was too daunting to accept.

He let out a shaky breath as he approached her door after the failed meeting. Daniel had no idea what kind of reception he was going to get, but he assumed it wouldn't be good. Unwilling to debate the reasoning behind coming here, Daniel knocked.

The breath left his body in a whoosh when he saw Jennifer standing there in a big pink fluffy robe, her hair still wet from a recent shower. God, she was breathtaking.

Shaking his head slightly to clear it, he said, “We need to talk.” Striding past her, he entered without waiting for an invitation.

As he brushed past her, he had to stifle a groan when he inhaled deeply. She smelled of strawberries and cream. Maybe this hadn’t been a good idea to come to her room. Keeping his back to her until he heard the door click shut, Daniel took several steadying breaths hoping she hadn’t noticed his nervousness.

“What can I do for you, Mr. President?” He heard the stiff formal way she spoke. She hadn’t forgiven him for not believing her, but seriously how could she expect him to? She may be the best analyst he’d ever met, but demons?

Slowly he faced her, searching for some clue that she understood that her story was some fantasy in her mind. Except, he was there, in her suite, because he was no longer sure about that.

All he saw was anger. She was pissed and not bothering to mask it. Her jaw was clenched like she was grinding her teeth in order to keep from cursing him.

Daniel had no doubt she only did so because he was the President of the United States. From others, he expected them to act with some deference to his status, but not with her. For some reason, Daniel wanted Jennifer to be uncensored and yell at him as she clearly wanted to.

At the same time, if there was even the slightest chance Jennifer was right, he needed her to get on board. Hell, even if she was wrong, Jennifer was too good an analyst to keep on the sidelines.

The question was, how was he going to get her back on track if she was mad? It wouldn’t be easy but neither was being President. So why did Daniel think this conversation would be more challenging than anything he’d faced in his job?

“Look, I’m hoping that now you’ve had time to rest you’re ready to come back and help.” Daniel winced as soon as the words left his mouth. He didn’t need to be a genius to know he’d just fucked up.

If it was possible, she looked even madder. Her fists kept clenching and unclenching at her sides and Daniel swore he heard her teeth grinding together. Maybe he should have given her more time. Then again, he wasn’t sure any amount of time would have helped when he treated her like a fragile doll instead of the strong woman she was.

Stunned when she spun on her heel and stormed out of the room into what he assumed was the bedroom, Daniel felt his jaw drop as the door slammed shut. Now what?

He wasn’t about to leave without speaking to her. He needed her help. When it came to the possibility of demons, Daniel freely admitted he was ill-equipped to deal with it...them?

Nor was he sure how to feel about someone walking out on him. It had been a long time since someone had dared to do that. Not since his wife.

Not so surprisingly, Daniel found himself smiling at Jennifer’s audacity. How many people had the courage to storm out on the President of the United States? Hell, she hadn’t even given him an answer - making him wait like some lackey. Noises from the other room told him her anger hadn’t lost any steam either.

At one point, he could hear her talking to herself. “Stupid, stupid, what were you thinking?” He couldn’t help chuckling at the words. “No one’s ever believed you before. What made you think he was different?”

That statement cut him deeply. Daniel didn’t want to be like everyone else, at least not when it came to Jennifer. Yet, wasn’t that exactly what he’d done? Instead of

listening, he'd jumped to the conclusion that she was crazy.

But what did she expect? They were talking about demons, for goodness sake. There might be some people who were what he would call evil, but honest to goodness demons? No way.

His head snapped up when the door to the bedroom flew open. Relief flowed through him as he saw her dressed in her normal business clothes. Standing he said, "Does this mean you are ready to help?"

Anger still rolled off her in waves but she gave a short nod. "But understand me, I wasn't kidding earlier. Those men who stopped the tsunami were demons. The only reason they would get involved is because one of their own caused it. And if you don't believe me, then you're a bigger idiot than I thought."

She didn't wait for him to comment as she left him in her wake. Apparently, his being the President no longer impressed her.

CHAPTER 19

Exhausted, Kian curled up on the dirt floor wishing he had the time to sleep, not that would have been possible, even if he had the time. The floor was mostly jagged rock, not exactly comfortable.

Now that he'd gained control of some of the power, Kian would swear electricity flowed through his veins, charging every cell in his body.

He would have thought those sensations would give Kian's muscles the added energy to keep going, instead, they begged for rest as they screamed in agony. In fairness, the only respite he'd given them since waking up had been a brief moment of weakness when he'd let the tears flow.

Kian hated himself for needing to cry. The last thing he wanted was to give up, but admittedly the release had done wonders. It hadn't hurt that he'd felt Alec with him. Kian wasn't sure it had been real, but it didn't matter, for it gave him the push needed to increase his abilities.

When he'd begun to test himself, Kian had only been able to start a small flame, dig up a tiny bit of dirt, or create a negligible breeze. All of which Kian had been able to increase with more effort, but never at the start of each session. After he'd given in to the hopelessness of the situation, Kian had dug deep and tried again.

When the wooden door had charred and an actual hole had appeared before the door instead of slight dip from the amount of dirt he'd moved, Kian pushed even harder. The improvement was astounding, well, at least Kian thought so. He had to hope it

would be enough when the time came to fight Brant.

Kian wasn't certain he'd be able to hold off Brant long enough until Alec could find him. It was why Kian pushed his palms against the ground rising up until he was sitting once more. Those doubts might still find their way into his mind, but Kian also knew there was no other choice but to fight Brant for as long as was needed.

The other option wasn't something Kian was willing to consider. Giving himself another minute to rest by leaning against the cool stone wall, Kian willed the lethargy that continued to threaten to consume him, to leave.

Danara?

Nothing. Great. Kian had tried several times to call out to the old queen but she'd been stubbornly silent. Figures. Now that Kian wanted company, Danara was nowhere to be found.

Drawing up his knees, Kian buried his head against them trying to summon the strength needed to face Brant. It couldn't be much longer before he came for Kian. He could only pray the longer it took, the more likely Alec would find them.

It wasn't helping that his heart broke every time he thought about what Alec must be going through. Brant mentioned Alec was killing, which meant Alec wasn't in control of his powers, all because of Kian. Ever since meeting Alec, he'd been able to feel Kian, so what was Brant doing to block it? Could Kian do something to help Alec find him?

Closing his eyes, Kian concentrated on Alec. Firm lips curling up into a smile while his emerald eyes sparkled with happiness immediately came to mind. Kian's skin tingled as he imagined those calloused fingers brushing along his arm. A frisson of electricity shot through Kian, just like when Alec touched him.

Alec.

There was something almost tangible in the air causing Kian's eyes to pop open. He'd half expected Alec to be there in front of him. When Alec wasn't there, Kian called out to him again, praying he heard.

As if God was answering him, Alec was suddenly sitting right in front of him, emerald eyes pleading, for what, Kian didn't know. Afraid Alec would disappear if he moved, Kian remained still even as his hand itched to reach out, but somehow Kian knew he wasn't real.

"Alec?" he whispered.

That smile that melted Kian appeared and his heart sped up. Alec's mouth moved but there was no sound. Vainly, Kian tried to read those firm lips but try as he might, Kian couldn't make out anything until the end. 'I love you,' he mouthed.

"I love you, too," Kian told him. Then, he was gone. Even though deep down Kian was afraid he was just hallucinating, Alec's visit had given him the strength Kian needed to do whatever it took to be ready to face Brant.

Good thing, because a wave of evil pushed its way into the room before Kian even heard Brant coming. Fear gripped him in its claws even as Kian steeled himself for what was to come.

Slowly, he inhaled deeply, willing his heart to slow down so as not tip off how much Brant terrified Kian. It wasn't easy to exert his will over his chaotic emotions. In the end, it was focusing on Alec, that he would come, which helped Kian the most. Opening his eyes, Kian waited for his captor.

He didn't, not even when Brant slammed the door against the wall. There was no way

he'd allow the evil monster the satisfaction of finding him cowering. Although, the maniacal glee in Brant's eyes nearly had him screaming for help. Only the knowledge it wouldn't do any good kept his mouth shut.

That same look was in his eyes when he'd murdered Kian's mother. Maybe he should have been more scared but something inside him grew stronger as he faced his mother's killer.

He was no longer that scared little kid who'd hid in the closet. Kian's expression didn't give anything away as he sat there, staring up at the vicious killer. Stalking toward Kian, Brant's large hands wrapped around his shoulders and yanked Kian to his feet.

Pain lanced through him at Brant's rough treatment, but Kian pushed the desire to cry out from his mind. He didn't have time for anything to distract from what he had to do. Brant dragged Kian behind him as he led Kian to a larger cavern with several large crystals around the edges.

He must have seen Kian's curiosity for Brant chuckled darkly. "Those allow Alec to feel you as you die but keep everything hazy enough that he won't be able to find you."

Crap ! Never once had Kian considered that Alec might not be able to find him once Brant allowed him to feel the pain he planned to inflict. Now what? Trusting Alec and himself, Kian refused to give into the fear trying to claw its way out.

Kian stood there in the middle of the room with Brant circling around him. The monster actually licked his lips in anticipation. Revulsion caused Kian to shiver and Brant had the audacity to chuckle at his obvious discomfort.

Then, with no warning, his fist slammed into Kian's abdomen. Searing agony ripped

through him, even as he heard the crack of what was assumedly a rib.

Unable to breathe, Kian crumbled to the floor. There were several long moments when he felt death was going to be the outcome as his lungs refused to expand. Panic tore through Kian when his body took over and a small stream of air entered.

Thank God .

Even though Kian's mind screamed for Alec for several moments, he knew if there was a way through this then he had to depend on himself. Several ragged breaths later, Kian worked to bring his brain back online in order to come up with a plan. But before he'd figured out what to do, Kian was lifted into the air, feet dangling, desperately trying to feel the ground.

Brant's hand was wrapped around his neck, cutting off Kian's ability to breathe once more. His hands clawed at Brant's but if he was doing any damage there was no evidence of it. Tiny black dots started forming in Kian's eyes. God, he was dying.

That maniacal grin was again there as Brant's breath hitched with anticipation. "Time to die."

CHAPTER 20

There was no doubt in Alec's mind that Kian hadn't heard him when he tried again to connect with him, but somehow Alec was certain his mate had seen him. It gave him enough of finding Kian to not burn down everything around him. When he opened his eyes, Tarak was sitting next to him, his hand on Alec's shoulder, fear in his eyes.

"What?" He held his breath, afraid of what Tarak would tell him.

"That is what I am asking you," Tarak said. "For the last five minutes, the ground has been shaking, nothing catastrophic, but I was afraid you were losing control again."

"Sorry." He'd been so lost in the joy of seeing Kian that he hadn't been paying any attention. "Kian saw me this time. I guess I let my control slip." There were times he wasn't sure he'd ever have that kind of discipline again when it came to his mate.

Tarak approached. "Alec."

Alec held up his hand to stop him from giving another lecture. "I know I have to stay in control." Exhaling loudly, his hands clenched slightly. "I didn't even know all I could do until discovering my mate existed, okay?"

Quietly, his father said, "I was just going to say we will find him." Those words were becoming a mantra Tarak said each time Alec was losing his damn mind. Walking away, Tarak went to talk to Trey and Samson.

Feeling like a jerk, Alec tried to concentrate on Kian's face. Exhaustion had shone in

those eyes, dulling the blue as it was obvious Kian could hardly stay awake. But Alec had also felt the determination to defeat Brant still inside him. Would he have the strength to fight off Brant when the time came? Alec hoped so, because even though he knew he'd find his mate, he was equally positive Brant planned for Alec to arrive a moment too late.

Turning to the other three, Alec called out, "Is everyone ready?" Not even waiting for an answer, Alec started off in directions his instincts told to go.

They had just started to make their way when pain ripped through him, forcing Alec to his knees. "Kian," he screamed even as the ground shook beneath him.

Spots formed before his eyes, blinding him momentarily. His entire focus was on the one person who was his whole world.

"Alec."

He heard someone screaming his name, but it wasn't until a fist connected with his jaw that he was brought out of the hell of what Kian was enduring.

"Alec, snap out of it." Tarak commanded in a voice that Alec used to believe was forged from steel. "What is happening?"

Alec wished he knew. No. That wasn't true. More than anything at this moment, he hated that he could feel Kian desperate to pull in oxygen as agony spread throughout his abdomen, likely from being punched by Brant.

"Alec," Tarak yelled again.

But it wasn't until he felt Kian managed to drag in a breath that Alec had been able to speak. "Brant hit Kian."

He gasped, his own hand going to his throat where undoubtedly Brant had his meaty hand around Kian's neck. "He's going to kill him," Alec whispered in defeat as he realized he could feel it all, yet when his soul reached for his mate, he still couldn't find him.

"Shouldn't we go to him?" Trey asked.

Alec's stood up, determined to save his mate. "That son of a bitch is still blocking Kian from me."

"What?" Samson wore a confused look, not that Alec could blame him since he had no idea how Brant managed it. "But you can feel him. Shouldn't that mean you can find Kian?"

Alec's hands curled into fists as he desperately wanted to punch Brant in the face. "I don't know how but I can feel everything he is..." Alec's words were choked off at the panic that tore through Kian's oxygen deprived body. "Fight, damn it. You are too strong to give up now."

He hadn't needed to speak the words aloud for Kian to hear him, but he had nonetheless. Alec nearly went to his knees once more when he felt precious air fill Kian's lungs. He didn't know how, but his mate had gotten out of Brant's grasp.

Now he just needed to figure out how to find him. Turning to his father and friends, Alec asked, "Anyone have any ideas of how to find him?"

Samson scratched his head. "I thought you said he saw you when you reached out last time."

Alec had no idea what Samson was getting at but he nodded.

His friend shrugged. “Seems to me, if Brant was completely blocking Kian then, yet you were able to see him now that he has at least some sort of opening between the two of you, you might be able to do the same thing to find Kian.”

Hope flared within Alec. He clapped a hand on Samson’s shoulder. “You’re a genius.”

Pink bloomed across Samson’s face. “Yeah, well, I just want to help,” he mumbled.

Alec didn’t waste any time. He knelt down right where he was and did everything he could to clear his mind and concentrate on his bond with Kian. It wasn’t easy as his mate was under attack, but Alec had to try. It might be the only way to save his life.

The sound of Alec’s voice in his mind did the one thing Kian hadn’t thought possible as the life was being literally choked out of him, it calmed him. The reminder that Alec believed in him hadn’t hurt.

Kian stilled in Brant’s grasp as he focused and let the new abilities rise to the surface. A shout of pain and Brant releasing his tight grip was all Kian needed to know it had worked. The sting of small pebbles digging into his skin when Brant had dropped Kian, barely registered as he took deep gulps of breath.

Still in danger, Kian rolled to his feet, smiling smugly at the rock he’d embedded in Brant’s bicep. It wasn’t exactly going to stop him for more than a moment as he dug the rock out, but at least Kian wasn’t dead.

Brant sneered at him. “Well, I admit I hadn’t expected you to be able to fight back, but that just makes it that more exciting.” His hand snaked out to grab Kian’s hair but Alec had taught him to use his smaller and more agile size to his benefit. At the last

second, he darted out of Brant's grasp.

By the rage on his face, Kian knew he had just pissed him off. Score one for him.

But that rage morphed into unbridled delight as if Brant relished the thought of being the predator and Kian the prey. Kian tried not to shudder at that thought, but he could tell by the way Brant's grin turned even more sinister, Kian hadn't hidden his revulsion well enough.

One thing was for certain, Kian needed to get out of there if Alec was going to find him. But how? Scanning the cave, Kian found the only exit. Unfortunately, there was no way he was going to beat Brant to it, not without a lot of luck.

When Brant was just out of reach, Kian used every bit of the control he'd been mastering and opened up a hole right underneath his feet. He took off running as Brant lost his balance. Kian's arm went out, fingers just brushing the wood of door to escape when what he felt what was like a steel band encircled his waist, yanking him back.

"Not so fast." Brant chuckled. "We wouldn't want Alec to get here before the main event."

This time, Kian couldn't stop the shudder from going through him, especially at the sensation of being pinned to Brant's body. He wanted to cry out in frustration.

How was he supposed to get away if Brant was faster and able use his powers better than Kian? Not even thinking about what he was doing, just letting instinct take over, his head snapped back into Brant's chest. The moment Kian heard his quick intake of breath, he thought he'd gain his freedom but Brant's arm didn't loosen at all. Thankfully, Alec's training had been intense and Kian had a lot more moves that had been drilled into him for months.

Slamming his foot down on Brant's instep caused him to curse and loosen his grip just enough for Kian to duck under his arm. Ramming his elbow into Brant's abdomen as hard as possible, it was Kian who cried out however, when his arm practically vibrated as his funny bone had hit those too hard muscles, but he refused to stop fighting.

Except, he didn't only use what Alec had taught him, Kian also applied all he'd learned when he'd watched several demon training sessions. Kian may not be as advanced as Brant when it came to using their abilities, but he wasn't about to go down without a fight either.

At the same time, he kicked Brant in the knee, Kian had hurled a rock through the air, this time catching him in the back of the head. Enraged, Brant roared loud enough to shake the ground beneath them.

It wasn't easy staying upright but Kian raced for the door anyway. He screamed in frustration when Brant managed to appear before him, even though he was only a few feet from freedom.

The rage in his eyes caused Kian to mentally tell Alec how much he loved him, for it was in that moment Kian realized he wasn't going to make it out of there alive. Not without Alec, and try as he might, Kian couldn't get out of that room so Alec could find him.

Brant watched the play of emotions on Kian's face and his anger died as the glee of his triumph returned. He knew Kian finally realized Brant was going to kill him.

But Brant's smile fell as the ground beneath them shook. He stared at Kian in confusion for a brief moment. Kian had no idea what was happening. He had been able to do something like that but from the frown on Brant's face, he didn't know that.

A figure suddenly appeared to his right. Alec. Relief flooded Kian.

“No,” Brant yelled as he saw Alec sitting on the ground, glaring at him.

Kian’s relief was short lived as he realized Alec wasn’t really there. His lips moved, but no sound came. It wasn’t until Brant blasted Alec with fire that went right through the mirage to the far side of the room that Brant understood Alec wasn’t actually there.

Kian turned on his heel and tried to make it to the door again, but Brant was too quick. His hand locked around Kian’s neck as he cackled in Alec’s direction. “This is even better. Now you get to watch me kill him, brother. ” Brant spat the last word out as if he hated the fact they were related.

Alec’s mouth moved to form Kian’s name on what he assumed was a scream. The ground pitched violently as Alec’s emerald eyes blazed with fury.

Brant couldn’t stay on his feet while holding Kian up in the air. Kian hadn’t even taken a full breath when the ground beneath Brant’s feet opened wide, burying him.

Kian’s eyes widened in shock as he turned back to Alec, who was trying to tell him something. Without sound, it was hard to know what he was saying, but when the ground that held Brant started to shift, Kian figured out what Alec was telling him.

The earth wasn’t going to hold Brant for long. If Kian had any hope of Alec finding him, he had to get out of the cave.

Bolting to his feet, Kian ran to the door, this time he not only reached it, but was able to yank it open. The bright rays of the sun momentarily blinded him, but the inhuman bellow from inside the cave he’d just left didn’t give him time to adjust. Brant had gotten free.

Kian ran. With no clue where he was going, he prayed Alec would find him in time. Wind whipped all around. It was nearly impossible to remain standing as the earth started to quake once more.

Laughter swirled on the wind around Kian. He knew Brant was playing with him but Kian didn't stop. Tears stung his eyes as the howling wind lashed against his face. Vision blurred, but he refused to give up.

A hand wrapped around his neck as Kian was jerked from behind, causing more tears to form as Brant slammed him against an unforgiving body. "Did you honestly think you could get away from me?" His breath against his ear made Kian cringe. "I don't know how you got that powerful to cause all that but it won't stop me. I will kill you," he promised.

Refusing to back down, especially since he was out of the cave with the crystals – which Kian assumed was how Brant was blocking Kian and Alec's connection – he just knew Alec would come for him.

As if answering his prayers, Alec suddenly materialized in front of Kian. For real, this time.

Even though Kian was trapped by Brant's hold, he could feel Alec's entire body hummed with unreleased energy of his dangerous emotions. The sight of him unlocked something dormant in Kian. He didn't quite understand it but Brant no longer scared him.

The grip on his neck tightened as Brant taunted Alec. "Well, well, look who's come to join the party." Brant's other hand reached around Kian's abdomen. "I have to say I'm impressed you found us. Not that it matters. At least this way, I'll get to watch your agony as I kill the human in front of you."

Kian stood there listening to his words that should have terrified him, yet, suddenly, he felt fearless. With Alec by his side, Kian was indestructible. Mentally, he shook off the fanciful thoughts knowing Brant did have the ability to kill him if Kian wasn't careful. Still, there was no doubt in Kian's mind Brant would die.

With his arm binding Kian's ribs, he struggled to take a breath but he found a way. Then he expelled it slowly. Searching inside for where that indestructible belief resided, Kian saw all the knowledge he needed. It probably shouldn't have been possible but Kian could actually access the core of his power.

"Let Kian go, Brant, and face me like a man instead of the coward we know you are," Alec taunted.

Brant's hand pulled Kian's head back against him, not giving him any room to move. With his arm around Kian's waist, Brant had effectively trapped both his arms. But he still had his feet. With speed Kian still wasn't used to, he stomped heavily on Brant's instep.

It wasn't as effective as he would have liked but that tight grip loosened a little. Using it, Kian slammed his head back hard. Pain exploded in the back of his head as he connected with Brant's chin. Hearing his grunt of pain was satisfying.

The moment both hands that had been holding him slackened enough, he pulled out one arm just enough to jab it into Brant's abdomen. Had he still been human, none of this would have mattered. It would have been like a gnat against an elephant. But Kian wasn't human any longer.

Using Brant's momentary confusion when he loosened his grip slightly, Kian instantly disappeared, reappearing next to Alec. "I did it," he whispered in a mix of disbelief and pride.

Not taking his eyes off Brant, Alec proudly said, “Of course, you did. You’re too strong to let him win.”

Kian smiled over at Alec, amazed at how lucky he was to have someone like Alec by his side. Then, as if called for by his will alone, Alec’s sword was in his hands while the ground beneath them continued to tremble with his fury.

CHAPTER 21

“Sir, there are more quakes being reported in Tibet.” General Rose appeared on one of the twenty screens that lined the front of the room. As he spoke, a map of the area took over two rows of screens.

The satellite images of the terrain weren’t exactly helpful. Most people knew they could read a license plate number off a car if they choose but seeing through trees still wasn’t an option.

Infrared wouldn’t help much as they couldn’t define who was causing the destruction, just that there were people down there. Hell, they didn’t even know if the people creating the earthquakes were down there.

“Sir, the first quakes happened about 10 minutes ago, registering a 9.3, but it was very localized. This one is gaining in strength.” All eyes in the room widened in horror as the ground shook hard enough the satellites couldn’t keep up which caused the images to blur.

Trees swayed, although by the way the branches were all flowing in one direction, Daniel suspected there was more than just an earthquake happening down there. Several huge trees toppled over. But it was the way in which it all took place that had Daniel glancing over at Jennifer, who wore an ‘I told you so,’ expression.

Unlike the catastrophic widespread damage that occurred on the east coast, this was localized to a square mile based on the dimensions at the bottom of the screen. Outside that area, nothing.

He had no idea how it could be possible. Then again, it could be the trembling just wasn't enough to cause the picture to be blurry. "General Rose, how extensive is the earthquake?"

The General went off screen, returning within a minute, his face ghostly white. "Mr. President, our readings, which admittedly may not be accurate since it isn't our equipment over there, but they indicate the earthquake extends for a mile in most directions but no further."

"Is that even possible?" Brad Flynn, Director of Homeland Security, asked. Just as the others in the room, Brad couldn't take his eyes off the screen.

The general didn't have a good answer. "Not that we are aware of, sir."

Daniel turned back to Jennifer and gestured for her to come over. When she stood next to him, Daniel leaned in close enough that no one else would hear him. "Your expression tells me there is proof of your claims. What do you see that we don't?"

She kept her voice pitched low, "Tell them to roll back about five minutes."

He gave the order, studying the film, but still he didn't see anything. Her eyes flicked to his, telling him he just missed it. Sighing, Daniel asked them to rewind again. Jennifer stiffened when he leaned in even closer to her. He tried to squash the hurt that washed through him, but it wasn't as easy as it should have been.

Not wanting to push himself where he wasn't wanted, Daniel put a tiny bit of distance between them once more. It wasn't much, for he was having trouble giving her the space she clearly wanted, when all he wanted to do was wrap her up in his arms and hold her.

Daniel wasn't even sure it was for her benefit. If the things Jennifer had told him

were possible, he feared the world as he knew it was about to be tossed on its ear.

Forcing himself to pay attention to what was happening around them, he watched the video once again. He shook his head having seen nothing new. “Tell them to stop the clip on whatever you think you see.”

Jennifer nodded but her body tensed up even more at his words. It would seem he couldn’t say or do anything right when it came to her. Worse, his need to be closer to her had him pressing the palm of his hand on the small of her back. He’d known it was wrong. She may not have said anything about keeping his distance but her body language had. Yet, he couldn’t control his need to touch.

“Stop.” Daniel wasn’t sure if Jennifer was talking to him or the marine manning the video, but he wasn’t about to let her order him around, so he kept his hand right where it was.

It wasn’t until her chocolate eyes turned to him pointedly, that he realized she was waiting for his reaction. His gaze returned to the satellite image but he still had no idea what she thought proved anything.

The picture revealed a blurry image of the earthquake taking place but nothing could be seen. He raised a brow at her in question.

Blowing an exasperated breath, Jennifer reached for one of the laser pointers. Off to the far left of the screen, one man stood. Then she shifted the red dot to the far right upper corner where another man stood. Finally, she moved that red dot again to reveal a third man at the bottom right corner. The small red light stayed on the last man.

Her chocolate eyes flashed with triumph as Daniel’s, and every other person in the room along with him, jaws dropped. As if she hadn’t done enough, she whispered,

“This is Tarak, the one I told you about earlier.”

Having learned to control his emotions in front of others since childhood, Daniel didn't give in to the shock of her words. The man she pointed to was definitely built but still looked like a normal man.

Yet, he definitely didn't belong there. Rewinding the footage a minute, all three men had abruptly appeared just like with the tsunami. The noise in the room confirmed that the others saw the same thing. How were they standing? That quake was strong, most men would be on the ground or at least holding onto something, but all three just stood there like they were waiting for something.

The hand Daniel had at the small of Jennifer's back slid to her hip pulling her even closer to him as he leaned down so his lips were touching her ear. Even as terrified as he was that she was right about demons, Daniel couldn't help but smile when he felt her shiver. “What are they doing?”

Jennifer shrugged but he noticed she didn't move away even when she turned to face him, causing their lips to nearly touch. “Honestly, I don't know. My guess would be they are trying to stop whatever is going on.” Her lashes swept up to meet his gaze. “Just like the others did when the tsunami hit.”

It was too surreal. There was no way Daniel could actually consider there were demons out there. Could he?

Jennifer must have sensed his incredulity, for her faced flushed a bright red. “Look, you don't have to believe,” Jennifer spat out. She pointed to the screen. “But the facts are there, Mr. President ,” her sarcasm dripped with those words. “All of your advisors have told you this is not something natural and we all know there isn't a human out there that could have created this without someone knowing.”

What she said was true but still demons ? Hell, he might believe aliens at this point but there was just no way... A gasp resounded around the room. Snapping his attention to the room to give them a quelling look for interrupting him, he found no one was even looking at him.

Astonished faces stared at the screen, which was now back to the live feed. His eyes nearly popped out of his head when he glanced back at the satellite image. Fire engulfed the trees in between the three men. But that wasn't what had everyone's mouth agape.

No, that was just a blip on the radar. It was witnessing all three men holding out their hands as water poured out of their palms onto the surrounding trees to stop the spread of the blaze.

If the others in the room weren't just as stunned as he was, Daniel would have thought he was hallucinating. A few startled cries rang out as the ground around the trees that were burning started to move. Not shake from the earthquake but actually move, as if someone were digging down into the earth. Moments later, a ring of dirt encircled the area.

"What are they doing?" One of the men in the room asked.

"It's a trench to stop the flames from spreading," General Rose said in disbelief. "But how? I didn't see anyone digging."

Daniel's eyes swung to hers. "How -?" He couldn't seem to get the words out but he knew, deep down, he knew she'd been telling the truth.

Her eyes held understanding. She better than anyone would know how hard it was to believe.

CHAPTER 22

Doubt wasn't something Tarak had ever felt until the day he'd found Alec with Kian. It was in that moment that Tarak had known deep inside that nothing in his life would prepare him for the what was to come.

He'd known by the way Alec had looked at him, his son wouldn't be able to stay away from the human, no matter their laws. Still, there had been no way to predict just how bad everything would turn out. He definitely wouldn't have predicted Alec nearly destroying the world.

Yet, there he was doing his best to stop Alec from doing more damage as he saved the one person who had risked everything, not only for Alec, but for all of demonkind. It made Tarak wonder if he'd been right in taking Alec in all those years ago.

Maybe it hadn't been the right choice to be Alec's father. His heart broke with that thought. Not adopting Alec hadn't been an option from the first moment he'd laid eyes on him. Those bright green eyes had stared at Tarak and he'd just known Alec had been meant to be his.

His wife hadn't been able to carry a child full term, even though she'd tried. It had been her last attempt that had killed her. She'd bled out before the doctors could help her as she miscarried for the tenth time.

Tarak's heart had been ripped out of his chest at the loss of his wife. If it hadn't of been for his job as a Sentinel, he would have died of a broken heart, but he had

vowed to the ancients to do everything within his power to keep demons safe, and he took that vow as seriously as his marriage vows.

Never had he believed he'd find another purpose, until Alec.

He hadn't known anything about kids, but Tarak had thrown himself into his new role as a father with all the love he had thought he'd lost when his wife had died. Had he made a mistake?

Tarak let out a snort. It seemed like that's all he'd done since forcing Alec to leave Kian and return to Tuklati. Would he have done things differently if he'd known Kian was destined for Alec?

Tarak wasn't so sure. At that point, with their world in turmoil, Tarak wasn't sure about anything. Such as how he was going to keep the humans from finding out they existed. Or even if it was possible.

Demons had already risked exposure to save millions from the tsunamis. It had been necessary but it also put them that much closer to a war that could wipe out all life on Earth, if the witches found them.

Tarak knew the others weren't sure if the human witches still existed. Tarak not only knew they did but had kept an eye on several covens that were still intent on finding and destroying the other paranormal races. The only advantage demons and the other races had was their ability to hide. Something that might now be impossible.

If it hadn't been bad enough that they were on film stopping the tsunami, Tarak could feel the cameras of the satellites above them watching everything as he, Trey, and Samson did their best to contain Alec's fury as he fought Brant.

It took too much of their energy to stop even more destruction to be able to hide

themselves from the humans. Tarak may not like the fact that the government was able to watch them, but he also couldn't allow Brant and Alec to kill anyone else. It was a risk to expose themselves but Tarak would do whatever was necessary to protect his son.

Not that it was going to do much good if they didn't get help soon. Alec was strong. Much stronger than anyone had ever guessed. Containing the results of his rage was draining Tarak quicker than he ever imagined. Tarak, Trey, and Samson had to absorb as much of the collateral damage as they could into themselves so it didn't spread and all three of them were losing the battle.

It didn't help that he was worried about Alec.

It wasn't that he thought his son would lose. Brant was no match for Alec, but if anything happened to Kian... A shutter ripped through Tarak at the thought.

The wind whipping around the circle they'd formed was threatening to blow the fire into the trees beyond them. The three of them weren't going to be able to hold on much longer. Tarak prayed he could hold on until the others, who were supposed to be nearby, could help.

Trey and Samson were close to collapsing so Tarak poured even more energy into containing the destruction from spreading. Just when he thought they wouldn't be able to hold on any longer, three other Sentinels appeared. "Go take Trey and Samson's place."

Even more reinforcements showed up, giving Tarak an opportunity to go help his son. He ran into the center of chaos, exhaustion slowing him as the ground beneath him bucked and rolled.

He fell to the ground before he could get close enough to help his son. All he could

do was watch in horror as swords clashed. The force of metal striking metal sent sparks flying.

Brant's eyes glowed eerily as he taunted Alec with how he would force Alec to watch as he tore Kian apart piece by piece. The earth pitched violently underneath Brant's feet, but he easily leapt into the air before it tossed him onto his ass.

When Tarak managed to grab Kian to drag him away from the danger of Alec and Brant, Tarak was sure all was lost. He should have known Kian wouldn't go down without a fight.

Kian stood rooted to the spot as he watched Alec turn a battle into art in motion. He had the heart of a warrior and in battle he looked every bit the part. Swords clashed, ringing out their deadly song.

No matter how many times Brant tried to get close to Kian, Alec would block him. Alec made sure to keep Kian at his back, not giving his brother an opportunity to use him as a shield. How he did it, Kian couldn't have said but it was poetry in motion to watch.

Kian's hair whipped around wildly as the wind picked up in intensity. He was fairly certain it was Alec unleashing Mother Nature as he fought Brant with a single minded goal of defeating him.

For several minutes, Kian felt safe for the first time since Brant had taken him. All that changed when a line of fire erupted and headed straight for him. Without thinking, Kian jumped out of its path so it wouldn't consume him.

When Tarak tried to drag Kian from the fight, he fought to get free. Fortunately, Tarak hadn't expected it and Kian was able to dart away. It wasn't until fingers grasped him around his neck, that he realized his mistake.

“Kian!” Alec screamed as the earth rolled beneath their feet as he saw that Brant held Kian.

But it was too late. Brant’s hand tightened. How had Kian ended right back where he was when Alec arrived, Kian had no clue, but he wasn’t about to stay there and let Brant win, especially since Alec stopped the fight in his tracks. Seeing the fear in those emerald eyes humbled Kian and he vowed to take Brant down if it was the last thing he did.

“Now that I know you have learned to use your powers, I won’t be stupid enough to let you go.” His breath was hot against Kian’s cheek. Revulsion snaked its way into him as Brant started dragging Kian away from Alec.

Kian locked eyes with Alec. It was when the fear in those emerald eyes turned to pure terror that Kian knew Danara had been right. Alec alone wouldn’t defeat Brant, not when the monster was willing to use whatever means possible to win. Alec was too afraid of hurting Kian to fight back. Good thing Kian didn’t have that same problem.

Physically, Kian wasn’t a match for Brant. But now that he knew how to use his abilities, Brant was going to go down.

That is why I made sure you were a demon before he took you, Danara said.

Concentrating on the voice in his head, Kian thought about everything Danara had said while he’d been held captive. The first queen said Alec couldn’t save Kian unless he fought. A fire burned within that emerald gaze and Kian remembered what Alec had told him about becoming the element, not just using it.

Brant turned his attention to Alec, which gave Kian time to dig deep within himself. Once more, he’d found the power that resided within, like a glowing light in his core. Unleashing it, Kian felt it encompass him, giving as much access as he needed to all

it had to offer.

A spark ignited deep inside, spreading out like wildfire. He'd only practiced with his hands before but once he'd accessed it, Kian found it was just as easy to imagine every one of his cells was the flame. Brant screamed as his body burned against Kian's.

The moment Brant jerked his arms away, Kian dropped to the ground. It was all the opportunity Alec needed. As if in slow motion, Kian watched Alec take a couple of steps toward them, his sword already swinging through the air.

Brant must have sensed the danger, for his eyes widened as they landed on Alec an instant before that sword sliced his head from his body. Kian winced at the gruesome scene even as he cheered.

Kian had known Brant had planned an even worse death for him, but that didn't mean he'd been prepared to have to witness anyone's demise.

If he went the rest of his life without having to see anyone else die, it would be too soon. Unfortunately, Kian was realistic. He was a demon now. A demon in love with a man whose job it was to track down and kill those who hurt others.

It hadn't been the life he'd planned on having but the moment Alec's arms pull Kian close, he knew there was nowhere in the world he'd rather be.

CHAPTER 23

Alec hadn't wasted a second pulling Kian into his arms, crushing his mate against him. That lithe body shook as Alec tried to calm Kian with his touch and soothing words. His heart raced as he thought about how he'd almost failed his mate. Never in his life had Alec been as terrified.

His lips crashed against Kian's in possession. Alec wasn't sure if he was going to be able to release his mate after all that happened, but he needed to get him away from this place and back home where they belonged. Looking up, he saw Tarak watching them with his mouth wide open, as if not believing what he'd just witnessed.

Even Alec didn't know how Kian managed to master his skills to get away from Brant, much less execute a skill that Alec had only recently learned demons had the ability to master. He'd tried to teach Tarak and the other Sentinels for the past couple of weeks, yet, not one of them had managed to come close to what Kian had done.

Alec was beyond proud, especially when he'd felt his mate's terror blasting into him the whole time, yet he'd managed to control it enough to fight. Not once giving up and letting Brant win.

Capturing his mouth again, this time more gently but no less demanding, Alec let his senses feel him completely. The fist of mind numbing panic that had been twisting his heart since he'd been kidnapped slowly loosened its grip. It wasn't until he felt he had some control over the panic that had consumed him since the moment Kian had been taken that Alec was able to pull back just a little.

Alec's eyes roamed over every inch of Kian, followed by his hands. The need to touch in order to ensure his mate was, in fact there, alive and safe, was too hard to ignore, so Alec didn't even try.

"Are you hurt anywhere?" He didn't bother asking if he was okay. How could he be after all Kian had been through?

Kian shook his head as if he were too afraid to speak. Those slim, yet strong hands gripped him tightly, as if refusing to let Alec go, which was fine with him. Slowly, his mate's trembling ceased but he could still feel the fear that coursed through him.

When he felt Kian sag against him in exhaustion, Alec didn't hesitate to lift him up, cradling his mate against his chest. He'd hold Kian as long as he needed him to.

With Kian tucked safely against him, Alec made his way to Tarak. "Time to go. I want to get him home."

"Okay," Tarak said with some hesitation. It was as if he were debating telling Alec something. He must have decided it was better to just get it out, for he added, "The humans saw us." Indicating the destruction surrounding them. Then he pointed up to the sky. "There were satellites above us. Obviously, I have no idea what they were able to see, but with everything else they've seen since..." Tarak trailed off.

Tarak may have been nice enough not to say it, but Alec had no doubt he was talking about his fellow demons being forced to expose themselves to stop the destruction Alec had created.

His father let out a harsh breath. "The Council will want an accounting when you get back." Tarak stared at him, his gaze hard and unyielding. "We need to be ready. They will come after both of you."

It was no less than he'd expected. Alec had caused enormous problems when it came to the humans. Not that he gave a damn. If it meant saving Kian, he'd do it again.

He gave Tarak a curt nod and disappeared with Kian still in his arms. Tarak followed Alec, leaving the others to fix the damage that had been created.

The first thing Alec did was take Kian home, do his best to wash of the dirt and grime in the shower, which wasn't easy since Kian was still passed out, and tuck him into their bed. No way was he going to force his mate to face the Council again after all he'd been through. He'd been the one to put their kind in peril. He'd be the one to take their punishment.

But not until he could ensure Kian would be okay. He had no idea what Brant had done while holding Kian. Alec wasn't about to leave his mate's side until he woke up and assured him Brant hadn't done any damage.

"Alec, the Council is demanding you and Kian appear before them," Aira said softly from the door. She kept herself partially behind the wood of the door as if protecting herself from Alec.

Guilt riddled him for putting his sister in danger when he'd discovered Kian missing. The bruise on her cheek was because of him. He'd hurt those he loved. Yet, even knowing that, Alec wasn't sure he would have been able to have done things differently.

Kian was his world. His reason for existing. Alec wasn't sure how that was possible, but he knew, deep in his bones that Kian was the reason he'd been put on this earth. That didn't mean he didn't feel terrible for hurting others.

Alec just didn't think he would have been able to stop himself, even if he'd known the devastation he would leave behind.

“Aira,” he whispered, slowly getting up from where he sat on the bed next to a sleeping Kian. “I’m so sorry.”

He hadn’t gotten more than a few steps when his sister held up her hand to stop him. “Don’t. I get it. I do.” Her voice wavered a bit. “I don’t blame you. Mostly,” she added when her words didn’t ring true. “I just need some time, but...”

Aira’s gaze met his for the first time since she’d opened the door. There was a lot of pain and fear in her gray depths, but Alec also saw love shining back at him. “I love you. I will stand by your side when you face the Council, but please, give me some time.”

Alec nodded. It was the least he could do.

There was a flash of relief that crossed Aira’s features. “Look, the Council is out for blood. You better get going. I can watch Kian.”

There was no way he was leaving Kian’s side. “The Council will wait. I’m not going anywhere until Kian wakes up.”

Aira’s gray eyes went wide as saucers. “But...you don’t...you can’t...I mean...” Aira took a breath as if trying to get ahold of her stuttering. “This isn’t one of those times to stick it to the Council. They want you dead, brother. Forcing them wait will only make things worse.”

Alec let out a short burst of laughter. He glanced around his room with its large cracks in the walls and several rocks that were scattered around the room from where they’d come loose from the ceiling and walls. “I’m not sure that’s possible,” Alec admitted to his sister.

He gestured at the destruction around them. “I mean I basically destroyed our home

and exposed demons to the humans. Hell, Aira, I risked our very lives, if the witches are still alive. Somehow I don't think appearing before the Council sooner rather than later is going to make that much of a difference."

Aira's shoulders dropped as the reality of his words sank in. "You're probably right." Then her grey eyes went to where Kian lay on the bed. "Is he okay?"

Alec turned back to Kian, staring at that beautiful face for several seconds before the need to touch once more had Alec going back to sit next to him. It was more than a need for him to be near Kian, it was like a craving. There was no denying the way he called to Alec on every level.

That link that was always there, connecting their very cells to each other had been severed for too long and Alec had sworn it was like a part of his body had been missing.

As if his hand had a will of its own, Alec reached out to trace his fingers along Kian's forehead and down his angelic face. He continued skimming his hand along the skin of Kian's arm until their fingers tangled together.

It was only when he felt Kian's fingers curl around his, even in his sleep, that Alec was able to answer his sister. "I hope so," he whispered, praying it was true.

CHAPTER 24

“How dare he tell us to wait?” Drark, a protégé of Kyden’s, railed. “He has destroyed all we have protected. The humans may be trying to explain what we are, but the fact is, there are some who have been told the stories. It won’t be long before they find the magic that destroyed us once before. That’s assuming they haven’t been practicing all these centuries in hopes of one day finding us again.”

Aticus had been preparing for this since he’d discovered Alec had fallen in love with a human. There had been no way that should have been possible for a Sentinel unless it was meant to be. Fortunately for Alec and Kian, Aticus was a believer in fate.

More than that, he trusted their ancestors. If they created a Sentinel who was destined to fall for a human, who was Aticus to turn his back on their plan? Too bad not everyone was as enlightened as he was.

Who was he kidding? Those like Drark were in the dark ages, or at least doing their best to ensure demons were dragged back to a time when they didn’t have any humanity. Not that Aticus was going to allow them to accomplish their goal. He would fight with everything inside of him to follow the path of their first Danara and Drakarn.

“Our secret was going to have to come out eventually.” Aticus pinned each council member with a hard stare. “The fact is, we need humans, so instead of trying to place blame, we need to figure out where we go from here.”

Drark wasn’t about to back down. He was like an animal on the hunt. He scented a

weakness to exploit and he wasn't going to be satisfied until he'd taken his prey down. "Even if that is true, do you think destroying the planet was the best way to go about revealing ourselves?"

Several members agreed with Drark, even ones that had been supporting Alec and Kian when they first arrived in Tuklati. Emboldened, Drark pushed even more. "I think the only way to fix this is to kill them and give their bodies to the humans to show that we won't let that kind of behavior go unpunished."

There was no way Aticus was going to allow that to happen. Old he might be, but Aticus was still one of the most powerful demons on Earth. It was why he was the Council Leader. He wasn't about to let a punk like Drark think otherwise.

Aticus stared at Drark until the younger Councilman was forced to look down and away in submission. Fear rose up from Drark and a few others in the room as Aticus made sure to pin each and every member with a hard look before he told them in no uncertain terms, "This is your last warning. No harm will come to Alec or Kian. As your leader, I am ordering you drop it."

Not completely cowed, Drark dared to test him. "Maybe you shouldn't be our leader."

Aticus heard the others gasp but he didn't pay them much attention. "Are you challenging me?" His tone was casual but his stance was terrifying. His entire body crackled with electricity as he stared down his rival.

There was no doubt to anyone there, Aticus was the most powerful man in the room, in their entire race - for now. He hadn't become their leader because he was weak. Aticus may play the elderly statesman for the crowd but he'd proven himself over and over again to those in this room.

Drark seemed to cringe at Aticus's obvious display of power. The younger Councilman refused to back down for fear of losing what little ground he had gained in calling for Alec and Kian's death. "Obviously, there is no way I could challenge you," Drark admitted. "But that doesn't mean you are right."

Smiling at the man's bravado, even though Drark was practically shaking in his seat, Aticus didn't back down. "Actually, that is exactly what it means." Turning to encompass the rest of the Council, he said, "There is more at work here than any of you know, or will know. As your leader, I have been given certain information that pertains to Alec and Kian."

Standing, he placed his hands palms down against the table, leaning forward, making sure their attention was focused on him. "Kian and Alec are not to be touched. Is. That. Clear?"

Nods were seen as they didn't dare speak. Knowing they got his message, Aticus swept out of the room.

It wasn't until he'd entered his office that Aticus realized his mistake in allowing himself to be so distracted, he hadn't even noticed he had a visitor until he was stopped in his tracks by the sight of the one person he really didn't wish to see. Ever.

"How did you get in here, Caleb?" The scowl Aticus wore deepened when he noticed Caleb wasn't alone. Aticus was clearly distracted if these three had managed to get into Tuklati without him knowing.

Caleb was the most dangerous of them all for he was still a hot head. Then again, most vampires were. Something about the call of human blood left them on edge, as if they were always ready to attack. Not that they needed to drink human blood to survive, but when humans had arrived on Earth, vampires hadn't been able to resist the allure of their blood.

The other races didn't have that particular problem. With the advent of witches, all the races had to go into hiding; it was vampires, however, who'd suffered the most. The animosity that had existed between demons and vampires had only increased tenfold, since it had been demons who had created the problem by allowing humans to have the ability to wield magic to begin with.

As dangerous as the vampire race was, demons were still stronger, but not if the others banded together to fight. Seeing Kieran, leader of shifters and Zelina, queen of the succubi, with Caleb, put Aticus on alert. At least not all of the other races were there.

Aticus knew he was lucky it was only these three. To be honest, he was a little surprised it had taken them this long to show up considering they were getting reports that the witches were in the area already looking for Tuklati.

Caleb chuckled. "If I didn't know better, Aticus, I would have to say you had no idea we were here." The smile Caleb wore faded as his gaze pinned Aticus. "Are you slipping, old man?"

Aticus snorted. There was no way he was answering that question. "Actually, I expected you a lot sooner than this. What took you so long?" he challenged.

This time, it was Zelina who chuckled. Her throaty laugh called to Aticus as it was meant to do. Succubi were beautiful creatures who could tempt a saint into giving up his soul for a taste of sin. Zelina was the most beautiful of the succubi and knew exactly how to wield her power over others.

She proved that by gliding across the room as only she could do. When she was pressed up along Aticus's side, she ran her delicate hand along his arm, letting her long manicured nails lightly scrape his skin, causing goosebumps to break out all over his body.

Aticus may be an old man, but he was still a man. If he'd been human, he would have fallen to his knees and begged Zelina to make him her slave. As it was, he had to force himself not to give into that particular temptation.

"Now, now, Aticus," Zelina purred. "You know we aren't here to attack you. We just want to know that you've killed whoever was responsible for exposing us to the humans and we'll be on our way."

Charming as Zelina was, Aticus knew the lie for what it was. Sure, they wanted the person responsible dead, but they wouldn't hesitate to exploit any weaknesses they might see if Aticus showed any, which he wouldn't.

He was a demon. If necessary, he would destroy all three of them. It was the reason they were all there. They would have been smarter to have brought the other leaders if they'd thought to have a chance of killing him.

He also wasn't about to bow to their wishes to see Alec dead. Aticus leaned his hands onto his desk and stared each leader down. There was no doubt his eyes glowed with the fire that simmered beneath his skin, but they refused to look away as they had in the past.

It caused Aticus some concern, but he wasn't exactly worried. None of the other races had ever seen the true abilities of a demon. Well, until Alec unleashed his on the world. They should have taken the warning of a demon's power to heart.

Aticus poured his rage into the ground beneath them, causing the ground to tremble. He made sure to keep it contained to his office. The last thing any of them needed was for humans to get another taste of destruction.

All three leader's eyes widened in fear. It wasn't until they finally looked away from Aticus that he drew his energy back into his body and the ground stopped its

trembling. “Leave.”

At first, the three appeared like they were going to refuse. It wasn't until they each gave a small, nearly imperceptible nod of agreement, that Aticus allowed himself to straighten.

Kieran stood from where he'd been casually slouched on the couch across the room. “We'll go, for now. But we want your word the person responsible will die.”

Aticus lifted the corners of his mouth in a sinister smile. “That won't be possible,” he told them honestly.

Shock appeared on each of their faces in varying degrees but it was Caleb who couldn't control his anger and demanded, “Why in the hell not? That demon put us all in danger. We want whoever it was to pay for that.”

Aticus leveled each of them with a hard stare before telling them the truth. “Because that man will be our new Drakara and will save us all.”

All three jaws dropped at the news but Aticus didn't care. It was time to talk with Alec and Kian, whether they were ready or not.

CHAPTER 25

Consciousness was slow in coming for Kian and he had no clue as to why. It seemed to be something that happened to him a bit too often. Then again, he'd been through a lot and his body appreciated the rest.

Less than a year ago, he'd been dreaming about graduating with his bachelor's degree; hell, starting his life, and now? For the last few months, he'd only been able to think about staying alive.

Awareness was starting to creep into his mind. Warmth suffused his back, a strong arm encompassed him, leaving Kian feeling safe for the first time in what felt like forever. All he wanted was to remain right where he was, but reality wasn't something he was good running from.

Slowly, he opened his eyes. A glance down had him smiling to see Alec's fingers entwined with his. Had the past few months been hell? Definitely. But it had all been worth it if it meant being in Alec's arms. As far as Kian was concerned, if at the end of the day he got to be held by this amazing man, who Kian loved more than anything, it was worth enduring whatever life had to throw at him.

Alec shifted. He rose up onto his elbow to gaze down at Kian. Needing to be closer to him, Kian turned over to face him. A soft smile lifted the corners of Alec's lips. "How are you feeling?" Concern laced Alec's words.

"Okay." A shiver went down Kian's spine as the image of Brant nearly killing him flashed in his mind. Shivering slightly at the thought of Brant's death, Kian snuggled

even closer to Alec's warmth.

"Kian, this isn't how I wanted to do this, but after..." His voice faltered. That strong arm at Kian's waist pulled him even closer to that solid body, as if even an inch separating them was too much.

Alec's lips pressed a kiss on the spot where Kian's neck and shoulder met causing his heart to flutter. Kian's breath caught in his throat when Alec lifted his head. Love shone from those emerald eyes Kian loved so much.

"Will you marry me?" he whispered.

A gasp of surprise left him. Then joy flooded his body. "Yes," Kian answered without any hesitation.

Their lips met in a heart stopping kiss that had Kian wishing the rest of the world would leave them alone for the rest of their lives. Too bad life never happened that way.

But they would at least have this slice of time. It wasn't enough, nor would it ever be, yet it was more than he'd once imagined.

Sinking further into the kiss, Kian knew, without a doubt, he'd been meant to find Alec. It was as if the fates themselves had created both of them to be the perfect match for each other.

All thoughts except those centered around the way Alec touched him fled Kian's brain. The brush of his fingers down Kian's back sent goosebumps across his skin. His muscles quivered wherever Alec touched.

"Need," Kian mumbled even as his own hands grabbed the taunt globes of Alec's ass

and arched up causing their groins to rub together. The friction was mind blowing.

Needing to feel skin on skin, he tugged up the shirt Alec had on, forcing them to break the kiss to pull it up over his head. Like a magnet to steel, their mouths were back together the instant the shirt was gone.

It was intense and electric. No. That didn't even come close to what Kian was feeling. His body craved Alec on cellular level. It was as if his soul cried out for the man he loved.

Then again, that might have had to do with the fact they'd been constantly fighting and hadn't had enough time loving each other. Although, that said, even if they'd made love every day, Kian knew it would never be enough.

When Alec broke from the kiss, Kian cried out, which turned into a moan as those firm lips trailed a path along Kian's jaw and down his throat. He'd not only heard but felt the rumble of a growl from deep within Alec's chest as he encountered the t-shirt Kian had on.

Instead of lifting it up over his head, Alec tore it from Kian's body. Damn, that was hot.

What was even better was the feel of Alec's mouth nipping, licking, and kissing every inch of Kian's chest. When those lips wrapped around one nipple and sucked it into that hot mouth, Kian was positive he felt flames lick over his skin.

Threading his fingers in Alec's short hair, Kian tugged him even closer as he arched up for more. "Please," he heard himself beg.

Not until he'd given the second nipple the same treatment did Alec move slowly down Kian's body. Way too slowly. Kian was about to take matters into his own

hands and stroke his dick when those talented lips sucked on the crown of Kian's hard length.

"Yes," he screamed out as his hips moved off the bed in an effort to push deeper into Alec's mouth. Not that it had done any good. Alec seemed determined to go at his pace, no matter how much Kian tried to push him to go faster.

He wanted...No...He needed to feel Alec inside of him after all Kian had been through. There was still a part of him that wasn't certain any of this was real. That maybe, just maybe, he was still in that stupid cave hallucinating.

Pushing those negative thoughts away, Kian only allowed himself to feel. Each loving stroke of Alec's hands. Each lick along his shaft. Every time those lips wrapped around him like he was Alec's favorite treat and Kian was lost to nothing but sensation.

"Mine," Alec growled just before taking Kian's dick to the back of his throat.

There was nothing Kian could do but take it since Alec took away his ability to thrust into that wet heat by pinning Kian's hips to the mattress. It was too much, yet not enough at the same time.

"Alec...need...plea...now...I...come." Kian knew he was babbling but he didn't care since there wasn't any way to string two words together.

Suddenly, a slick finger was probing Kian's entrance. He had no idea where or when Alec had gotten the lube nor had Kian cared. All he knew was that Alec was getting him ready for that long, thick cock. It was all that mattered. Hell, it was all Kian wanted. To feel Alec inside of him.

He hissed when he felt a slight burn as Alec's finger breached the ring of muscles

guarding his channel. That turned into a moan of pure ecstasy when Alec brushed across his prostate.

Kian ground down as he tried to force Alec even deeper. It didn't take long before two, and then three, fingers were inside of him. "Need...Please...Alec," Kian threw his head back on that last word as it tore out of his throat with a hunger so deep, he felt it in his very soul.

They might have been connected before, but now, it was on a whole different level. Kian could swear he could feel the lust that was coursing through Alec's body.

When Alec surged up to kiss his lips once more, Kian cried out in relief even though he missed those talented lips on his dick. He knew it meant that he was about to get what he wanted most. Alec was ready to breach him with more than his fingers.

Yet, despite knowing what was coming, it was impossible to stop the cry of dismay that fell from his lips when Alec tugged his fingers free. It wasn't until he felt the blunt head of Alec's cock that Kian's body melted into the mattress, even as every cell in his body tingled with pure need.

Gently – and way too slowly, if Kian was being honest – Alec breached Kian's hole with his cock. Two thrusts later, they both groaned when Alec bottomed out.

It was bliss. As impractical as it was, Kian wished to always have Alec inside of him. The feeling of being stretched wide was unlike anything he'd ever experienced.

As Alec pulled back until only the tip was still inside of him, then pushed back inside, Kian rolled up his hips to get him even deeper. He was filled so completely, Kian wasn't certain where he ended and Alec began.

"Love," Alec cried out as his lips sucked up a mark along Kian's neck where

everyone would see. Not that he was complaining. Kian would be proud to wear Alec's marks.

The dual sensation of Alec's mouth and cock was pushing Kian faster and faster to his climax. His whole body felt as if it were on fire as they both strove to their release.

Yet, at the same time, Kian didn't want it to end – ever. Every sensation was alive, coursing through his body at lighting speed, pushing him to his orgasm. Wrapping his legs around Alec, he tilted his hips slightly, allowing Alec to drive into him even deeper.

"I'm not going to last much longer," Alec warned even as one hand gripped Kian's dick and started stroking in time with his thrusts.

Everything in his body lit up as what felt like electricity shot up and down his spine until it landed in his balls. They rolled in their sack before pushing up closer to his body.

"Alec," he yelled out, his hands gripping tightly to Alec's biceps as Kian's hips bowed off the bed. In the next breath, wet heat splashed between them coating their abs.

He barely heard Alec's return shout as Kian was floating on a cloud of pure euphoria. But he felt Alec's seed filling him up.

Smiling, Kian held Alec tightly to him, hoping Alec would stay where he was as long as possible because there was nowhere else in the world he wanted to be but there.

CHAPTER 26

“Good, you’re both awake.” Aticus stood just inside the closed door, hands tucked in his robes. “We need to talk.”

Alec swore, not bothering to keep his displeasure at being interrupted to himself. “I don’t remember inviting you into our room, Aticus.”

Kian had to bite his lip to stop from smiling when Aticus seemed completely oblivious to Alec’s irritation and brought a chair over to the bed and sat down as if he wasn’t interrupting anything. The thing was, Aticus wasn’t a stupid man. He knew they didn’t want him there but he also didn’t care.

Kian may have wished for a reprieve from reality at the moment but he also knew that wasn’t going to happen. From what Brant had told him, and what Kian had overheard from Tarak, Alec would need to answer for not only the destruction he’d caused searching for Kian, but for exposing demons to humans.

Apparently, Alec didn’t care. “Get out,” Alec ordered harshly. Aticus being the Council Leader didn’t care about Alec’s anger in the least.

Aticus didn’t even blink at Alec’s tone. “You and I both know this cannot wait.”

Alec sighed and Kian squeezed his hand. “Can you let us shower and change first?” he asked Aticus. “We’ll meet you in the living room in a few minutes.”

Aticus looked like he was going to deny the request at first. Then, he gave his own

sigh and stood up. “Fine. Just don’t take too long. There isn’t a lot of time.”

When the door closed behind Aticus, Kian leaned into Alec and kissed him briefly. “Mind telling me just how much trouble we’re in?” he asked as he got off the bed and headed into the bathroom.

Alec didn’t answer, merely gave him a look that spoke volumes before reaching past Kian to turn on the shower. He couldn’t explain it but Alec’s silence made Kian more uneasy than if he’d simply told him the truth.

There was no doubt in his mind that Alec was trying to shield him, but Kian didn’t need protection. He could handle whatever it was that Alec didn’t want him to know. He should understand that by now.

It was time Kian made that perfectly clear. If only the tempting sight of water streaming down Alec’s naked body hadn’t taken away Kian’s ability to speak in that moment.

They might have just had sex, both of their bodies were apparently onboard for another round – or two. Not about to miss out on touching and feeling that heated skin against his own, Kian quickly took off his clothes and stepped under the spray. Too bad Aticus was waiting for them or Kian might have suggested they wash each other. But there was just no time.

To take his mind off more pleasurable pursuits, like how it felt to have that long, thick cock inside of him, Kian took several deep breaths and demanded more than asked, “What aren’t you telling me?”

Kian wasn’t sure what he’d expected from Alec but it wasn’t to be brushed off with, “Not now, Kian.”

That only pissed him off. He’d risked his life to become a demon, fought off Brant,

and even helped to kill him. There was no way Kian was going to let Alec treat him like some kid without the ability to handle the tough stuff.

He also knew anger would only cause a fight, which wouldn't do either of them any good. Needing to calm down, even if it were only a little, Kian stepped away and rinsed before grabbing a towel to dry off.

Once he was dressed, Kian felt ready for whatever battle they were about to confront. He wished it was easily ignored like Alec appeared to be doing. But one thing Kian had learned was that he might want the luxury of being able to bury his head in the sand but that wasn't possible. Life had made sure of that. Growing up, it had either been face it, or stay curled up in a ball in that closet praying for someone to save him.

At six, he'd done exactly that, but no one had come. Instead, they'd stuck him in foster care where the horror of what he'd witnessed should have been the worst thing he'd ever have to face. It hadn't been. No. If Kian wanted saving, he'd had to do it himself. That wasn't going to change. Not completely anyway.

Alec might be there by his side, but not even he would always be able save Kian. Brant made sure to prove that. As true as all that was, Kian didn't want to have to fight with Alec. He wanted them to be a team.

It was that thought that had him reach out and take Alec's hand in his. "Aticus is waiting for us in the living room. Don't make me hear it from him. Talk to me, Alec."

A heavy sigh passed Alec's lips. His shoulders dropped and he reached out to pull Kian against him, right where he belonged. "When Brant kidnapped you..." Alec's voice faltered. It was obvious Alec didn't want to continue but eventually he did. "I went a little crazy."

He barked out a laugh and pushed Kian away as Alec said the last part. His fingers ran through his hair, yanking on the strands as if the sting would help him to cope.

Kian moved to go to him but Alec stopped him by thrusting out his arm. Another sigh. This one even more defeated than the others. His arm dropped and it almost appeared as if his entire body drooped. Like a puppet whose strings had been cut.

“I caused a lot of damage,” he whispered.

Kian knew that. What he didn’t understand was how severe it was. “What do they expect you to do about it? Brant kidnapped me. They have to know our bond is too strong for you to have been in control.”

A soft smile crossed Alec’s face as he closed the distance he’d put between them and cupped Kian’s face. “If only it were that simple.”

No. Kian wasn’t naïve enough to believe anything was ever that easy, especially when it came to the blood thirsty demons. What he didn’t know was whether or not there was an infraction where they didn’t call for someone’s death. Still, he wasn’t about to let anyone hold Alec responsible for something they created.

Brant was their fault. They produced those like Brant by their idiotic policies. Kian wasn’t about to let them punish Alec without forcing them to accept their own involvement.

Soft lips pressed against his in a gentle, yet all too brief, kiss. “Kian, I caused a lot of damage around the world. The Sentinels tried to contain most of it but in doing so they were seen.”

Kian had known that too. But if demons needed humans to retain their humanity that was something that was going to happen anyway.

“I have left us exposed.” Alec refused to look at Kian during his admission. His shame evident on his face. “People died. There is no way the humans won’t retaliate.”

Kian had no idea how to make him feel better. He knew Alec hadn't been able to control what had happened.

"Excuse me." Startled at the sound, they jerked their heads in the direction of the voice. Aticus stood there, again. "I know I said I would wait but I could not help but hearing what you were saying in here. Before you jump to conclusions, I really think we should talk first."

"Do you ever knock?" Alec's spat. His frustration at the Council Leader's interruption was in every word.

Amused at the question, Aticus answered simply. "No."

Shaking his head at the scene he found himself in, Kian decided it was time to get this over with. He gestured for Aticus to proceed them out the door.

Once the three of them were seated in the living room, Aticus got right to the point. Kian sat on the couch with Alec, their hands entwined. His grip was a bit hard, but Kian didn't complain. He knew Alec needed the physical connection.

Aticus sat across from them in one of the chairs. "Obviously, I am here because we have a problem."

Kian stiffened at his words, not willing to let Alec be punished for something that wasn't his fault. "There is no way I'm allowing you and that two bit Council to blame Alec." Pointing his finger to the door, Kian said, "You can go tell your precious Council they need to change their minds."

The man had the audacity to smile, not just any smile but a huge, highly amused smile. Turning to Alec, he said, "How you got lucky enough with this one, I will never understand."

“I don’t either,” Alec murmured, smiling at Kian.

He couldn’t help the bubbles of happiness that erupted through his body at the way Alec looked at him, like Kian was the only person in the world as far as he was concerned. Embarrassed, Kian rolled his eyes and said, “Stop talking like I’m not sitting right here. You know I’m in the room, right?”

Leaning over, Alec kissed him quickly on the lips. “We know, sweetheart.”

“Not to worry, Kian, I have already warned the rest of the Council to not harm either of you.” Aticus’s eyes held the hard edge of steel in their depths at this statement. The first time Kian met him, he knew the demon leader was cunning but...A small shiver escaped down his spine. This was the first time he understood why Aticus was the Council Leader. He wasn’t a man to cross.

Alec’s grip on his hand tightened as he felt Kian’s reaction to Aticus’s words. “Thank you, sir. We appreciate what you have done, but may I ask why?” Alec asked.

His smile was sincere as Aticus answered the question. “I told you before, Danara told me you two would save us. I, for one, trust the Queen who accomplished the impossible task of changing demons from nothing more than animals to nearly human.”

Kian knew what he said was true. Not that he’d believed Danara just because of the things she’d done but something in her voice had compelled Kian to trust her. The first queen hadn’t been wrong yet. “So, why are you here?”

“Because Alec’s actions have still caused us a lot of trouble and we need to figure out how to fix it.” Apparently, Aticus didn’t believe in pulling his punches.

Kian felt Alec’s shoulders slump at the words. Indignation at his being blamed for saving Kian caused him to rise from the couch towering above the man who dared to

make Alec feel bad. “What he did was because you people let Brant escape. Hell, the very reason he was evil was because of your stupid laws. Brant would have torn me apart to make Alec suffer. How can you sit there and blame him for loving me?”

Kian’s fists were clenched tightly, nails digging into his palms in an effort to maintain some sort of control over the fury rising within him. It wasn’t helping. The need to unleash his newly acquired powers rose.

For a moment, Kian almost gave in until he felt Alec’s hand touch his. Voice low, pleading, Alec said, “Kian, please don’t.”

The frustration of not being able to use his powers had Kian pacing. Breathing deeply, he muttered under his breath about the stupidity of demons. Kian didn’t pay Alec or Aticus any attention until he began to feel more normal.

Well, normal might be the wrong word since none of this was exactly something he was used to. Calmer might have been a better term, although he wasn’t sure that would be a great description either as he still wanted to tear apart every demon who thought any of this was Alec’s fault.

Turning back to them, Kian found both men watching him. Aticus had the look of awe. Alec appeared proud but it was the depth of his love in his eyes that took Kian’s breath away.

More than a little unnerved by the scrutiny both were giving him, Kian blurted, “What?”

Neither man spoke at first. They glanced at each other, then back at Kian. Finally, Alec sighed, “Kian, you were glowing. Not just glowing, but electricity actually flowed around you.”

Not quite understanding what he was saying, Kian had no clue what to say.

Aticus said, "I've been alive for almost 1000 years and I have never seen anything even close to that display. There used to be rumors about our first Danara and Drakarn having that ability, but I'd always assumed it was nothing more than an exaggerated story."

Kian's mouth opened slightly in shock. "Is it a problem?" Maybe he had been too hasty with the blood ritual. Damn it. Kian should have done more research, but nooo, he listened to a voice in his head claiming to be some long dead queen instead. Kian should have known he was just crazy.

Alec was by Kian's side in two quick strides stopping the pacing. "Kian, it isn't bad. It attests to how much power you have."

"What?" How could that be? He'd only just became a demon. It wasn't possible to be that powerful. Right?

"Even though this is an interesting turn of events," Aticus admitted, "we need to get back to the other situation first." Aticus held up his hand to stop him when Kian opened his mouth to argue. "I promise to look into how this happened, but for now, the more pressing problem is the humans."

It pained Kian to admit that was something they needed to deal with. Sure, the humans eventually would have found out about demons, but Alec hadn't helped the situation by causing mass destruction, not to mention the deaths of so many.

"Fine," Kian said, sitting back down next to Alec. "What do we need to do?"

Once again, Aticus grinned gleefully, "I have a plan."