



Silent Knight

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Category: LGBT+

Description: Can someone have both all the luck and none at all? For Ezra Acker the answer is yes. Life just is for him...until one Christmas when everything shifts and he finds out he has a silent knight who has been protecting him.

A world Ezra didn't know existed is trying to kill both him and his knight. Can they survive the holidays and have a happily ever after or will Heaven and Hell see to it they don't?

Silent Knight is a standalone dark paranormal novelette that was a part of the O Deadly Night Vol 2 Charity Anthology. No part of this story has been changed.

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EZRA ACKER: AGE TEN

The first time it happened, I was ten. I was living with the Kimbers, my fifth foster family. I got off the school bus and started walking the five blocks to their house. It wasn't in a great part of town and, Natalie, my foster-for-now mom, always said to keep my head down and walk fast. So, I did and never had a problem...until today.

I'd made it three blocks when I crashed into something solid. I fell backwards, my school bag flattened on the ground under me.

"You should watch where you're walking." I didn't recognize the voice but when I looked up, I did recognize the face. Morris Fieldman. He was sixteen and loved bullying younger kids. He'd never bothered me before but likely because I stayed off his radar. Until now.

"Sssorry, Morris. I was trying to get home; dinner will be ready soon and I have to be on time."

Morris's laughter was cruel and that was when I noticed two other people with him. Them I didn't know but it likely didn't matter.

"It's not really your home though is it, Ezra? You don't have one, or a real family for that matter. Mommy and daddy didn't want you and left you on the doorstep of a church like an afterschool special. Only, there's no happily ever after for you, is there?"

I swallowed down my sobs as Morris taunted me and his friends laughed. When I

made to get up, Morris pushed me down with his foot.

“Stay down there, that’s where dogs belong.”

A sound in the alley behind Morris made us all jump and when the three of them turned to see what it was, I didn’t pass up the opportunity. I grabbed my bag and ran faster than I ever had before.

That night as I was getting ready for bed I heard Natalie talking to Mr. Kimber—Alex.

“That’s the path Ezra takes home, Alex. Police said those three boys were almost unrecognizable. Animalistic tears over their faces and chests. Alex, their hearts were gone.”

“Then find a new route for Ezra to take, Nat. What do you want me to do? Coyotes are a thing.” Alex didn’t like me, but he tolerated me because Natalie was a kind woman and loved children.

“That’s not a solution.”

“Nat, it’s sad, but what choice do we have. We both work.”

I’d find my own route if I had too, but I wanted to know about the boys. I rushed to Henry’s room, he was another foster kid who I knew had a tablet.

“Henry,” I whispered.

“What?” He was groggy because it was well past our bedtime.

“Can I borrow your tablet? I heard three kids were killed and?—”

He jumped out of bed and hit the light. “Dead?”

I nodded and he pulled his tablet out of the bedside drawer.

“Natalie said they were torn apart.”

Henry’s big green eyes widened and as soon as the tablet was powered up, he searched local news and read the article out loud.

“ Three boys were found in an alleyway between Henderson Boulevard and Cooper Street this evening. It appears they were mauled by animals, likely coyotes. Their hearts were missing, and identities weren’t revealed right away .”

That was the same alley that noise came from...where I ran.

“Oh wow,” Henry said. “There’s an update. The identities of the boys are Morris Fieldman, Issac Cooper, and Larry Hillston. I know those kids.” Henry was twelve, older than me.

“I...Henry, I was there.”

His head jerked my way. “When?”

“Today. Morris and those other kids were bothering me. When we heard the noise in the alley, I ran.”

Henry placed the tablet down and gripped my shoulders. “Don’t tell anyone.”

“What, why?”

“You’re a foster kid, Ezra. Don’t make waves, just be good, quiet, and no drama.

Take a different way home, try going around Bonnie's Bakery. It's a little longer but it's on a main street."

Like I said, Henry was older and I looked up to him.

"Okay, Henry, I won't say anything."

I didn't say anything, and their deaths were ruled as a freak animal attack. The search for the coyotes lasted weeks but no one ever spotted even one.

That was the first time I was saved by my silent knight, only I didn't realize it until years later.

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My life was weird after that. I was mugged once and, in the paper the next day, I saw the mugger, labelled a serial mugger, was stabbed behind a grocery store...two weeks later my wallet with all the contents was returned.

Three times I was almost assaulted on the subway and each time the power cut out and the would-be attackers disappeared.

That was my life. Odd happenstances, oh and did I mention the decade of constantly feeling like someone was watching me? Yeah, but strangely it wasn't terrifying. It was comforting.

As much as Henry said I'd be good if I kept my mouth shut, I only lasted at the Kimber's another four months. I was in a total of fifteen foster homes until I aged out.

My life wasn't glamorous, and from an outsider's perspective probably downright sad. I lived above a Mexican restaurant, so all my clothes smelled like spices no matter how many times I washed them. It was loud because the owners kept their doors open until two in the morning and then the kitchen staff had to arrive at five am for prep.

My work life consisted of being a janitor at Legend Hill Hospital five days a week and working at Crane Comics on the weekend. I loved Crane Comics and wished for more hours there so I could stop cleaning up after patients.

But I had work, paid my rent and bills, and even had some left over for food. Go me.

“ Feliz Cumpleanos , Ezra.” Mrs. Lopez was sitting outside her restaurant when I

exited. I was working the night shift at the hospital.

“Gracias , Mrs. Lopez.

“Please tell me you’re not working on your birthday?” She quirked a brow.

“A week before Christmas and being the only one who has no family to celebrate the holidays with, I got all the doubles.”

I wasn’t feeling sorry for myself. I’d make good money.

“You come to the restaurant tomorrow, birthday dinner on me.”

I leaned down and kissed her weathered cheek.

“You’re the best. Have a good night.”

As I walked to the bus stop, the familiar tingling on the back of my neck made me smile. I wanted to turn around and beg them to show themselves, but I was too afraid they’d run and I’d be all alone again.

“Happy Holidays,” the bus driver said as I got off at my stop right in front of the hospital.

“You too.” I waved and went inside to start my sixteen-hour shift.

“Ezra, I need some help on the ER floor.” Gia was an emergency room nurse who was always kind to me.

On my first day working at the hospital she saw me eating alone and sat beside me with a smile, a wink, and a barrage of questions, claiming she wanted to make a new

friend.

“Coming,” I said into my cellphone and hit the elevator button down to the first floor.

Likely it was a bodily fluid spill. She said I was the only one who ever cleaned it properly and honestly, I liked helping her. She was my friend and she made me feel useful.

“I’m here to save the day.” I smiled as I approached her.

She spun, her tight brown curls bouncing as she did. “Ezra, thank you.” I noticed tear stains on her cheeks and all my happiness drained.

“Gia, what happened?”

That was when I noticed the blood spatters all over her scrubs. My eyes trailed down the corridor and there were two bodies, a doctor and another nurse, on the floor.

“This guy came in, gunshot wounds, we had him on the gurney trying to stop the bleeding but couldn’t find the source.” Tears began falling freely and I pulled her close.

“It’s okay, breathe.” I rubbed her back and scanned the area.

A security officer was down also...it was so quiet.

“He...he cut Dr. Hu’s throat,” she hiccupped. “I...”

“Where is he, Gia?”

“Ran out of the hospital. Ezra, there’s a mess, the patients I?—”

She called me down here to help clean up so she could get to the other patients in the ER. She was falling apart but had to make sure the other patients were okay. That was the kind of person she was.

“The police will deem this a crime scene, Gia. I can’t touch anything.”

She stared blankly at the carnage before us and nodded slowly. “Right.”

A minute later the emergency room was filled with police, and patients were being transferred out. I held Gia as she explained to the police everything that happened.

“Thank you, Ms. Grant.” The detective handed her his card. “If you think of anything else, please contact me. Until then, you’ll need to bag your scrubs and hand them over to us. Then you can shower and change.”

All emergencies were being routed to a different hospital for the time being since the area was closed off. Gia was being sent home and when she asked if I’d stay with her, there was no way I’d say no.

I stood in the hallway as she cleaned up and listened to the sounds of patients and staff scurrying around. The prickling on the back of my neck intensified and I darted my eyes in the direction I believed I was being watched, but no one was there.

“Ready?” She smiled weakly as she came out. The scent of honeysuckle clung around her and I was sure she’d spent a good fifteen minutes scrubbing her skin.

“I am.” I held my arm out at my side and she tucked right in.

It was a little awkward walking that way but she was my only friend and she was scared.

“My car is in B lot.”

I nodded and we walked in silence to her car. I didn't drive. It wasn't that I couldn't, I just didn't own a car.

“Are you okay to drive?” I asked when I saw her hands shake around the steering wheel.

“Yeah, I need a minute.” She closed her eyes and took a breath. “Why was he there, Ezra? He wasn't hurt, just played hurt, and for what, to kill doctors and nurses?”

“Did he say anything?”

Gia opened her mouth a few times and then faced me. “He wasn't making sense. He was yelling, kept asking ‘where is he where is he.’”

“Never said who he was looking for?”

She shook her head. “We kept asking who he was looking for hoping he'd stop. When Alvin came in and lifted his taser, the man charged him, stabbed him, and ran out of the ER.”

“Okay, take a few breaths. Let's get you home. You'll feel better when you're inside your own house.”

She did as I asked and soon we were driving out of the hospital lot and onto the street toward her place. She didn't speak and I wasn't sure what to say so I'd be a presence. Something that made her realize she wasn't alone.

Growing up, and even now, I often felt like I was alone. When I was scared, being by myself was the worst...even with the secret stranger or whatever I knew was

watching me, I lacked a physical being to hold my hand, hug me, just be with me.

“Can you come up with me?”

There was no way I was leaving her alone so I smiled and said, “As long as you need me, Gia.”

She lived in a nice brownstone. I knew she could afford it because her grandmother left it to her when she died. It was in a safe neighborhood and you could feel the love the moment you stepped over the threshold.

“How about I make you some tea and you find a ridiculous movie to watch?”

“You’ll stay?” Her dark brown eyes widened.

“I meant what I said, Gia. I won’t leave you.”

She rushed into my arms and I hugged her as hard as I could because she needed it.

“You’re the best.”

“Yeah yeah. Now find that movie while I get your tea.”

I’d been to Gia’s place a few times so I knew where the kitchen was. I rummaged for a few minutes before I found everything I needed and went about making tea. I saw some cookies so I put them on a plate, why? Because times of absolute carnage called for sugar.

“What movie did you find?” I shouted when the kettle whistled.

I placed it all on a tray and made my way to the living room. “Couldn’t hear you, the

tea was screaming at me, so what movie are we?—”

You read how in movies the main character stumbles upon a moment in their life that has them freezing in place. They can’t speak or move. You yell at the screen for them to do something but they don’t.

I used to yell too, but for the first time I understood it. You could see something so unbelievable, so mind altering that you lose your ability to move or form any words.

I should have dropped the tray but again, frozen. I wasn’t sure what I was seeing.

Three people...maybe people, they didn’t seem human. They were standing in Gia’s living room. One had Gia by the neck, dangling her a few feet from the ground. She was alive, but struggling. The other two were staring at me. Eyes the color of blood, skin as gray as concrete, and the aura of all bad things wrapped around them.

“There you are,” one of them said with a hiss like a snake. “We’ve been looking for you.”

My gaze darted to Gia, she was looking at me, struggling to breathe.

“Um...can you put my friend down?”

Really, Ezra, that’s what you say?

The one holding Gia laughed, it sounded like rocks tumbling over metal and I flinched.

“Where is he, human?”

“Who?” Because I really didn’t know what they were talking about.

“The hospital,” Gia wheezed, and I darted my eyes back to the man asking me questions.

“You were at the emergency room tonight?”

He nodded. “Looking for you.”

“Why?”

He took another step closer...very much not human.

“Where is your protector?”

If I wasn't two seconds from pissing my pants I'd laugh. “My what?”

“Games.” Creepy dude tsked. “Your friend is only alive for as long as we feel she's valuable. If you won't answer us then she isn't important.” He waved his hand toward the creature holding Gia and I reacted.

I tossed the tray full of tea and cookies at the thing in front of me. “No!”

“What...” He shook off the moisture like I didn't just scold him with hot water. “You're a bother.”

“Tell me something I don't know. Let my friend go and I'll take you to him.”

I had no idea where he was, who he was, what he was...if there even was a person to take them to. But I didn't want Gia dead.

“This isn't a Hollywood movie, human. Faith isn't something I have. Your friend dies when she has no value left. Take us to him.”

“I can’t do that if I know you’ll kill her after I do.” I was talking out of my ass.

The creature cocked his head and took two more steps toward me. Now he was flush up against me. I had to crane my neck to see his face since he had to be pushing over six foot five.

“You don’t get it, do you, little one.” He growled. “These are not games we play. You aren’t understanding...let me make it clear.”

He looked over his shoulder and jerked his head. I didn’t even get a chance to scream. The crack of Gia’s neck breaking, the crash of her body going through the glass table, the smell of blood.

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“Are you understanding me now, human?”

Gia. Her big brown eyes were staring at me, lifeless. My only friend, all I had. Gone. Happy birthday to me.

“Take him,” I heard the creature order and suddenly I was being swept up into someone’s arms. As I was dragged from Gia’s home, I looked into her eyes until I could no longer see her.

The sound of her body breaking echoed through my mind. I was so far gone I didn’t even realize air was whipping around us. I blinked and saw clouds around me. Sky...I was flying.

“Sleep,” whoever held me said, and darkness surrounded me.

I opened my eyes to a dark room. The scent of musty, moldy, dustiness filled my nose and I sneezed.

“Awake, finally.” The creep who was in Gia’s home stepped forward. “Life means very little to me. I understand humans have guilt, a conscience. This is something my kind don’t possess.” He tilted his head, his red eyes narrowed. “You got your friend killed. Tell me something, Ezra, how many more will have to die for your stubbornness?”

I didn’t know what they wanted from me. I’d tried to save Gia, I thought...no, I was playing games.

“I lied.”

The creature hummed. “Yes.”

“Not about what you think. I don’t know who you’re looking for, I don’t know anything about whatever this is.”

The creature lifted his gray hand and long black nails scraped over my cheek.

“All these years, you never realized you were protected? How many who dared trifle with you was lost to this world. How many who slighted you disappeared?”

The prickle on the back of my neck, the feeling of never being alone.

“There it is.” The creature smiled, razor sharp teeth and a tongue as dark as night.
“You knew.”

“I felt?—”

“Something.”

I nodded. “But I never saw who it was. I don’t know who it is.”

“Hmm.” He stepped back. “Perhaps that is true.” He ran his fingers over the stone wall of the room, and the sound made my teeth rattle. “Whenever you were in need, he’d show.”

“Sometimes after. He never showed himself.”

“By that logic, he should be protecting you now...where oh where could he be, little human?”

It was a good question. I sure could use some saving right about now.

“I don’t know,” I whispered in defeat. I couldn’t give him what he wanted which meant my life wasn’t of value and I knew death would be greeting me soon.

“Then let’s get his attention, shall we?”

I snapped my gaze to him as he lunged for me, tearing me from the ropes I’d been tied down with.

“What are you?—”

With me clutched in his grip, he crashed through the window, and once again I was flying up, up, up. The night was freezing. I looked down and could see all the Christmas lights getting farther away.

“Will he save you, little human? Will he finally show himself to rescue you from death?” the creature growled in my ear. “Let us find out.”

Suddenly, I was freefalling through the clouds, icy wind cutting at my skin. I wasn’t sure if I was screaming because all I felt was pain, fear, and alone.

The lights came closer and closer and I braced myself for the end. I didn’t want to see it. My life wasn’t grand enough for it to flash before me. With my eyes closed I fell...until I wasn’t.

Warmth surrounded me, the cold melted away, the fear was gone. I blinked my eyes open but couldn’t see anything, just whatever was surrounding me. Black wings. My finger brushed over one and it was like petting a rich leather jacket.

It was as if I was floating and I sighed in relief. Then my body jolted and I gasped.

Another slam, then I was tumbling and rolling onto the cold ground.

“No more hiding, Senon!” I turned my head and saw the creature; he wasn’t looking at me but something behind me.

What I saw could only be explained as extraordinary. A man, with golden hair, glowing honey brown eyes, a body I swore was chiseled from my wet dreams, and the largest black leather wings I’d ever seen...okay, I’d never seen leather wings before but these were magnificent.

“You dare take what is mine,” this man...no, my protector shouted. Even in anger it was musical, I could listen to him forever.

“It is not him I seek, Senon, but you.”

“You die this night, Diabolus. To Hell I shall return you.”

Like rock hitting rock the two collided above me, battling in the air. I rolled as far from it as I could. I knew in my head I should take the opportunity to run, but my heart was keeping me rooted to the spot. If this Senon guy died, the demon creature thing would kill me anyway. But as I watched the two of them tear each other apart, something bloomed in my chest. Senon was going to win.

As fists and claws ravaged them, each impact was like thunder, and nails sparked against flesh brightening the sky. They flew so high I could no longer see them, but the sky lit up from the storm their fight caused. Drops of rain fell and suddenly more.

Crashes, flashes, a storm covered the entire town, and I sat and waited for my protector. I knew he’d return. The constant in my life, my silent knight.

A loud whistle from above forced my gaze skyward. Something was falling...fast. I

stood and ran to get out of the way but when it hit it rocked the ground and I stumbled.

I spun around, there in a heap of skin and bones was the creature. A quiet thud sounded behind me and I smiled.

“You won. I knew you would.” I turned and finally faced my protector.

He looked at me with warm eyes. Like a force was tugging me, I fell into his chest and almost cried as he wrapped his arms around me.

“More will come, we must go, Ezra. Hold on tight.”

There wasn’t anything in this world I wouldn’t do for my silent knight.

I knew I was flying but this wasn’t a flight of fear, it felt like home and dare I say it...love.

We landed on the roof of my building to the sounds of people laughing and the aroma of spices filling the air, and I was released.

“Ezra Acker, you are home but it is not safe for you here. Diabolus was only one and?—”

“One what?”

He cocked his head and regarded me with clear confusion. “A demon.”

“You say that like I’m supposed to know what he was?” And holy hell, he really was a demon?

“How could you not tell? He was gray and looked nothing like a human...and he flew.”

I chuckled and gestured toward his whole body. “You flew, are you a demon?”

“I am part demon, part angel, but more unique than Nephilim.”

He was so honest, and I realized he’d answer all my questions. “What is more unique than a Nephilim?”

He cupped my cheek and smiled. “I will answer all your questions. First, gather all you need—essentials only.”

“Where am I going?”

“With me.” That was all he said. As if that would be enough and I’d willingly just go with him. Spoiler alert, I willingly went with him.

It took me fifteen minutes to get my things together and then we were flying again. So strange how I felt no fear in his arms hundreds, maybe thousands of feet from land.

I watched Christmas lights become less and less. Festive colors replaced with miles of trees and snow. I didn’t want to shout and ask questions so I blindly trusted him.

We landed on the lip of a cliff and I gasped when cold air rushed around me as he stepped away.

“We are here.”

“No, we are on a mountain...I’ll die here.”

He chuckled and waved his hand over a part of the rocky mountain and it quietly crumbled away revealing a door.

“Come.” He took my hand, and I followed him across the threshold.

Whatever I thought I would see when I walked inside a mountain, this wasn’t it.

The scent of cinnamon and sugar tickled my senses and warmth encased me. A crackling fire off to the side was contributing to that. Tucked away in the corner was a Christmas tree but there was also a fully lit menorah on the mantle. This was a home, and I swore I’d see a grandmother walk out of the kitchen with a freshly baked pie any second.

“Wow,” I whispered.

“Do you like it here?”

I nodded and moved further into the space. The couch screamed comfort, the blankets and throws called to me, and the smells made my stomach rumble.

“You are hungry.” Senon raced toward the kitchen; the place was open concept so I could watch.

“Is this where you live?” I asked as I plopped my bag and backpack on the floor.

“I have lived wherever you have been. This is what I created for when you finally joined me.”

Suddenly all the questions that had been swirling around my brain began to bubble.

“Why haven’t you shown yourself to me until now?”

“It wasn’t needed. Tonight you would have died had I not, all the other times that was not the case.”

“But you said this place was created for when I joined you, how was I ever to do that if you didn’t introduce yourself?”

“It would have happened soon, Diabolus pushed the timetable up by a few years.”

“Years?” Okay, I didn’t mean to shout but Senon didn’t even flinch when I did.

“Sit.” He motioned to the breakfast bar. “I will cook you a meal and tell you a story.”

I did as instructed and gave Senon my complete attention.

He started cutting up vegetables and without looking up, told me the story of how he became my knight and why I never knew my parents.

“It was December twentieth, two thousand and three?—”

“That’s when I was born.”

He nodded. “Yes, don’t interrupt or this will take forever.”

I mimed zipping my lips.

“I was summoned by your mother.” He held up a finger when I opened my mouth. “Her name was Sylvia and she was a Great Divine. They are the ones who control the heavens. She fell in love with a human man, your father, Arthur Acker. You were not to be born, for none of the Great Divine had ever bore a child. There was no way of knowing what you’d become.”

He poured oil into a skillet and I lifted my jaw from the counter.

“Your father was killed before your mother was even showing her pregnancy. Demons, in force, came for him in the night. Sylvia was devastated and the Divine Kingdom feared what your birth would cause. War perhaps between good and evil, nobody knew. So it was ruled that you would not be born.”

I gasped but he went on as if he hadn't just told me the goodest of good were okay with killing me.

“Your mother wouldn't hear of it, so she fled the kingdom and summoned me.”

He sighed and looked right at me. “I don't belong to either the divine or the demons yet I am both. The only one of my kind. Your mother believed I'd want to protect another unique being. I could not have refused her if I wanted to for she was a Great Divine.”

I smiled, and he placed chicken in the oil.

“She stayed with me until your birth and told me to watch over you forever without fail. Protect you silently, only to reveal myself when you were of a certain age. On your day of birth she brought you to a church.”

“She's alive?”

He shook his head. “No. She lingered, unable to part from you. I warned her to flee because I could not protect both you and her. But she stayed, and Abaddon found her, and killed her.” His light brown eyes glittered with the promise of tears. “He was sent by the Great Divine to locate and kill you. Sylvia wouldn't give you up and therefore, she died.”

“Geez.” I swallowed and stared at the wooden bar under my fingertips. That was a lot.

“Sylvia named you Ezra Acker, giving you your father’s last name, and I was afraid that was how they’d find you. They never did. It wasn’t until you were ten and bullies tried to hurt you and I removed them that a tendril of awareness began to spark.”

“They were kids and you?—”

“Protected you. It was...is my duty. Any who touch you must perish.” Again, he held up his hand to stop me from interrupting. “Abaddon can track evil, so those who harmed you would hold your divinity. All Abaddon would need to do was search their memories and find you, but if they were dead, he couldn’t.”

“So not some sort of love lust or anything.” I chuckled nervously.

“No. But I do love you, Ezra Acker. You were eighteen, you were running late for work and stumbled over an open drain. Inside you found a litter of kittens, drowning and hungry. You scooped them up, spent the last of your money and got them food and things to clean them. When they were fine you dropped them off at a shelter and lost your job for that.”

I could feel how wide my eyes were. I remembered that day. I knew I’d get fired from the bowling alley, but it was fine, it was a third job I was already having trouble keeping.

“And that’s when you fell in love with me?”

“I’d never felt such a feeling as I did that moment. All I ever did was what I was ordered to do. I looked at you as a job. Until that night. And every day after, I watched you give more to this world than this world gave to you.”

He leaned over the counter and cupped my cheek in his warm palm.

“I can see the Great Divine in your eyes.”

“My silent knight.” I laughed.

“Is that what you call me?”

“I never knew who, but I knew someone was watching over me, quiet and valiant. Yeah, that’s what I call you.”

“I like it.”

I sighed and sat back. “But this Diabolus was looking for you, not me.”

“Yes. As I said I am unique. One of a kind some would say. Abaddon is my father and my mother an angel, I do not know her name. I was born both in lava and water, in light and darkness. Touched by the Great Divine and cursed by Hell itself. Abaddon wants me to sit at his side knowing it would bring war to both good and evil...much like you. But I never will. Diabolus thought if he brought me to him, it would give him all the riches he could ever want. He didn’t realize you are more valuable than me. He only knew I cherished you and protected you.” He chuffed.

“Funny if you think about it. Diabolus had a chance to hand you over to Abaddon but didn’t realize the treasure he held.”

My mind was reeling. He loved me, his mom was an angel, Senon’s dad killed my mom, who was a Great Divine, demons are not only real but they tried to eviscerate me... Do I have magical powers?

A plate was placed in front of me full of seasoned chicken, veggies, and fingerling

potatoes.

“Wow that was fast.”

Senon shrugged. “I have a way of speeding things up.”

So, magic is real.

I tucked into the meal, surprising even myself with how I could eat after having all this information thrust upon me.

Once I was done, I sat back and realized I was alone. I slipped off the stool and meandered around the large space.

There was a corridor on the opposite side of where I was standing, and I made my way down it. I passed a bathroom that was insanely luxurious. A clawfoot tub, ivory and gold settings, a large window overlooking a forest—which, weird since we were inside a mountain.

“Senon?” I called out when I reached what appeared to be the master bedroom.

“Ezra.” Drying his wet hair, he entered the room from a door off to the side. “Apologies, I tried to tell you I was going to wash up but you were absorbing everything I had told you.”

“I have so many questions and?—”

“I imagine you do.” He motioned toward a sitting area hugged by enormous bay windows.

I sat in one of the plush chairs and he did the same.

“Where are your wings?” I couldn’t believe I’d only just realized they weren’t on display.

“They tuck away when I am not in need of them.”

I nodded, that seemed reasonable. “So, the powers of good and evil both want us dead?”

“In a manner of speaking. My father would much rather I sit beside him but he is not a stupid demon. He realizes I could and would never. He would rather I die than fight on the side of the Great Divine.”

“And would you fight beside the ones who helped murder my biological mother?”

Senon sat across from me, his gaze boring into mine as if I truly were as precious as he claimed.

“No. Perhaps at one time I might have but, Ezra, understand something. I am born of darkness and light. When I kill I do it without remorse, and yet I warm at the sight of a man rescuing kittens.”

I chuckled. “You’re an enigma.”

“Perhaps.”

“Off topic...what’s with the Christmas tree and the menorah?”

Senon smiled so brightly my heart practically burst with how gorgeous he was.

“You celebrate both. You are Jewish, your father was and when Sylvia gave you his last name it was to honor that. But many foster families you have been with

celebrated Christmas. During the holidays in twenty ten you claimed how you loved both Christmas and Chanukah.”

Damn...he really had been watching me.

“That’s maybe sweet, maybe stalkerish.”

He didn’t say anything after that, simply watched me, waiting for what I’d do next I supposed.

“Senon—”

“I love my name on your lips.”

Okay, cue heavy blushing. “Senon.” I smirked. “Where do you stand now? What happens to us next? Can we fight and win and simply live our lives...well, can I live mine because you’re likely immortal.”

“I stand beside you, Ezra. Sylvia called upon me and I answered. I do not regret that choice. We always fight. Humanity does it every day. Why is today or tomorrow any different?”

“Um.” I laughed nervously. “We fight to keep our electricity on, not to survive demons from Hell tearing our skin off to wear as a cape.”

Senon furrowed his brow. “That is a very dark visual.”

“I need to know what’s next.” I sighed, all the adrenaline from earlier washing away, and sadness over the loss of my only friend returning. “Gia died for me, Senon.”

“Yes, I am sorry for your loss.”

His eyes were filled with sincerity and deep in my bones I wanted to curl on his lap and let him console me. But I couldn't. I had to sit with all of this and really let it sink in.

"I'm tired."

"Of course." He stood. "You can have this room. I will stay in?—"

"No way. I'll take another bedroom if there is one or I'll sleep on the couch."

I could see he wanted to argue but he acquiesced and led me to a room across the hall.

"You are safe here, nobody can invade this sanctuary."

I wanted to ask more, like how, but I truly was exhausted.

"Good night, Senon."

I shut the door and starfished on the bed. I hadn't even checked out the room, I just let sleep consume me.

When I woke, I wasn't sure if I'd dreamed everything but as soon as I sat up and surveyed the gorgeous room—definitely not my bedroom over the Mexican restaurant—I knew everything really did happen.

To my left, on a sun yellow chair was my backpack, and my duffle was on the floor beside it. Senon must've brought my things in from the main area of the house.

I needed a shower, clean clothes, to brush my teeth, and then something to eat...and coffee, for sure coffee. Then I could address the fact demonic and divine beings

wanted me dead.

By the time I left the bedroom Senon was placing coffee, scrambled eggs, bacon, and cut fruits on the table.

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“That looks and smells amazing.”

His smile was pure radiance and the slight blush at my compliment warmed my heart.

“I hope you enjoy.”

“Aren’t you eating?” I started scooping eggs onto my plate.

“I wasn’t sure if you wanted me to.”

Rolling my eyes, I motioned to the empty chair in front of me. “No matter how crazy everything sounded last night, the fact remains that you saved me. If you wanted me dead, I wouldn’t be here. Besides, I hate eating alone.”

Silently, he sat, filled his plate, and began eating. I waited until he was halfway through to begin today’s drilling.

“I’m having a hard time understanding that you love me...over kittens.”

He nodded. “Love isn’t really something one can explain. There’s always that moment when it takes you by surprise even though it’s been gradual. For me, I never looked at you any way other than that of a child in need of protection. When I saw you caring for those kittens, it was then I realized you’d become a man and the heart I always knew you had, became attractive.”

“So what’s the game plan? We can’t stay here forever.”

Senon's gaze traveled the space. "Actually we could. I have everything you'd ever need here."

"No, Senon, I can't. I have commitments. Speaking of, I need a phone so I can call both of my jobs and let them know I'll need a few days off. I'll claim it's the flu."

"I placed your cellphone on the charger in the living room after you went to sleep."

"Perfect, thank you." I stood and carried my dish to the kitchen. "Let me make some calls and then I'll wash up the dishes."

"No need, go do what is needed."

"Senon, let me, please. You were nice enough to cook, the least I could do?—"

I was properly silenced when Senon waved his hand and the mess disappeared.

"Now go make your calls, Ezra." He winked and strolled out of the room.

The comic shop was cool with it and wished me well, the hospital was a different story. My boss informed me the police were looking for me since I was good friends with Gia and was seen leaving with her the night of her murder. I had to get down to the station as soon as possible. Senon was going to love that.

"Senon?" I called out when I couldn't find him. When I got no response, I opened the sliding door where the view of the forest was. Bizarre that where there should be a mountain there was foliage.

"Senon?"

"Up here."

I looked above and there he was chilling in a tree.

“Uh, watch doin’?”

“I wanted to give you privacy and I love sitting high and watching the world.”

I nodded because yeah, I could understand that. “Listen, I have to go down to the police station.”

He cocked his head, and in a flash landed in front of me. “Why?”

“I was seen leaving with Gia the night she died. I have to talk with the cops or else it might appear I was running.”

“You don’t have to be a part of that world ever again, Ezra.”

“Senon, I am a part of that world. Sure, it has its faults but it’s mostly good. I don’t want my name tainted.”

“I see. What will you tell the police?”

I hadn’t thought about it. “I’m open to suggestions.”

“Perhaps the truth. The man who came into the hospital followed you both, came into her home, killed Gia, and you ran out of fear.”

“And when they ask what the man looked like?”

“Tell them...but leave out the demon qualities.”

I snorted. “Okay.” When I turned to get ready Senon grabbed my arm.

“Ezra, you must listen to me.”

“What’s up?”

“Once we leave this sanctuary, you’re no longer safe. Which means, never leave my side, do as I say, no matter if you like it or disagree, do I make myself clear?”

My eyes widened at the seriousness of his words.

“I guess but?—”

“No, if you do not listen to me, we both will surely not survive. We are leaving this space that I am quite sure Abaddon knows exists...maybe not where but for sure that we are in hiding. Once we are exposed, he will take advantage of the opportunity. Therefore, you must listen.”

“Okay, Senon, I promise.”

Senon walked beside me into the police station dressed like an average person. Okay, scratch that. He wore jeans, a black t-shirt, and Converse like a normal person but he was insanely hot. Even the female cop working the front counter was gawking.

“Hey.” I waved in front of her face successfully snapping her out of her lustful “I want to lick the immortal” trance.

“Sorry, how may I assist you?” She smiled, her attention flicking to Senon every few seconds.

He was oblivious to her affections and a part of me warmed to know he said he loved me, and she wasn’t even a speck on his radar.

“My name is Ezra Acker, I was told the detective in charge of the Gia Grant murder wished to speak with me.”

Crime wasn't uncommon in this town but judging by her expression, it certainly was known through this district.

“Please have a seat over there and Detective Hurst will be with you shortly.”

Senon and I sat in the very municipal looking waiting room. Me, I was riffling through a year-old magazine. Senon was like a watch dog scrutinizing every person around us, entering the building, or talking too loudly.

“Mr. Acker?”

My attention snapped to the sound of my name being called. The detective looked maybe thirty with sandy blond hair and brown eyes. He was in good shape and thankfully smiling.

“That's me.” I stood and Senon followed.

“Are you his lawyer?” The detective addressed Senon.

“No, a friend.”

Hurst nodded curtly. “Well, friend, I'll need to speak with Mr. Acker alone, so I'm going to have to ask you to wait here.”

I knew this was going to happen, I even warned Senon on the ride to the station that there was no way they'd let him in with me. He scoffed...and here we were.

“I do not think?—”

I squeezed Senon's bicep. "It's fine, I'm with a detective, safe as could be."

Not against Abaddon, I was sure that was what Senon wanted to say, but there was no choice.

He growled but sat back down, shooting daggers at the detective.

Detective Hurst chuckled and motioned for me to follow him. After shooting Senon a quick smile I joined the detective.

The interrogation room was how one would expect it to be. Cinderblock walls, gray floors, one-way glass, a table, and a couple of chairs.

"I apologize for doing this in an interrogation room, Mr. Acker, but it's easier to concentrate than on the floor."

I waved him off. "No big deal. I want to help." Even though there'd be no way anything I said today would assist the police in Gia's murder...since they were looking for actual demons.

"I appreciate you saying that. Now, I spoke with the hospital staff, and many if not all stated you and Gia Grant were very close and left together after the attack at the hospital?"

"Yes, she was scared and admittedly I was too. Neither of us wanted to be alone so I went back to her place with her."

He nodded. "That's when everything gets fuzzy, Mr. Acker. Gia wasn't harmed at the hospital but shortly after she was found with her neck brutally snapped and you were in the wind. Care to fill in the blanks?"

Yeah, the interrogation room wasn't a coincidence. I suspected this would happen, though they weren't wrong to think I did this.

"I was in Gia's house when three guys broke in. One held Gia and another was asking where someone was, but neither Gia nor I knew who he meant, and I said so but he wouldn't believe me. He got angry and told his friend to kill her. He..." I swallowed, closed my eyes, and tried desperately not to hear the sound of Gia's body breaking. "He killed her."

"So there were three men?"

"Yes."

"What happened after that."

"The one who seemed to be the leader, grabbed me and they took me with them."

"You were kidnapped?"

I nodded. "They kept accusing me of lying, that I knew where some guy was, but he never told me who they were looking for and I thought maybe it had to do with what happened at the hospital, but I was terrified. My best friend was dead, and I thought I was going to die."

Detective Hurst was scrutinizing me. "You're an orderly at Legend Hill Hospital and work part time at Crane Comics and somehow attracted lethal killers who killed a nurse and kidnapped you in order to find some mystery man you don't even know the name of?"

When he said it like that it sounded crazy. "Yes."

“Mr. Acker?—”

“I get it, it sounds insane. I don’t understand it myself. But I got away from them and hid. I called my boss to take time off and he told me I needed to go to the station.”

“Why didn’t you come here to begin with?”

Frustration and weariness began settling in my bones and I wiped a hand over my face. “I was scared. I hid. Not the best choice but I came here to do the right thing.”

“Did you get a name of any of the men?”

“They kept calling the leader guy D.” I’m a terrible person who lies.

“D? That’s it? A description?”

Fuck my life. “The leader guy was large like over six-one, bald, kind of looked like Thanos from The Avengers movies, you know?”

“Right...and the others?”

“I can’t remember, I’m sorry.”

Detective Hurst sighed. “Mr. Acker, I’m finding a lot of this hard to swallow. Was it possible this had nothing to do with you and everything to do with Ms. Grant?”

Oh wow this was taking a turn. “I don’t understand?”

“The hospital was attacked and then Ms. Grant’s home. She’s the common denominator here. Has anyone been threatening her? Perhaps the someone this D was looking for was someone Gia was working with or something?”

How in the hell did he maneuver over to that theory? “Uhh...I suppose, but if that’s the case Gia never said anything to me. Trust me, I’d have ratted on the guy if it would have saved Gia’s life.”

The detective was silent for a moment then slipped a business card across the table. “Please call me if you think of anything else and in case I have further questions, I’ll need a number to call you.”

I shot off the number and Detective Hurst walked me out to where a very nervous looking Senon was pacing.

“Ready?” Senon glared at the detective and pulled me closer to him.

“Yeah.”

Senon didn’t relax until we were back at his mountain sanctuary. Once the doors shut, he exhaled loudly.

“I did not like you disappearing with that human.”

“Senon, he’s a detective, what did you think he was going to do?”

He stormed over to the kitchen and began clanging dishes, pots, and pans around.

“Senon, relax, I’m fine.”

He shook his head but started taking food out.

“Senon?”

He was chopping onions so forcefully they were turning into mush.

“Senon!” I yelled. “Stop!”

He slammed the knife down, rounded on me, and barricaded me against the refrigerator.

“I cannot deal with something happening to you, Ezra. It would destroy me.”

His breath fanned across my face, his eyes glowing with vulnerability, fear, and possession.

“Senon,” I whispered and tenderly ran my fingers over his cheek.

“Ezra, I?—”

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“Love me, I know.” I pressed my lips against his and without hesitation Senon wrapped his arms around me and lifted me so I could hook my legs behind his back. I was being carried, but to where I didn’t know or care. Senon’s tongue was like silk, caressing my own, making me hunger for so much more.

I was pressed against what I assumed was his mattress and clothes were literally being torn from our bodies in a frenzy. Only when naked flesh touched naked flesh did Senon calm and his kisses soften.

“Oh, Ezra.”

“I’m here, I’m safe, and I want you very much.”

My fists gripped the sheets as Senon’s lips travelled down my neck until he had my nipple in his mouth. The tug shot straight to my dick and I arched my back, moaning like a wanton slut, but I didn’t give a shit. I wanted him to pound me into the bed and stay there forever.

“Senon, fuck!”

He chuckled and released my tender nipple, moving to the other one, and I swore I was going to come before he even made it to my cock.

“I need?—”

“I know what you need, Ezra. I’ve always known.” His eyes locked with mine and I practically came apart when he swallowed me down.

I'd never been worshiped like this. My life was one night stands where it was a race to get off and get out. Two people chasing a climax so we could move on with our lives. Senon treated me as if my orgasm was a gift and as he sucked me like my come was the secret to immortality, I wanted him inside me.

"Senon, please fuck me!" I tugged on his hair and my dick slipped from his mouth.

"I love hearing you beg." He hovered over me, his gaze never leaving mine as he reached over to the bedside table and pulled something from the drawer. "I want to bury myself inside your tight hole, but I will not hurt you."

I whimpered; dirty talk was a surprise but I was all for it. Senon squeezed lube on his fingers and I spread my legs wider as he began probing my hole readying me for...yeah, that was a big cock.

He nailed my prostate each time and the tingle at the base of my spine was getting stronger.

"Senon, I can't...please."

He chuckled and removed his fingers, leaving me feeling the loss and chasing relief.

"Breathe, my love," he whispered against my ear, and the press of his cock was like a balm to my desperation.

I was so full, gloriously and perfectly full. I both wanted him to move and needed him to stay. When I couldn't take the stillness any longer I dug my nails into his back, unable to speak but craving his movement.

The slide out was torturously slow and I tried to clench my hole to keep him in.

“Hold on to me, precious.”

He slammed in, giving me everything I desired as he fucked me into the mattress relentlessly. I was sure I was screaming in pure ecstasy, clutching on to his body, aching and thirsty for every glorious brush of his cock over my prostate.

“I’m coming.” My climax barreled through me and Senon fucked me through it, his own orgasm coating my insides making me come again. I couldn’t stop, and I never wanted to. This was bliss and torture, everything I never had and always hungered for.

When we were both spent, Senon rested atop me, my legs and arms flopping limply, neither of us moving. With a smile on my face I slipped into a blissful sleep only vaguely aware of Senon cleaning me and tucking me in, his arms protectively wrapped around me while we slept.

Buzzing. Over and over again. I blinked, my eyes heavy with exhaustion. Senon woke me several times to ravish my body through the night and there was no way I was fighting him off. I felt cherished, loved, and sore. Wonderfully sore.

The buzzing stopped and I realized it was my phone...that was still in my pants’ pocket. Senon was sleeping so I slid away from him—who knew he was a cuddler—and reached for my pants.

Once I had the phone in hand, I hit the button to listen to the voicemail.

“Mr. Acker, this is Detective Hurst. Last night a patrolman picked up three men harassing a woman in the park and we’d like you to come down to the station to see if these were the same three men you saw the other night. If you could call me back as soon as possible to arrange a line up or even if you could look at their photos, I’d appreciate it. Bye.”

“Uhg.” I plopped down against the comfortable pillow.

“What’s wrong?” Senon turned, his brows furrowed with worry.

“I have to go back to the police station because some cop picked up three men last night and they want me to see if it’s the same people who killed Gia, which we know they won’t be but if I don’t go it’ll become a headache.”

“I told you, Ezra, you never have to go anywhere. We can stay here forever.”

I smiled and pressed a sweet kiss to his soft lips. “I can’t do that, Senon. For a while that’d be nice but there’s a world out there I sometimes like being a part of. Anyway, if these guys were dickbags maybe I say it was them and this ends.”

I slid out of bed and walked to the bathroom to relieve my bladder, shower, and brush my teeth. I called the station while the water warmed and told them I’d be down in about an hour.

Sure enough, forty-five minutes later Senon and I were entering the police station.

“Ezra Acker here to see Detective Hurst.”

The cop at the counter nodded and asked for me to have a seat.

“I’m going in with you this time.” Senon clenched his jaw and damn I wanted to straddle him and have my wicked way with?—

“Mr. Acker?”

I jumped when the detective called my name.

“Yes...sorry, I was daydreaming.”

Senon smirked as if he knew where my thoughts had wandered off to.

“Right this way please.”

I was glad when no one stopped Senon from coming back with me.

“If you could sit right here.” He gestured to a seat across from his desk. Senon leaned against the wall, arms folded. Detective Hurst snorted but said nothing. “I’d like you to look at some pictures first. If we need to do a line up then we can but I’d rather not have to subject you to that.”

“Thanks.”

He placed three mugshots in front of me. I’d never seen any of those men before but I wanted this to end. I apologized to the powers that be for what I was about to do and threw these men under the bus.

“They look very familiar.”

“That man there is Declan Garrity, which fits with you saying they called him D.”

Okay this was almost too perfect. He was bald too.

“Did they kill anyone else?”

Detective Hurst took the photos back. “Not this time but all three have been in and out of prison for the last twenty years. None have an alibi for the night your friend was killed and you taken, so I think this will be pretty cut and dry.”

I slumped in my seat, relieved that maybe now I'd be left alone.

"Is that all, can I go?"

"In a few. I wrote up your accounts of the evening when Ms. Grant was killed and you taken. If you could read it over and sign it for me?" He slid the paperwork over to me and I started reading.

"Detective, you got a sec?" a police officer said when they popped their head in.

"Sure thing. I'll be right back, Mr. Acker, take your time."

Once he left, I looked at Senon.

"You lied," he whispered with a smirk.

"You heard him, they were bad guys."

Senon chuckled. "They are very bad man. Rape, murder, robbery, assault."

I jerked back. "How'd you know all that?"

He tapped his head. "I can see the darkness and light in every human. You did the world a favor today, your lie is forgiven."

I laughed and was about to ask if I'd be punished later when the building shook as if something exploded right outside.

"What the hell!" I jumped up and Senon was beside me in a second.

"We have to go, Abaddon is here."

“What!” I shrieked but didn’t hesitate to follow Senon as he ran.

Another blast and the ceiling came down over several officers. Dust filled the air making it hard to see or breathe.

“Senon!” I shouted, and in a flash, he was gripping my hand.

“Don’t let go.”

I nodded and kept up with him as best I could.

“Where are we going?”

“We need to get outside to take flight. Fleeing is our best bet.”

I was all for getting the fuck out and if Senon was afraid of his father, I sure as shit was too.

The station was in pure chaos, nobody paid attention to Senon and me as we raced through the building avoiding debris.

Senon’s grip on my hand was unforgiving and I didn’t even care that he was crushing it. We had to get out of here together.

Gun fire began ringing out behind us and I knew something or someone had breached the station and the police were attacking. My heart ached at the thought of the police falling, not realizing the reason this was happening was because of me and Senon. They had families...it was Christmas.

“Senon.” I stopped, his body jerking to a halt.

“Ezra, we can’t slow or stop, we?—”

“We can’t leave them. They’ll all die.”

“And so will you if we stay.”

My vision became watery. “No one life is more important than another.”

Senon’s gaze flicked over my shoulder and then met mine again, I could see the conflict resting there.

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“I promised your mother.” A tear slipped from his beautiful eyes and in that moment, I knew this was likely our last moment together.

I pulled him to me and pressed my lips to his. Cement and dust rained around us but for a few breaths I pretended Senon and I were alone, flying through the clouds, swirling with the air, not a care in the world.

“I love you too, Senon,” I whispered against his lips.

“Ezra,” he sobbed. “You will die.”

I smiled and stepped back. “I won’t have anyone else die for me.” I couldn’t bear to look at the anguish in his eyes any longer, I spun and raced toward the mayhem, toward the screams and gunfire.

I came to a screeching halt when I turned into the main area of the station. Police were hunkered down behind their desks shooting in one direction. I followed their aim, eyes widening at the sight before me.

A demon for sure. Black as the dead of night, blood red eyes, teeth the shape and size of swords, and so tall the roof no longer existed.

He was going to kill them all.

“No!” I shouted as loud as I could. “Take me, Abaddon, I’m who you want!”

The demon spun, eyes like slits, a grin as evil as sin itself.

“Ezra.” Abaddon’s voice shook the floor. “Son of Sylvia the Great Divine.”

“Yes, leave them be and you can have me.”

He chuckled darkly. “I was going to have you regardless, they were just appetizers.” He motioned toward the police who had ceased firing but had their guns aimed at the demon. I knew the moment Abaddon took a step toward me they’d try and defend my life. I couldn’t let them do that.

“But you wouldn’t have gotten me as well.”

I turned at the same time Abaddon did. Senon, his dark wings spread wide, armor I’d never seen adorning his entire body.

“Son,” Abaddon hummed.

“Leave these humans alone and I will stand at your side.”

“Senon, no?—”

“And let Ezra live.”

“Senon, I don’t allow you to do that.”

A small tug on Senon’s lips told me he intended to honor my mother’s promise. “Ezra, go toward the police officers, now.”

Abaddon wasn’t taking his attention off Senon and I was torn between running toward the cops and wrapping my body around Senon and begging him not to do this.

“Senon, please,” I cried.

He said nothing, from his back he pulled out a wicked looking weapon. Part ax, part sword.

“Advance on him, Father, and we will battle to the death and I’m not so sure you believe you can win.”

I took a step to Senon but he shook his head. “I love you, Ezra Acker. Your mother would be so very proud of your strength. Now, please let me honor my promise to her and keep you alive.”

My body ached as if it were being torn in two. I could barely see through the tears and anguish crumpled me to the floor. Arms around me dragging me were unfamiliar and I realized police officers were covering my body...protecting me.

My whole life I thought I was equal parts lucky and unlucky. Roaming through life alone, just getting by, surviving but never living. I wasn’t alone, ever. My mother and my father both died for me, Gia died for me, these police were willing to die to protect me. And across the station I watched as the man I loved faced off with his own father, willing to give up his existence to protect me.

I was so very tired of it all. I couldn’t go back to the hospital or comic book store, not after this. Not without Senon in my life.

I wasn’t important enough...he was.

I waited for my moment. Watched as Abaddon nodded.

“Very well, Senon. You stand at my side and rule, you battle with me and for me. Do this and your human, your pet can live.”

Senon didn’t relinquish his weapon but he lowered it.

“If you harm any of them our deal will be forfeited and I promise I will kill you, Abaddon.”

Abaddon stood even taller and hummed. “Understood.”

With one last look at me, Senon walked toward his father who now had his back to us.

Senon slid his weapon into the holder on his back...I was out of time.

I was part of the Great Divine. It had to mean something, and maybe nothing, but I couldn't let Senon do this, but these police would all die if he didn't.

I closed my eyes and prayed. “Mother, hear me, if you can give me strength, I can't do this life without him. I don't want to. You sent him to protect me but it will kill me if he dies. Please, Great Divine, I know you want me gone but maybe my existence can do amazing things. Please.”

When I opened my eyes, Senon and Abaddon had just stepped out of the building. I moved back, all of the officers' attention was with the demon so no one saw me.

Attached to the wall, glass case shattered, was a fireman's ax. I pulled it out and exited through a hole in the side of the building. My hope was to flank them.

If anyone noticed I was gone they said nothing. I peered around the corner, they were coming. Abaddon in front. I pressed my back to the brick and listened.

“Please let this work,” I whispered one last time.

A dark talon appeared. Knowing I'd need to reach, I leaped onto the dented newspaper stand in front of me, lifted my arm, and swung. The ax embedded itself into Abaddon's chest, his roar like thunder, but I didn't let go. Not when he arched

back and tossed me about.

“Ezra!” Senon’s voice was like sun on a cold day but all I felt was Abaddon’s grip as he wrapped his hands around my body.

“Foolish boy!” Abaddon squeezed.

“Stupid demon,” I forced out as he began cutting of my air.

I could see Senon pulling out his weapon. I hoped if I didn’t succeed, he would be able to so he could be free, so he could be as amazing as I knew he was.

I pressed as hard as I could against the ax, pushing it in. Darkness crept around the edges of my vision and just as Senon took flight, weapon raised to strike, Abaddon smiled at me and pulled me to his chest.

Pain radiated against my stomach, I looked down and saw the other side of the ax was buried in my abdomen.

“Somehow, I always win, pet,” Abaddon growled, just as Senon’s sword impaled Abaddon’s skull.

I was thrown, my body crashing against something hard and I slid to the ground.

I could see Senon on the shoulders of Abaddon, battling...winning. Abaddon collapsed and a light brighter than the sun washed over the area but I couldn’t appreciate its warmth as darkness won.

“Ezra,” a woman’s voice called to me softly.

Warmth engulfed me and where I thought there would be pain was numbness.

“Sweet boy, open your eyes.”

Slowly, I did what was asked of me. Dim lights shone above me, and a woman with raven hair and amber eyes smiled down on me.

“You’re so brave, so selfless.” Her fingers caressed my cheek.

“Who...where am I?”

“You know who I am, you called to me.”

Without thought, I gripped her hand and sat up. No pain, huh. I wanted to wonder about that a little longer but I was looking at the face of my mother.

“You’re alive?”

Her head tilted to the side, her smile never wavering. “No, sweetheart. I’m not living nor dead.”

“I don’t understand.”

When she ran her fingers through my hair, I relished the moment. Oh, how many times I wished for my mother’s touch to calm me when I was upset.

“You called to me, to the Great Divine. You woke the light that rests in your soul, my son. Whether the Great Divine wishes for your destruction or not, your plea can’t go unanswered. Your sacrifice was the most selfless of any they’d seen in hundreds of years.”

“I didn’t...I just?—”

“You gave your life for strangers. You wouldn’t let another live a life of servitude

that would surely be riddled with torture, you gave up the love of a lifetime. For that not even the Great Divine could interfere with your plea.”

Senon. “Is he?”

“He lives.”

“Am I?”

She chuckled and it reminded me of windchimes in a soft breeze. “You have a choice. One you will never get to make again.”

“What is it?”

“You can stay in the Great Divine, unharmed, untouched. Peace and warmth for all eternity, never feeling alone, never in pain.”

That sounded amazing. “Or?”

“Or you can return to your world and to Senon. I cannot promise others won’t seek you both out at some point, but with the awakening of your light, it would be foolish to harm either of you.”

“I—”

“Ezra.” She held one of my hands in both of hers. “If you choose love, if you choose Senon, you exist while he does. If he dies, so shall you, and vice versa.”

My eyes widened. “Oh, I can’t do that. I’m human. I don’t have the lifespan of an angel demon man...whatever he is.”

She chuckled. “No, sweet boy, his immortality becomes your own.”

Wow. I looked into her honey eyes, her smile, the face of the only woman I ever wanted to know.

“But I won’t ever see you again.”

She pressed her hand to my chest. “I will be with you always, Ezra, no matter where you are.”

“How do I know Senon would want to be tied to me forever?”

She held up her hand, a soft light appeared, and I could see Senon huddled over my crumpled, bleeding body. He was pleading.

“Take me, please take me. I forfeit my life for this man, I choose death if he cannot return.”

“Does that sound like someone unwilling to be tied to you forever, Son?”

“Oh, Senon.” I reached for the scene in front of me but as soon as my fingers touched it, it blew away.

“What do I do?”

“Do you want to be with him, Ezra?”

“I’ve never wanted anything more.”

She cupped my face in her hands. “Then that is what your choice should be.”

I smiled, the moment so bittersweet. “I wish I had more time with you.”

“Ezra, I’ve watched you your whole life. Seen how Senon protected and loved you. A

mother could never be as proud of her child as I am you.”

“I love you, Mom.”

She beamed at my words. “I love you too, Ezra.”

“How...how do I get back to him?”

“Close your eyes and wish it...it’s Christmas after all, the time of miracles.”

“But I’m Jewish.”

She laughed. “Don’t argue with your mother.”

I looked at her face one last time, then closed my eyes and wished to be back in Senon’s arms.

Pain...yeah, this part she didn’t warn me about. I was freezing, hurting, and being crushed?

“Ezra, come back, please. Great Divine take me!” Senon roared to the skies.

“Shhh...you’re yelling, and I have a headache.”

Senon gasped, his red-rimmed eyes widening as he stared at me in shock.

“Ezra!”

“I really hope you love me, Senon, because you’re stuck with me forever.”

“How? I mean you were—” He pulled away and while my clothes were covered in blood, the wound was healed. “The Great Divine.”

I nodded. “I saw my mother.”

He smiled and even though I was having a little trouble breathing with him crushing me, when he kissed my lips, I didn’t mind even in the slightest.

“Merry Christmas, Senon.”

He chuckled. I could hear people surrounding us and had no idea what we were going to tell them or how any of this would work. But I didn’t care. This was the best Christmas of my life, and I had an eternity with the man I loved.