



# Reign of The Beast (Immortal Passions #2)

**Author:** *Leia King*

**Category:** Fantasy

**Description:** Carnage. Terror. Bloodshed.

Divided we fall.

In trying to save us all, I opened a door to darkness.

Now I'm a danger to everything we've sworn to protect.

My men wont accept that.

They won't let me go.

A distress call reunites us and there's no going back.

They force me under their protection.

As we struggle to fix what's broken, the pillars of the supernatural world continue to crumble under Dracos wrath.

Time is running out.

Brutal secrets and revelations threaten to break us.

Blood is spilled.

Chaos abounds.

Terror reigns.

The Beast won't stop until he burns us allto ash.

**Total Pages (Source):** 22

# Page 1

*Source Creation Date: August 4, 2025, 2:15 am*

1

~Mia~

Three Months Later

The flames licked the logs in the fireplace, the satisfying crackle, a soothing soundtrack to the peaceful reverie encompassing me.

Everything was perfect.

The warmth of the fire, its refreshing cedar scent.

The muted light of my bedroom suite, softly illuminated by a mere half dozen candles situated around the room.

And... him.

I sank deeper into him, as we lounged on my pastel-blue chaise, my back to his front.

“Content, sweetness?” he breathed into my hair, his arms tightening around me.

“Always, with you.” I wove my fingers in his.

“I love you,” he said, nuzzling the side of my neck.

I moaned at the delicious tingle that resonated through me, making my core clench

with need.

It was always that way with him. Just the slightest brush of his mouth, his fingers, had me turning into putty in his hands .

And I loved it. I loved how he made me feel.

There was no freer feeling than surrendering to his touch, to letting myself go so completely, to allowing myself to be loved by him without reservation.

It had taken a while for me to get to this point, to divest myself from the shackles of my inhibitions. Even though I trusted him more than I had ever trusted anybody else, there had still been a part of me that had been holding back. With the volatile secret of my heritage, it had been instilled in me at a young age not to trust anyone.

But I'd come to accept that Ryker Morgan wasn't just anyone.

He was my confidant.

My best friend.

My first love.

And he would be my last too.

The true love of my life.

I tilted my head to look deep into his mesmerizing emerald-green pools. "I love you."

Heat flared in his eyes and the next thing I knew, he was grasping my hips and flipping our positions.

His powerful body covered mine, enclosing me with his warmth, his love surrounding me.

Safe.

I felt safe.

And wholly cherished.

“Mia,” he groaned, regarding me reverently.

His hand skated up my thigh, sliding under my lacy black chemise.

His chiseled, bare torso pressed into me and I moaned at the delectable sensation of his nipple hoops lightly abrading my breasts through the thin silk covering them, teasing them.

He chuckled. “Every time, huh?”

He shifted his weight, his fists coming down either side of my head, boxing me in .

The deliciously dominant move had my heartrate picking up, my body tingling with anticipation.

Grinding against me, his thick cock straining to escape the confines of his dark linen pants, he held my gaze while he brushed his fingers through my slick folds.

I arched my back at the delicious sensations he was invoking within me, as he teased me and his thumb flicked intermittently over my clit.

“Yes. Yes, Ry,” I breathed. I reached up and grasped his biceps, pulling him closer.

“Don’t stop. Don’t ever stop touching me.”

“I never will,” he vowed.

He tore at my chemise, baring my breasts with one rough tug of strength. My gasp of surprise caught in my throat when his mouth closed over my right nipple and he began to suckle, lick and nip ravenously.

God, his mouth was glorious.

“Let go, sweetness,” he spoke, his tone soothing, almost hypnotic.

With one last lick to both of my nipples, he shifted and jerked his pants down to his thighs, just enough to free his cock.

I swallowed hard.

He was rock hard, raring to go.

My pulse picked up as I took in the two shining studs in the thick, mushroom head. Those things were heavenly.

He grinned at my reaction, then took hold of my thighs in a bruising grip, knowing how much I loved it nowadays when he got a little rough and domineering when we fucked.

The moment our gazes clashed again, I was lost to him completely.

The desperate need in his eyes, the fervor of his warm grip on my thighs, had me enveloped in a thick haze of lust.

“Take me, my love.”

He shifted his weight.

And then he abruptly stilled.

“Ryker? ”

His eyes shone with green fire.

No. No. No.

There was no magic here.

We no longer practiced. We hadn’t for years.

We didn’t belong to that life anymore.

We’d escaped all of that, left the Guardian Movement, long ago.

It was what had brought us peace.

A sudden surge of energy had me choking in the next moment, the rush something I hadn’t felt in an age.

Our surroundings shook with the fervor of a violent earthquake.

Items toppled from my dresser, my bedside table.

Furniture began to shudder and rattle.

I sat up, Ryker easing back with me.

I reached for him.

But I never made contact.

I screamed as he dematerialized before my eyes.

The candles around the room snuffed out, the fire, too, all sources of light completely extinguished.

I scrambled off the chaise, just as the bedroom door blasted open, green fire exploding forth, and tearing through the room.

“Time to go,” a voice reverberated all around me.

I felt something pulling on me, an unseen force.

Clenching my teeth with the effort and digging the heels of my bare feet into the carpet, I struggled to resist it.

A warm sensation snaked around my wrists and I looked down, horrified to see shimmering green bands encircling them.

My hands were forced forward against my will, the bands pulling me toward the door.

“No! Stop! No!”

I screamed and tugged violently at them, but it was no use.

Without my magic, they overpowered me with far too much ease, pulling me through the open doorway.

Everything fell away .

I awoke in a panic, as the world came rushing back.

Unwelcome.

Cold.

Brutal.

Slapping my hand to my chest in a futile attempt to try to calm my racing heart, I fought to get a handle on my surroundings.

The glass-topped box, a combination of a coffin and a hyperbaric chamber.

The old, abandoned farmhouse in the middle of nowhere that I'd commandeered.

I gasped as I realized the glass lid was gone.

It, along with the farmhouse itself, had been enveloped in a powerful protection spell. One that shouldn't have been possible to breach, given that it had been forged from pure Immortal magic. My father's.

Oh my God.

"Father?" I called out, hesitantly, bracing myself for a hell of a reprimand for my offenses.



Stealing his magic, for one.

Then, hiding myself away, turning from the awful threat that plagued us, rather than taking up the mantle as he'd wished.

“No, sweetness.”

I stilled at the familiar voice.

Then I jolted bolt upright, searching him out.

A hand suddenly grasped mine, making me choke in surprise.

I hesitated until I traced its path up to a very familiar face.

“Ryker,” I breathed, as I instinctively took his hand and allowed him to help me out of the box.

Having not used my limbs for hell knew how long, my knees buckled as soon as my feet met the floor, my body not able to hold up its own weight.

Swiftly, Ryker's arms wrapped around me, saving me from hitting the ground.

I felt a spark of magical energy and a robe suddenly covered me, shielding my flimsy nightgown beneath.

He swept me up in his arms and carried me out of the little barn into the dark night.

He eased me down onto a nearby log, then stepped back, eyeing me intensely.

With a weary shake of his head, he shifted his weight and folded his arms across his

chest.

While my father hadn't come, it was clear I was still in for a reprimand either way.

## Page 2

*Source Creation Date: August 4, 2025, 2:15 am*

2

~Mia~

“How did you find me?” I asked, wanting to know how on earth Ryker had managed to break through Immortal magic.

“Very Snow White of you,” he said, ignoring my question, and gesturing at the box through the open barn doors.

There was no humor in his tone.

In fact, that trademark Ryker Morgan levity, the wit and sarcasm in the face of difficult circumstances, was nowhere to be found.

And that wasn’t the only thing that was off with him.

He wasn’t clad in his normal designer get-up, instead dressed in black from head-to-toe in a pair of worn jeans, a muscle tee and a hard leather jacket. His hair was wild and devoid of product, and weeks' worth of stubble plagued his jaw, just shy of beard territory.

With dark circles under his eyes, along with his wearied stance, he seemed exhausted.

Worst of it all was the haunted look in his eyes.

I couldn’t see that spark that was all Ryker anywhere .

“Ry, are you okay?” I asked.

He stared at me for a long while and I waited with bated breath, sensing that he wanted to confess what was burdening him.

But then he blinked hard as though coming out of some sort of trance and looked away. “It’s been three months, you know that?”

Three months?

I’d had no idea how long it’d been, how much time had been passing me by as I’d been safely ensconced in that phantasmal plane of my own creation.

I merely shrugged my shoulders.

His eyes flashed at my laissez-faire reaction to the news.

He strode closer, his boots thumping with an angry fervor. “Three fucking months it took me to find you. I’ve been busting my ass trying to track you down, used every spell I know, almost drained my magic completely a couple of times, invoking power that nearly sucked the fucking life out of me. I’ve been worried sick about you. We all have. You just took off, no word on when you’d be back.”

“I had to remove myself from the situation. There wasn’t time to entertain a lengthy discussion, or allow you all to attempt to convince me to stay. I needed to go.”

He blew out a breath, clearly trying to get a handle on his erratic emotional state. “I know what happened at the Maven Coven was a lot. You needed time to reconcile it all. But this self-imposed exile of yours is over now.” Eyeing me intensely, he announced, “I’m here to bring you back in.”

“No.”

To say he looked shocked by my refusal was an understatement of epic proportions.

“What?”

“I’m not coming back. ”

He shifted his weight. “You have to. You need to resume your Guardian responsibilities.”

“Life as a Guardian is behind me. Life as a sorceress, as an active member of the supernatural world, too. All of it. It’s over. I don’t want any part of it.”

“This is about your loss of control with Draco.”

He knew me far too well.

It could’ve been about any number of things that had happened that day, but he’d known, he’d just known instantly, exactly what had caused me to flee everything and everyone I cared about.

“I tasted darkness, Ryker.”

“You pulled it back.”

“It opened a door.”

“A door that’s now closed,” he countered.

I shook my head. “It’s not that simple for me. You know what I am. That greater

power makes me more predisposed to—"

"I get it," he cut in, impatiently. "You think you'll end up like Draco. A twisted, broken Immortal."

It was hard enough just admitting it to myself, let alone acknowledging it aloud.

But I needed to drive it home to him, to make him understand so he'd drop the whole concept of me returning to the fold.

"Yes," I confessed. "He was good once. He got a taste of unmatched power and he lost control, lost himself."

"You're not him, Mia. You're nothing like that monster and you never will be. The fact that you're so worried about it from merely touching a brief spark of darkness is proof enough. You don't have that kind of evil in you. Some beings are just born twisted. You're not one of them."

"Right, you can say all of that with confidence because of your staunch belief that evil is born, not made."

"Mia—" he started to protest, knowing where I was going with this, aware that our beliefs on good and evil differed.

"That's a lovely sentiment, Ry, but if it were the case then what we do matters not, because we'll end up good or evil regardless. A direct affront to the concept of free will."

"I'm talking about in the larger sense, about the extreme level of evil that Draco embodies, that he relishes."

“Well, I believe evil is made, created by our choices, our experiences. And that’s why I’ve retired, to make sure that I’m nowhere near the kind of life that could twist me into anything resembling that monster. No more magic, no more connection to any sort of dark temptation. Power corrupts. I won’t let that happen. I can’t take that chance. If someone like me, with Immortal blood running through my veins, loses it... hell will let loose. Quite literally, in fact.”

Ryker scrubbed his hand over his face, clearly frustrated with my answers. And then he said something that had my blood boiling. “So, the once almighty Mia Snow is nothing more than a coward now.”

His words sparked an instant anger in me and before I could check it, I was bolting from the log unsteadily, fuming at him, “How dare you? Say that again and see what happens!”

He kept his gaze steady, unflinching as he pointed out, “Nice to see your feisty edge is still there, but you threatening me means nothing now.”

“Excuse me?”

“You just told me you’re no longer using magic. ”

“I meant heavy magic. A flick of my fingers would still have you on your knees.”

His gaze shot to my hands and he stepped back abruptly.

I followed his gaze to see that my blue fire was sparking.

Drawing in a deep, centering breath, I strained more than I’d ever had to do before just to call it back.

“You had no idea you’d invoked your power,” Ryker said.

I turned away. “Go home. This discussion is over.”

I growled under my breath when, instead of heeding my words, I heard his footsteps following after me.

“We have a shitload of work to do,” I heard him say, more to himself than to me.

“This is unprecedented. It’s going to delay us. Dammit.”

“Delay what?” I muttered over my shoulder, hating that I couldn’t just ignore it, that I needed to know what his cryptic comment meant.

I was so used to taking point, to being in charge in basically every situation that it seemed to be ingrained in me now.

“Preparations for war.”

I spun back around, shocked. “War?”

“Draco has stepped up his game,” he said, his expression grave. “We need to respond with a decisive show of force.”

“A suicide mission, Ryker.”

“There’s no other choice.”

I scrutinized him for a moment. “You’re not telling me the whole story.”

“And if I’m not? You’ve refused to come back in anyway. ”



“After what happened... as I am now... I’m dangerous. A risk to you all.”

His eyes narrowed. “Like father, like daughter.”

“What the hell does that mean?”

“All this trouble started when Cornelius turned his back on his duty as an Immortal. Draco’s power grew so quickly because of it, because there was no one to stand in his way. Sure, Cornelius has tried to make up for it over the years, forming the Guardian Movement, for one. But his mistake still stands. A mistake that his own daughter is now making so many centuries later. Wow. Talk about a legacy.”

I couldn’t actually believe he’d uttered those words. Throwing all of that in my face? “Get the fuck away from me! We’re done here! Go!” I yelled, irately.

He held up his hands in an overly sarcastic way, as he called his green fire forth, preparing to teleport.

As usual, though, he couldn’t resist having the last word. “You can’t hold your power at bay for much longer. It will either eat you alive, or you’ll snap and lose control, becoming the very thing you’re so afraid of.”

He was gone in the next moment, but his parting shot had me frozen to the spot long after he’d teleported away.

He was wrong.

He was wrong about all of it.

Besides, if the Guardians were really in trouble and really needed my level of assistance, my father would have contacted me.

Ryker was either overreacting, or coming to find me had been more personal than business.

Blowing out a breath, I took in my surroundings properly for the first time since I'd been unceremoniously awoken.

I strode toward the farmhouse, glad I'd fixed it up and furnished it to my liking before I'd retreated to that phantasmal plane and sworn off magic.

I tried to push down everything Ryker had said in an attempt to get under my skin and influence me to putting an end to my exile.

I was done being everyone's go-to.

They didn't understand right now, but I was doing them a favor, sparing them.

Like I'd tried to explain to Ryker, I'd opened a door to darkness.

I was dangerous to everyone. That was why I'd left in the first place.

And it would stay that way.

I was retired.

End of story.

## Page 3

*Source Creation Date: August 4, 2025, 2:15 am*

3

~Ryker~

I took another gulp of my cocktail.

My usual. A Pink Lemonade Margarita spelled to give an extra kick that supernatural beings needed in order to feel a buzz.

And, hell, I really needed to take the edge off after my epic failure earlier.

Mia Snow was the most infuriatingly stubborn woman I'd ever known.

When she made a decision, she just would not entertain any other points of view, or even facts, that stood in opposition to it. Unfortunately for her, her continued retirement and infuriating exile couldn't continue and being left alone to her own devices wasn't an option. She had to come back in.

While she clearly wasn't up for listening to me , I knew someone who had mad persuasion skills, someone who wouldn't be so easy for her to dismiss, someone who wouldn't allow her to simply dismiss him.

Just the thought of him had me smiling like a lovesick fool .

I glanced around Polaris , tracking the path from my current position to the staircase in the distance leading up to his office.

I'd walked in over half an hour ago, yet there was still no sign of him.

Over the last three months, the blood bond between us had grown even stronger. There was no way he could've missed the fact that I was here. He could sense me anywhere now, at any distance.

I sank against the booth's luxurious white leather and polished off the rest of my drink. Pushing my glass aside, I heaved a heavy sigh.

I found myself becoming more agitated with every second that ticked on by when he still failed to show.

I knew, in my head, that it was an overly-sensitive reaction brought on by the shit show with Mia earlier and all the bull it had brought up for me, all the pain she'd put me through by running away twice now when things had gotten tough with this whole Covenant thing that Cornelius had concocted. First walking away from our relationship and now from everything and everyone who needed her.

But knowing I was overreacting wasn't enough for me to simply quash those emotions.

Before I knew it, I was downing the rest of my drink, then heading on up to the office of the infamous Lucian Black.

It took me a full ten minutes of navigating my way through his insanely crowded club floor, before I made it to the staircase at the rear.

I sprinted up the steps, taking them two at a time.

When I pushed on through the door to the hallway outside his office, I found Anton Rowan, Head of Security, stationed outside his door .

He smiled when he saw me, a genuine reaction, not merely the forced politeness he employed with everyone else.

He stepped forward and we shook hands.

“Ryker.”

“Anton,” I returned. “How’s your night been?”

“Eventful. Too much so,” he said, running his hand over his blond buzz cut, then shaking his head in dismay.

I offered him my sympathy for the bullshit he’d had to endure.

The last three months with Draco’s determination to invoke chaos throughout the supernatural world had made everyone more than a little nervous.

Many of them were running scared, but there were also those who had begun to react in a much more destructive manner. Rampaging, attacking innocents, going after beings with great power to raise their own standing in an ill-advised attempt to protect themselves from Draco’s wrath and his penchant for targeting the weak and bending them to his will.

Unfortunately, as an Ancient and a very public figure in the supernatural world, Lucian was a chief target.

His insistence on keeping Polaris open wasn’t helping and it’d had me on edge knowing he continued to make himself such a brazen target. But he believed that he was providing a much-needed service to the community, one even more necessary during such unsettling, dark times. Polaris offered an outlet to supernatural beings, a sanctuary where they could blow off steam and have their deepest desires fulfilled,

their needs catered to without judgment.

I had an idea about something I could implement to make things easier on Anton that would deter the troublemakers, but I had to run it by Lucian first. I didn't want to interfere with his business and overstep. When I saw something that needed fixing, my natural instinct was to take care of it, but I had to curb the impulse here. Lucian was a proud man and very protective of his club.

"I'll see what I can do," I told him.

"I appreciate it."

I took another step closer to the office door when voices reached my ear.

So that was why Lucian hadn't come down to the club floor. He was in a meeting.

Moving away, I told Anton, "I'll come back later."

To my surprise, he stepped into my path. "That won't be necessary. Go ahead."

It was strange enough that Anton had left his position by the door at all. He was very protective of Lucian and his privacy. But to actually encourage me to interrupt a meeting was downright shocking.

"What's going on?"

His face was an impassive mask.

When he refused to offer up an explanation, I blew out a frustrated breath. "Fine," I muttered as I opened the door.

He followed at my back as I stepped into Lucian's office.

What was happening? He always stayed outside, never coming on in with a guest. What was the root of his urgency and his uncharacteristic behavior?

My questions died an instant death as the scene inside stole all of my focus.

Lucian was lounging back on his leather couch, a drink in hand, smiling that alluring smile of his. He was dressed to the nines as usual in a designer pinstripe suit, his silky hair falling in ebony waves about his broad shoulders.

Of course, none of that was out of place.

The perfectly tailored suit .

The expensive scotch in hand.

The brazen confidence oozing a potent allure.

That was all very much classic Lucian Black.

What was off, and what was drawing my chief focus, was the large hand resting upon his thigh. Chunky rings encircled all four fingers like armor, abrading the smooth slate gray fabric as the being tightened their grip.

I gritted my teeth, my fists clenching as a white-hot anger sparked within me.

All right, jealousy. The root cause was fucking jealousy.

"Lucian, I believe your guest has overstayed his welcome," Anton spoke. He gestured at me while his gaze drilled into Lucian. "Wouldn't you agree?" he added pointedly.

Lucian rose, his expression fierce.

He was across the room right in front of Anton in the next moment.

He began to chastise him, the two of them moving off to the side and really getting into it.

It had my attention shifting straight to this guest of his, the being rising to his feet.

I saw him sniff the air, then abruptly turn to me.

His gaze raked over me in an assessing manner, just like mine was doing to him.

His thick hair was jet-black, wild on top, just shy of brushing his collar. His deep green eyes, similar to mine, stood out against his honey-brown tan making them all the more striking.

He was dressed a lot more casually than Lucian, yet all his shit was designer and expensive luxurious fabrics. I took in his charcoal long sleeve tee. The thing was so tight that it revealed every contour of his incredibly defined muscles beneath. He was at least half a foot taller than me, broad shoulders, major muscle mass. He filled out his straight-legged black slacks a little too well, the things barely stretching across his thick thighs, and only serving to highlight... other things.

As he strode up to me, power rolled off him, a power I'd become intimately familiar with over the last few months.

The might belonging to an Ancient.

He rubbed his facial hair as he studied me. It was one of those circle beards, anchored by a patch of hair in the center of his chin, that joined with either side of a mustache,



forming a circle.

“Magic-wielder,” he spoke in a low rumble.

“Ancient,” I returned.

In my peripheral vision I saw Anton storming to the door, pissed.

In the next second, it was slamming behind him so hard that the entire room shook.

Well, damn.

Grinning slyly, the Ancient held his hand out to me.

With a burst of speed, Lucian was at my side, snatching his hand. I heard a sharp crack and the Ancient hissed with pain.

“Do not ,” Lucian snarled at him.

The Ancient chuckled. “Come on now, Luc. Don’t be so greedy.”

Luc? Just how well did they know each other?

Lucian shoved him back, releasing his hand in the process.

The Ancient seemed startled. “You would deny me a power boost from your plaything during these dark and dangerous times?”

“You have misjudged the situation. He is not a plaything, not a power tap.” He caressed my hair lovingly, then slid his hand into mine, giving it a reassuring squeeze. “He is my beloved.”

A gasp escaped the Ancient. His sharply angled jaw ticked. “Ah, scusa ,” he gritted out. “I was unaware that you had... settled down.” The disdain in his voice was clear. He took a cautious step forward and addressed me. “A pleasure to make your acquaintance, youngling.”

Youngling. His derisive emphasis of that didn’t escape my notice.

He held out his left hand, devoid of those chunky rings. “Vincenzo Daza.”

Holy shit.

He chuckled, seeing my shock. “The name is familiar to you, I see.”

Damn right it was familiar.

Not just to me. To all Guardians.

He wasn’t merely known, he was on our top ten most-wanted list.

For centuries, he’d cut a path of destruction throughout the supernatural world, been responsible for horrific massacres of the human population, the razing of towns and villages. He was a merciless, relentless monster.

And right alongside him back then had been none other than Lucian.

Unlike him, though, Vincenzo hadn’t repented, hadn’t become a force for good. He’d continued on with his brutality, until a threat from Cornelius had forced him into hiding a century ago.

Now, here he was in Polaris , in a highly public space, as though he wasn’t a wanted being, as though he wasn’t standing before two Guardians.

“You have bigger fish,” he said, reading my reaction well.

“I’m a hell of a multitasker,” I fired back .

He grinned. “Hmm. Luc does enjoy fire in his... companions.” He took a step closer. “I should know. In fact, I am intimately familiar with his predilections.”

“Vincenzo,” Lucian hissed. “We are done here. Take your leave.”

“Done?” he scoffed. “I think not , amore mio .” He stepped up close to Lucian, “However, I will allow you time to consider my offer.”

In the next breath, he was gone with a burst of vampire speed, the office door opening and closing in a blur.

“Offer?” I queried, eyeing Lucian.

He sighed heavily and pulled away, striding over to his bar in the corner.

I watched him pour himself another scotch and down the whole thing.

When he set about pouring another, still not offering any response up, I’d just about had enough.

My night had been a shit show from start to finish and I’d reached my limit of bullshit.

“He’s a fugitive, Lucian. The Guardian Movement has been searching for him since he disappeared a century ago. And, not only were you sitting in here having a cozy fucking chat with him, but you also let him go. If it wasn’t for your damn inhibitor , I would’ve taken him down myself!”

He spoke calmly over his shoulder, “The complexities involved in dealing with a being like Vincenzo are incredibly difficult to explain. Besides, I never took you for such a stickler for the rules in any situation.”

“Don’t patronize me!”

“He makes a much better ally than an enemy, Ryker.”

“Oh, come the fuck on! That’s all bullshit! ”

Snarling, he tossed his glass at the wall, shattering it to pieces.

He spun around, his eyes flashing with anger.

The next thing I knew, my back was against the wall, his hands pinning my arms down by my sides as he loomed over me, barely holding his demon in check.

Seeing him lose it in such an uncharacteristic way told me just how much Vincenzo had gotten under his skin.

Was it more than a blast from the past, more than an overwhelming shock for him? Did he still... feel for him?

“You should not have interfered! You should have remained downstairs, summoned some semblance of patience for once , and waited for me to come to you!”

“To give him more time to feel you up? If I’d come in a few minutes later, would I have found him on his knees between your spread thighs with your dick buried down his throat?”

“His touch disgusts me. I endured it to appease him. I am working him, Ryker. Your

jealousy is unfounded. Not to mention, it's more than a little hypocritical, given who you spent your evening with."

Damn him.

I blew out a breath and scrubbed my hand over my face. "Why did you shove him away from me when he tried to shake my hand?" I'd been curious since the second it had happened.

His anger deflated, his grip on my arms loosening. "He wears a ring on his middle finger, something that was created off-realm by a particularly powerful faery with whom he had a fling three centuries ago. It has the ability to siphon power from magic-wielders."

Shit.

Off my stunned look, he said, "Exactly why I wished to keep you out of this, to keep him far away from you. He is quick to become obsessive when he sets his sights on something that is subsequently denied him."

"That ring and anything like it is majorly illegal here. It needs to be destroyed and he needs to be apprehended."

"He will not go easily. We are at war. Making an enemy of someone as formidable, resourceful and as manipulative as him would be foolish. The solution for the time being is to control him via fooling him into believing we are allies."

"Lucian," I said, shaking my head. "The guy's in your head. That's why Anton had me interrupt your meeting, isn't it?"

He let go of me and stepped back. "Anton believes that Vincenzo has influence over

me. He worries that I will revert to the monster that I was centuries ago if I allow him into my life once more.”

I tensed. “Ravager.”

“Yes.”

“And?”

“ And he is overreacting. I haven’t been that thing for a very long time, nor do I foresee any circumstance that will resurrect it.” He cupped the side of my face. “My life is with you, the Guardian Movement, continuing with our mission of safeguarding the supernatural world. Vincenzo is merely an unfortunate complication that must be dealt with using kid gloves.” He planted a chaste kiss on my forehead. “He means nothing to me. You are the only being I care for, the one whom I love.”

His reassurances and his reasoning were almost convincing.

They probably would have been completely if I wasn’t familiar with the hold a person could have over another when love was in play.

But he’d said all he possibly could, promised me all that he could, so if I refused to let it go now, we’d have a huge problem with us.

After everything that had happened with Mia, I had a really hard time trusting people.

I’d put that on Lucian enough times as it was in the early days of our relationship.

I couldn’t do it again or it would risk breaking us. He’d always been truthful with me, never done anything to violate my trust. I had to give him the benefit of the doubt now. He’d earned it several times over.

Besides, we had enough on our plates at the moment. We needed to be united.

“Okay,” I said, easing his hand from my face and holding it down between us. “I have your back with him if you need me, all right?”

“I appreciate that,” he said, smiling.

We pulled apart and I walked to his couch and slumped down heavily.

He followed me over and folded his arms across his chest regarding me shrewdly. “Given that Mia is not here with you, I take it that things didn’t go well.”

“She’s refused to come back in. After what she unleashed during the Maven Coven battle, she’s terrified of her own power now.”

He scrutinized me for a few moments.

“What?”

“You neglected to tell her about Cornelius, didn’t you?”

I tensed, my body going on high alert before I could tell it to calm the hell down.

I still wasn’t used to him knowing the truth about Mia.

But after she’d exposed her true power right in front of him when she’d battled Draco, it had become both impossible and pointless to deny what she truly was any longer. The proof had been there right in front of him.

I’d made a vow long ago to annihilate anyone who stumbled across her secret, figuring that they’d be a threat to her, ensuring she’d be in danger and hunted to the

ends of the earth for her rare power.

But Lucian had become the exception to all of that.

I knew him, I had faith in him. He'd protect her secret just as I had. It was in our best interests now with the whole Covenant thing. Plus, he knew what she meant to me, so he wouldn't hurt me like that by jeopardizing her. Furthermore, I'd noticed his growing affection for her ever since what had gone down in that phantasmal plane that Cornelius had forced us into. He had a definite affinity for her.

No, he'd never hurt her in any way.

"I'd planned on it," I told him. "It was actually supposed to be my trump card. But then I saw just how majorly unstable her magic is."

"She hasn't practiced for months, being secluded away in the phantasmal plane of her own making, which you determined was devoid of magic."

"It's more than that. She's tried to shut down her power completely and it's having adverse effects, leaking out, sparking without her permission. If I'd told her about what's happened to her father, she would've had an emotional reaction to the news. And something like that, with her magic unstable, could've had cataclysmic repercussions." With a heavy sigh, I rose and walked to the floor-to-ceiling windows, looking out over the club floor. My back to him, I admitted, "She's dangerous right now, made worse by her refusing to listen to me. I can help her, but she won't let me."

"Give her some time to acclimate to being back on this plane and then I will go to her."

I nodded. "Hearing it from someone else might be the push she needs."



“Moreover, I am a professional persuader.”

I chuckled at his use of my phrase. “That you are.”

“She won’t delay for long, not with war upon us. She is needed.”

“More than that,” I murmured somberly. “Without her, we will all fall.”

“It won’t come to that.”

But this time his reassurances fell on deaf ears as I took in the hundreds of supernatural beings enjoying themselves, letting loose and being free, in the club below. “They’ve got no idea how bad things really are.”

“It’s better that way,” Lucian said, coming up behind me. “It would only cause mass panic throughout the supernatural world. Things are already bad enough due to Draco’s attacks. Knowing the Guardian Movement has lost its leader would be too much for them to deal with, a responsibility that we must shoulder instead and shield them from.”

“Yeah,” I murmured.

He leaned in close to me, breathing me in. “In the midst of such upheaval and dangerous uncertainty, we must take the brief moments we have between battles to de-stress and find comfort in one another, to remember what we truly fight for.”

He trailed his tongue along the side of my neck, growling low in his throat as he tasted me.

Fuck me. That sound did things to me.

He pressed up tightly to me, his chest to my back.

He ground against me, his hard cock rubbing between my ass cheeks .

It had me sucking in a sharp breath. “Yes,” I rasped.

He fisted his hand in my hair, wrenching my head back.

Our eyes met over my shoulder.

His were on fire with barely-contained desire.

I shuddered with need as he whispered in my ear, “Tonight I will take you wholly. I will feed you my cock, taking your mouth, your perfect little ass.”

Releasing my hair, he trailed his warm, wet tongue up the other side of my neck.

He had me jolting in the next second, when he cupped my cock over my jeans. He gave it a firm squeeze, forcing a groan from me.

He ran his hand up and down my shaft. “Your cock is like steel beneath my fingers already.”

The next thing I knew, he was shoving me into the glass. “Brace your palms against it.”

I complied instantly.

He drew my jacket off my shoulders, letting it pool on the floor at my feet. Then he pulled my tee up over my arms and head and tossed it away across the room, baring my chest.

His mouth was at my ear, whispering huskily, “There are hundreds of them down there. Any one of them could see you. Just a glance up here and they’ll witness you bared for my pleasure, you submitting to my touch as I own your delectable body.”

I shuddered at his words.

Taking in the crowds, a thrill ran through me, something I hadn’t expected. I was getting off on the idea of being caught, the illicit nature of the entire situation rolling over me. Sure, I’d screwed around in public before, outdoors and all that. Sometimes waiting just wasn’t an option. But strangers watching me being owned by a dirty, dominant force like Lucian Black was a whole different thing.

A surprised cry escaped me as he began flicking and tugging at my nipple rings. “You have lived for several ages, yet you have barely scratched the surface of the depths of your erotic desires. I have so much more to teach you.”

“God, yes.”

He rolled my nipples between his fingers, sending sparks of pleasure erupting through my body.

Then, with a burst of speed, he jerked my jeans down to my thighs. A sigh of relief escaped me as my cock sprung free from its tight confines.

“Mmm. No underwear to get in the way. You know how much I enjoy you this way.”

He stifled my response with a single finger.

With a feather-light touch he traced a path along my lower abdomen, just shy of brushing my throbbing cock.

I trembled, fisting my hands on the glass.

He must've caught me looking out at the club floor, because he said, "What if it was her down there? Just her looking up at us? I'd call her up here, make her watch as I buried my big, thick cock in your ass, stretching your exquisitely tight hole. I'd make her spread her legs wide, her pussy so wet from watching you having your ass filled. I'd shove your face into her wetness, forcing you to eat her out over and over, even after she screamed for a reprieve. There would be no mercy. I'd fuck you until I'm on the verge of coming, then I'd pull out, shove you to your knees and plunge my cock down your throat, making you swallow every drop of my cum. The dirty act alone would push you over the edge, having you coming all over her delicious breasts." He scraped his teeth over my earlobe. "How would you like that? "

Holy hell!

His teasing touches, his dirty words, invoking Mia and revealing his desire for her to be a part of our lovemaking... it all had me losing my shit. I was sweating like crazy, my mouth so dry I didn't know if I could actually speak. I'd never felt so turned on, so desperate in all my life.

Lucian knew exactly what he was doing. He was so fucking good. I was consumed by need. Nothing else mattered, nothing else existed but the overwhelming desperation to feel sated in a way only he could provide.

His hands slid down to my ass cheeks, squeezing them roughly.

I squirmed, which earned me a sharp slap to my left cheek.

"Be still. Keep your hands tight to the glass."

He began fisting my hard length, slow and easy at first, then graduating to fast and

wild.

“Fuck!” I cried out, throwing my head back.

“That’s it. Take it,” he whispered hauntingly in my ear.

I almost shot through the glass when he employed his vampire speed.

Clawing at the wall, I gritted my teeth against the erotic torture.

The pleasure was too much all at once.

I couldn’t catch my breath.

Ragged curses tore from my throat.

I broke position, my right hand leaving the glass and clamping down on his wrist, trying to push him away, or get him to ease up at least. But, without my magic, Lucian was able to simply bat away my efforts.

“Glass!” he snarled.

Grunting, I slapped my hand back in front of me.

Sweat poured down my chest, my face, everywhere.

My entire body was shuddering .

My balls drew tight, my abs clenching.

I was going to come. Hard.

But then his hand fell away abruptly.

I couldn't believe it.

I couldn't stand it.

I'd never gotten to that point before, only to have it mercilessly wrenched away.

My body was on fire. I was fucking shaking. "Lucian!"

"You are at my mercy now. You come when I decide."

"But—"

In a flash of speed, he wrenched me away from the glass and spun me around to face him.

He gripped my jaw, jerking me closer. "Perhaps you will think twice next time about breaking position without my permission."

That's why he'd left me hanging so fucking brutally?

Before I had a chance to utter a vicious rebuttal, he shoved me against his desk, commanding, "Feet wide apart. Stick out that mouthwatering ass."

Fighting against my instincts and no small amount of uncomfortableness at being given such an order, I did as he asked. My need to come was greater than my pride. He had me out of my mind with it.

I caught a blur of speed in my peripheral vision and then he was right behind me again.

“Good,” he praised me.

Despite myself, I smiled, the praise warming me.

I heard a squirting sound, but I knew better than to look over my shoulder and break position again. I couldn't imagine going through that a second time.

His suit jacket brushed against the backs of my thighs as he stepped up close.

“Spread your ass open. ”

Swallowing hard, I reached back and did as he wanted, parting my cheeks and holding them open.

“Mmm,” he moaned. “Such a tight little bud. Always so desperate to be stretched open.”

Something warm and wet swept over my sensitive hole, stilling my mind and my body instantly.

It circled lightly for a few moments, coating my ass. It had to be his finger dipped in lube.

Then he began mashing my hole. Holy hell.

Moan after moan escaped me.

I found myself pushing back, silently begging for more.

When he'd first done it to me, it had been unlike anything I'd felt before.

That hadn't changed.

I was still beside myself with the glorious sensations. It was so fucking good.

"Yes!" I cried out. "Lucian!"

He stepped up the torrent of pleasure.

I was losing my mind when he breached me, his thick finger sinking into my ass.

But then he stilled all too soon.

I panted, squirming against him.

"Beg me."

And, hell, I did.

"Please!"

"Give me more," he pressed.

"Please, Lucian. Fuck my ass! Now, dammit!"

"As you wish," he snarled dangerously.

He drove his finger further, deeper and deeper.

I bellowed when he twisted it, then jerked it back out suddenly.

And then it plunged back in again.



He did it several more times, driving me to distraction, until I was a begging, whimpering mess sprawled across his desktop, my ass up in the air, struggling unsuccessfully to hump his finger.

He chuckled, clearly enjoying making me squirm.

“Such a desperate little ass,” he tormented. “Is this what you desire?”

He thrust back inside me, shocking me with the added thickness. Two, or more fingers, I guessed.

I grunted, struggling to accommodate the invasion as he drove as deep as he could go.

When he unceremoniously withdrew them, a whimper escaped me, the emptiness crushing.

“Shh, my beloved,” he crooned, gliding his hands over my ass.

With a jarring burst of speed, he flipped me onto the table, my back across the black marble top, my cock jutting up toward the ceiling, precum oozing from the tip and trickling down my shaft.

It jerked violently as I watched him pull out his mammoth length and coat it from root to tip with lube.

He pocketed the tube in his suit jacket pocket, stepped out of his pants, then moved up close to the desk.

He ran his lube-coated hand up and down my cock, making me moan out loudly.

Then he squeezed the base of my shaft like a makeshift cock ring and plunged his

cock into my ass.

“Fuck!” I cried out, bucking furiously on the desk, my ass clenching around his thickness. “Yes!”

He sawed in and out of me at an easy pace, driving deeper, bit by bit with every thrust.

A shock of intense pleasure took me by surprise when he hit that sweet spot in my depths.

“Fuck!” I roared, as he mashed against my prostate, over and over.

He shifted his weight. “Brace yourself,” he warned .

I stretched my arms over my head and grasped the edge of the desk tightly.

And then he brought his supernatural speed into play, jackhammering me, reaming my ass mercilessly.

All I could do was bellow out into the room. It was too intense to breathe steadily, let alone think, or even speak a full sentence.

My cock strained around his constricting grip.

I was trembling, bucking, screaming, the need to come straddling the line between pleasure and pain.

“Please,” I begged again.

His glazed eyes met mine, his jaw drawn tight, his muscles bunching and straining as

he struggled to hold back his own pleasure.

He grinned slyly.

And then he abruptly released my cock.

Blood, pleasure and hell knew what else tore through me.

“Come! Come for me!” he commanded.

I couldn’t have held it any longer even if he’d ordered me to.

I snapped, my cock jerking violently, releasing a torrent of cum all over my naked chest, splashing up to my neck, my chin, pumping and pumping like mad.

Before I could catch my breath, he pulled out, then climbed onto the desk, stripping his suit jacket and shirt off with his vamp speed as he went. His tie hung down between us as he straddled me, gliding through the cum coating my chest.

My head full of the ecstasy that was still taking time to subside, the moment overtook me and I tugged on his tie, brought it to my mouth and cleaned the cum off with my tongue.

“Holy hell,” Lucian choked .

His overcome reaction only excited me more and I reached out and grasped his ass cheeks. I jerked him to me and lurched forward, driving my mouth down onto his cock.

I took him deep, swallowing him whole, making him jerk and cry out in pleasure.

The dirty act of tasting his precum, lube and my ass all over his cock had mine stiffening again.

I deep throated him, rolling his balls between my fingers until he was beside himself, groaning, moaning, then growling.

I reached around him and eased two fingers into his ass. A snarl escaped him and I looked up to see him fully vamped out, his features twisted into their demonic form, his fangs glistening in the muted office light.

He fisted his hand in my hair, tugging painfully and taking me closer to the edge as he fucked my face, lost in bliss.

I twisted my fingers deep in his ass and he jolted, his body going taut.

His cock jerked in my mouth and he roared as he exploded, his cum shooting down my throat.

I struggled to swallow it all, some of it oozing down my chin.

Lucian collapsed on top of me, seemingly spent.

Or, so I thought until I heard a telltale snap.

He buried his fangs in my throat.

The initial sharp pain gave way to all-consuming pleasure as he drank deeply.

I couldn't stand it. Every part of my body was over-sensitized, on absolute overload, and I came hard again, shuddering beneath Lucian as the pleasure overwhelmed me .

He pulled back, his fangs retracting, and looked down at me, adoration sparking in his eyes.

He smiled as he let out a contented sigh and wrapped his arms around me.

“You are giving me a run for my money now.”

I looked around and down at the state of us half-clothed, covered in sweat, cum and blood.

“Good thing you have a shower in here. We should get cleaned up,” I said, starting to sit up.

Lucian tightened his hold around me, stopping me. “Not yet,” he whispered sleepily in my ear. “Stay with me.”

I smiled and kissed his cheek. “I love you.”

“I love you too,” he said, relaxing into me.

## Page 4

*Source Creation Date: August 4, 2025, 2:15 am*

4

~Lucian~

Glancing at my Rolex on my bedside table, I was surprised to see that I'd once again slept in.

I had always been a stickler for adhering to a strict schedule, to rising early and making the most out of the day. I never normally needed the assistance of an alarm clock to rouse me awake. My internal clock was infallible.

Or, it had been.

Until Ryker Morgan had started sleeping in my bed.

Having him with me, against me, brought me a peace that I had never felt before in my many centuries of existence. It was a sense of tranquility that my mind and body alike did not wish to leave, that sentiment consequently overriding my internal clock.

I looked down to see him sound asleep, his arm thrown across my abs, his head resting on my pecs.

The fact that either of us were able to find any semblance of peace given the situation surrounding us was a true testament to our relationship.

It had taken Draco only three days to recover from Cornelius' assault during the Maven Coven battle. And his ire at facing temporary defeat at the hands of his enemy

had been fierce, something he had taken out on the supernatural world.

It had only worsened over the last few months. He'd overrun and decimated many supernatural strongholds, targeting all species indiscriminately. If that wasn't enough, he'd turned hundreds of supernatural beings, recruiting them to his side on the false promises of power, wealth and glory. As a result, we weren't only battling him and his endless devastation, we were forced to fight against our own people.

A couple of weeks ago, he'd dealt a brutal blow to the Guardian Movement, one that we still had yet to recover from.

We were overwhelmed and unprepared, forced to respond reactively and defensively, which made it impossible for us to gain any traction in this war.

As the most powerful magic-wielder, with Mia in exile, a great deal of the burden had been placed on Ryker's shoulders. Despite his denial, I knew he was close to burning out.

His relentless search for Mia really hadn't helped matters either.

He'd put everything into finding her. Not only his magic, but his hopes also, believing her to be the key to winning this war and stopping Draco. He'd assumed she'd just needed a reprieve and that she would be ready to rejoin the fight when he'd found her.

Unfortunately, he'd been proven wrong.

She was so very far from ready.

I would allow her some time and then I would go to her, employ my powers of persuasion to bring her home.

Even at his most agitated, Ryker was soft with her. He treated her like she was precious, with kid gloves as though she were something breakable. While his intentions were noble and admirable, it also meant that he would not push her past her comfort zone.

I didn't see her that way, believing instead that she needed to experience a heavy, dominant hand. It was exactly what I would employ to ensure she returned to the fold.

Unfortunately, the state of her that Ryker had described meant that would only be the beginning. It would take a great deal to ready her for the threat we now faced.

She was afraid. The power I'd seen her unleash that day had been dark and she had not been ready to taste it, nor to accept that part of her. Like Ryker had been before we'd come together, she was repressed. Most magic-wielders were. They were afraid of losing control over any aspect of their lives, afraid it would allow the potential for darkness to swallow them whole.

I had also seen Ryker touch another level of power that he'd never accessed before. That green lightning he'd sparked to life in an attempt to stop Cornelius from pulling us into that phantasmal plane. But it hadn't scared him. It was because he'd accepted the dark as well as the light within him a long time ago. And that had occurred decades ago when he'd been forced to face off with his father.

I couldn't help thinking that things would not be so dire right now if Cornelius had gone about making his vision of the Covenant a reality in a different manner.

Instead of being transparent, he'd deceived us all, even his own daughter. He'd also alienated, threatened, and even attacked, his urgency getting the best of him when he was questioned. Had he really expected all of us to go along with something so profound, life-changing and irreversible, without time to think it over and discuss it?



He'd clearly lost his mind and his ability for rational thought as soon as Draco had resurfaced. And now we were all paying the price.

A grating buzzing cut through my maudlin thoughts and I turned my head to see Ryker's phone flashing on his bedside table.

I tensed automatically when I saw the caller ID.

Jaxon Silver.

The wild card of our yet-to-be-solidified Covenant.

Just what we didn't need.

Not to mention, I was sure the history between him and I would make things that much more complicated and our task that more difficult to accomplish.

Alas, Ryker and I had determined that he was most definitely to be a part of it, so we'd both have to get over it. Other things mattered a great deal more than old grudges.

The fate of the entire supernatural world rested upon our shoulders.

I watched Ryker stir as the buzzing graduated to a ringing.

I smiled with amusement as I recognized the ringtone. Hungry Like the Wolf by Duran Duran. He had a wonderful sense of humor.

"Ryker," I called, giving him a couple of gentle nudges when he failed to wake fully. He was a heavy sleeper in general, but a lot more so lately.

He opened his eyes with a disgruntled groan. “What’s wrong?” he rasped.

“You have a call from Jaxon.”

“Fuck,” he grumbled. “It’s way too early.”

“It’s late afternoon,” I informed him.

He shot bolt upright. “What? That late? Shit.”

“We were up late. ”

The truth was, it was a great deal more than that.

It was the burnout.

He rolled over and snatched up his phone, swiping it quickly, and answering, “Hey, Jax.”

Jax? They’d grown closer than I’d realized.

He tossed the covers off of himself and pushed out of bed, striding back and forth in nothing but his delicious navy boxers.

“Yeah, I found her last night. What? No. I didn’t want to tell you until we had her back with us. I didn’t want to get your hopes up. Left her? Never. She kicked me out. She doesn’t want anything to do with any of this right now. She’s scared. Yeah, about what happened with Draco. We’re going to give her some time, then Lucian will try to convince her.”

He turned, his gaze meeting mine, unease bleeding from him.

He looked away quickly, as he spoke down the line, “He won’t. He cares about her, just like we do. He’d never—absolutely not. You need to calm down. Yeah, I know how long it’s been. I’m doing everything I can, but forcing her back won’t work. She’s not the type of person you can bark orders to.”

He listened, fisting his hands with agitation.

Then, he blew out a breath and he scrubbed his hand over his face. “Look, you’ve trusted me this far, trust me this last leg, okay? I’ll bring her back to us.”

He jerked the phone away and grumbled with displeasure. “He hung up on me,” he said, turning back to me. With a sigh, he tossed his phone back onto the bedside table and climbed back into bed.

“Wolves are difficult to calm at the best of times. With the subject matter being his apparent mate, it’s virtually impossible. He won’t be at ease until they are reunited and he has completed his claim.”

He leaned back against the pillows. “She’s causing us a major fucking headache. If she’d accepted what Cornelius had told her months ago everything would be different. We would’ve been ready when Draco returned and we could’ve cut him down before he’d decimated the Maven Coven.”

“Perhaps, but there is no point regretting what we cannot change.” I slid my fingers through his hair, stroking his thick locks softly. “Besides, you and I may not have come together if that had been the case and if things had followed that ideal path.”

He planted a sweet kiss on my cheek, telling me earnestly, “I would’ve regretted that more than anything else.”

I smiled and wrapped my arms around him.

He had such a beautiful, pure heart. So much love to give. It was something to be treasured.

Unfortunately, it also made him vulnerable.

But I was here now and I would safeguard it to the best of my ability, something that would take a great deal when Mia returned.

She'd already wounded him once. I wouldn't allow her to do so again. In fact, until she was able to open herself as was required for the Covenant, I wouldn't allow her to get close to him.

"You are dealing well with the situation between Jaxon and Mia." Much better than I'd expected. In fact, he hadn't brought it up at all and when Ryker was upset about something, he had to vocalize it and talk it to death.

Shrugging his shoulders, he said, "Once upon a time, I did think she and I were destined for one another. But so much has happened. Everything's shifted. For me, a lot of that is because of you, because of what we have. Also, Jaxon is good for her. He's a wild, rough and tumble guy. He can break through that repressed part of her and bring out her wild side, coax her to let go and open up. It's exactly what's needed for the Covenant. We all need to be united. Mind, body and soul, according to Cornelius. What I am worried about, though, is you and Mia."

"Me and her?" I asked, surprised.

"You two are the only ones that aren't connected. Jaxon and I both share a connection with her. He's her mate and I'm her first love. But the only interaction you've had with Mia was a brief battle of wills and low level threats until I joined the party. I know you're sexually attracted to her, but it won't be enough."

“Ryker, I—”

“Look, I know it’s because of me. You’re pissed that she hurt me. But I’m over it. I need you to be too.”

“I will spend some time with her when she returns.”

“Good,” he said, stroking my arm. “Thank you.” He yawned, then rubbed his eyes. “I guess we should roll out of bed finally, huh?”

“Why don’t you rest today? There have been very few quiet days like this since Draco returned. We should take advantage of it while we can.”

He frowned. “I can’t just—”

“You can and I beseech you to do just that.”

“Well, what about you?”

“I must continue with my search for those Guardians who scattered, following the blow Draco dealt us a couple of weeks ago. I am close to retrieving them all. Only half a dozen more still elude me.”

“I can help you with a spell that—”

“No .”

He jolted at the harshness of my tone .

I laid my hand on his shoulder. “I’m sorry. I just want you to conserve your magic whenever possible.”

“I know you’re worried, but I can do this. I need to do this, to operate at this level. Everyone is counting on me. With Cornelius and Mia out of the picture, I’m the strongest magic-wielder remaining. No one else can do what I can.”

I took his hands and held them between us, drawing his gaze as I implored him, “I understand the predicament fully, Ryker. So, deal with those matters that require high-level magic, but delegate the rest. Like this tracking task which I am taking point on.”

He kissed my hands. “Okay, yeah. You’re right.”

“Good,” I said, releasing him and climbing out of bed. “Stay here and rest. When I return, we’ll—”

“Lucian,” he interrupted.

“Yes?”

“If you don’t put some clothes on in the next few seconds, there’s no way you’re going to be leaving here at all.”

I glanced down at myself. Oh . I’d forgotten I had slept naked. I laughed. “You’re insatiable.”

“You’re lucky I can keep up with the stamina of a vampire.” He clasped his hands behind his head, flashing me a self-satisfied grin, looking very pleased with himself. “What was it you said? I’m giving you a run for your money?”

Cocky bastard. “Yes. You most definitely are.” With a burst of speed, I snatched my black silk robe off the back of the door and covered myself. “Rest, my beloved.” I made my way to the ensuite bathroom, calling over my shoulder. “I will have my

staff prepare a hearty breakfast for you when I leave.”

I was just about to step into the bathroom when I felt Ryker’s pulse spike dramatically.

I spun on my heel as a curse escaped him, to find him hunched over in my bed, his hands slapped to his ears.

“Ryker!” I cried, speeding to his bedside. “What is it? What’s harming you?”

“Get... back,” he eked out.

I did as he asked.

A moment later, he brought his hands away from his ears. They were trembling with the effort as he held them before him, turning his palms upward. Green fire flared to life upon them. He brought them together and vibrant sparks erupted upon their contact, extinguishing in the next moment.

“Shit,” he breathed, as his pulse began calming, the pain that’d been etched into his features dissipating.

“What was that?” I asked.

He climbed out of bed, telling me, “After what happened to Cornelius, I set up an alert.”

“An alert?”

“Yeah. To let me know if any heavy magic of his fell. His magic powers several vital supernatural institutions—pillars, if you will.”

“And that’s what you just felt? One of them has fallen?”

He nodded.

“When a magic-wielder dies, all of their existing magic, any spells that they have conjured, cease to be.”

“It’s not only death that can cause that. He could be alive, but severely incapacitated.” He snapped his fingers twice and the both of us were instantly showered and dressed. “Either way, I need to fix this.”

“What has just fallen?”

His expression was grave as he took a beat, then revealed, “The Guardian Compound. The barrier protecting it.”

“Holy hell.”

“I need to head there to see if I can conjure something strong enough in its place.”

“I’ll go with you.”

He nodded and held out his hand, conjuring his magic to teleport us.

The situation was deteriorating quicker than either of us had imagined.

We’d thought we’d have a little more time at our disposal.

More time to bring Mia back into the fold.

More time to complete the Covenant ritual.



Now, though, with the Immortal's magic already falling, we were out of time.

## Page 5

*Source Creation Date: August 4, 2025, 2:15 am*

5

~Jaxon~

“Fuck,” I ground out as my back smacked against the trunk of an old oak tree.

The impact had it shuddering, almost tearing from its tough roots.

Fucking vamps had some major power in their shoves.

Growling, I pushed off it, flashing my claws, my wolf teeth dropping, as I stomped toward the asshole vamp who’d tossed me a hundred feet across my pack lands into the trunk with his super speed.

Three of his buddies had joined him now, all of them snarling at me.

I was pissed that I hadn’t sensed that shithead’s attack in time.

As Alpha of the largest pack in the world, my instincts could be matched.

But there was a hell of a lot going down right now.

My pack was under attack, a brutal territory invasion that had come out of nowhere.

No warning, nothing .

They’d hit us hard and fast, outnumbering my combatants ten to one.

We were in deep shit.

But I wasn't going to go down without a fight.

This was my pack, my wolves, my family. It was our land and our lives we were fighting for.

And these assholes were going to suffer through some major pain for trying to fuck with that.

Coming onto our territory? What the ever loving shit were they playing at?

Roaring, I leapt through the air at the two vamps flanking the one who'd attacked me. With two swipes of my claws, I tore their fucking heads off.

The other two ran at me.

Kicking one of them back, I twisted my body, grabbed the other one by the scruff of his shirt, then drove my clawed hand through his chest. I grabbed hold of his demonic heart and tore it through his open chest cavity.

Tossing it on the ground, I watched as his now dead body hit the ground, reduced to what all vamps were when they were killed—a mass of decomposed flesh and bone, partial ash, and a pool of blood. The amount of decomposition depended on their age. The blood on how much they'd consumed the day of their death.

It had been a long time since I'd murdered indiscriminately like this and the sight of so much death caught me off guard for a couple of seconds.

That was all the last vamp needed to take another shot.

I felt his talons digging into my shoulder, piercing through the hard leather of my jacket, just before he buried his fangs in my throat.

I fisted my hand in his hair, intending to wrench him off me and snap his neck at the same time with the force I was about to use, when he did it for me, jerking back and staggering a couple of feet.

I frowned as I took in his now dazed eyes, his uneasy movements.

Was he high?

Licking my blood off his lips, he spoke, “What are you?”

“I’m the goddamn Alpha, fucker.”

He shook his head, trying to shake off whatever had come over him. “No. Your blood is—”

He never finished his sentence.

A shot rang out, his body jerked.

He was dead before he hit the ground.

In his place stood my Beta, Tyson, his pistol armed with wooden bullets still in firing position. “You all right?” he asked, gesturing to my neck.

I touched the bite and my hand came away drenched in blood.

No wonder I was kind of lightheaded.

There wasn't time for that, though. I shrugged it off. "It'll heal."

He frowned. "What was that bloodsucker going on about? Your blood?"

"No fucking clue, T." I turned, scanning my pack lands. "Anyhow, we've got bigger shit. Focus up."

After hours of back-to-back fighting, we finally had a few moments to take a damned breath.

"Jesus fucking Christ," I gasped, my stomach churning at what I saw.

Acres of land were charred beyond repair, lodges were going up in flames. Others were already burned to the ground. All I could hear was screaming, snarling and growling, as the battle raged on .

I'd already had my secondary enforcers lead an evacuation of the women and children.

But now my army was being decimated.

If it wasn't bad enough worrying about the vamps with their speed, there were also traitorous wolves from hell knew where following whoever the fuck was leading the charge to take us out.

The worst, though, were the magic-wielders. We had no defense against them. They were the ones who'd set everything on fire. It was how it had happened so fast, why it had been impossible to stop.

"What do you want to do, Alpha?"

I watched more enemy soldiers coming in from the valley, making their way up to the mountain top where we were at.

So much destruction and devastation had already gone down.

I had to stop them from wiping out what was left. My top enforcers, the homes still standing.

But as I saw magic coming from the second wave of soldiers, I knew we needed help. The only way to fight magic was with fucking magic.

“Gotta call for help.”

I shoved my hand into my jacket pocket and pulled out something I’d kept close for months now, figuring I’d be needing it sooner or later with the way things were playing out everywhere because of Draco.

Rubbing my fingers over the raised letters of the strange card, I called out, “ Subitis.”

I heard Tyson gasp as a green glow emanated from it.

A bright spark exploded, then died out a second later.

I stared at the card for another couple of beats.

When nothing else happened, I stuffed it back in my jacket. “Guess that was it. ”

“I hope so. If that SOS didn’t go through we’re screwed,” Tyson said.

He’d been holding it together real well, especially because he always liked to be prepared for every eventuality, and this attack had come out of nothing. But now we

had a second, I could see he was freaking, right on the edge.

I had to get him to focus. He needed a task.

I slapped his shoulder. “Get me word on the women and kids. Make sure they’re on the road to our safehouses.”

“On it, Alpha,” he said, snapping into action and speeding off to get it done.

I let loose a command in Wolf Tongue for the pack to come together. It sounded like a ferocious howl to outsiders.

Every pack member in the area stopped and eyed me.

And then, as I bounded over to the edge of the mountaintop, I felt the ground rumble beneath my feet, the thunder of the fifty members left standing following my command.

I looked over the mountainside, seeing the enemy’s second wave was just a klick out now. I cursed under my breath just as my wolves lined up either side of me, a row forming at my back too.

I spoke to them in Wolf Tongue as we all braced ourselves in an attack stance, reminding them that we didn’t cower in the face of any threat, that we’d fight to the last breath to defend our territory, our home, our people, our family. We’d show no mercy.

Roars sounded all around me.

And then silence fell.

An awful silence.

It was the last thing I needed.

It had me focusing on the negative .

Normally, I could keep up with the positive, maintaining morale, which was vital as the leader everybody was counting on.

But, I was fading, big time.

I'd lost too much blood from hours of fighting. Taking that bite from that cocky vamp really hadn't helped with that.

All I could think about was how fucking brutal it was going to be when this next wave hit.

There was no way we could push them back. There were hundreds of them.

We weren't going to survive it.

Half a klick out now.

I shifted my weight, clenching and unclenching my fists over and over.

Quarter of a klick.

"Hold the line!" I bellowed.

A couple hundred feet.



A blinding flash of light had all of us hissing at the pain to our sensitive wolf vision.

I'd barely gotten over it when a shimmering blue wall shot up from the ground, going up about fifty feet.

The enemy hit.

And they bounced right off the blue wall, flying back several feet.

Goddamn.

What the—

A sweet scent hit me hard. Straight in the gut.

Coconut and strawberries, mixed with some kind of high-end perfume.

Nah, it couldn't be.

I swung my head to the right, shocked by what I saw.

So much so that I had to do a double take.

"Mia," I choked out .

"Alpha," she returned with a sexy wink.

She turned away, concentrating on the magic she was streaming to hold that wall up.

Her long, blue and black hair was blowing about all wild in the wind. Even though it was pitch black, except for the fires raging and the explosion of magic coming from

the enemy, I could make her out just fine with the aid of my wolf vision. She was wearing that tight fancy ass coat, black pants clinging to her shapely thighs that gave way to some fuck-me heels.

We were in the middle of a brutal battle, but just the sight of her had my cock rock hard, my whole body on edge wanting to throw her down and taste every inch of her.

After all this time she was here.

That ache deep in my gut that I'd had since she'd been forced away from me finally eased off.

I jolted out of my thoughts as vamps and wolves of the enemy hit the wall over and over with their full strength.

None of them could even make a dent.

Then the magic-wielders went at it, coming hard and fast.

She called out to them, "Turn back around! You will not breach this barrier, amateurs. "

That was the woman I remembered. The woman I'd never been able to forget.

The enemy stepped up its game, tens of them trying to tear at the wall, all the magic wielders striking all at once.

I watched Mia's eyes narrow. They were pissing her off.

She pulled her right hand away, holding the wall with only one.

Blue electricity circled her right hand. But then it snuffed out. I heard her cursing and grunting, as she shook out her fingers, fighting to get it back .

Shit.

Ryker's report about her being afraid of her own power rang in my head. Was this the fallout? Fuck, if it was, we were all in deep shit.

Relief sung through me when I saw that electricity spark to life again.

She thrust her palm forward.

A bolt of lightning shot through the wall and exploded on the other side, tons of smaller bolts scattering all over the enemy.

As it hit, it destroyed them instantly. They just evaporated like they'd never been there.

Jesus Christ .

Her first hit took out a good fifty.

She didn't let up, striking again and again.

Just as she was about to strike for the fourth time, what was left of the crowd parted suddenly.

She jerked her right hand back, her eyes wide with fear. I heard her pulse spiking.

"Mia?" I called.

“Draco,” she gasped.

I followed her gaze to see the thing she was so scared of striding through the gap in the crowd.

A giant son of a bitch holding an ancient-looking sword dripping with blood.

A cloak blew behind him, hanging off his shoulders by a chain. He was shirtless, but his chest was covered with tats. Words, it looked like. His worn brown pants that seemed made out of some kind of animal skin creaked as he stomped toward us with his hefty boots squelching in the mud.

He rubbed his shaved head, glaring at Mia for a second, until he jerked his head at me, staring in a strange and very unsettling way .

He sheathed his sword and stopped in front of the wall.

He pressed his hand to it and I was shocked when he didn’t go flying back like the others.

He thrust his fist into it. Mia cried out and the wall shuddered.

He did it again and Mia screamed and fell to her knees.

“Fear has made you weak!” he bellowed at her.

“Mia!” I dropped to my knees beside her.

Her left hand was still up keeping the wall in place. But she was shuddering and wincing in pain.

Wrapping my arms around her, I helped her back to her feet.

“I am immensely disappointed, sorceress,” Draco told her.

Ignoring him, she turned to me. “Pull your wolves back.” She thrust her palm at the wall, a ball of blue fire hitting Draco square in the chest, knocking him back. “Get them out of here,” she told me on a shaky breath.

I gave the order to my wolves and they sprinted away.

“You too,” she urged me.

I shook my head. “No. I’m not leaving you.”

“You won’t survive him,” she warned.

“Then I won’t.”

There was no fucking way I was letting her out of my sight again. I wasn’t going to be separated from my mate again. Three months was more than long enough.

She reached out and stroked my cheek. Heat flared between us. “Jax,” she breathed, shaking her head. “No.”

“Sorceress!” Draco roared. “Drop the shield! You know you cannot hold it much longer. If you heed my warning, I will spare you. For now.”

“Never,” she seethed.

“Then you will suffer greatly. I will take my time breaking you. I’ve found it extremely satisfying doing so with my old friend.”

Mia blanched. “Old friend?”

“The holier-than-thou Cornelius Martel.”

The winged bastard who’d attacked me?

“Oh my God,” Mia whispered.

I watched her clench her fist, tears filling her eyes.

Draco went on, “Information he reluctantly revealed to me led me here today.” He jerked his head my way with a creepy smile. “To you , Alpha.”

“What the hell does that mean?” I demanded. “Why are you doing this? Attacking my pack, my home?”

“I intended to decimate your pack lands and eliminate all members, to ensure nothing was left for you here in this life as Alpha you mistakenly believe to be your calling.”

What. The. Fuck?

“Stay away from him!” Mia yelled.

Draco laughed nastily, then thrust his fist right through the wall, tearing a hole in it.

Mia screamed and cursed, stumbling.

“Stop!” I roared. “Stop fucking hurting her!”

Shocking me, he did. He even stepped back. “As you wish.”

Mia looked as shocked as me.

Why was he actually listening to me and doing me a favor?

“What do you want with him?” Mia asked, before I could get a word out myself.

That was her in a nutshell, the ball-busting woman I’d met here months ago. Take-charge. Trying to rule every situation and everyone around her. I wasn’t used to it. I was top dog in my world. I still wasn’t sure how to handle it.

Draco looked me up and down, seeming real curious.

Was it the state of me? My clothes being ripped all over, bloodstained and dirty from beating back his soldiers for hours?

“I feel it now,” he announced. “It calls to me.”

I frowned, shifting my weight, uncomfortable at his weird comment. I had a bad feeling he was headed somewhere real messed up.

“Cornelius hid you well. I couldn’t sense it until I was right upon these lands. A formidable diluting spell indeed.” He scrubbed his hand over his face, thoughtfully. “It has not only served to keep me away, but also to keep you ignorant. You believe you are wolf, pure and simple.”

Mia caught my eye, shock all over her face. She zoned in on my neck wound, courtesy of that cocky bloodsucker. “Impossible,” she breathed, looking really freaked out.

“What? What’s going on?” I hated cryptic bullshit.

“Oh, it is very much possible, ” Draco told Mia, smugly. He stepped up close to the wall, his eyes burning into mine as he told me, “You are my last descendant, boy.”

What?

Some fucked-up black talon things sprung from his hands.

Then, moving faster than I’d ever seen anybody move, he ran at the wall, tearing it to shreds with his monstrous hands.

In the next second, he batted Mia away into one of the burning lodges several feet away.

Before I could even react, he lunged at me.

Grabbing my jaw, he squeezed painfully then jerked me off my feet, holding me up in the air in front of him.

I couldn’t get a word out against his brutal grip.

I growled instead.

He snarled at me and jerked me around, pointing at the fiery lodge he’d thrown Mia into.

It was collapsing into itself .

“Yield and listen, or she will perish. She has mere moments before her supernatural body burns to ash.”

Fuck! I couldn’t stand her being hurt in any way. I felt it in my gut, a sickness, just



knowing she was suffering.

I stilled in Draco's hold.

"Good," he said.

With a wave of his free hand, the fire raging through the lodge went out.

I heard an angry cry from Mia.

Relief filled me. She was okay. Okay enough to be pissed, too.

Draco released my jaw and I dropped into a heap on the grass.

Quickly, I reared back and somersaulted to my feet.

The demon was back in my space instantly, glaring down at me. "You despise what I have done today and you despise me by extension. Not only for my actions today, but also due to the girl's reactions to me. You care for her, yet she is closed to you. You engage in a fruitless pursuit there. The same is true of your life here as a lowly wolf ruling over but a single pack, squandering your abilities." He leaned in and grabbed my right hand. "The latter is not your fault. You have been denied a great deal. It is a cruel injustice that I will remedy." Shoving my jacket sleeve up my inked arm to my elbow, he stared at the birthmark on my lower forearm that was like a beacon through all the heavy ink. A two-inch-wide flaming circle that I'd had since I was born, something that I'd never been given an explanation for. "The mark of eternal hellfire," he said, smiling with victory.

He pushed up the sleeve of his cloak and pointed to an identical mark on his forearm.

Shit .

I fought to jerk my hand free, so I could grab Mia and wolf speed the hell away.

But he held fast, telling me, “That is the mark of the Anointed, those possessing my power. My kin. You are more than wolf. A hybrid. My blood runs in your veins. We are power personified. I will free you from the shackles forced upon you by Cornelius. Then we will reign.”

“Look, you’ve got the wrong guy. Now, accept you made a mistake and get the hell out of here so I can start rebuilding what you’ve destroyed.”

“Fool!” he bellowed. “I do not do things half way. When I set out to accomplish a task, I am thorough.” He pointed to the forest behind us. “You think I did not plan accordingly? I have soldiers positioned at all throughways located on Silverwood pack lands. Those you believed had been saved with evacuation are no more.”

“What?” I croaked.

He leaned in close. “Your secondary enforcers charged with leading your pack to safety, women, children. Those remaining fifty soldiers who stood with you on the mountain edge. Your pack is no more.”

“You’re lying,” I seethed.

“Reach out with your instincts. Seek them out.”

Hating that I needed to follow his instruction, I did. There was no other way to know for sure. I had to tap into the connection I had as Alpha to each member of my pack.

My stomach turned, my body tensed when I felt nothing.

The connection was... empty. There was no energy there at all.

I'd felt it before with my old man.

Death .

No. No. No. "No!" I roared, lunging at him, my teeth gnashing, my claws slashing.

I'd lost it.

I was out of control.

My rage, my grief was too much, too raw.

I couldn't swallow it down.

I couldn't fucking stomach it.

He'd murdered my entire pack, destroyed my pack lands? They were all gone? In one rapid-fire brutal attack, it was just... over? Everything was lost? I couldn't... I couldn't take it.

His boot socked me in the gut, blowing me back several feet.

As I struggled to keep on my feet, coming to a skidding stop, I noticed he didn't have a scratch on him. My attack had done nothing to him.

"You will join me, boy. With their annihilation, I have severed your connection to this life, a life not meant for you. You will thank me for it soon enough, once I release you and you taste true power."

Black flames started to swirl around him and he reached out to me.

I recognized the spell from Mia. He was going to teleport me away with him.

For once in my life there was nothing I could do.

He was stronger, faster, he had some serious magic.

“Hit the deck!” a voice yelled from behind me, a voice I knew well.

I reacted quick, throwing myself on the grass.

A green lightning bolt shot over my head, just as I rolled onto my back to see what was going on.

It hit Draco in the chest, propelling him away, hundreds of feet into the fields in the distance.

Holy fucking shit !

I turned just as a hand was held out to me.

Looking up, I saw Ryker standing there.

I let him help me up. “Thanks, man.”

His gaze dipped to my tattoo sleeves, lingering, some sort of intrigue sparking, a moment before he cleared his throat and recovered, telling me, “We don’t have long.” He spun and called out, “Lucian!”

I tensed. Lucian? I’d known it was only going to be a matter of time before we came face-to-face again, but tonight really wasn’t the night for it.

But, in the next second, the bloodsucker sped over to us holding Mia in his arms.

Our eyes met quick, but I blew past it, ignoring him, as all my attention went to my mate.

She was bloodied, burned, and unconscious, hanging limply in his arms.

“Her pulse is steady. I fed her my blood. Her wounds will heal quickly,” Lucian reported.

“What?” I barked. “You gave your blood to my mate?”

“Purely medical.”

I growled, getting in his face.

Ryker shoved me back.

I really was off my game if a scrawny magic-wielder was able to knock me back without using his power.

“Stop. Think,” Ryker ordered me. “Lucian doesn’t share his blood as a rule, unless he’s devoted to the person in question. It’s very special to him. Mia was in dire straits, he did it for me, knowing I couldn’t bear to lose her.” He laid his hand on my shoulder. “Enough blood has been spilled here tonight.”

Talk about a sucker punch. “Yeah,” I murmured.

Looking around, he shook his head sadly, telling me, “I’m so sorry, Jax.”

All I could do was nod .

What the hell else could I say?

Everything was burned to ash.

My pack, my family, was gone.

“He’s coming,” Lucian announced, his eyes darting off in the distance. “Now, Ryker.”

In the next second, Ryker’s magic enveloped us, teleporting us away.

## Page 6

*Source Creation Date: August 4, 2025, 2:15 am*

6

~Mia~

The moment I opened my eyes, I wished I hadn't.

To say I felt like hell would be a major understatement.

I was feverish, sweating, but shuddering from the cold at the same time.

Every muscle in my body was aching awfully.

I felt weaker than I ever had.

I looked down to find myself tucked up tightly in an unfamiliar bed with cheap, scratchy sheets.

As I tried to shuffle myself up into a sitting position, it became clear that I was also suffering from some intense dizziness.

My head smacked back down on the pillow.

"Dammit!" I yelled, thumping my fist down and instantly regretting it as my body burned.

"Calm down. You'll make it worse."

My eyes shot to the source of the familiar voice and I found Ryker leaning against the wall opposite, his arms folded, glaring my way.

Once again, he looked pissed at me .

“Where are we?” I asked, glancing around at the shabby surroundings.

Ugly paneling covered the room. Cheesy, motel-type artwork hung on the walls. And there were very few furnishings, all of which looked as though they were on their last legs.

“Sorry it’s not up to your snobby standards, sweetness, but our options are limited right now. This is one of your father’s safehouses.”

“What? Why here? Why not my place, for one?”

“This is one of the only places warded to block the scent of Immortal blood to outsiders.” He gestured at me. “Given the situation, I had no choice.”

“Situation?” I asked, looking down at myself. The covers had come loose during my struggle when I’d first woken up, and I saw my lacy blue bra was visible. I shifted and realized my underwear was all that I was wearing.

“Your clothes were covered in blood, ash, and dirt,” Ryker explained, the defensiveness in his tone clear.

But I didn’t care that one of them had stripped me.

Not in light of what else I was seeing.

My body was wrapped up in bandages, the wounds bleeding through each one of



them, burns and blackened skin marring the remainder not covered with gauze.

“I don’t understand. I’m not healing?”

“You are , but pretty much at the rate of a human. Lucian fed you his blood, but the trace of Draco’s magic is blocking its effects.”

“What about your magic?”

He seemed uncomfortable and shifted his weight uneasily. “I can’t right now.”

“What does that mean?”

“I said I can’t. You know if I could help you and ease your pain in any way, I would’ve already done it. ”

“You would have, yes.” I struggled into a sitting position. “What about Jaxon?”

“Ingesting enough wolf’s blood to heal yourself will make you sick. Plus, Jaxon isn’t in any state to do much of anything at the moment. He’s grieving.”

“Grieving? I held Draco off so his pack could get away.”

“He had his recruits surrounding Silverwood pack lands and he slaughtered everyone, those who ran before you got there and those you thought you were saving. He was prepared for every eventuality, determined to decimate Jaxon’s pack.”

“Oh my God,” I gasped, pain lancing through me. Draco had murdered everyone Jaxon cared about, taken his home from him, his whole reason for being. I couldn’t even imagine what he was going through. “Is he—where is he?”

“He’s here with us in this house, just taking some time. He took some big hits from Draco too. He needs rest.”

“I need to see him when he wakes up. Either take me to him, or bring him here. He can’t be alone with all of that, he can’t suffer alone, Ry.”

“He won’t.”

I studied him. He was earnest. Extremely so. “You two are friends now?”

He nodded. “He’s a good guy.”

“He has a good heart. Like you.”

His expression softened briefly. But then he shook it off, his eyes hard as he pushed off the wall and headed for the door. “Get some rest. I just wanted to make sure I was here when you woke up to stop you from bolting out of bed and aggravating your wounds. I’ll come back in a little while and redress your bandages. ”

“Ryker!” I called, just as he was about to turn the doorknob and walk out. “Stop this.”

His back to me, he grunted, “Stop what?”

“You clearly have a problem with me.”

“Don’t,” he ground out.

I snapped then, the situation, Jaxon’s pain, and Ryker’s attitude all too much to maintain a calm state of mind. Before I could stop myself, I was yelling, “What the hell is up your ass?”

He spun, his eyes wide with surprise at both my phrasing and me blowing up at him.

Storming over to the bed, he fumed, “What you did back there was an epic fuck-up all around!”

“I was rusty.”

“Rusty?” he scoffed. “That’s an extremely generous way of putting it. You never should’ve gone there. I don’t get why the hell you did. You refused my pleas for you to come back in and yet the second Jaxon’s in trouble, you toss all your reservations out the window and rush straight to his side?”

“I just... reacted.”

He stopped short, frowning. “Reacted? To what?”

“The blockage that’s been in place between him and I fell and all of a sudden I felt him. His fear, his desperation, his need. It was so powerful, pulling at me so strongly that I was teleporting to him before I knew it.”

A look that I couldn’t place blanketed his features for a moment. But it was gone in the next second, as he told me, “You should’ve called me. Going there was foolish.”

“I did what I had to do to protect someone I care about.”

“Wrong. You made everything worse.” He shoved his hand through his hair. “And you can’t even offer up an apology. So fucking typical. Fucking Ice Queen. ”

“Watch yourself,” I seethed at his scathing insults.

“Or, what? You’ll glare at me? It’s about all you can do right now.”

“You infuriating, jealous asshole!”

“Fucking Ice Queen!”

“That’s it!” I screamed, tossing the covers aside, and swinging my legs over the bed, against my body’s painful protests.

A sudden gust of wind blew through the room, stopping me short.

Ryker spun toward the door right as Lucian appeared before us in a burst of speed. “Please employ some restraint, children.”

“Children?” I fumed. “How dare you?”

“Yeah, Lucian, how dare you actually tell her like it is? You know the Ice Queen can never put a foot wrong,” Ryker uttered, sarcasm dripping.

Before I could get another word out, Lucian pressed his hand to my chest, gently easing me back down into bed.

He stepped up to Ryker and caressed his shoulder lovingly. “I know you are upset, however—”

“Damn straight I’m upset!”

“Why? What’s this really about? Why are you so angry with me? Is it Jaxon and me, our—”

“Get over yourself.”

“Fine. Then tell me!”

He jerked from Lucian's touch and shot forward, slamming his fist down on the bedside table, knocking the lamp off at the impact. "You almost died! Do you get that?"

Oh.

"Ryker, I—"

My words caught in my throat when a high-pitched ringing pierced through my very being .

I fell back on the bed, slapping my hands to my ears. "Ahh!" I cried.

"Mia?" Ryker called, coming to my side.

All of a sudden, Lucian snarled, vamped out, and launched himself at me.

I screamed as he landed on me, straddling me, pinning me to the mattress.

The piercing sound abated and I was able to summon rational thought again.

I shoved at him, hoping to throw him off me, but to no avail. I was still too weak.

My magic wouldn't come forth either.

I was helpless. Not a familiar feeling to me and not one I'd ever wanted to experience.

"Lucian!" I heard Ryker calling, as he wrapped his arm around his neck, fighting to pull him off me. "Stop! Think!"

Lucian ignored him and jerked my robe down off my right shoulder.

He snarled dangerously, then dove for my throat.

I shrieked.

A ferocious roar reverberated through the room.

Ryker was knocked back and strong, heavily tattooed arms took hold of Lucian, biceps bunching and straining against the strength of an Ancient vampire primed for the bite.

With a final heft of impressive strength, they managed to haul him off me.

I heard a nasty thud, then a thundering voice, “Bloodsucker!”

Scrambling back up into a sitting position, I hastily pulled my covers up to my chest and looked out to see Jaxon trapping a rabid, snarling Lucian in a body lock over on the far side of the room. There was a massive dent in the drywall, clearly from Jaxon tossing him into the wall so brutally.

Fingers grasped my arm and I jumped.

That was when I realized how freaked out I was by what had just happened.

I was trembling, clutching my covers tightly to me, my eyes darting every which way.

“Come, sweetness,” Ryker called in a gentle voice.

I turned to see him holding my arm, trying to urge me off the bed.

“What’s going on?” I asked, as I let him help me out of bed.

He caught me against him as I stumbled into him. It had him staggering back a step or two.

I looked him over quickly, frowning when I saw just how weak and exhausted he looked. We’d been arguing nonstop so I hadn’t even noticed.

I smiled up at him. He was barely able to stand, yet he was fighting so hard to do so, while taking my weight against him as well.

“I need to get you out of here,” he urged, tugging me toward the door.

“No. Jaxon can’t hold an Ancient for long. Especially not when he’s like this.”

He grunted, irritated. From my refusal, or because of my concern for Jaxon? “It’s not a request, Mia. You’re down for the count and my magic is tapped out.”

“What? You’re tapped out?” I uttered on a gasp.

“Nobody else I care about is gonna be hurt today!” Jaxon yelled, capturing both mine and Ryker's attention.

He hauled Lucian around, shoving him against the wall, holding him there with his inked arm to his throat. He drew something from the pocket of his robe with such speed that it took me a few seconds to make out what it was.

A stake!

“No!” Ryker bellowed.

But it was too late.

Jaxon brought it down, driving it deep.

Lucian stilled and choked as blood spewed from his mouth.

He slid down the wall, landing on his ass with a heavy thud.

Ryker blocked my view, bolting forward, frantic.

As he skidded to his knees beside a fallen Lucian, I finally saw where Jaxon had stabbed him.

Relief filled me when I saw the stake protruding from his gut.

A non-fatal wound.

Jaxon stepped back, watching warily, still on high alert and ready for anything.

I could almost feel the tension leave the room when Lucian's demon face dissolved, his human features returning, fangs retracting.

Ryker glared up at Jaxon. "Go!" he bellowed. "Get out of here now! Both of you!"

"Ry, I had to," Jaxon started.

"I know, all right? Just go. Get to the farthest corner of the house! Your blood—both of yours—he can smell it."

"What? How?" I asked.



Ryker looked at me, his expression grave. “You’re weak, so your veil has fallen. And now, that ringing you heard? That was Cornelius’ backup veil surrounding the both of you falling. As you know, Immortal blood makes vampires rabid. So, go! Get away from him until I can find a way to help him deal with it. ”

I heard the urgency, the desperation in Ryker’s voice, but I couldn’t seem to move a muscle.

My father’s veil had fallen?

The block he’d erected between me and Jaxon had too.

It could only mean one thing.

“He’s dead, isn’t he? That’s how you found me, yes? His magic fell and it’s begun to fall all over now too, hasn’t it?”

“Draco took him two weeks ago.”

“Oh my God.”

Lucian snarled all of a sudden and fought against his wound to get up.

“Shit. Go, fucking now!” Ryker yelled. “Get her out of here, Jax.”

With a burst of speed, Jaxon was on me, hauling me into his arms. “Come on, princess. It’s all going to be okay,” he whispered in my ear.

I couldn’t respond. I barely even acknowledged what he was saying.

I felt him carrying me through the house, but it was all basically a blur as my

thoughts consumed me.

My father had been captured by Draco.

He could be dead.

And I'd had no idea.

God. It was all my fault.

If I hadn't taken off and hidden myself away like a coward, I could've stopped it.

I should've followed his orders immediately and fulfilled his Covenant plan.

Now Draco had him, he'd murdered Jaxon's pack, and hell knew who else.

"I've got you, babe," I heard Jaxon telling me.

"Thank you," I murmured tiredly as Jaxon laid me down on a bed in one of the rooms farthest from Lucian's current location.

"For what?" he asked, settling himself on the edge.

"Saving me from having my blood drained by a rabid vampire, for one." Groaning, I shifted into a more comfortable position, something incredibly difficult to do considering the extent of my wounds. "Trying to protect me from Draco." I smiled. "And for not hating me for disappearing like Ryker does."

"Yeah, well. I know all about what happened at the Maven Coven. Figured you needed time to get past it. You nearly fucking died."

The pain in his voice cut at me. I reached out and grasped his hand. He started at my touch. “What is it?” I asked him.

“I guess I’m just not used to you showing affection to me.”

“I know,” I said sadly. “Everything has been a whirlwind. The revelations, being forced apart, Draco... all of it. We haven’t had time to talk.”

Giving my hand a squeeze, he said, with a sexy smirk, “Guess we better start then.”

“Yeah,” I agreed. “I’d like that.”

## Page 7

*Source Creation Date: August 4, 2025, 2:15 am*

7

~Lucian~

Devour!

An all-pervading scent consumed me the moment I regained consciousness.

It called to the demon within, goading it to the surface, giving it a power I had so long denied it.

I clenched my fists, straining to keep locked up tight what it so desperately craved.

I knew if I failed and gave it breath, allowing it to rise to the surface, it wouldn't stop until it drained every drop of coveted Immortal blood within range.

And once it had ingested such powerful fuel, it would rage, the infamous Ravager returning in greater force than ever before.

Drink!

Taste their power!

Indulge your true nature!

“No!” I roared, attempting to bolt forward, only to find myself held fast by some formidable binds.

I peered down at my prone form to see my wrists and ankles cuffed. They were attached to hefty chains that hung down either side of the bed I was sprawled out on, buckled into the floor below.

I tugged again, more than a little surprised to see that my strength had no impact whatsoever on the old floorboards holding the chains.

The door opened and I turned my head to see Ryker entering.

His gaze zeroed in on my clenched fists and my continued violent tugging.

“Stop. You’ll hurt yourself,” he warned. “You can’t break them. They work similarly to your club’s inhibitor , except rather than voiding magic, they nullify supernatural strength.” He kicked the door shut and walked to the bed. Eyeing me warily, he said, “Of course, one obvious way around it is to hurt me and force me to free you.”

“I would never harm you.”

He appeared unsure, hesitating on coming closer within my reach.

“You are my heart, my beloved. I would forfeit my life to safeguard yours.”

“Immortal blood makes any vampire lose their mind. But with your bloodlust issues, it’s even worse for you. I have to be cautious. I’m the only one who’s still standing unbroken right now. If Draco comes, I’m the only defense we have.”

“You have recovered from your magically-depleted state?”

He merely nodded.

“How long have I been out?”

“Close to a day.”

I started at the information. “How? I am an Ancient. A mere gut wound shouldn’t have incapacitated me for so long. In fact, it shouldn’t have caused me to lose consciousness at all. ”

He hesitated and looked away.

“Ryker?” I pressed.

With great reluctance, he met my gaze.

Drawing in a breath, he told me, “That stake was coated with holy water, along with magically-infused sunlight trapped at its core.”

“Excuse me?” I said, shocked to say the least.

“I know,” he said, gravely. “It was a major shock to me as well when I realized you weren’t healing and I questioned Jaxon about it.”

“The wolf possesses the means to take my life.”

It wasn’t easy to obtain such a weapon, one that had the means to actually take the life of an Ancient. We weren’t as fragile as run-of-the-mill vampires. A simple stake couldn’t get the job done. Furthermore, this special weapon had to be forged by an exceedingly competent magic-wielder through a lengthy and most difficult process. The price he would’ve had to pay for such an item would’ve been incredibly steep also.

Evidently, his hatred for me ran deeper than I had even realized. For him to still carry the weapon on his person meant it had not abated despite all the years that had passed

since we had crossed paths wherein I had incurred his wrath.

“And you wish to keep me bound and defenseless in light of this?”

“He’s in no state to go after you. He’s grieving hard. Besides, I’m sure it hasn’t gone unacknowledged that you saved Mia yesterday. That will be enough to stop him from harming you again. Don’t forget either that he had the chance earlier when my magic was tapped out to take you out with an instant shot to the heart, but he wounded you instead. ”

“All good points, but ones which are built on assumption, not facts.”

Ryker finally drew closer and actually took a seat on the edge of the bed close to me. He reached out and ran his fingers through my hair, mimicking the loving act that I often treated him to. “If you can’t trust him, put your trust in me. I am back at full strength. No one can hurt you with me here, no one can get past me. All right?”

“Thank you.”

He smiled. “I’d do nothing less for you.”

“I have lived a very long time, Ryker. I have seen everything there is to see, experienced everything there is to experience. I do not fear death.”

“Lucian,” he said, shaking his head, not liking the subject matter.

But I needed him to hear it, to understand my truth. So, I went on, “Until recently, I’ve never felt real peace. I’ve never felt what it is to be loved and to love so deeply, so purely. And now that you have gifted me that rarity, I don’t want to forsake it, not even for death itself. I don’t want to leave you .”

His eyes shone at my admission and he reached out and squeezed my hand. “I feel the same.”

I took a moment to swallow down my emotion, then I looked down at his hand clasping mine, how close he’d moved to me. “You are forgoing your caution?”

“You’re lucid, rational and there’s no sign of the rabid vampire from earlier.”

“Their blood still calls to me, still teases the demon within,” I admitted.

He nodded. “I can’t replicate the cloaking veil that Cornelius had in place without it depleting too much of my energy. It’s something that needs to be powered constantly, not an issue for Immortals, because they don’t have a cap on their power like I do. It’s one of the things that sets them apart from the rest of us.”

“I see.” Something occurred to me then. “How were you able to recover so quickly from your severely depleted state?”

He waved his hand dismissively. “It doesn’t matter. All that does is me being back at full strength.”

“Ryker,” I pressed. What had he done?

He pulled his hand from mine and shifted his weight. “Our priority right now is dealing with your bloodlust issues. We need to find a way around it. Not only do you need to be at peace with the scent of Immortal blood until Mia is able to wield heavy magic again and resurrect that cloaking veil, but to complete the Covenant ritual, you actually need to ingest her blood. Everyone needs to bind themselves to her. For me, it means I have to meld my magic with hers. For Jaxon, he has to make a wolf bite. But for you, as a vampire, you need to feed from her. Right now we are nowhere close to you being ready to do that.”



I cursed at the predicament.

“I have an idea,” he announced.

Judging by the look on his face, I was certain I wouldn't like it.

He pushed up the left sleeve of his hoodie and held his wrist up. “Feed from me.”

Instantly, I shook my head. “No.”

“Lucian.”

“No. Like I've told you before, when I bite you in the throes of passion, I am already well fed and sated. In this instance, I am being tested to my breaking point by the scent of Immortal blood, I have not fed for being unconscious for a day either. This is a similar predicament to that day where you had me ingest your blood to heal myself after Cornelius' attack upon you. ”

“Last time, we weren't as connected as we now are. We were just starting this thing between us and we weren't in love.”

“You made a vow to me.”

“I know and I'll honor it. I won't force you. But you need to get to the point of being able to feed from Mia and taste Immortal blood without succumbing to it and turning rabid. This , using me, is a good starting point. You love me. I really believe that will be enough for you to keep your control.”

I considered his words.

He'd certainly learned well how to argue with me during our time together.

I wanted to believe that my love for him would be enough to hold the dark part of me at bay. It was a beautiful notion and his faith in me and in us meant a great deal to me.

Alas, we did not live in a perfect world. Nor had he ever met the true demon within, the aptly named Ravager.

“All right. I’m going to leave you to think it over,” he said when I failed to respond, so caught up was I in my stormy thoughts.

As he started toward the door, I called out, “Come to me.”

He stopped and turned. “You’re sure?” he asked, so worried was he about breaking his vow to me now that his idea was floating out there.

“We are out of options. Draco must be annihilated and all these months of our own research into the situation has proven, beyond a shadow of a doubt, that we can’t do that without forming the Covenant.”

He walked back to me and perched on the edge of the bed right beside me .

His wrist was still exposed and as he held it out to me I could hear the beat of his pulse, strong and rapid.

“Closer,” I said, hating the inconvenience of the chains forcing me into subjugation. I had never fed in such a restrictive way before.

He climbed onto the bed, straddling me, then crawling up my body.

He cupped the back of my head, then took a steadying breath and pressed his wrist to my lips.

My vampiric nature did the rest, my features contorting, my fangs dropping.

“I did what had to be done,” I heard him say, just as my fangs pierced his skin, then clamped down, tearing into his wrist.

I didn’t know what he was getting at and the need to press him died quickly as I tasted his blood on my tongue.

I had thought his taste had been delectable the times I had fed from him before. But this time, it was beyond even that. It was... different. Enhanced, perhaps? It called to me in another way altogether, a whole other level.

Before I could gather my wits, I was clamping down on his wrist, burying my fangs deeper, drawing harder and gulping down mouthfuls of his blood.

“Fuck,” I heard him cry. I felt him grinding against me, his cock rock hard and rubbing frantically against mine. “Hell, yes,” he gasped.

Bliss consumed me, a bliss he was clearly lost to as well, given that he was dry humping me with an aggressive fervor.

Being bitten could be intoxicating to non-vampires, but that was only when they were bitten in the right way with pleasure in mind. The way I was feeding from him was a far cry from that, from what he was used to from me .

It meant he was taking pleasure in the pain, the roughness of it, the animalistic savageness of it.

“Lucian,” I was vaguely aware of him calling out.

But it sounded so far away, I convinced myself that I was imagining it.

I was being swept away in the undertow, the demon fighting hard to usurp me. And knowing I could continue to feed until I was beyond sated, to continue to taste his sweetness on my tongue, feel it like a living thing inside me, had me wanting to succumb.

“Stop. You’re... taking too much.”

Pain nagged at me.

His pain.

I was hurting him, weakening him.

Just knowing that sickened me and turned my stomach.

I tore myself from his wrist, my fangs retracting instantly, my vampiric features dissipating.

I looked up to see him drawing his arm away and sitting back on his haunches on top of me.

And to my utter astonishment he was smiling.

“You aren’t harmed?” I asked, at a loss, because he didn’t have the abnormally pale complexion that happened to those who were drained of too much blood. His eyes were sharp and focused, not glassy with exhaustion.

“You didn’t take that much,” he said as he swept a glowing green palm over his wrist wound and healed it in an instant.

“Then begging me to stop? That was merely a test?”

He nodded. "One that you passed with flying colors."

"A devious plan indeed."

"Desperate times. I knew you wouldn't hurt me. And I was right. I needed you to believe in it, though. I needed you to trust yourself."

"Very well done. You have opened my eyes." I glanced at the tent straining against the confines of his jeans. "To more than one thing."

He blushed and looked down. "You know it turns me on to have your mouth on me, your fangs buried deep."

I longed to reach out and tip his chin up so I could see the look of desire in his eyes that his husky tone betrayed.

"It was more than that. My bite was harsher than you have experienced from me before. Was it the pain?"

He raised his head, his look smoldering. "You were feral. Unleashed."

Interesting. "I had assumed that side of me would frighten you."

"No. Far from it."

He reached out and trailed his fingers over my cock. As I bucked from his attentions, he smiled lazily and said, "It's strange seeing you bound like this, the one in the submissive state for once."

I chuckled, amused at his naivety. "You forget yourself, my beloved. Just because I am restrained beneath you, it doesn't diminish my dominance." I growled low in my

throat as I took in his appetizing form. “Please feel free to test me.”

His eyes hooded. “You’re more impassioned than usual.” He fondled my belt. “Not that I’m complaining.”

Straining, I was able to reach him with my outstretched fingers. He jolted as I grabbed his hoodie, jerking him down to me and holding him at my mercy with my vampiric strength.

“It is your blood.”

“What?” he gasped.

“Did you think I wouldn’t taste the difference?”

“I wasn’t sure. It’s only just settled within me.”

“Ryker,” I reprimanded.

“I did what I had to do to protect all of us,” he argued. “ You heard him at the Maven Coven, you heard what Draco said about my potential. To a magical being like him it means untapped power. All these months, that’s what you’ve confused with burnout, me trying to access it, to take my magic to the next level. And I succeeded today. You didn’t see because you were fetching Mia at the time, but I was able to knock Draco back with a fucking bolt. The only reason I managed it was because I accessed this next-level power. Me being tapped out right after was my body acclimating to it, rewiring.”

“This is the power I saw you briefly tap into when you tried to save us from Cornelius' phantasmal plane .”

“Yes.”

“Why couldn’t you channel it during the Maven Coven battle? More was at stake then than the situation of being pulled into the plane.”

He dropped his gaze. “Fear,” he rasped, barely able to utter the word.

“You were afraid of Draco?”

“Of his invincibility, of losing my surrogate family that night, of losing Mia.” He raised his head, his gaze intense. “Of losing you . Everything was on the line and I wasn’t ready for it. I let it get the better of me. Since then, any alone time I’ve had, I’ve been at the Coven ruins in the one Ruminat hut remaining working to move beyond that fear that incapacitated me that day.” His eyes flashed, green sparks filling his irises, a brief flare of his new power. “And I did it.”

“Why have you kept this from me?”

“I knew you’d worry. We already had enough going on trying to beat back Draco’s acolytes. I didn’t want to add to it, especially when I didn’t know if I could actually do it. It was a major long shot that paid off.”

“I abhor secrets. ”

“Yeah? Tell me then, what did Vincenzo want from you? Why did he come to you after all this time?”

I released him, but he didn’t move away, staying close to me.

“Word reached him of Cornelius' capture. He was the one being he feared the most, the only thing keeping him at bay. He emerged from hiding at that point and learned

of our relationship. You are known by reputation to all those with significant power, acknowledged for your staggering abilities. Vincenzo wanted me to forsake you, agree to siphon your power to the point of your death, so that we could reunite and run together as we once had. With your magic protecting us, he believed no one would ever have the means to stop us again.”

“Wow. That’s a hell of an offer.”

“One completely abhorrent to me.”

“Why did you let him leave knowing that’s his goal?”

“I didn’t possess the means to detain a being of his power. Nor did I possess the means to kill him. I intended to buy time, have him believe I would come around in time, so that I could obtain such an item.” I met his gaze. “A weapon that is now here in this house.”

“You don’t have your own? Knowing he was still alive out there and how dangerous he is, why wouldn’t you—”

“That knowledge is precisely why I don’t have one of my own. Unrequited love can quite easily turn to hate. If that had occurred and he’d come for me, having a weapon like that could’ve meant my demise. His strength and abilities equal mine. We were sired mere days apart. He could have turned my own weapon against me. The risk was too great.”

“Unrequited love? You never loved him back then? I thought— ”

“Ryker,” I cut in. “In all my centuries of life, you are the only being I have ever loved.”



His eyes shone.

And then his mouth crashed down upon mine.

I rose to his explosion of passion, meeting his deep kiss, rolling my hips and relishing the feel of his hardness against mine.

“Fuck,” he gasped, pulling back and shucking off his hoodie. “I need to feel you. Right now.”

“Yes,” I breathed. “Strip and sit on my cock. I’ll fuck you until my chest is coated with your cum. You’ll take it as I make you taste release over and over again until you can cum no more.”

He trembled with anticipation, his fingers fumbling in his haste to strip off his jeans.

A forceful knock at the door startled him and aggravated me.

“Ryker!” Jaxon’s voice boomed through the door.

At least he was demonstrating some semblance of manners by knocking and waiting, rather than tearing through the door.

When Ryker didn’t respond swiftly enough, the wolf called, “Raincheck the fucking, all right? I need your help! And FYI, a good fuck ramps up a vamp’s bloodlust, so it’s not exactly the best idea right now.”

With a grunt, Ryker kissed my cheek, then offered his apologies and climbed off me.

He snatched up his hoodie, shrugged it on, then strode to the door and hauled it open.

“What’s up?” he queried.

I watched with intrigue as Jaxon’s gaze roamed over him, an eye-fucking if I’d ever seen one. It was brazen, as was the thing with wolves, yet Ryker didn’t notice, his mind elsewhere .

Very interesting.

Jaxon’s eyes finally snapped back to Ryker’s face. He cleared his throat roughly and told him, “Your fly is open.”

Ryker hastily peered down at his jeans and cursed when he realized he was still unzipped. He hastily fixed himself then folded his arms across his chest. “So?” he pressed.

“It’s Mia.”

I watched him tense. “What about her?”

“She needs you.”

“Me? You’re her mate.”

He looked incredibly uneasy and unsure as he reluctantly admitted, “Look, you know her better than anybody. She’s hurting about her father, piling all the blame on herself. I can’t get through to her, can’t make it better. There’s just nothing I can say, or do, to make it better. But you can.”

I took in Ryker’s hesitation.

It was clear to me where it was rooted. He was torn between staying with me and

going to her.

I didn't want that for him.

I couldn't allow it either.

If we were to perform the ritual that would bind us as one, we couldn't entertain these divisions between us.

He had to make peace with her. He had to reopen himself to her, the part of him that he'd closed off when she'd broken his heart.

"Go," I called out. "Go to her."

He spun back to face me. "But, we—"

"I need to rest," I lied.

"Lucian—"

"She needs you. Attend to her."

He stared at me for a long moment, before finally nodding. "Okay. I'll be back soon."  
,"

I smiled reassuringly at him. "I know you will."

With that, he turned on his heel and walked out to Jaxon, closing the door behind him.

I stared at my mundane surroundings, fighting to resist the urge to battle against my

binds once more.

It wasn't public knowledge, nowhere in the Guardian files on me, but I was greatly claustrophobic. Being restrained, my freedom stripped in any way, ate at me something fierce.

Perhaps the rest I had lied about would become a reality.

Perhaps then I could manage to endure the binds until the three of them deemed it safe to release me.

## Page 8

*Source Creation Date: August 4, 2025, 2:15 am*

8

~Ryker~

I watched Jaxon tearing up the fields in the distance in full wolf state.

After he'd led me to Mia, he'd excused himself and taken off to give us some space, while he'd returned to his version of therapy and working through his pained emotions.

Turning away, I looked back at Mia sitting on a bench on the porch, hunched over, her head in her hands. She was struggling to absorb everything I'd told her about what had been going on for the last few months since she'd been gone.

I'd healed her as soon as my magic had been back up and running a few hours ago and conjured her wardrobe from her place to offer her some semblance of comfort and normalcy.

But while she was up and about and physically fine, she certainly wasn't mentally.

Jaxon had been right to come and get me. She was in a bad way. In all the time I'd known her, I couldn't recall ever seeing her so broken.

And, fuck, it was the worst time for it.

It was bad enough that she was experiencing some major issues with her magic, but to be like this too?

I had a lot of work to do.

I walked to her and knelt down in front of the bench.

I grasped her hand to get her attention and she looked down at me with eyes red raw from crying.

“Listen,” I told her softly. “You did what you thought was best for everyone around you by taking off and sequestering yourself away. If you’d stayed, with your magic so unstable and your fear of unleashing darkness, it just would’ve made the situation worse. Plus, Draco could’ve taken you too and none of this Covenant shit would be possible. We would’ve been left with no way to take him down. You are the key to everything, to ending this, to saving the supernatural world from complete annihilation.”

She pulled her hand from mine, shaking her head as she rose to her feet with a heavy sigh. “I can’t even control my magic right now. I’m not the key to anything. Not anymore.”

“You are the only one who can wield Immortal magic,” I reminded her.

She brushed past me, her gaze going to Jaxon in the distance. She tugged at her hair, in clear distress. “He’s lost everything, all because of me.”

“Because of Draco.”

“No,” she murmured.

“You threw yourself into a completely unknown situation and did the best you could. Draco was just better, more prepared, with an entire fucking army at his back. Jaxon told me about the wall you conjured. You had control then over your magic and you

managed it for him.”

“But I couldn’t hold it.”

“Your fear got the best of you. It did with me too. ”

She spun at my admission, cocking an eyebrow. “ You were afraid?” A slight smile ghosted her lips. “Mr. Arrogant?”

“Yeah, the night of the Maven Coven battle. I couldn’t bring it like I needed to, I was struggling. But I worked through it.” I stepped forward and turned my palms up. In the next beat, I conjured my next-level magic, blinding green bolts sparking to life. “And now , this is where I’m at, stronger than ever.”

“Oh my God,” she gasped, walking up to me and studying my magic closely.

She cupped her hands around the power flaring in my right palm, just shy of touching it.

Her eyes rolled back in her head and she sucked in a choppy breath.

She was getting off on the power rush, a hell of an unspoken compliment from her, the most powerful magic-wielder on earth, bar the true Immortals.

“This is why you were meant for the Covenant. I was wrong about what I said before. It’s less about your connection to me than I’d assumed. It’s your abilities. No other non-Immortal magic-wielder can do what you have here. You’re the only one in the world who is this powerful, Ryker.” She pulled back and muttered, “My father was so consumed with his dislike for you that he blinded himself to your true potential, your true value.”

“Well, it’s no wonder. He was on the verge of losing his mind with Draco rising.”

“For good reason,” she said, coming to his defense. Her face clouded with grief.  
“He’s... gone now.”

“The likelihood that he’s dead is slim, Mia. They can’t kill each other, remember?”

“If Draco had the right weapon, he could’ve had one of his acolytes do it. ”

I stopped short. “What weapon? There’s no record anywhere in the Guardian Archives of anything like that existing. I searched for it while you were gone.”

When she hesitated and turned away, I grabbed her arm, easing her back around to face me. “There’s no more place for secrets. If there’s a weapon out there that can kill an Immortal, we all need to know. Until now I’d thought the only way was supercharging your magic with all three of us binding our power with yours.”

“To wield it, that still needs to happen. Draco would need to infuse his power into one of his acolytes in order to be able to use it against my father. Of course, the chosen acolyte would perish quickly after ingesting his power, as regular supernatural beings can’t withstand or hold pure Immortal power.”

I stepped up close, looming over her. Had she forgotten how well I knew her? It was really obvious she was stalling. “What is the weapon?” I demanded.

“A dagger,” she said. “It’s known as The Wrath of Hades. ”

“Where is it?”

“Hidden beneath layers upon layers of magic. Angel magic, Ryker. Not fallen angel, Immortal magic. This weapon was never meant to exist. Draco forged it in the fires of



Hell when he was a True Celestial, before he fell. Once it was discovered, it was confiscated from him and taken to earth. A weapon like that couldn't exist on the Celestial Plane. It was too dangerous, having the means to wipe out every being there. Extreme measures were taken to bury it and to ensure it would never be unearthed by any being.

“You aren't just any being. You're one of them.”

She scoffed. “You think I can find it? No. Even if my magic was stable and I was once again operating at full capacity, I couldn't summon enough power to track it.”

“When we join and form the Covenant, you could manage it.”

“Maybe. I don't know.”

I frowned at her reluctance. “I don't get it. There's a weapon out there that can kill our enemy and not only did you fail to disclose it ages ago when we first got word he was coming, but now you're not even willing to try to find a way to track it?”

She broke eye contact and looked down at her thigh-high boots. “I'm just off my game, I guess. Overwhelmed. My father's responsibilities have abruptly fallen on my shoulders. I woke up to find we're steeped in a brutal war. My mate is back in my life, but he's lost everyone he loves. And on top of that, he's apparently far more than a mere wolf. When Lucian had brought up his suspicions, I'd all but dismissed them. But now, after what Draco said yesterday, that's impossible. He was right.”

“Immortal blood runs through his veins,” I finished for her.

Her eyes shot back to mine. “You knew?”

“I tested his blood a while back. There were tiny traces of Immortal magic. I realized

then that Draco's infection had been his attempt to unbind Jaxon from afar, hoping that he would break through Cornelius' barrier himself, saving Draco from having to go to such great lengths to see to it. But I stopped it, wiped out Draco's magic with Cornelius'."

"Why didn't you say anything? He has no clue. That much was clear with the way he was dismissing Draco's claims."

"It wasn't the right time. He was on edge with not being able to find you. He's still part wolf and with that comes an extremely volatile temperament. Telling him that his whole life had been a lie, that his mate's father was responsible for keeping him in the dark would have complicated everything.. Learning he's that monster's descendant? It's a fuck of a lot to take, Mia."

"If anyone understands that, it's me. But he has a right to know."

"Soon. When we're ready to join. Once you take in our power, you'll have the means to stop him if he loses it when he's unbound. Not everyone can handle great power. It can twist people up. Draco is the living example of that."

She pinched the bridge of her nose. "Draco told him, Ryker. Why hasn't he said a word about it since?"

"He's in shock. His pack was wiped out. Once his brain has been able to play catch up, I'm sure he'll come to us demanding answers. We can't risk allowing him to be unbound until one of us is strong enough to stop him if things go south. He's Draco's descendant, not Cornelius'. There's a darkness in that bloodline."

"He's meant to be my mate though. Him going dark doesn't fit with that." A gasp escaped her. "Unless that's why the fates tied us together, to push me to the darkness."

“No.”

“It makes sense, Ry. I touched a dark power that day, remember?”

“Everybody has a darkness in them, sweetness. We just learn not to let it rule us. You freaked out because you’re too cautious, you never push yourself beyond your comfort zone. You can control it. You’re stronger than you think. You’re the barrier to the dark, not a part of it.”

I saw her taking my words in. “You really believe that, don’t you? After everything that’s happened between us?”

“No matter what, I’ll always believe in you. I know you. I know you better than anyone. I know your power and I know your heart.”

She reached up and stroked my face. “You’re the heart of us all, you know that?”

I grasped her hand on my face. “You sound like Lucian.”

“Good. Then he realizes how lucky he is to have you as his.”

We stared at one another in comfortable silence, both of us taken in by the sweet, honest moment between us. It had been a long time since we’d managed such a thing.

After a while, I pulled away and assumed a fighting stance, summoning my magic.

“Let’s get you back to your badass self, shall we?” I smirked at her. “Kick my ass, sweetness. If you can.”

## Page 9

*Source Creation Date: August 4, 2025, 2:15 am*

9

~Lucian~

I was pulled from my reverie of much-needed rest, my eyes snapping open at the sound of the bedroom door creaking open.

And the overpowering stench that accompanied it.

Alpha wolf.

Jaxon strode on in and kicked the door shut behind him.

I tensed when he went one step further and locked it.

The most concerning thing about his unprecedented visit, however, was the stake clutched in a death grip in his right hand.

The stake. The Ancient killer.

“Well, this has been a long time coming,” I spoke, adjusting my weight as much as I could, given the hefty resistance from the chains binding me to the bed. “I can’t say that I’m surprised.”

“Then you’re about to be.”

I watched as he pulled a steel box from the inside pocket of his leather jacket. He

placed the stake within—a perfect fit indicating that it had been specifically made for it—then sealed it closed.

Striding to the bedside table closest to me, he opened the top drawer and slid it inside. “Now it’s yours.”

I frowned deeply. It was quite the gesture he was making. “Why?”

He perched on the bedside table and settled in, folding his arms across his broad, muscular chest. “Other things matter more than getting my vengeance.”

“I’m listening.”

He drew in a breath, then forged ahead, telling me, “The way I understand it, this Covenant concept isn’t going to work if any of us are at odds.”

“True.”

“Then you and me need to find a way to get past all the bad blood between us.”

“Ah, so you handing over the one weapon that can kill me is a step down that road?”

“Yeah.”

“And, how do you plan to overcome the seething hatred that you’ve built up toward me over the years?”

His eyes burned into mine. “I need you to tell me why you murdered my dad.”

“Knowing that will not assuage your grief and pain. It can’t be undone.”

With a huff of impatience, he pushed off the bedside table and began pacing, the subject matter distressing him immensely, so much so that he wasn't even attempting to conceal it.

Truth be told, he wasn't the only one who found it distressing. It had haunted me for a long time. Of all the atrocities that I had committed as Ravager, this one that had been carried out when I had been long-free of the persona, had stuck with me the most. It was because I had committed the act while in full control of my conscience and my faculties, not twisted by bloodlust and a demented state.

“We need to work together and to do that, there has to be trust between us. If I knew why you did it, it might help me understand what the fuck was going through your head. You weren't that monster version of you when it happened, so I don't get why, or how, you did it. The way it stands with me not knowing, it seems like you could flip on a dime any second and go on a killing spree. Is that what that night was? You'd lost it when you murdered my dad?”

Jaxon was already questioning so much as it was. He'd had the proverbial rug torn out from under him with losing his pack, discovering he possessed a link to Draco, that Mia Snow was his true mate. To reveal what I knew now... it could shatter his already fractured world.

As such, it had me hesitating.

“Tell me!” he roared, that Alpha temper taking hold of him. “You owe me, Lucian! You owe me that at the very fucking least!”

Alas, it had become inevitable. He wouldn't stop now. Now he'd asked the question aloud. And he was right about us needing to be on the same page.

And so I revealed an awful truth that I'd been concealing for years, “The

assassination of Hank Silver was ordered via a directive from Cornelius Martel.”

Jaxon choked and took an uneasy step back. “What? Why?”

“I was sent there amid reports confirmed by Cornelius that Hank had become rabid, a combined result of his old age and from wielding too much power for too long. As the leader of the most significant wolf pack in the world, the Guardian Movement couldn’t allow this. Immediate action had to be taken. ”

“That’s a load of bull,” Jaxon started. “He wasn’t—”

I held up my hand. “I’m not finished.”

With a growl, he gestured for me to go on.

“When I got there, Hank didn’t appear rabid. I was shocked and I hesitated. Your father sensed me and attacked. A vampire on his lands without an invitation warranted such a thing, but, regardless, I had to defend myself. Your father really abhorred vampires.”

“He was definitely a speciest, yeah.”

“Come here.”

“What?”

“Lift my hair near the back of my neck.”

Confused but also curious, he complied and lifted it up. “Shit,” he exclaimed when he got a look at the jagged scar there. “He bit you,” he said, recognizing his father’s handiwork. “The scar of an Alpha’s battle bite never heals.”

“Indeed. That was the least of it.”

He moved back and regarded me with his arms folded.

“Then the mauling began,” I went on. “I defended myself with a blade I had been given by Cornelius. Non-fatal wounds.”

His brow furrowed. “What are you saying? He died . You must’ve delivered a fatal hit.”

“It was the blade.”

“The blade?”

“I questioned Cornelius about it once I returned to the Compound, after witnessing Hank die at my feet, just before you arrived and happened upon the scene, the night you saw the face of your father’s killer.” I drew in a breath. “Unbeknownst to me, Cornelius had spelled the blade to specifically ensure the death of an Alpha, no matter where the wound was inflicted. He’d misinformed me. He’d used me. He'd wanted a scapegoat, so that the Silverwood Wolf Pack wouldn’t turn against him or the Guardian Movement. So, he blamed me.”

“Why the hell did he want my father dead so badly? To go to those fucked-up lengths... shit.”

“Knowing what we now know, I would hazard a guess that he intended to keep you there on Silverwood lands, to contain you, keeping you both away from his daughter and from being discovered by Draco.”

“He wanted me sidelined to wolf business.”



“I believe so, yes.”

He eyed me intently. “Why didn’t you tell me all this, that it wasn’t your fault? Why let me blame you and hate you like that, all these years, Lucian?”

“Would you have believed me at the time if I’d come to you with these revelations?”

“No. I guess I wouldn’t have.” He pinched the bridge of his nose and muttered, “That fucking Cornelius has a lot to answer for.”

“Yes. His focus on the greater good rather than the individual has left him numb to so much. The ends justify the means with him.”

A bitter laugh escaped him, a way to relieve the tension, no doubt. “He gives a whole new name to nightmare in-laws.”

“At least, with the formation of the Covenant, you won’t have to deal with that alone. Ryker and I will also bear the burden.”

Jaxon started, a distasteful look marring his facial features.

“You haven’t made peace with it,” I realized.

He scoffed, finding the suggestion preposterous. “How can I? I’ve only just found her because she was kept from me. Now I’m expected to share her with two other men, even be there during the ritual and watch her fuck you guys?”

“Do you remember what I told you in the phantasmal plane?”

He took a moment to recall it, then nodded, answering, “Focus on what truly matters. Her pleasure.”

“Precisely.”

“That can only go so far.”

“Because you’ve overlooked something. It’s not surprising given the depth of your repression.”

“What does that mean?”

“The pleasure it will bring you to join with the three of us.”

The look in his eyes gave him away, confirming what I’d suspected.

But denial was a stubborn little thing. “No idea what you’re talking about.”

“The survival of the wolf species is dependent on two things. Strength and repopulation. The latter means that the only acceptable form of copulation is heterosexual. This is strictly enforced to ensure the bloodlines are extended continuously, that the annual quota of wolf births is met or exceeded. Any other leanings are squashed with force and no small amount of indoctrination. There have been several cases where those that would not conform have been exiled.” I shifted my weight. “For an Alpha, especially the leader of the largest wolf pack in the world, to reveal his bisexual nature, is beyond comprehension.”

“You think I’m into you?” he asked, incredulous.

“Ryker.”

He stilled. “I... no.”

I smiled. “It doesn’t bother me.”

“Why not? He’s yours. ”

“Vampires are known for sharing. Besides, your interest in him doesn’t take away from what he and I have. Our relationship is our own. Yours is different.”

“How did you know?”

“Your phone calls with him over the months we were searching for Mia weren’t strictly about her. They evolved to you querying about his life and interests, joking with him, growing closer. Your lingering looks at him since you’ve been here in close quarters. My biggest clue was during the events of the phantasmal plane wherein you allowed him to touch you even through the intensity of your attempted claim on Mia. That place brought out our true and repressed sexual desires.”

“Does he... uh... does Ryker know?”

“I doubt it. He’s not as perceptive as I am. Moreover, he’s been focused on handling Draco’s overarching threat. He’d likely be open to it, though.”

“He would?”

I smirked. “He likes wild things.”

“You’re sure? What about Mia?”

“He’s explored a lot with me, things that he, too, had repressed.”

Jaxon ran a hand through his hair, sighing heavily. “All the power we hold and we’ve never been free, you know?”

“Very few are. At least you’re recognizing it now.”

“Yeah, I guess,” he murmured.

Before more could be said about it, a flash of green light erupted, startling the both of us.

Ryker materialized in the bedroom, assuming a fighting stance, his magic at the ready trained on Jaxon.

“Are you alright?” he asked me urgently.

“Yes, I’m fine. Why?”

“The door was locked. I felt the stake move from its usual location and I tracked it to our bedroom. ”

“Chill,” Jaxon said. “I gave it to him for safekeeping.”

Ryker eyed me for confirmation.

“A peace offering,” I told him.

He pulled his magic back and stood down, relaxing his arms down by his sides. “Oh. Well, good. That’s unprecedented, but great news.”

“How’s Mia doing?” Jaxon asked.

“Hurting, but she’s doing better. She’s in the kitchen getting something to eat if you want to catch her before we get back to her training after a short break.”

Jaxon’s eyes lit up. “Yeah, thanks.”

“No worries.”

Jaxon took off and Ryker came to me.

He fondled my hair and gazed at me lovingly.

Then he startled me as he called his power again. “Let’s get you out of those chains.”

“Never have sweeter words been spoken.”

## Page 10

*Source Creation Date: August 4, 2025, 2:15 am*

10

~Jaxon~

Come the fuck on!

Striding into the kitchen, I growled low in my throat, as the sounds came through loud and clear, sounds that had been going on non-stop every night, filling the house.

Fucking.

Damn, I knew Lucian had some major stamina. He was an Ancient vamp and I'd seen it firsthand and up real close because I'd battled him before. But Ry's was surprising me. It seemed he was the instigator too. He couldn't get enough.

It couldn't be normal. Not for a magic-wielder. I figured there was something going on with him.

I strained to block it out, something I was having a hell of a hard time doing lately.

I was too fucking riled up and that shit messed with my control over my sensitive wolf senses.

My room was over on the other side of the house near Mia's and I could still hear them like I was right in the room with them and watching the show.

As if it wasn't enough that I was going stir-crazy stuck here, not able to take action,

just waiting and hiding from the enemy.

I'd been in wolf form way more than human for most of it.

I'd hardly seen the others either.

Since that day I'd had Ryker comfort Mia, they'd been sparring, practicing, or whatever the hell it was, pretty much non-stop. Lucian had been released and he'd just kept to himself.

I pulled out some leftovers from the well-stocked fridge, thanks to living with two magic-wielders who could conjure anything, and I slumped down on a stool at the kitchen island, picking at the plate full of pork chops. My appetite was even messed up.

I just couldn't shut my mind off.

I'd heard too much that day.

At first I'd felt a bit of peace when Ry had managed to make Mia feel better. But then I'd overheard some shit I wasn't happy about.

It had been clear they had no clue just how far I could hear, especially in wolf form.

In any normal situation, I would've pissed at the notion of people holding information back from me and discussing it behind my back.

But this situation was the farthest thing from the normal I was used to dealing with.

I was used to being the top dog, the one who knew everything, decided everything.

With the three of them, I was the outsider, the one who knew the least, who understood hardly any of it. I wasn't one of them, a Guardian.

I'd always been wolf-centric. Other species never concerned me. Running Silverwood Wolf Pack, they never had to. We'd kept to ourselves and outsiders knew to leave us to it, to stay the fuck away. Nobody ever came for our territory because of me, my rep as an unstoppable, ruthless son of a bitch when I was protecting the pack.

Then all this Draco shit had changed everything.

I'd lost my pack because of him and I'd lost my place, my goddamn footing too. I didn't know which way was up now, didn't know what my purpose was. I wasn't an Alpha running a pack of wolves anymore, so what the fuck was I?

According to Ryker and Mia, a fucking monster.

I was related to that... thing and they were scared that the evil in him was hereditary. They thought I was going to turn into him. And even worse than that was Mia being scared that if we mated, I'd take her down with me.

Being in this house with her had me on edge non-stop, the need to claim her stronger than ever now we weren't forced apart anymore. Every time I got up close to her, I could hardly keep my shit together. The wolf was egging me on, pushing me to rip her clothes off and bury my cock deep inside her, then claim her as mine.

But I couldn't do any of that until we were more connected. I hadn't had one real talk with her in months. I mean, I'd had to rely on somebody else to comfort her, because we didn't know each other well enough.

None of it was supposed to be this way.



A wolf finding his true mate was supposed to be the greatest experience of his life. It was all supposed to fall into place, to just be right, to happen easy and naturally.

With her, it was the opposite with so many complications.

Her being kept from me by the winged bastard I now knew was her old man after all the shit I'd managed to piece together.

Her taking off .

Having her ex in the picture, a guy she'd clearly believed for a long time was her mate rather than me.

Me taking a real strong liking to that ex.

And the hardest thing of all being the whole Covenant thing where I'd have to share her not only with her ex, but with a bloodsucker I'd hated for so long.

She'd never be just mine once that happened. I'd have to share her. And wolves didn't share. How the hell was I going to do that, be okay with it?

One step at a time.

That was the only thing keeping me going right now. Thinking about it all at once was fucking painful.

“Hey.”

I jumped, caught off guard.

Turning down my senses had worked too well.

Shooting from my chair and spinning around, I was surprised to see Mia leaning against the door frame.

“I didn’t mean to scare you,” she said, all sheepish about it.

“Didn’t scare me, babe,” I lied.

She pushed off the door and strolled on in.

My dick jerked as her walking in had a flash of thigh catching my eye. She was just wearing a black silky robe. It didn’t look like she had anything on underneath it either, because I could make out her nipples pushing against the thin material. She was barefoot and way smaller without those heels she always wore. Her eyes were a little glazed and her hair was fuzzy, like she’d been tossing and turning in bed.

She looked real cute and it hit me in the gut. I’d never seen her this way, just her sexy and abrasive, no-nonsense side.

It had the protective nature of the wolf going crazy.

“You all right? ”

She smiled. “Yeah. I just couldn’t sleep.”

Well, I knew there was no way Ry and Lucian were keeping her up, because she didn’t have the hearing range for it to reach her. “A lot on your mind, huh?”

She wrapped her arms around herself, this strong wave of vulnerability coming off her that made me want to throw my arms around her and hide her away from the world. “No—I mean, yes. But that’s not why I can’t sleep.”

I frowned.

She couldn't look me in the eye as she said, "It's you."

"Me?"

"There's this... pull to you. It's been there the moment that cloaking veil dropped and it's been getting stronger ever since. It's... intense."

I smiled. "It's the mate thing. When mates find each other, it kicks in, pulling them closer, urging them to complete the mating bond. It won't stop until I claim you and you accept that claim."

She lifted her head. "I see."

Her eyes roamed over my face, my tattoo sleeves, my naked chest, dipping down to my boxers and the tent there. I heard her gulp, then in the next second, her eyes were back on mine. "So, the whole claiming thing means we, uh—"

"It means," I said, stepping up close to her. "I'll fuck you like the animal I am, making you come all over my cock again and again until you're out of your mind with pleasure. Then I'll sink my teeth into your shoulder and taste you."

Her cheeks flushed, her chest heaving.

I heard her heart thumping wildly.

I could smell her arousal.

Fuck me.

She reached out hesitantly and stroked my bicep, her eyes burning into mine. “And me?” she rasped. “What will I do?”

I pushed into her, sucking in a breath as I felt her breasts against my chest. “You’ll take me like a good girl, then I’ll open my wrist and you’ll lick the wound nice and slow, accepting my claim, accepting us.”

Her hand moved up to my chest, sweeping across my pecs, trailing down to my abs.

I watched her taking her time, sensing her nerves, as she tried to push herself out of her comfort zone.

I clenched my fist down at my side, trying to hold back my animal instincts.

She was different, not like the wolves I was used to screwing. Nah, I had to hold off, take it easy, let her lead.

For now.

“I don’t think I’m ready for the claiming rites,” she murmured, her hand stilling.

Inwardly, the wolf whined in pain.

Being denied what it wanted so bad hurt it deep.

But the man knew better though.

Things with non-wolves were way more complicated than just giving into animal passion and instinct.

I teased the belt of her robe. “What are you ready for, princess?”

She fondled the waistband of my boxers. “I think... I...”

She was way sweeter than I’d realized when we’d first met. When it came to sex, she was so unsure of herself, so uneasy, so much so that she’d only been with one guy in her long lifetime.

I leaned in and whispered in her ear, “You want to know what it’s like to be fucked by me, yeah?”

She nodded against my shoulder.

“Say it,” I pressed .

“Yes,” she uttered. “I want you.”

Satisfaction coursed through me.

“Good girl,” I whispered, nipping her ear, making her tremble.

I reached into her robe and slid my hand up her left thigh.

She gasped and grabbed at my arms.

I skated higher, loving the feel of her silky skin beneath my fingers.

I took in the scar Ryker had told me about, etched into her side, an angry and jagged four-inch line much like a bolt of lightning. I brushed over it lightly, then continued my exploration.

I could smell how ready she was before I cupped her pussy.

She was so fucking wet, drenching my fingers. She wanted this as badly as I did.

I teased her clit briefly and she jerked against me just from that.

Damn .

I pushed two fingers into her.

I moved slow and easy, watching her eyes roll back in her head as I buried them deeper, bit by bit.

“Yes,” she moaned. “God.”

“Not God. It’s all me, babe.” I pulled my fingers free and held them between us, her juices coating them.

I scented them deep, then sucked them clean.

The look on her face was priceless. She was so prim and proper, she couldn’t believe it.

I didn’t know how much of the real her had shone through in that dreamscape thing, what was true and what was all made up bull. So, I had to go with what had happened between us in the real world in my bedroom all those months ago. And it’d been clear then that she wasn’t used to dirty. It seemed Ryker had been way too soft and easygoing with her, probably worried about upsetting her with her whole sexually-repressed thing.

Well, I wasn’t going to accept that. She was my mate. It was a forever deal and her holding back with the whole soft and slow pussy-ass lovin' wasn’t going to work for me.

Leaning in and crowding her, I spoke at her ear, “You remember what I told you that day at my place?” I growled low in my throat, “Alphas don’t know soft and easy. We take, dominate and fucking well devour.”

I licked her neck and she trembled, a little moan coming from her.

“You ready for that, princess?”

I watched her eyes darken.

And then she grabbed the waistband of my boxers and jerked me against her. “Bring. It.”

Hot damn. I hadn’t seen that coming. And it called to the wolf in a major way.

The next thing I knew, I was growling ferociously and tearing her robe off her shoulders.

My dick jerked at the sight of her naked body, all silky skin and curves.

“Fuck me, you’re gorgeous,” I said, grabbing her hips and slamming her against the wall.

She gasped at my roughness, her eyes sparking with excitement.

A warning sparked in my brain and I asked, “Are you on something?”

She frowned.

“Protection, babe?”

As much as the wolf relished the idea of filling her with my baby, it wasn't the right time, and she certainly wasn't ready. "Being mates, a condom isn't enough to stop—"

"It's okay, I have my own magical... barrier. It's foolproof, believe me."

"All right." I brushed my lips over hers and breathed her in. "Now relax for me, quiet your mind, and just feel."

I made my way down her body, tasting every inch of her sweet-smelling skin, taking in her reactions. She writhed against the wall, getting lost to my touch.

As I licked up her inner thigh, I saw her bite down on her lower lip, her body stiffening. Hmm. So, she was trying to hold onto her control.

Nah, I didn't like that.

And I wasn't going to allow it.

I ripped her off the wall, spun her around and slammed her down onto the kitchen table.

In the next beat, I tore off my boxers, then leapt on, straddling her.

I looked down to see her eyes filled with wonder.

"Now, little princess, I want to fucking hear you. You got me?"

She nodded and reached out to me, wanting me.

I grinned. "Good girl. Let it all out. Let go."



I took hold of her thighs, my nails digging into her soft skin. She moaned, letting me know she liked a bit of rough.

Just as I fucking thought. She'd just never been exposed to it properly.

Well, she was about to be.

I spread her thighs wide, baring her wet pussy, opening her up for me.

She was panting, squirming, basically fucking trembling.

So damn desperate for me.

Hell, I was right there with her .

I shifted my weight, grasped my cock, holding her gaze, as I sank into her.

“Jesus Christ,” I gritted out, fighting like crazy to take it slow, to hold the animal back.

She was as tight as I remembered from that dreamscape place. And I wasn't exactly easy to take.

Thumbing her clit, I rocked into her carefully, stretching her nice and slowly to take me.

“Jaxon,” she gasped.

She linked her hands around my neck and pulled me down to her.

Our lips clashed hot and heavy.

She kissed me hard, wildly.

Her tongue was thrusting down my throat before I knew it, tangling with mine, challenging me.

Passion and need exploded out of her as she shoved at my chest, her magic sparking. It was only brief, telling me she still didn't have proper control back. But it was enough power to push me back, so she could move us into a sitting position.

She wrapped her legs around me, grasped my shoulders and started to ride me like an animal.

Like a wolf.

Jesus Christ.

I hadn't seen this coming. Not this soon. I figured I was going to have to coax it out of her over time.

Grasping her sweet little ass, I ground her down harder on me.

She cried out, arched her back and threw her head back as my cock slid that little bit deeper to hit her G-spot.

"Jaxon!" she shrieked as I fucked her with the rapid-fire of my wolf speed.

"I know, babe," I growled in her ear. "Promised you'd be coming all over my cock." I half-growled, half- whispered my next words, punctuating each one with a rough thrust. "Real. Fucking. Hard."

Her magic sparked again as she slammed her hands into my chest.

It knocked me onto my back and she pinned me to the table, her sharp nails biting into my pecs.

She started raking them down to my abs as she rode me hard, giving it everything she had.

She was calling out the animal.

It had me snarling and I grabbed her hips and vaulted off the kitchen table with her.

With a burst of wolf speed, I had her slammed up against one of the kitchen counters.

She spread her legs without me needing to say anything, then stuck out her sweet little ass.

Presenting herself to me that way had the wolf right at the surface.

It wanted her.

It wanted her so fucking bad.

I was straining to hold back with her and keep control.

The wolf wasn't used to any of this.

It wanted more than a mind-blowing fuck.

It wanted—needed—to connect with her on a soul-deep level. To access every part of her and to fucking well own it.

It wanted to claim her.

Right here and now.

I reached out and fisted her hair in a makeshift ponytail, then slammed back inside her, making her jolt against the counter and scream out in pleasure.

I jackhammered her then, losing myself to the sweet agony of finally being with my mate like this.

It was unlike anything I'd ever felt .

Instead of the desire tapering off as I neared ecstasy, it intensified, making me need more and more.

I couldn't seem to get enough.

It was the pull to claim her, to make her mine fully.

She was screaming, pushing back on me, wilder than I'd ever imagined her being.

I jerked her ponytail, forcing her gaze to mine.

She was lost in bliss.

Leaning in, I scented her, before kissing her neck, her face, her mouth. She clamped down around my cock and I swallowed her screams as she came, bucking wildly in my arms.

The pressure, her reaction... it was one step too far for me.

I snapped, coming inside her with violent spurts, holding her to me in a death grip.

In all the pleasurable chaos, my wolf teeth dropped, and I found myself leaning into her.

Her eyes shot wide as she saw what I was on the razor's edge of doing.

She shook her head.

She wasn't ready.

She wouldn't accept my claim.

Her refusal was like the jarring impact of a sudden ice-cold shower.

But it was exactly what I needed to get a hold of myself and hold back.

I shot myself across the other side of the room with a burst of wolf-speed, slamming my back hard into the drywall in my panic to get away from the temptation of it all. Just like the first day we'd met back on Silverwood Wolf Pack lands.

"It's okay," I heard her sweet voice reassuring me. "I know you're struggling to control the wolf. A lot has been happening, putting your emotions out of whack, and this... thing between us is intense."

She held her hands out to me, wanting me to come back to her.

I hesitated.

She smiled and came to me and threw her arms around me, holding me tight to her.

"The intensity of the pull between us has eased," she spoke softly against my chest.

I encircled her in my arms. “For a while, yeah. Sex will take the edge off for a bit, but it’s going to keep coming back around, until we do the claim and complete the mating bond.”

She murmured her understanding, then sank against me.

And, fuck, having her against me like this, taking her how I’d needed to for so long... now I knew what it was like, the idea of sharing her with the others seemed worse than ever.

I got that it was necessary for the Covenant and that whole greater good bullshit, but it burned deep down just thinking about doing it, letting them in like that, allowing them to take my mate.

She was mine.

The wolf knew it.

The fates knew it.

How the hell was I going to stand for all this sharing?

It was against my nature in every fucking way.

## Page 11

*Source Creation Date: August 4, 2025, 2:15 am*

11

~Mia~

I was in hysterics.

Laughing so hard that I couldn't breathe, I noticed Jaxon grinning from ear-to-ear, highly amused by my laughing fit over a hilarious coming-of-age story he'd told me about his younger days as a wolf pup when he'd been figuring things out and understanding his nature and power.

It felt so good to laugh like that. It had been far too long since I actually had. My life was all seriousness, stiffness and duty.

But right now I was relishing the sensation of being light and carefree. It was only a brief window through all the darkness and brutality, but I was going to take it and cherish the limited time we actually had to be this way.

I was on a date with Jaxon.

After what had happened between us in the kitchen, we'd established a connection. It had kind of just snapped into place. It felt amazing and invigorating. I needed more, needed so much more of him. So, we were spending some quality time together, having a picnic out on the safehouse grounds.

"You've got a cute laugh," he commented.

I waved my hand dismissively. “Cute really isn’t a word anyone would use to describe me.”

“That’s their loss then, because it just means they never got the opportunity to know you.”

“I couldn’t let people in.”

“I know. Because of your true heritage.”

“At first, yes. But then keeping myself closed off became a part of me. I didn’t know how to reopen myself.” I grinned at him. “Until the other night when a stubborn Alpha asshole wouldn’t accept anything less and ruled my mind and my body in one fell swoop.”

He reached out and tucked a loose strand of my hair behind my ear in a sweetly intimate gesture that had me basically swooning. God, what was he doing to me?

“You know, it was far from one-sided? You brought out some stuff in me too.”

“I did?” I’d thought he was already open and free, like wolves were known for being.

“As Alpha, the leader of the most formidable wolf pack, I had to keep myself in check to a real intense degree.” He winced and murmured, “ Had to? It’s still so fucking weird talking about it all in the past tense.”

“I know. I’m so sorry.” I wrapped my arms around him and held him against me. “They will be avenged. I promise you.”

A soothed sigh emanated from him, making me realize that my touch was actually comforting him and easing his pain somewhat.



He nuzzled my shoulder and murmured, “If it hadn’t been for you, I’d be dead alongside them all. Or used by that monster. ”

I winced. “I should’ve been better. If I’d been in greater control of my magic, then—”

He pressed his finger to my lips. “No. Don’t do that. You did everything that you could. None of us were prepared for him. If Cornelius hadn’t kept so many secrets, we could’ve been. We could’ve all been united and ready for what he threw at us. Instead, we were all just pawns, Mia. Toy soldiers for him to fuck over and manipulate for his own ends.”

It was my own father that he was talking about, my father that I knew was suffering so much right now under Draco’s wrath. But I couldn’t deny the truth to Jaxon’s words. I couldn’t come to my father’s defense, because there was none to be had. He’d gone about this all wrong and it had cost us all in different ways.

Trying to rectify it now seemed insurmountable in my weakest and most disillusioned moments, and a hell of a tall order in my stronger, more optimistic moments.

I eased Jaxon’s finger from my lips. “He violated our free will. Especially when it came to you and me.”

A low growl emanated from him. “He denied our mating bond and kept us apart for so many years.”

I slid my hand into his hair and told him gently, “We can’t change any of that. We can only go forward. We’re together now .” I brushed my lips over his, kissing him softly, tenderly. What sounded a lot like a purr emanated from him.

I smiled as I pulled back and saw his eyes rolled back in his head, all blissed-out. “Is that all it takes?” I teased. “A little peck.”

“It was more than that. I could feel your love and adoration seeping into me.”

“I’m glad. I’m sorry it took me a while to get to this point with you. ”

“I get it. Like you said, it’s about the here and now, right?”

“Yeah. Yeah, it is.”

We pulled apart and resumed eating from the picnic basket I’d prepared, which had been filled to the brim with an assortment of foods.

“When did you make all of this?” he asked, devouring a roast beef sandwich like it was nothing at all. Wolves had voracious appetites... in more ways than one.

“I conjured it.”

“You... what?”

I shrugged. “I used my magic.”

“To make food?”

“Uh huh. Something wrong?”

He chuckled. “No, it’s actually a good sign. From what you’ve told me, you only use your magic for battle, or Guardian missions.”

“Sometimes, to get showered and dressed quickly too.”

“Right, yeah, but to head out to work.”

“I guess,” I said, popping a cherry tomato into my mouth.

“This means you’re loosening up a bit with it.”

I nodded, happy at him getting it without me even having to explain much. “I’m trying to allow it to become one with me, instead of something I just tap into for a specific purpose.”

“Trying to bring the fun?”

“Exactly.”

I took a bite from an apple tart and Jaxon’s next words had me choking on it.

“You ever use it to get yourself off?”

I slapped my hand to my chest, fighting to clear my throat.

“What?” I managed to croak out .

I snatched up a glass of orange juice and took a few sips to ease the irritation.

Jaxon was grinning at me like a freaking Cheshire Cat. When I’d managed to get myself under control, he pressed, “Well?”

“A lady never discusses such things,” I said with a wry grin.

“After the other night, I finally got my proof that you’re way more than that prim and proper lady persona you put on to the rest of the world. There was a wild thing trapped beneath all that, just waiting on the right guy to come along and bring it roaring to the surface.”

Well, he wasn't wrong. In fact, it was undeniable. Being with him had awakened me in that respect and I'd felt a whole new sense of freedom ever since. I felt lighter, more open, more confident.

It was what enabled me to continue what would have previously been a highly uncomfortable discussion, telling him, "No, I've never used magic to pleasure myself."

"What about with Ryker?"

I shook my head vehemently and winced at the recollection.

"What was that?" Jaxon asked, picking up on my reaction.

"I... uh... the one time I did use my power when we were in the throes of passion, it didn't go over so well. I lost control, blasted him across the other side of my bedroom and knocked him out."

Jaxon choked out a laugh. "Jesus."

"I know. It was bad."

He shrugged. "Well, he likes it rough. His thing with Lucian is proof enough of that."

"It was a little more than just some sexy roughness."

Eyeing me curiously, he finished the rest of his sandwich, then dabbed at his mouth with a napkin, before asking, "Why did you risk it with me?"

"Risk what?"

“Going the rough route? Allowing me to take it there, then you taking it there too?”

“It was instinctual. It felt easy, natural, like it was meant to be.”

His eyes shone, looking almost giddy with my confession.

I slapped his shoulder playfully. “Don’t look so pleased with yourself, arrogant ass.”

He snatched my hand with his wolf speed, making me gasp.

He brought it to his mouth, peppering my fingers with little kisses, as he said, “How can I not be an arrogant ass with you as my mate? You’re perfect. A sexy little thing, a prodigy, a real warrior, with a cute sweetness underneath it all.”

“Smooth talker,” I choked out, his ministrations working me up so quickly.

Just his touch, let alone his lips on my skin, stoked a fire in me.

The pull to him was intense.

It had been difficult enough just to sit and talk and enjoy this date, rather than giving into the mating bond need and jumping each other’s bones.

But we needed to get to know each other deeper and more intimately, to build a strong foundation, after the opportunity had been denied us for so many years.

He moved my hand from his lips and held it between us. “All of that is a good sign that the bond between us is growing stronger, that you’re putting your trust in me.”

Guilt gripped me and I eased my hand from his grip.

It was time .

I hadn't wanted to bring it up yet and risk ruining what we were building.

Not to mention, I'd agreed with Ryker's plan to keep it quiet until we'd formed the Covenant and had the means to control any unfavorable reaction from Jaxon.

I couldn't keep to that agreement any longer though. Things had shifted between me and Jaxon, so much so that it just felt so wrong keeping to it.

It had gone on long enough now. His talk of trust had been the last straw.

"In the spirit of trust, there's something I need to tell you."

He cocked an eyebrow.

I scrambled off the blanket and stepped back onto the grass, finding myself pacing in my distress.

"Babe?" Jaxon queried, rising to his feet as well and watching my erratic movements warily.

I couldn't even look at him as I forced the awful words past my lips, "Too much manipulation has been levied upon us. It's not right. For the sake of what we're trying to build here, and because you deserve it, we need transparency from this moment forward. No more harboring of secrets." I drew in a shaky breath and revealed, "Draco's claims to you during the Silverwood Wolf Pack battle weren't just the ravings of a madman or a case of mistaken identity. In fact—"

"Mia, it's all right. I know."

My gaze shot to his. “What?”

“I already know.”

“You... how?”

“I heard every word you and Ry spoke about it.”

“You heard us? You were a good half-mile away, maybe more. ”

“Well, it turns out that I’m not an ordinary Alpha, am I?”

“No. No, you’re not,” I murmured. “Wait. If you heard all of that, why didn’t you come to either of us, confront us, or ask for an explanation?”

“You weren’t ready for me to know. I figured on building your trust before I went there with it. And, I guess I wasn’t ready to accept it, let alone hear more about it from either of you.” He squared his shoulders. “But I’m ready now.”

“You’re sure?” It was a heavy burden to bear.

“I’m sure, princess. There’s a lot I don’t understand. I mean, why not unbind me? Why isn’t that our first go-to, instead of waiting on the conditions to be right for all four of us to be in sync so we can form that Covenant? With me unbound, wouldn’t I have Immortal-level power, like you? Then there would be two of us against him. That would be a hell of a force to be reckoned with.”

“It’s too dangerous.”

“Why? Because you think I’m going to turn dark like Draco, like you’re all worried about, but too afraid to say to my face?”

I took his hands in mine. “I know what you heard, but I’m no longer worried about you turning dark just from inheriting your powers. I know you now. I know your heart. You’re a good man. But there are other influences that could force you down that path. If Draco got his hands on you when you were unbound, he could guide you toward the evil that he embodies. You’ll be vulnerable when you’re first unbound. It’s a perfect opportunity for him to mold you.” I stroked his fingers, asking softly, “Is that what you want? To actually be unbound? You wouldn’t feel as you do now, as pure Alpha wolf. It would be tainted for you. ”

“Is that what happened to you?”

“No. I was never bound. I don’t know anything different than being... this. Something hunted for what I am, for my blood, my celestial link.”

“You think being what you are is a curse?”

“It hasn’t exactly been a picnic.”

“But it’s who you are, your true self. Being wolf isn’t all that I am, but it’s all I’ve been allowed to be.” He hung his head. “I’ve been trying to deny it all, wanting to hold on to the wolf, focusing on you and me. But that’s foolish.” His hands left mine and he shoved them through his hair. “I mean, how did this even happen? Hank Silver wasn’t my birth father after all? He adopted me? My mother had to have been wolf for that to pass onto me...” he trailed off, his brows knitting in consternation.

It was time for an Immortal history lesson.

I cleared my throat and started, “The True Celestials created Draco long after Cornelius. They wanted a different breed, one that was a true warrior who could carry out dirtier , questionable tasks without the weakness of a moral compass impeding them. Draco was made from a True Celestial and a True Demon. They thought they



could control him, anticipating him to be much like a living machine that would in essence be programmable and would carry out orders without question to please his masters. It worked for a while. Until the day that Draco was sent on a mission to this realm and he became obsessed with it. He kept visiting against orders. He rebelled when the True Celestials forbade him from going back ever again. In his rage, he destroyed an entire city, razing it to the ground with his hellfire.”

I shifted my weight as I carried on, “During his time on earth, he laid with several lesser supernatural beings, producing numerous heirs. That wasn’t tolerated by the True Celestials, so they ordered Cornelius to hunt and kill every single one of them. They couldn’t tolerate such a violation of the higher order. When Draco discovered the order to kill his heirs, he went on a rampage and killed several Celestials. On the verge of a massacre, they enacted a Law that forbade a Celestial being from killing another of their kind. Not just something written down, but a magical act that physically prevented it from being possible. It cut my father’s mission to kill all the heirs short.”

“And then your father went and did the very thing he’d been on a mission against, having his own kid?”

“Well, after the catastrophe with Draco, everyone was under a microscope. That was when they discovered that my father had fallen in love with a lesser supernatural being. He was cast out from the Celestial Plane and he became Fallen, or an Immortal as we refer to it. Years later, he and my sorceress mother had me.”

“She died in childbirth, like mine?”

“Yes. A wolf or a sorceress, any lesser supernatural being, can’t survive birthing an Immortal Descendant baby. The eruption of magic is too intense.” I continued, telling him, “Anyway, so after all of that, Draco went into hiding. He’d emerge, though, every now and then when his carnal needs became too much. That soon grew out of

control and then he was attacking people left and right, violating them, then razing places to the ground. That was when my father banished him.”

“I’m only in my thirties, though, if he was already banished... how did I come about?”

“Remember that sinkhole?”

“Yeah. What about it?”

“Through that, Draco was able to affect this realm, to actually touch and impact you , actual beings of this realm, despite him being bound and banished. I believe that’s what happened to create you.”

“So, he’s been reaching out every now and then whenever he could muster enough power, and infecting supernatural beings with his spawn? Going on and on until he finally found somebody who could hold his power?”

I winced. “Yes, I believe so.”

He frowned, thinking on things for a moment, before asking me, “So, somehow your father bound my abilities, made it so that only my wolf side shone through?”

“Yes. Bound you, erected a veil around you so nobody could scent your Immortal blood, and he hid you behind layers of magic to ensure we’d never meet.”

“He didn’t want his own daughter mixing with somebody of Draco’s bloodline.” He shook his head with disbelief. “That’s some intense helicopter parenting.” He blew out a breath. “Thanks for telling me all of this. I get that it’s not easy for you either. We’re in the same boat, I guess. The only two Immortal Descendants in existence.”

“I’m sorry you’ve been carrying it on your own.” I closed the distance between us again and gazed up at him. “You aren’t alone now . Tell me you know that.”

He beamed down at me. “Yeah, I know. After the other night, and the last couple of days since, I really do know, princess.”

“Good. I’m glad.”

He kissed my hand, then told me, “We’re supposed to be reveling in the moment right now. So, let’s put all this darkness and bullshit off to the side. We’ve got enough doom and gloom coming our way soon enough. Let’s take advantage of the small moments of light and fun that we’ve got, yeah?”

“That sounds perfect.”

“So, what do you want to do now we’re done with lunch?” I moved to speak, but he held up his hand. “It can’t be fucking.”

“But—”

“Getting to know each other, remember? Bonding?”

I thought for a moment.

I wasn’t exactly used to doing things for fun, or just in a leisurely manner. I was all work and no play in the extreme.

Jaxon had already gotten to know that about me, so he waited patiently for me to think of something. He was being sweet, because I knew how hard it was for an Alpha wolf to hold back his dominance and hand the reins over.

Alpha wolf?

I had it!

“I want to see your wolf.”

He looked startled. “What?”

“I want to see your wolf,” I repeated.

He hesitated, clearly struggling to grasp my request.

“Jaxon,” I chuckled. “What is it? Is it... too personal? I’m sorry, I don’t know enough about this to—”

“No,” he cut in, smiling. “Nothing’s too personal for you to ask of me. You’re my mate, woman.”

“Oh, does it hurt to shift? I thought after the first time that it was painless.”

“It is. There’s no pain and it’s instant for an Alpha.”

“Okay, then. So, what’s wrong?”

“I thought you were scared shitless of it.”

I frowned. “Why?”

“That day on pack lands when you were recovering from Draco’s attack, you freaked out when I partially shifted, called it a beast.”

Oh. Oh, shit. “Jaxon, no.” I stepped into him and grasped the sides of his leather jacket in my urgency to allay his concerns. “I was scared because I was defenseless in my magically-depleted state, in the home of somebody I didn’t know, this inexplicable overwhelming desire igniting between us, and you’d lost control of your wolf. I don’t know enough about wolves. You were the first I’d actually encountered. Knowing my father’s intent to keep us apart, that makes sense to me now. I used the word beast , because I thought that’s how you referred to it.”

He was quiet for a while as he took in my explanation, processing everything I’d said.

He pulled away from me and my heart sank, thinking he wasn’t good with it.

But then I watched his eyes glowing with that familiar gold.

In the next second, his claws of his right hand dropped. He shrugged off his jacket, letting it fall to the floor, and I looked to see that wolf fur had sprouted along his right arm.

He eyed me warily.

I knew what he needed.

Proof.

Reaching out, I ran my fingers along his arm, stroking his snowy-white fur. It was thick and so incredibly soft to the touch.

Emotion flared in his eyes as I lifted it to my face and nuzzled my cheek against it.

“The wolf is a huge part of you. Why do you think I asked to see it?”

“You want to bond with it,” he realized.

“Yes, baby.”

“Baby?” he murmured.

“That’s right.”

He smiled. “Step back, princess. A good few feet.”

I complied, putting the distance between us .

Excitement bloomed at the thought of setting eyes on this part of him.

I could hardly wait.

My skin was tingling with anticipation.

And then he started stripping.

Holy hell.

I didn’t think I’d ever get used to his hulking, ripped body.

He pulled his gray t-shirt over his head, baring that glorious chest, that block of hard muscle, his broad shoulders serving to contain it.

He flicked his fly open and winked at me, enjoying me basically salivating over him.

He shoved his jeans down, revealing that he wasn’t wearing any underwear beneath, as his cock sprung free from its confines, startling me when I saw that it was standing

to attention, rock hard and wanting.

“Just a touch and you’ve got me like this.”

“You’re not the only one.”

“Yeah? Show me,” he teased.

“Maybe after.”

His eyebrows shot up. “Really? That’s on the table now, is it? Wow. You really have become much more sexually liberated.”

I could feel myself blushing. “Well, I had a good teacher.”

He grinned as he kicked off his boots. “Glad to be of service. Seriously, any time.”

I rolled my eyes.

Then things became intense.

In the best way possible.

He took another step back.

His eyes glowed that beautiful gold again, this time that much more vibrant .

And then he slammed his hands down to the ground, on all fours.

With a ferocious roar, he arched his back, threw his head back, his wolf teeth dropping, his facial features contorting, hair sprouting throughout his body. His form

shifted fluidly and beautifully, limbs extending and angling, until the full transformation engulfed him.

Standing before me in the next moment was a breathtaking huge white wolf.

His snout swung my way, his eyes still aglow, so strikingly vibrant, as the wolf looked upon me.

And then he hung his head, signaling that it was safe to approach.

I made my way over, my hands shaking with anticipation.

When I was upon him, I reached out and tentatively stroked his head.

A small purring noise emanated from him.

Encouraged and emboldened by the favorable reaction, I moved closer still, stroking his back, relishing the feel of his soft, warm fur.

He turned his large head, his beautiful eyes burning into mine.

And then he nuzzled against my side.

I wrapped my arm around him, relishing his warmth and the love coming off him.

He sank to the floor, lying down at my feet.

I crouched down beside him and laid with him, relaxing against him and stroking him as he purred contentedly, mirroring just how I felt.

My badass, abrasive Alpha wolf was much more than he let other people see.



So much more.

For me .

For his mate.

I knew from too many years of experience just how hard and risky that was to do.

Especially when he'd had so much stripped away so brutally recently, to take a chance like this took incredible strength of will and incredible heart also.

“Sharing yourself with me means everything to me,” I whispered at his ear.

He purred once more, this one far more distinct.

And then he draped his paw over me and held me close, letting me know that he was right there with me.

## Page 12

*Source Creation Date: August 4, 2025, 2:15 am*

12

~Lucian~

“Swallow every drop.”

Ryker trembled excitedly at my deep, uncompromising command.

I was snarling in the next moment as that glorious mouth of his propelled me into ecstasy.

I came hard, filling him up with violent spurts of my thick, ropey cum.

He eased off my cock and I watched in satisfaction as he made a show of gulping down my cum.

He grinned when he was done and licked his lips seductively.

My cock jerked in response, ready for another round or two, a delicious perk of vampirism.

Ryker made a grab for my shaft, but I evaded his touch with a brief burst of speed, putting a couple of feet of distance between us.

Just enough breathing room to allow me to think straight.

Not understanding me turning him down, he started toward me, his eyes hooded.

“Ah, you want me to chase you this time. As you wish.”

I held up my hand and took another step back, needing to ensure there was a physical distance between us. I was still worked up and enthralled in our sexual spell. It was beyond trying to hold off on going in for another round.

Once was never enough with him.

People thought I was the seducer, yet Ryker was one in his own right without even trying.

He was naturally charming, extremely captivating. Irresistible, in truth.

But I had to resist at this point in time, much to both our regrets.

I'd noticed that he always had his defenses lowered right after one of our sessions , so it was the best chance to have the sort of difficult discussion that we needed to have now.

It was already long overdue.

A lot of that had been down to my mind not being clear with the powerful scent of Immortal blood in the air. My focus had been on fighting to overcome the awful urge that came with that. But a couple of days ago, Mia had managed to re-erect the veil that concealed the scent. Her magic had stabilized. Shortly after she'd allowed Jaxon to take her actually. Accepting him physically had served to calm her and comfort her, a benefit of the mating bond.

And now I was back to my levelheaded and astute self.

It was time to see to my beloved.

It couldn't wait any longer.

Thinking it would taper off and that he'd calm down had been a mistake.

"We need to talk."

He tensed, his heart rate spiking noticeably.

I held up my hand, realizing where his mind had gone .

The last time someone had uttered those words to him had been the night Mia had unceremoniously broken things off between them. I cringed inwardly at my choice of phrasing. "Calm, my beloved. It is not about us. We are solid, now and forevermore. I apologize. I should have worded it differently."

He calmed a little at my assurances. "What's wrong, Lucian?"

I tucked myself back into my dress pants. "I am concerned."

"With everything that's happening, you're going to have to be way more specific."

Touché. "You're insatiable."

He cocked his head to the side, perplexed. "Something of mutual benefit, no?"

"Of course. Under normal circumstances, I would be reveling in every moment of it," I said, as I took a seat on the foot of our bed. "As it is, circumstances are not normal."

"What are you saying?" he asked, coming toward the bed.

I shook my head. "No closer."

He chuckled. "Come on, Lucian."

"I'm serious. I'm still... affected by our tryst."

"Our tryst, huh? You mean you reaming my ass and making me come all over myself, then you fucking my face with your cock until I swallowed every drop?"

Hell! "Ryker," I growled in warning. "This is a conversation we need to have. Your attempt to avoid it is not only ridiculously transparent, but it's serving to intensify my concerns."

He rolled his eyes. "That's all well and good, except I have no idea what you're talking about."

I doubted that, but I'd spell it out clearly nevertheless. "You are using the rush of sex to numb yourself to certain distasteful and painful things. Not only is that not sustainable, given that you don't possess the stamina of a vampire, but it also won't end well. Burying things never does. You need to acknowledge the truth, your hurt. I understand why you can't to the others. You need to project stability and infallible leadership at this tumultuous point in time. But that's why I'm here." I shot him a look. "Not just to give you that sexual high you're currently craving without respite."

"I... I don't think of you as a thing to use just for that, a dick to ride, or whatever. I love you, Lucian. We're partners."

I didn't believe for a single moment that he saw me as something to use. However, he did need a push, so I challenged, "Then live up to that. Share the burden with me."

He turned away, muttering, "Fuck."

"I'm not here to judge you, Ryker."

“I know. I know! Because you’re amazing like that. Actually, you’re perfect.” He threw his hands up in the air. “And I’m not, okay? I’m not!”

“Perfection is an illusion. I’m certainly nowhere close to that. All too recently, if you recall, I lost complete control and almost drained Mia dry, the key to destroying Draco and saving the supernatural world. Millions at stake and I almost sentenced them to death in one fell swoop.”

“That wasn’t your fault,” he murmured.

“Debatable.”

“It wasn’t,” he said, sullenly. In the next moment, he spun back to me. “Besides, I meant you’re perfect with me . Opening my world up, accepting my bullshit with Mia and this heavy fucking Covenant duty, taking care of me, loving me. And I... I...” he winced, and shook his head.

“And you what ?” I pressed .

His eyes swam with emotion. “You nearly died,” he uttered on a broken whisper, like he couldn’t bear to give the words full volume. “Right in front of me. In that moment that Jaxon staked you, I really thought you had. When I saw it was a gut wound, relief like I’d never felt before flooded through me. Until... until I realized it was no ordinary stake.”

I frowned. “I don’t understand. Yes, the stake took me longer to heal, but—”

“It was killing you!” he blurted out, emotion getting the best of him. “The holy water and the infused sunlight was working its way through your bloodstream. I stopped it with my next-level magic. It was forged by magic, meaning the effects could be destroyed by magic.”

“Why didn’t you tell me that?”

“You were dealing with enough as it was.”

“So, the stake can kill an Ancient no matter where the wound is inflicted? It doesn’t need to penetrate the heart?”

He nodded regrettably. “It only needs to pierce your skin deep enough to enter your bloodstream.”

It was a great deal to absorb.

“I’m working on a way to protect you.” He came to me and took my hand, his brutal revelation nullifying the heat that had been raging through me for him. “I almost lost you,” he uttered on a pained choke.

“Ryker, I—”

“I can’t . I can’t lose you. It took me long enough to open myself up to what we have. Now that I have, I don’t want to imagine an existence without you in it, without you being a part of me.”

I gave his hand a squeeze. “I feel the same way.”

He released me and blew out an exasperated breath. “Shit. Part of me wants to take us far away from all of this, to walk away while we know that we still can, just so that we don’t tempt fate, so that we don’t risk it.”

I shook my head. “Ryker—”

“I know, I know. We can’t do that. And I never really would. It’s just... fantasy.

Another life, with options, without this dark cloud of despair, pain, and death hanging over us all.”

Stepping into him, I cupped his face in my hands, urging his gaze to mine as I spoke, “Death comes for all of us in time. But that time isn’t yet, Ryker.”

“How do you know?”

“We have just found one another, brought together by fate. Why on earth would it tear us from one another so soon? The logic doesn’t hold up well at all, now, does it?”

I saw my explanation impact him, my words taking hold. I strode onward, adding, “Let’s also not overlook the fact that you had the means to cure me of the affliction from that stake at just the right time. I refuse to believe that was just a coincidence. It was meant to be. I was meant to live. As are you. We won’t be taken from each other any time soon.” I stroked my thumbs over the rough stubble plaguing his jaw. “Regardless, though, we cannot live in fear of losing what we hold dear. If that were the case, then fear would rule our lives, and we’d never appreciate and revel in what we have in the here in and now. And, believe me, what we have is something I wish to revel in.”

Tears spilled down his cheeks.

He squeezed his eyes shut.

And then he sank against me.

I wrapped my arms around him, resting my head on his shoulder. “Even when a problem seems insurmountable, you can find solace in unburdening yourself to another, sharing the load. It can offer a flicker of light even when all else had



previously been steeped in darkness. ”

A weak chuckle escaped him. “Professional persuader indeed.”

I smiled to myself.

“So, is this what has been weighing on you?”

“That and the pressure of holding everything together.”

“I see. Well, Mia’s magic has stabilized now, so the pressure will ease very soon.”

“If she can rise to the occasion, yeah.”

“She will.”

He pulled back a little to look up at me. “How can you be so sure?”

“Because there is no choice.”

He gave a nod. “True.”

“What can I do to ease things for you in the time being?”

“Bond with her.”

I cocked an eyebrow. “What?”

“Her connection with me was established years ago. She’s just strengthened hers with Jaxon. For the Covenant to work, the two of you need one as well. Soon, Lucian.”

“I will see to it.”

“You will? No hesitancy, no argument?”

“You forget that I am already fond of her and it has only grown since our forced proximity.”

“I’d suspected, but I wasn’t sure. You brought her up vividly during our dirty liaison in your office. You also gave her your blood without reservation to heal her after Draco’s attack on the pack lands, and I know you don’t take that lightly.” He eyed me pointedly. “She doesn’t know that about you, though.”

I nodded my understanding. “I will make it clear, however, the resistance to us connecting is on her end, Ryker. I can’t control that . ”

“She’s just nervous, because you’re a hell of a sexually-intimidating force. But she’s gotten over that with Jaxon.”

“He is her mate. It took some light coaxing, but that was all.”

“Then ask him to facilitate your connection with her. Having him there will put her at ease.”

“All right, my beloved.”

“Thank you.”

I smiled and tightened my hold on him. “We’ll get through this tumultuous time and overcome these hurdles. And then we will prevail. All will be well.”

He murmured his agreement against my chest. “I believe you.”

## Page 13

*Source Creation Date: August 4, 2025, 2:15 am*

13

~Mia~

Finally!

I'd done it.

My magic was finally stabilized.

Now I could move on to the next step.

For us to succeed, for the Covenant to be solidified, I needed to go beyond my comfort zone.

I was to become the vessel for the joining of extreme power, but I was also to become the wielder. I couldn't balk in the face of channeling that.

In fact, I had to be ready to welcome it.

I needed to learn to revel in my magic.

And now was as good a time as any.

"Here goes nothing," I murmured to myself, as I fired my magic into the night sky.

That familiar warmth rushed through me and I watched as a kaleidoscope of vibrant

colors sparked into being, lighting up the sky in an awe-inspiring series of magical fireworks.

I smiled, savoring the stunning sight.

I rarely ever used my power for frivolous things. It had always been about need, rather than want. I'd used my abilities for battle, for Guardian tasks and missions. Professionally, rather than for my own pleasure.

It had left me disconnected from my magic, with that entire side of it left unexplored. It was like getting to know only the professional side of somebody and the job that they did, instead of their non-work persona as well.

I needed to be at one with my magic, to embrace all its facets, in order to increase my stability and control over it, in spite of whatever may come my way and try to challenge that.

"Breathtaking," a voice sounded all of a sudden. That velvety-smooth voice that had an almost hypnotic quality.

I pulled my magic back, the fireworks dissipating, the sky returning to its dark blanket with a light sprinkling of stars providing some partial illumination.

"Just doing a little experimenting," I said, turning to face Lucian.

He arched a dark eyebrow. "Experimenting?"

I pulled my silver silk cardigan closed against the chilly night air and folded my arms across my chest, as I settled in to live up to my recent goal of being more transparent. "I've always been very rigid about my magic usage, only really using it as a necessity. Ryker revels in his . It's a true part of him. He's extremely comfortable

with it, use to pushing the envelope. He doesn't hold back. He was even able to access next-level power without any dark consequences. That's pretty much the opposite of my experience. So, it occurred to me that, perhaps, I need to bask in it more like Ryker, use it for fun and personal pleasure, rather than just as a weapon or a tool to complete a task."

"An interesting theory."

He was smiling, but it was a tight, polite smile. He seemed to merely be humoring me, not on board with it .

"You don't agree?"

"I wouldn't say that. Experimenting is a great tool for growth and opening yourself up to things you would otherwise keep the door closed to. But I do think you are overlooking the foremost issue that impacts your magic usage."

I shifted my weight uneasily, trying to resist my instinctual urge to shut him down or even bite his head off at being questioned.

It was a go-to defensive tactic that I'd had as long as I could remember.

And Lucian brought it out in me more than either of the other two. With all of my recent self-reflection, I had managed to figure out why.

As much as I hated to admit it to myself, let alone to him or anybody else, Lucian Black intimidated me sexually. He was an indomitable force in that department. Just a look from him affected me. The desire was there, but I couldn't bring myself to act on it. I was worried he'd run right over me, leaving me as nothing but a messy puddle begging him for whatever pleasure he deigned to hand over to me. I couldn't submit like that. I couldn't kneel, not to anybody, not under any circumstances.

But the man had skills and I feared that I'd succumb despite myself, that I wouldn't be able to handle it with my stark inexperience.

Jaxon should have posed the same issue to me. And I guess he had very briefly. But the connection between us as mates transcended that somehow. It put me at ease knowing that his intentions were noble. They had to be, nature wouldn't have it any other way. It had made me comfortable enough to be able to let go, to lose myself in him, and taste true sexual freedom. I'd actually been wild with him.

Ryker was a different story. Wild hadn't been our thing when we'd been together. He was my best friend as well as my lover. We'd been safe, loved, and cherished in each other.

But I had to find a way to drop my guard with Lucian too and allow him in. Jaxon and Ryker each had a special connection with me already. To join, all three of them had to share a connection with me.

So, I swallowed down my irritation at him questioning me, and said, "I'm listening."

"You have a tight-fisted grip of control over every aspect of your life, including your magic. Unfortunately, as is the nature of life, not every aspect can be controlled. When you come up against that, you balk. You're not equipped to handle it. You have never allowed yourself to learn." He moved closer. "Ryker may not have been like that with his magic, but he was when it came to his sexuality and his true desires. Magic-wielders as a species are known for struggling with control. Your kind wields great power and the fear of that power becoming corrupted and untamable goes hand in hand with that. With practice, however, these things can be streamlined. The struggle will lessen, the burden will feel a great deal lighter."

"Is that what it's like with your bloodlust?"

“Yes.” He reached out and took my hand. I tensed and he noticed, but he didn’t call me on it.

Softly, he traced his fingers over my palm, sending sparks of sensation thrumming through me as he drew leisurely circles with feather-light pressure. God.

“Your father cut you off from so much in his bid to protect you and hide your true heritage. You haven’t explored who you are, or what it even means to be an Immortal Descendant. Your work as a Guardian was the only aspect of your life allowed open to you. Now, in such a short frame of time, the doors have been thrown wide open. Your fear took the wheel, however, and you turned away from the new and unknown, including the dark power that you touched during the Maven Coven battle.”

“I’m not turning away now.”

“You’ve come a long way. Allowing Jaxon to take you is a testament to that.” He reached out and slid a hand into my hair. “However, the mating bond offers a safety net through your interactions with him. Your friendship with Ryker acts in much the same way.” He pulled away. “You and I do not possess that and it is why you continue to turn away from me .”

I nodded, my throat dry as sandpaper.

“It’s not a lost cause. Like I said, Ryker was repressed and in a deep state of denial when he first came to me. I’ve helped him to explore his needs, wants, and desires. He’s found his true self and thrown off the shackles that had him merely playing a role that didn’t fit correctly for too many years. He’s helped me too.”

I cocked an eyebrow. “Ryker helped you? The almighty, infallible Ancient, Lucian Black?”

Amusement danced in his eyes. “Indeed.” His expression became sober and thoughtful in the next beat, as he told me, “After the regrettable incident wherein I became a rabid beast when the scent of your Immortal blood was unveiled, I was afraid of losing myself to it wholly, of not only being unable to be anywhere near you, but not being able to be around anyone, even my beloved. It was a crisis of faith, a stumbling block that called to long-held, deep-set fears and insecurities that I never let myself address. Ryker helped me to see beyond that, to trust in myself, to shore up my mental strength.”

I stared at him in open-mouthed wonder. “I... wow.”

He frowned at my stunned reaction. “Too much?”

“No,” I said, shaking my head vehemently, not wanting him to take it like that. “I just... I didn’t think you had... insecurities.”

“As you get to know me, I’m sure you’ll be horrified,” he said, with a laugh.

That had me laughing too.

And it really helped to take the edge off.

It occurred to me that it had been his intention.

He was shifting the power dynamic between us, softening things for me, trying to put me at ease.

It was unbelievably endearing.

He kicked that up another notch by confessing, “I am so sorry for my attack on you, beauty. I regret it deeply.”



“I know you do. It wasn’t your fault.”

“I shouldn’t be let off the hook so easily.”

“I’m not worried about you hurting me, Lucian. I understand. The veil suddenly dropping was a shock to all of us. I couldn’t control my reaction either. It just so happened that mine was an incapacitating ringing in my ears and a surge of weakness, whilst yours was uncontrollable bloodlust. I’m at peace with what happened, with you . I promise.”

“I am relieved to hear it.”

“I’ve actually been meaning to thank you.”

He cocked an eyebrow. “For what?”

“Ryker. You’ve given him a new lease on life, coaxed him from a dark pit of depression. You’ve made him happy and shown him such love and profound understanding, something he’s been craving for so long.”

“He has been a gift to me.”

I smiled, recalling my best days with Ryker fondly. “That’s him.”

Lucian shifted his weight. “For too long, I couldn’t accept what had happened between the two of you, the hurt you’d inflicted upon him. It was soul-deep when he and I came together. It took time and effort for him to offer me even a sliver of his trust.”

I winced at the recollection.

Lucian went on, “But with the truths coming to light about Cornelius and the Covenant, it became clear that you acted out of love. You went to great lengths at the expense of your own happiness to attempt to spare him. You protected him despite it breaking your heart and leaving you all alone at a time when you were dealing with the weight of your duty to the Covenant, when you needed somebody the most to share that burden with.”

Emotion clogged my throat. “He didn’t deserve it, any of this,” I choked out.

“The world doesn’t deserve Draco, but he is here, nonetheless.”

“I know, but—”

He grasped my shoulders gently. “We accept what we need to do. We are ready. You need not worry, sweet sorceress. We are here with you, not merely out of duty, but because we wish to be. I am in awe of you.”

“Right there with you,” a familiar raspy voice boomed from behind us.

I peered around Lucian to see my sexy wolf striding over.

The way he worked a pair of jeans was something else.

Hanging low on his hips, bolstered by his golden wolf’s head belt buckle, they really emphasized his thick, muscular thighs and the power residing there. Not to mention, other appetizing things.

I saw a brief chin lift exchange occur between him and Lucian, sparking my curiosity.

Jaxon draped an inked arm across Lucian’s shoulders, a friendly gesture that I’d never seen from either of them before, and one I hadn’t thought possible. Their heart-

to- heart the other day had dramatically shifted things between them.

I didn't doubt for a moment that Jaxon, being as astute as he was, had put two and two together as to why Lucian had come out to the backyard to me. Yet, he wasn't trying to rip him away from me, to warn him off touching what was his , or anything.

“Jaxon?” I questioned.

He broke from Lucian and grasped my jaw, then swept down and took me in a deep, searing kiss that stole my breath.

He moved behind me and eased my cardigan off me, the silk sweeping down my arms, before it dropped to the floor at my feet.

He stroked his hands over my hips, before taking them in a firm grip, and holding me in front of Lucian.

Presenting me to him, it seemed.

It made me feel so wanton.

I didn't understand it, but I couldn't deny it either.

I didn't want to.

I wanted more of it, those feelings of butterflies, of my stomach clenching in anticipation, my pussy weeping in a plea for more. I wanted to let go, to give in and let them sweep me up in their sexual spell.

Jaxon trailed his tongue along the column of my throat, making eye contact with Lucian as he did, silently goading him. “You're wet for him. I can scent it, princess.

Your body wants him so bad it can barely stand it.”

“I...” I struggled, hating my nervousness in spite of everything.

Jaxon’s hand slid under my skirt. I gasped as his fingers unceremoniously dove into my panties. “Mmm, that’s right,” he growled, spreading my wetness everywhere, saturating my clit, my inner thighs .

He pulled his hand free, dripping in my juices, then shocked me as he spread it over Lucian’s lips.

Lucian’s eyes hooded.

A growl rumbled as Jaxon took it further, breaching his lips and gliding two of his fingers into Lucian’s mouth.

Lucian’s talented tongue that I remembered so well, swirled around his digits, licking them clean.

Jaxon brought them back to me and I jolted as he called his claws forth.

He swept them across my strappy black tank, shredding it to pieces.

He brushed the fabric away from my body, then drew a light scratch across the tops of my heaving breasts, leaving a tantalizing burn in its wake.

He stepped back and guided Lucian forward.

I moaned out as his warm, wet tongue soothed Jaxon’s sting.

A flick to the front clasp of my bra bared my breasts.

Lucian cupped them in his large hands, his hooded eyes burning into mine. “Exquisite.”

His mouth descended on them, licking and flicking my nipples with his tongue, his lips suckling at my soft flesh, his teeth nipping.

“Yes,” I groaned, throwing my head back into Jaxon’s waiting hands. He gathered my hair into a makeshift ponytail, sweeping it off my neck and shoulders to give Lucian unfettered access, while also using it to hold me at their mercy.

Lucian made his way down my body, licking, kissing and nipping my stomach, across my hips, my navel. He gave my skirt a tug and it slid down my thighs, pooling at my feet.

I’d barely stepped out of it when Lucian grasped my hips and buried his face in my lace-covered pussy, kissing me through my panties that were very nearly translucent all over with how wet I was. He rolled his lips over my clit, alternating between soft and hard pressure, moving excruciatingly slowly.

It had a plea bursting from me, “More! Please, Lucian! I need more.”

He smirked up at me.

My hair fell loose down my back, Jaxon releasing me.

I watched him walk to one of the patio chairs.

A thrill shot through me as he kept his eyes on me, and pulled out his hard cock. He licked his lips at me, then started stroking himself in the vigorous, rough, unhinged way wolves were known for.

Mmm. Especially the Alphas.

Lucian drew my attention back to him as he tore my panties from my body with one rough tug of strength.

I went to reach for my heels, but Jaxon called out, “Nah, leave them on.”

“Indeed. The make quite the visual,” Lucian agreed as the two of them roamed their hungry gazes all over my naked body.

Not long ago, I would have been so incredibly intimidated having their eyes on me like this. But now? Now it just served to fire me up.

Judging by the look in Lucian’s eyes, he’d picked up on that.

He was so perceptive, able to intuit my needs with such ease.

As that realization hit me, his sexual prowess and his overt seductive charm was no longer something to shy away from and be uncomfortable with. It was an asset, a most welcome thing.

Emboldened, I stretched onto my tiptoes, linked my arms around his neck, and kissed him hard and deep .

He groaned in appreciation and slid his arm around my waist, holding me to him.

Our tongues clashed in an erotic dance that had me moaning out at the exquisite sensations it was evoking in me, desire coiling, need surging.

A choking cry escaped me as he brushed his fingers over my drenched pussy. “Show me,” I uttered on a breathy plea. “Show me everything.”

His shining red eyes burned into mine. “With pleasure.”

In a burst of vampire speed, he was on his back on the picnic bench with me straddling him and facing his dick, his mouth beneath my thighs. I shuddered as I felt his cool breath fan over my folds.

Instinctively, I reached out to free his straining dick from the confines of his dress pants.

But my brain misfired as he suddenly speared me with his tongue, thrusting up deep inside me. I bucked on him and dug my nails into his thighs. “Oh my God!” I cried.

He fucked me with his tongue, slowly and leisurely, drawing out my pleasure.

And then he switched it up abruptly, eating me out furiously, snarling primally as his lips, tongue, and teeth devoured me like a man starved.

Pleasure built to a crescendo so quickly.

I watched Jaxon sitting beside us on the patio chair fisting his cock violently, his hungry gaze boring into mine.

Watching him watch what Lucian was doing to me was all too much, and I crashed over the edge, riding Lucian’s face, and screaming out into the night.

Before I could catch my breath, Lucian flipped us. My back hit the table and he was on me, licking his way down my body.

“That was just a taste, little sorceress. ”

Oh shit.

His tongue swirled inside my navel, then trailed a wet path down to the inside of my thigh, avoiding my still pulsing pussy. He licked up the other one, making me moan out and spread myself open to him.

In a flash of vampire speed, his clothes were gone.

He took his dick in his hand, eyeing me predatorily.

And then he breached me.



14

~Jaxon~

Mia's screams of pleasure echoed through the still night as Lucian fucked her into oblivion, his big cock filling her with rapid-fire thrusts of his vamp speed.

He grasped her shoulders, holding her steady through his erotic brutality, showing her no mercy, no breather, giving her everything just like she'd begged him to.

I'd thought that seeing another man taking my mate would have enraged me to the point of losing myself to the wolf within.

But it was the opposite. It was exciting the wolf and sparking pleasure in me.

Seeing her blissed-out expression, watching her writhing, hearing those sweet moans of hers, was a hell of a rush. Her body being used was sending my own need through the fucking roof.

I wanted more, wanted to see Lucian push her further.

And I wanted to be right there with him, owning the shit out of her, worshipping that glorious body of hers in every way imaginable .

Lucian must've scented my building arousal, because he eyed me and gestured for me to join in.

Rising from the chair, still holding my cock steady, I strode over to her head.

Lucian released his grip as I reached her.

I grasped her shoulders and yanked her toward me so that her head was hanging off the edge of the table.

I took hold of her hair in a mighty grip.

Wide eyes met mine.

And then I thrust my cock down her throat.

She didn't so much as gag as I hit deep.

Goddamn.

I fell into a rhythm, fucking her face, making her take every inch of me, over and over.

I was vaguely aware of a new presence somewhere behind me, but the sight of her throat working me over was too much to draw my attention away from.

Or so I thought until I felt hands sliding up and down my back.

Craning my neck, I looked to see Ryker standing behind me, his hands roaming over me, warming me, drawing out my need.

The sexy smirk on his face combined with the glint in his eye, told me that he knew about my thing for him.

And now, he'd found an opportunity to act on it.

He and Lucian exchanged a sly, knowing look, Lucian nodding and giving him the go ahead, and the next thing I knew Lucian was pulling out of Mia.

She whimpered at the loss of him as she teetered right on the edge of coming.

"The tease makes it all the sweeter, beauty," he told her with a wicked gleam in his eye, as he hauled her off the table.

Her legs instinctively wrapped around him .

He grabbed her ass and laid his back on the table, positioning her on top of him, his mouth beneath her soaking wet pussy.

Ryker took the cue that only the two of them understood and moved to them.

He grasped sweet Mia's ass, leaned down and licked her asshole, then thrust his cock deep inside her. He slid out slowly, making her keen at the teasing.

Lucian took the opportunity, his tongue leaving Mia's pussy briefly to lick Ryker's shaft above. Ryker's eyes rolled back in his head.

He plunged back inside Mia, Lucian returning to eating her out.

Then they repeated the same thing over and over until Mia was thrashing and screaming to high heaven.

The two of them stopped when she got close to orgasming.

Then they started up again, teasing her, basically edging the fuck out of her, building

her up for one hell of an epic explosion.

Pleas fell from her lips, but they kept teasing her, working their will on her.

It was hot as all hell.

I'd never been so hard in all my life seeing her treated to so much pleasure and adoration.

Ryker held his hand out to me.

I cocked an eyebrow.

“You want to. Let everything else go.”

I swallowed hard, getting his meaning.

And then I took the leap, crossing the line, and grasping his hand.

He urged me behind him.

I trailed my hands hesitantly over his ass cheeks .

He pushed back against me, encouraging me, urging me on, fucking well wanting it.

Desire surged through me at the thought of it. I let it take me over, consume me.

Reaching around, I slapped Ryker's cheek, demanding, “Open wide, lovely.”

He grinned, liking me rising to the role he wanted me to play. And then he stretched his mouth wide.

I thrust my fingers inside, driving deep at first to get a reaction from him.

I was surprised when he didn't choke.

My dick jerked at the realization. He could take a fuck of a lot.

Pity I was just getting started.

## Page 15

*Source Creation Date: August 4, 2025, 2:15 am*

15

~Mia~

He'd finally given into it.

I'd picked up on Jaxon giving Ryker a look, a tiny affectionate gesture, here and there over our time confined to the safehouse. It had been clear that the friendship they'd built in my absence had evolved into something more.

But Jaxon had lived his life a certain way, repressed by arbitrary rules and expectations.

I knew a lot about that with my own life. It had you cutting off a part of your identity, afraid to get to know it for fear of drawing outside the lines.

The problem with that way of thinking and approaching life was that you didn't just end up forcing that denial onto yourself, you imposed it upon others unwittingly also.

Now, though, he was embracing it.

And it was glorious.

Craning my neck, I groaned as I watched him spit on his cock, spread his saliva all over his thick, bulbous head and down the length of his shaft, then ease into Ryker's ass .

A delicious rumble of a growl came from him as he sank deeper, his claws dropping in his excitement and digging into Ryker's hips.

Ryker's eyes flashed and he cried out in bliss, quickening his thrusts and fucking me harder, deeper, rougher.

Lucian's powerful grip around my waist was the only thing that kept me from jerking up the table with every brutal thrust. He rose to the intensity coming off the other two, slashing his tongue back and forth over my clit, sucking the sensitized nub into his mouth, nibbling, and hell knew what else.

I came, exploding into his mouth, grinding my pussy into his face, riding out my orgasm for all it was worth.

"Fuck," Ryker exclaimed as I clamped down hard around his cock, pulsing around him violently.

Lucian's grip shifted to my thighs and he held me up when I started to collapse against his mouth, spent from one hell of an orgasm.

Ryker reached over and grasped the back of my head, weaving his fingers into my hair. Then he shoved me down onto Lucian's dick.

I welcomed it, sliding my mouth all the way to the base, swirling my tongue around his shaft nice and easy.

My stomach clenched, need rising again already, at the guttural sounds from the three of them getting off on me, on each other.

"Don't stop. Give her more," Jaxon said, his breathing choppy.

In the next moment, Lucian's wild tongue was back.

I screamed and bucked, struggling against it with my pussy way too over-sensitized right now.

He only gripped me tighter, forcing me to deal with it, to take what he was giving me.

I had begged him for everything .

But this was beyond my wildest expectations.

Every part of me was on fire, burning for him, for them.

Ryker ground into me with his cock, swiveling his hips as he hit that sweet spot deep inside me. He concentrated there, driving me out of my mind. My head flew back, Lucian's cock slipping from my mouth as I screamed out in desperation.

Desperate for what?

For them to ease up?

Or for more?

I didn't know.

I wasn't capable.

In that moment, all that existed was need. I was caught in a delectable pleasure spiral and I couldn't find a way to break out of it even if I'd tried.

I wanted it all.



I didn't care about the submission anymore. It didn't matter.

I just wanted to feel.

I needed them to take me higher and higher.

To push me.

To absolutely shatter me.

All of a sudden, the swirling pleasure assaulting my pussy stopped.

Lucian lifted me off him, Ryker's cock slipping from me.

He spun me around, my back to his chest, then slammed me down on his cock.

"Shit!" I cried as he made me take him so deep.

His arms wrapped around me, confining mine down by my sides as he controlled the rhythm, grinding into me like Ryker just had, torturously slow and incredibly sensual .

"Watch," Lucian whispered in my ear, shifting us to face Jaxon and Ryker.

A thrill rolled through me as I took in the scene.

Ryker bent at the waist, grasping the tabletop in a white-hot grip as Jaxon impaled him on his cock. His face was twisted in sweet agony, his glazed eyes showing his utter rapture of being filled and dominated by someone as formidable and as powerful as Jaxon.

I threw my head back against Lucian's chest and he chuckled darkly. "A delectable sight to behold, isn't it, beauty?"

"Yes," I breathed.

"Watching the man so used to dominating you, being commanded and used so roughly and wholly by your mate."

"Oh my God," I uttered on a needy, whispered breath.

"He's reveling in every second of it. He wants it harder." Lucian thrust up inside me, making me cry out. "Rougher," he went on, suddenly employing his vampire speed.

I screamed, bucking against his hold, struggling to take the intensity as he abused my pussy in the most glorious way.

I could hardly breathe, hardly think.

All that existed was the incredible friction and pleasure skyrocketing faster than I'd ever experienced before.

"Please!" I cried.

He hadn't laid another finger on my clit since we'd shifted to this position.

And I needed it.

I needed it badly.

But he didn't give it to me.

Did he want me to beg more, was that it?

Because I would. I really would now .

I'd thought submitting like that and letting somebody own me in such a profound way would make me feel shame and like it had taken something away from me, my power and dignity.

But I'd been wrong.

It hadn't.

It was empowering beyond belief.

And incredibly freeing.

"Lucian," I gasped, barely able to speak with the reverberation of his vampiric thrusts.

I turned my head, nuzzling his chest.

Our eyes met, mine imploring and desperate.

His were on fire.

A sly smirk formed on his lips. "Almost time."

I frowned. Time?

In the next moment, he slowed his thrusts and wrenched my thighs open as wide as they could spread, eliciting a shocked gasp from me.

I trembled as he spread my pussy lips apart, holding them open.

Jaxon shoved Ryker forward.

He grasped his cock and aimed it at my exposed pussy.

And then Ryker came, spurting all over me.

I bucked against Lucian as his hot cum hit my clit, my gaping pussy, oozing deep inside, and painted my folds. The sensation, the dirtiness of it, sent me hurtling over the edge.

Lucian ground down on my G-spot and I came violently, screaming and screaming and screaming to high heaven.

Jaxon pulled from Ryker, then stood beside him in a burst of wolf speed, then shot his cum all over me, this time painting my breasts, then filling my mouth.

It was too much .

I came again and again.

Too much pleasure. Too much intensity.

They wouldn't stop.

I didn't want them to.

My body was overcome by the utter insatiability they'd sparked to life in me, the depth of my need.

Everything slipped away as I passed out enveloped in pure bliss.

## Page 16

*Source Creation Date: August 4, 2025, 2:15 am*

16

~Ryker~

A smile spread over my face as I opened my eyes.

Last night had been a fucking revelation for us all.

The intention had been for Lucian and Mia to bond with each other.

And that had happened much quicker than any of us had anticipated.

I'd felt it snap into place before he'd even touched her and taken her in that all-encompassing, powerful way of his. Jaxon must have felt it just as I had, with him being her mate. Their bond was growing stronger then, if he could already feel significant shifts in her. I could with Lucian, because of the bond we'd been establishing for months, so much so that we could mind-link too from time to time.

And then things had evolved beyond what I'd hoped, all four of us coming together, finally dropping our reservations and inhibitions, and connecting as one.

It meant it wouldn't be long at all now.

We could form the Covenant.

I wouldn't have to hold things together much longer.

We would have the means to beat Draco back .

Finally.

I made a move to stretch my arms out and crack my neck, only to find that I couldn't because of heavy resistance.

I looked down to see that Lucian and Jaxon were sandwiching me in on Mia's bed, Lucian nestled against my chest with a leg thrown over two of mine, and Jaxon tight to my back, his arm draped over my thigh. They were keeping me warm without the need of the covers.

Mia was the only one beneath them. She was tucked up tightly, the way we'd left her after she'd passed out from pleasure last night.

Jaxon stirred against me.

In the next moment, I felt his cock harden.

I jolted as he nestled it between my ass cheeks.

He nipped at my earlobe, sending a spike of pleasure through me.

Rolling his hips, his cock slid up and down, making me groan as I felt the building friction on my hole.

"Once wasn't enough, lovely," his raspy voice whispered at my ear.

"He is truly addictive," Lucian spoke, startling me.

I looked to see his eyes hooded, enjoying me being tended to.

He gestured to Mia. “She needs her sleep. If you will assist.”

Knowing his meaning, I flicked my hand, my green fire sweeping over the three of us, teleporting us to mine and Lucian’s bed.

We materialized in the same positions.

Lucian didn’t waste any time, wrapping his hand around my cock and beginning to fondle me in that delectable way that I liked, twisting his hand sharply every now and then, driving me crazy .

I threw my head back, giving into the pleasure.

Jaxon fisted his hand in my hair, jerking it back further, holding me at his mercy.

Lucian clamped his hand over my mouth, another dominant move.

The two of them playing with me and owning me was incredibly intense.

Jaxon’s cock stilled and it left my ass cheeks.

With my movements restricted, I was only just able to see why.

He smiled darkly, then spat into his hand.

I moaned at the dirty sight as he used it to lube up his cock, rubbing it all over.

He parted my ass cheeks with his thumb and forefinger, and guided his cock to my hole.

And then he breached me, his thick mushroom head forcing its way into my ass.



At the same time, Lucian stepped up his torment of my cock, bringing his vampire speed into play.

I bucked wildly, but my movements were restrained by Lucian pushing against me and Jaxon pressing his free hand to my chest to hold me in place.

They were making me take it, using my body as they saw fit.

And I couldn't get enough.

My eyes rolled back in my head as I felt every excruciating inch of Jaxon's cock burrowing deeper and deeper into my ass.

He hit that sweet bundle of nerves within and I screamed into Lucian's palm.

Jaxon stilled.

On purpose.

He grinned wickedly, relishing my helplessness, enjoying the power he was wielding over me even as he benefitted from the sensation of my ass holding his cock in a tight fisted grip.

I whimpered.

I couldn't stand it.

I'd been so close.

I ground into Lucian's hand, trying to get the relief I needed.

His hand clamped down around the base of my cock like a makeshift cock ring, denying me.

“Beg,” Jaxon ordered.

Lucian released my mouth. “Tell him what you want.”

“I’m going to need details,” Jaxon added. “Make me fucking hot with it, Ry.”

“Fuck me deep with your fat cock. Ream me with your wolf speed, make me feel the burn.”

His eyes darkened at my dirty words. “Mmm. Damn fucking straight,” he said, finally starting to move again, sawing in and out of me.

He kept his thrusts shallow, though, driving me to the brink of madness as he purposely avoided my prostate.

“Please! Fuck, Jax!”

“Good boy,” Lucian said, tugging at my nipple hoops with his teeth.

Abruptly, Jaxon slammed in deep and bore down on my sensitive bundle of nerves.

Lucian’s hand clamped down around my mouth just in time as a scream tore from my throat.

Jaxon drew all the way out, then slammed back in, bearing down again, then swiveled his hips.

The sensation was pure ecstasy, forcing another scream from me.

Lucian's constricting grip around my cock was becoming all too painful in my desperate need to come and be satiated .

I yelled my need into his hand, my muffled screams sounding like a wild animal in heat.

I saw the two of them exchange a look.

Jaxon pulled out in the next second, making me whimper.

Lucian released my cock and the sudden rush of blood had me crying out and gasping for breath.

I didn't get the chance to catch it, as Jaxon grasped my ankles and tugged, forcing my legs toward my shoulders.

"Hold your ankles. Don't move a muscle," he commanded.

Lucian shifted onto his knees, preparing himself to do hell knew what.

I couldn't think on it as Jaxon suddenly thrust back inside my ass, driving right to the hilt, hitting that sweet spot over and over and fucking over. He brought his wolf speed into play and I lost it, my orgasm slamming into me.

With lightning-fast speed, Lucian took hold of my cock, holding it steady, aimed at my face.

With his other hand, he used his superior strength to force my mouth open.

In the next second, my cum erupted, filling my own mouth.

“Every last drop,” Lucian ordered.

I frantically gulped it down, struggling to keep my concentration as Jaxon continued reaming my ass like a madman on a mission.

It sent me hurtling over the edge again, catching me off guard.

Lucian released my cock without warning and I shot my load all over my face and neck.

Jaxon pulled out and flipped me over onto all fours.

Lucian was there in a burst of speed, holding my cheeks open, spread painfully wide, staring at my gaping hole.

Jaxon let himself go, spurting his cum deep into my ass.

“Fuck, yeah!” he roared, making me shudder as I felt his hot cum oozing inside my hole.

“Hmm, not quite full enough,” Lucian said.

Jaxon spat into my ass, the indignity of it sending a dirty thrill through me. “How about now?” he joked.

“Not yet.”

The next thing I knew, Lucian was fingering me, stirring the mixture of cum and spit, then scooping some of it out and spreading it over my ass cheeks. He reached around and shoved his coated fingers into my mouth, making me taste it.

He shoved deep and didn't stop, throat fucking me without mercy.

I choked in the next second as he slammed his cock into my ass and began fucking me within an inch of my life. It didn't take him long with all the buildup to find his release, and he came inside me too with a snarl.

I felt my ass overflowing, cum dribbling down my thighs.

Lucian swept his hand over it, then reached around and wiped it over my mouth and cheeks.

I collapsed onto the bed. "Fucking shit," I choked.

I hadn't thought it possible, but adding Jaxon into the mix with me and Lucian took the dirty to a whole other level.

It was a hell of a rush.

I loved every second of it.

I felt Lucian's arms around me. He held me against him and whispered in my ear, "Well done. You were incredible."

"Damn straight," Jaxon breathed, stretching his arms out above his head with a deep sigh of contentment.

I smiled and closed my eyes peacefully.

"Head's up!" Jaxon called from the stove across the kitchen.

Lucian reacted for me, using his acute reflexes to catch the pancake sailing across the

room with my plate, adding it to the first.

“Thanks.”

He wrapped his arm around me and gave me a squeeze. “Of course.”

He’d been very touchy-feely with me since our liaison with Jaxon a couple of hours ago.

I wasn’t sure of the root cause.

Was he worrying that he’d gone too far?

Or now that the lustful intensity had worn off and we were all back to thinking clearly, was he concerned that bringing Jaxon in on things could impact what we had together?

He didn’t need to be concerned about either.

I’d reveled in what they’d done to me. If I’d wanted it to stop, I could have easily made that happen with my magic.

And what Lucian and I had was an entity unto its own.

Nothing could shake that.

I’d reassure him about it later. I didn’t want to in front of Jaxon.

Plus, I was starving. Two intense mind-blowing fucking sessions back-to-back was a lot to handle and I needed sustenance quickly. Judging by the two blood bags Lucian had blown through when we’d headed in here to the kitchen ten minutes ago, he was

right there with me on that.

Jaxon strode over to the four-seater table a moment later, putting down a large tray full of dishes containing a ton of bacon, sausages, eggs, fried tomatoes, fruit, and syrup for the pancakes.

He started filling the plate in front of him and eyed me, “Dig in.” He glanced at Lucian’s empty plate. “Feel free. I wasn’t sure about your eating habits. Vamps and Ancient vamps differ, don’t they?”

Lucian snatched up a piece of bacon and took a bite, grinning at Jaxon with amusement. “I can eat, but I don’t require food to sustain me.”

“Got it,” Jaxon said, starting to chow down on his food.

I kicked mine off with pancakes. At the first melt-in-your-mouth bite, I eyed Jaxon, “You’re a hell of a cook.”

He shrugged. “They’re just pancakes.”

“Still. They’re really good pancakes.”

“Yeah, well, cooking was one of the skills you had to pick up as a wolf pup, knowing how to feed your pack and all that.” His eyes flickered with pain.

I reached out and clasped his wrist. “Are you okay?”

“It comes in waves.”

“I can imagine.” I knew he’d been working through his grief with Mia. “If you need to—”

“I’m good.” He smiled over at me, then sucked in a breath. “I mean, I’m getting there. But thanks. I know you’re here.”

A few moments of sad, contemplative silence fell over us for a while as we ate together.

And then he spoke, commenting, “Yeah, this is hitting the spot.”

“You know, I could’ve just conjured all of this? You didn’t need to go to all this trouble. ”

“I like it. Cooking is kind of soothing. Keeps me rooted to reality too when the supernatural world is going haywire all around me. Keeps me grounded.”

I couldn’t believe it. An amused chuckle burst from me.

Lucian grinned, enjoying my laugh, a holdover from my more carefree side, something he hadn’t seen a lot of lately. He laid his hand on mine.

“What’s so funny?” Jaxon asked curiously.

“Just how alike you and Mia are in some ways. The pride, the repression, the sense of duty. The whole cooking thing is right up her alley too. She has the same reasoning that you do. It’s uncanny.”

“She can’t cook.”

I frowned. “She made that picnic for your date.”

“She said she conjured it.”



“The ingredients, because we didn’t have a lot here, yes. But she put it all together and actually made it, cooked the beef, made the quiche, those tarts, and everything else. I saw her working on it in here while you were outside running in wolf form.”

He looked more than a little stumped. “Weird that she never mentioned that.”

“It’s not really that confounding, knowing Mia,” Lucian piped up.

It took me a moment, but I realized what he was getting at. “Right,” I said, giving a nod. “She probably downplayed it so that you don’t start to expect it.”

“Expect it?”

“Given how you grew up, in a misogynistic environment? She probably didn’t want you to think her domestic side extended beyond the cooking thing.” I eyed him pointedly. “Because it doesn’t.”

“Chill. I get it.”

“Good,” I said, relenting .

“Good,” he muttered, sensitive about being schooled in the intricacies of his own mate.

A few moments passed in awkward silence, before Jaxon suddenly cut through it, asking me, “Is the breakfast working to wash away the taste of our cum and your own ass?”

I stilled, my forkful of egg just shy of my mouth.

He was fucking with me.

Well, he had no idea who he was dealing with.

I was Ryker Morgan, the guy who had an answer for everything.

I eyed him steadily and fired back, “It’s actually a cocktail I’m rather fond of. Adding yours to the mix this time around gave it an added spice though.”

Lucian gave my hand a squeeze and chuckled at my smartass response.

Jaxon grinned, impressed. “Nice.”

An exaggerated gagging sound came from over by the door and we all turned to see Mia leaning against the doorframe, her arms folded across her chest, eyeing us with a mixture of distaste and amusement.

God . She looked sexy as hell with her just-fucked bed hair all wild about her face, dressed in just that thin black, silky robe.

“If this is what you guys talk about over breakfast, count me out.”

“Nah, princess, we’re done with that,” Jaxon assured her.

Lucian rose to his feet and gestured at the empty seat beside Jaxon. “Join us, beauty.”

She smiled and sauntered over to us.

In a burst of speed, Lucian was behind her as she sat down, pushing her chair in for her.

“Thank you,” she said, reaching up and easing him down to her. She planted a sweet kiss on his cheek.

“My pleasure,” he said, then rounded the table and took his seat back down beside me.

I smiled. With instances like that, it highlighted how he hailed from a very different age, where chivalry was prevalent. He had so many layers to him, I’d wager it would take me several lifetimes just to explore them all.

“Apologies for starting without you,” he told Mia. “We thought it best to allow you to sleep as long as you needed. Last night was rather taxing.”

She blushed a little and I thought she was going to shut down and retreat to her shy persona.

But, surprising us all, she didn’t, and instead she made a little joke, “Tell me about it.”

Jaxon wrapped his arm around her as he filled her plate with his free one. “How are you feeling?”

She nuzzled against him as she looked out at all of us with a big smile. “Amazing.”

“Indeed,” Lucian said.

“Hell, yeah,” Jaxon added.

That was an understatement. I hadn’t had time to wrap my head around it yet, what with the impromptu hardcore double-teaming from Lucian and Jaxon the second I’d woken up this morning.

But Mia had been something else last night. I’d seen a side of her that I’d only ever gotten close to before. Her inhibitions had completely fallen to the wayside and she’d

been a wild thing, so free, so alive.

“You were incredible,” I told her.

That didn’t even cover it. She’d come such a long way.

I guess we all had in our own ways.

The threat hanging over our heads had forced all of us out of our comfort zones in a big way. We’d had to access the parts of ourselves that we usually buried down deep, the parts we’d been afraid of bringing to the surface for fear of being unable to make them a true and permanent part.

She grinned, taking my compliment, then dug into her food, wolfing it down in a desperate fury.

“Like mate, like mate,” I teased Jaxon.

“Yeah. I’m noticing it more and more.”

“The bond between the two of you is growing stronger,” Lucian said.

“Strong enough to do the claiming,” Mia added.

We all pulled up short at her heavy words.

“Really?” Jaxon asked, his excitement palpable.

There was anxiety in Mia’s eyes as she looked back at him though.

“Mia?” he pressed, his excitement petering out and concern replacing it.

She looked down at her food, pushing her bacon around her plate with her fork. “I’ve been researching the volumes of books that my father kept here in one of the storage closets. I was trying to find a quick fix to my issues I’d had with my magic. There wasn’t anything there, so I had to go about it the hard way with Ryker, as you all know. But there was a journal. His journal. I’ve been reading over it before bed.” She hastened a glance at us. “I know what he’s done to all of us and I hate it too, but he’s still my father and I’ve been missing him, worried about him. The journal, reading his thoughts, helped me to deal with that and keep my grief and anxiety about what’s happening to him at bay, until we can free him from Draco.”

I reached out and grasped her hand. “Mia, you don’t need to apologize or feel guilty for caring about your own father. We get it. It’s complicated for you.”

She nodded and pulled her hand from mine. “Well, two nights ago, I came across some of his writings about the Covenant .”

We all tensed.

I put down my utensils and sat back in my chair, bracing myself, watching Jaxon do the same. Lucian remained as calm and as impassive as he always was in these situations.

Mia struggled to meet Jaxon’s gaze as she revealed, “We all know that we need to receive one another physically and emotionally, opening ourselves all the way to one another to form a soul-deep connection, so that the fusion of your power into me will work. Because my father left you out of the details when he first broached the subject to the rest of us, I didn’t know until I happened upon it last night, but the mating bond is so powerful that it has to be used in full force during the ritual.”

“Meaning what, exactly?” Jaxon pressed.

“Meaning, the claiming has to occur during the ritual itself. Not just a regular wolf bite.” She winced. “I’m so sorry. I honestly didn’t know.”

“Well, Cornelius didn’t even intend for me to be a part of it in the first place, so what if we leave the claiming out of the picture altogether?” he asked.

“Then I won’t have enough power to defeat Draco. My father intended me and him to face off against Draco. If that were the case then our combined efforts would have been enough. Alone, though, with him captured and waning in strength, that’s no longer an option.”

“Shit,” I muttered.

“Fucking winged bastard was playing one hell of a dangerous game. What if I’d already claimed you, huh?”

“Then we’d be in trouble.”

“The fates ensured that you didn’t,” Lucian said .

Mia’s gaze snapped to his. “Of course! My father was trusting in that, using it as a failsafe.”

“I’ll do you one better,” I spoke up. “He made you find the journal. He’s weakened with his magic depleting, but he’d still be able to pull off drawing you toward a freaking book. There’s a blood link between you because you’re family, which would have made it much easier for him.”

“Makes sense, princess,” Jaxon said. “You found it at just the right time too.”

“The puppet master never fails to make us dance in his ruthless masterpiece theatre,”

Lucian growled.

Mia's distress at the sheer invasive manipulation at her father's hands was obvious and painful to witness.

Whenever we figured we'd finally discovered the extent of it, something else came to light. There was no line he wasn't prepared to cross to enforce his will. All his bullshit talk about free will to Mia and here he was directing every move we made. The ends justified the means for him, the end being putting Draco down permanently. None of us were safe from his twisted influence. Not even his own daughter.

I saw Jaxon register the raw emotion all over Mia as everything sank in with an awful brutality for her. He took a beat, scrubbed his hand over his face, then reached out and stroked her shoulder, drawing her gaze to his. "It doesn't matter how we do it, just that we do it, all right? I'm good with it happening during the ritual, princess."

Color all of us shocked.

"Jaxon, you don't have to pretend that—"

"There's no pretending."

"You're sure?" she pressed.

"Yeah, I mean, the whole idea of having everything just right and perfect and all that... it's not what really matters. The actual act of the claiming does, bonding with you does."

A smile ghosted her lips. She leaned against him and nuzzled his shoulder. "Thank you, baby."

He wrapped his arm around her, holding her tightly.

Then the two of them returned to eating.

I couldn't though.

There was a heavy weight hanging over us, the proverbial elephant in the room.

As much as I wanted to wait on it, given how upset Mia was, I just couldn't.

So, I shifted my weight on my chair and put it out there, asking her, "Are you ready to perform the ritual and seal the Covenant?"

I felt Lucian tense beside me.

Jaxon tossed me a look, a low growl rumbling in this throat.

I wasn't having it and I gave him the brutal truth, "We've already stalled as long as we can so that Mia could regain her equilibrium, so the rest of us could prepare ourselves, so we could all bond. That's been achieved. Now, with every second we wait, Draco remains out there unchecked wreaking havoc. Cornelius' strength is draining away, all the pillars of the supernatural world that he's erected are crumbling. The longer we wait now, the more of those that will fall."

"All right, Ryker, we get it," Mia cut in, pulling away from Jaxon and sitting up straight.

I cocked an eyebrow. "Well? What's the verdict, sweetness?"

Her eyes bored into mine, determination and conviction flashing brightly, as she uttered the words I'd been waiting on for too long.



“I’m ready.”

17

~Lucian~

“Over my undead, rotting corpse.”

Ryker stilled, halfway to shrugging on his leather jacket, and swung his head my way. He seemed more than a little disgusted by my phrasing.

That was quickly overshadowed by the content of my statement.

Well, it had been more than just a mere statement.

And he’d picked up on it well, judging by the incredulity in his expression.

“Was that an order?” he asked.

I buttoned my black linen shirt at the middle, then folded my arms across my chest, my eyes darkening in warning. “If it must be.”

His expression hardened, his body tensed, and I heard his pulse pick up. His fight or flight response had been triggered.

“It’s a suicide mission,” I pointed out. “You must leave it be.”

He scoffed. “You’re kidding, right?”

“I have never been more serious. ”

“I can’t just leave them. I can’t let the Guardian Movement get wiped out. I was supposed to put up a protection barrier, but then that run-in with Draco happened and protecting you, Mia and Jaxon took precedence.”

“As it should. The Covenant is the key to ending Draco’s path of destruction. The Guardian Movement isn’t.”

“The barrier they erected without me isn’t strong enough. Draco will break through it in moments. They can’t hold it. They need me, need my magic.”

“If the intel they’ve just communicated to you is correct, you are already out of time. You won’t be able to create another barrier. Instead, you’ll be running right into the line of fire of a battle that you cannot hope to win.”

We had barely awoken from a fitful night’s sleep when, ten minutes ago, Ryker had received an SOS report from the Guardian Movement. Draco was coming, headed straight for the compound.

“I won’t just stand by and let them all be massacred by that bastard.” He brushed past me, muttering, “Besides, you’re really underestimating my new power.”

With a burst of speed, I barred the way to the door.

“Lucian,” he gritted out.

“Doing this would mean you breaking your vow to me.”

That gave him pause.

His brow furrowed as he thought on it, clearly trying to find a way around it.

A few moments later, the twinkle in his eye let me know he'd found one.

Or, he believed he had found one.

Surprising me, his demeanor softened, warming even, as he took my hand and told me earnestly, "Lucian, we both know you're stretching the meaning of that vow in a desperate move to keep me here, to protect me. But you need to get this, get why I need to do this. Hear me out."

I nodded. How could I deny such a reasonable request? "As you wish."

"Thank you," he said.

Straightening and rolling his shoulders, he drew in a calming breath then told me, "With Cornelius and Mia gone, I became the next most powerful magic-wielder in existence. But I wasn't strong enough. My power still couldn't compare to theirs. I wasn't anywhere near the same ballpark as them."

"Of course not. Immortal blood does not run through your veins."

"Immortal blood is not the be all and end all."

I reached out and softly caressed his cheek, telling him gently, "They will always be stronger, Ryker." If he could not except that, it would continue to cause him a great deal of grief. I feared he would keep pushing until he pushed too far.

"There is what we're gifted, then what we work for. Our will, basically. And I'm one hell of a strong-willed son of a bitch."

“Some might call it stubbornness,” I jested, in an attempt to cut through the mounting tension.

“An argument could be made for it, yeah,” he said, meeting my humor briefly, before a gravely serious expression blanketed his face. “I busted my ass to access this higher level of power, Lucian. It’s not something done overnight, not even for the Immortals. It took me months and I know you saw the toll it took on me while I was doing it. Do you think I’d go through something like that just for vanity’s sake?”

“That isn’t what I meant.”

“It sounded like it. But the reason I did it was so I could stand against Draco when the time came again. We were without Immortal allies when I made that decision and we still are now, until Mia gets her shit together. So, here we are, with Draco on his way to decimate the supernatural world’s chief defenders with no Immortal might to speak of. But, I’m here. I can stop him. I can save them. Sitting out a fight when I know I can help because of selfish reasons like my own safety is despicable. I couldn’t live with myself.”

“Your conscience and your caring heart are two of the things I love most about you, Ryker and I understand your reasoning. However, it is a great risk.”

“I could’ve stopped Cornelius,” he announced.

I started in surprise. “Excuse me?”

“That night he pulled us into that phantasmal plane, I had the means to stop him.”

I recalled seeing that spark of green lightning that night, the magic that had now become part of his normal. “I saw the lightning. That was the first night it emerged and you realized your true potential?”

“Yeah.”

“I could almost rationalize it happening with Mia, but not Cornelius. He is a full Immortal. You couldn’t have overpowered his magic and the same stands for Draco, as a result, my beloved.”

He grasped my arms and leaned into me, whispering, “It’s not about overpowering them. This new level of power... this new, next-level magic... it’s different. It works in several different ways. One way that is particularly viable when going up against Immortal power is that it can corrupt an opponent’s magic, effectively destabilizing the stream of their energy.”

I couldn’t conceal my utter shock at his revelation. “ There is no known magic-wielder in the world who can do that. This is a brand-new form of magic.”

He grinned smugly. “Damn right it is.” He briefly invoked a spark of his green lightning, eyeing it reverently. “It’s a game changer.”

I took his hand. “It’s still something very new to you. You should practice more, spar with Mia and determine the precise limitations of your magic against Immortal energy.”

He squeezed my hand gently, his expression grave, as he said, “We’re out of time.”

I felt his hand slipping from mine and then his magic flamed into being.

Not expecting it so quickly, I failed to react in time, before he teleported away faster than he had been able to do in the past.

Panic gripped me.

And something I had not felt since I was human.

Fear.

Fear for his wellbeing.

Fear of losing him.

“He'll be all right.”

I started at the sound of the gruff voice.

I'd been so taken in with Ryker leaving and my anxiousness of him running headlong into danger that I hadn't been paying attention to my surroundings.

I looked up to find Jaxon walking into the room. I gestured for him to have a seat in one of the armchairs in the small seating area in the corner.

He smiled and took the offer.

With a heavy sigh I joined him, slumping down into the remaining one.

“He knows the stakes. He's not the reckless fool he once was,” Jaxon reminded me.

“He wouldn't go there if he didn't think he could handle it.”

“Handle what?”

We both swung our heads toward the door.

Mia stood there emanating her usual sophistication in a pair of sleek black leather pants paired with a vibrant-blue lacy blouse that matched the streaks in her hair. Her

heels clacked on the hardwood as she shifted her weight, looking on worriedly as she took in the state of us, the tension filling the room.

“Where is Ryker?” she pressed.

Jaxon and I exchanged a look.

She wouldn’t be happy.

In fact, I was concerned about her reaction.

I tensed, my muscles going taut, instinctively preparing to respond if she made the wrong and very dangerous decision of going after Ryker.

Ryker would never forgive me if I allowed it.

At this point, with the way I’d grown to care for her, I wouldn’t forgive myself.

“Well?” she pressed. “Where the hell is he?”

Time for some tried and true stalling tactics.



## Page 18

*Source Creation Date: August 4, 2025, 2:15 am*

18

~Ryker~

What a clusterfuck.

I pitied each and every one of them as I scanned the Great Hall situated in the center of the Guardian Compound.

We were all scattered around the circular amphitheater-style seating area. The current speaker giving his two-cents was in the center, turning around as he spoke to ensure he was addressing everyone.

So many of the members were ridiculously hung up on bureaucratic bullshit.

The rules and regulations that we were all used to abiding by didn't have relevance now, though. We were at war and in a goddamn state of emergency.

Plus, with the six-hundred odd members I'd counted, we only had about sixty-percent of our members present. We couldn't operate how we normally did when we had a skeleton staff.

We needed to take action now, instead of getting bogged down in procedural details.

They were even taking fucking meeting minutes like we usually did when issues were raised during these stupid hoity-toity gatherings.

Merek seemed to think he was in charge. He'd been one of Cornelius' first Guardian recruits. A five-hundred-year-old magic-wielder who always wore his hooded robe, even when not in the field on mission. He was basically a living wizard stereotype, with his flowing long hair, the almost equally long beard, his holier-than-thou attitude.

His shock of white shoulder-length hair flew about his face as he gestured wildly about another load of inconsequential bullshit that I'd stopped paying attention to. I was just waiting for a break in his monologue, so I could sort this shit out.

Althalos was up next, an Ancient, just a century shy of Lucian's age. His appearance was as opposite as could be of Lucian's though. He had the whole biker look going on, with leather pants, a rock band t-shirt and a worn leather jacket. His hair was short and dirty-blond. And he was a massive hulk of a guy, like a damn bodybuilder.

As he started backing up what Merek was saying, going on about chain of command and the supposedly correct way to deal with things, I'd had enough.

Time was running out. Draco was fucking well coming!

I teleported into the speaker's circle .

The surprise on the face of Althalos would've been comical if the situation wasn't so dire.

He jerked back, majorly caught off guard. Yeah, few vamps, even Ancients, could sense someone during teleportation state.

"Enough!" I spoke, my voice echoing around the room, thanks to the acoustics of the perfectly arranged amphitheater seating. No wonder the Ancient Greeks had been such a huge fan of the design.

“What is the meaning of this?” Merek demanded, shooting from his seat. “You do not possess seniority, thus decision-making privileges do not extend to you, youngling.”

“This isn’t about seniority. It’s about power,” I tossed back.

His eyes flashed, clearly taking it as a personal insult instead of the statement of fact it was intended as. “Just because you have bedded a sorceress of Mia Snow’s caliber, doesn’t mean you can match that power.”

Althalos smirked. “Not just her, according to rumors. The Ancient, Lucian Black, too.”

A chorus of gasps mixed in with some amused chuckles erupted around the room.

“You attempt to discredit me by using my personal life against me, but this is business. Plus, I was asked to come here to reinforce the protection barrier around the compound.”

Merek scoffed. “Those requests came from deluded fools, not those of us who believe in the sanctity of the Guardian Movement.” He added pointedly, “Those of us who understand it is vital to uphold our procedures and rules. You are a wildcard.”

“Your procedures and the rest of the high-handed bullshit won’t mean shit when Draco gets here and rips the place—and everyone in it—apart!” I challenged, my anger mounting.

This was the incompetence of bureaucracy at its finest.

“Cease this quarrel, Merek!” a deep male voice rumbled all of a sudden.

Its owner rose to his feet and I was stunned to see none other than Kalen, the ruler of

the Light Fae Kingdom speaking up.

I cringed inwardly as I noticed his oldest daughter, Ella, sitting beside him. She was the faery I'd messed around with while I'd been off-realm helping out in his kingdom.

Wow, my sex life was really being thrown back in my face today.

Fae were not Guardian members, but, I figured in light of the huge threat we were facing, Kalen had forced his way here today, knowing that if we didn't stop Draco here, in this Realm, then the threat would move to all others, including his.

When Merek moved to retort, Kalen held up his hand stiffly and cut him off, "Before you tell me that I do not possess seniority, I advise you to check yourself. I exceed your age and level of experience ten times over. To me, you are a youngling."

The affronted expression on Merek's face was going to live rent-free in my mind for a long time.

"Mr. Morgan is here to help. My sources have discovered it is he and he alone who is safeguarding the Covenant, the key to stopping Draco for all time. Without him taking that heavy responsibility upon himself, we would all be in far direr straights. Furthermore, the Orb of Life that he repaired for my kingdom has swelled in power. It is now outputting an incredible power that indicates one thing." His eyes strayed to mine and pride shone in his eyes. "Mr. Morgan's magic has evolved. Astronomically."

"What exactly are you saying?" Merek snapped.

Before Kalen could respond, the mammoth oak doors to the Great Hall flew open and the monster to end all monsters strode on in.

“Fools! Your egos and insufferable officialdom blind you to the obvious. You cannot sense it? Your youngling is the most powerful being among you.” He sneered. “Aside from me, of course.”

A deafening rumble erupted of shoes and boots charging across stone as everyone scrambled from their seats, heading toward Draco intending to fight.

Draco didn't seem the least bit worried about the six hundred Guardians snapping into action. The odds were crazy.

But the Beast was no ordinary opponent.

“No! Retreat!” They couldn't best him, not with a simple onslaught. They were running to their deaths.

The Guardian Movement needed to be protected.

We had to sacrifice the Compound in order to save lives.

Just like earlier, I was ignored, the older members charging Draco and ordering the others to do the same.

Merek directed the first wave, dozens of magic-wielders streaming their power at Draco like a damned multi-colored lightshow.

Draco swung his sword rapidly in an arc. Magic ricocheted off the hefty blade, firing into the amphitheater and blowing chunks out of it, decimating it piece by piece.

I sprinted forward into the fray, calling out warning after warning, telling them what Draco was capable of, that they couldn't best him like this.

But their egos had my words falling on deaf ears.

Althalos and a group of Ancients ran at him, some slamming into Draco and trying to topple him, others grabbing at his hand wielding the sword, trying to dislodge it from his grip.

I fought to get through the throngs of Guardians blocking my way to Draco, but there were so many of them, all fighting on impulse, completely chaotically.

A ferocious roar from the Beast made it clear he'd had enough, mere moments before he started batting his assailants away with his sword .

I cringed as they went flying right through the stone walls of the compound, their bodies crushed and bloodied.

Bone-chilling screams echoed through the Great Hall as Draco shoved his fist through chests, tore heads from bodies and then sliced others in literal halves with effortless swings of his broadsword.

Jesus Christ.

It was a brutal fucking massacre.

If I didn't take extreme action immediately, the Guardian Movement would be wiped out.

Trying to calm my raging thoughts, my emotions, and the adrenaline running rampant through my system, I focused on what needed to be done. Just the act itself, not the overall big picture chaos.

I sped forward, calling my magic forth in a sudden burst. The pressure of it had me

dropping to one knee as I slammed my palms together and it exploded out of me, creating the equivalent of a magical EMP.

The green pulse swept through the room, cutting out everyone's magic, causing mass disorientation, basically pausing the battle.

I pulled my palms apart and swept them backward, my magic doing the same, forcing back all the Guardians, erecting a shimmering wall to keep them at bay.

I ignored the protests and shouts of indignation and focused on what mattered.

The monster in front of me.

Draco twirled his sword idly in his right hand, his gaze fixed on mine.

He was smirking at me in a disturbing, all-knowing way.

"I told you months ago about your power."

"If you're expecting gratitude, it's not coming," I shot back .

"Gratitude is meaningless. I will settle for your cooperation." He took a step forward, the attempt at intimidation not lost on me. "Remove the veil you have cast upon the Covenant and I will leave this place intact and spare the lives of those remaining."

That was quite the offer.

And I wasn't buying it.

Mercy wasn't a part of his modus operandi.

“I don’t know what you’re talking about.”

His eyes narrowed. “Do not insult me. There is a barrier in place to the Alpha. It is not of Immortal magic, so I know it is not the sorceress’ doing. The Ancient possesses no magical ability. You are the clear culprit.”

“You’re all-powerful. Why do you need me to drop it? Can’t you just break through it?”

He took another step forward, spinning his sword idly at his side as he did, his agitation clearly growing. “You test my patience, Ryker.”

“Then why not just kill me?”

I heard gasps behind me from the Guardians at my near-goaded of the maniac right in front of me who’d just murdered tens of the most powerful supernatural beings in existence in mere seconds without breaking so much as a sweat.

With an exaggerated shake of his head, evoking disappointment, he said, “You stand here ready to defy me in order to fulfill the wishes of a being who abhorred you? Don’t you recognize the absurdity?” He lowered his sword and regarded me curiously. “You understand now why the great Cornelius Martel levied such animosity upon you? He knew your potential also. And instead of embracing it as an asset, he saw it as a threat to his misguided belief in his indomitable standing as the most powerful and revered being in all the realms. ”

“You’re telling me he knew I could do this?”

“Indeed. From the moment you were birthed unto this plane, he sensed a being of not only great power, but a unique power.”



Son of a bitch.

I forced myself not to react, to swallow the bitter pill down for the time being. Any flare of intense emotion risked destabilizing my magic. Too much was at stake to fall victim to that.

“Is Cornelius still alive?”

Draco smirked. “Duty above all, yes? I am sure you care not yourself.”

“It’s a simple question.”

“He lives. For the time being.”

“An Immortal can’t kill another of their kind.”

His lip curled in a twisted smile. “A loophole exists to every rule supposedly set in stone. You should know that better than anyone. It is where your strength truly lies, is it not?”

Did that mean he was searching for the dagger Mia had told me about, the Wrath of Hades, as it was so aptly named?

I couldn’t ask without giving my knowledge of it away, which would open up a whole other slew of complications. Assuming the worst was always the safest bet anyway. Shit. That put us on more of a time crunch than we’d already been facing. He’d just confirmed what we’d suspected. The only reason Cornelius was still alive was because Draco was still searching for the one thing that could kill his sworn enemy.

That settled it then, whether Mia liked it or not, she had to track the damn thing. We

had to find it before Draco did .

As much as I hated the old bastard, the indisputable fact was that he was needed.

Already we'd been struggling to contain the fallout of him being weakened, his magic collapsing and destabilizing vital aspects of the supernatural world. Right now he was only incapacitated, not dead. If that happened, far too much would be lost.

The world as we knew it would collapse upon itself, chaos would reign, unimaginable bloodshed would flow indefinitely.

The simple fact was that there was nobody else strong enough to counteract the loss of Cornelius Martel, the fucking almighty Silver Ghost.

Draco took a step toward me. "My patience wears thin, sorcerer. No more discussion." He brandished his sword. "The offer is simple. Drop the ward concealing my descendent, or I will decimate this sacred place and your precious Guardians."

A chorus of voices rang out, all trying to influence me.

It was deafening.

And, of course, all conflicting.

Some were commanding me to sacrifice whatever it took to protect the Covenant, our one shot at stopping Draco from overrunning the supernatural world.

Others were begging for their lives to be spared.

This kind of thing was exactly what happened when an organization was ruled with an iron fist by a megalomaniac dictator like Cornelius. Without him, it was left in

disarray, a decision unable to be made. Worse than that, the right decision unable to be made.

Fortunately, I'd never been one to toe the line.

I was all about out-of-the-box thinking and the strength and influence of the individual .

As Draco took another step forward, I called my power forth, my lightning.

"Never," I seethed.

His facial features contorted with rage. "Insolent fool. You've condemned them all." He moved closer. "You will suffer immeasurably for your defiance. I will break you."

I stood my ground. "Then fucking well break me, demon."

My insolence and my blatant disrespect did what I'd hoped, enraging him.

I knew well from my interactions with Cornelius that Immortals hated lesser beings challenging them. They just couldn't swallow down the shot to their egos.

Draco reacted emotionally, wildly , thrusting his palm out, black fire shooting my way.

Lucian's warning about him being able to move faster than an Ancient became null and void, as the demon gave away his intent in the midst of his rage, affording me time enough to prepare.

As his magic hit, mine was already firing back at him.

For the first time, I was able to truly see the effect that my next-level power had on somebody else's streaming magic in battle.

Gasps of surprise and awe from the Guardians behind me echoed my own as I watched my green lightning cut into and basically disintegrate Draco's magic at the point where it made contact with mine.

He roared, utterly incensed.

As he kept streaming, my magic continued to destroy.

I watched him shift his grip with his free hand on his sword. "There's a disadvantage to having this unique access to two forms of magic," he rumbled.

I tensed at his ominous tone and the knowing glint in his eyes .

"You require time to switch between your defensive lightning and your offensive power."

In the next moment, he tossed his sword like a spear.

His ridiculous speed finally bit me in the ass.

The brutal weapon cut through the air so fucking quickly that it was barely even a discernible blur before it was right upon me.

It drove into my right shoulder, tearing through my flesh all the way out to the other side, running me through.

I choked, my magic snuffing out at the intense agony that beset me.

I collapsed hard onto my knees.

“That wouldn’t be so much of an issue if my speed didn’t completely eclipse yours,” he went on.

“Missed the heart, asshole,” I rasped.

“Don’t worry, sorcerer, your death is imminent. For your insolence, however, some additional suffering is required first.”

I reached up with my left hand and closed my hand around the sword, supporting it. The bitching weight of it was worsening the wound, driving deeper into my flesh, and causing even more damage.

I managed to stabilize it.

But it would all be for nothing soon.

He took his time walking over to me, allowing himself to enjoy his handiwork, wanting to prolong my suffering too by leaving his brutal weapon imbedded in my flesh.

My pulse was pounding.

Sweat was breaking out all over me.

I spluttered, blood spewing from my mouth, down my shirt.

Eyeing my hand, I saw the mark of being struck by an Immortal weapon already taking root, black veins spreading rapidly over my hand, up my arm. As soon as they reached my heart, I’d be no more.

No, I couldn't die.

Not like this.

Not yet.

My right hand was hanging limply at my side, the sword buried in my corresponding shoulder taking it out of play, screwing with the nerves.

But there was a temporary way to override that, to transcend biology.

As Draco sauntered over to me, spouting off more reprimands and threats about what he was going to do when I was gone, I let it fade to the wayside, and took advantage of him being distracted by the sound of his own voice, thinking he'd already won without a shadow of a doubt.

I strained like never before to call my power forth.

Come on. Come on!

The familiar warmth surged.

It was coming.

It happened, my green fire sparking within my closed hand, concealed from Draco.

I only had one shot here.

I had to do it right.

Grunting at the effort, I managed to shift my weight enough to see behind me at the

Guardians.

Through the crowds of stunned onlookers, I managed to lock eyes with Kalen.

He was the only one of them who I could trust, the only one who saw things the way I did.

“Portal,” I mouthed to him.

I had to get the Guardians out of here. Bricks and mortar could be rebuilt, but lives couldn’t.

He lifted his chin discreetly, then gestured at my barrier, my green lightning sparking wildly and keeping them protected, but at a price, disabling any of them from being able to ignite their magic. It was the only thing powerful enough to prevent Draco from entering. One conjured with my regular green fire couldn’t hold against him for long.

But that was what had to happen now.

A mass exodus was required and Kalen was the only being strong enough to pull that off.

He could create portals that could transport hundreds of beings in one shot. Not to mention, he resided in the Light Fae Realm, and an off-realm location was the only place safe from Draco. For the time being at least. His focus was on this realm right now and it would be until he’d conquered every square inch of it.

I gave Kalen a nod, letting him know to be prepared to act any moment now.

Taking a beat to shore up what limited strength I had left as the deathly infection

wracked my body, I gritted my teeth, then I opened my hand.

I thrust it behind me.

My green fire burst forth, slamming into the barrier.

The sparking lightning diminished, replaced instead with a muted green glow.

Kalen's magic sparked in the next moment, a mammoth twenty-foot-wide swirling golden vortex erupting before him. He eased his daughter on through, then began ushering the Guardians too.

Before I could take in Draco's reaction, the asshole showed me.

In a burst of speed, he stood before me.

He grabbed hold of the hilt of his sword and wrenched it out of my flesh, twisting it for good measure on the way out .

"Fuck!" I bellowed.

He thrust his boot into my side, knocking me onto my back with a jarring thud.

"Ryker!" Kalen cried.

I looked out to see him and still a good half of the Guardians hesitating on my behalf.

"Go," I croaked.

Surprisingly, Marek snapped into action, forcefully ushering them all through quickly.



He gave Kalen a push, then turned back just before he stepped into the portal. “I’m sorry, Ryker,” he told me, pain and no small amount of humility coming off him. “Thank you.”

I smiled weakly and watched in relief as he followed the others through the portal, and it sealed behind them, then blinked out of sight.

The Guardian Movement had survived.

I’d done it.

A hand fisting in my shirt had my focus shifting back to my dangerous predicament.

Draco jerked me to him as he stood looming over me, snarling down at me.

I could barely see his expression now, my vision was blurring more with every passing second.

The pain in my shoulder was searing, making my entire body shudder uncontrollably.

It just wouldn’t stop.

I tasted blood in my mouth, felt it leaking from my nose.

I could feel my heartbeat in my ears.

And I was straining to draw in my next breath.

I was dying.

Being who I was, I couldn’t go out without the last word .

Sputtering and struggling, I managed to push out a croak at Draco. “You... failed.”

With a roar, he tossed me across the room.

I grunted as I skidded helplessly into a stone wall with a bone-jarring thud.

I tried to roll onto my side, but my body was so beyond done. I couldn't move a muscle.

All I could do was watch in horror as Draco raised his sword, that creepy-ass gem swirling with power.

He was calling his Hellfire forth.

“This place deserves to burn.” His eyes flashed at me. “As do you. Hellfire is an unimaginably painful way to die, sorcerer. I will enjoy watching you suffer.”

He thrust his sword up toward the ceiling, seconds away from the Hellfire erupting from it.

But then he abruptly stilled.

He spun, searching, his eyes darting all over the place, sensing something.

What?

Dark-blue lightning exploded through the room, firing every which way.

Someone emerged from its epicenter.

Terror gripped me as soon as she came into view.

Mia!

What was she doing here?

Draco reacted, firing his sword at her, the Hellfire sparking.

But she was ready for him.

Her right fist blazed with that ominous dark-blue power she'd been so afraid of tapping into. She thrust it at the floor, sending a violent path of lightning toward Draco.

He roared as it struck him, taking hold, encompassing him wholly.

He clawed at it, struggling wildly .

“Be gone, demon!” Mia yelled, groaning with the effort of a final push that had her magic swallowing Draco whole.

What the hell?

She rose to her feet and sucked in a trembling breath as she called her power back with some struggle. Shit.

Her eyes went wide with terror when she was able to turn her attention my way.

“Ryker!” she shrieked, running toward me, her heels clacking wildly.

“Where... did... he go?”

“I banished him,” she said, distractedly, not really giving me much. “Temporarily, at

least.”

“Go,” I told her, reaching out a shaking hand.

She knelt down beside me and took my hand in hers. “Oh my God!” she cried when she noticed the veins. “He struck you with his sword?”

Even as she asked the question, her eyes were scanning me frantically.

And then she zeroed in on the wound in my shoulder. “My love,” she breathed, pain all over her, her voice cracking with it.

“Need you... safe... before I... go,” I croaked, my hand going limp in hers.

“I’m not losing you,” I heard her say.

Her magic erupted around us and I felt the pull of teleportation.

Good. She was leaving the Guardian Compound.

Relief coursed through me.

It was the last thing I felt before the world slipped away.

19

~Jaxon~

“Hold him steady, Jaxon!”

“Easier said than done,” I told Lucian. “I use too much force and he’s dead anyway.”

Mia blew back into the room. “Nobody’s dying today.”

Lucian and I exchanged a look. She was more than a little optimistic, given the situation.

It probably helped that she couldn’t sense shit on the level that me and the old bloodsucker could.

When she’d teleported back into the safehouse in a blinding flash of blue light with Ryker slumped in a groaning heap at her feet, I’d felt his lifeforce hanging on by a thread. His pulse had been so weak, I’d barely been able to make it out. And those fucking black veins all over his hands and face, any part of his skin visible in his jeans and leather jacket getup, had been a hell of a giveaway too.

Mia came up beside Lucian and Ryker’s bed, where the Ancient had his wrist held over Ryker’s mouth, which he was having to force open because he was now out cold. Lucian was frantically feeding him his powerful blood from a deep, dripping wound he’d gouged into his wrist.

It was the only thing keeping Ryker alive right now.

But it wouldn't last much longer.

Lucian didn't have a limitless supply of his own blood and magic users could only ingest so much anyway. His body would start resisting soon enough.

"Claws," Mia called to me, gesturing at Ryker's jacket and t-shirt.

I shifted onto the bed, using my knees in place of my hands to hold Ryker down while he seized violently.

Then I let my claws drop and I swiftly shredded Ryker's clothes until his chest was bare, his clothes hanging in tatters about his arms.

Lucian cursed, tears springing to his eyes, as he took it what we all were.

The black veins had spread everywhere, just a couple of inches out from crawling their way toward Ryker's heart. Given the rapid spread we'd witnessed over the last twenty minutes since the two of them had teleported back here, simple math pointed to it being mere seconds before Ryker fully succumbed.

"My beloved," Lucian rasped, tears spilling down his cheeks.

Seeing somebody as formidable and as hardass as Lucian Black breaking down was several levels beyond intense. In that moment, I really saw just how deep his love ran for Ryker.

Also a known hardass, I saw the cracks in Mia too. She was struggling to hold on and focus on doing whatever the hell she thought she could do to save his life.

I saw her fumbling and cursing under her breath as she fiddled with a syringe that she'd run to get from the infirmary earlier .

She hastily shook off her coat, baring her blue blouse underneath. Fucking lace. My weakness. She didn't leave it at that, shoving her right sleeve up past her elbow. And then she moved to jab herself with the syringe.

I started in surprise when it didn't penetrate her skin.

"Dammit," she muttered. "The dark power I invoked, it's protecting me. It won't wear down for a few hours." She winced at the state of Ryker. "He doesn't have that long."

"Dark power? Are you fucking serious?" After all her struggle with it, after taking off for three goddamn months and now she'd just let it out, risking so much in the process.

"Calm down," she snapped.

One of the worst things to say to an Alpha wolf.

A growl rumbled in my throat.

She shoved her wrist at me. "I need your claws again."

"What?"

"I need you to slash me. Deep. My skin can't be penetrated by any forged weapon outside of an Immortal blade right now until the protective element of the power I invoked wears off. Your claws are natural. Plus, we're mates, so my power shouldn't be defensive with you."

“You’re seriously asking me to hurt you, your mate who is an Alpha wolf? Do you not get how insanely overprotective and possessive I am with you?”

Her hardheaded, determined expression softened for a moment. “I know and I’m sorry. I understand that it’s abhorrent to you.” She gestured at Ryker who was still violently seizing beneath my hold. “He’ll die, Jaxon. I can’t let that happen. I can save him.”

“You can?” Lucian asked, jerking his head toward us.

He’d been immersed in his grief and torment at the state of Ryker, blocking everything out and just focusing on feeding him his blood .

“How?” I added, eyeing Mia warily.

She held up the syringe she’d tried to inject into herself. “This is my father’s blood. I stole it from the Guardian Archives before I left a few months back, as a precaution. It has incredible healing properties. It will numb the unbearable pain the Immortal blade infection is causing Ryker, and give him one hell of an adrenaline boost that will jolt him awake.”

“Him being unconscious is the only reprieve he has from this suffering,” Lucian argued.

“He must be conscious for the next step to work.”

“Next step?” I asked.

“I need to spark that defensive magic of his with a... jumpstart. Ryker has the ability, with his new type of power, to disintegrate even Immortal magic upon contact with his. That’s what this infection is. Magical.”



Lucian cocked an eyebrow. “You’re saying he has the ability to heal himself from an Immortal wound?”

Jesus Christ. That was a hell of a thing.

“Not right now. Not in this state. But he will once I jumpstart it for him.”

“Jumpstart? What are we talking about here? Like a defibrillator?” I asked.

“Pretty much. Just magical rather than electrical.”

“That’s a great risk, given the state of him,” Lucian cautioned.

“Exactly why I need to bolster him with the blood first.”

“Why do you need me to cut you?”

“A non-immortal can’t take a shot of pure Immortal blood. It will overwhelm them. So, I need to use mine, that of a half-Immortal, to dilute it a little.”

“Just add Cornelius’ to mine,” Lucian said, gesturing to his bloodied wrist still dripping into Ryker’s open mouth .

Mia shook her head. “Too diluted.”

She thrust her wrist at me again. “Do it. Please, Jaxon.”

I grasped her wrist, but stopped short to eye Lucian. “You got this?”

He pulled his wrist from Ryker’s mouth, then stroked a hand gently through his hair. “Whatever it takes to restore my beloved. This transcends even bloodlust.”

Wow. Their love was... extraordinary.

Mia smiled at his words.

I readied myself for the hell that was no doubt about to break loose.

Then, I swept my claws across Mia's wrist, slicing deep to ensure it didn't heal up too fast with that dark power of hers protecting her, before she'd done what she needed to do.

She hissed.

It had my gut twisting like a son of a bitch. I gritted my teeth and fought to swallow it down, focusing on keeping Ryker steady, as she plunged the syringe into her open wrist wound and filled the rest of it with her blood, effectively mixing it with her father's.

I watched Lucian's eyes flame, his fangs drop, as the scent of her blood filled the air.

"Lucian!" I snarled.

He squeezed his eyes shut and tightened his hold on Ryker.

In the next moment when he opened them, his fangs had retracted, his eyes settling back to a muted glow.

Damn, that really was something impressive. He'd come leaps and bounds since the last time he'd scented Immortal blood.

"All right," she murmured to herself. "Here goes nothing. "

She moved to the left side of the bed, then injected the weird blood cocktail into Ryker's open shoulder wound.

Stepping back, she placed the syringe down on the bedside table, then looked on nervously.

Barely a couple of seconds passed before Ryker's body stopped seizing.

The wound began to heal, flesh, bone, and tissue repairing itself at an astounding rate.

The veins covering his body faded to a muted gray, the progression halting.

"Whoa," I uttered, more than a little shocked. "Immortal blood really packs a hell of a punch."

A choked sound of relief came from Lucian.

He scrubbed his hand over his face, sucking in a breath.

"I need room," Mia said, eyeing the two of us.

I pulled away from Ryker and climbed off the bed, taking a step back.

Lucian was much more reluctant.

"Lucian, if my magic touches you, we'll have another severely injured party on our hands," Mia warned.

"I can't leave his side."

"Lucian," she pressed. Her eyes shot to me. "I'm going to need a hand."

I eyed Lucian.

The two of us had finally found some peace between us, an understanding, after so many years of me hating on him. The last thing I wanted was to shit all over that. Especially with the responsibility of the Covenant hanging so heavily over our heads, pressuring us all to be united.

But, at the same time, my mate was asking me for a favor.

I winced and started forward.

Lucian's eyes flashed .

“Now who's the reckless one?” a croak sounded, pulling the both of us up short.

All three of us looked to see Ryker's eyes opening, a weak smile spreading over his face as he looked up at Lucian.

He reached out and slid his left hand into Lucian's hair, his other cupping his cheek. “Mission accomplished,” he croaked. “The Guardian Movement survived.”

Pain bled from Lucian as he stroked Ryker's hand against his cheek. “At too great a cost.”

Ryker grimaced. “I'm sorry.”

Lucian gathered him into his arms, holding him tightly, breathing him in.

“We don't have much time,” Mia told them gently.

Giving a nod of acknowledgement, Lucian carefully released Ryker, then climbed off

the bed, settling over on the opposite side to Mia, far enough away to avoid being touched by her magic.

I strode over, joining him.

Mia took a seat on the edge of the bed beside Ryker.

He turned his head and grinned at her. “Sweetness. Going to set my body on fire with that magic of yours, huh?”

Lucian and I exchanged a look. Even in his less than stellar state, he was still with the flirting and fooling around.

Mia’s brief grin at his words faded as she focused up and raised her palms and called her magic.

It erupted in the form of her vibrant-blue fire.

Good. She wasn’t using that dark power that worried the fuck out of me.

“This will be intense, Ry,” she warned. “To wipe out the infection, I’m going to need to basically attack you with mine to spur the full intensity of that defensive, next-level magic of yours. The Immortal blood I injected into you should be enough to bolster you to withstand it.”

“Should?” Lucian questioned.

“This is brand-new territory for all of us. It’s extremely rare for anyone to be wounded by an Immortal weapon. Not to mention, Ryker’s new form of magic has never existed before. That being said, it’s the only option. If I don’t do this, he will die. The blood won’t hold the infection at bay for much longer.”

“When he refused to drop the wards shielding us from Draco, that fucker found another way to make it happen. Ryker dies, his magic dies with him,” I pointed out.

“Yes,” Mia confirmed.

Ryker grasped her hand, jolting her gaze to his, urgency spilling out of him, as he said, “If this fails, find the dagger.”

“What?”

“It sounded like Draco is searching for it.”

“He’s going to kill my father.”

Ryker gave a nod. “Find the dagger before he can. Form the Covenant with Lucian and Jax. It might be just enough to conjure wards strong enough to hide from Draco until you can free Cornelius.”

“Stop,” Mia told him. “There’s no need for alternate plans. You’re going to be fine. Any second now. Do you hear me?”

He smiled. “Of course, sweetness. Guess I’m just being paranoid.”

The three of us exchanged a look, knowing how overly optimistic Mia was being, how completely unable she was to even consider things going a bad way here. She couldn’t imagine life without her best friend. She refused to.

“Ready?” she asked, stepping up close, her hands hovering over his heart .

He smirked. “You know me, sweetness. Born fucking ready.”

Mia's eyes hardened, that all-business, fierce side of her surging to the surface.

And then she unleashed her magic, her vibrant blue fire streaming wildly at Ryker.

He jolted violently and bellowed out a curse as it shot through his body making him shudder uncontrollably.

I watched his hands spark.

His green lightning erupted.

Mia pulled back and bolted away from him.

His lightning intensified.

Grew.

Raged.

It spread over his entire body, enveloping him completely, building and building until it culminated in a blinding explosion of luminous green light.

When my vision finally managed to adjust, I was shocked to see Ryker standing strong on the bed before us, radiating strength and power.

He looked out at us as he pulled his magic back.

Off our shocked reactions, he chuckled, "You didn't really think it would be that easy to get rid of me, did you?"

## Page 20

*Source Creation Date: August 4, 2025, 2:15 am*

20

~Mia~

He'd almost died.

If he'd been anyone else, he would have.

And it would have been all my fault.

Ryker had gone in my stead.

He'd fought the battle I was supposed to be fighting.

He'd suffered because of me.

Because of my deep-seated fears of my own power.

To say it had been a wake-up call, didn't even begin to cover it.

I'd allowed fear to rule me for too long and now it had come at too high a price. I'd been fighting for a way out of the Covenant, of being pressured to unleash my true power, when there wasn't a way out.

There was only through .

I'd finally been ready to accept my duty, but it had come too late, and Ryker had



almost paid the ultimate price for my foolishness.

I wouldn't let it happen again. I'd rise to the occasion and do this thing.

If I choked on the consequences, so be it.

First thing was first, though.

Transparency.

We had to lay all our cards out on the table.

Honesty had to prevail.

It was the only way to build the depth of trust needed for the four of us to work together. No more lone-wolf tendencies could be tolerated.

We had to function as one unit from here on out.

It was a tall order indeed.

But we all wanted the same thing.

To end Draco and protect the supernatural world.

And that was exactly what we would do.

Under my leadership.

I was going to take back control of the mission.

Ryker had done enough, beyond that actually. He'd handled the burden when I'd been unable to. It was a burden that had never been intended for him. I wouldn't allow him to bear it any longer.

The risk he'd taken to protect the Guardian Movement had been too much. It should never have come to that. The fact that it had sickened me. Guilt and shame had been nagging at me, trying to consume me. I'd beaten it back with my focus on the mission, on what could be changed, rather than the brutal realities of the awful things that had already happened.

I'd fix it.

I'd fix everything.

No more near-death experiences.

No more being caught off guard by Draco.

No more.

As I continued to pace the living room, I listened to my men embroiled in a heated discussion, allowing them to get it out of their systems so that we could then sit down and have a rational discussion. That was an impossible feat when they were all so worked up.

They were gathered in the seating area of the living room.

Jaxon had his arms spread out over the back of the couch.

Ryker was sitting forward in the adjacent armchair gesticulating wildly, Lucian perched on the arm mostly observing with that intense brooding look on his face that

told me he was compiling all the facts and data rapidly as they spoke, in order to determine the best course of action. As the thoughtful, deliberate decisionmaker of the four of us, I expected nothing less.

Just like I expected Jaxon to be impulsive, emotionally-charged, and reactive.

And Ryker was of course, the know-it-all when it came to the magical side of things, as well as the onward propelling force that yearned to get things done as efficiently as possible. He had answers when others couldn't see any because of his out-of-the-box thinking.

"He massacred a whole bunch of Guardians and nearly took the rest out!" Jaxon cried. "For fuck's sakes, I'm not worth that, not worth any of this."

"You are and it's not that simple," Ryker told him.

"Look, Ry, I know you've got a whole lot of love for my cock these days, but almost dying to keep that psycho from taking me is going way too far, don't you think?"

"Check yourself, Alpha," Lucian said with a warning snarl.

A testament to how far they'd come, Jaxon backed off with a raise of his hands and even offered an apology, "My bad. This is just... fucked. Let me outside your ward and hand me over to Draco. The price is way too high if you don't. "

"The price will be even higher if we do," Lucian countered. "Draco would use you and your released power for his own ends."

"Besides, unbinding you wouldn't help us right now anyway," Ryker added.

"Why not?"

Ryker sat forward and told him patiently, “Magic-wielders aren’t just born into the full breadth of their abilities. It takes time, years. And during that time, we train and learn to wield and hone our power. Gradually. That won’t be the case for you. Once you’re unbound, the power will erupt in a violent rush through you and it will be incredibly difficult just to stomach it, let alone to wield it against an enemy as experienced and as formidable as Draco.”

“What I inflicted on Draco at the Guardian Compound will put him out of commission for days,” I revealed, joining them and standing between the couch and the armchair, taking all three of them in. “

“Days?” Lucian asked, incredulous. “How? Even Cornelius struggled to achieve that at the tail end of the Maven Coven battle.”

I looked away as I admitted something that was abhorrent to me. I’d had to, though. I’d done what had been needed to save Ryker. “I bound his magic.”

“Like your father did to Ryker?” Lucian pressed.

“It was the only way to stop him in the moment and to buy us the time needed to deal with our issues, then find the dagger.”

“How could you, as a half-Immortal, bind the magic of a pure Immortal?” Jaxon asked.

“Draco was weakened from touching Ryker’s defensive magic. I could feel it attacking him. He would have been able to shake the infection in time, but I used the vulnerability to flood him with a block. No one can unbind themselves. He’ll have to use an entire coven to do it for him, and mustering that level of power will require a celestial event. There isn’t another one for a while yet.”

“Well, shit,” Ryker said, beaming with pride.

“I’m impressed. Extremely so,” Lucian added.

“Right there with you,” Jaxon’s rough rumble sounded.

“It buys us the time we need to do the ritual.”

For once all three of them were momentarily speechless, shocked into silence at my statement.

While that was still the case, I went on, “We’ve had to remain in hiding in this safehouse to protect the Covenant, it being the greatest shot we have of defeating Draco. While that was the case, the Guardian Movement was doing what it was created for, safeguarding the supernatural world and maintaining the balance and in this particular case that being beating back Draco and his acolytes’ reign of terror, chaos, and destruction. Ryker had to move them off-realm. Now there’s no force out there holding back the proverbial tide. Once we perform the ritual, there’ll be no need to hide. The Covenant will be sealed and I’ll wield enough power to stand against Draco. We need to use this opportunity of him being down to use that to our full advantage.”

“Why can’t we attack now if he’s compromised? Why even risk doing the ritual?” Jaxon asked. “Doesn’t you binding him change things? Can’t we attack right fucking now?”

I sighed heavily, hating the question being put out there, because it inadvertently served to highlight my shortcomings.

Noting that, Ryker answered in my stead, informing Jaxon, “None of us possess the power to actually take the life of an Immortal being. At least, not magically.”

“If we had the Wrath of Hades, then the situation would be different,” I said. “He could be killed with that while in his weakened state.”

“All right, yeah, I get it,” Jaxon said with a nod of his head.

“In light of that, the plan is two-fold,” I began. “We join, solidifying the Covenant and imbuing me with your power. Then I should have enough juice to be able to track down the dagger. We’ll be able to end Draco and save my father in one fell swoop.”

“The Wrath of Hades,” Ryker breathed.

“The... what?” Jaxon asked.

I eyed Jaxon. “It’s the one weapon that can take the life of a Celestial being.”

“Wow. Good. Just what we’ve been needing. You couldn’t track it before?”

I shook my head. “It’s buried beneath layers and layers of magic.”

“Of course it is,” Jaxon grouched.

It took me a moment to realize that Lucian wasn’t joining in the discussion.

“Lucian?”

When he didn’t respond, clearly deep in thought, Ryker rubbed his arm.

It jolted him and he looked out at us, the expression on his face making my stomach lurch.

“What’s wrong?” I asked.

“I may know a way to locate the dagger.”

“How?” I asked, incredulous.

He rose from his perched position and scrubbed his hand over his face, cursing under his breath.

“Lucian?” Ryker pressed gently. “What is it?”

Staring into space, Lucian revealed, “When Vincenzo came to me, he said that with Cornelius incapacitated by Draco, he finally had the opportunity to facilitate his freedom forevermore. I thought he was just posturing, as he has been known to do.” He shot me and Ryker a glare. “But that was because I had no idea about the existence of such a formidable weapon. It’s clear now that he meant that Cornelius was weakened enough for him to go for the kill without fearing for his own life in the process.”

“With the dagger,” Jaxon cut in. “You think he has it?”

“It’s a strong possibility, yes. He’s been on the run from Cornelius for years. He would have spent those years researching and unearthing everything he could about his enemy to shift the balance and get his life back.”

“All right. He’s the first lead we’ll run down once the Covenant is solidified.”

“I will go to him,” Lucian countered. “He won’t respond well to a show of force and he is immune to all forms of torture, so forcing it out of him won’t work either.”

“So, what’s your plan then?” Ryker sniped. “Fuck it out of him?”

Before anyone could get out a word, Ryker shot from the couch and stormed out of

the room, slamming the door behind him for good measure.

“Curses,” Lucian muttered.

He sucked in a breath, then strode out after him.

“Trouble in paradise?” Jaxon mused.

“It would seem so.”

And it was the worst time for it.



## Page 21

*Source Creation Date: August 4, 2025, 2:15 am*

21

~Ryker~

I heard his footsteps, followed by a sudden rush of cool air whipping around me.

And then, there he was, standing right before me.

“I need a fucking moment, Lucian,” I groused.

“Unfortunately, we are all out of moments.”

“What?”

“The sorceress is ready to join with us.”

“I know.”

“Then let’s make haste.”

I cocked an eyebrow.

What was going on? Why was he pushing it all of a sudden? He’d been all about things needing to take their natural course, our bonds to Mia growing without undue pressure or interference, in order to ensure that they were genuine and strong enough. It was why he’d held off going to her for so long. And when he finally had, it had been right, she’d been ready for him.

Before I could get into it, he went on, “This issue between us needs to be tabled, Ryker.”

Just like moments ago in the living room, that anger, so pure and raw, sparked to life and I snapped, “Tabled? How about I do one better and resolve it here and now? You’re not going anywhere near that asshole, Vincenzo.”

“Is that so?” he asked, stepping up to me.

I glared steadily up at him. “Yes. I forbid it.”

His features hardened. “That sounds very much like an order.” There was a very clear warning in his tone, urging me to tread carefully.

The hell, I would. Not about this. “If you need to label it, then that’s what it is.”

“You believe you can enforce this,” he stated.

“That’s not what I said.”

“Yet, you wouldn’t have put it out there if you didn’t believe you had the means to back it up.”

“I’ll do what I need to do to protect you.”

He laughed, but there was no humor to it.

It was bitter and pained.

“Here we stand, with the roles now reversed.”

“This isn’t the same as me taking off to the Guardian Compound.”

“Correct. What you did was far, far worse.”

“Lucian, we’re talking about Vincenzo Daza here!”

With a burst of speed, he slammed me into the wall, pinning me there with a single hand to my chest, roaring, “You almost died! ”

Choking, I looked up to see him vamped out, his features twisted into his demonic form, his fangs dropped and glistening ominously, his red eyes aflame.

It took me a moment to see past it all, but when I did, I realized it wasn’t rage that was fueling him.

It was pain.

His snarls mingled with my heavy pants as we stared at one another on the verge.

We hadn’t spoken about my near-death experience .

For one, that wasn’t what I did.

I’d been a soldier of the Guardian Movement for so long that putting my life on the line was par for the course now. Old hat, really. If I stopped to dwell on it, I feared it could cripple my ability to roll with it, to get back up and do it all over again, throwing myself into the chaos of battle.

Beyond that, I just didn’t like to linger in the past.

Mia had been the only exception to that. She wouldn’t release her grasp on me. And

I'd hated it. I'd hated the hold it'd had on me. I kept going, kept moving and looking forward. It was what I did, who I was. It was who I needed to be.

But it was brutally clear right now that I needed to make an exception this one time.

For Lucian.

His peace of mind demanded it.

Our relationship craved it.

Swallowing hard, I reached out and touched his cheek, caressing the raised flesh and hollow grooves of his demonic form.

He flinched, but he allowed it nonetheless.

The hardness from him faltered, the blaze in his eyes petering out.

An act of tenderness while he was in this dangerous, volatile state took him aback.

By the time I started speaking, his demonic form had fully retreated.

But he didn't ease up with his grip on my chest, keeping me against the wall, keeping me right up close.

"I thought I could get there in time to re-erect the ward around the compound. The bureaucrats ate time away and, before I knew it, Draco was descending on us. I didn't plan on that. I didn't want that. And I certainly didn't mean to hurt you. "

Emotion swam in his eyes. He was on the verge of breaking, fighting terribly to hold it back.

His hands slid to my shoulders, up my neck, settling on my face. “You were dying in my arms. I could barely hear your heartbeat. I felt you slipping away to the Valley of the Dead. I watched helplessly as the Immortal infection spread, growing closer and closer to your heart, to taking you from me forevermore.”

I nodded sadly. Mia had told me everything. “I know, Lucian. I’m sorry I put you through that.”

He slid his hands into my hair, holding me to him, his voice a rough whisper, as he told me, “It took me long enough to find you. I cannot lose you.”

I wanted to tell him that he wouldn’t, that I wasn’t going anywhere, that the incident at the Guardian Compound had been an awful anomaly.

But that would all be a lie.

The truth was, to take down the enemy, we had to risk everything.

None of us were safe.

None of us were immune to death coming for us.

So, instead, I gave what I could, grasping his hands on my face, and telling him, “I swear to you that I’ll do everything in my power to come back to you, to keep what we have intact. I love you. I would never do anything less.”

“My retrieval of the dagger would serve those ends.”

I started.

Damn, he was good.

He'd backed me into a corner.

Honestly, he had every right to, given what I'd put him through. I hadn't even given him a choice in the matter, I'd just taken off to play hero .

But, right now, I could give that choice.

I nodded. "Fine. Go to Vincenzo. Unleash your powers of persuasion upon him."

He planted a soft kiss on my forehead, and then he released me, stepping back.

"Just one condition."

He stilled, tensing. "And what might that be?" he asked warily, clearly concerned our discussion may not be over after all.

"You're not doing it alone. I'll back you up."

"As I've said, he won't respond well to a show of force."

"Which is why we're keeping Jaxon and Mia out of it. I'll cloak myself and only step in if things take a bad turn."

It took him a moment, but he gave a nod. "As you wish."

I wrapped my arms around him and held him to me. He sank into me, resting his head upon mine, breathing me in, just as I was with him.

"From now on, we work as one," he spoke at my ear.

"Partners," I agreed.

Footsteps sounded, startling us enough that we pulled apart and turned to see Jaxon and Mia entering the hallway.

“Glad you guys buried the hatchet,” Jaxon commented. “We’ve got shit to do. You ready?”

Mia stepped forward, her gaze sober and intense. “It’s time.”

## Page 22

*Source Creation Date: August 4, 2025, 2:15 am*

My heart was jackhammering in my chest.

The last time I remembered being so insanely on edge was the night I'd first shifted into wolf form.

All my emotions felt heightened.

My thoughts were scrambled to hell.

I was moments away from undergoing some heavy shit.

We all were.

For me, though, there was a whole extra level of intensity because of the claiming.

I was excited, nervous, anxious, a whole load of things all fighting for top billing.

Impatience was thrumming through me, making my skin itch with it, as the four of us stood around Mia's room listening as she briefed us on what was about to happen.

“This joining is the first of its kind. Uncharted territory. It means we have no way of knowing what side effects may occur as a result. What I do know, from logic and a couple of lifetimes practicing magic, is that it will take a lot out of all of us, meaning we'll be weak for a little while afterward, vulnerable. Fortunately, the wards are up protecting us and Draco is currently incapacitated. I'll take Ryker first. It will be the easiest fusion because of our established history and the fact that we're both magical beings. Lucian will follow.” She eyed me intensely. “You'll be last so we can savor



the claiming. I owe you that at the very least.”

I gave a chin lift, accepting the plan of action.

The other two voiced their agreement as well.

“All right then,” Mia said. “Here goes nothing.”

She untied her silky robe, a partial view of her naked body beneath coming into view.

We took her cue, the three of us stripping off our shirts and tossing them in the corner.

Lucian popped the fly of his dress pants, using his vamp speed to do the rest until he was standing naked and stroking his cock leisurely.

Ryker shucked off his designer jeans, the things so deliciously tight, they took his boxers with them as he pulled them off.

I followed suit, tearing off my ripped, well-worn jeans in a burst of wolf speed.

Mia shoved her robe off her shoulders until she was standing before us bold and beautiful in all her naked glory.

A low growl rumbled in my throat at the sight of her pussy already glistening with need.

She held out her hand to Ryker.

He took it and slid his other into her hair, leaning in and kissing her softly.

She rose to it, kissing him back, and sank into the sweet sensuality of it, as he walked

her back toward the bed.

As she jarred against it, he grasped her thighs, wrapping them around him, then lifted her onto the bed. He laid her down softly on the mattress, his body covering hers, as he took her in another sensual kiss.

“My love,” she gasped against his mouth, reaching up and looping her hands around his neck to hold him close to her.

The endearment did something to him and ignited an intensity in him that had him rolling his hips, grinding his cock against her, making her feel every hard inch of him.

She moaned into his mouth and let her legs fall wide open.

The scent of her heightening arousal hit me right in the cock.

That and the sight of Ryker’s hot, tight ass grinding up and down was too much erotic torment to handle.

I caught Lucian’s eye and he gave a chin lift, making it clear he was on the same page as me.

In a combined burst of speed, we were both at the foot of the bed.

Lucian fisted his hand in Ryker’s hair and used his grip to yank his head back, forcing his mouth from Mia’s. He kissed him deeply, his tongue dancing leisurely with his.

Pulling away with a satisfied snarl, he took hold of Ryker’s shoulders and eased him down the bed, settling him between Mia’s legs, bringing his ass right into my waiting hands.

He jolted at my contact and shot a look over his shoulder.

Lucian gripped his hair again and shoved his face into Mia's wet pussy. "The fantasy we spoke of months ago is here."

Ryker shuddered.

Must've been one hell of a fantasy.

Then Lucian spelled it out, grinding Ryker's face all over Mia's pussy, making her moan and buck on the bed. "Eat her out until she begs for a reprieve. Then keep going. Don't stop. No mercy. Not until Jaxon's done fucking your delectable ass." He eyed me. "When you're close, rip him from Mia and make him swallow your cum."

Walking to Mia's head, he held his cock in his hand and trailed it over her cheek.

She trembled with anticipation. "Lucian," she breathed.

He smiled slyly. "Open wide, beauty."

She did as he said and he grasped the back of her head, holding her steady, as he thrust his cock into her mouth, hitting deep and making her gag. His eyes rolled back in his head and he eased up a little, starting off with an easy, gentle rhythm, sliding his cock in and out of her sweet mouth.

I saw her tongue peek out, swirling around his shaft as she worked him over enthusiastically with her throat. "Good girl. That's it, worship my cock. I'll mark your breathtaking breasts with my cum and Ryker will clean up every drop."

Her eyes glazed over with lust at his dirty words and she groaned around his cock, making him shudder and grin with satisfaction.

Goddamn, he was good.

He was fucking well firing me up.

I spread Ryker's ass cheeks apart and swirled my tongue around his tight little hole.

He moaned into Mia's pussy as I rimmed his asshole, drenching it with my saliva, teasing him and dipping my finger inside every now and then, just the tip.

He pushed back against me all needy and desperate.

Just how I wanted him.

Dominating him and making him need it, beg for me, was a hell of a rush. He awakened a craving in me that I'd forced myself to bury for so long. The fact that he was so powerful and I was able to own him, to bring somebody of his might to his knees was a thrill unlike any other.

And he wanted it so bad. He wanted to be pushed to that headspace, to a place where all that existed was desire and a desperate need to be filled and used until he was completely spent.

Grasping my hard cock, I rubbed it up and down between his ass cheeks and he clenched them around me, gripping me as hard as he could, trying to keep me there and make the most of the teasing friction.

I reached around him and dragged my fingers through Mia's wet pussy.

Her heavy-lidded gaze shot to mine.

I held her gaze and shoved two fingers deep inside her even as Ryker continued to tongue her like a ravenous animal. His tongue licked my fingers, dousing them, as I

finger-fucked her pussy, then pulled out suddenly making her gasp.

I grinned and held up my fingers drenched in her juices. “This is going in his ass. Going to coat his walls with it and slide my cock in nice and deep.”

She mewled, her eyes widening.

Ryker reacted to my dirty words too, ferociously sucking her clit into his mouth.

It set her off and she came, bucking wildly, cumming all over Ryker’s face. Her screams were muffled by Lucian’s cock lodged down her throat and he squeezed his eyes shut at the pleasure of the vibrations around his shaft.

He tightened his grip on her hair to the roots and stilled her, jerking her head in my direction. “Watch,” he commanded.

I angled Ryker without pulling him from her pussy so she could see enough and imagine the rest, as I slid two of my drenched fingers into his ass. Real nice and slow, driving deeper and deeper until I brushed his prostate. He roared in pleasure and slammed his fist down onto the mattress, rocking the bed.

“Is this what you want, lovely?” I taunted, curling my fingers and teasing his sweet spot.

“Yes!” he cried, lifting his head from Mia. “Fuck, Jax! Do it!”

Hell, yeah.

I pulled my fingers free, then rammed my cock home in one sudden thrust that had him screaming into Mia’s pussy. He raked his fingers down her breasts and the bite of pain set her off once more, drenching Ryker in her juices all over again.

Lucian let himself go this time as she screamed around his cock. He pulled out quick, grasped the base, then painted her sweet tits with his cum with spurt after violent spurt.

Mia's back arched and the dirty act set off yet another orgasm.

She grabbed at the headboard, trying to inch away from Ryker's mouth.

"I can't. It's too much," she cried.

Lucian slapped his hands to her shoulders using his strength to hold her in place so she couldn't escape Ryker's torment.

Fuck, watching her take it, and come over and over was a hell of a thing. My cock was painfully hard. I needed release real fucking bad.

Bringing my wolf speed into play, I jackhammered into Ryker's tight little ass, concentrating on his sweet spot, mashing his prostate with my cock over and over and over.

"Ah, fuck!" he yelled.

"Do not come!" Lucian ordered him. "You'll swallow his seed, then you'll come inside Mia. Not before." He shifted his confining grip on Mia to one hand and used the other to wrap around Ryker's shaft like a makeshift cock ring, forcibly preventing him from coming.

My nails dug into his hips, as I fully unleashed my fury on his ass, fucking him without mercy over and over, drawing it out until I was right on the edge.

I pulled out, grasped his jaw and jerked him toward me. "Swallow it down like a good little whore," I commanded as I forced my cock deep down his throat and let

myself go, filling him up with my cum.

He choked and gagged, struggling to swallow it all down. But I didn't let up, holding him steady until he drank up every drop.

I eased out and held my cock right in front of his face. "Lick me clean. Taste your ass all over my shaft."

Lucian squeezed his cock, urging him on.

He gasped and stuck out his tongue and began licking all over my shaft until it was glistening from a good tongue cleaning.

"Good boy," I said, patting him on the head.

Lucian smiled and released his cock.

Ryker took the cue, grasped Mia's hips, then thrust deep inside her.

He rose up, caging her in.

She wrapped her arms around him and moved in time to his deep, grinding thrusts.

"Been too long, sweetness," he ground out, his eyes rolling back in his head at the sweet feel of her that I knew all too well.

Hands sliding down my back all of a sudden caught me off guard and I looked over my shoulder to see Lucian feeling me up.

I hesitated, considering pulling away for a moment .

But the dark look in his eyes stopped me.

A light tap to either thigh had me complying without thinking and widening my stance.

In the next beat, he was spreading my ass cheeks and licking my untouched hole.

I choked and grabbed at the bed to steady myself, bending over in the process and increasing his access.

Pleasure surged as he reached under me and glided two hands up and down my cock, swirling his fingers all over the place even as his tongue teased me.

“Ancient,” I groaned.

“Alpha,” he returned.

Being pleased by Lucian while watching Mia and Ryker get it on was a whole other level of intensity.

And then I watched Ryker’s hands slide up her stomach and spark with his green fire. He slid them higher, skating over her breasts, her throat, her face, until he tangled his fingers with hers. Her blue fire came into play then and I looked on in awe as the flames fused, then erupted in a powerful wave of power that enveloped the two of them completely.

Mia screamed out in ecstasy and Ryker was right behind her as they orgasmed together.

The magic snuffed out and Mia collapsed onto the bed panting and looking high as all hell.

Ryker rolled off her and lay sprawled out at the foot of the bed, spent.



Mia had been right about the ritual taking a lot out of us then.

I felt Lucian tense, noticing Ryker's exhaustion.

In a sudden move that shocked the hell out of me, he thrust two fingers deep into my ass and finger-fucked me like a madman, getting right down to it, and trying to make me lose it. I roared out at the sweet agony .

His vampire speed took over and I lost it. It was so fucking intense, I couldn't hold it, and I came. Lucian was there, sealing his lips over my cock and swallowing every drop of my cum.

He eased off, licked my tip, then stared at me intensely.

He couldn't believe what had happened.

Neither could I.

On the surface, it looked like we'd just gotten caught up in the moment.

But, fuck, it was more than that.

There really was a thin line between love and hate.

"Clearly, it was a mistake to forgo sampling a wolf in all my years," he said with a wry smirk as he rose to his feet.

"Right back at you." He was my first vampire too. He wasn't like the rest, though. There was something... special about him.

As he went to Ryker and stroked his hair, whispering comforting words in his ear, it hit me.

It was his compassion.

It was so blatant whenever he was around Ryker. His capacity to love was what set him apart from the rest of his kind.

His eyes flicked to Mia.

She was crooking her finger at him, signaling that it was his turn to do his part of the ritual.

With a kiss to Ryker's forehead, he pulled away and asked me, "Will you?"

I lifted my chin and as Lucian went to Mia, I sat with Ryker, easing him against my chest, stroking him reassuringly as he murmured peacefully, out of it and wracked with weakness.

Lucian climbed onto the bed and gathered Mia into his arms so that she straddled his lap .

"Your turn," she said with a lazy smile.

"My turn," Lucian rumbled, as he thrust inside her.

She bucked and he held still to give her time to adjust.

She was shuddering all over, way over sensitized from the little game we'd played.

But she was all too ready to rise to the occasion and, in the next moment, she rose up on Lucian, digging her nails into his scalp, then slamming back down onto his cock, as she rode him like a woman possessed.

He smiled at her reaction and held her through it, allowing her to take control.

Warmth lit his eyes and he kissed her all over reverently, getting lost in his bond to her, just like Ryker had with his magic. He was making love to her, rolling his hips sensually as she took him deep, losing herself to it.

“Ready, beauty?” he breathed against her breasts.

She fisted her hands in his hair, slowing her thrusts, as she gasped, “Yes.”

In the next moment, Lucian snarled, his features contorting, his eyes flaming, as he vamped out. His talons dropped and he loosened his grip on her so as not to hurt her with them.

He brought his wrist to his glistening fangs and tore into it. “Drink,” he urged, offering it to her.

She dipped her head and her tongue darted out tentatively tasting his blood.

It did something to her and then she was grabbing his wrist and feeding in a frenzy.

He threw his head back and savored it.

I winced.

Sure, I’d come a long way when it came to him. But actually witnessing this was a lot to take. A low growl rumbled from me and I saw Lucian register it. He eased Mia off his wrist .

My growl deepened when she brushed her long black hair off the side of her neck, offering it to him.

Lucian shook his head.

I frowned.

What was he doing?

He stilled her with a single hand to her left hip.

Then, with his right, he swept a talon lightly across the tops of her breasts, drawing a shallow wound.

I watched his eyes flash, his entire body tense.

His hands started shaking.

He was fighting the bloodlust as her Immortal blood wafted into the air.

I was a split-second away from starting forward, when his eyes calmed, his body relaxing, and he regained control.

Just like before.

He leaned in and gently suckled at the wound.

“God!” Mia cried out in bliss, and began riding him hard again.

He groaned and drew a little deeper.

The room began to reverberate.

A couple of the motel art paintings fell off the walls, the frames smashing onto the floor.

A rush of warm air tore through the room, real creepy and otherworldly.

Mia screamed out in ecstasy.

Lucian pulled his mouth from her chest and snarled as he followed her over the edge.

Then he fell back and collapsed beside Ryker.

Mia struggled to her knees, weakened, but not as much as the other two.

A smile tugged at her lips as she looked out at me.

My turn.

I eased Ryker off me and laid him against Lucian .

Then I climbed onto the bed and made my way to her.

Grasping her ankles, I pulled her legs out from under her and her back hit the bed, a small cry of surprising coming from her.

Holding her gaze, my eyes burning deeply into hers, I crawled up her body until I had her covered, completely caging her in.

I cupped her face and breathed her in.

The potent cocktail of sex and blood hit me, along with Lucian and Ryker. But that sweet scent of strawberries and coconut came through the strongest and I held onto it as I took her mouth in a searing kiss.

I groaned as her hands roamed all over me, feeling every inch of me, exploring, reveling.

I slid my cock inside her.

Goddamn.

She was so fucking slick, a mixture of her own juices, and Ryker and Lucian's cum filling her.

I thought it would disturb me and sully the moment between us, that I'd just have to push through it, but it didn't. It actually turned me on. It had the whole time I'd watched her being pleased and played with. If it had been with anybody else, I wouldn't have stood for it or accepted it, even liked it. But, with our group, this Covenant, it changed everything. We were connected in a way that went beyond everything. I wanted to see her pleased and fulfilled. By all three of us.

More than anything right now, though, I needed to cement our mating bond.

It had been clawing at me something fierce to be fulfilled. I knew it had for her too. But as wolf, with my highly-attuned instincts, it was far worse for me, far more intense and overpowering.

Once we completed the claiming, it would settle. The need would be there still, but it wouldn't be desperate and an agonizing pull. It would be loving, sure, and powerful. We'd be content and at peace in one another.

She groaned as I angled my cock and drove deeper, hitting her sweet spot dead on.

"Shit!" she cried, throwing her head back.

I licked her throat like the animal that I was and she trembled all over, loving it.

"I want the wolf," she gasped.

When I hesitated, she clawed at my back, making me hiss, trying to coax it out.

I snagged her hands and slammed them into the bed either side of her head.

Excitement shone in her eyes, thinking I was taking it there.

Like I hell I could.

I couldn't actually go full wolf with her, a non-wolf.

But I could get close and unleash all over her.

Just not now.

Not during the claiming.

I leaned into her and whispered at her ear, "Just relax. Feel me moving inside you, my cock hard as steel for you, stretching you wide, opening you to me. Feel my body on yours." She closed her eyes, savoring my words. "Feel me all over you. Smell me. Taste me. Feel us . Connecting, joining, becoming one."

I slipped my hand between us and strummed her clit.

Her lips parted in an 'O' and a delicious hum sounded from her, sending a thrill through me.

She rocked with me, getting lost in the moment.

And so was I, losing myself in her.

My blood heated.

My eyes burned.

I could feel it coming .

Things were snapping into place between us.

Pleasure was engulfing us.

My wolf was calling out to her, my eyes glowing gold and burning into hers, urging her to connect.

And she did.

They flamed the same vibrant-blue as her magic.

Neither of us could look away.

The claiming was taking hold of us.

“I love you.”

The words poured out of me, unable to be contained.

Tears glistened in her eyes. She melted and choked back at me, “I love you .”

Adoration bled from the both of us.

I let my wolf teeth drop.

We needed to bleed for real now.

I scraped them across my right wrist.

Remembering what I’d taught her, she lapped at my wound, tasting me.



Brushing her hair off her shoulder, I leaned in.

She didn't even tense as my teeth scraped her skin.

She was fully accepting, wanting, just as I was.

And that was why, as my teeth sank deep into her shoulder, her blood filling my mouth, the only cries emanating from her were ones of absolute ecstasy.

There was no pain in a true claiming bite.

Pleasure surged through me and I gave myself over to it, coming deep inside her.

She spasmed around my cock violently, over and over again, as she came and came and fucking came.

A bright golden glimmer erupted around us, surrounding the two of us.

I tensed, easing my teeth from her shoulder, and pulling out of her.

It wasn't a part of the claiming .

Was it the sign that the Covenant was fulfilled?

I looked down at Mia to ask, but I found her eyes closed in sleep.

It had finally taken its toll on her. She was spent.

I leaned in to kiss my newly claimed mate, but I was stopped as my throat began to burn all the way down.

I felt an ice-cold sensation traveling through my body, painful as all fuck.

I grunted and as a gasp escaped me an awful taste filled my mouth.

Tar-like, it seemed.

I tried to spit it out, but it wouldn't come.

The pain intensified, debilitating me.

I couldn't hold my own body up.

I looked out at Ryker and Lucian, but they were out cold like Mia.

I collapsed.

And then everything went dark.

To be continued in FALLEN ANGEL