



Dancing With Death (Shadow of Death #2)

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Category: Fantasy

Description: I knew my final would change my life but not like this.

I'm devastated as I lead my first collected soul to Scythe Academy. My heart is shattered, left in pieces on the floor next to the cold, dead body.

It's finally time for me to reveal my plan of vengeance to my mates. I know they won't like it, but I'm hoping they love me enough to help me. Because it's clear I can't do this on my own.

Plus, there's what The Fates told us. I could have more mates out there, and we still have no idea what destiny The Fates were referring to. There's so much uncertainty in my life right now.

With my mates by my side, will I be able to find my path forward? Or am I doomed before I've even begun?

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Audrey

G lancing around, my eyes land on the dead body. All I can see are the person's feet and the blood pooling around their body. It's a lot of blood, leading me to believe this was likely a violent death. Maybe that means the person will be a future reaper.

I'm so focused on the body, I don't notice the soul at first. It's a woman, but that's all I can tell. Seeing a soul isn't quite the same as seeing a person alive. Until they get to the underworld, they are little more than a glowing golden light. The only reason I can tell that it's a woman is because I saw the person's feet.

"Hello," I call out, but the soul keeps staring down at her dead body. I can only imagine what's going through her head as she stares down at herself. She has her memories for now, but if she's heading to the academy, then they'll be wiped away once we hit the underworld.

Walking over, I take the soul's hand in mine—or at least, what I assume is her hand. It's not like there's any real definition to her at the moment. Flipping it over, I see the purple skull and let out a sigh of relief. I know I'll have to meet the ferryman eventually, but I'm glad it doesn't have to be today.

"Hi there," I try again. "I'm sure you're very confused about what's going on right now, but I'm here to take you to where you need to go. We can't stay here. Unfortunately, you're already dead."

The soul turns toward me, a wail falling from their lips that brings tears to my eyes. When it turns back to its body, I can't help turning toward it as well.

“No... No. No. No. No.” I let out my own wailing scream.

This can't be happening.

Tears spill from my eyes as I see my face staring back at me. Well, my twin sister's face.

There's no recognition in her eyes, and I fucking hate it.

Already, her memories are slipping from her.

Glancing back at her dead body, I bite back another wail. Now, I can see more of her body. Her curly red hair is spilling around her, her green eyes that match mine wide open and blank. There are numerous stab wounds to her abdomen, which explains the blood.

It's not fair. Not only had I been murdered, but so had my sister. Something tells me Michael had something to do with her death as well. Especially with how he spoke to me.

What the hell am I going to do?

Taking a deep breath, I close my eyes. My sister's spirit is staring at her dead body as she wails, and I know we need to get out of here. This is hurting her, and I never want her to hurt—even when she has no idea who I am.

“It's time to go,” I tell her, swiping at my tears.

“Go where?” she asks softly. “Who are you?”

“My name is Audrey, and I'm going to take you somewhere safe.” Without waiting

for her to respond, I reach into myself and locate the pool of reaper magic, pulling on it as I imagine Scythe Academy in my mind.

One second, we're in my sister's house she shared with Michael and the next, we're standing outside the gates of the academy where I've spent the last six months learning to reap souls.

Now, my sister has to go through the same thing.

This is not what I wanted for her. This is my fault.

If only I'd been able to keep Michael from killing me. Or if I'd been able to seek my vengeance before now. But that would've been impossible. Technically, until I deliver Wren's soul to the room inside the academy, I'm still a student myself.

"Where are we?" she asks, eyes wide as the gates swing open to admit us. Her body has taken shape now, the golden glow almost completely gone, and it's like staring into a mirror.

I fucking hate it.

I probably should've tried to direct us to the room and not just the academy. Not that it's a far walk or anything, the administrative building is only a few hundred feet inside the gates.

"This is Scythe Academy," I tell her, wondering if she'll remember any of this once I knock her out.

Yup. That's something I get to look forward to doing—knocking my sister out with my reaper magic.

“This is the training center for reapers, which you’ll have the chance to become, but they’ll tell you all about it later.” I squeeze her hand, grateful she hasn’t pulled away—even if she has no idea who I am. “We’re just heading to that building right there.”

Poor Wren. She’s going to have to sit inside that room all day until all the reaper hopefuls’ souls have all been reaped for the day.

This is so fucked up. Everything about this situation is fucked up.

Shaking my head, I lead my sister into the administrative building.

A blonde woman looks up with a smile as the door shuts behind us. “Good morning. Oh, you’re one of our graduating students, aren’t you?”

“I am.” Glancing around, I realize I don’t actually know where to take her. “Ummm...I’m sorry. I know where the rooms are, but I’m not sure which one I’m supposed to bring her to.”

“No worries, sweetheart,” she says as she stands, still smiling. “You’re not the first graduate to walk through those front doors. It’s easy to forget where you’re supposed to go in the moment, but you did well getting her to the academy.”

“Ummm...thanks?”

“I’m Barbara,” she says, eyes flashing from me to Wren, all the color dropping from her face. “Is she...”

I scoff. “My twin? Yup. I was sent to reap my sister’s soul for my final.”

She shakes her head. “That’s not supposed to happen. No one is supposed to reap a

family member. There must have been a mix-up. I'm so sorry...what was your name?"

"Audrey. Audrey Maddox."

"I'm sorry you've had to deal with this shock on top of this being your final." Barbara steps around her desk, and from the look on her face, I think she recognizes my name. "I can take her from here. Since you've arrived at the academy, you've already passed. There's no reason for you to have to do the rest of this. Wraith would have our heads if he knew we had his mate reap her twin."

I shake my head. "No. I want to be the one to do this. I've already come this far."

Glancing at Wren, I see she's not paying any attention to our conversation as she looks around the room with wide eyes.

Barbara hesitates. "Are you sure, dear?"

"I'm sure. Just tell me where I need to bring her, please." I chew on the inside of my cheek, trying not to lose my temper with the woman who's only trying to help me. It's not her fault someone decided it would be a good idea for me to reap Wren's soul.

My mind flashes to Professor Novak. Surely, he wouldn't have done this to me, right?

"You'll head to room thirteen. Whenever you're reaping a soul to the academy, you'll want to go to the room number that matches the date. Since it's the thirteenth, you'll go there."

As soon as the words are out of her mouth, it clicks. I remember this from my classes.

Fuck, how had I forgotten?

But one glance at Wren tells me exactly how I forgot. I'm just lucky I was able to remember to bring her to the academy.

Grief and anger wage war inside of me as I try to keep myself in check. Barbara might say I've already passed my final, but I can't be sure of that.

Did someone purposefully set me up to reap my twin's soul in hopes that I would fail?

I can't focus on that right now. I need to focus on getting Wren into the right room, then I can seek out my mates and fall apart.

I might be Death's mate, but I refuse to have anyone say I only passed because of that.

"Thank you, Barbara," I tell her, once more reaching for my magic. With another tug at it and a picture of the hallway outside of the welcoming rooms, we're tugged through space and time once more.

"That's trippy," Wren says as we appear in the hallway right in front of room thirteen.

I force a smile and nod. I wasn't sure if I'd be able to travel like that again, but I'm glad I was able to—probably because Wren is still with me. I feel like it would've been mentioned to us if we could travel like this once we became reapers. "It's only the third time I've traveled like that, so I agree. Okay Wren, I'm going to bring you into this room where you'll wait for the welcoming speech."

Reaching for the door, I swing it open, and I'm surprised to see at least a hundred

bodies already lying on the floor. I guess that makes sense, considering there will be over a thousand by midnight.

“Why are they all on the floor?” Wren asks, tilting her head to the side.

I open my mouth to answer her, but no words come out. I snap it closed and finally drop her hand. “Everything’s going to be okay.”

Pressing my fingers to her forehead, I allow the reaper magic to spread through me once more. She immediately falls unconscious, and I barely manage to grab her body before she hits the floor.

Not that she wouldn’t heal from the damage by the time she woke up, but I’m not going to hurt my sister more than she needs to be.

Lowering her to the ground, I can’t help wondering why the Fates would do this to me. Why would they allow this? This has to be something they can control.

Or maybe they’re the ones who made it happen. After all, they told me I had an important part to play in the future, but so does Wren.

In the end, does it really matter who caused me to reap my sister’s soul? It’s already done.

That doesn’t stop my anger, still warring with the grief inside me.

I need to get out of here. I can’t lose my shit where anyone can see.

I press a kiss to Wren’s forehead and push to my feet. Leaving the room, I make sure to press the button to close the door before deciding to check and see if I can still travel like I had with my sister. A quick pull of my magic confirms I cannot.

That just pisses me off more.

I stalk out of the building and veer off to the left. I'm going to cut through the woods so I don't have to walk throughout campus to get home. The last thing I need is to lose my shit on someone because they bump into me or something.

With that thought in mind, I pick up the pace until I'm jogging. I don't slow down until I'm deep into the woods.

Hopefully, I won't get too lost while trying to find the house. As long as I don't end up walking in circles, I'll reach it or the gate surrounding the academy, eventually.

How the hell did this happen? How is my sister dead and here at the academy?

Rage rises within me, finally pushing away the grief—for now, at least. I throw my head back and let out a scream. Then another and another until my throat hurts, and I feel a tiny bit better.

Panting, I hear my phone go off and reach into my pocket, tugging it out to read the message.

SCYTHE ACADEMY

Congratulations on passing your final, reaper. For all your hard work, you'll have the next week off before being moved to your new housing off campus.

Oh, yes. That's exactly what I need—a fucking congratulations text.

Still pissed, I stalk through the trees with only one intention—find Wraith and make him fix this.

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Audrey

I slam the door behind me as I step into the house. Opening my mouth, I'm practically screaming as I call for my mate. "Wraith!"

I hear noise ahead and move toward it. Wraith appears in the doorway of the living room, a frown marring his face. "What's wrong, trouble?"

"What's wrong?" I screech as I barrel toward him. "I just had to reap my fucking twin's soul!"

Shock is written all over Wraith's face that's quickly replaced with pity. "Oh, Audrey."

When he opens his arms for me, I throw myself into them as my anger dissipates, leaving me with only my soul-wrenching grief. Sobs wrack my body as he lifts me into his arms and carries me to the couch.

I hear Brenden and Donovan join us, but I can't bring myself to lift my head from where I've buried it in Wraith's neck. They speak around me, but I can't make out their words over my tears.

I hate how my anger is gone, leaving me with the grief of knowing my sister is dead.

Fuck, what about Mom?

Both of her daughters are dead. Wren and I are dead. Mom is all alone.

That realization just has me crying harder. How is this my life?

I don't know how much time passes as I cry, but eventually, the tears dry up—even if the pain and grief don't go anywhere. They sit heavy in my heart as I sit up, and I know nothing will fix those feelings except time.

I find Brenden and Donovan pressed against Wraith, one on each side, as all three of them touch me.

Being surrounded by them makes me feel a little better, but even my mates can't wipe away the pain of knowing my sister is dead.

No. Not just dead—murdered, just like I was. She didn't even recognize me, and I think that might be what cuts the deepest.

“Hey, firecracker,” Brenden murmurs, his hand trailing down my face. “I know you're not okay, but is there anything we can do?”

“You're already doing it,” I tell him because there's nothing more any of them can do—except maybe Wraith.

Wraith sighs. “Where did you have to deliver her soul to?”

Turning so I can see him, I scoff. “Right here to the academy.”

“No.” Donovan lets out a growl. “Your sister was murdered? I'm so sorry, pretty girl.”

Pulling away, I know I need to tell them the entire story so they can understand just how bad this is. I push to my feet, pacing across the space before coming to a stop in front of my mates.

“Her bastard of a husband is the one who killed me. He’s probably the one who killed her.” At the surprise on Wraith and Donovan’s faces, I tell them the story about remembering everything. I should’ve told them before now.

Before I even finish filling them in, Donovan is on his feet and pulling me into his arms. Instead of returning to the couch, he sits in an armchair facing said couch. “I’m sorry. I just need to hold you right now.”

Softening slightly, I give him a quick kiss before wiggling in his lap until he releases me enough so I can face the others as I finish telling them the story. I sniffle, once again fighting tears as I tell them about reaping her. “She didn’t even recognize me.”

“I’m going to kill him,” Donovan growls, and I bite back a smile.

Wraith sighs. “Fucking hell, trouble. I wish you would’ve told us this sooner, but I can understand why you didn’t. That’s a lot, and you might be right—your sister might have been killed by her husband. Not that it matters now. She’s already here. You never should’ve been the one to reap her soul—I’ll be looking into that as soon as I can.”

“There’s nothing you can do about it?” I ask, almost afraid of his answer.

“About her being dead?” He shakes his head. “I don’t have the ability to bring someone back to life, but there are other things I can do.”

That gets my attention. “Oh? Like what?”

Wraith sighs, running a hand through his hair. “Anything I can do will have to wait until after I welcome her class at midnight. She’ll have to remain there until then. After that...”

“Well, don’t leave me hanging, Wraith.” I’m trying not to get frustrated with my mate, but that’s kind of hard when he’s not telling me a damn thing.

“I can give her back her memories if you really want to know who killed her, and so she’ll recognize you,” he finally says.

I stare at him in shock. “You can do that? You bastard! Why didn’t you give me back my memories, then?”

He rubs his forehead as he considers me. “Honestly? I thought it would be better if you didn’t remember how you were killed—although you apparently already knew. I was trying to save you from having to deal with it.”

“Do me a favor, Wraith, okay? Never keep something from me because you want to save me from something, okay?”

Now I’m pissed again, which is much better than dealing with my grief. There’s nothing I hate more than things being kept from me because someone thinks it’s better for me. Those are decisions I should be allowed to make on my own.

Wraith winces, eyes moving over my shoulder to Donovan, who chuckles. “I told him to give you the choice. He wouldn’t listen.”

“At least I know someone has my back,” I bite out.

“Hey!” Brenden frowns. “I always have your back.”

“Yeah, you do.”

And just like that, Brenden is grinning at me.

What a fucking sociopath, but he's my sociopath.

"Fuck. I'm sorry, Audrey. I should've listened to Donovan." He shakes his head as he pushes to his feet before coming to kneel in front of me. "You're so strong all the time, trouble, and I just want to protect you from what I can. Which I know isn't what you want. I'll try to do better."

"That's all I can ask," I tell him, leaning forward to kiss him. "Now, tell me more about giving my sister back her memories."

Wraith shakes his head, turning his attention back to Donovan. "You can't hog our mate, pet."

I can practically hear Donovan roll his eyes behind me. "I can do whatever I want."

"Ummm...yeah, I'm not okay with that," Brenden calls over, his smile turning predatory. "I don't handle it well when someone tries to keep me from my obsession, and that's exactly what Audrey is—my forever obsession."

And it seems Brenden is letting out all of his crazy today.

How the hell did I end up with a sociopath vampire, a possessive hellhound, and literally Death as my mates?

At least life will never be boring, and that's without adding in my other two possible mates.

Maybe the two of them will be more normal?

I scoff because knowing my luck, they'll be worse.

I pat Donovan's knee. "Why don't we go sit back on the couch? I can sit between you and Brenden so neither of you freaks out."

"I guess that works." It totally sounds like my hellhound is pouting, and when I turn around to glance at him, I see he is.

"Okay, grumpy pants, let me up. I want to hear what Wraith has to tell me."

Donovan's arms tighten around me for a moment before he sighs and lets me go. Wraith helps me stand, leading me over to the couch. Somehow, Donovan ends up getting there before us, launching over the back of the couch and leaving barely any space between him and Brenden.

I just shake my head and sit down, knowing this isn't worth arguing over. If they want to be sitting on top of me—more like me sitting on top of them—then so be it. It's not like it's a hardship to be pressed up against my mates. Wraith sits on the coffee table across from us.

"Instead of assigning her to one of the groups, I'll put in a request shortly for her to be in a group on her own. Since you're not staff, Audrey, you can't be in the room with us—"

"Why not make her staff, then?" Donovan asks, and I perk up. I like the idea of being able to be in the room with them.

Wraith sighs. "Fucking hell. Honestly, I probably should. You can be a teacher's assistant like Brenden for now. We're going to have to figure out how all of this is going to work, anyway. I guess I'll put that request in as well."

"Thanks, Wraith." I grab his hand, giving it a squeeze, but when I go to pull away from him, he keeps a hold of it. "Can I have my hand back?"

He shakes his head. “No. I think I’ll hold on to that since your other two mates are cuddling with you.”

I throw my free hand into the air, rolling my eyes. “Yeah, okay. Do whatever you want, I guess.”

“I will, but thanks for your permission.” He smirks, and I have to bite back a smile. My mates are so damn attractive. “I’ll assign Wren to you, then you and Donovan can bring her back to the house. I’ll have to handle a few things, but I’ll meet the three of you back here.”

“And then you’ll give her back her memories?” At his nod, I let out a sigh of relief. “Then what?”

Wraith looks confused. “Then you’ll know if you’re right about it being her husband. That way, you won’t have to worry about it. Your sister will remember you, and we’ll help her through the academy.”

I frown. “And then what?”

“I don’t know what you want me to say, Audrey. Like you and Brenden, I won’t allow her to be sent away. She’ll become a reaper just like you.” Wraith pushes to his feet. “That gives us six months until she graduates. That’s plenty of time for us to figure out how this will all work once everything is said and done. Now, I’m sure you’re hungry. Why don’t I go make us breakfast, and we can figure out what we’re going to do with the rest of our day.”

All I can do is blink as he walks toward the kitchen as if the conversation is done and over with.

I might have shared how I died with them, but I realize I never shared my vengeance

plans. That was probably a smart move on my behalf because I don't think Wraith is going to take that well. He seems to think I just need to confirm if Michael killed my sister and then I'll be able to move on with my life.

Yeah, that's not going to happen. Even if he didn't kill Wren, he had something to do with her death—of that, I have no doubt—and he will pay for what he's done.

Brenden's already on board with my plan. I think Donovan will back me up, but I think Wraith is going to be a hard sell. But that's not something I have to worry about just yet.

First, I need to get Wren her memories back and confirm that Michael killed her, too. Then I can bring up my plans. Okay, my non-plan because I don't actually know how the hell to make him pay, but I've already cleared the biggest hurdle—I passed my final and graduated.

One step at a time, I remind myself.

"I am pretty damn hungry. Who knew that crying burned so many calories?" My joke falls flat even to me. I huff as I stand. "I'm going to take a shower. I'll be down in time for breakfast. Thank you—all three of you. I don't know what I'd do without you."

Without waiting for a response, I practically run from the room and up the stairs.

A shower sounds amazing—definitely the right call. Hopefully, it'll help relax my tight muscles and then I can come at the situation with a fresh mind.

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Audrey

Leaning against the wall, I bounce my leg.

Stupid fucking mate.

When Wraith said I could be in the room with them, I thought it meant I could stand next to him and Donovan on the stage while he gave his speech. Instead, I'm stuck in the hallway with the professors, waiting for Wraith to let us know it's time for us to head inside.

"You shouldn't be here," Professor Freeman hisses, and I roll my neck to find her standing beside me. "You've barely graduated."

I shrug. "And yet, here I am. Why don't you take it up with Wraith if you have a problem with it?"

She sneers at me. "Just because you've somehow convinced him he's your mate, it doesn't mean you can do whatever you want."

"I didn't convince him of anything," I tell her, straightening. "He is my mate, and I'm here because he asked me to be. He has something for me to handle, so again, if you have an issue, you can take it up with him. In fact, how about you do it while I'm there? I'd love to see his response to you questioning his decisions."

She pales, eyes going wide. "I didn't... That's not what... You're a bitch."

I snicker as she stomps away, shaking my head. She's calling me a bitch? Really? As if she wasn't the one who approached me and started talking shit.

Fates, I hate that woman.

I wonder if I can convince Wraith to find her a job somewhere else. I'm sure there's someone else who can take her place.

Wraith slides out of the shadows with Donovan in his hellhound form at his side and nods to Professor Gregory.

"Audrey," she says sharply. "Come on. You're up first."

I blow both my mates a kiss as I hurry to the door, following the professor into the room. Once we climb onto the stage, she lets the students know to come forward when their names are called. My eyes scan the room, trying to find Wren. I finally catch a glimpse of her red hair near the back of the room and clear my throat as Professor Gregory waves for me to join her.

"Umm...Wren Nathaniel," I say, speaking up so I can be heard throughout the room that's gone completely silent. I watch as my twin moves to the front, stepping off the stage as she reaches me. "Hi, Wren. You're with me."

She frowns, glancing up at the stage where the next professor is calling out multiple names before focusing back on me. "Just me?"

"Yeah, you're a special case. Follow me." I lead her out the door, happy to find Donovan waiting for me.

"Hello, ladies. Are we ready?"

Wren glances between the two of us, her frown more pronounced. “Who are the two of you?”

I guess she doesn’t remember me bringing her here. At least that’s one question answered.

“I’m Audrey, and this is Donovan. We’re going to be your guides,” I tell her with a soft smile.

“I just don’t understand.” She shakes her head. “Why do I have two guides when everyone else is going in groups with just one guide per group? And why do you look so familiar?”

I force myself to keep smiling as my eyes flash to Donovan. I don’t know what the hell to tell her. Does her question mean she doesn’t remember what she looks like? Because if she did, wouldn’t her question have been something about us sharing a face?

I’m totally going to fuck this up.

“Well, Wren, you’re a special case.” Donovan links our hands together, giving it a squeeze as he starts toward the exit. Luckily, Wren trails behind us. “Wraith, the man who spoke to you a few minutes ago, needs to speak with you personally. Both Audrey and I work for the academy, so he asked us to escort you to his home. He’ll be meeting us there as soon as he can so he can talk to you.”

She seems to accept his answer as she shrugs. Her mouth falls open as we step outside, and I bite back a laugh. I guess I’ve gotten used to the underworld since I’ve been living here for the last six months, but Wren hasn’t been. I remember how surprised I was by the academy’s appearance that first night. This is probably blowing her mind right now. No one expects the underworld to be green and lush.

“You’ll get a tour of campus tomorrow,” I tell her. “You’ll have orientation first.”

That’s as much as I feel comfortable telling her since we don’t know what’s going to happen after Wraith returns her memories. Hell, maybe she won’t have to attend orientation.

“Oh, okay,” she says quietly, still following us down the path.

It takes us a bit to reach the house, and Wren blinks up at it for a moment. “Why does Wraith live in the middle of the woods?”

Donovan chuckles. “It’s not just Wraith who lives here. He’s our mate, and Audrey has one other mate who lives here. We’re in the middle of the woods for privacy. Since Wraith runs the school, he needs to be on campus, but that doesn’t mean we want people just walking up to our house.”

She hums, nodding. “That makes sense.”

That’s my logical sister right there. Even without her memories, she can understand the logic behind that. The two of us have always been two very different people. I was always the one who would fly off the handle—quick to both anger and to calm down. I reacted immediately to a situation while she would take the time to think it out. Wren rarely loses her temper, but when she does? You should run because it’s going to be nuclear.

“So, are we waiting out here or inside?” she asks, eyes on Donovan.

It’s not until that moment that I realize she hasn’t looked at me since asking why I looked so familiar—not even when I spoke to her. Even now, she’s avoiding my gaze.

I wonder what that's about.

"We can wait inside. He shouldn't be long—if he hasn't arrived before us." Donovan leads us inside to the living room, where Wraith and Brenden are both waiting for us. He scoffs. "Of course you beat us here. Come on in, Wren, and have a seat."

My sister chooses one of the armchairs as Wraith and Brenden come over to kiss me—as if they hadn't seen me less than an hour ago.

I settle onto the couch with Brenden and Donovan sitting on either side of me while Wraith remains standing. Wren's eyes rove over the room, taking in every detail before returning to Wraith. "Donovan and Audrey said you wanted to speak with me?"

"I did." He clears his throat before glancing over his shoulder at me. I can see the question in his eyes—am I sure?

"Do it," I mouth, already anxious for my sister's memories to return. I don't like how she won't look at me, almost pretending as if I don't exist.

I hate it.

Wraith sighs as he turns back to Wren. "As I mentioned in my speech, you don't have your memories of your life. I'd like to return those to you."

"Are you returning everyone else's?" she asks, frowning when he shakes his head. "Then why me?"

It's Donovan who answers. "Like I told you on the way here, you're special. You have memories we need to access."

She considers him for a moment before her gaze returns to Wraith, hurrying past me as if I'm not there. "Okay, if that's what you need. I don't know what memories you might be after, but I feel like remembering everything can only aid me."

Wraith moves toward her, laying his hand on her forehead and murmuring under his breath.

Wren's eyes go wide, flashing to me as she grasps at her chest. "Audrey?"

Wraith steps back as I launch myself across the room and into my sister's arms. Tears stream down my cheeks as she hugs me close.

"Holy shit. You're here." Wren is crying just as hard as I am. "I never thought I'd get to see you again."

I can't even form words, so I just cling to her until both of us fall quiet. When I pull away, I sit on the edge of the coffee table and keep a hold of her hand. I'm not ready to let her go just yet.

"If you're here, and I'm here, then you were murdered, too?" Wren shakes her head, tears filling her eyes. "But you died in the fire at my house. Michael said he didn't know you were there or he would've saved you."

"Fuck Michael," I growl, and her eyes flash.

"That fucking bastard. He's the one who killed me. Does that mean he killed you, too?"

I nod. "He did. I told you, Wraith. I told you he killed her, too."

Wren shakes her head. "The things he said to me. He wasn't making any sense. He

was rambling about plans and how we were trying to ruin everything he'd been planning. Honestly, I thought he was having a nervous breakdown. I certainly didn't expect him to stab me—repeatedly.” She shivers. “I could go without reliving that ever again. The look of joy on his face as he killed me. It scared me—it still scares me. Do you know what the hell he was talking about?”

“I don't. He said something similar to what he told you, but that's it. He wasn't making any sense.” I grip her hand. “I'm sorry I wasn't there to save you?”

She scoffs. “Really? You're apologizing because my husband murdered you, meaning you couldn't save me from the same fate? Fates above, Audrey.”

I shrug. “I'm your big sister. I should've been there to take care of you.”

“Really? You're pulling the big sister card? You were born twelve minutes before me.”

Brenden chuckles, drawing our attention to him. He just grins. “I'm sorry. The two of you are adorable. While I hate that your sister was murdered, I'm happy she's with you again.”

“Ugh, seriously, Brenden?” I tap my hand against my forehead, trying to summon some patience for my mate. “That is not really appropriate to say out loud. Remember, some thoughts should only be said inside your head.”

“Wait. Hold on. With everything rushing back to me at once, I almost forgot what Donovan said out front.” Wren yanks on my hand until I'm looking at her once more. “Did he say you have three mates?”

“Surprise,” I tell her with a tired sigh. “You've met Wraith and Donovan. This sociopath is Brenden. All three are my mates, and it's possible I have two more out

there. Oh, Wraith is Death—yes, as in the horsemen of the apocalypse—and Donovan is a hellhound shifter. Brenden is a vampire.”

Wren gapes at me. “I think I need a drink.”

“That I can help with,” Wraith says pleasantly. “Do you have a preference? We pretty much have every liquor known to man—and many not known to them.”

She shakes her head. “Honestly? I don’t care. I think I might be in shock.”

“At least it won’t kill you,” Brenden says with a smirk, and I lower my head.

You love him, Audrey. Don’t kill your sociopath vampire.

A smack follows Brenden’s words, and when I open my eyes, he’s glaring at Donovan.

“What was that for?”

“That, mate of my mate, was for being insensitive.” Donovan shakes his head. “I know you have more than a few screws loose in that head of yours, but you really need to think before you speak. At least when you’re talking to your mate’s sister.”

Brenden glances at me, finding me glaring at him and blanches. “I’m sorry, firecracker. I wasn’t thinking.”

Wren throws her head back as she laughs. “You know what? I think I like him.”

“Me, too,” I admit with a snort as Wraith appears with two glasses and hands them to me and Wren. “Cheers.”

She echoes my sentiment before both of us throw back the clear contents. Both of us end up choking. I don't know what the hell Wraith gave us, but that shit was strong.

Once we both recover, I take the glass from her and set both of them on the table.

“Now what?” Wren asks, glancing around the room, and isn't that the question?

What now?

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Source Creation Date: July 26, 2025, 5:22 am

Wraith

My eyes are on Audrey—as they often are—when I see her and Brenden share a look I don't understand.

“What are you thinking, trouble?” I ask, already knowing I'm not going to like what comes out of her mouth.

When she lifts her head to meet my gaze, she straightens her shoulders and lifts her chin.

Oh, I'm really not going to like what she has to say, am I?

“I'm going to kill Michael. He killed me and my sister, and he deserves to be dead.” She pauses. “He could go after Mom next, and I'm not going to let that happen.”

I sigh, running a hand through my hair. I was right. I don't like that at all.

Seeking vengeance isn't going to change anything. She and Wren will still be dead, both becoming reapers.

Do I think this Michael needs to die? Absolutely, but I don't think Audrey is the one who needs to do it. In fact, I want to keep her far away from him.

“I understand why you're upset and why you want him dead, Audrey. I really do.” Shaking my head, I glance at Donovan. His face is blank, and I have no idea what he's thinking. He's blocking our connection, purposefully keeping me out. “But this

isn't what being a reaper is about. Reapers cannot seek out their murderers to kill them. It would be chaos if I allowed that to happen."

She lifts her eyebrows as she shrugs. "Then I quit. I don't want to be a reaper if it's going to stop me from seeking vengeance for us."

After knowing my mate for a few months, one would think I would expect the things that she says, but I don't.

"That's not how it works, trouble. You can't just stop being a reaper." I say it softly, knowing she will not like what I have to say, but she has to understand. This isn't the path she needs to be on, and I can't allow her to travel it.

Not that I'm going to tell her that. If I order her not to do something, it'll only make her want it more.

Audrey pushes to her feet and turns until she's fully facing me. "I'm doing this, Wraith—whether you like it or not. There's nothing you can say that will change my mind. Either get on board or I'll do it by my damn self."

Fates. Why does she have to be so stubborn?

"I'm in," Donovan tells her. I try to catch his eye, but he's ignoring me—his focus completely on our mate. "If killing him will help you move on so we can enjoy the rest of eternity together, then that's what we'll do. I support you in everything you do."

Wow. He's putting it on thick, isn't he? Making me sound like I'm the unreasonable one.

I realize her attention is still solely on me, causing me to glance at Brenden, who still

hasn't said anything.

"Why aren't you asking Brenden?" I spit out, unable to hide my annoyance—with both her and the situation we've found ourselves in.

Brenden chuckles, leaning back as he catches my eye.

"Because this has been my plan from the moment I remembered who killed me, Wraith. Brenden's been on board since day one. I don't have to ask him for his support—he gives it to me without hesitation." Audrey isn't going to back down from this—at least not from my words alone.

Hurt shoots through me as I realize she's questioning my belief in her. She's putting my loyalty as her mate into question, and I don't like it one bit.

"Audrey, I support you in most things. But in this? I can't. This is asking for trouble. You're smarter than this. You know it will fix nothing—you'll both be dead, and you'll still be angry." As soon as the words are out of my mouth, I regret them—even before I see the anger flash across her face.

Audrey scoffs. "I am smart, you're right. That's why I waited to finish at the academy. That's why I promised Brenden I would tell you and Donovan. I know this isn't something I should do on my own. I thought I'd be able to rely on my mates to help me—to help me work out a plan, so it's not as dangerous. I've told you once, and I'll tell you again—you're not going to change my mind about this, Wraith."

"Audrey," Wren calls softly, and my mate spins to face her. "Maybe Wraith is right. Maybe this isn't the way to handle it. I know it's hard for you to let go of the anger you feel at him, but it's not worth something happening to you."

Audrey softens as she reaches for her sister, and I wonder if Wren will be able to

change her mind since she isn't listening to me.

"He killed us, Wren. He murdered us in cold blood for something we don't understand. That can't go unpunished. I'm sorry, but I can't let this go. I love you, but you won't be able to change my mind, either."

Well, there went that plan.

My eyes turn to Donovan and Brenden, but Donovan still won't meet my eyes. He knows I don't like that he's opposing me on this. I can't even be mad at him. All he's doing is supporting our mate—even if I disagree with her choices.

I can't just give in to her on this. It's going to bring literal hell raining down on us. I might be Death, one of the four horsemen, the person who runs Scythe Academy, but I still have a boss I answer to.

How would Lucifer react to this? It's not like I'll be able to hide it from him—the planning, sure. But once one of my reapers kills someone, he'll know, and he'll want answers—from me.

He could take Audrey from us—lock her in a cell for the rest of eternity. Hell, he could even destroy her soul.

She doesn't understand I'm trying to protect her from this, but maybe I can make her understand.

"Trouble, I want to give you everything you desire—I really do. But this is about more than just you. This could affect the balance between good and evil that Lucifer has barely been able to keep since the gates to heaven closed—Mount Olympus, whatever you want to call it." I reach for her, trying not to let it bother me when she steps away. "If you kill a living person, Lucifer will know. He'll know, and he'll

want answers. He'll come to me wanting to know why I allowed this to happen."

If I thought my words were going to sway my mate, I'm severely disappointed when all it does is make her lift her chin.

"I'm not scared of Lucifer. If he comes looking for answers, I'll explain it to him. I'll make him see why it needed to be done. You don't need to worry about me, Wraith."

But I do worry about her, and I always will. That's what it means to be her mate.

Scrubbing my hands over my face, I sigh. "Lucifer could rip apart your soul, Audrey. He could torture you for all of eternity. He could take you from us, and we'd never see you again. Don't you understand? I'm trying to protect us all."

Her face softens. "I understand what you're trying to do, but I'll deal with whatever consequences come from my actions. I won't let what he might do stop me. I need you to accept that."

"I don't think I can." Anger rushes through me as I stalk across the room, grabbing the first bottle of liquor I can find and throwing it at the wall. A growl spills from me at the thought of losing my mate forever. I've just found her—I can't lose her yet.

No, that's not right. I don't want to lose her ever. We're meant to spend eternity together, and that's what I want. An eternity with my fated mate and my chosen mate at my side.

If Lucifer comes for her, I'll fight him with everything I have, and that's not what I want.

Lucifer is one of my oldest friends—even if we'd both gone by different names then. We've been through so much—Lucifer, me, and the other three horsemen. We

watched the world form and change over millennia. The five of us might not spend as much time together as we once did, but we share a bond that I don't want to destroy.

But I would for my mate. For Audrey or for Donovan.

There has to be another way. I just have to figure it out—which I can't do while losing my shit.

“You should be scared of the consequences, trouble. But you don't have to take my word for it.” I turn back to her, phone already in my hand. “I'll let someone else explain what happens when you seek vengeance above all else. How it breaks you before Lucifer gets a chance to. Maybe you'll listen to someone who stood in your shoes and made the wrong choice, since you won't listen to me.”

Audrey opens her mouth—probably to argue with me—but I can't listen to her repeat the same words over and over again. I stalk out of the room and up the stairs as I dial the familiar number.

“What's up, boss?”

The corner of my mouth quirks up at his use of boss. Sure, I'm his boss, but on top of that, we're friends. I might not have known him as long as Lucifer, Gael, Octavius, and Riggs—or even Donovan—but there are some people you just know you can count on, and he's one of them.

“My mate is set on seeking vengeance against the man who killed her and her twin—”

“Her twin's dead? And here? When did that happen?” he asks, shock tingeing his words.

I shake my head, wondering how he even knew she had a twin, but it's not important. "Focus, please. She's not listening to me. I need someone who's been through this to explain it to her. Will you please come over and talk to her? I know you don't like talking about that part of your life, but it could make a difference."

He scoffs. "You really think she's going to listen to me?"

"Maybe. Maybe not. But I have to try. Donovan took her side, and I'm sure it's no surprise that the vampire did, too."

"Yeah, no surprise there. Fine. I'll be over soon."

"Thank you—"

"Yeah, don't thank me for this. See you soon."

He hangs up before I can say anything else, and I sigh in relief. If there's anyone who can understand what she's feeling, it's him. Maybe he can get through to her where her sister and I failed.

I sit down on my bed, having come to mine and Donovan's room unconsciously. I guess it's not really just our room anymore, is it? All four of us sleep in here most nights because none of us wants to be away from Audrey.

Now that she graduated, I was planning to spend the next week with her in bed with me and Donovan while Brenden was working. I was going to let him join us when he wasn't, but if this is the path she chooses to take, there won't be a week of sex in my future.

With me not supporting her on this, I might not be having sex with her for a long while.

That's a punishment I'm willing to take if it keeps her safe, but if she doesn't give up her quest for vengeance, then I can't guarantee her safety. I can't guarantee a damn thing, and I think that's what's bothering me the most.

I'm used to being the one in control. I'm used to everything running just the way I like it to, but since mating with Audrey, everything has changed.

I'm not saying that's a bad thing—it's not. Change is good, but change is hard for me when it doesn't happen often in my world. Or it's small changes over a long period of time so I don't notice them.

Audrey appearing in my life hadn't been gradual. She'd crashed into it on the night of her arrival—questioning me after I gave my welcome speech.

She's good at questioning me, and I love that about her—except in this case.

Fuck. I really hope he can convince her to veer off this path because if she's set on it, I know I'll need to support her—no matter how much I don't want to.

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Source Creation Date: July 26, 2025, 5:22 am

Nex

I 'd just fallen asleep after leading my group of new students to their dorm when my phone rang. I wish it didn't happen as often as it did—being woken up by my phone, I mean—but I'm fairly used to it by now.

I wasn't surprised when it was Wraith calling me. I was surprised by his request to come and speak with Audrey. I get why he wants me to.

My story is one that would make most people give up their path to vengeance, but Audrey? I highly doubt I can change her mind now that she's decided on it.

I've never met a more stubborn woman in my life than Audrey Maddox.

Or more beautiful.

No. I can't think about how beautiful she is or how desirable she is.

Shaking my head, I quickly pull on a pair of sweats before making my way to Wraith's house.

This is the last thing I want to be doing in the middle of the night when I have a class in the morning, but it's not like I'm going to say no to Wraith. Not just because he's my boss but because he's my friend.

He's freaking out—as he should be—and he doesn't know what to do. I still don't think I'm going to change Audrey's mind, but if it'll make Wraith feel better, then

I'm willing to rip off that particular bandage.

Who knows? Maybe she'll use my story as the cautionary tale it is.

Unlikely, but maybe.

Once I'm outside, I let my demon form out and flap my wings, lifting into the air. I don't spend enough time in my demon form since Wraith thinks it'll scare the students. He's probably right, but I need to start making time outside of class to do so. It's been entirely too long.

It doesn't take long for me to make it to his house, lowering myself to the ground. Before I land, my ears pick up on a quiet sound from the porch. My head snaps toward it, and my night vision reveals Audrey staring at me in shock and awe.

Right. She's probably never seen a demon in this form before. Hell, she probably doesn't even know it's me.

"Miss Maddox," I say with a tilt of my head as I climb the stairs.

"Professor Novak?" Her eyes are wide as they rove over my body, and I have to fight from preening beneath her gaze. "I've never seen a demon in this form before."

I shrug. "Most haven't, and how about we drop the 'professor' title? You're no longer a student, so I'm no longer your professor. My name is Nex."

"Oh, umm...Nex. Got it." Her tongue darts out to wet her lips, and I can't help following the movement. "What are you doing here?"

"Wraith called me," is all I tell her, stepping past her and into the house.

She trails behind me. “Seriously, how did I forget you were a demon?”

I smirk as I glance over my shoulder at her. “Not just a demon, but a lust demon.”

“A fucking incubus? I knew that. How could I forget that?” she mumbles to herself.
“That’s why he’s so hot.”

I snicker. “No, that’s just genetics.”

She flushes, eyes widening. She hadn’t meant for me to hear that. Too bad for her that demons have amazing hearing. But I’m not going to call her out on it.

“Where’s Wraith?”

“Right here.”

Turning my head, I find Death descending the stairs toward us. “Thank you for coming, Nex. I really appreciate it.”

“Why did you call Profess—” She cuts herself off. “Nex. Why did you call Nex over?”

Wraith’s eyes narrow on her blushing face before returning his attention to me. “Why are you in this form?”

I shrug. “I flew over.”

“That doesn’t explain why you’re still in this form. The last time I allowed you to have your wings out in my home, you destroyed a vase.”

Behind me, Audrey scoffs. “And why would you care about a stupid vase being

broken?”

“It was a vase from 3000 B.C.E. Sumer—what you would know as Mesopotamia—in pristine condition. I met the potter myself on a trip earth-side. It was a one-of-a-kind piece that was irreplaceable,” Wraith tells her softly as he glares at me.

I roll my eyes. He’s never going to let me live that one down. “Fine. Fine. I’ll put away the demon.”

With nothing but a thought, I return to my usual human form.

“That still doesn’t explain why he’s here,” Audrey says, annoyance painting her words.

“Patience, trouble. Patience.” Wraith waves for me to follow him into the living room, where Donovan and Brenden sit with a woman who’s clearly Audrey’s twin. The only difference between the two women is their hair. It’s the same vivid red, but Audrey’s is straight, while her sister’s is curly. It must be natural because if she’d just curled it, it would’ve reverted back to its natural state when she died.

I hear Audrey huff behind me, and I have to bite back a smile. She really hates not knowing what’s going on. I saw it time and time again as she stumbled her way through my classes.

“Hi, I’m Nex Novak,” I tell Audrey’s twin, leaning over to offer her my hand. “I teach here at the academy.”

She smiles, but it’s clearly forced as she shakes my hand. “Wren Nathaniel. Audrey’s twin, obviously.”

“Okay, enough with the pleasantries. Will someone please tell me why Nex is here?”

Audrey's frustration is clear for all to hear as she stomps over the couch, sitting between Donovan and Brenden.

"As I told you before, trouble, I want someone who went down the vengeance path to explain just how badly things can go." Wraith is just as frustrated as Audrey—there's no missing that—but he's also worried.

Audrey's eyes find me once more. "You?"

"Me, Miss Maddox."

"If I'm going to call you Nex, then you need to call me Audrey," she says before I can continue, and I incline my head.

"Okay, Audrey. I don't know how much you know about demons, but there are only seven main types of demons—pride, greed, envy, wrath, lust, gluttony, and sloth. Within those main categories, there are usually multiple subsets." I grin. "While you were correct in calling me an incubus, cubis aren't the only lust demons, but that's neither here nor there. We do not mate outside of our demon type. For example, a lust demon cannot mate with a sloth demon. We're just not compatible. That doesn't mean we can't be with one another, but there will be no children."

Audrey shrugs. "I actually didn't know any of that, but I don't know what it has to do with me."

I sigh, reminding myself to have patience with Wraith's mate. "I was getting there. Each type of demon has powers that deal with their demon type, and we're not meant to seek out something that falls under another demon type when it comes to humans—what we do with other demons doesn't matter. It's basically to keep everyone on task. As a lust demon, vengeance isn't within my realm of expertise as that falls under wrath demons.

“I come from a large family. I have seven fathers and seven mothers—all cubis—so they have many children, but I was their first. I had four sisters born within twenty years of me, and they were mine to care for. This wasn’t something my parents told me I must do, but it’s what I felt needed to be done. They were my responsibility.” Wraith hands me a glass of whiskey, which I’m grateful for. This isn’t an easy story for me to tell—even if it’s been over 2,000 years since it happened.

“Demons gain their strength and power from humans. We would often go earth-side to fill up our power by, you guessed it, sleeping with humans. At the time, it was just the five of us kids. It was my youngest sister’s first time earth-side as she was only twenty-one, which is when we receive our powers. I made sure she was all set up with a man and his wife in Mycalessus, who were very interested in what she had to offer before I sought my own meal. It should’ve been easy.

“Only there was no way for us to anticipate the Thracians massacring the entire town on the day following our arrival. My sister was too young to protect herself, and she was killed alongside the husband and wife she bedded. It didn’t matter to me that my other sisters survived. All I could focus on was Allegra, who I’d allowed to be killed by not being more vigilant. I vowed vengeance on those Thracians—knowing I might have to spend years finding them all and hunting them down, but I didn’t care. They needed to pay for what they’d done to my sister.”

I lift the cup to my lips, finishing the contents before forcing my eyes upward to meet Audrey’s. “My parents warned me there would be a price to pay. My sisters begged me to give up my vow, but I refused. I managed to kill each and every last man who was in Mycalessus that day. Upon my return to the underworld, I found Lucifer waiting for me—though he was known as Hades then. He informed me I’d stepped out of the boundaries laid forth for my demon type and would need to be punished for my crimes against humanity.”

Audrey blinks at me, a frown marring her face. “What did he do?”

“Well, my punishment was three-fold,” I tell her, leaning back in my chair. “As the first part of my punishment, I was sent to work for the four horsemen—basically being their little bitch. I was also banished from my homelands on Elysium, never allowed to return. The only way I was able to see my family and meet each of my new siblings that have come over the years was by them visiting me. First on Ephonia, where we lived before the academy was created, and then here on Bristix. The final punishment was the curse he placed on me.”

I rub my hand against my chest, hating the pang of longing shooting through me. Usually, I’m able to ignore it—push it down so far I forget about it—but telling this story is bringing it all up again.

“A curse? What kind of curse?” It’s Wren who asks, though my eyes never waver from Audrey.

“The worst kind for someone who lives as long as we do—to never find love. To only be able to sleep with people but never to care. Because if I allowed myself to fall for them, something would happen to rip them out of my life.” I sigh. “You can listen to me or not, but as someone who chose to follow the exact path you’re planning, it’s not worth it.”

I push to my feet and head for the door. I’ve said my piece, and now it’s time to get the hell out of here. The last thing I need is for Audrey or one of her mates to notice the way I watch her. The way I feel about her.

Because Audrey Maddox is my fated mate, and she’s here. But I’ll never be able to have her. I won’t even chance it because I won’t take her away from her other mates, and that’s what will happen if I allow myself to love her. She’ll be ripped from my life and theirs.

“Nex! Wait!” I hear Audrey calling after me, but I’m at my limit. I’ve bared my soul

to them—to her—and I'm afraid of what else they'll see.

I need to get the hell out of here.

I throw open the door and rush down the stairs, having to pause for a moment to shift forms. Before I can take off, a small hand grasps my wrist, and I curse.

Damn it. Of all the times for her to touch me, of course, it has to be right now—at the worst possible time. Because demons confirm their mates via touch when they're in their demon form. We're usually able to tell before then, but it's the only way to confirm it.

And from the gasp I hear from behind me, I know she's felt it too.

Fucking hell. This is not what I needed right now.

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Source Creation Date: July 26, 2025, 5:22 am

Audrey

When Nex practically launches himself from his chair, I find myself chasing him—even if I have no idea why. Especially since I spent so long pissed off at him, but it's like that anger is nowhere to be found. I guess it just stopped being such a big deal?

It doesn't really matter now, does it? Not with everything else going on.

He looked devastated when he admitted he would never be able to find love, and I didn't like that one bit. Not that I should care. All he ever was to me was my hot professor, and now he's not even that. Now, he's just a hot man I'll see from time to time. He shouldn't mean anything to me.

How upset he is really shouldn't matter to me.

Yet, none of that stops me from following him. He ignores me when I call out his name, and that just makes me want to stop him even more.

When he transforms into his demon form, I forget how to breathe for a moment as I take him in. He's the first demon I've ever seen before—at least in their demon form. I recall meeting a few demons before my death—not that they told me that.

It's an innate power I've always had—knowing someone's supernatural type without having to be told. Mom always told me to keep it to myself, but she had no idea why I had it.

He's gorgeous in both forms, but there's just something about this form that really does it for me. His skin is a deep crimson with small smatterings of black here and there—though I can't make out if they're just marks or something more. His wings are crimson-tipped in black and they appear to be made of skin, though it's hard to tell without touching them. His horns are black, curling backward over his head before curling forward to his chin and then curving outward. I've seen pictures of mountain sheep that have similar horns, but I can't recall what species they are.

His hair appears more black than brown in this form, but that could also be because of how dark it is out here. Based on the glimpse I got of them earlier, his eyes are black instead of brown. This form is so much more bulked out than his human one—not that he isn't well built in his human form. I've spent more than one class staring at the muscles, pulling his suit jacket tight. Let's be real. Nex Novak is smoking hot, no matter which form he's in.

Shaking my head to clear away my lustful thoughts—I have three mates. I shouldn't be thirsting over my professor. Ex-professor? Whatever.

Luckily, the moment it takes for him to shift gives me just enough time to catch up with him. I wrap my hand around his wrist to keep him from flying away before I can talk to him, gasping as lust hits me hard, along with a shock of electricity that starts in my fingers before buzzing through my body.

I've never felt anything like it before, but somehow, I know exactly what it is.

“You're my fated mate?” My voice is heavy with desire, and he curses again. “How long have you known? Why didn't you tell me?”

“Really?” he scoffs, wrenching his arm from my hold as he steps back. “Did you listen to anything I just told you? Of course I didn't tell you! Lucifer cursed me to never be able to find love. Why would I tell you I suspected you were my mate when

nothing can come of it?”

Now that he’s no longer touching me, the lust falls away as I wrap my arms around myself, a frown forming once more. “That makes no sense. Why would the Fates give you a fated mate if you couldn’t love them?”

The Fates aren’t cruel. They wouldn’t give someone a fated mate when they’re cursed to never find love, would they?

I only spoke to them for a mere moment, but nothing about them leads me to believe they’re cruel. They seemed to care about me. They wouldn’t do this to me.

“To punish me? Fuck if I know. What I do know is that I’ve had multiple lovers torn from my life for one reason or another. I don’t get a happily ever after, Audrey, and I’m not going to give you false hope of that happening between the two of us because it can’t. It won’t because I refuse to hurt you like that.” He shakes my head. “You should just forget this ever happened. Go back to the three mates you already have. They’ll make you happy where all I can bring you is heartache.”

“Damn it. What is it with my mates thinking they’re the ones who get to make decisions for me?” I shout, baring my teeth at him. “This isn’t a decision you get to make on your own. You can’t just decide that this isn’t going to happen on your own. You’re mine.”

I see the corner of his mouth tip up for a moment before he glares at me. “And you don’t get to decide it’s happening just because you want it to, sweetheart. Relationships are a two-way road, and I want nothing to do with it or you.”

I blanch as his words hit me. He doesn’t want anything to do with me?

That’s very different from him being afraid of this supposed curse placed on him.

“Fuck. I’m sorry, Audrey. That’s not what I meant.” Nex transforms back into his human form as he runs his hands through his dark hair. “I’m trying not to hurt you. That’s my entire point, and clearly, I’m fucking that up as well.”

Today is the first time I’ve seen him without his glasses on, and I wonder if he even needs them. He seems to see perfectly fine right now—unlike me, who’s struggling with the lack of light.

“I can’t do this with you, Audrey—not now. Not ever. You need to forget all about me. I won’t ruin the happiness you’ve found with your mates.”

And there he goes again, making unilateral decisions.

I reach for him again when he shifts into his demon form and looks like he’s going to take off into the sky. I pant as lust washes over me once more—that damn electric shock shooting through me. It doesn’t hurt, but it’s not exactly comfortable. “Stop making decisions for me. I should be able to decide if I want to take a chance with this curse—not you.”

“No.” This time, he speaks gently and doesn’t rip himself from my grasp. “I’m sorry, Audrey. Just like I don’t think you’ll be swayed from your quest for vengeance, you’re not going to be able to convince me to do this with you. It’ll just end with all of us hurt, and I’m not going to do that to you or to Wraith, who’s been a good friend to me for a very long time. Not to Donovan, who wants nothing more than to love you and for you to love him in return. Not to Brenden, who I really like. Remember, you’re not the only one who will have to deal with the consequences.”

Before I can argue with him further, the front door swings open. Both of our heads swing toward the sound, finding Donovan and Brenden stepping outside with Wren right behind them.

“Sorry to interrupt whatever all of this is.” Brenden gestures between me and Nex. “But we need to get Wren to her dorm. She has orientation in the morning and needs to get some sleep.”

“And I have classes. I need to get some sleep too,” Nex says before taking off into the air.

“You motherfucker!” I scream after him, hoping he can still hear me. “This conversation isn’t over!”

Nex doesn’t give any indication that he heard me, but if he thinks this is over, he’s sadly mistaken. We need to at least talk about it. I don’t like the idea of him staying away from me just to protect me.

Wren clears her throat. “Everything okay, Ree?”

I melt at the childhood nickname my sister used to call me. “Not really, but it’ll be fine, eventually.”

At least, I hope it will be.

Shaking off the bullshit, I loop my arm through my sister’s and lead her toward the dorms while two of my mates trail behind us. After we drop her off at her room and exit her dorm, Donovan and Brenden crowd me against the wall of her dorm building.

“What was it that we interrupted between you and Nex?” Brenden asks, snaking a hand into my hair and tugging on it.

“He’s one of my other fated mates.” I hold up my hand when Donovan opens his mouth to speak. “I’ll tell you everything once we make it back home, okay?”

Donovan grins. “I like it when you call it home.”

“It is home. Now, let’s get to walking so we can make it back there, yeah?”

Brenden looks like he wants to argue but finally nods.

It feels weird leaving Wren in the dorms on her own. I hate that she’s here, but I’m glad I’m here with her. At least she has her memories from the start. Plus, Wraith won’t allow her to be sent away.

Not that I’m worried about Wren not doing well. She’s always been an exceptional student, and she gives everything her all.

I’m glad neither Brenden nor Donovan tries to talk to me on the walk back. I’m too lost in my thoughts to keep up with a conversation.

Today has been a long ass day, and as much as I’d love to climb into bed and sleep for the next twelve hours, that’s not really an option.

My twin is dead and at Scythe Academy.

Nex is my fourth fated mate, but he wants nothing to do with me. All because of some curse that’s supposedly been placed on him. Sure, Lucifer is a god, but is that really something they do?

I try to recall if there have been stories of any gods cursing anyone in the past. I don’t know a lot of mythology, but I seem to recall more than a few people cursed by the gods in Greek mythology.

Damn it. Maybe he is cursed, but then I really don’t understand why the Fates would make us mates if it was never meant to be.

Ugh, there's no way they gave me a star-crossed mate, is there?

Fucking hell. This so isn't what I need to be focusing on. I need to figure out how I'm going to kill Michael now that I have more freedom as a reaper. Although who knows how much freedom Wraith will allow me since he doesn't want me seeking vengeance.

I don't understand why he can't just have my back on this. So what if I piss Lucifer off? So what if he punishes me? I'll gladly take any and all consequences I receive for my actions.

As long as Michael is dead—that's all I care about.

Sighing, I run a hand through my hair as I consider Nex's story. Yes, he was sent into servitude and unable to return to his homelands, but is that really all that bad? Does he regret what he did? Was it all worth it to him?

These are questions I wanted to ask him, but then I figured out we were fated mates, and all those questions slipped my mind.

How long has he suspected that we're mates? Did he know when he was so cruel to me? Did he know way back in the beginning and that's why he offered to tutor me?

Why does all of this have to be so confusing? Is it because I'm dead? It just doesn't make any sense.

I'm frustrated beyond belief at everything that seems to be currently raining down on me. It feels like too much.

My mind trails back to what the Fates told me. I was always meant to die because I have a destiny to fulfill. While that sucks ass, it makes me feel better to know that

there's likely a reason this is all happening at once. The Fates wouldn't give me more than I can bear, would they?

I can't break beneath what's happening around me—even if it's just to spite every fucker who wants to watch me fail. Not that I can think of many people who want to see me fail. Probably Professor Freeman, the fucking cunt. But besides her? I can't think of anyone else.

I blink, shaking away my thoughts, and realize we've already made it back to the house. Brenden's hand is still in mine as he drags me up the stairs to where Wraith is waiting in the doorway.

I guess it's time for another conversation.

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Audrey

Wraith reaches out to take my free hand, pulling me away from Brenden and into his arms. “I love you. You know that, right?”

Holy shit.

Did Wraith just tell me he loved me for the first time?

“Uhhhh....” I bury my head in his chest, refusing to look up at him. It seems like a weird time for him to just announce that. “I...ummm...”

“Nex is one of her mates,” Donovan announces, brushing past us into the house.

Well, I guess that’s one way to change the subject. I’m not sure if I should kiss Donovan or hit him.

Yes, I was definitely floundering after Wraith told me he loved me—even Donovan hasn’t said those words to me yet—but did he really have to throw me under the bus about Nex?

I was planning to tell them what happened, but he could’ve at least given me a minute.

Wraith pulls back so he can look down at me, all talks of love seeming to have been forgotten. “Is that true?”

I shrug. "Can we go inside before we start this conversation, please?"

"Of course, trouble." Wraith spins us around and leads us into the living room with Brenden trailing behind us. He lowers himself onto the couch before pulling me into his lap. "Talk to us."

"Clearly, I followed Nex when he stormed out of here. I had questions I wanted to ask him." I hesitate. "Plus, it felt like something was urging me to follow him. Rather than ignore it, I did. He transformed into his demon form and was about to fly off when I grabbed his arm. Not only was I hit by a shit ton of lust, but it felt like there was an electric bolt shooting from where we touched. Somehow, I just knew he was one of my mates, so I asked him about it."

Wraith scoffs, pulling me to him until my head is lying on his shoulder. "Let me guess. He's been staying away from you for your own good since he's cursed. He doesn't want you to get hurt, and that just pissed you off."

I frown, not liking that he knows me so well after such a short time. It makes me a little uncomfortable that I'm so predictable.

"Is that what happened?" Brenden probes when I remain silent, and I nod. "I have another guess at what happened next. You argued, but both of you are so stubborn neither of you listened to the other."

"Alright, fuck off. I don't like this game." I bury my head in Wraith's neck, hiding from their gazes.

Donovan chuckles as he wraps his hand around my ankle, squeezing it. "You should be glad we know our mate so well."

"You can all fuck right off. I've had enough shit today. I should've just gone to bed. I

didn't have to come talk to you all. I could've just buried it all and ignored it."

Wraith kisses my forehead. "I'm glad you told us. I'm sorry we gave you a hard time, but this is something we needed to know."

"The Fates said you'd either have three mates or five. I wonder if you'll meet your fifth mate soon now that you know about Nex." I turn my head so I can look at Donovan as he continues, "Obviously, Nex has a reason to fight against being your mate. It makes me wonder why your possible fifth mate might not be willing. Or if it's something outside of their control."

"I don't even want to think about that right now," I tell him. "I'm so angry with Nex for keeping this from me and for not listening to me. Although, Brenden is right. I wasn't listening to him either. This is a fucking mess."

Wraith hums, one of his hands running through my hair. "That's okay, trouble. We knew what we were getting into with you. I'm not keen on messes, but hopefully, we can help you clean this one up."

The four of us sit in silence for a moment before Brenden asks, "Now what?"

Wraith rumbles beneath me, drawing my attention back to him. "Are you still determined to go after Michael?"

"Yes." I steel myself for his argument, but instead, he lets out a long-suffering sigh.

"Then we need to come up with a plan."

"Really?" I ask, almost afraid to believe him. He was so against me seeking vengeance. Why the sudden change of heart?

He nods. “Yes, really. I don’t have to like it, but you’re going to do it whether I agree or not. I figure I better get on board to make sure none of you do anything stupid because we all know Donovan and Brenden aren’t going to temper your impulses.”

My smile grows as I reach up to cup his face, stroking my fingers through his beard. “But you will.”

“You’re damn right I will. Out of the four of us, I’m the only one who’s likely to stop and think about something instead of reacting rashly.” He shakes his head. “I don’t know how I ended up with two mates who are so impulsive.”

“Hey, don’t forget about me,” Brenden complains, to which Wraith scoffs.

“You’re not my mate—something I’m damn glad about.” Wraith offers Brenden a soft smile. “But you’re my mate’s mate, which means you’re mine to watch over as well. Now, Audrey, this isn’t something that’s going to happen overnight. It’s going to take time for us to make a plan that isn’t likely to fail—and that will hopefully keep us out of too much trouble with Lucifer.”

I nod, so glad that he’s agreed to help us. Honestly, I’m not sure we could’ve come up with a good plan without him. It’s not that my other mates aren’t smart, but Wraith is right—the three of us tend to act without thinking. “I understand. I hate the idea of him out in the world spreading his evil, but using caution isn’t a bad idea. Thank you.”

“Tonight, I think we need to get you into bed before you fall asleep on my lap,” Wraith says with a laugh. “We’ll come up with a plan soon, but what I need you to focus on is making sure your sister passes the academy. Yes, I’ll keep her from getting the boot, but she has to pass, and that’s not something I can make happen. I’ve given it a little more thought, and I’ll be giving Brenden his own class for now, but not you—at least not yet. You can help Brenden and Nex in their classes—“

Brenden lets out a howl of laughter. “Oh, Nex is going to love that. I guess it’s one way to get them to work out their shit, though.”

Wraith nods. “I was planning to do that before I knew he was one of her mates, but I think it’s especially important now. It’s not going to be easy for you to convince Nex to become one of your mates. He’s spent over two thousand years thinking he can’t have a mate—that he doesn’t deserve one.”

“Did Lucifer really curse him?” I can’t help asking.

“I don’t know. He told Nex he did, but I don’t know if he truly did. It wouldn’t be the first person he cursed, but Lucifer isn’t one to rail against the Fates.” Wraith considers me for a moment. “If he did curse Nex, I bet there’s a loophole when it comes to a fated mate. Of course, he wouldn’t tell Nex that. He won’t come to you. You’ll have to be the aggressor when it comes to him.”

I shrug. That doesn’t matter to me, but I’ll have to figure out how to go about it. Clearly, yelling at him wasn’t the right choice.

“That’s fine, but I might need some help on how to approach him without pissing him off more.” I make a face, hating that I have to admit that I don’t know how to handle my mate. “It’s not going to do us any good if we just keep arguing—and not listening, like Brenden pointed out.”

Donovan grins. “How does it feel to have to fight for a mate after the three of us just fell into your lap?”

“I would’ve fought for the three of you if I had to.” I wrinkle my nose at Donovan’s disbelieving look. “Eventually, I would’ve fought for you. Once I stopped freaking out.”

Brenden tips my head back so he can kiss me. “I never would’ve left you alone, firecracker.”

Wraith chuckles. “That’s because you’re a fucking stalker. Most women would find that creepy—not endearing.”

“So what does that say about me, then?” I ask. “Since I find it endearing?”

“That you’re just as crazy as we are.” Donovan stands up so he can kiss me before stepping back. “Now, I believe Wraith mentioned something about bed?”

I stretch my arms out before clambering to my feet. I bite my lip as I glance around at the three of them, my mind going back to Wraith’s words from earlier. “You told me you loved me.”

“I did, and you freaked out.” Wraith smirks, spreading his legs as he stares up at me.

Turning my attention to Donovan and then to Brenden, I feel like my heart is going to jump out of my chest.

“I love you—all three of you,” I admit quietly. “I’ve only ever said those words to my sister, my mom, and Brenden before now. I don’t know when I fell in love with either of you, Wraith and Donovan, but I did, and I’m so damn happy about it. We completed our bonds when I barely knew you. It felt right at the time, but it’s finally time to admit that I love you all.”

I suck in a deep breath. “I love you, Wraith. I love how you worry about all of us—how you take care of us. I love that you’re supporting me even when you don’t agree with the path I’ve chosen. That means a lot more to me than you can ever know. I love you more than I ever thought I could love another person—besides my other mates, of course. I never expected to have one mate, let alone three—or maybe

five—but I’m so glad that you’re one of them. I’m tired of holding back from you.”

Wraith’s smirk falls as he tilts his head. “I’m sorry. Can you repeat that?”

Bastard.

“I love you, Wraith,” I repeat, grinning at him. My heart is full of love for him—for them.

“I thought that’s what you said.” When he stands up, he towers over me, but I just tilt my head back. I love that my mates are so much bigger than I am. He brushes his lips over mine. “I love you, too, Audrey. It’s not something I thought I’d find again. Donovan’s always been enough for me, but I’m so glad you fell into our lives. We would’ve been happy, just the two of us, but we never would’ve been complete without you.”

I stretch up on my tiptoes and he leans down to meet me halfway so we can share a kiss—this one with a lot more heat and tongue.

I’m panting when we break apart, but I force myself to step away from Wraith so I can turn to face my hellhound mate. “I love you, Donovan. How could I not? You’ve brought me so much happiness, but it’s so much more than that. When I didn’t want to accept that you were my mate, you helped me cast a spell so I could confirm it. The Fates spoke to us, saying I had a bigger destiny. I might not know what that destiny is yet, but I know I want you to be beside me when I find out. I don’t want to exist in a world where you’re not mine.”

“Fuck, pretty girl. I love you, too.” Then he’s kissing the hell out of me, turning me on even more than Wraith’s kiss had.

Only, I can’t let them distract me too much. I’ve already told Brenden I love him, but

he deserves to have his moment, just like Donovan and Wraith did.

It takes more than a little effort to break the kiss with Donovan as he chases my lips. I shake my head, pushing against his chest. “Patience, my mate.”

“Brenden,” I practically sigh as I turn to my last mate—currently, at least. “I’ve told you I’ve loved you before, but I want to make it clear that just because I love Donovan and Wraith, it doesn’t mean I love you any less. You’re not exactly someone I would’ve sought out when I was alive, but who knows? Maybe if we’d met when we were both alive, I wouldn’t have been able to fight the pull to you. I might have run from you at first, but that pull has always been there. You—and your sociopathic tendencies—were meant for me. I love you, Brenden.”

“I love you so fucking much, firecracker,” he declares as he pulls me into his arms and kisses me, leaning me back into a dip. Yes, like in the old movies.

Never expected that to happen.

For once, he doesn’t try to devour me, standing us back up and releasing me.

“I want the three of you to take me to bed,” I declare.

“Are you sure?” Wraith asks cautiously. “You’ve been through a lot tonight. You were falling asleep in my lap earlier.”

A smile breaks out on my face. My hands are still shaking as I nod, but that’s okay. “I’ve never been sure of anything in my life. I’m definitely not tired anymore. I need your hands on me—need you to show me how much you love me.”

Donovan cheers. “Hell yes! To the bedroom!”

I laugh as he scoops me into his arms and rushes up the stairs.

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Audrey

I can hear Brenden and Wraith thundering behind us—neither of them using their ability to beat us to the bedroom.

As soon as he has the door open, Donovan launches me across the room and onto the bed. I can't help the scream that falls from my mouth—not that I thought I'd hit the ground. It's just that I had no warning. It's a little scary to go from being cuddled in your mate's arms to flying through the air.

My breath is knocked from me as my back hits the bed. I lean on my elbows, watching as Wraith and Brenden nudge Donovan out of the doorway. All three of my mates prowl toward the bed, stripping off their shirts and then their pants.

I lick my lips because my mates are hot as hell. Donovan, with his messy platinum blond hair, wide shoulders, and rippling muscles. Wraith, with his black hair, beard, bronzed skin, and swimmer's build. Brenden, with his messy brown hair, slender build, tattoos, and sexy-as-hell nose and eyebrow piercings. They couldn't be more different if they tried.

And Fates above, those cocks. I got really lucky in the size department with them—even if Donovan pushes all my limits. Especially when you add in his knot, but fuck, I wouldn't give it up for anything.

And they're all fucking mine.

I rip off my shirt and bra, never taking my eyes off them. By the time my fingers find

the button of my leather pants—I never bothered changing out of the outfit I donned for my first reap—they’re all climbing onto the bed with me.

Wraith knocks away my hand. “Let me, trouble.”

Brenden leans in for a kiss as Wraith undoes my pants, hissing when he realizes I’m bare beneath them.

Yeah, this girl isn’t going to have panty lines with her leather pants. Thanks, but no thanks.

Wraith bites my hip as Brenden breaks away. My eyes find him easily as he slides down my body so he can undo my boots and toss them to the side. My pants quickly follow the same path.

“You’re so fucking beautiful,” Donovan moans as he leans down to suck a nipple into his mouth.

My back arches off the bed, my hand going to his head as I bite back a moan. A squeak escapes me when a hand slaps the inside of my thigh.

“What the fuck was that for?” I growl at Wraith as he smirks.

Arrogant asshole.

“Don’t hold back your sounds. We want to hear how good we make you feel. Don’t we?”

Donovan hums against my tit while Brenden nods his agreement.

Rolling my eyes, I release my bottom lip. “Fine. Now, I want you to fuck me.”

“I like how you think you’re the one in charge,” Wraith says with a laugh, his hands clamping around my thighs. “But don’t worry, mate, we’ll take good care of you. You just lie back and enjoy the pleasure we bring you.”

I want to argue with him like the brat I am but decide against it. “Okay, Daddy.”

Wraith’s eyes burn with molten lava as a shiver runs down his spine.

Now, it’s my turn to smirk. “I knew you liked it.”

“Yes, brat. I like it very much, which surprises me.” He glances at Donovan, who has lifted his head away from my tits. “Don’t get any ideas, pet. Neither you nor Brenden are to call me that. It’s for Audrey only—and only in the bedroom, trouble. Do you hear me?”

“As if I want to call you Daddy outside of the bedroom, Wraith.” I roll my eyes.

Wraith smacks the inside of both my thighs this time, and I mewl. The pain quickly turns to pleasure. My cunt is needy and wet as it pulses around nothing.

“Be a good girl for Daddy, and he’ll make sure you get everything you want,” Wraith says as he rubs his hands over my thighs, soothing the last bite of pain.

I find myself nodding without thinking about it. I enjoy being called a good girl—I definitely have both a praise kink and a daddy kink. Luckily, Wraith seems to share that particular kink.

“I want your cocks.”

Wraith chuckles, shaking his head. “You’ll get what you need—when I say you get it. Brenden, our girl is feeling a little needy. Why don’t you bury your face in her

dripping pussy?”

Brenden hesitates for a moment. “Can I bite her?”

I swoon a little at him asking Wraith for permission. Brenden is neither dominant nor submissive, falling somewhere in the middle, but he doesn’t seem to mind letting Wraith take control. It’s something I’ve noticed over the last few months.

“Yes, you can bite her, but don’t take too much.” Wraith nods as he moves from between my legs so Brenden can take his place.

Having been granted permission, Brenden doesn’t hesitate to drop between my legs, lifting them over his shoulders and licking from ass to clit. He lets out a rumbling growl, his eyes flashing up to meet mine. “You taste divine, firecracker. If I could, I’d spend the rest of my life right here between your legs.”

“Pet, I want you and trouble to suck my dick,” Wraith demands as he kneels beside me.

He doesn’t have to tell me twice. I curl up to lap up the pre-cum on the tip of his thick erection before closing my lips around him.

Wraith’s hand wraps into my hair, fisting it before pulling me off his cock. “I always appreciate how eager you are to have a cock in your mouth, trouble, but I want both of you to suck me. Pet, why don’t you pile a few pillows behind Audrey so she’s more comfortable?”

Donovan does just that, and I’ll admit this is much more comfortable.

I’m distracted from Wraith when Brenden sucks my clit into his mouth and pushes two fingers inside of me. There’s a slight pinch of pain, but I’m wet enough to take

them both. Plus, who doesn't mind a bit of pain from time to time?

My hand delves into Brenden's hair as my hips jerk up to meet him. He groans against my clit, and I gasp.

"That feels so fucking good, Brenden. I love your mouth."

Wraith's cock slaps me in the face, shocking me into returning my attention to him.

"Yes, keep your attention on me, trouble. Now, suck my dick."

Donovan leans forward, licking a stripe from root to tip, so I do the same. We press kisses and licks to his entire length before Donovan closes his lips around Wraith's thick cock. He takes him deep into his throat before popping off and offering it to me.

I'm not going to turn that down, sucking Wraith down a few times before switching with Donovan again.

It's getting really hard to concentrate as Brenden doubles down his efforts between my legs. My head falls back on the pillows, my hand tightening in his hair as my pleasure builds.

"Tsk tsk." Wraith shakes his head. "I told you to suck my cock, trouble."

"I can't....can't focus," I pant, lifting my hips to grind against Brenden's face. "I'm going to come."

"That's fine. I guess I can fuck your mouth and cut off the air-flow a little while Brenden makes you come on his face."

My mouth falls open as I nod. "Yes, please. That. Do that."

Wraith straddles my chest—making me release my hold on Brenden’s hair—before feeding me his cock. He gives me no time to adjust as he slips into my throat. I gag a little as he sits there for a moment. He’s thick enough that it’s hard to breathe around him, which is kind of the point. He thrusts in and out of me, his cock never leaving my throat as I struggle to get enough air in through my nose so I don’t pass out.

Donovan has returned his attention to my tits, circling one nipple with his tongue while his fingers pinch the other.

Brenden twists his fingers, pounding into my G-spot as he bites down on my clit, and my orgasm rushes through me. I try to scream around the cock in my mouth, but only a few choked sounds make it out.

My body goes taunt as it wracks through my body, and I absolutely forget to breathe as my pussy pulses around Brenden’s fingers. Pleasure pours through my entire body from head to toes. My vision darkens around the edges, but I still can’t seem to get in enough breath until Wraith pulls out of my mouth.

“Holy shit,” I say between pants. “That was fucking intense.”

Then Brenden bites into my thigh, and I scream out as it sends me into a second orgasm before the first has fully ended. When Brenden lifts his head, his lips are covered in my release and my blood, and it sends a shiver through me.

Why is that so fucking hot?

Brenden strokes his cock as he kneels between my thighs. “Can I fuck her, Wraith?”

Wraith glances at my vampire mate with a soft smile and a nod before lying beside me. “We’ll let Brenden wreck your pussy and fill you with his cum. Then I’ll fuck it back into you before filling you up myself. Donovan will go last, and you’ll be so

ready for him there won't be any pinch."

"Yes," I scream out as Brenden buries himself to the hilt. "I want you to fill me up with your cum until it's dripping from my used cunt."

"Fucking hell, firecracker. The mouth on you, I swear." Brenden's hands tighten on my hips as he pulls out until only the tip remains and then plows into me once more. "You take my cock so well, Audrey."

Wraith turns my head, kissing me gently before turning me toward Donovan, who does the same. A whimper falls from my lips as Brenden spreads my legs wider before hooking them over his shoulder. When he tilts my hips, I gasp as he pounds into me.

Donovan and Wraith close their lips around my nipples, and someone's finger finds its way to my clit and flicks it.

My back arches once again as sensations rush through my body. It's hard to focus on one thing when all three of my mates are making me feel so good.

I'm unsurprised when I come quickly, Brenden cursing as my pussy grips him while I scream out his name. He continues to fuck me through that orgasm and into the next before following me over the cliff.

I'm sweaty and panting, collapsed against the pillows and unable to move when Brenden pulls out and Wraith rolls away from me. In the next moment, his hands are wrapped around my hips until I'm straddling him. His hard cock slides between my slick lips, and I cry out. I'm still sensitive from the four orgasms I've already had, but I reach down so I can notch him at my entrance before sliding down his length.

We moan together, Wraith's cutting off when Donovan kisses him.

Once I'm fully seated, I rock my hips, loving the way my clit grinds against him with each movement. I know he wants me to ride him, but I can already feel another orgasm creeping in, so I keep rocking back and forth as I lean forward, bracing my hands on either side of his hips for leverage.

Donovan and Wraith break apart as I swivel my hips, their eyes falling to me.

"Are you about to come again already?" Wraith chuckles as I nod frantically. "Use me, trouble. Use me to make yourself come."

Apparently, that's all I need to send me spiraling once more. My fingers dig into the sheets as I moan, leaning forward until I'm lying on top of Wraith.

Even though I'm coming, I need more, so I use my legs to lift my ass off him before slamming back down. I pant as I fuck myself on his thick cock.

"Fuck, Audrey. You're desperate for it, aren't you?" Wraith breathes out, his hands tightening on my hips.

I turn my head so I can look up at him. "Yes. I need you. All of you."

"I've got you," he assures me, helping me impale myself on him again and again. He fucks into me from below, meeting each of my movements and hitting just the right spot. I scream as I barrel into another orgasm.

Wraith fucks into me a few more times before following me over the edge with a long, loud groan. He wraps his arms around me, holding me close, even as his hips continue to push into me in small strokes, drawing out my orgasm.

"You're perfect, trouble. Absolutely perfect," he tells me as he leans down so he can kiss me. The kiss is dirty and messy, all tongue and not a lot of precision, but it's

fucking perfect.

When we pull apart, Donovan lets out a whine.

“You’ve been so patient, pet,” Wraith says as he runs his hand over Donovan’s chest. “You’re always such a good boy. Bury that monster cock of yours into our mate and make her come over and over again.”

Donovan lifts me off Wraith but doesn’t take me far. In fact, all he does is turn me so my arms are on one side of Wraith while my knees are on the other with Donovan behind me.

“Mmm...yes.” Donovan leans forward and bites my ass, causing me to jerk away from him, but his hands hold me steady. He leans forward until he’s curved around me and his lips brush my ear. “Sorry, pretty girl. Your ass is just so biteable. I couldn’t help myself.”

Before I can respond, he’s pushing his cock into me, and I forget how to speak.

Wraith was right. After coming as much as I did and having two of my mates’ cum inside of me, Donovan slips inside with no problem.

My eyes roll backward as he fills me completely, his pelvis resting against my ass.

“I’m going to rut you,” Donovan warns me as he closes one of his hands around my hanging tit and squeezes it. “I can’t hold it back.”

“Don’t you fucking dare,” is the only reply I get out before he’s pounding in and out of me. He’s so fucking big that his cock drags against every part of me.

He fucks me hard and fast, sending me into two mind-blowing orgasms before he sits

back and pulls me up with him. He hits all new angles with this position, and I find myself meeting each and every one of his thrusts, fucking him as he fucks me.

I've come how many times already? I've lost count, but I know this next one is going to destroy me.

Donovan pinches my nipple as someone's lips close around my clit, sucking it before biting down. I have just long enough to glance down to see Wraith staring up at me before I detonate. I scream as it rocks through me, Donovan pulling out and slamming back into me until his knot slips inside and locks us together.

His cum is hot as he paints my walls, and I shake in his arms before slipping into unconsciousness.

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Source Creation Date: July 26, 2025, 5:22 am

Audrey

CELESTE

You're really missing out on these sweet-ass new apartments.

AUDREY

I thought you guys weren't moving for a week? That's what the text I got said.

DIANA

Ha. Probably because you're the boss's mate.

We haven't been here for long. Just got here, actually.

CELESTE

And our girl is going through withdrawals.

Her girl passed her final—so did the boyfriend. But they're not getting their new places until tomorrow.

DIANA

Shut up, Celeste. You're making me sound desperate.

AUDREY

So where are your new apartments since I won't be getting one?

CELESTE

What the hell do you need an apartment for when you have that massive house?

AUDREY

I don't, but that doesn't mean I'm not totally jealous.

DIANA

We're in Ephonia—the city.

CELESTE

Not to be confused with the land of the same name that we're also on.

AUDREY

You're both nut-bags, you know that?

DIANA

But you still love us.

CELESTE

You'll need to get your mates to bring you over soon.

Diana and I have apartments right next to each other.

AUDREY

I'll talk to them.

I'm meeting Wraith and Donovan now. They have a surprise for me.

I'll call you later. Love you both!

"Audrey!"

I glance up at the sound of Wren's voice, spinning around to find her hurrying across the courtyard toward me. "Hey, Wren."

It hasn't quite been a week since my sister arrived, but it's finally Saturday, which means a day off for all of us. I have no idea what they have in store for me, but I'm glad my sister found me before I left. When I stopped by her dorm room, she wasn't there. I sent her a message but didn't hear back from her. I figured I would catch up with her later in the day, but here she is.

"I was looking for you," I tell her as she catches up with me.

She nods. "I figured when I saw you walking away from my dorm."

"You didn't have to chase me. I sent you a message."

"I forgot my phone in my room." She wrinkles her nose. "Honestly, I just needed a moment away from it all, you know? I'm a little surprised this is the first time you've come looking for me."

I don't like how hurt she sounds as I pull her into my arms. "I'm sorry. I was giving you space so you could adjust to the new normal. I remember how overwhelming it was when I first arrived here."

Wren returns the hug, clinging to me almost desperately, and I realize just how badly I fucked up.

"I thought you were dead for months, Ree. Okay, you are dead, but I didn't know I'd get to see you again. I don't want you to give me space. I want you up my ass so I can be up yours," she tells me as she pulls back, and I laugh.

"I'd rather neither of us was up the other's ass, but I get what you're saying." I sigh. "I'm sorry. I won't stay away anymore. Soon, you really won't be able to get away from me. I'll be helping out in at least two of your classes starting Monday. Since I passed my final, they gave me a few days off."

Wren's face lights up. "Does that mean you can come spend time with me?"

"I'm sorry, Wren. I'm actually on my way to meet up with Donovan and Wraith. They have a surprise planned for me." I don't like the way her face falls. "You know what? I'll just call them and ask them if we can do this later. I've missed you."

Wren shakes her head. "You're not canceling your plans with your mates to hang out with me. Maybe we can hang out after you get back?"

"Oh! If we're back in time for dinner, then we can have you over. Brenden is already pouting that he's not allowed to come with us today. But I can spend all day with you tomorrow."

"That sounds perfect. Just call or message me when you get back, and we'll figure it out." Wren hugs me again before stepping back. "Have fun."

I hesitate as I realize Wren can probably help me fill in the one remaining hole in my memory. “Before you go...I seem to have a problem with crowds. It’s the only thing I haven’t remembered. Do you know why?”

Wren’s face falls as she nods. “It’s probably for the best that you don’t remember.”

Annoyance ripples through me, but I manage not to growl at her. “That’s all fine and dandy, but can you tell me why? It’s driving me crazy.”

“Are you sure?” She sighs at my nod. “When we were eight or nine, Mom took us to a concert—”

“I remember that. It was a supernatural music festival. We saw some great acts.”

She laughs. “We did, and we had a blast—for the most part. But hunters somehow found out about it and attacked the festival. Somehow, you ended up separated from me and Mom. You were almost trampled by the crowd. By the time someone grabbed you off the ground and we found you, you had a broken arm and leg. You haven’t really been able to handle crowds since then. You will if you have to, but usually only when I’m with you.”

A shiver runs through me as a flash of a memory rushes forward—me curled into a ball on the grass as people run over and around me, pain and panic coursing through me. It’s there and gone in a moment, and I think Wren is right. That’s one memory I don’t want back.

“Well, that sucks, but I’m glad I know. Thanks, Wren.” I glance down at my phone as it vibrates, seeing a message from Wraith. “I better hurry. I think they’re getting impatient.”

“Love you, Ree. I’ll see you later!”

I wave as she heads toward her dorm building, and I duck into the administration building. I could've gone around, but that would mean extra walking. Why walk more than I have to?

I nod to Barbara behind the front desk as I pass her, and she waves. Then I'm outside, staring at the academy gates. Wraith and Donovan are talking quietly beside it, and I hurry over to them.

"Sorry I'm late. I went looking for Wren so I could let her know I wasn't going to be around. We had a quick talk, and she told me why I have so many issues with crowds." I explain to them what she just revealed, and the two of them share a look. "What?"

Wraith frowns. "Honestly? I forgot about your issues with crowds. We were planning to take you to Ephonia to show you around, but it's always crowded there. Hard for it not to be since it's the major city of the underworld. Maybe we should do something else."

"Oh, no. Nope. You're not getting out of this. I want to see the city. Plus, Celeste and Diana told me they just got their new apartments. I want to see them." I wrinkle my nose. "I can deal with crowds if I need to. Wren said I could do it with her, so I don't know why I wouldn't be able to with the two of you."

As usual, Wraith looks like he wants to argue with me. "Fine, but if you get too overwhelmed, tell me. I can travel us through the shadows to get us away. That's how we're going to get there, anyway."

"I promise, I'll tell you if it gets to be too much." I squeeze his hand as I grin. "I really want to see Ephonia. Can we go now?"

Wraith still looks uncertain, so I turn to Donovan as I poke out my bottom lip. "Tell

him it'll be okay, Donovan."

Donovan shakes his head. "Don't try to use me to get your way, pretty girl."

Now I really am pouting. Now that I know what we were going to do, I'm not going to be happy doing anything else.

Huh.

Maybe Wraith is onto something. I am a brat.

"Please, Wraith. I really want to go."

"Fine, but do not leave our sides," he demands in his best dad tone, and I really want to call him daddy to fuck with him, but I promised I wouldn't. "At least one of us needs to be with you at all times. If you get overwhelmed, I'll bring us to the reaper apartments and you can see your friends."

I nod. "I agree with your terms. Although I want to see my friends, regardless."

"We'll make sure that happens. Now, hold on tight and don't let go." He pulls me against his side before doing the same to Donovan.

I loop both my arms around Wraith, smiling when Donovan grabs one of my hands while locking his other around Wraith's back under mine. I know that even if I do accidentally let go, Donovan won't let me go. He'll always keep me safe.

Shadows rise around us, pooling at our feet before wrapping around us like a cocoon. As with the last time, my stomach dips a little as I feel us beginning to move. It takes us longer this time. I'm guessing it's because we're covering a longer distance, but it's still only seconds later when the shadows begin to recede.

I find myself standing in an alleyway, surrounded by tall, dark buildings. They're not black but a dark slate. At first, I think they're made from brick, but as I reach out to touch them, I realize it's some kind of rock.

"Obsidian," Wraith tells me. "Every building in Ephonia was built by Lucifer's magic, and he fucking loves obsidian. We'll point out his palace when we're closer. I'm sure it'll come as no surprise that it's also made from obsidian."

My ears feel like they're blocked, so I yawn to clear them, and the noise finally filters in. I wonder if that's caused by traveling through the shadows. I don't remember it happening the last time, but I was also a little preoccupied then.

Turning toward the sounds, I see people bustling past the open alleyway. Sniffing, I realize something smells amazing, too.

"Can we go now?"

Wraith chuckles. "Yes, trouble. We can go now. Remember, one of us needs to be with you—"

"And I need to tell you if I get too overwhelmed. I got it." I hurry forward, realizing we're at a street market. "Ohhhh, what's this?"

Donovan throws his arm over my shoulders and leads me to the first tent that houses leather clothing—my mate knows me so well. "Every weekend, people from all over the underworld come out to sell their goods. You'll find a little of everything here—food, clothing, weapons. You name it, it's probably here."

"We thought it would be something familiar that could ease you into the city," Wraith says as he comes to a stop on my other side. "If you see something you want, let me know. Most of the sellers are demons. They'll rip you off if you don't know how to

haggle with them correctly.”

“I take great offense to that, Death,” an old woman says as she slips between the curtains at the back of her tent. She appears as a human, but I know that doesn’t mean anything.

“Evelyn, how many times do I need to remind you I go by Wraith now? And you know I wasn’t speaking about you. It’s these other assholes we have to watch out for.” My mate sounds exasperated, but he’s smiling down at Evelyn. He leans down to hug her when she reaches him.

Donovan leans over so he can whisper in my ear. “Evelyn is a pride demon. She doesn’t take well to people questioning her integrity—even Death himself.”

“You act as if I can’t hear you, hellhound.” Evelyn turns to face me. “And who is this lovely creature?”

Wraith hurries back to my side. “Evelyn, this is mine and Donovan’s fated mate, Audrey. Audrey, this is Evelyn. She’s an old friend.”

Evelyn bats at his arm. “Stop calling me old. You’re older than me—by a lot. But I’m glad to hear you’ve met your mate, and that you share one. That must make things easier.”

I’m not usually someone who embarrasses easily, but my cheeks warm at her insinuation. I hold my hand out to her. “It’s nice to meet you, Evelyn.”

“It’s nice to meet you, too, Audrey.” She shakes my hand, glancing between the three of us. “Not that I don’t appreciate the visit, but since neither of you wears leather, why are you here?”

I bounce on my toes. “Hopefully, it’s for me.”

Donovan snickers. “Yes, pretty girl, it’s for you. Our mate seems to prefer leather pants, and I like the way they look on her ass, so I thought we could get her some more.”

“Ahhhh, I can definitely help with that. Come with me, Audrey. Let’s discuss your likes and dislikes, and we can figure out what I have for you.” Evelyn pulls me away from my mates, and I glance back at them. Wraith told me not to leave their sides, but they’re letting a demon lead me away.

“You’re safe with Evelyn, trouble. I trust her,” Wraith assures me, and I shrug.

Thirty minutes later, I walk out of her tent wearing the most comfortable pair of leather pants. Plus, the ten pairs and a few shirts that Wraith sends back to the academy with his shadows—which is really fucking cool. Evelyn also promises to work on some designs for me she thinks I’ll love.

As my mates lead me through the crowds, I find I don’t mind it nearly as much as I thought I would. I was planning to fake it until I made it, but with Donovan’s arm around my waist and Wraith’s hand tangled with mine, I feel safe and protected. Half the time, I forget we’re surrounded by people as we shop.

Wraith wasn’t joking about haggling with the demons though—especially the greed demons.

Anything I look at ends up being bought. Both my mates ignore me when I tell them it’s too much before I finally stop complaining. If they want to spoil me, then I’ll let them.

I don’t think I’d want to wander the market on my own—I’d definitely freak out—but

I hope they'll bring me back. I meet so many people. Lots of demons, but so many other supernaturals that I wouldn't have expected to be in the underworld. Apparently, some people choose to live here. Humans can't. They can only enter the underworld as a spirit, but the rest of us? We can travel here whenever we want.

Not that it matters to me since I'm already dead, but I wonder why I never learned that. Is it not widely known by supernaturals? Or did my mom just not know? Or did she know and not tell us?

It's not really important in the grand scheme of things, so I just let it go, allowing my mates to lead me from tent to tent until Wraith announces it's time for lunch.

Audrey

I 'm not sure where I expected Wraith to lead us, but a pub wasn't on the list of places I considered. He stands out in his sharp suit, but Donovan and I blend in with no problem.

It's pretty busy considering it's only lunchtime. The bar is completely full, as are most of the booths and tables.

“Wraith! Donovan!”

The three of us spin at the sound of their names to see a mammoth of a man waving at us. I thought Donovan was a big guy, but he's got nothing on this other man. His dirty blond hair is long and pulled back in a bun. He's taller than even Wraith, probably closer to seven feet than six, and built like a linebacker. On top of that, he's hot as hell.

Then he smiles, and I almost melt into a puddle right then and there.

“Holy shit. That smile is dangerous.” Both of my men let out growls, and I bite back a smile. “Down, boys. I take it he's a friend of yours?”

“That's Gael,” Wraith tells me, leading us to the booth Gael just sat down in. “Also known as Conquest.”

My eyes widen. “Am I meeting the rest of the horsemen?”

“Unfortunately, yes.” Donovan is practically pouting. “And if that was your reaction to Gael, I’m not going to like you meeting the other two.”

Before I can think of how to respond, we reach the large circular booth. Gael is grinning at me, his sky-blue eyes holding nothing but mischief. Beside him sits a man with skin so dark it rivals the obsidian tabletop. His hair is in box braids, a deep shade of blue that looks unnatural but matches his eyes. While not as big as Gael, he’s still bigger than my mates. On his other side is a man with red hair, a full beard, and gray eyes. He looks tall, built more like Wraith than the other two men. They’re all fucking gorgeous.

“Aren’t you going to introduce us to your new mate, Wraith?” Gael asks as he leans back in the booth.

I glance up at Wraith, finding him glaring at the three men, who all just grin back at him. “I hate all three of you,” he mutters with a shake of his head.

“No, you don’t,” the redhead says. “But you’re being rude.”

“Like any of you care about being rude.” Wraith scoffs. “Trouble, this is Gael, also known as Conquest. Beside him is Octavius, also known as War. That just leaves Riggs, also known as Famine. Horsemen, I’d like you to meet mine and Donovan’s mate, Audrey.”

“Ummm, hi,” I say with a wave, not sure which one of them to look at. They’re all just so damn attractive—although not nearly as hot as my mates.

Octavius chuckles. “It’s nice to meet you, little reaper. We’ve been begging Wraith to bring you around since he told us about you, but he’s been keeping you to himself.”

When I go to slide into the booth, Wraith stops me and slides in first, pulling me

behind him with Donovan taking the outside seat. I glare at Wraith, knowing he purposefully put himself between me and Riggs.

What a jealous asshole. If he keeps this up, I'm going to give him something to be jealous of.

"Maybe I just didn't want to watch the three of you hit on her," Wraith snarks, and I snort.

Riggs lifts an eyebrow. "No one is hitting on your mate, man. If we were, you'd know it."

Donovan snarls, and it sends the horsemen into a bout of laughter.

"Donovan, we're not going to try to steal your mate." Gael rolls his eyes. "We just want to get to know her, for Lucifer's sake. You're lucky he was busy. He wanted to join us, and he's the one you need to worry about. He'd totally hit on her. You know he has a thing for redheads."

"He even hits on me," Riggs says with a wink in my direction. "Not that I mind. The man is amazing in bed."

"Can we not?" Wraith asks, his exasperation clear.

I grin at the three horsemen before turning back to Wraith. "I wanna meet Lucifer."

"You're not meeting fucking Lucifer," he snarls back before shaking his head. "Stop being a brat. They don't need any encouragement. They'll be on their worst behavior, regardless."

A server appears and asks us what we want to drink as she hands out menus. By the

time she returns with our drinks, we're all ready to order, and I can focus back on the horsemen.

"So what's it like to be a horseman?" I ask, and Gael grins.

They tell me about how it used to be earth-side but then explain that they'd rather prevent famine, war, and conquest rather than spread it. It's actually kind of sweet. They're all pretty awesome. It takes a while for my mates to loosen up, but after a few drinks, they were joking just as much as Octavius, Riggs, and Gael.

This isn't what I expected from the four horsemen of the apocalypse, but Wraith has already explained to me they're not actually going to bring forth the apocalypse. Yes, they have the powers to do so, but that's not why they were created.

Lucifer will occasionally call upon them to use their powers to spread conquest, war, famine, or death—or at least he has in the past—when there's no other option for a group of people. It's meant to teach them a hard lesson, and if they don't learn it, that's when it falls to Wraith.

A lot of what I thought about the world—what we're taught in school—is so very wrong. Being in the underworld is eye-opening, that's for sure.

"Gentlemen," a tall woman says, and all five men at the table stiffen as she and two men approach us. They're all about the same height, maybe six feet or so. They're each gorgeous, but that's not all that shocking. I'm coming to learn that most people in the underworld are beautiful.

What is shocking is that they have wings. Not wings like Nex, but wings made of feathers. Almost like...

"Angels?" I ask hesitantly.

“Fallen angels,” the woman corrects, her eyes trailing over me. “Wraith, I wouldn’t expect you to be at a pub with one of your reapers.”

“Lovely to see you, as always, Ophelia. This is Audrey, mine and Donovan’s mate.”

Ophelia nods, pushing back her long black hair. “Ahhh, that makes more sense. It’s lovely to meet you, Audrey. Boys, you can relax. I promise neither Sol nor Cassian are here to start any trouble. We just saw you over here and thought we’d say hello. It’s not often we see the four horsemen together.”

“It’s nice to meet you as well,” I tell her, unable to tear my eyes away from her wings. They’re completely white, making her hair appear even darker than it is. Her skin is bronzed, a few shades lighter than Wraith’s. Her eyes are such a light blue, they almost seem white. It’s kind of freaky.

Behind her stand two men—Cassian and Sol, I assume. The one on the left has golden skin and short blond hair. I’d describe him as beautiful—especially with those cheekbones that I’m definitely envious of. His eyes are a pale green as they meet mine. He gives me a nod before they return to the men surrounding me. His wings are a mixture of white, gray, and black as he flexes them.

The other man is otherworldly and beautiful. His cheekbones are almost as sharp as the other man’s, but his skin is a cool taupe color—a light brown with a hint of gray. His head is shaved and his light yellow-brown eyes are locked on me. His wings are a dove gray, and they look so soft. I wonder if he would let me pet them.

Mate.

I jolt at the word bouncing around in my head. Mainly because it’s not my voice.

My eyes are still locked on the angels—sorry, fallen angels—and I see the second

man's lips turn up at one corner.

Clearly, no one warned you about angels. Many of us are telepathic, mate of mine.

My eyes widen as I realize the angel is talking inside my head.

What. The. Actual. Fuck?

"Umm...Wraith?" I tap his hand, unable to tear my gaze away from the angel.

"Yes, trouble?" he asks, voice taut with worry as he follows my line of sight. His next word is practically a hiss. "Cassian. What are you doing to my mate?"

Cassian's lips curl up, and it's not a friendly smile. "She is your mate? That's...interesting."

"What did he do, Audrey?" Wraith asks while Donovan blocks my view of the angels with his body.

I glance between the two of them with wide eyes. "He spoke inside my head, and he called me his mate."

Silence falls around us, and I swear I'd be able to hear a pin drop. We're not the only ones in the room, but everyone has fallen quiet. It's as if they're waiting to see what the fallout will be.

Hell, maybe they are. It's clear Wraith doesn't much care for the angels before us.

"Over my dead fucking body," Donovan snarls as he spins toward the angels.

I get another glance at Cassian's smirking face before Donovan shoves him, and he

stumbles back.

“Donovan!” I screech, jumping to my feet even as Wraith grabs me.

“Do not get between them, trouble. Cassian and I have a long history—none of it good. He and Donovan usually get along, but I think it’s been a lot on his hellhound today, having you around so many people he doesn’t know.” Wraith sighs. “Just let me handle it. Stay here.”

Wraith disappears into his shadows as Riggs pulls me toward him, only to reappear just behind Donovan and Cassian. The angel takes a swing at my hellhound, and I have to fight back a snarl of my own.

Ophelia slides into the booth beside me. “It looks like you’re going to shake things up in the underworld, Audrey, and I’m here for it.”

She laughs while I blink at her. I have no idea what the hell is going on right now, but I don’t like it one bit. Part of me wants to kick the angel out of the booth to get her away from me. She’s the one who led them over here. She’s the reason this is happening.

We were sitting here having a great time—until the three of them walked up.

I wince as Donovan lands a blow to Cassian’s jaw.

“I’m Sol,” the last angel says from where he’s leaning against the booth next to Ophelia. “Sorry about the fistfight. That was rather unexpected. Especially since we all had drinks with Donovan last weekend. I’m assuming it’s a mate thing.”

I shrug, still completely lost. “I’ve only been in the underworld for six months, and it turns out that most of what I thought I knew was wrong.”

“So you just graduated. Congratulations.” Ophelia offers me a smile. “I’ll get you a drink.”

“They’re over there fighting, and you’re offering to buy me a drink?” I grimace as Wraith steps between Cassian and Donovan, catching a glancing blow from each of them, but he doesn’t even flinch.

“Enough,” he says it quietly, but there’s enough power behind it that it feels like he yelled. “Donovan, this isn’t like you. Go sit with our mate. It seems we need to have a conversation with Cassian.”

Donovan doesn’t look happy—especially not when he sees me flush against Rigg’s side with Ophelia sitting beside me. Ophelia quickly exits the booth while Riggs releases his hold on me. That doesn’t appear to be enough for Donovan, though, as he reaches out to snag my leg, dragging me to the edge of the booth.

“Mine,” he snarls before his lips descend on mine. He claims me with his kiss for everyone in the pub to see.

I should be angry with him for his possessive attitude, but it really just turns me on.

We break apart when someone clears their throat, finding Wraith standing there with a raised eyebrow. “Are you done pissing on our mate?”

“I wasn’t pissing on her,” Donovan grumbles as he stands up, offering me his hand.

Gael throws his head back as he laughs. “Maybe not literally, but you were definitely pissing on her.”

“Shut up, Gael. You’re not helping anything. I’m sorry to cut this short, but apparently, we need to speak with Cassian.” He shakes his head as he turns back to

the fallen angel. “Meet us at the penthouse?”

Cassian nods sharply, already heading for the door. He throws it open, and I catch a glimpse of his powerful wings flapping before he’s gone.

“Is someone going to tell me what the hell is going on?” I ask, glancing between my mates.

Wraith sighs, leaning over to press a kiss to the top of my head. “I’ll explain at the penthouse. It’s in the same complex as your friends’ new apartments. As soon as we’re done, I’ll take you to see them.”

His shadows wrap around us before I can say anything, and then we’re traveling through them once more.

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Audrey

I step away from Wraith's hold as the shadows melt away, and my eyes rove over the room I find myself in.

This must be the penthouse Wraith referred to. It's very modern, with all sleek lines and monochromatic colors. It's very different from the house we call home.

"Brenden should be here for this conversation." Wraith hooks my chin with his finger, lifting it until I meet his gaze. "I'm going to grab him from the academy. Cassian probably isn't too far behind us. Don't answer the door. Let Donovan do it."

I wrinkle my nose. "Why can't I answer the door?"

Donovan scoffs. "Because he doesn't trust Cassian. Plus, I'm still feeling feral. It would make me feel better if you let me get the door when he arrives."

"Oh, so you can punch him again?" I cross my arms over my chest, popping out my hip and glaring at him. "Is that how you plan to greet my mate?"

Wraith's strangled laughter dances through the air. "I'll be back in a moment."

Then he's gone, leaving me staring at my hellhound mate with lifting eyebrows. "Well?"

"I...ummm...Well, no. I don't plan to punch him again. I'm sorry, pretty girl, and I'll apologize to Cassian as well. Hearing that he was your mate and knowing the issues

he and Wraith have, something just snapped.” Donovan steps toward me. “Please don’t be mad.”

A knock on the door cuts off any response I might have made.

“Are you going to answer it?” I ask, and he smirks.

“I am, mate. I just wanted to make sure it was okay with you first.” He spins on his heel and opens the door to let Cassian in. “Cass, I owe you an apology—”

Cassian chuckles, waving off Donovan’s apology. “You don’t. It’s not the first time you’ve punched me because you were feeling possessive.”

I startle when Wraith and Brenden appear out of the shadows, shaking my head as I laugh at myself. Maybe I’ll eventually get used to people popping into the room out of nowhere.

Brenden rushes across the room, pulling me into a kiss. “I missed you.”

“You goof,” I laugh, pulling away from him. “You saw me this morning. It’s only been a few hours.”

“Seconds away from you is too long,” he tells me as his eyes flicker to Cassian. “This is the new mate?”

I hum. “It is.”

He nods, sauntering across the room to offer the fallen angel his hand and flashing him a bit of fang. “I’m Brenden. Don’t fuck with Audrey. If you hurt her, I have no problem killing you.”

“I’ll keep that in mind,” Cassian says easily. “I’m Cassian.”

“Now that we’re all here, let’s get this done and over with.” Wraith is clearly not happy, and I once again wonder what his and Cassian’s deal is. “Let’s sit down. If I’m going to be forced to be in your company, I at least want to be comfortable.”

“Wraith,” I hiss, eyes wide, but Cassian just waves it off.

“Don’t worry, little mate, I’m used to Wraith’s disdain as well as Donovan’s possessiveness. Why don’t we sit?” He gestures toward the couch.

Not knowing what else to do, I take a seat in the middle. Brenden zooms over to sit on one side of me while Cassian sits on the other side. Donovan and Wraith share the couch across from us.

When no one speaks, I glance around at them. “Don’t all speak at once. I was promised I’d be told what the fuck is going on, so someone needs to get to talking.”

Wraith frowns, his eyes finding Cassian once more before he shakes his head. “Angels aren’t exactly what you think they are, trouble. They’ve become what they are because of human’s beliefs. Angels have usually existed in one form or another throughout history, in one religion or another, but they haven’t always appeared as this. The dominance of Christianity is what gave them this form.”

“We’re actually demigods,” Cassian picks up.

My head snaps toward him. “As in, one of your parents is a god?”

“That’s usually what that means, yes.” He snorts. “When a god procreates with a human, a demigod—or angel, as we’re more commonly known now—is born. Because we are their children, most of the gods wanted us to live with them. I guess

the most common name for it currently is heaven.”

I nod slowly. “But heaven’s gates have been closed.”

Cassian scowls, rubbing his hands against his jean-clad thighs. “They have been. Ophelia, Sol, and myself were banished from heaven as a punishment.”

“A punishment for what?” I ask, cutting him off.

“I’d rather not talk about that now.” He sighs, glancing at me. “Could we table that particular conversation for now?”

I shrug. I doubt it has any importance to what we’re discussing, so I gesture for him to continue.

“We were banished to the underworld where we were tasked with judging the souls of the dead—deciding which part of hell they would reside in. It was meant to be a temporary punishment, but when the gates were closed, we weren’t given the option to return home.” I’m surprised to realize he doesn’t sound bitter like I expected. “I have long since accepted my role in the world. The underworld isn’t a terrible place to live.”

“So angels are demigods. That probably means you have powers that aren’t anything like how Christianity describes them.” At Cassian’s nod, I bite my lip. “The three of you are who my soul would’ve been sent to if I failed at the academy.”

Cassian glances at Wraith. “Something tells me that was never going to happen, but yes, it is the three of us who would’ve weighed your soul.”

“Well, that’s cool. Maybe you can explain how you knew I was your mate?” I cuddle into Brenden’s side when he wraps his arm around my shoulders. “As a witch, I’m

unable to sense my mates.”

“You’re no witch, little mate.” Cassian frowns. “Why do you believe you’re a witch?”

“Ummm...because my parents were witches. My twin Wren and I have fire magic like our mom.” Lifting my hand, I call on my fire to make a flame in my palm, jerking back when I notice it’s purple. “Why is my fire purple?”

Wraith and Donovan lean forward with matching frowns.

Cassian, seeming to understand something is wrong, clears his throat. “It hasn’t always been that color?”

I shake my head, unable to tear my eyes off the purple flames. They’re gorgeous, but I don’t understand why the color has changed. “When I was alive, it was just like every other fire. Even once I relearned my magic at the academy, it was just plain old flames.”

“When was the last time you used your fire magic?” Wraith asks, reaching out to run his fingers through it. He hisses, jerking them back and frowning at the burn on his fingers.

“What the fuck, Wraith?” I release my hold on my magic and spring across the room. “Why would you do that? Fire burns. That’s not something new. We need to get this under cold water.”

He shakes his head. “No, it’ll heal, but the fire you just called is no ordinary fire, trouble.”

“Duh. That’s why I asked why it was purple.”

“That’s not what he means, pretty girl.” Donovan pulls me into his lap. “As Death, Wraith is immune to damage from elemental magic. Your fire from before wouldn’t have burned him. There’s only one kind of fire that can burn Death.”

I swallow hard, my stomach in my throat. That doesn’t sound ominous or anything. “And what kind of fire is that?”

“Hellfire.” It’s Cassian who answers, eyes wide. “You can wield hellfire.”

My eyes find Wraith, not understanding why everyone is freaking out. “I feel like I’m missing something here.”

“Me, too,” Brenden adds.

“There are very few who can wield hellfire. There are the six gods who live in the underworld—Lucifer, Nyx, Hecate, Thanatos, Hypnos, and Erebus—and their descendants. A few of the more powerful demons, War—I mean Octavius—hellhounds. There are a few others, but they’re all from the underworld.” Wraith gives me a grim smile.

Tee hee. The original Grim Reaper gave me a grim smile.

I bite back my laughter, understanding this isn’t the time.

This happens sometimes when I get overwhelmed. My mind latches onto something that will make me laugh. It can be really annoying in serious situations such as this.

“So, what does that mean?” I ask, still really fucking confused.

“It means, little mate, that you’re not a witch at all.” Cassian pauses. “Or at least not a full witch.”

Wraith hums. “It’s possible you’re a direct descendant of Hecate. She was the original witch, and those from her bloodline have always been more powerful.”

“But she wouldn’t be able to be more than a generation or two removed.” Cassian rubs his chin, deep in thought. “You said your mom is a fire witch?”

“Yes, and before you can ask, her fire was never purple.”

“Hellfire comes in many different colors,” Donovan informs me. “It just depends on who’s wielding it. My hellfire is green, but my brother’s is blue.”

“Wraith, is it possible that one of Hecate’s sons is roaming Earth?” Cassian asks.

Wraith shrugs. “It’s possible. As you’re aware, the gods of the underworld aren’t sleeping like the gods were in heaven. If they’re even still sleeping. Who knows with those lazy fuckers? For all I know, she could have given birth to a dozen children in the last hundred years. I don’t make it over to Elysium all that often.”

I bury my head in Donovan’s neck, sucking in lungfuls of his scent. It instantly calms me. “What does any of this mean?”

“It just means you’re just as special as I always knew you were.” Donovan wraps his arms more snugly around me.

“But it also means we have no idea what you are,” Wraith admits.

Of course not. How many times have I heard someone tell me I’m something more than a witch since arriving in the underworld? I didn’t believe any of them, but now, I’m beginning to wonder.

I saw the burn on Wraith’s hand, and they have no reason to lie.

“Awesome. Great.” I sit up, shaking my head. “If we don’t know, then let’s talk about something else. Like why you and Cassian don’t get along?”

Wraith clears his throat. “I don’t really think that’s relevant to the conversation—”

“They used to be lovers,” Donovan murmurs in my ear, loud enough for everyone else to hear. “Well, the three of us used to be lovers.”

“Oh.” I lick my lips, my mind immediately picturing the three of them together. My thighs rub together, because the idea of the three of them together? Yeah, that’s hot as hell. “But not anymore. What happened?”

“We had some differences of opinions,” Wraith says haughtily, leaning back to stare up at the ceiling.

Cassian snorts. “Yeah, I guess you could say that.”

Glancing between the two of them, it’s clear they’ve never resolved whatever ended their relationship. They’re going to have to if we want this to work. Deciding that now probably isn’t the best time to bring that up, I focus on Cassian. “Earlier, I asked how you knew I was your mate.”

“Hmmm, yes.” Cassian has to tear his gaze away from Wraith. “My mother was one of the Fates. I inherited her power to see the lines of fate...or at least some of them. I’m not proficient like she and my aunts are, but our mate bond was lit up like a neon sign.”

“Oh. I...uh...I guess that means I met your mom.” At his confused look, I laugh. “Donovan found a spell for me to prove that he was my fated mate. It sent us somewhere else where the Fates spoke to me. They failed to mention that one of my mates was related to them.”

Cassian frowns. “My mother and her sisters are meant to be sleeping with the other gods. I haven’t been able to make contact with any of them. How were they able to speak to you?”

I shrug. “I have no idea.”

“What did they say to you?” he demands, and I’m a little taken aback. He sighs. “I’m sorry. It has been a very long time since I was able to speak with my mother. I miss her and my aunts a great deal.”

“That’s okay. I understand.” Donovan and I relay our vision with the Fates.

Once we’re done, Cassian is on his feet and pacing the room. “You are already mated to the three of them. That means myself and someone else might not be mated to you. Do you know who the other is?”

“I do. He’s a professor at the college. Nex Novak?”

“Nex? Seriously?” Cassian freezes, his gaze falling on Wraith. “Does this mean we need to find some way to break his curse?”

“I don’t know.” Wraith sighs. “We have so many questions and very few answers when it comes to Audrey. Maybe you can try reaching your mother? If she’s spoken with Audrey, then maybe she’s awake?”

Cassian shakes his head. “I try to reach them every night in my dreams and haven’t been able to. I will do what I can.”

“I feel like this gets asked a lot,” Brenden says with a smirk. “But what now?”

Silence falls over the room, and I realize none of us have any idea where to go next.

Where can we find the answers we need?

“Maybe we should try to find my mom?” I ask quietly. “Wren said she went AWOL after my death—which is very unlike her—but I feel like she might be the only one who will be able to give me any insight on what I am.”

Wraith nods slowly. “That’s not a bad idea. I’ll get someone to track her down.”

“In the meantime,” Cassian says, looking at me shyly. “I’d really like to get to know my mate.”

Wraith and Donovan tense, and I narrow my eyes. If the two of them are about to tell me I can’t, they’re going to have a fight on their hands.

“I’d like that a lot.” While I’m speaking to Cassian, my eyes never waver from Wraith.

“Fine,” he snarls. “You can come visit her on the academy grounds. She doesn’t like crowds, and I don’t want her traveling to Ephonia without one of us. At least not until she’s more familiar with the city.”

Cassian shrugs. “That’s fine with me.”

The two of them glare at one another, and the tension in the room ratchets higher.

“It’s getting late, and Audrey wanted to visit with her friends.” Donovan’s voice breaks their stare off. “Why don’t you call Diana and Celeste and let them know you’re on your way to see them?”

I nod, eyes still moving back and forth between Wraith and Cassian. “I can do that.”

“Then I will take my leave.” Cassian offers me a smile, pulling his phone out of his pocket and handing it to me. “If you’ll put your number in my phone, I’ll call you to set up a time for us to get together.”

I do as he asks before handing it back. “I look forward to it.”

“As do I.” He nods at me once more before heading for the door, leaving me with my three mates.

Holy shit. I have a lot to catch my friends up on.

Rising to my feet, I dial Diana.

“Great news, Di,” I say as soon as she picks up. “I’m on my way to see you and Celeste. I have so much to tell you two.”

Maybe they’ll be able to help me wrap my head around everything I learned today.

Audrey

“T his is so good,” Wren moans around the mouthful of lasagna. “Who knew Death could cook so well?”

“Call me Wraith,” he reminds her.

She nods, piling more food into her mouth. “Sorry. I’ll try to remember that.”

After Cassian left us, I spent about an hour with Diana and Celeste before Wraith brought us home. He’d been ecstatic to have Wren over for dinner. My plan had been to cook dinner, but he bumped me right out of the kitchen and told me to relax.

Personally, I think he’s just shook up over seeing Cassian again and needed something to keep him busy. I want to ask him and Donovan about what happened so badly, but I don’t think it’s a good idea. At least not to ask Wraith. It’ll probably be easier for me to get the story out of my hellhound mate since he doesn’t like to keep things from me.

But that’s a problem for another time. Tonight is about bonding with my sister.

I practically abandoned her over the last few days, and I hurt her. I never want to hurt my sister. I definitely need to make this up to her—no matter how many times she tells me I don’t have to.

I’ve already finished eating, but my sister went back for seconds, so I’m just waiting for her to finish.

“We need to have a conversation,” Wraith tells me quietly.

I nod. “I know. After I spend some time with Wren.”

His smile is soft. “Of course. I’m sure the three of us can find ways to entertain ourselves while you spend time with your sister.”

Once Wren finishes, I give each of my men a quick kiss before dragging her upstairs and into the room that’s officially mine—not that I spend any time in here. We all sleep piled together in the main bedroom unless Brenden drags me to his room for a night alone. I can count the number of times that’s happened on one hand.

Brenden might not be sexually interested in my other two mates, but he loves spending time with them. I’ve caught him and Donovan cuddling on more than one occasion. I found it a little odd at first, but then realized it offered both of them comfort. I’m never going to deny my mates comfort. Plus, they look adorable.

“So what’s this conversation you have to have?” Wren asks, throwing herself back onto the bed.

I run a hand through my hair before pulling it on top of my head in a messy bun and securing it with a hair tie. “There’s so much I need to fill you in on—even before today happened, but now there’s more.”

I give her a quick recap of the conversation I had with my mates following Nex’s departure on her first night at the academy before moving on to the events of today.

“Five mates? I don’t envy you.” Wren pats the bed, waving for me to join her instead of pacing the floor like I am right now. “You’re stressing out, Ree. Come sit and cuddle with me.”

How am I supposed to say no to that?

I hop onto the bed, lying down to face her with our foreheads touching. We've always been close, as I suspect many sets of twins are, and there's always been something comforting about wrapping ourselves up in one another.

We make each other stronger.

After a few minutes with my twin, I feel like I can do anything.

"Better?" she asks, smirking.

"Yes," I respond reluctantly. "Just like you knew it would."

She nods, rolling over onto her back. "Good. Now tell me what's going on inside your head."

"Really? You need me to spell it out for you?" At her nod, I sigh. "I have two mates who might not become my mates. That's what the Fates told me. If I can't get Nex to accept me as his mate, then I lose him and Cassian. If Wraith and Cassian can't get along and make this work, then I still lose both of them. I know it doesn't make sense, considering I just met Cassian, but I already miss him. These mate bonds are no joke."

"I wish I could find my mate or mates." Wren gives me a wry smile. "If I'd found them, I wouldn't have married Michael, and I'd probably still be alive. Which would be better but worse since you're here. Although you might still be alive if I hadn't married him."

"Nope. We're not going to think about the what-ifs. All they'll do is drive you crazy. Plus, I wouldn't have met my mates if I hadn't died." Which isn't something I want

to think about. “According to the Fates, we have a destiny to fulfill or whatever, so I think everything happened the way it was meant to.”

Wren wrinkles her nose, scowling. “I’m assuming they didn’t give you any hints about this destiny?”

I laugh. “Definitely not. It would’ve been easier if they had, but life is never that easy, is it? Enough about that. I want you to tell me what you’ve been up to. Catch me up on the goings-on of earth-side.”

Wren raises her eyebrows as she considers me. “I’m not filling you in on celebrity gossip. You know I don’t read that shit.”

“Fine. Fine. Fine.” I hesitate. “If you feel up to it, can you tell me what led up to Michael killing you? Was he always abusive to you and you just hid it from me? From Mom?”

She covers her face with her hands. “Ugh. Really? This is what you want to talk about?”

“Yes? No? I feel like we need to talk about it, even if I don’t want to.”

“Yeah, I guess.” She rolls over to face me once more. “No, he wasn’t always abusive. That didn’t start until after he killed you, I guess. Since our house went up in flames, we didn’t really have anywhere to go. Michael wanted to get a hotel, but I needed to be near Mom. Losing you was like losing a part of myself.”

Tears pool in her eyes, and I wrap her up in a hug. “It’s okay. I’m okay.”

She snorts. “Yeah, but you’re still dead. Neither Mom nor I handled it well. Michael was so cavalier about the whole thing, and it rubbed both of us the wrong way. The

day after your funeral, Mom said she needed to get away for a while. I understood it—even if I still needed her—so I sucked it up, and she left. She told me and Michael that we were free to stay at her house as long as we needed. She checked in with me twice after leaving, but that’s it. It’s almost like she disappeared off the face of the earth.”

“You don’t think that Michael has her, do you?” My eyes widen. It could’ve been completely possible for him to grab her without my sister knowing. He’s never been one for telling Wren what he does with his time. I was so worried that he would go after her next, but what if he already has her?

“I don’t know, Audrey. I really don’t. I wouldn’t put it past him, but if he did have her, then wouldn’t he have rubbed it in my face before he killed me?” She sighs. “I’m not sure he cares about our family so much as us getting in his way. Mom left town, so she isn’t in his way. Hopefully, it stays that way.”

I sit and move up the bed until my back hits the headboard, pull my knees up to my chest, and wrap my arms around my legs. “I really hope she’s okay, but she would’ve come home after they found your body—in her house, no less.”

“Fuck. I didn’t think about that. I’m sure Michael moved out, though, so there won’t be any way for her to find out whatever he’s up to. Not that I have any idea what that is. He didn’t tell me a damn thing before he killed me—though he made sure to tell me how much he couldn’t stand me. And how fucking annoying you were. If I could’ve, I would’ve killed him when he said that. I was so angry.” She scoots back so she can sit beside me, mimicking my posture with our sides pressed together.

“Let me guess, he used bindings that wouldn’t allow you to use your magic?” At her look of disbelief, I giggle. “It’s what he did to me. He’s not overly original, so I figured he’d done the same to you.”

She sighs, resting her chin on her knee. “When Mom left, all I had was Michael. I needed someone to help me through my grief, and I thought he loved me. Apparently, that annoyed him. He slapped me the day after Mom left, and I tried to kick him out of the house, but he just laughed at me. He started talking down to me, but the physical abuse amped up slowly. I know you and Mom didn’t like that I married him. You made it very clear you thought he was controlling—”

“He was controlling, Wren. Please don’t try to defend the man who fucking murdered you!” I wince as I shout at her. I didn’t mean to raise my voice, but I always hated how she had excuses for his behavior.

“Oh, I promise you I’m not, but how he used to treat me was nothing compared to how he acted once you were gone.” She bites her lip. “I think you protected me from the worst of it without even knowing it. He was always a little afraid of you.”

I scoff. “Afraid of me? I doubt that.”

She shrugs. “You don’t have to believe me, but he was always on his best behavior when you were around. Not that it matters now.”

We sit there in silence, and it’s nice to just sit with her.

“Oh, my gods! I can’t believe I forgot to tell you!” I bounce onto my knees, startling Wren. I call on my magic and show her my flame. “It’s purple!”

“When did that happen?” she asks, reaching for it. “Why did it change? Is it because you’re a reaper?”

I try to douse it before she can get near it, but I’m too late. Her hand is already dancing in the flames, but she’s not screaming out in pain like I expected.

“It’s hellfire,” I tell her.

She jerks her hand back, staring at it in shock. “It didn’t burn me.”

“I wonder if that means you’ll also end up with hellfire?” I ponder out loud. “No one has any idea why I’m able to control hellfire. They don’t think our dad was a witch, though. Or if he was, he would have to have been a direct descendant of Hecate.”

That gets Wren’s attention as she meets my gaze. “So Mom lied to us?”

“Or she didn’t know. I have no idea. I just know I’ve had more than one person tell me I’m not a witch since arriving in the underworld. Between that and the hellfire, I’m beginning to believe them.”

“Yeah. I can see why.” Her eyes have returned to the flames now dancing along my arm. “I haven’t been able to call on my magic yet.”

I shrug. “Don’t feel bad. I was one of the last to be able to use their magic. Nex—I mean Professor Novak—was tutoring me. Once I was able to use it, I found out very quickly how much stronger it was from when we were earth-side. I’m betting yours will be the same.”

“I’ll keep that in mind.” Wren yawns, her hand shooting to her mouth. “Shit. I’m sorry.”

A glance at the clock shows it’s getting late. We’ve been up here longer than I thought. “There’s no reason to apologize. Why don’t I walk you back to your dorm so you can get some sleep?”

“Yeah. Okay.” She stands up, stretching as she does so. “Are you going to go back to ignoring me now?”

“I said I was sorry. I just wanted to give you space, but don’t worry. I’ll be up your ass from here on out.” I shoot her a grin. “Starting on Monday, I’ll be assisting in classes. I’ll also be tutoring you if you need it. You won’t be able to get rid of me.”

She pulls me into a hug. “Good.”

I sigh as I relax into her hold. With so much going on in my life, I’m glad to see that hugging my sister still makes me feel better.

“Come on, let’s get you back to your dorm so I can have a chat with my mates.”

“Better you than me,” she says as she bumps my shoulder.

Once again, I’m struck with relief at having her here with me. It’s quickly followed by guilt because I should never be happy my sister is dead. Everything just seems a little bit easier knowing she’s here with me.

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Audrey

Monday morning finds me assisting Nex with his classes. He's still teaching the same relearning your magic and abilities class.

Besides telling me good morning, he hasn't spoken to me at all. I'm already over it.

I had lunch with my mates, which was nice, but now I have to deal with my asshole mate again. Because I don't want to deal with him, I drag my feet on my way back to his classroom, and I'm almost late.

Stepping into the room, my eyes immediately find Nex, who's sitting at his desk. His eyes meet mine for a moment before he forces them away as he stands.

I scowl as I hurry to the front of the room and take his seat. He's kindly left the papers I need to grade on his desk. I'll do that until it's time for the students to practice. There's nothing I can do until then.

"Yes, Wren?"

My head lifts, eyes quickly finding my twin sitting in the front row with her hand raised.

She grins at me before turning her attention back to Nex. "Is it true that some students end up much more powerful than when they were alive?"

Nex's shoulders tense, and I know he wants to glance back at me but refuses to allow

himself to.

“Yes, Wren. There are some who will have more magic or abilities than they had when they were alive. The opposite can also be true. Some students find themselves with significantly less magic or it remains the same. No two students are the same—not even siblings.”

I smirk when Wren shoots me a wink. I’m not totally sure why she asked him that. She already knows it’s true. Not only did I tell her that, but I’m fairly certain Nex goes over it during the first class.

“Does anyone else have questions before I begin?” Nex glances around the room, and when no one raises their hands, he begins his lecture.

Class flies by, especially when I get to leave the papers behind to help anyone who’s struggling with calling their magic. All the students in this particular class have been here for less than a week, and only one of them has been able to use their magic so far. That means Nex and I stay pretty busy, but I do manage to help another student call on their vampiric abilities just before the end of class.

“Are you trying to cause trouble, Wren?” I ask at the end of class as she’s packing up her things.

She grins up at me. “Nope. Just reminding him you were in the room since he seemed intent on ignoring you.”

Rolling my eyes, I glance over my shoulder to find him sitting at his desk once more. “Yeah. He’s been doing that all day. He told me good morning just before the first class, but it’s been crickets since then.”

“You should talk to him,” she urges me, and I nod.

“I’m planning to, but not until after our last class. Thirty minutes isn’t long enough—especially since students tend to start trickling in just after the last class has been released.” I nod my head toward the door. “Case in point. Professor Novak is the ‘hot professor’ that they all want to flirt with. Although, apparently, Brenden is dealing with it now, too. Hopefully, I won’t have to scratch out any eyes or beat someone’s ass for hitting on what’s mine.”

Wren laughs. “Are you talking about Brenden or your reluctant mate?”

I shrug. “Why choose? Come on, I’ll walk you to your next class. It’s better than sitting in here while he ignores me.”

When I make it back to Nex’s classroom, it’s only two minutes until the next class starts. He’s already standing at the front of the room, so I move behind his desk and get back to work on the papers.

There are fewer people in this class as they’re nearing the end of their six months. Their finals are scheduled for Wednesday of next week, so there’s very little help needed from me.

As soon as Nex releases the class, he quickly starts to pack up. He’s probably trying to run away before I can talk to him, but I’m not going to let that happen.

I knew he’d try this shit, which is why I’m standing at the door when the last student exits. I flick the lock and start down the stairs toward him.

“In a hurry?” I ask.

He doesn’t even look up as he nods. “Yes. I promised some of the other professors that I would eat dinner with them tonight.”

I hum. “Isn’t that nice of you?”

“Believe it or not, I have friends here,” he says, lifting his bag onto his shoulder and stepping toward the door.

He frowns when I step in his path, his eyes finally meeting mine. He shakes his head, trying to step around me, but I move with him.

“What are you doing, Audrey?” His voice is dripping with exasperation. If he’d spoken to me like this before my final, I would’ve felt like an idiot—which is what he’s trying to make me feel like.

But now I know his play. Too bad for him.

“We still have a conversation to finish,” I inform him, crossing my arms over my chest.

His eyes follow the movement, lingering on my tits before jerking his gaze upward. “We’ll need to do this another time. As I said, I have plans tonight.”

“That’s too bad. I guess you’ll have to be late because I’m not letting you leave until we talk about this.”

He scoffs. “And how do you plan on stopping me from leaving?”

Smirking, I shrug. “That’s the easy part.”

I call on my hellfire until it’s circling us. Nex flinches away from the heat, and I have to bite back a sigh of relief.

I wasn’t actually sure if he would be able to just step right through them or not.

“What is this?” he asks, shock and awe clear in his voice as he stares at the purple flames.

“Oh, you like my new party trick? On Saturday, we discovered that my magic had changed. I can’t call on my usual fire magic anymore. All I can do is use hellfire. Apparently, that’s unusual.”

“Highly unusual,” he agrees. “I assume you showed Wraith?”

I nod slowly. “I did. I told him, Brenden, Donovan, and Cassian. Hmmm, right. You don’t know about Cassian, do you? My fifth mate and apparent ex-lover of two of my mates.”

“Cassian?” Nex shakes his head. “Yeah, good luck with that one.”

“Doesn’t really matter if I can’t convince you to give this a chance,” I tell him. “The Fates were very clear. I either have three mates or I have five. Four isn’t an option.”

He makes a face. “Don’t put that on me.”

“Put what on you, Nex? It’s the truth. If either you or Cassian decides not to become my mate, then I get neither of you. That’s not me putting anything on you. It’s just how it is.” I shake my head. “I’m not trying to make you mad. I just want to talk to you about this.”

He runs a hand through his hair, staring at my flames once more. “There’s nothing to talk about. I told you, Lucifer cursed me.”

“Wraith believes he would have put a loophole in for finding your fated mate,” I tell him, already feeling him shutting down.

“What?” He frowns but still refuses to meet my gaze. “What would make him think that?”

I shrug. “He says Lucifer is a firm believer in fated mates, and he doesn’t think that he would go against the Fates like that.”

He’s quiet for a moment. “But he can’t know for sure.”

“Not without asking Lucifer, I guess.”

He’s shutting down. I can already tell he’s not going to listen to anything else I have to say.

Unsure of what else I can do to convince him, I throw myself into his arms. He drops his bag as he struggles underneath my unexpected weight.

I wrap my legs around his hips as his hands rest on my ass to keep me from hitting the floor. My arms snake around his neck, and I press my lips to his.

He freezes, and I wonder if I made this a million times worse.

But then he’s returning my kiss with a groan. One of his hands slides up my back and wraps in my hair as he staggers backward. I gasp when he drops into his chair, but when he tries to break the kiss, I’m having none of it.

I planned to wear a pair of my preferred leather pants today, but Wraith was having none of it. He told me I could keep wearing the uniform. When I tried to argue with him since I’m no longer a student, he admitted that he just liked the way it looked on me. Really, he meant the skirt, so I relented, and I’m wearing it with a tank top.

I’m also not wearing panties since they were stripped from me at lunchtime when all

three of my men took turns fucking me. Like I said, it was an excellent lunch.

Nex notices my lack of panties as I grind down on his hard cock.

“Where the hell are your panties?” he asks as he flips up my skirt, staring at my bare pussy as I continue to rock my hips.

I shrug. “Wraith ripped them off me when I had lunch with them. All three of my mates fucked me after we finished eating. Luckily, they let me clean up, otherwise I would’ve been leaking their cum down my leg during your class.”

Nex growls, his power washing over me.

“Holy shit,” I squeak as it sends me straight over the edge. I continue to ride his lap, a second orgasm already building. “What was that?”

“That,” he says with a smirk, “was my magic. I don’t even have to touch you to bring you pleasure.”

I cry out when his hands close around my hips and lift me. I fight his hold as he sets me on the desk and releases me before lifting my skirt once more.

“I need to taste you.”

Oh.

“Please, Nex,” I beg, lifting my legs to the arms of his chair and spreading myself open for him.

“What a pretty pink pussy,” he murmurs, ducking his head and running his tongue along my slit. “Fuck. You taste amazing.”

Then he buries his head between my legs, fucking me on his tongue. I lean back until I'm lying down on the desk, moaning as his tongue seems to grow larger.

"Ummmm..." I start, but Nex doesn't stop what he's doing as his fingers find my clit.

I forget everything but the orgasm barreling down on me as his powers dance over my skin.

I come hard.

He's not allowing me much of a chance to recover as he works me up again.

I feel like I'm being fucked by a thick cock, but when I glance down, I see it's still his tongue buried inside of me. I don't really understand how that's possible, but I don't say anything because I'm afraid he'll stop.

My hips roll as I fuck myself on his tongue, ready to come again, and Nex seems more than happy to help me do just that.

This time, I scream out his name as I come.

The door flies open at the same time, and Nex pushes away from me.

"Nex," I beg, reaching for him, but he's already shaking his head.

"We can't do this. We just can't." He grabs his bag off the floor as I sit up. My eyes find Brenden as Nex hurries past him.

"I'm sorry, firecracker. I heard you coming, and I just needed to see you." Brenden glances over his shoulder, watching as Nex ducks out the door. "I didn't mean to interrupt."

I scoff. “You absolutely meant to interrupt, Brenden, but I know you weren’t trying to send Nex running. Next time, maybe don’t ignore that the door is locked?”

I bury my face in my hands and let out a scream.

Brenden pulls me into his arms. “It’ll be okay. He’ll come around, eventually.”

If only I was as sure as my mate is.

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Source Creation Date: July 26, 2025, 5:22 am

Audrey

A few days later, I'm heading home with a little pep in my step.

Sure, I had to spend another long day with Nex not speaking to me more than necessary, but Cassian is coming over tonight. He's bringing over dinner for just the two of us, and I'm thinking we'll watch a movie or something after we finish eating.

This is the second time we've had a "date," if that's what you want to call it. He came over on Sunday for a few hours and we wandered around campus, getting to know one another.

It's hard having him at the house because he and Wraith snipe at each other like crazy. Which is why I tried to convince Cassian to meet me at the gates and not the house, but he promised he would be on his best behavior.

I'm not sure I believe him, which is part of the reason I'm hurrying.

Yes, I'm excited to see him, but I also don't want him and Wraith alone for longer than necessary.

I don't even know if Wraith is home, and it's unlikely he's by himself if he is, but I'm not taking any chances. I haven't figured out how to get the two of them to kiss and make up yet, but that's still my plan. If I could just get one of them to tell me what caused the breakup in the first place, it might make coming up with a plan easier.

Maybe if I can get Donovan alone, I can make him spill the beans. Not that he's told

me every other time I've tried to get him to tell me. But if I keep trying, then eventually, he'll break, right?

That's a bad plan.

I run up the stairs to the house and throw open the door. My eyes widen at the sounds of grunts and cursing—and not the good kind.

Damn it.

I rush through the house, stopping in the doorway to the living room.

What the hell?

Cassian launches himself at Wraith, burying his fist into my mate's stomach just before Wraith swings for Cassian's head. All the while, Donovan is sitting on the couch, watching with a grin on his face.

Is he eating fucking popcorn?

“What the fuck is going on here?”

Cassian and Wraith continue fighting as if they didn't hear me while Donovan waves me over.

Not sure what else to do, I avoid the fight and join my mate on the couch—who is definitely eating popcorn. “What are you doing? Why aren't you stopping them?”

“Because it's hot?” Donovan gives me an unrepentant smile as his eyes fall back to Wraith and Cassian. “Want some popcorn?”

“No, I don’t want any popcorn. This isn’t a TV show or movie—my mates are fighting.” I shake my head, turning back to them.

Watching the way their muscles bunch beneath their clothing and seeing how they move against one another as if they’re unable to keep themselves away from each other.

Donovan isn’t wrong. It is hot.

Not that I’ll admit that to him. Donovan doesn’t need any encouragement.

“Are you ready to tell me what the deal is with the two of them?” I ask, eyes staying on the fight.

“Nope. It still isn’t my story to tell.”

I grind my teeth, frustrated that no one will tell me what happened, but I also understand where Donovan is coming from.

What I need to do is stop their fight, but I’m not dumb enough to step between them.

“Why don’t you just fuck it out already?” I yell, allowing some of my frustration to bleed through while Donovan laughs.

Luckily, my words have them drawing away from one another and turning to me with confusion clear on their faces.

“When did you get here, trouble?”

“When you were fighting, obviously.” I roll my eyes when I notice the bruising on both of their faces. It’s already healing, but I hate that they’re hurting each other.

“Now, are you going to take my advice?”

Cassian tilts his head as he considers me. “What advice?”

“About fucking it out. Clearly, there’s some unresolved shit the two of you need to work out.” I gesture between them. “If you don’t want to talk it out, then I vote for fucking it out.”

“We’re not fucking, trouble,” Wraith says slowly.

Cassian nods. “We’ve been there, done that. I have no desire to fuck him again.”

I snort. “Yeah, okay. You keep telling yourself that, but I’d totally be down to watch.”

“Ohhh, me, too.” Donovan chuckles. “Not that I haven’t watched before, but I’d be down to watch again.”

“Don’t start, pet,” Wraith growls, stepping away from Cassian. “We’ve had this conversation.”

I lift my eyebrows. “Oh, have you? Would you like to share with the class?”

Wraith leans down to kiss me before shaking his head. “It’s not going to happen, trouble. That’s all you need to know.”

I throw my hands in the air, frustration rolling through me. “Then can someone fill me in on why the two of you can’t seem to get along? I thought you were going to be on your best behavior. I hate to tell you, but getting into a fistfight isn’t being on your best behavior.”

I glance between the three of them, shoving to my feet when none of them answers me. “Fine, you stubborn assholes. Can you at least tell me why the fuck you’re fighting?”

“Umm...” Cassian ducks his head as he rushes over to grab some bags off the table. “I brought dinner.”

“That doesn’t answer my question.” I focus on Wraith, hands on my hips.

“He brought you food from the restaurant where the two of them used to go. They never brought me. It was just for the two of them,” Donovan offers up with a smirk. “Wraith didn’t like that, so he swung at Cassian, and you saw what came after.”

I blink at Donovan, trying to understand what he’s telling me. “That’s what caused a fistfight? Are you fucking kidding me right now? How is it I’m the youngest one in the room while all three of you are ancient? You’re acting like children. This is ridiculous. Wraith, Cassian is my mate, just like you. The two of you need to work your shit out because I don’t want to walk in on this bullshit again. I promise that neither of you wants to see what’ll happen if I do.”

Not bothering to wait for a response, I storm toward the stairs. “Are you coming, Cassian?”

“Uh, yeah. I just wasn’t... You know what? It doesn’t matter. Of course I’m coming.” He hurries across the room, his hand going to my lower back as he joins me.

I don’t speak again until I shut the door to my room behind us. “I want to know what the hell happened between the two of you. Don’t bother trying to brush me off because if you are, you can leave. I have enough on my plate without having to worry about the two of you killing one another when you’re alone.”

Cassian sighs as he sets the bags of food on the table, slowly pulling the cartons out and opening them. Finally, he spins around to face me. “Why don’t we sit down?”

“Are you going to tell me what I want to know?”

“Yes.” He sits in one of the chairs, gesturing for me to join him. “First, this happened a long time ago, and I would love to let it go, but Wraith won’t. I didn’t always like my job or living in the underworld. No one wants to be banished from their home, but it was especially hard on me, Ophelia, and Sol. I was born in Mount Olympus, and it’s the only home I’ve ever known—that any of us had known.”

I reach over and take his hand, giving it a squeeze. “Why were the three of you banished?”

“Ugh, it’s stupid,” he admits. “We might have kidnapped Zeus’s current conquest and kept her from him for over a year. It may have caused some wars between gods, as he blamed all of them. It wasn’t pretty. We should’ve given her back sooner, but we just wanted him to stop being such a jackass. I’m sure you’ve heard stories of how he was. He’s always been an arrogant prick, but that’s neither here nor there. When we finally returned her, he’d already moved on, but he was still pissed. He called a vote, and we were banished.”

I shake my head. “That is stupid.”

“I told you it was. It is what it is. We deserved to be punished. Wraith and Donovan were already together when we arrived. I was a complete asshole to them, but they seemed determined to be my friends. They eventually wore me down. They never gave up, even though it took them over a hundred years. One thing led to another, and we ended up together. I was happy for the first time since I was banished. Of course, I had to fuck it up.”

Cassian leans back, staring up at the ceiling. “Ophelia and Sol were giving me a hard time about being with the two of them. Sol, more than Ophelia—part of me thinks he doesn’t believe in homosexual relationships—but their comments were beginning to get to me. What kind of demigod was I to be sleeping with one of the horsemen and a hellhound? How was I ever going to be forgiven and welcomed back to Mount Olympus when I was making myself so at home in the underworld? Didn’t I want to see my mother and my aunts again?”

“Seriously? And these are your friends?” I ask.

He shrugs. “Kind of? Not really. They are now because I don’t really have anyone else. Either way, they got in my head. That’s about when Wraith started up the academy. The amount of people murdered was growing, but it’s nothing like it is now. Back then, a lot of people died because of wars and diseases. The reapers still had to reap all the souls, but there weren’t as many reapers then. One of his reapers mistakenly delivered a soul to us for judgment that was meant to go to the academy.

“I saw the mark on his arm that indicated he was meant to be a reaper, but I didn’t care, and neither did the other two. So we judged his soul. He wasn’t a good man, so he was sent to Tartarus. When Wraith came looking for the soul, I informed him it was too late. The man’s soul had been weighted and judged.” He shakes his head. “He was rightfully pissed, but at the time, I didn’t see that. He had already confided in me that some of his reapers didn’t agree with the academy, and I threw that in his face. I said a lot of things I didn’t mean.”

I blink at him, trying to reconcile what he’s telling me with what I know of these men. “I understand why he would be angry about what you did, but to hold on to it for this long? That doesn’t make sense.”

He winces. “Honestly, I was trying to avoid telling you everything I said to Wraith that day. I was cruel, and I hit him where it hurt. I’m not sure which straw broke the

camel's back. If I had to guess, it was when I told him that he and his horsemen should go back to doing the thing they're good at—bringing pain to humans. I told him that's all they were good for. That he was beneath me because I was a demigod. That I was kind where he was evil. That there was no saving his soul. Then I told him I could never love someone like him or Donovan, which was a complete lie. I loved them both."

"And yet, you still said the words." No wonder Wraith hasn't been able to let it go. "I'm assuming you never bothered explaining any of this to him?"

"Oh, I tried for a long time. Donovan listened, which is why we're friendly now, but Wraith wouldn't even listen to him. This is one hundred percent on me, but I don't know how to make it right. It's like every time I open my mouth, he takes everything I say the wrong way."

I laugh, shaking my head. "Of course he does. Although, that's a really long time to hold a grudge. He must have loved you a lot for him to still be holding on to his anger."

Cassian's face falls. "He did, and I just...threw it all away for no reason. Now, he purposefully goads me, and I let him. It's far easier to be angry with him than to be hurt."

"While I understand that, this can't keep happening. You need to talk to him. You need to force him to listen. I was serious earlier. If you can't figure it out on your own, then I'll be forced to knock your heads together. But considering you're both so much older than me, I shouldn't have to get involved."

"I understand. I'll keep trying," he says quietly.

"Good. Now tell me about this place you brought me food from."

Brenden

I t's been three weeks since my mate's sister arrived at the academy. Which means it's been three weeks since she discovered Nex is her mate, and two weeks since I walked in on him fucking her with his tongue.

He's barely said a word to her since then and even requested Wraith to stop having her help in his classes. Wraith had denied that request, telling him to man up and get the hell over himself.

Wraith doesn't like how much Nex is hurting my firecracker. I can admit, I don't much care for it myself, but I'm trying to give Nex the benefit of the doubt. After all, he's been dealing with a curse for a really long time.

Audrey told him about Wraith's belief in a loophole, but he didn't want to hear it. I'm not sure if he's being stupid or stubborn. Maybe both.

Either way, I've decided to take matters into my own hands.

It's Saturday, and Audrey is spending some time with her sister. Wren has already been able to call on her magic, much to Audrey's chagrin, but hasn't been able to access hellfire. As twins, they obviously have the same father, so Wraith thinks Wren will be able to control it eventually, too. He reminded both of them it wasn't until after Audrey graduated that her magic changed, but neither of them listened.

Wren is determined to call on hellfire, and Audrey is determined to help her.

That means she spends a lot of time with Wren outside of classes, which means less time with her mates. I'm not a fan of that part of it, so I may or may not have been stalking her when she's spending time with Wren.

Who am I kidding? I'm absolutely stalking the shit out of her.

I would do it all the time if I didn't have to teach at the academy, and they're desperate for teachers.

I never realized just how many teachers they have at the academy, but with a batch of a thousand new students coming in every day, Wraith is continuously having to bring on new teachers. But I also hope he doesn't expect me to keep doing this forever.

While I don't mind helping out, I can't see myself teaching here day after day—and that's only partially because it keeps me away from Audrey. At least she helps in my classes every other day.

Shaking my head, I glance around to see I'm nowhere near the house where Nex is supposed to meet me. I really need to stop getting lost in my head like this. It had taken a lot to convince the demon to come over to the house. Wren had to confirm that she would be with her sister before he would agree. I can't remember the last time I had to work that hard to get someone to hang out with me.

That's probably because I usually use mind control to get them to do what I want. I don't even know if I can control a demon's mind, but I figured since he's my friend, I shouldn't try. I'm sure if I did, I'd piss off him and Audrey both, and there's no need for that.

A quick look at my watch tells me I'm a few minutes late, so I put a burst of speed on—thanks to the Fates for making me a vampire—to make it there in mere seconds. Just in time to see Donovan open the door with a snarl.

“Nope.” I boop the hellhound on his nose, stepping between the two of them. “You can go back inside. Nex and I are just going to sit out here on the porch and enjoy the day.”

Donovan opens his mouth to say something, but I don’t bother waiting to find out what. I push him back and slam the door shut before leading Nex over to the porch swing Wraith put in for Audrey.

“You didn’t tell them I was coming,” he says with a shake of his head.

“Nope. I didn’t want him or Wraith giving you a hard time because then you wouldn’t want to hang out with me.” It’s really none of their business if Nex and I are hanging out, anyway.

He hesitates as I sit on the swing, patting the spot beside me. “Just sit your ass down, please. I really like this swing.”

“Fine.” Nex sits down carefully because it’s barely big enough for both of us to fit. I kick off, setting us swinging lightly as I lean back and close my eyes. “Why am I here, Brenden?”

“Because we’re friends.”

There’s a moment of silence before he speaks again. “We were friends. I figured we weren’t anymore when I told your mate that I wanted nothing to do with her.”

“But that’s not really true, is it?”

Another moment of silence.

“I can’t have anything to do with her,” he finally says. “My curse could cause her to

be taken away from you, too. From all of you, and that's not fair to anyone. I won't do that."

Cracking an eye open, I turn my head to watch him. He's not paying me any attention, his eyes on the forest.

He's so fucking hot. Before I knew he was Audrey's mate, I considered talking to her about him. She seemed okay with Donovan and Wraith being together before she knew Wraith was her mate, so I wanted to see how she'd feel about me asking Nex out. I decided to put it off until after her final, which turned out to be just a little too long since she found out he's her mate.

Now, I'm not sure if it would be okay for anything to happen between us. I should probably mention it to Audrey. She probably doesn't even know I'm interested in him like that. Although, she made a few comments here and there while I was helping in his class before I got my own.

"Why are you looking at me like that?" he asks, and I realize he's facing me again.

"Like what?" I ask, even though I already know the answer.

He clears his throat, his eyes dropping to my lips and causing me to smirk. "Like you want to devour me."

I shrug. "That's exactly what I was thinking about, so I'm not that surprised."

He looks stupefied as he stares at me, unblinking.

"I don't know why that surprises you," I continue. "I've been hitting on you since I arrived."

“Yeah, but I thought that was just because you were a flirt. Especially since you continued to do so after mating with Audrey.”

I shake my head. “Nope, but that’s not why we’re here. We’re here to talk about Audrey. You’re hurting her, and I don’t like it.”

“Damn it, Brenden.” Nex pushes to his feet and stalks to the railing. “I thought you understood—that you were on my side. That’s the only reason I came over. If I’d known it was just for you to try to change my mind, I wouldn’t have bothered.”

I’m not sure what would have given him that idea.

I slowly stand, joining him at the railing. While he’s facing the forest, I lean against my hip so I can study him.

“I will always be on Audrey’s side, no matter what. It doesn’t matter if she’s wrong or being belligerent, I will always be on her side. That’s what it means to be her mate. Something you should understand and should do because she’s also your mate.” I hold up my hand when he starts to argue. “It doesn’t matter if you want it to be true or not. You are her mate. Sure, you could choose not to mate with her, but that’ll just hurt both of you.”

He clenches his teeth, glaring at me. “I don’t want to hurt her. That’s why I’m trying to stay away, but everyone seems determined to throw the two of us together at every turn. The only thing that can come with her bonding with me is heartbreak. I’m so sick of talking about this. I shouldn’t have to keep explaining myself.”

“You wouldn’t have to if you didn’t want her. If you truly wanted nothing to do with her, we’d leave you alone, but it’s very clear that’s not how you feel.” I shake my head, leaning into him. “You want her.”

“Of course I fucking want her,” he roars. “But I can’t have her.”

I tap his chest with my hand. “Ahhh, but that’s where our opinions differ. Have you even tried talking to Lucifer? Even if he didn’t put a loophole in the curse, it’s not like he can’t lift it once he knows you’ve met your fated mate.”

“No,” he tells me, shaking his head. “I haven’t tried talking to Lucifer, and I won’t because this is what I deserve.”

And there it is—the real reason why he keeps pushing Audrey away.

He feels guilty for what he did, and he doesn’t feel like he deserves her. It’s stupid and completely wrong, but at least it makes a little more sense to me now.

It also gives me a jumping off point on how to convince him to accept her as his mate.

“So you don’t think you deserve happiness? That’s it?” I lean into him further, his eyes falling to my lips once again.

“That’s not what I said.” He shakes his head again. “What are you doing to me, Brenden? Are you trying to control my mind?”

“Who? Me?” I point at my chest, attempting to look innocent—which I am. I already said I wouldn’t try to control his mind, and I’m not planning to change that. “I’m not doing anything to your mind. You’re my friend. I wouldn’t do that to you.”

He can’t seem to tear his eyes away from my lips, and I throw caution to the wind when I lean in to kiss him. He stands there frozen, and I wonder if I fucked up.

But then he kisses me back, and I melt into him. I’ve imagined kissing him before,

but as usual, my imagination has nothing on reality.

Nex deepens the kiss, our tongues tangling together as he wraps one arm around me and pulls me against him. My cock perks up as I feel him harden against me.

I wonder if Audrey would be mad if I pulled his cock out and jerked him off. I'd like to see what he's packing, and I think she would too.

My lips curl up into a smile when I hear her step into the clearing. She walks closer, coming up short when she realizes what's happening. I catch the hitch in her breath, and I know she's enjoying the view.

Unfortunately, Nex also notices it and pulls away. He glances between the two of us before shaking his head and hurrying down the steps. He transforms into his demon form and takes off in the air, leaving me and Audrey to stare after him.

"I wasn't expecting to come home to that," she finally says, trudging toward me.

As soon as she makes it within arm's length of me, I tug her into my arms and kiss the shit out of her. She's smiling when she pulls back, and I like that a lot better than the despondent face she'd been rocking after watching Nex run away again.

"I wasn't expecting it to happen, either. Are you mad?"

Audrey shakes her head. "About you kissing him? Absolutely not. It was hot. But I am getting sick and tired of him running from me every time he sees me."

"Understandable, but he's scared," I tell her, and she hums.

"I'm aware, but I don't know how to fix it. I don't know how to make him give me a chance."

I make a face that she doesn't see since she's laying her head on my chest as we speak. "I don't know if there's anything you can do, but I'm working on it. I promise."

We stand there for a few minutes in silence, just enjoying each other's company, until she pulls back to grin at me.

"Are there any other mates of mine you'd like to make out with?"

I throw my head back as I laugh. "No, firecracker. Just Nex. At least for now."

She giggles, and I let out a sigh of relief. It's been far too long since I heard that sound. She's been stressing out too much over everything with Nex and Cassian—not that I can blame her—but it's nice to hear her letting go, even if it's only for a few minutes.

"Donovan growled at Nex when he answered the door," I tell her, leading her inside. "But I shoved him back inside and shut the door in his face."

"You did not!"

Donovan scoffs. "Oh, he did too, and I'm not a fan."

I shrug. "Too bad, so sad."

"Oh, that's it, vamp. You're in for it now." I laugh, throwing myself away from Audrey as he launches himself at me. My grin stays on my face as I avoid his grasp while Audrey giggles.

Yeah, this is my favorite way to see my mate. We'll have to make sure she has more to smile and laugh about and less to stress about.

After all, isn't that what we're meant to do as her mates?

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Source Creation Date: July 26, 2025, 5:22 am

Audrey

I sigh as I watch Nex bolt from the classroom once again.

It's been two weeks since I saw him and Brenden kiss. Now, he's not speaking to me or Brenden. It's making both of us more than a little grumpy.

I know I can't force Nex to accept our bond, but after Brenden filled me in on the fact that it's guilt holding Nex back. I figured between the two of us, we'd be able to convince him to give this thing a chance.

Let's just say the plan isn't going well. In case you didn't get that from him running away from me again.

He hasn't bothered packing up at the end of class after the first time I approached him. I guess he's coming back later, after I'm gone.

That's a lot of effort for someone to hang onto their guilt over something that happened over two thousand years ago.

At least Cassian and Wraith haven't gotten into any more fistfights—although that could be because they haven't been in the same room since the last fight.

Everything was so easy with my first three mates, but nothing can seem to go right with Nex and Cassian.

I fucking hate it.

Sighing, I grab my bag from the desk and grab my phone.

DONOVAN

You have visitors.

AUDREY

Visitors? As in plural.

DONOVAN

Yup. And before you ask—it's not Cassian.

AUDREY

Did my besties come to see me?

DONOVAN

Nope. Not them either.

Maybe stop guessing and come home to see who it is?

I frown, wondering who the hell else would come visit me. It's not like I know a ton of people living in the underworld.

I guess it could be Wren, but I'm not sure who she'd have with her. Unlike me, she hasn't made any friends so far. I'm a little worried about her since she's always been a social butterfly.

Did we switch personalities upon death?

That seems unlikely.

I tuck away my phone and hurry toward the house, wishing I had wings like Nex or was able to travel through the shadows like Wraith. It would be so much more convenient.

A squealing scream slips from me when I smack my head on something. Lifting my hand to my head, I step back and frown.

How the hell did I run into the house? I hadn't even made it to the path through the woods.

The front door flies open and Donovan, Wraith, and Brenden hurry toward me with Gael, Octavius, and Riggs right behind them.

Why are the horsemen here?

“Pretty girl? What’s wrong? Why did you scream?”

Blinking, I turn to Donovan with a frown. “I walked into the house.”

Wraith gives me a funny look. “We usually don’t recommend doing that. Why did you walk into the house?”

“I have no fucking idea. One minute, I was walking down the path just outside The Abyss, thinking about how I wished I had wings or the power to shadow walk, and the next thing I knew, I was smacking my head on the house. I don’t even know how I got here.”

“Huh.” Gael glances between me and Wraith. “I didn’t know your mate could use your magic.”

Wraith shakes his head slowly. “She can’t. That’s not something mates can do—not even fated mates.”

“First, why do you think I shadow walked? Second, what are the three of you doing here?” I ask, still rubbing my sore head. What kind of idiot walks into a house?

Gael shrugs. “I’ve walked into lots of things when shadow walking by accident—usually it’s when I’m drunk, though. Are you drunk?”

I jerk my head back, giving him a bewildered look. “No, I’m not fucking drunk. I just finished classes. Why the hell would I be drunk?”

“I don’t know. I just figured I’d check.”

Octavius rolls his eyes. “Ignore Gael. I do agree with him, though. It sounds like you shadow walked on accident. We’ll have to see if you can do it on purpose. Although, I don’t know why you’d be able to shadow walk. That’s not something Hecate’s descendants can do—not like using hellfire.”

Well, I guess someone filled in the rest of the horsemen about my newly acquired powers. It would’ve been nice if someone informed me of that.

“I still don’t understand why you’re here,” I say, my hand falling away as my head stops pounding finally.

It’s Riggs who speaks up this time. “We came to hang out with you.”

“And why would you do that?” Did I give myself a concussion when I hit my head?

And if I did, why didn't it clear up when my head stopped hurting? Or are they just not making any sense?

"That's the exact same thing I asked them," Wraith growls, glaring at the other three horsemen. They just grin at him in return.

"I'm so confused. Can we go inside so I can get a drink or something? I think I hit my head harder than I thought." Not waiting for a response, I head straight up the porch, wondering if I really can shadow walk now.

Then I hit my head on a fucking wall. "Shit. What the actual fuck?"

Blinking, I glance around to see I'm in the kitchen. Either I'm losing time or I'm shadow walking—there's no other explanation for this.

"Well, that's one mystery solved," Gael says with a grin as he steps into the living room. "You're definitely shadow walking. Did you mean to do that?"

I gesture to where I'm holding my head. "Does it look like I meant to do it?"

Wraith laughs, striding across the room to pull me into his arms. "Did you hit your head again?"

"Yes. This is really fucking annoying. I was just wondering if I could shadow walk and then I was hitting my head on the wall. Someone better teach me how the hell to do this so I can stop hitting my head. I really don't need or want a concussion."

"Don't worry, pretty girl, even if you got a concussion, it would be gone in a matter of minutes," Donovan assures me. "But we'll teach you how to properly shadow walk. Although, maybe don't think about it until we do?"

I flip him off as Brenden appears, holding a glass of sweet tea.

“Yum. Thank you,” I purr after taking a sip. Turning my attention back to the horsemen, I ask, “So, why did you come to hang out with me? I’m a little confused about that.”

Riggs shrugs. “You’re Wraith’s mate. We want to get to know you better.”

“And you couldn’t have just told me that?” Wraith asks, exasperated. “Here I was thinking you were coming to try to steal my girl—”

“Seriously, Wraith? How many times do we have to tell you we have no interest in your mate like that?” Octavius rolls his eyes. “Not that you’re not beautiful, Audrey, but you’re not meant to be ours. You’re more like a little sister.”

I wave him off. “I’m not gonna lie. I’m kind of happy about that. I have my hands full enough with the two mates I may or may not be able to keep. As for you,” I say, turning to face Wraith. “Did you really think they were coming here to steal me away? As if I have no say in the matter?”

Wraith shrugs. “You were checking them out before I introduced you to them. You think they’re attractive. Maybe you would have wanted to go with them.”

I bury my face in my hands, praying for patience. “I can find people attractive without wanting to be with them. What concerns me is you thinking I would just abandon my mates.”

He says nothing as he shrugs, and I glance at Donovan with raised eyebrows.

“Do you have any idea why he’s acting like this?”

Donovan just shakes his head, and I sigh.

“Maybe he’s worried you’re going to leave him to be with Cassian,” Gael offers.

I frown at him, but Wraith doesn’t deny his words. “Seriously, Wraith? The three of you are my bonded mates. I wouldn’t leave you. Not to mention, the Fates said I’d have three or five mates. Never once did they say I would only have one. I feel like that’s something they would’ve mentioned if it was a possibility.”

Now I’m annoyed that he thinks so little of me. Not that I really believe that he thinks that. He’s just freaking out over everything going on with Cassian.

I guess Cassian hasn’t been able to get Wraith to listen to him yet.

Joy.

I’m so not in the mood to deal with any of this right now, so I turn to the horsemen. “So, what were you thinking?”

“Oh! We brought food!” Riggs looks around, frowning. “Where did we put it?”

Wraith sighs. “I put it in the oven to keep it warm.”

“Excellent. We brought enough for you and your mates,” Riggs assures me. “Then, after we eat, we can do whatever you want.”

Octavius grins. “As Wraith’s mate, you’re going to be around us quite a bit. We just want to make sure you like us, I guess.”

Gael scoffs. “As if she wouldn’t like us. Everyone likes us.”

“That’s a lie,” Donovan says with a snicker. “A lot of people don’t like you. Maybe you should be around less, then she won’t find out what assholes you are.”

“Donovan! That’s rude.” I glare at him, and he holds his hands up in surrender.

“He’s just telling the truth. We are assholes,” Octavius says with a shrug. “At least to most people. We won’t be to you.”

I nod slowly, reaching for my bag, when I hear my phone go off.

WREN

Dinner?

Ugh. Of course I want to have dinner with my sister, but do I want her to meet the remaining three horsemen after they admitted to being dicks? Not that I think they’re assholes.

Eh. Fuck it.

“That was my sister, Wren. She wants to grab dinner. Do you mind if I invite her over?” I’m not really sure who I’m asking. I just don’t want to upset anyone since the three of them apparently came over to get to know me better.

“That’s fine. The more the merrier.” Riggs grins. “Plus, we brought way too much food.”

“Cool.”

AUDREY

How do you feel about meeting the other three horsemen?

WREN

Seriously?

Ummm, yes!

Are they cool or are they assholes?

AUDREY

Why don't you come over and find out? They're here now.

They even brought food.

WREN

Boo. Does that mean Wraith isn't cooking for us?

AUDREY

No. Wraith isn't cooking for us.

Does that change your answer?

WREN

No, but know that I'm disappointed.

I'm almost at your house.

Lifting my head, I grin at Wraith. “Wren is sad you’re not cooking for us.”

“I can cook something,” he assures me, perking up from whatever bad mood he’s been dwelling in. “I don’t mind.”

I shake my head with a laugh. “Absolutely not. They brought food, so we’ll eat that. My sister will be fine.”

Wraith looks like he wants to argue with me but wisely keeps his mouth shut.

“I’m here,” Wren calls a moment before she steps into the living room.

She just recently started listening to us when we told her to stop knocking on the door. She might not live here, but it’s my home, and I won’t make my sister knock. I want her to be comfortable enough to come in whenever she wants.

I did warn her to call out first, just in case we’re having sex in a public space or something.

It took me another two weeks after that comment to actually get her to stop knocking. Apparently, she doesn’t like the idea of walking in on me getting railed by my mates.

I can’t really blame her for that.

Wren comes to an immediate stop, eyes widening, as she takes in the horsemen. I see the way her body reacts to them, and I know my sister finds them just as hot as I did when I met them.

Hell, I don’t think there’s a person, alive or dead, that wouldn’t be attracted to them—unless they’re not attracted to men, but that’s a different story.

“There’s two of you?” Gael asks with a frown, his eyes moving between me and Wren.

Octavius rolls his eyes. “They’re twins, remember?”

He snaps his fingers before pointing at Octavius. “That’s right. I forgot. Hi, Audrey’s sister, I’m Gael, aka Conquest.”

“Her name is Wren,” I remind him, hurrying over to take her hand. “That’s Octavius, aka War, and Riggs, aka Famine. Guys, this is my twin sister, Wren.”

“It’s nice to meet you, Wren,” Riggs says with a goofy smile on his lips, and I pull my sister toward the table.

I really hope that look doesn’t mean what I think it does because I don’t know how I feel about any of the horsemen being interested in my sister.

“So, what’s for dinner?” I ask, sitting down and pulling Wren to sit beside me. Donovan sits in the empty chair on my left while Wraith sits on Wren’s other side. Brenden scowls but sits across from me, leaving the horsemen to fill in the empty seats as Gael places the food on the table.

“Indian!” he says, breaking open the containers.

I’m practically drooling as the scents hit me. I’m a big fan of Indian food, something I told them the night we met.

Okay, maybe they’re alright. I’m still not sure about them being interested in Wren, though.

Hopefully, Riggs’s reaction was just because there was a pretty girl in the room.

Otherwise, he and I are going to have to have a talk that I don't think he'll enjoy.

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Source Creation Date: July 26, 2025, 5:22 am

Audrey

I blink awake and stretch before rolling onto my side to reach for my mates—except there's no one there. I'm in bed alone.

Frowning, I glance at the clock. I don't enjoy waking up alone, but as soon as I get a glimpse of the time, I realize why I did.

How is it already after one in the afternoon?

I fell asleep watching movies with my mates and Wren at some point, I guess, and they brought me to bed. I only remember a few minutes of the first movie, which means I passed out before eleven. I haven't slept this long in forever—even when I was alive.

On the upside, I feel amazing. Although, I really need to pee.

I hurry into the en suite and use the bathroom before climbing into the shower. As soon as I'm clean, I throw on a pair of leather shorts—that's what Evelyn's surprise had been for me, and I'm in love with them—with an oversized tank top that's almost as long as the shorts. My bra is completely visible, but I don't care. I'm comfortable and that's all that matters.

Thundering down the stairs, I find Donovan and Wraith sitting on the couch. Donovan is snacking on some chips while he watches TV and Wraith is working on his laptop with those sexy-as-hell reading glasses sitting on his nose.

I don't know if he actually needs them or not, but he's been using them all the time since I told him how hot he looked.

"There's our sleeping beauty." Donovan grins at me, setting aside the chips and pushing to his feet. He hurries over and pulls me into his arms, kissing me sweetly. "I was beginning to think you were going to sleep all day."

"Too late, she already did," Wraith says without looking up from his laptop. "Do you at least feel well rested?"

I hum, pulling away from Donovan so I can drape myself over Wraith. He cocks an eyebrow as he turns to look at me.

Leaning over, I give him a kiss. "I feel great. So great, in fact, that I'm ready to get to work."

"Okay, I'll bite," he says dryly. "What are you getting to work on?"

"Hmmm..." I tap my chin. "What is it I was so worried about three months ago, after I had to reap my sister's soul? I feel like it was really important, but I just can't remember. Oh! Right! Killing Michael. You said we'd make a plan once Wren had adjusted to being at the school. I'm fairly certain we can call her well-adjusted, considering she's at the top of all of her classes."

Wraith sighs, pulling his glasses off before rubbing his eyes. "I was kind of hoping you'd forget about that."

"Yeah. Like that was ever going to happen." I close Wraith's laptop, ignoring the annoyed look he shoots me. "Have you ever known me to forget something like this?"

Donovan snickers. “Pretty girl, I don’t think you’ve needed to remember something like this since we’ve known you.”

I wave him off. “Semantics. Where’s Brenden? I want him here while we make a plan.”

“He’s running with Nex,” Donovan says with a wink. “It seems the two of them have worked out their differences.”

I sigh, wishing Nex would stop ignoring me. “I hope they’re not making out since I can’t watch them from here.”

“Really, trouble? That’s what you’re worried about?” Wraith sets aside the laptop as he leans back. “Since Brenden isn’t here, then I guess we’ll have to talk about it another time.”

“They should be back soon, Audrey. He’s been gone for a few hours. I can’t see him being gone much longer, but you can text him if you want.” Donovan grabs the bag of chips and turns back to his show. “Just let me know when we’re ready to plan your vengeance, and I’ll turn my show off.”

Honestly, it would be better if Nex and Cassian were here for this planning session, but I somehow doubt that’s going to happen.

“I’m going to go grab Wren, too. She should be a part of this.” I don’t bother waiting for either of them to respond, stepping through the shadows and into the hallway outside of Wren’s room.

It didn’t take me long to master shadow walking, but it’s completely different from how Wraith does it. He calls the shadows to him until they surround him and transport him. For me, one moment I’m walking in one place and then, with just

another thought, I'm somewhere else. Donovan says it's like I just disappear into the shadows that no one knew were there. All I know is I think it's really fucking cool.

Knocking on my sister's door, I bite my lip. I probably should've texted her to make sure she was even in her dorm. She still hasn't made any friends, so the only place I can think she would be is in the cafeteria. I'm just about to shadow walk there when Wren throws open her door.

"Audrey? To what do I owe this surprise visit?" Wren grins at me, but it doesn't hide how exhausted she looks. There are dark circles under her eyes and her shoulders seem to be caving in.

Frowning, I shake my head. "We'll get to that in a minute. Why do you look so exhausted? Are you sick? Can reapers even get sick? Or almost reapers? You're dead, so surely you can't be sick."

Wren laughs. "I'm not sick. I just couldn't sleep last night. It's fine. I'll survive. Now, what's going on?"

I don't like her nonchalance when it's clear it's not just tonight she hasn't slept well. Had she looked this bad last night?

No, she didn't, which means she was wearing makeup and trying to hide this from me.

I don't like it one bit, but I don't push her on it—mainly because she's begging me not to with her eyes.

"We're finally going to come up with a plan on how to take out Michael. I thought you might want to be there."

Her eyes brighten. “Oh, yes. For sure. Come in. Let me change really quick.”

She doesn’t bother to wait for a response, already darting toward her bedroom. I have to surge forward to catch the door in time so it doesn’t slam shut. Then I feel a little like an idiot when I realize I could’ve just shadow walked into her room.

Sometimes I just don’t think about things like that.

I head for the couch, coming to a halt when Wren steps out of her room, already ready to go. “How the hell did you get ready so fast?”

“Magic,” she tells me with a wink, and I frown. She’s always been better at magic involving spells than I am. Not that I’m jealous or anything.

Nope. Not me.

I would never.

“Brenden was out with Nex when I left, but hopefully he’s home now...” I trail off. “Even though it’s only been like five minutes.”

Wren laughs, linking her arm through mine. As she pulls me toward her, I realize she’s once again covered up how tired she is with makeup.

She might not want to talk about it, but she’s going to have to soon. Whatever is going on with her can’t continue. She looked like shit, and I’m not all about that shit.

“Well, let’s go! I’m very much looking forward to planning how Michael will meet his maker.” She lets out a happy sigh, and I have to bite back a laugh.

Since when did my sister get so bloodthirsty?

Probably around the same time I did—when he murdered us.

I step toward the door, pulling Wren with me into the shadows and popping out in front of the house. I'm more than a little surprised to find a shirtless, very sweaty Brenden talking with Nex, who's wearing just as few clothes and just as much sweat as my mate.

I lick my lips, eyes running over the expanse of skin revealed on both men. I'm not surprised to see Nex has a few tattoos. I'm not close enough to make them out, but I'm sure they're sexy as hell.

Yes, I have a thing for tattoos and piercings. What can I say?

“You have a little something here.” Wren knocks her hand against my chin with a giggle, drawing both men's attention.

Nex's eyes meet mine, and for a moment, it's like nothing else exists. It's just me and him.

Then he looks away. “I should get going—”

“Actually,” I call out, hurrying over. “We're about to have a meeting to plan how we're going to take care of Michael—in case you're interested in being a part of that.”

Nex refuses to look at me, keeping his eyes on Brenden as he shakes his head. “I shouldn't...I need a shower after that run.”

“Oh, that's okay. Brenden needs a shower, too. I'm sure he'd be happy to share with you so as not to waste any water.”

“Audrey!” Wren sounds scandalized, but I just ignore her and smile at Brenden, who seems to be considering my idea.

“You know...that’s not a bad idea. Conserving water is always high on my list,” he says with a smirk, stepping closer to Nex—who immediately takes a step back, running into me.

He jumps away, shaking his head. “I swear the two of you plan this shit.”

I shake my head. “Nope, but we’re both very good at taking advantage of a situation. But seriously, if you want to be here while we’re planning, you’re welcome to join us.”

“I...ummm...” Nex looks between the three of us before nodding. “Okay, yeah. I’d like to know what the plan is for that. But maybe I can take a shower in another bathroom.”

Brenden pouts, rolling his eyes. “If you insist. Come on, I’ll shower in Wraith’s room. You can use my shower. Let the others know we won’t be long since Nex doesn’t want to share a shower with me.”

“Are you okay, Ree?” Wren wraps her arm around my waist, hugging me from the side as I stare after them.

I sigh because what am I supposed to say to that? Of course I’m not okay. I have one fated mate who refuses to look at me, let alone talk to me. I have another who can’t stop fighting with another of my mates. I want to make them mine, but I’m beginning to wonder if it’s really worth it.

Is it time to just cut my losses and accept that I’ll only have three mates instead of five?

Pain courses through me at that thought, and I know I can't give up on them yet. I don't ever want to give up on them, but definitely not yet.

"Yeah, I'm fine," I assure her before leading her inside.

It seems Wren isn't the only one lying. I wonder if she's lying to herself, too.

It's another half an hour before Brenden and Nex join us, most of which I spend trying to convince Wraith to let Cassian come over to help us plan.

"I don't need his judgmental ass here telling us we shouldn't be doing this. Neither do you." Wraith crosses his arms over his chest. "We're not telling Cassian—end of story."

I squeeze my eyes shut and pray for patience—something I've seriously been lacking when it comes to Wraith and my two wayward mates—while I remind myself that I need Wraith to help make a plan that won't fail.

"Fine," I finally spit out. "We won't have him help us come up with a plan, but you're sadly mistaken if you think I won't be telling him."

I had to stop inviting Cassian to the academy. Wraith loses his shit every time he sees him now, which isn't helping Cassian talk to him. It's hard to get a word in edgewise when he starts attacking with magic as soon as he sees you.

At least I'm able to shadow walk to his place in Ephonia, otherwise I'd never see him.

Maybe this is why I slept so long last night. Maybe my body just finally gave up after all the stress I've been forcing on it.

Not that any of this matters right now.

“Come have a seat.” I wave everyone over to the table where I have my iPad. “Wraith, a lot of the planning is going to depend on you. You’re going to have to tell me what we can and can’t do since you want to piss Lucifer off as little as possible.”

He nods slowly. “Yeah, I’ve actually been giving that a lot of thought. I was thinking we could use Michael’s death for Wren’s final.”

“What?” both of us ask at the same time.

“I’m sure Wren will want to confirm Michael’s death, and she can’t leave the underworld until her final. I know that’s another three months, but that’ll give us plenty of time to fine-tune our plan.” Wraith glances around the table. “What?”

“I thought you couldn’t fuck with people’s finals?” I sneer at him. “Isn’t that what you told me? And that’s why you haven’t been able to find out who sent me to collect my own sister’s soul?”

Wraith sighs. “No, I usually can’t. As fucked up as it was that you were sent to collect Wren’s soul, it didn’t hurt anyone. You passed your final, and you were able to find out she was dead. I’m not going to push that, trouble. I’m sorry, but it’s not worth it. If you want vengeance on Michael, this is the only way I can make sure you’re both there. I’m going to be breaking a lot of rules doing this, but I understand that you both need this.”

“And then what?” Nex asks. “You’re just going to kill him in cold blood?”

I scoff. “Seriously? Is that why you joined us? I thought you were here to help us plan this—not try to talk us out of it. Plus, it’s not killing him in cold blood when he already killed me and Wren. You know what? If you’re going to be all judgmental,

you don't need to be here."

"What? You're the one who wanted me here!"

"Sure. When I thought you were here to help." I throw my hands in the air. "If you can't support this plan, then get out."

Nex just stares at me. "You're really kicking me out?"

"If you're just going to try to convince me I shouldn't do this, then yes!" By the time I finish my sentence, I'm screaming in his face. "You know what? This was a bad idea. I can't be here right now. Why don't you all argue over what we should or shouldn't do? Then, when you have it figured out, you can tell me. I can't deal with any of you anymore."

I head for the door, stomping across the house before I remember I don't have any shoes on. My boots are upstairs, but there's no way I'm going up there to grab them. Instead, I pull on a pair of tennis shoes sitting by the door and bolt.

Was that the most mature way of handling the situation?

Definitely not, but I'm just so sick and tired of the push and pull that's happening between me and everyone else.

I have no idea where I'm going. I just know I need to not be here.

After about an hour of getting lost in the damn woods, I shadow walk to Diana's place and knock on her door.

When she swings it open, I burst into tears and throw myself into her arms.

“Oh, Audrey. Come on in and tell me what’s going on.”

I let her lead me inside, happy to see Celeste is here, too. The two of them surround me, wrapping their arms around me and letting me cry until I can’t anymore. Then it’s time to let them in on the mess my life has become.

Thank the Fates for my two besties.

Audrey

I refuse to leave Diana's apartment for two weeks. None of my mates are happy about it, but they can't exactly force me home. It helps that I allow Donovan and Brenden to come visit me. I would've let Wren come visit me too, but Wraith wouldn't let her leave Bristix.

Yet another reason to be annoyed with my overbearing mate.

"Audrey, babe, you know I love you," Diana begins, "but you have to go home. You miss your mates, and based on the way they've been blowing up your phone, they miss you, too."

"Maybe, but they're all driving me crazy. No one wants to fix anything, and they're all stressing me out. That's on top of everyone trying to talk me out of killing Michael." I hold my hand up when she goes to speak. "I know how you feel about it, but it's not going to change anything. Just like none of my mates have been able to change my mind before now. I have to do this—even if none of you understand it."

She nods, and I appreciate the fact that she doesn't try to argue with me about it again. Diana thinks I should let it go, but Celeste is with me. She thinks the man needs to die.

It seems that murdering my killer is a controversial topic. Who knew?

"I get why you needed time away, but you're not sleeping or eating. You're hurting yourself by being so far away from your bond mates." She makes a face. "Also,

you're kind of cock blocking me."

I gasp. "I would never!"

She laughs. "But you are. The only way I'm getting any cock right now is at their place, which means Melody is there. Warren and I are supposed to be working on our relationship. The three of us are solid, but I'm supposed to be spending more time with him than with both of them right now. Part of that is definitely having sex with him, therefore, you're cock blocking me."

"Damn. I wish you would've told me sooner. I would never knowingly cock block a friend." I run a hand through my hair. "I think I'll shower first. Are my clothes clean? I don't want to wear any of your clothes to get home."

She nods. "I washed them when I did laundry the other day. If you really need more time, you know I'm happy to have you stay with me—"

"Nope. You already said I was cock blocking you. You can't take it back now." I stand up, stretching my arms over my head before jerking my head away when I realize just how bad I smell. "Yeah. Fuck. I'm getting in the shower now."

Diana's laughter follows me all the way to the bathroom, where I take a long, hot shower.

I feel like a new woman when I step out and head home. I still don't want to deal with any of the shit I ran away from, but Diana's right. It's time to stop hiding from my problems.

I thank Diana for her support and apologize profusely for cock blocking her before shadow walking home. I stop in front of the house, staring up at it for a moment before trudging inside.

I'm greeted by screaming from the living room.

Fuck. Here we go.

This is not what I wanted to come back to, but I'm not that surprised.

I stomp into the living room to find Cassian and Wraith in each other's faces, yelling about something or another. Honestly, I don't care what the fuck they're arguing about. It just needs to stop.

Sticking my fingers in my mouth, I let out a shrill whistle that has both men falling silent. All attention turns to me, and that's when I notice that Donovan and Brenden are on the couch, sharing popcorn.

Idiots.

"That's enough. Do I need to leave again for another two weeks?" I ask, waving my hand between them. "I said I wanted this shit to stop. You both promised me it would, and yet, here we are. I walked in on you arguing again."

"Trouble—"

"No." I shake my head. "I'm the one speaking right now. Not you. In fact, all four of you can keep your mouths shut. Donovan and Brenden, I don't want to have to point this out to either of you again. Watching Cassian and Wraith fighting is not entertainment. If you see them fighting, you break it up or you let me know it's happening, and I'll come break it up. No more eating popcorn like it's a live theater or some bullshit. Do you understand me?"

They both nod, and Donovan sets aside the popcorn.

“Now, for the two of you.” I stalk over, jabbing Wraith and Cassian in the chest. “I’ve had enough. It’s time to stop fucking fighting. No, I don’t care what either of you has to say right now. The two of you need to earn my forgiveness for breaking a promise to me.”

“Little mate,” Cassian starts but smartly shuts his mouth when I glare at him.

I point to the stairs. “I want both of you upstairs in the main bedroom. Take your fucking clothes off and wait for me.”

They both stare at me like I’m stupid, and I suck in a lungful of air. “Are you deaf or dumb? Because I can think of no other reason why you’re still standing here.”

“That’s hot, firecracker. You can boss me around in the bedroom any time you want.” Brenden squeezes his dick through his pants as Cassian and Wraith glance at one another before hurrying up the stairs.

Donovan snickers. “I doubt either one of them is going to allow you to be in charge for long.”

“Oh, yes, they will—if they want me to stop being pissed at them.” I shake my head. “I’m serious. The two of you need to break them up if you see them fighting anymore. Until Wraith is willing to listen to Cassian, I don’t see it getting any better—as much as I’d like to think me taking them to bed will make it all better, I know it won’t. I need to know I can count on the two of you.”

Brenden nods. “Of course you can. I promise we won’t just watch them fight anymore. I’m sorry.”

Donovan runs a hand through his messy hair. “Yeah, I’m sorry, too. Whatever you need us to do, you can count on us.”

“That’s all I need you to do right now. Well, and maybe see if you can talk some sense into Nex.” Sighing, I start toward the stairs. “Also, please don’t come upstairs and watch. This needs to happen with just the three of us.”

Both nod solemnly, and I leave them to it as I trudge up the stairs.

How sad is it I’m not even looking forward to what’s coming? This isn’t how I wanted my first time with Cassian to be.

I guess that’s what I get for waiting so long. It’s just hard because I know sleeping with him will only make me fall harder for him, and I don’t want that when he might never be mine.

That might make me a coward, but nothing is looking like it’s going in my favor when it comes to Nex and Cassian. Until I can get everyone on the same page, I just didn’t want to take that next step. But who knows? Maybe this will teach the two of them how to work together.

Or it’s all going to blow up in my face. I’m not sure which yet.

I’m a little surprised when I step into the bedroom to find both of them stark naked—even if they’re on opposite sides of the bedroom and refusing to look at each other.

My eyes trail down Cassian’s body, and I bite my lip when I realize he has bars through his nipples and cock. That’s definitely a Jacob’s Ladder. I can’t wait to get a closer look at it.

Hell yes!

“Since neither one of you can seem to talk to each other civilly, I don’t want to hear

either of you speak. I'm in charge. If you want to remain in the room, you'll listen to what I tell you to do. If you can't listen, then I'll kick you out." I glance between them. "Any questions or comments?"

Surprisingly, they both shake their heads.

"Good." I pull off my tank top and bra, tossing them to the side before ridding myself of my shoes, shorts, and thong. "On the bed."

There's a moment of hesitation before they climb onto the bed. It's big enough that they're nowhere near each other, and that's never going to work.

I climb onto the bed, crawling to the top before lying down. "I want both of you to eat my pussy and get me off."

"I'll go first," Cassian says, hurrying forward, but I shake my head.

"You misunderstand. I want both of your mouths on me at the same time." I snort when they both balk. "You act like your mouths and tongues have never touched. I didn't ask you to blow one another. All I did was tell you to make your mate feel good by working together. That shouldn't be asking too much of you."

They share another look before both nodding. They each take one of my legs and spread me open as far as they can. It's a tight squeeze for both of them to fit together, but they make it work.

My eyes fall shut at the first swipe of another. Then another. Then both.

"Yes," I hiss, hands sinking into their hair. "Like that."

It's easy to lose myself to the pleasure they're giving me—especially when they both

slide their tongues inside my cunt as they fuck me together. Imagining their tongues sliding against one another is what sends me flying over the edge. I grind against both of them as I cling to their hair, riding out one of the best orgasms of my life. I don't let up until my body feels like jelly.

"That was good," I assure them, tsking when Wraith moves off the bed. "If you think you're done, you're sorely mistaken. Now that you've gotten me off on your tongues, it's time to use your cocks. I want both of them buried inside my pussy at once. Wraith, since you're up, why don't you grab the lube?"

He looks like he wants to argue, but eventually, he relents and grabs the lube before rejoining us on the bed.

I push Cassian onto his back and straddle him. "Wraith, get me ready to take your cock—just don't take too long. Remember, I heal quickly."

Then, without another word, I sink onto Cassian's cock. We groan together as my cunt flutters around his length.

Those piercings feel fucking amazing.

I roll my hips, loving the way those bars drag against my walls. His fingers find my clit, circling it as Wraith pours lube onto his fingers before pushing them in alongside Cassian's cock, pulling moans from all three of us.

I just went two weeks without sex after living with my mates for months. I'm horny as fuck, and I want both of their cocks inside of me.

Wraith is going entirely too slowly for my tastes, so I slam down on the cock and fingers inside of me. "Enough. I need your cock. Damn it, Wraith."

“I’m going. I’m going.” Wraith pulls his fingers from me, and I hear the sounds of lube being poured once more.

I ride Cassian slowly, leaning forward to kiss him.

Wraith notches his cock at my entrance, pushing in slowly with no urging from me. Because I didn’t allow him to stretch me out properly, there’s a bit of pain, but I don’t mind too much.

Cassian is panting beneath me, and I smile down at him. “What’s wrong, Cass? Have you never had another cock with yours inside a pussy?”

“No, brat, I haven’t. It feels so good. Damn, Wraith. Hurry on, man. I can’t hold on much longer.” Cassian yanks me down for another kiss as Wraith slams in the last bit.

My back arches, a scream falling from my lips as two sets of fingers dig into my hips.

“Move,” I demand. “Fuck me. Now.”

And boy, do they.

For two men who can’t speak to one another without arguing, they do amazingly well at finding a rhythm with one another that ensures I always have a cock buried inside of me.

“Holy shit, Cassian. Those fucking piercings.” Wraith grunts as he pulls out and then buries himself in me once more.

“They feel good, don’t they?” My fallen angel mate asks with a chuckle.

Wraith doesn’t answer him, but that’s okay because they pick up their pace as they

plow into me. When one of their fingers finds my clit, I detonate. My entire body shakes as I come, pleasure rushing over me and leaving me euphoric.

Cassian is the first to come, cursing as his hot cum spurts against my walls and Wraith's cock.

“Shit. That's so fucking dirty,” Wraith moans as he comes, still fucking into me while Cassian and I lay there, trying to catch our breaths.

Eventually, Wraith pulls out of me and rolls onto his back. I somehow manage to pull myself off Cassian and collapse between them.

“Now, am I going to walk in on any more arguments or fights between the two of you?” I ask, eyes closed.

Neither of them answers right away, but that's fine. As long as they give me the answer I want, then I don't give a fuck how long it takes them to respond.

“I'll try harder,” Wraith says reluctantly. “But I need him to stop trying to talk to me about what happened when we broke up.”

Cassian sighs. “But I need to—”

“No,” Wraith cuts him off. “That's the only way I can promise we don't fight.”

Rolling my head to the side, I stare at Wraith. “Eventually, you're going to need to listen to what he has to say. This isn't going to work if you continue to hate him.”

“Fine. I promise to hear him out—eventually. When I'm ready. Until then, he needs to not mention it.”

I don't like it, but what else am I going to do?

“Cassian?”

He sighs. “I like it when you call me Cass, little mate. But yes, I'll stop bringing it up, and I promise to do my best not to fight with him.”

“Good. I'm glad that's settled. Now, cuddle with me.” I roll onto my side, facing Wraith, smiling when they both cuddle up to me.

Have I really fixed anything? I don't think so, but maybe—just maybe—this is the beginning of fixing what's broken between the two of them.

Source Creation Date: July 26, 2025, 5:22 am

Audrey

A nother month has passed—both over too quickly and not moving fast enough.

We have a plan in place for killing Michael in just a few short months. Technically, fifty-six days, but I’m not counting down or anything.

“Audrey?” a voice calls out, and I lift my head from the papers I’m grading. Looking around the room, my eyes land on a man in his thirties with dark hair. I search for his name. Ah, right. Jason. “Can you come help me?”

I glance at Nex, who’s helping another student, but he isn’t paying me any attention—as per usual.

“Of course.” Standing, I make my way over to him. He’s a witch with earth magic, and he’s trying to make a seed grow. I give him a few pointers, and when the plant shoots above the soil, we both grin.

“Thank you,” Jason says softly, and I head back toward the desk at the front of the class.

A hand wraps around my wrist, stopping me. I smile down at Wren as she beams up at me. “Sit with me for a minute?”

My eyes find Nex, who’s now roaming around the room as he waits for someone to need help. His eyes steadfastly avoid both me and Wren, so I shrug and drop into the seat beside her.

As they've passed the four-month point, my sister's class has shrunk down to less than ten. There's really not much need for me to help with this class anymore. Nex is perfectly capable of handling this many students on his own, but I just can't bring myself to stop coming.

Even if he avoids all eye contact and rarely, if ever, speaks to me. I'm still here and in his face. I won't let him forget about me.

Is that pathetic?

Fuck, it is, isn't it?

Shaking my head, I force myself to focus on Wren. "What's up?"

"Are you okay?" she asks. The look she shoots me is daring me to lie to her, but what's the point?

"Not really. I don't like how unsettled everything feels." My eyes find Nex once more. It's like I can't help myself. They're always drawn to him—something I both love and hate. "You see how Nex acts around me. There haven't been any major blowups between Cassian and Wraith, but it's coming. I can feel it. Plus, waiting to get to Michael is killing me."

Wren hums, offering me a soft smile. "You have a lot going on. No one can blame you for feeling overwhelmed. Are you at least leaning on your mates?"

"Probably not as much as I should be," I admit. Although I don't tell her I've been avoiding them fairly regularly—at least as much as I can since none of them are above stalking me.

It's not that I don't want to spend time with them. I love them and our time together,

but everything feels off without Nex and Cassian there. It feels like parts of me are missing, and when I'm surrounded by my three bonded mates, it's even worse. And it's not like I can admit that to them.

I can just imagine how that conversation would go. Sorry, I love the three of you, but you're just not enough for me.

They'd love that.

"We could hang out tonight," Wren offers, and I shake my head.

"I wish I could, but Cassian's coming over tonight. He has something planned for us." I play with the ends of my hair, following Nex's progression around the room with my eyes.

Wren waggles her eyebrows. "He does, does he? I wonder what that could be?"

I wave my hand at her, dismissing her words. I'm sure we'll end up having sex. That's practically a given any time I'm around my mates. We can't seem to keep our hands off one another—except Nex, who never touches me.

I love sex just as much as anyone, but the relationships with my mates are about so much more than that. I like who they are as people, which means the world to me. I'm sure the Fates wouldn't pair me with someone who I wouldn't get along with, but since they fated me to one of the most stubborn demons to ever live, who the hell knows?

Yes, I'm feeling sorry for myself and the lack of relationship I have with Nex—sue me.

"I just wish he would look at me," I mumble, but Wren catches my words, her face

falling.

“I wish I could do something to help you with that.” She sighs. “Of course you’d end up with a mate even more stubborn than you.”

I’ve all but given up on speaking with him—with trying to convince him he should give us a chance. Not so much by choice but because he flees in the opposite direction every time he sees me.

Brenden assures me he’s working on it, but I’ve yet to see any progress when it comes to me. There’s been a ton of progress between Nex and Brenden. At least that’s what he tells me. They’ve made out a few times, but nothing more than that.

Not that I would hold it against Brenden if things progressed with them. Although, it makes me sick that Nex doesn’t seem to mind getting closer to Brenden when he wants nothing to do with me. Shouldn’t he be worried about what happens to Brenden with the curse?

A thought occurs to me, my gaze drifting back to Nex.

What if that is his plan? To get close to Brenden, to fall for him, and when the curse kicks in, he no longer has to worry about me or Brenden.

Holy shit. That better not be his plan. If he hurts my mate, I will eviscerate him.

“Umm...Audrey?” Wren’s voice wavers for a moment. “Why are you growling at Nex?”

Jerking my head toward her, I realize I’m baring my teeth and growling.

I cut that shit off immediately, filling Wren in on where my thoughts strayed before

we both consider the man in question.

“I want to say he’d never do that,” Wren begins hesitantly, “but it totally seems like something he would do.”

“Right? If he hurts Brenden, then I don’t want anything to do with him.” I toss my hands in the air. “I know Brenden comes off a little crazy—”

“A little?” Wren snorts, covering her face when I glare at her. “I’m sorry. Please continue.”

Brushing away nonexistent lint, I continue, “He’s a little crazy, but he’s also fragile. I don’t want to think about how he’d react—what he’d do. I don’t want him to get hurt.”

Wren sighs. “But it’s okay if you’re hurt?”

“Of course I don’t want to be hurt,” I practically yell, flushing when all eyes in the room turn to me. I offer a tight smile and lower my voice before continuing. “But I already am. Plus, I’m not crazy.”

“If you say so.” Wren tosses me a smile. “I think Brenden will be fine, even if he has a few screws loose. He knows what he’s up against with that man.”

I shrug, knowing she’s right, but it doesn’t make me any less upset about the idea of Brenden being hurt. “Alright, I should get back to those papers.”

“It’s all going to work out,” Wren assures me, giving my hand one last squeeze.

As much as I’d like to believe her words, I can’t. I don’t see how this can work out. Not unless Nex gets amnesia or something.

Settling at the desk once more, I bury my hands in my hair and massage my temples. There's a tension headache building, and I'm so not here for it. I have plans I don't plan on missing.

"The papers aren't going to grade themselves," Nex snarks, glaring down at me.

"I'm well aware. Thank you." I return his glare, wondering why he suddenly feels the need to talk to me.

"Also, if you could please refrain from interrupting my class by yelling at your sister, that would be great." He clenches his jaw. "In fact, maybe it's best if you just don't talk to her during class. If she needs help, I can help her since you can't be trusted. I'm not even sure why you're still helping in my classes. I have no need for you, and I don't want you around."

I jerk my head back as if he slapped me. Where the hell had that vehement tone come from? Who the hell does he think he is?

"Why don't you go fuck yourself?" I push to my feet, not bothering to keep my voice down. "I don't know what crawled up your ass, but if you think I'm going to allow you to speak to me like that, you're sadly mistaken. Did you decide ignoring me wasn't working, so you'd be cruel? Well, I have news for you, asshole—no matter how much you don't want it to be true, you're still my fated mate. Go ahead and keep fighting it. You're the one who's going to end up alone and with no one to blame but yourself."

I'm practically panting with anger as I lean across the desk, hands planted on the papers I've been grading. "As far as helping in your classes, you're right. You don't need me, and I sure as fuck don't need you. But if you hurt Brenden, I'm coming for you—mate or not. I guess it's just time to accept that you're not worth my time and that you really are an asshole."

Nex's jaw drops as he stares at me in shock. Anger rattles through me, and I know I should just walk away, but I can't seem to make my feet move. Instead, I swipe my hand across the desk, pushing everything to the floor.

It doesn't make me feel any better.

"You finally succeeded in your quest." My voice has gone quiet as sorrow begins to overwhelm my anger. My voice shakes as tears fill my eyes. "I don't think I want you to be my mate anymore."

Head held high, I stalk out of the classroom before sliding through the shadows. As soon as I land in the bedroom, I collapse to my knees as sobs wrack my body.

Rage and dejection are at war inside of me as I slam my hands onto the floor and let out a heart-wrenching scream filled with fury and pain.

Footsteps thunder up the stairs, making me realize I'm not alone in the house.

Damn it. None of my mates need to see me like this.

The door swings open to reveal Donovan, whose eyes flash when they land on me. "What the hell happened?"

I shake my head, unable to speak. I'm not strong enough to tell him what just happened. I feel like I'm shattering from the inside out, and I don't know if I can put my pieces back together.

Who knew that giving up on my mate would hurt so badly? I certainly wasn't expecting it.

"Fuck." Donovan races across the room and scoops me into his arms. I wrap my arms

around his neck and cling to him.

I might not be able to put myself back together again, but maybe my mates can. Maybe they can hold me together while I splinter. Maybe they're all I really need—just the three of them.

Because if I'm accepting that Nex will never be mine, then I have to accept that neither will Cassian.

My body shakes as my tears fall faster.

I don't know if I'm ready to accept that just yet. I don't think I can deal with the additional pain it will cause me.

I don't know if I can survive this.

"I've got you, pretty girl. Whatever happened, we'll fix it. Lean on me. You don't always have to be the strong one. Let me help you."

What choice do I really have but to accept his help? I can't do this on my own, and I don't want to.

I bury my face in his chest, soaking his shirt, but my hellhound mate doesn't seem to notice or care as he carries me to the bed. When he sets me down, I let out a cry and reach for him, but he's already shushing me and crawling up beside me. He wraps me up in his arms, soothing me the best he can as I lose it.

Eventually, the tears stop falling, and I feel empty—oh, so empty. I can't think, I can't feel—all I can do is lie here until sleep drags me into her warm embrace.

Source Creation Date: July 26, 2025, 5:22 am

Cassian

I flap my wings, eyes locked on my mate down below. She has no idea that I'm stalking her from the sky.

Why would she?

No one ever thinks to look to the sky for danger.

It's been nearly two weeks since Donovan called me to let me know Audrey wasn't in any condition to go on a date with me. He'd had no details to give me, just that she came home early and fell apart in his arms. I wanted nothing more than to rush over there, but he asked me not to.

It had taken all of my willpower to grant his request. Every part of me wanted to be with my mate—especially because we aren't bonded.

It was days later when Donovan called again. Audrey hadn't spoken to any of them or gotten out of bed since he last called. It was Wren who told them what happened in Nex's classroom that day.

As he relayed the story, I could tell how tight of a leash he was holding on to his hellhound. Something I completely understood because as soon as he finished telling me what happened, all I wanted to do was hunt down the demon and tear him to shreds. The only thing that held me back was Donovan reminding me that Audrey couldn't have me without also having him.

It's a bunch of bullshit. Why the hell does my fate rely on a man who seems intent on self-destruction?

I've messaged her multiple times, but she hasn't responded. To say I'm not happy is putting it mildly.

When Donovan texted me yesterday to let me know Audrey had finally left the house—it had taken her a full week to get out of the bed—I knew I needed to see her. She might not want to answer my texts, but she can't ignore me if I am standing right in front of her, now can she?

Which is how I ended up stalking her as she heads back to the home she shares with three of her mates. A home I want nothing more than to share with her, but that's not going to happen until Wraith hears me out. Until I can get him to forgive me for my idiotic choices.

I smile when Audrey veers off the path and into the woods.

Perfect.

I follow her progress deep into the woods, wondering what she's doing when she comes to a stop. She throws her head back and lets out a hoarse scream. The sound dies away before she does it again and again.

My heart feels like it will shatter from the pain and anger in that one sound.

Deciding I can't wait any longer, I dive through the trees. I land quietly behind my mate as her scream falls silent once again.

Audrey stands there panting and has no idea I'm there.

“Oh, little mate,” I murmur, grinning when her head whips around in surprise.

Hellfire flies toward me before she realizes it’s me. It’s coming too quickly, I won’t be able to dodge it—although I’m going to try my damndest.

Only it stops inches from me before she pulls it back into herself. Her eyes flash purple, almost as if the hellfire takes their place before it’s gone.

“Damn it, Cassian. You shouldn’t sneak up on people like that.” Audrey’s voice is flat, and I’m not a fan. “I need to get home.”

When she takes a step away from me, I rush over to grab her arm and turn her to face me. “Oh, no, little mate. You don’t get to run away from me.”

Her head falls back as she meets my gaze, and all I can see there is the agony she’s fighting to not feel. “I tried to make a clean cut. I’m sorry, but there’s no point in doing this anymore. It’s clear that I will only have three mates. There’s no reason to torture us both by getting closer and then having it ripped away from us.”

“Oh, hell no.” I cup her cheeks, shaking my head. “You are not giving up on us.”

“There is no us if there is no Nex, and he’s made it clear what he wants—and that’s not me.” I hate the emotionless way she says this. “I’ve accepted it and now you need to.”

“Fuck no, little mate. I’m not letting you go. Sure, there are going to be some bumps and bruises along the way, but that’s no reason to give up.” I bare my teeth at her as I adjust my hold to her shoulders, shaking her lightly. “Do you hear me, Audrey? I won’t let you give up on us.”

She sighs as if I’m an inconvenience. “I’m sorry, Cassian.”

Audrey tries to step away, but I cling to her harder. I'm not letting this happen. I'll beat some sense into Nex if I need to, but I'm not losing my mate. Nor am I going to allow her to be this emotionless shell of a woman. I need to think of something to snap her out of it.

A smirk slides across my lips as something occurs to me. I don't know if it'll work to snap her out of this, but I have to do something. I bite my bottom lip, my cock hardening beneath my pants.

Oh, yes. This will be so much fun.

"You want to run from me, little mate?" I ask, releasing her and stepping back. "Then run. But be prepared because I will give chase."

She blinks at me, confused.

"Do you not understand?" I laugh, a bit of cruelty sinking into the sound as she tilts her head and stares at me. "You want to run, and I've decided to let you—because I want to chase you. And when I catch you, I'm going to tear the clothes from your body and fuck you into the ground until you understand that I'm never going to let you go. That I'm never going to let you give up on us. I am yours, and you are mine."

Interest flashes in her eyes—there and gone again in a second, but it's enough.

"NOW, RUN!!!"

Audrey startles at my shout, her eyes wide. She seems frozen for a moment before taking off into the trees, running as quickly as she can.

This was definitely the right call.

Not wanting to catch her too quickly, I pull out my phone and shoot off a few messages.

CASSIAN

Audrey won't be home for a bit.

DONOVAN

???

CASSIAN

I'm working on snapping her out of this bullshit.

DONOVAN

Need some help?

CASSIAN

Sigh. Not this time.

Maybe we can have a repeat later.

DONOVAN

Now I'm intrigued.

CASSIAN

Gotta go. I've got a mate to catch.

DONOVAN

I fucking hate you.

CASSIAN

Get your ass to the forest.

NOW.

NEX

Fuck off.

CASSIAN

Don't make me hunt you down. You won't like the consequences.

NEX

The forest is a little general. Would you like to narrow it down a little?

CASSIAN

Oh, I won't be hard to find.

Tucking my phone away, I jog after my mate. This is going to be a two-prong plan. The first is to break Audrey out of the hole she's fallen down, and the other? To remind Nex what the hell he's throwing away.

I turn my head from side to side, keeping my steps as quiet as I can. Audrey's out here somewhere, and I need to find her.

Reaching down, I squeeze my erection. It's never fun running when my dick is hard, but there's no way it's going down until I come inside my mate.

"Where are you, little mate? Are you still running or did you find a hiding spot?" I call out, focusing to see if I hear anything out of place. "You're being such a good girl listening to me and running. But we both know you won't escape me—nor do you want to."

A branch snaps to my right, my head jerking toward the sound, and I catch a glimpse of red.

There she is.

I dart after her. She's moving quickly and trying to be quiet, but I can pick up on the sounds of her heavy breaths as I near her. It won't be too much longer now.

Another flash of red has me veering to the left as Audrey stumbles over a log, and that's all I need.

With a burst of speed, I launch myself across the distance and tackle her to the ground as she tries to get back to her feet.

"Oh, look at what I caught," I taunt her, rubbing my dick against her ass. "A little mate."

She bucks beneath me with a snarl. "Get the fuck off me."

I hesitate for a moment, unsure if she means it.

“If you want this to stop, all you have to do is say red.” When she continues to fight me, I adjust my hold on her until I can slap a hand on her ass. “Do you understand?”

Audrey glances at me over her shoulder, eyes filled with hunger as she licks her lips. “I understand.”

“Good girl,” I purr, lifting her off the ground and carrying her to the log that she tripped over. I lay her upper body across it so she’s on her knees with her ass in the air.

She lets out a growl, continuing to fight my hold as I bury my face in her neck and suck in her scent.

“I love it when you fight me, little mate,” I growl, yanking off her tank top and pulling her up until she rests against my chest. My hands fall to her tits, cupping her through her bra and tweaking her hard nipples. I hook a finger in the front of it and tear it.

“You mother fucker!” she yells, continuing to fight me as I pull the bra down her arms.

I stare at it for a moment. I’ve never used a torn bra as a restraint before, but I think I can make it work. Holding her arms behind her back, I loop the bra around them and manage to tie them off. If she really wants to, she’ll be able to break out of them, but I don’t think she wants to.

No, I think my little mate is really into what we’re doing right now.

Once more, I pull her up so her back is resting on my chest and cup her tits. They’re really magnificent, and I want nothing more than to devour them. But that’s not what this is about right now. I continue to grope her as a rustling noise followed by the

snapping of a branch draws both of our attention.

When Nex steps out of the trees in front of us, his eyes are wide and his mouth is agape.

Audrey is frozen in my grasp as I twist her nipples. She cries out as I lean down to press my lips to her ear. “Remember, all you have to do to get this to stop is say red.”

She just nods and keeps her mouth clamped shut.

I shove her down on the log, keeping my eyes locked on Nex as I undo Audrey’s leather shorts and yank them down her thighs until they hit her knees.

“What the hell is going on?” Nex asks, unable to tear his eyes off our mate. Not that I can blame him. She looks amazing all trussed up from behind, but I can only imagine what she looks like from his point of view.

I bring my hand down on my mate’s ass, and she gasps again. Pushing her panties to the side, I delve beneath them to find her drenched. I groan, burying one finger and then two into her hot cunt.

“Such a dirty girl,” I growl. “Did you like me chasing you through the woods and tying you up so you’re at my mercy?”

Her walls flutter around me, growing wetter as she whimpers.

“That’s right, little mate. I’m going to take what’s mine. I’m going to remind you that you can’t run from this—from me. None of us can. No matter what some assholes seem to think.” My eyes narrow on Nex, and he startles. He’s hard beneath his pants, but he doesn’t reach for his cock. He also doesn’t leave.

Audrey whines when I pull my fingers out of her and rip the panties from her body. I just laugh as I wrap my hand around the back of her neck. I'm going to make sure she watches Nex the whole time. Not to hurt her but to make sure he can't look away from her. I'm going to show him everything he's missing out on.

Using my free hand, I undo my pants and release my cock, squeezing it for a bit of relief before moving forward so I can notch it at her entrance. "I'd say hold on, but I guess you can't with your hands bound behind you. Too bad."

I thrust into her all at once, and she cries out. I didn't really prep her enough to take me at once so that probably hurt a little.

"What are you doing?" Nex asks, taking a step forward before freezing again.

Her legs are already spread as far as they can with her shorts around her knees, so she feels tighter than usual as her wet pussy squeezes my cock. I close one hand around her hip and slip the one holding the back of her neck to close around her throat as I pound into her.

As I expected, Nex isn't able to look away as Audrey mewls beneath me, no longer fighting me. Because she wants this—no, needs this just as much as I do. Leaning forward, I press my chest into her back, pinning her to the log as I fuck her hard and fast.

Nex's hand drifts toward his dick as if it has a mind of its own. He flicks open his pants, dipping his hand beneath and pulling his cock out. The bastard doesn't really deserve to get off to the sight of our mate, but with the way she tightens around me and the whimper that spills from her, I know she likes it.

"You know, Nex, if you weren't such a jackass, you could be filling our mate's mouth with your dick." I sneer as I continue to pound her into the ground, likely

marking her up with how she's moving against the unforgiving bark of the log. "You're lucky I'm letting you jerk off to her. If it was up to me, I'd make you watch without touching yourself, but our little mate likes watching you stroke your cock."

Nex's eyes remain on Audrey as he continues to jerk himself, hard and punishing. I know he heard me by the way his movements slow before picking back up.

"I told him to join us," I whisper in her ear. "I wanted to show him what an idiot he's being. No one in their right mind wouldn't want to be with you. He's lucky I didn't knock out his fucking teeth."

"Please, Cass," she begs so prettily. When she tries to turn her head to look at me, I tighten my hand around her throat and send her straight into an orgasm. She screams out my name as I continue to plow into her, never slowing my pace, even as her pussy pulses around me.

While I hadn't meant to make her come, I'm not sad about it. All I want to do is wring all of the pleasure from my mate's body that I can.

As she comes down, I snake my hand around to stroke her clit as I fuck her so good. She cries out with each movement of my hips while I keep my hand collared around her throat. I'm really fucking close to coming, and I need her to fall apart with me.

Nex groans low and loud moments before his cock jerks in his hand, cum spilling onto his hand and the forest floor. Audrey whines before coming even harder than the first time, and this time, I come with her. I grind my hips against her ass as my cock jerks, painting her walls with my cum.

The only sounds are our ragged breathing as the three of us try to catch our breaths.

"Nex," Audrey says his name so quietly, I'm almost not sure he hears her.

That is, until he jerks and takes a step backward. He shoves his cock into his pants, shaking his head, before he turns around and takes off at a sprint.

“Fucking coward,” I growl, pulling out of my mate, undoing the bra from around her wrists, and gathering her into my arms.

I expect to find tears on her face, but all I see is anger and disappointment.

“Are you okay, little mate?”

She reaches up, running a hand down my face as she offers me a soft smile. “Thank you, Cassian.”

I smirk. “You don’t have to thank me for fucking you. It’s my pleasure.”

She giggles, slapping her hand against my chest before sobering. “Not for that. Okay, yes for that, too. Thank you for not giving up. Thank you for seeing how much I was hurting and doing something about it. I wouldn’t have expected you to be the mate who chased me through the woods before fucking me into the ground, but I’m not complaining.”

“You’re thinking Donovan should’ve been the one chasing you, aren’t you?” I laugh at her shrug. “He’s going to be very jealous when he finds out I hunted you without him, but he’s not the only one of your mates who wants to chase you through the woods. Wraith, Donovan, and I used to do monthly hunts with the prey of the night changing up. And something tells me Brenden would love to hunt you.”

“You’re probably right.” She leans up to kiss me before pulling away to redress. When she goes to pull on her bra, she scowls as she tugs the tank over her head instead. “No more destroying my bras. Especially not when we’re in the woods. Now they’re going to be just hanging out.”

I stare at her as she slaps her hands on her hips, and I see what she means. The tank top is oversized, gaping on the sides and does nothing to hide her tits. Not that I'm complaining.

"You'll be fine. We'll just head straight to the house." I push to my feet, tucking my cock away. "I'm sorry Nex took off."

Audrey shakes her head. "You were right when you called him a coward. He wants me—and I think Brenden—but he won't allow himself to have us. Part of me thinks this curse is all in his head, but I don't think I've ever met another person more stubborn than him."

I kiss the top of her head, looping my arm over her shoulders. "You just leave him to us. The past two weeks? That can't happen again. Your job is to focus on the mates you do have, and we'll help Nex see the error in his ways."

"I can't ask you to do that—"

"You didn't." I cut her off, smiling at the glare she shoots in my direction. "And you don't need to because it'll be our pleasure to make him see just how fucking wrong he is."

She sighs but doesn't argue with me any longer.

Nex is in for a surprise because I know her other mates have to be chomping at the bit to get their hands on him.

Oh, yes. We'll be happy to show him what an idiot he's being.

Audrey

I t's been a few weeks since Nex jacked off to Cassian fucking me in the middle of the woods.

My thighs clench and my cheeks warm at the memory of how Cassian chased me through the woods. I'd been so lost in my head and trying to figure out how to accept losing two men who were fated to be mine that I just stopped feeling anything.

I worried my mates—something I feel terrible about. But the looks on their faces when Cassian led me into the house, both of us covered in dirt. It was fucking hilarious.

Now, I just have to make sure I don't sink back into that hole. I can't do that to my mates again—I won't.

Nex has continued to avoid me, which is much easier now that I'm not assisting in his classes any longer. I don't know if that's better or not.

Should I be throwing myself into his path as often as possible, like I was before? It didn't seem to make any difference, but I hate not seeing him. I hate not knowing what he's doing.

I hate that he seems to be doing just fine without me.

I know he's punishing himself for what happened to his sister and the vengeance he sought afterward, but it's not just himself that he's punishing. He's punishing me and

my other mates, too, and that's not okay.

"Damn it, Donovan! Not my damn face." A grunt follows the words, and I frown as I hurry up the path.

It's late and there shouldn't really be anyone out at this time of night. There usually isn't when I take my two a.m. walks. I'm not sleeping well, and I don't want to keep my mates up, so I've been slipping out of the house and walking around campus while I wait for the sun to come up.

I know they've noticed, but no one has mentioned it.

There's another grunt, and when I round the corner, I find Donovan standing over Nex as he crumples to the ground.

"What the hell?" Both their heads jerk toward me as I hurry over. "What's going on right now?"

Donovan smirks. "Nothing for you to worry about, pretty girl."

I snort. "Yeah, that's not how this works. Please tell me this isn't what Cassian was talking about when he said you all would handle Nex."

"Okay, I won't." Donovan winks.

I grimace, shaking my head as I remind myself it's not nice to lose my shit on my mates. "While I appreciate your concern—all of my mates' concern—beating him up isn't going to change his mind."

"I don't need your help, Audrey," Nex grunts, spitting blood onto the ground. "I'm a big boy."

“This isn’t about you, you fucking shithead.” I sneer at him before turning my attention back to Donovan. “This isn’t what I want.”

Donovan wrinkles his nose, glancing between me and Nex before sighing. “Fine. I won’t beat up the piece of shit anymore.”

“Good, and you can pass it along to the others.” I shake my head, squatting down beside Nex. “Are you okay? Do you need anything?”

He rears back when I touch his arm, jumping to his feet and slumping against the wall with a groan. I frown as he clutches his side, and I wonder how long Donovan was at this before I walked up.

“What the hell is your problem, Nex?”

“My problem?” He scoffs. “My problem is that you can’t take no for an answer. You and me? It’s never going to happen. There’s no happily ever after waiting for us, and it’s kind of pathetic how you keep following me around.”

I push to my feet, stepping between him and Donovan, when my hellhound mate snarls. “No, Donovan. You’ve already beaten the shit out of him. I can handle this on my own.”

I don’t ask him to leave because I know he won’t, but I wait for him to nod his agreement before turning back to Nex.

“First of all, I’m not following you, you arrogant ass. I was walking around campus—as I do every night—because I can’t sleep. I came upon the two of you and made Donovan stop beating the shit out of you. A thank you wouldn’t be out of place.” I scoff at the look on his face. “Yeah, I know I’m not going to get one. I won’t hold my breath. As for the rest of the bullshit you just spewed?”

I shake my head. “I’m not the pathetic one. I’m not the one clinging onto some curse that probably isn’t real because I want to continue to live in the guilt I feel over my sister being killed and all the people I murdered in retaliation. I’m not the one who’s willing to throw away the best thing that happened to them because I’m fucking afraid. No, that would be you.”

He looks stricken as he stares at me before pulling himself up straight, hiding behind the icy mask he always dons in my presence. “Are four mates not enough for you? Do you really need to add a fifth? Are they that bad in bed or are you just so desperate for cock that you’re willing to bed someone who doesn’t want you?”

“Three mates,” I correct him. “If you don’t want me, then I’ll never have more than three.”

“I told you not to put that on me,” he snarls, getting in my face. “That’s not my fault.”

I shrug. “I never said it was. I’m just correcting your statement. I don’t know what would happen if I tried to mate with Cassian when you’re still rejecting me, but I can’t imagine it would be anything good. But you’re right. That’s not on you.”

Already over the conversation, I spin on my heel, but Nex’s hand closes around my arm and jerks me back to face him.

“You don’t get to just walk away from me.” His eyes flash, his mouth turned up in a snarl. He’s practically rabid as I scoff.

“Actually, I can do whatever the hell I want. And I don’t want to stand here listening to you tell me how desperate and pathetic you think I am.” I try to pull out of his grasp, but his fingers just tighten. It hurts, but I refuse to acknowledge it. I’m not giving him the pleasure of knowing just how much he’s hurting me—both physically and emotionally. “You need to let me go.”

He shakes his head slowly. “No, I don’t think I do. I don’t think you want me to. You’re still holding out hope that I’ll suddenly change my mind. Is that why you had Cassian text me the other day? Did you think that watching him fuck you would change my mind? Did you think I got hard because it was you? It could’ve been anyone there getting fucked, and I would’ve gotten hard.”

“So then, why did you fuck your hand?” I ask, daring him to tell me another lie. “Or did that have nothing to do with me, either?”

“Not a damn thing,” he growls, and it’s such a fucking lie that I laugh in his face. “I jerked off because there was a live porn show, and you were practically begging for my cock. Such a little cock slut, aren’t you? You’ll never have enough. What hole are you trying to fill with your desperation? Did Daddy touch you when you were little? Do you need to reclaim the body that was violated?”

My hand slams into his cheek, his head jerking away from me. When he turns back to me, anger flashes in his eyes, but I don’t fucking care. I know what he’s trying to do. He’s trying to push me away, and he’s succeeding.

What the hell am I talking about? He had already succeeded the day I left his classroom. I don’t want to be here doing this with him again. I’m so fucking over it.

“I don’t have a dad, Nex. Which you would know if you bothered to get to know me. As for cock? My mates are packing quite the punch. I don’t need another cock. I don’t need another man or mate, but fate has decreed you to be mine.” I scoff, eyeing him up and down, my face telling him just how much I find him lacking.

“I haven’t sought you out a single time since I walked out of your classroom, and I won’t be. You won. You convinced me of how horrible of a person you are and how much I want nothing to do with you. So why don’t you go back to running away every time you see me, and I’ll just pretend like you don’t exist? Does that work for

you?” I practically spit out my words at him, ire rising the longer I have to stand here and talk to him.

“What’s wrong, Audrey? Do my words hurt?”

I bare my teeth, annoyed to give him even that much of a reaction. He knows exactly what he’s doing and how much he’s hurting me.

“I’ve said it before, and I’ll keep saying it, Nex. Go fuck yourself. You’re not worthy of me, and I’m not going to spend another damn minute thinking of you.” I smirk. “But you won’t be able to stop thinking about me and the lives you’re ruining by depriving another man of the fated mate that he’ll never be able to have because of you. Adding a little more guilt onto your plate shouldn’t be a big deal since that’s all you seem to care about, anyway.”

His hand tightens on my arm again when I try to pull away, and this time, I can’t bite back the pained noise that escapes me.

Donovan is there in a second, ripping Nex away from me and slamming him into the wall. “Do not put your hands on my mate. I know Audrey’s already said it, but you’re the pathetic one. You’re the one throwing away the most amazing woman you’ll ever meet. You’re a fucking idiot hiding behind guilt like it’ll keep you warm at night—like it’ll love you. That’s okay. Your loss is my gain. That’s one less fucker I have to share her affections with.

“If I see you so much as glance her way again, I will fuck you up. You don’t deserve her or her time. She’s entirely too good for a piece of shit like you. You’re lucky your punishment from Lucifer is ironclad or you’d be looking for another home. Any friendship you had with me or Wraith? Hell, even Brenden and Cassian—that’s done and over with.” Donovan growls when Nex tries to break away from him.

“Brenden cares for you. He’s the real reason we all kept trying. He was convinced that you would come around. This is going to break his heart. But when he sees the marks you left on his mate? He’s going to tear you to shreds. I hope you’re happy with what you’ve done because now you have to live with it.”

He steps back, rolling his shoulders and shaking his head from side to side before he offers me his hand with a small smile. “Why don’t we head home, pretty girl? I can think of some ways to occupy our time while we wait for the sun to rise.”

“That sounds amazing.” I take his hand and allow him to lead me back toward the house. I don’t glance over my shoulder. I don’t worry that Nex might be hurt.

I’m officially done. No matter how many times I’ve said it before, I mean it now. He’s gone too far and done too much to damage the relationship we could’ve had.

I bury the hurt deep inside, determined to forget his entire existence. I only worry about what this will mean for me and Cassian. I’m not prepared to lose him.

I won’t lose him because of Nex. I just need to figure out how to fix it.

“I think we need to talk to Wraith,” Donovan says quietly, pulling me from my thoughts.

“Why?”

He glances at me, worry in his eyes. “I don’t think you working at the academy is the right call anymore. I think he should put you on the reaper roster. It’s what you should be doing anyway—gathering souls and transporting them to the underworld for judgment. You never wanted to teach at the academy, did you?”

“Not really,” I admit, excitement simmering inside me. “Do you think he’ll go for it?”

I mean, my first reap wasn't great, but at least I don't have any more sisters to find dead."

He grins. "That you know of. But yes, I think Wraith will be happy to move you over to reaping if that's what you want. He only had you assisting with classes so you could be closer to us. And to Nex. We all thought if you were always there in his face, he'd accept you. Clearly, we all overestimated his smarts."

"Clearly," I grouse, face pinching at the mention of him.

"Are you really done with him?"

I nod. "I am. He's pushed me away before, and I was okay with that. Now, he's just being cruel. He's made it clear that he doesn't want me. Why should I keep trying? He's telling me he doesn't want me, and it's about time I start listening. I don't know what this means for all of us—especially Cassian—but we'll figure it out."

"Together," he says, and I find myself returning his smile.

"Yes. We'll figure it out together."

Fuck.

I really hope we can because I'm not prepared to be miserable for the rest of my life.

Audrey

“He did what?” Brenden launches to his feet, stalking over to look at my arm. He growls when he sees the bruises already forming. “Who the fuck does he think he is?”

Donovan made good on his promise to occupy me until the sun came up, making me come over and over again—on his fingers, on his tongue, and on his cock. It helped me forget everything that happened for a few hours, and it meant the world to me.

Unfortunately, as soon as everyone started waking up, he called for all my mates and my sister to join us. I wouldn’t have minded a little longer before explaining everything to them, but Donovan thought ripping off the bandage and getting it over with was the best idea. I was too tired to argue with him.

I reach up, cupping his cheek. “I’m okay, Brenden.”

He shakes his head, still snarling. “No, you’re not. He put his hands on you. I’m going to kill him.”

Donovan chuckles. “I told him that’s how you’d respond.”

“How else would I?” he asks, staring at the bruises. “I don’t understand why he would do this. I’ve been making headway with him—“

“Have you?” Wraith asks gently. “Can you truthfully say you’ve been getting through to him about accepting his mate bond with Audrey? Or has he just been warming up to you?”

Brenden blinks at Wraith, his anger falling away. “I...I don’t know.”

Taking his hand, I lead him back to the couch. I push him to sit beside Donovan before climbing on his lap. He needs me right now.

I might be hurting, but it’s buried beneath so much anger and resentment that I can ignore it. I’m really afraid of what this realization will do to my vampire mate. I expressed my concerns to Wren not that long ago, and I hoped it wouldn’t come to this, but here we are.

“Is it possible he was using you to put more distance between him and Audrey?” Wren asks quietly, sympathy written all over her face.

“I don’t know,” Brenden admits again. “Was I deluding myself into thinking he cared about me?”

I shake my head, hating the desolation in his voice. “I don’t think so. I think he feels something for you, just like he does for me. The problem is that he doesn’t think he deserves us. It’s possible he was planning to use you to hurt both of us, but we won’t know the answer to that question unless we speak to him—which I have no intention of ever doing again.”

“So that’s it?” Cassian asks. “You’re truly done with him? Not to be a selfish bastard, but where does that leave us?”

I shrug. “I have no idea. I’m not giving you up, Cassian. I will fight for you, but the Fates were clear when they spoke to me. It’s either three or five—no in between. Maybe that just means we’ll never be able to bond.”

I hate the idea of not being able to share with him what I share with my other three mates, but if it keeps him in my life, who am I to complain?

“If it’s as simple as that, I can live with it. You’re it for me, little mate. I’m never giving you up.” Cassian says it with such devotion. Like he’ll move heaven and earth or raze it to the ground if that’s what it takes to keep me, and I love it.

We all fall silent, lost in our thoughts when Wren speaks up again.

“Does this change anything?”

I glance at my sister with a frown. “What do you mean?”

“Does this change anything with me being here at the school and becoming a reaper? Does it change us dealing with Michael? Where does this leave you?” Wren has tears at the corner of her eyes as they flash with indignation on my behalf. “How can you be expected to work with him? I don’t know how I’ll be able to look at him after knowing the shit he pulled.”

“Oh! Donovan had an idea about one part of that.” I sit up so I can see Wraith better. “I don’t want to work at the academy anymore. I don’t want to see him or deal with him. I want to start reaping.”

Wraith cocks an eyebrow as he considers me. “Oh, do you, trouble? And this was my pet’s idea? Of course it was.”

“Don’t be like that, Wraith.” Donovan snuggles further into his lover’s side. “You know it’s a good idea. I think Audrey is going to love reaping—you know, when it’s not her sister’s soul that she’s reaping. Yes, it means she’ll be away from us sporadically, but I also don’t want her anywhere near Nex.”

“You do make some good points.” Wraith rubs his hand against his chin. “Okay, Audrey. I’ll get your name added to the roster so you can begin reaping.”

Then his attention turns to Wren. “As far as the rest of your questions. This changes nothing about your schooling—except I’ll have you reassigned to one of Brenden’s classes if you’re not comfortable remaining in Nex’s. It also changes nothing about our plan with Michael. He might have been here for the planning stage, but we were never counting on him to participate. After he left, we adjusted it to only be the six of us. Though it can be adjusted to just five if need be.”

His and Cassian’s gazes clash as my fallen angel shakes his head. “I’m not backing out of this, Wraith. I’m in this, and I’m not going anywhere—no matter how much you want me to.”

“Until it gets too hard or too real. After that, who knows if we’ll be able to count on you then.” Wraith sneers. “Your track record hasn’t proven you to be someone we can count on.”

“Well, if you’d just let me fucking explain.” Cassian jumps to his feet, stepping toward Wraith, and I feel like my heart is being ripped from my chest.

Why do they have to keep fighting?

“NO!” I yell, yanking myself from Brenden’s grasp to stand up. “We are not fucking doing this. I’m not dealing with the two of you fighting on top of the bullshit Nex just pulled—“

I cut off with a frown, a realization hitting me out of nowhere. I think back on to the fights between Wraith and Cassian, checking the timing, and sure as fuck, they coincide with the confrontations with Nex.

“What’s wrong, Ree?” Wren’s at my side, squeezing my hand.

“Holy shit,” I murmur, trying to wrap my head around all of it.

Wren nudges me. “Audrey, you need to share with the class. You’re kind of freaking us out.”

I shake my head, glancing around at the others. “I want all of you to think back on the fights Wraith and Cassian have had.”

“I’d rather not,” Wraith grumbles, and I glare at him. He just holds up his hands in surrender.

“What about them?” Cassian is trying to be patient, but he doesn’t understand. None of them do.

I sigh, running a hand through my mussed hair. I really should’ve brushed it before meeting with everyone.

Hell, I probably should’ve showered first. It’s too late now.

“Every fight—except maybe the first one—was preceded by some confrontation between me and Nex. Another time, he rejected me or told me he didn’t want me. When he was an asshole or we fought.” I shake my head, hating that I hadn’t seen it sooner. “This is what they were talking about. Something is influencing the two of you every time Nex pulls away and causes you to fight with each other.”

“That can’t be true,” Wraith says with a frown, but I can already see his brain working through it.

Cassian has collapsed back in his seat, face filled with disbelief.

Wren is shaking her head—not because she doesn’t believe me but because she does.

Donovan and Brenden are both silent on the couch, their eyes never leaving

me—although Donovan grasps one of Wraith’s hands.

“Damn it.” Still seated, Wraith grabs the lamp on the side table and launches it across the room, where it hits the wall and shatters.

Wren and I both jump at the sound, turning to stare at my mate, who’s buried his face in his hands.

“If this is true,” Cassian begins, “which I think it is—I can see the pattern just as clearly as you can, little mate—how do we combat that? How do we literally fight the Fates? I can’t believe my mom and her sisters are doing this to me. Why are they doing this, and how? They’re sleeping with the other gods.”

Wren hums. “Just because they’re sleeping doesn’t mean their powers aren’t active. If they were awake and coherent, maybe they’d be able to do something about it. But they can’t while they’re sleeping. Or at least, that’s what makes the most sense.”

“I think you’re onto something there, Wren,” Wraith says as he pushes to his feet. “As for how we combat it? I think it’ll be easier now that we know it’s happening. We’re conscious of something altering how we respond to the situation. We might not be able to stop it, even if we know it’s happening, but that doesn’t mean we have to give up.”

I tense when he goes to sit on the coffee table in front of Cassian. I really don’t think I can deal with them fighting right now.

“Okay,” Cassian agrees. “We won’t give up. But what do we do?”

Wraith makes a face before shaking his head. “Yeah, we’re definitely not going to be able to stop it from happening, but we can try to mitigate the damage we cause one another. I think the first step is going to be for me to hear you out finally.”

“Seriously?” Donovan snorts. “You think now is the time to have him come clean? You’re already clenching your fists. You’re never going to be able to listen to what he has to say.”

Frustration rolls through me. Wraith is making a concerted effort with Cassian right now, but is it enough? Or is Donovan right? Will Cassian spill the story just for Wraith to lose his shit on him?

Wraith nods. “Yes, I am clenching my fists because it’s helping me stay grounded. There’s so much anger boiling inside of me right now, but now I know it isn’t of my own making. Yes, I’ve been angry for a long time, but if our lives weren’t being meddled with, would I have already listened and forgiven Cassian?”

Cassian is already nodding along with him. “I can feel the frustration, too. It’s so out of proportion to how I’m feeling. I think Wraith’s onto something here.”

“It’s not going to be just that simple,” Brenden admits. “The two of you can’t be left alone. If one of you snaps, it’ll likely set the other off.”

“This is such bullshit.” I grind my teeth as Wren pulls me into her arms, hugging me close.

She giggles, nuzzling her cheek against mine. “Don’t you remember what Mom always says? Nothing easy is worth having.”

“I always hated that saying,” I grumble with a smile. “She did always say that, didn’t she? So fucking annoying.”

“You said you’d fight for your mates, pretty girl.” Donovan offers me a ruthless smile. “It looks like you’re going to have to do just that.”

Pulling away from Wren, I walk over to where Cassian and Wraith are staring at one another, a plan forming in my head. “I might have an idea of how you can both get through this conversation without losing your shit on each other.”

Wraith turns his head, meeting my eyes. “Are you going to share with the class?”

“What we need is for both of you to be distracted—not too distracted that you can’t speak or listen to one another—as a way to keep from fighting,” I tell them slowly.

Cassian’s eyes narrow. “And you have an idea for that?”

Now, I grin. “I sure do. I think we need to fuck while you explain.”

“Seriously, Audrey?” Wren groans behind me, and I laugh. “I didn’t need to hear that.”

“Group sex?” Brenden perks up as he grins at me.

“Pretty much.” My eyes find Wraith and Cassian once more. “It’s something we can stop if we need to, but it’ll definitely distract you from getting too angry. Or if you do get angry, you can take it out on me. Or Donovan. I’m sure he wouldn’t mind either.”

Cassian runs a hand over his head, shaking it. “This is insane. You realize that, don’t you?”

I nod. “One hundred percent, but can you think of anything else that would distract either of you enough for this to work? Because I can’t.”

“I’m assuming you’re not talking about me and Cassian fucking, because that could very easily turn into a fistfight.” Wraith keeps his eyes locked on me, but I can already see his cock pressing against his pants.

“No. That’s what me and Donovan are for.” I glance at Brenden, who’s shaking his head. “Brenden will just have to play with me or something because he’s not interested in either of you.”

Cassian snorts. “I feel like I should be offended.”

“Don’t be. You should be glad you’re not one of his obsessions,” Wraith says dryly.

“Stop it, Wraith.” I glance around the room. “So, are we doing this?”

“You know what? I’m taking this as my cue to leave.” Wren snickers, already heading for the door. “Have fun...I guess?”

I giggle. “Love you, Wren!”

“I love you, too, you little shit.” With that, she hurries from the room.

“So?” I ask again.

Wraith nods as he climbs to his feet, glancing at Cassian. “Yeah, let’s do this.”

My eyes find Cassian, and he gives me a sharp nod.

Hell yes. Looks like group sex is on the agenda tonight.

Yes, there’s also the bit about getting Wraith to hear Cassian out, but it all just sounds like a win-win situation to me.

Donovan

I sprint up the stairs to the bedroom with Audrey in my arms, the others right on my heels.

What can I say? I'm always ready to get my mate naked. Adding the fact that Cassian is going to be there with all four of us?

It's definitely giving me some ideas.

When everything with Cassian blew up, I took Wraith's side. It was never a question to any of us. Unlike my lover, I needed to know what the hell happened, so I confronted him. I don't agree with the actions he took, but over the years, I've slowly forgiven him.

I didn't like him not being in my life. Being his friend is better than nothing, which is why I've settled for just that.

When Audrey announced he was her mate, I was ecstatic. I knew things couldn't just go back to the way they were—there were conversations to be had. I just didn't realize how much anger and hurt Wraith had held onto.

Though, finding out that the Fates are meddling with his and Cassian's responses makes more sense—and I'm fucking livid about it. I've always known that the Fates are a part of life. Some people have destinies that are beyond the norm. Some people have great loves they're meant to meet and then lose. I just didn't realize how much it would piss me off to find out that they were fucking with my life—with the lives of

people I love.

And, yes, that includes Cassian.

Do I think Cassian telling Wraith what happened will solve everything? Not at all. There's always the possibility it'll make things worse, but we should be able to find that out on our own. We shouldn't have to rely on Nex getting his act together for Cassian to be with us.

None of this is fair—especially not to Audrey.

Nex broke her heart, and I want nothing more than to break his face. I'd been well on my way to doing just that before she found us. If I'd known what would come after, I wouldn't have stopped when she walked up. I would've kept going until he was dead or wishing he was.

“Donovan?”

I look down at my pretty girl and smile. “Yes, Audrey?”

“You were growling.”

Of course I was.

“Sorry, pretty girl. I was just thinking about how unfair all of this is.” I shake my head as I push open the door to our room with my shoulder. “But I do love this idea you came up with. Not just because it's going to be so much fun for us. I actually think this could work. What happens after that? I have no idea.”

I set her on her feet, pulling off her clothes until she's naked. My mate is so fucking gorgeous. A glance at her other mates shows they're thinking along the same lines.

“This was your amazing plan, pretty girl. How are we doing this?” I pull my shirt over my head, loving the way her eyes run over my torso.

We all quickly strip down as her eyes flash between us. Finally, she shakes her head and blinks at me.

“I have no idea. I’ve never orchestrated group sex.” She laughs. “We need to keep Wraith and Cassian distracted and away from each other. I guess I’m with Cassian and Brenden and you’re with Wraith.”

I glance at Cassian and Wraith and bite my lip. “Or I’m with Cassian, and you’re with Wraith and Brenden.”

Wraith’s head whips around to look at me, his eyes wide. “Is that what you want, pet?”

“I’m not against the idea,” I say softly, trying to judge his reaction. I’m not saying this to hurt him, and if he has a problem with it, that’s fine.

“Neither am I.” Cassian’s eyes locked with mine, desire in his eyes, and tears prickle at my eyes. I never thought I’d see that look in his eyes again—at least not directed at me.

Audrey presses her hand to Wraith’s chest. “Are you okay with that?”

Wraith sighs, raking a hand through his hair. “I don’t know.”

“Then we go with the first plan,” I tell him with a smile. “I don’t want to make you uncomfortable.”

“But you want to be with Cassian again. You still want him.” Wraith’s smile is a little

sad. “You still love him.”

“That doesn’t mean I love you any less, Wraith.” I start toward him, needing to make this right.

I never should’ve suggested it. I’m an idiot. Audrey wanted to clear up issues, not make more. Of course I make that worse.

Damn it. Damn it. Damn it.

Wraith holds up his hand, and I immediately freeze. “I’m not mad at you, Donovan. I’m not hurt. You have every right to want to be with him. The only reason you’re not is because of me. Honestly, I kind of feel like an asshole. You never told me you still had feelings for him.”

“I didn’t want to make things weird.” I shrug, suddenly uncomfortable. “You were so angry, and I just...I’d choose you time and time again, Wraith. I’ve loved you for a very long time, and that’s never going to change. I just have a lot of room in my heart to love.”

Wraith smiles, cupping my face in his hands. “You do, and you deserve to be loved by whomever you want. You’ll be with Cassian, and from here on out—no matter what happens between him and me tonight—you’re free to continue to see him if that’s what the two of you want. If I’d known...I don’t know what I would’ve done, but I’d like to think I would’ve told you to be together as long as you were still with me.”

“You’re sure?” I ask, barely believing my ears. It’s like my birthday, Christmas, and every other holiday wrapped up into one.

“I’m sure, pet. Just be aware there may be some growing pains as we find our footing

through all of this.” He makes a face. “Especially with the damn Fates meddling with my feelings. I can’t promise not to be jealous or not to be a prick, but I’ll try. Now, get over there.”

When Wraith pushes me toward Cassian, I’m surprised but more than happy to find myself in my old lover’s arms.

Cassian glances over my shoulder, looking for something, I’m guessing. When he meets my gaze once more, a smile lights up his face as he pulls me in for a kiss.

“Gods above,” he whispers against my lips. “You don’t know how hard it’s been for me to be your friend. I still love you so fucking much, Donovan. I never wanted to let you go.”

I want to weep in joy at his words, but he deepens our kiss until all I can think about is having him buried inside me.

“Oh, fuck, trouble. That mouth of yours is heaven.” Wraith pants, and I break away from Cassian. Spinning around, I find Wraith kneeling on the bed with Audrey sucking his cock while Brenden eats her out.

It’s fucking hot as hell.

“Oh, thank fuck.” Wraith’s eyes roll in his head as he tightens his hand in Audrey’s hair. “Get up here and start talking. Oh, little vixen decided we didn’t need to wait for the two of you to join us.”

I snicker, climb onto the bed, and offer Cassian my hand. He hesitates, glancing at Wraith before linking our hands together and allowing me to drag him onto the bed.

I move to rest beside Brenden and Audrey before releasing his hand. “I think this is

good. This way, we have me, Audrey, and Brenden between the two of you.”

Without waiting for a response, I lean down and close my lips around the head of Cassian’s cock, sucking lightly before trailing my tongue along the pretty piercings that he didn’t have before. He hisses, his hand sliding through my hair, and I smirk.

“I like these new additions. I can’t wait to see how they feel inside me.”

“Fuck.” Cassian’s hips jerk forward as I suck him down until he hits the back of my throat. “I’m going to need lube.”

“Not yet, you’re not. First, you need to start talking.” Wraith chuckles. “But here.”

I feel Cassian move, and as I look up the length of his body, I see him holding a bottle of lube. My cock throbs, and I reach down to squeeze it. I already feel like exploding and no one has even touched me yet.

Gods, I can’t wait to have his cock buried in my ass.

“I was an asshole,” Cassian says before letting out a moan as I swallow around him. “Damn, this is going to be hard. I fucked up, but you already know that. I don’t know if what I have to say is going to change anything, but I need you to hear it.”

I slow my pace as Cassian explains how he was feeling and the pressure he felt from the other two demigods.

Fallen angels? Judges?

Fuck, it doesn’t really matter what I call them in my head, does it? They’re the same damn thing, no matter what I call them.

Part of me wishes I could see Wraith's face, to know what he's thinking—what he's feeling—but I'm quite enjoying myself.

Once Cassian finishes speaking, I double down on my efforts as a reward for doing his part. He groans as he tugs at my hair before pulling me off him completely.

“No,” I whine, but he's already turning me around to face the others.

Wraith is already buried in Audrey's cunt while she swallows down Brenden's cock. Focusing on Wraith's face, I try to figure out what he's thinking, but all I can tell is that he's enjoying being buried in our mate's pretty pink pussy.

I miss Cassian popping open the bottle of lube, startling when it dribbles down my crack. Cassian's finger circles my hole before pushing inside, and I groan.

“That's a good pet,” Wraith murmurs, eyes locking with mine. “Take Cassian's finger like a good boy. Let him get you ready for that big cock you've been missing.”

I gape at him, surprised to hear him talking dirty to me about Cassian's dick. I thought he'd be so pissed off right now. I know I was when Cassian first told me what had caused our breakup. Pretty sure Audrey was onto something with this whole having sex while talking thing.

“You're right,” Wraith pants, hands tightening on Audrey's hips before almost immediately loosening. “You were an idiot, and you did fuck up. But I can see why you would've reacted that way. It still wasn't the right way to handle it, but I understand.”

I stare at my lover in shock, grunting when Cassian adds a second finger and scissors them. Then he's fucking them in and out of me, brushing my prostate and having me see stars, and all I can think about is coming.

I hear the two of them talking but can't concentrate on the words. Neither of them sounds angry, which I'm taking as a win.

Another whine slips out of me when Cassian's fingers slide from my body.

"Shhh, pet," Cassian murmurs, picking up the name both he and Wraith used to use for me as if he had never stopped using it. "Now you get my cock, and isn't that so much better?"

I lift my head, eyes clashing with Wraith's once more. He looks more than a little feral as he watches Cassian push into me.

"Does he feel good, pet? Is his big cock filling you up just like you remember?" Wraith's hips stutter as Audrey screams around Brenden's cock. "Fuck, trouble. Your pussy is trying to milk me so badly."

"I'm coming," Brenden warns, and my eyes fall to Audrey as I watch her swallow his cum as he fills her mouth. When he pulls back, she reaches up to catch the stray bit that's trying to escape and pops it into her mouth.

I curse as Cassian's fat cock pushes against me, slowly pushing inside. He gives me a few moments to adjust before he pulls out and fucks back into me.

Gods, I've missed this.

Cassian has always liked taking me hard and fast. He hurts me just right to enhance my pleasure. Not that Wraith is a bad lover. He's just a different kind of lover, and I want both of them. Call me greedy if you want, but I love them both.

And Audrey. I can never forget my beautiful fated mate. My eyes find hers, and she smiles.

“Did they work it out? I got distracted.”

She giggles before gasping as Wraith yanks her upright to rest against his chest while Brenden lowers himself between her legs. I can see just enough to notice Brenden isn't discriminant with his tongue. He might not be interested in Wraith sexually, but he doesn't back away from tonguing him while he fucks in and out of our mate.

What a good mate.

I jump when Cassian's hand comes down on my ass, a sharp pain that radiates over my cheek before soothing out and adding to my pleasure. I'm not going to last long.

“Once again, you're not paying attention.” Cassian snorts. “At least we know better than to have a conversation with Donovan while he's having sex.”

Wraith chuckles, hips jerking up into Audrey. “No, our pet is easily distracted, but yes, we worked it out. It's not going to be easy, but we're not going to let the Fates ruin this for Audrey—for us.”

I beam up at him, wishing I could kiss him. He's close, probably only holding out for Audrey to come again.

Cassian's arm wraps around my chest until I'm in an identical position as Audrey. The new angle has him hitting me just right, and I cry out.

His hand fists around my cock as he jerks me, hips flexing as he fucks my ass like it's his damn job.

Audrey's eyes find mine just as she explodes, screaming out her pleasure. Wraith follows her over the edge, fucking into her with short, sharp movements as he fills her with his cum.

Watching her, and then Wraith, fall apart has my orgasm ripping through me. I groan, hips shuttering as my cum covers Cassian's hand, and he follows me over.

The five of us collapse onto the bed, limbs intertwining as we all catch our breath. We're going to need to shower because we're all sweaty and most of us are covered in cum, but that can be dealt with later.

"I was right about the piercings," I say. "Wraith, how do you feel about getting your dick pierced?"

He scoffs. "That's not happening, pet."

"Why not?" Audrey sits up on her elbows. "I think it would be a great bonding experience for all of you to get your cocks pierced. You'll heal almost instantly. Then I can reap all the benefits."

I lift my eyebrows. "I'm down, pretty girl, but only if you get some piercings, too."

She considers me for a moment before nodding. "That's not a terrible idea."

"Still not happening," Wraith announces before pushing to his feet. "As much as I'm enjoying this, I can feel the anger rumbling beneath the surface. It's probably best if Cassian and I aren't in the same room. Trouble, you and Brenden can shower with me. Cass, Donovan will take you to his room."

"Thanks, Wraith," Cassian says softly, already standing.

Wraith nods. "None of this is going to be easy, but I'm glad you're back."

He sweeps Audrey into his arms and rushes to the bathroom with Brenden nipping at his heels. I push to my feet and steal a kiss from Cassian.

“I’m so fucking happy,” I tell him.

He nods. “Me, too, but Wraith is right. We need some distance.”

As I lead him to my room, I wonder if we can really make this work—even with the Fates working against us.

I really fucking hope we can.

Source Creation Date: July 26, 2025, 5:22 am

Audrey

I 'm playing a game on my phone when the alert comes in. Opening up the Serene Souls app, I click on the new message to find an address.

All I have to do is think of the address as I stand, and with the next step, I'm outside the one-story home. It's pretty enough, but it looks just like the houses on either side of it. I hate cookie-cutter homes. Not that my thoughts on the home are relevant.

I climb up the stairs and step through the door without opening it.

Yeah, that was an interesting discovery to make. While reaping, we're not only invisible to the living but incorporeal. It makes getting around easy, but if you're not expecting it, it can be a little freaky. If the first soul I had to reap hadn't been my sister's, I probably would've known this during my final.

I step into an entryway with a living room to the right. It's empty, so I continue down the hallway. I pass the empty living room and kitchen before hitting the bedrooms. The first one is empty, and it's in the second that I locate my soul.

No, that's not right. It's not just one soul but two. They're huddled together, waiting for me.

I can't help smiling when I glance at the bed to see it's an older couple. They're holding hands, likely having passed in their sleep. I'm surprised that they're living alone at their age, but it looks like they've lived a long life. I'm choosing to believe it was a long and happy one because I like how that sounds.

Because sometimes we just need a win when our own lives feel like they're in the toilet.

“Hi,” I say softly, drawing the attention of both spirits. “I’m Audrey. You might be confused about what’s going on right now, but I’m here to take you to where you belong. We can’t stay here. Unfortunately, you’re already dead.”

“Are you an angel?” one of the spirits asks—the woman, I think. It’s hard to tell, as the voices of spirits aren’t actually verbal. It’s also not like they speak in my head, as Cassian did the first time we met. It’s like I just know what they’re saying.

I glance down at my leather shorts, oversized tank top, and my scythe—which is totally badass, and I’m mad I didn’t have it for my final. I’m not at all what anyone would imagine as an angel, but I also don’t know what they see when they look at me. It’s possible that I appear to them as they appear to me—as a vague outline of a body and a bright glowing light.

I laugh. “Not quite, but I am here to bring you to the afterlife. Are you ready?”

Not all souls are ready to leave their lives behind. No matter what, I’ll have to take them to the underworld, but it’s easier if they come willingly.

Both of their heads turn back to the bed before they nod.

“We’re ready,” the other spirit confirms.

I smile, moving forward until I stand just in front of them. This close, the light is almost blinding. “I’ll touch each of you, and you’ll go into a trance-like sleep. You won’t remember that part. When you wake up next, you’ll be in the afterlife together.”

I touch each of the spirits with the scythe, and then they're gone. Their souls will remain in my scythe until I bring them to the ferryman at the end of my shift.

I glance at the bed once more, smiling, and then take a step forward, appearing in the lounge at the reaper headquarters.

Being a reaper is a lot different from how I thought it would be, but I love it so much. It's almost like working a corporate job, which is really fucking weird. But the actual reaping of souls? It brings me peace.

The reapers are split into three eight-hour shifts. There's the midnight to eight a.m. shift, the eight a.m. to four p.m. shift, and the four p.m. to midnight shift. During our shifts, we're required to stay at the reaper headquarters, which is a large compound in the center of Ephonia. It has a lounge for us to hang out in, a cafeteria if we get hungry, offices we can work in, and even bedrooms for us to sleep in.

It's not a bad place to spend eight hours in—although, we don't usually have a lot of time to just hang out considering the amount of people who die in a day.

As if to prove my point, my phone sends another alert. With a sigh, I zip off to the next address and then to the next.

By the end of my shift, I'm tired and have nearly two hundred souls hanging out in my scythe.

Instead of going back to headquarters after I collect my last soul, I head to the docks where the ferryman waits.

I sigh as I realize I'm one of the last ones to arrive, so now I have to wait in the long ass line.

Ugh.

Of course this happens on a day when I have plans after work.

Luckily, it's a pretty fast process—even when there are hundreds of reapers in front of me. But it also means I'm going to be late meeting my besties.

AUDREY

I'm at the end of the line, so I'm going to be a little late.

DIANA

No worries. We'll just grab a booth and order a round.

CELESTE

Depending on how long it takes, don't be surprised if we're on our second by the time you get here.

AUDREY

Brat.

CELESTE

You know it. Love you!

DIANA

See you soon!

AUDREY

Love you both. Be there when I can.

Both of my besties had to work today, too, but obviously they were closer to the front of the line.

Lucky bitches.

I should just be glad that Wraith was willing to move them to the same shift as me. Before I started reaping, they were stuck working the midnight to eight a.m. shift, and Wraith didn't want me working that shift—for which I'm eternally grateful.

I guess there really are some perks to being mated to the boss since he wants me to work the same shift as them. So now I work the eight to four shift, Monday through Thursday.

Yes, that's right. I might have to work in my afterlife, but I don't have to work forty hours a week, which I'll take as a win.

Finally, I make it to the front of the line.

I'm not going to lie—the ferryman still gives me the creeps. He wears a dark cloak that keeps his face hidden in shadows—the kind most humans think the Grim Reaper wears. He never speaks as he holds unnaturally still. The first time I came here, I was sure he was a statue as I stared at him. Then he moved and I let out an embarrassingly loud squeal. His shoulders had moved as if he was laughing at me, but no sound came out.

Now, every time he sees me, his shoulders make the same movement. I don't know how he remembers me when he sees thousands of reapers every day, but he sure

does.

Leaning my scythe forward until it connects with his, I watch in delight as hundreds of souls slide from scythe to scythe. I've been doing this for almost three weeks, and it never gets old.

Once he has the last of the souls, he pulls back his scythe and bobs his head. He sets it down in the boat and picks up his pole to shove off into the water.

I watch him for another moment as he leads the souls to the holding area further down Ephonia, where the judges will sort the souls before sending them off to their proper island.

Spinning on my heel, I shadow walk to the pub where I'm meeting Diana and Celeste. It's the same one where I met Cassian, and it's close to their apartments, so we tend to meet up there since they can't shadow walk like I can.

I push open the door and step inside. The familiar sounds and scents rush through me, and I instantly relax. I don't know what it is about this place, but I always feel right at home.

"Audrey!" Diana is on her knees in our usual corner booth, waving her arms at me wildly. I grin at how over the top she's being as I make my way over to them, only to be stopped by Gael.

"Little sister!" he roars as he jumps out of his seat and pulls me into his arms. "I didn't know you'd be here tonight."

I pat his back, laughing as he lifts me off the floor. "I'm having a girl's night tonight."

“Gael, put Audrey down.” Octavius chuckles as Gael releases me. “We won’t keep you then, but it’s good to see you.”

I wave at the three of them before dodging around Gael to get to the girls. I’ve learned I have to run away as quickly as possible or Gael will keep me with them—even if the girls are waiting.

“I expected that to take longer,” Diana comments as I slide in beside her.

I take a sip of my margarita. “Octavius saved the day and distracted Gael.”

Celeste leans out of the booth for a moment before sitting back up. “Are you sure they don’t want in your pants?”

Of course, I’m in the middle of taking a drink when she asks that and end up choking, margarita spewing out of my mouth and nose.

“Ugh, can you not do that?” I grab a napkin to clean up the table and wipe at my nose, wincing as it burns. “No, they don’t want in my pants. I just think they’re lonely. It’s always just the three of them. Wraith even said he doesn’t see them as often as he should.”

“I’m happy to spend time with them if they’re lonely.” Celeste smirks, wiggling her eyebrows.

I just shake my head at her antics. Now that we’re working together, I get to see them more frequently, but it’s not the same as living with them.

For the last three weeks, we’ve been getting together on Thursday nights since it’s the end of our work week since most of my weekends are spent with my mates. Not that I couldn’t hang out with the girls on the weekend. My men would understand, but I

like having that time with them.

I push aside my drink, wave down the server, and order a new one. I'm not drinking it since who the hell knows what ended up in it after the margarita shot out of my nose.

Thanks, but no thanks.

"Any news on the Nex front?" Diana asks, cautiously, and I feel my good mood deflate.

"Nothing. I haven't even seen him this week—not even when I crashed Brenden's classes last Friday. He's doing a very good job of avoiding me." I shrug. "It's better this way. Wraith and Cassian are still struggling with their emotions, but we're doing the best we can."

Celeste scowls. "Nex is an asshole, and I'm glad you decided to not give him any more of your time."

Diana squeezes my arm. "I'm sorry about Wraith and Cassian. I know that's hard on you."

"It is what it is." I stare into my drink as if it holds all the answers to my problems. "I don't know how long we can keep this up. It's really putting a toll on both of them, trying to fight it off. I'm afraid one of them is going to fly off the handle at any moment and say something they can't take back."

"Oh, Audrey." Diana pulls me into a hug the best she can when we're sitting side by side.

I have to bite my cheek to keep myself from crying. I've been doing my best to make sure the guys don't know how upset it makes me to see Wraith and Cassian swipe at

one another. Diana and Celeste are the only ones I can be real with, and it's getting harder and harder not to fall apart when we talk about it. I can already feel the snapping point building up, and I don't know where we'll go from there.

It's selfish of me to want to keep Cassian when the Fates told me it would be three or five and nothing in between, but I love him. How can I not?

And now there's Donovan to think about. He's been spending more and more time with Cassian as they find their way back together. I'm afraid that he's going to be forced to choose between them again, and I don't know if he can survive it.

Brenden's already struggling with staying away from Nex—something Nex also seems to be failing at. It's as if they're two magnets being drawn to one another. I already told Brenden he could be with Nex, even if he's not with me. But my stubborn mate refuses to be with him after the way he treated me.

Honestly, it feels a bit like we're being torn apart at the seams, and I don't know how to fix it.

Can I fix it? Or is it always going to be like this without Nex?

Fucking hell, I hope not.

"I don't want to talk about it," I declare, pulling away from Diana. "Tell me about Melody and Warren. How are things going with them?"

Diana flushes, filling us in on how things have been going, and I push away all my shit. For just a few hours, I don't want to have to worry about my relationships.

It'll all be waiting for me when I go home, so for now, I'll let the girls distract me and enjoy our time together.

Audrey

A couple of weeks later, I find myself lying with my mates on the living room floor while we watch a movie.

The tension is thick, and I'm having issues ignoring it.

Cassian and Wraith had a spat while we were getting settled. They both said they were fine and not to worry about it—even though they're clearly not fine.

I'm using Brenden's chest as a pillow as I sit between his legs. Cassian is beside us with Wraith on the outside and Donovan snuggled between the two of them. I'm glad he's getting time with both of them, but he also doesn't seem to notice how tense they both are as he watches the movie.

It feels like they're practically vibrating, neither of them watching the movie but each other. Brenden seems as oblivious as Donovan, but I can't relax. I can feel the tension headache seeping in as I watch them. Every muscle in my neck and back feels locked up.

I hate watching my mates fight—especially the two of them since I know it's not something they can really control.

I wiggle in Brenden's hold, feeling him growing hard against my back.

“Oh, is it going to be that kind of movie?” he asks suggestively, and when I glance up at him, he's waggling his eyebrows at me.

I dig my elbow into his stomach, smiling as he lets out an “oof” before focusing back on the movie. “No. We’re watching the whole damn movie this time.”

We don’t have the best track record when it comes to watching movies together as a group. In fact, I don’t think we’ve made it through an entire movie in the last two months.

What can I say? My mates are hot, and I have a hard time keeping my hands to myself.

But right now? I’m in no mood for sex, too stressed out about what’s about to happen. It’s entirely possible that nothing will happen, but with each argument they have, they just get worse and worse.

“I’m down for some distraction,” Donovan says as he leans up on his elbows, leering at me. I flip him off without responding.

Wraith and Cassian remain suspiciously silent as I stare at the TV blankly. I don’t even know what movie we’re watching, let alone what’s been happening.

Squeezing my eyes shut, I sigh.

Even if nothing happens between the two of them tonight, it will eventually. It’s just a waiting game right now, and I’m not sure how much longer I can wait.

I shouldn’t wish for the two of them to fight because it upsets me, too. I think waiting for the other shoe to drop is harder.

There are less than three weeks until Wren’s final, and I’ll finally be able to end him. The world will be better without his evil in it.

And yet, I'm not even excited because all I can focus on is what's happening among my mates.

"What's wrong, firecracker?" Brenden murmurs in my ear. I have no doubt the others heard him with their preternatural hearing.

I shake my head, pushing to my feet and heading to the front porch as tears fill my eyes.

How am I supposed to explain to them I'm just waiting for my relationships to implode? How do I tell the men I love I don't think we can continue as we are? How do I admit I don't think we can best the Fates? How do I admit I'm just waiting for the moment when I have to give up Cassian?

I curl up on the porch swing, pulling my knees to my chest as I fight my tears.

When I hear the door open, I keep my eyes locked on the forest. I'd come out here to get away from them so they wouldn't have to see me like this. I should've known they'd follow me.

I just wish they hadn't.

No one speaks as they shuffle across the porch, and even without looking, I know all four of them have joined me. They stop just a few feet away from me, but I don't acknowledge their presence as the first tear falls.

"Audrey?" Brenden sounds worried, and I hate that I'm the one who caused it.

I also don't know what to say to make it go away. They don't want to hear what's floating around in my head. They don't need to know I'm doubting the entire relationship. None of them have done anything wrong. It's not their fault I feel this

way, and I don't want to burden them with any of it.

I lay my head on my knees, turning away from them as tears continue to course down my cheeks.

Now that they've escaped, I have no hope of stopping them.

"Pretty girl, what's wrong?" Suddenly, Donovan is kneeling in front of me, and I never heard him move.

When I don't turn my head to meet his gaze, he leans over into my field of vision, forcing me to look at him. His face falls as soon as he sees my tears.

"What can we do?" he asks, nuzzling into me.

I sigh. "Nothing. There's nothing anyone can do."

"I don't understand," Wraith says as he joins Donovan, though he remains standing.

"Of course you don't. How can you?" I scoff, burying my face in my knees and wishing they would leave me to cry in peace.

Someone settles onto the swing beside me, but I don't look up to see who. Not that I need to see him to know it's Brenden as he wraps his arm around me.

I know they're all waiting for me to explain, but I can't tell them. I'm supposed to be the linchpin holding all of us together. I'm not supposed to have doubts.

Brenden sighs as he scoots me closer until our sides are flush. "Talk to us, Audrey. We can't make it better if you don't tell us what's wrong."

“Did you not understand when I said there was nothing you could do?” I ask with a harsh laugh. “Clearly, there’s nothing anyone can do. We just need to accept the way things are and move on with our lives, but I don’t want to.”

My laughter turns into sobs as they stare at me blankly.

Cassian steps forward, reaching for me, but Wraith knocks his hand to the side.

“What the fuck, Wraith?” Cassian’s words practically come out as a growl.

“This. This is what I’m talking about.” I shake my head, hysteria slowly building inside me. “The two of you can’t stop swiping at each other. Eventually, one of you is going to snap and then everything we’ve been building is going to be gone. Finished. I don’t know why I thought I could fight fate.”

Cassian and Wraith jerk back, looking like I slapped them as they stare down at me.

Wraith’s voice is tense as he speaks. “We’re doing the best we can, trouble.”

“And I know that. You’re both so strong and determined, but you can’t make it stop.” I chew on my lip as I force my eyes away from them. “Why are we delaying the inevitable here? Aren’t we just making it worse by waiting?”

“Please don’t tell me you’re talking about me,” Cassian begs me, dropping to his knees beside Donovan. “Please tell me you’re not giving up on us.”

I shrug, shaking my head from side to side. “I can’t because I don’t see any way around it. I couldn’t focus on the movie inside because I was worried about the tension between the two of you. All I do is wait and worry about the next fight. Not knowing if it’ll be the straw that breaks the camel’s back. I can’t sleep. All I do is stress out, and it’s too much.”

My gaze meets Cassian's, and when I see the tears collecting there, I throw myself into his arms.

"I don't want to lose you. It'll break me irreparably, but I feel like I'm looking down the barrel of a loaded shotgun. I love you so much, Cass. So fucking much that all I want to do is cry every time I think of not having you by my side." I don't even know if he can understand half of what I'm saying as I sob into his neck. "But we can't fix this. Without Nex, everything is going to be against us."

"I love you, too, little mate. I'm sorry this is causing you so much pain, but I'm never giving you up. We'll just have to figure something out."

"We need to get Nex on board," Wraith says, determination in his voice.

Brenden scoffs. "After the shit he said, you still want him to be a part of this? Fuck that guy."

Even I can hear the pain he's trying to hide. It's my fault it's there, and I hate it.

There's a small part of me that wonders if they'd be better off if they hadn't met me.

"He doesn't deserve our pretty girl," Donovan agrees. "But look at her. Is this any better? She's losing weight. I know you've noticed."

Are they right? I haven't noticed, but I haven't been eating as much since I haven't been hungry. It's insane what stress can do to our bodies.

I wish I was immune to it since I'm dead, but clearly, that's not the case.

Sitting up, I swipe at my face as I try—and fail—at drying my cheeks. "If it were that simple, he'd already be my mate, Wraith. We've all tried to convince him to join us,

and we've all failed. He doesn't want anything to do with me. I will not force someone to be with me just because they're fated to me. You weren't there the last time we spoke. He hates me."

"He doesn't hate you," he argues. "He's afraid. He's afraid to care too much for someone. He's afraid he'll be hurt. There's a difference."

"That's what I kept telling myself, too, but I don't think that's it at all. He can't seem to stay away from Brenden, so that's obviously not it." I shake my head, not willing to allow hope to grow within me. "Even if he changed his mind about us, I don't know if I can forgive him for how he spoke to me, so it's a moot point."

Wraith is shaking his head again. "I refuse to give up, trouble. I don't want to hate Cassian. I want to be able to forgive him and mean it. Donovan isn't the only one who's missed you. I want us to be a family, and we can't do that without Nex."

"How do you plan on convincing him?" Cassian asks as he clings to my hand as if he's afraid I'll disappear at any moment.

I can't blame him for that after I spilled all my worries to them. While I didn't want to burden them with how I've been feeling, I'll admit I feel a hell of a lot better now that I've told them.

Wraith's words really struck a chord with me.

We're meant to be a family. I want us to be a family, and being a part of a family—at least the way I grew up—means being part of a team. We can rely on one another to help keep us afloat when we can't do it on our own.

Have I been apart from my mom and sister for so long that I forgot that?

“Maybe it’s time for me to go see Lucifer.”

My eyes are wide as my head swings back to Wraith. “What does he have to do with this?”

Wraith chuckles. “Nex believes he’s been cursed by Lucifer. There’s no one else who can confirm or deny that for us, except Lucifer. The only problem is I think he’s on vacation earth-side right now. He might not answer when I call.”

“The devil takes vacations?” I frown, wondering how that works. Does he leave someone in charge of the underworld while he’s gallivanting among the humans and supernaturals? I’m all for everyone getting a vacation from time to time—especially one who has as much on their plate as Lucifer—but it’s hard to imagine.

“Not often, which is why I feel bad about bothering him.” Wraith sighs as he runs a hand through his hair. “It took a lot for me, Gael, Octavius, and Riggs to convince him to go. We’re the only ones he trusts to keep shit in order while he’s gone.”

I chew on my bottom lip. “Then we wait. What’s another week or two in the grand scheme of things?”

“Are you sure, trouble? This seems to weigh on you heavily, and I don’t want this to continue.”

“I’m sure. Plus, wouldn’t it be better to not draw attention to ourselves before we kill Michael? What if he decides he needs to watch us and realizes what we’re up to?”

Wraith considers me for a moment before nodding. “Yes, it would be better to wait until after, but I need you to promise me you’ll come to one of us if you start stressing out over anything like this in the meantime. We’re here for you.”

“I know...I just...forgot? I just got all wrapped up in my head, and it felt like I’d be burdening you or something.” I hold up my hand when all four of them speak at once. “It was stupid. I know that. I promise to not let it get this far again. If my head becomes a mess, I’ll find one of you to talk to. I know I can count on you—that I can lean on you when I need strength. Mom raised me to be independent, and sometimes that makes me feel like I have to do it all on my own.”

“But you don’t,” Donovan assures me. “We’ll always be here for you—no matter what.”

Brenden presses a kiss to my forehead. “We’ll always fight for you.”

“We’ll always be here to support you and shower you with love.” There’s still a bit of sadness in Cassian’s smile.

“We’re your mates. We’ll give you our strength to keep going when you feel like you can’t,” Wraith assures me. “We love you.”

Finally, my tears have stopped as I beam at them. “And I love all of you. Thank you.”

They lead me back inside and we start the movie over. The tension from earlier has dissipated, and when Brenden decides I need a massage to loosen me up, I don’t complain. I also don’t make it through the movie before I fall asleep.

Source Creation Date: July 26, 2025, 5:22 am

Audrey

I stare up at the ceiling, letting the music roll over me as it speaks to me. It's a beautiful song that has my heart breaking before putting it back together.

When it cuts off, I sit up with a smile. "That was beautiful, Wren. I've missed your music."

"It's nothing special," she says, ducking her head.

I roll my eyes, but she's always been like this. She's never looked more at home than she does when she has a violin in her hands. She was a rising star when she met Michael, but he didn't want her working, so she gave it up.

It was only the first of many things he took away from her, but it was the hardest for her to lose. I was shocked when she told me she was giving it up. She always used music to express her feelings when they felt too big.

When she started writing her own music, it blew me away. Her pieces always make me feel something—whether that's joy, anger, happiness, or even sorrow. It's a beautiful journey.

Then she just stopped playing.

I don't know what made her pick it back up again in the last few weeks, but I'm ecstatic. Not only do I enjoy listening to her play, but it makes me forget everything going on in my life right now.

That's not to say my life is bad. It's really not. I have four mates who love me, two besties who would do anything for me, and my twin who would destroy the worlds for me. I shouldn't be complaining. It's just hard not to.

If Cassian and Wraith have been fighting, they've been doing a really good job of hiding it from me. They're protecting me from something they know I hate, and I'm not sure how to feel about it. On the one hand, I hate that they feel like they have to hide anything from me. On the other hand, it's so nice not to have to worry about a fistfight breaking out over dinner.

Plus, the two of them have been getting...closer. As in, I walked in on them fucking just yesterday.

They didn't notice me at first, and I totally perved on them. It was hot as hell, and I'm not even sorry I watched them. When they did notice me, they invited me to join them, but I didn't. It was really freaking hard, but I walked away and left them to their moment.

That's one of the things I love most about the family we're building. Not everything is about me. They all love me, but they love each other too. Cassian, Wraith, and Donovan are rebuilding a relationship they thought they lost a long time ago, and I couldn't be happier.

I just wish that Brenden had that too. If Nex was with us, he would.

Ugh. I don't want to think about him right now.

Forcing myself to focus on my sister, I wrinkle my nose. "You can pretend it isn't a big deal all you want, but you're fucking amazing. You never should've given up the violin. I hate him for that, too."

“As if you need another reason to hate him.” Wren gives me a half smile as she puts her violin away. “He might have been the one to suggest it, but I was more than willing to give it up. Just like everything else in our relationship. I gave up everything, while he gave up nothing. I don’t know how I became that woman. Mom raised us better than that.”

“No, Mom raised us to be what and who we wanted. You thought you wanted to be the picture-perfect wife for the asshole you married.” I grind my teeth, feeling like I’m defending what he did and hating it. “You wanted to make him happy. He’s the one who took advantage of that. The good news is he won’t be a problem for much longer, and he’s already not your problem anymore. You can be whoever you want to be in your afterlife.”

She shrugs. “As long as I’m also a reaper, you mean?”

I make a face. “Technically, yes, but I have an in with the boss. If you hate it, then I’m sure Wraith can find you a position at the academy. I bet you’d make a great teacher.”

“I don’t know if that’s what I want either,” she says slowly. “I feel like there’s so little I can do or choose for myself. Michael took that from me, too. Being here kind of feels like being married to Michael again—even if Wraith has the best of intentions, unlike my bastard husband.”

“I’m sorry, Wren. I’d give anything to go back and save you from being killed.”

She snorts. “But not to go back and save yourself.”

I shake my head, as this is a conversation we’ve had more than once, and it always goes the same.

“Nope. I wouldn’t give up meeting my mates. Plus, I like being a reaper.” I roll on my side to face her as she joins me on her bed.

There are only two weeks left until her final, and when she asked if I wanted to hang out, I jumped at the chance to get out of the house. I love my mates, but after my breakdown, they’ve been kind of up my ass.

If I thought we were having a lot of sex before, it’s nothing compared to now. It’s partially because that’s the only time Wraith and Cassian can carry on a conversation that doesn’t leave either of them angry, frustrated, or hurt. I also think they’re trying to distract me, but there’s only so much sex a girl can have.

Once again, I know I shouldn’t complain, but if I wasn’t a supernatural with enhanced healing, my cunt would be bruised. Or torn. Or something.

I have now learned that there is such a thing as too much sex. Not that I’ll admit it to my mates. With my luck, they’d just fuck me more.

I sound like a whiny bitch, and I know it. That’s probably why I haven’t been complaining to my besties or my sister.

“Did you have anything exciting happen this week?” I ask her, using my hands as a pillow.

She shakes her head. “Just more classes. I can’t wait until this is over. I feel like there isn’t anything else for me to learn.”

I snort. “You think that now, but wait until it’s time for your final. Everything I learned just seeped away. I reacted on instinct and was lucky that was enough.”

Wren narrows her eyes. “You also had to reap my soul for your final. I don’t think

that counts.”

“I’m still pissed about that, and Wraith refuses to look into it. I know there’s nothing we can do about it now, but I’d feel better knowing which asshole has it out for me.”

“You’re ridiculous. Don’t you think having one vendetta at a time is enough?”

I jerk my head back when she flicks my nose. “That was rude.”

I dig my fingers into her ribs in retaliation, and she squeals. Even when she begs me to stop, I don’t let up. She’s always been ticklish as hell, and I’ve always taken advantage of that.

“Okay! Okay! You win! Mercy! Please! I’m going to pee my pants!”

“You’re damn right, I won.” I shoot her a smile as I roll off the bed. “Let’s go outside. I could use some fresh air, and we can work on your magic some more.”

Wren keeps saying she’s ready for her final and over the classes, but I know it’s driving her crazy that she hasn’t been able to do half of what I can with my magic. Of the two of us, she’s always been the one who had better control over her magic, so it surprised both of us when she didn’t advance as I had.

She was able to use her magic long before I could, and it’s strong but nothing like mine. It has me wondering if bonding with my mates didn’t affect my magic. Clearly, not how long it took me to be able to finally use it, but with its improved strength. Brenden and I have talked about it a few times, even bringing it to Wraith, but neither of them could say one way or the other.

They just don’t have the knowledge that Nex does.

If he wasn't such an asshole, then I'd ask him. I'd have to catch him first. I swear he's part ninja now that he's avoiding me, Brenden, and even Wraith. It's kind of ridiculous the lengths he'll go to in order to avoid being around me. I'm not sure why he's avoiding my mates now. Except Donovan—that one makes complete sense.

“Yeah, okay. I'll never turn down playing with fire.” Wren's grin is wicked as we head for the door and out of her home.

She's not sharing with anyone since she still hasn't made any friends. I don't understand why she hasn't, but she clams up every time I bring it up, so I just stopped asking. When she asked me to talk to Wraith about her having a place to herself, I wasn't going to turn her down. Neither was he, apparently.

I lead her across campus and into the woods. There's a clearing not too far from her place that we've been using for practice.

Whatever her reasons for not making friends are, I think that's what makes her want to hide away when we work with our magic. I hate that she's keeping something from me, but it's her prerogative. She'll break eventually and spill the beans. At least I hope she will. She always has before.

Neither of us has ever been good at keeping secrets from each other. I think it's the twin bond we share. It's nothing like the bond I share with my mates, which feels tangible.

My bond with Wren has been there since we were born, something that tethers us to one another in a way no one else can understand. It's why she lost herself to grief when I died. I could still feel the bond, even in death, but she couldn't. She said it was like it just snapped, and that's how she knew I was dead.

I'm not sure I would've dealt with it any better if our roles would've been reversed.

“Ree?” Wren’s quiet voice pulls me from my thoughts, and I realize we’ve made it to the clearing. I was already halfway across it and heading back into the dense forest.

Oops.

“Sorry.” I shoot her a smile as I turn around. “Sorry about that. My brain went on a tangent, and I was just along for the ride.”

She shakes her head, and I know she wants to ask me about it, but she doesn’t. Probably because she doesn’t want me asking questions in return.

How did this happen to us? We used to share everything. I always knew what was going on in her life, and she knew what was going on in mine.

But I already know the answer to that, don’t I?

Michael happened.

It started when she met him, and it just got worse as time passed. Then he killed me.

It’s kind of hard to know what’s going on with one another when one of us is dead, and it’s been a struggle to regain all the ground we lost.

Wren is still the person I’m closest to in the world, but we’re just not as close as we once were. It was bound to happen with age as our lives grew apart, but that doesn’t mean I have to like it. I’d like to fix it if that’s possible, but I have enough on my plate.

Sadly, my relationship with my sister isn’t a priority right now, and I feel like shit admitting that—even if it’s only to myself.

“Okay, how do you want to do this, little sister?” I grin, already knowing how she’s going to respond.

“Not the little sister thing again. Knock it off, Audrey. I’m onto you.” Wren mock-glares as she tries to bite back a smile. “You’re trying to rile me up on purpose. You’re lucky I don’t have access to hellfire, or I’d burn your ass real good.”

And just like that, it feels like old times again. Our relationship might not be the same as it once was, but that doesn’t mean it can’t be better.

Now, I just need to make it through the next two weeks so we can take care of Michael before focusing on my relationship issues.

Who knew that the afterlife would be so hard?

Certainly not me.

Source Creation Date: July 26, 2025, 5:22 am

Audrey

“Only two days left,” Brenden comments as he takes my hand. “Are you excited?”

It’s hard to believe we’ve almost made it to Wren’s final. Soon, Michael will spend the rest of his afterlife being tortured in Tartarus. At least that’s what Cassian has assured me will happen.

He seems to think he’ll have no problem convincing Ophelia, and maybe even Sol, to send his soul there once Wren delivers his soul to the ferryman. He says Ophelia has always had a soft side for those seeking vengeance against those who wronged them. He and Sol have sided with her quite a few times when they’re met with a soul that’s been blackened by vengeance. They’ve sent some souls meant for Tartarus to The Asphodel Meadows instead, allowing the spirit to be reborn.

He told me they’ve only had to send one onto Tartarus after they’ve been given a second chance, so it sounds like they’re doing more good than harm. Plus, if it helps get Michael sent to where he belongs, you won’t find me complaining.

I don’t answer him right away, my eyes falling to the items at the next booth we pass. I dragged him to the market in Ephonia this afternoon so I could get some space from my other mates.

Not that I think they’re really giving it to me. I swore I saw Donovan and Wraith a few minutes ago, but when I turned around to double-check, they weren’t there. I know I saw Cassian this morning, but since he still mostly lives here, I didn’t really think anything of it. Not until the third time I saw him.

At least they're giving me some semblance of space.

As we grow closer to D-day, things have gotten tenser at the house. I know Wraith and Cassian would prefer if I gave up on killing Michael, but I just can't. Donovan and Brenden are just as blood-thirsty as I am, so I don't even know if they could be convinced not to kill him if I changed my mind.

Not only do I feel like I owe it to Wren, but there's this little voice in the back of my head that never stops thinking about killing him. I didn't even realize it was there until Wraith and I were talking the other night. He asked me why it was so important that I killed Michael. I immediately started to explain like I always do, and he stopped me. He told me to think about it and then come back to him.

It was overall a very weird conversation, but it got me to do what he wanted. I sat and thought about it for a long while, forcing myself to look beyond the fact that he took my sister away from me before he killed me and then killed her. Obviously, those all played a factor in my reasoning, but eventually, I heard that little voice loud and clear.

It didn't provide me with a reason he needed to be dead. It just insisted repeatedly that I end it—that I kill him and end it all. It still doesn't make sense to me, but when I mentioned it to Wraith, he found it odd as well. He also had no idea why it would be there and so intent on one purpose—almost as if it had been placed there.

He wanted to call the whole damn thing off right then and there, but I shut that shit down real quick.

I don't care why I have a mysterious voice in my head urging me to do the one thing I want to, but I'm not worried. Just because I don't understand it doesn't mean I need to fear it. Wraith believes otherwise.

That's probably why they're following me around now. I'm not sure what they think is going to happen, but they clearly don't trust me on my own.

Whatever.

"I don't think excited is the word I would use," I finally answer. "I'm ready for it to be done and over with, but as much as I want him dead, I know this is a serious matter. Taking a life is no little thing—not something for me to get excited about. But I'm definitely ready for it to be done and over with so we can focus on more important matters."

"Like Nex."

I glance up at Brenden with a frown, not liking how off he sounds. His face gives nothing away as he smiles, but something is bothering him. "What is it, Brenden?"

His smile falls away as he glances away from me. "How can you forgive him? After the way he's treated you?"

"I don't know if I can," I admit, biting my lip as I glance around us. "For all I know, he'll keep denying me, even if Lucifer lifts the curse or admits there never was one. I know all of you think he wants me, but I'm just not sure if that's true. I refuse to allow myself to hope for anything when it comes to Nex. I can't think about what might happen. I just...don't have the spoons for it."

He hums. "I'm so angry with him, but I also miss him. I don't like it. I'm just as obsessed with him as I am with you, and I'm not used to denying myself when it comes to my obsession. It's taking more restraint than I'd like to admit. I've always been more of a take what I want and damn the consequences kind of guy—as I'm sure you've figured out. But with him, I can't do that because it feels like I'm betraying you if I do."

“I’ve told you I don’t—“

“Care. I know. But it doesn’t feel right to me.” He snickers. “I’m not even sure when I started worrying about something being right. It’s...weird. Being here with you and the others—it’s changed me. I don’t think that’s necessarily a bad thing, but I’m not used to it.”

That brings a smile to my face. “Awww, you’re growing up.”

“Shut up, brat.” He doesn’t bother hiding his smile. “They have hotels here, don’t they?”

“I have no idea. Why would I know that? And what does it have to do with the conversation we were having?”

He chuckles. “It has nothing to do with our conversation. I was just thinking maybe we could grab one for the night. It’s been a hot minute since it was just the two of us.”

Oh. He needs it to be just the two of us, but he’d never ask that of me. Brenden’s never been one to keep me from my other mates, which I love about him, but if this is what he needs, then I’ll gladly give it to him.

“Yeah, we can do that. We should let the others know. And maybe ask where we can find a place to stay since neither of us knows.”

I grab my phone from my back pocket and pull up our group chat.

AUDREY

Hey, Brenden and I were thinking about staying in Ephonia for the night.

Except we don't know where to find a hotel.

DONOVAN

Why are you staying?

WRAITH

It doesn't matter why they're staying, pet.

I'll book a room for you at my favorite place and then send you the address.

Assuming that's okay with you.

AUDREY

That would be great, Wraith. Thank you.

As for why we're staying—we just want to.

DONOVAN

Can I come?

brENDEN

No.

DONOVAN

I don't like this.

CASSIAN

You can come stay with me.

WRAITH

Or you can stay at the house with us.

CASSIAN

Is that a good idea?

WRAITH

We have to try it sometime.

Trouble, the name of the hotel is The Hellfire Lounge.

The address is 6425 Sinner Highway.

AUDREY

Thank you! Have fun with your sleepover.

CASSIAN

And you have fun with yours.

I tuck my phone back into my shorts as Brenden comes to a stop. “We can head there whenever. Since I have the address, I can shadow walk us there. I’ve gotten really good at it since I started reaping.”

When he doesn't respond, I lift my eyes to find him staring at something. As I follow his gaze, I realize it's not something but someone—Nex, who's staring right back.

“Well, that's unexpected,” I mutter under my breath, but Brenden lowers his eyes to meet mine, and I know he heard me.

“We should just go,” he says quietly, but his eyes make their way back to Nex almost immediately.

Once again, I'm struck with guilt over keeping the two of them apart—even if it's been their decision, it's still because of me. Brenden can deny it until he's blue in the face, but it doesn't make it any less true.

I chance another glance at Nex and our gazes clash, a shiver running through me at the longing in his. I don't know if it's for me, Brenden, or both of us, but I don't like it. “Or maybe you should go talk to him.”

“Why would I do that?”

I shrug, even though he's not looking at me. “Because you want to.”

He sighs, taking my hand in his once more. “Only if you come with me.”

“That sounds like a terrible idea.” I glance between him and Nex as I bite my lip. What's the worst that can happen? Nex is cruel to me again? It's not like he can really hurt me anymore than he already has. “But fine.”

“Really?” Brenden tears his eyes away from Nex to glance down at me. “Honestly, I was expecting you to tell me no and then we'd carry on as if we hadn't seen him.”

I frown. “Is that what you want to happen? Because we can do that, too.”

“I don’t know what the hell I want. I want to talk to him, but I also want to run in the opposite direction.” When he flashes me his fangs, I realize just how much this is bothering him.

“Are you hungry?”

Brenden looks confused as he frowns at the sudden subject change. “What?”

“Your fangs are out. I figured you must be hungry. Or stressed. I guess that would make more sense.”

He curses, lifting his hand to his mouth. Then he’s dragging me toward Nex.

“You.” Brenden stabs his finger into Nex’s chest.

Nex glances down at the finger in his chest before his gaze returns to Brenden and then slides to me. “What are you doing here?”

Brenden scoffs. “We’re at the market. What do you think we’re doing?”

“Oh, right.” Nex flushes. “That makes sense.”

Silence falls over us as we glance at one another. I don’t have any idea what I’m supposed to say right now. The last time Nex and I spoke, his words were cruel. I should hate him. I want to hate him, but I don’t. I don’t know if I can with the unrelenting mate bond insistently tugging at me. It wants us to be together as we’re meant to, but Nex doesn’t want that.

I wonder if it tugs at him in the same way. Does it hurt him to stand so close to me and not touch me? If it does, then how can he stand there so nonchalantly?

The silence quickly grows awkward, and I wish I was anywhere but here.

“We should—“

“I was just about to—“

I bite back a smile as the two of them speak at the same time, both cutting off.

“Go ahead,” Nex says, and Brenden shakes his head. With another glance at me, Nex takes a deep breath. “I was just going to say I’m planning to grab some dinner now that I have what I came for. Maybe the two of you would like to join me?”

“Why?” I blurt it out before I can stop myself.

He runs a hand through his dark hair, wincing. “I...I’m sorry for the things I said to you, Audrey. I didn’t mean them, but having you around all the time without being able to touch you was driving me crazy. I thought that if I could run you off, it would be easier.”

“And how did that work out for you?” Brenden asks, flashing his fangs again.

“Clearly, it didn’t work. It was a million times worse than when I was at least able to see you.” He shakes his head. “I know apologizing isn’t enough to make up for what I’ve done.”

“It sure the fuck isn’t.”

I lay a hand on Brenden’s arm, trying to calm him as he shoves himself into Nex’s face. “Stop, Brenden. I appreciate you looking out for me, but I can fight my own battles. As far as dinner goes, I’m starving. We might as well eat together, right?”

Hope flashes in Nex's eyes as he nods. "I'd really like that."

"Are you sure, Audrey? I don't want you to be uncomfortable." At my nod, Brenden sighs. "Fine. We'll have dinner, but if you even blink the wrong way, I'm going to snap your neck."

I glance between the two of them, trying to figure out if he's actually threatening Nex or if he's flirting with him. That might seem like a strange question to be asking myself, but when it comes to Brenden, it's sometimes hard to tell. Especially if he's as obsessed with Nex as I think he is.

Nex holds his hands up in surrender, slowly backing away. "There's an excellent restaurant just up the road."

"It sounds perfect. We'll follow you."

Nex shoots me a small smile and starts down the street. When I go to follow him, Brenden stops me.

"Are you sure about this?"

I snort. "Not at all, but it seems a bit kismet, doesn't it? Like we were meant to run into him here. He's not acting like an asshole like he has been. I think we need to take a chance—give him a chance. I still don't know if I can forgive him, but if I don't try, I'll never know."

"Yeah, okay."

It doesn't take long for us to catch up to Nex, and I have no idea what I'm doing—or thinking or feeling. I'm a fucking mess.

At least I won't be a hungry mess after we eat, so that's a plus. Let's just hope this doesn't blow up in my face.

Nex

I don't know what made me invite Brenden and Audrey to dinner. The question kind of popped out before I really had a chance to think about what I was doing.

I wasn't lying when I said I missed them and that being away from them was killing me. It had been easier when I saw Audrey in my classes than when I was avoiding her and the rest of her mates.

But there's a reason I was avoiding them. I just can't seem to recall it right now.

Dinner was amazing—not just the food but the company as well. I'm just not ready to say goodbye yet because I know I still can't have them.

The last few hours with them haven't changed my situation. As much as I'd love to believe Audrey's the cure to my curse, I can't take that chance. I can't hurt either of them like that. What if being with me ends up with her dead?

She wouldn't be the first of my lovers to end up dead.

And if not her, then what if it's Brenden? I can't watch her lose him. Anyone with eyes can see how much he means to her.

But couldn't I mean just as much to her if I just tried?

I shake my head, trying to push away those thoughts. Having hope is only going to end up with someone hurt. I thought I gave that up a long time ago, and I don't know

why it's suddenly trying to rear its head. I know better than to hope for anything. All it does is lead to pain—a pain I caused myself.

My eyes find Audrey as she laughs at whatever Brenden just said. I hope she doesn't find herself in a similar situation as me after she kills Michael.

Wren's final is in two days, and I know their plan was to do it then. I don't know if that's changed at all now that I'm no longer being included in it. Nor should I be after the way I spoke to Audrey.

I've been fucking terrible to her. I hate myself for every single foul word that fell from my mouth, but it did what I set out to accomplish—sending her far, far away from me.

It's why I'm surprised that she was the one to agree to dinner. I also hadn't expected Brenden to threaten to kill me. Or the way my cock throbbed as he did so, flashing me his fangs.

I've spent a lot of time wondering what it would feel like to have them buried in my neck while he fucked me with his cock.

Shit. And there goes my dick again.

It's been hard practically since I saw the two of them, but that's nothing new. Even when I pretended to want nothing to do with her, the sight of her always had me growing hard. It's a little embarrassing to be popping a boner like a teenager again, but there doesn't seem to be any way to avoid it.

My body wants what it wants, even if my mind knows we shouldn't go there.

“So, ummm...” Audrey looks nervous as she glances from me to Brenden and back

again. “This is awkward.”

“I missed something, didn’t I?” I shake my head, an apologetic grin on my face. “I’m sorry. I was just thinking about something and just quit listening.”

Brenden arches his brow. “Oh? Care to share?”

Hell no, I don’t care to share, but somehow, the words just fall out of my mouth. “I was thinking about how hard I got when you threatened to kill me. Then I was imagining you biting me while you fucked me. After that, I was thinking about how inconvenient it is to pop a boner every time I see either of you.”

I stare at them, bewildered over why I told them that. Those were inside thoughts, not outside thoughts.

What the fuck?

“Brenden! Did you just make him do that?” Audrey slaps his arm.

The asshole doesn’t even bother to look repentant as he smirks. “Maybe.”

“I guess I deserve that.” I shake my head. “So, what were you saying?”

Audrey looks nervous again. “We’re staying in the city tonight. We have a room at The Hellfire Lounge. I thought you might want to come over and have a drink with us?”

All I can do is blink at them as my brain implodes.

They’re inviting me back to their hotel room? And I don’t think they’re inviting me for a nightcap.

My first response is to say no. I know I'm playing with fire here, but I don't want to say no.

I want to say yes more than anything else.

"Are you sure? I don't want to take advantage or whatever." I shake my head, feeling like an idiot.

Audrey bites her lip as she nods, and when my eyes find Brenden's once more, he also nods.

Gods, this is such a bad idea. I should say no, but I'm so weak when it comes to the two of them. Staying away from them has been the worst kind of torture.

"Then, yes. I'd love to."

I'm an idiot, and I know I'm going to regret doing this, but I don't have it in me to deny them tonight. Whatever they want, it's theirs—at least for tonight.

We take care of the bill quickly before Audrey grabs both of us and shadow walks us into the hotel lobby. Brenden heads for the front counter while she drags me further into the dark corner we just exited. She pulls on my shirt and loops her arm around my neck, yanking me down to kiss me.

I forget every reason why this shouldn't happen the moment her lips touch mine. It's never felt like this when I kissed someone before. It's euphoric.

My hands fall to her ass, lifting her and pulling her against me as I deepen the kiss. There's no way she's missing how hard my cock is as I rock her against it.

"As hot as it is to watch the two of you dry hump in public, everyone's watching. Not

that I mind. I'm all for some exhibition from time to time, but I do have our room key."

We break apart, panting. Brenden's smirking as he leans against the wall beside me. It takes a moment for his words to register.

I clear my throat. "Right. Yes."

"Room number?" Audrey asks as she lays her hand on his arm.

"1369," he says, still smirking.

He barely gets the number out before we're traveling through the shadows and directly into our room.

"Now, where were we?" she asks before attacking my lips once more.

Everything gets a little blurry from there. It's hard to think when she's kissing me like this and grinding her cunt against my cock.

Eventually, I find myself on the bed with both of them, all our clothes discarded as they kiss.

I groan, squeezing my cock as I watch them run their hands over each other's bodies. Individually, they're both beautiful, but together? Together, they're a fucking masterpiece.

I'm not sure how to slot myself in with them. They've been together for months—nearly a damn year at this point. They share a familiarity that I don't have.

Fuck. I'm happy just to sit here and watch the two of them fuck if that's what they

want. It certainly wouldn't be a hardship.

"Why are you all the way over there?" Audrey asks as they break apart.

"I wasn't sure..." I trail off. "Yeah, I'm just not sure."

Audrey tenses. "About this? About us?"

"No. Not that. I just don't know how to do this." I snort. "I've never had a threesome."

Brenden smirks. "An incubus who's never had a threesome? Well, that definitely needs to be remedied. I have an idea. Why don't I share what I'm thinking, and we see what the two of you think?"

"Okay. Yes," I say quickly, which only makes his smirk grow as Audrey nods.

"What I'd really like to do is fuck you into Audrey." There's a predatory look in his eyes as a shiver runs through my body.

I just nod frantically, which makes him chuckle.

"He's enthusiastic about that, Brenden. I think that's a brilliant idea," Audrey says as she scoots up the bed to settle against the pillows before curling her finger at me.

I move to her eagerly, pausing when Brenden curses. "What?"

"I don't have any lube." He shoots me an apologetic look. "I haven't really needed to carry it with me."

I toss him a smirk before continuing toward Audrey. "I guess it's good that incubi are

self-lubricating then, huh?”

Brenden groans. “Fuck, yes. I’ve always wanted to fuck a cubi.”

Reaching Audrey, I cage her in with my arms and body as I crawl over her. I lean down and kiss her, mumbling against her lips. “Fuck. There are so many things I want to do to you—with you. Both of you.”

“There’s plenty of time. We have forever.” She says it hesitantly as if she’s afraid I’m going to change my mind.

I give her a small smile. “Yes, we do, don’t we?”

Her face lights up as she drags me down for another kiss. My cock slides between her slick folds, and I can’t help thrusting against them. I’m too desperate for her—for them.

“I can’t do slow or drag this out,” I admit. “I’m so desperate for you.”

“Fuck me, Nex.”

Well, fuck. If that isn’t a turn-on, I don’t know what the hell is.

Reaching between us, I grasp my cock and notch it at her entrance before slowly pushing into her. My head falls forward as I bury myself in her. Nothing has ever felt so right in my life. She’s so wet, so tight, so perfect.

This right here is where I belong—my cock buried in her pussy.

I kiss her once more as I draw out of her before ramming into her once more. I love the way her tits bounce as I do it again and again.

And the sounds she makes? They're fucking heaven.

I freeze when a hand runs down my back, having completely forgotten that Brenden was here.

I'm such a fucking asshole.

I bite back a groan as he presses a finger into my ass, then a second. I grind into Audrey as he fucks me on his fingers. It feels so fucking good—his fingers in my ass while I'm in her pussy.

Fucking hell. I'm never going to last.

“Mmmm, this self-lubricating thing is amazing. You're always ready to be fucked. A guy could get used to this.” Brenden laughs, sounding a little manic as he removes his fingers.

Then his hard cock is pressing against me, easily slipping inside me and filling me to the brim.

I lied earlier. This is where I belong—between the two of them, with my cock in Audrey and Brenden's in me.

When he pulls out and slams back into me, Audrey and I both moan. It feels fucking amazing as he fucks me slow and deep—except it isn't enough.

I thrust my hips back to meet his before plunging back into Audrey, essentially fucking myself on his cock as I fuck her.

Yes. This is what I need. This is what I'm desperate for.

Surprisingly, Brenden allows me to take control as I fuck them both faster and harder with each movement of my hips.

My fingers are clumsy as they reach between me and Audrey, but I find her clit with no problem. Sending out a burst of pheromones, I smile as they both moan and buck against me. All it takes to send Audrey over the edge is one little pinch to her clit.

Her back bows off the bed as she screams, and her pussy grips my cock. My movements grow more rapid and less controlled with each passing moment as I feel Audrey's magic brush against mine.

Knowing we're not ready for that, I yank my magic back into me, coming as it rolls through me.

"Fuck. Fuck. Fuck."

Brenden's teeth sink into my neck as he pulls on my blood, and I come again—somehow even harder than the last time. I grind my hips against Audrey and she explodes for a second time as Brenden fills my ass.

I'm an incubus, so I know pleasure. I've experienced it personally, and I've felt it through others. But it's never been like this. This is almost overwhelming with how good it feels.

I collapse on top of Audrey as Brenden releases me, his tongue sliding across the bite seductively and sending another shiver through my body. There's just something so sensual about it.

I can't help fucking into Audrey as I come again. I don't know how I do it, but I drag Audrey right along with me on this one, too.

Once I still, I don't know if I'll ever be able to move ever again. I don't think I want to move ever again. Maybe we can stay like this forever.

Yeah, that seems like a good idea.

I'm practically thrumming with energy after all those orgasms—both mine and theirs. Sex before bed for an incubus is a bad idea. We can't help feeding when we're having sex, so it leaves us high on power.

"As blissfully happy as I am at this moment, if the two of you don't get off me, I'm going to pee in the bed." Audrey pushes against my chest, and I lift off her as much as I can with Brenden's weight pressing down on me.

"We definitely don't want that, firecracker." Brenden laughs as he moves off me, his cock slapping against my ass and leaving a trail of cum and lubricant in its path.

I shake my head as I sit up, biting back my own laughter when Audrey practically darts to the bathroom.

Brenden collars my neck with his hand and yanks me in for a kiss. My cock perks up, already hardening against my thigh.

"I'm going to take a shower. Are you two going to join me or just keep making out?" Audrey calls, and we break apart with a laugh.

Clearly, we choose to shower with her. None of us can keep our hands off each other, and we each get another orgasm. Well, Audrey gets three because I can't stop eating mine and Brenden's cum out of her pussy.

By the time we make it back to the bed, the two of them can barely keep their eyes open as they surround me on the bed.

“Thank you,” Audrey mumbles, her eyes already shut. “Love you.”

My heart wrenches in my chest.

“Love you,” Brenden returns, and I’m not sure if they’re only speaking to each other or me too. I bite my lip hard to keep the words from escaping my mouth, my mind already swirling.

It doesn’t take that long for the two of them to fall asleep as they cling to me. I envy the way they’re able to just fall asleep so easily.

Meanwhile, my brain is working overtime—reminding me why this was such a terrible idea. What we all stand to lose from my moment of weakness.

Or moments of weakness, if you will, because it wasn’t just one that led to me sleeping with the two of them. At least Audrey and I didn’t complete the mate bond. That would’ve been disastrous.

I lay there, agonizing over what a mistake I’ve made until I’m sure I won’t wake them when I disentangle myself from them.

This should never have happened. All it’s going to do is make everything worse.

Tears form behind my eyes as I slowly climb off the bed. A sigh of relief escapes me when they don’t wake up.

At least that’s one less thing to worry about. I’m not sure I could face them and tell them this was a mistake—that no matter how much I told them I wanted this, we shouldn’t have done it. That it changes nothing.

I’ve told Audrey on more than one occasion that there’s no happy ending in store for

us. There isn't.

I don't deserve to be happy.

I don't deserve them.

They're going to hate me after this. I know they will, but I don't have a choice. I have to do this.

It's to keep them safe.

I'm not even sure if I believe my lies anymore.

Or is it that I don't know how to separate my lies from the truth anymore?

Shaking my head, I find my clothes and dress as quickly as I can. The faster I get out of here, the better. Even knowing that, I can't help pausing in the doorway to look back at them. They look so happy right now, but once they wake, they'll be devastated.

Am I doing the right thing? Or am I just doing the only thing I know how to do?

No. I can't worry about how they'll feel when they wake up. I need to get away while I can.

I stumble into the seating area, my lungs constricting and pain coursing through me with every step I take away from them. I'm almost to the door when I see the pen and pad of paper on the table.

Without a thought, I change course. I scribble out a quick note, not knowing if it's going to help or hurt things, but I can't leave without saying something. I just can't.

Audrey and Brenden,

I'm sorry. I never should've let this happen. Know it's not either of you but me. I didn't mean to hurt you, but I know I will. If I allow this to continue, it'll just be worse. I'll ask Wraith to reassign me to one of the other horsemen, so you never have to see me again.

Be happy.

Nex

It's harder than it should be to force myself to stand up and walk away.

This is the best choice.

No. It's the only choice.

I was meant to live a miserable life, but I wish I hadn't dragged them down with me.

I should've stayed away.

Audrey

I wake up with a smile on my face.

Holy shit.

It finally happened. I slept with my last mate—well, Brenden and I slept with him.

I wasn't lying when I told him I wasn't ready to forgive him—that he'd have to earn that—but I can't bring myself to regret last night.

“Audrey, wake up.”

My eyes pop open at Brenden's shaky voice. I sit up as he climbs across the bed and shoves a piece of paper in my face. I grab it from him but don't bother looking at it yet. No, I'm too focused on the anger and tears on his face.

“What's wrong? What happened? Where's Nex?”

He shakes his head. “Just read it.”

Assuming he's talking about the paper he shoved in my face, I glance down and immediately recognize Nex's handwriting. My stomach drops, already knowing I'm not going to like what it says.

I read over it once, then again and again. The words don't change, no matter how much I wish they would.

Lifting my gaze to Brenden's, my eyes fill with tears. I can barely make him out as my mouth falls open and a wail springs free.

Brenden pulls me into his arms, and we hold one another as we fall apart.

I don't know why I didn't see this coming. I should've. The writing was already on the wall.

I should've listened when he said there would be no happy ending for us.

Why did I allow it to get this far? Why did I invite him back to our room? Would it have been better if we let him walk away?

My tears fall before stopping as rage courses through me.

How dare he do this to me? To Brenden?

He made us trust him, and then he walked right out the fucking door like we were nothing to him.

I don't give a fuck what pretty words he left on paper. He's a fucking coward. A real man would've waited until we were awake and talked to us about this.

If he would've done that, then Brenden and I could've convinced him to wait until after Wren's final. We could've all gone to see Lucifer together.

But no, he ran away while we were sleeping. Probably because he knew we'd convince him. He knew he wouldn't be able to walk away from us.

Well, fuck him. I won't give him another chance to hurt us—to destroy us.

Even if we can't find a way around the Fates' words, he'll never have a chance at my heart again. I'll bond him if I have to, but there's no way in hell I'll give him another chance to shatter me.

He's gotten more chances than he deserved, and he's shown us over and over what kind of man he is. He doesn't deserve us.

"Fuck him," I mutter into Brenden's chest. "He's a fucking coward."

Brenden growls, and when I pull away, he's snarling. "He'll pay for this."

"He will. He fucked me over for the last time. I hope he's ready for hell to rain down on him." I'm certain the smile I give him is feral, but I don't give a fuck.

I've run out of fucks to give.

Taking a deep breath, I tug Brenden into the bathroom so we can wash away the night. I don't know about him, but I can't stand the idea of leaving any part of him on my skin. Not his cum or his kisses. Most certainly not his scent.

I've never regretted anything more than I regret giving in to the stupid mate bond that makes me want to forgive him, even when I know he's not sorry for a single damn thing he's done. If he was, this never would've happened. He never would've walked out on us.

Our shower is fast, as neither of us wants to linger in this hotel room longer than we have to. When we step out to pull our clothes on, I realize that not only do I not want to put them back on—I never want to see them again.

Without a thought, I click my fingers and watch as hellfire envelopes them before flickering out and leaving nothing but ashes behind. Hopefully, Wraith can get us

checked out without us being here because I'm not walking into the lobby in nothing but a towel.

Linking my fingers with Brenden's, I walk us through the shadows and into our living room, where I find Cassian, Wraith, and Donovan making out on the couch.

"I'm glad someone had a better night than we did," Brenden snarks, causing the three of them to break apart.

They turn to us with smiles that quickly fall away when they take us in.

"What the hell happened?" Cassian frowns as he stands, walking toward me until I hold up my hand to halt him.

I glance at Brenden, who looks just as wrecked as I do. "Brenden and I made a mistake last night. We ran into Nex and went to dinner with him. One thing led to another, and we slept together. When we woke up, he was gone. All he left was a note telling us he's sorry and that he'll be asking for his services to be transferred to another of the horsemen."

Wraith's eyes flash with anger as he joins Cassian. "Please tell me you're joking."

"That's not really something I would joke about, Wraith." The only joke is me—not that I'd say that out loud. My mates would eviscerate me for talking about myself like that. "I fell for his pretty lies. It won't happen again. If we need me to bond with him in order to keep Cassian, then that's what I'll do. But I'll never trust him. He'll never truly be a part of the family we're building. He made his bed, and he can fucking sleep in it alone."

"Oh, pretty girl. This isn't on you. It's on him. He fucked up—not the two of you."

Brenden scoffs. “No, Audrey is right. We heard what we wanted to hear—what we needed to hear. Now, we know how far his lies will go.”

None of them have anything to say to that. I mean, what can you say to that?

Nothing they have to say is going to make us feel better. Or erase the last twelve hours. We’ve learned a lesson I would’ve preferred neither of us had to.

Pretty lies are the easiest to believe, but they’re also the ones that cut the deepest.

It hurts now, but we’ll heal. We have each other and my other three mates. They’ll help us put back together our pieces. We’ll be stronger for it, but both of us have lost something important today. I don’t yet know what it is, but I can feel the missing piece inside me throbbing with pain.

“While I know you don’t condone vengeance, Wraith, I don’t want you to grant Nex his request. He doesn’t just get to run away after what he did. He doesn’t get to hide from the pain he caused. He needs to be here to see what he did. Brenden and I will make sure he sees the error of his ways, but when he comes crawling back, we know his words will be lies. Then we’ll crush him, make him feel the pain he made us feel.” I smile, though it falls a bit when the three of them flinch. “What?”

The three of them share a look before Wraith steps forward. “Nothing, trouble. You just sound tired. You both probably are after what you’ve gone through this morning. Let us take care of you. We need you both at your best for tomorrow.”

I hum, knowing he’s right. I need to focus on taking out Michael and fixing that problem before worrying about Nex. One step at a time. One foot in front of the other.

“That sounds nice,” I finally say, and he smiles.

“Good. Let’s get the two of you upstairs and into something comfortable. Donovan and Cassian will cuddle with you two while you watch a movie or something. I’ll call to get you checked out. Plus, there are a few administrative things I need to take care of before tomorrow. I’ll join you as soon as I’m finished.”

I shrug as Wraith leads me over to Donovan, who picks me up in his arms. I lay my head on his shoulder with a sigh.

“Brenden, Wraith and I will help you upstairs,” Cassian offers, and I hear Brenden scoff.

“I don’t need help to go up the stairs.”

I lift my head to see Wraith still reaching for Brenden. “Remember, Brenden, we’re here for one another. We’ll be your strength. There’s no reason for either of you to be strong through this. Lean on us.”

Brenden shrugs with a shake of his head. “I have no problem accepting your help, Wraith. I thank you for wanting to be here for me, but I’m fine.”

His voice is so monotone, it’s almost as if he’s shut down. Kind of like me.

It’s only then I realize I no longer feel the pain of Nex’s betrayal. In fact, I feel nothing. I feel blank and empty.

I wonder if I should find that disturbing. Right now, I don’t think I have the energy to worry about why I feel as I do. Wraith is right. I need to rest.

“I’m ready to go upstairs now,” I tell Donovan.

With a nod, he carries me up the stairs. I hear Brenden, Wraith, and Cassian follow us

up, but I suddenly don't have the strength to lift my head. It feels too heavy for my body.

In fact, all my limbs feel that way. I don't feel in control of my body, and I know that should freak me out. It doesn't.

"Okay, pretty girl, I'm going to set you down now and get you a shirt to wear, okay?" Donovan asks when we reach the bedroom.

Thankfully, he doesn't seem to need a response as he lowers me to my feet. I blink and he's back.

"That was fast," I tell him, surprised. He moved as fast as Brenden does when he uses his vampiric nature. I didn't know he could do that.

Donovan hesitates before undoing the towel and allowing it to fall to the floor. I lift my hands over my head as he helps me into the shirt. When he bends down to help me slide my panties on, I use his shoulders to keep me upright before he leads me to the bed.

Brenden's already lying there on his side in a pair of sweats, so I crawl over to him and curl around him. Neither Cassian nor Donovan joins us immediately as they talk with Wraith quietly.

At first I can't make out what they're saying, then suddenly I can hear them so well, they might as well be standing next to me.

"What the hell is wrong with them?" Donovan asks, sounding panicked. "What can we do?"

Wraith sighs. "I'm not one hundred percent sure, but I think they might be suffering

from rejected mate syndrome.”

“That makes sense for Audrey, but Brenden and Nex aren’t fated mates,” Cassian says slowly.

“Do you know that for a fact?” Wraith pushes.

“Brenden hasn’t said anything,” Donovan replies. “But would he have if he knew? Knowing that it would hurt Audrey?”

Cassian grunts. “But he’s been at the academy longer than Audrey. Don’t vampires sense their mates by smelling their blood? Wouldn’t Brenden have noticed that before he even met Audrey?”

“Fuck,” Wraith curses. “Nex takes pills that change his scent. They’re often used when someone is hiding from another supernatural. Brenden would’ve had no idea. I’m going to fucking kill him.”

“Let’s not be rash, Wraith. If you kill him, then you can kiss me sticking around goodbye.”

The sounds of a scuffle reach my ear, but I can’t bring myself to see what’s going on.

“Don’t be a selfish prick, Cassian. This isn’t about you.” That’s Wraith, and he sounds pissed.

“That’s not how I meant it, and you know that. Don’t let the anger get to you. Please.” That one is Cassian, obviously.

“This is not the time to start fighting,” Donovan hisses. He’s pissed too. “The two of them are falling apart just a few feet from us, and the two of you think it’s a good

time to start a fistfight. Knock it the fuck off or I'll kick both of you out of here and take care of them myself."

There's a loud smacking sound—not like skin against skin, but I think someone punched something. I'm not curious enough to turn over to find out.

"Fuck. I'm sorry. This is why I said the two of you would stay with them." Another sigh from Wraith. "I'm so fucking pissed with Nex, and it's combining with this bullshit anger I don't want to feel toward Cassian. I need to make some phone calls to see what the fuck we need to do for them. Don't leave them alone, please."

"We've got them, Wraith. We'll hold them together until you can find out how to fix them." That's Cassian again.

At least they're not fighting anymore.

Not that it really matters if they do. It's not like I can stop them.

I'm just so tired.

Lifting my head, I find Brenden staring back at me blankly.

Had he listened to my mates, too? Did he understand what they were talking about?

I've never heard of rejected mate syndrome before. It doesn't sound good, though, does it?

And is Brenden truly Nex's mate, too? For his sake, I hope not.

I blink once, then twice. Cassian is pressed against my back now while Donovan is curled around Brenden. I missed them climbing into the bed. I also missed when

Brenden fell asleep as I cling to his hand.

I'm losing time, and once again, I realize I should be worried.

The thought is there and gone again in a second.

I'm just so tired...

Source Creation Date: July 26, 2025, 5:22 am

Audrey

“What the hell did you do to my sister?” Wren hisses at Wraith, stabbing her finger at me like he doesn’t know I’m her sister.

Wraith rakes a hand through his hair, eyes moving to me. “Audrey is fine.”

“Like hell she is.” Wren might think she’s being quiet, but I can hear every word she says.

“I’m right here, Wren. I’m ready to go. I’m not really sure what you’re talking about.”

She stalks over to me, grasping my arms and shaking me. “This isn’t you, Ree. What the hell happened in the two days since I saw you last?”

“Nothing much,” I say with a shrug. “Brenden and I had sex with Nex. It was nice...until we woke up in the morning to find him gone. That was unfortunate, but it doesn’t affect what’s happening today. I’m going to kill Michael, and you’re going to reap his soul.”

“Are you fucking kidding me right now?” Wren throws her hands in the air. “We can’t take her like this. There’s something wrong with her.”

I sigh, ready to move on and get this over with. I don’t know why she’s so hung up on this. “Wraith thinks I have rejected mate syndrome—whatever that is.”

He curses. “You heard that?”

“I heard everything the three of you said. It’s not like you were being quiet.”

“Yeah, we were, trouble.” Wraith shakes his head. “It looks like you accessed some new abilities. We’ll have to deal with that later if we want to get to Michael before he heads into work.”

I shrug. “That’s fine. I told you I was ready. Wren, are you ready?”

She shakes her head as if she doesn’t recognize me, so I decide my time is probably better spent finding the others. We should’ve left already. I don’t know what’s taking so long.

I head up the stairs as Wren demands answers from Wraith—answers he doesn’t seem to have. I find Brenden sitting on the bed, where I’d left him after we both finished dressing. He’s staring at the wall, completely unmoving. It doesn’t even look like he’s breathing, but his head turns to me when I step inside.

“Why are you still up here?” I ask.

He stands quickly. “Is it time to go, then?”

I tilt my head to the side, frowning as I run my eyes over him. Is this how my sister sees me? Because it’s clear something is wrong with Brenden. I don’t like it.

“As soon as I find Donovan and Cassian. They weren’t downstairs yet. We need to go or we’re going to miss our chance.”

Brenden nods. “I’ll check Donovan’s up here. You check downstairs and outside. They can’t have gotten far.”

We both head for the door, and I make my way back outside. I double-check to see if they made it to the living room while I was upstairs, but it's completely empty.

Great. Now I have to find four people instead of two.

I don't find them downstairs, but when I near the front door, I can hear voices outside.

"Damn it, Wren. We're just as worried as you are, but no one has been able to tell me how to fix them yet. All we can do right now is to be there for them." Wraith's frustration with my sister, and maybe even the entire situation, is clear.

"We can't take them when they're like this," she argues with him. "We need to wait until they're better. They could be a liability when they're like this."

"They weren't upstairs," Brenden tells me as he joins me. "What are you doing?"

I nod toward the door. "Listening to Wren and Wraith argue about what's wrong with us and if we should do this today or not."

"We're doing this today. If they want to argue, I say we leave them to it and go on our own."

There's merit to Brenden's idea, but something stops me from agreeing with him. "No. Wren should be there."

He nods. "Okay."

I swing open the front door, four heads swinging our way. No one speaks as we walk down the stairs and join them.

"No more arguing. Wren, you should be there when I kill Michael, but if you can't

stop arguing, then I'll leave you behind. That goes for all of you. I don't need you there, but I want you there." I look around at them, and I can tell they all want to argue with me, but they keep their mouths shut. "Brenden and I are fine. And now that we have that settled, let's go. Michael will head to work any time now."

I don't bother waiting to hear what they have to say as I snag my sister's arm and Brenden's hand, stepping forward and landing us in the middle of Michael's new home. I release both of them as Wraith, Donovan, and Cassian appear.

Calling on my reaper magic, I will my scythe into existence. "Oh, Michael. Where are you?"

There's a thump from upstairs before someone thunders down the stairs toward us. Michael is smirking when he steps into the living room with us.

"Well, what do we have here?" he asks, eyes roving on the group before settling back on Wren. "Hello, wife. I do have to say, death looks good on you."

Wren grinds her teeth. "Why, Michael? Why marry me? Kill my sister and then me? None of it makes sense."

"Oh, darling. Don't hurt yourself trying to figure out what's going on. It'll all be a little over your head." Michael chuckles. "Why are you in my home?"

I smile. "I'm here to kill you."

I don't expect him to laugh, but that's exactly what he does.

That should annoy me, shouldn't it? Honestly, it's probably better that it doesn't.

The one part of the plan we never discussed was how I was actually going to kill him. I'm not sure if that was purposefully ignored or how I missed that, but now that I'm

here, I know exactly how to kill him in the most painful way possible.

I'm unsure where I learned this, but I know I can use my scythe to rip the soul straight out of his body. It'll be torture for him.

Yes, that sounds like the perfect way for him to pay for his crimes against my family.

"Gods damn it, Michael! Why the hell are you laughing when Audrey just threatened to kill you?" Wren takes a step toward her husband—I guess he's her ex now that she's dead—before stopping. "Tell me why, Michael. It's the least you owe me."

"It's nothing personal, babe. You were a means to an end." He continues smirking as his eyes find me. "The two of you don't know a damn thing about your family, do you? If you did, you wouldn't be asking me why. If you knew what I do, then you'd completely understand. Okay, maybe not completely."

Donovan growls, lunging toward Michael, but Cassian and Wraith hold him back. "Stop talking in circles."

Michael rolls his eyes. "You're really taking the fun out of my revelation, you know that? But fine. You don't know who or what you are, do you?"

"I know I'm not a witch," I tell him as hellfire runs along my scythe.

"While a cool trick, I'm not as scared as you want me to be." He laughs again. "I really hate to be the one to ruin the surprise, but no, neither of you are witches. Because neither of your parents are witches."

Huh. So Mom has been lying to us. It makes sense—that she was lying to us, not why. If she's not a witch, then what the hell is she?

Wren shakes her head. "Mom wouldn't lie to us about that. You're lying."

“I’m not sure he is,” I admit. “But if she’s not a witch, then what is she?”

“You can’t believe anything he says, little mate,” Cassian says, stepping up beside me. “He’s a known liar.”

I nod in agreement. “He is, but look at him. He’s getting entirely too much enjoyment out of this. I don’t think he’s lying now.”

Michael tilts his head as he considers me. “You’re different, Audrey. I think I like this version of you better. If you’d been more like this when you were alive, I would’ve chosen you over your weak ass sister.”

More growls sound behind me, and I sigh. Look at my mates overreacting again. What a surprise.

“That never would’ve happened, Michael. Look, if you don’t want to tell us what our mom is, that’s fine. I can ask her after I rip your soul from your body.” I shrug because it really isn’t a big deal to me at all.

Michael whistles. “Oh, yes, I do like this version of you. It’s sexy as hell. As for your mom, she’s an angel.”

“Is that possible?” I ask Cassian, and he shrugs.

“Anything is possible. The powers you’re gaining aren’t from an angel, though. They’re too strong.”

“Mmmm,” Michael hums. “You’re one of the fallen—the judges.”

Cassian bristles but nods.

“The two of you are keeping very interesting company in your deaths. Death himself,

a hellhound, a fallen angel, and a vampire...who's also a reaper. Interesting indeed."

"I'm over this—whatever it is," I announce, taking a step toward Michael.

He might claim not to be afraid of me, but he takes a step back for every step I take forward.

"What's wrong, Michael?" I ask. "I thought you weren't scared."

"I'm not scared of you, bitch," he snarls, stopping his retreat. "I'm just not done playing with you. The fallen is correct. That power doesn't come from your mom."

I sigh. Is what he has to say really worth keeping him alive any longer? I'm not sure it is.

"Your dad was definitely the more powerful one of the two. Not that either of them knew who or what they were getting involved with. Did Mommy Dearest tell you that the two of you were a result of a drunken one-night stand?"

He says it like we should be ashamed of it. "Actually, yes. Once we were old enough to understand, she told us she met our dad at a bar and they slept together. She never saw him again. He doesn't even know we exist."

"Huh. I didn't expect her to be that honest with you when she was lying to you about so much more." Michael shrugs. "And you don't have a clue about who he is."

"Clearly," I say once more, all of my patience gone as I step toward him once more.

I smirk when he starts to take another step back, just barely stopping himself in time.

Then he laughs, surprising me. He's not acting rationally at all. It makes him harder to predict. It's probably best if I just kill him now.

What he doesn't seem to realize is I don't need to touch him to rip out his soul. I point the scythe at him, still smirking. "Take."

Nothing happens at first, which seems to make him laugh harder—until it cuts off completely.

His eyes shoot to mine, wide and scared as he pales. "What are you doing? You shouldn't be able to do this."

"And yet, here we are." My smirk only grows as I watch the first strand of his soul slip out of his body, heading straight for the scythe.

"No. You can't do this." Michael is panicking now. "I know who your father is. If you kill me, you'll never know."

I shrug. "I'm not sure I really care."

"Audrey! Stop!" Wren rushes up and grabs my arm. "You might not care, but I do."

I sigh, rolling my eyes. I don't release my hold on his soul, but I stop pulling on it. "Fine. Tell us who he is."

"Only if you promise to not rip out my soul."

"Done." That's easy to agree to. Not that I have any intention of keeping that promise. I don't even feel bad about lying to him—not that I feel bad about anything currently, but that's neither here nor there.

Michael considers me for a moment, trying to figure out if I'm lying to him, probably. "You might want to sit down for this one. Your father is..."

To be continued in the final book of the Shadow of Death series, Kiss of Death.