



April's Fool (Northarbor Coven Book 2)

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Category: Fantasy

Description: Damon will never regret freeing his best friend, even if it has put him in a powerful witch's sights. For a human, even an accomplished hitman, a witch is a dangerous enemy to have.

Damon was thinking of leaving the hitman life behind when in a stroke of irony, a hit is ordered on him. Soon, nowhere is safe, not even the demon realm. He finds himself under the protection of Mori, a demon prince and his best friend's dad. Damon doesn't do love, but he can't deny they share a connection. How can he guard his heart from the sweet demon? As a prince, his people love Mori, yet no one has caught his attention quite like Damon. The hitman is hiding more than a tragic past. Mori wants to learn his secrets and earn Damon's love.

It will take more than Mori and his bodyguard to protect Damon, but when the Northarbor Coven gets involved, everything becomes more complicated.

Was Damon a fool for thinking that Northarbor and a life with Mori could be his fresh start?

April's Fool is the second book in the Northarbor Coven series, with a hitman who loves to be creative in his work and a golden retriever type demon. Someone meets their end to a peanut allergy and there is some violence. Best read after January Blues.

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No Good Contract

Damon

Parker was so fired for this shit. I was getting another handler.

I stood outside the well maintained but rundown apartment building that my next mark lived in. He'd bought the place a few years ago, done some work to it in order to bring it up to date. So far, everything looked done to code, no upset contractors.

The guy was a little younger than me. No known family in the area aside from a cousin. No social media presence. Very few friends. A witch with little to no magic, to the point where he could barely perform the most basic of spells.

That would make my task of getting into his apartment so much easier, at least. Witches usually had wards in place that were a pain in the butt, not to mention costly, to get around.

My phone buzzed in my pocket. Since only one person had this number, I answered. "Parker, I'm in a bad mood. Make it better or you're fired," I muttered, careful to keep my words from being overheard .

"Promises, promises. You'd be lost without me," Parker sing-songed.

"I'd be twenty percent richer without you. Saner, too. How much research did you do on this guy?"

“The usual deep dive. Bank records, employment, family, criminal record too. All squeaky clean. A little too clean. Something about this job is pinging my bullshit radar.”

Right, so Parker had the same feeling. Good.

As a hitman for hire, it was difficult to know who to trust. I’d worked with Parker for years. We’d trained together, my mentor picking the hacker out for me so that we could bond and learn to trust the other. Occasionally, when I needed backup, Parker came into the field with me. I trusted him daily with my life. Basically, since Magnus had died, he was my only family.

“Parks, this feels off to me too. The guy is nice. Sweet even. There’s no way that he should have gotten on our books.”

“Maybe The Luna put him there.”

I scoffed. While I loved Parker like the brother I never asked for, I found some of his belief in a mythical goddess to be a bit much. Shifters like him all sang from the same hymn sheet. The Luna this, The Luna that. Everything was her pulling strings.

To me, there was no proof, so therefore, no belief.

“Ah, you might scoff, Dameonus, but my hawk thinks something is about to happen, and when is he wrong?”

Fucking Sparrowhawk was a know-it-all dick of an alter. As a beta shifter, Parker was strong, but didn’t have that bullshit alphahole thing going on. He refused to be a part of the aviary when we moved to Northarbor a couple of months ago, and they kept begging Parker to join them. Parker’s Sparrowhawk was determined to keep away from them, so that’s what we did. Then we found out some of their thoughts on

mixed pairings and he would not stop being smug about it.

“Fine, I’m going in. I’ll do some digging. I think I might have to speak to this guy, though.”

“Really?” Parker sounded incredibly skeptical suddenly.

“What?” I asked innocently.

“That’s the excuse you are going with. You need to speak to him?”

“I do!” I insisted.

“Dameonus—“

“Fucking stop with that name!”

Parker coughed to hide a laugh. “Damon, I’ve seen the pictures of this Cody guy. He’s cute. Just your type. So tell me again why you need to speak to your target?”

“I just want to ask him why someone would want to kill him!” I protested. “This contract is all messed up. We don’t take these jobs. Only people that deserve it. If there’s a reason, I’ll make it quick.”

“You don’t think there’s a reason, do you?”

“Do you?” I fired back.

“No. Which is why I’m telling you, The Luna put us on this path.”

“There’s no talking to you sometimes.” I hung up the call to Parker’s barking laugh.

He honestly sounded like a fucking hyena, not a bird shifter.

He was good at his job, though, and had my back, so I didn't completely dismiss his idea of higher assistance for this job. Maybe his goddess was throwing me a bone so I could get laid. It had been a while.

Getting into Cody's apartment was too easy. Far too easy. Anyone, even those without a jot of skill, could pick his locks. It didn't match the home of someone with something to hide.

Inside, the place was spotlessly clean. Everything, or what little he owned, had a place. Parker's deep dive into Cody's life revealed that Cody had a trust fund, but he had made a promise to donate it to charities after his death. Cody would gift his apartment to his coven if he died without a mate or partner. So a financial motive for his death was unlikely. I checked if there was a way to see if anyone close to Cody had taken out a life insurance on him .

Looking in every conceivable place I could check, I worked my way through the small apartment and found nothing worth notice. His sex toy drawer was probably the most interesting thing about the place. Clearly, Cody had been single for a while.

His wardrobe was where the real travesty laid. His suits were just... blah. I'd seen him. He was cute, had a great body, but these were just poorly fitting monstrosities. The fabric alone gave me hives.

If I had to kill him, then I'd ensure that he had a decent suit to be buried or cremated in. He couldn't go into the afterlife in one of these. It was the least I could do.

I left the apartment exactly as I found it. Luckily, I'd learned to have a fantastic memory for detail, otherwise I would have neglected to notice that the wardrobe had been thirty degrees ajar and not fifty. Just that small amount would spark awareness

of something being off in most people.

Thumbing through my phone to have an excuse to keep my head down around the security cameras, I noted blind spots for my return visit.

Once clear of the building, I called Parker again. A video call this time. “Yeah?” he answered around a mouthful of food.

“Charming. Look, there’s nothing in that place,” I said, running a hand through my hair, careful not to dislodge the wig. Normal gestures like that were necessary for making it look natural. Everything about me was designed to blend in from my hair color, the clothes I wore, even my average height. Standing at five-nine, I got lost in a crowd. “This contract is a dud. Any sign of who made it?”

On the other side of the screen, Parker choked. I watched him, alarmed, as he tried to speak, then tried to type it. He went through the motions of trying to mouth the words.

“Fuck!” My curse drew some attention, so I moved further down the block. “Give it a rest, Parker. Don’t hurt yourself! You’ve been put under a geas.” A restriction spell.

Parker frowned, but also relaxed. “Fucking witches,” he rasped finally.

“Yeah, so that makes me more suspicious about the coven.”

“Might not be them. Could be a lone witch,” Parker pointed out.

“Also true. The only way to figure this out is to speak to Cody.” Parker rolled his eyes. I ignored him. “I’ll get a truth spell.”

“Really? More witches?”

“It’s not like I can make one myself and I’m not bringing you in on this any more than I need to. ”

“Fair point.” He paused. “Both of us are getting a weird feeling about this. Not being able to tell you who—“ his words cut off. “Fuck my life!” Parker tried again. “There was a proxy!” he practically yelled.

I processed his words while Parker sucked in some air. The geas that prevented him from speaking had punished him briefly by cutting that off.

Someone had made the contract on Cody, someone who, despite our digging, we had nothing on. They’d been smart enough to use someone else to do the contract. Either both had magic, or there was just one witch. Even so, this was a reason for caution.

“Parks, I’m getting that spell and speaking to Cody. Tonight. If he’s as innocent as I think he is, then we need to end the contract, and get the maker blacklisted so no one else comes for him.”

“You know, most of them don’t care about principles. Just as long as they get paid.”

“I know. Maybe you’re rubbing off on me, but this has me on guard.”

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Cursed Silence

Damon

Thumping my foot against the door, I made the knock that signaled that I was outside, my hands too full of takeout.

Parker opened the door and relieved me of my burden. He headed off to the kitchen while I scoped out the desk he'd been working at, checking for any clues he might have missed. I wasn't sure that he would leave anything out for me to happen upon, since Parker was usually meticulous about his work environment. Another reason I didn't take him on jobs often, he hated the mess they inevitably made.

At the corner of the desk was a piece of paper, the writing too faint for me to make out. I reached for it, curious why Parker would leave this out. When I picked it up, the paper zapped me with some heavy magicks. The name entered my head, but it got trapped. I could feel it pulling at me, the information trying to shield itself from my consciousness.

My handler and friend took two plates from the kitchen through to the tiny table and grinned. "So now you know, huh?"

"Yeah, it's—" I tried to pronounce the name, already knowing it wouldn't happen. Still, I had to test the limits of the spell.

Like Parker, I choked and floundered the more that I tried to push through to get it out. Parker leaped from his seat and came to my side. "Fuck! What's happening?"

“Water,” I rasped, as I held myself up against the desk.

Parker led me to the couch and let me calm down while he got me a drink. I drank half the glass before he spoke again. “So why can’t you say it’s... Basil? Fuck, that was hard to get out. We both know, so why won’t it let you talk?”

I thought about it for a minute. Magic had always made me itch uncomfortably. Shifters, vampires, nymphs. I loved them all. Witches, though, gave me the ick. “I can only assume it was because the spell just started on me. You struggled and you’ve had this information for what, a week?” I shuddered, knowing that magic had been done on me unknowingly. Then pushed my conscience away when I remembered the spell in my pocket. I didn’t have to like witches to find some spells useful .

“Yeah. I’ve tried digging up information on him. Not only was he part of the coven at one point, he was the High Witch. There’s nothing else.”

I wrinkled my nose. “This reeks of magic.”

Parker frowned. “That’s just the paper.”

Slapping a hand on his chest, I drawled, “No, honey. The lack of information on the contract. It’s been magically erased. This Basil guy either has connections, or he used his magic. If he was the High Witch, then he was very powerful.”

“Right, so what now?”

“We continue as planned. This could all be coven infighting or some random grudge. Either way, I want none of that. If Cody is as innocent as he seems, then we call the job off like we planned. We have reasonable cause to get this guy blacklisted. He used magic against us without permission, right?” Parker nodded. “So we get him

shut down and move on to the next job.”

“What? Who are you?” Cody lurched up in bed, half sitting against his pillows, when he became aware of my presence. I’d actually been thinking that I’d have to wake him. He’d already ingested the drops of the truth potion I’d acquired and I’d been getting bored.

Seriously, the man had no self-preservation instincts. He hadn’t even put the chain on the door!

“I’m the man that was sent to kill you, sweetness. So, what did you do?” I smirked down at him. The question burned within me. All of me said that Cody was innocent of any wrongdoing. He was someone that needed to be protected, cared for. I’d seen how hollow and lonely his life was. Sure, he had some friends, but no one really loved him.

As I spoke, he wriggled and tried to scramble up the mattress as if trying to get away from me. His face paled further when he noticed I held a gun in my gloved hands.

“Nothing! I swear!” he vowed, his voice full of sincerity.

“Strange thing is, I believe you.” He didn’t need to know about the spell. Not now. Not ever.

My new friend shook as I told him about the contract on his life. “Why are you doing this?” he asked when I called Parker to blacklist Basil, though I couldn’t say or type his name with Cody around.

He asked me if I knew who, but I shook my head. As much as I hated the untruth, it wasn’t a complete lie. Basil was part of it, but it was unlikely that he wanted Cody dead. On his own, Cody was powerless, defenseless. No, this came from somewhere

else.

As I watched Cody center himself, drawing on an inner strength that I could only admire, I knew I was going to do anything in my power to protect him.

The Luna had not thrown me a bone. I had a boner and no one to fuck. Goddammit, why did I always have to crush on the incompatible ones? I loved Cody in a complicated, protective way. He called to me in ways I couldn't explain. Just being around him made me feel normal.

Over the last couple of days, I'd spent time cleaning up the mess of the broken contract and making sure that Cody was safe. We'd gotten him better locks, wards, the works, just to make sure that his enemy, or enemies, wouldn't try again.

On jobs, I was usually denied the privilege of getting to know the marks like Cody. He got to know every side of me, to where I was using disguises less and less around him, letting him see the real me underneath.

"Hey sweetness," I called as I entered Cody's home. He'd buzzed me up, and I was coded into the spells he had protecting him.

I found him, his firm ass hanging out of his closet, looking frantically for something. "I mean, I love you like this, but you need clothes, sweetness, for that meeting with the board. You've got five minutes before we need to leave."

"I can't find it!" he wailed.

"Find what?" I frowned at him. He hadn't paid me any attention as I stood there with the hair products that would tame that hair. I wondered how he hadn't spotted the new suits hanging in the closet that I'd had my tailor make especially for him. The man was the least vain man that I'd ever met. Had he even noticed me sneaking new

items into his closet or had I blended them in too well?

“I had everything set out last night. I checked my alarm clock a dozen times! It’s never failed me. It’s spelled not to! Then there’s no heat or hot water!”

He was this close to breaking. I set down my burden and went to him. “Hey, slow down,” I turned him to face me, his skin icy under my hands. “Shit! We need to get you warm. You’re like ice!” I hugged him to me, trying to share my body heat, then took off my jacket and draped it over him. “Here, wrap up. I’ll find you the perfect outfit, then we really have to go.” I found what he needed and passed it out. “Get these on.”

Within minutes, I had Cody out of the door, my concern for my friend speeding me along. The magic of the wards was off. It hadn’t tingled over my skin in welcome like usual. The lamp on the bedside table was off center. An imprint of a person was on the bed next to Cody’s feet.

Whatever was happening with Cody wasn’t over.

“Thanks, Damon. I’m lucky to have you in my life.”

“Anything for you, cutie. “You know that,” I said playfully.

The short drive to his office passed as Cody got himself ready and I thought about what I needed to do. First, I’d contact Parker and check that no other contracts were out on Cody. I thought we had an alert set up for his name, but things could slip through. Second, I’d do some digging into his work. Check out the other employees. It was where he spent most of his time, so it made sense to look there.

If I had to go into the coven for him, I would. Basil wasn’t there now, though it wasn’t out of the realm of possibility that he was waiting to take his place back.

Rumors on the street said he hadn't gone willingly.

"I think I love you!" Cody said as we pulled up outside the building. "Seriously, you saved my job!" He leaned into my space and pecked me on the cheek. I loved that about him. Despite what I was, he was never afraid of me.

I couldn't resist reaching out and touching him. "If only you could fall in love with me, cutie. "

"Just give me time and I might." He gave a flirty wink that we both knew wasn't real. "Either that or I'm going to become a spoiled brat."

"Never! You're much too sweet for that. Knock 'em dead, darlin'. I'll pick you up later on." I planned on circling the block and ditching the car. Paranoid was better than dead in this business. I made sure to never be seen in the same vehicle for long, just in case.

"I'll just get a ride share or something," he said as he left the car.

"No chance. I'll be here," I vowed with a kiss.

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Revelations

Damon

Cody had a crush on his new colleague. It was apparent as soon as the two were in the same room together that the new guy, Quill, liked him back. Quill was one of the few colleagues that genuinely liked Cody. The rest were all too busy trying to climb the ladder, unafraid to trample him on the way. It gave me too many targets to choose from.

All I could do was to keep watch on him. Help him keep his spirits up, even as he seemed to fade in front of my eyes. The flowers had cheered him, until they, too, seemed to wilt under the strange air in Cody's apartment.

Watching my new friend struggle with something he was too scared to talk to me about made frustration burn in my gut. Instead of confiding in me, he was withdrawing, and I hated it.

Even the secrets of his past weren't enough to draw him out. I had Parker working every angle to figure out what his family had done to him when he was born. Our theory was that Basil had been tasked with ending Cody so his family could get the trust fund back. Apparently, it would revert to the family on his death instead of going to charity and they weren't as solvent as they used to be after buying their way into another coven.

His emerging magic might be the block on him failing, but why would his family have done that to him and not his siblings? So much of this made little sense. I could

tell we were missing a lot of information.

Watching Cody and Quill dance around their attraction to each other was difficult. It only got harder when Cody sweetly announced his date with Quill.

Naturally, I followed them on their date, neither one aware of my presence as they flirted. I could practically see them falling in love with each other, and I prayed to every deity I knew of to prevent Quill from hurting my friend.

Not that I was in love with Cody, but I loved him deep in my soul, even as his magic grew within him, making him something that I feared had been taught to hate.

My views made no sense, considering how deeply ingrained magic was in our culture now. There were healers alongside doctors in the hospitals. Spells served a variety of purposes, from security to cosmetics. Hell, I'd even used magic on Cody. Yet I'd always had this innate fear of it. I was more cautious around witches than any other supernatural being, for reasons I didn't understand.

Of course, my upbringing hadn't helped. I'd moved from foster homes to group homes, been adopted, and then returned when the family became pregnant. Some couples had made more of a mark on my psyche than others. Those families had hidden their prejudices from social services and encouraged, with stern punishments, a hatred of anyone not like them, especially witches.

Later, I'd discovered that those foster parents had come from witches and had their powers stripped, but it was too late to undo the conditioning, no matter how hard I tried.

Cody Valentine represented something I hated, yet, no matter how I tried to turn away from him, I continued to stay by his side.

I hadn't planned on watching Cody with Quill. Somehow, I still found my way to the building that overlooked his own with a clear line of sight into his apartment.

The cameras I'd installed in his tiny space—truly, Cody deserved better than that dump, though it kept him humble and sweet—caught all the action, though, unfortunately, none of the sound. I saw through the feed on my phone the moment that their lips met, and a swell of purple magic .

My friend lurched back with surprise, not fear, on his face. Quill looked hopeful and concerned for Cody. Then he had wings!

A demon! My friend was a demon! Was that the reason for the contract on his life? Had someone figured out the secret?

Watching, I saw Cody come to terms with what he was, then kiss Quill again. Instead of looking away like I should have, I watched, far too curious for my own good.

Eventually, I saw Quill break out into a demon form. He and Cody talked for a few minutes, a whole host of emotions playing over both their strangely beautiful faces. My heart ached with how perfectly they fit together.

I returned to the space I shared with Parker, then showed him Cody and Quill in their true forms.

“Well, fuck, this just got more complicated.”

“Indeed. We need to speak to them, but judging by what I witnessed before I left, they won't be coming up for air anytime soon.”

Parker laid a hand on my arm, squeezing with sympathy. “Sorry, man. I know you had a crush on him. ”

“It was barely anything. Cody is... he’s my friend. I feel responsible for him.”

“Still—“

“I’m good, I swear. Let’s just take a break, okay? Pick this up in the morning. He’s got a demon with him. He’s safe for the time being.”

Spending the night tossing and turning had made me cranky when I woke. Make up was useful for more than blurring my features as I painted it on to cover my dark circles.

Would Cody need me now that he had a mate?

Trying to lighten my mood and subtly tell him I knew everything, I sent Cody some messages to tease him and make sure he got to work.

I followed him and Quill to his office building and then watched in dismay as he was fired for being part demon. The rejection stung him. I could feel it almost as if it had happened to me.

The reaction of his former colleagues had me taking names for further investigation. I still couldn’t rule them out, even with Cody’s family under suspicion. His family were even bigger suspects now that it was out that Cody was part demon. How far would they go to hide such a secret? Did his coven know? The elders had helped with a spell, one that was likely the binding of his demon side. So had they been the ones to make the contract ?

All I knew was that my friend was part demon, and I didn’t care. He was still my sweetness, my Cody, and if he would let me, I would figure this mess out. I’d even give his demon boyfriend a chance to prove he was good enough.

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Broken

Amorandes

The breaking of the hold on my son's demon powers rippled through me. I felt the moment that he became his true self. From where I was in the demon realm, I couldn't feel his joy or pain. I could only hope that wherever he was, he wasn't scared or alone. I hoped, perhaps in vain, that he had found another demon that could detect the block on him. Someone that had helped him without harm.

Regret tugged at my heart. For years, I had wanted to go to him. To find him. My sources had told me that his mother, the one keeping me from him, had abandoned him for more power for herself. Still, I hadn't gone, too afraid of rejection. I wasn't ready for that.

"Sir? Are you alright?" Gregoris asked.

"Really? How often do I have to ask you to call me Mori?" I raised a perfectly groomed eyebrow at him.

"I guess another time, Mori. Honestly, are you okay? You seem paler than normal. Do you need to feed?" His concern was touching. Gregoris was not only my guard, but my closest friend .

I thought about my answer. My reserves of power were lower than usual. I'd been expending a lot of magic helping get the hotel up and running. My parents had summoned me home for a trivial matter when all I had wanted to do was to oversee

the renovations myself. They missed me, which was lovely and all, but I just wanted to stew alone.

How long did I wait after my son found his powers before looking for him myself? Should I send someone to him?

“Mori?” Gregoris prompted.

“I need to find my son.”

“Cody? Why?”

“It’s broken. He knows.”

“Mori...”

“What?” my tone turned sharp.

“He could be anywhere, doing anything. You can’t just burst into his life. He might not know a thing about you.”

The thought turned my stomach to lead. My darling son, the boy I’d only ever seen at a distance from my rare trips to the human realm, might not know that I exist. That I loved him so dearly that I cried on his birthday every year as it was another one that we spent separated.

“Should I go to his coven? ”

Gregoris gave me an assessing look. “Sir, please. The witches won’t accept you. As much as it pains me to say, you will have to wait for your son to come to you.”

My mouth fell open. Wait? No! “There must be something that I can do. The thought of waiting makes me itchy, Gregoris! I feel like I might burst out of my skin if I don’t take action. He has to know that I’m waiting for him to find me, at the very least.”

He was silent for a few minutes as I fidgeted under his scrutiny. I admired his strength. He stood tall, holding himself rigid as he studied me. All that ran through my head was my need to get to my son, to help him through this transition, and my fears about his safety. How could I live not knowing if his powers had escaped because he was in danger?

A whimper left my lips. “Gregoris, please! I can’t cope with this. We need to find out if he’s okay!”

With a sigh, his tense posture relaxed. “We need to go find a Seer. With some of your blood, they might be able to check on your boy.”

In a realm of demons, it wasn’t all that hard to find a Seer. Getting past my mother and father was my biggest problem. I didn’t want to tell them about Cody getting his powers. They asked after their oldest grandchild regularly, and I truly believed that they loved him as much as I did. They were just waiting for a chance to dote on him. Given that our entire family had been prevented from contacting him, it was clear they would be eager to meet him as soon as possible.

Gregoris made some excuse about meeting a vendor for the newest hotel and got me out of my family’s home with little fuss. “Don’t be long!” Mama yelled. “Dinner is at eight!”

Nodding to show I’d heard, I shuffled out the door and took flight with my friend.

The warm air buffeted my magenta wings, the light turning them more pink than red. The span was massive, lifting me high easily. Below, I saw other demonkin looking at my fine form and smiled for the first time since I'd sensed the binding break.

My guard took us higher into the mountains, to an enormous building carved into the cliff-side. Only those with wings could gain entrance, unless there was another cut deep into the mountain that I couldn't see.

We landed and waited in a spacious vestibule as an earth elemental with moss colored skin announced our presence to the lady of the house.

"Follow me please," they said politely when they returned.

They led us into a cavernous room lit by hundreds of candles spread throughout the space .

When the door closed, the candles all winked out. I looked around me, unable to see a thing in the perfect darkness. "Welcome," a pleasant, female-sounding voice said. "I hear you have come to seek truths."

The candles all flared to life, illuminating a stunning woman. The Seer had chosen to show us a human form with skin the color of umber and flame red curls falling to her generous waist. She was a perfect specimen of beauty that many incubi, or succubi, would lust after. I felt no such stirring, even with the faint pangs of hunger I felt.

Studying me much like Gregoris had earlier, I saw her smile. "Yes, you'll do. Come, child, let's answer your questions in the fires."

We followed her to a sunken fire pit in the center of the room. With a thought, she ignited it, casting a tiny smile my way. Gracefully, she sat and observed us. "Ask," she commanded.

“I have a son. His demon side has been unbound. I need to know if he is safe.”

Her grin grew. “I knew I liked you. It was there, right away. That heart you wear on your sleeve. Careful, prince, that bleeding heart will cause you much pain if you are not careful.” Gregoris made a sound of distress for my safety, which caught her attention. She directed her next words to Gregoris. “The watcher. You’ll be relieved of that duty soon.”

Gregoris startled. “What?”

“Hush!” The Seer turned hard eyes on him. “Only the prince may ask questions. Now, let me concentrate.”

She looked into the fire for a few moments as several emotions flashed across her face too quickly for me to pick up. “Ah! I see him. He’s handsome! Oh! Oh, yes, perfectly safe.” Was she blushing? Her eyes focused on the fire again. “He will come to you soon. Be ready, prince! Much is coming your way.”

Gregoris was a stoic demon by nature. He came from a large family and was the eldest son of a baron. His grandfather had served my mama, and so he had followed him into my family’s service. For all my life, he had been a steadying presence. My closest friend and confidant. Yet his continued silence was unnerving.

“Are you still brooding over what that seer said?” I finally asked the next day over our morning meal. While I was concerned for my dearest friend, I was excited about all that the Seer had said. Cody was healthy and safe! He would come to me soon. It took all of my self restraint to stay in my seat and not go searching for him right away

.

“I just find it difficult to believe that I would leave your side. I would never abandon you.”

Pushing down my sigh, I turned to look at him. His mouth was down turned and a frown sat heavy on his brow. “We both know that. But—“ I held up a hand to stop him interrupting. “What if you find a mate? Or I do? Mama gave up her guard when she found father.” My smile was genuine at the thought of the love my parents shared for each other. I’d grown up as a very blessed child.

He scoffed and then colored. “I’m sorry, sir, but that was a decision that neither me nor my grandfather approved of.”

I shrugged, unoffended. “I know. Mama loves your grandfather to this day. Truly she does, yet none of them wanted a triad long term. Probably just as well, or we would be related!” I flashed him a smirk before returning to my breakfast, feeling hungrier than normal.

A smile tugged at the corners of his generous mouth. “True.”

Part of his attitude was that Cody was a permanent reminder of Gregoris failing at his duty. All of this had to be bringing back bad memories for my guard. Along with all of his unresolved guilt. I’d been free for nearly thirty years. Nevertheless, it bothered him greatly to have failed at protecting me .

If it hadn’t been for him calling for me, using my full name, Amorandes, then Cody’s grandfather wouldn’t have learned my true name. While he couldn’t get used to calling me Mori, he used sir, or your highness around humans, shifters and witches.

Not that we went to the human realm often. Though a trip might become necessary if I was going to continue expending so much magic. Usually I had reserves of energy, but I felt so depleted. In the demon realm there was usually enough magic in the air to replenish most demonkin that lived there. I was just using so much to spell my hotel into the vision that I had for it.

When the situation called for it, Gregoris helped me feed. Unfortunately, I'd been sensing growing feelings on his side and while I absolutely adored my friend, there was no love there. He didn't set my heart alight with joy at seeing his admittedly handsome face each day. Our arrangement was mutually beneficial, as Gregoris had stated when he had suggested it a century ago.

"How about we head topside," I offered, using the nickname we had for the human realm. "We could head to a strip club and try to sense Cody whilst we're there."

Gregoris mulled it over, another frown on his face. He was lucky that demonkin aged slowly and had fast regenerative powers or he'd have wrinkles all over his too pretty face. Like me, he had the familiar deep pink skin, horns, and wings. He stood taller than me, with a wide build that was perfect as a protector. Gregoris had used his superior strength more than once to protect me from someone I'd inadvertently offended, either just by breathing or trying to feed. In human form, he had the human guise with rich umber skin, wavy black hair to his shoulders and eyes so deep brown they almost appeared black. He was so beautiful as a human, but my heart didn't love him. My soul didn't yearn for him to be closer.

Eventually, he answered, his words dripping with reluctance. "We can if you need to feed, though I could see to your needs here, sir."

"Please, Gregoris, I cannot just sit here and wait."

He relented with a sigh. "Of course, sir. Whatever you wish, I will do."

Happy in my victory, I cleared my plate and looked over my itinerary for the day. I was going through correspondence when there was a knock at the door. Gregoris answered, his brusque tone reaching my ears. Startled, he shouted in alarm as the visitor pushed by him and entered my spacious suite in my family home. "Prince Amorandes, your highness, your son is here and is looking for you!"

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Reunited

Amorandes

Joy. Pure and simple, flooded my system. My son was looking for me! I was going to meet him as soon as I could get to him.

“Where is he? You must tell me everything!” I implored the hellhound.

The demon realm was not as vast as the human one and we were governed by our kings and queens, with the gentry acting as advisers and a panel of elected representatives taking up the causes of regular demonkin. Yet, it seemed the gossip that I was looking for my son had reached a fair distance.

We were in the capital city, Hellasburg, with my mother and father, who preferred to stay close to their own parents. I liked to travel and kept several homes over the realm. The hotel that I’d been working on was in a nearby city called Eshura. Far enough away that I couldn’t fly home every night.

“He is in Djalling city, your highness.” Quite some distance. Even further away than Eshura, requiring a flight that would take hours unless we could portal, or teleport, though the magic for teleportation was rare and expensive.

The hellhound bowed low. “News arrived just this morning that you were looking for your son. Then the demon, Quezalintoth, asked one of his servants, my friend, Jorgoth, for help with finding the young master his father. When they came to stay at the hotel, I just knew he had to be the same son that our Prince Amorandes was

looking for. I remember seeing you before, in your human form, and your scent is similar.”

He colored, the flush running up his hairy chest and up to his cheeks. It wasn’t polite to talk about scents, especially to royalty. I waved a dismissive hand, too excited to sit still and incapable of taking offense. “Please, tell me more. What is he like?” Gregoris laid a quelling hand on my thigh. I felt like I might vibrate out of my skin. I wanted to know everything about my boy.

“Oh, he’s a handsome one,” the hellhound said cheerfully. Immediately, it occurred to me I’d neglected to find out his name. “As I said—“

“Sorry to interrupt,” I said, cutting him off. “What’s your name? You know mine, of course, however I’ve been remiss and neglected to introduce you to Gregoris, my guard.”

The hellhound blushed again. He really was a pretty thing, with big puppy dog brown eyes, dark fur running all over his hybrid form. He matched Gregoris in size and build. “Oh, um, I’m sorry, Your Highness, it’s Conchobar. Most people call me Barr.”

“It’s nice to meet you Barr. Okay, so more about Cody!”

Barr grinned at me, the redness of his cheeks deepening and a sweet scent coming from him. What a sweet boy! He found me attractive, too.

I listened, with great interest, to all the details that Barr had picked up about my son and his new mate. Barr had gone to the trouble of learning more about his friend’s master. Jorgoth, his friend, was a water elemental that worked on Quezalintoth’s farm, helping the special apples grow. Quezalintoth had also been contracted by a witch, just like me. With sadness, I learned his family had abandoned him for it.

In that regard, I had been lucky. My parents had looked for a way out for me and then Mama had discovered royal parentage. She had been the one to petition for us to be recognized in the court. Sadly, it had come too late to save Cody from his mother's family. It gave him privilege now, though. Once we could get him recognized by our kings and queens, he and his mate would be princes and therefore free from any contracts.

"Thank you, Barr, for coming to us. You must have used a lot of magic to portal so far," I said with praise layering my voice. I had to reign in the suggestion. My incubus nature tugged at me, hungry for a snack. Barr looked like a tasty treat.

"Oh, it was no trouble, your highness. I can portal you to Djalling city. I just need to eat and refresh a little first." The hellhound looked embarrassed at that admission. "If you could just excuse me while I—"

"Of course! So useful! It's quite a distance and flying there would take so much time. The least we could do is feed you. Truly, please, it would be our pleasure to aid you after you came all this way with the news."

Barr blushed prettily again. It was then I noticed I was giving out too much of my attraction pheromones. The poor lad must have been feeling the effects. I refrained from looking at what he was packing, though a good fuck would be welcome. If it wasn't for Cody waiting for me, I would see if he was unattached and open to being shared with Gregoris. Both of us could do with a boost, and having a buffer would be good for distance.

"All I require is something small, Your Highness. I wouldn't want you to go to any trouble."

Gregoris intervened while I got myself under control. "I will see that something is sent up from the kitchens. When you are eating, we will pack lightly for our trip. "

I excused myself from the table, giving Barr my seat and earning myself another blush and a simply stunning smile. His attraction to me gave me more of a boost in energy than my breakfast had. With a gentle caress to his cheek, I entered my room to pack.

Within the hour, I could be seeing my son for the first time since they had made me bind him.

Quite honestly, I believed that the magic owed me a little extra for just how patient I managed to be while the hellhound ate. Gregoris had fetched Barr a large snack that the young thing devoured with gusto. I actually felt bad that he was so hungry. Perhaps where he worked, they didn't feed their employees properly. I would have to see to that.

"Gregoris?"

"Yes, sir?"

"Could you guarantee our employees earn more than the staff at the competitors' hotels?"

"Sir?" His questioning look had my hackles raising.

"I will not explain myself," I said somewhat sulkily. He raised an eyebrow, looking distinctly unimpressed. "Fine," I relented and then softened my voice, though Barr was still likely to hear me. "I want to make sure my employees don't have to go without while they serve the privileged."

A distinctly familiar look crossed Gregoris' face. It was a softening, like one would get when looking at a kitten doing something particularly cute. "Of course, sir. I'll have that done."

Proving that he had indeed heard everything, Barr gave me a grateful smile that was tinged with embarrassment. I could understand his pride feeling a little bruised, but I needed him to appreciate this small thing. Feeding him and improving the lives of my employees was nothing next to the gift that he had given me.

“Have we replenished your energy some?” I asked him, drifting closer. What a tasty morsel he was. I hoped he would be open to a night with me. After I spoke to my son.

I wished with all of my being that the magic would steer me into a kind and loving relationship with my son. I prayed he had no animosity towards me for what had happened.

“Oh, yes. I feel great. Ready to go? I better not be away for too long or the manager will be furious.” Barr tried to laugh the statement off, but Gregoris exchanged a look with me. If it was one of my hotels, then it was getting another manager. Barr deserved a raise .

“Just a second.” I entered my room and looked into the compartment I kept spelled for privacy. Opening it, I looked through the assorted jewels and gold, picking up some coins for Barr and then a stunning ruby that would suit him if he chose to keep it. Just in case, I found him a diamond so he could hold onto the red gem. Putting them into a pouch, I tucked it into my pants and joined them, ready to portal to my son.

We stepped through all together into the bustling city of Djalling. The portal opened up in front of a familiar hotel, one of my own. Exchanging a glance with Gregoris, I knew it would be under new management as soon as it was possible.

An officious demonkin, an air elemental with silvery blue skin, greeted us. He wore a perfectly pressed suit and concealed his wings. I hated him on the spot. “Ah, Your Highness, welcome to The Djalling Grande.” He cut a look at Barr that promised

punishment. Barr slumped in defeat.

I snapped, unable to take the poor treatment. “You’re fired.” Barr looked terrified for a second, and I realized he thought I was speaking to him. “Not you, Barr, lovely. Now, take this token of my gratitude,” I handed over the pouch, “and go get my son for me, please. ”

Barr took the proffered gift and bowed low. “Thank you, Your Highness. Right away.” He scurried off, his face red.

“What is the meaning of this?” the air elemental stammered.

“Your Highness,” Gregoris breathed, pressing a hand to the small of my back, an intimate gesture in public like this. He could touch my wings easily. “Let me deal with this. I will get you situated in the conference room.”

The room was opulent, like most of the hotel was. I stood, unable to sit with how restless I felt. My son was just upstairs! He was within these same walls and I could speak to him for the first time in his life!

Gregoris wasn’t gone for long. He returned to my side with a grin on his handsome face. “He will be gone by morning. The assistant manager will take over until you can decide on a proper replacement.” Again he touched me, this time squeezing my shoulder. Too familiar.

Stepping away, I turned for the door when I heard voices outside of it. I couldn’t wait any longer. Throwing open the door, I greeted my son and his mate and hugged my only child close to me.

So precious. My boy was perfect in his demon form. He’d taken my coloring in his wings and horns, but kept his human skin tone. He was a beauty. It was almost a

shame that someone had already bonded with him. Quezalintoth was a fine demon, though. He would cherish the gift that was my son.

I wasn't sure of all that I said, so stunned to be in front of him. My tail was swishing around like I was a small child again. I was just too excited to calm it. I listened to Gregoris remind me of my title and flushed a little. This behavior really was not befitting of a prince, but I had only been one for less than thirty years, barely any time at all for a demon.

Gaining my manners, after another prompting from my rather amused guard, I escorted my son and his mate into the room so we could get to know each other.

It was easy to see that Cody had some trauma from his parents' treatment and would take some time to warm to me. I could tell that my open affection and delight in meeting him went a long way to easing his worries over his reception into demon life. Mama and father accepted Cody was only half demon and would have both witch and demon abilities

We demonkin weren't purists. All demonkin, half-breed or not, were welcome. In fact, I knew that some of the queens were infatuated with seeing how demon genealogy presented itself in other species. There was a precedent for a so-called halfling being made royalty. Of course, they would never rule, but they were bestowed with the title and privileges that accompanied it. There had never been a witch-demon hybrid, as far as I could recall, making Cody more special.

Seeing my son this close, it was clear to see which of my features he took on, aside from the demon ones. It appeased my hurt pride that his human features were much like my human guise. We had the same color hair, the same mouth. Our builds were different, though I wondered how much of that was from neglect as a child in Cody's case.

Just getting to know him was a treat, and it was clear he wanted to do this again. It was a shame that the visit was ending. I clearly didn't hide my disappointment well when Cody mentioned dinner plans with his best friend.

He tentatively offered. "Unless... did you maybe want to come meet my best friend? Toth will be meeting him for the first time as well."

His smile when I accepted warmed my heart. Cody checked with his friend and when Toth, as he preferred to be called, received a call from his master, I pretended not to know that he was under a contract. The fact that I had gone to such lengths to learn about my son and his mate embarrassed me. I didn't want to come across badly to them. It was perhaps a tad invasive to go to such lengths .

My eyes filled when I found out that Cody had lost his employment because of my binding breaking. It had been the only measure I could provide to ensure his safety. There was always a chance that a demonkin could find out who he was to me and use magic against him. I just hadn't known how far his parents had gone, binding his witch side too, leaving him so vulnerable.

To make Toth feel better about his circumstances, and to let Cody know about his past, I explained about my own contract and the time around Cody's conception. I wanted him to understand how badly wanted he had been.

Toth looked so forlorn that I wanted to make things better for them both, deciding then and there to go to the court and petition for Cody and Toth to be accepted as princes. It was only Gregoris' reminder about our dinner plans that quashed my excitement.

Tomorrow. I'd make that happen as soon as I met this mysterious best friend. The hitman that had been sent to kill my son.

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A Chance Meeting

Damon

As confident as I came across, okay, arrogant, I was nervous to meet Cody's new mate and his father. It seemed impossible that Cody would find the other side of himself as well as a life partner and the parent that he hadn't known about all in the space of a day, but he'd done just that. He had unlocked his demon side and then bonded to Quill, or Toth. It was all going to take a while to get used to.

I needed to get my friend alone and get all the juicy gossip about what it was like to be mated to a demon. Was the demon versatile in bed? Cody, like me, preferred to top, so I couldn't imagine him being happy with a partner long term that didn't appreciate that side of him.

"Are you sure you don't want me there as backup?" Parker's concern shone through his usually calm demeanor.

"I'm sure. It's just Cody and his family."

"With everything that's happening, I just have a bad feeling. That message—"

"Don't worry about it." I had to cut that train of thought off. "My guess is that it's just a newbie hacker trying to freak us out." I dismissed the feeling in my gut.

"Still, I don't like it. I'll stay close by in case you need me."

“Parks... I’ll be fine. Go home and try to figure out this mess. Get me all you have on Austin. We need a plan to deal with him.”

“Okay. I’ve got it.” He hugged me close and let me leave the car. “Check in,” he yelled before pulling away from the curb.

Out of habit, I scoped out the restaurant that Cody had named as our meeting place. I checked the entrance and exits, looking for weaknesses in the security I could exploit if necessary.

Once I was happy, I leaned against the building, waiting and trying to blend in with the crowd. I people watched, making up stories about those that passed me. Ever since I was a kid, I’d made up tales to keep me entertained. I didn’t trust easily and people were always wary around me, so I’d never had many friends. Parker sticking around as long as he had was a bit of a mystery to me.

Soon, I noticed a group approaching. There, sandwiched between his mate and who I assumed was his father, was my friend. Cody was practically glowing with happiness, and he was wearing one of the suits I’d had made for him!

“Hey, sweetness. Who are all these handsome men?” I called out. When he got close, I pulled him into a tight embrace, grateful that he was there and safe where I could see him. “I missed you, cutie. All okay?”

Cody assured me he was fine. I could hear his joy as he introduced me to his mate, Toth, aka Quill. Seeing his human guise slip for that of a demon had been terrifying for a second, until I’d seen them look at each other. I knew Cody was safe with Toth.

I also hugged Toth, making sure he knew how precious our Cody was.

The remaining pair were stunning to look at. The one called Mori looked like his son.

Cody and Mori had the same brown hair, though Mori had strands of gold and bronze through his. They both had chocolate brown eyes.

I shook hands with Mori, a strange buzzing feeling going through my body at the contact. The demon fixed his gaze on me, questioning something I couldn't answer. I briefly lost focus on what was said.

“Guard? Are you important in the demon realm?” I asked, looking between the two men. Gregoris was frowning at me. Was I standing too close to his charge? I put some distance between us. Mori still stared until he registered what I'd asked .

“A little.” He blushed! Goddamn, he was beautiful with the flush on his high cheekbones. I knew incubi were meant to be attractive by design. It helped them feed, but this one drew me in. Guess I knew why I liked Cody so much. They had been there, his incubus genes, just buried.

“A little? Care to expand on that?”

Cody begged me to leave it, but I found I couldn't give him that, when normally I would give him the world if he asked. It also set alarm bells ringing that this father of his was important enough to have a guard and Cody was cagey about answering why. “Is he mafia or something, sweetness? I don't want you getting into danger.” If he was, I would get us out of there. I'd prepared an exit route. I didn't care that the demons had magic, I'd have them knocked out cold before they could hit me with a hex.

Then Mori laughed. He had the audacity to laugh! Just when my mind was coming up with all these scenarios and forming a game plan. “No, nothing like that! I just didn't want to embarrass my son. He's still getting over the idea himself.”

I looked at Cody, confused. By his wince and Toth's side eye, I could tell some of my

annoyance was showing through the normal social mask I put in place.

“I’m a prince. So is Cody now. My family have agreed to that. They just have to meet him to put in the final approval,” Mori continued, blissfully unaware of how close he had come to harm. A frown tugged on my brow and Mori must have seen it as he quickly added, “Which they will. His horns are magnificent. His wings will carry him far once he learns to fly. He is a fine demon and I’m proud to call him my son.”

Cody hugged his father, and I decided the demon could live for another day since he was making my friend so happy.

Toth was looking at his phone strangely throughout the meal. Every time it rang and he either silenced it or ignored it, he pulled my attention. It kept me too distracted to figure out what Mori’s angle was. Did Mori truly just want to be in Cody’s life? Or was there more to it? I didn’t know all that had happened and why he hadn’t been with Cody as he grew up, but his love for his child was clear. I felt a prickle of jealousy that I refused to look at.

When I realized it was Basil calling Toth, using magic to do so, I shared my frustration with my friend’s new mate over the situation. Magic was a grade A pain in the ass, and not the good kinky kind that I could get behind .

We were in the middle of discussing how Mori could help Toth break the contract with his master when Toth vanished. Summoned out from among us.

Cody freaked out, which was totally understandable, so I went to comfort him. Taking my place and earning a glare, Mori took his son in his arms to soothe him. I hated that I’d been replaced as comfort to Cody, but then I was also confused by the prickle of irritation I felt towards Cody for getting so much of Mori’s attention. A stupid and irrational chain of emotions.

I had to push it aside for my friend. We needed to find Toth for him, but Cody's bond was still too new for him to summon Toth out from under Basil. We needed more to work on.

With Toth's phone left with us, there was nothing for Parker to trace, leaving me more frustrated. The one silver lining was at least Cody got to find out who owned his mate. The voicemails were the perfect evidence for the coven, who Cody called. They brought in reinforcements with other shifters from Sweetwater, a pack that Parker hadn't considered because of their past.

I'd never met Basil, but I'd already decided what I was going to do with him. "He's quite dead when I catch him," I voiced those thoughts to the assembled group .

There was some useless muttering about a trial, which I ignored. Basil would find a way to escape. Tricky witch types like him always did. One witch suggested letting me have Basil once he answered their questions. That I could get behind. It earned me a glare from Mori. I really didn't get what his problem was. Surely he wanted me to be friendly with Cody's other friends.

Gregoris was pretty useful, if a bit stiff, and he showed Cody how to use his mate bond with Toth to find him. We would bring the fight to Basil.

When Cody let out his horns and pointed ears, I couldn't help but brush my fingers over one point, gaining a firm rebuke from Mori in return. He even slapped my hand! How was I supposed to know that they were a no touch zone? Though the idea of touching Mori's created a delightful shiver. I wondered, briefly, if pinching an ear would feel like a kick in the balls. He deserved one after the bruise he gave me.

Finally, after some back and forth over healing me, Cody summoned Toth's pet, from my suggestion I might add. I nearly fell on my ass! That thing, the hellcat was as big as a tiger. She, I assumed it was a girl, seemed to love Cody. I could hear her purrs

over the exclamations of the others with us. He cooed to her like she was a tiny kitten and not a massive, ferocious looking beast. The pair looked at each other before Cody looked at us with hope shining in his eyes. “Found him.”

We took a few precious moments to figure out who would travel together. Cody was sent with the pack alpha and his head enforcer. The car was too small for me with the shifters and the hellcat.

“You’re with us,” Mori barked as he and Gregoris led the way to another vehicle.

“There’s no space,” I pointed out as I reached it. It would be a tight squeeze with all of us. “I’ll ride with the witches.”

“No.” The word was final. Mori had lost all the softness that he exuded when Cody was around.

I turned, leaning against the car and laid a hand on Mori’s arm in a flirty gesture, a smile stretching across my face in contrast to my bitter sounding words. “What’s your problem with me?”

Mori leaned in, so close that I could feel the warmth of his body and his breath ghosted over my lips. I thought for one precious second that he was about to kiss me. My gut swam with butterflies, a sweat broke out in my palms where I was still clutching Mori.

“Where should I start, hitman? You were sent to kill my only child. Then, for whatever reason, you decided to protect him, but you failed. You let a demon close to him. ”

My breath stopped in my throat, my lungs seizing at the menace in his tone. “If his witch goddess hadn’t blessed him, he would be dead and it would be your fault.”

Your fault.

The words rang in my head as I slumped against the car, my legs unable to hold me up.

“Then there is the matter of you being in love with my son,” Mori fired the last shot. I saw a brief flash of what looked like pain in his eyes before he turned his face away from me and put some distance between us. I drew in some much needed air, my head swimming.

I gaped. Reaching for him, I caught his hand. His skin was warm next to mine. The chill of the January air had seeped into my bones. Or rather, Mori’s words had cut me so deeply I felt exposed, naked. “No,” I protested. It sounded weak to my own ears. More firmly, I said, “I love him, but I’m not in love with him.”

Mori’s dark demon eyes met mine. He studied my face. “One of the most honest things you’ve said.” He leaned in closer. This time, my body reacted. Prickling awareness of his proximity lit up my nerve endings and my cock twitched. Mori smelled divine, wood smoke and jasmine, and something else I wanted to get more of.

Leaning closer, I caught his whispered words. “I’m going to keep a very close eye on you.”

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Watchful

Damon

As suspected, the car journey was deeply uncomfortable. Because of my smaller stature, compared to my demon acquaintances, I was stuck in the middle seat as the shifters drove. Mori had refused my last plea to travel with the witches, insisting that I stick with them.

We drove to a place between Northarbor and Sweetwater, where the shifters were from. As we ate up the few miles to where Toth was being kept, I tried to text Parker to let him know where I was going.

“Who’s that?” Mori asked with a hint of demand.

“My handler and friend, Parker. I told you about him at dinner,” I answered honestly. Mori and Toth had both peppered me with questions, the majority of which I deflected onto them. It made me too vulnerable to talk about my private life and everything about the contract was now out in the open. Everyone knew Austin had contracted me to kill Cody, but had used magic and Basil to make it so he wouldn’t be found out.

Mori hummed and settled back, brushing against me. There was a burst of his scent, and my chilled skin absorbed his warmth. With difficulty, I repressed my shudder.

It was strange, seeing this quieter side of Mori. When texting with Cody, I’d gotten the impression that Mori was excitable and overeager. Here he was being restrained.

It made me wonder what was going on underneath. Had my presence in Cody's life rattled the demon?

All the vehicles pulled up to a deserted lot, and I watched in fascination as the shifters peeled off their clothes and shed their human forms for their alters. I loved watching Parker let his bird out whenever he shifted, even if it was a bossy, prideful bird. I knew my issues with magic were strange.

In my thirty years on this earth, I'd experienced a lot. I'd seen magic in many guises, the fae, elves, shifters and especially witches. None of the supernatural races made me as nervous as the witches did, so I kept back as Oak exited a car and began using his magic to trace Basil.

Everything about what Oak was doing was to help Cody find Toth, but it made my skin crawl, a visceral reaction I could barely control.

"Are you alright?" Mori asked with concern as he observed Oak and watched the shifters fan out .

There was a small part of me that wanted to lie, but it was obvious that Mori didn't trust me, and wouldn't if I lied. "Witches make me uncomfortable."

He studied me. "They do?"

"Old habits die hard, I guess."

Mori wasn't given a chance to question me further as the shifters all began running in the same direction, a massive Komodo dragon lumbering behind them at a slower pace. He was still faster than Cody until my friend let out his violet wings and took flight.

I couldn't help my whispered shout at seeing him be his true self. Mori slapped a hand over my mouth, muffling the sound, and drew me close to him. "We can't let anyone hear us." Like Cody, he let out his wings without damaging his finely tailored suit. Really, it was a beauty. I'd have to find out where I could get one. He slung an arm around me, pulling me tightly against his hard body. Holy shit, he felt good.

With a hop, Mori lifted me into the air, gliding after Cody just as my friend entered a warehouse. The sensations of the air rushing over me and Mori's tight grip were exhilarating. Being in his arms, trusting him with my safety, should have been impossible, but I found myself leaning into him, soaking up his warmth as the cold air blasted over my exposed skin.

Up ahead, Cody entered a warehouse and Mori landed not far behind him .

Inside was my own personal hell.

I took in the details, the spell circle holding a tortured Toth inside, the cup of coffee on a counter, signs that Basil had been living here. All of it registered in a detached manner. While I worked to get my feelings under control, the facts filed themselves away. The demons were sure to be sensing the mounting distress that I tried to squash down under a veil of apathy. The shifters could likely scent my growing fear.

Both Mori and Gregoris looked at me as I watched my friend with his mate. It was easy to read their concern, not only for Cody and Toth, but for what they were getting from me.

Taking a step away as Oak settled next to the outer ring of the spell circle, I looked around for more clues to where Basil could have gone. I needed to get a photo of this fucker.

With no one paying attention to me, I snagged Basil's comb. There, on its lacquered

surface, were fine dark red hairs. Hopefully, there was enough DNA to get into the registry and find out everything there was to know about him, including a way to trace him. Without magic, of course, because he would expect that.

There were mutterings happening around the circle, and despite my fear, I drew closer. It didn't surprise me that Oak dismissed my suggestion about the spell. I barely refrained from rolling my eyes. The witch seemed to have some misplaced hero worship for Basil. Although Basil had been High Witch of the Northharbor coven the previous year, he'd also prevented the coven from growing and having healthy relationships with other supernaturals. He believed witches were above everyone. He was the exact kind of witch that I had been taught to despise.

Cody agreed with me and with a small sigh, Oak tried my approach. It worked. Of course it did. I might not like magic, but I could spot a rushed spell and the signs of a man on the run. Basil had left his toothbrush along with his comb. That guy was fleeing before he could be caught. This spell had been one last fuck you to his former coven.

I felt a pang in my heart at seeing the mates reunited. Not out of jealousy, but of longing. No one had loved me like that. I wanted it for myself.

"A new name? Like in that movie?" Cody asked hesitantly. He didn't truly believe that he had the power to free his mate. I knew enough about Gregoris from the last few hours that the demon was being as serious as death about this. He had taken on the role of protector to Mori's son from the moment that they had met. Not that Cody, or likely Toth, had seen that.

I couldn't help my scoff, remembering a movie that Cody had made us watch once. "A new name for the princess to save the world." We both laughed. It brought me genuine joy to still have that with my friend. I might lose him to his mate, yet we might end up closer after all this was done now that we were on a more even footing.

He wasn't mine to protect anymore. Cody didn't need that from anyone other than his mate.

They settled into performing the magic and soon both opened their eyes with smiles on their faces.

Toth was free. Basil was in the wind. Austin was about to have an accident.

I watched Cody and Toth make plans with the witches and shifters warily. Mostly, I kept out of their way and texted Parker instead.

Damon: You might want to look into Sweetwater again. Their shifters are hot ??

Toth used his own inherent magic, and some of the healing power that Oak could spare to get patched up. The witch looked drained, the demon not much better after his ordeal.

From a safe distance, I observed them until my phone vibrated with a text, drawing my attention.

Parker: Yeah? The hotness really outweighs the shady past they have?

Trust Parks to have high moral ideals like he wasn't a freaking hitman too.

Damon: No, you should hear how they talk about their omegas. The alpha worships his and all the enforcers seem to adore him.

It didn't take long for Parker to get back to me. All the while, I caught Mori casting glances at me and slowly inching closer.

Parker: Did you know they have a website now? Damn, that omega is cute! Fancy

moving to Sweetwater?

Not really , I thought, but I kept that to myself. Sweetwater was a place where Parker would fit in. I wouldn't. I would stand out worse there than here. Maybe it was time for him and me to part ways. Leave the business and find something else to do with my skills. Parker could get hired anywhere with his computer skills. I could work in private security, I guess, though they preferred witches for that. Having magic was a useful skill in that line of work. Still, there had to be a place for me.

Mori wandered closer. "Everything okay? "

His words broke me from my thoughts. "Hmm? Oh, yeah. I'm just going to say my goodbyes to Cody and Toth and then head home."

"To Parker? Is he someone special?" he asked.

Cody, Toth and Gregoris turned to look for Mori and found us together. My friend's face became marred with a frown. Did he not like me speaking to his dad?

"Parker is family," I answered, moving away.

Mori stopped me with a hand on my arm. "Cody loves you. You were really there for him when he needed you. Don't stay away too long."

I shrugged. "I'll see you around, Amorandes."

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Concerns

Amorandes

“We will travel to the capital and then visit you at your home when we have news. Is that okay?” I wanted to get my son the protections he desperately needed as quickly as possible, almost as much as I wanted to stay with him. He needed more care than just Toth could give him, though Toth was an adequate mate for my only child. Thankfully he would not need to be present when I made the petition. The capital city would be far too overwhelming for such a young demon and Toth required rest to heal.

Cody’s face fell, then brightened as Toth whispered something in his ear. “Um, yeah, that would be good. It’ll give Toth time to recover from this. There’s so much to do.”

“We have plenty of time,” Toth assured his mate, wrapping him up in his arms.

I felt the faint trickle of arousal from my son, immediately feeling faintly nauseated at the way it fed my magic. Damon’s lust had fed me well. A jolt of it had hit me when I’d picked him up. The energy would be enough for me to power a portal back home.

“We will take our leave,” Gregoris said formally, performing a little bow to my son, who flushed, clearly pleased and embarrassed by the gesture.

With one last hug for Cody and goodbyes for the remaining witches and shifters, the hitman long gone, I opened the portal to just outside the capital, and took us home.

My heart hurt as the portal closed behind me, outside of the city gates, cutting me off from my son. Another pang existed for Damon. He had stood looking so alone as Cody and Toth reconnected. Despite my concerns about the hitman, I would admit to feeling curious about him.

“Why can’t we get closer? I am royalty, after all.” Maybe I’d whined a little, but it had been a trying day, or more than a day. I had lost my sense of time with my growing exhaustion. Of course, I knew that portaling was only permitted inside of the city by kings and queens. Though I was a prince, I was so far from the line of succession that it barely counted.

Often I thought that my title was a convenient way for the royals to protect their subjects. I actually investigated the number of times someone had been proclaimed a prince or princess, and it typically aligned with a contract. Naturally, I kept that information to myself.

“Prince Amorandes and his guard, Gregoris, wish for access to the city and an audience with their highnesses.” Gregoris called to one of the many guards at the heavy metal gates. They had stood there for centuries and showed no signs of wear. With my guard’s words, the barrier broke apart, allowing us entry into the vast city.

Trams powered by magic wound their way through the bustling streets, and Gregoris and I hopped on, then changed trams as we worked our way up through the city to the castle on the peak. There we would find our government and rulers. Then they could decide if they wanted to pass protection onto my son.

The demon realm had many similarities to the human world, except our technology was often adapted from theirs during our visits. We powered it with magic and renewable sources, as we didn’t have fossil fuels. No demon dinosaurs here.

There was silence between us as we traveled. We both had much to process, and I had

to admit that my mind kept straying to the hitman. Damon was gorgeous. I had wondered more than once since we had met, if he had incubus blood in him. It would account for the tingling feeling when we touched .

Having his body against mine, feeling his arousal, had been a challenge. I had wanted to feed, but Cody would have been furious and I sensed an inner delicate core to Damon that he kept hidden with his flirting.

With effort, I drew my thoughts back to the task at hand: getting Cody and Toth approved and protected. It stunned me to think I had gone looking for one son and found two. It would take time for me to adjust to thinking of the other demon as part of my family, but for Cody, I would.

I honestly didn't think that the kings and queens would reject him. Cody was a treasure, not just because he was my only child. No, it was more than that. He was unusual in that he was a hybrid of two opposing species. Witches could control us, so generally we avoided them. Unlike other supernaturals, our birth rate was good. Children were usually planned. With other demonkin we were compatible, and one kind would overpower the other in our children. With humans, the child would take after their demon parent, usually with less magic available or a need to feed more often.

Never had there been a witch-demonkin. Or at least, none that I knew of. Having kept tabs on my son at a great distance, forcing the limits of the binding spell, I knew why they had forced me to bind his demon side. I'd not known much about the magical side of Cody. They acted as if he had been born without his witch side. A null was an embarrassment to witches, so it made sense that it was kept quiet.

Knowing that Cody had both sides to his nature, even if he had very little magic, I had researched as much as possible around running my businesses and trying to live my life with the gaping hole missing. Dramatic, perhaps, but my son was a shining

light in my life. He was this beautiful soul that had come out of such a dark time. He made it all worth it.

So, I knew he was the only documented witch-demonkin in existence. I wasn't arrogant enough to believe that no other had ever been born. Cody was just the only hybrid of his kind we knew about.

As such, he would be a treasure in court. They coveted the unusual. There was no chance that my petition would be rebuffed. My walk through the shining palace gained a hint more of its normal swagger. I was a prince. My people loved me. I was a fair and generous employer and I had fathered the only witch hybrid in our extensive records.

Mother and Father were waiting for us just outside the doors to the vast chamber where our kings and queens held audiences. I was in for a scolding. After they hugged us both, of course. They loved Gregoris almost as much as me. Sometimes more, I felt .

Sufficiently greeted, Mom held me at arm's length. "Did you come here without my grandson? After waiting all this time! Now we can see him and you're making me wait more?" Her voice rose with her incredulity.

"Mom!" I gasped. "Is that how things are now? You can see Cody and I no longer matter?" I teased with a grin, pulling at my lips. I was sure mischief danced in my eyes. Behind Mom, Dad snickered.

"Psht!" she chided, swatting at my arm. "I can see you any time. Where is our grandson? What's he like? Is everything okay? Last I heard, you were going for dinner with him and his friend topside and then you went missing for nearly a day!"

My mom was a strong demon. She had to be after losing me for years when I served

the witch family Cody came from. Sure, I'd been allowed to return home periodically, mainly so I could replenish my magic, since Cody's grandfather had a distaste for my incubus feeding habits. Damn prude.

Still, it had left her anxious when I was gone from her for too long. I felt like a youngling again. A demonkin barely in control of his powers. Not a centuries old demon with a child of his own.

"Well?" Mom's voice became shrill.

"I can explain," I tried in a soft voice .

"There better be a damned good reason you were gone for so long!" Mom's cheeks reddened with her anger.

"There is," Gregoris said calmly, inserting himself into the conversation.

I shot my bodyguard a look. This was my mess to explain. "Well, you see..." How did I explain all that had happened in the last day since I had found Cody?

"We met him. He was staying at one of my hotels! Cody is adorable. You are going to love him, but the reason that we were gone is that his mate—"

"Mate?" Dad interrupted.

I smiled, thinking about the demon that was protecting my son and teaching him about his abilities. Having seen what Toth went through to keep Cody safe, I knew he was the perfect fit for my son.

"Yes, it's a funny story." I went on to fill them in on Toth's contract, what he was made to do, and how he fought it when Mom got angry at the idea of anyone harming

Cody. I then explained about Basil calling on Toth and our hunt for him.

It took some time to tell my parents all the story and have them understand Cody needed a few days with his mate to rest and recover from the ordeal. My parents were wonderful, but they weren't very patient.

“So you see, I'm here to request that both of them be recognized.” To protect them both, even with Toth's new name. Cody had gifted his mate a new name. He gifted his mate something that would protect him from being summoned ever again. He was the only one that knew the name other than Toth. This was just another layer of magic to keep them safe. Once they were recognized as princes of the land, they couldn't be put under contract to witches like Toth and I had both been, ever again.

Dad drew Mom away from us, clearly seeing that she wanted to protest waiting for Cody and Toth to come to them. It was too much to expect the young couple to deal with grandparents they had never met only days after Cody had unlocked both his demon and witch heritage and completed their bond. They needed honeymoon time like humans did. Shifters had their heats, after which they could be guaranteed some peace for a day or two. No, my parents needed to be patient. Something Mom struggled with.

They returned to us, Mom with a resigned look. “Fine. We will wait, but only for a week. And we'll come with you to petition. Our words will have more weight. Plus, your dad is owed a favor in court.”

I knew it cost Mom a lot to give me that, so I wrapped her in a hug, my wings folding around us. “Cody's perfect, Mom. Just wait and see. You'll be glad you waited for when he's not utterly terrified and overwhelmed. ”

She squeezed me tightly. At her height, she came to my shoulder, so it was easy for her to rest her head there without damaging me with her horns. “Thank you. I'm so

happy he's free now. I just want—"

"I know."

Gregoris continued his quiet stalking as we entered the courthouse portion of the palace of the demonkin kings and queens. I feared that I'd offended him, but shrugged it off. While I cared for my guard, and he was the closest thing I had to a best friend, we needed better lines drawn. I knew his feelings for me were an issue. I couldn't return them and didn't want to hurt him.

Walking behind us, he stayed silent. Dad gave me more than one questioning look, but I shook my head minutely. That chat would have to wait until another day.

Court was busy. All kinds of demonkin, incubi, hellhounds, elementals, all waited in line for their chance to address one, or more, of the royalty within the main chamber. Not all would go in front of the kings and queens. Some would put their case to the heirs, demonkin much higher in the line of succession than I was.

Our turn came a couple of hours after we arrived; it would have been rude to jump the queue. As it was, the staff served us refreshments, which I made sure to share with the people I had made friends with in the line as we waited. Some had amazing stories to tell, and I wanted to go in with each to offer them the moral support they needed. Unfortunately, my parents wouldn't allow me to help where I could. They were kind in their rebuffs, reminding me, and my friends, that I needed to stay on task.

When each returned to the waiting chamber, I either celebrated or commiserated with them before they went on their way. Then it was our turn.

I had to admit to being a little cowed by the court. The main chamber was vast, allowing many of the royals to be in attendance. There was no actual count of how

many kings and queens we had, though it was rumored that there were a pair to represent each sub-species of demonkin. Not knowing which were which offered them another layer of safety from anyone that would attempt to take their lives.

About a dozen of them stood in front of us. Again, like in the outer chamber, there were elementals sitting next to hellhounds. They were a wonder to behold. The power that they radiated replenished my own levels beyond anything I could have expected. We demonkin got our powers from the very air around us, but here, in their presence, it was like the air was supercharged with energy. It buzzed along my nerves and pulled at my control.

Vaguely, I could feel the concern from Gregoris as I twitched and reacted to how quickly my magic was being restored. Despite being almost as depleted as I was, he remained by my side without making a movement.

“Speak,” several voices ordered as one.

As before, I told the story of my son, beginning at his conception, then the forced binding of his powers and my inability to see him grow up or offer him refuge with his people. I spoke of the binding in more detail, about all the failsafe I had put into the magic, to the point where I was nearly drained as I offered my son the only safety net I could manage. While I hadn’t known that the witches planned to bind his witch powers too, my spell had broken both bindings thanks to the contact with Toth.

My new son-in-law was harder to talk about. There were many parallels in our stories, as with a lot of demons forced into contracts with witches. This brought back a lot of unpleasant memories for me, some of which the royals could probably see. There were demonkin there that I couldn’t classify at a glance.

Once finished, I fell silent, waiting for the judgment to come. Finally, it did. The sound echoed through the chamber. One voice as before.

“Petition granted.”

Cody and Toth were now princes and safe from this, at least. Basil was still an issue. As was the human, though he was the hitman’s problem now.

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A Hitman's Work is Never Done

Damon

As I walked away from my best friend and his mate, I brought my phone to my ear, already dialing the only other number saved.

“‘Bout fucking time you called! Where the hell have you been?” Parker’s voice was a low, rumbling growl of agitation. “You’ve been gone for hours! I’ve not heard from you since that last text.”

“You know where. Don’t tell me you haven’t been keeping tabs on me. Or did I find the last tracer you put on me, hmm?”

“Fuck you, Damon, you know you got them all. So I’ve been wondering where the fuck you disappeared off to for hours. All I knew was that you needed my help to track down Basil.” Parker spat the name out. “Then it was radio silence for literal hours. Not even a thank you, Parks.”

“I’m sorry... it was... Parks, I was so helpless. There were all these witches and other shifters. The situation was a mess.”

Silence fell between us before he spoke. “Damon... I get it, okay? I worried, but you needed your focus on what was happening. What do we do now?”

“Well, Basil is in the wind. That’s going to take some time and careful digging to scare him out of hiding.”

“I can practically sense the mental cogs turning. Do you have a plan?”

“How do you feel about ending Austin?”

Parker’s rich laughter warmed my soul. This is why he was my family. We were of the same mind most of the time.

“Austin, huh? I feel quite good about it. Like it’s necessary, y’know. How do you want to do this?”

Laughter bubbled up, pushing away the last of my melancholy from watching Cody with Toth, the demons, and the shifters. All of them had a place. There was nowhere for me. I shoved that last trace of sadness away.

“I think our friend is going to have a terrible accident.”

Home, sweet, home. Or rather, temporary base, sweet... yada yada. I had this feeling that prickled under my skin, that we needed to be moving bases soon. We had spent weeks in this place, more than we usually did, and there were too many threats.

Parker’s face filled with relief as I walked through the door. He stood from his desk, crossed the room in a few steps, and had his arms around me for a crushing hug.

“Overreaction much?” I huffed into his neck.

“Shut up,” he muttered against my head.

He was about half a foot taller than me. He had the alpha height, just not the alpha designation. I’d wished for it, for Parker to have been born an alpha. Prayed to Parker’s goddess, when he had fallen to the beta sickness. Parker had shaved years off my life when he became ill and slipped into a coma within a day like all the betas

in the Sweetwater pack had. For an entire month, I'd watched him. I'd paid private nurses, all kinds of healers, even approached a witch for my brother, but nothing except time had done the trick.

The beta sickness was still a mystery, yet it had affected vast amounts of betas. It affected the Sweetwater pack disproportionately. The Northharbor pride had a few betas affected and the Northharbor aviary had none. They were the strongest indicator that there was an outside force at work there. Perhaps Parker's beloved goddess, The Luna.

Parker had taken weeks to recover and still hadn't gained all of his former muscle tone back. Partly because I had been reluctant to let him back into the field with me. But I would need him for my plan.

We broke from our hug, both looking away in our embarrassment. I loved Parker. He was my family, but we didn't hug and do feelings.

"So I have a plan. I'll need your help on this one." Then I launched into how I was going to end Austin's life for all that he had done to Cody.

Bonus was, it would damage the company that had fired my best friend for being half demon, too.

There wasn't a lot of time for us to plan it. We talked into the night before crashing for a few hours' sleep. If we wanted to get this done, Parker needed to be in Austin's building before the lunch orders went out. I had to be there all freaking day, to not stand out.

Worse still, I had to wear a poorly fitting suit! A cheap one that I might have stolen from Cody's closet. What? Now he had no need for it. He was going to be a freaking prince! He shouldn't be seen dead in that ghastly poly-blend suit!

Parker got into the building easily under the guise of doing maintenance. He had already hacked into the security system earlier, but Parker also had a physical part to play in our plan. He was lucky and got access to Austin's office after looping the cameras, so his presence would go undetected. With his quarry in hand, he went to the break room for the next part of the plan.

Job done with no one noticing he wasn't there to actually work, Parker left the building just as the order for the food went through.

Austin was easy to anticipate. He liked things on a schedule and only ever ate from the building's cafeteria. They were used to his demands, however ludicrous, and catered to him with only muttered complaints.

The building was vast, and they served breakfasts and lunches to many of the employees for a subsidized fee. Yeah, the company was so greedy that they didn't even provide free meals. This worked in Austin's favor, as he had very particular dietary requirements. His meals were prepared especially for him under strict controls. Really, it worked for me too. My job was to get my hands on Austin's lunch and switch them out.

I completed the trade quickly and easily. No one really noticed me and I knew that Parker would have my back and scrub any trace of me, switching them on the cameras in the cafeteria. They needed to be able to see me collect the food and take it to Austin.

Prize in hand, I took the elevator to Austin's floor, whistling a jaunty tune as I stood alone for the car to get to the correct level .

"Don't celebrate just yet. We need this to go off without a hitch. Get ready to give an Oscar worthy performance, Damon." Parker's voice came from the tiny monitor in my ear.

Most places of business had wards that prevented most spells from working. They always forgot about technology. I shook my head, but stopped whistling. I didn't reply, not needing to be seen talking to myself.

At her desk, Austin's assistant was looking harassed. "Oh, hey. I've not seen you before."

"Intern," I explained. I'd used clever make-up and prosthetics to look younger than my thirty years. "Got lunch for... Austin?"

She lit up. "Fab. He's in a bear of a mood. Would you mind going in?" I would not feel bad for her later. She was willing to throw an intern into the lion's den, knowing that I was going to get the brunt of Austin's foul mood.

Maybe I'd had Parker play with some of their systems while he was in the building. It was child's play for him to access their system. Really, for such a powerful company, their security was shocking. If I fancied being legit, I could consult with them to fill those holes. If they took Cody back first, though.

Frankly, I didn't see that happening after we were done with them. Plus, a prince was far too important to be working for a shitty company like this. Maybe I could convince him to sue them for the last of their worth later on. I'm sure Cody had dreams that needed funding.

Maybe Mori could help with that. Those suits... the man wasn't hurting for cash. He was impeccably dressed and seemed to be used to money. Hadn't he said something about owning hotels?

I often found my thoughts drifting back to the demon. What it was about him that had caught my attention, I didn't know. There was something aside from the perfect fashion sense, hot body, and charming personality. Perhaps it was just how clearly he

loved my friend. He was so accepting that I couldn't help but feel jealous. I'd found myself wanting some of Mori's attention on me. My skin buzzed when he made eye contact or we touched.

Austin made me wait a full minute in the corridor outside his office after I knocked. This was a power play on his part. Pretending he was much too busy working to deal with an underling. He knew it was his lunch because I heard his assistant call him. I'd also heard her curse his name after she hung up. Yeah, she wouldn't last in this job for long with that attitude.

"Come in," Austin finally called.

I entered the large corner office that was supposed to be Cody's, finding that Austin had already put a bunch of tacky personal touches to the space. The decor was nineties wall-street, flashy and fake.

Austin looked me up and down, then dismissed me, immediately snatching the tray from my hands and uncovering the dishes.

Nothing that he ordered was that extravagant. A simple salad and tomato soup, which looked like it was going cold. There was a fruit compote with greek yogurt for dessert.

"Dismissed," Austin muttered as he lifted a spoonful of soup to his lips. He slurped it off the spoon and grimaced with distaste. He tried another few before pushing the bowl away. "Fucking cold."

He must have sensed my continued presence because he looked up at me. "You can go."

"No, sorry, sir. I have to check that it is to your liking. The kitchen said they've had

complaints and want to fix them.”

No word of a lie there. Austin’s list of complaints was long and varied. He huffed, but ignored me and picked up his fork to try his salad.

I had paid little attention to what was in the salad, only that it was going to have an extra ingredient this time.

It must have passed muster, or he was starving because he devoured it. Within minutes, he was tossing his fork down and reaching for his dessert .

Worry filled my gut the longer he went on eating his food. I was glad that there was little to no trace in the salad, but I began to doubt that I’d picked up the right one when it started.

Austin’s eyes went wide, his spoon halted halfway to his mouth. He scratched at his throat with one hand. The spoon fell and clattered on his glass desk. His eyes went wide, then bulging.

He fumbled for his desk and opened it violently. I knew he wouldn’t find what he wanted in there.

“Sir?” I asked, faux concern filling my tone. “Are you okay?”

“Allergic. Help!” Austin got out.

Playing the role perfectly, I rushed to the door. “Help! He’s having an allergic reaction!” I yelled.

The assistant stood. “There’s a pen in his desk!”

I turned to look at Austin. His lips seemed to be going blue. It was a good look on him. His face was red and sweaty. He shook his head.

“It’s not there!” I shouted at her. Hiding my glee was hard. Never in my time as a hitman had I enjoyed my job so much. Time to get out of the business , I thought vaguely to myself.

“Shit!” She got up and ran to the break room. In a matter of seconds, she was back with an epi-pen. I knew that the company had a stock of them on each floor since Austin wasn’t the only one with a serious allergy that worked there. They were also practical enough to know that having a healer on staff was expensive and this place was cheap.

The assistant dashed into Austin’s office and went to use the pen herself. Austin snatched it out of her hand, un-capped it, and sank it into his upper thigh while she called for an ambulance.

We waited, Austin’s lips getting more and more blue, his eyes bloodshot, his tongue thick.

Nothing happened.

In front of me, Austin died. I was sure he caught my smirk before he passed out.

“Oh, my god! Fuck! Is he—?” The assistant went into a panic. The phone slipped from her hand, the call still connected, as I stood stock still.

“I think he’s dead.” I infused my voice with shock.

“Oh, shit.”

The ambulance and what seemed like half of the management team arrived minutes later. Just after them, the police arrived and allowed the body to be taken away.

Someone steered me into a seat in the break room and pressed a cup of weak tea into my hands.

“I think he’s in shock. Can this wait?” someone said from nearby. A hand rested on my shoulder.

“We need to get the details of what happened now before anything is missed.”

Distantly, I heard a muttering of a “tragic accident.” Parker laughed in my ear and my lips twitched.

Eventually, I let them know that this was my first day, and I had the responsibility of picking up Austin’s lunch and bringing it to him. They would examine the camera footage later and not find anything suspicious. Austin’s allergic reaction to the peanut oil in his salad would be chalked up to careless cross contamination in the kitchen.

It was just so tragic that Austin’s epi-pen was missing. It must have gotten lost in the move to the new office. In fact, they would find it in his old desk if they looked.

The epi-pen in the break room, though? That was negligent on behalf of the company. Out of date and damaged? There was no way for the epinephrine to work. It had gone bad. Austin had basically injected himself with water for all that it had helped.

Hours later, I was let go from the company with a glowing letter of recommendation, a hefty check for my troubles, and a number for a therapist.

I felt no remorse then. Just for a second, which worried me .

“He deserved it,” Parker said when I returned to the apartment.

“Maybe so. Didn’t mean we had to do it.” Regret filled me. I worried Cody would be upset when he found out what I’d done.

Parker clicked a few things on his screen. “Want to feel better?”

“Sure.”

With a couple of clicks, Parker pulled up another hit ordered by Austin.

This one was on me.

“Better?”

“Much.”

A New Hit

Damon

“How is this possible? I thought he was blacklisted?”

Parker seemed hesitant to answer. “This is... look, I’ve been trying to figure out a way to tell you this—“

“Well? Spit it out!” Taking my anger out on Parker was a bad idea. He was bigger than me and could put me on my ass if he tried. Even after losing a lot of muscle mass to the beta sickness. I softened my tone. “Sorry, this has just...”

“I get it. This has me freaked out. Can you... um, can you ask Cody if you can go stay with him for a bit? I’d feel better if you were with him and Toth.”

“Yeah, but you haven’t explained why.”

Red flags of anger striped his cheeks, his eyes flashed with his bird and I swear I saw talons, which was impossible, that only happened with alphas or maybe omegas with their children under threat. “Someone, I don’t know who, has overturned the blacklisting and instead, they put you on the list. You are persona non grata right now. They seem to have forgotten about my other aliases and access, because I can see shit, but not who has done this to you.”

Parker’s eyes were suspiciously bright, like tears would fall any second. He was afraid for me. “Damon, you need to go into hiding.” He held up a hand when I went

to interrupt. “No. It isn’t safe. I’ll work on the case from here. Call in every favor I can. There are rumblings of dissatisfaction in the subgroups. No one gets why this is happening, but too much money is flowing for the rest of them to ignore. You’ve also—“

“Made enemies. Yeah, I know.”

It was a fact of life that a successful hitman will have made a list of enemies a mile long. Sure, I did what I could to mitigate the damage, yet there was always going to be someone jealous of how well I’d done for myself. I had resources that many other assassins could only dream of having. My team, or just Parker now, was the biggest thing that made me stand out. Too many of those people on that list only trusted people transactionally. They hired people for jobs and discarded them. They never gave them the whole story and never stayed in touch. These people didn’t have friends, loved ones. Life was killing and making cash.

“Will you please ask Cody if you can spend some time with him in the demon realm? No one can get to you there, and having you with both of them, and their magic, will give me peace of mind while I figure out who we need to kill.”

Damn, Parker was bloodthirsty as well as panicked. Rather than roll my eyes at how overprotective he was being, I gave it a thought. There were plenty of reasons why a vacation in the demon realm was a good idea.

First, I’d get to see Cody again. It had only been a couple of days, but I missed him. Second, well, it was the demon realm. I’d never dreamed of visiting there. Now I had an open invitation. Third, well, it would be a bonus if I got to see that demon who lingered in my thoughts.

“Fine, I’ll call him.” I paused midway, taking my cell out of my pocket. “Do cell phones work down there?”

Parker rolled his eyes at me. “It’s not down there,” he pointed to his feet. “It’s another dimension, dumbass, and Cody already told you his cell will work there because of the ambient magic.”

Right, I vaguely recalled the conversation with Cody where he told me that the demons used a lot of the same technology that we did, though theirs was powered with magic. Toth was going to check his cell for him and make sure that it could accept calls. I could text, except that would just lead to a lot of back and forth. Who had time for that?

Getting out of here and somewhere safe was the priority, not just for me. Parker needed to be out of the danger zone. If the others on the site hadn’t put the two of us together, and really, with our history, they should, then he would be better off away from me. Having two targets would also split their focus. Parker could hide better than me. If worse came to worst, he could shift and fly off.

The call lasted minutes. I felt bad because Cody clearly didn’t want me interrupting his honeymoon with his demon, yet his manners dictated he help me out.

Taking advantage of his kindness like that had a bolt of anger spearing through me towards Austin and Basil. I had no doubt that the witch was involved in this latest contract. He, and by extension, Austin, should have been blacklisted. Only the witch would have had the power and influence to overturn that ban.

Toth arrived to get me just minutes later. I’d barely had time to ram some clothes in a bag. I wanted to take some of my suits. I finally settled on two, though, really, they were too precious to be worn on a farm. Plus, I was aware that they often made me stand out when I should blend in. I imagined that most demons didn’t wander about in Saville Row. I argued with myself that we might venture out places and have to dress nicely. Mori owned fancy hotels, didn’t he?

While he glowered at me, I dashed around my bathroom and shouted orders at Parker. “Leave here straight after me. Get the packers to put our shit in storage. Do not take all my stuff with you. Leave it and focus on getting away from here.”

“Yes, boss,” Parker sassed, as he watched me scan my room for anything I absolutely needed. “Come here.”

I paused to stare at him. “Seriously?”

“You’re not going anywhere until I get a hug. I’m going to miss you. Who knows when this will be over?”

My hug was a little tighter. “Less of that in front of the demon.”

“I don’t think I care what you two are muttering about unless it will affect Cody,” he said, now sprawled on the couch and looking bored.

“It won’t be a problem because I’ll be in the demon realm with you guys, so I guess you don’t need to know.” Toth just glared at me. “Okay, so I don’t want Cody to know. So if asked, do you want to be honest and say I didn’t tell you, or do you want to lie to that sweet face because you don’t want to worry him?”

“The one where I don’t have to lie to my mate.” Toth glared at me for extra measure.

“Good answer.”

Cody welcomed me with open arms when we arrived through a portal to the farm where he and Toth lived. There was an honest to goodness castle that stood at the top of a hill. Below the castle were trees spanning for as far as I could see.

“Come on, I’ll show you to your room. It’s just over here,” Cody said after he had

finished welcoming his mate home properly.

Really, I felt bad about intruding on their happiness just so I could have somewhere safe to stay while we worked out what the hell was going on.

“Is your dad here?” I hadn’t meant to ask. It just slipped out.

“No, but we really should invite him. He’ll be offended if he finds out you are here.” Cody wrung his hands. Fuck, I was making life difficult for him.

Toth glowered in the background. A demand for me to fix this. Right now!

“Well, if you invited him and his bodyguard, you would have someone that knows the demon realm on hand to show me around. I’m sure you and Toth are really busy with the orchard. Weren’t you going to do something with the shifters? ”

“Oh! That’s a great idea. The pack is coming tomorrow and I really wouldn’t want to leave you alone all day while we sort it.” Cody beamed at my slight manipulation and opened the door to my bedroom.

Toth said nothing as he followed, but his expression said less about murder, so I felt like I’d fixed things suitably.

Cody was just putting his phone away when I entered the room. “Mori will be here soon. He’s got to get my grandparents off his back first.” He sighed. “This is so wild to me. A week ago I knew nothing about my dad and now he’s begging to be in my life and I have a set of grandparents that are apparently desperate to see me!”

“You deserve it, sweetness. Mori clearly cares about you. Why wouldn’t his parents?”

“I know.” He blew out a breath. “It’s a lot to go from virtually no family, aside from you,” he just said it as a throwaway comment, but it landed square in my heart, “to having all these people wanting to know me. Obviously I’ll have to invite them to visit,” he must have caught Toth’s horrified expression, “or we can go visit them. Do a day trip somewhere. That would be better, right?”

I nodded while Toth hugged his mate and reassured him either plan was good. With a glance, I cataloged the room, all the points of entry and the best defensible position. Then I flopped down on the bed, utterly exhausted.

“We’ll let you get settled in, maybe have a nap before dinner. Mori and Gregoris will be here soon.”

“Thanks, sweetness.” I felt the day’s events catching up to me with an exhaustion I felt down to my bones.

“Damon?”

“Yeah?”

“You don’t have to tell me everything, but are you in trouble? Please be honest. I want to help if I can.”

“I am. You’re doing all you can, just by letting me stay here. If trouble comes this way, though, I’ll leave.”

“I’m glad you came here. Maybe it’s my turn to keep you safe.”

“Maybe it is.”

Visiting

Amorandes

“Did you ask him?”

I saw the tears brimming in my mama’s eyes. She knew what I was going to say before I did. “He’s not ready for so many people. Plus, his friend is there,” I said as gently as possible. “The castle is rather... neglected. Cody would like the chance to make a good impression on you both.”

“Oh.”

The one word spoke volumes. My son was the greatest gift of my life, but I hated being the one to disappoint my parents. They had been so good to me.

“They have an important business meeting tomorrow for the orchard, but they would like to spend the day with you a couple of days after that if you would like to meet them in town?” I was just making stuff up. On the call, there had been little time to talk to Cody about meeting my parents. I’d heard his hesitation and knew I’d do anything to make things right for both of them. I could bridge the gap between them. Once I got there, I’d convince Cody of my plan .

There was a small town not too far from Toth’s castle. Cody and Toth would want a more neutral venue for when they met Cody’s grandparents for the first time. I knew how insular my son-in-law was. He wouldn’t want strangers in his home and this way if something happened...

Not that I expected any issues. Both of them were introverted and seemed reluctant about the meeting. I guess it was understandable that both were hesitant over family, with their history.

“We can’t go to the castle? I’d like to see where my grandson lives.” My mama was a stunning demon and looked like she could be my slightly older sister, still it was jarring to see her pout like a child.

“Amoredessa,” Dad chided gently. Yes, my mama’s name was very similar to my own. They were sure they were having a female child and refused to change the name. “We discussed this. At their pace. We’ve had much longer than Cody to prepare for this day.” She brightened under his attention.

“You’re right, Hanandes, as always.” They traded smiles. Dad squeezed my mama’s shoulder and poured her another cup of tea.

Behind them, I caught Gregoris relaxing fractionally. As if I didn’t know how to handle my parents by now. I reined in my scoff, but his eyes narrowed at me, nonetheless. “We should pack,” he reminded me .

It took far too long to get packed up and start our journey deeper into the capital. Hellasburg was bustling with many scores of demons flying and walking the streets of the city. I wanted to get to a portal guild quickly and have a hellhound transport us to Djalling. It was a reminder of how flustered I was when I found out that Cody was in our realm that I’d forgotten such a thing existed. They were tightly controlled and very expensive, worth every coin in my opinion. Gregoris had put in our application as I had finished up packing my things. I’d packed for an extended stay, ever hopeful I would get to spend some quality time with my son.

My magic could open a door to the human realm easily. All demons could travel to the human realm and back, though it was taxing on their magic. The only species that

could travel between places in our realm were hellhounds. It was something to do with the ambient magic in the air that I'd learned and forgotten as a child. I remember being told it was what we had wings for, which was fine. I was grateful for my wings. Loved them a lot and there was nothing like flying, but it was so damn time consuming. Okay, so I was a little envious of the ability hellhounds had.

The hellhound that opened our portal was very different from the hellhounds I was used to. This one was very stoic. He offered nothing in conversation and practically abandoned us on the other side without even a smile! The wonderful smiling face of Barr greeted us. While he still had that trickle of attraction to me, there was nothing on my end. All I felt was affection and a feeling of protectiveness. It was just a shame that Barr wasn't in my personal employment. It would be good to have such a powerful hellhound in my service. Costly, though. He was better off at the hotel helping our customers.

Honestly, the sweet hellhound had gone out of my mind once I had met Cody and his friend. I knew Damon was staying with my son for an undetermined amount of time. All Cody would say was that Damon wasn't telling him much, and he feared Damon was in trouble.

Damon was my son's family, which should make him mine, yet I knew what I was feeling towards the young hitman was nothing a family member should be feeling. I was protective, but in a possessive way. I was drawn to the man and would do anything I could to get him under me.

Gone was the concern that he would hurt Cody. With my son safe in the demon realm and able to use his magic, once properly trained, of course, there was nothing here that could touch him. No one would risk harming the newest prince .

Perhaps Barr caught my eagerness to see Cody, Toth, and Damon, because he kept the chit-chat to a minimum and opened a portal to Toth's castle quickly.

“Um, Prince Amorandes, sir.”

“Mori, please Barr.”

“Mori, I wanted to thank you for changing the management at the hotel, and for the pay raise. With you taking more time in this area, I just know the hotel will be much better for it.”

“Oh, uh.” It caught me off guard. I’d just reacted. Seeing others suffer unjustly was a tender area for me. I would always react upon seeing it. “You’re welcome, Barr.”

“Can I... could I give you a hug?”

This was more like the hellhounds I knew. Most of them were like overgrown puppies. I adored it. “Of course.”

I kept the hug short and friendly. His arousal was sweet and simmered under his skin. The energy was a welcome boost with a tangy flavor. We parted with a last squeeze. “Thank you, Barr. See you soon.”

The castle loomed in front of us, the wards still intact until Gregoris touched them, asking for entry. It was the equivalent of knocking on the door in the human realm. In just a matter of moments, Cody came rushing out of the front door and down the short hill to greet us. Toth walked at a slower pace behind him and reminded him to wait.

Despite the last minute nature of our invitation, we appeared to be welcome. I caught sight of Damon loitering at the doors, his lean frame leaned against the wall, looking for all the world like he was bored, not watching us carefully.

Toth lowered the wards and muttered a spell which would allow us to come and go

freely, and even admit people ourselves. This was such a significant sign of trust that I couldn't help but hug my taciturn son-in-law. He went tense in my arms before relaxing fractionally. I wasn't about to push his boundaries, so I quickly broke away with a pat on his shoulder. Was he blushing?

As we entered the castle, I noticed it was in perfect condition. Yes, I'd told Mama a white lie to save her feelings. I knew the place had charmed Cody, he just needed more time before meeting his grandparents. The castle had all the modern amenities that Mama would like, with tasteful, though simple, furniture throughout. It was decorated as a man's haven, which I guess it was. Toth had few friends aside from his employees, having believed that other demonkin would reject him just as his family had, so his home was built around his comfort.

I would have to confess to Cody about my lies later, before my parents come to meet my sons. Son-in-law was such a clumsy term. Toth would just have to be my son, too. We needed to be on the same page. Cody would know how to get me out of this mess.

The group of us lingered in the hallway, making our greetings. Things were awkward. I could sense that Toth wasn't all that pleased to have so many guests staying with them. They were so new! Barely had days together before real life intruded.

More than once, I felt Damon's eyes on me. He'd given me a tentative handshake, that same prickle of energy going through me at his touch. Even when we parted, he was there. Awareness of him skated over my skin. A pull I couldn't deny. He looked good, dressed in a suit that probably cost more than most made in half a year. It emphasized the lean lines of his body. The cut of the slacks framed his ass so well my mouth watered.

Cody frowned at us both, catching us looking. Gregoris glowered, but quickly pulled on a blank mask of indifference. "Perhaps we should see our rooms. It's getting late."

“I’ll start dinner,” Toth offered.

“Okay, quick tour and then I’ll show you where you’ll be sleeping. ”

The castle was gorgeous. There were more than enough rooms for my parents to stay if their first visit with Cody went well. Clearly, someone had aired out and refreshed the rooms with magic before we arrived. They showed Gregoris his room first, which was closest to the stairwell leading downstairs. It had a Jack and Jill bathroom, so he had easy access to where I was sleeping. Unnecessary, but it would keep him from complaining about his fears for my safety. As if there weren’t four demons staying in the castle. Well, three point five, but with Cody’s added witch power, we definitely had four very powerful beings keeping us all safe.

“Your room is here, Dad,” Cody said with a sweet smile. I glanced through the doorway at the movement opposite my door. My son caught me watching Damon enter his room. “I don’t care what’s going on there,” he leaned in closer to say, “but you will not fuck my best friend in my home, do you understand?” Cody’s eyes promised fire and retribution if I went against his wishes.

“So I can fuck him? Just not here?” I asked for the necessary clarification.

Cody flicked a look over his shoulder where Damon was lurking in his doorway, close enough to hear if we talked clearly enough. I had no idea what his human senses were like, though I wasn’t entirely sure that Damon was fully human. “You’re both adults. As long as it’s consensual, I don’t care. I will say this, though,” Cody leaned in even closer to bite out the words. “Don’t make me choose between you if this goes wrong. You might not like what happens.”

Well, that was charming. Not that I blamed him.

Distraction

Damon

My smirk was wide as I retreated into my room, as Cody exited Mori's.

“Did you hear that?” he demanded, his tone still chilly from his warning to his father. Damn, that had been hot to watch. Mori had been all careful submission. Those big black demonic eyes staring up at his son so guilelessly. Just my type.

“Permission to fuck your dad, just not here?” I teased, unable to help myself. “Oh, and that you’d pick me over him? That right, sweetness? I love you too, Boo.” I blew air kisses his way.

Cody huffed out a laugh and crossed my room to launch himself onto my bed. He claimed one of the extra pillows and hugged it to his chest. “Yeah, yeah. Just don’t mistreat him, okay? I kinda like him already. Is it weird I feel protective of him? I know he’s my dad—“

“Hey, you don’t need to explain yourself to me. I get it.” I got onto the bed beside him and leaned against the headboard. This bed was something else. A four post monstrosity, though I supposed with how big demons were, it was necessary. Toth even had chairs that would be comfortable with wings out. Not that he, Mori, Gregoris, or even Cody, kept their wings out. They just had a few of their demon features on show. Mostly the horns, eyes, and ears. They were the same kind of demon, all incubi, but sex and lust did not feed Toth as much as with other potent emotions like despair and fear.

Cody hadn't gotten the build his dad had. He was still his slender self. Mori's demon form was smoking hot, with wide shoulders, toned chest and stomach, probably from holding those wings, right? His legs were long and muscular and I wanted to crawl between those muscular thighs and squeeze them while I sucked his cock.

I wanted to see his tail again, and to run my fingers over it to see if it was as sensitive as the horns were. I'd noticed a rune-like shape on them I hadn't noticed before, not that I'd had much of a chance to explore his horns, and wanted to know what it meant. The pinky-red skin thing was weirdly attractive, too. I wanted to see how the color changed and deepened over his body. I wondered what he would feel like under me and it turned out I might actually get a chance. Incubi were vers, right? Cody loved me, but I doubted he'd answer that question even if he knew the answer.

"Mori is your dad, and more than that, he really cares about you. He literally dropped everything to come here and stay with me while you have your business meeting." I couldn't quite believe that the shifters were coming here. It was a pretty big deal to have shifters be open to working with demons. No one worked with demons. In our world, they were used. I felt a flash of anger, followed by gratitude that Cody and Toth were now safe from that fate, thanks to Mori.

"I didn't want you to be alone." Cody hugged the cushion tighter, a frown on his pretty face.

He'd gotten the hang of only letting some of his demon features out already. I could see his horns through his hair, the tips of his ears, and his eyes were fully black. The change wasn't at all jarring to me, which made me wonder about myself. Here I was staying with a witch-demon in a demon's castle, in a different realm to my own, and this felt more comfortable to me than my shared apartment.

"Sweetness, I would have been fine, but I appreciate it," then I paused. "Hey, what's that on your horn?" He had a similar etching on it to the one that Mori had. "Did you

have that before?” My hand gravitated towards the right horn bearing the mark, but paused when I remembered it was an intimate thing to let someone touch them.

Cody’s hand fluttered up towards it as his face colored. The blush ran down his face to his neck.

“Hon?”

“Oh, uh... well...” The redness deepened. “It’s my royal mark,” he muttered hastily.

“What?” I cocked my head, trying to get a good look at it. Huh, it did look like a crown.

“When me and Toth were made princes, we got these marks to show our status. Mori has one, too.”

“I thought it might just be a family thing since you met him, but that’s pretty cool, right?”

“You don’t think it’s silly?”

My opinion clearly meant a lot to Cody. We were best friends at this point. No one could dispute what we felt about each other. So I knew I had to be enthusiastic about my praise for the move. Honestly, it was the best thing that the royals of this realm had done. This, a mark as proof, would keep Cody and Toth safe. “It’s amazing! Everywhere you go, people will know how special you are.”

“Damon,” Cody complained, “be serious.”

“I am. They liked you, so they put a crown on it!” I joked. His lips lifted in a smile, his face returned to its normal color .

“Weirdo.”

“Takes one to know one.”

He suddenly turned serious. “Don’t hurt him, please.”

I didn’t have the words to explain to Cody just how I felt about his dad. Whatever was happening between us was more than just a one-night thing. With Mori, I knew I was in danger of wanting all his nights.

Tension flared to life between me and Mori whenever our eyes met over the breakfast table the following morning. I knew I wasn’t imagining the feeling of lust heavy in the air, and the prickling jealousy that came from the bodyguard.

Gregoris was keeping Mori’s attention focused on him whenever possible. He served Mori food, was conscientious about filling his coffee cup and checking that Mori had enough water or juice. He hung on every word Mori uttered and monopolized the conversation.

Then there were the touches. Did Mori realize just how much Gregoris touched him? Even when he didn’t have a hand on Mori, he was lingering just a little too close.

Even sweet Cody was frowning. Toth just ate his breakfast peacefully, making sure Cody had plenty of food to sustain him before their meeting. They still had to go and change. There was no way Cody was going into a serious business meeting in sweatpants and a baggy t-shirt. I wouldn’t let him. I’d already picked out a very snazzy suit, thank you very much. Someone had to help him! Cody looked all sex mussed and happy. Not the most professional first impression, though he’d met some of these shifters under less than perfect circumstances when they helped him find Toth.

Getting away from Mori and his bodyguard, who was clearly ready to mark his territory right there on the table, was a must. I shooed Toth and Cody off to their room to shower. I had to get ready myself. There was no way the Sweetwater pack Alpha Pair was going to see me in jeans, even if my ass looked fine.

The heavenly shower pressure washed away the tightness in my shoulders. I worked through my feelings as I soaped my body. Gregoris was jealous. Pure and simple. Though they were close, there didn't seem to be a lot of affection there. Mori clearly cared about the bodyguard, but at the end of the day he was an employee and then maybe a friend. I just didn't like how proprietary Gregoris was over Mori. Sure, they probably fucked. Often. I was under no illusions, but here in the demon realm where there were demons that fed from emotions and sexual energy, sex was not some weird taboo. It was feeding, like having lunch. Demons were much more open about their desires because of it.

I picked my suit carefully. Such a limited choice couldn't be helped having left all my others in the apartment I shared with Parker. He knew how to treat my stuff, so I was sure the rest were sure to be in good condition when I took them out of storage. It wasn't like I was going to take chances with these. They were unworn and so damn pretty. I was going to look amazing in both of them.

The navy made my blue eyes pop, so I went with that. A crisp white shirt, navy vest with a subtle silver pattern, blue and silver tie, my dark brown brogues, and I was set. My sandy blond hair was naturally wavy, so I teased it into falling over the left side of my forehead.

No more hiding. This was my face. No more makeup unless I wanted to look nice for a date. I was done with prosthetic noses and altering my face shape. Done with wigs and coloring my hair. Done with the contacts and fake lashes. How I looked was fine. It was time for a fresh start.

This was me. I was pretty normal looking. Decently attractive, some would say. Yes, my nose had a bump from repeated breaks. There was a tiny scar that intersected my top lip from a fight I'd gotten into in the group home, another on my chin from the same fight. I had good bone structure, and I was lucky that my features were pretty symmetrical.

If I wasn't going to be a hitman anymore, then there was no reason for me to hide. I could live a normal-ish life. Not normal. Most humans weren't best friends with a demon that was also a witch. They didn't have a shifter brother.

A commotion sounded. I heard Cody's squeal and then laughter. Rushing to the window, I was greeted with the sight of Toth flying with Cody and then fucking dropping him when Cody's wings popped free of that gorgeous suit. He better not have wrecked it! Thank fuck he was a quick learner, because I wasn't sure Toth was going to catch him when Cody began flying. I actually thought my heart had stopped for a moment, until I figured out that they seemed to be racing!

Sometimes, being Cody's best friend felt like it would send me to an early grave.

My phone dinged with a message.

Unknown number: Hey, this is Oak, from the Northarbor coven. Are you free to come to the coven house to teach us how to track Basil the human way? He has us blocked.

I wanted to be smug, but I hadn't expected them to contact me quite so quickly. After a quick call to Parker, who said he would be on hand to help, I texted him back that I would have to find a way back to Northarbor. Oak had seemed okay when I'd spoken to him during the mission to rescue Toth, then he sent a fucking thumbs up to my message! Vague much? I was doing them a favor. The least he could do was give me a thank you. I was perfectly fine chilling in the demon realm.

When I appeared in the orchard to catch up with the tour of the grounds and to meet the pack, Cody was talking about having babies and Mori wanted to buy a heat club. Just what had I missed? I'd get the information out of them at some point.

The shifter guards had been aware of me approaching, though Toth and Cody clearly hadn't, too caught up dreaming about expanding their family already, because they both startled some when I tapped Cody's elbow.

"Hey sweetness, I'm going to have to miss this meeting. Is there anyone that can portal me to the coven, or nearby?" Best to be direct and get this over and done with.

Cody clearly wasn't happy about me leaving so soon, especially since he knew I wasn't telling him everything. I briefly explained what was going on, sugarcoating it into threats rather than a hit on me. Not that Cody reacted well to that. I kept telling him I'd be fine. He just didn't seem to believe me. I told him I'd use some protection spells, a lie since I had no intention of willingly using magic on myself.

"I'll be fine, sweetness." I tried to assuage his worry over my safety seeing he was getting worked up.

"He will, my son," Mori interrupted what I was sure to be quite a rant from Cody. "I'll go with him to the coven house. My meeting with the pack can wait until another day. Damon is too important to put at risk."

He what? I was? What the fuck?

"I'll go where Prince Amorandes goes, naturally." Gregoris had a weird expression on his face. This was just wonderful.

"Of course, Gregoris will ensure our safety," Mori said, smiling and ignoring my glare.

Our safety? Unlikely. If Gregoris had a chance, he'd take me out before this hit could.

Mate Cute

Amorandes

We were quite some distance from the others before I broached the subject with Damon, who was stewing silently beside me. “Are you sure you should go back to the human realm? I thought there was some trouble there?”

Truthfully, I didn’t know the ins and outs of the situation, just that Cody felt there was more that Damon was refusing to tell him for whatever reason. Damon constantly put my son’s feelings above everything. Was it any wonder that I’d thought he was in love with him? So Cody was likely right and Damon was either minimizing the situation or just plain ignoring things. Why he would risk himself to help the witches, I didn’t know.

“Not really. Parker doesn’t want me to do it. He’s going to meet us at the coven house once we grab some of your stuff.”

“Stuff?”

“A go bag and a coat. It’s February after all.” Damon smirked.

“What’s a go bag?” I frowned, unfamiliar with the term.

Damon rolled his eyes. “Just the essentials. We have no idea how long the coven might need us so it’s helpful to have a change of clothes, cash, weapons, IDs, etc.”

“Ah!” I brightened, understanding. “I’m looking forward to meeting Parker.”

I got the feeling that Parker, the hacker I’d heard a lot about, had stronger objections, but again, I was getting a sugar coated version of the story. Worry swirled in my gut.

It was actually more of a portent. I think my magic, or the magic of the realm, was trying to give me a warning. Nothing like this had ever happened to me before, so I was inclined to listen to it. Thanks to my time in the human realm before Cody, I’d been given training with my magic and I could fight decently hand to hand against other supernaturals, not humans, who our magic protected. Witches were a gray area, making them tricky to fight against.

Gregoris was fantastic at combative magic and several fighting disciplines, but he was with me more as a deterrent than as a necessary bodyguard. Honestly, he was with me more as an assistant and companion than anything else these days. Our realm was so peaceful compared to the human world. Despite that, with our training, we could both back Damon up if something went wrong.

Inside the castle, it was delightfully cool. The demon realm was always a balmy temperature unless you were in the far north, the only place that we got snow. The first time I’d experienced cold and snow was when I served Cody’s grandfather. We would have to pack some extra layers or buy some things once we got there because it was February and cold in Northarbor. I was not freezing my balls off!

“Parker is bringing me some more of my things, so just grab what you need so we can get going. I don’t think this will take long,” Damon called as he broke from us to enter his own room.

“Do you really think you can find this witch?” Gregoris asked skeptically. His words had the man faltering.

My eyebrow raised all on its own, just from the tone that Gregoris was using with Damon. It was just towing the line of being rude. What was his issue?

Damon turned and looked completely unruffled. “I know I can. Then it’s all up to the coven. I’m not going up against a witch.” He shuddered.

“Not a fan of witches?” I’d caught his hesitation with them when they had shown up to help Cody. I doubt anyone else noticed. They likely hadn’t been paying as much attention to him as I had been .

“No.” The simple word said more than a whole paragraph. There was history there. I decided not to push. Instead, I went to my room and packed a bag.

Gregoris entered just as I was finishing up. “Your highness... should we be getting involved in this?” His expression spoke of concern, but his recent actions told another story. My bodyguard was jealous of Damon. I’d clearly left this talk too late. I hated upsetting people, but drew in a breath and held it before I spoke.

“Yes. Not only is it important to my son that I keep Damon safe, I care about Damon. You know this and I’m sorry if this hurts you.” Gregoris’ mouth opened and closed without a sound escaping. “I know the lines have blurred between us and there may be feelings involved, so I will understand if you don’t want to come with us. If, going forward, and you wish to, we could find another place for you. If working for me is uncomfortable for you.” I sighed. “It’s really okay to stay here. We’ll go straight to the witches.”

“I’m coming with you! You can’t leave me behind!” Fire flashed in his eyes. His magic flared. In response, mine threw up my personal wards. Gregoris stumbled back at their strength.

Gregoris growled in frustration. “Please, sir, don’t leave me behind,” he begged. “I

couldn't bear it if anything happened to you. Why do you need to go at all? Why can't we just open the portal for him?"

"You want me to leave Damon on his own with witches when he's clearly uncomfortable with them and when he's in trouble? Who are you, Gregoris? I thought you had more empathy than this! I want to help Damon. I want to be near him." I sat on the edge of my bed and clasped my hands together. This was a mess of my own making. I'd seen the friction between them and done nothing to stop things coming to a head like this.

My friend paced. "I don't understand the fascination with the human. He'll grow old. He could die at any minute! The man is a killer, and he was after your son!"

"Yes, he is. And he could have killed Cody at any time," I said simply. "I know Damon is a good person and only kills those who would harm others. That's why he protected my son."

Gregoris turned a furious expression on me. "He's not good enough for you. You're a prince and he's just a..."

"Just a human," the man in question drawled as he leaned in the doorway. "And one that has somewhere to be." He straightened. "Now, if you don't mind, I'd like to get going. Places to be, people to see and all that."

My eyes narrowed. The emotions coming off Damon were complex. There was hurt there, anger, a flash of bitterness that stung. Also, a tinge of humor, likely at my expense. I could have handled this better.

"Damon..." I tried to put my thoughts into words.

"Maybe we just aren't meant to be, Mori." Damon shrugged. "I've never done the

serious stuff and I think we might be too different. Besides, you two make more sense than we do.”

“That’s not what I want.” It just slipped out. I caught Gregoris’ flinch. “I’m sorry,” I muttered. “Gregoris, I care about you. I really do.”

“Is this one of those human break up cliches? It’s not you, it’s me? We’ve never had a problem in the bedroom, so we are obviously compatible.” He sat on the bed, slumped in defeat.

This time, it was Damon’s turn to flinch. “I’ll come back.”

“No,” Gregoris sighed, “I’m sorry, I just wanted...” There was a long pause, where we all stared at each other. It was super uncomfortable. Damon lingered, looking all for the world like he wanted to flee. While the silence stretched on, I searched for something to say. Then Gregoris spoke again. “It doesn’t matter, does it? You’ve been nothing more to me than my boss and my friend, despite how much I wanted things to be different.”

“Gregoris...” I reached for my friend .

“It’s fine. Let’s just get this done. Find a witch and then we can deal with all this when we get back.” He stood, then chuckled. “Guess that Seer was accurate.”

I felt my face drain of color as his meaning became clear. Gregoris was going to leave me. “No!”

“It’s for the best, your highness. I’ve lost myself in this. Caused harm to you with my own feelings. I’m looking at things recently and nothing I see pleases me.”

“But—“

“We can talk about it when we return.”

I couldn't lose my friend like this. Somehow, I had to convince him. I glanced at Damon. Was he worth losing Gregoris over? Even before there was a chance with the young man, I hadn't considered a relationship with the guard, so putting the blame on Damon was unfair.

Maybe Gregoris was right. Perhaps some distance between us would do us good. My heart ached. Either way, with or without Damon, I was going to lose Gregoris, just like the Seer had said.

A portal to the human realm was easy enough to make. Damon supplied the location and together, Gregoris and I formed the doorway to Northarbor.

The coven house was so well warded that we exited the portal quite a distance away. They would likely know we were on our way, as any coven worth their magic had several alerts. I'd forgotten about their tricks in our haste to get to Toth. None of us had believed that Basil, the witch that had owned Toth, would have had much time to do anything to my new son, or get away, but we had underestimated just how clever he was.

Now we were going to do this the human way. It was unlikely that Basil knew all the tricks that Damon did.

I hunched against the cold. Though I'd added a wool coat over my suit, it was hardly enough to keep out the bitterly icy February wind. Snow fell and swirled around us. Flakes landed in our hair and on Damon's eyelashes. He was so beautiful with what I assumed was his real face.

In the harsh cold, his pale skin had taken on a rosy hue. I liked all the things he would likely consider flaws. The scars, the uneven light scruff on his face showing he hadn't

shaved that morning, the slightly off center nose with the bump that spoke of a violent past. His jawline wasn't sharp enough to cut glass. He didn't have model high cheekbones. His face was rather innocent and cherubic, though there was a shadow in those light blue eyes that told of a harsh life. Damon was... interesting to look at. Time and time again, my gaze was dragged to him. I couldn't keep my eyes off him.

"Park!" Damon yelled, his steps picking up pace until he was nearly running towards a man standing at the gate of the coven house.

The other man's head lifted at the shout, and he ran towards Damon. They embraced tightly and words passed between them I couldn't catch. Delight and relief were on both their faces.

"You've been safe? Did you move?" Damon asked Parker.

"I am, don't worry. Staying in a hotel right now while I use other avenues to find us somewhere to go. None of the safe houses are a go, since both of our IDs on the forum have been burned."

"What the fuck?" Damon's face reddened further. I had the urge to wrap an arm around him, so I did, gratified that he relaxed into me.

"They figured out one of my IDs as someone who worked with you a few times, so they put a target on me and kicked me. Unfortunately for them, they don't know how many other names I've got, so I'm still getting who has been interested in your hit."

"Hit? You have a hit on you?" Gregoris looked ready to snatch me off the street and return to our realm.

"Calm down, Gregoris. We're perfectly safe here." Damon dismissed my bodyguard.

"Mori, this is my brother, Parker."

The man gave me a firm handshake. “Nice to meet you,” we both said.

Parker grinned. “You are everything he said.”

I had no idea what that meant, but I was pleased that Damon had mentioned me.

“Parker, this is Mori’s bodyguard and friend, Gregoris. He’s very unhappy about being here, but refuses to be left behind.”

Gregoris clasped hands with Parker. Both of them just stared at each other for a full minute. What the hell was happening there? Both of them took half a step closer to each other while Damon turned his head to catch my eye. “What’s going on?” he mouthed.

“You coming inside?” a witch called from the open doorway, breaking the spell they seemed to be under. “Everyone is waiting.”

Parker shifted his hand into Gregoris’ and led the way into the house.

The Coven

Damon

Mori kept his arm around me, the weight and warmth soothing as I wondered just what the hell was going on with Parker and Gregoris. Whatever it was, they were still holding hands as they walked into the coven house in front of me.

The house was an imposing building that housed only a few of the key members. Poppy, the Head Witch, her wife, the wife's brother, and a few other key witches lived there. Usually, coven business was held at another building. Because the warding needed for a home interfered with spells, they conducted all their ceremonies and big workings off the premises.

I knew it was unlikely that we would see Poppy or Zinna, since the Head Witch had not long ago had their baby, and her wife was understandably protective. The magic that the pair held was impressive, yet it had drained them to create their child. They also had Poppy's store to run.

"Come through," Oak said, as he guided us into a large parlor. There were several deep blue plush sofas set around a large wooden coffee table laden with maps, crystals and other magical tools. The decor was understated, but classy. It actually felt like a home, with small touches that showed the personalities of the residents. I could see what I knew of Poppy in all the fresh flowers, soft furnishings and animal art. "Pops, Zinna, and Sage," I'd forgotten the baby was called Sage, "are all elsewhere right now. We didn't want them around for their safety while we were searching for Basil. Even I don't know where they went, so it's basically just a handful of us here

right now. Take a seat.”

To my surprise, Parker led Gregoris over to a wide couch. The larger man took up so much space that Mori and I needed to take another sofa. I cast a look at Mori, wondering if he was going to say anything about what was going on. Parker avoided my eyes, clearly knowing I desperately wanted to speak to him.

What was this? Could they be mates? Was a simple touch enough to change his world view? I always thought that betas didn't get true mates, except demons and shifters rarely interacted, right? Demons were so removed from supernatural society that we knew so little about them. I thought demons would only mate with demons. Could I be wrong and would I deny Parker and Gregoris their happiness just because of the things Gregoris had said about me and Mori ?

No, I wouldn't. I loved my brother too much for that.

Everyone just continued on like this was all perfectly normal. To outsiders, it probably was, since both demons were in their human guises. Gregoris' human form had rich dark skin, deep brown eyes, and shoulder length wavy hair. He was wearing a frown, yet he still held Parker's hand in his. I wondered what he was thinking. He didn't glance once at me and Mori.

Was that just it for him? His heart switched that easily? Did he not see how fickle it made him? There was no way that he was good enough for Parker if he could go from unrequited to this in the matter of moments. Or was this just another example of me not getting the supernatural world? My human heart couldn't understand a paranormal bond.

I caught myself frowning at the direction of my thoughts, then blanketed that expression. There was no way I was giving these witches any more information than they absolutely needed.

The demon beside me caught my attention once again. Something inside me was always searching for Mori if he was near me. Mori looked a lot like Cody did as a human. The same mid brown hair and eyes. Same pale complexion I knew would go red in the sun before taking on a golden hue. Mori was a lot bigger than Cody, though. Wider in the shoulders and likely over six feet tall .

I couldn't help but compare the two demons. Gregoris dwarfed us all, even in this disguise. He must have been about six and a half feet, if not taller. I was bad with heights. All I knew was Parker was slightly shorter than Mori and claimed to be six feet tall and next to Gregoris, he looked small.

Within seconds I took in the witches in the room, just Oak and River who we had met before, then I cataloged all the exits and important furniture. I made sure to have Mori out of line of sight from the window but I had left us with a clear view of the door, our only exit. I noted all the problems, like the building next door that had a great line of sight for a sniper if someone was determined. The wind would make the shot tricky, though.

We went through the pleasantries, the introductions and offers of drinks, before we could get down to what we were really there for. All the while I was simmering, wanting to ask what the fuck was going on!

I declined a cup of tea with all the manners that I had despite the tense situation, but took the offered sealed bottle of water. Sue me, I was still a paranoid hitman who had a contract out on him.

Not only did I have to deal with this potential mate thing, I also needed to decide what I wanted to do about the hit taken out on Parker. There was no way he could go back to a hotel, not alone. He wouldn't let me come with him, either. We really shouldn't be in the same place together... unless he came with us to the demon realm.

With a glance at him, his hand still being held by the guard's, I knew he was coming back to the demon realm with us. Something had altered him during that handshake. We were never that touchy-feely before this. They were still touching! Parker looked... happy, content about it, so I wasn't going to say a word. I might not have been a fan of the guard, but I knew Mori loved him in his own way. That made him a decent person. Demon. Whatever.

Mori was super sweet, made friends with everyone and had already charmed the witches. He sat next to me cheerfully sipping on a piping hot cup of tea, a cookie in his free hand. He was sitting so close we were touching from knee to shoulder. His presence was reassuring and settled some of my nerves from being in this house. I was grateful to him almost as much as I wanted to test out our chemistry. It buzzed between us like it was a living thing.

I snapped myself out of daydreaming about what Mori would feel like under me to focus on what Oak was saying. The witch was answering some questions Mori had about Cody. Every aspect of Cody's life fascinated him. I couldn't wait to tease Cody about his doting dad.

Focused once again in the room, I shivered. Magic flavored the air, leaving every breath bitter with the tang of it. I hated the feeling, irrationally so. This was all conditioning from my childhood, I knew that. I had no reason to fear or dislike the witches.

"Should we make a start?" I asked when the conversation settled.

"Sure," Oak said affably, his tawny skin became rosy with a blush. He and his sister, Zinna, had similar features. The same deep gray eyes and straight dark hair that spoke of their Asian heritage. Oak wore his tied back in a low ponytail that really suited him. If I hadn't met Mori first... no, he still wouldn't have been my type. Oak gave soft dom top vibes. Plus, he was a witch and just... shudder. Nope.

“Well, we went through the usual spells trying to trace him. It was useful because his brother is here. Thyme—“

“Thyme? Seriously.”

Oak rolled his eyes. “Yes, Thyme.”

I couldn’t help the snicker that escaped me. “Basil, Thyme, and are there any other herb related names?”

Gregoris was glaring at my rudeness. Parker took his hand back to cover his mouth and hide his own giggles .

Oak scowled. “Thyme is a fine name. It’s from a naming tradition in his family—“

“Are you talking about me again?” a voice came from the doorway. A shorter, red-haired man with the bluest eyes I’d ever seen entered the room with a smile on his face. He was cute, with a soft-looking, heart-shaped face. Adorable if you were into twinkles, which I wasn’t. I preferred someone of my build or more muscular. A challenge. Thyme’s hair fell in soft curls over his forehead, into his eyes. He pushed them aside and winked at me. “Damon, right? Are you here to help us find Basil? My brother is sneaky, so I hope you can help.” He let out a frustrated sigh. “I just want this over with.”

“Uh, sure. Sorry about the name thing.” Honestly, now that he was in front of me, I thought the name suited him. It was almost fae-like, and he had the air of magic about him.

“No worries. Like Oak was saying,” he perched next to the other witch with an easy familiarity that Oak didn’t seem to mirror. He became stiff next to Thyme. “It’s a family name. I had it before my transition and kept it.” Thyme grinned cheekily. Him,

I liked. “Besides, it always seemed like more of a boy’s name, anyway.”

“It was good of you to honor your great-uncle that way,” Oak said rather formally .

Thyme bestowed a stunning smile on Oak that did nothing to melt the chill between them, or rather, from Oak’s direction. Whatever was going on there was Oak’s issue, not Thyme’s. Could it be mistrust from who Thyme was to Basil?

“Okay, so you want Basil taken care of? Let’s have a look at where you’ve had traces of him.” I returned to the business at hand. I wanted to get me and Parker, plus our demon companions, back to Toth’s castle as soon as possible.

In the corner of my eye, I caught Thyme’s startle and Oak’s contemplative look. Were they worried that we would say something about Thyme being trans? Was his mention of it a way of feeling me out? Were they checking I was a decent person despite being a paid killer? Seemed like I passed the test if that’s what it was. Stupid really, since I likely wouldn’t have known, as most witches transitioned with magic and not hormones and surgery like humans did. Some humans could get a coven to help them with it at a massive cost. For an individual witch to do it was to give up some of their magic forever. Living their authentic selves came at a significant cost. I actually admired Thyme for being willing to do that. I’d only just met the witch, but I could guarantee that I respected him a hell of a lot more than the other witches in this coven .

Any coven, really. Northarbor’s witches, Basil aside, seemed decent, but at the end of the day, they were still witches.

We had been at this for hours. They had looked for the ex-High Witch in many places, as indicated by the little pins on the map in front of us. The trouble was that Basil was too powerful and knew how to hide himself with magic easily. He also had allies. Someone in the coven had to be helping him, which is why they were down to

just three people looking for him. Even then, they often excluded Thyme from things because they were afraid he was leaking information to his brother.

While I didn't know the situation, I knew people. Thyme was determined to find his brother and make him pay for his crimes. I knew this as a fact. It was something I was going to have to bring up with Oak, since he was wasting a valuable resource. Thyme had information about his brother that we could likely use.

The hours passed by with countless cups of tea, takeout, and snacks marking the passage of time with very little to show for our work .

Parker was working on a database of all known allies of Basil, any aliases he used, and the all important money trail. He would need supplies and cash to fund the things he had been up to.

All of this was taking too much of our time.

Despite Mori's soothing presence and happy-go-lucky attitude, even his patience was wearing thin. "Should we return for the night and come back fresh tomorrow?" he finally asked. It had to be about three in the morning. My eyes felt gritty, and I kept suppressing yawns.

"Why don't you stay here?" Oak offered. "There are a couple of rooms you could have. We could all get a couple of hours' rest, then start fresh in the morning."

I seemed to be taking the lead on this, as my companions all looked at me to answer. Something about it didn't feel right, but Parker's eye bags had bags of their own at that point. Moving with us all this tired was stupid and dangerous. "Fine. Let's get some sleep."

River led us up to the spare rooms while Oak and Thyme talked in low voices,

arguing about something I was no longer interested in. I just wanted to lie down and close my eyes for a few hours. Just switching off my brain for a while would help. “Here you go.” River opened both the doors. “You’ll have to double up, I’m afraid. Sorry, there aren’t more rooms. ”

“No worries,” Parker said with a smile before towing Gregoris into one room and closing the door with finality. I guess we were having that discussion another time then.

“Shall we?” Mori’s face lit up with a grin. Okay, this was probably better than bunking with Parker. He always had cold feet that he liked to warm on my legs.

“Sure. Thanks, River.”

We said our good-nights and entered the comfortable guest room. There were none of the personal touches that filled the downstairs rooms. It was as welcoming as most hotel rooms were. Bland, inoffensive, with hopefully a comfortable bed.

Mori turned to face me when I shut the door carefully and locked it. A crackle of energy arced between us. Was he feeling the pull as well? He closed the distance between us and cupped my face. “Can I kiss you?” he whispered. “I need to know.”

“Know what?” I asked, leaning into his touch. His hand was warm. It made me feel... safe.

His eyes never left mine. “Just what it is about you.”

“Yes.”

Slowly, he closed the gap between our lips. It felt like it took forever, the anticipation of his mouth on mine drawing tight like a bow string before snapping .

When he kissed me, I gasped. Not out of a sense of him belonging to me, or some mystical sense, just a feeling of rightness.

Home.

Mori felt like every dream come to life.

I pushed closer to him, opening his mouth with my tongue. He clasped the back of my neck and groaned into the deepening kiss. This was everything I'd ever been looking for.

Bed. I wanted to get him into bed to see just how well we came together. Based on this kiss alone, Mori was perfect.

Clever fingers loosened my tie and worked at the buttons of my shirt. It was my turn to moan into Mori's kiss as he touched the bared skin of my chest.

"Hmm," he sighed, as I worked kisses over his jaw to his neck.

"Let your ears change. I want to test how sensitive they are." The familiar feel of magic filled the air as he let his ears free. I licked along one, making Mori groan.

Mori's mouth landed on mine just as I heard it.

The whip-crack sound of a shot.

Mori jolted, then cried out in pain as blood bloomed on his shoulder.

Fuck!

Instinctively, I acted. "Get down!" I yelled, as I pushed him to the floor .

I flung myself behind the bed and withdrew my gun that I'd hidden inside the jacket of my suit. The witches hadn't even thought to check us for weapons.

It took a second, but I found the line of sight the shooter had used. I couldn't get a shot with such a small gun. The shooter had the advantage. Dammit. We were fucked. We had to get out of there.

The door burst open.

"Down!" I cried as another shot went off, this time hitting the wall beyond the empty doorway.

"Your highness!"

"I'm here," Mori called in reply. "Damon, come on, we need to go!" Mori raised his hands and, using his magic, formed a shield around me. I crawled towards him.

Another shot rang out, glancing off the shield. The house was in chaos.

"A portal." Gregoris looked horrified at the growing stain of blood on Mori's shoulder.

My demon looked pale. His expression was tight with pain.

"We can't. The wards."

Mori glanced at me, then had a wordless conversation with Gregoris. "We can break them if we combine our magic."

We didn't have a choice. "Do it," I said .

They clasped hands, and the hallway filled with a magenta colored magic, the same color as the wings that burst from both Mori and Gregoris.

I heard shouts of panic as the wards strained and crumbled. Some still held firm. Oak and Thyme rounded the corner, their hands raised, ready to do magic.

“Quick, come with us. We’ll return you somewhere safe after,” I called to them.

They nodded their agreement, pushing magic out to help Mori and Gregoris with removing the wards. The ever present feeling of pressure, like an impending thunderstorm, fell. With their help, the wards were down.

The feeling of magic surged once more. A portal opened in the hallway, the demon realm waiting for us on the other side.

Oak nodded at me, clasped Thyme’s arm, and ran through the portal.

The Orchard

Damon

The early dawn light was filtering down through the apple trees as we exited the portal on Toth's lands. This was as close as we could come to the castle with the wards. Getting out wasn't a problem, getting back in was the issue.

Mori stumbled, all his strength gone, as the portal snapped closed behind us. "Mori!" I reached for him as he regained his balance.

"I'm fine, just empty." He leaned against the trunk of a tree and took shaky breaths.

Gregoris looked weak, too. He glanced between us and the far off castle, clearly torn about what to do.

Thyme approached and tried to do some healing magic on Mori. "I'm sorry, it's just not working." He shook out his hands with a rueful smile. "I used a lot helping to take down the wards so we could get the portal out of there."

"Same," Oak added. He lay on the hard ground, looking defeated. "It's going to be a while before I can do anything. I need food and sleep. Not necessarily in that order." He leaned against the smooth bark of one of Toth's apple trees.

Since my tie was loose, I pulled it over my head and pressed it into Mori's wound. "Help me with his jacket," I asked Thyme as I searched for the exit wound. He helped me get it free and dropped the remains of it on the ground. Our hands brushed as I

tried to get Mori out of his ruined shirt. He flinched as he touched me, his eyes going wide.

I had to ignore whatever reaction Thyme was having to me in order to care for Mori. “Stand up a bit. You’re squashing those wings.”

“Can’t... put... them... away,” he said around gasps of pain.

There, found it, where the bullet had gone in and then out. Relief filled me that I wouldn’t have to remove a bullet from him. I picked up the scraps of his shirt and then fastened them to his shoulder using my tie. The sight of Mori’s blood was upsetting me more than I could have imagined. I needed him to stop bleeding. Now I knew it was a through and through, I knew he was in no real danger. He was hardly bleeding now. Even without his magic, he had some healing ability. I just wanted the wound gone, now.

“Are you sure you aren’t hurt?” Parker was checking Gregoris over as the bodyguard stood frozen, hand on a tree as if it was propping him up, as he watched me patch up Mori with Thyme’s help.

“Gregoris, take Parker, Oak, and Thyme up to the castle. Send Toth here to help me get Mori healed.”

“I can carry him.” The bodyguard took a wary step towards us.

Mori blanched. “Absolutely not!” He was going to be fine if he still had some pride left.

“That’ll hurt him.” I smoothed a hand over Mori’s back, careful of his wound, to soothe him. There was this irrational need to keep touching him to reassure myself he was with me. “We need to heal him before we move him. Or get him some pain

relief.” My tone brooked no argument and Gregoris fell back a step at my glare.

“Oh!” Thyme’s face lit up. “If Toth’s kitchen is well stocked, I might be able to make a pain tonic.”

“Perfect.” I smiled at the witch. “You can’t get into the castle without Gregoris, though.”

Understanding what I wanted, Thyme stepped up to the other demon, took Gregoris by the arm and led him towards the castle.

“You sure you’re going to be okay here alone?” Oak asked as he stood shakily. Magical burnout was hurting him more than Thyme. He must have taken the brunt of the snap-back of the ward breaking. It would have been worse for him since he was connected to the wards.

“I’ll be fine here with Mori, don’t you worry. Just don’t let Cody come down right now, okay? It’ll upset him to see his dad like this.” Oak nodded in understanding. “Get him looking after Gregoris. I think he’s in shock.”

If it wasn’t shock, it was guilt because he wasn’t with Mori when he got shot. Though he wouldn’t have been shot if it wasn’t for me. I got the feeling that Gregoris was mentally beating himself up for having time with Parker when he knew we were in a potentially dangerous situation.

We all had let our guards down. Mori had paid the price for it. I was just grateful the worst hadn’t happened. We could have lost Mori! I gave a shudder at the thought.

“Cool.” Oak picked up his pace to catch up with the others, who were already halfway up the hill to the castle.

“Damon,” Mori breathed through the pain, “thank you.”

He sagged to the ground, his wings folded in a way that looked painful as they rested against the tree. His head fell back as the rest of his human guise slipped away. Mori’s demon skin was a pinky red color that Cody would probably have a better description of. He looked gaunt and worn without his magical energy. Far from his vibrant self.

“For what?”

“For getting us out of there. If you hadn’t—“

“If I wasn’t there, you wouldn’t have been shot at.” I got to my knees so I could meet his eyes properly. “Mori, you took a bullet for me.”

His skin darkened with a faint blush. “Not intentionally. An accident.”

“You got us out of there.” He had to see how impressive he had been. Not once had he tried to take control of the situation. He had listened to me. Followed my lead. Just the memory of his trust had this strange feeling welling up inside my chest, even as I fought with the fear that we could have lost him. Cody would never forgive me if I’d let Mori be killed.

“Not without help.” Mori’s smile trembled, his black eyes glistening with unshed tears. “That was terrifying. How do you cope with things like that? You were so calm.”

“To be fair, most of the time I’m in and out without a trace. This is the first time someone is after me.” I tried to give a nonchalant shrug. Pretty sure it failed to look convincing .

“Why though? Why you?” Mori’s brow wrinkled with a frown.

“No clue.” It bothered me that I didn’t know the answer. Really, it should have been the first question I’d asked Thyme. We had all concluded that Basil and Austin orchestrated the hit, but why? What reason did they have for getting me out of the way?

Basil had to be involved because, even with Austin’s death, the contract was still active. Magic had to be involved with keeping the contract open. In fact, Parker had told me that the amount had doubled since I’d taken the human out.

When we had all rested some, I was going to ask Thyme why his brother had it out for me.

“Come here,” Mori coaxed, holding out his hand for me. His injured shoulder he kept still. He had to be in a lot of pain.

I hesitated. “I don’t want to hurt you.”

“But hugs are so good!” Mori wheedled. He pouted, which was just adorable.

Carefully, so as to not jostle him too much and aggravate the wound, I sat next to him and leaned into his side. Honestly, it felt good to be with him like this. We had never really spent any time alone. All the time I’d known him, there were others around. Mori was the sweetest person I’d ever met and just this gave me a feeling of comfort .

We sat in silence for a while. “Is there anything else I can do until Toth comes with help?” I kept my voice low, reluctant to spoil the quiet moment.

“Hmm, a kiss would make me feel a lot better,” he murmured, looking completely wiped out. Mori looked slightly better just from resting. I knew there was ambient

magic in the air and he'd eventually replenish. He just needed time, unless there was a quicker way to fill his magic.

I jolted. Struck with the solution.

A kiss!

In fact, I glanced towards the far off castle for any trace of Toth heading towards us. Something a bit more would really help him. He could feed from me.

I shuffled, so I was in his lap, keeping my weight off him to avoid hurting him, then I pressed my lips to his, smirking at his sound of surprise and then his groan as I deepened our kiss. He was such a great kisser. I wanted to growl at the reason why. Being possessive wasn't my usual MO, but Mori had turned my life upside down.

Mori's arm came around me and pulled me closer to him, rocking my growing cock against his flat stomach. I relished the solid feeling of him under me. He was still with me, here and mostly okay. He would recover. We had another chance to see what this was growing between us .

His lips warmed under mine. Our tongues met and Mori ran his hand through my hair, making me shiver as his blunt nails raked my scalp. I sank into the feeling for a moment. Only a momentary reprieve since I wanted to heal him before we were found.

Breaking the kiss, I whispered against his lips. "How about I suck you off? Would that feed your lust? Heal you?" I needed to do this for him to assuage my guilt. That bullet had been for me. I'd been sloppy and Mori had paid for my mistakes.

He shivered. "No, I need your pleasure. That's what feeds the magic."

I gave him a wicked grin and kissed down his bare chest. “I can get plenty of enjoyment out of it.” His body was a work of art. Hairless, toned and smooth, Mori was stunning. “Please, let me do this for you.”

His tail snaked out and ran up my leg, making me freeze for a second. It was Mori’s turn to smirk as my eyes rose to meet his. “How about I use this to get you off?”

My dick filled so fast I was almost dizzy from it. I grinned at him, then pressed a kiss at his navel. “Yeah,” I croaked. “I’d be into that.” So into it I was close to coming at just the thought of it. His tail gave me so many ideas.

Mori reached for the button of my suit pants, and with deft fingers, undid them. “If you don’t want them completely ruined, take them off.” It was sweet, considerate of him. I didn’t want to tell him I’d never wear this again. It was stained with the memory of his blood being spilled.

I looked at the remains of his clothing. His shift into his demon form had burst from him, leaving his clothing torn in places. “I’d say same, but at this point...” I gave him a cheeky smile.

He chuckled, then opened his pants, freeing his erection. Commando. Hot. “How is it that just the thought of your lips around my cock has me this hard?”

“Because you know I’ll be great at it.” I took him in hand and stroked from root to tip, collected a drop of precum and used it to ease the next stroke. Mori huffed out a sound of pleasure.

Bending, I licked a path down his chest again towards his leaking cock. I blew a breath over it, loving the hitch in his breathing at my tease. With a lick, I tasted his precum. It had the usual bitter taste I’d expected, but was also sweet, too. At complete odds, yet I liked it. I licked and sucked on his cock, drawing it out before I

took him deep into my mouth. I didn't have time to draw this out as Mori deserved.

Mori had a great cock. Perfect length and girth, maybe eight inches. Not that it mattered because I wouldn't be bottoming if we got that far. I loved how it curved. It wasn't all that different from a human cock. The head was slightly more tapered, less mushroom shaped. I wondered if it was different in his human form.

Shaking off my thoughts, I sank into what I was doing; getting Mori off as quickly as possible and giving him a blow job that made him forget about anyone else.

Moans and sighs filled the air as I worked Mori with a hand and my mouth. I jolted as I felt something wander up my leg. His tail. It reached my underwear and eased inside before circling me. The sensation was unlike anything I'd ever experienced. The tip was slightly cool from the morning air and made me shiver with lust as it tightened its grip on me.

The tail mirrored my movements on Mori's dick. Twisting and tugging on me as I bit back my noises and tried to pleasure Mori. Fucking distracting, but oh so good!

Spit covered my chin and hand as I took him deep, then into my throat and swallowed around him. The tail's motions faltered as I held him there and massaged his cock, breathing in through my nose. I felt triumphant as Mori's hand reached for me, his fingers twitching with need. "Damon," he gasped.

Around us, pink magic tinged the air. I looked up at him, watching it work. Mori's eyes glittered and his face filled with color and life once again. Before my eyes, his magic replenished and closed the wound until there was nothing there.

Triumph had me redoubling my efforts. I wanted him to feel as good as he was making me feel.

His tail worked faster, prompting me to give him more of me. I concentrated on the sensation of his tail, the scent of his skin, tinged with apples, the look in his eyes. It had me so close. All I could focus on was my pleasure and giving him all of the lustful energy I could.

Mori's hands gripped my hair, holding me steady as he began to thrust into my mouth. His cock thickened and jerked, filling me with his creamy cum. I swallowed all I could. Fuck, there was a lot of it. A trickle escaped my mouth and ran down my chin. The taste, the magic in it, coupled with the tightness of his tail around my length, had me crying out and spilling onto him and the ground beneath us.

I pulled off of him, kissed his stomach, and grinned. I felt like I could float away.

"Fuck, Damon... that was...fantastic." Mori gave a contented sigh and drew me close. He pressed a kiss to the top of my head and wrapped his wings around me. Contentment rose up in me, an alien feeling since I'd never been a cuddler. Mori gave me more than I knew I needed. "We need a bed next time we do that. "

So true. Already I was scheming to get him laid out like a buffet. I needed to take my time with him as soon as we got a chance. We had a promise to uphold, though. "How about we take a night in one of your hotels soon?"

The grin he gave me was devilish. "We do have to keep our promise to Cody." I knew he hadn't forgotten.

"We do, but I want to do much more to you." I cast another look around. We still had time, right? "What's your recovery time like?" I smirked.

"I am an incubus, darling. How about I suck you this time?" Mori was already reaching for me. I needed more than a couple of minutes to get hard again. Though, the magic in his cum seemed to be having an effect on me.

“Sounds good.”

“Can you not?” came Toth’s grumbling voice from a thicker patch of trees. “I don’t want to see or hear anymore of... that.”

My gaze caught Mori’s wide-eyed horror filled expression and I just couldn’t contain my laughter.

Oops

Amorandes

Being caught in a sexual act by your son was awkward, even as an incubus. There were just some things that you didn't want anyone to see. It's not that I was embarrassed of my body. No, I knew I looked good. It was more about the man in my arms. Damon's cock wasn't for other eyes. Toth had no right to see him so vulnerable and sweet. All fucked out and cuddly after a great orgasm.

Still chuckling, Damon climbed from my lap and straightened what remained of his fantastic suit. I would have to find out the name of his tailor so I could replace it with the exact same one. It fitted him perfectly. It would be a shame for it to go in the trash.

I got to my feet easily. What Damon had given me had filled my magical well quite a bit, which was surprising considering he was supposed to be human. I had wondered vaguely more than once if he had fae blood or a distant elven ancestor and caught myself dwelling on the thought again. It would explain the beauty of his cornflower blue eyes and the reaction my magic had to him. Whatever he was, it had let me heal myself so that the gunshot was just a mere memory. A painful one, yes, though I was hardly in danger. It would take more than a bullet to kill me.

Toth watched as warily as Damon hovered in front of me, obscuring me from my new son's view so I could tuck myself away. "Do you need more healing, Mori?" he questioned, looking distinctly uncomfortable. Toth may have been a species of incubus similar to mine, but he fed off emotions more than lust. He would have to get

used to being around people having sex if he and Cody were to create a baby as they wanted to in a not too distant future.

At least I hoped it wouldn't be long before they took that leap. I may have been adjusting to being a father, but I also wanted to be a grandpa as soon as possible.

"No, thank you, Toth. Um... Damon—" I tried to make the implication clear.

"Yeah, okay," Toth interrupted, his face darkening with a blush. "I'm sure Cody will still want you looked over. Would you like me to get a healer?"

Like in the human world, we had healers. Some of the water elementals received training in the healing arts. Though our realm was peaceful, accidents did occur. Demons had babies. Children were children, no matter their species. We had many schools to learn how to heal, and though expensive, it was worth it rather than waiting for your own healing ability or magic to do the job.

"That won't be necessary," Damon said, holding a hand out for me, which I took with a smile. I loved that he was freely initiating contact. "Thyme had some things he could make if you have the right ingredients. If not, I could always give Mori another boost." His grin was wide.

Toth glowered. "Not in the castle."

Damon held up his free hand in a placating gesture. "Don't you worry, we already promised Cody, and I keep my promises." He winked at me, reminding me of our plan to get a hotel soon. I wanted to spend an entire night learning his body, what made him sing with pleasure. More than that, I just wanted to have him all to myself for a while. To get to know him properly. I knew I wasn't imagining this thing growing between us. It wasn't one sided.

We followed a still grumpy Toth back to the castle. The others, minus my guard and Damon's friend, were waiting just inside when we arrived. "They're fine," he announced before heading into the kitchen. No one brought up why Gregoris was missing, and frankly, I didn't have the energy to ask about it.

Everything that had happened with Gregoris was something to be dealt with another day. My time with my guard seemed to be coming to an end. If he had truly found his mate, then I wished them the best. After his behavior with Damon, I knew a lot of damage had been done to our relationship. Parting ways was likely. Perhaps with a mate we could salvage a relationship.

Cody, as I expected, made a tremendous fuss of us both as he hustled us into the sitting room. He, unfortunately, figured out why I was so healed and frowned. "Did you just blow him to stop the bleeding or..."

"Or," Damon said simply. He left the words hanging for so long that Cody just shrugged and moved on to the continued discussion about the coven house.

I slumped onto a sofa, putting most of my demon features away, and pulled Damon down to sit with me. Even with his boost, I was tired. We'd had no sleep in nearly a day and it was wearing on what magic I had. When I looked into my core, where that energy lived, I found it to be fuller than a single feeding from a human would provide. I'd had the thought before, but I really needed to do some research on Damon, trace his family tree, to discover the root of the anomaly. He felt human to my senses, yet there was the initial spark when we touched that spoke of magic.

The witches were looking at us curiously. Both looked worn out. We all needed about twelve hours of sleep. "Are you in any pain?" Thyme asked .

"No, none. I just need some sleep."

“Damon? Are you okay?” Thyme turned to the man next to me. I got a sense of confusion, fear, and something else before he locked those emotions down.

“I’m good. Just want to shower and sleep.”

The witch slumped in relief. “Me too. Can we get a few hours and then think of a plan later? We need to figure out what happened.”

“Oh, I know what happened,” Damon said firmly. “You have a mole, or likely moles, in the coven. Someone told Basil, or his hired help, where I was and they took that chance to act.”

“No. No way!” Oak looked furious. “None of them would put us in danger like that.”

Damon stopped Oak’s protests with a flat look. “Use the brain you clearly have, witch.” Damon sneered. “I came from the demon realm directly to the coven house. Unless someone was waiting outside for me, or somehow followed Parker, which is highly unlikely since they would have attacked while we were outside, then the only other possibility is someone in the coven house told them we were there.” Damon jolted and glanced around the room. “Where’s Parks?”

Cody perched on the seat next to Damon, then took his hand. “Parker and Gregoris are upstairs.” Cody hesitated. “Gregoris is in a bad way, mentally.” His eyes met mine, full of sympathy. He squeezed Damon’s hand. “Parker, well, he says they are mates and his hawk won’t let him leave him. We should give them some time before we try to figure out what happened.”

Beside me, Damon let out a heavy sigh. “Fine. Can we go get some sleep now?”

“No, first you are going to have some of this tea I’ve made,” Toth said, entering the room balancing a wide tray. On it was a silver teapot and cups for all of us. There was

also a small plate piled high with cookies. “This is a special brew to help replenish magical energy. It won’t do you any harm, Damon. It might help with your healing.”

“The cookies?” Damon raised an eyebrow.

Toth blushed. He really was a sweet demon. The ideal son-in-law and mate for my Cody. “Soothing.” He cleared his throat. “Made with lavender and honey.”

Unwilling to embarrass him more, I reached for a cup and let Toth pour me some of the tea. I even picked up a cookie and nibbled on it as the tea cooled a little.

None of us spoke while we enjoyed the treats. My mind was too full of what had happened, the implications with my guard, and Damon, to really make chit-chat with the witches .

“Parker and Gregoris are sharing a room. Dad, would you mind sharing with Damon so I can put Oak and Thyme in a room?”

“I can sleep on this couch,” Oak said rather stiffly. I had noticed he was constantly putting distance between himself and the other witch. Did he think he was the traitor? Thyme was not the mole in the coven.

A flash of hurt passed over the other witch’s face. “No, I can. I’m smaller than you. You’d never get comfortable and we both need sleep.”

“You will share a bed because you are grown adults.” Cody’s expression dared them to say another word. “Oak, get over yourself. Thyme is not the problem.” Oak opened his mouth to speak and snapped it shut again at Cody’s dark look. “Who else was at the house?”

Oak named a couple of other witches. One of them, River, had shown us our rooms.

They knew where Damon was supposed to be sleeping.

“And where were they when this all went down? Did you even let Thyme out of your sight?”

“He didn’t,” Damon answered. “Because they were arguing downstairs when we were shown to our rooms. Only a few minutes passed, so I doubt that Thyme had a chance to tell anyone anything.”

“I don’t even have a cell phone right now, so it’s not like I could call someone even if I wanted to.” Thyme just shrugged. “I get why the coven has been so reluctant around me. Before Basil was made Head Witch, I was being trained for the job. My transition took me out of the running.”

“Seriously?” Cody asked. “I didn’t know you were supposed to lead.”

“It was before you were born.” Thyme laughed, a sweet sound. “I’m a lot older than I look.” He finished his tea. “Would you mind showing me the room? I’m feeling really sleepy suddenly.”

The tea’s effects were working on me, too. “I’m going to shower first.”

“I’ll help,” Damon stood, pulling me up with him. I’d forgotten he was still holding onto my hand. It felt natural for him to be touching me like that.

“Remember that promise!” Cody yelled as we left the room.

Damon’s laugh was the only answer.

There was something intimate about letting someone wash you. Damon didn’t linger over our joint shower, just got us clean and then toweled us off. “I can do it,” I

laughed.

“No. ”

I let him finish drying us and took the offered toothbrush. Damon began brushing his teeth, the moment even more intimate than the shower somehow.

“Damon... are you okay?”

He paused, spat out his toothpaste, and considered me for a moment. His mouth opened and closed a few times before he finally spoke. “Are we doing the right thing? Trying this between us?” He looked agonized. “Mori, you could have died!”

“I really wouldn’t have. A shot, even to the head, won’t kill me.”

He paused, “What?”

“Demons have to be beheaded and salted before we truly die. Well, it’s one of the ways to kill us. There are other, magical, means, but a bullet to the head isn’t one of them.”

“Salted? What the fuck?”

“Special salt with sage and other herbs. It kills the magic we have inside us. It’s part of why you won’t find sage growing in our realm.”

There was a long silence while he processed. “But when we got here, you looked so ill.”

“Magical backlash from breaking the wards and forcing a portal. I hadn’t replenished enough magic from the portal there. Gregoris helped. Having the witches do some of

the ward breaking saved me from being really ill—“

“Really ill? Mori, I thought you were going to die!”

“No, I just would have gone to sleep until the magic would fix me. It’s happened before when I was younger. I slept for nine days once.”

“Oh my fucking gods, Mori!” He paused, “So, down in the orchard?”

“I just wanted to kiss you, Damon. To do anything with you.”

Red rose in his cheeks. He turned away from me and made a show of finishing brushing his teeth. I did my own, just to give him a moment that he so clearly needed.

“Come to bed,” he said when he finished.

“We can’t do anything here,” I reminded him, likely needlessly. Neither of us had the energy for anything, anyway.

“I can’t believe I’m saying this, but just to cuddle, okay? It’s been a long ass day.”

Damon picked his side of the bed first and opened his arms to me. I wished my horns away, worried about hurting him as I cuddled into his chest. With one of his fingers, he traced a pointed ear. I shivered with delight, though that was as far as it went. Sleep was calling me. “Let your tail out, please,” Damon whispered into the dark room .

I did as he asked. Without thought, my tail wrapped around his arm, holding him tightly. Claiming him as mine.

Gone

Amorandes

“What do you mean, they’re gone?” Damon demanded, an edge of pain in his voice.

Cody’s eyes flashed with fire, which quickly banked as he looked between us. “Exactly what I said.” He sighed. “Oak got a call saying he was needed at the coven house. He and Thyme went back after a few hours of sleep. Toth opened a portal for them.”

“So the witches are gone?” I asked my son.

Cody looked distinctly uncomfortable, then scrubbed a hand over the back of his neck. He avoided looking at either of us. “Not just the witches.”

My eyes met Damon’s, seeing the same betrayal there that was probably in mine. It hurt like a kick to the chest that Gregoris could just up and leave me without a word of what had happened to him. I couldn’t begin to imagine what Damon felt.

Damon stalked from the room, his fury crackling around him. I made my apologies to Cody. “It’s okay, Dad, I get it.” While I adored him calling me dad, I hated the kicked puppy look he wore in the face of Damon’s anger. It wasn’t his fault we had been let down by our friends and they had left him to play messenger.

“You know—“

“Yeah, he’s mad at Parker. He’s his only family. Just to leave like that...” I picked up Cody’s anger. He hadn’t learned to mask his emotions yet. All incubi and succubi learned at an early age to mask strong emotions with their magic until they were feeding someone. Toth had masked a lot of Cody’s emotions for him, or placed a barrier when they were intimate, but my son needed to learn to do this for himself.

I caught up with Damon in our room as his call connected. “What the fuck, Parks?” Damon glanced over his shoulder as I entered and perched on the edge of the bed. He put the phone on speaker.

“I’m sorry, Damon.” At least he sounded sincerely sorry. “Gregoris just wouldn’t settle. He kept talking about how he’d failed, and something about a Seer.” My eyes widened at the mention of the demon we had gone to. “Once he was recovered enough, I asked him to portal us out of here. We slipped out of the castle when you were sleeping.”

Damon let out a little growl. Now was not the time to find him sexy. “Without saying a word? What the fuck? I thought we were family.” His eyes shone with unshed tears. “How could you just leave?” His voice cracked. “You aren’t safe in Northarbor. ”

“We aren’t there.” There was a pause as Parker decided what to tell us. “We went to Vegas.”

“Vegas? What the hell is going on with you, Parker?”

“Gregoris is my mate.” We all had guessed as much based on their behavior. Though it was good to have the confirmation, I would have preferred it from Gregoris. Not on a call like this.

“I don’t know how or why. Don’t even care. As soon as my hand touched his, my hawk knew. He’s it for me, Damon—“

“And I’m happy for you, so fucking happy. You deserve this, but Jesus, Parks, you could have spoken to me. We could have made a plan!”

“You are?”

“Of course I am. Mori is happy for Gregoris too, aren’t you, baby?”

There was such a plea in Damon’s eyes for me to agree. “I really am,” I said honestly. “All I want is for him to be happy.” My voice cracked as I asked, “Why did he abandon me?”

Damon wrapped me in his arms. I leaned my head on his as I held back a sob. Gregoris has been in my life for so long, I couldn’t remember a time without him near me.

“I’m happy he has you, Parker. Look after him, won’t you?” I managed to get out as I swallowed back my emotions. Making Gregoris feel more guilty over his actions wouldn’t make him come back any faster.

“Of course I will.” Even through the phone, the honesty was clear. “Once we all take a few days, we’ll get back on this hit thing and maybe come back to Toth’s.” Those sounded like empty words to me. I was sure that I wouldn’t see my friend and guard for some time. “Northarbor isn’t safe for any of us.”

“I know,” Damon said, looking sad. “Stay safe, okay?”

“You too. Stay with Mori. Stay at the castle, where you’re safe. For me, please, Damon. I need to know you’re okay. You’ve got Mori, Toth, and Cody to watch over you. Gregoris just—“

“Needs you more. I get it. Call soon, okay?”

“I will.”

Parker ended the call, making the room fall into silence. I stood with Damon still in my arms as I thought about what we should do next.

“I’m going to call my parents. They’ll want to know that Gregoris is gone.”

“Okay,” Damon said numbly.

“I’m warning you though, they are really protective and just want to come meet Cody. We might not be able to get rid of them for a bit.”

Damon gave a wobbly smile. “They sound fun. You can’t just wait around here and babysit me. There’s all your businesses to run, so if you need to head home...”

I froze. What made him think I would abandon him now? That I was going to give up on whatever we were building? I paced as I set him right.

“Damon, I’m not going anywhere. I’m telling my parents so they can arrange a new guard for me and bring the pertinent documents here for work. The Sweetwater pack wants to speak to me about the heat club, but I can do that from here, or go to them once I have another guard.” I stopped in front of him to cup his face. “I’m staying with you.”

Relief shone in his eyes. “Okay.”

The next few days were a whirlwind of preparations. Rather than make my parents stay at a hotel, Cody convinced Toth to allow them to stay in the castle, so it had to be made ready for them. Cody was worried about his home not meeting their standards, so went a little overboard with the cleaning and redecorating. It was rather cute how much he wanted to make a good impression on them.

Despite there being available rooms, Damon never moved back into his own one, sleeping each night with me. Unfortunately, we were still tied into our promise to Cody, and aside from a few kisses and another stolen moment in the orchard, we couldn't take our growing relationship to the next level. Still, I appreciated the time with him. We curled up together every evening, and I followed him around all day, likely looking like a lost puppy, as he helped my sons get the castle to visitor standard.

I laughed so hard when Cody said that. It seemed to me that he didn't count me as a visitor, some stranger. He accepted my place in his life and was making way for me. I loved him and Toth. I was growing to care for Damon in a way I knew could soon be love.

While we spent time together, not getting up to anything sexual—oh the blue balls I had—we talked. A lot. About everything. I was so curious about Damon's life. It saddened me even further to realize that until his mentor had shown up in his life, he had gone far too many years without someone to rely on. This meant that he was taking Parker's abandonment even harder than I first thought.

It took him a day or two, but he was finally relying on me. We were building trust between us, and I was getting to know the man underneath the snarky exterior.

He had never really had a family after his mom had died when he was about four. My heart hurt for a little boy with no one else in the world and very few memories of the woman who had raised him alone. There was very little said about the families that he lived with over the years, though there was a running theme. None of them had treated him with love. None had kept him. Most had some sort of prejudice and he'd quickly gotten sent somewhere else.

I felt myself growing closer to the young man with each story we told each other. Damon let me see his early pain, so I showed him mine. Cody's life growing up was

one of my biggest regrets. I hated that I had allowed myself to be trapped into keeping my true identity hidden from him. Who he was. Damon and Cody were alike in a few ways. Damon was more ruthless, harder than Cody.

Damon was working on his prejudice towards the witches, though that wasn't helped by them going completely silent on us. We appreciated they had a traitor in their midst to deal with. Except for the fact we were caught up in this mess, there was no good reason for Basil to continue coming after Damon.

"Oak still won't answer my texts." Damon was clearly frustrated as he returned his phone to his pocket. Working in a suit wasn't a good idea, so I was pleased to see him in the comfortable sweats he had borrowed from Cody.

I kept finding myself staring at the curve of his ass as the material hugged it. He wasn't wearing a shirt, the weather far too warm for that. I added incubus to the list of creatures in Damon's ancestry. He was too beautiful. Unlike incubi, he had a fine layer of chest hair and a line that went down to his groin that always drew my attention down.

"Hmm, it's only been a couple of days. Give them some more time to sort the mess out at the coven house."

"Are you sure they'll like me?" Damon asked as he fussed with a sofa cushion for the hundredth time. The sudden change in subject threw me for a loop.

"Shouldn't I be asking that?" Cody laughed. I'd almost forgotten that he was in the room with us. Apparently, he didn't trust us to do things alone. Honestly, he only caught us kissing a couple of times. It wasn't like we broke any of his rules. "I can't believe I'm going to meet my grandparents!"

"They will love you," I finally answered, to looks of confusion from both of them.

“All of you. In fact, I guarantee they will find something I have said or done offensive within the first five minutes and they will focus all their attention on the two of you. Cody, they will want to know every second of your day because they are your grandparents and they adore you. Damon, you will fascinate them. They haven’t ever heard of someone keeping my attention as long as you, especially since they, unfortunately, know about the promise we made. ”

That had been mortifying. In order to reschedule their visit, we had called my parents. Mama had prodded at me for more information about Gregoris until Cody had given in and told her about my attraction to Damon, the promise he had extracted, and then finally, Gregoris finding his mate.

My parents knew that my magic was choosing Damon to bond with. It had latched onto him the same way my tail did every time I let it loose. While I didn’t understand the buzz of magic that came over me when we went a long time without touching, I did understand my heart and it was bound to Damon. No one had ever given me this feeling. I knew it was mutual too from what Damon had told me of his past.

Dad had been almost as livid as Mama over me being abandoned without a guard. They were bringing my new one so I could get back to work. In another week, I had a meeting with the Sweetwater pack, so I was keen to get used to this new guard and hopefully find some time with Damon before then.

The familiar buzz of magic over my skin let me know they had arrived.

“They’re here!” Cody announced to Damon, who wouldn’t have felt the wards’ magic being activated. Cody was almost bouncing in place.

“You better come with me and let them through.” I took Damon’s hand and squeezed it. “It’ll be fine,” I assured him.

My mom's perfume wafted ahead of her. She blew into the room like a tornado. Instead of damage, she squeezed and kissed cheeks and dropped sweet words into everyone's ears. Even Toth had a smile on his face after she was done with him.

Dad followed behind, not with handshakes, he was too warm and enthusiastic about showing affection for that. No, it was tight bear hugs. He towered over most of us in his full demon form, so we also got kisses on our heads between our horns, like we were children.

They stood back and appraised us, speaking to each other. "They're perfect, aren't they Hanandes? Our grandson is so handsome and his mate is a fine demon. An ideal match. Just look at them together!" She beamed at us. Toth blushed harder than I'd ever seen.

"Oh, you're right, of course, Amoredessa. And the human Mori is taken with? He has to be something else. He's far too pretty just to be human, right?"

"Yes! You're right, Hana. He must have some fae blood or something. Those eyes!" She stepped closer to examine Damon as if she needed to be right next to him to see him clearly. She manhandled him into place, so he was pressed up against my side. "Better. So beautiful together. I think we can approve this match, can't we, Hana?"

"We can, Dessi. It's even better knowing Damon can fight and shoot. He'll be perfect to help Kerensanith with keeping Mori safe, especially in the human world, because he knows it better."

"But," Cody interjected, "Damon can't go there until after the hit is off."

Mama waved him away. "With two powerful demons by his side and only short visits, I'm sure he'll be fine."

“I’m sure I don’t want to risk his life like that. Neither will Kerensanith.” Then the name registered with me. “Hold on, how did you get him out of retirement? Gregoris is going to be furious.”

“Who? Why?” Damon asked, looking between me and my suddenly guilty looking parents.

“We had to have Keren. He was the only one we trusted with your safety!”

“Who’s Keren?” Cody asked, looking just as confused as Damon.

“He’s Gregoris’ grandfather and I have to say that I am deeply unimpressed at my grandson. We will be having words once he and his mate show themselves,” The man himself grumped as he crossed the threshold into the house.

Damon and I shared a glance. Gregoris was in so much trouble.

A Night Alone

Damon

Was it possible to die of sexual frustration? It felt like my blue balls were going to drop off and leave me to bleed out all over if I didn't get some time alone with my... what was Mori to me? My boyfriend? The term didn't seem right for the older demon.

Our age difference didn't seem to bother Mori, who had been around for decades before I was born. I didn't know how long. He was so old; I was afraid to ask, especially around Dessi, who was at least a century older. Me being the same age as Cody, well I was a couple of years older at twenty-nine take two, didn't seem to be a barrier to Mori being attracted to me. I knew he had feelings for me besides just wanting to get off. He looked at me with so much care, listened to every word I spoke, and just was so interested in everything I did. Just being around Mori made me feel so powerful, a heady feeling, considering I was the only human in the castle.

I loved his parents. They were so genuine, loving and accepting of Mori and his choices in life. As far as they were concerned, Mori had chosen me, that meant I was family and was treated as such. They valued chosen mates over fated... there was a story there I just wasn't getting the full picture of. Mori's eyes shuttered when it was brought up. While I wanted to push the issue, we had so much going on, I just didn't want to rock the boat. What we had felt so fragile.

We were stuck in this kind of limbo while Parker was working on the contract on both of us. Getting it canceled was tricky with the amount of influence that Basil had

over the group. Each time he thought he had it, someone new popped up. We still hadn't heard from Gregoris, but Parker's updates about the two of them sounded happy. A lot happier than the witches who had kicked River out of the coven and were in the process of moving to a new place. Hardly a straightforward task in downtown Northharbor. The coven had money, but prime real estate was expensive.

Essentially, we were sort of in no-man's-land with everything, unable to make any progress with anything. Mori was trying to adjust to Keren being his bodyguard rather than Gregoris and the pair were going on short flights into the town and "practicing maneuvers" as Keren put it. He was so angry that his grandson had abandoned Mori that he was doubting all the training the pair had done in their years together. A wrong assumption, though I got where he was coming from.

I knew Gregoris was good at his job. He had just failed to keep his emotions out of it. Meeting Parker, sensing a mate bond had completely thrown the demon. He had expected a life with Mori beside him as partners and fate had told him, "no, there's your mate there." He was perfect for Parker, who needed a caretaker as much as he needed a lover.

It was just sad for all involved how it had gone down. I hoped, eventually, Gregoris and Mori could heal and become friends again because I wanted my brother back, dammit!

So while Dessi and Hana were such good parents, they were a tad overbearing. Okay, more than a little. Gone were the stolen moments with bone melting kisses. There was no chance of a blow job or hand job in the orchard, with them liable to pop up at the most inopportune time. Just ask Cody, who had already quietly complained multiple times about being caught in compromising positions with Toth. It kept happening to them, which shouldn't have been hilarious, except it was.

Cody loved having grandparents. He just would have liked to have them at more of a

distance.

Hard same, Cody. I wanted some time alone with Mori to see where this thing was going between us. We'd tried to get away several times with no success. Neither Mori's parents, Keren, or Cody wanted us out of their sight. Frankly, it was ridiculous. I was a trained killer! I could protect Mori. We'd broached the subject many times but they always used the hit on me as an excuse.

We were into March, weeks of relaxing in the sunny demon realm making me lazy, when it happened. I got a call from Parker.

"We're in the clear! I've got Basil and any sympathizers out of the group. I've scrubbed our identities. Everything from that old life is gone."

"Gone? What do you mean?"

There was a long pause on the line to the point where I moved the phone away to check it was still connected to the call.

"I thought you wanted out, too." He sounded hesitant. "So I made it look like the oldest versions of us were dead and that our current identities, Parker and Damon, were clean and sparkly. Nowhere near the dark web and just normal security consultants. Did I do the wrong thing?" The worry in his voice cut me to my soul.

"No." I let out a breath. Parker had given me such a great gift. "No, I wanted out. It's just there was nothing for so long and now it's over, y'know?" The weight of my past didn't completely fall free from my shoulders, but it eased knowing that I could start fresh, be someone that Mori might want to keep around.

"There's something else..." Parker trailed off. I could sense his unease. The small hitch in his breath let me know this was a big deal.

“Oh-kay,” I said, drawing it out. “What else?”

“When I was cleaning our identities, I changed a few things.”

The anticipation was killing me. Was he feeling guilty? Was it really that bad?

“Well?”

“I, uh, made Magnus our dad and us brothers. We all share the same last name of Miller.”

A smile broke across my face. “How’s that going to work, hon? We look nothing alike.” Parker was taller than me with warm terracotta skin, deep brown eyes, and silky straight black hair he wore tied in a man-bun. Then there was me with my cool fawn skin that burned a little too easily for my liking, had too many freckles thanks to the damn sun here, and light blue eyes.

“Right, well, Magnus and my dad were both white and obviously both shifters, so it’s fine.” I could practically hear him shrug.

Parker had been unclaimed by his alpha father and raised by his omega mother. The pack he had grown up in had easily accepted Parker as a bi-racial child of a single mother since shifters were gaga for babies. His mother’s family were first-generation immigrants from Bangladesh who had cast her out of their small pack when an arranged mating had gone wrong. Both families had believed she was infertile, when clearly, the alpha was the problem. She found refuge in a new pack. Then, a few years later, after a contraceptive potion gone wrong at the heat club, Parker had come along.

He had taken after his alpha parent with his shifter side. His mom had been a clouded leopard, but he’d taken after her in beauty. Unfortunately, being an omega can be

hard. They had a pretty good life until another pack took theirs over. His mom was taken, not quite willingly, as a mate to one of the enforcers when Parker was fourteen. She did everything she could to get him ready for life on his own, perhaps knowing she wouldn't make it through her next pregnancy. Magnus found him at fifteen.

“But shifters can't have kids with humans. So he clearly couldn't be my dad.” I hated to pick holes in his fantasy he'd concocted.

“No, but here it has him adopting you and then having me after. So maybe not by blood, okay? But you and me are family. Now we just have the paperwork to prove it.”

“Thank you,” the words came out choked. “I'm proud to call you my brother. ”

There was a sniffle on the other side of the line. “Same. Gotta go.” Then he ended the call.

“Everything okay?” Mori found me looking out of our bedroom window down into the vegetable gardens below and out towards the orchard where Toth grew his amazing apples. I wouldn't admit it, but I was growing to be addicted to the hellspice apples in particular.

“Hmm?” I turned to face him, struck as I always was at how attractive he was, not just because he had a pretty face, but with the warmth and genuine interest he had in me. It practically shone from his pores. Mori was partially in demon form as he seemed to prefer with his parents around. His wings were away, as were his talons, leaving his ears, horns, eyes and skin color to be that of his natural demon state. His tail flicked lazily behind him, reminding me of a cat's tail. Mori had also given up on wearing a shirt, wandering around like Toth and Keren did most of the time just clad

in pants.

Not that I was complaining. The view was wonderful. Ten out of ten would look again. I loved tracing my fingers over Mori's toned chest when we made out whenever we had the chance. Every quiet moment we could get, especially that lovely, sleepy time just before we would drift off, wrapped up in each other .

The gorgeous pink demon was making me feel things I wasn't prepared for.

“Are you okay? You've been up here a long time. Do you need a break from it all?”

Mori got that I was one of those extroverted introverts. Sometimes I needed to charge my social battery. Being around so many people all the time was wearing. I never thought I'd have shit in common with Toth, but let's just say I had a lot of sympathy for him.

I quickly caught Mori up on the situation and, without me having to tell him, he got just how much it meant to me that Parker had legally turned me into his big brother, since I was older than him by six years.

Mori wrapped his arms around me. “This calls for a celebration. Why don't we head into Djalling? We can go out for dinner and perhaps stay overnight? I'm sure Keren wouldn't mind a trip into the city.”

My heart tripped at the thought of having a night just with Mori. A real date, too. “I'd love that.”

His wide smile lit up his face. “Okay, I'll go get it arranged. Pack a small bag.”

He left the room laughing to himself. I picked up my phone to tell Parker because he knew how frustrated I was getting at the cock-blocking Mori's family had been

doing. Then I'd have to go break the news to Cody, who hated me being out of his sight for long .

Parker's reply made me grin. I knew that all the hurt over him disappearing was forgiven, if not completely forgotten. We would get past it.

Bro: Fucking Finally! Screw dinner, just screw him!

Damon: Saved you in my phone as bro. I don't say it often enough, but I love you.

The words came much more easily as a text.

Bro: Love you too. ?

That was enough lovey-dovey stuff for the day. Well, unless Mori needed some extra sweet talk to get him into bed. I recalled the heat in his gaze when he suggested the night away and knew none of that was needed. Mori was mine for the night any way that I wanted him.

After throwing some things in a bag, clothes for me and Mori, I went downstairs to join him. I just followed the raised voices, and it led me to him.

In the living room, he was having a heated conversation with Keren over the old bodyguard's opinion that Mori wasn't ready to go places with just one guard. Quite frankly, it stung he forgot to include me. I'd protect Mori at any cost. It was my fault he'd gotten injured last time .

"Damon is trained. We'll be fine, won't we?" He held out a hand to me.

"We will," I agreed before I turned to address Keren. "It isn't fair for Mori to be punished for Gregoris leaving. Mori didn't ask for that. He'd take Gregoris back in a

heartbeat, wouldn't you?" I glanced back at the demon gripping my hand. He needed this as badly as I did.

Mori nodded, his eyes gleaming as he watched Keren crumble.

"Come on now, Ker, the boys need a night of fun," Dessi cajoled.

A victorious smile threatened to break free. With Dessi backing us, Keren had no choice but to relent. Mori's parents, his mom especially, were so protective of him. If they saw no threat in the nearby city, then we were free to go.

"Fine," Keren ground out.

Fantastic. Mori and I beamed at each other. We'd won that battle.

Cody rounded the corner, panic clear on his sweet face. "What's this about going away? When are you coming back?"

Next round of the battle to fight.

Date Night

Damon

Getting out of Cody's clutches was harder than I'd anticipated, mainly because Mori crumbled like a cookie whenever Cody set that anxious expression on his dad.

Turned out I had to be the strict parent. Fucking hell, he was my best friend and here I was thinking like a stepdad! Well, it looked like one of us would have to be tough on him and it certainly wasn't going to be Mori.

Goddammit, I should have known that Mori meant something special to me when I was willing to spoil that stunning suit by getting to my knees for him when we both knew he wasn't in any real danger. He could have held out for a healer. Mori had just made me feel powerful by giving that energy to him, letting me control the situation that had gotten so out of hand just moments before. I had this drive, this urge to protect him, care for him, drive him out of his mind with need.

Maybe our forced celibacy had been a good thing, though I'd never admit that to Cody .

"Sweetness, me and your dad need some time away," I said, approaching my friend. Reaching out, I gripped his shoulder. I looked him directly in his eyes and continued. "You conned us into making some very restrictive promises, and I'm dying over here! Have you seen him?" I threw a thumb in Mori's direction. He smirked, just making him hotter. Yeah, I was getting him under me as soon as possible.

Cody pulled away from me with a grimace. “Gag! That’s my dad, dude. I just... I’m worried something will happen.”

“Oh, something will happen,” I said suggestively. “Some super hot things between two consenting adults. All night if I have my way,” I leered.

Mori laughed. Loved that sound. I was sure I heard Dessi and Hana giggle. Those two were a hoot.

“Oh, my god! Stop, please!” Cody begged as he pulled away from my hold, a disgusted look on his pretty face.

“Cody,” I begged, “you have to let me have this. Keeping our promise had been hard, no pun intended.” I let out a dramatic sigh. “We need to test out our compatibility. Who knows, you might be calling me Daddy soon.”

“Gross!” he wailed. I caught sight of Mori tensing, all humor fleeing from his expression. “Get out of my sight, the pair of you!” He made gagging noises. “I am never calling you Daddy!” Cody glared at me, then burst out laughing, totally breaking the mood in the room and returning a smile to Mori’s face.

“Remember when you said, ‘not my kink’? Who would have thought this is where we’d end up, with you dating my dad?” Cody rolled his eyes. “You two are adorable. Go have your date, we can discuss that ridiculous promise when you get back. I can’t believe both of you kept it.”

There was a twist to his expression. “Cody?” Mori approached him slowly.

“Sorry, I just feel bad. You two have been sharing a room all this time and haven’t...?”

“It was never about us having sex, though, was it?”

Cody was quiet for a moment, then finally shook his head. “When you get back, you don’t have to do that anymore. Not for me.”

The offer of acceptance was there. I’d always known it wasn’t about us having sex in his home. He had wanted to see I was truly in this with his dad before letting us be more open about our relationship. I hoped he would spend the time with his grandparents learning how to block emotions for our return, because there would be no holding back.

I hugged him and kissed his forehead. “Thanks, sweetness.”

Mori had a quiet moment with his son, then returned to my side. “Ready? ”

“So very ready.”

“Are you okay flying with me carrying you?”

Flying. With Mori? I recalled the feeling of his arms around me; the wind ruffling my hair, how free I’d felt when he’d flown with me in Northharbor.

“Absolutely. I trust you.” Thing was, that was the truth. There were so few people I trusted in my life, Parker, Cody, Toth to a point. Now there was Mori. I trusted him with my safety. More than that, I was growing to trust him with my heart.

Mori’s expression softened. He cupped my cheek. “Thank you. I’ll never betray that trust.”

“I know.”

He wrapped his arms around me, pressed a kiss on my head, then let his wings free. With a jump and a few flaps of those massive pink wings, we were in the air above the orchard.

Keren was our silent shadow carrying our bags as we flew over farm land then finally the outskirts of the city of Djalling.

“Oh!” I thought my gasp was torn away with the breeze, but Mori must have heard me. He squeezed me tighter and huffed a laugh in my ear. “It’s beautiful.”

Demons flying were so commonplace most of the residents of the city ignored us until we circled the hotel looking for a place to land. A couple of non demons reacted, staring open-mouthed, reminding me why Mori had a guard in the first place. He said while demonkin wouldn’t risk the backlash, these others might not have the same incentive. So guard it was. Yes, his home was safer, but not completely risk free. He was also very rich, which made him a target.

The hotel was grand and took up half the block. There was a circle of packed earth next to the hotel that I guessed was supposed to be a landing port of some kind. The demon realm was cool with all its magic. It had a lot of great things, yet I missed having a car. Maybe if I had wings, I wouldn’t have missed it so much.

The hotel had four floors that I could see. It sprawled, taking up much of the street with no other buildings close to it. Something about it screamed expensive and exclusive.

We landed about a block away, making dust clouds puff up under our feet. Mori kept a hand on me as I regained my balance. “I love flying. Wish I had my own wings.” The grin on my face was so wide it was beginning to hurt.

“I’m glad,” Mori said, looking relieved.

“Let’s get inside,” Keren barked, frowning. He scanned the area, like I should be doing, as we walked up to the hotel. The demon realm just felt so safe it allowed me to switch off. Part of me hoped Keren would fade into the background once we were inside so we could enjoy our date. I liked the old demon. I just didn’t want a killjoy ruining the day. We’d waited so long to just be together.

Inside, the hotel was furnished opulently. The marble flooring, gold fixtures, and rich fabrics for the soft furnishings in the hotel were all done without any expense spared. The overall result could have been gaudy, this was just the other side of understated. Stated, I guess. I chuckled to myself as Mori led the way to the desk.

“Your highness!” An employee almost ran to meet us at the desk. He was wolf-like with a bushy tail that I swear was wagging.

“Barr! It’s nice to see you again.” Mori gave the strange demon a quick hug. Keren glanced at me as if expecting a prickle of jealousy, except it didn’t follow. The hug was clearly platonic and over in a millisecond. “Damon, meet Barr. He’s the one that portalled to tell us Cody was staying in this hotel.”

Ah, the hellhound. I thought he looked different from the other demons I’d seen. He didn’t have wings for a start, though with his portal power, he didn’t need them. Mori had told me about some of the different demonkin that lived in the realm. He was as equally fascinated with hellhounds as I was.

“It’s lovely to meet you, Barr. Thanks for getting Mori to Cody so quickly,” I said honestly. “He would have flown all day and night to get to him.” My joke got a little laugh out of the hellhound.

“Oh, it was nothing. His... Mori got me something to eat and gave me a pretty gem. He was very nice to me.” Barr looked around. “Where’s Gregoris?”

Mori's eyes lit up, genuine excitement to share his gossip clear. "You'll never believe it, but he met his fated!"

Barr gasped with delight. "By the magic! Such joyful news!"

Okay, so he might have had a crush on my Mori, yet I adored this kid straight away. He was likely a lot older than me, he just acted younger. There was an innocence and sweetness about him the years hadn't stolen. Unlike me, whose soul was tainted with all the lives I'd taken. What did Mori see in me?

"Isn't it?" Mori gushed. He was so excitable, like a puppy. "This is Kerensanith, he's Gregoris' grandfather."

They made their greetings while Mori booked us into the hotel. I had asked why they used their full names when introducing each other before. Mori had said it was a sign of trust to give someone your full name. Not doing so when you are introduced is an insult. As such, most demons knew each other's full names. Unfortunately, it led to accidents, such as how Mori had ended up contracted into Cody's grandfather's service.

Barr took the bags from Keren and led us to the elevator. Once again, I was grateful for all the modern conveniences the demon realm had. Magic was pretty cool when it was used like it was there with their use of technology powered by magic.

The hellhound chattered with Mori as we ascended to the top floor. We were staying in the penthouse suite with an adjoining room for Keren, complete with spells to hide some of our emotions, which were going to come in handy. Not that I didn't want Keren to feed on lust, just not mine or Mori's.

I scoped out the bathroom, then decided to take a shower to freshen up before we went for an early dinner. Our plan was to explore the city some before coming back

to the room. Mori wanting to spend time with me outside of the bedroom was the sweetest thing. It made me feel like this was a relationship, not just two horny people testing their chemistry.

“Hmm, maybe we could order room service,” Mori drawled as he entered the bathroom, finding me naked and wet under the spray .

“Perhaps I want to draw out the anticipation.” I smirked at the gleam in his eyes. He loved this.

“No, I’ll need to feed you before I get you in bed. Wouldn’t want you passing out from hunger. Pleasure, yes, hunger, no.” Mori’s grin was wicked.

“I wouldn’t be opposed to sharing this shower with you.” My eyes roved his body. “Water conservation is important, after all.”

Mori stripped so fast he was a blur. He rounded the shower screen with heat in his eyes and a growing erection.

He touched his lips to mine before kissing down my neck and torso. “Better make this fast so we aren’t wasting water, then.” He got to his knees and licked my shaft from root to tip before sucking on the head.

“Fuck, Mori.” My hands clasped his horns, making Mori moan around my dick. “Ugh,” I groaned as he started to take me deep. His mouth was perfect. Hot, wet and just the right amount of suction. After weeks of almost nothing, I wasn’t going to last long.

Determined to make him feel as good as he was doing to me, I stroked one of his horns and an ear, remembering his reaction to them being touched before.

With a curse, Mori doubled down on his efforts, sucking me harder and faster, head bobbing in time to the movements of his hand on his cock. Damn, that was hot. The familiar tingle at the base of my spine signaled I was getting close.

His tail snaked out, running up my thigh, teasing my balls and taint, then around my pucker.

When he breached me, I tensed. No. Not there. My grip tightened on his horns.

“Damon?”

I hadn’t noticed Mori had stopped sucking me. He pulled away and got to his feet.

For a moment, he just searched my face, absently wiping the water from out of my eyes. I wondered what he saw in my expression.

“Sorry, I didn’t...”

“You didn’t know. I just... I can’t, okay? You can touch me anywhere except there. Is that okay?”

“Is that okay? Damon, that’s better than okay. We will only ever do what you want to do. If that’s a boundary for you, then I won’t cross it. I’m just sorry—“

“You didn’t know,” I repeated. “That’s why I top. I can’t—“

“Then you won’t. Just as well, I love the idea of taking you.”

I reached for him. He came into my arms easily. The warmth of his skin sliding against me caused me to groan. Despite the bite of fear, I was still hard .

Mori reached for the soap, poured some into his hand and grasped my length. “Let’s do something about this, shall we?”

I pressed closer, wrapped my hand around us both, and stroked. Mori’s head fell back with an exhalation. “Fuck, Damon.”

Our mouths met as we worked to bring us both over the edge. Within a minute, he was following me over.

We spent a few minutes enjoying the water and kissing. “Hmm, I don’t think we saved any water, do you?” Mori teased.

It was just what we needed to break through the last of the tension.

“No, but it beats showering alone.”

Dinner was at a small restaurant a few streets away from the hotel. The atmosphere was cozy and friendly, with food that made my mouth water. I found the realm was so similar to earth with the same animals, and foods that took influence from humanity with their own added demon spice. Demons liked things hot.

A river cut through the city with multiple bridges connecting the two halves. Together we ambled around Djalling, crossing the river many times. Keren kept a safe distance from us, allowing me to sink into this moment.

“Are you okay, about earlier? I didn’t mean to press a boundary.”

I sighed. “You didn’t know it was an issue for me because I hadn’t told you. Now you know.”

“I won’t push.”

“Yeah, I know. I trust you Mori. From the moment I met you, I knew you were good.”

He pulled me closer to him and kissed the top of my head. “I’m so grateful for that trust, though I admit it wasn’t mutual at first. When I first met you, I was suspicious of you.”

“Did you wonder why a ruthless hitman was in your precious son’s life?” My question had more than a little bite to it. His words had stung.

“No. I realized almost immediately that you loved Cody and were protective of him. I was... jealous. Instead of admitting that to myself, I tried to convince myself you were untrustworthy.”

“What convinced you?”

Mori was silent as he thought. “When you figured out how to free Toth. It was so selfless. You could have left him there to suffer, but you saw how much Cody was hurting. ”

I stopped walking and turned to Mori. Going onto my tiptoes, I kissed him sweetly. He had just proven he saw me, not the killer I used to be.

Parker had given me a fresh start. I was determined to grasp onto it with both hands.

“Shall we head back?”

“Let’s.”

Together, we turned and began walking to the hotel.

If anyone looked at us as we rode in the elevator to our suite, it would have been clear what we were about to get up to. If it wasn't Mori's glittering dark gaze hooked on me, or my smug grin as he held me tightly against him, it would have been Keren's long suffering sighs and eye rolls that clued them in. The demon needed to go get some. I meant Keren. Mori was totally getting some as soon as we were alone. I wasn't sharing him.

Mori practically slammed the bedroom door in Keren's face before pulling me towards the bed.

With care and precision, he stripped me and then removed his clothes, leaving his tie for last.

"This," he said, holding the tie up, "is for my naughty tail. I want you to tie it and my hands to the bed." With a smile, he handed the tie over.

"Mori—" I ran the silky material over my hands .

"I know you trust me. This is for me. I don't trust myself." He climbed onto the bed and draped his hands and tail on the pillow above his head.

He made such a wonderful sight, a long muscular torso tapering into narrow hips and down to thick thighs and long legs. He had barely any body hair. Just a small thatch of deep brown hair surrounding his erect cock.

"Fine," I gave in easily. I wanted him too much to argue the point. With quick motions, I tied his tail and hands to the headboard of the bed. "Okay?"

"Yes. Get over here so I can kiss you."

Unable to deny him, I climbed on top of him and lay down on top of him. Damn, he

felt good. Our lips met in a sweet kiss that soon deepened. I sucked his tongue and nipped at his bottom lip as my hands explored his body.

“Damon,” Mori sighed my name as I stroked his cock. I broke from his mouth to kiss down his torso as I continued to work him. “Please, more!”

I put my fingers in front of his mouth. “Suck,” I demanded.

“No need,” he smirked. “I’m prepped already. Perks of being an incubus.”

Reaching down, I circled his hole. Finding it slick, I pressed a finger inside, savoring the noises Mori made. Those sounds made me desperate to get inside him .

Checking he was ready, I pushed another finger inside him as I sucked on the tip of his cock.

“Now, Damon!”

My lover was being demanding. Time to show him just who was boss. Sweeping a hand over his stomach, I used the precum there to slick up my cock. I pushed his legs further apart and settled between them.

Slowly, with painstaking care, I slid inside him. Holy fuck! Forget the demon realm. This was heaven.

Once inside him, I leaned down for a kiss, giving him a chance to adjust. As I felt him relax around me, I began to thrust.

I took my time, just sinking into the feeling of being inside Mori, having him look up at me with adoration as I gave us both pleasure. He clutched at the tie, straining his arms in his need to touch me, though I knew that me having control was getting him

off. His grin told me as much.

Harder and faster, I pumped into him. Sweat ran down my back, my breaths heavy. So good. Never better with anyone else. Mine. All I could think about was Mori.

“Can I?” Mori’s eyes glittered. Just looking at him made me feel so powerful.

“Yeah,” I said, knowing what he needed.

Magic swirled in the air as Mori fed from our passion. It wasn’t draining; it made sex with Mori better somehow. Over and over, I had to chant random facts in my head so I didn’t blow my load in seconds. Fuck, Mori felt so good.

I reached between us, desperate to get him close, and stroked him in time with my thrusts, adding a twist over the tip.

He tightened around me with a gasp. That was all it took for it to be game over for me. I came inside him with three quick pulses of my hips.

“Fuck,” I gasped. I panted for a moment, trying to catch my breath.

Pulling out, I leaned down and took him into my mouth. With a finger, I caught my release leaking out of him and pushed it back inside, needing to mark him as mine. I fucked him with a couple of fingers while I sucked him.

“Damon!” Mori cried as he came down my throat. The bed creaked as his arms flexed.

I popped off his cock with a grin. “You taste so good, lover.”

“Can’t think,” Mori giggled. “Untie me so we can cuddle.”

The simple knot came undone easily. Mori really hadn't tried to get free. I flung the tie onto the floor, kissed Mori quickly and slumped back on the bed, still high from my orgasm .

Mori wriggled his way into my arms. "Worth the wait?"

"Worth twice that wait and more."

Sweetwater

Amorandes

“Sir, you need to wake up.”

Groggily, I lifted my head. “What?” I whispered, trying not to wake my lover. Damon sprawled out, half lying on top of me. Carefully, I slid out from under him.

The sun, less intense than the human sun, was high in the sky. The light filtered through the shaded windows, bathing Damon in light. His formerly pale skin was now dotted with freckles and a hint of a golden tan. Our sun didn’t burn him the same as the human one did, for which I was grateful. I wouldn’t want anything in my home harming Damon.

I tiptoed to the door, aware of a pleasant ache in my muscles and ass from the second and third rounds we had gone the night before. Exhaustion was the only thing keeping us from each other. I yearned for Damon with an intensity that scared me.

Quietly, I unlocked the door and eased it open. “What?” I took a breath, my eyes closing as I fought for patience. “Sorry, that was rude. What can I help you with?”

“Sir, your phone must be on silent. The Alpha from the Sweetwater pack has been trying to contact you. There’s an auction for the heat club, Heatwave, today. Apparently, you were interested in buying it?” The words came out as a question and I sensed a lot of judgment there. I needed Gregoris back.

“Yes. I am buying it. It’s a fantastic opportunity for demons and shifters alike.”

“You have an hour to get there. They have sent a picture of an area where you can open a portal. Then they will take you to the club in time for the auction.”

“Fantastic, thank you!” I turned to gather my clothes. “What are we going to do about Damon? Should I wake him? He could come.”

“The young sir will be fine here until we return. There’s no time for the both of you to get ready. Plus, the human is untested. I want to do some training with him before we use him as security for you. Just ask him to stay in the rooms.”

Keren’s severe expression prevented me from arguing in favor of Damon joining us. I knew he would be an asset. He saw things differently to supernaturals. Plus, he had this natural charm that was ideal for setting people at ease. The Alpha had already met Damon and likely would prefer him to the gruff Keren .

I frowned. “That’s not very fair to Damon. I’ll contact Cody and ask someone to come get Damon. I’ll leave a gem so he can use a portal. Oh! Maybe Barr could take him back to the castle.” I swear I saw Keren roll his eyes at my planning.

“Sir, you are running short on time.” Now his patience was wearing thin. I was in for a scolding if I didn’t get a move on.

“Give me fifteen minutes.”

Quickly, I rushed through a shower, irrationally disappointed that Damon wasn’t there to share the hot water with me.

Damon had packed clothing for both of us. Sadly, none aside from the underwear was appropriate for what I was going to do. Last night’s suit would have to do. I was

grateful I had taken Damon out to a nice place for dinner. Both of us had dressed for the occasion.

Our antics ruined my tie, so I borrowed Damon's, which looked decidedly less crumpled.

Fully dressed, I went to the bed to rouse my lover. I needed a better term for him. Mate would be good, though it was far too soon to lay claim to the human.

"Damon, you need to wake up."

His eyes snapped open, taking me in. "Everything okay?"

"I've got to head to Sweetwater. Heatwave is up for auction today." I straightened as he got out of bed .

"Give me a few minutes and I'll come with you." He paused his journey to the bathroom, his ass looking delectable. It was a shame he didn't like to bottom. I sensed trauma there, so I wasn't going to push the issue.

"Hey, is that my tie?" He raised an eyebrow at me.

"I thought my lover wouldn't mind me borrowing it after we wrecked mine."

"Fair enough."

Damon was at the bathroom door when Keren's voice came through the door clearly. "The pack is expecting just the two of us. Someone will collect you, Master Damon."

His face fell at my bodyguard's careless words. Perhaps the old demon should be in retirement. If I couldn't have Gregoris, then perhaps I needed someone younger,

more like-minded to me.

Mama would sort it. I'd tell her he upset Damon.

"Right." Damon slumped against the doorway.

I rushed to his side, cupped his cheek, and kissed him. "I'm sorry."

"Not your fault. Just be quick, okay? Cody promised the rule was done." He gave a suggestive leer, complete with wiggled eyebrows.

My laugh burst free. I couldn't help hugging him tight enough to make him squeak. Another kiss, then I broke free. "I've left a gem to pay for a portal back to Toth's. There's a guild a few streets over. Do not fly with whoever comes to get you. From now on, you only fly with me, okay?"

Unable to stand the look on his face, I darted forward for another kiss. His lips were addictive.

"Be safe."

Damon smiled. "Come back soon."

"Promise!"

The area around the hotel was a no portal zone while the renovations I'd ordered were being done at the back of the hotel. Inconvenient, yet nothing to get in a tizzy over. Keren was not in the mood to deal with delays, though.

He didn't have to say a word. His hulking presence with his own personal rain-cloud was bad enough.

“Keren, we’ll get there in plenty of time. I didn’t take that long to get ready.”

“I abhor lateness,” he growled, “so I told you we had less time than we actually needed. Do you need to return home or to Toth’s castle before the meeting for anything? We have time for you to prepare.”

“Relax. There’s nothing I need. I just need to make my bids when it’s time. The shifter council and the pack have both agreed that should I bid the highest, I won’t be barred from buying the club.”

His steps faltered. “That was a possibility?”

“Yes. There was concern that demons could cause problems to the shifters. Then I explained the intricacies of how we feed and gave proof of other demon owned clubs in Europe.” Demons were more accepted in Europe for some reason. They had protections under law that prevented witch contracts and bindings. There were also anti-discrimination laws in place we didn’t have in the US. “Once they saw how it worked, they actually seemed excited about it.”

“So today is a formality?”

“Well, no. There are other bidders. Independent shifters, other packs from surrounding areas. The council is sick of running it, so they are glad someone wants to take it off their hands.” My feet slowed as a scent caught my attention. “I’m starving. Can we get breakfast first?”

That time, Keren did roll his eyes. “Of course, Sir.”

The bakery we entered was small, with just a handful of tables, all of them packed with the lunch-time rush. We really had slept late.

While we waited to place our orders, I messaged Damon to tell him that Keren had tricked me, Mama to tell her I needed a better guard, then my darling boy to tell him someone needed to come get Damon while I went to the auction.

Mama: Of course, Sweetheart. Poor Keren should be relaxing, not dealing with troublesome demonkin. He was a temporary measure. Let me figure something out.

Rude, though as long as I got my way, I didn't really care what she said. I knew I wasn't that much of a hassle for a bodyguard. Gregoris had been with me for over a century, after all.

Damon: Keren sucks, and not in the good way.

That earned a snort from me and a side eye from Keren.

Cody: I'll ask Toth if he can go, if there isn't anyone to spare. He was busy with something, but I'll get him to go. Maybe we both could fly.

Keren ordered for me, which was just overbearing in the extreme, further cementing my dislike. I much preferred him when he was just Gregoris' grandpa. He made it worse with what he'd ordered. I didn't want a black coffee; I wanted a chai latte. At least he had the decency to order me a pastry. Perhaps my stomach grumbling was bothering him .

I sent Cody a reply:

Me: If you can't get Toth, call the hotel and see if Barr is free. I'll give him another gem if he can take Damon back safely. It's quite a long flight for new wings.

There was a weird feeling in my gut. I texted Damon back and asked him to only go with Toth, or Barr, if Toth was unavailable. It didn't immediately go on read, so I

assumed he was in the shower.

By the time I put my phone in my pocket, our order was ready. We took it outside to a bench and ate in silence. The city moved around us, bringing a smile to my face. I was proud of where I came from and hoped after Damon had seen more of it he would be willing to settle here, somewhere close to Cody so I could spend plenty of time with my son, yet somewhere where we had our own space, and most importantly, privacy.

“Ready, Sir?”

I stood, brushing the crumbs from my pants. “Sure. I’m excited to see the pack grounds.” He said nothing, just waited for me to be ready.

Working with Keren, we drew the portal easily, with little drain on our magic, not that I had an issue with that thanks to Damon, and stepped through to Sweetwater.

Immediately, we were surrounded by shifters and elves readying themselves for a fight. Some were in their animal forms, poised to strike. I stood still, though I let the portal go, as did Keren. Holding my hands out, I showed I wasn’t a threat. I knew how some people acted when faced with one of us, so I made sure to safely tuck away all of my demon features. They still looked nervous at our appearance in the middle of the compound.

“Stand down!” a familiar voice ordered. Alpha Blake came forward to stand a few steps away. “Welcome, Mori.” He gave me a quick smile. “Keren, I presume?”

We made our greetings and introductions while the guards surrounding us relaxed. Alpha Blake praised them for their quick action and restraint. They returned to their stations.

“Thank you for inviting us here to prepare for the auction, Alpha Blake.”

“Please, just call me Blake when we are in private. Hearing Alpha all the time gives me a headache,” Blake joked.

I could imagine there was a lot of stress managing such a diverse pack, especially with the addition of the elves who were living there long term as they researched the reason for and long-term effects of the beta sickness which had ravaged the Sweetwater pack.

Blake led us to the main house, a short distance from where we had opened our portal. Once safely inside his office, there was the offer of refreshments. I absolutely couldn't refuse even after the recent pastry, I was still famished! I also had to fuss over the babies. They had so many! After I'd eaten a scone, I just had to go compliment the cook, Winter, who was a darling man with talent in the kitchen. His loyalty to the pack was admirable in the face of my bribes. He denied me every time. I wanted him for Cody's home, or one of my hotels.

My presence in the pack house appeared to amuse Blake. I was glad to cut the tension between us all, as it would make the next couple of hours go much more smoothly. Plus, I also wanted a good working relationship with the young alpha. He had come to help Cody when he hadn't even met him, so I owed him.

Shifters were fascinating to me. I wanted to see all their different forms, experience a pack run, see all the babies. Their tight pack bonds were just so lovely, not too dissimilar from demon culture.

After going over what to expect, we got into a truck to drive in to Sweetwater and Heatwave, the club where the auction was going to be held.

There were only a few people there when we arrived and were ushered inside. I

immediately liked the vibe of the place, though the decor would need some updating. Damon would have to tour the premises when I acquired the club to check for security concerns. From what I had been told, the club had been closed temporarily after abuses by alphas over an omega. That obviously couldn't happen anymore. This was supposed to be a place of safety and sanctuary for omegas in heat. If they didn't have an alpha to mate with, they could come here to find one, or use some of the beta shifters on staff.

In all honesty, with our magic, we could create a knot, so omegas might prefer to take their heats with a demon. Plenty of incubi would love to help a shifter in heat.

Blake's assistant, Dakota, was happy to make a list for me of things that either needed to be repaired or replaced throughout the club. He even gave me some useful suggestions as a former patron of the club. Dakota was now settled with a mate, a baby, and two older children, one being the Alpha Mate, Kade. He spoke with so much love for his family.

People trickled into the club as the time for the auction drew nearer. The auctioneer set up her equipment, laptop and microphone at the ready.

A hush came over the crowd as the auctioneer called the lot out. She gave a brief description of the building, the business, and certain responsibilities that entailed with owning a heat club. Then it got under way .

Quickly, it was apparent they weren't expecting me to have the funds necessary to buy the club. Hopefully, it wouldn't be a problem later on.

Naturally, I was the highest bidder. When I wanted something, I went for it. Dakota, Blake and Blake's brother, Axel, clapped their hands enthusiastically for me, while the rest made a token gesture.

I had just signed the paperwork, assuring the auctioneer on behalf of the seller that I would pay within the next week, when there was a prickle of magic.

“Portal!” Keren yelled, pushing Blake behind him and next to me.

Seconds later a portal opened, and a frantic-looking Barr ran through behind a sheepish-looking Damon.

“Hey, did you miss me?”

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Source Creation Date: July 28, 2025, 6:54 am

The Demon Realm

Damon

What was a human to do when he was left alone in the demon realm? Not explore, apparently. That was ill-advised despite the many assurances that the demon realm was much safer for me, for anyone, than the human one.

Something about this didn't feel right. Whether it was Mori's insistence I stayed put or my gut feeling, but something was off.

So like the good human boyfriend I, hopefully, was, I did as I was told and waited in the suite for someone to come collect me. First I showered, packed our things neatly, then ordered a hearty breakfast. I hoped Keren thought to get Mori some food. All that sunshine and rainbows needed to be powered by sugar.

My lips lifted in a brief smile at the thought of Mori. The night before had been amazing. We had proved without a shadow of a doubt that we were compatible. The smile slipped when I thought about the shower when Mori had naturally headed somewhere... the memory of being penetrated flashed through me, making me shudder.

No, Mori had apologized, then respected my boundary. He was just so good. All the shower had been was a tiny blip in an otherwise wonderful night. The shower had ended well for us both.

A smirk returned at all the ways I'd taken Mori through the night. Being with an

incubus was an experience I'd never forget. I wasn't going back to human guys.

Mori was different, though. He wasn't just a brief lover I'd keep for a week or two at most. When I thought about my future now that my hitman days were over, Mori was there with me. I wasn't sure how it would work with our life spans being so different. Still, I'd take another sixty years of Mori over none at all. He was the one I wanted by my side.

If he wanted me, then I was his.

We would have to talk about my reaction in the shower and what it meant. It didn't come from some sexual trauma. I'd consented to what happened, I hadn't been forced. It was the aftermath that'd caused my reaction. I'd messed around with a slightly older guy in my teens. Neither of us had been very experienced. A little too little prep, definitely too little lube, and a visit to the ER later, it was now a no go area. Who knows, maybe Mori could eventually build up enough trust for me to try it again. Just now, while we were still learning how we fit, I wasn't ready.

Breakfast done, I read over the texts from Cody and Mori. Toth was coming to get me, though it wouldn't be until later on in the day when most of the work for the orchard was done. I hated waiting for a babysitter, but I understood the need for it. Demonkin weren't the only things in the demon realm, though they made up the majority of the population. Some humans, shifters, and other species all lived here, drawn by the clean air and ambient magic of the place.

For the foreseeable future, I was stuck in the suite. I was grateful after about half an hour of twiddling my thumbs that demons had integrated human technology with their magic. I'd noticed during our flight they also used hydro, wind and solar power.

The suite had a flat screen TV with magical access to streaming services in the human realm. Quickly, I remembered why I didn't watch TV and shut it off.

I huffed out a breath, scanned the room, then decided to do a yoga workout. A workout would occupy me for a while. I found a pair of loose cotton pants and a t-shirt and changed, then made sure my bag was ready to go again. If Toth arrived, I didn't want the grumpy demon to have to wait for me while I sorted my things. He would be antsy to get back to Cody. The longer I made him wait, the grumpier he would get.

Yoga was the ideal distraction. I worked up a light sweat as I went through the routine I knew by heart.

A knock came at the main door. Hurrying to it, I opened it to see Jorgoth, an elemental demon that worked for Toth in the orchard. He used his water powers to make sure the apples grew well.

"He-llo," he stammered, nervously. "I—I've come to collect you."

Alarms in my head began blaring. This guy was throwing off all sorts of vibes. He was distinctly uncomfortable, sweating, his eyes darting around the place.

"Cool, just let me get my stuff." I turned my back on him and quickly texted Cody.

Damon: Jorgoth is here. Something is wrong. Did you send him?

Fussing with my already packed bag gave me some time to wait for a reply. After a few minutes, I was forced to think of a plan.

"Sir? We need to go. I'm expected back."

Why did that twig my senses as a half-truth?

"Okay, I have everything." With a final glance, I made sure I had everything,

including the gems Mori had left to make sure I portalled to Toth's castle .

Jorgoth was pensive as we descended in the elevator. The silence between us was stifling. Having spent a couple of weeks at Toth's, I had built up a relationship with the demonkin who worked for Cody's mate. Things had never been so awkward, making me even more suspicious.

We walked through the reception to the main door. Jorgoth didn't acknowledge Barr, who I knew was his friend from things Mori had told me about the hellhound. I'd even sensed something romantic between them, making this weirder.

Another red flag.

Outside of the hotel, I worked to create a bit of distance between me and the elemental. I knew we couldn't portal directly from the hotel. The staff had been very apologetic about it. Mori had said something about building works and renovations, meaning they didn't want portals opening up and causing accidents.

"This way, please," Jorgoth said, still sweating profusely.

Without speaking, I followed him. Part of me wanted to go through with whatever this was, some sort of half-baked kidnapping. Yet I knew I was vulnerable. My guns were back in my room in the castle. I had a knife on me, but against magic, I was severely outclassed. My best bet was getting some distance between us and running.

I was grateful for the walk I'd shared with Mori, as I'd been able to learn where things were. Ever thoughtful, Mori had shown me where the portal guild was. He said to go there and wait for him if we were ever separated or if there was an issue. I wore a gem on a necklace as a 'just in case'.

Didn't look like I would need it, though.

During our short walk, we had picked up a tail.

Barr, the sweet hellhound, was following us as Jorgoth took me further from the hotel, in the opposite direction of the guild.

What I needed was a way of delaying so Barr could get closer. We were out of the hotel exclusion zone, so Jorgoth could portal me at any point. The only place he could take me was the human realm.

Fuck.

Was Jorgoth in contract to a witch?

My mind buzzed even as my steps slowed, making Jorgoth look at me with a frown. “Sorry, long night, tired. Incubi and their stamina, huh?” I joked.

Who could Jorgoth be—?

Basil.

The only witch who would have a reason to come for me was Basil. The same witch who had Toth for hours before we rescued him. Could Basil have tortured Toth for more than Cody’s demon name?

Jorgoth’s face twitched in, I guess, was supposed to be a smile. Not a hint of a laugh escaped him. If anything, my delaying tactic and joke seemed to make him more uncomfortable.

Out of the corner of my eye, I caught Barr’s approach. Without a word, I took off, running back the way we came, towards the portal guild. I was not relying on the hellhound to get me to Mori. There was no way I was going back to the castle. Who

knew how many names Basil had stolen from Toth's mind.

Not knowing if Barr was friend or foe, I skirted him and just ran.

Streets blurred past me as I dashed through them. Shouts went up as water was flung at me, crashing into walls. An icicle flew by my head by inches. Fuck, that would have hurt!

"This way!" Barr yelled.

I hesitated, losing vital seconds to Jorgoth, who was relentless in his chase.

Barr reached me before he did. He clasped my wrist, drew a portal, and we were gone.

We came out only a few streets away. "Sorry, I panicked." Barr's eyes were frantic. His breathing was heavy, his slightly furry cheeks red.

"Are you working for Basil? "

"Who's Basil?"

The hellhound was innocent, my gut told me as much.

"Why were you following us?" I asked.

Barr ran a nervous hand over his face. His fingers were trembling. "Can we move while I explain?"

I nodded my agreement and took a circular route, still intending to get to the guild, but not waiting for Jorgoth to find us until I had answers.

“So, a few weeks ago, Jor was supposed to meet me on his day off, and he just vanished. When I finally got a hold of him, he couldn’t explain where he’d been. It was just so off, you know?”

Again, I nodded. “Couldn’t? Like he couldn’t say the words, or wouldn’t?”

“He tried speaking. It was like his throat would close around the words.”

“A geas.” At Barr’s confused look, I explained, “a binding spell of sorts. Makes it so the person can’t do something. Here, it was preventing him from telling you he’s contracted.”

Barr stopped still in the street. “He is?”

“Yeah, I think I know which one, too. Means I can’t go back to the castle and Cody really shouldn’t be there until we either free the demonkin affected, because if I know this witch, there’s more than one in contract, or we kill the witch. ”

“By the magic! This is worse than I thought. Prince Amorandes is going to be so upset! What was Jor going to do with you?”

“I think he was taking me to the witch because he certainly wasn’t taking me to the portal guild.”

Up ahead, I spotted the guild. “Fuck! Jorgoth is there.”

“Where do you want to go? You said you can’t go to the castle, so where can I take you?”

“To Mori. He’s going to be in a club in Sweetwater.”

I led Barr away from the guild while I searched for a picture of the heat club on my phone. He would need a reference of where to go for the portal.

“Here.”

Barr glanced at the picture, then closed his eyes briefly. “Got it.”

Jorgoth rounded the corner in front of us.

Barr grabbed me again, taking off in a sprint while drawing another portal. This one was bigger, took seconds I wasn't sure we had.

In a blink, we burst through, the portal snapping closed behind us.

There, surrounded by shifters, was Mori, his eyes wide with concern.

“Hey, did you miss me?”

Heatwave

Amorandes

Unable to help myself, I darted forward and wrapped my arms around Damon. Without even thinking about it, my wings burst free, thankfully not ruining my suit, my magic created space for them. They wrapped around him, cocooning in my protection.

“Are you alright, my love?” The words just slipped out so naturally. I was in love with Damon. Had been in love with him for a while. Now was not the time to admit that, though.

“There’s a lot to discuss, but we need to get Cody and Toth out of the castle.” Damon relaxed into me, his arms around my waist.

I went rigid with fear. “Is he in danger?”

Damon stepped back to meet my eyes. He pushed at my wings so he could see me. “Jorgoth is under contract to Basil. I’m sure of it. I’m not sure why he came for me rather than Cody—“

“He’s a prince.” I stepped back, forcibly pushing my wings away, returning them to their place inside me. They almost had a mind of their own, wanting to keep Damon tucked up and safe. Subconsciously, I believed it was my duty to care for my human lover, yet he was more dangerous than me. I touched the crown on my horn. “This doesn’t just protect us from witch contracts. It prevents a witch or demon from

attacking us physically, but only in our realm," I stressed my point. "Royals have limited protection here, in the human realm, our magic forms a basic shield. Getting around the protection it provides is incredibly difficult. I've never known a witch to hunt us like this."

"So Jorgoth can't just go and take him or Toth out? He can't take them to Basil?"

"Not unless they went willingly."

"Like if Basil had me?"

Realization dawned. "Basil could use you to get Cody. He's powerful enough to control you, to force you to harm him unless he's figured out a way to do it himself. He's certainly powerful enough."

"I would never harm Cody!" Damon spat. Though his anger wasn't for me, I still flinched. Thankfully, Damon missed the movement, too caught up in his fury for the witch that had hunted him for months.

"You wouldn't have a choice. Do you really think that a man so crazed he sent a hitman after a hitman wouldn't use the dark arts? He wants Cody gone. I don't know why."

"I do," Thyme said as he walked in the doors of Heatwave, Oak, and two new witches by his side.

Beside me, Damon stiffened. His fear around witches made sense after some things he had told me about his past. My last words about being controlled wouldn't have helped, either. Damon needed a way to be safe from their magic. Perhaps I could ask the shifters if the elves had any suggestions. Their magic was different. They might know something.

In unison, Damon and I moved closer to each other. We clasped hands, each giving a squeeze that said, “I’m here. I’m with you.” Having someone to protect made Damon feel stronger, so I was willing to be that for him even when I was perfectly safe from the witches.

“Why is he so obsessed with Cody? What does having a hit on me achieve? None of this has made sense from the start.” Damon glowered at the witches as if they were agents for Basil, which, after our last encounter, some of them could be.

“What is Cody? He’s the first—“

By the magic! “That we know of. Just because no other witch-demon hybrid has been documented, doesn’t mean one hasn’t existed.” I recalled my visits to the archives. There was no information on such a mix in a child. We knew nothing about their powers .

Thyme inclined his head. “True. Basil doesn’t care about that. He sees a witch that has demon powers and abilities. Imagine, like he probably has, a witch with a great well of power who can replenish that well quickly by feeding off emotions such as lust. How powerful would such a being be?” Thyme looked directly at me. “Your son is a threat to Basil retaking the coven because Basil believes he is the only person that could stand in his way.”

Damon shifted closer to me. “Cody wouldn’t want that. He just wants to live a peaceful life with Toth.”

“Do you really think Cody would stand aside and let the coven, let Poppy, be harmed because of a madman?” Oak spoke for the first time. “We all know he wouldn’t. He would be the first in line to do something about it.”

“He’d have help.” I’d forgotten the shifters were there. Alpha Blake joined the

witches, greeting them all in turn. He was painfully polite to the new witches, clearly distrusting them, yet he was warm and welcoming to Thyme. Was there something his wolf could sense that I was missing?

“So what was the hit on me for?” Damon’s face was set in a frown. I squeezed his hand once again. I hated Basil for treating Damon as a pawn in his games almost as much as I hated him for targeting my innocent son. Cody didn’t deserve this .

“A warning? A distraction? Bait? Getting Cody out into the open? Who knows?” Thyme gave a shrug. “You’re trying to rationalize the behavior of an irrational man. Basil does whatever the fuck he wants and it’s down to us to stop him.” The fire in his eyes was blazing. I wasn’t alone in my hate.

“So, what do we do?” I asked.

This conversation, the entire situation, made me wish for Gregoris to be by my side. Keren was a poor substitute. He hadn’t moved from his position near the bar. Once Cody was here, I was sending him home, if not sooner. I was sick of his face. It was his fault Damon had been in danger!

“We get you two, then Cody and Toth, somewhere safe. Then we put as many protections on you as we can while we continue our hunt.” Oak cast an eye around Heatwave. “This place yours?” he asked Blake.

“As of now, it’s Mori’s.” Blake smiled at me. “You know, this would be a great place for you to stay while the renovations are ongoing. There are apartments out back. Between the witches and the elves, I’m sure we could have plenty of protections put on the place.”

“Could the sale be put under a different name? To hide that it’s yours until after it opens?” Damon looked thoughtful.

I shrugged, unsure. My tour of the place had shown an apartment with two bedrooms. Hardly ideal since it would be cramped with four of us. We'd just have to make it work.

"We need to get Cody and Toth here. Could Parker work his tech magic to hide the sale?" As much as I would have liked to keep this from Parker and Gregoris, they were our family. They needed to know.

"Yeah, I'll call him now while the witches look at what needs to be done. You okay to call Cody?" Damon asked with a final squeeze of my hand before breaking away to make his call.

"Hey," I called. Damon turned back. "Together, we'll protect Cody." I pulled him into my arms and brushed a kiss on his mouth. "I'll protect you."

A smirk stretched over his face. "No, I'll protect you."

"We'll protect each other."

"Deal."

With one last kiss, we broke apart to make the calls we needed. Telling my son about Basil was going to break my heart. I didn't want to be the one to take away his feeling of safety.

"Dad? Is everything okay? I've been trying to call Damon, but his phone was going to voicemail." My poor boy had been worrying.

"Cody, I need you and Toth to pack as many things as you can and come straight here. Don't talk to anyone. Just come here so we can explain. "

“You’re scaring me. Is Damon okay?” I wanted to cry at the fear in his voice.

“Damon is fine. Jorgoth came for him. He’s contracted to Basil.”

“Fuck! Okay. Where are you? We’ll have to bring Hela. That won’t be a problem, will it?”

“No, it’ll be fine.” Hela, Toth’s hellcat pet, was adorable. Though she had initially kept her distance from us, she had soon warmed up. She had completely vanished since Keren became my guard, only turning up for meals. Cody had reassured me she was fine, keeping to their rooms rather than wandering the castle as she had been before. With another assurance Damon was okay, I gave him the address and ended my call.

No sooner was I off the call, than it rang again. Mama. Fuck.

“Hey Mama—“

“Amorandes.” Threat lined my name. “You and my grandson are in danger. Were you ever going to tell me?”

“Of course,” I lied. “Just as soon as I got Cody here, I was going to ask you and Dad to head home.”

“Head home! Why? We can help!”

The magic bless her. My mom loved so fiercely.

“No, Mama. As much as I love you, I can’t have you in danger. This man will use anyone against Cody. Don’t you think coming here would create another weakness for him?” I heard her sniff. “If Basil got you, he would have me, Cody and Dad all

out searching for you, making us vulnerable. The best thing you can do right now is go home and order Keren to return.”

“Keren? Why?” Mama had calmed some, obviously seeing reason in my explanation. My mother was overbearing at times, only out of love. She wasn’t unreasonable and did listen.

“He told me to leave Damon in the hotel, Mama, rather than risk being late. Even when he had more than enough time for us to make the meeting. Worse still, the auction wouldn’t have started without me!”

“So? Damon would have been fine at the hotel.”

“Mama, a demon tried to kidnap him! Jorgoth is contracted to a witch. The same witch that’s trying to hurt Cody.”

“I see.” Mama’s voice had taken on a razor sharpness. “Put Keren on the phone.”

My gaze caught on the bodyguard. During my call, he had wandered closer. I held the phone out silently. He took it like I was handing him a grenade.

“Hello?” They held a brief conversation. “Understood.” Keren held out my phone. “I’ll take my leave, Prince Amorandes. My apologies to the human. I let personal biases cloud my judgment. A replacement will be found shortly. ”

Keren didn’t even wait to hear my response. Didn’t say anything to Damon or anyone else. He just left the club, presumably to portal home.

The next few hours were filled with anxiety as we waited for Cody and Toth to arrive while the witches and a few elves worked on numerous spells to ward the property. They focused on the apartment initially, ensuring we would be safe while we slept.

Damon had Parker overnight some security devices.

“You always forget about human means. Basil isn’t above paying some random human to come in here,” he chided.

He was right. We had to make sure human security measures, as well as all the supernatural ones, covered the entire club. We could afford the extra expense, especially with lives at stake.

As soon as Cody was in sight, I rushed to get my arms around him. I hugged him fiercely before turning to Toth. Refusing to listen to his grumbling, I hugged my other son just as tightly. Hela made a chirping noise at me, but ran to Damon for pets. The shifters didn’t react to her presence, having met her, but the elves made a few noises of pleasure. The cat was going to be spoiled.

“This is not your fault,” I whispered in Toth’s ear.

It was there, barely perceptible, but Toth relaxed a fraction. He truly had believed it was his fault. “Thank you,” he muttered. “I just don’t remember telling him anyone’s names.”

“He probably made you forget. I’ve told you this over and over. Jorgoth won’t blame you,” Cody said reasonably, like he hadn’t just been forced out of his home thanks to the witch.

“Where is Jorgoth?” Barr asked. Honestly, I’d forgotten the hellhound was there. He had stayed silent the entire time, just watching us all pace the club making calls. To start with, he had followed the witches with his eyes until some elves had turned up. The elves were just as fascinated with him as most hadn’t seen a hellhound before.

“He’s been arrested. That’s why we took so long to arrive. I reported him to the

guards, so when he got back to his home, they picked him up,” Toth said. Jorgoth lived in a house in the castle lands. Far too close to Cody. “He’ll be kept in the cells until he can either be claimed, mated, or Basil is dead.”

A trickle of sympathy worked its way through me for the poor demon. The cells were comfortable. It wasn’t his fault he’d ended up with a witch master after all. This was just a precaution. The magics around the cells would stop Basil calling Jorgoth to him.

“Come on,” I urged. “Let’s get us all settled in.”

Protective

Amorandes

It took hours before Alpha Blake and the elves deemed the club and apartment safe enough for us for the night. They would return the next day, and likely every day after, to check the warding and slowly build up the layers of the spell.

As much as I would have liked to keep the club closed as all this went on, the omegas in the area deserved to have somewhere safe for them to go through their heats.

It made for much more work because every employee would need to be vetted, then given security spells. We would have magic oozing from our pores if Damon was in charge.

“Babe, the cameras have arrived. Could you help me set them up?” Damon held up a box in one hand, a drill in the other.

I cocked my head, confused. “What do you want me to do with that?”

“Well... with you looking at me like that, I’m not putting you in charge of the drill.” His laugh rang out, the first sign of his good humor returning after all the stress of the last day. “Could you go full demon and boost me up so I can mount the cameras?”

“For you? Anything!” I sketched a low bow, making him laugh again, then removed the shirt I’d been wearing. My pants had an elastic waist, so they were unlikely to rip when I let my full demon out. Damon clearly wanted the extra height and strength I

had in that form.

I let go of the magic keeping me in my human form and just... let it all out. The tail, horns, ears, eyes, they all appeared as my body stretched to my true height. Finally, my wings unfurled. I sighed. It was such a relief to let myself be in this form as I was born.

“Fuck, you are so hot like that.” Damon’s eyes darkened with desire. “Let’s just get this done and maybe we can go test that bed out. I was too exhausted to appreciate just how glad I am to have you.” His voice lowered, getting husky, “I do have you, don’t I, Mori? You’re mine and just mine, aren’t you?”

“Yours. Only yours.” I felt my cock thicken, the desire between us palpable. “Camera, then you can show me how much I belong to you.”

I bent at the knee so Damon could use it as a step. He grasped my wings, making me shudder. “I’ll remember that for another time,” he whispered in my ear as he clambered onto my shoulders .

Together, we made quick work of mounting three cameras in the box to hidden spaces. These were motion activated, giving us notice that someone was approaching the apartment. They couldn’t be knocked out with magic, and with Damon’s clever positioning, they likely wouldn’t see them.

Damon’s relief at having them was easy to sense. “Done! Here,” he leaned down with the drill and box, then in a move I couldn’t have predicted, stood to his full height on my shoulders. “Stay still a sec.” Damon leaped, did a somersault in midair, then landed with a flourish in front of me. “Ta da!”

Shock had me frozen for a second. Damon’s face fell a bit until I got a hold of myself. “Wow! That was fantastic, Damon!” I praised.

“Yeah? One family I was with had me doing gymnastics.” Damon gave a shy smile as he remembered them. “It’s come in handy more than once.”

“You’re good at it.”

“Not very useful though, is it? Now that I’m not a hitman.”

“I’m sure you could find a legal use for it.” I grinned. “You could do an acrobatic show in the club. Be a pole dancer. ”

He laughed again, a sound I was growing addicted to. “Maybe. I’ll think of something. Now come on, I want you to ride my cock with your wings out.”

I had to pause to adjust myself at the visual.

Damon led the way to the shower, which was built for shifters, so was bigger than human ones, something I was grateful for as I stripped and followed him under the spray. Still, I had to put my wings away to avoid hitting Damon. We really needed a wet room with multiple shower heads for them.

We didn’t touch, a deliberate tease of what was to come. Just brushed against each other as we made quick work of washing. It was almost more erotic than getting my hands on him, because Damon’s eyes didn’t leave mine once. He just smirked as he watched me.

The water switched off. Damon held out a towel to me, brushing his fingers against mine as I reached for it. I made quick work of drying, always keeping my eyes on him. I felt like prey in the sights of a lion. Yet I couldn’t wait for Damon to devour me.

Finally, he reached for my hand. When we touched, I got that hint of a spark I usually

did when touching him after some time with no contact. It was like static that built between us, then discharged as soon as our skin met.

He yanked me closer, stealing a kiss. “Get on the bed. I want you stretched out, wings and all, if that’s comfortable.”

The good thing about shifters was the bigger beds. I set some pillows out to cushion my wing bones, let them out, pushed them to their full width, and lay down.

“Uh-uh, face down, Mori.” Somehow it was hotter when he said my name, rather than baby. There was no confusion over who he was with. Who he wanted in his bed. I did as I was told, tucking my wings in as I turned, my face nestled in a pillow.

Damon began his teasing with feather light touches, followed by kisses along each of my wings, then down my spine to the base of my tail. There, he licked a tantalizing path around it, sending shivers through me. I bit at the pillow as he trailed further down, licks and kisses giving way to sucking marks and tiny bites.

A hand parted my cheeks. Damon ran his tongue down over my crease, around my hole, then down my taint. “Spread those legs, Mori, hold that ass open for me.” Damn, he was sexy when he spoke to me with a growl in his voice. I was so hard I was sure I was leaking on the comforter.

I did what I was told, earning myself a “good boy,” that wrenched a gasp from my lips. “Oh, you like that, do you, Mori?” Damon blanketed my body, the warmth of his skin made me moan as he whispered filthy things in my ear. “You want to be my good boy and earn your reward?” He licked along my tapered, pointed ear. That time, I shuddered and made an incoherent sound. “Or do you want to be a bad boy that gets punished?”

Don’t get me wrong, spanking is fun, but I was here for all the pleasure Damon could

give me. In such a short time, he had learned all the ways to make me sing. “Good, I want to be good for you.”

“A good boy for me? Say it properly, Mori.” He nipped at my ear.

“Damon!” I cried. “I want to be your good boy.”

He cupped my cheek, turning my head towards his lips so he could kiss me sweetly.

“You say all the right things. Such a good boy. Now, do as you’re told.”

Quickly, I spread my legs as wide as I could, then held my cheeks apart. Not a hint of shame at how needy I was to be all that Damon wanted.

With a sound of pleasure, Damon resumed his teasing, tracing the same path over my wings, lighting up all the sensitive nerves. He hit every spot on my back that had me arching into his lips .

“Such a pretty hole. There for me to use whenever I want, isn’t it, Mori?”

“Yes, Damon. Whenever you like. Anytime.”

“Maybe you aren’t a good boy. Maybe you’re just my slut. My needy, needy slut.” He spoke the words against my ass, the hot air of his breath blowing against my hole, driving me out of my mind.

“Please,” I begged.

“Please, what, Mori?” he teased as he caressed my ass and kissed along my crack, avoiding the one place I really wanted him to touch me.

“I’ll be anything you want. Just... fuck... touch me, Damon. I need you.”

“You are so perfect.” With those words, he finally licked over my hole. I went rigid, then boneless as he licked and sucked at my pucker. He teased me with the tip of his tongue before backing away.

“Damon!”

His chuckle was warm against my entrance as he plunged his tongue inside, then went to town with more nips and long laps of that wicked tongue.

“Lube up a little, baby. Get yourself all wet for my fingers. I want to open you nicely for my cock.”

“Fuck!” He was saying all the right things. I was going to shame myself and all my incubi ancestors by coming all over this comforter before he could get his cock inside me. Good thing I had an excellent recovery time.

I did as I was told and didn’t remove a hand from my ass, even though I desperately wanted to squeeze my cock and stave off my orgasm. My legs must have been inching closed to hide my struggle, as Damon batted them apart.

“Uh-uh, keep them spread like a good boy.” He reached between my legs, cupping my balls. With a firm grip, he tugged, the bite of pain bringing me back from the edge. “That’s what my good boy needed, wasn’t it? Gotta save that for when I’m inside you. I want you to come on my cock.”

It was just as well he still had a hand on my balls, because really, I wouldn’t have been held responsible for my actions then.

“Please, Damon.”

“I’m getting there, baby. Gotta make sure that hole is loose, so I don’t hurt you.” He

pushed a finger inside. “So wet, just like I wanted. Aren’t you just perfect?”

“Only for you.”

“A sweet talker, too.” He added another finger, fucking the two of them in and out of me. “Hmm, you are so quick to relax for me. You have such a needy hole.”

I was going to die if he kept talking to me like that. All I could do was moan and let him use my hole. Another finger.

“Four and then I’ll give you what you really want.”

There was a slight burn as he pushed in the fourth finger, twisting and pulsing in and out of my ass.

“Tell me what you want, Mori.”

“I want your cock,” my voice came out all raspy with need.

He didn’t wait, just climbed over me, set the head at my entrance and with one smooth glide, thrust inside. “Shit, you feel good,” he muttered against my neck. “You’ve got me so hot, Mori. I’m going to blow so fast. It’s all good, though, because you can suck me until I’m hard again, then ride my cock with your wings out like I wanted.”

“Yes!” I would have agreed to anything at that point.

As he talked, he continued rocking in and out of me, sending me higher and higher with each push of his hips against my ass. He felt so good inside me, like he belonged there.

Each thrust of his hips became faster and harder until I felt that telltale change in rhythm. Damon was about to spill inside me. I moaned, then came with him as he bit down on my ear. “Mine. My good boy,” he growled.

Then I passed out.

When I came to, I found Damon smiling fondly at me. He also looked proud, as anyone would for making an incubus pass out. It was my turn to show off my skills.

Just like Damon wanted, I sucked him to full hardness, and then rode that glorious cock until we were both sated and sweaty.

We showered again, then settled back in bed, with a clean comforter after our afternoon delight.

“Should we go look over the plans, or check the cameras or something?” Damon asked as he cuddled me close.

“No, I want to stay here and just enjoy some time just like this. Maybe take a nap. The last couple of days have been a lot.”

“Hmm,” Damon agreed. “A nap sounds great. I just... feel like I should be doing something.”

I kissed his chest and snuggled closer. There was no way that Damon was getting out of this bed without spending some more time cuddling me! We needed a moment to just be.

“You know what I think it is?”

“No. What? ”

“Something about Cody set off your protective instinct. Ever since you met him, you’ve been in protector mode. Always looking out for him, always putting yourself last.” I paused, trying to figure out what to say. “I guess you aren’t used to trusting anyone other than Parker to look after you. But here we are, my family, Toth, the shifters, even the witches and elves, are in your corner, making sure everything will be okay.”

Damon’s eyes closed as he willed a heavy emotion away. “Yeah,” he sighed. “I just need time to learn to trust it.”

“You know how you could start?”

He eyed me, a grin playing at his lips. “How?”

“By having a nap with me before we look over the plans.”

The smile broke out. “Okay,” he huffed.

I got my nap and my cuddles. My protective ex-hitman lover was sweeter than he first appeared, and I couldn’t love him more for it.

Re-Opening Night

Damon

Heatwave was ready for the public by the end of March. It had taken a couple of weeks of hard labor to get it to the exacting standards Mori required for all his businesses.

The experience, renovating something, had opened my eyes to a more serious side of Mori. My boyfriend, lover, whatever, still charmed the pants off, figuratively, everyone he met, woman, man, and everything in between. To me, though, he was the same Mori I'd gotten to know at Toth's castle. He gave me the chance to see all sides of him, not just the image he projected to the public. That Mori was very outgoing, made friends with all, was always there to help people. My Mori was determined, fiercely protective, loyal, stubborn and sometimes had a touch of sarcastic humor.

Mori had encouraged me to be a part of everything included in the renovations. He'd asked me my opinions about everything from wallpaper to flooring. When we weren't discussing things with the decorator, we were holding interviews for the staff who wanted to return, then for new staff to cover the slots left by unsuitable returning candidates. There were a lot of them, unfortunately.

Weeding out the alphaholes, betas with alphahole tendencies, and those who were easily influenced was mind-numbing yet essential work. No one wanted to allow situations to happen where an omega was forced into something when they couldn't really consent. Heatwave had been closed when the former management had allowed an alpha who was stalking an omega to coerce the omega into passing some of their

heat with him. The omega had escaped, thankfully with no long term added complications like a kid. I couldn't imagine being that vulnerable and having to find strength from somewhere to get through it. I didn't envy omegas at all.

All around us, the club had risen from the ashes of the previous incarnation into something beautiful, a sanctuary designed around omegas and their needs during their heats.

Some liked coming to the club to be the spectacle, so we had new viewing areas. Others liked the convenience of the club, with a choice of alphas and betas on staff. That part had changed little, except we were more sure of the intentions of the women and men that staffed the club .

Our biggest change was to use female staff more. The manager was a beta female, who I just knew would take no shit from the alpha males. We'd bonded over her mentions of enforcer training in another pack. She wasn't a member of the Sweetwater pack, yet. Steph was new to the area, had the pass through rights, and was considering her options. I wanted to introduce her to Parker, just for him to have another shifter friend. Steph already had a mate, another beta, and a new member of our security team, Liam.

"Are you ready?" Mori asked, pulling me out of my thoughts.

I straightened my bow tie. We had gone all out for the opening night, gathering demons, witches, and shifters to the club to see all we had changed.

"Ready as I'll ever be. I don't know why you made me co-owner. I'm just a human. Not a very good one, either."

"You are not just an anything. You are my Damon, the best human I know."

“Mori, I’m a trained killer.” I raised a skeptical eyebrow at him, willing him to deny that fact.

“No, you’re an ex-hitman, my son’s best friend, brother to Parker, and the person I love most in the world.”

My heart caught in my throat. Over the last month, we had danced around our feelings, never truly saying the words while clearly, we both felt them strongly. “Mori...”

“You don’t have to say it back, Damon, not if you’re not ready. I know how you feel about me,” he pressed a hand over his heart, “right here, from the moment you kneeled in the dirt and ruined that suit to make me feel better.” His lips quirked as if he was holding back a laugh.

I was still struggling with my emotions. No one had ever told me they loved me like that. I kept the feelings locked away in a battered cage, desperate to give someone the key. Then Mori had come along and shown me I was the one that needed to unlock it.

“Mori, I love you, too. I’ve never been as sure of anything as I am of you.” With a few steps, I was in front of him. I cupped the back of his neck to pull him down for a deep kiss.

We must have gotten caught up in the moment, as it was broken when we heard a throat clearing behind us. “Um, Mori? Damon? It’s time to go.” Barr stood in the doorway, looking dashing in the tuxedo I’d ordered for him. We had taken the trip to a tailor together so he could be measured properly. Neither I, nor Mori, had wanted to risk another demon coming in. We trusted Barr and his hellhound abilities were more useful than fighting skills were, especially up against a witch. Barr was naturally more resistant to magic, a talent I was a tad jealous of.

Mori planted another peck on my lips before unleashing his beaming smile on Barr. “I’m so excited to show everyone the new and improved Heatwave!”

He led us through the club with its navy walls, mahogany floors, and night sky like ceilings. Past the booths, each with new high-tech screen doors which could go clear or opaque depending on the mood of the occupants, each with sound limiting charms and so many spells it was a wonder shifters could enter them. Mori had asked some to check the facilities out and was met with a resounding thumbs up.

In each booth were dispensers for drinks, snacks, towels, anything an omega would need. It was totally up to them to tailor it to their needs. They could see out when the door was opaque and have the thrill of being close to being exposed.

The private rooms had a safe word spell on them. All the omega had to do was say this particular word, and security would come running. The alphas and even the betas that shared heats with the clients, weren’t told the word and it would be changed every so often.

For the demons, there was a lounge full of overstuffed sofas, oversized chairs to accommodate wings, and everything a demon could desire, where they could enjoy a drink and just soak up the lust floating in the air, letting them feed in luxury. We still didn’t know how many shifters would be willing to let a demon take them through a heat, but personally, I knew once you went demon, you never went back.

Time slipped away as Mori and I greeted the guests, each one having been checked by security before they could enter.

We knew full well that opening the club would attract all kinds of attention, both good and bad, so we had contingency plan after contingency plan until we believed we were covered.

Wrong.

All wrong.

Just before midnight, Basil stalked through the doors, all arrogant confidence in an admittedly decent looking tux. His wild red hair had been slicked back from his face, highlighting sharp cheekbones and sunken, boring blue eyes. Basil was plain looking, really. Thyme got all the looks in that family. But he more than made up for it with power.

During my time with supernaturals, I'd learned to sense power. It oozed from Basil, suffocating all in his path as he took a tour of the club. The witch with him had a dazed look on their face, making me suspect magic had been used on them. Clearly, not all the Northharbor coven witches could protect themselves like we'd been promised .

Basil picked up followers as he rounded the club. Someone served him a glass of champagne, which he took with a glower when the server spat in it. Gross, but I liked the sentiment.

One by one, witches and shifters spoke to Basil before leaving him alone. Why were none attacking him? This was our chance to end him.

“Mori, why—?”

“It's the spells that are in place to prevent us from physical and magical attacks. In here he's untouchable.” Mori's face told of his fury. We should have expected Basil would come.

“Fuck!”

“Ah, it’s good to see you in the flesh, Amorandes. Don’t worry, I know your crown keeps you safe from me. What about you, Damon? You led me on quite the chase. Can you resist my magic?”

There was a tug deep in my chest as Basil set his eyes on me. His expression gave nothing away about his feelings, yet the twitch in his eye told me of his rage when he couldn’t control me.

“I see you were prepared. Well done.” Another tug. This time, his eyes flared with surprise. Basil backed away. “Well, it was lovely to meet you both, but something has come up and I must return home and make new plans.”

What the fuck was he going on about ?

“No! You can’t leave! Why are you doing this? Cody wants nothing to do with witch powers, just leave the coven and him alone.”

Basil whirled back around, retraced his steps, his eyes crackled with his anger, his magic sparking uselessly at his fingertips. “The Northarbor coven is mine! Once I get it back, I’m going to make sure witches are placed where they belong; at the top. No more answering to shifters. We don’t answer to elves. We own the demons,” he spat.

“When I rise to power again, I’ll make sure even royalty can be used as the tools they were born to be.” He flicked a glance at Mori while he shook, barely restraining himself. “Cody should never have been born. He’s an abomination. That’s why he has to die.”

Mori looked horror-struck and had frozen in place.

I was ending this now.

“You, well, you were an unexpected complication. I’ll be seeing you soon... Damon.” With his last threat, Basil began to run. He fled for the door.

No. He wasn’t getting away from me.

From the secret pocket inside my tux jacket, I whipped out my favorite gun, flicked off the safety, took aim, and fired.

Nothing.

I tried again.

Still nothing .

Basil was almost at the door. I re-checked the clip. Full.

Mori laid his hand over mine, pushing the gun down so it was pointed to the floor. “It won’t work. The spells prevent guns from firing.”

“Fuck!”

The demented witch escaped through the door completely unchallenged. Mori wrapped his arms around me as I raged inwardly for not expecting this. Basil had completely blindsided us, and we’d let him.

Fucking magic.

Aftermath

Amorandes

Damon stood stock still, his anger palpable. It tainted the air, once full of laughter and joy for a new chapter for Heatwave, now poisoned with the rot Basil left behind.

Finally, after a full minute where I feared Basil had ruined everything, Damon softened against me. He clumsily returned his gun to his pocket, then wrapped his arms around me so we were holding each other tight.

“I just wanted it over,” he muttered against my chest. “Wanted to just kill him so no one else has to. Thyme shouldn’t have to kill his brother. Cody is too innocent to take a life.”

“I am not!” Cody cried, advancing on Damon, who raised his head to look at his friend. I was gratified when Damon didn’t move away from me. “If it’s between us and him, I’m picking us. I won’t lose sleep over it, either.”

He wrapped his arms around us both, before Toth appeared at his side and whisked him away to safety .

“Should we close the club?” I asked.

“No. He’s made his point. There’s no show when it’s just shifters around. He came tonight just to show he could.” Damon eased out of my hold, kissed me softly, then took my hand. “Come on, we need to tell the others what he said. Then we are getting

back to your party. You did all this hard work—“

“We did,” I interrupted. “Both of us. As partners. This is partly yours, too.”

While I knew it made Damon uncomfortable to remind him, I’d put his name on this place along with mine. Some of that was because of human laws not recognizing demon ownership of property, even as a royal.

“Okay. We did all this work, so he isn’t going to spoil it.”

The Northharbor witches, along with the Sweetwater Alpha and his security, gathered together. They looked shell-shocked.

“I can’t believe he had the audacity!” Oak shook his head.

“Oh, I can,” Thyme said, swirling the remains of his cocktail in his glass. “This is on brand for him.” Thyme cast his gaze, which caught on Damon, narrowing slightly. “What exactly did he say to get you so rattled?”

Damon recounted all Basil had said, even the confusing words about him. How was Damon a complication? Had Basil sensed the other in my lover? Parker had searched for Damon’s past. Until he entered the foster care system, there were no records of him even existing. They weren’t sure if Damon was even his real name. It didn’t matter, it was his chosen one.

Deep in my heart, I knew my lover wasn’t all human. I was still leaning towards the fae. It wouldn’t have been outside of their nature to switch a baby or birth one with a human and abandon them both. Perhaps his other nature was further back and his mother just couldn’t cope. She had surrendered him rather than let him suffer. He should have had a wonderful life with caring parents, but people let him down, over and over, they gave up on him, or changed their minds. It was like he had been

cursed.

The word cursed rang inside me as truth. I didn't understand where the sense came from, it just reared up sometimes, never in time to stop me making some truly spectacular mistakes in my life, though. As long as it was there to help Damon, I didn't care.

Thyme seemed hung up on the part about Damon. I recalled some of the times I'd caught Thyme studying Damon closely. Was he aware of what Damon was ?

"Say that again, but tell me exactly how he said it, his face, everything," Thyme demanded, voice harder and more serious than I'd ever heard it.

Damon huffed, but went to repeat himself.

"No," Oak cut in. "This is getting us nowhere. We need to get you all somewhere safe."

"Nope." Damon's expression dared Oak to suggest that again. "We're not letting him ruin all Mori's, I mean, our hard work. The club is safe. The apartment is as safe as we can make it. If Basil comes again, I'll be ready for him."

"How?" Oak challenged. "Your gun didn't work."

"It didn't," Damon agreed. "But there are always loopholes. I'll protect Mori, Cody and Toth with my last breath."

The air felt like it had been punched from my lungs. "No, Damon, please. Don't speak like that." I reached for his hand. He felt so far away, like he was shutting himself off from me. "We'll do this together. Me and you, okay?"

Finally, he let me have his hand. “Yeah. Together.”

“Since Cody is Basil’s prime target, I think he should get out of the area. The demon realm isn’t safe. Where can they go where they will be protected?” Blake asked. His team was on edge. They probably wanted to get Blake out of there. This wasn’t the shifters’ fight. At least not yet. It might never be .

Silence stretched out between the group. We were settled in one of the lounges made for the demons. Most of the other guests had left, some without even realizing just who had walked among them as if he owned the place. By the magic, I hated Basil. Hated his threats against my son. For the words he had spoken to Damon. Something about Basil’s reaction had shaken Damon to his core. I hated that he had that power.

Where could Cody and Toth go where they would be safe and protected? The demon realm was out, of course, just because we didn’t know if Basil had any other demon names. Toth wouldn’t be comfortable in the elven world, Cody would be too far away for me. No, they couldn’t go there.

Suddenly, the ideal place came to me. “Vegas!” I cried at the same time Damon did.

I turned to my lover, seeing a grin on his face. It soothed me that we were on the same page with this.

“Great idea,” Alpha Blake stood. “We’ll leave you to your preparations. If you need us, please just call. I’ll send a couple of elves to you tomorrow. They can try to find loopholes for you, Damon. We want him gone as much as you do.” He gave Damon and then me hugs. I wasn’t aware we were on such friendly terms, but I liked it. I liked the young Alpha .

“Okay, I have triplets who are giving their papa a hard time. I need to go rescue my mate.”

The Alpha and his team left quickly.

“Damon, could I have a word?” Thyme asked hesitantly.

“Could it wait for a bit? Please? I just need a minute with Mori. We need to get Cody out of here before you say whatever you need to.”

Thyme sighed. “It’s waited this long. I suspected before. I tried to tell you what I—You know what? It can wait a bit longer.”

It was Damon’s turn to sigh. “Sorry I dodged your attempts.” Thyme had tried to speak to Damon alone before? Why? Also, why was Damon so reluctant to listen to the witch? Was it just because of what he was?

The witch waved him off. “It’s fine.”

A distant clock rang out. April first. I laughed bitterly, an odd sound, not one I was accustomed to making. “Basil’s timing was off. An hour later and we could have passed it off as one of those April Fools’ jokes.”

Damon’s smile was an echo of his usual one. “If only this was one big prank.”

“I’ll wait here. Maybe get another cocktail,” Thyme said before heading up to the bar.

“Do you want me there while you speak to Thyme?” I wrapped an arm around Damon’s waist, letting him know I was there for him .

“Please. I just... something tells me it’s big. Life changing. I... I can’t take anymore. Can’t we just have peace? This was supposed to be a fresh start.”

“Whatever happens, I’m here, okay?”

“Okay.”

Cody did not take the news well and kind of threw a tantrum, which was a first for me on my parenting journey. Then I got to put my foot down as his father, another first, and insist that he go far away so he could be safe.

Then there was a lot of back and forth about putting myself in danger but not allowing him to take the same risks where Damon had to step in and count all the ways I was in a better position to defend myself and others thanks to the training of Keren and Gregoris, the man we were sending my precious son to.

Things with Gregoris may have not ended well, yet he was still my friend, the person who had been by my side for so long I hardly knew how to function without him. I’d managed, though I still missed him with a fierce ache. Having Damon with me helped with the pain .

Gregoris was the only one I could trust to look after Cody properly. Alongside me, he had watched Cody grow up. Now he was mated, he would have a new name, making him safe from Basil. Only Parker would know that name.

Finally, Cody agreed with a huff. Toth thanked us quietly, then joined Cody in their room to pack. Damon sat with me on the couch as Barr lingered in the kitchen, eating some leftovers from the opening. I was glad the food wouldn’t go to waste.

“Barr, would you take them to Vegas, then return to us?” I asked, catching his attention.

He swallowed the bite of sandwich he’d just taken. “I, uh, well, I need to spend some time at home first, to replenish before I return to you. Would that be okay, Mori?”

“Oh, of course! Sorry, I hadn’t thought.” Hellhounds didn’t have the same way of

recharging their magic energy as incubi did. He would be running low after creating two portals across the country, dangerously low. It was better he recharged first.

“If he’s not going to be here, then we’re leaving Hela for you. She can protect you, can’t you, Hela?” Cody cooed to the hellcat. The beast chirped and purred at him, rubbed herself around his legs, then went to stand guard. “She’s very smart. ”

Our goodbyes were long and tear-filled. I cried the most, I’m unashamed to admit. My son was going away. We were going to be parted for an unknown amount of time. Visits would only happen if Barr could make them work. We couldn’t fly to him or use another work around in case Basil caught our trail. Cody was too important to risk because of my delicate feelings. I’d lived without him for a long time. I could handle it until Basil was dead.

The apartment was quiet, with Cody, Toth, and Barr gone. Hela still stood guard. All I wanted to do was take Damon to bed.

“Why can’t we just go to bed?” Damon whined, echoing my thoughts. It brought a smile out. “Why did I say I’d listen to Thyme?”

“Because, despite what you say, you are a good person who cares about others. Thyme clearly needs to get this off his chest.”

“Fine, let’s just go so we can get to bed.”

I followed Damon back into the club and deeper into the lounge where Thyme waited. Oak lingered, as did a couple of the other witches. I barely paid attention to them, my senses picking up on Thyme’s deep unease and a trickle of fear.

“Thanks for coming back. I hope Cody got away okay.” Thyme forced a smile.

“Can we just... I’m tired. ”

Thyme cleared his throat, then reached for a glass of water. The cocktail glass still full. “Okay. Goddess, this is so hard.”

“Please,” Damon sighed, exhausted. “Just spit it out.”

“Damon... I knew your mother.”

April Fools?

Damon

What the fuck?

“You knew my mother,” I repeated, my voice sounding numb to my own ears. This entire situation was beyond fucked up. The mess with Basil had been feeling off kilter, with only Mori to keep me grounded. He held my hand as we sat opposite Thyme on one of those ridiculous lounging sofas.

“I did.” Thyme’s gaze searched my face. Was he looking for the traces of the person he once knew?

“What happened to her? Why did she give me up?” Those questions had haunted me my whole life. Every time I left one family to go to the next, I asked myself if there was just something about me that made it easy for people to give up on me.

Until Magnus and Parker, I’d had no one to call family. Now, I had Mori, Cody, Toth, as well as Parker and Gregoris. We seemed to keep finding people and absorbing them into our group. Shifters, demons, a witch-demon hybrid, and me, the human .

Thyme went so still, it looked like he was barely breathing. “Damon, whatever you’re thinking, I swear it wasn’t that. Fern, your mom, loved you so much. All she thought about was you. I—I lost touch with her after you were born. If I’d known sooner, I might have been able to find you.”

It still blew my mind that Thyme was much older than me. He looked to be around twenty-one, with a sweet, innocent face. His ethereal looks hid a lot of pain and secrets. Like knowing my mom.

“How long have you known about who my mom was?”

He studied me again. What was he looking for? The ghost of my mom wasn't going to suddenly appear! She hadn't when I'd begged for her to come get me for years after she left me at that office. I didn't even remember her face, or what she sounded like. My mom was a vague shape, shadows of memories, a life of knowing I'd been loved at one point. It just wasn't enough for her to keep me.

“When we first met, there was something about you.” He picked up the water as if to take a sip, then set it down. “After the attack, when we touched, I felt a trace of deep magic. This stuff was practically etched on your soul, it was so deep.” Thyme let out a heavy breath. “I pushed it aside, and you,” his eyes met mine, “were careful not to touch me again, so I put it out of my head as residual magic from breaking the portal.”

“That was weeks ago,” Mori said with a frown. I hated that expression on his face. It didn't belong there.

“I know,” Thyme stated simply. “So I had people look into Damon. It all aligned. Fern, the timeline. It all made sense, but I still didn't want to believe it.”

“But you believe it now?” I scoffed. “Why now? What's changed?”

“Basil.” Thyme slid from the seat and shuffled on his knees. He stopped on the floor in front of me. “Damon, I'm so sorry.”

“I don't understand. What does Basil have to do with this?”

“He knew. About you, your mom, my transition. He knew about it all. I thought it was our dad that was the problem, but it was Basil the entire time. Fern knew, and she protected you. It killed her.”

Panic seized my breath. I clutched a hand to my chest, wrinkling my tux. Breath wouldn't come. “I'm here, Damon,” Mori soothed, his touch calmed me enough to take in much needed air.

“Thyme. What the fuck are you saying?”

The witch looked at me with pity in his gaze from his place at my feet. “I'm saying that you are a witch, Damon. And you're my brother.”

I shot to my feet, causing Thyme to tumble backwards into the low table. The sound of glasses clinking then shattering followed me as I stalked to the other side of the room, my hands in my hair. I tugged on the sandy blond strands, the bite of pain tethering me to reality. This was wrong. A mistake.

For a minute, the club was silent as they let me stifle the scream working its way up my throat. I worked for control, falling back on my training. Emotions clouded judgment. Those with poor judgment, without all the information, made stupid mistakes and got themselves dead.

Stupid was one thing I wasn't.

A witch... no... I couldn't be.

Thyme and Basil were my brothers? I wanted to laugh at the lunacy of the thought. There was no way. Sure, I could have taken after my mother, but we were nothing alike.

A familiar hand rested on my shoulder. Mori turned me to wrap his arms around me. Mori was safety and love. With him near me, everything would be okay. I finally took a full breath .

“I’ve got you, Damon.” He pulled back to meet my eyes. “Whatever you are doesn’t matter to me. Witch, demon, shifter, elf, ogre—“ His lips twitched with a barely suppressed smile.

“Ogre?” My eyebrow raised in question.

“Just one of the many ideas I floated around to explain how special you are.” He punctuated it with a kiss to my forehead. It felt like a balm washing over me. “I honestly thought you were part fae. You’re just so pretty.”

“At this point, I’d take that over this. How can I be related to them? I don’t understand.” I rested my head against his chest. He was in that in between state with only some of his demon features out. I wanted my full demon lover, but that tux he wore was too splendid to ruin with the transformation.

“Right now, we don’t have the full story. Why don’t you come back and listen to Thyme?” I was grateful Mori didn’t call him my brother. “Once we have all the information, we can decide what to do.”

“What do you mean?”

Mori looked at me with sympathy. “Damon, you have magic. You might want to have it for when Basil comes again. If he knows who you are...”

He didn’t finish that sentence. Didn’t have to. There was no way I’d join Basil on his pathetic quest for more power and domination over the witches, shifters and demons. I was an unknown threat. An additional complication, as he’d said.

Fuck!

This was all so messed up.

“Okay,” I said, reaching for his hand.

Together we walked back over to the sofas where Oak and Thyme were in quiet, though heated, conversation. Guess I wasn’t the only one blindsided by the news.

Bitterly, I sat in front of Thyme, waiting for him to destroy all I thought I’d known about my life. At least I knew I had Mori there to pick up the pieces after.

“I’m sorry, Damon. This situation is fucked up. If it wasn’t for Basil recognizing you, I’m not sure I would have told you. Yes, you deserve to know, but I also... well, let’s just say your... aversion to witches has been noticed.”

“You try growing up in some of the homes I did over the years and see how you turn out!” I spat. “It’s not like they put you in therapy, it’s the fucking foster system,” I huffed, settling back against Mori. “Most days I was just grateful for food and a warm bed. None of them cared I was gay, they just were scared of people like you and your brother with your magic taking their control,” I spat bitterly. “Or they were the cast aside ones. So jealous of those with power with theirs taken from them, they taught us to hate you. ”

As an adult, I saw what their hatred was: fear. They were at the bottom of the food chain with no protections against the magic witches could wield against them. Even the ex-witches were vulnerable, making them lash out. I had tried hard to not let my feelings show in my interactions with the witches. They couldn’t help how they were born. The conditioning was hard to shake, though.

Stubbornness had me grasping at straws. “How do I know for sure you’re telling the

truth? That I really am your brother.” Accepting that was easier than calling myself a witch. My upbringing had really done a number on me. I was trying, goddammit, this had just been a fucking long emotional day.

“I can take a hair, twine it with mine and do a spell,” Thyme offered.

“Right, that means nothing to me because I don’t know what a non related result would look like.”

Oak held out a freshly plucked hair. “Thyme can demonstrate it with mine. After he proves he’s your brother, I need you to listen to him. I get you’ve been through a lot, but we need to plan. You’ll need to be trained—“

“Woah! Hold on! One thing at a time.”

“Of course!” Thyme said brightly. He did the spell quickly, one of his hairs wrapped around Oak’s dark strand. The light from the magic flared red. “Red is no match. Green is what we’re looking for.”

“Right.” I reached up and pulled at a hair, taking three with it. With one hand, I rubbed the spot as the other passed the hair over.

Thyme repeated the spell, word for word, the same. Green.

Brothers. I’d just gained two, one of which I might have to kill before this was all over. Fratricide wasn’t on my list of reasons for going to hell, just as well I didn’t believe in God.

Wishing this to all have been a dream, I fixed Thyme with a look and said, “Tell me about my mom.”

He quickly complied.

“I met Fern when I was twenty. She was a little older, around twenty-five, I think. She wasn’t part of the coven because her family had been cast out. Her father disagreed with my father about how things should be done. Her father was less powerful than mine. You know how these things go with covens.”

The witch’s nerves were palpable.

“For a long time I’d been struggling with being in a female body. I was powerful, next in line to lead the coven over Basil because of how much power I had. Did you know women generally have more magic?”

I shook my head .

“Our goddess venerates the female form. So you can imagine I was under the stress of being the heir, living under the expectations set for me, and hating what I saw when I looked in the mirror.”

Inside, I felt pity for that young Thyme. With all the struggles he faced just to live his life freely.

“Fern was hanging around with some people I fell in with. We made friends quickly. Because I loved her, just as friends, not more at that point, I begged my father to consider taking her into the coven. Not her parents, though. She would have to cut ties with them. He agreed, and Fern was brought back in.”

After a quick drink, Thyme continued.

“Quickly it became clear that father was attracted to her. She was pretty and her well was deep.” At my frown, he added, “She had a lot of magic.” He continued. “They

began an affair. He'd had many by that point, only a couple got pregnant, none of them kept the babies. Later, I found out Basil was threatening them. Scaring them into ending the pregnancies and paying them off. When Fern became pregnant, she came to me. She begged me to help her hide from my father in return for helping me with my transition. She got together another couple of witches she used to hang with, and they did the spell with me."

I could only imagine my mother, a woman only slightly younger than I was now, taken in by a man much older with so much influence, then hearing the whispers of what Basil had done to others like her. Fern sounded like she had a good heart. She had helped Thyme become his authentic self.

"With a few working the spell, the drain on my magic wasn't nearly as bad. I'm no slouch in the power department, though I'm nowhere like Poppy and Zinna, like I used to be. Being this," he pointed down himself, "was worth losing what I gave up."

"It sucks that there was such a high price."

"That's the thing, Damon. Magic always has a price. Depends on if you're willing to pay it." He shrugged like it was no big deal.

"We believed no one knew Fern was pregnant. Father was absolutely livid she had helped me transition. He had been dead set against it. For what she had done, he cast her out of the coven. Nearly cast me out, too. I was sent away for a while, so he didn't have to see me, which suited me fine. I took Fern, and we crossed the country. We were still concerned about Basil, and she began having visions as her pregnancy progressed. When you were born..."

Thyme's voice cracked.

"Goddess, you were so cute! Fern wouldn't settle in the hospital. Kept saying we had

to leave. Had to bind you. She made me swear I'd never tell a soul until you came to me. We left as soon as we could. Went to Canada for a bit. There, Fern gathered all we needed for the spell." His face changed. Sadness washed over him. "She was different after you were born, distant. All she could focus on was your safety. She loved you so much. You followed her every move when she was in the room."

He took a drink of water. "We argued a lot but, eventually, I gave in. We performed the spell on you when you were just a couple of months old. Fern poured so much of herself in there, she was drained for weeks afterwards. It affected her health. I did what I could. It—it wasn't enough."

My heart hurt for my mother. For having to make that choice. She really had loved me.

"I got a call when you were five months old and Fern was still recovering. My father was dead, and I needed to return to the coven for the funeral. I couldn't not go. In my absence and because of my transition, Basil was appointed High Witch."

Thyme wiped away tears. I frowned.

"I'm not crying for him. These were for Fern." He wiped some more away. "I loved her and let her down. She was the one that told me to go. I should have gone back to her sooner."

He twisted his hands in his lap. Oak put a quelling hand over his. Their eyes met, something passing between them .

"By the time I did return, she had left. I looked everywhere for you both but couldn't find you. So I went back to Northarbor and waited. Then, just three years later, she called. Fern was sick. She was dying. All the while, she had been putting a lock on your magic, hiding every trace of you both. It had drained her, but she said you were

essential to defeating Basil. Fern kept laughing, saying she'd hidden you from the wrong one, to be careful of Basil... I thought the spells had driven her mad. The visions she had shown me seemed clear, that it was my dad who was the problem. She should have been free once he died. It only made her worse.

“What I didn't get was Basil and my dad looked like twins to anyone else. To me, the differences were obvious. Her perceptions colored Fern's vision. When she saw Basil, she thought it was my father. Our father, I guess.”

“So what happened?” I wanted to know why I was put into foster care.

“I failed her. She asked me to come, to find a new family for you, but Basil was watching me like a hawk. I couldn't move without him breathing down my neck. The next thing I knew, I was getting a call from a hospital saying Fern had died.”

The room echoed with the silence that followed .

Thyme sniffled. I just felt numb. There were faint stirrings of pity for them both, but that was it.

This story felt like it belonged to a stranger. I guess it did. I never really knew Fern, never knew my mom, I was too young.

“I searched for you. I swear I did. But you were lost in the system and completely human to all tests. I buried Fern and tried to move on with my life. She knew things, though. Her visions had told her what was to come. I didn't believe her then, I do now. In the notes she left, she told me things.”

He launched himself at my feet again. This time he took hold of my hands. A sudden golden flare erupted between our joined hands, bathing the entire club with its blinding light.

A pain shot through me, sharp and piercing my very soul.

Then a click.

A current tried to sweep me under. It felt vast. Too vast.

It was over in just a moment, leaving me panting for breath.

The wave ebbed, waiting.

Panic overtook me at the alien feeling inside. I felt the power inside me, ready to spring forth.

Protect.

Guard .

Safety.

I clung to the last feeling with everything I had. With my last conscious thought, I was gone.

Searching

Amorandes

My vision came back far too slowly. I was disoriented for a moment. Then I noticed Damon was missing.

The bottom fell out of my world. Where was he?

I rounded on the witches, my fury powering my change, my full demon form bursting out of the beautifully tailored tuxedo. Damon was going to murder me for ruining it later. The vague thought passed through my mind as I focused all my ire on Thyme.

“What did you do?” I shook with fear and anger. Damon was gone, yet I knew he was still alive. Whatever fledgling bond we had developed let me know that. My magic had bonded itself to him subconsciously. Damon was mine as much as I was his.

“I... uh...” Thyme cut a nervous glance at Oak. “I unlocked him.”

“Unlocked him?” I repeated, barely comprehending what he was saying .

“I was the key. Fern made it so I could unlock the spells with my magic. He has all his powers, plus some. Whatever was left of Fern’s magic went into him... and to me.”

When I spared Thyme more than a passing glance, I could tell he was struggling with magical overload. His fingertips sparked against the carpet he’d landed on.

“Then where is he?”

Oak recovered first. “He had a massive surge, likely putting him down for a while. He’ll have gone somewhere safe. If he’s not in your apartment—“

“Unlikely, the warding is too tough because of the elves. No one can portal inside. Teleportation will be out too.”

My teeth bared in frustration, earning a flinch from Thyme. I’d feel bad about that later and likely apologize to the witch, yet having Damon out of my sight after such a trying and emotional day left me feeling off kilter. Like I’d lost something fundamental to myself. I was desperate to find him.

“Where else could he have gone?” My wings fluttered with agitation. I just wanted to take wing and scour the city for Damon. A thoroughly useless endeavor since I didn’t know the boundary of his magic .

“With his magic so new and protective? Somewhere with good memories attached to it.” Oak was frowning at Thyme, who was slowly letting bursts of magic out.

Damon couldn’t have gone back to the demon realm. I would have felt a door opening. Standing in the club was useless. I had to get out and explore the city, figure out where the bond wanted me to go.

“I’m going to look for him. Alone.”

He wouldn’t come home if they were with me when I found him.

“Mori, is that wise?” Thyme asked, still hesitant to speak to me. While I hated that he was afraid of me, I was too caught up in finding Damon to care.

“Basil can’t do anything to me, and one person searching the city is less conspicuous than if we all went. You two can stay here until I know where he is. Hela is guarding our apartment. If you don’t want to stay, I’ll just lock the doors and set the wards.”

“No, we can stay. I want to know he’s okay. Despite everything, I care about him. He’s my little brother. I half thought I’d never see him again.” Thyme’s eyes filled with tears, which he swiped away angrily. “Just find him, please Mori.”

I backtracked to our shared apartment, petting Hela as I went to our bedroom to get some clothes. I had to take a few calming breaths before I could use my magic and take my human form. The shredded tux I put on a chair. I’d use it as proof to Damon to show how much I loved him.

The weather was still cold at night, so I slung a hoodie on over jeans and a t-shirt. The hood easily hid my horns and ears, handy since they wouldn’t go away. It was taking too much focus to keep my tail and claws back.

Dawn was on its way as I walked the city streets, using the pull in my soul to take me to Damon. I tried his phone a couple of times, but it went straight to voicemail.

My steps slowed as I approached a building. The door was locked with an electronic lock, and I had no idea which apartment he could be in. I was certain he was inside.

Only one person I knew had the ability to get me inside and narrow down where Damon could be. I called Parker, not caring about the time difference.

“Hello?” He picked up after only a couple of rings. “Mori? Is everything okay?”

“I need your help. Damon is inside this building and I can’t get inside.”

“Where are you? Give me the address and an explanation.”

“Long story short, Damon is a witch and his brothers are Basil and Thyme. He’s just had his magic unlocked, overloaded and somehow transported him to this address.” I gave the street name and building number.

“Oh-kay, well, that’s going in my pile to deal with later. I need you to get Damon to call me as soon as he’s okay.”

“I swear it. Damon’s had a lot to deal with. We’ll get him through it.”

“Damn straight.” Parker clicked on some keys. “Huh, that’s Cody’s place. Thought it sounded familiar. Go get him and text me, okay?”

“Will do.”

A text followed the end of the code with the key to get into the apartment building and which number Cody had lived in.

On his floor, I found the right door. With a little magic, I opened it, and there, sprawled out on the bed, sleeping soundly, was Damon.

I closed the door quietly, then crossed the room to the bed. My knees gave way with relief at finding him safe.

With a careful hand, I brushed his hair off his face, seeing dark circles of stress under his closed eyes. I consoled myself with stroking his hair and let him sleep a little longer. He’d transported himself halfway across town with his first magic use. That was an insane amount of power. Normal witches didn’t teleport. He’d likely never do it again, since it was probably the overload after being unlocked, but it was terrifying to think of how much power he would wield.

My text to Parker was brief and to the point.

Mori: Found him. Safe.

“Mori?” Damon’s sleepy voice crackled next to my ear. “Are you really here?”

Tears welled in my eyes over how distraught he sounded. “I am, my love. I could find you anywhere.”

“You could? Even like this?”

“Especially like this.” I stroked a finger down his nose and booped it, trying to lighten the mood. “Your soul is so bright right now. It called to me. Told me where you were.”

“Mori... I don’t want this.” His chin wobbled as he held back his own tears. I let mine roll free.

“I know. It’s not fair, but you were made for incredible things, and besides, this means great things for us.”

“How?”

Finally, those pretty light blue eyes opened to meet mine. I had to swallow my gasp because they were different. They had two new rings, one of dark blue, like sapphire, and another of gold. His magic was a tangible force in the room, almost suffocating.

“Well, now I get to keep you longer. I worried we couldn’t bond properly. The archives were going to get sick of me because I was going to spend all my free time looking for a way to share my lifespan with you.”

“Mori... fuck! That’s beyond romantic.”

“Now, we have a bit more time. You get to live longer, just as you are, with me.”

“That makes it worth it.” He nuzzled his face against my palm. “Knowing you’re still here for me helps me breathe. I was so scared, Mori.”

“I know, sweetheart. It’s going to be fine. We have each other, and our family. We can end this and be happy.”

“Do you really not care I’m a witch?” Damon’s eyes met mine. “Even after your contract, Cody’s mom, everything?”

“No. I don’t care what you are. Only who you are. Witches have hurt me, they also gave me Cody. I can’t regret him. Before you, he was the light of my life. You are the love in my soul.”

Damon wept. His tears glistened with magic, filling the air with it. “I love you so much. I thought—“

“Thought I’d run from you? Never. Unfortunately for you, I’ve bonded with you. You’re never getting away.”

He chuckled through tears, then paused. “Wait, what?”

“Sweetheart, look inside you. Can you feel it? Next to your magic, it’s me. I’m there, where I belong.”

For a long moment, he closed his eyes and searched internally, grasping at his magic, then sinking deeper. I didn’t know when we had started our bond. It wasn’t intentional, it just was.

“I see you. How can that be? We aren’t fated.”

“No, we aren’t. You are chosen, which can be a stronger bond for it.” I sighed. “This story has been itching to come out. There just wasn’t the right time, except I think you need it now.” I ripped the bandaid off. “My fated mate died a long time ago.”

“Oh god, Mori, I’m so sorry.”

“Honestly, it’s fine. We never bonded. Never wanted to.” It was the whole truth. My preference was for men, although I had been superficially attracted to the succubus.

“You see, she had mates and wasn’t looking to add to her group. They didn’t want me either, which, again, was fine. We wouldn’t have suited. If we had met earlier, then maybe. Or if she had lived, perhaps we could have worked something out. It just wasn’t meant to be. She is why my family and I put more stock into chosen heart mates. Like you are to me.”

“Even as a witch? ”

“Even as a witch. Remember, I was ready for you to be part ogre.”

Damon laughed, the sound pushing away all of my fears. Finding out the truth was hard. No doubt about that. Damon was stronger than he thought.

“Why don’t you climb up here with me? I want to cuddle a bit.”

I’d almost forgotten I was sitting on the floor by Cody’s bed.

“You know as well as I do that if I get up there, it’ll end up in so much more than a cuddle.” I grinned at my lover, my mate.

“Yeah, and?” Damon smirked despite me catching on to his wicked plan.

“Have you forgotten you’re lying on my son’s bed? He wouldn’t let us fuck in his castle. Do you really think he’d be okay with us fucking on his bed?”

More healing laughter. Damon was so resilient. I was in awe of him.

“How about making sweet, sweet love?” Damon teased.

I shook my head with a laugh. “How about we head home? Hela is desperate to see you, I’m sure.”

“Okay, that sounds better, actually. I have no idea when Cody last changed these sheets!” Damon scrambled from the bed, nearly stumbling into me. I steadied him gently. “Thanks. ”

“You’re welcome.” I took his hand and led him out of the apartment. “So why this place? Why did the magic take you here?”

Damon was quiet as we walked the streets. “I think it was the last place where things were normal for me. No magic. No witches. No gorgeous demon lovers. I was just so scared. Everything had changed in that one moment.”

“Not everything. I still love you. So does Parker, Cody, my mama.”

He laughed again. “You don’t think they’ll care, do you?”

“Not at all. Like me, they just get you for longer. No one is going to be sad about that.”

“You say the sweetest things, you know.” He cuddled closer his head resting just below my shoulder. The sun was rising, but there was still a chill in the air. He brought us to a stop and looked up at me. “Hey, could you fly us back? I want that

feeling of safety I get when we fly.”

With a careful stream of magic, I let my wings out without damaging the hoodie. I tucked Damon close, letting my wings surround him, before I jumped into the air.

“Anything for you.”

Training

Damon

Despite only getting a few hours of sleep after the catastrophic events of the day before, I wasn't getting any sort of reprieve.

All I wanted was some time to process this new side of myself, to absorb it and the magic into my personality, my life, before I had to actually do something with it. Was it too much to ask that the witches would leave me alone for a day or two, just to give me a chance to accept my new reality?

Granted, I was elated I would have the longer lifespan witches were gifted, accidents and murder aside, of course. The downsides were this magic, which I would have to train to use, and the shiny new target on my back.

Brothers.

I couldn't quite believe I had two brothers and one was probably going to try to kill me if Thyme was to be believed.

Actually, I believed my half brother wanted me dead. The cold look in Basil's eyes after he touched me struck a nerve. The witch hated me for what I represented. I was the child who escaped his machinations. Fern had evaded him, had me regardless of his schemes to prevent other heirs from being born. That was the root of it. Basil hadn't wanted other potential heirs to the coven being born. With Thyme transitioned, his magic reduced in scale, he wasn't a suitable choice for High Witch instead of

Basil. Likely why the job went to Poppy after Basil was removed from the job.

Persistent knocking came from the door. Hela let out a low growl. The hellcat was a fantastic protector. With her nearby, it was easy to get some sleep. Until, of course, my other half brother decided sleep was for the weak and I had to learn how to cast spells immediately.

Hela chirped a greeting as I shuffled to the door dressed only in a silk robe. Mori gave off too much heat at night to bother with clothes. I barely needed a blanket with him tucked up against me.

“Hey, Hela, let’s see who has no manners, will we?”

As soon as I opened the door, I wanted to close it again. Thyme looked haunted, Oak annoyed, yet there they stood with a bakery bag and cup holder full of coffees. “Breakfast and training!” Thyme aimed for cheerful, but fell far short of the mark .

I stood aside to let them through as Mori came out of our bedroom. He’d slung on some sweatpants and a tank, making him far too delectable for other eyes. He raised a brow, as if he knew where my thoughts were going. “Why don’t you get dressed, sweetheart? I’ll feed Hela and save you the best pastry.”

With a quick kiss, Mori set about his tasks as I retreated into the safety of our room. I blew out a breath, tried to get myself together, then looked for some comfortable clothes. While well-tailored suits were a passion of mine, I enjoyed the freedom of movement I got in yoga pants. As a hired killer, I was trained in several martial arts, though it wasn’t my preferred method of killing. I liked to make things look like an accident where I could.

Pulling on a t-shirt, I walked back into the living room where Mori was sitting with Thyme and Oak in an uncomfortable silence. Hela sat at Mori’s feet, just watching

them. She was still in her hellcat form, barbed ears and tail out, wings ready to help her glide places. I found her endlessly fascinating. Hela had bonded so closely with Cody after she had helped him find Toth. I thought she only tolerated me and Mori, but it seemed like she held affection for us too.

“We can’t wait to start your training,” Thyme said apologetically. “Now that Basil knows who you are. He could attack at any moment, and I don’t want to leave you vulnerable.”

“Fine,” I muttered bitterly. The reasoning was sound. I didn’t want to die anytime soon, not now that I had Mori in my life, had my family in Cody and Toth, Parker and Gregoris. Absently, I petted Hela’s head, careful of her barbed ears. “What do I need to learn?”

“Everything,” Oak said deadpan.

“We’ll just start with shielding right now,” Thyme amended. “It’s one of the first things young witches learn after their spell language.”

“Spell language?” I asked, sitting forward. This was all new to me.

“You might have noticed most witches speak a different language when they cast. It’s often a language we don’t speak in daily life. Oak uses Bulgarian, for instance. At home growing up, they spoke Cantonese and Mandarin along with English. I speak German.”

“Right, so how do I know which language I’ll use? I never learned another language in school. Foster care, remember? I moved around a lot.”

Thyme’s face fell briefly, a blink and miss expression. Then he rebounded and said brightly, “Well, I’m sure it will come to you. It’s personal to each witch. Could even

be completely made up from what the history texts say. ”

“Should we go into the club for this? Where there’s more space?” Mori suggested.

The others agreed, which is why we found ourselves half an hour later on the dancefloor of the club with Thyme lobbing balls at my face. It was instinctive to reach inside myself and pull the magic out to protect me, just like a shield would.

What was unusual was I didn’t use any words to do it. Other witches would mutter or whisper their spell words under their breath as to not broadcast their moves. I just had to think about what I wanted. Thyme believed it was due to my insane power level and lack of formal training as a kid. Nothing to worry about, he assured me. Not really reassuring when he kept giving me the side eye. Great, so I was a freak.

“Time for something a little harder. Let’s grab a seat.” We found a booth with some seats in front of it. Thyme and Oak took the booth and left us to take the chairs. “I want you to try a glamor.”

“A glamor?”

“Yeah, so you are showing the world one thing and are really something else. Kind of like Mori’s human side or Hela’s domestic cat version.” She looked like a Savannah cat when in disguise.

“Okay, so what do I do?”

“Concentrate on what you want us to see. Pick something simple, like changing yours and Mori’s clothes.” Thyme thought for a second. “Oh! Put you two in your tuxedos from last night.”

I glared at Thyme for the reminder of what Mori had done to his tux. It was in ruins! I

appreciated he'd been upset, but did he have to trash it completely?

"Fine," I grumbled, pulling up the mental image of the tuxedos from the previous night. The image came easily. The magic flowed again without a spoken word.

"That's great, Damon. Now I want to step it up a notch. Mori, I want you to distract Damon. While he's trying that, Damon, I want you to hold the image and block any sounds. Okay?"

"Right," Mori and I agreed.

Keeping the focus on what I was projecting, I attempted to ignore Mori as he slipped off the seat and onto his knees next to my chair. He let some of his demon features out. His tail flicked back and forth before heading for my crotch.

"Mori!" I gasped as he stuck a hand down my pants, letting his tail slip inside alongside it.

"Hmm, commando. Thought so. Do you think you can stop them from seeing what I'm doing to you?"

His hand slipped free while his tail wrapped itself around my cock.

"Um..." Oak raised an eyebrow at us as the image slipped a little .

"Can he hear us?" Mori whispered in my ear as his tail worked my cock. He trailed a finger down my chest, then up again under my t-shirt. His skin was always so warm. I fought back a shudder and kept tight control of the magic.

"You're doing great, Damon. It just looks like you and Mori are sitting staring at us. To be honest, it's a little creepy."

It was hard, no pun intended, to listen to my new brother while Mori's tail was wrapped around my dick. He slicked my precum down my shaft and worked it with a delicious twist that added a bite of pain that was exquisite.

"Mori," I moaned. "Close."

He tightened his grip as I struggled to hold onto the magic. I felt it flicker and saw the brief reaction of Thyme and Oak as they saw Mori crouched behind me, hand up my shirt tweaking my nipples as his tail jerked me off.

The picture we must have made nearly had me spilling over myself and Mori's naughty tail. Damn, it was so hot he could do that.

"Not yet," Mori breathed against my ear. His tail tightened against my base for a second before he was gone.

Mori yanked his tail away and stood, breaking the magic. "Go grab us some lunch, would you? I have stuff to do." He transformed, letting his demon skin shred his tank, then picked me up, throwing me over his shoulder with a smack to my ass.

"Apparently, I'm stuff. Though I'll be the one doing." I couldn't hold back my laugh at the look of exasperation on their faces.

Mori dropped me on the bed then went for my clothes. We met in a sloppy, though enthusiastic kiss, Mori pushing me down into the mattress.

Being carried like that had been hot. Mori acting like a caveman fired all my buttons, or whatever the saying was. I could hardly concentrate with Mori's tongue in my mouth and his wandering hands. My cock was still achingly hard from his tail job. Dammit, just thinking about it had me close to blowing. We were so doing that again.

“Mori,” I panted against his mouth as his tail found the print of my cock in my pants.

“I couldn’t wait anymore. I need you inside me, Damon.” Mori shoved off his torn clothes, letting his dick free .

“Let me suck you while I stretch you.” I trailed kisses down his neck, nipping at the joint where his shoulder met his neck.

Mori shivered. “No, I just want it quick.”

He straddled me, set the head of my cock at his entrance, and sank down in one fluid movement, stealing my breath. Damn, he was so tight, hot and wet around me.

With slow rocking movements, Mori worked himself on my cock. He sped up, rising and falling harder and faster as I focused on not shooting straight away.

I grasped his cock, smeared his precum over it and let him fuck into the tunnel of my fist. “Fuck, Mori, you feel so good.” I remembered how much he’d loved me calling him my good boy, and repeated it.

“Damon!” Mori cried out.

“Use your tail on me, please. I want to try it.” The idea came from nowhere, but felt right. I trusted Mori not to hurt me. He only wanted my pleasure.

With a start, I felt his tail push inside him, alongside my cock. “Getting it wet,” he smirked. He rocked slowly.

“That’s hot.”

He pulled his tail out and trailed it down my base, balls, and taint before he reached

my hole. The wet tip slid around as Mori continued his slow movements, my cock deep inside him .

The tip entered me with a slow glide, then a sharp burn as it widened. “No!” I shouted, unable to stop myself.

Mori withdrew his tail carefully and stopped, my cock still inside him. “Do you want to stop?”

“No, I just...”

“You aren’t ready for that. Might never be ready and that’s okay. Don’t push yourself, my love.” Mori bent to kiss me sweetly. “Will we stop?”

“You better not. I need to come so badly.”

His sigh of relief made me shiver as he tightened and relaxed around me.

“I have another idea.” He began to fuck himself on my length again. His tail reached for my throat. “I sensed it at the club. Danger, a little pain gets you off. So I’m going to wrap this around your throat and squeeze.”

Holy fuck.

“With your magic, I want you to push it away when it gets too tight, okay?”

I nodded and lifted my head a little so his tail could wrap itself around me. Then it squeezed as Mori picked up the pace.

Harder and tighter, and then it was too much. Without thinking, my magic pushed his tail away, forming a shield for a few seconds so I could breathe, then letting it drop so

I soared.

Apparently, I was into breath play now.

We played like that for a while, getting all sweaty and breathless as Mori pleased us both.

I tightened the hold I had on Mori's length, making him moan and rock faster.

"Damon!" Mori cried as he came all over me. He spread his cum over my stomach with a gleam in his eyes. "Mine."

"Yes!" I shouted with the last of my air as I filled him and blacked out.

Best way to train was my final thought as I faded into unconsciousness.

Wicked Witch

Amorandes

It gave me immense pleasure to be the one making my lover pass out after amazing sex. I don't know what it was about Damon in particular. Maybe it was our fledgling soul bond, but no one had ever matched me as well as he did. Over my lifetime, I'd had countless lovers. Damon made them pale in comparison.

For a while I let Damon sleep, just enjoying the peace I got from being next to him. His pleasure fed me much more than a meal would, yet I was aware that Damon would need to eat soon. Using his magic would burn through his energy reserves, and I didn't want him to lose any weight. He was perfect as he was, compact muscles, lean limbs, not an inch of body fat. My lover was gorgeous.

Before I could get turned on again, and delay his training more, I woke Damon with sweet kisses and murmured words. I adored him and wanted to keep him in bed all day, except his safety, and mine, relied on him being able to use this new magic .

We returned to the club to a lunch of deep filled sandwiches, chips, and freshly squeezed juices. Damon wolfed it all down, then stole my chips with a grin. I would have given him the world to see him smile like that.

Training was hard on him. Mentally more than physically. Adapting to having magic, being supernatural, was more difficult for him to adjust to. It helped that his family were supportive when he got a chance to break the news.

I knew their reactions wouldn't make a liar of me. When I'd told him they would be happy, I hoped they would agree with me that Damon being a witch was a good thing. Regardless of his upbringing, with all the families that envied witches, most witches, aside from Basil, were good people who used their magic for good.

Poppy was an endless supporter of Cody, even before his heritage was unlocked. She included him in coven life. He was there to perform a blessing on baby Sage. For that alone, I was a fan of the witch. She called Damon that night before we got into bed. He put the call on speaker so I could listen easily.

"Hey, Damon. I'd like to formally invite you to become a member of the Northharbor coven. We would be blessed to have you. I'm sorry I'm not there to oversee your training personally—"

"It's alright," Damon interrupted. "Your baby is far more important than a newbie witch."

"Hardly the case. Every witch is important. I can't help but feel if Basil senior was nicer, more supportive of Basil junior—"

"Wait, my Dad is called Basil, too? As in he was so arrogant, he shared his, frankly, awful name, with his poor son? No wonder Basil is a dick. Well, maybe not a dick. I like dicks. Megalomaniac. Yeah, that." Damon smirked as Poppy laughed.

"Accurate. I mean, dicks are fine, I just prefer—" There was a commotion on the other side of the line.

"My wife was not about to be vulgar to the new witch she wants to join our coven. Nope. She was going to say women. This woman. Hi, I'm Zinna. Hope to meet you in person soon."

The other voice spoke in a teasing tone, which I liked straight away. It was how deeply bonded people talked to each other. There was intimacy and so much love in it.

These two were adorable. I regretted not meeting them or speaking to them sooner. No wonder Cody had stuck around the coven with people like them. They had a warmth that was endearing.

“Poppy, Zinna, I’m really flattered you asked.”

“Please consider it,” Poppy cut in. “I know things are awkward with Thyme. Of course they are.” She sighed. “Oak has asked me to banish Thyme several times. But my gut tells me he’s important. We’re going to need everyone by the end of this.”

Poppy sounded exhausted. Not just having a young baby tired. This was soul weary tired.

“I was going to say I don’t think I’m ready yet. It’s got nothing to do with Thyme. He was stuck in a difficult position. Basil’s actions shouldn’t reflect on him.”

Damon was far wiser than I’d given him credit for.

“Okay, that’s fine. This is an open offer, okay? Hope to meet you soon!”

The call ended.

“Are you okay with this?” I asked Damon after a beat of silence.

“If I’m as powerful as Thyme thinks, then it was natural the coven would want me. If I’m going to learn how to be a...” his voice hitched, “witch, then being a part of the coven is the best choice. I just—“

“Wish things were back to how they were when it was us, Cody and Toth, and the castle?”

“Yeah, before I went and got involved in the Basil shit.”

“If it helps, I don’t regret anything to do with you. Witch Damon, hitman Damon, they are the same to me and I love all sides of you.”

“You say all the best things.”

There were only two more days of peace, hardly any time to teach Damon anything offensive with his magic, before Basil struck.

Whether this was planned, or a spur-of-the-moment choice on his part, taking advantage of Oak and Thyme being so distracted, I wasn’t sure. It worked in his favor, though.

“Shit!” Thyme cried as he looked at his phone.

Oak was staring at his own with a horror filled expression. “No!”

“What’s going on?” Damon approached Thyme hesitantly, taking his phone from him. “Oh, fuck! We have to go!”

“Where? What is it?” I was trying to stay calm as panic saturated the air.

“The coven is under attack! Poppy is there with the baby! We need to get there as soon as possible. Can you fly me?” Damon clutched at my arm for support.

“No, we need Barr. He can take us all. Barr!” I yelled, running across the club, taking Damon with me. We were in the lounge set aside for demons as the rest of the club

was in use with a couple of omegas in heat.

“Here, Mori! ”

“We need a portal to the coven house for all of us. Can you manage?”

Barr nodded eagerly, following us back to Oak and Thyme, who were getting reports of the situation. Barr was putting on a brave face, but his tail was low. He was scared. So was I, to be honest. I didn’t know how to fight witches. Damon hadn’t had enough training. Barr absolutely none at all. We weren’t in the right position to be taking part in a fight like that.

“No, it’s not the house, it’s the center, it’s uh, where Poppy has been staying since its wards are deeper. The coven grimoire is there.” Whatever that was, Oak sounded almost as panicked about it as he did his sister-in-law.

“I need to see what it looks like,” Barr said nervously.

Oak held out his phone with a picture of a squat, long building, very nondescript and in the middle of the city. There was no way this wouldn’t escalate quickly.

The portal went up quickly, and we ran through, immediately finding ourselves in the thick of it.

“Damon, Mori, Barr, just knock out witches you don’t know. We’ll sort theirs from ours later. Sleep spells only, okay?” Oak took charge of the situation as Thyme hung back nervously, twisting his fingers. “Thyme, with me.”

I turned to Barr. “Look, you’ve not had any training with this. If you want, just find somewhere to hide. There’s a park there, climb a tree and wait for us to come back.”

“Mori, Sir, I can help.” He tried to put a brave face on.

“Only if you want to, okay?” I wasn’t about to order him to hide, no matter how much I’d like him to.

Damon halted Barr, following us with a hand on his chest. “Look, you are too important to be running around, maybe getting hurt. I need you to take a position where you can see and you are safe. We might need you to make a portal at short notice, so be ready, okay?”

Barr deflated, all his false confidence gone. “Thank you. I’ll keep watch.”

“Here.” I handed him my phone. “Call Alpha Blake. Tell him what’s happening here just in case he wasn’t already alerted. He might want to get some shifters here.”

“Okay.”

Oak and Thyme were in two different fights, back to back, as they tried to get inside the building. With the witches distracted, it was easy enough to sneak up behind one and knock them out. I hated using physical attacks, but my magic, if it could be useful, had to be reserved for what we might find inside.

The other was easy for Damon to knock out. He used a burst of magic, then frowned at his hands. “I’ll get used to that eventually,” he muttered .

As a group, we ran through the building avoiding skirmishes, instead focusing on getting to Poppy.

They were in the heart of the building. Poppy stood with Zinna, a crib behind her. In Poppy’s arms was a book so ancient I was surprised it hadn’t crumbled to dust. The leather binding was frayed. Even from this distance, I could feel the power.

Basil, alone, stood in front of them. He was building a spell, muttering in an old language, Greek or Latin, so old no one spoke it anymore.

Our steps across the boundary must have triggered it. Basil let go of his spell, a percussive wave of energy that shook the foundations of the building.

Damon reacted on instinct. He threw up two shields.

One covering me and him, the other, the crib.

It all happened so fast, I didn't have time to react to anything.

The blast hit our shield, leaving us to watch as it hit the others.

Oak, Thyme, Poppy and Zinna all fell and didn't move.

Basil

Damon

Reacting reflexively may have saved mine and Mori's lives. Somehow, my magic had identified the one other person in the room incapable of looking after themselves; baby Sage, and threw up a shield for her, too.

For the first time, I truly thought having magic might be a good thing if I could save the one I loved from coming to harm.

As soon as the others fell to the wave of magic, Basil bolted to another door, book in his arms.

My initial response was to go after him, but I needed to know if the others were alive.

Without having to ask Mori, he was running forward to check for a pulse on Thyme's neck.

"Alive." He reached for Oak, the pair having landed on each other in a tumble of limbs that would be funny under any other circumstances. "Him too. Check Poppy and Zinna!"

I was on my knees next to the women in the next second, finding each of them also alive but knocked out cold. I had no idea how long this magic would last. Likely too long for them to help me.

Basil couldn't get away, not after this attack.

Without thinking, still working just on pure instinct, I shot to my feet and chased after Basil. There was no chance he was getting away from me. He might be a powerful witch, but I was a hitman. I'd trained for nearly half my life, was in perfect physical condition, and was furious. My anger fueled me, giving me extra speed.

The building was large, yet Basil's gasping breaths led me to him easily. Dude could really do with laying off the donuts and trying some cardio. I followed the sounds of slapping steps and heaving breathing until I'd closed the distance between us.

Scanning for something to stop him, I spotted a picture, yanked it from the wall, and with a burst of magic, flung it at Basil, nailing him in the back of the head with a satisfying thump.

"Aaahhh!" he wailed as he pitched forward onto his pasty face.

Not going to lie. After what he'd just done, I got a sense of satisfaction from using my magic against him.

Basil got to his feet and rounded on me, his nose bloody, cheeks red with fury. His eyes were like mine, almost the same shade of blue, certainly the same shape. We had the same nose, or we would have if mine hadn't been broken and improperly reset.

People could probably guess we were related. I couldn't really see it. Basil was so alien to me, the antithesis of who I was, I couldn't bring myself to find things in common with a madman. I certainly wasn't looking to claim him as family.

He muttered strange words and fired magic at me which I shielded without a thought, pushing it back on him and forcing him to brace his own barrier against it.

We exchanged magical blows, with me successfully backing Basil into a corner.

“You’re not leaving here with that book, Basil. It belongs to the coven. You aren’t coven.”

“It belongs to me! I am the rightful High Witch! Not that weak little girl. Not you, either.”

I couldn’t help my laugh. “I want nothing to do with that book if it just makes you a target of losers like you.”

Basil let out a yell of impotent rage, even stomping his little feet. Huh, he was smaller than me. The smile on my face seemed to make him angrier. Yep, he had small dog syndrome.

Magnus would have slapped me upside the head if he’d caught me laughing to myself and underestimating my enemy. Basil caught me off guard, pushing a massive amount of energy, which shoved me into the wall and stole my breath for a second.

With me fighting to fill my lungs and distracted, Basil ran past me, back the way we’d come, since he was trapped.

Nope, no way was he getting away.

My temper got the better of me. I rushed him and tackled him to the floor. The book fell from his hands and slid along the carpet, just out of his reach.

I slammed his head into the floor. He gave a satisfying grunt of pain.

Basil wasn’t out just yet. I might have had him pinned, but he fought like a wildcat before relying on his magic when his physical strength failed him.

Avoiding the shots of pure magic, the heat of fireballs, and even electricity became too much. Basil knocked me off him and scrambled to his feet.

My hand shot out, grasped his ankle, and yanked him off balance. He fell again with an “oof,” that was just so gratifying.

We tussled on the floor, trying to sling magic and fists at each other. If this was what having brothers was like, count me out. One out of ten, do not recommend.

He slipped out of my hold, got to his feet, but I was a second behind him. I pinned him by his neck to the wall and punched him clean in the face. There, we had matching broken noses. I clipped his jaw before he electrified me.

I hit the floor, covering the damn book, and tried to recover my senses.

Basil, clearly giving up on the book, ran for the nearest exit. Fucking place had too many of them. I kicked the book into an alcove where it was hidden, and followed.

He was just clear of the building, my heart hammering double time, when I fell back on my training.

This idiot was not getting away. He’d tried to kill a fucking baby! That spell wouldn’t have knocked Sage out. I felt it deep inside.

In a blink, the gun in my pocket was in my hand. I took aim, put magic behind it, and fired.

The fucker was hit! He floundered, recovered and kept running. Close to his heart, but not close enough.

I returned to the alcove for the book and picked it up. The aged leather warmed on

contact with my skin and gave off a faint glow.

“Damon!” Mori cried, relieved to see me as I returned to the others. He rushed me, pulled me into his arms, and kissed me soundly. I returned it with all the emotion I could spare. I was so grateful he was okay.

“You scared me!” he admonished. I felt the love, the fear for my safety behind it.

Kissing him again, I apologized. “Sorry, I had to get the book.”

“Did you kill him?”

Shaking my head, I said, “He’s tougher to kill than he looks. I didn’t want to risk shooting him while he had the book in case I damaged it or it protected him.”

“Shit. So he got away?”

“Yeah, I did manage to shoot him. Bullets and magic are effective.”

“He’ll be expecting that, next time, I mean,” Thyme said from the floor. He and Oak looked groggy, but okay. Oak was checking him over. Thyme batted his hands away. “I’m alright. Check your sister.”

The two women were fussing over Sage, the little baby’s cries now whimpers.

Poppy, she could only be Poppy since Zinna had dark hair like her brother, approached me. She wrapped me in her arms. “Oh, thank the goddess for you, Damon! I didn’t even have time to shield Sage. Yet, you, a perfect stranger to her, just automatically saved her! I can’t thank you enough. ”

I felt the dampness of tears on my shoulder. I tucked the book under one arm to give

her a couple of awkward pats. Displays of emotion like that made me uncomfortable.

“You’re welcome. It was just instinct.” My gaze found Mori, who looked so proud of me. I managed a smile for him, despite my anger at letting Basil get away. I wanted the wicked witch dead.

She smiled, something almost bittersweet. “I guess that’s why the book chose you.”

“Chose me?” I asked, frowning at the still lightly glowing book in my hands.

“That glow? It only does that when it’s picked someone new to lead us.”

“Lead?” I repeated, a kernel of worry settling in my gut.

“Yes. The Northarbor grimoire has chosen you, Damon, to be the new High Witch of the coven.”

Well, fuck. How had I gone from hating witches to leading them?

Safety

Amorandes

If Damon thought that leading the coven was the only shocker of the day, well, he was going to be horrified at what else Poppy and Zinna had to confess.

Leaving Damon to take Basil on himself almost tore me in two. My protective side wanted to be with Damon, to ensure his safety. Yet I knew someone had to stay behind with the vulnerable witches and baby.

When he vanished out the door, chasing after Basil, I stayed behind to guard the others. It was the least I could do. This whole mess felt like my fault. I had made Cody and Basil hated Cody.

No, thinking like that was wrong. Basil hated shifters, demons, and half his own coven. He only hated Cody because he was a challenge to Basil's power. Basil feared the unknown and lashed out at it. If Basil had been rational, he would have known my sweet boy would never have been the coven leader. Even if the book had chosen him, the witches wouldn't. Basil wasn't the only one to see demons as lesser, as tools .

So I took up guarding the witches who had treated me with respect and dignity. They didn't give me pause.

Besides, as a demon, I was prevented from causing harm to humans. Witches were a gray area. My magic wasn't particularly effective on them and with five beings to protect, a physical altercation was out of the question. Unlike Damon, I wasn't

armed.

The baby cried in her crib. I went to her, let her see me, before I attempted to pick her up. She quieted a fraction. As a witch baby, she would have been sensitive to the magic in the air.

Sage looked at me with huge dark eyes, reminding me of her mama Zinna. She held traces of both witches thanks to the magic they performed to conceive her. The same or similar magic Cody and Toth could use to have their own child.

I rocked her while Damon chased after Basil and tried to get the book back. My fears grew the longer the witches were unconscious and Damon was gone. Anything could happen to him and I was stuck holding a baby. It was the right thing to do, but I wanted to be by his side.

Poppy was the first to stir, then, as if Poppy had summoned her into waking, Zinna opened her eyes. Oak and Thyme were a little worse for wear, though they soon woke too .

The women approached me unsteadily. When they could stand properly, I handed Sage to Poppy. She shared a look with Zinna I didn't understand then. There was grief behind it.

It was only moments later when Damon returned, his clothes torn and a couple of bruises blooming on his body.

Our reunion was too short, there was so much to discuss, when Poppy dropped her bomb about the covenant.

Damon's expression spoke all the words he couldn't say; his horror over the responsibility, how uncomfortable he felt over the magic, the hidden pride at being

chosen.

Finally, something had picked him.

He just didn't realize I'd picked him as my chosen mate as soon as I'd met him, since he proved what a pure heart he had.

Unfortunately, Poppy had more bombs in her arsenal. "We need to seal this room. What I'm about to say cannot go anywhere else." Her stress was obvious. She leaned on her wife as Zinna comforted the baby.

Thyme and Oak exchanged a loaded glance, then set to work on soundproofing the room as Damon stood stock still, holding the grimoire. He was alternating between looking at it with scorn and awe. At any moment, he might just decide to say "fuck it," and throw the book out the window.

"Are you okay?" I asked, breaking him from his staring match with the book.

"Huh?" He met my eyes. "No. This is fucked up. I'm barely a witch and now this!" He shook the book. "This bullshit! I don't want to be a coven leader. I can't be!"

Damon walked up to Poppy, crossing the room in a handful of steps. "Here, take it back. Be the High Witch."

Poppy waited for the signal from Thyme and Oak that the room was sealed. "I can't take it because I don't have any magic."

"Explain this again for me really slowly. Like I have a head injury, which I might because Basil can pack a punch." Damon had given up on standing. He had righted the sofa and pulled me down to sit with him.

Poppy and Zinna were sharing another while Thyme and Oak perched on the arms of ours.

“Basil needed to break my hold with the book. He and I were about matched with power. It accepted you, Damon, because your mother gave you so much of her own magic when she sealed you. Some of it returned to Thyme, so technically, both of you are more powerful than I was.”

Damon glared at Thyme and muttered something unkind, which made Oak muffle a chuckle. Thyme ignored them both.

“That doesn’t explain why yours and Zinna’s magic is gone,” Thyme said, staying on task.

“After the call went out about the attack, Basil found his way here. He tried everything to get the book. Then he took his amulet out of his pocket. It was the darkest thing I’d ever felt.” Poppy paused, clearly upset. Zinna comforted her, staying strong for the both of them.

“We were fighting back with our magic. Just... every spell we did, they bounced right off,” Zinna explained. “No, that’s not quite right. They were absorbed.”

“Yes! Absorbed!” Poppy added. “Not just that, they seemed to suck our magic in each time. It was impossible. Basil was firing all this magic, which we ended up just defending ourselves from. By the time the last blast went off, we had nothing. We’re practically human.”

The word echoed around the room while we all sat in shock.

“What can we do? How can we fix this?” Thyme asked.

“The elves,” Oak answered, surprising us all. “We can’t turn to other witches. You are both too vulnerable right now. Other covens would take this as an opportunity to take over this one. It has to be the elves. We’ve learned from spending time with the pack that our magics are compatible.”

“We need to find that amulet. We fought pretty hard, there’s a chance he left more than the book behind.” Damon’s mouth was set in a hard line.

“Okay, well, I can call Kade and ask about the elves to see if they will help us while you look for the amulet. The stone is blood red, almost black.” Poppy took out her phone, the screen cracked, yet still working, and dialed her friend.

The call was short. “They’re coming by portal. Oak, could you go let them in? Zin, could you pack us some stuff? They want us to stay with them.”

Zinna nodded. She began packing a bag; the baby nestled carefully against her shoulder in a sling.

Damon asked me to join him in his search for the amulet. This was one task I could help him with, since the magic would have a trace in the air.

“Close your eyes,” I said, taking his hand in mine. We were away from the others, tracing the path Damon had run following Basil.

“Okay.” Damon complied, trusting me implicitly.

“Feel the magic in the air? Not me or you. All around us there is magic. Each kind has a sort of signature. Can you pick out the dark thread? ”

He was silent for some time. “Got it.” My pride in him grew when I saw it matched in his own face. Damon deserved to feel good about his magic. Wanted or not, this was

his new reality, he shouldn't fear it.

We followed the magic until I caught a glint under a curtain. "There!" I bent to pick it up.

"Careful! Wrap it in the curtain. Just in case."

He was right, of course, to be wary.

Amulet in hand, we returned to the others in time to hear one of the elves make an announcement.

"Ah, you have it. Perfect." He took the amulet from Damon with a restrained smile. Elves were interesting as a species. This one could have been anywhere from thirty to five hundred. There was no telling.

"As soon as we have you checked over by our healers," he continued, storing the amulet in his coat pocket, "we will take you to Abrocaelum."

"Abrocaelum?" I asked.

"The elf and fae realm. It is where the study of magic is most proficient and should return the stolen power to Poppy and Zinna."

He turned to the women, who stood anxiously with the Sweetwater Second and some guards. This elf was important. Another stood close to the Second protectively, long white blond, almost silver hair cascading down his back .

"Shall we go?" He waited for their assent before the silver haired elf drew a portal. The wards all fell without so much as a blink from the elf. By the magic, he was strong. Old.

We stood by as the elves, shifters, the two women and their baby all walked through the portal, leaving us behind.

“What now?” Damon asked.

Epilogue

Damon

The answer to my question was simple.

War.

We spent the following days picking up the pieces of the coven after Basil's devastating attack. Parker was constantly on the other end of the phone, waiting for me to say what we needed.

We sent the witches to their own homes. Luckily, very few lived in the new coven house, which we no longer deemed safe. We couldn't stay in the coven house because the wards weren't keyed to me, the coven leader. There wasn't space for them at the club apartment, so I encouraged, okay, threatened, the witches to take their coven friends into their homes. Thankfully, there weren't many displaced witches.

There wasn't much of a coven left.

Many of the coven members were in league with Basil. They wanted a return to the old ways, saw Poppy as too progressive with her continued relationship with the Sweetwater pack. It didn't matter to them that the support of the pack had been beneficial to all. When the elves came, they brought magical teachings long forgotten or even unknown by witches. Their magic was so compatible, they could perform all sorts together they couldn't alone.

Witches, like so many people, were afraid of what they didn't understand.

Alongside going to war with a power-hungry witch, I had to rebuild what was left, so when Poppy and Zinna returned, I could give them back this thing. I didn't want it. All I wanted was time with my family, Mori, next to me.

"Hey, so I've got you, Mori, Barr, Oak and Thyme, a new house. I'll text you the address. It's clean and safe, so it's ready when you are."

Parker had really come through for us, knowing how much we were struggling all living together.

The five of us were still at the club apartment, which, as a coven house, was a bad idea. With so many witches going back and forth, the shifters were uneasy, and Basil knew about it, leaving us open to attack. None of us could sleep soundly there, each taking shifts. It was far too cramped for five grown men, especially when Mori and Barr went full demon. Hela was showing signs of stress being apart from Toth for so long. We needed a better home base.

I was grateful for Barr. He acted as a sort of buffer between Oak and Thyme, the two butting heads more often than not.

Our hellhound friend had waited patiently outside for us. He got to his knees and groveled for forgiveness for being unable to call for help. I felt like shit when I found out he couldn't work the phone we had given him. We'd left him alone all that time while I was battling with Basil. Anything could have happened to him.

By the time he'd figured it out, the battle was over, and the elves had arrived. Still, he waited where we left him rather than coming inside, just in case. Since then, I'd gotten pretty protective of him. He was ours, part of our family, which just kept growing. No returns. No take backs.

“Okay, we’ll head there with some stuff right now. It’s probably better we keep a low profile around the club just now.”

“Yeah. Okay, I’ve got to go.”

Parker was being cagey. Distracted. I understood Parker was newly mated, however that worked, but I needed his help to navigate this new path I was on. He was so important to me, I couldn’t lose him, especially with everything coming.

I called the others together; we packed and headed for the address Parker had sent, grateful for a new space and the promise of a decent night’s sleep. Oak had taught me several wards I’d need to lay down for the new property. Magic was... becoming easier to use. It was going to take me much longer than what, a week? To get used to such a fundamental change in my life.

Mori. Well, Mori helped. My demon lover was with me for every step of the way. He could have run, gone home to the demon realm, gone to stay with Cody, yet he stuck to my side, supporting me with everything. I couldn’t imagine loving anyone as much as I loved him.

Parker lived up to his genius. He’d given us a picture so Barr could portal to the new house, one on the outskirts of Northarbor, technically still in the city, though much closer to Sweetwater where our allies were.

The house, mansion rather, was large and set far back from the road, making it hidden from view. There had to be at least ten bedrooms, which was perfect, because waiting there in the doorway, were Cody, Toth, Parker and Gregoris, all looking smug. Fuck, I’d missed them all so much, even Gregoris.

“We figured you’d need us for this next part. No more making us hide.” Parker came forward, wrapping me in a hug.

Crushing him to me, I whispered, “I missed you. ”

“Missed you too.” He pulled away, rubbing at his nose. “You smell all spicy now with the magic.”

“Better get used to it. Turns out I can’t give it back.” I shot a mock glare to Thyme, who shrugged.

Mori was in the doorway, squeezing the life out of Cody, before I’d even noticed him move. His arm shot out to grab Toth, who had been inching away. He was made to join the hug, though I thought I saw a ghost of a smile on his taciturn face.

Deciding to let bygones be bygones, I held out a hand for Gregoris to shake. “Welcome to the family. I mean, I said it before, but it means more in person.”

Gregoris gave me a firm handshake and a bro hug. “He’s so happy with you. Fate was kind to us all.”

I looked at Mori. “No, it feels better that he chose me. No fate involved there.” I smiled at my lover, still hugging his sons and talking a mile a minute. “Still, I’m glad you have Parker. He’s one of the best people I know, so I don’t have to tell you, I’ll hunt you down if you harm a hair on his head.”

“Let’s just agree we are both so in love with our men, it’s impossible.”

“Yeah, that.”

Mori

May

My eyes followed my son’s form as Cody worked through the drills Keren and

Gregoris were taking him through. I was supposed to be resting, having already done my required workout for the day. I couldn't help watching my son or keeping an eye on Keren, who I still didn't trust. With Gregoris there, I doubted he would do anything to put Cody in danger. I just couldn't risk it.

Like Damon, Cody had lived most of his life as a human, so training was coming harder to him than it was Toth, who had basic fighting skills, or Parker, who had much of the same training as Damon, and also his shifter abilities. Truly, Cody was so kind natured, the thought of harming another didn't sit well. Time and time again over the last few weeks, I'd impressed the need on Keren for Cody to concentrate on defense physically. His witch magic could do the necessary harm.

My lover and son were both having a crash course magical education. Thankfully, the magic came easier to Cody. Damon, naturally, excelled at it. I'd never seen him fail at anything. He was a wonder to me.

Day after day, we all spent time honing our abilities, just waiting for Basil to strike.

The witch had vanished. There was talk of him joining the Northharbor aviary, the bird pack, or flock, in the city. Northharbor was home to the pride and the aviary, both groups of shifters splitting the territory south of that run by the Sweetwater pack. He and the aviary both held some divisive views. The aviary were against mixed shifter species matings, casting out those who went against them, even with betas who couldn't reproduce.

How Basil convinced them to protect him, considering his views on shifters, I didn't know. Didn't care to. It would all come crashing down around him, then we would strike, taking Basil out for good so the coven could heal, and shifters and demons could be safe again.

There was more at stake than just the coven. I'd realized that when Basil had stooped to dark magic to steal magic from other witches. He was determined to rule, not just

the coven, but all witches and more. His words to Damon often repeated in my head. Basil wouldn't stop until he could control all demons, royal or not.

My home realm, my family, all demonkin were in danger.

"Hey." Damon leaned against the wall next to me. "You can't watch him all the time. Come on, you're exhausted and you stink." He wrinkled his slightly crooked nose in a teasing manner.

"I do not!" I said incredulously.

"Maybe," he said, leaning in so he could whisper in my ear, "I just wanted to get you into the shower. Things were interrupted this morning." He ran his hand suggestively down my chest, sparking heat wherever he touched.

Immediately convinced, I needed no other words. "Let's go." I took his hand and practically ran out of the room towards our bedroom.

I was particularly grateful to Thyme for teaching Damon silencing wards, a sort of doorbell alarm, and a number of useful spells when living in a house with two other couples, a couple who were on the brink of giving in, and two single demons. There was little privacy to be had. No one wanted to hear the others having sex, especially as one couple was my sons .

Damon pushed me against the wall of our bedroom and activated the wards. I felt the buzz of the magic travel through me.

"Strip," he commanded.

Eager to comply, I dropped all my clothes where I stood.

"Go start the shower." I did as I was told. "Get in, start getting soapy. I want to see

you all wet.”

The water was perfect, just the right side of hot. I found the body wash Damon preferred me to use. Something about the scent got him hot and bothered. I ran the slick substance over my body, paying extra attention to my cock, balls, and crack.

“You are so hot. I can’t believe you’re mine.” Damon’s voice filtered through the water and steam. I could no longer see him, yet I felt his presence with every cell of my body. “Be a good boy and let those horns and tail out.”

Just the words “good boy” had my hard cock twitching. Naturally, I did as I was told. Always good for Damon.

Damon entered the shower, pressed his body against mine, and ran his hand down to my dick. “Hmm, knew that would get you hard.” He stroked me, his equally hard length against my thigh. I bent my knees so he could rest against my ass where I wanted him. “Such a good boy. Turn around.”

I turned, gasping as Damon stole a bruising kiss, pressing me against the shower wall. The cold tile felt amazing against my heated skin. Damon set my senses on fire. My hands reached for him, but he pinned them above my head. When he was demanding and bossy like this, Damon made me weak at the knees. I was putty in his hands.

“Mori,” Damon spoke against my neck, setting off a chain reaction. I shivered, our cocks rubbed together, the friction perfect. “Take that tail, wrap it around us both and stroke until we come all over you.”

My eyes closed against my will as I fought back a full body shudder at his words. Damon made me feel like I’d never been with anyone before. Each time he brought out a side of me I hadn’t known about.

Damon groaned and bit my neck as I stroked us. With my hands still held, just my tail

doing the work, it felt... I couldn't quite explain. It was still me getting us off, yet it felt like it wasn't.

Our bodies moved together, adding to the friction until I couldn't take it anymore. I moaned his name as I came. I continued stroking until Damon bit my shoulder, muffling his cry of release.

We stayed there for a while, just enjoying the feeling of being close to each other. Every stolen moment was precious .

Eventually, the water cooled. We rinsed off and left the shower.

"Come to bed for a bit. I've missed spending time with you," Damon cajoled.

"Shouldn't you be training?" I quirked an eyebrow at him, though I still got into bed with him. I rested my head against his chest, thrilled we had this moment of peace.

"Haven't you heard? I'm quite the prodigy. The elves are going to start training me next week."

"Any news?"

"Poppy and Zinna are recovering. Whatever Basil did wasn't permanent. The elves couldn't get the magic out of the amulet, but slowly their magic is coming back. Probably because it's like the demon realm." Long ago, the elves and fae made their own realm by combining their magic so they could flee from persecution from humans. They abandoned the rest of the supernaturals, leaving them to go into hiding. Only in the last century or so had they revealed themselves. Humans had coexisted with them mostly peacefully since.

"They're staying in Abrocaelum for the time being," Damon continued. "Sage is so young. They don't want her in the line of fire again."

“I understand. As much as I’d like to, I can’t ship Cody off somewhere. He’s an adult with a mate. He can make his own decisions.”

The crux of it was we weren’t being given a choice. Basil had decided Cody was something to hate, not a person who loved with his whole heart. Ironically, if he hadn’t allowed Austin to go after Cody in the first place, none of this would have happened. He created the problem.

“You love him so much. It’s sweet.”

“I love you more.”

“No, you don’t. You love me just as much, just differently. Besides, I wouldn’t want you to love me more than him. The bond you have with him is what drew me to you in the first place. You wear your heart on your sleeve for everyone to see, but share it with only a few. I’m proud to be one of those.”

“Damon,” my voice cracked with emotion. “Whatever comes, I’ll be by your side. The coven, Basil, everything. Seeing you take it on over the last month has been amazing. I’m proud to be yours.”

“Enough sappy talk. You and me, we’re the best dressed couple in the group. Of course, we have to be the ones to lead them.” I could hear his smile. The mood lightened. “You know, I was interested in you as soon as I saw that suit you wore.”

“That right? ”

“Yeah, which reminds me. You still owe me a suit after I got your blood on mine in the orchard.”

I laughed as he intended. We might only have a few times like this before we went to war. I was determined to savor them with Damon, my ex-hitman lover turned High

Witch.

Basil didn't have a chance.

The End

The Northharbor Coven will return in November Reign, release date to be confirmed.